



Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture

Proceedings of the International Conference on
**History of Islamic Learning and
Scholarship in Africa**

June 2023, Kaduna, Nigeria

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Preface

Prof. Dr. Mahmud Erol Kılıç
IRCICA Director General

As the cultural subsidiary of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); IRCICA conducts various academic events, international conferences and research projects dedicated to the exploration of the history of Islamic learning and scholarship in different regions. In this context, the International Conference on the "History of Islamic Learning and Scholarship in Africa" was jointly organized by the Arewa House of Ahmadu Bello University, the General Secretariat of the OIC and IRCICA in Kaduna-Nigeria on 13-15 June 2023. It is with great pleasure that we present the proceedings of this milestone event to the attention of global scholarly community. This conference marked the inauguration of our long-term research agenda to unveil the rich intellectual heritage of Africa and its profound contributions to the formation of Islamic scholarly traditions. Being the first of its kind held in the Continent, the conference focused on the development and legacy of Islamic learning and scholarship in the English-speaking regions of Western, Eastern and Southern Africa. As such it provided a fruitful scientific platform for the related scholars and researchers to engage in meaningful dialogue, share their insights, and deepen understanding on dynamic processes that shaped Islamic scholarship and learning.

The articles collected in this meticulously edited volume are organized into three main parts namely Islamic education and learning; intellectual and spiritual movements; and colonialism and cultural revival. Academic contributions highlight the historical evolution of educational systems from the traditional Qur'anic schools to contemporary integrated models, while examining the role of indigenous languages like Hausa in advancing literacy and intellectual heritage. Case studies which focus on the transformation trajectory of Islamic education in different African countries were accompanied by in-depth studies on some of the classical texts of Islamic scholarship.

Original contributions to the volume focus on the formation of the tafsir tradition in Africa and underline the role of intellectual centers such as Timbuktu, while stressing the relationship between scholarly dynamism and reform (*Tajdid*) movements. The volume also contains academic studies on the preservation of cultural memory through local teaching practices and the challenges faced in adapting Islamic education to modern technologies and social changes. With wide ranging analyses from the reformist efforts of the Sokoto Caliphate to the transcultural networks established through the Hajj journeys, the authors illustrate various forms of Interconnectedness between the Muslim communities in Africa and the wider Muslim world. In the meantime, special attention was given to the often-overlooked contributions of women scholars to Islamic scholarship as well as the enduring influence of poetry and other artistic expressions in transmitting knowledge and values across generations.

The multifaceted impact of colonialism on Islamic scholarship and Muslim communities was also underlined in the articles as well as subsequent attempts for spiritual, intellectual and socio-cultural revival. The resilience of intellectual traditions in Africa was highlighted with special reference to exemplary figures such as Al-Hajj Umar Tall, as well as innovative efforts to revitalize Islamic education in the modern era. In short, invaluable contributions to the volume offer the readers a comprehensive overview of the respective role of African scholars in shaping the global Islamic intellectual and cultural landscape. It is our sincere hope that the original insights provided by the academic analyses in this Book of Proceedings will inspire further research and enrich existing interest on Islamic learning and scholarship in Africa. I would like to take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Arewa House of Ahmadu Bello University and to the OIC General Secretariat for their collaboration in the organization of this landmark conference. Their commitment to fostering knowledge and promoting Islamic cultural-intellectual heritage in Africa is truly commendable in the context of the long-term research agenda of our Centre.

In fact, following the Kaduna Conference, the second international event on the “History of Islamic Learning and Scholarship in Africa” was successfully held by IRCICA in Yaoundé-Cameroon in September 2024. The Book of Proceedings which will include similar analyses for the French-speaking countries in Western and Central Africa is scheduled to be published in 2025 in French, as part of the same series. Our special thanks are due to Prof. Shua’ibu Shehu Aliyu, Prof. Abubakar Abdullah Senghore, Prof. Sadık Ünay and Dr. Lhoucine Rhazoui for their efforts leading to this crucial volume; as well as the distinguished participants whose scholarly contributions will open up new horizons in the field.

Address of OIC Secretary General H.E. Hissein Brahim Taha

Delivered by Dr. Lhoucine Rhazoui

Director of Cultural Affairs at the General Secretariat

Excellency Asiwaju Ahmed Bola Tinubu, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; Excellency Senator Uba Sani, the Executive Governor of Kaduna State; Eminence Muhammad Saad Abubakar, the Sultan of Sokoto; Excellency Ambassador Ahmad Nuhu Bamalli, Emir of Zazzau; Ambassador Mahmud Erol Kılıç, DG of IRCICA; Professor Kabiru Bala, the Vice-Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University; Distinguished guests and participants;

Allow me first of all to extend my deepest thanks to the organizers of this event, namely IRCICA and Ahmadu Bello University for associating the OIC to this excellent academic enterprise and for the opportunity to contribute to its successful holding. On behalf of H.E. the OIC Secretary General, who could not make the trip to Nigeria due to prior commitments, I would like to extend to all of you His Excellency's wishes of success to this truly meaningful event and to commend the initiative of holding this august scholarly gathering that reflects our common desire to celebrate Islamic scholarship, culture and civilization and highlight the role played by some of its devoted scholars and thinkers in its global eminence and radiance.

The holding of this international conference on the history of Islamic learning and scholarship in Africa in Kaduna State, in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is a further witness of the universalism of Islam as a world religion with deep roots in Africa and with a huge impact on the lives of millions of people coexisting with followers of other faiths in perfect harmony. It also sheds more light on the rich Islamic heritage in the African continent that testifies to its originality and the creativity of its people and its acceptance within different layers of society.

The OIC, being the collective voice of the Muslim Ummah, is committed more than ever to contribute to any effort or initiative whose primary goal is to reflect on the richness of Islamic scholarship and its ancient culture as we staunchly believe that investment in

learning and spreading the true message of Islam as a religion of peace, tolerance, brotherhood, mutual respect and justice yields definitely constructive returns. Taking the message of Islam out to the world takes lot of serious endeavors and genuine initiatives to correct the blurred perceptions and consumed stereotypes of Islam, especially in the West, and get the record straight when it comes to its steady and genuine call for peaceful coexistence, respect for diversity and common prosperity. It takes also the committed engagement of learned and seasoned academicians like yourselves and scholarly contributions to achieve this goal.

As we live today in a global village thanks to the huge development in communication technologies and the spread of mass media and social platforms, cutting-edge research in the study of Islamic scholarship and its impact on religious, political, social, economic and cultural history of Africa is very important as a major medium to enlarge the scope of Islamic knowledge, learning and culture to further boundaries and endow it with an international resonance. This interdisciplinary international conference offers us the opportunity to explore in-depth the intellectual and spiritual exchanges between populations and scholars across the extensive geography of Africa, including the Maghreb, East, West and Central Africa, and to reflect not only on the historical spread of Islamic scholarship in Africa but also on its current status and future trends. As the study of Islamic scholarship in Africa is growing rapidly, this conference could not be more timely to give us a feel of the transformative and self-adjusting nature of this scholarship and the evolution of social science research in Africa beyond common and probably biased Western definitions.

It is common knowledge that Islam has had a great impact on the people and states of Western Sudan and West Africa in general, for it was not just a religion or a mass of doctrines or beliefs and rituals, but rather a complete way of life or civilization. This great religion produced great scholars and outstanding scholarly traditions that hopefully would be demystified and elucidated in this international conference. It is only through the rear mirror of history and its valuable lessons that Islamic scholarship in Africa could move forward with confidence, clarity of vision and steadfastness.

Excellencies;

It is with this in mind that OIC participates in this event to reaffirm its firm belief in the power of education, learning, academia and cultural diplomacy and in the perspective of contributing to provide such informed spaces of academic, scientific and intellectual encounters that favor dialogue, useful exchange of ideas and intellectual interaction. At the OIC, we do give much importance to the encouragement of the organization of these kinds of academic conferences, cultural weeks and festivals, among the brotherly and friendly countries, to extend bridges of convergence, cooperation and understanding among peoples belonging to the three geographical areas in Africa, Asia and the Arab world where our 57 member States co-exist and thrive together. Our approach is simple: We want people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to come together to meet, to listen to each other, to talk to each other and understand each other.

Our participation today in this international conference co-organized by IRCICA and Ahmadu Bello University, is a further token of our commitment to these noble human values that transcend territorial borders and stand as a reminder of our common humanity and a bulwark against divisive agendas and extremist tendencies.

Allow me to wish the best of success to the working sessions of this important conference. May Allah^(SWT) bless all our endeavors and lead us to the right path in the service of humanity at large.

Thank you for much for your kind attention.

Part I: Islamic Education and Scholarship

Islam and Islamic Scholarship in East Africa

Abdin Chande*

Introduction

The monsoon winds have created opportunities for interaction between the East African coast and the Western Indian Ocean world since the early centuries of common era. We know this from the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* which mentions trading centres along the Red Sea coast and the East African maritime region. Nevertheless, trade relations became more entrenched with the advent of Islam, a religion that encourages commerce, migration and travel across vast lands not only to earn a living but also to observe the universe that is made up of the signs of the Almighty. The various regions of the Indian Ocean world, both in Africa and Asia, that shared this oceanic highway, as well as their hinterlands, all contributed to the circulation of goods, people and ultimately Islam. These interactions across time and space was what led to the creation of Swahili culture and civilization.

Swahili city-states began as small fishing villages and later became vibrant marketing and trading towns with the growing volume of trade. In these towns, some of the newly arrived settlers from Western Asia (especially southern Yemen) searching for trade opportunities eventually began to marry into local families. That was how their descendants slowly and over time gained positions in the local communities. Along with trade came Islam, which was introduced in this region, and later, as it gained some foothold, the first mosques began to appear. For instance, Mark Horton's excavations in the coastal town of Shanga in the Lamu region revealed the presence of a ninth-century clay mosque.¹ It is possible, though, that there were mosques that were built even earlier than this, but only archaeological excavations can settle this matter with more extended research in the future. In any case, it was also during the early centuries of Islam

* Assoc. Prof., Adelphi University, Department of History, USA.

1 See, for instance, Mark Horton Shanga, *The Archeology of a Muslim Trading Community on the Coast of East Africa* (London: British Institute in Eastern Africa, 1996).

before the end of the first millennium CE that, according to oral traditions, some refugees found their way into coastal East Africa.² More importantly, however, by the beginning of the second millennium CE, trade, urbanization and Islamization grew and became salient features of Islam in East Africa. Evidence of this is that, for instance, the mosque in Kizimkazi, Zanzibar, with its coral detailing and column shafts, is dated to the 12th century.³ This period of increasing prosperity is noted for the marked transition in building materials from construction in wood and mud to coral stone buildings. This was clearly an architecture across boundaries in a world shaped by deepening transcultural entanglements and trading linkages in the Indian Ocean region. By then, a distinct *pwani*/coastal culture had emerged with its complex urban lifestyle and the presence of material culture, including Chinese silk and porcelain, Indian textiles and so on. Not surprisingly, this was also the era (13th to 15th centuries)⁴ of the local chronicles (for instance, Kilwa) and Shirazi myths.⁵ This has sometimes been referred to as the "golden age" (with gold trade from Zimbabwe) of East Africa with the proliferation of dozens of autonomous coastal Swahili city-states stretching over an area of 1,500 miles from Mogadishu or supposedly *mji wa Mwisho*/last city (in modern-day southern Somalia) in the north, to Sofala (in modern Mozambique) in the south.⁶

Soon after this period, disaster struck coastal East Africa with the arrival of the European intruders to the entire region by the beginning

2 John Craven Wilkinson, "Oman and East Africa: New Light on Early Kilwa History from the Omani Sources," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 14, no. 2 (1981): 285-297.

3 Consult Maximilian F. Chami and F. A. Chami, "Management of Religious Heritage in Tanzania: A Case Study of Kizimkazi Mosque on Zanzibar Island," *Journal of Heritage Management* 5, no. 1 (2020): 71-88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455929620934342>

4 See, for instance, the discussion in Randall L. Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800-1900*, African Studies, Series Number 53 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

5 Thomas Spear, "The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions, Culture, and History", *History in Africa* 11 (1984): 291-305.

6 Randall Pouwels, "The Medieval Foundations of East African Islam", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 11, no. 3 (1978): 393-409.

of the 16th century.⁷ In other words, the Portuguese engagement with coastal East Africa, including Swahili city states such as Kilwa and Mombasa, not to mention the Zimbabwean Mutapa Kingdom whose area of control reached Mozambique, was framed as a crusade against local "Moors". Furthermore, it was equally motivated by economic greed and Portuguese interests to take over the local trade from the Swahili/African, Arab and Indian traders as part of their efforts to construct an empire of port cities in the Indian Ocean region. The brutal attacks and disruption of trade in the East African Swahili city-states did not, however, bring the Portuguese any substantial benefits as foreign traders moved to areas further north, and the Portuguese were left to focus their efforts in what became Portuguese Mozambique.

Religious Scholars in East Africa

While Kilwa and later Mombasa went into decline in the sixteenth century, this also became the period of immigration with many families arriving in the Pate/Lamu region from Benadir (southern Somali towns such as Barawa) and particularly Hadhramaut (Yemen). More specifically, the Lamu region witnessed the establishment of an advanced Islamic scholarly tradition by Pate *shurafa*, descendants of the Prophet (SAW) with origins in Hadhramaut. This made the Lamu region, from the mid-sixteenth century to the 1700s, the religious heartland of Islam in coastal East Africa with a scholarly tradition whose roots were in Hadhramaut's Tarim and Sewn/Seiyun. In fact, Hadhrami scholars had migrated as far north as Zeila, Red Sea trading town in Somalia, and as far south as Kilwa. More importantly, the Pate *shurafa*/*ulamā* played a significant role in the resistance against the Portuguese, as did the Barawan Amaranis and the descendants of Hadhrami Mansab clan of Abu Bakar b. Salim of Inat, who had settled in Pate and the Burayk in Siyu.⁸ These were jurists, theologians, and

7 C. R. Boxer and Carlos De Azevedo, *The Portuguese in East Africa - Fort Jesus and the Portuguese in Mombasa* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1960). For a framing of this discussion on the Portuguese crusades, see Adam Simmons, "The African Adoption of the Portuguese Crusade during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *The Historical Journal* 65 (2022): 571–590.

8 See Randall Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*; Scott Reese, *Renewers of the Age: Holy Men and Social Discourse in Colonial Benaadir* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); B.G. Martin, Arab

literary figures in their own right. It is important to note that further research is needed, if sufficient sources exist or if information can be gleaned, to understand the level and depth of Islamic scholarship in coastal East Africa before the 1500s. As a case in point, Ibn Battuta's visit to Kilwa in the early 1330s, for instance, reveals more about the town's prosperity from the gold trade, its magnificent three-storeyed stone houses for the ruling elite, and its grand (Friday) mosque which now lies in ruin than it does about its scholars and the learned jurists.⁹ Nevertheless, further north, in Benadir, on southern coast of Somalia, in the towns of Barawa and Mogadishu, such learned scholars were already present, much earlier with the Qahtan al-Wa'il 'ulama' who had settled in Mogadishu.

In any case, by the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries, the Ya'rubi Dynasty of Oman had successfully expelled the Portuguese from East Africa, north of Mozambique. This ushered in a new era of commercial revival after the Omanis established their East African commercial empire. Although the Omanis, like the Portuguese before them, were unable to assert their claim over the entire coastal region, they succeeded in establishing a limited government with their administrative structures in place in several towns. This included the appointment of, for instance, *liwalis* (local governors), qadis (Muslim judges who were integrated into the Busaid government), customs officials and Baluchi *jamedari*/commanders of garrisons in some towns. More importantly, Omanis restored old patterns of trade on the coast before the arrival of the Portuguese. This included re-establishing trade links with hinterland African ethnic groups with whom the Swahili had a close relationship for the supply of trade items for the wider Indian Ocean trade with India, the Arabian Peninsula-Persian Gulf region and so on.

As already suggested above, by far the most important development during this post-Portuguese period of the 18th and 19th centuries in coastal East Africa was the momentous decision by Sultan Sayyid Said of Zanzibar, after subduing the Omani Mazrui family of Mombasa in

Migrations to East Africa in Medieval Times," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7, no. 3 (1974): 367-390.

9 On Ibn Battuta in Africa, see Said Hamdun & Noel King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1975); and H.A.R. Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, Vols. I, II, III, (London: Hakluyt Society, Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1956).

1837, to move his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar by 1840. This ushered in a period of commercial revival in East Africa that encouraged Indians, Arabs and other groups seeking to make a fortune for themselves to settle in Zanzibar and eventually other coastal towns. This was also the period that marked the beginning of a far more important era of higher Islamic learning in the whole coastal region. In other words, the Busaid (Omani) Arabs contributed to literacy and the intellectual life of the coastal community.¹⁰ As a result, religious scholars from Arabia, mainly Hadhramaut and Oman, the Comoros and the Benadir/Somali coast, especially Barawa, began to arrive in the coastal towns. Later, some of the leading scholars in East Africa (from Zanzibar and Mombasa), due to scholarly networks, travelled to the Middle East, including Istanbul, where they received their education. Being the Omani capital in East Africa, Zanzibar emerged as the major centre of Islamic learning in East Africa.¹¹

Prominent Muslim Scholars of Zanzibar

During the late 19th century to the early decades of the 20th century, two religious figures in Zanzibar stood out as the most celebrated and venerated scholars in East Africa. In fact, one could not consider oneself a scholar worthy of note in East Africa if one had not studied and received an 'ijāza (license of competence), indicating that they had mastered a certain field of study, from one of those scholars. The first and the most well-known was Sayyid Ahmad Sumayt (d. 1925), a Comorian of Hadhrami origins. His father had migrated from Shibban/Tarim, Hadhramaut to Comoros, where Sayyid Ahmad was born. Following his father's wish, the young Sayyid Sumait, at the age of twenty, travelled to Hadhramaut to study under the most renowned scholars, such as Aydarus al-Habshi, Ahmad Abdalla al-'Atas, Ubaydullah Muhsin al-Saqqaf and Abd al-Rahman al-Mashhur, the *mufti* of Hadhramaut. He returned from southern Yemen in 1883 and settled in Zanzibar where, due to his erudition, he was appointed the qadi of Zanzibar. Sayyid Sumayt had acquired higher Islamic education through a network of family, ethnic and scholarly connections that had

10 See the discussion in Randall Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*.

11 See the list of these scholars in Abdallah Salih al-Farsy, *Tarehe Ya Imam Shafi na Wanavyuoni Wakubwa wa Mashariki ya Africa* (Zanzibar: Zanzibar, Education Department, 1944).

allowed him to study under different teachers. This was how he studied briefly in Istanbul with Sayyid Fadl b. Alawi b. Salh/Saleh (also known as Fadl Pasha, d. 1900).¹² In any case, Sayyid Sumayt went on to study both at al-Azhar University in Egypt and in Makka, a centre for pilgrimage and religious study with extensive opportunities for meeting scholars from different regions of the Muslim world. In the mid-1880s, Sayyid Sumayt asked for permission to resign as qadi and Sultan Barghash refused to grant his request. Accordingly, Sayyid Sumayt fled from Zanzibar to Istanbul, where he was hosted by Sultan Abdulhamid II, who shared his pan-Islamic sentiments nurtured during his study with Sayyid Fadl. The prodigal son returned to Zanzibar in 1888, and was again reappointed as the qadi of Zanzibar. His reputation as an Islamic legal expert by then, had spread beyond East Africa to Hejaz and Egypt. He was also a prolific writer who wrote several books, including two legal commentaries and a treatise on the 'Alawi *tariqa*, of which he was a member.

The other prominent scholarly figure of Zanzibar was Sayyid Sumayt's colleague Sheikh Abdalla Bakathir (d. 1925). He was born in Lamu, and he, too, was of Hadhrami origins and came from a long line of judges. He had his first Islamic training in Lamu, and he later had the opportunity to travel to Makka to study with the renowned scholars in Hejaz before later going on to Hadhramaut to study with various masters there. In the process of doing so, he accumulated a significant number of 'ijāzas testifying to his competence in certain texts. This process of gaining 'ijāzas continued in Zanzibar, the major Islamic intellectual centre of East Africa, where all sorts of scholars in different fields lived and held special classes for advanced students. In Zanzibar, he opened Madrasa Bakathir, which was known for its high standard of Islamic learning and attracted students from far and wide. Among the texts studied were *Tafsir al-Jalālayn*, Ibn Malik's *Alfiyya* and *Lāmiyat al-Af'al*, *Minhāj al-Tālibīn* of al-Nawawi and *Muqaddimat al-Hadramiyya*, to mention just a few. It is all worth pointing out that Sheikh Abdalla Bakathir, like many of the other East African scholars

12 Sayyid Fadl's interesting sojourn in different regions landed him on the Malabar coast of India before he settled in Istanbul where he developed close ties with Sultan Abdulhamid II. See Randall Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*; al-Farsy, *Tarehe ya Imam Shafi*; and B. G. Martin, "Notes on Some Members of the Learned Classes of Zanzibar and East Africa in the Nineteenth Century," *African Historical Studies* 4, no. 3 (1971): 525-545.

of his time who were of Hadhrami lineage, was also a member of the Alawi *tariqa*, which was popular among Hadhramis. Similarly, the 'ulama' in East Africa being a closely knit group, even after moving to Zanzibar, for instance, Sheikh Bakathir continued to maintain close ties to the major scholar of Lamu, Habib Saleh. This illustrates the fact that the learned men were itinerant/travelling scholars who were part of the Hadhrami scholarly diaspora extending from Lamu through Zanzibar to Comoros.¹³

Muslim scholarly in-breeding in coastal East Africa meant that famous scholars often produced famous sons who became scholars in their own right. For instance, both Sheikh Umar Ahmad Sumayt, who later became the *mufti* of Comoro Islands, and Sheikh Abubakar Abdalla Bakathir (d. 1943), renowned scholars in Zanzibar, continued the scholarly tradition of their famous fathers, Sayyid Sumayt and Sheikh Abdalla Bakathir respectively. It was the sons of these two revered scholars who were among the teachers of Sheikh Abdalla Saleh al-Farsy (d. 1982), who became the qadi of Zanzibar and later of Kenya. Sheikh al-Farsy, like other scholars, left Zanzibar at the first opportunity after the violent Zanzibar revolution of the mid-1960s.

One of the most prominent Ibadhi scholars of Zanzibar was Sheikh Ali b. Khamis b. Salim al-Barwani (d. 1886). He was among a significant number of Ibadi 'ulama' of the coastal region who, over time, converted from Ibadi to the Shafi'i school of law. Sheikh al-Barwani trained several students, the most famous of whom was Sayyid Mansab Ali (d. 1927), the Comorian Hadrami Sayyid. Even after Sheikh al-Barwani's death, Islamic scholarship within the Barwani family was kept alive by his descendants. One of them, Sheikh Ali Muhsin al-Barwani (d. 2006), a former pre-1964 Zanzibari politician and diplomat under the Sultanate of Zanzibar, and moved to Oman. He was able to translate

13 See al-Farsy, *Tarehe ya Imam Shafi*; B. G. Martin, "Notes on Some Members", 525-545; B. G. Martin, "Materials for the Understanding of Islam in German East Africa", *Tanzania Notes and Records* 68 (1968); and B. G. Martin, "Muslim Politics and Resistance to Colonial Rule: Shaykh Uways b. Muhammad Al-Barawi and the Qadiriyya Brotherhood in East Africa", *Journal of Africa History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 471-486.

what has become one of the crucial translations of the Qur'an into the Swahili language. It was published in 1993 and is available online.¹⁴

Sheikh Abdalla Saleh al-Farsy¹⁵ is the most famous Zanzibari scholar of the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁶ He studied both in Zanzibar from many teachers, including Sheikh Bakathir and Sayyid Sumayt, and also in Mombasa from the famous Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui (d.1947), from whom he became exposed to the modernist reform ideas emanating from Egypt and championed by Sheikh Muhammad Abduh and Sheikh Rashid Rida. In 1969, Sheikh al-Farsy became the first Sunni scholar in East Africa to write a complete translation of the Qur'an in Zanzibari Swahili.¹⁷ He was a scholar, teacher, preacher and jurist responsible for training many scholars in East Africa, including the Zanzibari-born current Grand Mufti of Oman, Sheikh Ahmad Hamad al-Khalili, a specialist in both the Ibadhi and Shafi'i legal schools of law.

Influential Muslim Scholars from Barawa

Sheikh Muhyi al-Din al-Qahtani al-Wa'ili (d. 1869) family was among the prominent Barawa families attracted to and settled in Zanzibar. He was the first to be appointed as the Shafi'i qadi of Zanzibar by Sultan Sayyid Siad in 1837 after the Mazrui were defeated in Mombasa. He wrote poems both in Arabic and Swahili. He went on to produce his crop of students in Islamic subjects, some of whom later became qadis in Zanzibar and Comoros. He wrote on different subjects, including Islamic law and theology. Another scholar from Barawa who also migrated to Zanzibar as a teenager was Sheikh Abd

14 Sheikh Ali Muhsin al-Barwani translated the al-Azhar produced *Al Muntakhab fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* from Arabic to Swahili under the following title: *Tarjuma ya Qur'an Tukufu kwa Kiswahili*. It is available at:

<https://www.iium.edu.my/deed/quran/swahili/index.html>.

15 Said Musa, *Maisha ya Al-Imam Sheikh Abdulla Saleh Farsy: Katika Uliwengu wa Kiislamu. Dar es Salaam* (Tanzania: Lillaahi Islamic Publications Centre, 1986). This book is written by Sheikh's former student and one of the most prolific writers in East Africa on subjects related to Islam. He also translated Barzanj's *mawlid* from Arabic to Swahili despite being an opponent of *mawlid* celebrations.

16 Mohamed S. Mraja, "The Reform Ideas of Shaykh 'Abdallāh Sālih al-Farsī and the Transformation of Marital Practices Among Digo Muslims of Kenya", *Islamic Law and Society* 17, no. 2 (2010): 245-278.

17 Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy, *Qurani Takatifu [Holy Qur'an]* (Nairobi: The Islamic Foundation, 1969).

al-Aziz al-Amawi (d. 1898). He was a member of the Nuraniyya branch of the Qadiriyya order.¹⁸ Among his two teachers in Barawa were Sayyid Abu Bakr al-Mihdar (probably of Hadhrami origins) and Haji Abd Ali b. Abd Rahman as well as the North African Sayyid Ahmad al-Maghribi.¹⁹ He next studied under his Barawan compatriot, Sheikh Muhyi al-Din al-Qahtani al-Wa'ili, who introduced him to the Sultan of Zanzibar. That was how later the Sultan appointed him as the qadi of Kilwa when he was still in his late teenage years. Sheikh al-Amawi was described as a prolific writer and historian, who also wrote poetry on divine unity of God and composed *qasida* or religious poetry. He was reported to have been responsible for converting a significant number of Ibadis to Shafi'i legal school, as well as debating with Christian missionaries who were quite active in East Africa at the time. He later became the qadi of Zanzibar, as did his son Burhan al-Din after him. He was also reported to have thrown his support behind the Uwaisiyya branch of the Qadiriyya *tariqa*. This branch was led by another famous religious figure from Barawa, Sheikh Uwais b. Muhammad al-Barawi (d. 1909). His branch of the Qadiriyya order later reached Zanzibar, the other coastal towns of Tanzania, and even the interior of the country. Sheikh Uwais also had the opportunity to visit and spend some time in Zanzibar, where he developed close ties with successive Zanzibari sultans.²⁰

Major Muslim Scholars of Mombasa

Without doubt, the Muslim intellectual life of Mombasa was dominated by the Mazrui family, which was reported to have produced twenty-five scholars and jurists. Moreover, being trained as jurists and due to its scholarly reputation and influence, the family produced many qadis of Mombasa for the last few centuries. In fact, the governorship of Mombasa was given to the Mazrui by the Omani Ya'rubi Dynasty after expelling the Portuguese, and the Mazrui ruled the city as an autonomous city-state from 1735 to 1837. In 1837, the

18 See B. G. Martin, "Notes on Some Members of the Learned Classes of Zanzibar and East Africa in the Nineteenth Century", *African Historical Studies* 4, no. 3 (1971): 525-545.

19 Ibid.; al-Farsy, *Tarehe ya Imam Shafi*.

20 See B. G. Martin, "Muslim Politics and Resistance to Colonial Rule: Shaykh Uwais b. Muhammad Al-Barawi and the Qadiriyya Brotherhood in East Africa", *Journal of Africa History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 471-486.

Busaid Omanis, who had displaced the Ya'rubī Dynasty in Oman, attacked Mombasa and once Fort Jesus fell, Sultan Sayyid Said asserted his authority over Mombasa, which lost its autonomy and was incorporated into the Zanzibar Sultanate. It was in the aftermath of this struggle over control of the crucial port town of Mombasa that one can understand why the Mazrui of Mombasa, like the other important Omani Ibadi families of Zanzibar such as the Barwanis, converted from Ibadism to Sunnism by adopting the Shafi'i school of law. Once the Mazrui resistance had collapsed and the Busaid took control of the town, Sheikh Abdalla b. Nafi al-Mazrui and his two sons, Ahmad Abdalla Mazrui and Ali Abdalla Mazrui, fled to Makka.²¹ Their study in the holy city for the next nine years resulted in their converting from Ibadism to Sunnism and adopting the Shafi'i school of law. In any case, only Sheikh Ali Abdalla Nafi Mazrui returned to Mombasa in 1846, while his father and brother never returned to East Africa.²²

Sheikh Ali Abdalla Nafi Mazrui (d. 1894) became one of the most eminent and celebrated scholars in East Africa with his extensive knowledge of the Islamic religious sciences acquired from over a decade of study abroad. He came back to a Mombasa where the Mazrui still enjoyed social and economic preeminence as part of the upper-class, but they had lost political power. Similarly, Sheikh Ali Abdalla too challenged the Ibadi scholars of Zanzibar by holding public debates against them. He conducted his popular *darasas* (teaching sessions) and taught a number of students while also successfully converting many fellow Mazruis and members of other Omani families, such as the Barwany and Mandhry, into Shafi'i school of law.²³

Sheikh Ali Abdalla Mazrui trained and passed on this high scholarly tradition with its reformist impulses to his relative, Sheikh Suleiman b. Ali Mazrui, who in turn trained several scholars, the most famous being Sheikh Ali Abdalla's own son and his nephew, Sheikh al-Amin Ali Mazrui (d 1947). Sheikh al-Amin became the major scholar of East Africa after the passing away of the two venerated scholars of Zanzibar, Sayyid Sumayt and Sheikh Abdalla Bakathir, who had been

21 Randall Pouwels, "Sh. al-Amin B. Ali Mazrui and Islamic Modernism in East Africa, 1875-1947," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 3 (August 1983), 334-335.

22 Ibid., 334-335.

23 Ibid.; See also Al-Farsy, *Baadhi ya Wanavyuoni*, 6-9.

among his teachers. Sheikh al-Amin became the champion of reformist Islam which was influenced by the writings of the Egyptian Sheikh Muhammad Abduh. This modernist reform impulse with pan-Islamic overtones was also partly influenced by the threat of colonialism and its Western values, and also by anti-Muslim missionary activities in East Africa. Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui²⁴ trained many scholars, including Sheikh Kassim b. Mazrui and the aforementioned Sheikh Saleh al-Farsy both of whom became chief qadis of Kenya. Sheikh al-Amin also began the translation of the Qur'an into Kimvita/Mombasan dialect of Swahili although he translated only a few chapters. Sheikh Kassim al-Mazrui continued this family project of translating the Holy Qur'an, and this uncompleted work is now being carried on or attended to by his son, Sheikh Hammad Kassim Mazrui.²⁵

Influential Muslim Scholars from Lamu

We have already mentioned that descendants of an important family of *sayyids* from Inat, Hadhramaut relocated to Pate in the Lamu area in the late sixteenth century, thereby making the Lamu region a significant centre of Islamic learning in coastal East Africa.²⁶ This was at the invitation of the ruler of Pate, who was facing Portuguese aggression as Christian crusaders against Islam. Sayyid Abdallah Ali b. Nasir (d. 1820), the composer of the well-known Swahili poem *al-Inkishafi*; Aydarus b. Uthman (d. mid-18th century), the author of the *Hamziya*, a Swahili revised edition of al-Busiri's *Umm al-Qura* and Sayyid Mansab Abu Bakr b. Abd al-Rahman (d. 1922), a major literary figure, theologian, and Shafi'i jurist, were among the descendants of this family of Husayn b. Abu Bakr b. Salim who had settled in Pate.²⁷

The later Hadhrami migrants to the Lamu region were the Jamal Layl *sayyids*, who ended up in Comoros as Hadhrami migrants and

24 Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui is the father of the famous academic Prof. Ali Mazrui (d. 2014), who taught first at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, then at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, US and finally at Binghamton University, New York, US.

25 Several years ago, al-Amin Mazrui, a professor of linguistics at Rutgers University, US, who is the brother of Sheikh Hammad Kassim Mazrui, gifted a copy of one of the chapters that has been translated into Mombasan Swahili.

26 The Mahdali *shurafa* were among the earliest cycle of migrants to arrive in the area but were later eclipsed by the Abu Bakr b. Salim Shurafa, who had better genealogical credentials.

27 Martin, "Notes on learned members", 528.

settled and resettled in different localities. This branch of the *sayyids* produced Salah Alawi Jamal al-Layl, also known as Habib Layl (d. 1936), a great scholar of Lamu in the nineteenth-twentieth century.²⁸ He was born in Comoros but moved to Lamu in the 1870s/1880s. As already mentioned, he was a descendant of a *sharifian* scholarly family from Hadhramaut that had first settled in Pate in the 16th century, later some members branched out to Zanzibar and Comoros. As a scholar of Hadhrami descent, Habib Layl also had affiliations with the *tariqa* Alawiyya, whose secrets were transmitted within the bloodline of the Prophet (SAW) to such an extent that Anne Bang has described this as "clan sufism."²⁹ In later centuries, however, this practice, especially outside of Hadhramaut, was modified, to some extent, partly due to the reform impetus within the *tariqa* that led the *shurafa* to start initiating non-*sayyids* into the order. Moreover, they also began to teach, not so much through the *murshid-murid* method, but through schools known as *ribat* and what was known as the Riyadhha Mosque. This led to the combination of a mosque and institute, as happened in Lamu with its Riyadhha Mosque and Islamic centre. It provides both basic Islamic teachings and higher Islamic learning to advanced students. It houses manuscripts (digitized over a decade ago) that include the *Alfiya*, *Burda*, *Mawlid al-Barzanj* and a wide collection of books on the Busaid era.

In the 20th century, Lamu has been very much associated with traditional Islam dominated by *shurafa* and the practices of observing *mawlid* and other rituals, whereas the much larger port town of Mombasa is more cosmopolitan and open to new Islamic trends that have been associated with the likes of the Mazrui 'ulama' and Sheikh Abdalla Saleh al-Farsy. These scholars have championed modernist reform ideas emanating from Egypt and the Hejaz. They have also enjoyed the benefits that come with holding the position of the chief qadi of Kenya. For instance, Sheikh al-Farsy had access to national radio, public *darasas* and teaching sessions held in different mosques in addition to producing religious books and pamphlets, all of which provided him with a platform to disseminate his reformist ideas and

28 See Abdul Hamid El Zein, *The Sacred Meadows: A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

29 Anne Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860-1925* (London: Routledge, 2004).

criticize local religious practices. Nevertheless, this did not go unchallenged, as Lamu scholars have emerged as his main opponents. Among such critics was Sayyid Ahmad Badawi (Mwinyi Baba), a prominent Lamu scholar, who was a major defender of traditional Islam against "moderate" reformers such as Sheikh Abdalla Saleh al-Farsy and the stricter ones such as Sheikh Nasoro, who began to assert themselves by the late decades of the 20th century. In fact, Mwinyi Baba has not spared any efforts in his criticism of reformist Islam, including producing a critique of Sheikh al-Farsy's Swahili translation of the Holy Qur'an.³⁰

Influential Muslim Scholars from Comoros

We have already mentioned that some of the descendants of Husayn b. Abu Bakr b. Salim's family from Hadhramaut first settled in Pate before some of them relocated to Comoros. The branch of the family that settled in Comoros produced famous scholars such as Sultan Ahmad of Moroni (d. 1875), and his grandson Mansab b. Ali (d. 1927), who was described before as the most famous student of the Zanzibari scholar Sheikh Ali b. Khamis b. Salim al-Barwani. Similarly, the other line of Ali b. Abu Bakr b. Salim's family also found its way to Comoros, which included the famous 19th century *sufi* leader Muhammad Ma'ruf b. Sheikh Ahmad Abu Bakar (d. 1905) of Moroni. He was the scholar who introduced the Shadhiliyya Yashurtiyya order in East Africa and northern Mozambique.

Among the other migrant sayyid families in Comoros was Sharif Abu Bakr b. Sayyid Sharif Husayn Ba Faqih, a name suggesting origins in Tarim, Hadhramaut.³¹ There were also instances of Hadhramis who became sultans, as in Anjouan. Sayyid Ahmad Sumayt, a Comorian of Hadhrami origin, was perhaps the most learned scholar of his time in East Africa. Many well-known scholars from Barawa, Lamu, Comoros and other cities were attracted to Zanzibar as the most exciting and stimulating Islamic intellectual centre of East Africa. Sayyid Sumayt was one of them who, after his studies in the Middle East, settled in Zanzibar and was immediately appointed by the Sultan as the qadi of

30 G. C. Van de Bruinhorst, "Changing Criticism of Swahili Qur'an translated three 'Rods of Moses'", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 15, no. 3 (2013): 206-231.

31 Ibid., 529.

Zanzibar due to his extensive knowledge and expertise in the Islamic legal field.

Finally, we should mention Sayyid Omar Abdalla (1918-2018), a Comorian descendant of the Hadhrami Ba 'Alawi family of Habib Abu Bakr b Salem. He was born in Zanzibar, where he lived and studied with local scholars before travelling to Hadhramaut to study with the renowned scholars of that region. In a recently published book, the Kenyan academic Muhammad Bakari laments the fact that Omar Abdalla has not received the attention that he rightly deserved³² despite the fact that he was a unique scholar who had been trained in both the traditional Islamic and Western educational systems. For instance, he had obtained a PhD in Islamic philosophy from Oxford University. He was undoubtedly a very versatile scholar and was known as an educationist, reformer, public intellectual, philosopher, and *sufi* practitioner. He saw reason and revelation as being allies, and as such considered both secular and religious education to be quite important and relevant for our times. In his vision of the function education should serve in Muslim societies in our complex and globalized world, he recognized the significant contribution that local institutions should play in promoting "the intellectual and spiritual development of Muslims." Accordingly, when in 1957 the Islamic Academy of Zanzibar was established to provide secular and religious education, he agreed to serve as the principal of the school.³³ This was the type of school that other Muslim scholar-reformers such as Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui (Mombasa) and Sheikh Al-Farsy had called for that would impart to Muslims both Islamic and Western/modern education. Finally, we should mention that Omar Abdalla, like other scholars we have mentioned before, was forced to leave Zanzibar for Comoros after the 1964 Zanzibar revolution (he had even been briefly detained) but the unstable political situation in Comoros there too led him to relocate to Saudi Arabia.

³² To rectify this situation, Mohamed Bakari has written a book, *The Sage of Moroni: The Intellectual Biography of Sayyid Omar Abdallah, A forgotten Muslim Public Intellectual* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 2019), 2 and 12.

³³ Ibid., 116.

Influential Muslim Scholars of Tanga

The most famous scholar of Tanga (a town which lies south of Mombasa on the northern Tanzanian coast) and of mainland Tanzania was Sheikh Ali Hemed al-Buhriy (d. 1957). He received his earliest Islamic education from his father, a scholar and poet, Sheikh Hemed b. Abdalla al-Buhriy (1840-1928),³⁴ before continuing his studies with other leading scholars of Tanga, including renowned scholar of Islamic law, Sheikh Omari bin Stamboul,³⁵ former qadi of Tanga and former student of Sheikh Ali Abdalla Nafi al-Mazrui (d. 1894) of Mombasa. Later he travelled to Zanzibar to study under Sayyid Ahmad Sumayt, the venerated scholar of Zanzibar.

Due to his extensive religious training, Sheikh Ali al-Buhriy was appointed the qadi of Tanga, although his position approached that of the qadi of Tanganyika, a position that, unlike the case in Kenya, was not created in Tanganyika. He went on to become one of the leading scholars of Islamic law in East Africa. Joseph Schacht, in 1953, described him as the most learned Shafi'i scholar he had ever met.³⁶ He lived during the heyday of another scholarly giant of Islam in East Africa, Sheikh al-Amin b. Ali Mazrui, whose family dominated the religious life of Mombasa. The two men were of Omani ancestry and both, because of their legal Islamic training, had served as qadis during the British colonial period. The Buhriy family has its origins in Pemba Island from where Sheikh Buhriy's grandfather had migrated to Mtangata on the mainland coast of Tanga in the 19th century and eventually, some members of the family ended up in Tanga town. Like the Mazruis and other Omani families on the East African coast, the Buhriys also converted from Ibadism to Shafi'i school of law. However, in contrast to the Mazruis, the Buhriys embraced a more traditional Islam that included a fascination with the healing practices and astrology, for which Pemba (where they had originally settled) was known.

34 Hemedi b. Abdallah al-Buhriy was the author of the famous *Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima* [Epic of German War to seize Mrima/The Northern Tanzanian Coast], Tr. J.W.T. Allen (Dar Es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau, 1971).

35 Omari bin Stamboul, "An Early History of Mombasa and Tanga", Translated by E. C. Baker, *Tanganyika/Tanzania Notes and Records* 31 (July 1951): 32-36.

36 Joseph Schacht, "Notes on Islam in East Africa", *Studia Islamica* 23 (1965): 109.

For the purposes of comparison, the Buhriy family of Tanga is arguably the equivalent of the Mazrui family of Mombasa, as its members have been leading poets and Islamic legal scholars in Tanga for almost two centuries. The family attained fame as poets as poetry was cultivated by all the cultured, educated Swahili. More importantly, Sheikh Ali al-Buhriy was responsible for training many of the Digo, Segeju and Bondei religious scholars of the Tanga region and beyond. Among his students was his son Sheikh Muhammad Ali al-Buhriy, who combined Islamic religious education in *fiqh*, *tafsir* etc., with a law degree from the University of Dar as-Salaam and later became the Secretary General of BAKWATA/The National Muslim Council of Tanzania. His nephew Sheikh Hemed b. Juma also later became the first *mufti* of BAKWATA. Finally, Sheikh Ali Hemed al-Buhriy wrote several books on Islamic law and a Swahili translation of some of the chapters of the Holy Qur'an,³⁷ just as his colleague and friend Sheikh Al-Amin Mazrui had done.

Muslim Scholars in Bagamoyo and the Buganda Kingdom

In the preceding discussion, we noted that significant changes took place in coastal East Africa following the expansion of coastal trade both within and outside the region. This was the post-Portuguese period of Omani ascendancy in coastal East Africa when Swahili towns absorbed new cultural influences from across the Indian Ocean, and the resulting wealth from the commercial revival in the region, to some extent, began to trickle down to different social classes. This partly explains why some of the scholarly families we have mentioned had the financial means to pursue their higher Islamic education in the major centres of Islamic learning in the Arab-speaking world. Moreover, the onset of colonial rule in the final decades of the 19th century and the period after, provoked a Muslim response in the form of a religious renewal and a heavier emphasis on the written tradition as well as a veneration of the life of the Prophet (SAW) as a model for

³⁷ Ali bin Hemed al-Buhriy, *al-Murshid al-Karīm ilā Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-Azīm* [The Noble Guide to the Interpretation of the Glorious Qur'an], Unpublished. For more information on this tafsir see Abdin Chande, "Shaykh Ali Hemed al-Buhriy's Mrima Swahili Translation of the Qur'an and its Place in Islamic Scholarship in East Africa", *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 4 (2021): 111-132.

Muslims to follow.³⁸ As such, there was a corresponding rise in Muslim propagation efforts³⁹ as well as attempts to provide Islamic religious education among the lower classes in the coastal region, especially in the last two decades of the 19th century and the first few decades of the 20th century.

While we have already mentioned the predominance of highly educated and influential Muslim scholars who were of Hadhrami, Omani and Barawan origin (the Mazruis, Maamiris, Mandhrys, Buhriys, the Hadhrami sayyids etc.) there was also a new generation of literate Swahili scholars who slowly began to emerge and started to vie for the same positions, religious offices and influence. In some cases, these were preferred by the Busaid rulers over, for instance, Mazruis in Mombasa. Among the scholars who were responsible for disseminating Islamic education to a wider population and who, at the same time, were committed to providing education to lower classes, four names stand out.⁴⁰ They are Sheikh Abdalla Bakathir of Lamu and Zanzibar; Habib Layl of Lamu, who made Islamic education available to poor Hadhramis and former African slaves; Sayyid Abdurahman b. Ahmad b. Umar al-Saggaf (d. 1922) also known as "Mwinyi Abudi" of Siyu and later Mombasa, who was famous for making his *darasas* available to the poor disadvantaged townsmen;⁴¹ and Sheikh Ramiya of Bagamoyo, a former slave and convert to Islam.⁴² Of these four religious figures, our focus below will be mainly on Mwinyi Abudi but

38 Randall Pouwels, "Sheikh al-Amin", 336. Tha Maji Maji uprising was an instance where this sentiment was expressed.

39 B. G. Martin, "Materials for the Understanding of Islam in German East Africa", *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 68 (1968): 16.

40 Pouwels, "Sheikh al-Amin," 336. Sheikh Hassan b. Amir al-Shirazi is also worth mentioning here, although his influence was much later in the 1940s to 1960s. Here is another Swahili scholar who trained many students, especially after he moved from Zanzibar to mainland Tanzania. He is reported to have travelled widely all-over East Africa, although he ended up settling in Dar as-Salaam, where he opened Madrasat al-Shirazi in the Comorian Mosque. See August Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa: The Sufi Order in Tanzania* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1980), 23.

41 <http://ummah.co.ke/blog/2014/10/7-sayyid-abdurahman-bin-ahmad-mwinyi-abudu>, accessed 25 June 2023. Abdulkadir Hashim has an upcoming book that examines Muslim intellectual contributions along the East African coast. One of the scholars he has chosen for this study is Mwinyi Abudi of Mombasa, who served as qadi of Siyu in 1878 and as chief qadi of Kenya from 1902 onwards.

42 August Nimtz, *Islam and Politics*.

especially on Sheikh Ramiya, who, unlike Sheikh Abdalla Bakathir and Habib Layl, were not members of a Hadhrami scholarly elite, did not benefit (through scholarly and family networks) from extensive study outside of Africa in the central heartlands of Islam. Moreover, Sheikh Ramiya was of humble origin as an African who hailed from the interior of East Africa, a region where Islam reached only in the 19th century. Similarly, no doubt, Mwinyi Abudi was also identifiably an African or someone completely assimilated to the local Swahili culture, though his last name (al-Saggaf) may suggest a Hadhrami connection that goes back to a far distant past. Mwinyi Abudi was a champion of the poor who used his salary to assist the poor people in every way he could. He taught students from all over the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts (e.g. from his native Siyu, Lindi, Mtwara and Pemba) including members of the Digo ethnic group of Mombasa and its hinterland.⁴³

As for Yahya Abdalla Ramiya (1856-1931), he was born in eastern Congo among the caravan porter Manyema people, and ended up in Bagamoyo. His name at birth was Mundu, a former slave who embraced Islam later.⁴⁴ In 1880, he was allowed by his master to start trading fish, and he made enough money to buy some coconut plantations. It was probably around this time that he embraced Islam and took on the name of Abdalla Ramiya. Using the money he had earned in his trading activities, he began an intensive study of Islam as an adult and is reported to have completed the Qur'an with Sharif

43 See footnote 44 above. See also Hassan Mwakimako, "Conflict and Tensions in the Appointment of Chief Kadhi in Colonial Kenya 1898 to 1860s," in *Muslim Family Law in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial Legacies and Post-Colonial Challenges*, eds. Shamil Jeppie, Ebrahim Moosa and Richard Roberts (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

44 Sheikh Mtumwa, is another former slave, who later became the leader of the Nkhotakota branch of the Qadiriyya in Malawi. She was born in Zanzibar to a Malawian slave woman and a Swahili man. Mtumwa, literally "slave" in Kiswahili, lived in Malawi until 1914 when her husband, the district commissioner, passed, and she opted to return to Zanzibar where she studied, living off her husband's pension and some work that she did while studying. She received her 'ijāza (permission to teach) from Sheikh 'Abdul Kadir and returned to Nkhotakota, and successfully introducing women to the *tariqa*. See <https://www.theislamicmonthly.com/sufism-slavery-in-east-africa/>.

Abdallah bin 'Alawi al-Jamal al-Layl by 1889.⁴⁵ He continued his studies of the Islamic sciences, including *tawhid* (theology), *tafsir* and *tasawwuf* with Sheikh Abu Bakr bin Taha al-Jabri for the next couple of years. It was not until 1911 that he is reported to have received an *'ijāza* from Sheikh Muhammad b. Husayn al-Lughani.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, he had also become a *khalifa* of the Qadiriyya order and was selected the Sheikh of Bagamoyo (*sheikh of tariqa*) after the death in 1910 of his master, supposedly Muhammad Ma'aruf bin Sheikh Ahmad bin Abu Bakr.⁴⁷ Is this perhaps a reference to Sheikh Abu Bakr b. Taha al-Jabri al-Barawi, who was also mentioned as a Qadiriyya *khalifa* in Bagamoyo around this time and also ran a Qur'anic school? Or is this a perhaps a reference to some other person?⁴⁸

Whatever might be the case, for our purposes, what is important to mention here is that Sheikh Ramiya became a renowned Muslim figure in the African Muslim community of Bagamoyo. By 1900, he had set up his *madrassa* and sponsored students from all over East Africa to study at his learning centre. He also took care of the orphans, poor and travellers, especially around the *mawlid* season. Moreover, the influence of his Qadiriyya order reached all the way to the Great Lakes area of Lake Tanganyika. It did not take long for the colonial authorities to notice his presence and influence. Accordingly, in 1916, he was appointed the *liwali* (district governor) of Bagamoyo, making this former slave an influential personality throughout East Africa.⁴⁹ His religious sessions were open to ordinary people among whom his religious mission or outreach *da'wa* program was directed. Moreover,

45 August Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa*. He discusses the competition and rivalry between followers of Qadiriyya led by Ramiya as the *tariqa* that mobilised the Africans of Bagamoyo vs Alawi/Ba'Alawi, the *tariqa* of Hadhramis or *sayyid* elites.

46 See Hassan Mwakimako, "Yahya bin 'Abdalla Ramiya (1856-1931)", *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, May 29, 2011, 737.

47 Ibid. Is there a confusion, i.e. a mix of names by Nimtz since Muhammad Ma'aruf b. Shaykh Ahmad b. Abu Bakr also happens to be the name of the Comorian *sheikh* who introduced the Shadhiliyya order from Comoros to Kilwa and northern Mozambique? See August Nimtz, *Islam and Politics*.

48 B. G. Martin, "Muslim Politics and Resistance to Colonial Rule: Sheikh Uways b. Muhammad Al-Barawi and the Qadiriyya Brotherhood in East Africa", *Journal of Africa History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 484. This *sheikh* al-Barawi was also quite active in spreading copies of the alleged Meccan letters calling for Muslim resistance against German colonial rule.

49 See footnotes 33 to 35.

he was known to be the most generous person with his time and whatever material resources or wealth he had made from his previous business ventures. When he died in 1931, his son, Sheikh Muhammad Ramiya, took over his father's work running the *madrassa* and as head of the Qadiriyya order in Bagamoyo. Both the father and son together were responsible for converting many Africans to Islam through the activities of the *tariqa* and *madrassa* teaching sessions to impart Islamic education and promote literacy. Their concerted efforts through *da'wa* work, *tariqa* activities and teaching empowered people who were formerly slaves, porters or members of the lower classes. In the decades preceding independence, Sheikh Muhammad Ramiya played a crucial role in assisting TANU/Tanganyika National Union [now known as CCM] to organize the local population of his area for the nationalist cause to free the country from the British colonial yoke.

Islam and Islamic Scholarship in the Interlacustrine Region of Uganda

By the 1830s to 1840s, coastal caravans (and with them, Islam) had reached the interior Great Lakes region of East Africa, where Arab and Swahili traders were trading with the people of the ivory-rich interior. This is how Islam and the Swahili language were first introduced in the areas where the caravan passed, for instance, the central Nyamwezi region to Lake Tanganyika and eventually to Lake Victoria/Nyanza region of Uganda. From that time right into the era of colonial rule, by the end of that century, Islam slowly began to gain a foothold in the interior regions of all three East African countries: Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. This included Malawi and the major urban centres of Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Congo despite the role of European colonial administrators and Christian missionaries, especially in Uganda, to arrest the spread of Islam that was seen as a rival and competitor. With time, local scholars began to emerge who had been trained either locally or in one of the towns in the interior where Swahili speakers had settled or in one of the coastal towns for those who had the opportunity to study there.

Arguably, the most important scholar to emerge in Uganda, who was responsible for training many of the future scholars was Sheikh

Shuayb [or Swaibu] Semakula (1875-1973).⁵⁰ The consensus in Uganda was that he was the most learned scholar of his time. He was born in a Christian home, and later in his twenties, he found himself going to the Lake Nyanza town of Kisumu in Kenya to earn a living as a porter,⁵¹ though according to Haji Mutumba's account, his presence there was as a Christian railroad chaplain.⁵² While there, he met a number of Swahili Muslims, such as Yusuf and Musabaawa Abedi, as well as an Indian Muslim by the name of Shakib, who treated him well. He was so impressed by the Swahili Muslims he had met, the kindness they showed him when he was sick and the way they lived/practised their faith that on his return to Uganda, he became a Muslim. He began his study of Islam locally before travelling to Kiziba in northern Tanzania to study with a well-known Swahili Muslim teacher. After his return to Uganda, he went to Mbale in eastern Uganda where he spent several years as a student of a very learned scholar by the name of Sheikh Abdu Samad Ibn Najm. In 1911, Shuayb Semakula received an *'ijāza* from Sheikh Najm to be a *sheikh*, the same year that, coincidentally, Sheikh Abdalla Ramiya of Bagamoyo too had received his certificate of competence. Again, like Sheikh Abdalla Ramiya, Sheikh Shuayb Semakula's main contribution to the consolidation of Islam in Uganda was in his teaching and graduating many of the students in the country, who went on to become *sheikhs* in different parts of the country. They included Sheikh Yusuf Kasujja, Sheikh Muhammad Lunowa, Sheikh Muhammad Matovu, Sheikh Ali Kulumba, Sheikh Muhammad b. Said and many others.⁵³ One last fact to mention about the *sheikh* was that he belonged to the Shadhiliyya *tariqa* (though *tariqa* was not as strong in Uganda or even in Kenya as it was in Tanzania), whose major centre in East Africa was Kilwa in southern coastal Tanzania.

50 See the short online piece by Haji Nsereko Mutumba, Public Relations Officer, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, written in 2013: <https://ugandamuslims.wordpress.com/2013/05/29/the-unsung-muslim-heroes-of-ugandah-e-sheikh-swaibu-ssemakula-sheikh-mukulu/> who claims that he lived for 100 years. But in 1964, the *sheikh* himself said he was 89 years old, which would make him 98 years old when he died in 1973. See Abdu B. K. Kasozi, *The Spread of Islam in Uganda* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 87.

51 Ibid., 86.

52 Unfortunately, Mutumba does not mention the source of his information.

53 Kasozi, *The Spread of Islam*, 87.

In the period following the death of Sheikh Semakula in 1973, Muslim students from Uganda and the other East African countries began to receive scholarships to study in the Arab countries, especially at the University of Madina in Saudi Arabia. More specifically, in Amin's Uganda (1971-1979), Islam was on the ascendancy for the first time since the onset of British colonial rule when the British deliberately favoured Christians (specifically Anglicans) over Muslims. The first translation of the Qur'an in Luganda was not long in appearing as *da'wa* work expanded. With changed political circumstances, not only did Uganda get the opportunity to join the OIC/Organization of Islamic Cooperation, but also became a recipient of funds from the OIC-affiliated Islamic Development Bank of Jeddah to build the Islamic University of Mbale. With opportunities for Islamic studies at the University of Madina and other universities in the region in the post-colonial era, a new generation of Islamic scholars who were fluent in Arabic began to appear in Uganda and other countries of East Africa. This created a new breed of African Muslim scholars who were not necessarily from the elite scholarly families of the coast.

Conclusion

This article had three major aims. The first was to briefly examine some of the factors within the West Indian Ocean world that contributed to the development of Islam along the East African coastal region from the earliest times to the present. The second was to outline and explain in detail the origins, establishment and development or entrenchment of the Islamic scholarly tradition in this maritime region. This necessarily included presenting and discussing the role and contributions of the most influential Muslim scholars in some coastal towns, such as Barawa, Lamu, Comoros, Mombasa, Tanga and especially Zanzibar, the seat of Omani power and the major Islamic intellectual centre of East Africa by the later decades of the 19th century. An attempt was made to understand such diverse and interconnected factors as trans-Indian ocean migration networks and trade, Islamic education and knowledge acquisition and its links to networks of travelling scholars/*shurafa*, *sufis* and traders, local and pan-Islamic/global interactions, textuality and orality, pilgrimage and external religious influences, Shafi'i and Ibadi interface, and

Hadhramization and Omanization of the top ranks of the 'ulama' class in East Africa. The third and final aim of this study was to describe the rise of a non-Hadhrami and non-Omani generation of Swahili/African Islamic scholars who appeared in an age that was characterized by Islamic education being increasingly disseminated to a wider population, including the lower classes. This was the period when Islam began to penetrate from the coast to the immediate hinterland and eventually to the interior of East Africa during the 19th century era of the commercial caravan trade and it was being absorbed and replaced by the European colonial economy.

This article concludes by noting that Islamic scholarship in East Africa is no longer exclusively dominated by scholars from certain Hadhrami and Omani families/lineages, though these scholars still have their place in the communities and quarters of the towns where they have their *madrasas* and mosques associated with these families. Moreover, as we have noted, studying abroad is no longer limited to members of certain families and their knowledge acquisition being linked (as it was in the past) to scholarly networks of travelling scholars/*shurafa*, *sufis* and traders. Opportunities for African Muslims to study at the University of Madina and others like it have levelled the playing field concerning opportunities for acquiring Islamic education abroad. Moreover, local universities, Islamic or otherwise, are producing university-educated Muslims, whether trained in the Islamic subjects or other fields for professional careers, who are better informed about their religion and have a heightened sense of awareness about their faith and want to have a say in the matters affecting their Muslim communities. This is an outcome of living in a period in which there are far too many resources, including books (not to mention cassettes, CDs and access to the internet, YouTube videos, social media and digital networks) are readily available in a way that was not conceivable during the era of colonial rule when there was a far limited number of schools with Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, serving the higher educational needs of students of all the three East African countries. There is also a new generation of scholars who have raised the bar on scholarly activities (some in Uganda, known as Bible preachers, are involved in public debates with Christian clergy on the teachings of the Bible on Jesus) and pose a challenge, given their skills in the Arabic language, to the monopoly on

religious education held by traditional Islamic scholars. In Kenya, to give another example, there have been some voices that have been raised in recent times by some up-country African Muslims about getting Muslim scholars from outside the coastal region to serve as chief *qadis* of Kenya instead of the post being an exclusive reserve of certain families from Mombasa or other coastal towns.⁵⁴ The future landscape of Islam and Islamic scholarship and what it will be is still evolving, and what the future holds in store is not yet clear, especially since this is the age in which Islam is being viewed through the prism of security, and the insecurity this creates is forcing Muslims to slowly navigate their place in a world in which politics of full inclusion have yet to be realized.

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54 See this article "Muslim Leaders Lobby for a Non-coastal Chief Kadhi" at this URL: <https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2021-02-03-muslim-leaders-lobby-for-a-non-coastal-chief-kadhi/> in which chief *qadi* Ahmed Muhdhar dismissed these allegations by saying that he is from Tana River.

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Transformation of Islamic Learning in Kenya: Tripartite Competition between Traditional Islamic Education, Conventional Education and Islamic Integrated Education Systems

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Introduction

From the early interactions along the Swahili coast to the inland regions, the arrival of Islam brought a rich blend of intellectual, artistic, and societal contributions to the East African region. Muslim culture played a crucial role in establishing Islamic knowledge and identity in Kenya long before the arrival of Euro-Christian culture. The encounter between Muslim culture and incoming Euro-Christian influences ushered in a period of cultural contestation. This competition, fuelled by colonial ambitions, led to the gradual marginalization of Muslim culture and education. Institutions such as *madrasas* and centres of Islamic learning faced significant challenges due to colonial policies that favoured Euro-centric education systems and Christian missionary efforts. However, Kenya's independence heralded a new era, and the post-independence period marked a cultural shift towards the accommodation and promotion of Muslim culture and education. Integrated Islamic schools were established in Kenya towards the end of the 19th century, and by the mid-21st century, their number had significantly increased. The inclusion of Islamic religious education in the mainstream education system reflects a cultural symbiosis, wherein Islamic teachings and cultural values were incorporated into the conventional educational framework. This development led to a scenario of tripartite competition between traditional Islamic education (TIE) and conventional education (CE) on the one hand, and between TIE and Islamic integrated education (IIE) on the other. The emergence and flourishing of Islamic integrated education were perceived by some traditional Muslim scholars as a threat to Traditional Islamic education, with some even viewing it as a

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state mechanism designed to undermine traditional Islamic schools (*madrasas/dukis*). This perceived threat was further exacerbated by the so-called “war on terror,” which targeted traditional Islamic schools, condemning them for allegedly nurturing “terrorist” ideologies. In this context, the article scrutinizes the evolution of TIE and IIE in Kenya, delineating the opportunities and obstacles they encounter. The study also contends that despite the growth of IIE in Kenya, there are fundamental challenges to its flourishing within the mainstream education system. Furthermore, the article argues that TIE faces both internal and external challenges affecting its curriculum and teaching methods and concludes by elucidating these perceived and actual challenges while proposing strategies to mitigate them.

Significance of Islamic Education

Islamic education has a long history that stretches back to the history of Islam. Like other aspects of Islam, Islamic education has evolved and adapted to various local cultural and political contexts. Throughout its voyage across the globe, Islamic education has faced challenges that have forced it to adapt to prevailing patterns of life. Despite the trials and tribulations that it has endured over the years, Islamic education has stood the test of time. Several models have been developed in various Muslim countries, such as *almajirai* and *tsangaya* in Nigeria, *fasantres* in Indonesia and *fondoks* in Malaysia.¹ Since the advent of Islam in the African continent, Muslim scholars have contributed tremendously to establishing institutions of learning and shaping Islamic scholarship along the East African coast. Muslim teachers and propagators who arrived with traders and merchants from Arabia and the Indian subcontinent established humble learning centres within mosques, known as *darsas* (seminars), and in their residences, known as *chuos* (residential Islamic schools). Through this system of learning in *halaqas* (study circles), the oral tradition of

1 See Abu Bakar Yakubu, “Pondok, Tsangaya, and Old Age Spiritual Wellbeing”, *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 2, July 2021; Isa Mohammed, “The Almajiri Educational System: Origin, Dynamics and Challenges”, *Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 2, no. 2, (2015): 196-207; Ibrahim Dahiru Idriss, Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, Adamu Abubakar Muhammad & Abubakar Idris Barde, “A Study on the Historical Development of Tsangaya System of Islamic Education in Nigeria: A Case Study of Yobe State”, *UMRAN - Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies* 9, no. 2, (2022): 59-71.

transmitting Islamic knowledge "helped to establish the authority of teachers who were to follow and it served as the criterion to distinguish one student from another as far as his closeness to the master."² These small centres of learning were pioneers and fountains of Islamic education that ensured promotion and preservation of Islamic education in the Eastern African region. The existence of traditional Islamic education (TIE) in Kenya and the subsequent emergence of integrated Islamic education (IIE) are examples of the adaptation of Islamic education to the local educational environment.

Islamic education serves as an agent of socialisation, through which learners culturally determine their religious orientation.³ It is a significant source of religious knowledge aiding the spiritual and moral upbringing of the learners and educating them about their religion. In this sense, the Islamic content in educational development has a decisive influence on the socialisation processes. Muslim parents face the challenge of reconciling the preservation of their children's Islamic identity with the demands of modernity. For them, Islamic education and religious identity are two sides of the same coin and Islamic education transcends mere academic pursuit. Therefore, it plays a significant role in inculcating Islamic values in learners, which in turn serves as a source of holistic inspiration that assist in their spiritual and moral upbringing. In some Muslim populated areas in Kenya, communities consider conventional education (CE) as a waste of time or even an active threat due the values that it imparts to learners. Some Muslim communities view conventional education as antagonistic to their cultural, social and economic way of life and as a ploy to erode the identity of learners. Parents today are caught between two extremes, on the one hand, sending their children to conventional schools in order to access an education that will meet market demands without religious instruction, and on the other, enrolling them in traditional Islamic schools to master their religion without receiving conventional education (CE). This scenario has resulted in a dichotomy

2 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Oral Transmission and the Book in Islamic Education: The Spoken and the Written Word", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no.1 (1992): 2.

3 Bassam Tibi, "Institutions of Learning and Education in Islam: Their Historical Contribution to the Cultural Accommodation of Change and their Current State of Crisis" in *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change*, trans. Clare Krojzl (Oxford: West view, 1990), 102.

where contemporary Muslims find themselves choosing between their sacred world and the conventional one.

The failure of conventional education institutions to sufficiently meet the religious needs of Muslim children has led parents in Kenya to send their children to IIE schools. This concern is compounded by the parents' fears that their children will lose their Muslim identity due to the strong non-Islamic influence in conventional schools. Consequently, a dual system of education has emerged in Kenya: modern schooling offered in CE and IIE on the one hand, and TIE on the other. The dilemma of this dual education system is that it has created three types of graduates: TIE graduates who are well-versed in Islamic knowledge, CE graduates who lack Islamic education, and IIE graduates who are in between. As Fazlur Rahman has rightly pointed out, the dualistic system of education is one of the major challenges facing Islamic education, where Muslims are forced to choose between loyalty to their religion and loyalty to the conventional world. This situation is true in Kenya as well as in other parts of the world.

Historical Development of Islamic Education in Kenya

A) Traditional Islamic Education (TIE)

In the pre-colonial period, Muslims were the most literate society in Kenya and had a thriving civilization, including a vibrant trade along the east coast of Africa and the establishment of towns which were centres of knowledge. These towns included, inter alia, Mogadishu, Pate, Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, Zanzibar and Kilwa. Traditional Islamic education played a significant role in shaping Islamic intellectualism in the Kenyan coast and beyond. Traditional Islamic education in Kenya predates the colonial period and has since remained relatively peripheral to education policies. The existence of TIE along the East African coast is linked to the arrival of Islam to the East African littoral since the end of the eighth century A.D. Based on archaeological excavations at Shanga near Lamu, Mark Horton suggested the presence of a Muslim community living in Shanga from as early as 760 A.D.⁴ Later in the 14th century, the Muslim traveller

4 Mark Horton, *Shanga: The Archaeology of a Muslim Trading Community on the Coast of East Africa* (London: The British Institute in Eastern Africa, 1996.). See also Ahmed Dueleh Jama, *The Origins and Developments of Mogadishu AD 1000 to 1850*, *Studies in African Archeology*, 12 (1996).

and historian Muhammad ibn Abdullah Ibn Battuta (d. 1377) visited Mogadishu, Mombasa and Kilwa and gave an account of Muslim settlements along the East African coast.⁵ As evident in his account, Ibn Battuta was impressed by the formidable Islamic presence in Mombasa, a city in present-day Kenya, observing that “they are Shafi’i by rite, they are a religious people, trustworthy and righteous. Their mosques are made of wood, expertly built. We spent the night at this island and then travelled by sea to the city of Kilwa.”⁶ These historical accounts of the influence of Islam along the East African coast demonstrate the presence of Muslim settlements in the region and, by extension, the existence of TIE long before the arrival of European powers on the Kenyan coast towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Prior to British colonial rule in Kenya, traditional Islamic education was primarily conducted in mosques and residences of scholars, which served as the foundational centres of Islamic learning across the East African coast. Among the earliest Islamic educational institutions in Kenya was the *chuo* (Qur’an school) typically located in the teacher’s residence. Learning in *chuo* resembled the approach found in conventional nursery schools, with a focus on teaching the basics of the Arabic alphabet and the recitation of the Holy Qur’an. Children were typically introduced to *chuo* at a very early stage, where they learnt the Arabic alphabet using a common syllabus that was widely adopted throughout the East African coast. The *Qā’ida al-Baghdādiyya*⁷ was the basic text used in *chuo*, containing reading exercises on the Arabic alphabet and the last chapters of the Holy Qur’an. Once children became proficient in reading the Arabic scripts, they were gradually taught to recite and memorize the Holy Qur’an. Memorization of the Holy Qur’an at an early-stage prepared children for future memorization of religious texts across various disciplines. Seyyed Hossein Nasr noted the significance of oral tradition and memory in the transmission of knowledge, stating that they “affect the

5 Muhammad b. Abdullah b. Battutah, *Tuhfat al-Nuzzār fī Gharāib al-Amsār wa Ajā’ib al-Asfār* (Cairo: Matba’ al-Istiqāma, 1967).

6 Said Hamdun and Noël King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, fourth ed. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010), 21-22.

7 Despite the popularity of the *Qā’ida al-Baghdādiyya* and its importance in early childhood learning, the name of the author is neither mentioned nor known.

whole of the Islamic intellectual tradition and educational system".⁸ The progression of Islamic learning typically started for a child in the *chuo*, advancing to the *madrassa* and the *darsas* in mosques upon reaching puberty (*tamyiz*). However, this educational trajectory was altered with the introduction of *madrassa*, where children were directly enrolled. While *chuo* focused primarily on the Holy Qur'an, *madrassa* education broadened to include a wider syllabus of Islamic religious teaching, making it more appealing to parents due to its comprehensive curriculum and pedagogical methodologies. Traditional Islamic education has been a pioneering system of education along the Eastern African coast, laying the foundational structures for the region's intellectual and religious development.

Transitioning to a significant development in the Islamic educational landscape, we observe the contributions of pioneering Muslim educators such as Habib Salih Jamal al-Layl (d. 1935), who was among the first to initiate Islamic teaching on Lamu Island along the East African coast. Habib Salih initially conducted *darsas* in Bilad Mosque before constructing a hut that served as a *musalla* (prayer place). Subsequently, with the community support, he built the Riyāda Mosque and established a *madrassa* within its courtyard, naming it Ribat al-Riyāda in 1900. This *madrassa* adopted new methodologies of teaching that were practiced in Tarim (in Yemen) and has since graduated numerous Muslim intellectuals across the Eastern African region. Close to Riyada Mosque, another *madrassa* named Madrasat al-Najah al-Islamiya was established.⁹ Additional examples of *madrassas* in the region include Ukutani Madrasa in Zanzibar. Instruction in these centers typically took place through *darsas* (session) conducted in *halaqas* (study circles), either within the residence of the teacher or in the courtyards of the mosques. This traditional mode of Islamic education through *halaqas* and *darsas* laid the groundwork for a more formalized system of Islamic learning, leading to the establishment of structured educational institutions such as *madrassas* and, later, integrated Islamic schools.

8 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Oral Transmission and the Book in Islamic Education: The Spoken and the Written Word", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no.1 (1992): 1.

9 Madrasat al-Najah al-Islamiya was officially inaugurated by 'Alawiyya scholar 'Abd al-Qadir b. Muhammad b. Ali al-Hibshi on Tuesday 6 Rabi' al-Thāni 1375/22 November 1955.

The evolution of *madrasa* education and curriculum development was significantly influenced by the influx of graduates from higher learning institutions in the Muslim world during the 1980s. These graduates, upon their return, established *madrasas* and imported curricula from their respective institutions of higher learning abroad. While some of these graduates from Gulf countries were employed by religious organizations to propagate Islam, most were integrated into the *madrasa* education. Conversely, other graduates who came from less affluent countries were employed in the civil service and some were appointed as qadis in Zanzibar and Kenya. This new generation of young graduates trained by various Islamic universities seemed gradually to replace locally trained Muslim teachers. This trend not only changed the intellectual climate along the East African coast but also influenced the institutional framework of centers of Islamic learning and their curricula in the Eastern Africa.¹⁰

A.1) TIE and British Colonial Administration

The colonization of Muslim territories had a profound impact on Islamic education. With the arrival of European colonial powers, a systematic effort to marginalize and eliminate Muslim educational systems began, accompanied by the introduction of secular and Christian education systems. Supported by colonialist powers, Christian missionaries established health centers and educational institutions alongside churches to facilitate evangelization, often using education as a primary tool for spreading their religious influence. Some of the so-called 'explorers,' such as Vasco da Gama of the Portuguese Roman Catholics, and Johann Ludwig Krapf and Johannes Rebman of the Lutheran Church Missionary Society, were integral parts of this colonial mechanism aimed at 'conquering' Muslim areas and gradually transforming Muslim culture and education. The British colonial administration, in collaboration with missionary academics, even replaced the Arabic script used for writing Kiswahili with the Latin script. Muslim educational institutions along the East African coast, which had long existed before the advent of British colonial power, were reduced to mere centers for producing clerical human

10 For details of these Islamic traditional educational institutions see my article "Scholars of the Circles: Role of Qadis in Training and Transmission of Islamic Learning along the East African Coast between Mid-Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", *Journal for Islamic Studies* 29 (2009): 104-143.

resources to serve the colonial administration. When the British established a protectorate along the Kenyan coast in 1895, they focused on consolidating power and paid little attention to traditional Islamic education (TIE). The schools established by the colonial government did not cater to TIE, as most were sponsored by Christian missionaries. This support for missionary-led schools created a negative attitude among Muslims toward Western-style education, leading some Muslim parents in Kenya's coastal towns to refrain from sending their children to government schools. Consequently, the educational landscape in these regions was marked by a deep-seated tension between traditional Islamic education and the new colonial educational systems.

Conventional education was introduced to Kenya by the Christian missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, primarily to promote evangelism. However, it later evolved into an instrument for producing skilled labour for European farms and clerical staff for the colonial administration. The first school was established by Church Missionary Society in Rabai, Coast Province, in 1846.¹¹ Muslims in Kenya perceived that the British colonial authorities, in partnership with various Christian churches, used the education system as the main tool for evangelisation, with government grants being channelled to schools established by the churches.¹² The marginalisation of traditional Islamic education (TIE) was further reinforced by educational policies of the British colonial administration, which focused on separating Islamic religious education from government schools.

For instance, in 1909, the British colonial government in Kenya established the Fraser Education Commission, which recommended the separation of education systems along racial and ethnic lines. The Legislative Council adopted Fraser's recommendation in 1910, and the education system was separated into three racial categories: Europeans, Asians and Africans together with Arabs.¹³ The Fraser Commission further diluted Islamic education by recommending the use of English and Kiswahili languages as the medium of instruction in government schools and abolishing the use of the Arabic language

11 Ministry of Education, *Education in Kenya: Information Handbook* (Nairobi, 1987), 1.

12 SUPKEM, "Memorandum to the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System in Kenya", *The Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims* (No date), 1.

13 Ahmed Idha Salim, *The Swahili-Speaking Peoples of Kenya Coast, 1895-1965* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973), 148.

in schools. The European education system, which had an entirely academic curriculum based on British traditions, had the upper hand in terms of resources, and its main objective seemed to have been to prepare their youth for leadership positions. The Asian and Arab systems came second, while the African system tended to develop as a hybrid of some academic, technical and vocational education, designed to prepare the youth for servitude, especially on European farms. There were, therefore, considerable disparities in educational opportunities not only between the races but also between the regions of the country.¹⁴

A.2) TIE After Independence

After the independence of Kenya in 1963, there were various systems of education inherited from the colonial period for different races and religions, including TIE schools such as *madrasa*, *chuo* and *duksi*. The existence of multiple systems of education posed a challenge to the nascent country, which embarked on consolidating the system of education amongst other sectors of governance. TIE schools are named differently in various parts of Eastern Africa. For instance, the Somalis call it *dugsi/duksi*, whereas the Swahilis refer to it as *chuo*. In Kenya, TIE schools range from the traditional *duksi* and *chuo* schools which focus on *hifz* (memorisation) teaching, to the more modern *madrasas* which incorporate state curricula.

TIE schooling occupies a significant place in the education and upbringing of Muslim children and it is designed first and foremost to meet the spiritual needs of the learners and to provide them avenues for growth in the faith. Moreover, it is intended to offer Islamic religious teachings to learners in order to complement what is offered in conventional education and ensure that a Muslim child receives Islamic education even as they attend conventional schools. TIE is predominant along the Kenyan coast and north-eastern region, and is widespread in the interior of Kenya. The vast majority of Muslim children across the country are enrolled in an ITE. This demonstrates the significance of these religious centres of learning and their contribution towards providing access to basic religious education. More importantly, TIE provides religious education to the poor and

¹⁴ Ministry of Education, *Education in Kenya: Information Handbook* (Nairobi, 1987), 1.

less privileged children particularly in densely Muslim populated areas, which are considered to be among the marginalised areas. TIE also provides an opportunity for poor and marginalized communities an opportunity to ensure that their children are provided with the basics of functional numeracy, literacy and Muslim values. In addition, TIE learning also offers holistic and social preparation for the learners, which in turn helps them to integrate into the wider society. The number of TIE schools is increasing due to the growing Muslim population in various parts of the country. TIE schools serve as a tool in transmitting Islamic religious knowledge that empowers Muslim communities in their daily business lives. Students in the TIE schools are taught word task skills to identify Arabic letters, sounds and numerals. These skills were transferable to other forms of learning. The educational objectives of reading, writing and the formulation of basic pre-education concepts are addressed in the TIE schools.

B) Integrated Islamic Education (IIE)

Since its inception in the mid-1980s, IIE has continued to prosper in the Muslim community's education sector at all levels, from nursery to high school. The need for learners in the Muslim community to receive both Islamic and conventional education has led Islamic education stakeholders to innovate alternative education systems that enable children to receive both without compromising their faith. IIE aims to produce well-rounded and morally upright individuals who can serve as role models in the Muslim community and excel in their daily affairs.¹⁵ It also aims to embrace conventional education while preserving Islamic identity. IIE combines an Islamic education curriculum with a conventional/Western education system. IIE schools play a significant role in imparting knowledge by combining the best of both worlds: religious education and conventional education. IIE teaches students Islamic values and lays the foundation for early education. Muslim parents prefer to send their children to IIE schools because of the success the schools achieved in both Islamic and conventional education. The emergence of IIE was partly due to the

15 Adan Sheikh Adan Saman, "The Challenges Facing Islamic Education in Kenya: A Case Study of Islamic Integrated Schools in Garissa County" (PhD thesis, University of Nairobi, 2013).

failure of conventional schools to cater for the Islamic religious needs of Muslim children. IIE is relatively regarded as 'morally safe' and can offer the ethical values needed to counter the social plagues of corruption, drugs, violence and crime.¹⁶ Because of its importance in the education sector, the Ministry of Education in Kenya has recognised IIE as part of the country's education system. The emergence and prosperity of IIE has been seen by some traditional Muslim scholars as a threat to the TIE, and others have even perceived IIE as a state mechanism to undermine traditional Islamic schools (*madrasas/duskis*). The perceived threat to TIE has even been exacerbated by the current war on terror that has targeted traditional Islamic schools and accused them of nurturing terrorist ideologies. This has led to an interesting scenario of calls for the recognition of the IIE in the mainstream education on the one hand, and calls for the rejection of government interference in the TIE on the other.

B.1) IIE in Pre-Independent Kenya

Among the pioneering Muslim intellectuals who advocated the integration of Islamic and conventional education systems was Sheikh al-Amin bin Ali Mazrui. As the Chief Qadi of Kenya from 1937 to 1947, and earlier as an Arabic teacher from 1919 to 1921, Sheikh Al-Amin recognized the limitations inherent in traditional Islamic education (TIE) and called for its reform to better meet the needs of the Muslim community. Sheikh Al-Amin's writings highlighted the importance of Islamic education within the Muslim community, particularly during a time when there were strong advocacies for secular education. He emphasized the crucial role of the Arabic language as a foundational tool for learning Islam and advocated for the inclusion of Arabic language instruction and religious education in secular schools, noting that traditionally, only Islamic centres utilized Arabic as the medium of instruction. During his time, a significant cultural shift was occurring: the Swahili language, traditionally written in Arabic script, faced proposals to switch to Roman script. Sheikh Al-Amin staunchly opposed these changes, advocating the preservation of Arabic script for writing Swahili. His dedication was fueled by the belief that the Arabic language was integral and irreplaceable in Islamic education. He argued that learning Arabic was an essential duty for every Muslim

¹⁶ Ibid.

and cautioned against the dangers of uncritically adopting Western cultural values and secular European educational models.¹⁷ His efforts were primarily aimed at countering these trends to maintain the integrity of Islamic educational practices. Sheikh Al-Amin bin Ali Mazrui's advocacy for the integration of Arabic language and Islamic education into mainstream secular schools marked a significant moment in the history of educational reform in Kenya. His steadfast efforts to preserve Arabic script and resist the adoption of Western educational models set the stage for further innovations within the Islamic educational system.

Building on the foundation laid by thinkers such as Sheikh Al-Amin, the broader context of Islamic education in Kenya saw new developments aimed at bridging the gap between traditional Islamic education and modern educational demands. The first major initiative to establish an Integrated Islamic Education (IIE) school in Kenya was undertaken by Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah Ghazali in Mombasa, who founded Madrasat al-Ghazali al-Islamiyya in 1933. Recognizing that Muslim children in TIE schools were becoming isolated from the mainstream education provided by government schools, Sheikh Ghazali innovatively incorporated subjects from the government school curriculum into his *madrasa's* syllabus. Among the subjects introduced in Madrasat al-Ghazali were history, geography and mathematics, which were taught in Arabic language alongside other Islamic religious subjects. Boys who had successfully completed the recitation of the Holy Qur'an were traditionally admitted to the *madrasa*. Notably, in 1936, Madrasat al-Ghazali expanded its admissions to include girls in segregated settings from the boys, ensuring they received the same opportunities for education. Sheikh al-Ghazali himself taught Arabic and Islamic religious education, with the support of his wife and half-sister who assisted in teaching other subjects. Prior to 1933, Islamic religious education primarily focused on the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an, supplemented by a few additional Islamic subjects and Arabic. This educational model began to evolve as other *madrasas*, such as Madrasat al-Falāh al-Islamiyya established by Sheikh Abdalla Husny in Mombasa, and

17 Ibrahim E. Soghayroun, "The Arab and Swahili Culture in Historical Perspective Some Important Links in 'The History of the Mazrui's in East Africa' by Shaykh Al-Amin b. 'Ali Al-Mazru'i", *Sudanic Africa* 12, (2001): 15.

Madrasat al-Najāh in Lamu, introduced in 1938 and 1945 respectively, started integrating modern subjects into their curricula, reflecting a broader trend towards a more comprehensive educational approach.

B.2) IIE in Post-Independent Kenya

After independence in 1963, the Kenyan government set, as one of its most important objectives, an education system that "must foster, develop and communicate the rich and varied cultures of Kenya." To meet these objectives, the government passed the Education Act of 1968, revised in 1980, to adopt and promote various cultures of Kenyans. This paved the way to embrace religious ethics and teachings in conventional education. Despite these efforts, the specific inclusion of Islamic religious education remained largely overlooked. Five commissions, working parties, committees, and task forces were instituted during this period, yet none offered a comprehensive solution to address the needs of Islamic education within the broader educational framework. However, amidst this drive for cultural inclusivity, the distinct requirements of Islamic education often found themselves sidelined. In the following discussion we will have a short look at the complex developments of Islamic education in the Kenyan education system.

To start with, in 1963, the Ominde Education Commission was formed to introduce changes that would reflect national sovereignty and focus on identity and unity, which were critical issues at the time. The following year saw the publication of the Ominde Report (1964), which led to the abolition of racial segregation in schools, the unification of the curriculum, the standardisation of the examination system and the distribution of resources to schools. The report also recommended that religious education be taught as an academic subject. The teaching of Islam suffered from this recommendation since it was used to be taught in conventional schools as a distinct religious subject in addition to the teaching of the Arabic language. Despite the fact that the Report pledged "to respect the convictions of persons of all religions..."¹⁸, the Commission did not consider Islamic education as a distinct unit to be taught in the primary level but instead it was merged with the social studies subjects. Islamic education is considered by Muslims not just as an academic subject

¹⁸ The Ominde Report, 1964, Part I, 22.

but rather an integral part of religious education that plays a vital role in the moral development and deepening of learner's religious commitment in Islamic faith. Due to the failure to respond to concerns raised by various stakeholders, including religious circles, on the shortfalls of the the Ominde Education Commission (1963) and the Ominde Commission (1964) the Government established the Gachathi Committee in 1976 to evaluate the system of education and formulate a programme that would make education a more potent instrument of social and economic advancement. The committee, chaired by Dr. George M. Gachathi, conducted a thorough examination of various aspects of the education system, including curriculum content, teaching methods, and resource allocation. One of the key recommendations of the committee, pertinent to our research, was the inclusion of religious education, social education, and ethics in conventional education institutions. Recommendations of the Committee led to the establishment of the National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) at the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), which paved the way to develop a pilot programme on early childhood education which was undertaken by the Aga Khan Foundation and resulted in the introduction of an integrated Islamic system in Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE).

In 1981, a Presidential Working Party was appointed under the chairmanship of Prof. Colin B. Mackay. The Working Party was tasked with proposing reforms to restructure the education system, transitioning from the existing 7:4:2:3 model to the newly envisioned 8:4:4 system. Among the key recommendations put forth by the working group was the inclusion of Islamic education as a compulsory subject at the primary level of education. However, despite the recognition of the importance of Islamic education within the curriculum, the Islamic education component was not adequately addressed due to a lack of resources, including a shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate facilities. This shortfall hindered the full integration of Islamic education into the educational framework, thereby limiting its accessibility and impact.

In 1986, the Aga Khan Foundation supported an early childhood education programme that integrated Islamic and conventional education. The Madrasa Resource Centre (MRC) was developed by the Kenya Institute of Education as an integrated curriculum that was

appropriate and culturally relevant for early childhood practice. The Madrasa Resource Centre (MRC) is an example of an effort to introduce a pre-madrasa early childhood programme, which was implemented in Mombasa in 1986 and then expanded to Zanzibar and Uganda in 1990 and 1993 respectively. The MRC initiative aimed to facilitate the development of quality, culturally appropriate and sustainable early childhood centres in low-income communities. The curriculum of MRC integrates Islamic religious and conventional education, which enables the children to learn both Islamic religious and conventional education in the same premises.¹⁹

Due to insufficient significance given to the Islamic education by various commissions established by the government, Muslims embarked on exploring other options which included the introduction of integrated Islamic education that encompassed a variety of Islamic subjects including Arabic language.

Curricula and Assessment Modes of Islamic Education in Kenya

A) Traditional Islamic Education (TIE)

TIE offers an elementary literacy programme in Arabic, with a particular emphasis on the memorisation and recitation of the Holy Qur'an. The curriculum includes a range of subjects such as Arabic, *tafsīr*, *hadith*, *sīrah* and *tarikh* (Muslim history). Depending on the specific educational requirements, some madrasas also provide additional advanced courses in Arabic literature, English and other foreign languages, as well as science and world history. The curriculum in TIE schools focuses on the writing, reading and memorisation of the Holy Qur'an. Learners who attend conventional schools during the mornings and afternoons often find themselves too tired to memorise any portions, thereby taking many years to complete the recitation of the 114 chapters of the Holy Qur'an. This trend has led parents to enroll their children in the Qur'an memorisation centres, known as *tahfīz* centres, where children only memorise the Qur'an between three and four years of age without attending conventional schools. Some parents prefer to take young children between the ages of four and five to *duksi*, where they spend approximately three to four years memorising the Holy Qur'an, after which they join either conventional schools or IIE. The rationale behind this approach is that it is easier

19 Aga Khan Foundation, *Madrasa Resource Centre* (2000), 14.

for children to memorise the Qur'an at a younger age, which enables them to excel in conventional schools.

The *madrasa* education provided students with a more comprehensive curriculum encompassing a wider range of Islamic religious teachings. Parents preferred sending their children to the *madrasa* due to the comprehensiveness of the *madrasa* syllabus and the pedagogical methodology employed therein. The *darsa-madrasa* development was followed by an expansion of the syllabus. The establishment of *madrasa* education and syllabus development were influenced by an influx of graduates from higher learning institutions in the Muslim world in the 1980s. Upon their return, these young graduates established *madrasas* and imported syllabi from their respective institutions of higher learning abroad. Some from Gulf countries were employed by religious organizations with the objective of propagating Islam. The majority of these graduates were employed as teachers in *madrasas*. The new generation of young graduates trained by various Islamic universities appeared to be gradually replacing locally trained teachers. This trend not only changed the intellectual climate along the Kenyan coast but also influenced the institutional framework of centres of Islamic learning and their syllabi.

The duration of study in *madrasas* is divided into three levels: *rawda* (nursery) for students aged 4-7 years; *ibtidāi* (beginners) for students aged 7-14 years; *mutawassit/ʿidādi* (intermediate) for students aged 14-18 years; and *thānawī* (advanced) for students aged 18 and above. The curriculum of the *madrasa* differs from that of the *chuo*, with the former being more structured and comprising subjects ranging between 14 and 20. The primary level *ibtidāi* encompasses 14 subjects, while the advanced levels encompass 17 and 20 subjects respectively. In *madrasas*, learners are exposed to a variety of subjects. The principal subjects include memorisation and understanding of the Holy Qur'an, *sunnah*, *tarīkh* (history), *aqīda*, *fiqh*, *sīrah* and Arabic language. Emphasis is placed on learning the Arabic language due to the fact that Arabic is used as the language of instruction throughout the *madrasa* education. In *madrasas* learners are grouped into classes according to their ages and academic progress, in contrast to *chuo*, where the criteria to distinguish between pupils is the knowledge of recitation of the Holy Qur'an. The level of each learner is determined

individually according to their ability to grasp the task in question. The languages used for instruction in *madrasas* are Kiswahili and Arabic. *Madrasas* have adopted modern teaching methods and activities, such as prize giving, where parents are invited to a graduation ceremony to celebrate the awarding of certificates for the best-performing pupils. Some *madrasas* have introduced extra-curricular activities such as *qasīda* (religious choir) and games. These activities have increased the popularity of the *madrasa* education among parents and pupils alike.

A significant further stage of early Islamic learning was conducted in private houses and, was known as *chuo*. The curriculum of *chuo* focused on the acquisition of the fundamental skills associated with the Arabic alphabet and the recitation of Holy Qur'an. Normally, children were enrolled in *chuo* at a very early age and instructed in the recitation of *Qasīda al-Baghdādiyya*, a poetic form that was widely adopted along the Kenyan coast.²⁰ The text contained reading exercises on the Arabic alphabet and the last chapters of the Holy Qur'an. Once children were conversant with reading the Arabic scripts, they were gradually taught the recitation and memorization of the Holy Qur'an. Memorization of the Holy Qur'an at an early-stage oriented children for future memorization of religious texts in various disciplines. Several *chuos* along the Kenya coast were staffed by Muslim women teachers. The majority of TIE schools operate solely during the evenings and at weekends, as their students attend conventional schools during the morning hours. During the weekdays, learners attend conventional schools from 8:00 am to 17:00 pm. Subsequently, learners attend TIE schools from 17:30 pm to 20:00 pm, and on Saturdays from 8:00 am to 16:00 pm. During conventional school vacations, learners attend ITE schools from Monday to Thursday from 8:00 am to 17:00 pm, while on Saturdays and Sundays from 8:00 am to 16:00 pm. The official calendar for the *madrasas* is aligned with the Islamic calendar. Two periods of vacation are observed: one during the month of Ramadan and the other during the Eid al-Adha celebrations. We now turn our attention to the assessment procedures employed in traditional education centres. There is no uniform examination for TIE schools. Each institution employs a distinct mode of assessment, and

20 Despite the popularity of the *Qasīda al-Baghdādiyya* and its importance in early childhood learning, the name of the author is neither mentioned nor known.

there is no centralised examination and evaluation system. Some initiatives have been proposed to introduce a unified examination for *madrasas* in the Kenyan coast, but these have not yet been implemented.

Integrated Islamic Education (IIE)

The main objective of the integrated Islamic education is to combine both conventional and Islamic education on a single platform. The curricula taught in Islamic integrated education schools are approved by the *Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)* under the Ministry of Education. Primary level education comprises 7 years, with subjects in lower primary including Kiswahili, English, literacy, mother tongue, science, social studies, and agricultural activities. In upper primary, learners are taught subjects that include Kiswahili, English, Mathematics, Home Science, Agriculture, Science and Technology, Creative Arts (art, craft and music), Moral and Life Skills and Physical and Health Education. Other subjects include social studies (citizenship, geography and history) with an option of a foreign language (French, German, Chinese and Arabic). Islamic religious education subject in IIE is a compulsory and examinable subject at the end of the primary level. In addition to the conventional subjects which form part of the national curricula, learners in integrated Islamic schools are taught the basics of the Islamic tradition, including religious duties such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Some of the Islamic subjects in IIE curriculum include, among others, *tafsir*, *sunnah*, *tarīkh* (history of Islam), *aqīda*, *fiqh*, *sīrah* and Arabic language. The introduction of Islamic subjects in the IIE is primarily aimed at providing learners with an opportunity to acquire the fundamental principles of Islam.

IIE curriculum in integrated Islamic schools is dual: the national primary curriculum and the integrated Islamic curriculum. IIE schools combine both the national curriculum and the Islamic curriculum, which introduces the element of duality in education, with learners switching from English to Arabic as the medium of instruction. The national curriculum consists of seven subjects, two of which are non-examinable. The Islamic curriculum has about seven subjects. The integrated Islamic curriculum covers only part of the syllabus of one subject, namely social studies, which includes an element of Islamic

religious education. Students in IIE are overburdened with the subjects they are taught, which in turn, puts them at a disadvantage in national examinations compared to students in CE who take fewer subjects. Due to the heavy subject load, students in IIE do not have enough time for recreational activities. It is a common trend for IIE learners to leave their homes early in the morning and return late in the evening. Another challenge related to IIE curricula is the lack of uniformity in curricula and the use of foreign curricula, which do not cater for the pedagogical methods and local content to suit learners' educational needs. Although IIE has transformed TIE to a large extent, a new phenomenon of commercialisation of education seems to be looming. Currently, the Government of Kenya recognises IIE schools that follow the Ministry of Education's curriculum for both primary and secondary education. The subjects that can be examined exclude Islamic religious subjects taught in integrated Islamic schools, with the exception of IRE (Islamic religious Education, which is a component of the subject Social Studies). Students in most IIE schools are assessed according to the examination guidelines of the Ministry of Education. At the end of the primary and secondary levels, the learners sit for national examinations. Other routine assessments, such as continuous assessment tests, are also conducted in TIE. The main challenge which facing TIE schools is that there is no national body charged with the responsibility of setting and marking of examinations.

Challenges Facing Islamic Education in Kenya

Islamic education in Kenya is challenged by the coexistence of a dual educational system. Both learners and teachers are overburdened by the current dual system, which requires them to study both conventional education and Islamic education in the IIE schools. In some cases, learners must also contend with a triple system of education, which involves the conventional curriculum, Islamic religious education in IIE, and attending *duksi/chuo* in the evenings.

A) Islamic Education in Primary and Secondary Schools

One of the most challenging issues facing learners in CE is the scarcity of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in many schools. This shortage of teachers has resulted in numerous Muslim children who lack access to Islamic education being compelled to take Christian religious education, which has led to the creation of a generation of

youths who are unable to comprehend their religion fully. Furthermore, Islamic religious education is taught by non-Muslim teachers as an academic subject, which has the effect of diluting its religious content. This, in turn, affects the quality of religious knowledge that the child accesses, as it is taught with prejudice and makes the pupil doubt rather than understand and accept the religion.

B) Traditional Islamic Education (TIE)

The emergence and subsequent growth of IIE have been viewed by some Muslim traditional scholars as a potential threat to the TIE. Indeed, there have been instances where IIE has been perceived as a state-sponsored mechanism to undermine the TIE. The perceived threat against TIE has been further aggravated by the current "war on terror" that has targeted TIE and accused them of nurturing "terrorist ideologies". Following the 9/11 September attacks, TIE institutions have been subjected to countrywide crackdown on the premise that they are breeding grounds for "terrorists" and "fanatics". As a consequence of the "Global War on Terror", a number of Muslim NGOs have been accused of having links with terrorist organisations and were forced to close down. Apart from these allegations, there has been a dearth of concerted efforts to devise an efficacious plan for coordinating between the government education bodies and Muslim organisations to come up with a unified curriculum that will be utilised by TIE schools in Kenya. Currently, TIE schools use different syllabi. The curriculum taught in TIE is not well structured. Furthermore, unlike the assessment system employed in conventional schools, there are no centrally organised examinations in TIE schools. The primary challenge is the absence of a national body charged with the responsibility of setting, marking and analysing the results. Consequently, each TIE school designs its own system of assessment and issues its certificates once the learners complete their studies. The examinations in TIE schools are set during the vacation periods of conventional schools, with learners having one full month in August and December to attend.

Another challenge facing TIE schools is the lack of government recognition. Currently, the government recognises IIE schools, which follow the syllabus of the Ministry of Education for both primary and secondary education. TIE schools operate outside the purview of the

statutory bodies and are, therefore, not subject to any form of control, including monitoring the certification process. Generally, the government has given little recognition to TIE schools by not considering them as part of the national education system and by excluding them from official statistics.²¹ In several countries TIE schooling constitutes an alternative or parallel schooling system to the conventional education system. However, in most countries, TIE is seldom recognised officially in terms of its contributions to education. Hence, they remain relatively unknown to education planners and statisticians, and are rarely explicitly taken into account in the formulation of national policies and strategies. It is unfair for learners to invest significant time and resources in TIE schooling only to have their education subsequently devalued and/or unrecognised. TIE needs to be recognised as an alternative educational system. However, those who advocate for recognition are concerned about the conditions that may be attached by the government to the recognition process. Once TIE is officially recognised by the relevant authorities, it will be subject to close monitoring by state agencies. This may result in the content of TIE being diluted to align with the desires of the authorities.

The lack of conventional training among teachers is another challenge facing TIE in Kenya. Teachers in TIE schools are not given adequate recognition and are not provided with adequate opportunities in the training and teaching profession. It is crucial to provide relevant training, particularly in teaching methodologies, to TIE teachers. The lack of exposure to conventional training contributes towards the inability of learners to cope with modern requirements of employment. Funding is also a major challenge for TIE schools, with poverty being a cause and a hindrance to the schools and learners in achieving high quality education in both conventional and unconventional sectors. *Madrastas* and *duksis/chuos* are mostly owned by individuals or groups of individuals, although a few of the *madrastas* are funded by Muslim NGOs and with the efforts of Muslim communities. Some *madrastas* are attached to mosques or associated with the mosque committees, which sponsor and manage them. Learners in sponsored TIE schools pay nominal fees, making these educational institutions accessible, particularly to those from

21 Mark Bray, "Community Initiatives in Education: Goals, Dimensions, and Linkages with Governments", *Compare* 33, no. 1 (2003): 35.

disadvantaged backgrounds. Some *madrasas* are not provided with adequate funding due to the low economic status of the parents and communities. In addition, teachers in TIE schools, particularly *maalims* in *madrasas* and *duksis/chuos*, receive low salaries, and the terms their employment do not meet their basic and daily needs. Many teachers are compelled to supplement their salaries through private businesses such as weaving and agriculture, which has a detrimental effect on the quality of education offered in TIE schools. In order to earn a living, some teachers undertake religious and ritual services to their clients during teaching time.

C) Integrated Islamic Education (IIE)

Students enrolled in ITE schools frequently express complaints regarding their heavy workload. However, they generally maintain a positive outlook regarding the programme, viewing it as a valuable opportunity and their sole chance of learning about their religion. Muslim children are at a disadvantage when it comes to national examinations, as they are required to take more subjects than their counterparts in conventional schools. Their curriculum comprises both the government syllabus and Islamic education. They take eight years for primary education and four years for secondary education to complete the curriculum. At the school, students are required to sit for monthly, termly and final exams. The teaching periods for IIE schools are Monday-Friday, beginning from as early as 6:30 am and concluding at 16:00 pm. Students in upper primary and secondary classes attend school on Saturdays from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm for remedial classes. The tight and compressed schedule of IIE schools leave students with no time to play; in accordance with the adage: "Too much work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."²² The challenge of curriculum overload places a heavy burden on both teachers and students, leading to exhaustion. For instance, one integrated Islamic secondary school offers 56 lessons, while another integrated Islamic primary school provides 24 classes per week.

Another challenge facing IIE schools is the lack of unified teaching materials for Islamic subjects. Several local publishers have produced

22 Adan Sheikh Adan Saman, "The Challenges Facing Islamic Education in Kenya: A Case Study of Islamic Integrated Schools in Garissa County" (PhD thesis, University of Nairobi, 2013).

textbooks on Islamic education, which are recommended by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE). However, Muslim teachers perceive the content of these texts to be inadequate and prefer to use alternative teaching materials in preparing their notes. IIE schools use different textbooks, some of which are based on foreign curricula. For instance, the King Abdulaziz University curriculum is used in the majority of IIE schools. One of the difficulties encountered by educators and students alike is that the foreign curriculum does not take into consideration the local academic environment. This is because such curricula were prepared and developed in different contexts using the Arabic language.²³ Another layer of problems is constituted by pedagogical constraints. The majority of teachers at IIE institutions have not completed their training at a teachers' training college. A great proportion of IIE teachers are graduates from Islamic universities in faculties of Shariah and Islamic studies, who lack the requisite pedagogical skills to teach effectively and efficiently. Consequently, teachers in IIE schools who lack the training are unable to grasp the fundamental principles of the learning process, thereby comprising the standards of quality assurance. In relation to the lack of professional training, the IIE is deficient in the area of quality assurance, which contributes to poor quality of teaching in the schools.

In conclusion, it is important to highlight that the medium of instruction in conventional schools in Kenya is predominantly English, with Kiswahili taught as a subject. Conversely, integrated Islamic education institutes prioritize Arabic instruction from an early age to bolster understanding of Islamic teachings. However, the concurrent exposure to three languages —English, Kiswahili, and Arabic— during formative years may present challenges in language acquisition and mastery. It's imperative for educational policymakers and practitioners to explore strategies that balance the benefits of multilingualism with the need for effective language instruction.

Prospectus of Islamic Education in Kenya

The teaching of social values and ethics represents one of the most valuable traditions to be incorporated into the education system. Both TIE and IIE provide a foundation in Islamic religious education, which is essential for the development of religious values in children.

²³ Ibid.

Furthermore, Islamic education plays a vital role in the moral and ethical development and deepening of learners' religious commitment within the Islamic faith. Learners who undergo Islamic religious education system are expected to experience behavioural changes in their future lives. In addition, the highly structured and time-ordered nature of Islamic piety tends to cultivate a level of self-discipline and time management that may have broader applications. Islamic education serves to reinforce the strict moral teachings of the faith and is a generally accepted as a reference point for public service and good governance. The teaching methodology in TIE schools is value-oriented, where learners are being instructed in religious values and principles such as morality, honesty, and integrity. These teachings aim to foster in the learner an attitude of compliance with the law and a commitment to becoming law-abiding citizens. In addition, students are also instructed to take care of their local neighbourhood and develop positive relationships with others in the wider community. The strength of this value-based educational system lies in the fact that learners are taught religious teachings at an early age. The moral and ethical values instilled in learners' characters in TIE prepare them to integrate into the Muslim community at various levels.

Despite their limited knowledge and skills of contemporary education, graduates from TIE are imbued with the notion that they will need to fend for themselves or find appropriate sponsorship beyond a certain age. Upon completion of their studies in TIE schools, most learners proceeded to engage in business and joining the small-scale industry.

In town centres, TIE schools are perceived not only as institutions that provide Islamic religious teaching but also as sources of employment. Many entrepreneurs have realised the significance of these centres in providing opportunities for potential job seekers, particularly in Muslim communities. Additionally, TIE schools also serve as a potential avenue for the advancement of basic education, and the training of non-conventional educators. Graduates from TIE schools contribute to community services, including the management and running of orphanages. Other graduates continue to teach in TIE schools. Besides teaching, graduates from TIE schools were also utilised by the community to recite Islamic rituals and preside over religious ceremonies. TIE has also enabled learners to develop the

ability to read and write with a basic knowledge of numeracy, which enables them to perform simple arithmetic tasks in their daily lives. TIE can thus be seen as having at least three broad socio-economic functions over and beyond its core religious ones: a.) it serves to preserve the integrity of local Muslim culture from influences that might weaken the faith; b.) it integrates and socialises members of the Muslim community into the wider society; c.) it serves to integrate students into existing economic networks.

Since its inception, Integrated Islamic Education (IIE) has continued to prosper in the Muslim community's education at all levels, from nursery to secondary schools. In recognition of its significance in the education sector, the Ministry of Education in Kenya has designated IIE as a component of the country's education system. The teaching of the Arabic language has opened up opportunities for graduates of IIE to get employment in local Muslim NGOs and get job opportunities in the Middle Eastern countries.

Conclusion

This article explored the interplay between three education systems: traditional Islamic education, integrated Islamic education and conventional education. This examination revealed an interesting scenario of tripartite competition between three competing systems of education. This competition demonstrated convergence and divergence between the systems. A key challenge facing Islamic education in Kenya's systems of education is the existence of a dual system: the conventional and the religious. Learners are overburdened by the current dual system of education of having conventional education being taught beside Islamic religious education. In certain cases, learners are required to undergo a triple system of education, comprising conventional curriculum, Islamic education in the integrated Islamic schools and attendance at *duksi/chuo* in the evenings. Although all the three systems aim to equip and mould learners with sets of values, each is seen to encroach upon influence of others. On the one hand, conventional education strives to encroach upon and limit the influence of Islamic education. On the other hand, ITE and IIE have resisted this encroachment but with varying appeals. Whereas ITE seeks to inculcate whole Islamic values in learners without consideration of the demands of modern market, the IIE seeks

to achieve a balance between the two extreme ends posited by CE and ITE. The development of both ITE and IIE in Kenya highlights the prospects and challenges facing both systems of education. Despite the promising growth and booming of the IIE in Kenya, there are underlying challenges that might threaten its long-term sustainability within the mainstream education. Equally, ITE is confronted with both internal and external challenges, affecting its curriculum and teaching methods. The challenge facing Islamic education in Kenya is to identify a middle ground that will combine the merits of the three systems of education and develop a harmonised curriculum that will mould learners with Islamic values and equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to cope with modern market demands. In this context, contemporary Muslim educationists and thinkers have been engaged in a discourse on the epistemology of modern conventional education and its impact on Muslim society. They have realised the need to reconstruct the thinking of Muslim minds and developed the concept of 'Islamisation of knowledge'. Pioneers and advocates of this concept included Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman, Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi and Mona Abul Fadhl.²⁴ Abu Sulayman is of the view that building the future of Muslim minds needs to be done in the intellectual and educational spheres.²⁵ Al-Faruqi perceives the Islamisation process as "a systematic reorientation and restructuring of the entire field of human knowledge in accordance with a new set of criteria and categories derived from and based on the Islamic worldview."²⁶ Within this framework, he proposes that, to eliminate dualism from the educational system, knowledge should be Islamized.²⁷ Abu Sulayman lays out the road map for the Islamization of the knowledge process, emphasizing the necessity of instilling Islamic principles and values

24 Adan Sheikh Adan Saman, "The Challenges Facing Islamic Education in Kenya: A Case Study of Islamic Integrated Schools in Garissa County" (PhD thesis, University of Nairobi, 2013).

25 Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind*, trans. Yusuf Talal De Lorenzo (USA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), 85.

26 Isma'il Raji Al-Faruqi, "Islamizing the Social Sciences," in *Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Isma'il Raji Al-Faruqi and Abdullah Omar Nasseef (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: Islamic Education Series, 1981): 8–20.

27 Isma'il Raji Al Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan* (Brentwood, Maryland: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982), 9.

within the educational system for all Muslims.²⁸ Despite its shortcomings, the prospect of Islamic education in Kenya is promising. However, the primary challenge facing actors and stakeholders in Islamic education in Kenya is to determine the future trajectory of the model of Islamic education. This entails deciding whether to continue with the integrated approach or to adopt the Islamisation process. Both ways present their own set of challenges. Integrating Islamic educating into the mainstream conventional education system will face the challenge of incompatibility due to the distinct features of the two education systems. Conversely, Islamising the conventional education sector will face the challenge of resistance and rejection from both supporters and opponents of Islamic education.

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28 Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind*, 86.

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Knowledge Across Borders in West Africa: Islam and Cross-Border Scholarship in Nigeria and Niger

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Introduction

The Nigeria-Niger border has long been a region of unrestricted movement, facilitating the exchange of people, goods, knowledge, and scholarship. Since the late eighteenth century, powerful Hausa commercial cities such as Kano, Katsina, Zaria, and Zinder have exerted broad cultural and economic influence across the area. The hegemony of the Sokoto Caliphate further contributed to the widespread dissemination of specific religious practices and knowledge. Today, the northern Nigerian states of Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa, Yobe, and Borno, along with the southern Niger regions of Dosso, Tahoua, Maradi, Zinder, and Diffa, share more than just an international border. They are united by a common history, strong commercial ties, and a wealth of shared cultural and educational characteristics.¹ Although the border regions of both Nigeria and Niger are ethno-linguistically diverse, Hausa is used as a *lingua franca*, which is particularly convenient in the context of constant trade and intense movement of people.² The colonial partition of Hausaland into Nigerian and Nigerien zones set in motion changes that gradually moulded the self-identities of the communities living on either side of the otherwise invisible border.³ It is conceivable that these colonial boundaries disrupted cultural and linguistic links

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1 Élodie Apard, "Introduction: Studying Islamic Dynamics from a Niger-Nigeria Transnational Perspective," in *Transnational Islam* (Nigeria: French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA), 2020), 1; Muhammad Mustapha Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam, the State and Muslims of Nigeria and the Republic of Niger", *Diya'u Journal of History*, Federal University Birnin Kebbi (2022).

2 S. A. Yakasai, "Language Across Two Borders: A Socio-Linguistic Study of Hausa in Konni and Illela Border Towns," (PhD Diss., Bayero University Kano, 1999), 3.

3 William F. S. Miles, "Development Not Division: Local Versus External Perceptions of the Niger Nigeria Boundary", *Journal of Modern African Studies* (2005), 299.

between numerous groups that had lasted for generations. For example, in the Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara borders, the Dandawa, Arawa, and Kabawa have long had contact with the Zamfarawa and Gobirawa. the Zabarmawa are also present on the periphery of these groups, having been particularly engaged in trading and other commercial contacts with the others. The boundary delineation not only severed these long-standing links but also influenced the vocabulary of communication in the border districts.⁴

The tradition of scholarship had been well established in Hausaland since the 16th century through the movement and settlement of scholars of repute. By the 17th century, Hausaland had developed indigenous Islamic scholars whose contributions made the 19th-century *jihad* of Hausaland conceivable.⁵ As a result, the tradition of Islamic study and scholarship in Western Sudan had been firmly established for decades before Sheikh Usman bin Fodiyo's *jihad*. Based on this extensive era of mobile scholarship, we may conclude that the Nigeria-Niger border axis is a good illustration of West African frontiers where Islam has had a strong position of influence for many centuries. It makes up the majority of Hausaland and Borno, where for generations, the governing elite, merchant class, and commoners desired closeness to the scholarly class.⁶ Following the colonial occupation of the area, colonial officials established several regulations that had an impact on local customs and scholarly culture. Colonial policies implemented by the British and French in the region influenced the mobility patterns of intellectuals and *malams*. The British tactics of appropriation, confinement, and surveillance, in particular, created a conducive climate for intellectuals and students from neighboring French colonies. Under these conditions, many scholars from the Republic of Niger moved to Nigeria's northern territories to make a livelihood. Similarly, Nigerien students poured into northern Nigeria for the same reason. During the colonial and

4 Abubakar Samaila, "Impact of Colonialism on the Development of 'Hausa Trade Language Borrowings' across Nigeria's North-West International Border Areas", *Journal of Linguistics, Language and Culture* 4. no.2 (2017), 63.

5 Ahmed M. Kani, "The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān up to 1800" in *History of Learning in Katsina*, eds. Ismail A. Tsiga and Abdalla U. Adamu (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1997).

6 Hamza Muhammad Maishanu, *Five Centuries of Historical Writings in Hausaland and Borno, 1500-2000* (Nigeria: Macmillan, 2006).

postcolonial periods, the majority of scholar families from districts around the Niger border studied at Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Zaria, or Borno.⁷ Thus, despite the erection of new barriers to separate the territories of Nigeria and the Republic of Niger, the nature of the French colonial policy and its distaste for the mixing of religion and governance forced many Nigerien scholars and students to move to the northern areas of Nigeria in search of Islamic knowledge. This mobile pattern of scholarship that has been experienced in the area over time underlines the point that Islam and its process of intellectual pursuits have continuously exposed the fact that the borders in this part of Africa were not only porous but also socio-culturally non-existent.

The enduring influence of Islamic scholarship across the Nigeria-Niger border reflects the dynamic interactions and the profound impact of historical movements of scholars in the region. This scholarly tradition has navigated various socio-political landscapes, adapting to and evolving with the changing tides of governance and colonial impositions. As we delve deeper into this intricate history, it becomes evident that the borders, both physical and conceptual, have played a crucial role in shaping the patterns of intellectual exchange and mobility. In this context, the main focus of this study is to identify the networks of relationships that are inherent in the long history of the Islamic tradition of scholarship across the Nigeria-Niger border. It explores the historical forces that have sustained this mobile tradition of learning. Additionally, the study investigates how Muslims in both Nigeria and Niger have navigated the restrictions imposed by colonial and post-colonial borders, as well as the impact of these policies on the continued tradition of Islamic education and scholarship.

Conceptual and Theoretical Discussions

The study of religion beyond national boundaries has focused increasingly on religious networks like messianic and missionary organizations since the early 20th century. Concerns over the security and assimilation of immigrant populations in Western nations following the 9/11 attacks in the United States spurred interest in Islam

7 Muhammed M. Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam, The State and Muslims of Nigeria and Niger", *Diya'u Journal of History*, Federal University Birnin Kebbi (2022).

within the border studies and state boundaries in general.⁸ However, the divergence between the study of borders and religion has grown significant enough that academics have felt compelled to bring their worries back to the forefront. Similarly, "religion on the move" has emerged as an academic approach that emphasizes the transnational processes of transculturation and the reconstruction of cultural and national identities across and within boundaries, as noted by certain anthropologists and sociologists of religion.⁹ Other scholars study religion and ethnicity in foreign contexts, focusing on how communities from various national and cultural backgrounds negotiate religious and ethnic boundaries, as well as the socio-political ramifications of interactions between Senegalese, Ghanaian, and Fulbe diasporas in Europe.¹⁰ Specifically concerning Islam, this study movement centers on the securitization objectives of global imperial politics, exemplified by Samuel Huntington's ideas about the "clash of civilizations".¹¹ A second trend consists of reconstructionist endeavours that attempt to challenge the discourses of global secularisation and interreligious conflict.¹² In this line of research, some scholars focus on African Muslim communities both in Africa and the diaspora, while others examine how Muslim networks are constituted, and support migration economies.¹³ Additionally, in post-colonial contexts, certain historical studies employ novel approaches to political and economic integration. Several studies in the field of border studies focusing on African borderlands have elucidated the substantial impact of religion on the structure and development of border-related economies. Religion is identified as one of the critical

8 Elia Zureik and Mark B. Salter, *Global Surveillance and Policing : Borders, Security, Identity* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005).

9 Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff and Klaus Hock, *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora* (London/New York City: Continuum, 2008), 1.

10 Stanislaw Grodz and Gina Gertrud Smith, *Religion, Ethnicity and Transnationalism Between West Africa and Europe* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004).

11 Sohail H. Hashimi and Jack Miles, *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); See also, *Political Islam and International System: Impacts and Implications* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43107194>.

12 Stein Villumstad, *Social Reconstruction of Africa: Perspectives from Within and Without* (Nairobi: Acton, 2005)

13 Muhammad Haron, "Africa's Muslim Communities: Caught between Reform Agendas and Traditional Programs", *Contemporary Islamic Thought and Societal Reforms*, 2019.

symbolic forces shaping cross-national and regional economic dynamics.¹⁴

As we explore the multifaceted implications of religion within the dynamics of international borders, it becomes evident that the socio-economic and cultural landscapes shaped by religious practices, particularly Islamic scholarship, challenge and redefine the imperial or conceptual borders. This observation is particularly relevant in the context of border studies, where the interplay between religion and the socio-economic structure of borderlands demands a deeper understanding. To navigate this complex interconnection, it is crucial to dissect the foundational concepts that govern the physical and metaphorical boundaries, especially the notions of territorial boundary and border, before discussing how they relate to Islamic learning and scholarship. In this regard, we should keep in mind that meanings vary over time and in space, depending on factors such as the paradigms in which they are used and the period over which enquiries are undertaken. In general, borders are found whenever there are distinctions between people, governmental entities, social environments, cultures, and belief systems. Their primary goals are social control and political order-making—defining the rights and obligations regarding property on resources that are part of a territory. Borderland studies, or the multidisciplinary analysis of localized impacts of borders, represent a major and virile innovation in the study of international boundaries and the nation-state creators of the boundaries.¹⁵ The emphasis is on borders as unique locations, in contrast to the conventional diplomatic statist or state-centric approach, which places nation-states as the major focus of study. The economic, social, and humanitarian aspects of the issues brought about by border functions and operations are highlighted in these localized studies. These aspects are typically overlooked by state-

14 Kate Meagher, "Trading on Faith: Religious Movements and Informal Economic Governance in Nigeria", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47, no: 3 (2009): 397–423; Kate Meagher, "A Back Door to Globalisation? Structural Adjustment, Globalisation and Transborder Trade in West Africa", *Review of African Political Economy* 95 (2003): 57–75.

15 Aboubakr Tandia, "Islam and Borders in Western Senegambia: A Historical Perspective on Muslim Leaders and Boundary Maintenance" in *Readings in Post Colonial Borders and Economy in West Africa*, ed. A. M. Ashafa, et al. (Kaduna: Pyla-Mak, 2018), 228.

centric studies, which include those in the fields of international relations, international law, international politics, diplomatic history, etc.¹⁶

A border is an international boundary line that delineates two or more political entities, commonly referred to as modern states. As such, it serves a demarcation that defines limits or division. On the other hand, a boundary typically denotes a line which distinguishes one object or territory from another.¹⁷ In territorial terms, a boundary is a line that separates one area of land from another.¹⁸ However, in the international context in which the concept is being considered in this study, a boundary is a line of demarcation which delimits the scope of two or more administrative jurisdictions. A boundary line could be imaginary or actually represented on the ground in the form of a pathway with markers placed at regular intervals.¹⁹ Similarly, a borderland is an area of land close to the border between two countries, as in the case of Nigeria and Niger Republic. It could be a geographical space or zone around a territorial border.²⁰ From a socio-cultural perspective, however, the concept of borders can diverge from their conventional interpretation, as Solene Marie eloquently describes: "the reality of the border (is that) it is created by the meaning that is attached to it. A line in the sand is not always a limit, as well as a border is not always a line in the sand. A line is a geometry, a border is an interpretation."²¹ Borderlands are areas close to an international boundary, usually disadvantaged in terms of their location as the

16 William F. S. Miles, *Hausaland Divided: Colonialism and Independence in Nigeria-Niger* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 78.

17 T. A. Imobighe, "Theories and Function of Boundaries" in *Management of Nigeria's Internal Boundary*, ed. B. M. Bakindo (Lagos: National Boundary Commission, 1992), 13-25.

18 F. A. Fajemirokum, "Survey and Mapping Requirements and Techniques for Demarcation of International Boundaries" in *The Nigeria-Niger Transborder Co-operation*, eds. A. T. Asiwaju and B. M. Barkindo, (National Boundary Commission, 1989), 348-379.

19 T. A. Imobighe, "Theories and Function of Boundaries", 26.

20 Omolade Adejuyegbe, "Identification and Characteristics of Borderlands" in *Borderlands in Africa: A Multidisciplinary and Comparative Focus on Nigeria and West Africa*, eds. A. I. Asiwaju and P. O. Adeniyi (Nigeria: University of Lagos Press, 1989), 27.

21 Solene Marie, *Cultural Policy and Management in Borderlands: Creating an Edge*, (London: Routledge, 2024), 6

farthest point and marginal to the core areas of the states. However, borders are often more than such a line; they are zones that expand beyond the boundary line. Borders, therefore, must be seen as processes that do not only serve the political goals and interests of state institutions but are also the products of interactions between states and peoples in border regions, including religious actors, whose experiences and activities are reflected in many respects.²² The colonial partition of the late 19th and early 20th centuries separated the same communities from each other. Along with the social and political context of the people, the border populations' psychology, culture, perception, conception, and language were also impacted by the division. The contacts between the peoples of Nigeria and Niger over an extended period have shown that they coexisted as members of the same socio-political and socio-economic community. Although divided by dissimilar colonial experiences and the challenges of modernity, the social network that has bound them together over time remains functional and relevant.²³

The concept of boundary in Islam is entirely different from the Western/modern definition. Muslims recognise only two collective entities: the *umma* (Muslims) and *kufr* (non-Muslims), and this definition implies that no 'nationality' is recognised as a basis for law, statehood or sovereignty. That is why Islamic movements recognise no frontier in the *umma*.²⁴ What is important is that the lands should be ruled by Muslims and the law of Islam should be supreme. In such a scheme, national borders are regarded as man-made stumbling blocks on the path of implementing the divine will. Historically speaking, the emigration to Medina sharpened the lines between the community of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the community of disbelievers in Mecca. The practice of *hijra* was a strategy which was later practised by many Muslim communities in Africa. Such indeed was the tactic adopted by Shehu Usman Danfodiyo when he broke with the ruler of Gobir in 1804, and it was his *hijra* that led to the *jihad* and ultimately to extensive political realignments in northern Nigeria and southern

22 Hastings Donna and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 5.

23 Miles, *Hausaland Divided*, 55.

24 See John Hunwick, "Borders, Boundaries and the Concept of State in the Islamic Tradition" in *The Nigeria-Niger Trans-Border Cooperation*, eds. Asiwaju, A. I. and B. M. Barkindo (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1989), 336.

Niger. It is interesting to note here that Shehu Danfodiyo was born in Maratta (in the present Niger Republic) then part of Gobir Kingdom, before migrating to Gudu (in the present Nigeria) where the community was established.²⁵ The establishment of Muslim *umma* (the community) is the ideal community of Muslims, which is defined as the 'abode of Islam'. Certainly, Muslims did have a special set of loyalties and a mental set of boundaries based on their religious beliefs, just as they had special reasons related to their faith for crossing borders or even extending the borders of their territory. In the Nigeria-Niger border region, there were also other pressing reasons for cross-border movement. Accordingly, Muslims on both sides of Nigeria-Niger border feel a greater sense of belonging to each other than to either nation state.²⁶ This implies that an unseen 'mental border' that establishes classifications and frequently allegiances is more important than actual national boundaries, in this case the Nigeria-Niger border.

History and Patterns of Islamic Scholarship Across the Nigeria-Niger Border

The origins of Islamic scholarship in the Nigeria-Niger axis, where the mobile scholarship system developed, can be traced back to the ancient Timbuktu learning culture.²⁷ Communities in western Sudan benefited greatly from links with each another and with centres of learning, particularly in Timbuktu and the Ahir (Aghades) region.²⁸ Knowledge of Islam expanded significantly when the published works of prominent Islamic scholars began disseminating across much of the Sudan starting around the 15th century.²⁹ Indeed, this was the period when Islamic scholarship and learning were clearly focused on

25 Abdullahi Rafi Augi, *The Gobir Factor in the Social and Political History of the Rima Basin, C. 1650 to 1808 A.D.* (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2021), 199.

26 Muhammad M. Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam, The State and Muslims of Nigeria and the Republic of Niger".

27 Ahmad Moyi Gada, *A Short History of Early Islamic Scholarship in Hausaland* (Kaduna: Nadabo Printing Production, 2010), 5.

28 Ahmad M. Kani, "The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān", 28-31.

29 Ibid.

knowledge-building.³⁰ The focus extended beyond merely memorizing standard texts and the Holy Qur'an; it also emphasized shaping and moulding the character of students through a defined curriculum and pedagogy uniformly applied across the region.³¹ As a result, a tradition of Islamic scholarship and reform continued in Hausaland and the rest of Bilād al-Sūdān throughout the 16th century, with the continued movement and settlement of eminent scholars, such as Sheikh Umar b. Aqit, the grandfather of Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti.³² Other prominent figures in the region at various times were al-Sheikh al-Tadhikhti, and Makhluḥ b. Salih al-Bilbali, who was in Katsina in 1509 and was convinced to serve as qadi. Makhluḥ b. Salih al-Bilbali, a distinguished scholar from Timbuktu, was also saddled with the responsibility of serving as qadi; however, he died at home in Timbuktu after 1533.³³ Thus, by the 17th century, Hausaland and the broader region of Bilād al-Sūdān had cultivated indigenous Islamic scholars. Their contributions laid the foundational groundwork that made the 19th-century *jihad* of Hausaland possible.

Thus, in a kind of mobile scholarship, students travelled great distances to study with renowned *sheikhs*. In order to be taught by different teachers, to learn a particular text, or even simply to repeat a text they had already mastered, different categories of people crossed many cultures and regions.³⁴ Such traditions of mobility between the regions of Western and Central Sudan were very common along the Hausa-Borno-Sudan axis and are still practised among the Muslim population. This acknowledgment underscores the profound understanding that true knowledge transcends the mere text; it resides within the scholar. Most of the leading scholarly families of Hausaland

30 Marry Last, "The Book and the Nature of Knowledge in Muslim Northern Nigeria, 1457–2007" in *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, eds. Graziano Kratli & Ghislaine Lydon (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 175–212.

31 Usman Muhammad Bugaje, "Some Reflections on the Development of Islamic Learning in Katsina 1300–1800 AD" in *History of Learning in Katsina*, eds. Ismail A. Tsiga and Abdalla U. Adamu (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1997), 80–82.

32 Ibid., 28.

33 Ahmad Muhammad Kani, "The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān", 28.

34 Misbahu Na'iyā Katsina, "A Discourse on the Intellectual Legacies of Some Pre-Jihad Muslim Scholars of Katsina" in *History of Learning in Katsina*, eds. Ismail A. Tsiga and Abdalla U. Adamu (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1997), 37.

trace their origins and history of scholarship to this period and processes of moving from one centre of learning or *alim* (scholar) to another. Kani explained the extent of the learning relationship among the scholars of Yandoto and Birnin Katsina through this mobile scholarship.³⁵ As indicated, there has been a cross-fertilization of ideas with other centres of learning in Western Sudan, but particularly Timbuktu, the Ahir region, where the Aghades happened to play a leading intellectual link between the centres of learning in the Maghrib and Egypt and even beyond. Similarly, several '*ulama*', such as Dan Marina, traced their origins to Borno and settled in Katsina and other centres of learning in the same area, such as Kurmin Yan Ranko and Yandoto.

By then, it was customary for scholars in Hausaland to move from one centre to another and from one *ālim* (teacher/scholar) to another, seeking further knowledge and exchanging ideas and experiences with the host scholars. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the scholars of Yandoto and Katsina had already become famous in the field of mathematics and other related subjects such as the occult sciences under the '*ulama*' of Katsina and Yandoto. For example, Kani suggested that Muhammad al-Katsinawi owed his success in mastering '*ulūm al-hurūf*', '*ulūm al-awfāq*' and the sciences of the calendar (*al-mawāqit*) in the genre of the Maghribian system of calculation and '*ulūm al-asrār*' according to its *harfī* and *waqfī* methods, to Sheikh Muhammad Bindo.³⁶ He is also said to have studied at the feet of Sheikh Muhammad Kuru in Borno before leaving for the Hijaz. It was this *sheikh* who introduced al-Katsinawi to certain achievements in the sciences of '*ulūm al-asrār*', *al-raml* (geometry) and '*ilm al-hisāb*'.³⁷ This form of mobile school culture remains the tradition among most West African communities. According to Hunwick, communities of western Sudan have therefore lived as members of a religious community sharing a common worldview, one of Islamic notions of self-identity through Islamic scholarship.³⁸ Consequently, inter-community relations between the various mobile *tsangaya* groups became much

35 Ahmed M. Kani, "The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān", 31.

36 Ahmed M. Kani, "The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān", 31.

37 Ibid., 32.

38 Ibid., 330.

more elaborate and developed well into the modern period, so that, the protocols for crossing international borders are based on reasons of faith or any evidence of mobile learning rather than any document. Research on this phenomenon emphasizes that mobile *tsangaya* has continuously proven that the borders in this part of Africa were not only porous but socio-culturally non-existent. Now, let us briefly explore the *tsangaya* mobile education system before we continue analysing other factors influencing transborder religious mobility. This will provide a deeper understanding of how such educational practices contribute to the fluidity and dynamics of cross-border interactions within this region.

Mobile System of Education: The Example of *Tsangaya*

Tsangaya is an Islamic education system with a longstanding presence in Northern Nigeria, focused on teaching children mastery of the Holy Qur'an. The term *tsangaya* is adopted from *sangaya* in Kanuri, which means educational institution.³⁹ Therefore, *sangaya* is the original name while *tsangaya* is a Hausa adaptation of the term.⁴⁰ The *tsangaya* school, also known as *makarantar alqur'ani* (Quranic School), derived its name from what is largely visible in it, i.e. wooden plates or *allo* in Hausa. *Tsangaya* is defined as an area or a place where the Holy Qur'an is taught and which is generally characterized by the assembly of a conglomeration of children, most of them carrying their individual *allo*, around a single teacher, often with a whip in his hands.⁴¹ It is also defined as any place –it could be a room, balcony, veranda, hut, guest room, tree shade, etc.– where the students are gathered to learn the Holy Qur'an.⁴² *Tsangaya* is a system of knowledge acquisition in which both the teacher and the students travel out of their places of origin, and in some cases remain there for learning, mastering and memorizing the Holy Qur'an, preparing in the process

39 A. Yahaya, "Tsangaya: The Traditional Islamic Education System in Nigeria", *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* (2018), 2.

40 Ibid., 3.

41 Masooda Bano, *Engaged yet Disengaged: Islamic Schools and the State in Kano*, Religion and Development, Research Programme, Working Paper 29, 2009, 11.

42 H. Hoechner, *Quranic Schools in Northern Nigeria: Everyday Experiences of Youth, Faith, and Poverty* (United Kingdom: International African Institute, 2018).

to face the hardships and tumults of life.⁴³ Thus, students travel long distances to learn from renowned *sheikhs* in a sort of mobile scholarship. Most leading scholarly families of Hausaland trace their origin and history of scholarship to this period and process, where they were found moving from one centre of learning or *alim* (scholar) to another through the system of *tsangaya*. The extent of the learning relationship amongst the scholars of Yandoto and Birnin Katsina as well as Borno and Agadez, before Sokoto *jihād* was through the *tsangaya* mode of learning. The participation of both individuals and states creates an important catalyst that strengthens the mobile nature of the *tsangaya* scholarship. This form of mobile *tsangaya* culture remains the tradition among most West African countries.⁴⁴ The zeal to provide Islamic education to Muslim children right from the earliest time led Muslim scholars, parents and leaders, even in the remotest areas, to think of the simplest means to accomplish such a task. Muslims, therefore, adopted every simple method to ensure the acquisition and dissemination of Islamic learning. As for the students, they could be small children or grown-ups provided they can speak. Such schools could also be settled and mobile. Likewise, the teachers who provide religious instructions could be settled or mobile.⁴⁵ This flexibility characterizes the *tsangaya* Quranic schools as inherently mobile, centered around the teacher (*mallam*) who frequently travels with the students and establishes a camp often on the outskirts of towns to immerse the students fully in the study of the Holy Qur'an.⁴⁶

As indicated above, there are two types of teachers involved in *tsangaya*: mobile and settled. The mobile teachers are Islamic religious educators who travel from one location to another with the primary goal of imparting religious knowledge. However, the mobile scholars in Hausaland may differ slightly from the early itinerant scholars; the former typically travel with children entrusted to them by their parents, whereas the latter moved individually, visiting various places

43 Ahmad Moyi Gada, *A Short History of Early Islamic Scholarship in Hausaland* (Kaduna: Nadabo Printing Production, 2010).

44 John Hunwick, "Borders, Boundaries and the Concept of State in the Islamic Tradition" in *The Nigeria-Niger Trans-Border Cooperation*, eds. Asiwaju, A. I. and B. M. Barkindo (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1989).

45 A. M. Gada, *A Short History of Early Islamic Scholarship in Hausaland*.

46 A. U. Adamu, "Islamic Education in African Countries: The Evolution of Non-formal Al-Muhajirun Education in Nigeria", *BUK* (June, 2010), 6.

where they settled temporarily to impart Islamic knowledge to the local populace. Usually, migrations are directed towards a popular teacher in the quest for Islamic knowledge. Islam encourages its adherents to seek knowledge, even if it means travelling to distant lands.⁴⁷ The concept of migration is widely practiced, particularly for acquiring knowledge, which in Islam is likened to a precious stone that needs to be searched for, mined, purified, transported and utilized for the benefit of mankind. Therefore, it has been a common practice among *malams* in different parts of Nigeria and Niger to migrate across extensive regions with their *almajirai* (the students) in pursuit of knowledge. The movement of a mobile teacher together with his students, known among the people of Hausaland as *yawon bindi*,⁴⁸ involves the teacher traveling to a distant location from his students' homes, taking them away from their hometown. Upon arriving at their destination, a traveling educator may occasionally be hosted by a permanent educator in that area, who might be an *imam* or another respected figure in the community. A mobile teacher's primary motivation for constantly moving with his students stems from the Hausa people's long-held notion that a kid learns best when removed from immediate and familiar surroundings,⁴⁹ as he can focus more on learning when away from his immediate family, relatives and friends.⁵⁰

The enrolment process in the *tsangaya* depends on the stage one aspires. There are three types of Islamic education: Quranic elementary school (*tsangaya*), *Islamiyya* (advance) and *makarantar 'ilmi'* (higher school). Consequently, the type of education dictates the enrollment process. Since the focus here is on the *tsangaya*, the mode of enrolment includes self-enrollment or enrollment by parents or enrollment by other *mallams*.⁵¹ Like Western-style educational systems, Islamic schooling follows structured stages and varied

47 A. M. Gada, *A Short History of Early Islamic Scholarship in Hausaland*.

48 The literal Meaning of *yawo* is journey and *bindi* means tail. Joined together gives the literal meaning of "Tail Journey" technically it refers to the long journeys which the mobile teachers undertake after leaving their homes.

49 H. Hoechner, *Searching for Knowledge and Recognition: Traditional Qur'anic Students (Almajirai) in Kano* (Nigeria, French Institute for Research in Africa/IFRA, 2013).

50 An important Arabic source material on the subject matter is *Al-fara'id al-jalilah wasa'it al-fawa'id al-jamilah fi 'ulum al-qur'an* written by Abdullah bin Fodiyo.

51 Hannah Hoechner, *Search for Knowledge and Recognition: Traditional Qur'anic Students (Almajirai) in Kano* (Nigeria: IFRA-Nigeria, 2018), 97.

enrollment ages. Typically, children begin their educational journey at four or five years old, embarking on foundational character-building and ethical training akin to that of kindergarten or nursery. From the outset, these young learners are introduced to reading and writing in Arabic. A significant draw for parents to enroll their children in *tsangaya* schools is cost-effectiveness, a crucial factor for families often engaged in farming or trading and generally possessing modest incomes. The *malam*, as the leader of the school, is seen and required to be the embodiment of the teachings of Islam, serving as a model for the students.⁵² Beyond the educational content, parents value the broader exposure their children receive by studying away from home, interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds, and absorbing life lessons in responsibility and community living.⁵³ This experience, believed by many parents to be enriching, supports the notion that there is substantial value in learning and growing in new environments.

As highlighted above with various examples, northern Nigeria is diverse and, in many ways, similar to southern Niger in terms of its people, culture and socio-material setting. The border between Nigeria and Niger forms the bulk of Hausaland and Borno, where, for many centuries, the ruling elite, merchant and commoners sought proximity to the scholarly class.⁵⁴ The culture of Islam has significantly influenced the diverse groups who traverse the border between Nigeria and Niger, including the Hausa, Manga, Tuaregs, Djerma, and Kanuri.⁵⁵ This influence extends beyond physical borders, deeply effecting relationships and community ties across the region. However, the colonial powers imposed a number of regulations that had an impact on the region's scholarly and traditional practices.⁵⁶ Most members of the scholarly families from areas close to the Niger border studied in Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Zaria, or Borno during the colonial

52 A. M. Gada, *A Short History of Early Islamic Scholarship in Hausaland*.

53 Hannah Hoehner, *Search for Knowledge and Recognition: Traditional Qur'anic Students in Kano* (Nigeria: IFRA-Nigeria, 2018), 98.

54 Maishanu, *Five Centuries of Historical Writings in Hausaland and Borno*, 58.

55 The peopling of the area include; Zamfarawa, Katsinawa, Gimbanawa, Sullubawa, Arewa, Adarawa, Kubawa, Gobirawa, Azbinawa, and Filani. See, O. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria* (Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1965), 551.

56 *Ibid.*, 59.

and post-colonial periods. Therefore, we would like to emphasize that although colonial policies affected the people of the two neighbouring countries, the culture of scholarship and Islamic learning among these communities continued unabated. The old relationship between the people, who are traditionally, ethnically, socially and culturally homogeneous, was disrupted but could not be stopped due to the resilience of the traditions that cut across the neighbouring communities. Moreover, since the pre-colonial days, an increasing number of people, especially the young *malamai* (religious knowledge seekers) and their *almajirai*, have flocked to Nigeria to study with numerous *malamai* in Katsina, Gusau, Sokoto and Kano, and this practice has continued to the present day.⁵⁷

Spiritual Mobility Across Nigeria-Niger Border: *Hajj*, *Malams* and the *Sufis*

An important factor that binds Muslims together and encourages massive movement across national borders is the institution of the *Hajj*. This religious obligation brings Muslims from all over the world to Mecca at a particular time of the year. The *Hajj* has enabled organized pilgrimages to Mecca from particular locations in West Africa. Historically speaking, pilgrims from West Africa have merged into the trans-Saharan networks and routes leading to Cairo or Red Sea ports, such as Aydhab, Suwakin or Port Sudan.⁵⁸ Through the institution of *Hajj*, West African pilgrims could engage with North African centres of religious study, such as the universities of Qarawiyyīn, Zeytūna, and al-Azhar, by crossing the Sahara.⁵⁹ As the Tijāniyya Sufi brotherhood gradually gained popularity in West Africa, adherents combined their *Hajj* with visits to the grave of their order's founder, Sheikh Ahmad Tijjānī, located in Fes. The main hubs for pilgrims in the Nigeria-Niger region were Kano, Agades (formerly Takedda), or Birnin Gazargamo in Borno. They would simply travel to the most accessible centre, where they could join a caravan of other pilgrims for the Saharan crossing. As a result of the strong Islamic

57 John Hunwick, "Borders, Boundaries and the Concept of State in the Islamic Tradition" in *The Nigeria-Niger Trans-Border Cooperation*, eds. Asiwaju, A. I. and B. M. Barkindo (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1989), 33.

58 Ibid., 36.

59 Bazz Lecocq, 'The Hajj from West Africa from a Global Historical Perspective (19th and 20th Centuries)', *African Diaspora* 5 (2012), 187.

presence in these countries, the eastern route—which primarily left Nigeria at the border with Cameroon and continued to do so throughout the colonial period—became increasingly popular from the 18th century onwards. These routes would eventually leave Nigeria at the border with Cameroon, pass through Garoua and Fort Lamy (Ndjamena), head south along the Shari River or north through Abeche, join up at El Obeid in Kordofan, and then proceed to either Suakin or Massawa on the Red Sea coast of Ethiopia.⁶⁰ In the post-independence era, pilgrims from the Hausa-speaking areas of Niger have been glad to pass themselves off as Nigerians in order to obtain a pilgrim's passport and board the charter flights in Kano. As Miles points out, the highly secular orientation of the government in Niger provides a powerful incentive for Nigeriens to borrow a Nigerian identity, which is much more sympathetic to their needs as Muslims.⁶¹ Thus, the conceptual contrast between the two states on the role the state should play in religious matters can affect border relations just as significantly as disparities in currency value or the prices paid for produce.

The tradition of seeking knowledge often led to travel extensively, much like the *Hajj*, to study with renowned *malams* and *sheikhs*. In the Nigeria-Niger region, major gathering points for the *Hajj*, such as Kano and Agades, also served as important hubs for Islamic education and also drew students seeking both scholarly and spiritual growth. The convergence of pilgrimage and scholarship illustrates the deep interconnectedness of religious devotion and learning in the Islamic world, especially in West Africa. As a religion centred on a revealed scripture, Islam demands of the believer the ability to read that scripture if the believer is to be more than a blind follower of others. Reading and understanding the Holy Qur'an requires knowledge of Arabic. Literacy in Arabic is therefore the foundation of an Islamic education. But simply reading the Holy Qur'an is not enough; it is a matter of understanding it and of exploring its depth through its many commentaries. In pre-modern times, it was common for scholars to

60 John Hunwick, "Borders, Boundaries and the Concept of State in the Islamic Tradition" in *The Nigeria-Niger Trans-Border Cooperation*, eds. Asiwaju, A. I. and B. M. Barkindo (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1989), 37.

61 William F. S. Miles, "Promise and Realities of Partition in Hausaland" in *The Nigeria-Niger Trans-Border Cooperation*, eds. Asiwaju, A. I. & Barkindo, B. M. (National Boundary Commission, Malthouse Press, 1989).

travel, sometimes for years to visit great teachers and centres of learning to perfect their education. Timbuktu and Jenne were among the earliest major centres of Islamic learning in West Africa, dating back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁶² But centres of learning, which in the sixteenth century did not exist in what might be called the greater Nigerian zone, were not far behind. This is almost certainly true even at the lowest level of education, where boys were sent across national borders to study with particular *malams* and eventually may ending up in big cities such as Kano. It is important to recognize that for Muslims, education has traditionally not been primarily concerned with attaining superior job qualifications. Rather, education has been regarded as a means of self-fulfilment through the pursuit of a religious obligation to obtain a deeper and nuanced understanding of Islam.

In parallel with the pursuit of formal knowledge, there has been a search for spiritual knowledge through the *sufi* tradition. This entailed attachment to a *sheikh*, a spiritual teacher, from whom one imbibed the *sufi* way, stage by stage and over the years. Once again, people were inclined to gravitate towards large centres where numerous *sheikhs* were present, for example, Katsina as centre of precolonial intellectual activities hosted many *sufi* scholars along with Sokoto, which had a strong Qadiri/Uthmani tradition, and Kano, which had a robust Tijjānī/Niassene tradition and still had a considerable Qadiri presence. As eminent intellectuals continued to migrate and settle in the region, numerous scholars appeared, including Sheikh Umar b. Aqit, Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti's grandfather; Sheikh al-Tadhikhti; and Makhluḥ b. Salih al-Bilbali, who visited Katsina in 1509 and was convinced to take on the role of qadi. Other prominent *sufi* scholars include Muhammad B. al-Sabbagh (Dan Marina), a notable scholar from Katsina who lived in the 17th century. He made significant contributions to Islamic learning in Hausaland.⁶³ Muhammad al-Barnawi al-Kashnawi (Dan Masani) who is also another renowned scholar from Katsina, lived in the 17th century and left a lasting impact on the spiritual traditions of the region. Sheikh Dan Tafa (‘Abd al-Qadir ibn Mustafa) widely regarded as the most erudite scholar of the second generation in the Sokoto Caliphate, was born during the *hijra* (emigration) that marked

62 Ahmad M. Gada, *A Short History of Early Islamic Scholarship in Hausaland*.

63 Ahmed M. Kani, *The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān*, 31.

the beginning of the Sokoto *jihād*.⁶⁴ His maternal grandfather was Shehu Usman dan Fodio, the leader of the Sokoto *jihād* and a revered scholar and *sufi*. Similarly, Sheikh Isyaku Rabi'u Kano's great-grandfather, Abubakar Gwani, was a well-known Islamic scholar and *sufi* who immigrated to Kukawa in the Kanem-Bornu Empire. He was reportedly part of a group of Islamic academics from Birnin Ngazargamu, who, under Mai Rabi'u's rule, eventually relocated to Kukawa. In 1695 AD, he moved from Kukawa to Yerwa, now known as Maiduguri. The family later moved further west to Hadejiya, Danbatta, Bichi, and Gaya. Students from across the region flocked to Gwani Abubakar, after they settled in Yerwa, to continue their Islamic education from his wealth of knowledge. These movements of Muslims in search of formal knowledge or spiritual tutelage are old, deeply engrained patterns and represent what some might call inalienable rights. Borders form only minor obstacles to these movements. They are rather like membranes, which breathe and allow the great centres of Islam to act like lungs that draw in the aspirants and propel them out again in due time. This tradition of itinerant scholarship persisted notwithstanding the French and British colonial division of the region. Notably, there are no equivalent Islamic centers in Niger; instead, the major centers are found on the Nigerian side of the border. Consequently, the majority of the pull is in the direction of Niger to Nigeria.

Colonialism and Islamic Scholarship Across the Nigeria-Niger Border

Colonial policies established rigid borders and physical barriers to monitor and control movement, but ironically, they also facilitated the movement of people across these artificially imposed boundaries. This unintended flexibility allowed knowledge-seekers and scholars from Niger to travel extensively within Nigeria, particularly to centres of learning such as Katsina, Kano, Zaria, Sokoto, and as far as Borno.⁶⁵ In contrast to the British, the uncompromising French policy towards Islam and Islamic movements in Niger forced the scholarly community

⁶⁴ Ibid, 32.

⁶⁵ Miles, *Hausaland Divided*, 249.

to travel to northern Nigeria.⁶⁶ In French West Africa, Islam was seen as a problem in a way that it never was in British West Africa.⁶⁷ Similarly, there is a tendency among some scholars who erroneously believe that the British worked in favour of the spread of Islam and enhanced the status and prestige of the Muslim *emirs* and scholars.⁶⁸ Contrary to this opinion, the British actions portrayed a power which is at war with Islam. Umar noted that the British rule in northern Nigeria adopted four approaches towards Islam. These were *appropriation, containment, surveillance and outright antagonism*.⁶⁹ In reaction to this, the Muslims of northern Nigeria adopted strategies of avoidance, submission, confrontation and alliance in their responses to the British military power and exploitation. The choice of any one of these options was determined by the influence of the '*ulama*' class on the ruling *emirs*, relations with non-Muslim neighbours or subjects, and the personal disposition of the individual *emir*.⁷⁰ Due to the impact of these policies, there had been a movement of scholars from the French-controlled areas into northern Nigeria. These movements became the natural option for Nigerien Islamic scholars and students seeking Islamic knowledge. The Muslim intellectuals from Niger were also encouraged to relocate and settle in northern Nigeria by the French colonial policy for Islam. In particular, a large number of academics and students were dispersed around Katsina, Sokoto, Kano, Zaria, and Borno.⁷¹ These communities were renowned for a well-developed culture of Islamic learning.⁷² The risk of drought and several fundamental sociocultural linkages were other significant reasons that encouraged the migration of academics and students from Niger to northern Nigeria. The foregoing makes it evident that, in addition to the pre-colonial friendships and bonds of fraternity between these

66 Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam, the State and Muslims of Nigeria and the Republic of Niger."

67 Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule* (London: Hutchison, 1968), 359.

68 *Ibid.*, 558.

69 Muhammad Sani Umar, *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 33.

70 *Ibid.*, 34.

71 Prothero R. Mansell, *Migrant Labour from Sokoto Province Northern Nigeria* (London, 1958), 17.

72 Mustafa M. Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam, the State and Muslims of Nigeria and the Republic of Niger".

communities, the spread of mobile scholarship between the communities of Nigeria and Niger was facilitated by the French colonial hostility toward Islam and Islamic scholarship as well as the British colonial policy of toleration.

As previously stated, the developments in Islamic scholarship and learning across the Nigeria-Niger border were influenced by the British colonial policies on education.⁷³ It can be observed that the British encountered a well-established culture of scholarship and learning, which proved difficult to abandon. Consequently, they attempted to modify the system in their interests. For instance, the dominant culture during the British occupation of the area was the *sufi* orientation, represented by the Qadiriyya and Tijāniyya orders.⁷⁴ A significant aspect of the *sufi* tradition is the pursuit of knowledge and for closeness to Allah, as well as the purification of the heart for total submission to Allah's will. This state of mind is achieved through a constant search for knowledge, which explains the establishment of numerous schools and centres of worship (mosques/*zawiyyah*).⁷⁵ Additionally, it is important to interact with those who attained spiritual enlightenment (*shuyūskh*) in order to gain their guidance in prayer for success in business or to excel in one's endeavours. Consequently, from the ruling elites and the merchant or business classes down to the commoners, the population sought to establish closer ties with the scholarly class.⁷⁶ This established culture, in part, led the British to implement their policy of *appropriation, containment, and surveillance*.⁷⁷ The policy was so expansive and generic that it provided an enabling environment that accommodated scholars and students from neighbouring French colonies. Not long after the British colonial rule commenced, the two *sufi* orders, which represented the

73 Ibid.

74 Abdul Rauf Mustapha, & Mukhtar U. Bunza, "Contemporary Islamic Sects and Groups in Northern Nigeria" in *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities and Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, ed. Abdur Rauf Mustapha (James Currey, Western Africa Series, 2014), 56.

75 A. R. Mustapha ed., *Sects and Social Disorder*.

76 Ibrahim Tahir, "Scholars, Sufis, Saints and Capitalist in Kano" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1975); Auwalu Anwar, "Struggle for Influence and Identity: The Ulama in Kano, 1937-1987" (MA diss., University of Maiduguri, 1989).

77 M. M. Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam, the State and Muslims of Nigeria and the Republic of Niger."

scholarly class, became embroiled in a contest over their positions of authority within the Muslim community. This provided the British with the assurance that the scholarly class posed no further threat. It was during this period that a great number of scholars from the Republic of Niger relocated to northern regions of Nigeria in order to pursue their livelihoods. *Mallam* Ibrahim Dantasawa was one such scholar. It was also around this time that Sheikh Abubakar Kiota resided in Zaria with the renowned Sheikh Yahuza Zaria, who died in 1958.⁷⁸ Sheikh Abdulrazaq Kuso (Magarya) received most of his scholarly training under the tutelage of Sheikh Tijānī Yan Mota and Sheikh Abubakar Atiku Sanka in Kano.⁷⁹ Similarly, students from Niger were also drawn to northern Nigeria for the same purpose. Liman Shafiú, the son of Liman Ishaq, the present chief *imam* of the central Maradi Mosque, studied in Kano under the aforementioned conditions.⁸⁰ The majority of members of the scholarly families in Maradi (Sheikh Mallam Abba and Sheikh Ibrahim Danjiratawa), Niamey, and beyond all attested that they had studied in Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Zaria, or Borno during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Conclusion

The continued existence of socio-cultural ties and the bond of trust between the Nigeria-Niger border communities will serve as the basis for the continuation of cross-border mobile scholarship. Established Islamic learning practices such as mobile *tsangaya* (Quranic schools), and other related Islamic means of intellectual pursuits will persist in shaping socio-cultural practices across the border of the two countries. Finally, the culture of Islamic scholarship, which was so much engrained for a long period in the lives of the communities of Nigeria and Niger, will continue to be the basis of inter-state relations and diplomacy, and this will probably remain so for a very long period. Islam has been in constant opposition to the border ordering, at least, in most African countries, where such borders cut across ethnic

78 Muhammad Mustapha Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam, the State and Muslims of Nigeria and the Republic of Niger", *Diya'u Journal of History*, (Federal University Birnin Kebbi, 2022).

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

relations.⁸¹ Nigeria and the Republic of Niger share much in common, making it predictable that what obtains in Nigeria can also be found in Niger. This is seen by following the history of Islamic scholarship and learning between and across the borders of the two countries. The French policies led to the establishment of secularism in Niger in contrast to the British policy of containment in Nigeria, and this approach was adopted by the succeeding administrations after independence. Thus, the pattern of preaching as obtained in Nigeria is unpermitted in Niger, and this led to the flow of teeming population into Nigeria in search of Islamic knowledge. Most importantly, the fact that principal Islamic centres are on the Nigerian side of the border and there are no comparable ones within Niger has contributed so much to the pull towards Nigeria. Indeed, it would be imperative if some study of cross-border mobility for the pursuit of Islamic education and spiritual tutelage would be undertaken, linked no doubt to a study of group and family ties as well as economic ties that may play a complementary role. It would also be valuable to investigate the attitudes toward national borders and the nation-state among Muslims specifically to see how Islam shapes border identity among the Nigeria-Niger border communities.

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81 A. I. Asiwaju, *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations Across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884-1984* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1985), 11.

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Fading Cultural Memory in Arabic Alphabet and Syllable Teaching in Qur'anic Education in Ilorin

Aliyu Sakariyau Alabi*

Introduction

The importance and uniqueness of Arabic as the language of the Holy Qur'an have made knowledge acquisition an inevitable part of the religion. The spread of the religion to non-Arab speaking regions of the world gave further impetus to the refinement of the language to prevent its corruption from contact with other tongues.¹ Although the language is primary for religious rituals, understanding the meaning of the words is secondary, even though it is desirable. Nevertheless, this secondary importance of meaning, especially for ritual praxis, does not deny the words of the Holy Qur'an the power of its sound. This way, the words of the Holy Qur'an are passed down from generation to generation, and the Arabic language becomes an essential part of the religion, a means to an end. The quest for the knowledge of the word of Allah (SWT) became synonymous with being a Muslim.²

Islam and the Islamic system of education first came to West Africa south of the Sahara in the second half of the 11th century through the two main trade routes across the Sahara. One followed the Fez, Sijilmasa and Taghaza route that served the kingdoms of Western Sudan, while the second one followed from Tripoli down to Kanem-Borno, and it also moved in a west-east route from Ghana-Mali region through the Hausa region, meeting up with Kanem-Borno. The peoples of *Takrur* were the first black Africans to embrace Islam. They also served as missionaries spreading it among the Wolof, Susu, Madinka groups, Fulbe, Hausa and the Kanuri along the east-west route.³ Islam came into the Yoruba region from the Hausaland and Borno regions

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1 Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 90-91; Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (Revised Tenth Edition, London: Macmillan Publishers, 2002), 241.

2 Aliyu Sakariyau Alabi, *Transmission of Learning in Modern Ilorin: A History of Islamic Education 1897-2012* (Leiden Universiteit, 2015), 74.

3 J. Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 42-47.

and also along the west-east route through Malians (Wangara). It was not very strong among the Yoruba until the emergence of Ilorin Emirate in the early decades of the nineteenth century,⁴ following the advent of Sokoto jihad in the regions, probably in 1817.

Islam among the Yoruba and in Ilorin

Islam first had its inroad into the Yoruba-speaking areas sometime in the 17th century, through the Wangara traders from Mali, and hence, Yoruba name for Muslims *imale* was derived from Mali.⁵ The real impetus to Islam among the Yoruba began after the establishment of the Muslim Emirate of Ilorin in the second decade of the 19th century. The foundation of Islam, its education and the multiculturalism of Ilorin was laid in Okesuna; the inhabitants include Yoruba, Kanuri, Malians, Hausa, Fulani and no doubt Nupe and Baruba Muslims.⁶ Uthman Thaqafi has listed some of the Fulani scholars including Sheikh Albayani Alfulani al Malawi, Sheikh Muhammad Isale Koto, Sheikh al Malik al Fulani, Sheikh Ahmadu Bariki⁷ and Uthman Olufadi. Other scholars of Okesuna include Sheikh Sanusi, Imam Matase and the grandfather of Sheikh Bashar Adangba.⁸

The scholars of Okesuna were the first Muslim educators in Ilorin. As an exclusive Muslim trading settlement,⁹ the passing on of Islamic knowledge can be taken for granted. We know that before the arrival of Alimi, they had only half of the classical Sunni exegesis book of *Jalālayn* written by Mahallī (d. 864/1459) and Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), which presupposes that their knowledge was limited to the half-

4 Adam Abdullahi al-Iluri, *Lamahāt al-Ballūr fi Mashāhīr 'Ulamā' Ilori* (Agege: Maktabat al-Adab, 1982), 140; R. Deremi Abubakre, *The Interplay of Arabic and Yoruba Cultures in South-Western Nigeria* (Iwo: Darul 'Ilm Publishers, 2004), 21.

5 G.T.O. Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam Among the Yorubas 1841- 1908* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1978), 4; Abubakre, *The Interplay of Arabic*, 18.

6 Stefan Reichmuth, "A Regional Centre of Islamic Learning in Nigeria: Ilorin and its Influence on Yoruba Islam," in *Madras la Transmission du Savoir Dans le Monde Musulman*, ed. Nicole Grandin and Marc Gaboreieu (Ap Editions. 1997), 232.

7 Ita Ahmadu (Ahmadu's frontage) is a settlement named after Ahmadu Bakiri. He was a friend of Alimi, who was credited with laying the foundation of his mosque. For more details, see Abdussalam Thaqafi, *A. Tarikhū' l Adabi'l Arabi fi Madinat Ilorin* (Cairo: Sharkatul Arabi li al-Tab'i wa al-Nashri, 2008), 17.

8 Abdussalam Thaqafi, *Tārikhul Adabi'l Arabi*, 18.

9 Compares with Diaba of Mali mentioned in Nehemia Levtzion & Randall L. Pouwels eds., *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens: Ohio, 2000), 63.

volume of the book. They also had other books of religious sciences.¹⁰ Living an exclusive life meant religion was practiced with zeal even though their texts were limited. Knowledge of Arabic as a language on its own was not strong among the inhabitants of Okesuna since they had only limited resources with which to learn the language. Emphasis was more on the praxis of the religion, which requires no strong knowledge of Arabic.¹¹

In the early decades of the 19th century, Alimi was invited by Afonja to serve as his preacher and around him grew a multi-ethnic Muslim community. In the aftermath of the rebellion of Afonja against the Alafin, his alliance with Muslims and later discord with the Muslims, the children of Alimi led the Muslim community to establish an emirate. In further intrigues of power, the Fulani dynasty destroyed Okesuna and resettled some of its scholars into Ilorin. This development united the hitherto semi-autonomous settlements into one Muslim city. From then, the Fulani consolidated the town as a Muslim emirate among the Yoruba.¹²

The foundation laid by Abdulsalami, the first ruler of the Ilorin Emirate, was built upon by his brother and successor Shitta (1836-61), from then on, we began to have some clear evidence of activities that took place in Ilorin. Shitta was well-versed in Arabic and he encouraged scholars to settle in Ilorin. The traveller Campbell, in 1859, noticed that there were several Qur'anic schools in the town.¹³ The scholars who responded to the invitations of the emirs were to help in the spread of learning in Ilorin. One of them is Sheikh Abubakr Bube, who came from Gobir in the Hausa region. He established a school in the Gambari quarters. A contemporary of Bube was Sheikh Takuti Nufawi, a native of Nupe.¹⁴ These scholars from different ethnic and geographic backgrounds also brought the intellectual traditions from their various places, making it possible for the scholars in Ilorin to have access to all these multiple knowledge backgrounds. Another such scholar was

10 Thaqafi, *Tārikhul Adabī'l Arabi*, 23.

11 Ibid.

12 Stefan Reichmuth, *Islamische Bildung und Soziale Integration in Ilorin* (Munster: Lit. Verlag. 1998), 29.

13 Robert Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to Motherland: An Account of a Journey Among the Egbas and Yoruba of Central Africa, in 1859-60* (1861) (Philadelphia: Thomas Hamilton, 1861), 104.

14 al-Iluri, *Lamahāt al-Ballūr*, 28.

Sheikh Ibrahim, known as *sare imo* in Yoruba or *kumburi karatu* (from Hausa *kabari*, meaning fountain/stream of knowledge), who came from Borno and established a school in Gambari quarters.¹⁵ These scholars came with texts of tafsir and fiqh. These became the texts for the scholars to study. They copy these from those in possession to have their own copies.¹⁶

Qur'anic Education: Alphabet and Syllable Teaching

The first duty of any Muslim convert is to learn the rudiments of the rituals of the religion. This includes the *shahada* (affirmation of faith), the call to prayer, various salutations and recitations accompanying the prayers, ritual of ablution, and they are also taught the Qur'anic verses to be recited in prayers. These must be in Arabic; hence, religious education began with teaching these religious rudiments, often an oral exercise, and committed to memory. In the early period of Islam in Ilorin, as happened in other places, Islamic education was not widely conducted, nor was it well organised.¹⁷ The promoters of the religion in this incipient period were mostly traders who used the opportunity of their commercial endeavours to spread the religion. For example, al-Tahir Sholagberu is known to be a merchant who had travelled widely in the northern Yoruba region.¹⁸ These promoters of the religion were also often on the move from one town to the other in pursuit of their commercial activities. The students themselves were adults who are also occupied with some other engagements; hence full-time attention could not be given to the study in the initial period.¹⁹

A Muslim begins acculturation into the world of Islam from the Qur'anic school. Here, the Muslim is introduced to the word of Allah (SWT) in Arabic. The first step is to learn the *Hurūf al-Hijāiyya*. When

15 H.O.A. Danmole, "The Growth of Islamic Learning in Ilorin in the Nineteenth Century," *Religions* 6 & 7, (1982): 20.

16 Thaqafi, *Tārikhul Adabi'l Arabi*, 19.

17 Aliy-Waliy Kamal, "Islamic Education in Ilorin" (M.A diss., Department of Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, 1984), 36.

18 Stefan Reichmuth, "Literary Culture and Arabic Manuscripts in 19th-Century Ilorin," in *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade*, eds. Graziano Kratli & Ghislaine Lydon (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV. 2011), 223; Kamal, "Islamic Education in Ilorin," 36.

19 Munir-ud-deen Ahmed, *Muslim Education and the Scholars' Social Status up to the Fifth Century of the Muslim Era in the Light of Tarikh Baghdad* (Zurich: Verlag. 1968), 28.

Islam became established in Borno and among the Hausa, the letters of the Arabic alphabet were given new names, or where the sound of the letter did not exist in the local tongues, the nearest sound was adapted to suit the phonetics of the local tongues. For example, the third letter of the Arabic alphabet, ث 'thā' is pronounced 'sa' in the absence of 'th' sound in the local languages. Descriptive phrases are used for some of the letters to conform to local understanding. The seventh letter, خ 'khā' following ح 'hā' and being differentiated in structure only by the diacritical mark, had been named in Hausa as 'ha mai ruwa' (ha with a (water) dot). This was phonetically adapted among Yoruba speakers as (h)ameruwa. This is a common phenomenon when languages go through adaptations from one language to the other.

The Kanuri and the Fulanis were Muslims long before the Hausa converted and were, thus, the teachers of the first Hausa Muslims. The Hausa adopted some of the names of the letters of the Arabic alphabet from these two ethnic groups and modified them over time. As the lingua franca of trade across the West African sub-region, the Hausa language became the preeminent language of teaching the Holy Qur'an and Islamic sciences, even among the Fulanis and Kanuris, who had accepted Islam long before the Hausas.²⁰

In the early period the teaching and learning materials were not sophisticated. A wooden slate (*walaa*)²¹ was the writing material for learning to read the Holy Qur'an. These are of two types; one is white, and the other is dyed black, usually of hardwood. The white slate is the most common one, it is used for learning and is in different sizes. The second type is dyed dark and has a smooth surface. Some would bury the slate for seven days by the riverside to attain the dark colour.²² It is used for writing therapeutic verses to be washed and drunk for healing. The wood of the following trees is used for making the slate: *agan-o* (khaya ivorensis), *ayan* (prosopis africana), *Afara* (terminalia

20 Nehemia Levtzion & Randall L. Pouwels eds., *The History of Islam in Africa*, 80-85; J. Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa*.

21 Wala (derived from Hausa *allo*) is a rectangular carved slate of various designs and sizes. Some have handles at the longer sides, but all have a 'T' like top handle; the cross usually curved like an inverted crescent.

22 This may also have some ritualistic belief attached to it. Interview with Alfa Zakariya Yahaya, 20-4-2013.

superba). Woodcarvers (*ogbena*) used to make the slates, but nowadays, carpenters also produce them in most parts of Yorubaland.

The ink (*tadawa* or *tadaa* from Hausa *tawada*) is made from boiling the young leaves of *oori* (*vitex doniana*) tree.²³ The bark of the tree is also used for writing in the Holy Qur'an. Mostly done by women, the water is then boiled for up to three days until it thickens and becomes dark before it is ready for use.²⁴ Red pepper is grounded and added to achieve the red colour used in writing the diacritical marks and for decoration on texts written on paper.²⁵ The pen is made of either a sliced bamboo stem or a guinea corn stalk. This is sharpened with a knife to a tapered end. The tapered end is sometimes sliced in half to facilitate the retention of some ink.²⁶ After each lesson had been mastered, the student is given leave to wash the slate. When it is dried, the surfaced is then smoothened with leaves of *ipin* tree (*ficus asperifolia*). In modern times, sandpaper is also used. A thin film of pap is then rubbed on the surface of the slate to prevent the ink blotting the surface. In Gbagba Qur'anic School,²⁷ white chalk is rubbed on the surface. This gives a sharp contrast to the dark ink.

From the 19th century and into the early part of the twentieth century, books were a rarity, especially when the religion was just making a foothold, and papers were scarce to come by. The papers were of European-made that found its way down through the trans-Saharan trade.²⁸ Before the printed Qur'an became common, when a student had advanced in his studies, he copied the lessons from the master copy with the support of the teacher at the rate of about two pages per lesson.²⁹ Some develop a special ability as calligraphers through this means. Written Holy Qur'an are considered sacred and cherished heirloom.

23 Reichmuth, "Literary Culture and Arabic Manuscripts," 216.

24 Discussions with Alhaji Mahmud A. Bello Ahmadu and Alhaji Muhammad Sani Ibrahim (Islamic book sellers), 31-10-2012. See also Kamal, "Islamic Education in Ilorin," 48.

25 W.O.A. Nasiru, "Islamic Learning Among the Yoruba (1896 to Modern Times)" (PhD Thesis, Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, 1977), 82.

26 This also has some magical belief attached to it.

27 Gbagba Qur'anic School is one of the oldest schools in Ilorin, established during the reign of Shitta (1836-1861), the second emir of Ilorin.

28 Reichmuth, "Literary Culture and Arabic Manuscripts," 218.

29 Interview with Imam Yakubu Aliagan, 12-9-2012.

Categorizing Muslim learning

Like in the other parts of the Muslim world, Islamic education can be categorised into two in Ilorin: elementary Qur'anic education and the advanced (ilm) education. By far, the most numerous and noticeable are the elementary Qur'anic schools. These piazza schools are to be found in every locale.³⁰ Children from the neighbourhood are brought to the school to begin their acculturation into the Islamic world. Often, learning begins as toddlers coming to school on the back of their elder sisters, but only quiet toddlers are tolerated.³¹ When the children begin to speak, they are kept in a separate part of the school, where an older student teaches them the recitation of the alphabet in unison without using any writing material. Memorisation, which is one of the hallmarks of Islamic education, begins at this very early stage.

From this class they graduate to learning to read the alphabet written on slate for them by the teacher or any of the older students. A pupil could spend between some months to over a year in this class, depending on the age of entrance or aptitude. In this class, it is usually the older students who handle the class on behalf of the teacher, though the teacher pays attention from his corner and sometimes assist in teaching the younger pupils. Usually, they are taught three or more of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet at a time. A pupil progresses at his own pace. A pupil can remain in this class from a few months to over a year, depending on his ability to master the alphabet. After learning the alphabet singly, the student begins to learn to recognise the letters in conjunction with other letters different from its arrangement in the (*hijā'īyya*) alphabetic order. The words of the shorter verses are written without the vowel notations, and the pupil will learn this for months according to his ability.³²

Lessons were taken orally from the teacher, and the emphasis was on learning and the language of instruction in the early period and well into the twentieth century is usually that of the founding teachers, who were mostly from the north, especially Hausa and Fulani

30 Muhammad Shafii, "Ta'alim Lughatul Arabiyyah fi Madinat Ilori" (B.A Project, Department of Arabic, University of Sokoto, 1982), 41.

31 Interview with Alfa Jubril Gbagba, 11-6-2012.

32 Interview with Imam Ahmad Yahaya Maisolati, 16-6-2012; Alfa Saidu Oko Erin, 19-6-2012 and Alfa Jubril Gbagba, 11-6-2012.

languages.³³ Time for lessons, especially for Quranic studies, include morning, evening and night. The prevalence of Western education in the second half of the twentieth century has made many of the Qur'anic schools shift their lessons to afternoon and night when most of the students would have returned from school. Only those who do not attend Western schools continued to study in the morning, and they are limited in number.

The concern of this article is discussing the elementary level, where the alphabet and syllable formation are taught. This twin learning process forms the main building blocks of word formation needed to read the Holy Qur'an. Once mastered, any word could be read. Usually, it is children that are to be found in this stage of schooling, though an adult who has not had the education before could also be found at this stage.³⁴ Until the advent of *al-Qā'idat al-Baghdādiyya* after the reformation of Qur'anic schools to modern *madāris* (sing. *madrasa*) and closer communication with the Arab world, alphabet and syllable formation are taught in Qur'anic schools using three main languages in Ilorin, namely, Hausa, Yoruba and Fulfude. The letters of the alphabet had been given local names by the scholars of northern Nigeria region over the centuries.³⁵ This was to make it easier for students to understand the language of Arabic.

The scholars of these two regions, in their trading activities, had introduced Islam to Yoruba region since the 16th century³⁶ or even a little earlier. But it was not until the 19th century and 20th century that Islam became well entrenched among the Yoruba-speaking people, especially following society which saw the establishment of Ilorin emirate as a major centre of Islam in Yoruba region.³⁷ As such, the

33 In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, the use of a language for instruction does not necessarily mean the teacher uses such language as a first language. Usage is mostly for this aspect of learning. Among the Hausa, you find situations where the teacher is Hausa but teaches using the Fulani language, though he does not understand the language. See Kamal, "Islamic Education in Ilorin," 38. Also, interview with Mallam Usman Muhammad Modibbo, 25-4-2013.

34 Alhaja Rihanat Temim began learning at the age of forty. She runs her own school where she teaches. Interview with Alhaja Rihanat Temim, 26-12-2012.

35 See table 1.

36 Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam Among the Yorubas*, 4; Abubakre, *The Interplay of Arabic and Yoruba Cultures in South-Western Nigeria*, 21.

37 Adam Abdullahi al-Iluri, *Al-Islam fi Nijeriyya*, (Agege: Maktabat, 1978), 40; Stefan Reichmuth, "A Regional Centre of Islamic Learning in Nigeria," 233.

phonetic pronunciation adapted in these two regions was adopted with slight phonetic adaptations among the Yoruba-speaking people. The Nupes, who formed part of the ethnic composition of Ilorin, also adopted from the Hausas to the north.

Thus, indices of the multi-ethnic Muslim ensemble that formed Ilorin can be found in the language of teaching Qur'an recitation at the lowest level of teaching and the Arabic alphabet and syllable formation in Ilorin. This system persisted well into the late 20th century when the use of standard Arabic phonetics of *al-Qā'idat al-Baghdādiyya*³⁸ Arabic primer became the norm, and the use of slate barely survived. As such, the initial languages of instruction in Islamic education were largely Hausa and Fulani. Yoruba, the lingua franca in Ilorin, became a language of instruction after native speakers of the language had become well-grounded in Islamic education or when the Hausa or Fulani scholars have acculturated into Ilorin with Yoruba as their lingua franca, especially by the second generation of such scholars who have settled in Ilorin.³⁹ Even at this, the names of the letters were mainly adapted to Yoruba phonetics from the Hausa original. See the table below on the different languages' pronunciation of the Arabic alphabet.

Arabic	Hausa ⁴⁰	Hausa/Ilorin	Yoruba	Fulani ⁴¹	Fulani/Ilorin ⁴²
Alif ا	Alifu	Alifi	Alifi	Alifu	Alifu
Bā' ب	Ba	Ba	Ba	Ba/Bajoore ⁴³	Ba/Bajore
Tā' ت	Ta	Ta/takuri	Ta	Tau/Takabe	Ta/ takabe

38 This primer is of uncertain origin. Efforts to trace its genealogy are yet successful.

39 Reichmuth has done remarkable work on this process of cultural assimilation in work. See Reichmuth, *Islamische Bildung*.

40 The Hausa pronunciation is borrowed from Nasiru. See Nasiru, "Islamic Learning Among the Yoruba," 56.

41 This is how native Fulfulde speakers would recite it around the Sokoto region. For this information, I am grateful to Mallam Usman Muhammad Modibbo of Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto, personal communication, 25-4-2013.

42 For this, Alhaji Aminullah Toyin and Baba Imam Kuntu are among the few remaining scholars who have learned using the Fulani phonetic pronunciation in studying the Holy Qur'an at Ile Oniguguru in Adifa area of Gambari quarters of Ilorin. They are not Fulanis but had studied in a Fulani school.

43 Some of the letters are pronounced differently depending on whether they are at the beginning, middle or end of a word. When 'ba', for example, comes at the end of a word, it becomes 'bajoore.'

Arabic	Hausa ⁴⁰	Hausa/Ilorin	Yoruba	Fulani ⁴¹	Fulani/Ilorin ⁴²
Thā' ث	Cha/Sa	Sa	Sa	Saa'u	Sa
Jīm ج	Jim	Jimu	Jimu	Jimu	Jimu
Hā' ح	Ha qarami	Hankarimi	Ankarimu	Hacingol	Hasingo
Khā' خ	Ha mairuwa	Hameruwa	Ameruwa	Khaatobbungol	Khaatobbungol ⁴⁴
Dāl د	Dali	Dali	Dali	Deli	Deli
Dhāl ذ	Zali	Sali	Sali	Zaali	Sali
Rā' ر	Ra	Ra	Ra	Raa'u	Ra
Zāy ز	Zaira	Saira	Sinra	Zaayu	Saira?
Sīn س	Sin	Sin	Sin	Sinni/ siinara	Sinni
Shīn ش	Shin	Shin	Shin/sin	Siinun to buude	Sinni to bude
Sād ص	Sadi	Sodi	Sodi	Sadira	Sodi
Dād ض	Radi	Lodi	Lodi	doodira/toluadi	Lodi/toluadi
Tā' ط	Da mai hannu	Tamisonu	Tamisonu	Dadi	Dadi
Za ظ	Za mai hannu	Samisonu	Samisonu	Zodi	Sodi?
'Ayn ع	An baki wofi	Ainbakiofin	Ainbakiofin	ainu/Ainakeebel	Ainakebia
Ghayn غ	Ga baki wofi	Agankakinofin	Agankakinofin	Ghainu/ghainukeebil	Aganakebia sujo?
Fā' ف	Fagunje	Fakunje	Fakunje	Faa'u/ fayarodi	Fa/fayarodi
Qāf ق	Ka mai ruwa	Kafuara	Kafuara	Kaafu/kafura	Kafu
Kāf ك	Kau lasan	Kamulasa	Kamulasa	Kafara	Kafara
Lām ل	Lam ara	Lamuara	Lamuara	Lamu/laamura	Lamara
Mīm م	Mi ara	Mimu	Mimu	Mimuu/Mimara	Mimara
Nūn ن	Nu ara	Nuara	Nuara	Nuunu/nuunara	Nunara
Wāw و	Wau	Wo	Wo	Wawu	Wawu
Hā' هـ	Ha babba	habuba	Habuba/hakuri	hamangol/Hasakeri	Hasakeri
Lām alif لا	Lam-alifi	Lam-alefi	Lam-alefi	Lam-alefi	Lam-alefi
Hamza ء	Aliansa	Aliansa	Aliansa	Hamusa	Hamusa
Yā' ي	Ya ara	Yara	Yara	Yaau	Ya/yara

Table 1. Changes in Pronunciation as the Letters are Adapted From one Language into Another.

⁴⁴ Respondents could not remember or be sure of some letters like this; hence, the Sokoto pronunciation was used.

The (short) vowels in Hausa are called *wasali bisa* (fatha), meaning *wasli* over, *wasali kasa* (kasra), meaning *wasli* under and *rufua* (damma). (Sukun-resting) is called *damure*. The nunation of the vowels is not represented in these adaptations, though they are correctly pronounced when reading. The vowels in Yoruba are referred to as *omo* (mark), literally meaning child. It thus become *to l'omo loke* (with a mark on top) for fatha, *to l'omo nisale* (with a mark below) for kasra and *rufua* is used for damma. Sukun is *damure*. *Alif maddah* (lengthening of alif) becomes *alau beki*.⁴⁵ In the Fulani school, the vowels are represented as *masido* (fatha), *masiles* (kasra), *tur* (damma), while *Oi* stands for (sukūn).⁴⁶

These adaptations are comparable to adaptations in other parts of non-Arabic speaking Muslim world. Take the teaching of the alphabet in Bosnia, for example, the teacher would instruct his students like this:

'Elif stretches like a stick; *be* is like a *tekne* (boat) and a *nokta* (dot) distance to me. *Te* is like a *tekne* and two *noktas* distance from the teacher. *Hi* is like a sickle and has a *nokta* distance from the teacher. *Ri* is like a hook with which we reach for cherries. *Zel* is like *zelic's* sabre (*zelic* was a police officer and had a sabre). *Ayin* opened its mouth like a wolf. *Gayin* opened its mouth like a wolf and had a *nokta* distance from the teacher. A *nun* is like a bowl from which we eat soup. *Lam elif* looks like *Huso Zelic's* scissors (*Huso zelic* was a tailor).⁴⁷

Here, objects or subjects resembling the letters of the alphabet are used to describe the alphabet, appealing to the visual comprehension and memory of the students to learn the alphabet.

Depending on the ethnic origin of the scholar, especially the founding scholar of a school, the syllable formation is done either in Yoruba, Hausa or Fulani language. Nupe language, like Yoruba syllable

45 This was derived from Hausa *alifu baki* (black alif), which came from the textual practice of using colour to denote certain letters. When alif is written with the red ink on paper, it is called *alifu ja* (the *ja* has a double meaning. It means red and also lengthening at the same time).

46 Interview with Usman Muhammad Modibbo, 25-4-2013.

47 A. Gadzo-Kasumovic, "Education- Beginning and Development of the Ottoman-Islamic Literacy in the Bosnian Eyalet," in *Learning and Education in the Ottoman World*, ed. Ali Caksu (Istanbul: The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture - IRCICA), 2001, 219.

formation, was influenced by the Hausa system. Islam never developed in isolation long enough among the Yoruba for them to have developed their own names for the alphabet. Only the Fulani words for some of the letters are completely different from the Hausa pronunciation. Words are formed by saying the relational position of the consonant and the vowel. Arabic vowels are not part of the alphabet, and the position of the vowels, either at the top or bottom of the letter, determine its sound. At an advanced level, though, Arabic could be read without the vowel signs.

To spell *اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ* *alhamdu lillāhi* (Praise be to Allah)⁴⁸ in a school such as Gbagba Qur'anic school using Hausa⁴⁹ as the language of conjoining the letters to form words, it would read like this:

Hausa as used in Ilorin	Number of words used	Meaning	Modern Arabic	Number words used
Aliansa da wasali bisa si ⁵⁰ ne <i>a</i>	7	aliansa with <i>wasali</i> on top is <i>a</i>	(hamza alif fatha <i>a</i>) ⁵¹ اَلْحَمْدُ	4
ya damure lamu ya se ⁵² <i>ali</i> ,	6	it joins with lamu, it says <i>ali</i>	(lām sukūn <i>al</i>) اَلْحَمْدُ	3
ha karami da wasali bisa sin ne <i>ha</i>	8	small ha with wasali on top is <i>ha</i>	(hā' fatha hā) اَلْحَمْدُ	3
ya damure mimu ya se <i>hamu</i> ,	6	it joins with mimu, it says <i>hamu</i>	(mīm sukūn ham) اَلْحَمْدُ	3
dali da rufua sin ne <i>du</i> ,	6	dali with rufua is <i>du</i>	(dāl damma <i>du</i>) اَلْحَمْدُ	3

It is then pronounced *a- ali- ha- ha –mu- du, alihamu*.

48 These are the first two words of the first verse of the first chapter of the Holy Qur'an. The complete verse is *Alhamdu lillāhi rabbi l 'ālamīn* "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds." Quran 1:1. Bello Ahmadu, 31-10-2012.

49 This, however, does not mean only people of particular ethnic groups attend the school, and sometimes, a teacher uses a language that does not reflect his ethnic origin but rather that of the school he had studied.

50 Among native Hausa speakers, this would be *shi*. It should be noted that most do not know the meaning of words in the original language because they are largely learned by rote.

51 The Arabic letter being pronounced is underlined.

52 Among native Hausa speakers, this would be *ce*, which is not available in Yoruba phonology.

Hausa as used in Ilorin	Number of words used	Meaning	Modern Arabic	Number words used
Lamu da wasali kasa si ne <i>li</i> ,	7	lamu with wasali at the bottom is <i>li</i>	(lām kasra <i>li</i>) لِله	3
lamu da sa(n)dda da wasali bisa sin ne <i>lla</i> ,	9	lamu with sadda and wasali is <i>lla</i>	(lām shadda fatha <i>lla</i>) لِلله	4
hakuri ⁵³ da wasali kasa si ne <i>hi</i>	7	hakuri with wasali at the bottom is <i>hi</i>	(hau kasra <i>hi</i>) لِله	3

The word is then pronounced *li-lla-hi*.

Table 2.

In a Fulani Qur'anic school⁵⁴ the same words would be spelt like this:

Fulani	Number of words used	Meaning	Modern Arabic	Average words
Alif masdo bie <i>a</i> ,	4	Alif with a mark on top says a	(hamza alif fatha <i>a</i>) اَلْحَمْدُ	4
to lam oi bie al,	5	Lam with a circle says al	(lām sukūn <i>al</i>) اَلْحَمْدُ	3
(H)asingo masdo bie ha,	4	Hasingo with a mark on top says ha	(hā' fatha hā) اَلْحَمْدُ	3
to mim oi bie ham,	5	Mim with a circle says ham	(mīm sukūn ham) اَلْحَمْدُ	3
to dal tur bie du- <i>Alhamudu</i>	5	Dal with a curved mark says du	(dāl damma <i>du</i>) اَلْحَمْدُ <i>alhamd</i>	3
Lam masile bie li,	4	Lam with a mark below says li	(lām kasra <i>li</i>) لِله	3
lam lam sa(n)da masdo bie lla,	6	Lam lam (with) sanda says lla	(lām shadda fatha <i>lla</i>) لِلله	4
(H)asakeri masile bie hi- <i>lillahi</i>	5	(H)asakeri with a mark below says hi	(hau kasra <i>hi</i>) لِله <i>lillah</i>	3

Table 3.

⁵³ *Ha babba* becomes *Hakuri* when it comes at the end with other letters to form a word.

⁵⁴ Ile Oniguguru at Adifa is one such example.

Alif madda, the long vowel, becomes *alif to budo* in a Fulani school. The Yoruba scholar would recite the same words this way:

Yoruba	Average words	Meaning	Modern Arabic	Average words
Alifi to lomo loke nje a or shortened to alifi taloke nje a	6 or 4	Alifi with a sign on top is <i>a</i>	(hamza alif fatha <i>a</i>) أَلِفٌ	4
Badamure lam a je ali	5	Badamure lam becomes ali ⁵⁵	(lām sukūn <i>al</i>) أَلِفٌ	3
(H)ankuri to lomo loke nje ha or ta loke nje ha	6 or 4	(H)ankuri with a sign on top is ha	(<i>hā</i> ’ fatha <i>ha</i>) أَلِفٌ	3
Badamure mimu a je hamu	5	Badamure mimu is hamu	(mīm sukūn <i>ham</i>) أَلِفٌ	3
Dali to ni rufua loke nje du or to rufua nje du, <i>alighamudu</i>	7 or 4	Dali with rufua is du	(dāl damma <i>du</i>) أَلِفٌ	3
Lam to lomo nisale nje li or lam tosale nje li	6 or 4	Lam with a sign below is li	(lām kasra <i>li</i>) لِ	3
Lam lam to lomo loke nje lla or ta loke nje lla	6 or 4	Lam lam with a sign above is lla	(lām shadda fatha <i>lla</i>) لِلْ	4
(H)ankuri to lomo ni sale nje hi or tosale nje hi,	7 or 3	(H)ankuri with a sign below is hi	(<i>hau</i> kasra <i>hi</i>) لِلْ <i>lillahi</i>	3

Table 4.

These were all written on a slate before the printed Arabic primer *al-Qa’idat Baghdādiyya* became most popular. It is to be noticed that the old Hausa traditional syllable formation method employs between five to nine words to explain what sound the letters and vowels would give for a syllable. The Yoruba spelling uses about six words to pronounce a syllable in the long form or four in the short form. The Fulani spelling uses an average of four to five words, while the modern Arabic pronunciation employs an average of three or four words, thus, shorter than the Hausa, Fulani and Yoruba methods of spelling.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Here, we have a combination of Hausa and Yoruba. Badamure is transmitted from Hausa without Yoruba translation, while the last part explaining the sound is in Yoruba. The Yoruba never developed a replacement for badamure.

⁵⁶ Towards the end of the 20th century, most Qur’anic schools adopted the modern standard Arabic pronunciation, and the old system is gradually being forgotten.

The Fulani schools also begin their lesson with syllable formation, unlike the Hausa and Yoruba schools, which start with alphabet pronunciation and reading without the diacritical marks. The alphabet is learned together with the syllable formation in the Fulani school. This would mean a reduction in the time it takes to learn to read in a Fulani school.

Al-Qa'idat Baghdadi⁵⁷ and the Threat of Losing an Intangible Heritage

Modernisation of Arabic and Islamic education in Ilorin began early in the twentieth century through the pioneering efforts of Sheikh Tajul Adab (1877-1924).⁵⁸ Tajul Adab is the precursor of the reforming scholars of the twentieth century in Ilorin. Among the innovations he introduced to his teaching is the shortening of the duration of study and use of pictorial Arabic texts, until then unknown in Ilorin. He also imbibed in his students a love of Arabic literature that could still be found among the Adabiyya to the present.⁵⁹ The efforts of Tajul Adab is most illustrated in the work of his most illustrious pupil, Sheikh Kamalud-deen al-Adaby (1905-2005).

Taking the reform of his teacher further, from the 1930s, Sheikh Kamalud-deen⁶⁰ introduced reforms with far reaching impact in the teaching of Islamic and Arabic studies, especially among the Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria. He became the first to establish a model Qur'anic school, adopting from the Western systems the classification of students according to their level, fixed duration of study and texts

Respondents who had been trained with this system but had since adapted to the modern system had slight recollection slips due to non-usage.

57 This primer has been around as early as the 1940s; it appears to have been introduced by Arabs around the coast of West Africa. It is not yet ascertained the route or influence that has made this primer a most important primer, especially among the Yoruba-speaking people. It gained popularity in the late 1980s.

58 For a biographical work on this scholar, see Yusuf Adebola Bamigboye, "The Contribution of Sheikh Tajul Adab to Arabic and Islamic Learning in Yorubaland" (B.A. Project, Arabic and Islamic Studies Department, University of Ibadan, 1987).

59 Stefan Reichmuth, "Sheikh Adam as I Came to Know Him-Memories of an Islamologist," Keynote Address at the *International Conference on the Life and Times of Shaykh Adam Abdullahi al-Illuri*, University of Ilorin, 2012.

60 For his biography, see Sheikh Ahmad Tijjani Adisa-Onikoko, *The Legacy of Sheikh Muhammad Kamalud-deen al Adaby* (Ilorin: Sat Adis Press, 2008); Muhammad Y. Aliagan, *Shaykh Muhammad Kamalud-deen al-Adabiyy* (Ilorin: NNI Publishers, 2001).

for each level, use of syllabus and attendance register for record keeping.⁶¹ He was also the first to teach using table and chairs, instructing with the black board and the use of uniform wears for his students.⁶²

He emphasised the correct phonetic pronunciation of Arabic words among his student to the ridicule of others. He would often tell his Ajanasi (repeating reciter) *aid l qiraa* (repeat the reading).⁶³ He was using the *Qirā'atu Rashīda* to teach his student Arabic and *adab* (manners or morals). His innovations were highly criticised, and he was stoned and cursed for these on different occasions. But he also had supporters such as the emir Abdulkadir, whose palace he often returned to with his pupils to preach after being chased from other parts of the town. He was also the first individual to establish a private Western school, where he taught Islamic science along Western subjects.⁶⁴

Following in his footsteps was Sheikh Adam Abdullahi al-Illuri (1917-1992),⁶⁵ whose reform was a masterpiece of the Adabiyya. He was averse to accommodating Western and Islamic learning within the same space, wary of the domineering nature of the Western system. He nevertheless encouraged its learning. His reforms were based on Arabic and Yoruba as the only means of instruction in his school. Based in Agege in Lagos, his influence was to reach Ilorin early in the decade of independence at the instance of the new emir Zulkarnaini Gambari (1959-1992).⁶⁶ The result was the establishment of Darul 'Ulūm in 1963. In the post independent period, many of such reformed schools emerged along the lines of these two pioneers to a greater or lesser extent. From these schools, the graduates began to travel to the

61 Aliagan, *Shaykh Muhammad Kamalud-deen*; I with Sheikh Mumeen Ayara, 11-9-2012.

62 Interview with Khalifa Adabiyyah- Sheikh Sofiyyullah Kamalud-deen Al-Adabiyy, 1-9-2012.

63 Bamigboye, "The Contribution of Sheikh Tajul Adab to Arabic," 63, 86.

64 National Archive Kaduna, "Al-Adabiyya Moslem School" Ilo prof file No. 4659; See also Kamal, "Islamic Education in Ilorin," 86; Adisa-Onikoko, *The Legacy of Sheikh Muhammad*.

65 For the life and works of this remarkable scholar, see R. D. Abubakre, ed., *Shaykh Adam Abdullah al-Ilory in the Tableau of Immortality* (Vol. I & II, Riyadh: The Nigerian Center for Arabic Research, 2012).

66 Ibrahim A. Jawondo, "The Place of Mosque in the History of Ilorin Emirate 1823-2000" (PhD thesis, Usmanu Dan Fodiyo University Sokoto, 2004), 114-115.

Middle East and North Africa for higher education and, upon their return, would promote Arabic language and Islamic knowledge.

As these *madāris* produced many graduates who continued the tradition of Qur'anic teaching, gradually they replaced old cumbersome traditional system for the more technical and phonetically standard system introduced by *al-Qā'idat Baghdādiyya* that they have been exposed to in their *madrassa* education. Exposure to standard Arabic, its grammar and the Arab world, the shorter and quicker form of the *al-Qā'idat Baghdādiyya* led to the phasing out of the old system such that by the beginning of the 1990s, the old *ile kewu walaa* (slate Qur'an school) was no longer popular. The slate becomes cumbersome with the availability of printed excerpts of the Qur'an, especially the 30th Juz' - the *Juz' Amma* in the *al-Qā'idat Baghdādiyya*. The *Qā'idat Baghdādiyya* became the most popular text for teaching young ones both the alphabet and syllable formation. In the *al-Qā'idat Baghdādiyya* are to be found many variations of syllable formation exercises. Once mastered, reading the Holy Qur'an become easy.

Apart from the loss of the collective memory of the people of the antiquated method in the traditional school, the advent of the *al-Qā'idat Baghdādiyya* also reduced the opportunity for the students to practice writing that the slate offers. Only students who proceeded from the Qur'anic schools to the *madāris* can master the writing skills very well. Most of those who had learned to read with the old method found it difficult to recall the words used since it is longer the norm and have been forced to abandon it. With few schools still using the old method, it will soon be forgotten from the collective memory of the people. It will be difficult in the near future to have people remember how the teaching of the alphabet and syllable formation used to be done. The Hausa and Fulani methods are endangered because Ilorin has fully acculturated into a Yoruba-speaking community. Fulfulde has always being a minority language, and the native speakers are always shy to speak in public except in the Adamawa region.⁶⁷ Now, most people from Ilorin would only learn to speak Hausa when they live among the Hausas. The Yoruba method is no less endangered even though it is the lingua franca of the town because the old method is no longer the trend.

67 A.B Muhammed, "Brief Notes on the Main Fulfulde Dialects in Nigeria and the Meaning of the Term Hausa Fulani," *Journal of Nomadic Studies* 3, (2000).

This article is not advocating a reversal to the old method. The old method, apart from being cumbersome, also lacks the economy of words and standards that modern Arabic has in terms of phonetics. With the present level of advancement in Arabic learning attained in Ilorin, the old system would not hold on its own. Nevertheless, this study advocates the inclusion of the knowledge of these forms of teaching Arabic letters and syllable formation to students, especially in the *madāris* and higher institutions of learning, where Arabic is taught, for its cultural history value.

Like Sheikh Adam had commended the scholars of the old system, he argued that their efforts and strivings need to be respected and appreciated even if we no longer need to use their methods.⁶⁸ Because they did not have the opportunities of the modern-day scholars, such as books and improved means of learning, contact with native speakers of Arabic, their achievement is worthy of respect, best expressed in memory kept alive. In the knowledge of the old forms, we can find a way to better appreciate our privileged position today and further work harder at our own strivings. Without this background, improvised and kept alive by the scholars of old, the modern scholars would not have had a place to build their scholarship upon. Recent historical research indicates that the quality of memorisation of the Holy Qur'an on the old method was better than the new one.

Conclusion

This study examined the traditional methods of teaching Arabic alphabet and syllable formation in the early stage of Qur'anic education in Ilorin. Because of the multi-lingual and multicultural antecedents of the founding scholars, right from Okesuna and the establishment of the emirate, the teaching of Arabic alphabet and syllable formation for the purpose of reading the Holy Qur'an was being done in three main languages of Fulani, Hausa and Yoruba. This survived into the late twentieth century, when the impacts of the modernisation of Islamic education led to the pragmatic abandonment of the old traditional method. This was replaced by the *al-Qā'idat al-Baghdādiyya* and the gradual erasure from the collective memory of the people of the old methods. This article has essentially tried to highlight an endangered cultural memory, in the form of syllable formation

68 Adam Abdullahi al-Iluri, *Lamahāt al-Ballūr*, 10.

techniques in Qur'anic schools in Ilorin, that needs to be preserved as part of our collective intangible historical and cultural heritage.

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Islamic Literacy and Scholarship in African Languages: The Case of Hausa in West Africa

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Introduction

Language is the main instrument in spreading and documenting Islam and Islamic history in Africa and beyond. Historical development and rapid spread of Islam in African societies were historically accredited to African languages. The historical contact of the first Muslim generations with the Ethiopian emperor opens up the gate for the socio-linguistic development of translating Islamic messages into African languages. The Hausa factor in West African Islam is evident in the writings of the early Muslim scholars. African linguistic contributions enhance the converts' literacy and develop a strong community of scholars of the highest historical relevance in the history of Islam in the African context. Africa is home to about 2000 languages, from which Nigeria has more than 556 languages, and Hausa takes the lead with about 150 million speakers; accordingly, it was rated as number 11 out of 7500 languages in the modern world as of 2022. Interestingly, about 85% of the Hausa native speakers are Muslims and about 69 percent of the Nigerian Muslim scholars are either Hausa natives or hausanised through Islamic activities in Hausaland. Thus, the spread of Islam in Africa was the handwork of African languages and not by the sword as proclaimed by the observers. It is evident from a contact with Muslim scholars of various regions in Hausaland that the technique of identification and naming Arabic alphabets is the same across the regions. The Ajami writing styles are also the same. Thus, hundreds of books and manuscripts are of the same orthography. It is paramount in this regard to investigate how Ajami writing style helps Islamic scholarship in the West African regions. Therefore, this article examines the role of Hausa Muslim scholars in the translation, naming, and adaptation of the 28 Arabic alphabets into the Hausa language, which further led to the innovation of Hausa Ajami writing and subsequent development of scholarship in

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the Hausaland. The study also critically looks into the Hausa-Arabic battle for alphabets treatment and the role of the mother tongue in Islamic scholarship in West Africa, with special emphasis on Hausa-speaking communities of West Africa.

Islam is the revealed religion of Allah (SWT) sent to humanity through the last Prophet, Muhammad (SAW). Indeed, all prophets sent to humankind were chosen from their language groups with same linguistics characteristics and cultures to ease the conversation and communication gap. This testifies to the relevance of language in the context of religion, specifically in learning, teaching, preaching and the related religious penal codes. Thus, the article examines the historical link between Islam and African societies, with special reference to Arabic, the language of the Holy Qur'an, and African Languages. The Hausa language in the West African region is selected as the major case study.

What is Literacy?

A literate person is one who can read and write in any language. Experts suggest that such a person must be from seven years and above and must be able to understand what he reads and writes in any language. In this view, the ability to read and write is not the only yardstick of being literate since one must comprehend the meaning of what he is reading or writing in order to extend the information to the third party. Without these qualifications one remains illiterate. In some societies, a person is considered literate if he can read the letters of alphabet or read and write his name in any language. Therefore, functional literacy, as defined by William S. Gray, is the training of adults to meet independently the reading and writing demands placed on them.¹

Moreover, according to the UNESCO:

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in their community and wider society. Generally, literacy also encompasses numeracy,

1 William S. Gray, *The Teaching of Reading and Writing: An International Survey* (UNESCO: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1969), 21.

the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations. The concept of literacy can be distinguished from measures to quantify it, such as the literacy rate and functional literacy.²

The ability to read and write in any language might be the first yardstick for one to be literate. These abilities are expected to give a person a learning culture of interpretation, innovations, identification and understanding of printed and written materials to the extent of guiding and leading learners to any subject under review. If a literate person acquires such a skill, then the ability to conduct research and train the trainers at the university or college is certain, and hence, gain mastery in one or more disciplines. According to the educationist, any person of such a position is called a scholar and his productions named scholarship. Therefore, the peak of literacy is the ability to innovate and interpret ideas and knowledge in writing in any language regardless of its status in the global ranking of the so-called linguistic hierarchy of the world languages.

Language and Islamic Scholarship

The modern world in our century is blessed with about 6,500-7,500 languages. Africa is having 1500-2000 languages, and Nigeria has about 520-560 languages.³ In Nigeria, Hausa-speaking communities are predominantly in the northern region, which comprises Kano, Jigawa, Kaduna, Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto, Niger, Katsina, and Bauchi states. Hausa native speakers were also found in the Republic of Chad, Niger Republic, Ghana, Benin, Mali, Burkina Fasso, Central African Republic, Sudan, Serra Leone, Eritrea, and Saudi Arabia. Interestingly, Hausa people are about 98% Muslim by religion. Their language, Hausa, used to be the vehicle in all their Islamic activities.

The first contact of Islam with African languages was during the first era of Muslim migration to Ethiopia, the oldest Christian Empire in African societies, founded by Emperor Menelik, son of King Solomon and Queen of Sheba. The first Muslim generations who migrated to the Empire met Najjash, an honest King on the throne.

2 "Literacy," UNESCO, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/literacy>.

3 Greg Kame, "Multilingualism in African Nation States: Stepping Stones or Stumbling Blocks for Development," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 14, no. 8 (2012): 228-240.

Ja'afar ibn Abi Talib (RA), the speaker of the migrants, spoke at length on the issue of monotheism, and the prophethood of the Prophet Isa (AS) and Muhammad (SAW). He spoke in Arabic, and an Amharic rendition was provided instantly. Amharic, one of the oldest languages in the world, has about 345 alphabets and is the only African language to have its own writing system. The historic discussion between the Emperor of Ethiopia and the Prophet's delegation under the leadership of Ja'afar ibn Abi Talib (RA) was the first episode of involving African languages in Islamic da'wah. Certainly, the interpreter between the King and Prophet's delegation was verse in both languages, and the message was accurately delivered. In this respect, translation was the first mechanism of literacy in history of Islam in African societies.⁴

On the other hand, Islam made an inroad into Eastern Africa around 610 AD, about 1,412 years ago. In South Africa, the advent of Islam was in the 8th century about 1,300 years ago, while in West Africa, it was about 1000 years. In Central African Republic, Islam was introduced around 1086 AD, about 936 years. In North Africa, Amr b. al-As (RA), the first Muslim governor, conquered and ruled over Egypt around 640-646 AD.⁵ These brief discussions demonstrate the historical origin of Islam in African countries. Where Arabic was the language of instruction and communication. In this respect, the main tool for religious activities was native languages of the respective inhabitants. The idea of learning recitation of the Holy Qur'an, writing its chapters and verses, documenting rituals, was locally done in the native languages. This development led to the idea of using Arabic alphabets in writing African languages to communicate religious activities. This development is called *Ajami*, which was the historical origin of Islamic literacy in African Languages. Hausa, Kiswahili, Bambara, Fulfulde and Kanuri languages are among the leading African languages that developed *Ajami* literacy to the academic standards.

4 For more information about the Muslim migration to Ethiopia see Abdulmalik b. Hisham b. Ayyub al-Himyari, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah (Sira Ibn Hishām)*, ed. Mustapha al-Saqa and Ibrahim al-Abyari (Maktabah wa Matba'ah Mustapha al-Bābi al-Halabi, 1955), 1: 335-338.

5 For history of Islam in Africa see, for instance, Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels eds., *The History of Islam in Africa* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000).

Arabic Literacy in Hausaland

There was extensive debate on the utilisation of the Arabic alphabet to compose in the Hausa language long before the advent of Europeans into the region. Egyptian Copts and Arabs, who were involved in the slave trade and raiding, brought the language into the Hausaland through their translators and interpreters. This might be undisputable considering the missionary activities in West African societies, especially in Hausaland and Borno. In fact, some classical Hausa vocabularies that are of Arabic origins, such as *baki* (mouth), *kafa* (leg), *gashi* (hair), and *mutuwa* (death) were found in some Hausa Ajami document of Hausa and Arab merchants. Therefore, the development of Arabic Ajami literacy in African languages date back to the period before the arrival of the Muslim scholars and preachers of Mali to Kano during Aliyu Yaji Dantsamiya. They met Ajami literacy and writing style in commercial transactions, debts, loans, and very few official memos. However, it was very restricted to the custodians of the merchants and ruling class. In whatever situation, it does exist regardless of its quality and remains a historical document of Islamic literacy in African languages dating far back to the 13th century.

The Second Stage of Islamic Literacy in African Languages

Arabic is the language of the Holy Qur'an, and all believers are expected to learn its chapters and verses. The *Zaure* or *Makarantun Allo* schools have a common practice across the Hausaland, which gave them the best practice for grooming children to memorise and recite the Holy Qur'an. The stages in these schools include the following:

1. The child must be between the age of 4-5 to be admitted as a registered pupil.
2. He will be introduced to *ta'awiz* and *basmala* for a period of one week.
3. The *Fatiha* would be given a special treatment to be memorised in seven days.
4. After successful completion of *Fatiha*, the same style would be employed to handle *Suratul Falaq* to *Suratul Fiil*, one after the other.
5. The content of *Suratul Fatiha* to *Suratul Fiil* is (67) verses, which a pupil is expected to commit to memory.

Through these stages, the students start reciting and memorising the Holy Qur'an, even though they cannot identify what they recite in writing. They would be carefully trained on pronouncing each word correctly in its manners and places of articulation of each sound of a given word. The students will not start reading any written verse until they perfectly memorise 67 verses of the 13 chapters, from Suratul Fatiha to Suratul Fiil. Thus, for the students to have the skill to read and write, reading culture was first introduced to them in a memorising manner.

Identification of Arabic Alphabet

The third stage of Islamic literacy in African languages is the identification of the written Arabic alphabet. The Arabic has 28 alphabets, with a different appearance in Arabic orthography. The Arabic letters, therefore, are written in three distinct styles, as demonstrated in the table below:

Name of letter	English representation	In the end	In the middle	At the beginning	Single letter
alif	a	ا	أ	إ	أ
bā'	b	ب	ب	ب	ب
tā'	t	ت	ت	ت	ت
thā'	th	ث	ث	ث	ث
jīm	j	ج	ج	ج	ج
hā'	h	ح	ح	ح	ح
khā'	kh	خ	خ	خ	خ
dāl	d	د	-	د	د
dhāl	dh	ذ	-	ذ	ذ
rā'	r	ر	-	ر	ر
zāy	z	ز	-	ز	ز
sīn	s	س	س	س	س
shīn	sh	ش	ش	ش	ش
sād	s	ص	ص	ص	ص
dād	d	ض	ض	ض	ض
tā'	t	ط	ط	ط	ط
za	z	ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ
'ayn	'a	ع	ع	ع	ع

Name of letter	English representation	In the end	In the middle	At the beginning	Single letter
ghayn	gh	غ	غ	غ	غ
fā'	f	ف	ف	ف	ف
qāf	q	ق	ق	ق	ق
kāf	k	ك	ك	ك	ك
lām	l	ل	ل	ل	ل
mīm	m	م	م	م	م
nūn	n	ن	ن	ن	ن
hā'	h	ه	ه	ه	ه
wāw	w	و	و	و	و
yā'	w	ي	ي	ي	ي

From the above table, the (28) Arabic letters are placed in three stages for a student to identify. As stated earlier, identification of printed or written materials in any language is part of the qualification for a person to be literate. In this development, only five (5) letters maintained their positions in the middle of written Arabic words. These letters are: د، ذ، ز، ر، and و. In addition, two letters are also noted to have double appearance at the terminal end of an Arabic word. Letter Q is noted to have two different appearances at the initial and middle of a word. After successful identification of these alphabets, the next level is the naming process.

Naming Process

Hausa naming of the letters	Letters in Arabic
alu ja	ا
alu baki	ا
baguje	ب
taguje	ت
jīn sābe	ج
hasābe	ح
ha karami mai ruwa	خ
dal	د
zal	ذ
ra	ر
zaira	ز

Hausa naming of the letters	Letters in Arabic
sin'ara	س
shin mai ruwa	ش
(swodi) sodi	ص
(lwodi) lodi	ض
damus'hannu	ط
(zwodi) zodi	ظ
An bakin wofi	ع
Fa fa'ara	ف
kan mai ruwa	ق
kaf wau	و
kaulasan	ك
takuri	ة
ha karami	د
an agi likkafa	غ
lam	ل
min'ara	م
nun'ara	ن
ha babba	ه
waw	و
ya'ara	ي
ya	ي

It is noteworthy to mention that eight Arabic letters have no equivalents in the Hausa language.

ت	<i>sin caa</i>
ح	<i>eɓas ha</i>
خ	<i>kha mai ruwa</i>
ذ	<i>zal</i>
ص	<i>swadi</i>
ض	<i>lwadi</i>
ظ	<i>zwadi</i>
ع	<i>an bakin wofi</i>

Dots (*Ruwa*) in the Hausa Names of Arabic Letters

The historical origin of dots in Arabic letters was accredited to Abul Aswad al-Du'ali, the first scholar to provide such a meaningful development in the orthography of the Holy Qur'an. He provides dots at different locations of some selected Arabic words/letters as follows:

- One dot on top of a letter represents *Fatha*.
- One dot under the letter to indicate *Kasra*.
- One dot at the front of a letter to indicate *Damma*.⁶

In Hausa language interpretations, these dots are name (*ruwa*), meaning a drop of water (ink). The (15) Arabic letters with dots are:

غ، ن، ي، ق، ف، ظ، ض، ص، ش، ز، ذ، خ، ج، ث، ت، ب

In Hausa phonetic naming of the alphabet, only the following three letters are named with their dots:

ش	<i>Shin mai ruwa</i>
خ	<i>Ha karami mai ruwa</i>
ج	<i>Jin mai ruwa</i>

Naming Arabic Vowels in Hausa

Since the vowels guide the reader on how to pronounce each letter, literacy is not only the identification of alphabets but also recognising the changes of each letter with its respective vowels. The Arabic vowels translated into Hausa reads:

و	<i>Fatha</i>	<i>Wasalin bisa</i>
ر	<i>Kasra</i>	<i>Wasalin kasa</i>
ُ	<i>Rufu'a</i>	<i>Rufu'a</i>
هـ	<i>Shadda</i>	<i>Shadda</i>
ث	<i>Sukūn</i>	<i>Dauri</i>
َ	<i>Fathataini</i>	<i>Faɗuwar wasulan sama</i>
ِ	<i>Kisrataini</i>	<i>Faɗuwar wasulan kasa</i>
ُ	<i>Dammataini</i>	<i>Faɗuwar wasulan rufu'a</i>
آ	<i>Madda</i>	<i>Jan wasali</i>

6 See Ghanim Qadduri al-Hamd, *Ilm al-Naqti wa al-Shakli: al-Tārikh wa al-Usūl* (Amman: Daru Ammar, 2016), 15.

The letters are always in contact with the vowels in the process of reading and writing. A letter without vowel is ambiguous. Thus, efforts would be made to study the (28) Arabic letters with the (9) vowels for one to graduate as literate in Arabic and Ajami.

Methods of Reading Consonants with Vowels

Students should recognise the Arabic alphabet and identify vowels before reading the consonants with vowels altogether. There are exercises for students to insert the vowels at the appropriate positions of each letter/consonant. In Hausaland, it was a tradition that pupils would practice these exercises, starting from the first chapter, *Suratul Fatiha*, to *Suratul Fiil*, making 67 verses.

This exercise is traditionally named *farfaru da babbaku*, meaning consonant and vowels, or *tafi-da-wasula*, the application of the vowels.

Art of "Tattashiya" (Reading Drill)

The reading drill (*tattashiya*) is almost similar to the naming of consonants with vowels but differs in one important segment: reading skills. In *tattashiya*, given words would be pronounced with their vowels. The learner is permitted to recite each word based on its vowel specifications with a clear voice to the places and manners of articulations of each word.

A successful drill of *tattashiya* from *Sūratul Fātiha* to *Sūratul Fil* is evidence that one is literate in reading and writing in the Arabic language and possesses a good level of reading the Holy book (Qur'an).

The Ajami Innovations

It is worth mentioning that about ten letters in Hausa have no equivalents in the Arabic alphabets. This resulted in the reconstruction of some Arabic letters to conform to the tune of Hausa pronunciation. These reconstructions were accepted across Hausaland and were used as Hausa Ajami characters by writers in different capacities. The affected Hausa letters are as follows:

ي	'y'
ک	ky
کو	kw
قو	kw

قي	ky
غي	gy
غو	gw
ظ	ts
ث	Ca
ب	Bb

Ajami Literacy and Islam in Hausaland and Beyond

Ajami is one of the gigantic contributions of African languages to the development of literacy and Islamic literature in Africa. The Hausa Ajami writings was perhaps the early Ajami writing in the West African Sub-regions. The Kanuri Tarjimo could not reach beyond Borno Empire within the reach of the inhabitants (Kanuri). The Fulfulde Ajami developed during the 19th century Jihad in Husaland and targeted only the native speakers. Certainly, there is much evidence to credit Nupe, Yoruba, Zarma, Kyanga, and Tuaregs, for the literacy contributions of their Ajami to the development of Islamic scholarship in West Africa. Notwithstanding, the Hausa factor in development of Islamic literacy in West Africa is remarkable. Materials of Hausa Ajami manuscripts worth to be mentioned include:

1. Records of financial transactions of prominent merchants and traders.
2. Issues related to natural calamities such as famine, flood, and drought.
3. Religious activities of the Christian missionaries in pamphlets and treatise.
4. Court records and judicial proceedings.
5. Poetries and songs.
6. Translation from Arabic and other languages to Ajami.
7. Special books on topical issues in Islamic rituals.
8. The *Kundi*: a collection of books written by prominent scholars.
9. Preservation of unique documents related to charms and amulets.
10. Memos and related official document.
11. Contracts and sales agreements.
12. Debts and repayments.
13. Biography and information of travellers.

14. Tales, folklore and storytelling.
15. Special books on prayers.
16. Records keeping.
17. Learning a second language.
18. Truce.
19. Newspapers.

As at 2023, Ajami writings have reached their peak of development because they are recognised in schools, colleges and high institutions of learning in Nigeria. Many famous Islamic books on Maliki Fiqh were translated into Ajami Hausa writing, many of which are in circulation in West African countries. Some of these books are:

Kawa'idus salat, Ma'anar Laa, Ahalari, Ashmawi, Iziyya, Risala, Askari

Among the popular religious songs published in Hausa Ajami writing, which are in circulation throughout West Africa, include:

Gangar Wa'azu: Malam Muhammadu Na Birnin Gwari, Wakar Kiran Salla: Malam Maharazu Barmu Kwasare, Wakar Rokon Ruwa: Malam Kwaren Gamba, Wakar Tabban Hakika: Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo, Wakar Furen Gero: Aliyu Namangi Zariya, Wakokin Infiraji: Aliyu Namangi Zariya, Wakar Ma'ama'are: Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo, Wakar Yabon Annabi: Liman Aliyu Isa, Wakar Allah: Malam Maharazu Barmu, Wakar Murnar Cin Birnin Alkalawa: Abdullahi Gwandu, Wakar Na Kare Lawali: Liman Aliyu Isa, Wakar Yabon Danfodiyo: Wani Malami, Wakar Yabon Bawa Jangwarzo: Wani Malami, Wakar Yabon Abdullahi Gwandu: Wani Malami, Wakar Yabon Sayyidina Aliyu: Yusuf Kantu Isa, Wakar Mi'iraji: Akilu Aliyu Jega, Wakar Jakadiyar Fikiri: Akilu Aliyu Jega, Wakar Zuwan Nasara: Sarkin Musulmi Attahiru, Wakar Mata: Malam Dangani Zariya.

Hausa Ajami manuscripts are in thousands across the West African regions.⁷

7 Sa'id, B. "Gudunmuwar Masu Jihadi a Adabin Hausa" (MA diss., Bayero University, Kano, 1978); Mervyn Hiskett, *A History of Hausa Islamic Verse* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1975).

Islam in Hausar Boko Scripts

The invasion of Nigeria by the British marked the beginning of imposition of a colonial educational system in Nigeria. Before Western education, Islamic education was in wider circulation in the country. Writing Roman figures in Hausa language is referred to as *Hausa Boko*, and any education under this guise is called *Karatun Boko*. Though *Boko* faced serious challenges from the Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria, colonial administrators deployed all their resources to enforce it. These efforts led to the establishment of primary schools, secondary schools, and teachers' colleges in Nigeria. In addition, Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Nupe, Yoruba, Igbo, and other native languages were selected among the major languages of the region to be used in teaching pupils from class one to three. This was the beginning of using *Hausar Boko* Western education, and later became part of the national education policy in Nigeria.

During the colonial and post-colonial periods, adults underwent special training in literacy called *Yaki da Jahilci* (Adult education). Through this training, adults and elders were encouraged to participate in education and hence, a strong class of literacy developed in Northern Nigeria. Through the use of *Hausar Boko*:

Islamic manuscripts, and treatises were translated into *Hausar Boko*. Popular Hadith books of Buhari, Muslim, Tirmizi, Ibn Majah, Abu Dawud, and Muwatta Malik were all interpreted into *Hausar Boko* versions. As of 2023, there are about ten different translations of the Holy Qur'an into Hausa language. There are also translations and commentaries of Bible in Hausa.

The State of Islamic Literacy in the Hausa Language

The Hausa Muslim communities are well-placed in terms of literacy in an Islamic perspective. Arabic Islamic books have been translated using Ajami and *Hausar Boko* writing styles. This helps to make Hausa Muslim literate and to have access to the advanced materials of Islamic jurisprudence and law. To this end, the efforts of leading Islamic scholars in Northern Nigeria, who employed Hausa language in their daily activities of preaching, tafsir and sermons, are part of the Hausa language contributions to Islamic literacy and scholarship in the Hausaland. Some of these scholars are:

Sheikh Nasiru Kabara, Sheikh Abubakar Gummi, Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi, Sheikh Jafar Mahmud Adam, Sheikh Buhari Siriddawa, Sheikh Ibrahim Saleh, Sheikh Abubakar Tureta, Sheikh Isma'ila Idris Jos, Sheikh Ahmad Lemo, Sheikh Haliru Binji, Sheikh Na'ibi Sulaiman Wali, Sheikh Ahmad Bemba, Sheikh Muhammadu Maizabura Niamey, Sheikh Lawal Abubakar Kaduna, Sheikh Sanusi Gumbi, Sheikh Muhammadu Baba Ba'are Zariya

The Outcome of the Study

The Historical development of Islamic scholarship in the Muslim world was highly influenced by the native languages of the believers. Arabic, as the language of the Holy Qur'an, played a significant role in the Arab world among its native speakers. In the African context, indigenous languages played a crucial role. In West Africa, Hausa was the leading language with about 200,000,000 speakers and was rated number 11th out of the 7,500 languages of the world. The Hausa people ruled some powerful kingdoms in West Africa, such as, Kano, Gobir, Zazzau, Zamfara, Kabi, Yawuri, Maradi, Katsina, and Damagaran. Most of these kingdoms were among the centres of Islamic learning in the 14th century. In addition, after their leaders accepted Islam, it became the state religion long before the colonial inversion. In view of this, Islam and Muslims were well-secured and given freedom of worship across the Hausa kingdoms. In this context, this chapter makes the following deductions: Islamic literacy and the development of Islamic scholarship in Hausaland were solely the contribution of Hausa language. Arabic literacy was critically studied in the native language, and the 28 Arabic alphabets were linguistically assimilated into Hausa Ajami writing. The Hausa Muslims have the advantage of Ajami writing before the coming of Western education. This contributes immensely to the development of literacy in Hausaland. Thus, the Hausas are among the best literate communities in West African societies as of today.

Conclusion

Literacy is the ability to read and write in any language. For a person to be literate, he must have a working knowledge of reading and writing. The ability to interpret, communicate, create and compute are necessary ingredients to demonstrate the competence of a literate

person. African Muslim societies considered Arabic language as the second language that one must be ready to learn. The methods of using the Arabic alphabet to learn how to read and write in the Hausa language are unique, to the extent that no African language in the West African regions reached its standard. Combination of Ajami and *Hausar Boko* enhances Hausa language development in terms of publications, book culture, and manuscripts development. The Hausa's perception of Arabic literacy is equal to Islamic literacy.

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Islamic Education and Scholarship in Cameroon: 1960 to Present

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Education is central to Islam, and thus, a Muslim is a person who is entitled to learn and acquire knowledge and skills to worship Allah^(SWT), his Creator, accurately. The process of learning may vary from one society to another, but the objectives and the fundamentals remain so equally unchallenged as the functionality of knowledge in Islamic societies. In Cameroon, Islamic education provided the scripts, the pen, the ink, the scribes, and a specific form of governance long before the inception of colonial rule. Some sources dated back the implementation of Islamic education to the 11th century among the Sayfawa peoples living around Lake Chad,¹ while others traced it to the 16th century with the advent of the Kanem-Bornu Empire under the leadership of Idriss Alaoma (ca. 1564-1596).² The post-Dan Fodio jihad era also accelerated the expansion and implementation of Islam in Cameroon.³ In either case, it is apparent that Islamic education had a long tradition of scholarship in Cameroon, and it had significantly impacted social life, economy and the judiciary. From Central Sudan down to the rainforest Equatorial Region in the south, Islam took two different directions (Eastward and Westward), which experienced relatively meaningful success among the population, certainly due to the leadership and the charisma of the actors involved.

By and large, Islamic education and scholarship in most cases negotiated and compromised with the colonial powers, which were the

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1 Henry Barth, *Travel and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, Vol. II (New York, 1858); Dixon Denham and Hugh Clapperton, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the years 1822, 1823, and 1824* (London: British Library, 1828).

2 Nur Alkali and Bala Usman, eds., *Studies in the History of Pre-Colonial Borno* (Zaria: Northern Nigerian Publishing, 1983); Bawuro Barkindo, "The Early States of the Central Sudan: Kanem, Borno and Some of Their Neighbours to c. 1500 AD," in *History of West Africa*, Vol. I, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (Harlow, 1985), 225–254; Dierk Lange, *Le Dīwān des sultans du Kanem-Bornu* (Wiesbaden, 1977).

3 Sa'ad Abubakar, *The Lamibe of Fombina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Martin Z. Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola (Old Adamawa)* (Yaounde: Cepr, 1978).

German, the French, and the British colonial Administrations, to ensure survival in a very hostile political environment. After the end of colonial rule in 1960, it came out fragile and subordinate to the formal and Latin education implemented by the West despite the "compromising" concessions made by the "Europhone"⁴ elites who took over power in various countries.

The purpose of this article is to revisit the history of Islamic education and scholarship in Cameroon by examining its three main components namely the Qur'anic schools, the Franco-Arabic/Anglo-Arabic Schools and the Madrassas. The study will focus on its dynamism and functionality to positively contribute to a redefinition and reorientation in the changing environment. The impact of government policies on formal Islamic education, its adaptability and flexibility to accurately open up to new technology, as well as emerging challenges and methods of learning, will be addressed.

Overview of Islamic Education in Cameroon

Islam was introduced in Cameroon by the nomads, merchants and travellers who crisscrossed the Sahel in search of greener pastures, commodities, goods, and other marketable items.⁵ Individually or collectively through brotherhood organisations, such as the Tijāniyya, the Qadiriyya, the Mahdiyya or the Sanusiyya, through Jihad movements and merchant networks, Muslims expanded Islam from the Lake Chad region down to the Equatorial rainforest zone. Various means and strategies were deployed to conquer large territories, to incorporate various ethnic groups and to install a new Muslim order. New cities emerged, and a new system of governance, new taxation and Arabic alphabets, as well as a new numeric code, were introduced. Besides peaceful means such as trade, exchange of commodities, and intermarriages with host communities, among others, jihad was also engineered to expand Islam southwards and onto the Adamawa highlands plateaux. Where the jihad was successful and the local populations conformed as was the case for the southern sub-emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate, Islamic education structures were set up and developed to comply with the needs of the emerging community. In

4 Ousmane Kane, *Non-europhone intellectuals* (Dakar, Codesria, 2012).

5 Hamadou Adama, *L'Islam au Cameroun: entre tradition et modernité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

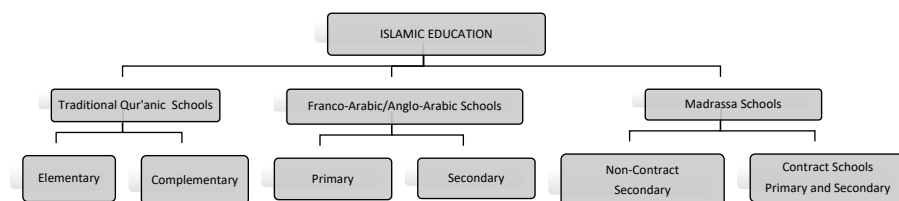
other places where peaceful means were deployed to spread Islam, such as the Equatorial Zone, Muslims collaborated with the local rulers who tolerated their religion and, in some cases, associated them in the management of their host localities to implement Islamic centres of learning. With the negotiated proximity to local rulers, Muslims created and developed Islamic schools over the years where children and adults received education, acquired knowledge and skills.

Education is undoubtedly critical to sustained development because of its role in building the skilled workforce necessary for economic transformation. Education's key functions in shaping social values and norms explain its central role in all manner of social movements, both religious and secular, that seek to bring about social change. Since its earliest days, Islamic teachings highlighted learning the revealed word of God (the Holy Qur'an) as a central component of religious worship. The first Islamic schools, which appeared in the 17th century in the Lake Chad region and early 19th century in the Savannah zone, taught Arabic literacy and were mainly aimed at memorising the Holy Qur'an.⁶ In the ensuing decades, the body of knowledge associated with Islam grew. The words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) (*hadith*), the body of scholarship associated with the Islamic legal schools (*madhhab*) were progressively introduced, and Islamic law (*fiqh*) was harmonised with customary law when and where necessary. The expanding Islamic corpus necessitated a deeper and more rigorous approach to study. The schools for advanced Islamic learning and scholarship appeared in the twentieth century, first in the Sokoto and Borno sub-emirates (Mora, Maroua, Garoua, Ngaoundéré, Balda, etc.), then spread rapidly across the Lake Chad, the Savannah and Adamawa Highlands.

In Cameroon, Islamic education comprises three types of schools, namely the traditional Qur'anic schools, the Franco-Arabic schools and the Madrassas. There are also Anglo-Arabic schools, which operate in the former British colonised Cameroon, principally among the Fulani ethnic community who migrated in the early 20th century to the North-Western and South-Western regions of Cameroon. All of those schools included Qur'anic memorisation in their respective curricula.

6 Hamadou Adama, "The Islamic Civilization in Cameroon: From 18th Century to Present," *Journal of Religious Dynamics in Africa for knowing 21st Century Africa* 1, (March 2013): 51-59.

Differences emerged in terms of subjects taught, methods used to teach, qualification of teachers, autonomy and government oversight, as well as sources of finance. These, in turn, can differ by region and local policy.



Structural Organisation of Islamic Education in Cameroon

Traditional Qur'anic Schools

Traditional Qur'anic Schools exist in almost every neighbourhood among the Muslim communities in both rural and urban areas across the Republic of Cameroon. They vary in type and have different local names, including *makaranta*, *janguirdeh*, *maktab*, *madrasah* OR *Islāmiyya* schools, depending on the region. The Qur'anic schools were the first established form of schooling and education that reached the elites and wider communities. These traditional Islamic schools were segmented into two sections.⁷

The first section, elementary education, is centred on the teaching of the Holy Qur'an, with a study duration of three to five years. The elementary cycle is dedicated primarily to the reading, writing, reciting, and partial memorisation of the Holy Qur'an. While the target texts are in Arabic, Fulfulde is the language of instruction. Comprehension of the lexico-semantic content of the Holy Qur'an is not a goal for the first several years of instruction. Thus, the *mallum* (teacher; pl. *mallum'en*) does not translate or explain the meaning of the Qur'anic texts that the student is learning to recite, read, and/or memorise; in most cases, the *mallum* does not know the meaning of the

7 Susan L. Douglass and Munir A. Shaikh, "Defining Islamic Education: Differentiation and Applications," *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 7, no. 1 (2004): 5-18.

texts him- or herself.⁸ The primary lesson objective is the faithful, that is, verbatim, fluent, and reverent recitation of the text by the novice without assistance from the *mallum*. Correct recitation of the sounds of the Qur'an constitutes understanding of the first layer of meaning. Subsequent layers of explanation and commentary are reserved for the learner who has already achieved mnemonic mastery of the entire Qur'an al-Kareem.

An ink (*dawa*), a flat surface tablet (*alluha*), and a wooden pen (*bindirgol*) are the main didactic materials used by the pupils for the elementary cycle in their process of learning. Attendance at the elementary cycle is mandatory for the Muslim children, both male and female. During this first period of education, a child is also initiated to Islamic worship, values, principles and beliefs.

The second phase, known as complementary (*durso* or *jangirde defte*), could take the whole life.⁹ It is based on reading, explaining and commenting on the textbooks, which vary from literature, grammar, and theology to judiciary, biographies and poetry. Courses are delivered in open-air spaces, under large trees or in double doors vestibules dedicated to teaching. Conversely, the complementary cycle is conducted by an elderly scholar (*moodibbo*) whose reputation is favourably recognised by the community, which employs him and honours his scholarship. The subjects in the complementary cycle include theology, Islamic law, exegesis, *kalam* or poetry through a Maliki perspective. Some devoted students can be allowed to study esoteric books or Sufism and dedicate themselves to serving the Qadiriyya Brotherhood, the largest Sufi Community in Cameroon. This section is instrumental in providing a wide scale of revealed and earthly knowledge, i.e. revealed knowledge that comes straight from Allah (SWT) and earthly knowledge discovered by human beings. Also, earthly knowledge provides functional and marketable skills to meet the socio-political demands of Muslim society.¹⁰ According to Islam,

8 Hamadou Adama and Modibbo Amadou Aboubakary "Itinéraires d'acquisition du savoir arabo-islamique dans le Nord-Cameroun," *Annales de la FALSH de l'Université de Ngaoundéré* 3, (1998): 5-38.

9 R. Santerre, *Pédagogie Musulmane d'Afrique noire : l'école Coranique Peule du Cameroun* (Montréal: PUM, 1973).

10 Uzma Anzar, "Islamic Education: A Brief History of Madrassas with Comments on Curricula and Current Pedagogical Practices," *Paper for the University of Vermont, Environmental Programme*, (2003), 55.

seeking earthly knowledge is also significant because earthly knowledge compliments the knowledge revealed by Allah (SWT) in the Holy Qur'an and helps Muslims to live productive and good lives in this world.

Traditional Qur'anic schools still exist in large numbers and serve diverse Muslim communities in Cameroon.¹¹ They are exclusively created by private individuals and are fully independent from the state control. Since the 2000's though with the impact of the 9/11 events, traditional rulers who are the main supervisors of the Qur'anic schools have been active in reforming, restructuring and organising the schools to regulate them and attract public attention and funding. Nevertheless, they frequently faced repulsion and strong opposition from hardliners who disregarded secular intrusion into basic Islamic education.

Despite its conservatism and the impact of the growing urbanisation, the traditional Qur'anic schools were and are still seen by Muslim communities across Cameroon as a significant purveyor of literacy. One of the tangible outcomes of these schools was that their graduates who went on to attend advanced Islamic studies pursued a scholarly tradition. And because of their scholarly inputs, some inventively employed the pliable Arabic script to produce an exceptional set of literature known as *Ajami* texts that was included as a sub-set of African literature. They penned an array of theological and jurisprudential works for their diverse communities, most of whom were adherents of the Maliki School of jurisprudence. In addition to these texts having been written and copied by subsequent scribes in various handwritings (*nushî*, *sûdânî*, etc.), as demonstrated by Blair and others,¹² letters and treatises were also found in the script.¹³

The manuscripts produced by Muslim scholars trained and mentored at the traditional Qur'anic schools form part of the region's rich heritage that international scholars from around the world should factor in when they re-write the social histories of the Sudanic region. The Muslim minorities who inhabited the Steppe and the Savannah

11 Hamadou, *L'Islam au Cameroun*; Sa'ad, *The Lamibe of Fombina*; Martin, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola*.

12 Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

13 John O. Hunwick, Razaq Abubakre and Hamidu Bobboyi, *Arabic literature of Africa. Volume 2: The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

areas were very innovative. They helped to shape a specific identity through the production of knowledge in the form of the *Ajami* literature.

Put differently, these unique manuscripts have directly impacted the Muslim educational systems and indirectly on the region's education systems. These manuscripts might not be considered by some scholars as outputs of robust rigorous scholarship. However, one wish to counter-argue by stating that these manuscripts laid the basis for present-day Muslim scholarship that stretches from the borders of Chad to the fringe of the Equatorial rainforest that connect with the intellectual outputs encased in many private and public libraries.

The Qur'anic schools were thus the principal education providers in Cameroon for the last two centuries, with few other options until the colonial period. The French colonial administration, whose rule began in 1900 with the assassination of Rabah in Kousseri,¹⁴ sought to solidify its hold through various assimilation strategies and a classic indirect rule system that notably involved the leaders of the Sufi orders. However, the French did meet resistance, both armed and cultural. The outcome of the confrontation generated a hybrid educational system which is still operational in Cameroon. A mix of rule through traditional authorities and authoritarian measures was reflected in approaches to education policy and practice.

The Franco-Arabic and Anglo-Arabic Schools

During the 1920s, several colonial administration policies aimed to shift education away from a focus on Arabic and Islamic studies in favour of promoting the French language, the French curriculum and agenda. Cultural assimilation of the colonised populations was the goal, the results of this initiative were mixed and controversial. Efforts made by the French colonial administration included measures designed to limit Qur'anic schooling and drive children to French schools.

In practice, colonial authorities established fines for those who did not abide by the decrees and regulations issued while encouraging attendance at French schools by the children of the aristocracy so to attract those from the lower social classes. French speakers were

¹⁴ Mohammed Kyari, *Borno in the Rabih Years, 1893-1901: The Rise and Crash of a Predatory State* (Maiduguri Nigeria: University of Maiduguri, 2006).

offered job opportunities in the colonial administration, whereas non-French speakers faced difficulties, such as communicating with colonial authorities in various issues. Many parents and Qur'anic instructors resisted the colonial mandates, while some Qur'anic instructors pretended compliance but resisted subtly.

After facing tensions, colonial authorities attempted to make public schools a more attractive option to Muslim communities by integrating Islamic education and Arabic into the curriculum. The introduction of public schooling across the northern regions did not displace these schools, although, it did, in many cases, force them to adapt to the evolving wants and needs of the Muslim community. Adaptation came in several ways, including preschools, evening schools, weekend schools, or holiday schools – i.e., supplementary schools attended in addition to public schools. Adaptation also came with the emerging of a hybrid education system, which was aimed at “modernising” the traditional Qur'anic schools known as the Franco-Arabic and Anglo-Arabic schools.

Cameroon has two education subsystems today namely, the French tradition inherited from colonisation and the Anglo-Saxon subsystem, a legacy of the British colonial rule. The two subsystems have a board of Education (Office du Baccalaureat and GCE Board) supervising public and private schools. The private schools include the secular, the Catholic, the Protestant and the Islamic order, each coordinated by a Secretary of Education who represents the Board at the regional and local levels. The Franco-Arabic and Anglo-Arabic schools are also under this category of private schools.

The private schools have integrated into the national education board through specific contracts. The first Franco-Arabic school was established in Cameroon in 1935 in Northern cities such as Garoua and Maroua, among the Muslim-majority areas under French colonial rule. It was conceived as a hybrid school where both Islamic and secular teachings were delivered in equal measure, at least during the first years of its existence. It was created under the name “Ecole des fils des chefs” (School for the Children of the Aristocracy) and was purposely framed to attract Muslim children whose parents were reluctant to send their children to the school of the “unbelievers” and to learn “how

to convince without having right".¹⁵ Two decades after establishment of the first Franco-Arabic school, the first Anglo-Arabic school was opened in 1955 in Bamenda by the generation of Muslim settlers who migrated under British colonisation to the former British Cameroon, the present North-Western Region.

The advent of Anglo-Arabic and Franco-Arabic schools thus made it possible for Muslim children to acquire affordable secular and religious education in both Muslim and Non-Muslim environments. In many impoverished rural areas, especially in the Sahel region, these schools were the only available educational institutions. The quality in these schools was quite remarkable given their limited material resources. Students from these schools were accepted to register and sit for all government recommended external examinations, and successful candidates can gain admission to tertiary institutions, colleges and the universities.

The quality of education offered by the Franco-Arabic and Anglo-Arabic schools declined drastically during the mid-1980s due to the severe economic crisis, which impoverished promoters of this hybrid Islamic education system. As a result, the *Organisation de l'enseignement scolaire privé islamique au Cameroun* (Islamic Private Education Board), also known by its French acronym OESPI, was set up in 2000 by Muslim scholars with the benediction of public administration to reorganise and revitalise the Islamic schools by secularising the curricula, the structure and textbooks. New investments in infrastructure were initiated, professional teachers were recruited, performance contracts with the state were signed to authorise permanent inspection by public authorities, and the variety of training offered was diversified. Subsequently, parents regained confidence, and the number of students substantially increased, as well as their academic performance in national exams.

In 2020, the Franco-Arabic and Anglo-Arabic schools received about fifteen per cent of students combined both Muslims and non-Muslims registered in the primary and secondary private schools. The Catholic schools led the pack (40%), followed by the Secular schools (35%) and

15 Cheikh Hamidou Kane's classic 1961 novel, *L'aventure ambiguë* [Ambiguous adventure], gives a vivid fictional depiction of Qur'anic school education and the relationship between teacher and pupil in northern Senegal during the colonial period. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'aventure Ambiguë* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1961).

the Protestant schools (20%). Of course, the percentage recorded, which represents around a hundred thousand pupils, was insignificant compared to other private schools. However, this can be considered a breakthrough if we look back to the pathetic situation of these schools during the 1980s, when they were literally languishing. But still, numerous factors can explain the long-time unattractiveness of Franco-Arabic and Anglo-Arabic schools among the Muslim communities across the country. Besides the poor performance of their students in national exams, main and durable infrastructures were decaying in all areas, and their expansion to larger spaces had become hypothetic since land acquisition had always been a burning issue in present Cameroon.

By and large, almost all the Franco-Arabic and Anglo-Arabic schools in main regional cities are increasingly performing well. Young Arabic scholars managing these schools are gaining recognition both from the public administration and the external donors through successful partnership programmes. Similarly, the Madrassa schools experienced obstacles and difficulties during the second half of the 20th century, but they capitalised on the previous experiences and engineered practical solutions that accurately promoted the Islamic education in Cameroon.

The Madrassa Schools

The term *madrassa* means school in Arabic, which refers to various and different Islamic educational institutions. Global discussions on *madrassa* education are complex partly because of the imprecise usage of the term. *Madrassa* can be used to refer to a range of Islamic schools, from Islamic primary schools or "kindergartens"—known in Cameroon as *jangirde* or *mahad* and in Chad as *kuttab*, which focus primarily on mechanical memorisation of the Holy Qur'an—to Islamic colleges and universities known as *Institut Supérieur islamique* or *Complexe islamique* in Cameroon, some of which teach predominantly secular subjects, including arithmetic or biology.

Perhaps the salient features of the *madrassa*, in contrast to Qur'anic schooling, include the acquisition of Arabic grammar knowledge and, at the same time, memorising the Holy Qur'an from the beginning of a student's training. Thus, while traditional Qur'anic schools emphasised memorisation and recitation of the Qur'an at the early

stage of training and reserved the study of Arabic grammar for more advanced students, the madrassas stressed the study of Arabic grammar as the first step to assimilating the holy texts. This emphasis allowed students to learn the Qur'an and other texts within a short period. Furthermore, whereas Qur'anic school students sat on the floor and wrote their lessons on whitewashed slates, madrassa classrooms were furnished with chairs, benches, and blackboards, and the students wrote in exercise books and read from the Arabic texts.

Moreover, in the social organisation of the Qur'anic schools, the students were part of the teacher's household until graduation, and they offered services such as assisting in farming and doing daily chores in exchange for their education. In contrast, the madrassa required students to pay fees, attend classes at a fixed time, and return home at the end of the day's session, similar to the western-styled secular and missionary schools. This arrangement was convenient, especially in the urban centres where teachers needed more money to cover the high cost of living. The madrassa thus accommodated urban lifestyles and in which teachers needed fees, and parents needed their children to help with household chores. The madrassa system also freed the teachers from being responsible for other people's children in a difficult urban environment. The use of uniforms, chalkboards, furnished classrooms, and the charging of fees, among other features of madrassa schooling, were borrowed from the secular school system to make Islamic schooling more effective. This madrassa system not only facilitated the acquisition of Islamic knowledge but also prepared a new scholarly elite capable of integrating local communities with the global Muslim community through their knowledge of Arabic.

Evidently, the transformation of the madrassa represented the Muslims' response to the advent of new pedagogical models and the availability of resources that made it possible to train many students efficiently within a short time. For example, students of Moodibbo Ali Dewa Madrassa in Ngaoundéré can memorise large portions of the Holy Qur'an faster than their colleagues could have in a Qur'anic school system.¹⁶ Because, in the madrassa, the ability to read Arabic at an early stage of academic training, along with the availability of tape-recorded recitations from the Arab world, facilitated the memorisation

16 Hamadou Adama, "L'école Franco-arabe Camerounaise: Bilan et Perspectives," in *Cameroun 2001* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), 89-136.

of the Holy Qur'an. Furthermore, the madrassa model was expected to encourage a new belief in rational exoteric knowledge and use scientific methods to explain natural phenomena instead of resorting to supernatural explanations. In addition, it encouraged personal independence, individual responsibility, and self-reliance instead of depending on society.

In Cameroon, the Madrassa schools, whether home-based, mosque-based or independent, were operated in the afternoons or weekends and during the mornings, and their students, on the other hand, attended the Muslim state-aided or public state secular schools. These madrassa schools were created around the late 1970s by a generation of Cameroonian Arabic scholars who returned to their homeland after studying Arabic language and Islamic theology in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and North Africa. The students were informally given scholarships during the post-independence decade by private individuals and organisation to study theology and Islamic law in some Arab countries. The scholarship was made accessible to many sub-Saharan students with the prospect of promoting and strengthening Arabic and Islamic values across the sub-Saharan Africa. Many students who benefited from the scholarship and travelled to Arab countries to fulfil their academic training did not complete their secondary school education in Cameroon before their departure and thus without due certificate. As a result, upon return after graduation, their qualifications and degrees obtained abroad were not recognised by the Cameroonian government.

With the support of private donors and international organisations from the Middle East and North Africa such as World Association of Muslim Youth (WAMY), Muslim World League (MWL), Islamic Relief, unemployed Islamic scholars set up informal schools known as *Institut islamique* or madrassa aiming to modernise the traditional Qur'anic schools and provide upgraded primary and secondary education while disseminating the Islamic ethics and values. In most cases, the curricula and textbooks used in these schools were drafted by the donors and similar to the ones used in their countries. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar and Morocco were among the main donors of textbooks through their respective diplomatic representatives and transnational Muslim organisations. Qur'anic recitation (*qira'a*), hadith, Arabic grammar (*nahw*), Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsîr*),

jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*usûl ad-dîn*), and principles of jurisprudence (*usûl al-fiqh*). Many madrassa schools signed a performance contract with the Ministry of Education for recognition and incorporated secular subjects, including mathematics, philosophy, and poetry, based on classical texts. From this point of view, madrassa schools did popularise some of the greatest and most influential thinkers of the medieval era, such as al-Ghazali, al-Farabi, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, Ibn al-Haytham, and al-Qurtubi, among others.

Despite apparent disharmony in textbooks, whose contents and narratives differed from the Cameroonian realities, most of the madrassa schools maintained a comprehensive religious curriculum besides Qur'an memorisation. Contrary to Qur'anic schools, the madrassa grouped children into classrooms according to their age. Similarly, the more student-centred pedagogy of the Qur'anic schools gave way to what we might call a more "Western" method, with children all expected to learn at a similar pace and to pass to another class as a group. Like the Qur'anic schools, these schools had a good deal of autonomy from state regulation and interference, although the past 20 years we have seen an increase in the desire of public authorities to regulate and scrutinise all confessional private schools to verify the law enforcement governing the sector. A National Board of Education in charge of confessional private schools was created in 1995 with sectorial and local branches to supervise the creation process of madrassas and ensure its conformity with the established requirements before it went fully operational. Following specific regulations and recommendations, madrassa schools that fulfilled the prerequisites were registered, integrated and therefore made eligible for public funding.

Teachers in these schools are a mix of traditionally trained *mallams* and graduates from universities in Egypt or the Persian Gulf countries with a more "modern" education, perhaps some formal teacher training and a diploma or certificate. The certificates given by integrated madrassa schools are recognised by the government. Therefore, it allows the holder to qualify for a scholarship, pursue his ambition and study in Arab countries. Students who graduated from the madrassa can also register in public secondary schools or other private confessional schools. After the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, the number of those who travelled to Arab countries to pursue

their studies drastically reduced. Visa restrictions and scarcity of scholarships were the main obstacles that discouraged prospective students from travelling to Arab countries.

Conversely, very few madrassa schools are operating in their classic forms. The inability to reform and obtain government recognition had long affected the credibility and function of the madrassa education system across the country. Registration of new students continues to shrink considerably in informal madrassa schools, and their attractiveness is questioned by the partners of education and the state.

Conclusion

Islamic education in Cameroon is gaining ground despite some obstacles and difficulties. The traditional Qur'anic schools kept reproducing the Islamic learning *per se* and were reluctant to reform and adapt to changing environments. On the other hand, the Franco-Arabic/Anglo-Arabic schools and the madrassa schools opted to negotiate their recognition with the state in order to attract students, gain credibility, improve academic performance and attain eligibility for public funding. However, the lack of adequate infrastructure, deficiency in professional teachers and poor academic performance are among the emerging difficulties of these schools. Nevertheless, private initiatives towards remediating the problems were invented and applied with tangible success. Interestingly, the upgrading tendency initiated in the late 1990s was set to continue over time and space. What would be the future of Islamic education in Cameroon depends on its interaction with the political power and its sustainability.

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An Early West African Arabic Contribution to Islamic Learning: The *Bustān al-Fawā'id wa al-Manāfi'* of Modibbo Muhammad al-Kābarī (fl. 1450, Timbuktu)

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Introduction

There is no doubt that Muhammad al-Kābarī was one of the most important scholars in Timbuktu in the fifteenth century. Likely of Soninke background from the region of Kābara south of Timbuktu,¹ al-Kābarī's influence as the formative teacher of both Timbuktu's later "saintly pole" (*qutb*), the *sharīf* Yahyā al-Tadallisī (d. 1462), and the first of many Sanhaja chief judges in the city, qadi 'Umar Aqīt (d. 1468-1480),² usefully destabilizes later colonial-era stereotypes describing the instruction of Islam from Arab masters to African followers. But despite this formative role in the development of Timbuktu's scholarship, al-Kābarī's own writing has escaped academic attention.

Muhammad al-Kābarī's "Garden of Benefits and Advantages" (*Bustān al-fawā'id wa l-manāfi'*),³ dating from the fifteenth century, may be the oldest extant Arabic text written by a West African scholar. Although the Arabic chronicles of the Songhay Empire identify al-Kābarī primarily as a jurist (*faqih*), it was no doubt the *Bustān al-fawā'id* that ensured his lasting fame throughout West Africa. Complete versions of the manuscript are relatively hard to find, but the book appears to have had a wide impact. An anecdote from Senegal – where the prominent Tijānī scholar and successor (*khalifa*) of Ibrāhīm Niasse, 'Alī Cisse (d. 1982), reproduced sections of the *Bustān* in his own private manuscript (*kunnāsh*) on the healing sciences –

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1 Wright, "Islamic Intellectual Tradition," 65. This was the consensus of both Saad and Hunwick.

2 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sa'dī, *Tārīkh al-Sūdān*, (trans. John Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, Leiden: Brill, 2003), 38; in Wright, "Islamic Intellectual Tradition," 64.

3 Muhammad al-Kābarī, *Bustān al-fawā'id wa l-manāfi'*. MS no. 161 Paden Collection, Herskovits library, Northwestern University. 70 pages; MS no. 5684, Ahmed Baba Institute of Higher Learning and Islamic Research, Timbuktu, Mali.

suggests that Kābarī's text circulated among a West African scholarly elite well into the twentieth century.⁴ Closer analysis of the *Bustān al-fawā'id* demonstrates that discourses on the oneness of God, sufism, and the esoteric power of Islamic prayers were mutually constitutive fields of knowledge in fifteenth-century West Africa, and likely in later generations that continued to draw inspiration from Timbuktu scholarship in the formative period.

The first mention of the *Bustān al-fawā'id* in academic writing appears to have been Elias Saad's inventory of the West African manuscript collection endowed to the Northwestern University Herskovits Africana Library in the 1970s.⁵ Evidently drawing on al-Kābarī's reputation as a scholar of Islamic law and "master of masters" (*shaykh al-shuyūkh*) in Timbuktu,⁶ Saad mislabeled the seventy-page *Bustān* as a "jurisprudential treatise"⁷ and did not include it among the list of sources for his later book on Muslim scholarship in Timbuktu.⁸ John Hunwick's landmark *Arabic Literature of Africa, the Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* also referenced the *Bustān*, but mentioned only that it "opens with a discussion of *al-'Aqīda al-Murshida*, the 'creed' of Ibn Tūmart."⁹ Our own attempt to analyze the work suggested that it in fact defies disciplinary classification: it is at once a work of theology,

4 This *kunnāsh* in 'Alī Cisse's handwriting (Archive Cheikh Tidiane Cisse, Medina-Baye Kaolack, Senegal) begins with very similar lines to the *Bustān*, "Praise to God who created me an upright human being, who trained me in Islam, and taught me Arabic ..." and subsequently mentions the *Bustān* as a source. Cisse's title, *Mu'awanat al-ikhwān fī ma'āshirat al-niswān* ("The Assistance of Brothers over Each and Every Woman") reveals the primary focus on prayers to increase male virility, also a primary preoccupation of al-Kābarī's text. The title is also identical to an earlier Sokoto text of Muhammad al-Takūr (see Ismail Abdalla, "Islamic Medicine" 163; Wright, "Islamic Intellectual Tradition," 69), but the specifically Tijānī prayers of much of the later pages (incidentally having little to do with male-female relations) might indicate that Cisse accessed al-Kābarī's text through that of al-Takūr, and then added a number of other prayers.

5 Elias Saad, "The Paden Collection of Arabic Materials from Kano", *History in Africa*, 7 (1980), 369-372.

6 Elias Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu: The Role of Muslim Scholars and Notables, 1400-1900* (Cambridge UP, 1983), 60.

7 Saad, "Paden Collection," 371.

8 Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu*, 298-303.

9 John Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa, volume 4: the Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Brill, 2003), 12. Hunwick mentioned a manuscript copy available in Niamey, Mali, but overlooked the copy that exists in Northwestern's Herskovits library.

hadīth commentary, Qur'an exegesis (*tafsīr*), sufi litanies (*awrād*), and esoteric secrets (*asrār*). A subsequent analysis of al-Kābarī's prayers or "secrets" for protection and healing situates such practices within the context of increasing demands for clerical independence from the perceived corruption of kings through the Songhay Empire (1464-1591), thus marking the social and political implications of the *Bustān* as well as its contributions to the Islamic discursive tradition.

Muhammad al-Kābarī

The *Bustān* gives the author's full name as Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Abū Bakr b. 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Kābarī. He was known as "master of masters" (*shaykh al-shuyūkh*) in Timbuktu.¹⁰ In al-Sa'dī's *Tārīkh al-Sūdān*, he is given the honorary title "Modibbo", meaning scholar or holyman,¹¹ and described as "the righteous and virtuous friend of God, locus of manifestations of divine grace and wondrous acts, the jurist qadi Muhammad al-Kābarī, may Allah (SWT) have mercy on him."¹² A relevant passage from the *Tārīkh* provides a wealth of detail concerning al-Kābarī's legacy in Timbuktu:

Modibbo Muhammad al-Kābarī attained the very pinnacle of scholarship and righteousness, and was the teacher of the jurist 'Umar b. Muhammad Aqīt and Sīdī Yahyā [al-Tadallisī]. So numerous were his students, it is said, that no month would end without someone completing with him a reading of the *Tahdhīb* of al-Barādhī. At that time, the town was thronged by *Sūdānī* students, people of the west who excelled in scholarship and righteousness. People even say that, interred with him in mausoleum, there are thirty men of Kābara, all of whom were righteous scholars.¹³

There are several important clues as to al-Kābarī's intellectual context in this description. The first is his association with a key text of the Mālikī legal school (*madhhab*), *al-Tahdhīb fī ikhtisār al-Mudawwana* by Khalaf b. Abī l-Qāsim al-Azdī al-Qayrawānī (d. 1039, Tunis), known as al-Barādhī.¹⁴ The "Refinement" (*al-Tahdhīb*) is a

¹⁰ Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu*, 60.

¹¹ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, lv.

¹² *Ibid*, 38.

¹³ 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sa'dī, *Tārīkh al-Sūdān*.

¹⁴ Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, n. 15, p. 41. The full name of the text is given in Muhammad Iqbal, "History of the Mudawwanah" (unpublished paper).

commentary on Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī's (d. 996, Tunis) summary (*ikhtisār*) of Sahnūn's (d. 854, Tunis) *al-Mudawwana*, the first major collection of Imam Mālik's legal opinions. It appears then that the *Tahdhīb* marked the summation of legal studies in Timbuktu in the fifteenth century, before its replacement with the fourteenth-century Egyptian Mālikī text *Mukhtasar Khalīl*. The *Mukhtasar Khalīl* was not popularized in Timbuktu until the sixteenth century through the teaching of Mahmūd b. 'Umar Aqīt (d. 1548), the son of al-Kābarī's student 'Umar Aqīt, who likely procured the text during his pilgrimage east in 1509-1510.¹⁵ Mastery of the *Tahdhīb* clearly distinguished al-Kābarī as a foremost authority in Islamic law. But like al-Kābarī's own text, the *Tahdhīb* appears to speak to multiple disciplinary specializations simultaneously. For example, the *Tahdhīb*'s noteworthy argument for censuring the slandering of another's lineage claims certainly invokes an ethical preoccupation with "thinking good" (*husn al-zann*) of others, rather than legal rulings (*ahkām*) alone.¹⁶

Al-Kābarī, according to the passage above, was interred in Timbuktu with thirty "righteous scholars" from his hometown of Kābara. Kābara was a town in the Masina region of modern Mali, south of Diakha (or Dia) from whence the Jakhanké clerical lineage dispersed. Elias Saad describes the Kābara people as "Sudani scholars, and suggests that their settlement predated the rise of the Mali Empire,¹⁷ a likelihood seconded by Hunwick, who believes their origin to have been Soninke,¹⁸ thus connected to the ancient Kingdom of Ghana. Kābara, like Diakha, thus emerged sometime during the decline of the Ghanaian Empire as a center of Islamic scholarship. In the fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta mentioned both Kābara and Diakha as well-established settlements specializing in Islamic learning.¹⁹ The only recorded statement of al-Kābarī in al-Sa'dī's *Ta'rikh* is in fact a testimony to the righteousness of his scholarly peers in the Sankore *madrasa*, where the Kābarī scholars may have earlier predominated despite the institution's later association with "white" Berber

15 Evidence for this can be put together from the al-Sa'dī's entry on Mahmūd Aqīt. See Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, 53-55.

16 For discussion of al-Barādhī's fatwa, see David Powers, *Law, Society and Culture in the Maghrib, 1300-1500* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 190.

17 Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu*, 38-39.

18 Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, lvii.

19 Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu*, 8.

(Sanhaja) scholars: "I was the contemporary of righteous folk of Sankore, who were equaled in their righteousness only by the companions of the Messenger of God."²⁰ Indeed, al-Kābarī was not the only scholar to give fame to his home town. Before emerging as a scholar in Jenne, a certain Mori Magha Kankoi went to study in Kābara around the same time that al-Kābarī came to settle in Timbuktu (c. 1450). Upon his return to Jenne, "learned men hastened to study with him and pick up valuable pieces of knowledge (*fawā'id*)."²¹ Kābara was clearly a center of knowledge, the leading scholars of which came to invest their learning in Timbuktu as a new cosmopolitan African center of scholarship.

The *Bustān al-fawā'id*: An Overview

Muhammad al-Kābarī's *Bustān al-fawā'id wa l-manāfi'*, a title which loosely translates as "The Garden of Beneficial and Useful Prayers", is mostly a work concerning the Islamic esoteric sciences.²² Analysis of this manuscript is based primarily on the seventy-page copy contained in the Northwestern University Herskovits collection, with supporting reference to a partial twenty-nine page copy in Timbuktu's Ahmad Baba Collection.²³ The two manuscripts consulted here, the former

20 Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, 38. For discussion of Sankore's association with Sanhaja scholarship, see Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, lviii. Sanhaja scholars replaced some "Sudanese" scholars in Sankore and other Timbuktu institutions by the mid-fifteenth century as the result of a Tuareg conquest of the city. See Nehemia Levtzion, "Islam in the Bilād al-Sūdān to 1800," in *The History of Islam in Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion (Ohio University Press, 2000), 69.

21 Ibid, 23. For the date of al-Kābarī's settlement in Timbuktu, see Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, 69. The reference to *fawā'id* in relation to Kābara, which can also be translated as "special prayers", is intriguing given the nature of al-Kābarī's own text, *Bustān al-fawā'id*.

22 For a more comprehensive overview of the work, see Zachary Wright, "The Islamic Intellectual Tradition," 55-76. Lectures that discussed this manuscript include Zachary Wright, "Islamic Esotericism in West Africa: from Timbuktu to Senegal, 15th to 20th centuries," *Islamic Esotericism in Global Contexts* (virtual conference hosted by the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, December 2020); Rudolph Ware, "The Dawn of the West African Clerisy: Moodibo Muhammad al-Kabari and the 'The Grove of Gains and Benefits,'" *Timbuktu Talks* (virtual lecture hosted by UIUC Center for African Studies, December 2021).

23 Muhammad al-Kābarī, *Bustān al-fawā'id wa l-manāfi'*. MS no. 161, Paden Collection, Herskovits Library of African Studies; MS no. 5684, Ahmed Baba Institute of Higher Learning and Islamic Research, Timbuktu, Mali. Two further copies exist in the

probably copied in Nigeria in the nineteenth century and the latter transcribed in Mali in the early twentieth century, are not identical.²⁴ Nonetheless, they are remarkably similar for a single manuscript that has never been published and has circulated throughout West Africa for over five hundred years.

The *Bustān al-fawā'id* is al-Kābarī's only surviving text, and perhaps the only surviving text from West Africa before the sixteenth century.²⁵ Our confidence in the work's authenticity is based on the specific attribution of the text to al-Kābarī in both consulted manuscript copies. There appears to be other clues. The style of *hadith* citation, which seems to reflect a pre-eighteenth-century permissibility for the relation of unsubstantiated narrations in relation to ethics,²⁶ and the author's apparent discussion of an early text on Ash'arī theology (see below) without reference to the later canonical work of Muhammad al-Sanūsī (d. 1490, Algeria) popularized in Timbuktu after al-Kābarī's generation. Elias Saad's earlier recognition of the work expressed hope as to its authenticity, although he otherwise misclassified it as a "jurisprudential treatise."²⁷

Institut de Recherche en Sciences Humaines, Niamey, Mali (no. 1110 and 1342), but We have not been able to acquire copies without traveling to Mali. We thank Mauro Nobili for helping us acquire a digital copy of Ahmed Baba manuscript and for facilitating my contact with the Niamey collection. All subsequent citations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Northwestern manuscript. Although we find the Arabic script of the Ahmad Baba manuscript easier to read, the Northwestern manuscript is more complete, with the last page of the Baba manuscript (29) corresponding to page 42 out of 71 pages of the Northwestern manuscript.

- 24 Examples of discrepancies between the texts mostly surround the inclusion or non-inclusion of various diagrams or arcane symbols. The Ahmad Baba text includes the seven symbols said to represent the "Seal of Solomon" (see page 20 of the Baba manuscript), for example, while the Northwestern text appears to include a number of "names" composed of disjointed letters according to the *simā* tradition (see page 28 of the NU manuscript) that the Baba manuscript does not include. Appraisals of copying dates are according to information provided by Rudolph Ware and Mauro Nobili.
- 25 Ironically, the next surviving text is the sixteenth-century poetic eulogy of al-Kābarī written by his disciple, Yahyā al-Tadillisi. See Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu*, 81.
- 26 Jonathan Brown, "Even if it's not True its' True: Using Unreliable Hadīths in Sunni Islam," *Islamic Law and Society*, 18 (2011), 4.
- 27 Elias Saad, "The Paden Collection of Arabic Materials from Kano," *History of Africa*, 7 (1980), 371.

The *Bustān al-fawā'id*, in fact, defies disciplinary classification: it is at once a work of theology, hadith commentary, Qur'an exegesis (*tafsīr*), sufi litanies (*awrād*), and esoteric secrets (*asrār*). But otherwise, there is little mention of the jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that constituted the majority of al-Kābarī's teaching. This should not raise doubts about the authenticity of the text: it is likely that al-Kābarī took time to write only what he did not find assembled elsewhere; he clearly had useful books of jurisprudence already in his disposal. Indeed, the majority of the work (the last sixty pages) concern various secret prayers (*fawā'id*) for which the book appears to be named. Al-Kābarī is forthcoming in his own description of the work:

I have gathered in this book the beneficial and useful knowledges that I found among the wise men of divine provision (*al-hukumā' al-ajwād*), and which I transmitted from the books of the scholars (*fuqahā'*) and the righteous ... and I have called it "The Garden of Benefits and Advantages", may God grant benefit in it for us and for all Muslims.²⁸

In other words, al-Kābarī intended to collect wisdom and special prayers that circulated among the saintly scholars of a West African Islamic learning tradition already well established by the fifteenth century.

Theological Reflections

Al-Kābarī starts his book with a basic statement of orthodox (Ash'arī) theology attesting to God's oneness (*tawhīd*), reproducing entirely the introduction of Ibn Tumart's *Aqīda al-Murshida*:²⁹

Know, may God guide us and you, that it is incumbent on every accountable person (*mukallif*) to know that God, Mighty and Majestic, alone has all dominion. He created the universe in its entirety, the celestial and the profane, the divine throne (*al-'arsh*)

²⁸ Al-Kābarī, *Bustān al-fawā'id*, 1.

²⁹ This text is difficult to find in printed form today, but a version was recorded in Arabic in Ignaz Goldziher, *Le Livre de Mohammed Ibn Toumert, Mahdi des Almohades* (Algiers: Imprimerie Orientale Pierre Fontana, 1903), 241-242. Al-Kābarī's version has minimal variations from that reproduced by Goldziher. Hunwick appears to have been the first academic to recognize al-Kābarī's reliance on Ibn Tumart. See Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, volume 4, 12.

and the footstool (*al-kursī*), the heavens and the earth; along with everything that is in them and between them.

All of creation is subjected to His power. Not one molecule moves except by His permission. Besides Him, there is no disposer of affairs in His creation. He has no partner in sovereignty. *"He is the Ever Living, the Self-Subsisting. He is neither seized by slumber nor sleep."*³⁰ To Him belong what is in the highest heavens and the lower earths. *"He knows the unseen and what is apparent."*³¹ *"Nothing is hidden from Him in the earth or in the heaven."*³² *"He knows whatever is on land or in the sea. Not a leaf falls except by His knowledge, nor any seed in the dark recesses of the earth, nor anything moist or dry, but that it is in a clear book."*³³ *"He surrounds all things in knowledge."*³⁴ *"He keeps a numbered account of all things."*³⁵ *"He does whatever He wills."*³⁶ [Indeed] He has the capacity to do whatever He wills. To Him belong the dominion and the treasures (of all creation). To Him belong might and perpetuity. To Him belong the ruling and the judgment. To Him belong all praise and laudation. To Him belong the most beautiful names.³⁷

There is no defense against His decree, and no obstacle to His benefaction. He does what He wills in His kingdom and governs His creation by what He wills. He desires no reward and fears no punishment. He is not bound by any right, nor governed by any rule. Every blessing is a generous bounty from Him, and every trial is a manifestation of His justice. *"He is not questioned about what He does, but they are the ones questioned."*³⁸

He existed before the creation. He does not have a before nor an after. He has no above and no below, no right and no left, no in front and no behind, no collectivity and no individual part. It cannot be specified when, where, or how He is. His being is not confined to place, for he brought place into being. He regulates time, but He is

30 Holy Qur'ān, 2:255.

31 Holy Qur'ān, 6:73.

32 Holy Qur'ān, 3:5.

33 Holy Qur'ān, 6:59.

34 Holy Qur'ān, 65:12.

35 Holy Qur'ān, 72:28.

36 Holy Qur'ān, 11:107.

37 The version of al-Kābarī's *Bustān* from the Timbuktu's Ahmad Baba Institute adds the words here "... and the most sublime attributes."

38 Holy Qur'ān, 21:23.

not bound by time, nor designated by space. The imagination (*al-wahm*) cannot fathom Him. The intellect (*al-'aql*) cannot describe Him. The mind (*al-dhihn*) cannot particularize Him. The ego-self (*al-nafs*) has no access to His semblance. He does not take shape in the imagination, nor does He explain Himself to the intellect. Imagination and thought cannot obtain to Him. He is not encompassed by direction or horizon. He overcomes all imagination. *"Sight does not comprehend Him, but He comprehends all sight. He is the Graciously Subtle, the Aware."*³⁹ *"There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the all-Hearing, the all-Seeing."*⁴⁰ *"He is the ever Living, there is no god but Him, so worship Him with sincerity in the religion. All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds."*⁴¹

This is followed by Muhammad al-Kabārī's own summary of the important points:

The first incumbency on humanity is the cognizance of God (*ma'rifat Allāh*), Glorious and Exalted. One must also have knowledge (of the nature) of created things, thereby denying any semblance between the Creator and the created. One must thus deny any place, partner, time, or deficiency to God, and confirm His decree, power, justice, and excellence. One must have faith in the ambiguous verses of the Qur'an, and in what came with the Messengers in terms of revelation (*risāla*).

One must deny ten specifications (to God): before, after, above, below, right, left, collectivity (*kull*), partition (*ba'd*), front, back. There was no beginning to His preexistence, and there is no end to His eternity. He knows what will be before it comes into being, collectively and individually. Everything is brought forth into light (of being) by Him,⁴² not by themselves, and He provides sustenance for all things. In Him is final return of all things, whether on high or low. He knows what is above the above, and what is below the below. Nothing is hidden from Him, and nothing eludes Him from either side (of creation). Nothing defies Him from any direction (in the universe). His throne overspreads the earth and the heavens.⁴³ He is praised in all conditions. To Him belong all preceding and all

39 Holy Qur'an, 6:103.

40 Holy Qur'an, 42:11. This is where the text ends in Goldziher's version.

41 Holy Qur'an, 40:65.

42 *Hall kull* in Arabic; the translation here would thus be a loose rendition.

43 The wording in the Ahmad Baba Institute MS is "heavens and the earth", thus quoting more precisely the Holy Qur'an verse 2:255.

following, all easts and all wests. No request exceeds Him, and no fugitive escapes Him. He knows what is hidden at night and what is conspicuous at day. If any of these ten specifications had been contravened, that would entail origination (*al-hudūth*) and dependency on created entities, and the Creator, glorious is He, is self-sufficient, worthy of praise.

Al-Kābarī's introduction is thus mostly preoccupied with the invocation of the Muslim doctrine of God's oneness (*tawhīd*). Of course, terms like "obligatory" (*wājib*) and "mature person" (*mukallif*) specifically invoke a legal discourse: such doctrinal basics are considered the theological preconditions for all Muslim piety. This reliance on *al-'Aqīda al-Murshida* attests to its relatively wide circulation; the work was translated into Latin in the thirteenth century, and also commented on by the fifteenth-century Algerian Muhammad al-Sanūsī.⁴⁴ In reproducing Ibn Tūmart's short catechism on the subject within the context of a discourse on "benefits," the *Bustān* suggests that such works might be considered as advantageous special prayers – some to heal the body and some to heal the soul.

Ibn Tūmart's *al-'Aqīda al-Murshida* appears to have been the primary pedagogical text for the teaching of basic theology through North and West Africa from the twelfth to the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries, when it would be gradually replaced by Muhammad al-Sanūsī's *al-'Aqīda al-Sughrā*.⁴⁵ The *al-'Aqīda al-Murshida*, like other treatises of the Ash'arī theological school, was marked by a condensed simplicity aiming to strike a middle path between the perceived heretical extremes of anthropomorphism and philosophical abstraction in the understanding of divine attributes.⁴⁶

Rather than criticizing perceived anthropomorphists, al-Kābarī no doubt uses Ibn Tūmart's catechism to address a significant liability in the employment of the type of powerful spiritual weaponry the *Bustān* contains. Indeed, a recent analysis of similar manuscripts in West

44 William al-Sharif, *The Dearest Quest: A Biography of Ibn Tūmart* (Tranent, Scotland: Jerusalem Academic Publications, 2010), 121-122.

45 Dorrit van Dalen, *Doubt, Scholarship and Society in 17th-Century Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 109; Wright, "Islamic Intellectual Tradition," 67.

46 For more on Ash'arī thought in between the perceived extremes of Mu'tazalī and literalist approaches, see Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (trans. Liadain Sherrard, London: Kegan Paul, 1962), 113-115.

Africa describes their contents as "magic discourses,"⁴⁷ perhaps suggesting that works like the *Bustān* might be considered magic spell-books. Even if al-Kābarī would not have described his own practices as magic/sorcery (*sihr*), the capacity to access the hidden power of the Holy Qur'an, divine names, and Arabic letters certainly presented a challenge to the ordinary Muslim. If a specific talisman constructed with particular verses of the Holy Qur'an was found to be efficacious in protecting the wearer from the "evil eye" or for attracting love among creation, a person might come to rely on the amulet rather than on God for the obtainment of his need. As the Ottoman scholar Mehmed Birgivi (d. 1573) reasoned: "It is possible that charms and spells are forbidden only to those who think that they are the only means of cure. Those who believe both sickness and its cure are from God, and that medical intervention is in the hand of God, may also use charms and spells."⁴⁸ As 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (1492/897 H.) explained, "Know that the subsidiary causes (*asbāb*) are all in the hand of God, and He is the healer, none other ... everything other than Him is but a means (*sabab*)."⁴⁹ For al-Kābarī, beginning with Ibn Tūmart's coherent articulation of God's oneness served to remind his reader that there is no power or cause in creation except God's power and agency. Wearing a talisman for protection in battle, for example, was no different for the God servant than donning metal armor. God was the ultimate protector, and seeking God's protection by means of secondary causes in the creation was simply good manners with the Creator. According to the Palestinian scholar 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731), "Seeking medicine is loved and is the path of the Prophet (SAW) and his companions, and of the righteous ancestors (*salaf*)... unlike the exaggerators among the sufis who do nothing claiming everything is fated."⁵⁰

47 Ariela Marcus-Sells, *Sorcery or Science? Contesting Knowledge and Practice in West African Sufi Texts* (Penn State Press, 2022), 11-16.

48 Muhammad Birgivi, *al-Tarīqa al-Muhammadiyya* (trans. Tosun Bayrak, *The Path of Muhammad: a book on Islamic Morals and Ethics*, Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2005), 98; as cited in Wright, *Realizing Islam: The Tijaniyya in North Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Muslim World* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 42.

49 Al-Sha'rānī in al-Nābulusī, *al-Hadīqa al-nadiyya*, as cited in Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 43.

50 Al-Nābulusī, *al-Hadīqa al-nadiyya*, as cited in Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 42-43.

In any case, al-Kābarī was clearly invested, as was Ibn Tūmart, in laying out the strict Ash'arī position of God's incomparability with creation, specifically in relation to space and time. While theology is often considered a strictly rational exercise, here the reference to knowledge as *ma'rifa* or "gnosis" connotes a potential experiential awareness of God's oneness (*tawhīd*). The possible influence of such theological formulations on the later West African tradition of initiatory theology known as *Kabbe* deserves note,⁵¹ as does its foundation for later West African sufi formulations of gnosis.

Al-Kābarī's Sufism

As if to substantiate the broad understanding of "benefits," immediately following the discussion of theology that the translation below details, al-Kābarī proceeds to discuss the "benefits" of the opening sura of the Holy Qur'an, *al-Fātiha*. He includes the following narration, the origin of which we have been unable to trace:⁵²

It has been related that Caesar, the King of the Romans, once wrote a letter to the Prince of the Faithful, 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, may God be pleased with him, saying:

The Gospel (*al-Injīl*) attests to the existence of a revealed prayer (*sūra*), absent seven (of twenty-eight) letters. God will make the body of whoever reads this *sūra* forbidden to the Hellfire. It does not contain (the letters) *fā'*, *shīn*, *zā'*, *khā'*, *zā'*, *jīm*, or *thā'*. We searched for this prayer in the Gospel, but we did not find it there. We searched in the Torah, but we did not find it there. We searched in the Psalms (*al-Zabūr*), but we did not find it there. Have you found it in your scripture (*Kitāb*)?

'Umar b. al-Khattāb read this letter and informed the (Prophet's other) Companions of its contents. Then (Ubayy) Ibn Ka'b said, "This is a reference to (the opening chapter of the Qur'an beginning with) 'All praise is due to God, Lord of all the worlds.' O Prince of the Faithful, it is absent the letters mentioned. Then 'Umar b. al-Khattāb wrote back to Caesar the King of the Romans to inform him (of their

51 Louis Brenner, *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (London: C. Hurst, 2005), 73-74.

52 A similar version of this story that references such a letter exchange between a Caesar and an Abbasid Caliph is mentioned in the appendix of Yasin al-Jibouri, *Mary and Jesus in Islam* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011), 223-224. Al-Jibouri appears to be citing from earlier unmentioned Shī'ī sources.

findings). At this, the Caesar converted to Islam and died a Muslim by the blessing of this *sūra*.⁵³

The text goes on to explore the reasons for the exclusion of the seven mentioned letters. For example, the letter *fā'* is not included among the letters of the Qur'an's opening sura because it represents *firqa*, or sectarian division. Later, al-Kābarī prescribes the recitation of this sura seventy times, along with other suras and verses of the Holy Qur'an, over a container filled with the water of an "abundant spring rain (*matar nīsān*)" as a cure for all illness.⁵⁴ The lengthy discussion of *al-Fātiha* thus encompasses al-Kābarī's wide understanding of the meaning of "benefit" – from salvation and protection from things like sectarian division that spoil one's faith, to chanting prayers over spring rainwater to cure bodily sickness.

Such mention of verses of the Holy Qur'an to be recited as a form of liturgical remembrance appears to mirror Sufi manuals of beneficial prayers elsewhere in the Muslim world. As if to sustain the Sufi nature of the text, al-Kābarī then proceeds to a discussion of spiritual purification, emphasizing the movement from darkness to light and worldly abstinence. He includes two narrations, from the Prophet (SAW) and Abū Bakr (RA) respectively, that are significant for their lack of appearance (to our knowledge) in any canonical hadith collection. Here, al-Kābarī cites the Prophet (SAW) attesting to worldly abstinence and supererogatory worship:

I sought provision, and found it in the morning prayer (*salāt al-duḥā*). I sought contentment, and found it in the honoring of guests. I sought success, and found it in silence. I sought enlightenment of the heart, and found it in fasting in summer. I sought the wealth of this world and the next, and found it in the night prayer (*qiyām al-layl*).⁵⁵

This narration speaks to practical means by which the heart can be purified of worldly attachments. Similarly, al-Kābarī has the Prophet's companion Abū Bakr (RA) speaking to the means by which darkness can be dispelled in this world and the next:

53 al-Kābarī, *Bustān al-fawa'id*, 2-3.

54 Ibid, 5.

55 Ibid, 8.

There are five darknesses, and five dispelling lights (*sirāḡi*), one for each darkness. The world is one darkness, and the light for it is the fear of God (*taqwā*). Sins are another darkness, and the light for them is repentance. Disbelief is a darkness, and the light for it (is to say) "there is no deity except God". The hereafter is darkness, and the light for it is righteous deeds. The bridge (over hellfire) is darkness, and the light for it is certainty.⁵⁶

Remarkable here is the theme of illumination that often infuses Sufi literature. Such a framework best comprehends the ethical exhortations al-Kābarī means to communicate, similar in kind to Rumi's periodic assignment of unsourced statements to the Prophet (SAW).⁵⁷ The possibly contested authenticity of these narrations is not really the point: pre-modern Islamic scholarship often embraced "weak" narrations for teaching purposes, reserving more rigorous verification for narrations that constituted legal rulings (*ahkām*).⁵⁸

The "Esoteric Sciences"

Al-Kābarī's much longer discussion of esoteric sciences is remarkable for its comprehensive application. After a section on supplications that connects his overview of remembrances and Sufism to special prayers, al-Kābarī begins with reference to various prayers for protection against tyrants, enemies, enviers, sorcery, and jinn. Aside from spoken invocations, several of these prayers are meant to be written and worn on the body as talismans, erased in water for bathing purposes, or written in the sand. There are also prayers for healing, for love and attraction, and for fertility. There are continuous references to devotional practices, such as "ten words by which Moses prayed to his Lord."⁵⁹ Overall, such prayers likely added to, rather than detracted from, al-Kābarī's scholarly prestige in fifteenth-century Timbuktu.

Paradoxically for an apparent work on "secrets," al-Kābarī's title, "Beneficial and Useful Prayers," appears to target a wider, more general audience beyond an initiated elite of fellow esotericists. Since al-Kābarī writes of his book, "may God grant benefit in it for us and

⁵⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁵⁷ See for example, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Signs of the Unseen: the discourses of Jalaluddin Rumi* (trans. W.M. Jackson, Putney, Vermont: Threshold Books, 1994).

⁵⁸ Brown, "Using Unreliable Hadīths in Sunni Islam," 1-52.

⁵⁹ al-Kābarī, *Bustān al-fawā'id*, 11-12.

for all Muslims," this leaves the researcher in a curious ethical dilemma. Some of the included prayers closely mirror prayers designated elsewhere as "secret," and would clearly be subject to censure by contemporary Muslim reformists. On the other hand, al-Kābarī did not seem to limit the audience of his work in his own time, suggesting that there was a wide currency of "special prayers" in medieval West Africa, and that al-Kābarī's own scholarly credentials would have silenced any criticism. Alternatively, he may have relied on the difficulty of acquiring and reading the text to limit the audience. A similar precept was communicated by the Egyptian esoteric master Ahmad al-Shinnāwī (d. 1619), who reportedly said of his lengthy commentary on Muhammad al-Ghawth's *al-Jawāhir al-khamsa*, "Anyone who finds this book has permission to use it."⁶⁰ Despite our own disposition to keep secret the precise content of Islamic esoteric sciences in accordance with the wishes of practitioners, the analysis of al-Kābarī's text indicates that a lay readership might appreciate the prayers it contains. Nonetheless, the reader is reminded that the practices referenced below, no matter how strange to modern sensibilities, were laid out by one of the most prominent experts of Islamic law in his time.

Al-Kābarī claims that he is not really the author of an original text, but that he has only gathered the beneficial and useful knowledge among the wise men of divine provision, and transmitted from the books of scholars and the righteous.⁶¹ While al-Kābarī does not mention his exact textual references, some exploration of earlier Islamic esoteric influences in West Africa is warranted. One obvious source could have been various works attributed to Ahmad al-Būnī (d. 1225, Cairo),⁶² or perhaps the "encyclopedic lettrist opus" *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-hurūf wa-l-awfāq* of 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Bistāmī (d. 1454,

60 Shaykh al-Tijānī 'Alī Cissé, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, February 2022. Shaykh al-Tijānī showed me a copy of al-Shinnāwī's commentary, consisting of more than 700 printed pages, that he was preparing for publication in Egypt.

61 Al-Kābarī, *Bustān al-fawā'id*, 1; also cited in Wright, "Islamic Intellectual Tradition," 66.

62 For more on the circulation of al-Būnī's works, see Noah Gardiner, "Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Ahmad al-Būnī's Works," *Arabica*, 64, 3/4 (2017), 405-441. Gardiner considers al-Būnī's most famous work, *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*, to be falsely attributed to him.

Aleppo).⁶³ Arabic compilations of "secrets" may reasonably have been among the "texts [Mansa] Mūsā brought back from Cairo," especially given that Mansa Mūsā's son and successor Maghā was later known in oral traditions as "Maghan the Sorcerer,"⁶⁴ presumably for his talismanic expertise rather than a return to Islamically-prohibited practices of sorcery. Al-Kābarī's text demonstrates some theological influence from the North African Almohad leader Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130),⁶⁵ suggesting that esoteric practices associated with Ibn Tūmart as the legendary successor of al-Ghazālī may have been available to al-Kābarī, perhaps contained in al-Ghazālī's text, *al-Sirr al-maknūn*.⁶⁶ The name "al-Ghazālī" appears on West African tombstones no later than the fifteenth century, included in "unusually long genealogies, which must have been also understood as chains of transmission of knowledge."⁶⁷ Al-Kābarī's own *Bustān al-fawā'id* contains reference to a three-by-three "*budūh* magic square"⁶⁸ rendered famous by al-Ghazālī's transcription of the square in his autobiographical *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*.⁶⁹ Given al-Kābarī's apparent predilection towards Ibn Tūmart, it is tempting to associate such an alleged Ghazalian inheritance with another collection of esoteric sciences called *Kanz al-ʿulūm wa-l-durr al-manzūm*, sometimes attributed to Ibn Tūmart, but more likely authored in the thirteenth century.⁷⁰ Notwithstanding such possible

63 Ibid, 233.

64 Michael A. Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 145.

65 Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, volume 4, 12; Wright, "Islamic Intellectual Tradition," 67.

66 Ignaz Goldziher, *Le Livre de Mohammed Ibn Toumert*, 18-19; Wright, "Islamic Intellectual Tradition," 67.

67 Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions*, cxlix.

68 The name so derived because the four letters at each of the four corners of the square render the name *b-d-ū-h*. Farouk Yahya, *Magic and Divination in Malay Illustrated Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 203-204.

69 Al-Kābarī, *Bustān al-fawā'id*, 38; Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error: Five Key Texts including his Spiritual Autobiography*, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* (trans. R.J. McCarthy, Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2004), 95. While not all diagrams are shared between the two copies of the *Bustān* consulted for this article, this *budūh* square is also found on page 20 of the Ahmad Baba manuscript.

70 Jean-Charles Coulon makes this connection in his article, "The *Kitāb Sharāsīm al-Hindīyya* and Medieval Islamic Occult Sciences," in *Islamicate Occult Sciences*, 342. However, the catalogue of *Islamic Medical Manuscripts at the National Library of*

external influences, al-Kābarī's text must be considered an original contribution to the field of Islamic sciences, drawing from a variety of Arabic texts and oral transmissions in the Middle Niger available in fifteenth-century West Africa.

Al-Kābarī's text also contains specific mention of scholarly relations with Sultans. The first reference is early in the manuscript, with a heading, "What to recite when entering in the presence of the Sultan." Al-Kābarī connects such a preoccupation with the early Muslim community, reporting a *hadīth* from the Prophet Muhammad (SAW):

As reported by Abū Hurayra, God's Messenger, God's blessing and peace upon him, "Whoever is singled out by the despotism of a deliberately (unjust) sultan or arrogant oppressor, let him read upon entering his presence, 'In the Name of God, the Mighty, the All Powerful. Enter by the gate, for if you enter by it, surely you will be victorious. Put your trust in God if you are indeed believers. [And the verse] He said, Fall back [into the Fire], and do not speak to Me. [And the verse] I have taken refuge in my Lord and your Lord, lest you should assault me. [And the verse] Enter here in peace and security. [And the verse] Their plots will not harm you in the least. Surely God encompasses all that you do. Indeed, God the exalted will defend you from his evil and turn his plots back against his throat, and God will replace your fear with security.⁷¹

This *hadīth* seemingly falls in the same category of several others employed in al-Kābarī's text: it cannot be located in the canonical collections of Prophetic narrations, but it was no doubt considered authentic enough to be acted upon by al-Kābarī's students.⁷² The Holy Qur'an verses employed here are noteworthy for their relevance to the theme of confronting injustice. The first verse describes the words of

Medicine lists this text as authored by another Ibn Tūmart al-Maghribī (d. 1001) who "is not to be confused" with the latter Ibn Tūmart.

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/magical1.html>. Accessed on 24 March 2022.

71 Qur'ān, 5:23; 23:108; 44:20, 15:46; 3:120. Several of the Arabic words here contain variant readings of the Qur'ān according to the *warsh* (as opposed to the now more popular *hafs*) recitation of the Qur'ān. For more on the comparison between these two variant readings of the Qur'ān approved in the Prophet's own lifetime, see Vugar Garadaghli, "Vocal Inflection in the Warsh Transmission (compared to the Hafs Transmission)," *Laplage em Revista*, 7, 3B (2021), 481-494.

72 For other such examples in al-Kābarī's text, see Zachary Wright, "Islamic Intellectual Tradition of Sudanic Africa," 66, 68.

the righteous followers of Moses (AS) when entering the "promised land" despite it being populated by powerful and oppressive people. The second verse is God's words to the miscreants who demand to be removed from their punishment in Hellfire. The third verse is the statement of Moses (AS) when he enters the presence of Pharaoh to demand the release of the Hebrew people. The fourth verse contains God's assurance to the believers to enter Paradise after having been protected from the accursed Satan. The last verse refers to some Jewish conspirators who, according to Muslim accounts, plotted to kill the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in Medina.

Al-Kābarī's text also contains prayers to overcome opponents while wrestling, to ease the pain of beatings, and to protect from weapons in battle.⁷³ This last appears to include a number of opaque combinations of Arabic letters that should be read over water that is later used for bathing and drinking: "No weapon will harm you in the course of war or other (conflict), if God wills." In other words, scholarly prayerful exertions did not always exempt scholars from actually getting their hands dirty in physical combat.

The single greatest preoccupation of many collections of Islamic esoteric sciences, including al-Kābarī's *Bustān al-fawā'id*, appears to have been women. A later collection of secrets from the region, that of Saydī 'Alī Cissé (d. 1982, Senegal), which counts the *Bustān al-fawā'id* as a key source, contains a separate section on prayers relating to women, with an introduction emphasizing patience with women: "Whoever bears a cruel word from one's family has the reward of seventy martyrs."⁷⁴ Such statements should of course be contextualized with similar assurances given to women. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) once told a woman that her patience with her husband in the house would afford her the same reward as those who fought in Jihad.⁷⁵ In any case, the overall message of esoteric collections like those of al-Kābarī and Cissé is to encourage marriage despite its challenges.

73 Al-Kābarī, *Bustān al-fawā'id*, 21, 55, 40-41.

74 Saydī 'Alī Cissé, "Mu'awwanat al-ikhwān fī ma'āshirat al-niswān," in *Kunnāsh al-ākhir*, 3.

75 Janan Izadi, "Women's Nature in the Qur'an: Hermeneutical Considerations on Traditional and Modern Exegeses," *Open Theology*, 6, 1 (2020), 344.

Praise be to God. We seek His assistance and forgiveness. We seek refuge in God from evil and from our own lethargy. Whomever God guides, no one can misguide him. Whomever God allows to stray, there is no guide for him.⁷⁶ I bear witness that there is no deity save God and that Muhammad (SAW) is His servant and messenger. Fear God as He should be feared and die not except in a state of submission.⁷⁷ Fear God, through whom you claim rights of one another, and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you). Ever does God watch over you.⁷⁸ Fear God and speak the truth.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The *Bustān al-fawā'id* substantiates al-Kābarī's reputation as a "renaissance" scholar, gifted with knowledge in a variety of fields. He is at once the theologian, Qur'anic exegete, narrator of traditions, Sufi master, healer, esotericist, and spiritual warrior. While initiatory transmission was no doubt involved in much of this knowledge, he specifically mentions his hope that his work will benefit all Muslims. His students certainly took more from his learning circles than knowledge of jurisprudence, something which contributed to his scholarly reputation. Yahyā al-Tadallīsī thus described his teacher as "a civilized jurist who transmitted pearls of knowledge."⁸⁰ Analysis of the *Bustān al-fawā'id* helps give some shape to the scholarly "civilization" that produced al-Kābarī, as well as some of the "pearls of knowledge" that helped ensure Timbuktu's lasting reputation in West Africa.

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76 Holy Qur'ān, 7:186.

77 Holy Qur'ān, 3:102.

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Part II: Intellectual and Spritual Movements

The Culture of Islamic Scholarship and Knowledge Transmission in Mauritania, the "Land of Million Poets"

Abubakar Sadiq Abdulkadir*

Introduction

Close to two decades ago, I left Damascus, where I had been studying numerous Arabo-Islamic sciences, for Mauritania, where I ended up spending several years to continue my studies as a student of sacred knowledge. I had chosen to study at a celebrated and reputable traditional centre of Islamic learning (*Mahdara*) in al-Nabbāghiyya, one of several desert villages in Mauritania. On one occasion, 'Abd al-Malik, a student and friend of mine became ill. One of the teachers of the *mahdara*, who happened to be one of our instructors, noticed the student's absence from his teaching circle that day and, after hearing of the student's illness, visited him after class.

Having sat with the student for a little while, the Shaykh made a silent supplication (*du'ā'*) for the student and then requested a pen and paper. Upon delivery, he remained in his sitting position for a few seconds in what looked like silent contemplation. Finally, he brought his pen onto the paper, scribbling as we watched. When he had finished writing, he handed the piece of paper to the sick student. In those few minutes, the Shaykh had composed some poetic verses in short metres (*rajaz*) on the student's state of health, asking God to heal (*shifā'*) him. Those of us who were at the time unfamiliar with the tradition of poetry and verse-making were astonished by the Shaykh's composing of the verses in beautiful prosodic form. We were, in fact, so impressed that we took to memorizing them immediately. The first two verses read:

We seek in the graciousness of *al-Malik* (the King)
Healings for 'Abd al-Malik (servant of the King)
And may his dwelling place
Exude pure sweet fragrance

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I encountered the same kind of scenario later, but this time, it was with another teacher, and I was the sick person. I had gone to his house for my daily lessons of the Egyptian Ibn Hishām's Arabic grammar text, *Qatr al-Nadà wa-Ball al-Sadà*. When I happened to tell him about my illness, he took the opportunity to compose poetic verses of prayer for my healing.

During my stays and visits to different people and villages in Mauritania, I had many more poetic experiences, ranging from scholarly demonstrations to students' exchanges and plays. In other parts of the Arabo-Muslim world, on occasions like the ones mentioned earlier, the most likely recommendation of a Muslim scholar would be the recitation of certain prayers based on transmitted supplications from the Qur'an, hadith (prophetic traditions), and litanies by scholars and saints. Mauritanian scholars, however, would compose verses or versify supplications or prayers on a regular basis.

Poetry, or the art of verse-making, is a fixture in the lives of Mauritians—an important medium of intellectual and scholarly discourse. It is a rarity for Mauritanian scholars to not have composed a collection of poetry, and it is even rarer not to find gatherings of students where some form of poetry and verses are sung, chanted, or recited.

In different parts of Mauritania, book introductions and forewords, religious and pedagogical texts, panegyrics (*madh*), responsa (*radd*), political campaigns, polemics, and even correspondences (*rasā'il*) are versified or written in poetic forms. A perusal of the catalogues of Mauritanian manuscripts, such as Charles C. Stewart's *Arabic Literature of Africa* (ALA V), show enormous works of poetry and verses produced by scholars from Mauritania and the Western Sahara, the country's neighbour and cultural affiliate.¹ Therefore, it is not

1 Charles C. Stewart and Sidi Ahmed Ould Ahmed Salim, eds., *Arabic Literature of Africa*, Vol. 5, *The Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara*, 2 Vols (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Charles C. Stewart, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts among the Ahl al-Shaykh Sidiyya, Boutilimit, Mauritania* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1991); Ulrich Rebstock, *Maurische Literaturgeschichte* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2001). The same applies to other Saharan and West African countries, ranging from the ones at the *Centre de Documentation et de Recherches Historiques Ahmed Baba* in Timbuktu, Mali, to the Nigerian National Archives Kaduna, Nigeria. See Sidi Amar Ould Ely, *Handlists of Manuscripts in the Centre de Documentation et de Recherches Historiques Ahmed Baba, Timbuktu* ed. Julian Johansen (al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, London,

surprising that Mauritania has become synonymous with the tradition of poetry and verse making—hence the sobriquet, the “Land of Million Poets” (*Balad al-milyūn shā‘ir*).

This tradition of poetry and verse-making in Mauritania reportedly ‘emerged’ comparatively late, in the second half of the seventeenth to early eighteenth century. During this period, Mauritania saw a paradigm shift in intellectual production away from prose. Key scholarly texts on jurisprudence, logic, Arabic grammar, rhetoric were composed and/or transformed into poetry; new poetic compositions fed a flourishing literary production. This poetic genre would later dominate and characterize the culture of Islamic scholarship and knowledge transmission in the region since the last centuries. This begs the questions: how and why did this large desert country emerge as one of the most prolific poetic cultures of the (Islamic) world? What impact did this development have on the articulation of Islam, the culture of scholarship and knowledge transmission in a moment of intellectual and political transformation in Muslim West Africa?

In this article, the author explores the questions posed above while also providing a critical historical and textual examination of the ‘emergence’ of the classical Arabic verse tradition in Mauritania, which came to dominate the region’s culture of Islamic scholarship and knowledge transmission.

Before delving into the subject matter, it is crucial to clarify that the concept of “verse,” as used in this article, refers to both *shi‘r* (poetry) and *nazm* (versification). This is because the two terms, though distinct, are often used interchangeably due to their shared prosodic origins. Furthermore, the term “tradition” is not intended to imply a static or unchanging entity, but rather “something that, through struggle, goes through continual transformation as it is transmitted.”²

1995), Vols. 1-10 and Baba Yunus Muhammad, *Handlists of Manuscripts in the Nigerian National Archives of Kaduna*, ed. John Hunwick (al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, London, 1995), Vols. 1-3. See also Bruce S. Hall and Charles Stewart, “The Historic “Core Curriculum” and the Book Market in Islamic West Africa,” in *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, eds. Graziano Kratli and Ghislaine Lydon (Brill: Leiden. Boston, 2011), 109-174.

2 Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in France West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19.

To answer the questions, it is essential to first situate the concept of the 'emergence' and establishment of Mauritania's Arabic verse tradition as a social phenomenon, and then to "locate" it within its specific geographical and social context. This is key because understanding the impact of this literary tradition on shaping religious and intellectual spheres requires acknowledging that it developed within and was continuously shaped by its changing contexts.

Setting the Stage

Major literature discussing the history and development of Islam in the Sahara and Sudan regions tends to focus on the eleventh-century Almoravid (Murābitūn) Islamic reform movement as the take-off point. However, some sources acknowledge that the processes of Islamization in these regions began earlier. These early developments can be traced to the military expeditions of 'Uqba ibn Nāfi' (d. 62/682) and his grandson, 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ḥabīb, in the Sahara, as well as to the commercial exchanges between various geographical, ethnic, and racial groups. These groups included North African Berbers and Arabs, some of whom were Ibādīs, as well as the Soninke people in cities like Walāta and Shinqīt.

That said, it was the emergence of the Murābitūn movement that marked a defining moment in the widespread adoption of Islam and the establishment of a distinctive Islamic intellectual tradition and culture, not only in the Western Sahara, where the movement originated, but also in the Sudan, including the ancient Kingdom of Ghana. Imam Abū Bakr al-Murādī al-Hadramī, a key figure in the movement, is said to have facilitated the teaching of creed and jurisprudence among the Saharan Berbers. The Mālikī school of law (Mālikiyya) also spread to other parts of the Western Sudan and further into the southern Niger regions.

Islamic and Arabic learning would later excel, particularly among Sanhaja nomads in different parts of the Adrār and Tagānit caravan towns in the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. Though the popular language of the Berbers was Aznāga, "classical Arabic works on many

subjects were studied and cherished even if the grammar books and standard texts were few."³

There was a highly advanced educational curriculum from the Sāqiyat al-Hamrā and other parts of the Sahara. The study of the sciences of jurisprudence, Qur'an, Arabic language and creed flourished in numerous trading centres and cities such as Shinqīt, Tajākant, Tishīt, Timbuktu, Wādān and, most notably, in the Saharan nomadic school of Islamic learning, known as *Mahdara* (pl. *Mahādir*).⁴ The city of Shinqīt had some of the best scholars and centres of production of Islamic knowledge, where it garnered reputations for high-level scholarship in the eyes of well-respected Muslim scholars throughout the Islamic world.⁵ While in Tinīgi in the Adrar, the Lamtūna Tajākant became renowned for their learned men. It was a learning hub for hundreds of students of both genders who studied the *Muwatta'* of Imam Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795) by heart.⁶ In fact, the reputation for learning among Tinīgi's Jakanī people earned them the descriptive *ilm Jakanī*, meaning, "knowledge resides among the Jakanīs." Under the Midlish group (*Majlis al-ilm*) in some northern settlements, *al-Mudawwana* of Sahnūn ibn Sa'īd ibn Ḥabīb (d. 240/854), a Mālikī manual and book of reference was memorized among the youths. The Idaw al-Hājj, like the Midlish, were groups famously known for Islamic scholarship. Some of their scholars settled in cities such as Wādān. In fact, some of these scholars were founders of these cities. For example, Sharīf 'Abd al-Mūmin 'Uthmān was reported to be one of the founders of Wādān. Their movement led to the creation of new centres of Islamic learning, scholastic networks and commerce.⁷

Conflicts and internal dissent among the people of the Sahara and the Sudan were rife. For example, in 1433, Saharan Tuaregs conquered

3 H. T. Norris, "The Znāga and Islam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 32, no. 3 (1969): 498.

4 Chouki El Hamel, "The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in Moorish Society from the Rise of the Almoravids to the 19th Century," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29, no. 1 (1999): 62-87; Erin Pettigrew, "History of Islam in Mauritania," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (University of Oxford, 2019).

5 See Erin Pettigrew's "History of Islam in Mauritania."

6 H. T. Norris, "Muslim Sanhaja Scholars of Mauritania," in *Studies in West African Islamic History, The Cultivators of Islam* 1, ed. John Ralph Willis (Frank Cass, London, 1979), 149.

7 E Ann McDougall, "The Economics of Islam in the Southern Sahara: The Rise of the Kunta Clan," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 29, no. 1 (1986): 46-49.

Timbuktu, a centre of Islamic scholarship at the time and in subsequent centuries. Scholars of Timbuktu, apart from their link to the Andalusian and Maghribian scholarly tradition were exposed to the scholastic ones of Egypt. Some of them had contacts with and studied under Egyptian scholars during travels for pilgrimage. This cemented their knowledge of other sciences outside of theology and the Mālikī jurisprudence that they knew and followed in the Sahara and the Sudan.

Numerous towns and cities of Mauritania, such as Shinqīt and Tinīgi, experienced regular feuds among the Moorish people, which led to disorder and the abandonment of these towns and settlements. The feuds in these regions affected Islamic learning, Arabic and Islamic Sanhaja scholastic legacy, leading to a decline in the scholasticism in certain centres and limited revival in others. Despite all of these, there was “no extinction of Islamic learning. It survived and rekindled in spite of ethnic turmoil.”⁸

However, it could be argued that three major events occurring between the fourteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries had a profound and lasting impact on the Sahara and Sahel. These events would later shape and ‘reconstruct’ the culture of Islamic scholarship and intellectual traditions in the region, including the Arabic verse tradition of Mauritania.

The first of these was the fall of Granada in 1492, which led to the persecution of Muslims by Christian rulers in the Iberian Peninsula and triggered large-scale emigrations. While migrations had occurred prior to this period, the fall of Granada intensified and periodically renewed contact between North Africa and Andalusia. This, in turn, further stimulated the settlement of refugee and emigrant scholars from Spain and the Maghrib in various localities across the Sahara and Sudan.⁹ The Saharan and Sudanese intellectual traditions became more connected to the Andalusian and Maghribian ones, and they “became associated with an indigenous class of Muslim scholars” in the region. According to Paul Lovejoy, this era came to be known as the

⁸ Norris, “Muslim Sanhaja Scholars of Mauritania,” 149.

⁹ Ibid., 152.

'Andalusia period'.¹⁰ The second influential event and development was the Moroccan Sultan Ahmad al-Mansūr al-Sa'dī's (d. 1012/1603) invasion of the city of Timbuktu in 1591, which led to the death and imprisonment of several Timbuktu scholars and jurists, including Qādī 'Umar and the legendary Ahmad Bābā, who were put in chains and deported to Marrakech. The Sa'dī invasion of the Songhay Empire, in some ways, devastated the commercial activities and intellectual centre of medieval Timbuktu, which was at the height of its Islamic scholastic tradition.

However ... it did not mark a decline in Saharan Islam, but rather an evolution reflecting economic and scholastic growth ...¹¹

In many ways, this event led to the 'opening' of inner Africa and marked Timbuktu's period of greatest intellectual and social influence in the Sahara and Sudan. It also triggered the migration of resident, itinerant, and refugee scholars away from Timbuktu to other Saharan commercial towns and intellectual hubs, thereby contributing to the on-going decentralization of Islamic learning and scholarship from urban centres to rural areas. Furthermore, Timbuktu's academic traditions and scholarship became increasingly intertwined with Mauritanian scholarship "with a wide expanse of interrelationships spanning the areas from Arawan, Tishit and Shingiti" at the time.¹²

The third major influential development was the southward movement of the Arab Hassānī of the Banū Ma'qil and their infiltration into different communities from the southwestern Mauritanian region of the Gebla (*Qibla*), the Senegal River, the meridian of Timbuktu and the Atlantic Ocean.¹³ This movement reportedly started in the fourteenth century and reached its peak in the seventeenth century.¹⁴

10 Paul E. Lovejoy, "Islamic Scholarship and Understanding History in West Africa before 1800," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, Volume 3: 1400-1800*, eds. Jose Rabasa et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 224.

11 McDougall, "The Economics of Islam in the Southern Sahara," 49-50.

12 Elias N. Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu, The Role of Muslim Scholars and Notables, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 71.

13 Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, "Herders, Traders and Clerics: The Impact of Trade, Religion and Warfare on the Evolution of Moorish Society," in *Herders, Warriors, and Traders: Pastoralism in Africa*, eds. John G. Galaty and Pierre Bonte (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 202.

14 The Gebla is the southwestern part (mostly the Trarza) of Mauritania, comprised of many Arabs and Znāga clans. The most famous of them were the Idaw 'Alī, Awlād

It led to some competitions for space, power and authority between the Arab Hassānī, Berber Zawāyā and other ethnic nationalities in the Sahara and Sahel regions. The Arab Hassānī wielded political power, their dominance and vigorous connection with non-Arabs would later shape the tribal, cultural and linguistic structures of this Moorish society.¹⁵ Thus, Arabic literacy and literary production increased in the Sahara and the Sudan and significantly in the southwestern region of the Gebila in present day Mauritania. As Pettigrew notes:

The use of Arabic as both a written and a spoken language began to displace...the primary languages spoken among populations there ... The Hassaniya, a vernacular form of Arabic named after the Banu Hassan, became widespread...¹⁶

Thus, the seventeenth century was marked by numerous intense conflicts, among which was the Shurr Bubba (or Sharr Babba) war, a culmination of several events that reportedly lasted for years.¹⁷ The victory of the Arab Hassānī over the Zawāyā and other ethnic and racial groups reshaped the social hierarchy, as well as political, religious, and intellectual categories in the region. As Bruce Hall notes, it was from these events "from which modern Mauritanian history is dated."

Daymān, Midlish, Tandagha, Awlād Antshāyt. The Znāga Berber clan, popularly known as the Tashumsha, is divided into five, with the Awlād Daymān as one of the top clans.

15 Chouki El Hamel, "The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in Moorish Society," 64; In some literature, some scholars use the word 'Arabization' for their discussion of the arrival and dominance of the Arabs, thereby leading to the transformation of the people and cultures of the Sahara and the western Sudan. It is important to note that the region, before the arrival of the Arabs, had been Islamized and had a presence of Arab culture through economic activities with some Muslim and Arab merchants long before the Almoravid and spread of the Banū Ma'qil in the southern parts of Morocco. See Harry T. Norris, *Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara: Studies of the Historical Events, Religious Beliefs and Social Customs which made the Remotest Sahara a Part of the Arab World* (Michigan: Longman, 1986), xxi.

16 Pettigrew, "History of Islam in Mauritania," 6.

17 For a detailed examination of Shurr Bubba, cf. Ould Saad, M. M., "Harb Shur Bubba," *la guerre de shurbubba ou la crise du 17e siècle au Sud-Ouest mauritanien* (Nouakchott: IMRS, 1993); See also Charles C. Stewart and Elizabeth Kirk Stewart, *Islam and the Social Order in Mauritania: a Case Study from the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1973), 14-16, 20; and Rahal Boubrik, "Hommes de Dieu, homes d'épée: Stratification sociale dans la société bidân," *Journal des Africanistes* 68, no: 1-2 (1998): 102.

These developments had a profound impact on the articulation of Islam and the culture of scholarship in Mauritania, revolutionizing its nomadic Islamic education system (*Mahdara*) and transforming the language and medium of knowledge transmission. This transformation also influenced the region's Arabic poetic tradition. However, it is important to note that this does not imply that no poetic or verse tradition existed in Mauritania prior to the seventeenth century. Though, our knowledge of the oldest verses to have come from the Sahara and broader West African regions are the verses of Ibrāhīm al-Kānimī, the twelfth-century grammarian and poet, from the Kanem-Borno Empire on the northern shores of Lake Chad, which he recited in the court of the Almohad Sultan, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Mansūr (r. 1184-99) in Marrakesh.¹⁸ Two verses read:

He removed from his veil, but my eyes,
Out of awe, saw him through a veil.
His favour drew me near, but being near,
Out of awe I found myself distant.¹⁹

As Abdul-Samad Abdullah argues, "it is not unreasonable to suggest that Arabic poetry in West Africa already existed at a time that we do not know of and cannot be guided to."²⁰ He further adds that "it is impossible, therefore, to assert a definite beginning or define the period during which the poetry developed."²¹ It is noteworthy, however, to speak about the poetic artistry of the verses of al-Kānimī. An observation of the verses indicates al-Kānimī's display of literary knowledge of the science of Arabic prosody, which could not be the work of a novice. It shows evidence of the flourishing of the mastery of the Arabic language and the level of its maturity at the time, as seen from the verses mentioned earlier. However, this does not direct us to

18 John Hunwick, "The Arabic Literary Tradition of Nigeria," *Research in African Literature* 28, no. 3 (1997): 210. See also Hunwick, "The Arabic Qasida in West Africa: Forms, Themes and Contexts," in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa: Classical Traditions & Modern Meanings*, eds. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 83.

19 Translations by Hunwick, "The Arabic Qasida in West Africa," 83.

20 Abdul-Samad Abdullah, "Arabic Poetry in West Africa: An Assessment of the Panegyric and Elegy Genres in Arabic Poetry of the 19th and 20th Centuries in Senegal and Nigeria," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 35, no. 3 (2004): 375.

21 Abdullah, "Arabic Poetry in West Africa," 375.

physical evidence of other works of poetry in the Sahara and West Africa before that time.

There are also sound accounts of existing Hassāniyya verses before the *Shurr Bubba* war.²² Furthermore, unlike the different and ambiguous situation of poetry and verse-making in most parts of Mauritania before the mid-seventeenth to early eighteenth century, especially in the western areas, including the Gebla, Timbuktu seemingly had a vibrant tradition of poetics, metrics and prosody in the medieval period. In his *Tā'rikh al-Sūdān*, 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sa'dī mentions how Abū al-Qāsim al-Tuwātī, Imam of the grand mosque, would recite a single ode of the Andalusian 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Yakhlaftān al-Fazāzī's (d. 1230/1815) *Ishrīniyyat* after every Friday (*Jumu'a*) prayer. Ahmad ibn Ahmad, the father of Ahmad Bābā, the Sanhaja Timbuktu scholar, wrote a commentary on the poem. The learned seventeenth century jurist, Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Mahmūd ibn Abī Bakr ibn Baghayūghu (Baghayogho) al-Wangarī (d. 1065/1655), teacher of Ahmad Bābā and nephew of the famous Timbuktu scholar Muhammad Baghayogho (d. 1002/1594), produced a versification (*manzūma*) of the *Umm al-barāhīn* of Muhammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 890/1486),²³ a large compendium of Ash'arī creed. There is also evidence of Ahmad Baba's verses, which he wrote to the people of Gao during his exile in Marrakesh. Al-Sa'dī mentions some texts that Ahmad Baba claimed to have studied under his teacher. This includes the Andalusian Diyā al-Dīn al-Khazrajī's famous text on the science of prosody, famously known as *Matn al-Khazrajīyya*. All of these are indications of the familiarity of the nuances of prosody, poetics and verse-making in Timbuktu. Also, there are a few traces and examples of literary poetry and verse-making in manuscripts by people from Walāta in the Hodh (Hawd), Wādān and Tishīt areas prior to the second half of the seventeenth century. This is not surprising because these areas had close connection with Timbuktu's elites and scholastic tradition and had served as an entrepot for refugee and emigrant scholars from Spain and the Maghrib.

22 There are also proofs of the influence of Hassāniyya verses on the works of some pioneers of the Arabic verse tradition of Mauritania, such as Muhammad Sa'id b. al-Yadālī al-Daymānī (d. 1750) in his panegyric poem: *Salāt Rabbī ma'a al-salāmi* by al-Yadālī.

23 Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu*, 72-73

Mohamed el Moktar Ould Bah, the late Mauritanian scholar of Arabic and Islamic intellectual history and literary heritage, argues that there were minor traces of literary poetry and verse-making in Mauritania before the emergence phenomenon. However, he notes that most of them were verses on intercession (*al-tawassul*), prayer for rainfall (*al-Istisqā'*) and few versifications. He also claims that the poetics and metrics of these works were not at exceptionally high-level save for some areas. Furthermore, he buttresses his argument claiming that the period before the mid-seventeenth did not have much exposure to linguistic tools and sciences such as Arabic prosody (*'ilm al-'arūd*), grammar (*'ilm al-nahw*) hence the sparse spread of literary poetry and verse-making in the region. Quick literary archaeology of texts studied and transmitted from the twelfth to the early seventeenth centuries shows that Mauritanian scholars were mostly focused on creed, jurisprudence (in the forms of *nawāzil/fatāwā* and *fiqh* manuals) and basic Arabic grammar and literature such as the *Matn al-Ajurrūmiyya*.

In addition to these arguments, there are other possible reasons for the non-pursuit of literary poetry and verse-making in most parts of Mauritania before the mid-seventeenth century, one of which was because, for centuries, some *Zawāyā Fuqahā'* reportedly had concerns about it, and in some instances, attacked its use. An incidence is reported that Nāsir al-Dīn, the Berber *Zawāyā* reformer, punished a young boy for reciting some verses on *ghazal*.²⁴ Some *Zawāyā* scholars had opposed verse-making because it promoted unhealthy qualities of vainness, slandering, and backbiting, among others. More so, they drew upon, to some extent, some verses of the Qur'an, as well as some reported hadiths and *fiqh* disapproval of it. They also reference the statement of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996) in his *Risāla*, where he said, "one is not supposed to engage in the use of poetry in abundance and be deeply involved in it."²⁵

Moreover, such an attitude towards poetry and verse-making can possibly be linked to the Almoravids' intellectual and religious legacy in the region. The Almoravids, in some instances, were critical of verse-making and the art of poetry. They were critical about profanity

24 Jamāl Hasan mentions the incident about the young boy named Habīb ibn Bullā from the Ya'qūbī tribe (Idayqub) in his *al-Shi'r al-'Arab al-Fasīh fī Bilād Shinqīt*, 117

25 Ould Mbarek, "Nash'at al-Shi'r al-Shinqītī wa 'Amaliyyat al-Ta'arrub," 221

contained in the verses of poets and promoted by them. Also, they were cautious of the extraordinary persuasive power of poetry/verse-making which when performed, spoken or transmitted, could mobilize the masses/audience against authorities, particularly those unsatisfied with their leadership. Thus, it would seem safe to suggest that these dynamics delegitimize and/or watered down the art of literary poetry and verse-making for several centuries in the region, especially in the southwestern and central parts of Mauritania until the later part of the seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries. However, from this period, literary poetry and verse-making began to be accepted among some groups of *Zawāya Fuqahā'*. The reason for this development and new inclination was based on the need for deep knowledge of jurisprudence, which, in some ways, lies in the possession of deep knowledge of the Arabic language, rooted in poetry. This was also against the backdrop of the migrations of hundreds of outstanding poets and litterateurs to major rural and urban areas of Mauritania as triggered by several socio-political, economic and religious developments, including the Moroccan Sultan al-Sa'di's invasion of the ancient city of Timbuktu highlighted above.

The events of the seventeenth to the early eighteenth century had a profound impact not only on the intellectual landscape but also led to a major paradigm shift in the culture of Islamic scholarship and literary production in Mauritania. People began to compose or transform scholarly texts on jurisprudence, theology, Islamic spiritual and mystical tradition, and even the Holy Qur'an exegesis to verses, overturning the previously dominant prose genres. From a conceptual historical perspective, this is not unusual because periods of social foment and multiple transitions (i.e., crisis) often demand and catalyze the development of new social imaginary and conceptual languages to comprehend, sustain, and articulate the [inevitable] emergent eidos. In other words, the reported 'emergence', for a better word, revival and restrengthening of the Arabic verse tradition of Mauritania during this period is not out of place.

In Search for Religious and Political Authority: The Impact of the Genealogical Claims on Reshaping Intellectual Language in Mauritania

Although significant developments associated with these transformations have been highlighted above, the specific catalysts noted below played a crucial role in reshaping the medium and language of intellectual exchange and the culture of Islamic scholarship in Mauritania from the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries. These catalysts include the claim to the superiority of the Arabic language and the legitimacy of political and religious authority; the dispersion of itinerant and refugee scholars of Andalusian and Timbuktu origin into the Sahara and Sudan due to wars and conflicts, leading to the creation and spread of new centres of Islamic learning; and the increased circulation of Arabic-language pedagogical texts, particularly those on Arabic linguistic tools and jurisprudence, which were often composed in verse. Lastly, the Zawāyā scholars developed a renewed interest in linguistic tools, driven by the need for a deeper understanding of Islamic law.

The claims to Arabic language superiority and legitimacy of political and religious authority overlap in the sense that they were not only used to legitimize religious authority through the reconstruction of lineages connected to prominent Muslim figures and sages, but also to prove linguistic prowess through artistic demonstrations and intellectual discourse. All of that started taking shape in the post-*Shurr Bubba* era of the later part of the seventeenth to the beginning of the eighteenth century. The era also marked the birth of intellectual activities and a strong tradition of Islamic learning with increased Arabic literacy and literary production.²⁶ This does not dismiss the centuries-old tradition of Islamic scholarship among the Sanhaja through the eleventh century Almoravid influence in the region.

Contrary to the understanding that the Hassānīs did not value Islamic learning, they simply did not pursue it like the Zawāyā, who have maintained the tradition of Islamic scholarship for centuries. These opposing groups took several actions to legitimize different forms of control. Though the Arab Hassānīs trace their ancestry to Ja'far al-Tayyār ibn Abī Tālib (cousin of the Prophet Muhammad ^(SAW)

26 El Hamel, "The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in Moorish," 64.

and the brother of Imam ‘Alī), they are members of the sub-group, Banū Ma‘qil of the Banū Hilāl. The Banū Hilāl migrated to North Africa in the eleventh century. It was their descendants Banū Ma‘qil, who penetrated northern Mauritania in the fourteenth century, which led to their spread into southwestern Mauritania and other parts of the Sahara. Every group was drawing upon genealogies and lineages to important Arab Muslim or saintly figures as a right to political and religious authority. Bruce Hall writes that “[t]he genealogical claims made by virtually every significant Arabic- or Berber-speaking “noble” group in the Sahel invoke an Arab Muslim origin. The relative strengths of different genealogical claims vary significantly in ways that suggest historical competition over power and status among different groups”. Furthermore, the “importance that the “social charters” of the seventeenth century assign to specialization in Islamic religious knowledge, and the so-called clerical-status groups or lineages...suggest that Islam, itself was becoming a more important component in Sahelian life. Entering ever more fully into Arab Islamic culture and constructing and elaborating connections to important Arab Islamic ancestors”²⁷ was increasingly a pivotal feature of competition for superiority in the religious (and, to some extent, ‘secular’) domain.

This model of genealogical (re)construction was taken up by non-Arabs in the region. For example, some Berbers of the Zawāyā, whose lineage tradition was matrilineal, started reconstructing a patrilineal genealogy to Arab Muslim ancestry. They based theirs on a different kind of religious authority, claiming descent from important saintly and renowned Muslim figures and thereby connecting themselves to a genealogy founded on religious knowledge and authority.²⁸ On the other hand, there was a different and interesting claim by the Tashumsha, one of the major Zawāyā groups of which Nāsir al-Dīn, the Zawāyā religious figure who fought and was killed by the Hassānīs, came from. They claimed descent from Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, the closest companion of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and first caliph of Islam. The Kel Entasār based “their authority on their connection to Ahmad ag Adda and his descendants” by claiming a “prestigious Sherifian

²⁷ Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600 - 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 57.

²⁸ Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 60.

genealogy through 'Uqba b. Nāfi' (d. 683)," and to 'Alī b. Abī Tālib.²⁹ The same was true for the Kel Essuk.

The nineteenth century has witnessed more of this claim to sharīfian, Arab, and religious authority. The most prominent among was the Kuntas: Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d. 1226/1811) and his son, Sīdī Muhammad ibn Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d. 1241/1826), with claims of ancestry to 'Uqba ibn Nāfi'. During that period, the Fulbes employed a similar argument to assert their Arab lineage through the figure of 'Uqba. 'Abd Allāh ibn Fūdī (d. 1245/1829), in his works "*Īdā' al-nusukh*," referenced various accounts of Fulbe lineages, some of which were linked to 'Uqba. It is important to note that he refrained from making an absolute claim of direct descent from 'Uqba b. Nāfi'.³⁰ In his "*Infāq al-Maysūr fī Tārīkh Bilād al-Takrūr*," Muhammad Bello (d. 1253/1837), the son of 'Uthmān ibn Fūdī (d. 1812/1817) and the caliph of the Sokoto caliphate, on the other hand, explains a historical genealogy to 'Uqba. He complicates this claim by mentioning three different 'Uqbas and seems to be unsure the one they were linked to: 'Uqba ibn 'Āmir, or 'Uqba ibn Yāsir or 'Uqba ibn Nāfi'.³¹

29 No author, *Khabar al-Sūq*, IHERIAB ms. 4604; Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 61; Norris, *Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*, 83.

30 In one account, he wrote that the "Fulanis are also reported to be descended from 'Uqba b. 'Āmir (d. 58/678). Ibn 'Āmir was reported to have married the daughter of the king of a tribe of African Christians after his embrace of Islam." See Ibn Fodio, *Ḍiyā' al-ta'wīl fī ma'ānī al-tanzīl*, n.d., 10.

31 'Uqba ibn Nāfi' al-Fihri played a significant role in the early spread of Islam through North Africa, where he ultimately passed away and was buried. However, the relationship between 'Uqba ibn Nāfi' and other historical figures named 'Uqba, such as 'Uqba ibn 'Āmir al-Juhānī and 'Uqba ibn Mustajāb, with the people of the Sahara and broader Sahel underwent a complex evolution, shaped by various socio-political, cultural, and religious factors. Several Saharan sources, particularly those related to the Kunta group, have put forth claims about Ibn Nāfi' al-Fihri's actions after his conquest of North Africa. According to some accounts, he traveled south to the ancient Ghana Empire, near the region of present-day Walāta, and brought back with him a conquered Berber chief named Kusayla. This chief feigned conversion to Islam and joined forces with Ibn Nāfi' al-Fihri, only to be killed during Friday prayers. Before these events unfolded, Ibn Nāfi' al-Fihri left his son, al-'Āqib, in Walāta, who would later become one of the ancestors of the Kuntas. In another version of the account, it was Ḥabīb ibn Abī 'Ubayda ibn 'Uqba, the grandson of Ibn Nāfi' al-Fihri, who ventured southward, raiding Sūs and crossing the Sahara into the lands of the Sūdān. Through him, the ancestry of certain Saharan groups was traced. See Mauro Nobili problematizes the complexities of these claims and their development through

The mention of these dynamics is not to authenticate any ancestral claim to important Arab or saintly Muslim figures but rather to draw a connection to two prominent factors that could be linked to the sudden revitalization of the verse tradition of Mauritania that would later sweep through the 17th century to the present time. The reconstructions of genealogy, in a large scheme of work, were efforts to establish religious as well as political authority. This genealogical claim created avenues for boastfulness about lineage and superiority claims to Arabic fluency by discrediting the literary prowess of other people perceived as non-Arabs or not considered people possessing the same quality of eloquence as the Arabs. The only way this could be done was to use verses. This is because verse-making is regarded as "the quintessential Arab medium of artistic expression" and is the hallmark of scholars, the poetic language medium with its "... power to set forth novel tropes and ontologies, to disorient and reorient thought by way of an ever-expanding vision," would seem to be the most suitable deconstructive (regenerative) procedure in such a context. This boastful act is illustrated in the words of later members of the Banū Hassān, such as Muhammad Fāl ibn 'Aynīna, who would use verses to boast about their lineage and fluency in Arabic. Two of his verses read:

I am of the offspring of Banī Hassān, a proof of our eloquence
To the Arabs, we are genealogically linked
If there are no distinctive features that we are Arabs
Then by the eloquence and fluency on our tongues, clear proof that
we are Arabs.

This kind of boastful expression and impression did not escape instigating exchanges between opposite groups through the same medium of verses, like a reminiscence of the events of competitive poetic prowess between poets in the courts of Muslim Sultans. Ghislaine Lydon corroborates this when she said that "poetic expression became a favourite pastime of Saharan family members competing in the art of creating best rhymes and lines. Long-distance debates were fought in eloquent literary contests." She adds that

exploration of relevant Arabic manuscripts, among other works. See Mauro Nobili, "Back to Saharan Myths: Preliminary Notes on 'Uqba al-Mustajab," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, no. 11 (2012):79-84.

"battles were lost and won through pen and rhymes, and poets sometime spent years trying to outsmart their enemies with their pointed verses."³²

The place of the Arabic language and its sciences as the linguistic mechanism in studying and understanding Islam makes it an indispensable tool for Muslim scholars. It is the central building block of other sciences and a 'practical field'. As one Mauritanian scholar points out, "deep engagement in the Arabic language and excelling in it is part of the religion (*fa-inna al-i'tinā' bi'l-lughat al-'arabiyya wa itqānihā min al-dīn*)". Therefore, proficiency in the use of the language, particularly poetry, was/is significant as part of being a scholar.

The Versification Culture in the Mauritanian Authorship

As mentioned above, the al-Sa'dī's invasion of Timbuktu have played a significant role in the spread and the reported 'emergence' phenomenon of the Arabic poetry tradition of Mauritania. The devastation of the city as a result of the invasion did not only facilitate the movement of scholars away from the city but also the movements and influx of pedagogical and scholarly texts in verse forms of mostly Andalusian and Maghribian origins to different parts of the Sahara and the Sahel from the Maghrib and Timbuktu. These texts were mostly in 'practical disciplines' such as linguistic sciences: Arabic grammar (*nahw*), morphology (*sarf*), or literature (*lugha*), as well as primary religious sciences such as jurisprudence (*fiqh*). These include the *al-Alfiyya*, the *Lāmiyat al-Af'āl*, and the *Tuhfat al-Mawdūd fī al-Maqṣūr wa'l-Mamdūd*, by the Andalusian Abū 'Abd Allāh Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Mālik al-Tā'ī (d. 672/1274); the *Nazm Muwatta'at al-Fasīh* of Mālik ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Māliqī, known as Ibn al-Murahhal (d. 699/1300), a versification of the *Kitāb al-Fasīh* of al-Tha'lab; the *Tuhfat al-Hukkām fī Nukat al-Uqūd wa'l-Ahkām* known as al-Āsimiyya, a juridical text for Mālikī judges (qadis) by another Andalusian, Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Āsim (d. 829/1426).

The use of these texts exposed both scholars and students to the intricacies of Arabic prosody and its related disciplines by fostering a

32 Ghislaine Lydon, "Inkwells of the Sahara: Reflections on the Production of Islamic Knowledge in Bilād Shinqit," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott Reese (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 51.

deep engagement with the language's nuances. This immersion led to an era of scholarly and literary output in which prominent Mauritanian scholars produced countless works in verse form primarily for Islamic learning. These compositions drew inspiration from the intellectual traditions of Andalusia, the Maghrib, and Ifrīqiya. Through admiration of their predecessors' legacies and the intellectual friction that came with imitation, Mauritanian scholars composed verse-based pedagogical works that would shape the region's literary and scholarly discourse.

Mauritanian Islamic learning centres increasingly adopted these verse pedagogical texts from the beginning of the eighteenth century, the era of the pioneering poets and versifiers. This marked a period in which Islamic scholarship became deeply intertwined with poetic expression. Scholars from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries further solidified this tradition, particularly in the religious sciences. The third phase saw the widespread circulation and flourishing of the verse tradition, while the final phase, from the twentieth century to the present, is characterized by the deep-rootedness and continuity of this distinctive scholarly practice.

These scholars produced a significant number of didactic creedal ('*aqīda*) works. These local '*aqīda* works include versifications of the chapter of the *Ihyā*' and the *Iqtisād* of al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). During the 19th century, Mukhtār ibn Būnā al-Jakanī (d. 1220/1805), a scholar from Tājakānt, penned *Wasīlat al-Sa'āda fī Nashr al-Shahāda; Nazm fī Masā'il al-'Aqā'id*, which was popular in the 19th-century curricula. 'Abd Allāh wuld Hamā Allāh, among the 18th-century scholars, penned the *Nazm Aqīdat al-Risāla*, a versification of the '*aqīda* chapter of the *Risāla* text by Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996). In the original text, Ibn Abī Zayd titles it as *Mā tantiqū bihi al-Alsina wa Ta'taqiduhu al-Afīda min Wājib Umūr al-Diyānāt*. 'Abd al-Qādir b. Muhammad Sālim al-Majlisī also penned the well-known *aqīda* called *al-Wādh al-Mubīn fī Asl 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. Ahmad ibn Muḥamdī ibn al-Najīb al-Hājji (d. 1251/1835) wrote the *al-Durrat al-Farīda fī mā Tazkū bihi al-'Aqīda* – in over 550 *rajaz* verses and also a treatise on the temporal origination of the world, entitled *al-'Ālam al-Hādith*. He wrote a *qasida* in Hassānī dialect in an attempt to teach theology to the less literate class, which he called *al-Wasīlat al-Ridwān*. Sh. Mā al-'Aynayn al-Qalqamī (d.

1328/1910), a 20th-century scholar who was a prolific Sufi and anti-colonialist, wrote a poem on creed titled *al-Manzūma fī al-Tawhīd*.

In jurisprudence, the works of Shaykh Muhammad al-Māmī, a prominent scholar of 19th-century Mauritania, comes to mind.³³ He was an "illustrious poet and his sayings are part of everyday language."³⁴ Most of his verses are in Hassāniyya. He, however, largely succeeded in getting "ideas across to the wider audience."³⁵ He versified the *Mukhtasar* of the Egyptian Khalīl ibn Ishāq al-Jundī (d. 776/1374) in about 10,000 verses. This work is reported to have been written in one night.

Also, apart from the versification of the *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, Mauritanian scholars produced quality Māliki texts in verses, such as the Shaykh Muhammad Mawlūd's *Kafāf al-Mubtadi* of over 3,000 verses containing jurisprudential issues related to rural/Bedouins, and Shaykh Muhammad Sālim wuld Addūd's *al-Tashīl wa'l-Takmīl*, which is essentially a versification of the *Mukhtasar* of Khalīl ibn Ishāq and its commentaries. He expounded on it by drawing from the *Mudawwana*, 'Utbiyya and primary books from the Māliki school such as al-Qarāfī's *al-Dhākira* and *mutāwalāt* (expansive books) like the *al-Nawādir wa'l-Ziyādāt* of Ibn Abī Zayd. It is also as lengthy as al-Māmī's versification of the *Mukhtasar*.

There are several works on Arabic grammar, such as Shaykh Muhammad Buttār's *Badhl al-nadā fī nazm qatr al-nadā wa balla al-sadā* which is a versification of Ibn Hishām al-Ansārī's (d. 761/1360) *Qatr al-nadā*, *Ubayd Rabbih*, a versification of the *Matn al-Ājurrūmiyya* of Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Dāwūd al-Sanhājī known as Ibn Ajurrūm (d. 723/1323), the *Ihmirār* of Ibn Būnā (d. 1220/1805), a super-addition of verses to the *al-Alfiyya* of Ibn Mālik (d. 672/1274) mentioned earlier.

Sīra works such as Qādī Iyād's *al-Shifā' bi Ta'rīf Huqūq al-Mustafā* were widespread in the major libraries of Sahara and West African countries. Mauritanian scholars wrote works of the *sīra* genre in verses. Some of them are the *Nazm al-Ghazawāt* on military campaigns by Shaykh Ahmad al-Badawī ibn Muhammad al-Majlisī, *Nazm al-*

33 See Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh *Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique dans la société maure précoloniale* (1985), 799-808.

34 Lydon, "Inkwells of the Sahara," 67.

35 Ibid.

Akhlāq al-nabawiyya by al-Murābit b. Matālī, *Nazm fī al-Shamā'il* by Muhammad Mahmūd ibn 'Abd al-Fattāh al-Abyayrī, and the versification of the *al-Shamā'il al-Muhammadiyya* of Imam Muhammad ibn 'Isā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) by Shaykh Ahmad ibn Shaykh Muhammad al-Hāfiz al-'Alawī.

More interestingly, there are works of Islamic spirituality (*Tasawwuf*) and exegesis of the Qur'an – traditionally written in prose – which emerged in numerous numbers in verse forms. For *tasawwuf* literature, there is the *Matharat al-qulūb* and the *Mahārim al-lisān* of Shaykh Muhammad Mawlūd wuld Ahmad Fāl al-Ya'qūbī al-Musawī as against the *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn* of Hārith al-Muhāsibī (d. 243/857), *Qūt al-Qulūb* of Abū Tālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) or the *Qawā'id al-Tasawwuf* of Sīdī Ahmad Zarruq al-Barnūsī al-Fāsī (d. 899/1493-94). We also have several versifications of the *Khātimat al-Tasawwuf* of al-Yadālī (d. 1166/1753) by several scholars in and outside of Mauritania. These works include al-Shafī'ī ibn Muhammad ibn al-Mahbūbī al-Yidālī's *Zawāhir al-Waliy Jāmi'at Jawāhir al-Waliy*, and Abāh ibn Muhammad al-Amīn al-Lamtūnī's *Murshid dhī al-Tashawwuf limā Hawat Khātimat al-Tasawwuf*.

For exegesis of the Qur'an, there is Ahmaddu b. Muhammaddu b. Ahmadhī al-Hasanī's poem of about 8,300 verses titled *Marāqī al-'Awwāh ilā Tadabbur Kitāb Allāh*, Muhammad ibn Ahmad Yūrah al-Daymānī's *Nazm al-Rāqī'at fī Sharh al-Wāqī'a*, and many others.

Conclusion

The conflicts of the seventeenth century in southwestern Mauritania and across the Sahara were key in shaping the so-called emergence of the verse tradition in Mauritania. One significant outcome of these conflicts was the creation of a social charter, wherein opposing groups invoked the 'discourse' of lineages and genealogies to assert religious, economic, social, and political authority. Central to this discourse was the attempt by various factions to monopolize claims of linguistic superiority. These groups contested such claims using the very medium in which they were made namely poetry. The resulting exchanges between different factions contributed to an intellectual dynamic that many Muslim scholars integrated into their fields of expertise.

This tradition of verse, largely preserved through the active involvement of Muslim scholars, became an intellectual arena in which distinction was demonstrated through rhymes, polemics, wordplay, and intricate linguistic constructions. Verse was also employed in the composition of pedagogical religious texts. For Muslim scholars of Mauritania and, by extension, those of West Africa, this verse tradition stands as a hallmark of scholarly excellence. It is a testament to the vibrancy of the intellectual culture and the rich social lives of Muslim scholars and students in the region. As a result, libraries and archives throughout the Sahara and West Africa are replete with literary works on Arabic rhetoric, philology, grammar, and morphology, many of which are composed in verse form.

While it is commonly understood that these pedagogical texts were composed in verse to aid students in chanting and memorization, such a view underestimates the intellectual rigour involved in their creation. This simplistic logic fails to acknowledge that it is far easier to write a page of prose than even half a page of verse when adhering to the strict rules of prosody. If memorization had been the primary goal, why, then, is the verse tradition not as prominent in other parts of the Muslim world as it is in Mauritania? What factors led to its limited presence elsewhere, and why is there such difficulty in producing high-quality verse in contemporary times in most parts of the Arabo-Muslim world outside of Mauritania?

The verse tradition in Mauritania remains vibrant, continuing to shape intellectual discourse in social and religious circles. Mauritanian scholars compose book forewords, devotional litanies, supplications, and polemical responses in verse-practices rarely seen elsewhere in the Muslim world. For this reason, Mauritania proudly retains its title as the "Land of Million Poets" (*balad al-milyūn shā'ir*), a testament to its lasting poetic and intellectual heritage.

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Islamic Learning and Female Scholarship in West Africa: A Study of Nana Asma'u

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Introduction: Bridging West Africa and the Global Islamic Tradition

Islamic learning in West Africa has always been deeply connected to the broader developments in global Islamic intellectual history. West African Muslims were never isolated; instead, they established and maintained robust connections with scholars and centres of learning across North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and beyond. The spread of Islam in the region, beginning in the eleventh century in Kanem-Bornu and extending to the Hausa States, facilitated these connections. Figures like Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi, who studied in Murzuq and Tripoli, exemplify this engagement. As Al-Saidi notes, Hausaland was a crossroads for scholars from the Western Sudan and North Africa, underscoring the region's integration into the wider Islamic networks.¹ In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire's reach extended as far west as Algeria, introducing new intellectual influences and currents across the Sahara, particularly in Borno.² This development provided the context for a dynamic local tradition of historical writing and scholarship, not only in Timbuktu but also in several regions throughout the Sahel. The Sahara, far from being a barrier, served as a bridge facilitating trade, diplomacy, and intellectual exchange with the global Muslim world, contributing significantly to the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. For example, the growth of Arabic literacy in West Africa paralleled the expansion of Islamic learning, contributing to Arabic becoming one of the most widely spoken languages on the continent. Numerous studies have highlighted significant contributions of prominent Muslim scholars

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1 See Thomas Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology* (London: Oxford University Press), 4.

2 Paul E. Lovejoy, "Islamic Scholarship and Understanding History in West Africa Before 1800," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, eds. Jose Rabasa, Masuyuki Sato, Edoardo Tortarolo, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), III, 1400-1800.

during this period, underscoring their role in the intellectual and cultural development of the region.³ In *Beyond Timbuktu*, Ousmane Oumar Kane explores this rich history of Muslim learning in the region, tracing its development from the early days to the present.⁴ Kane rightly challenges misconceptions which claim that African Muslim heritage is a minor part of the Islamic civilization, emphasizing instead the deep and enduring connections between West African Muslims and the broader Muslim community.

However, the role of Muslim women in learning and scholarship in Africa has attracted less scholarly attention. For instance, while historians of the Sokoto Caliphate utilized the writings of Nana Asma'u, daughter of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio, as primary sources in the late 1960s, it wasn't until 1989 that a comprehensive publication finally emerged with Jean Boyd's biography of Nana Asma'u.⁵ Only then did her contributions begin to receive the recognition they deserved, highlighting a significant yet often overlooked dimension of Islamic scholarship in Africa. This neglect was likely to be linked to the predominant focus on powerful, and iconic figures in African Muslim history. Additionally, the perception of the social role of women in Africa in general, and Muslim societies in particular, led most academic research to overlook the existence of female Muslim scholars, as it challenged popular stereotypes. Much of the existing literature on Muslim women has focused on their roles as marginal participants in Islamic practices, often overlooking their intellectual contributions and religious leadership. As Britta Frede compellingly argues, women were instrumental in both the proliferation of Islamic educational institutions and the consolidation of religious authority. Historically, women have played significant roles across Africa, often as teachers, spiritual guides, or founders of these institutions. Yet the scholarship on Muslim women in Africa remains remarkably underexplored,

3 See, for instance, Thomas Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology* (London: Oxford University Press); Paul E. Lovejoy, "Islamic Scholarship and Understanding History in West Africa Before 1800," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, eds. Jose Rabasa, Masuyuki Sato, Edoardo Tortarolo, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), III, 1400-1800.

4 Ousmane Oumar Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

5 Jean Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u, 1793-1865, Teacher, Poet and Islamic Leader* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1989).

primarily due to the recent initiation of research and the scarcity of available sources.⁶ Roded similarly posits that the marginalization of women in historical narratives is due in part to the tendency of scholars to differentiate and often diminish the roles and contributions of women.⁷ In this article we highlight the need for a deeper exploration of how women have engaged in the transmission of Islamic knowledge and their influence on the religious and social structures within their communities. We argue that the intellectual contributions of Muslim women, particularly in religious education and leadership, have been pivotal in shaping the character of Islam in West Africa.

In light of this, the present study aims to shed light on the significant yet often overlooked contributions of Muslim women to the intellectual and scholarly traditions of Africa. The focus will be particularly centred on Northern Nigeria, with an emphasis on the Sokoto Caliphate's *jihad* movement and the pivotal role of women within it. A special emphasis will be placed on Nana Asma'u, whose extensive literary works, pioneering efforts in women's education, and foundational role in establishing educational institutions offer a rich and nuanced perspective on the impact of female scholarship in this region.

Women Scholars in the Sokoto Caliphate: An Intellectual Revolution

The resurgence of reformist traditions across much of Africa during the nineteenth century had significant implications, one of the most notable being the renewed impetus it provided for learning and scholarship. It was a period of remarkable changes on the lives of Muslim women as well in the area later known as northern Nigeria. The *jihad* movement in 1804, led by Shehu Usman dan Fodio, resulted in the establishment of the powerful political entity known as the Sokoto Caliphate. The Caliphate was unique both in the practice of Islam and the Islamic scholarship. This movement, organized by the triumvirate of Shehu Usman dan Fodio, Abdullahi dan Fodio, and

6 Britta Fred, "Female Islamic Knowledge in Africa: A Forgotten Story," *Oasis* (online), URL:/en/female-islamic-knowledge-in-Africa/retrived 25/5/2023.

7 Ruth Roded, *Women in Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sai'd to Who's Who* (Colorado: Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1994), 75.

Muhammed Bello, was as much an intellectual revolution as it was a political one. It sought not only to improve the intellectual and moral state of individuals but also to address the social injustices that plagued the community. Among these injustices was the condition of women, which the movement aimed to reform. Scholars have established that the conditions of women before the *jihād* were deplorable.⁸ Usman Bugaje notes that, Shehu Usman dan Fodio was particularly moved by the pathetic position of women, who had been deliberately left ignorant.⁹ In effect, the *jihād* culminated in the rise of a number of women scholars particularly within the Shehu Usman dan Fodio's family. The reform movement under the leadership of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio created an opening in which Muslim women played a vital role. As Mukhtar Umar Bunza observes, as early as 1786, women were allowed to participate in teaching and enlightenment campaigns embarked upon by Shehu and his supporters.¹⁰ This act of women empowerment attracted considerable criticisms from scholars, particularly in Borno, who questioned the practice of allowing women to attend educational sessions alongside men. However, it's important to note that within the Qadiriyya community, to which Usman dan Fodio belonged, the education of women was highly valued. Shehu Usman dan Fodio actively promoted women's education, as demonstrated by the education of his daughters and the broader emphasis on female scholarship within his family. The women of his family made extensive contributions to Islamic scholarship, significantly shaping the cultural and intellectual development of society. For example, the four wives of Usman Dan Fodio —Hawwa'u, Maimuna, Aisha and Khadija — were prominent scholars who served as teachers, instructing their children in classical Islamic education.¹¹

8 Jean Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u, 1793-1865, Teacher, Poet and Islamic Leader* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1989). Jafar Makau Kaura, "Emancipation of Women in the Sokoto Caliphate" in *State and Society in the Sokoto Caliphate*, eds. Ahmad Mohammad Kani & Kabir Ahmed Gandhi (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1990).

9 Usman Bugaje, *The Past as Future: Some Preliminary Thoughts on the Sokoto Caliphate* (Abuja: Books and Libraries, 2015), 12.

10 Mukhtar Umar Bunza, *Gwandu Emirate: The Domain of Abdullahi Fodiyo since 1805* (Kaduna: Amal Printing Press 2016), 13.

11 Jean Boyd and Abubakar Koko, "Nana Asma'u" in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Bolanle Awe (Lagos-Ibadan: Sankore Publishers-Bookcraft, 1992), 72.

These women became well-versed in Islamic sciences and authored numerous works. Over fifty books were written by women within this scholarly tradition, reflecting the presence of a highly intelligent, educated, articulate, and determined group of women. Nana Asma'u and her sisters, especially Khadija, who translated Khalil's renowned *Mukhtasar* into Fulfulde, are prime examples of this legacy.¹²

The Life and Legacy of Nana Asma'u: Scholar, Poet, and Educator

Nana Asma'u was born in 1793 into a prominent Fulani Sufi Qadiriyya family in Degel, near Gobir, in the northwestern part of present-day Nigeria. Her birth coincided with a significant moment in her family's intellectuals history, as it was the same year her father, Shehu Usman dan Fodio, authored his renowned work, *Ihya' al-Sunnah*. Nana Asma'u –also known as Nana uwar daje– was nurtured in an environment steeped in both revolutionary fervour and scholarly pursuit, elements that profoundly influenced and shaped her intellectual trajectory. She was the daughter of the great Islamic scholar and the nineteenth century leader of the Sokoto *jihad* movement Sheikh Usman dan Fodio. The *jihad* was waged against those who had mixed Islam with customs rooted in un-Islamic practices of the past. Nana Asma'u grew up in the midst of these conflicts, witnessing her father stand his ground, devoted to Islam and the *sunnah*.¹³ Her pastoralist ancestors came originally from the coastal region of West Africa, near the Senegal River, known as Futa Toro, from which the clan derived the designation "Toronkawa". They were Sunni Muslims affiliated with the Qadiriyya order. Education and literacy have been central to Islam since its inception, and within the Qadiriyya Sufi community to which Asma'u's family belonged, egalitarianism in the pursuit of knowledge was highly valued. Her grandfather, Muhammadu Fodio, earned the Fulani title "Fodiye," meaning scholar. Asma'u paternal grandmother, Hawwa bint Muhammad, was associated with the branch of the family mostly

12 Beverly Mack, "Muslim Women Scholars in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Morocco to Nigeria" in *The Meaning of Timbuktu*, edited by Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Bachir Diagne (South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2008), 167.

13 Beverly B. Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 26.

renowned for its scholarship.¹⁴ It is reported that her father, Shehu Usman dan Fodio, received his early education from his mother and grandmother. In 1795, when Asma'u was just two years old, her mother Maimuna—Shehu's first wife and also his cousin—passed away, and she was subsequently raised by her stepmothers, Aisha and Hauwa.

Asma'u was born a twin, and her brother was named Hassan. However, instead of following the traditional practice in Hausaland and other Muslim communities of naming twins after the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) grandchildren, Hassan and Husayn (and for females Hussaina), her father chose to name her after Asma, one of the daughters of Caliph Abubakr (RA). Abubakr (RA) was one of the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) closest companions and played a crucial role in protecting the Prophet (SAW) and his companions during their *hijrah* from Mecca to Medina. The Shehu's choice of this name for his daughter is significant and is understood to reflect the deep sufi devotions he was engaged in at the time of her birth.¹⁵ Nana Asma'u began her early Islamic education at the age of three or four within the Degel community. She learned to read from wooden writing boards at a school run by her older sister, Khadija. Displaying remarkable intelligence from a young age, Asma'u memorized the Holy Qur'an early in her childhood. In addition to memorizing the Qur'an, she mastered Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and went on to author over 60 published works, which continue to be valuable resources for research and study.

In 1807, Asma'u married Gidado dan Laima, a learned scholar and close friend of her brother, Muhammad Bello. The marriage was blessed with five sons: Abd al-Qadir, Ahmed, Uthman, Abdullahi Bayero, and Muhammad Laima. Asma'u's career as a teacher began in her matrimonial home, where she used her room as a classroom to teach young children and women within the compound. As word of her teaching spread throughout the neighborhood, other women in the community began to send their children to her school. This growing interest in her instruction deepened Asma'u's commitment to teaching and the dissemination of Islamic knowledge. Among the pupils she

14 Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (Harlow: Longmans, 1967), 4.

15 Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *Educating Muslim Women: The West African Legacy of Nana Asma'u 1793–1864* (United Kingdom: Interface Publications and Kube Publishing, 2013), 28.

taught were her brother Isah (Mai Kware), who later became a renowned scholar, and her sister Maryam (Uwar Daje). In addition to teaching students within her own community, Asma'u extended her influence far beyond the confines of her compound through a network of itinerant women teachers whom she trained to educate isolated rural women. Asma'u was active in politics, education and social reform, as she was a prolific author, popular teacher and renowned scholar and intellectual.¹⁶ Kaura argues that Asma'u and her sisters played a significant role in disseminating knowledge to both their brothers and sisters, thereby contributing greatly to the intellectual development of their society.¹⁷ To effectively disseminate their knowledge across the communities of the caliphate, Asma'u and her contemporaries composed poems in various fields. Supporting Kaura's argument, Boyd and Mack note that Asma'u also undertook the translation of works by jihad leaders from Arabic or Fulfulde into Hausa, making them more accessible to the majority of people in Hausaland.¹⁸ For instance, she translated *Tabbat Hakika*, written by her father, Usman dan Fodio. The circulation of such material in vernacular languages, alongside classical Arabic, significantly broadened the reach of Islamic teachings, ensuring that Islam was no longer the preserve of an intellectual elite but became deeply integrated into the common culture.

According to Madina Shehu, Nana Asma'u was not only a highly educated scholar upon whom even the most learned individuals in her community could rely, but she was also an efficient manager and a skilled mediator.¹⁹ Beyond these roles, Nana Asma'u served as her father's biographer and the historian of the *jihad*, documenting the significant events and foundations of the movement. Her writings played a crucial role in the dissemination of Islamic culture and

16 Beverly B. Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 21.

17 Jafar Makau Kaura, "Emancipation of Women in the Sokoto Caliphate" in *State and Society in the Sokoto Caliphate*, eds. Ahmad Mohammad Kani & Kabir Ahmed Gandi (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1990), 19.

18 Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *Educating Muslim Women: The West African Legacy of Nana Asma'u 1793–1864* (United Kingdom: Interface Publications and Kube Publishing, 2013), 78.

19 Madina Shehu, "Critics in the Poetry of Nana Asmau Bint Fodio: An Overview", *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 20, no. 4: (2015): 56.

elevated the status of the Hausa language within the West African Islamic corpus. One of her early contributions as a historian and literary figure was a short acrostic poem written in 1821 in Fulfulde, directed against the Tuareg chief Ibra, who had invaded the caliphate. This poem, titled *Fa'inna ma'al 'asur yasuran*, is based on verse 5 of Surah Al-Inshirah from the Holy Qur'an, is among her earliest works. Additionally, Asma'u composed a poem titled *Victory at Gawakuke (Gawakuke Famarde)* in Fulfulde, as an eyewitness account of the battles fought in 1836. In this work, she vividly described the battle and her brother Muhammad Bello's role, showcasing her abilities as both a poet and a chronicler of her time. Asma'u described the battle and her brother Muhammad Bello as follows:²⁰

Then Bello ordered the standards to be unfurled; he told his men to prepare; he said, 'today the unbelievers will be put to shame'. The men got ready and lined up with their weapons; the spearheads looked like fields of ripe millet. With standards flying Bello rode to take up his position at the head (of his men); swords and spears glittered. Round the matchless Caliph the host was as numerous as (flocks of) quale birds or (swarms of) locusts.

Asma'u and her husband, Gidado, authored numerous works on the lives and expeditions of Shehu Usman dan Fodio and Muhammad Bello, which have served as foundational texts for later historians. Notably, after Bello's death in 1837, Asma'u and Gidado composed nine significant works that have become the biographical cornerstone of all subsequent writings on the *jihad*. She also played a key role in sustaining the sense of purpose for which her father and brother had become famous throughout the western Sudan region.²¹ During the reign of Bello's son, Aliyu, Asma'u wrote several works supporting his efforts to instill a martial spirit in his army. Between 1834 and 1839, she composed a poem titled "A Warning" to educate Muslims about their basic Islamic obligations as enshrined in the Holy Qur'an. Other notable works from this period include "Forgive Me," written during a time of retreat (*khalwah*), "Elegy for Bello," "Elegy for My Sister Fadima," and a translation of the Holy Qur'an accompanied by an elegy

20 Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *The Collected Works of Nana Asmau Daughter of Usmanu Danfodiyo* (Ibadan: Sam Bookman, 1999), 40.

21 Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 11.

for Imam Buhari. From 1840 to 1854, Asma'u authored "The Story of Shehu," "Remembrance of the Prophet," and several other important works such as "Islam, Sokoto and Wurno," "Destroy Mayaki," "Elegy for Na'Inna," and "Remembrance of the Shehu."²² In 1831, as previously mentioned, she translated a significant work by Shehu Usman dan Fodio, *Tabbat Hakika* (*Be Sure of God's Truth*), which was already well-known in its Fulfulde version. The phrase "Be Sure of God's Truth" is notably repeated in every verse. Asma'u's subsequent works include *The Sufi Women* (1836), and *Tashir al-Ikhwān bi Tawassul bi Suwar al-Qur'an inda Khāliq al-Mannān* (1839), along with "Elegy for Gidado", written after the death of her husband in 1842. The *Sufi Women* is a translation of Muhammad Bello's *Kitāb al-Nasiha*, which he specifically requested Asma'u to translate and versify. In this work, Muhammad Bello expresses his concern about the pervasive influence of materialism, particularly among women, and its detrimental impact on the broader Muslim society. Asma'u uses this translation to illustrate the ideal ways in which women can contribute to Islam, introducing the concept of women saints—figures she regarded as extraordinary and expected to meet in the hereafter. Below are some of the verses from the poem *Sufi Women*:²³

Alhamdulillah, we thank God
 We invoke blessings on God's messenger
 We invoke blessings on his family and companions
 And those who followed them; thus, we gain self-respect.
 We invoke blessings on the Companions of the Prophet who are now sanctified
 My aim in this poem is to tell you about Sufis
 To the great ones I bow in reverence
 I am mindful of them when I am still alive
 So that they will remember me on the Day of Resurrection
 The ascetic women are all sanctified
 For their piety they have been exalted
 They prayed ceaselessly to delivered from the fires of Hell
 Take this to heart my friends
 I have written this poem to assuage my heart:

22 Jean Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u, 1793-1865, Teacher, Poet and Islamic Leader* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1989), 18.

23 Ibid., 43.

I remind you how they yearn for God.
 I swear my God that I love them all
 In the name of the Prophet the messenger of God
 The scent of their yearning engulfs me
 Its intensity exceeds the perfume of musk.
 To the Prophet's disciples who draw close to God
 I bring all Muslim to A'ishah
 A'ishah the noble daughter of Al-Siddiq
 The believer, an honest man, Abu Bakr the esteemed.
 To Muslim women I speak of Zaynab Jahsh
 I cherish them, Lord of the world.
 You made her exceed, according to A'ishah
 She was held in esteem by the Prophet.
 I speak of all the mothers
 Who were wives of the Prophet.
 And Fatimah Zahra'u or Batul
 Gracious lady, close followers of the Prophet.
 She was peerless, she who shunned the world,
 The Prophet's daughter, who was better than any child.
 I speak of Aminah Ramliyya,
 And Umm Hassan, or Kufah
 As was Umm Sufyan of Thawri

It is noteworthy that both Muhammad Bello's *Kitāb al-Nasiha* and Asma'u's *Sufi Women* rendition provide a rich depiction of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), his mother and daughters, as well as the women of her father's community. By drawing these direct connections to the family of the Prophet (SAW), Asma'u sought to encourage and engage the Muslims of her time to emulate the virtues and piety exemplified by these revered figures. The poem *Sufi Women* underscores the role of pious women within the mainstream of Islam, and cautions against excessive attachment to worldly pursuits. Designed to be memorized by teachers for instructional purposes, the poem aimed to mobilize women in upholding and promoting the Islamic ethos above all other influences. Another significant work by Asma'u, composed in 1830 in Fulfulde and titled *Sunago*, meticulously lists each sura of the Holy Qur'an by name and in order. Asma'u translated this work into Hausa in 1838, and it was later rendered into Arabic by her nephew, Aliyu b. 'Abdullah b. Fodio. These translations

reflect Asma'u's commitment to making Islamic teachings accessible across linguistic and cultural boundaries, reinforcing the spiritual and educational roles of women within the Islamic community.

Yan Taru: Nana Asma'u's Enduring Legacy in Islamic Education

Nana Asma'u established a network of Muslim women known as the Yan Taru, who are trained as teachers to teach other women and children in Islamic religious and literary education. The Yan Taru organization, established in 19th century Sokoto, is a profound example of how women were integrated into the fabric of Islamic education and religious life during a transformative period in West Africa. Following the successful *jihad* led by Sheikh Usman dan Fodio, there was an increased emphasis on maintaining Islamic values within households, particularly as large numbers of non-Muslim captives were absorbed into the Muslim community. This necessitated a concerted effort to educate women in Islamic teachings, a task that was taken up with remarkable dedication by Nana Asma'u.

The term Yan Taru literary means "the collective" or "those who have come together" in the Hausa language. It refers to a cadre of literate women who travelled throughout the caliphate, disseminating the instructive poems of the princess, among the masses. By 1838, women began to receive classes on Islamic knowledge and history through the use of poetry written and translated into Hausa and Fulfulde for easy comprehension, making Islamic knowledge more accessible to the general populace. Mack & Boyd observe that, during the reign of Caliph Muhammad Bello, groups of women, who became known as the Yan Taru, the Associates, began to visit Asma'u under the leadership of representatives appointed by her.²⁴ The result of this massive women's education campaign was the production of articulated scholarly women called *modibbo*.²⁵ The Yan Taru movement was led by learned women known as *jajis* appointed to disseminate the message to listeners at the mosques, marketplaces, or even at the gates homes. As a symbol of their authority Asma'u gave each *jaji* a strip of

24 Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *Educating Muslim Women: The West African Legacy of Nana Asma'u 1793–1864* (United Kingdom: Interface Publications and Kube Publishing, 2013), 92.

25 The term *modibbo* is a Fulfulde word and a noun in plural form, the singular of which is *modibbe*, meaning a woman Muslim scholar.

red cloth to be tied round the brim of their hat. These women gave religious instruction, cared for the poor, and performed various social functions. They acted as extension teachers, using Asma'u's works as lesson plans and mnemonic devices through which they instructed secluded women in the privacy of their homes.²⁶

The society in which Asma'u and her scholarly family found prior to *jihad*, motivated her to establish this itinerant women's group. In the defunct Gobir Kingdom, the non-Islamic practice of *bori* had been a significant part of the social life dominated by women with no knowledge of Islam under the leadership of a female priestess, *inna*. In view of this, Asma'u felt the need to convert and educate the women captives in Shehu's family and the rural women about Islam. She expressed the concern in a written work *Tabbat Hakika* which was first written by his father Shehu in 1812 in Fulfulde, and which was revised by Asma'u in 1831.²⁷ Asma'u said that *bori* was akin to witchcraft and described it as the work of satan. She warned that hell would be the punishment of those who indulged in the practice. In the poem, Asma'u also emphasized the redeeming value of education. She urged the pursuit of divine truth through education, which path should be open to all, regardless of gender, age, political level, or socioeconomic status. In order to reach a broader audience, Nana Asma'u simplified complex subjects such as *aqidah*, *fiqh* and *tazkiyatu al-nafs* in her writings. For example, the *Path of Truth (Tabbat Hakika)* was written for teaching purposes around lessons concerning religious obligations, rewards, and punishments, with sections including commentary on religious duties, resurrection, sinners, salvation, and the hereafter. Therefore, the teacher's work involved bringing the wider world into the domestic sphere, without limiting it to that private domain.

As mentioned above, the Yan Taru organization was modelled on traditional structures like the *inna* in Gobir but was innovatively adapted to suit the Islamic context. Women from various villages travelled to Sokoto to receive instruction, participating in organized pilgrimages that resembled caravans, complete with a guide and a set of rituals, including the singing of religious songs and the imparting

26 Beverly B. Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 40.

27 Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *The Collected Works of Nana Asmau Daughter of Usmanu Danfodiyo* (Ibadan: Sam Bookman, 1999), 26.

of Islamic teachings. The Yan Taru movement was not only a religious initiative but also a strategic one, that reinforced the Qadiriyya order. Through her efforts, Nana Asma'u and the Yan Taru played a pivotal role in solidifying the religious legacy of her father and in ensuring that women were recognized as vital contributors to the spiritual and intellectual life of the community. Gradually, the network developed into women's educational and charitable foundation that impacted on many lives. After Asma'u's death in 1864, the Yan Taru classes continued under the leadership of her sister Mariamu and were later resumed by her niece Ta Modi after Mariamu's passing. Maryam followed Asma'u's footsteps and became a principal voice in the Hubbare and a leader of the Yan Taru, writing numerous books on poetry. The Yan Taru underscored the significant yet often overlooked role of women in the Islamic tradition, particularly in West Africa, where they have been key in shaping religious thought, education, and the broader cultural landscape, challenging the narrative that women have been merely peripheral figures in Islamic history. It is noteworthy that women's organisations have played a crucial role in mobilizing women within the caliphate for more than a century. The itinerant nature of these groups has proven to be highly effective in educating women and children by moving from house to house. The Yan Taru, amplified the voices of Muslim women, ensuring they were heard. Mack argues that since its foundation in the mid-19th century, the Yan Taru has met the needs of both urban and rural women, whether literate and illiterate, by providing Islamic cultural literacy in an oral society.²⁸

Asma'u was central to her father's *jihad*, and her writings immensely contributed to the actualization of the caliphate that followed. She mobilized many women by teaching them and establishing educational centres for literacy. Nana Asma'u's Yan Taru, became an enduring educational and welfare network, offering knowledge and inspiration that enriched the lives of the needy, particularly rural women.²⁹ The concern for the low level of education

28 Beverly Mack, *Women in Muslim Northern Nigeria* (Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History, 2022), 1.

29 Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, *Religion, Gender and Civil Society: The Role of a Muslim Women's Association In The Evolution Of Nigerian Society* (PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 2018), 86.

among Muslim women continued even after the colonial conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903, particularly through the efforts of Muslim women's associations. Boyd and Mack assert that women in both Northern Nigeria and North America continue to identify as Qadiriyya Sufi Muslims and organize in groups of Yan Taru, led by women known as *jajis*, explicitly and self-consciously following Nana Asma'u's example.³⁰ Their aim, like hers, is to seek knowledge and improve ethical standards within their communities. Much of their inspiration derives directly from the work of the women of the Sokoto Caliphate, who were led and trained by Nana Asma'u.

From Yan Taru to FOMWAN: Continuity and Change in Women's Islamic Education

The intellectual tradition established by female scholars, particularly within the Sokoto Caliphate, has continued to thrive into the contemporary period, with the legacy of Nana Asma'u's scholarship remaining a pivotal reference point for women's contributions to Islam. This enduring influence has catalysed the emergence of numerous Islamiyah schools, many of which are owned and managed by women. These schools, often established within homes or community spaces, serve hundreds of students and reflect the deep-rooted commitment to education that Nana Asma'u championed. In Sokoto State, the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), established in 1985, has played a critical role in advancing the educational and spiritual development of women. FOMWAN operates a nursery and primary school, with a dedicated section for married women to acquire basic Islamic knowledge. The organization also conducts annual Ramadan tafsir sessions, attracting over 400 women, and actively engages in Da'wah outreach in rural communities. Prominent female scholars continue to contribute significantly to these efforts, offering lectures and teaching both male and female adults on platforms such as the Sunna television program. Scholars like Juwairiyya Suleiman, Zainab Aliyu, Malama Khadija Abdullahi, and Hauwa'u Said Suleiman have been instrumental in

30 Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *Educating Muslim Women: The West African Legacy of Nana Asma'u 1793–1864* (United Kingdom: Interface Publications and Kube Publishing, 2013), 24.

educating Muslim women, youth, and adults about the ideal Islamic way of family life through various media outlets.

The founding of FOMWAN was driven by the need to address the disadvantaged status, oppression, and exploitation of women, as well as their lack of agency within society. Bawa highlights that the Muslim women under FOMWAN, despite being highly educated and influential, challenge traditional notions by demonstrating how formidable Muslim women can be in addressing women's issues. Prior to FOMWAN's establishment, there was no unified platform for Muslim women to coordinate their voices and concerns. Recognizing this gap, Hajia Aisha Lemu and other Muslim women across Nigeria initiated the foundation of FOMWAN to raise awareness of the true teachings of Islam as outlined in the Qur'an and *sunnah* and to encourage women to live in accordance with these teachings.³¹

Much like Nana Asma'u oversaw the *jajis* who led numerous Yan Taru groups, FOMWAN is managed by an *amira*, the National President, who oversees operations, volunteers, and a small number of recent paid staffers. The organization also includes national executive officers—volunteers who chair various boards, including those of education, health, publications, finance, welfare, disciplinary matters, and international relations. Additionally, there is a tier of zonal coordinators for different regions across Nigeria, including the North East, North West, North Central, South West, and South East. During the Ramadan period, FOMWAN conducts *tafsir* sessions for women in various locations, which have achieved resounding success over the years, solidifying the organization as a rallying point for Muslim women. These *tafsir* sessions have been broadcast on national radio and television stations such as Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Radio Kaduna, and Rima Radio in Sokoto, further extending their reach. The influence of FOMWAN extends beyond Nigeria, as it has supported the formation of similar federations of Muslim women in other West African countries, including Ghana, Liberia, Gambia, and Sierra Leone. This expansion underscores FOMWAN's role in promoting Islamic growth in the contemporary period.

31 Aisha Balarabe Bawa, "Muslim Women and Sharia implementation in Northern Nigeria: An Overview of FOMWAN", *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanity* 18, no.1 (2017): 162.

Abdullah et al. (2020) observed that Muslim women faith-based organizations are formed not only for the purposes of Islamic propagation alone, but also to serve a mission of re-orientation, revitalization, rehabilitation and re-instatement of Islamic values and cultures in the minds and attitudes of Muslim women and Muslim society at large.³² Adebayo notes that FOMWAN's various activities within Nigeria include the education of Muslim women, women's health and HIV/AIDS awareness, the role of women in democratic processes and consolidation, and economic empowerment of women. FOMWAN's formation coincided with significant religious transformations in Africa, a time when religious organizations were increasingly involved in development and humanitarian projects. Various governments, international organizations, and donor agencies began to invite religious bodies to become partners in development, leading to a reemergence of faith-based initiatives.³³

Another organization actively engaged in educating the Muslim *ummah*, particularly women, is the Women in Dawah (WID). This Islamic organization was established to encourage Muslim women and the broader *ummah* to contribute to the spread of Islam, assist the needy and vulnerable, and help curtail atrocities and societal menaces. WID has branches across Nigeria and conducts *tafsir* sessions for women during Ramadan, which have become highly successful over the years, making the organization a rallying point for Muslim women. It is regarded as a fountain of knowledge for women, particularly through its monthly *dawah* sessions known as *talim*. Additionally, Women in Dawah conducts special sessions on the Islamic method of preparing a body for burial.³⁴

32 M. Abdullah, A. Abdullah & D. Haruna, "Women Empowerment as Panacea to Social Media Challenges in the 21st Century Muslim Society: The Role of Muslim Women Faith-Based Organizations in Nigeria", *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 10, no. 4 (2020): 27.

33 A. O. Adeboye, "Towards a Global Sisterhood: The Transnational Activities of the Federation, Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria" in *New Dynamics of Religious Expansion in a Globalizing World*, ed. Afe Adogame and Shobana Shankar (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2012), 268.

34 M. Abdullah, A. Abdullah & D. Haruna, "Women Empowerment as Panacea to Social Media Challenges in the 21st Century Muslim Society: The Role of Muslim Women Faith Based Organizations in Nigeria", *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 10, no. 4 (2020): 36.

Conclusion

This study has explored the significant contributions of Muslim women to learning and scholarship in Africa, particularly within the context of the Sokoto Caliphate. The Sokoto *jihad* movement, led by Shehu Usman dan Fodio, was instrumental in establishing a tradition of Islamic scholarship aimed at societal reform based on the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Education was recognized as a vital tool for addressing moral decay in society, and this was a principle embraced by both Shehu and the scholars of his community. Nana Asma'u, a scholar, educator, author, and poet, emerged as a prominent figure within this intellectual atmosphere. She founded the Yan Taru, a network of women who were trained to educate others across the caliphate. This movement not only reinforced the value of learning within the Muslim African context but also highlighted the role of women in the transmission of Islamic knowledge. The legacy of the Yan Taru movement has continued into the contemporary period, extending beyond Africa to the Western world, underscoring the enduring influence of Muslim women in education and activism. In the 20th century, faced with the deteriorating conditions of Muslim women, organizations like the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) emerged as a contemporary form of Yan Taru. FOMWAN continues the tradition of Nana Asma'u by advocating for women's education, preserving Islamic values, and empowering women in both religious and social spheres. Asma'u's work has inspired and motivated generations of women, leading to the establishment of schools, the production of scholarly works, and the translation of key texts into native languages for broader accessibility. These contributions have positioned women as respected religious leaders, spiritual guides, and social activists, whose impact extends far beyond the religious sphere. Their efforts have ensured that women remain integral to the fabric of African Islamic history, leaving an indelible mark on their communities and beyond.

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The Sokoto Reform Movement and the Hausa Society: From Enlightenment to Spirituality and Preservation of Islamic Values

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Introduction

The reform movement led by Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio in the 19th century in Hausaland was comprehensive, resulting in its enduring influence from 1804 to 1903. This movement profoundly transformed Hausa society, integrating it into a dynamic and vibrant part of the Muslim *ummah*. Raised in a scholarly family, Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio pursued Islamic knowledge with great zeal, learning from all the scholars he could reach. After acquiring both foundational and advanced knowledge, he felt a deep sense of responsibility to enlighten his community, both locally and beyond. His approach to reform intended to encompass both intellectual and spiritual dimensions. Leaders of the movement, including Usman Dan Fodio, his brother Sheikh Abdullahi Dan Fodio, and Sultan Muhammad Bello, consistently worked to guide the community. They authored numerous treatises focusing on enlightenment, deep spiritual training, and socio-economic empowerment, with the goal of fostering self-reliance and establishing clear principles of *al-Amr bi al-Ma'aruf and al-Nahy anil-Munkar*. These efforts were aimed at preserving the Islamic system that had been established, ensuring its longevity.

Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) was a product of his time and circumstances. He stands as a significant figure in the transformation of traditional Hausa society into a reformed Islamic society in 19th-century West Africa (Bilād al-Sūdān), particularly in present-day Northern Nigeria and southern Niger Republic. Of Fulani origin, Usman Dan Fodio was known for his high intellectual and moral character. He grew up in Hausaland, a region where the inhabitants were engulfed in ignorance, suffering under the weight of severe oppression and ruthless exploitation by the ruling authorities. He deeply internalized Islamic teachings and devoted his life to spreading

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the true, unadulterated message of Islam through teaching and preaching. Unlike many scholars of his time who remained in established schools or centres of learning, Usman Dan Fodio was an itinerant teacher and guide, moving from place to place to disseminate his teachings. This approach was in contrast to the resident scholars who, while respected and often appointed as imams or custodians of Qur'anic schools, were more stationary in their roles. Mobile scholars, like Usman Dan Fodio, played a crucial role in spreading Islamic knowledge across different regions. These scholars were known as itinerant teachers, a tradition rooted in the early centuries of Islam. However, in Hausaland, this role slightly diverged from its original form. Unlike early itinerant scholars who travelled individually, often settling in various learning centres, mobile scholars in Hausaland frequently moved with students entrusted to them by their parents, ensuring that Islamic knowledge was imparted to broader communities.¹ Driven by a passion for reform, Usman Dan Fodio studied the problems of his society and developed strategies tailored to the specific circumstances of his time. He was motivated by the widespread ignorance of Islam among the masses and the failure of existing scholars to guide rulers away from blameworthy acts. Despite facing significant harassment and attacks from those who supported the existing order, Usman Dan Fodio ultimately succeeded in his mission. He established the Sokoto Caliphate, which endured until the British colonization of the region in the early 20th century.²

To fully appreciate Usman Dan Fodio's role in societal reform, it is essential to understand the problems he identified and the systematic approaches he employed to address them. His strategies for transforming society, which fundamentally changed the central Sudan, focused on four key areas: enlightenment and pedagogy, spiritual development, socio-economic empowerment, and the principles of *al-'Amr bi al-Ma'aruf* and *al-Nahy an al-Munkar*. In light of these key areas, this article will delve into some of the significant works written by Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio, his brother Sheikh Abdullahi Dan Fodio, and Sultan Muhammad Bello. These leaders, often referred to as the

1 Ahmad Moyi Gada, *A Short History of Early Islamic Scholarship in Hausaland* (Kaduna: Nadabo Pring Production, 2010), 77-78.

2 Muhammad Bello, *Infāq al-Maisur fī Tarīkh Bilad al-Tukrur*, ed. by C. E. J. Witting (London: 1957), 28-9.

triumvirate, authored hundreds of treatises that not only addressed the immediate concerns of their time but also laid down a comprehensive framework for societal reform. Through an analysis of these works, this article aims to highlight the depth of their commitment to these areas and the enduring impact of their intellectual and spiritual contributions. Finally, we will conclude by offering recommendations on how the methods employed by these Islamic reformers, can be adapted to address the challenges of modern societies. By examining their holistic approach to reform, we will try to demonstrate the relevance of their legacy in shaping a just and ethical society in the contemporary world.

Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's Methodological Approach: Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice

Usman Dan Fodio's efforts were primarily concentrated on advancing the principles of Islam and enacting comprehensive social and moral reforms within Hausaland. His teachings placed a strong emphasis on the pivotal role of education, justice, and Islamic ethical conduct. He was a staunch advocate for the eradication of societal vices, including corruption, oppression, social inequality, and ignorance. Central to Sheikh Usman's mission was the widespread enlightenment of the populace, driven by his unwavering belief that education was essential for individuals to truly comprehend and practice their faith. Under his visionary leadership, a network of Islamic learning centres emerged across what would later become the Sokoto Caliphate. These institutions provided a holistic education, encompassing not only Islamic sciences but also disciplines such as mathematics, science, and literature. Through the promotion of education, Sheikh Usman sought to instil virtuous values and a broad spectrum of knowledge among the population, thereby fostering a society aligned with Islamic principles.³ In his quest to further promote virtues and curb vices, Usman Dan Fodio also championed significant social reforms. He ardently opposed practices that undermined human dignity, such as the mistreatment of women, and emphasized the importance of fairness and respect for all individuals,

3 Usman Fodio, *Kitab al-Amru bil Ma'rufi Wa al-Nahyi An-Munkari*, ed. by Aminu Bukhari (Published by Muhammad Murtadha ibn Alhaji Almustapha Kofar Marke, Sokoto), 16.

irrespective of their social status or gender. The teachings and reformative efforts of Usman Dan Fodio profoundly impacted the social structure of the Sokoto Caliphate, promoting virtues such as compassion, justice, and the respect for human rights. He modelled moral leadership and good governance, embodying the virtues he advocated in both his personal conduct and public duties. His emphasis on justice, righteous leadership, and the establishment of an Islamic state founded on these principles inspired a deep sense of moral responsibility among his followers and the broader society, encouraging a commitment to virtuous conduct and a rejection of societal vices. A cornerstone of Sheikh Usman's mission was the moral upliftment of society through Islamic education. He placed great importance on the acquisition of knowledge, particularly in the Islamic sciences. Wherever he travelled, he established centres of learning where students were educated in religious texts as well as in subjects like jurisprudence, language, and ethics. This educational focus was instrumental in promoting moral values and virtues within the community, contributing to the broader goals of his reform movement.⁴

The methodology employed by Sheikh Usman in transforming the Sokoto Caliphate was grounded in leading by personal example, rather than mere theoretical instruction. His life itself was a reflection of Islamic guidance, yet he was actively engaged in preaching and teaching others, which constituted his primary life's work. His approach to preaching was characterized by excellence and strict adherence to Qur'anic principles. As detailed in Muhammad Bello's work, *Tarjuman 'an Kaifiyyati Wa'azi al-Sheikh*, Usman Dan Fodio's methodology and the curriculum he developed were meticulously designed to provide the necessary training he envisioned for his community. He preached with wisdom and sound counsel, and his training of others was deeply rooted in knowledge. Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio, affectionately known as the Shehu, dedicated himself to the transformation of his society through the promotion of a deep understanding of *tawhid*, *hadith*, *tafsir*, *fiqh*, Arabic language and other fundamental Islamic sciences. Any knowledge deemed beneficial to the community was taught and disseminated by Sheikh Usman and his

4 Murray Last, "The Sokoto Caliphate and the Dynamics of Education, Society, and Politics in Northern Nigeria", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 46, no. 4 (2016), 464-497.

close associates.⁵ Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio was a leader of extraordinary stature. Although he was a man of peace, he successfully led a prolonged struggle, and though he was a mystic who shunned worldly affairs, he established a vast territorial empire. His spiritual magnetism, as noted by Ibrahim Sulaiman, played a critical role in maintaining the unwavering loyalty of his followers throughout his life.⁶ Even in the most challenging and desperate circumstances, Sheikh Usman's moral courage enabled him to steadfastly uphold his principles. As Sulaiman indicated, his profound belief in his destiny was so compelling that it inspired those around him to transform potential defeats into victories. Despite his numerous achievements, Sheikh Usman remained deeply unworldly, "unspoiled in triumph" and unshaken in adversity. Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio led a life of simplicity, piety, and abstinence, eschewing worldly gains precisely at the moment he had secured them. On the basis of his achievements alone, he is rightfully regarded as one of the greatest figures Africa has produced. However, when both his character and accomplishments are considered together, his place in history is truly unique.⁷

Target Audience in Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's Teachings and Preaching

In analysing the societal impact of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's reform movement, it is essential to categorize the target audiences of his teachings and preaching. These groups reflect the diverse challenges he faced in his efforts to establish a society governed by the principles of *sharia*. The following sections explore the three main audiences that were central to his mission: the ignorant populace of Hausaland, the traditional rulers, and the venal scholars.

a) Ignorance in Hausaland

Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's primary concern was with the widespread ignorance of Islamic principles among the common people of Hausaland. In his hometown, he observed that many were unaware

5 Ibrahim Sulaiman, *A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio* (London and New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1986), 15.

6 Ibrahim Sulaiman, *The African Caliphate: The Life, Work and Teachings of Shaykh Usman dan Fodio*, (Diwan Press, 2020).

7 Ibrahim Sulaiman, *A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio* (London and New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1986), 22.

of the basic tenets of Islam, which prompted him to focus on educating the masses. As Ismail Balogun observes: "He encouraged the common people to study the basic knowledge that is necessary for discharging their religious obligations, while advising that they should leave the details to the scholars."⁸ As noted by Muhammad Bello, Usman's son, the spiritual condition of the people was dire, with many practicing a corrupted form of Islam. Bello remarked,

It is so hard to find anyone among people of the Hausaland whose faith was pure and who worshipped properly at the time of his father's appearance. Most were ignorant about Islam and its rituals. Thus, Usman Dan Fodio categorises them into different categories, in which among them there were those who were pure believers at the same time worshipped stones. There were also those who pronounced *tawhid* while at the same time mixed up Islam with blameworthy acts inherited from their predecessors. It was in this situation that Usman Dan Fodio started inviting them to Allah.⁹

This observation underpinned Usman Dan Fodio's efforts to correct the religious practices of his people and guide them towards a purer understanding of Islam. Sheikh Usman's method of addressing this ignorance involved direct engagement with the community. He encouraged the populace to acquire basic religious knowledge essential for fulfilling their obligations while advising them to leave more complex matters to the scholars. His brother, Abdullahi, described their experience in Zamfara, stating "In Zamfara, we stayed therein for almost five years, and it was a land on whose people ignorance was overwhelming. Most of its people had never smelt the fragrance of Islam. They used to come to Sheikh Usman's council mixing with their women. He separated them and taught them that it is forbidden for men and women to intermingle. He then taught them the pillars of Islam. This reflects his concern with rectifying not just the spiritual deficiencies of the people, but also the social practices that contradicted Islamic teachings.

8 Ismail A. B. Balogun, "A Critical Edition of the *Ihya' al-Sunna wa-Īkḥmād al-Bid'a* of 'Uthman b. Fudī, Popularly Known as Usumanu Ḍan Fodio", Ph.D. Thesis (University of London, 1967), 112-113.

9 Muhammad Bello, *Infāq al-Maysūr*, translated by Alfa Umar Muhammad Shareef in the introduction of his translation of *Ihya' al-Sunnah wa Ikḥmād al-Bida'ah* written by Uthman bin Foduye, 58-61.

In several of his writings and preaching sessions, Usman Dan Fodio expressed deep concern about the tendency of many scholars in Hausaland to neglect the education of their own families, leaving them in a state of ignorance regarding their religious obligations by failing to teach them or send them to school. This issue was explicitly highlighted in the essay by Muhammad bin Yusuf bin Salim bin Ibrahim, where Usman quoted that:

Scholars of Hausaland were day and night together with their students teaching them the religion of Islam, but carelessly they left their daughters, sons, wives and their slaves without knowing anything about Islam. In fact, they considered them as wild animals that have not any benefit attached to them, or even as a pot, which once it breaks would be thrown away as a waste. They were not concerned to teach them about the rights of Allah on them. It was in this case that Usman Dan Fodio called upon women not to respond to the calls of any misguided scholar, who commanded them to obey their husbands by saying the success of women in this life is in obedience to her husband, but in reality, they do not command them to obey Allah and His Messenger (PBUH). Usman, however, emphasised that this is nothing but self-glorification or seeking popularity among their students.¹⁰

The quotation above reflects Usman Dan Fodio's profound concern for the education of the people of Hausaland, with a particular emphasis on women. It can be inferred that Usman regarded women as the foundational pillars of society, recognizing that their understanding of Islam was crucial for the overall development and flourishing of the community. Furthermore, in describing the methods of Usman Dan Fodio's public preaching and his approach to the people, Muhammad Bello elucidates in a long quotation, saying that (his father):

Once he went to a place to deliver a lecture, he used to sit calmly and then he would greet people with the greetings of Islam three times in a laudable voice... While delivering his lecture, he never showed any anger to those who were sending questions; rather he would stop and answer their questions before proceeding. Usman was never

10 Usman Dan Fodio, *Tanbīh al-Ihkwān 'ala Jawāz ittikhādh al-Majlis li 'ajli Ta'alīm al-Niswān 'Ilm Furūd al-'Ayān min Dīn Allah ta'ala al-Rahman*, ed. by Aminu Bukhari (Sokoto: Nigeria, n.d.), 9-10.

afraid of the presence of scholars who attended his lecture. He used to speak to them on what is acceptable to him. This is nothing but a little among his distinctive characters in his mission of preaching. His main intention was to teach ignorant people and remind the neglectful scholars...¹¹

Muhammad Bello, may Allah have mercy on him, has further described his father's methods of teaching and preaching, stating "He used to go out every Thursday to give admonition to the people... Many people used to join his lectures... He would go out in some of the nights after 'Isha' prayer diligently conveying the knowledge of Islam and important wisdom. He used to go out after the 'asr prayer to give instructions in the sciences of *tafsir* of Qur'an, *hadith*, *fiqh* and mysticism."¹² Through these efforts, Usman Dan Fodio intelligently and compassionately prepared the masses to understand and embrace Islam, as well as his vision for transforming their ailing society. His approach to teaching and preaching was firmly rooted in Islamic morals, ensuring that even the most uninformed individuals felt no embarrassment when asking questions during his lectures. Usman recognized that anyone seeking to guide others toward practicing Islam and refraining from evil must be both patient and kind, as this is essential for keeping people engaged and receptive to the message.

b) The Traditional Rulers of Hausaland

The traditional rulers of Hausaland represented the second group to whom Usman Dan Fodio directed his efforts for Islamic guidance. While his initial focus was on educating the common people, Usman recognized the importance of extending his *dawah* activities to the ruling elite, who held significant influence over the region. His brother, Abdullahi, noted that Usman was not initially accustomed to interacting with kings or engaging in relationships with them. However, as his following grew and his influence became widely known within the royal courts, Usman found it necessary to engage with the rulers directly. Usman's first significant encounter with the traditional rulers was with Sultan Bawa, the King of Gobir. During this meeting,

11 O. S. A. Ismail, "Some Reflections on the Literature of the Jihad and the Caliphate", in *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate*, ed. by Y. B. Usman (1979), 20-21.

12 Muhammad Bello, *Infāq al-Maysūr fī Tārīkh Bilād al-Tukrūr*, ed. C. E. J. Witting (London: 1957), 94-95.

Usman called upon the Sultan to adhere strictly to the correct practices of Islam and to establish justice throughout his land. After this interaction, Usman returned to his homeland, continuing his mission to spread Islamic teachings.¹³ As noted by Abdullahi Dan Fodio in *Tazyen al-Waraqat*, while meeting with the Sultan of Gobir, Sultan Bawa, he "... showed wisdom and sensitivity in preaching Islam to the rulers of Hausaland. His approach was neither confrontational nor violent; it is clearly simple (admonition). He showed respect to them but advocated before them the tenets of Islam without any fear. He handled Bawa in such a manner that he granted all his requests."¹⁴ This exemplifies Usman's fearlessness in speaking the truth, regardless of the power and status of his audience. Usman Dan Fodio's engagement with the rulers of Hausaland underscores his determination to ensure that the words of Allah (SWT) and His Messenger prevailed in society. His approach serves as an indirect lesson to Muslim scholars, emphasizing the importance of sincerity and integrity in the dissemination of knowledge. Usman's example illustrates the necessity of remaining impartial and avoiding the support of blameworthy actions by rulers or wealthy individuals for personal or political gain, a lesson particularly relevant for those who might be tempted by the allure of political influence.

c) The Venal Scholars and Their Activities

The third category that Usman Dan Fodio targeted in his efforts for societal reform was the group of venal scholars within Hausaland. Despite the significant successes Usman achieved through his teaching and preaching, he faced substantial opposition from these scholars. Their criticism was not rooted in theological disagreements over the content of Usman's message, which was firmly based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the *hadith* of the Prophet (SAW), but rather in the rapid spread and influence of his movement across Hausaland. These scholars, motivated by envy and fear of losing their own influence, launched various attacks against Usman, accusing him of misleading

13 Abdullah Dan Fodio, "Tazyin al-Waraqāt: Decorating Pages with Some of My Poems" in *Selected Writings of Shaykh Abdullah ibn Foduye*, ed. by Abubakar Buba Luwa & Sulaiman Musa, Volume 2 (Nigeria: Iqra' Publishing House, 2006), 5.

14 Ibid., 6.

the people.¹⁵ One notable instance of such opposition involved an erudite scholar from Borno, known as Mustapha Gwoni, who confronted Usman Dan Fodio upon his arrival in Daura. Gwoni, whose nickname "Gwoni" signifies an expert, presented Usman with a poem instructing him to prevent women from attending his sermons. This accusation was emblematic of the broader opposition Usman faced from scholars who were more concerned with maintaining their own status than with the true teachings of Islam.¹⁶ In response to Gwoni's accusation, Usman turned to his brother Abdullahi, recognizing him as the most suitable person to address the issue. In replying to Gwoni, Abdullahi initially stated that one should know that it is religiously obligatory based on the consensus of scholars, to do the lesser of two evils concerning religion and the worldly affairs. Relying on this rule, Abdullah vividly responds to Mustapha's poetry that "the greater evil is leaving women in ignorance of their religious obligations and of Islam itself, rather than the potential evil of their mixing with men." Abdullahi's response highlighted the critical importance of women's education in Islam, countering the baseless arguments presented by Gwoni.

Many of the scholars who opposed Usman's *dawah* were closely aligned with the rulers and elites of Hausaland, driven by a desire to protect their own interests rather than to uphold the true tenets of Islam. They were indifferent to the widespread blameworthy practices in the land, as their primary concern was preserving their influence and favor with the ruling class. Usman Dan Fodio criticized these scholars for their complicity by stating that: "Among their misunderstandings is that some of them (i.e. scholars) tolerate worthless customs under the pretext that the custom of a land is *sunnah*. But this is not truth and causes confusion according to the consensus of opinion (*ijma'*) because a custom should not be abided if it contradicts the *sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW)." Usman further asserted that: "Someone of the brethren told him that he heard some of them say 'Forbidding evil in the land of evil is the real evil'. And for this reason, they do not blame each other for committing an evil. I take

¹⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶ Ibid.

refuge with Allah the exalted."¹⁷ This complacency and moral relativism were, in Usman's view, a profound betrayal of Islamic principles. To address these issues, Usman found it necessary to compile a special treatise, emphasizing the necessity and permissibility of women's education outside the home, provided it was to gain an understanding of the basics of Islam. This treatise was specifically aimed at refuting the misguided arguments of the venal scholars who opposed his efforts to educate women in Hausaland.¹⁸ Through this treatise and his broader reform efforts, Usman Dan Fodio sought to dismantle the harmful influence of venal scholars, advocating instead for an Islamic society grounded in true knowledge, justice, and the equitable education of all its members, including women.

The Analysis of Usman Dan Fodio's Teaching and Preaching Methodologies

The preceding discussion has outlined the key audiences targeted by Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio in his efforts to reform the society of Hausaland. To gain a deeper understanding of the rational wisdom behind his strategies, it is necessary to examine the methodologies he employed. These can be categorized as follows:

1. Foundational Teaching of *Tawhid* and Islamic Rituals

Usman Dan Fodio's educational approach began with instilling the basics of *tawhid* (the oneness of Allah) and Islamic rituals among the people. His objective was to guide them in purifying their faith and correctly performing essential religious duties, such as prayer, fasting during Ramadan, giving alms, and pilgrimage. Muhammad Bello, Usman's son, provides insight into this systematic teaching methodology, noting that Usman would go out every Thursday to deliver sermons and would also conduct lectures after the 'isha prayer. Additionally, he would instruct people on various Islamic sciences, including Qur'an, *hadith*, *fiqh*, and *tasawwuf*, after the 'asr prayer.¹⁹ This structured approach demonstrates Usman Dan Fodio's detailed planning, with each day dedicated to specific themes of discussion.

17 M. A. Al-Hajj, "Meaning of the Sokoto Jihad" in *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate* (Nigeria, 1975), 7.

18 For more detail see Usman Dan Fodio, *Tanbīh al-Ihkwān*, 2-12.

19 Muhammad Bello, *Infāq al-Maysūr*, 31-32.

2. Enlightenment and Preaching

Usman Dan Fodio was recognized as both a resident and itinerant scholar, traveling from one place to another to spread his message. He was adept at communicating in multiple languages, including his mother tongue, Fulfulde, and Hausa. This multilingual approach significantly enhanced his acceptance and influence among the diverse populations of Hausaland. The use of local languages in his preaching is aligned with the Qur'anic principle that Allah (SWT)'s messengers were sent to their people in their own languages to ensure the clarity of the message. As stated in the Qur'an: "And we sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them. Then Allah misleads whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And He is the Almighty, the all-Wise."²⁰

3. Persistence and Perseverance

Usman Dan Fodio exhibited remarkable persistence in advancing his mission, undeterred by the challenges and opposition he encountered throughout Hausaland. He remained committed to instructing people in both towns and villages, fully aware that achieving his objectives required not only perseverance but also sincerity. Usman believed that force should not be employed unless absolutely necessary and even then, it should be applied with caution. His approach to preaching and societal transformation was fundamentally peaceful. According to Sulaiman, Usman's "effort to transform society, was basically a peaceful process which should not be disagreeing or create deliberate tension or complaint." Sulaiman further emphasized that "there is no way in which people can be changed through force. If using force becomes necessary, it should not be invited from the person whose job or assignment requires peace and compassion."²¹

4. Deep Spiritual Training and Self-Reliance

Usman Dan Fodio's movement was not only an intellectual endeavor but also deeply rooted in spirituality, aligning with the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and unwavering devotion to

²⁰ Qur'an, 14: 4.

²¹ Ibrahim Sulaiman, *A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio* (London and New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1986), 74.

Allah. The reform he envisioned was comprehensive, addressing both spiritual and socio-economic dimensions of the individual. A significant example of the spiritual guidance provided by the movement is found in the work of Sheikh Abdullahi Dan Fodio, titled *The Way of the Righteous to Felicity* (*Sabīl Ahl al-salāhi ilā al-Falāhi*). In this book he outlines the qualities and responsibilities of a righteous individual. He emphasizes the urgency of preparing for the Hereafter by sincerely repenting for one's sins and rectifying past wrongs, including returning anything unjustly taken. The individual must abstain from forbidden actions, struggle against the soul's inclination toward evil, and feel genuine remorse for past misdeeds. Abdullahi Dan Fodio also stresses the importance of seeking knowledge, particularly from scholars who adhere to the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and consistently choosing what is good while avoiding what is harmful or contrary to divine guidance.²² Understanding that reformed Muslim individuals are the foundation of any authentic Islamic renewal (*tajdid*), Sheikh Abdullahi and his contemporaries not only emphasized the acquisition of knowledge and enlightenment but also advocated a profound attachment to Allah (SWT), fostering deep devotion. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of self-reliance in securing one's sustenance, livelihood, and overall well-being. This focus on spiritual and economic self-sufficiency was a practical aspect that enabled the Caliphate to sustain itself and thrive.

Economic Stability and Justice in the Sokoto Caliphate: A Value-Based Approach

The emergence of the Sokoto Caliphate brought significant opportunities for economic growth and stability in the region, particularly in agriculture. Under the leadership of the Sokoto Caliphate, the most visible and profound impact of the *jihād* was the economic development that took place. Leaders like Sultan Muhammadu Bello, as noted by Abdulkadir Adamu, emphasized the importance of sustainable development as the foundation of the economy, ensuring that the population had access to sufficient food

22 Abdullahi Dan Fodio, "Sabīl Ahl Al-Salāhi Ilā Al-Falāhi" in *Selected Writings of Abdullahi bin Fodiyo* vol. 3, ed. by A. B. Yahya et.al (Gusau: Iqra' Publishing House, 2013), 283.

and raw materials for industries.²³ In his book *Tanbīh al-Ihkwān*, Bello cited verses from the Qur'an and *hadith* to assert that the most honorable and dignified members of society are those who fulfil their livelihood needs through gainful employment.²⁴ The Sokoto Caliphate's leadership actively encouraged the establishment of new towns and villages, both for defensive purposes and to enhance agricultural activities and related industries. In his book *'Usūl al-Siyāsa*²⁵ (*The Procedures of Politics*) written to the Emir of Katsina, Umarun Dallaji, Bello advised that: "One of the duties of the Muslim leader was to see to the colonization of rural areas through the foundation of villages and walled towns. This was part of a general policy of fostering the material welfare of the people. It should involve the encouragement of farmers and artisans the provision for the storage of food, and the regulation of market and road."²⁶ At the heart of the Caliphate's economic philosophy was a value-based system. Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio, advocated for an economic system grounded in justice, sincerity, moderation, modesty, and honesty. He asserted that justice is the key to progress, while injustice leads to societal decay. A just government, he argued, could endure even in the absence of belief, but it could not survive with injustice.²⁷ On the other hand, he warned against the unhealthy practices such as fraud, adulteration and extravagance and their bad consequences in the economy.²⁸ He exalted labor and hard work, and rejected begging. He encouraged his followers to engage in earning livelihood even through an ordinary occupation. This value-based approach extended to the revival of just Islamic economic institutions such as *al-hisbah* (market regulation),

23 Abdulkadir Adamu, "The Establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate and its Impact on Society and Economy: The Case of Zazzau in the Nineteenth Century" in *The Sokoto Caliphate, History and Legacies (1804 – 2004) Celebrating 200 Years of the Sokoto Caliphate and Its Legacies*, edited by H. Bobboyi and A. M. Yakubu (1st edition 2006), 100.

24 Muhammad Bello, *Tanbīh al-Ihkwān li Muhammadu Bello*. (N.P), (N.D), 6.

25 Muhammad Bello, *'Usūl al-Siyāsa li Muhammadu Bello* (N.P), (N.D), 7.

26 V. F. Sheriff, "Transformation of Sokoto Caliphate by Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo: A Social Thought Perspective", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* (2016), 11.

27 Usman Fodio, *Bayān Wujūb al-Hijrah ala al-Ibad* (*Statement about the Obligation of Migration for People*), ed.& tr. by F. H. al-Masri (Khartoum: Oxford University Press, 1978), 142.

28 Ibid., 142.

hima (protected land), *bayt al-mal* (public treasury), *zakah* (almsgiving), and *waqf* (endowments). Many of his economic ideas are outlined in his work *Bayan Wujub al-Hijrah ala'-Ibad*, as well as in other writings such as *Kitab al-Farq*, *Siraj al-Ikhwan*, *Bayan Bidah al-Shaytaniyah*, *Najm al-Ikhwan*, and *Nur al-Ibad*.

Self-Reliance in Local Production Taught by Sokoto Caliphate Leaders

The leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate placed a significant emphasis on promoting self-reliance and maintaining ethical standards in local production. Recognizing that traditional professions could not be sustained without strong ethical foundations; they understood that the absence of ethics would lead to moral decay and a lack of discipline among the youth. The Sokoto *jihad* leaders emphasized the importance of combining education, trade, and animal husbandry, as documented in their writings and imparted to their students across the caliphate's various schools of learning.²⁹ In his book *Kitāb al-Niyyāti fī Amali al-Dunyawiyyah wa al-Dīniyyah*, Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio detailed the ethical considerations necessary for engaging in traditional professions, which were well-established in Hausaland even before the arrival of Western influences. Sheikh explained that each professional should intend to fulfil their duties not only for themselves but also for the benefit of their fellow Muslims, as these professions are a communal obligation (*fard kifāyah*). Sheikh Usman emphasized that there should be no distinction between one's acts of worship and professional conduct, as both are ultimately for the sake of Allah:

A chapter on craft, other occupations and how to make an intention/*niyyah* (to perform it for the sake of Allah): Crafts and occupations are many; however, we will focus here on our purpose. Professionals in any occupation should intend to do it on behalf of themselves and their brothers in religion because engaging in a profession is a communal obligation (*fard kifāyah*). Also, because Allah's bounties (*rizq*) are not bound by a known entity, a skilful professional should not focus (his intention) on what to gain (from

29 Abdulkadir Adamu, "The Establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate and its Impact on Society and Economy: The Case of Zazzau in the Nineteenth Century" in *The Sokoto Caliphate, History and Legacies (1804 – 2004) Celebrating 200 Years of the Sokoto Caliphate and Its Legacies*, edited by H. Bobboyi and A. M. Yakubu (1st edition 2006), 100.

this world); rather, his intention should be righteous (for the sake of Allah). Thus, by doing so, he gets rewarded by Allah, and there won't be any difference between his prayers and his behaviour (in occupation) since all are for the sake of Allah.³⁰

Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio reinforced these views in his book *'Ādāb al-Tbādāt wa al-'Ādāt* (*Etiquette of Worship and Customs*), where he discussed the ethics of conducting business according to *shariah* principles: "It was the ethics (of making business) sanitizing the business in accordance with the *shariah* and the intention (of the business maker) should also be self-prevention from begging as well as being contented from the people's possession, and making that (business or trade) as a helpful way towards establishing a lawful means in the religion (of Islam) and strengthen the right of family, to the extent that this business does not prevent him from saying the prayer in due time and in the congregational mosque.³¹ Sheikh Usman highlighted that the intention behind engaging in business should be to prevent oneself from falling into begging and to maintain independence from others. Additionally, business should serve as a means to establish lawful practices within Islam, uphold family responsibilities, and ensure that religious obligations, such as timely prayer, are not neglected. As stated above, these ethics represent essential objectives that every businessman or trader ought to uphold before engaging in any business transaction. These guiding principles ensure that economic activities are conducted with integrity, aligning both personal and professional conduct with Islamic values.

Factors Behind the Success of Usman Dan Fodio in Transforming the Sokoto Caliphate

A key factor in Usman Dan Fodio's success was the dedication and loyalty of his followers, who were receptive to his teachings and obedient to his commands. Their soft hearts and willingness to embrace his guidance played a crucial role in the movement's impact. The assistance provided by scholars and students was also vital to the transformation of the Sokoto Caliphate. Usman Dan Fodio carefully cultivated a body of scholars, jurists, and students who were

³⁰Usman Dan Fodio, *Kitāb al-Niyyāti fī Amali al-Dunyawiyyah wa al-Dīniyyah*, (N.P), (ND), 19.

³¹ Usman Dan Fodio, *'Ādāb al-Tbādāt wa al-'Ādāt*, 20.

instrumental in disseminating his message, conducting the war, and eventually managing the caliphate.³²

Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's approach to his mission was distinctly phased which reflects a careful and deliberate progression. He did not rush from one stage to the next; instead, he patiently disseminated education and moral consciousness among the people over nearly three decades.³³ He took great care to avoid actions that might provoke the rulers, choosing instead to focus on purifying the faith of the people, enlightening them about proper worship and social transactions, and initiating them into the *tariqa* (spiritual path). Throughout this time, Sheikh Usman never mentioned jihad in any of his open-air preachings. His primary aim was to foster a deep spiritual and moral transformation within the community. According to Ibrahim Suleiman, this approach laid the groundwork for the eventual social and political transformation of the entire region.³⁴ When the time was right, and with Allah (SWT)'s permission, the focus of Sheikh Usman's message began to shift as *jihad* became necessary. He then started speaking about *hijra-jihads* (migratory struggles), a theme that he emphasized for several years. As victory was achieved and the Sokoto Caliphate was established, Sheikh Usman adapted his teachings to the new historical and political context. The emphasis of his message evolved to focus on the administration of the caliphate, the strengthening of Muslim solidarity, the application of *shariah*, and the preservation of the order of the *ummah*. This gradualist and systematic approach, reflective of the methods used by the Prophets and all genuine *mujaddids* (Islamic reformers), demonstrated Sheikh Usman's deep faith in the resilience of Islam. He believed firmly that no one could protect and preserve Islam better than Allah, nor could anyone love Islam more than Allah (SWT) Himself. Sheikh Usman's confidence in Islam, in Allah (SWT)'s judgment, and in the ultimate triumph of his cause was unwavering—and it was this confidence that ultimately led to the establishment of an *ummah*, an Islamic order, and a caliphate.³⁵

32 Ibrahim Sulaiman, *A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio* (London and New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1986), 15.

33 Usman Dan Fodio, *ʿĀdāb al-Tbādāt wa al-ʿĀdāt*, 152.

34 *Ibid.*, 152.

35 *Ibid.*, 152.

Another significant factor in the success of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's revolution and the transformation of the Sokoto Caliphate was his direct appeal to the masses, particularly to women, the poor, and other marginalized and dispossessed groups within society. With the support of the '*ulama*', Sheikh Usman was able to reach these communities effectively. He immersed himself in their lives, shared their aspirations, and made a concerted effort to understand and personally experience their struggles and grievances. Sheikh Usman fully identified with the people and championed their cause unconditionally.³⁶ In his view, it is Islam's abiding responsibility to defend the poor against the oppressive rich, as well as against a tyrannical social order and a tyrannical government. The success of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio's revolution was also bolstered by the strong and cohesive body of consultants and supporters who worked closely with him and migrated to join his cause. Their keen obedience and dedication were crucial, but perhaps even more important was the very existence of this advisory body. Throughout the movement, it became evident that Sheikh Usman was not acting alone; he rarely made decisions unilaterally. For instance, the election of the *amir al-muminin* was proposed to him, and he left the decision-making process to his advisers. Similarly, decisions regarding the conduct of the *jihad* were entrusted to the council. When these advisers eventually became rulers, they were encouraged to exercise their own judgment, as Sheikh Usman withdrew to focus on teaching and training. The revolution was not the work of a single individual but a collective effort deeply rooted in mutual consultation and collaboration.

The deep commitment of the *jamaah* (community) that supported Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio was another crucial factor in the success of his revolution. These individuals prioritized the hereafter over worldly concerns, demonstrating a readiness to leave behind their homes, property, families, and personal comforts to undertake the *hijra* (migration). They chose knowledge rather than ignorance hence each of them strove to learn and work by it. They preferred consciousness of Allah over moral degradation, enabling them to resist corruption and instead work toward the social transformation of society within the Caliphate. The *jamaah* functioned as a unified body, clear in their objectives and goals. They understood that they were working for a

³⁶ Ibid.

cause whose ultimate reward lay in the afterlife. This understanding drove them to acquire knowledge, live enlightened lives, and recognize that the success of their mission depended on their relationship with Allah (SWT) rather than on the fleeting pleasures of this world. They were engaged in a process of *tajdid* (renewal) and were resolute in their rejection of anything that could corrupt them. This strong sense of a shared mission, a common cause, and a unique identity helped to forge a cohesive *jamaah*, giving it the strength to persist in its efforts for many years and to fight continuously for more than a decade. A significant contributing factor to the transformation of the Sokoto Caliphate was the charismatic personality and effective methods of Sheikh Usman himself, which drew people to his cause and inspired their unwavering dedication.

Conclusion

The reform movement led by Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio, alongside Malam Abdullahi Dan Fodio and Sultan Muhammad Bello, offers timeless lessons for contemporary society. These leaders, along with various flag bearers who established the emirates, worked tirelessly to create a society grounded in the enduring principles of justice and the rule of law. Their achievements, deeply rooted in scholarship and a commitment to ethical governance, remain one of the Sokoto Caliphate's most enduring legacies, even 200 years later. The works authored by these leaders on managing public trust and improving society were highly relevant in their time, continue to be relevant today, and will remain significant in the future. As we reflect on the glorious history of the Caliphate, it is essential to draw lessons and insights that can guide and inform our present and future. The Sokoto Caliphate's foundation rested on principles that ensured its greatness and the longevity of its institutions. Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio emphasized the importance of good governance, laying out its principles and exemplifying them in his life. His approach to societal reform was not superficial; he understood that meaningful change is often difficult and requires deep, comprehensive shifts in attitudes and institutional structures. Superficial reforms, he warned, would provide only temporary relief, whereas profound, systemic changes are necessary for lasting improvement. Tolerance was another key aspect of the Sokoto Caliphate, which spanned a vast and diverse region,

stretching from Masinal in present-day Mali to Nikki in Benin, and from Maradi in Niger to Tibati in Cameroon. Within this expansive territory, various ethnic groups, economic communities, and religious sects coexisted peacefully. The leaders of the Caliphate not only laid the groundwork for cooperation and integration but also provided a model for peaceful coexistence that remains relevant in our sub-region and across the world. The harmony and tolerance that characterized the Caliphate serve as a powerful reminder of how diverse communities can live together in peace, regardless of their differences. Moral courage was also a defining trait of the Caliphate's leadership. Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio and his contemporaries were not afraid to speak truth to power, even when it involved admonishing powerful rulers and politicians.

In conclusion, this analysis has illuminated the critical factors behind the success of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio in establishing the Sokoto Caliphate, his methodologies, and the transformative impacts on the socio-political, educational, and economic lives of the communities within the Caliphate. The teachings of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio continue to resonate with people today, and his scholarly contributions still inspire new thinking and debates. The political model of governance that the Caliphate established, rooted in justice and the rule of law, serves as an enduring example of how religious commitment and ethical governance can lead to the creation of a just and prosperous society. The legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate will undoubtedly continue to guide Islamic thought and jurisprudence, serving as a springboard for real societal reform not only in Nigeria but far beyond.

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Learning, Scholarship and the Tajdīd Movements in Africa

Muhammad Shareef bin Farid*

Introduction

The word '*tajdīd*' (renewal/revitalisation/rejuvenation) comes from the root '*tajaddadu as-shay*' (to renew a thing), where the thing is made brand new after becoming dilapidated (*balā*). Thus, '*tajdīd*' has three qualities: [1] that a thing or matter at first exists and is useful to the people; [2] that the thing then becomes shabby or run-down and old in its nature; [3] that the thing then is returned to its original state that it was before it became ruined. The concept of *tajdīd* Islamically is, then, the same as: [1] commanding the good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahyi 'an al-munkar*) from one respect; and [2] struggle (*jihad*) and establishing social justice from another respect. Thus, societal transformation, religious reformation, cultural renaissance, and social revolution all fall under the comprehensive meaning of '*tajdīd*' (renewal) in Islam.

The source for this concept is found in the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna*. As for the *Qur'an*, Allah (SWT) says:

"If He desires, He will do away with you and bring a new generation. And this is not difficult for Allah." [35:16-17]. As for the *Sunna*, it has been related in many prophetic traditions in unbroken chains of transmission (*mutawātir*) that the religion of Islam will persist until the End of Time and that it will be renewed every century by the right acting scholars. Among them is what was related by Abu Dawud in his *Sunan*, al-Hassan ibn Sufyan in his *Musnad*, al-Tabarani in his *al-Awsat*, al-Hakim in his *al-Mustadrak* and many others on the authority of Abu Hurayra that the Prophet (SAW) said:

"Indeed, Allah will raise for this Umma, at the head of every one hundred years, those who will renew for it the matters of its religion."

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It is from the above cited prophetic tradition and many others that are similar in wording and meaning¹ that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) established: [1] the soundness of the concept of '*tajdīd*' (renewal/revitalization/rejuvenation); [2] the cyclical, inter-generational and persistent nature of '*tajdīd*'; [3] that '*tajdīd*' is one of the Divine favours or mercies with which Allah (SWT) distinguished the *Umma* of Muhammad (SAW) with over all previous religious communities; and [4] that the function of '*tajdīd*' is to revive, teach, explain and resolve the matters of the religion of Islam for the *Umma*.

***Tajdīd*: The Antithesis to Apocalyptophobia**

The overall advantage (*fā'ida*) of '*tajdīd*' is that the *Umma* of Muhammad (SAW) would not fall into what modern scholars describe as 'apocalyptophobia' (fear of the apocalypse) or apocalyptic fear or doomsday anxiety. Apocalyptophobia first developed in Judaism and Christianity, particularly in its Western manifestations, during the Hellenistic period, when the Roman Empire conquered the Judeo-Christian homeland, destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem and 'Hellenized' their traditions. Thus, apocalyptophobia was the Judeo-Christian response to Roman imperial control, and it sometimes morphed into 'apocalyptic violence' and even suicide cults.² The mass Jewish suicide at Masada during the 1st century (CE), as well as the violent Christian Crusades of the Middle Ages are prime examples of apocalyptophobia morphed into apocalyptic violence. In modern times, the Zionist movement, Heaven's Gate, Jim Jones and the People's Temple, and the resurgence of violent white supremacy in the United States and Europe are real-time examples of apocalyptophobia gone bad. Thus, *tajdīd* is the antidote to *Umma* of Muhammad (SAW) against the emergence of this kind of fatalistic doomsday anxiety.

Sultan Muhammad Bello ibn Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio, in his *Kitab ad-Dhikra*, narrates several profound prophetic traditions, which

1 For more details on these prophetic traditions see, Jalāluddin Abdurrahman al-Suyūṭī, *al-Tanbīh biman Yab'athuhu Allahu 'ala Ra'si Kulli Mi'a*, ed., Abdulhamid Shanuha (Dāru al-Thiqa li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1990), 8, 11, 24, 25, 32, 46, 47.

2 See: Colin McAllister, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Apocalyptic Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Vondung Klaus, *The Apocalypse in Germany* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000); Maria Manuel Lisboa, *The End of the World: Apocalypse and Its Aftermath in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers), 2011.

foretell the emergence of apocalypticophobia in the overall Muslim *Umma*, but also in the future heirs of the Sokoto tradition, where he narrates:

It has been related by al-Tabarānī in his *al-Awsat* on the authority of al-Mustawridī that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "This community will not neglect a single thing of the bad customs of the first communities except that they will do them." It has also been related by al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "The Hour will not be established until my community takes on precisely what the earlier generations before them took on." It was said: "Like the Persians and Romans, O Messenger of Allah?" He replied: "Who else but these people." ... The above prophetic traditions clarify to you that this community of Muslims will inevitably encounter the same misdeeds and transgressions that befell the Bani Isra'il after their first enjoying blessings, power, knowledge, and clear explanation.³

It is then, not surprising that we have witnessed the emergence of apocalyptic violent cult movements in the *Umma* of Muhammad (SAW), such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, etc., following the same trajectory of the apocalyptic movements of the Jews and Christians. To reiterate, the process of '*tajdīd*' is thus an antidote from Allah (SWT) against the emergence of such violent and fatalistic anomalies. '*Tajdīd*', as the above-cited prophetic traditions corroborate, is the actions of Allah (SWT) upon the *Umma* of Muhammad (SAW) that occurs every century and entails, first and foremost, the revival of Islamic learning and scholarship and then the transformative implementation of that learning and scholarship in society. Thus, *tajdīd* is, by definition, socially transformative and results in social transformation.

The Prerequisites of *Tajdīd* Based on the Sources

An understanding of the meaning of the prophetic traditions narrated regarding *tajdīd* reveals its meaning, its legal judgment, its extent, its limits, and its prerequisites. The meaning of the Prophet's words (SAW): "Indeed, Allah (SWT) will raise (*yab'athu*)..." is that this is a Divine action as an inherited continuity of prophet-hood and messenger-ship since the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets.

3 Muhammad Bello b. Shehu Uthman Dan Fodiyo, *Kitāb al-Dhikra* (Unpublished Manuscript), folio 2.

This meaning can be seen in what has been related by *Sheikh Ahmadu Baba al-Timbukti* in his *Jalb al-Ni'ama*, from al-'Aqīlī on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, who said that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said:

The scholars are the trustees (*umana'*) of the Messengers to the servants of Allah, as long as they do not intermix with unjust rulers and use their learning to enter into worldly affairs. For if they intermix with the rulers or use their learning to enter worldly affairs, then they have acted treacherously towards the Messengers, so be wary of them and avoid them.⁴

Thus, the scholars are partners with the Prophets in being 'raised' since they have inherited their knowledge, *taqwa*, and mission in calling the people to Allah (SWT).

The meaning of the Prophet's words (SAW): "Indeed, Allah (SWT) will favour (*yamunnu*)..." is also a Divine action of Allah upon His servants since the scholars of the *Umma* are a continuation of the mercy (*rahma*) with which Allah favoured the Prophets and Messengers; and are their vicegerents (*khulafa*). It has been related in the authority of Ibn Abbas that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) once said: "The mercy of Allah is upon my vicegerents." It was said: "What are your vicegerents?" He said: "Those who give life to my *Sunna* and teach it to the people. Whoever gives life to my *Sunna* has given life to me. Whoever gives life to me will be with me in Paradise." The meaning of his words: "Indeed, Allah will destine (*yaqīdu*)..." is a Divine promise (*wa'd*) and decree (*qadr*), which again is connected to the Divine promise that Allah makes for the Prophets and Messengers. Allah ta'ala says:

"Our Lord! and grant us what You have promised us by Your messengers, and do not disgrace us on the day of resurrection; surely You do not fail to perform the promise."⁵ The Divine promises of victory in this life and spiritual bliss in the Next that the Messengers bring to humanity for their belief and worship of Allah alone is the same function the scholars and jurists serve.

The jurists disagree regarding the meaning of the words of the Messenger of Allah (SAW): "at the head of every one hundred years" whether it is from the Prophet's birthday, the Prophet's death, the year he was chosen as a prophet, or the prophetic *hijra*. Imam as-Subki is

4 Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti, *Jalbu al-Ni'ma wa Daf'u al-Niqmati bi Mujānabat al-Wulāt al-Dhalama*, ed. Muhammad b. 'Azzuuz (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2011), 130-131.

5 Ali-Imran, 3/194.

of the view that it is from the prophetic *hijra*.⁶ The jurists also disagree regarding: "at the head of every one hundred years" whether it refers to the end of the century or the beginning of it. Imam al-Qari said: "It means either at the end of the century or at its beginning when knowledge and the *Sunna* will decrease and ignorance and heretical innovation increase." However, Imam al-Tayyib and Imam al-Mināwī are of the view that "the head of every one hundred years" means that when the one hundredth years end and the scholar who is *mujaddid* is still alive (*hāyy*) and is well known (*mashhūr*).⁷ This means that the *Mujaddid* must be alive at the turn of the *hijri* century and die before the 50th year of that century. If the scholar dies before the turn of the century or is still alive after the 50th year of that century, then he is not counted among the *mujaddidūn*.⁸ It is for this reason that outstanding scholars who combined in themselves all the remaining prerequisites of *tajdīd*, such as knowledge, lineage and renown, yet they were excluded from being *mujaddid*, like Imam Malik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), Imam al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Imam Muslim (d. 261/875), Sheikh Abdulqadir al-Jaylāni (d. 561/1166) and Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse (1900-1975).

Imam al-Suyūṭī corroborated this view in his *Tuhfat al-Muhtadīn bi Akhbār al-Mujaddidīn*:

And the prerequisites in that are that the century passes
 And the reformer is alive among the people
 And he is indicated to by his knowledge and by his station
 And he gives victory to the *Sunna* by means of his teachings
 And that he must be singular, is the famous view
 As expounded by the prophetic tradition and the majority of the scholars⁹

This establishes that the *mujaddid* must be alive at the turn of the century and die within the first half of the century. If a scholar is alive during the second half of the century, then he is precluded from being *mujaddid*. This idea of the *mujaddid* being a singular individual who

6 Al-Suyuti, *al-Tanbīh*, 9.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 13.

9 Jalāluddīn Abdurrahman al-Suyuti, *Tuhfat al-Muhtadīn bi Akhbār al-Mujaddidīn*, ed. & trans. Muhammad Shareef b. Farid, (Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International (SIIASI), 2023), 5.

will emerge in every century was promoted by Imam al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), who claimed that this was the prevalent opinion (*mashhūr*). This is based upon the apparent meaning of the above-cited prophetic traditions, where the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "Indeed, Allah will destine at the head of every one hundred years a man from the people of my household who will teach my *Umma* the religion"; and His words (SAW): "Indeed, Allah will favour the people of His religion at the head of every one hundred years with a man from the people of my household who will clarify for them their religion." It is for this reason that Imam al-Suyūṭī designated the *mujaddidūn* to be a single individual and, after the third century, to be scholars of the school of thought of Imam al-Shafi' (d. 204/820). He said in his *Tuhfat al-Muhtadīn*:

For there was during the first century Umar
 The caliph of justice, by acknowledged consensus
 And al-Shafi' was the reformer of the second century
 Due to what he possessed of sublime science
 Then Ibn Surayj was the leader of the third century
 And al-Ash'arī was counted among the Umma
 The al-Bāqillānī was the reformer of the fourth, or Sahl or
 Al-Isfarayaynī; there is dispute regarding their judgment
 And the fifth was the learned savant, who was al-Ghazālī
 And He is counted among them due to his deliberations
 And the sixth was the highly honoured, the Imam ar-Rāzī
 As well as al-Rāfī'ī, like him, he was equivalent in achievement
 And the seventh the most refined of the refined
 Ibn Daqīq al-'Eid by unanimous agreement
 And the eighth was the learned savant, he was al-Bulqīnī
 Or it was the most learned of creatures, Zayn al-Dīn."¹⁰

Scholarship: The Key Criteria for the *Tajdid*

One of the most important prerequisites for the *mujaddid* is that he must be a scholar, as some of the different versions of the earlier cited prophetic tradition clearly state: "...who will teach the people their religion", "... who will teach my *Umma* the religion", and "... who will clarify for them their religion." The majority of the jurists hold the view that the *mujaddid* must be not only a scholar but also a *mujtahid*

¹⁰ Ibid.

capable of giving independent judgment upon the contemporary issues that will inevitably emerge.

Sultan Muhammad Bello ibn Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio stated in his *Dhikr al-Mujaddidīn* that Abdulwahab al-Shaʿrani said in his *al-Wasāya*: "No time is ever free of one from among them, meaning scholars of the Reminder who renew from the Divine Law what had been effaced by the hand of the deviants. Among his signs is that he manifests knowledge unlike any earlier example. His knowledge is nearly matchless, due to the depth of his understanding, along with the fact that his knowledge is never transmitted except based upon the judgment understandable to the common believers, devoid of self-aggrandizement. Even though, he is among the people of established rank, he discharges and delivers knowledge to those who deserve it while remaining obscure and unknown as if nothing is attributed to him."¹¹

Based upon decisive legal evidence (*dalāʾil qāṭiʿ*), the *mujaddid* must exist at the head of every one hundred years. They must also be among the scholars of *ijtihād* who revive the religion and the *sunan* after its decline. However, the exact identity of a *mujaddid* is a matter of supposition, inference and speculation (*dhanniyyun*), for any individual who meets the earlier-mentioned requirements can be a reformer of the century in which he lives.¹²

Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz as The Prototype of the *Mujaddid*

All the scholars or jurists who deliberated on the identification and classification of the *mujaddidun* unanimously designated the Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz as the *mujaddid* of the first century of the *hijra*. Imam al-Zuhri (d. 124/742), Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855) and others from the former and latter jurists were unanimous that among the first of the *mujaddidun* of the first-century *hijra* was the Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz. Imam Ibn Hajar (d. 853/1449) said that Abu Bakr al-Bizaar said: "I once heard Abdulmalik ibn Abdulhumayd al-Maymuni say: 'I was once with Ahmad ibn Hanbal who said that Umar ibn Abdulaziz was the *mujaddid* of the first century'." Abu Ismaʿil al-Haruri related Ahmad ibn Hanbal said regarding the prophetic

11 Muhammad Bello b. Shehu Uthman Dan Fodiyo, *Dhikr al-Mujaddidīn*, trans. Muhammad Shareef b. Farid (Bamako: SIIASI, 2023), 7.

12 Muhammad Bello, *Dhikr al-Mujaddidīn*, 7.

tradition: "Indeed, Allah will favour the people of His religion at the head of every one hundred years with a man from the people of my household who will clarify for them the matters of their religion": "I examined the first one hundred years and saw that there was a man from the family of the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and he is Umar ibn Abdulaziz." Imam Ibn `Adiy once said: "I heard Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn say: 'All of our companions have said that the Umar ibn Abdulaziz was the *mujaddid* of the first century'."¹³

The reason Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz was designated as the *mujaddid* of the first century of the *hijra* is because he combined all the prerequisites of *tajdid*. He was from the Quraysh, the people of the House. He was an expert in the science of prophetic traditions. He was a scholar. More importantly, what distinguished him from most of the subsequent *mujaddidun* is that he established Islamic sovereignty, *jihad* and adjudicated with justice and equity. Allah (SWT) blessed him with the political power to establish *tajdid*. It is for this reason that he was considered a prototype for *tajdid* and the jurist called him a *mujaddid kamil* (a perfected reformer).

Imam Mubarak ibn Fadala related on the authority of 'Ubaydallah ibn Umar on the authority of Nafi' who said: "I use to hear Abdullah ibn Umar often say: 'I wonder about this one who has the sign of the scion of Umar, that he will fill the earth with justice'." The jurists of Medina used to say about him before he was appointed as Caliph: "The scholars are like the disciples of Umar ibn Abdulaziz." He was first appointed as the governor of Medina; then as the *wazir* to the Caliph Sulayman ibn Abdulmalik, and then he was appointed a Caliph and *amir al-mu'minin*. It was then, due to his astuteness in knowledge and his capacity to establish social justice, he became one of the *khulafa al-rashidun* and the *mujaddid* of the first-century *hijra*. Allah (SWT) favoured him to gather together the blessings, learning and scholarship, as well as upright government and social justice. Allah (SWT) favoured him to join mastery of inward spirituality and outward political sovereignty. This appeared again in the 12th century of the *hijra* in the personage of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio.

13 al-Suyuti, *Tuhfat al-Muhtadin*, 12-13.

Multiple *Mujaddidūn* in Each Century

Imam al-Suyūṭi designated each of *mujaddidūn* after the Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz and Imam Muhammad ibn Idris as-Shafi' to be followers of the school of thought of Imam al-Shafi', the designation of the *mujaddidūn* being a singular individual from a specific school of thought restricted the overall meaning of *tajdīd* and narrowed its scope from being able to impact the entire *Umma*. This is impractical because the prophetic traditions clearly stipulate that the *Mujaddid* will impact the entire *Umma*, not a specific sector of the *Umma*.

However, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ahmadu Baba at-Timbuktu advanced the idea in his *Ta'liq 'ala Tuḥfat al-Muhtadīn bi Akhbār al-Mujaddadīn*, where he quotes his father that the majority of the prophetic traditions which foretell of the coming of a *mujaddid* use the relative pronoun '*man*' ('one who'/'those who'); where he said: This is because '*man*' is applicable for a multiplicity

Likewise, it is usually applicable to the singularity
The Exalted says: '*Among them is he who listens*',
And He say: '*Those who listen*'; therefore listen
For both verbal expressions are from the language of the *Qur'an*¹⁴
And the latter singular meaning cannot take prevalence over the
other

This is further corroborated by the fact that the last of the *mujaddidūn* will be more than one, as it has been well established in the prophetic traditions regarding the End of Time in the appearance of the *Mahdi* from the family of the Prophet (SAW) and the heavenly descent of Jesus, the son of Mary. Both will be *mujaddidūn*, both will live during the same time, and one will be a just Caliph (an executive ruler), and the other will be a just judge (*hākim*).

It is for this reason that Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ahmadu Baba al-Timbukti said in his *Ta'leeq* enumerating the array and multifaceted nature of *mujaddidūn* during the first century of the *hijra*: "At the head of the first century was the possessor of political sovereignty (*'ulu al-amr*) Umar ibn Abdulaziz, who sufficed this *Umma* specifically because he acted on behalf of Islam to the extent that is not hidden from anyone. At the same time, among the scholars of Medina were

14 Muhammad b. Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti, *Ta'liq 'ala Tuḥfat al-Muhtadīn bi Akhbār al-Mujaddidīn* (Manuscript, Mamma Haidara Archive, Bamako), 16871, folio 2.

Muhammad al-Baqir ibn Ali (d. 114/733), al-Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr as-Siddiq (d. 107/725), and Salim ibn Abdallah ibn Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 106/725). In Mecca, there were Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. 103/721), 'Ikrima the freedman of Ibn Abbas (d. 105/723), and 'Ata' ibn Abi Rabah (d. 114/732). In Yemen, there was Tawus ibn Kaysan (d. 106/725). In Syria, there was Makhul (d. 112/730). In Kufa, there was 'Amir ibn Sharahil al-Sha'bi (d. 104/722). In Basra, there was al-Hassan al-Basri (d. 110/728) and Muhammad ibn Sirin (d. 110/729). Among the scholars of *Qur'anic* recitation at the head of the first-century *hijra*, there was Abdallah ibn Kathir (d. 120/738). Among the scholars of prophetic traditions, there was Muhammad ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d. 124/742) and a large community of famous jurists among the *Taabi'un* and the *Tābi' al-Tābi'in*.¹⁵ Not only did Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ahmadu Baba and his father provide evidence that there is an emergence of a multiplicity of *mujaddidūn* in a variety of Islamic disciplines in a single century, but they also deemed those considered *shi'a imāmiyya* among them.¹⁶ Thus, the concept of *tajdid* in Islam was viewed as a 'megatrend' that impacts the entire *Umma* of Muhammad (SAW), and cuts across all sectarian peripheries.

Sheikh Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Wansharisi said in his *Jāmi' al-Miyar*, citing Fakhruddin al-Mubarak ibn Abdilkarim al-Athir:

The foremost view is that the prophetic tradition can only be understood in a general sense. For his saying (SWA): 'Indeed, Allah will raise for this *Umma* at the head of every one hundred years, those who will renew for it its religion'. This does not necessitate that those suitable to renew the religion at the head of every century be a single person. It is conceivable that the person can be one individual or that there can be more than one. This is because the relative pronoun 'man' can apply to a single individual, or it can apply to more. For this reason, also it is not necessary that the prophetic tradition of those being raised for that century follow a specific school of thought, as some scholars assume. For perhaps the *mujaddid* can benefit the *Umma* in the realm of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) or they can benefit the *Umma* generally in the overall affairs of the religion. For it is conceivable for those who renew the religion to benefit the *Umma* in many other matters such as those who possess political authority ('*uli al-amr*'), likewise with the scholars of

15 Muhammad b. Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti, *Ta'liq*, folio 5.

16 Ibid., folio 4.

prophetic traditions, who bring benefit in the verification of prophetic traditions which act as the evidence for the *shari`a*. This is the same for the scholars of *Qur`anic* recitation who bring benefit in the authentication of its recitation (*bi dabt al-qirā`at*) and the verification of the narrators (*dabt al-riwāyāt*). Likewise, the ascetic sages (*zuhhād*) bring benefit to the *Umma* through their exhortations (*wā`idh*) and encouragement to adhere to fearful awareness of Allah and having austerity in this world's life. Thus, each category of scholar can benefit the *Umma* in ways that the others cannot."¹⁷

This is important because the promise of the possibility of the *mujaddid* being more than one in a century protects the *Umma* from falling into personality worship, partisanism and sectarianism, which are the downsides of designating a singular individual. Thus, we can surmise from the above that every scholar of Islam is involved in some aspect of *tajdīd*, but not every scholar involved in *tajdīd* is a *mujaddid*.

Tajdīd in the Bilād al-Sūdān

Because *tajdīd* involves renewal and revitalization of the most forward-looking traditions of the past, we can equate *tajdīd* in Islam with that African Ghanaian Twi concept of '*Sankofa*'. '*San*', meaning 'to return; '*ko*', meaning 'to go'; and '*fa*', meaning 'to take or fetch'; thus, '*Sankofa*', to go back into the past to retrieve what is best and manifest it for the future. This is the meaning of *tajdīd* in Islam. In fact, the religion of Islam, which Prophet Muhammad (SAW) came with, was itself *tajdīd*. Allah (SWT) says:

"And who has a better religion than he who submits himself entirely to Allah? And he is the doer of good (to others) and follows the faith of Ibrahim, the upright one, and Allah took Ibrahim as a friend."¹⁸ Allah (SWT) says:

"Say: Surely, (as for) me, my Lord has guided me to the right path; (to) a most right religion, the faith of Ibrahim the upright one, and he was not of the polytheists."¹⁹

So clearly, what our Prophet Muhammad (SAW) came with the religion of Islam was nothing new. It was *tajdīd* of the *deen*, the *milla* and the *sunna* of the prophets and messengers before him. This idea is

17 Muhammad b. Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti, *Ta`liq*, folio 2-3.

18 al-Nisa, 4/125.

19 al-An'am, 6/161.

psychologically important when looking at the African continent and its people because nowhere on earth has the idea of *tajdīd* played out more in its development, transformation and history.

The African Kingdom of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) was the first unitary polity to assist Islam, and because Allah (SWT) assists His religion and those who help His religion, Africa became a continent where Islam was renewed repeatedly for the past fourteen hundred years. The identity construct of the Abyssinian Kingdom traced its lineage back to the earliest Christians and back to the House of King David, the King/Prophet of the Banu Isra'īl. The encounter between this ancient line of the Banu Isra'īl and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) constituted a '*tajdīd*' (revival) of their ancient covenant with Allah (SWT). It was this encounter which gifted Africa with an unbroken line of Islamic civilisational polities that stretched from the Red Sea to the Atlantic.²⁰

The *Mujaddidūn* of Africa

Imam al-Suyūti, the Egyptian polymath who designated those individuals who were well known and whom the consensus of the generations before him indicated as the *mujaddidūn* from the 1st century to the 8th century of the *hijra*, was also counted among the *mujaddidūn*. He said the following in his *Tuhfat*:

And as for this ninth century, which has
Now come, for the Guide will not go against His promise
For I hope that I am the reformer
In it, for the bounties of Allah can never be disputed.²¹

Of all the previously cited reformers, Imam al-Suyūti was the first to have a major impact on Sub-Saharan Islamic Africa. He was one of the key advisors to Askia Muhammad Toure when the Songhay ruler passed through Egypt on his way and his return from the *Hijaz*.²² In fact, al-Suyūti was the scholar responsible for the Abbasid *Sharif* of Mecca, Malik al-Adil ibn Muhammad ibn Barakat, to appoint Askia

20 Muhammad Shareef b. Farid, *The Original Message to the Blackman: Islam and African, the Revival of An Authentic Anthropology* (London: SIIASI, 2000).

21 Ibid., 5-6.

22 Joe Wilson, "In Search of Askia Mohammed: The Epic of Askia Mohammed as Cultural History and Songhay Foundational Myth" (Master's Thesis, James Madison University, 2016), 86.

Mohammed as Caliph of *Takrur*.²³ Kati narrated that it was Imam al-Suyūti who informed Askia Mohammed that the last two of the twelve righteous Caliphs foretold by the Prophet (SAW) would come from the lands of Takrur.²⁴ As cited above, Imam al-Suyūti declared that he was one of the *mujaddids* of the ninth-century *hijra*. Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ahmadu Baba described him as a polymath, a leading *Sheikh* of the science of prophetic traditions and a master of all the sciences and disciplines associated with independent judgment (*al-muta'alliqa bi'l-ijtihād*).

Another scholar who was considered as one of the *mujaddids* of the ninth-century, and who had a major impact on the *Bilad as-Sudan* was Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdilkareem al-Maghili. His influence as a reformer spread from Tuat in southern Algeria, Timbuktu, Djenne and Gao in Mali, as well as the city of Kano in the Hausaland, where he advised rulers on the implementation of Islamic rule and the reformation of society.

The 9th-century *hijra* constituted what scholars call the golden age of African Islamic civilisation.

This century witnessed the emergence of the great Songhay polity, which brought under its political sovereignty the rich salt mines of Tuat in southern Algeria, the gold mines of present-day central Ghana, and stretched from Senegambia to present-day Burkina Faso. The 9th-century *hijra* also witnessed the emergence of the seven Hausa city states that revolved around the growing economic centres of Kano, Katsina, Daura, Kebbi, Gobir, and Zauzau. And to their east emerged immense polity of Kanem Bornu, and because of increased Islamisation of the region, learning and scholarship flourished.

In his *Dhikr al-Mujaddidīn*, Sultan Muhammad Bello acknowledged that he did not know with any certainty who were the *mujaddidūn* of the 10th and 11th centuries, other than Sheikh Ahmadu Baba al-Timbukti.²⁵

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ahmadu Baba corroborated this in his *Ta'liq 'ala Tuhfat* where he said:

In the 10th century, my father is the *Mujaddid*

23 Qadi al-Hajj Mahmud Kati al-Timbukti, *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh* (SIIASI, 2022), 44.

24 Ibid., 5.

25 Muhammad Bello, *Dhikr al-Mujaddidīn*, 7-8.

And Allah knows best, and who is there that can debate?"

He was the Sheikh Abu al-Abbas Ahmadu Baba ibn Ahmad ibn Ahmad ibn Umar ibn Muhammad Aqit. As-Sa'di said of him: "He was earnest and strenuous from the beginning of his affair in the service of knowledge until he outstripped all of his contemporaries and surpassed them exceedingly. No one vied with him in knowledge except his *sheikhs*, who testified to his eminence in the sciences. His affair became renowned in the West and his reputation spread throughout the regions. The scholars of diverse quarters surrendered to him regarding legal decisions. He stood firm in support of the truth even on behalf of the lowly of people and he never glossed over the truth even in the face of the amirs and the sultans. The name Muhammad was written upon the right side of his back innately in white characters."²⁶

Many of Sheikh Ahmadu Baba's contemporary scholars from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia as well as those of the Bilād al-Sūdān declared that he was the one of the *mujaddidūn* of the 10th century *hijra*. Nevertheless, to him, it was his teacher, the learned Sheikh Muhammad Baghyuyu ibn Mahmud ibn Abi Bakr al-Wangari al-Timbukti, who was one of the *mujaddidūn* of the 10th century.²⁷ However, this seems incorrect because Sheikh Baghyuyu did not meet one of the key prerequisites of the *mujaddid* since he died in the year 1000 A.H.

As for the 11th century *hijra*, among the scholars of the Bilād al-Sūdān who met the criterion for being *mujaddid*, there was the renown Sheikh Muhammad al-Wali ibn Sheikh Sulayman al-Turudi of Baghirma. He authored excellent works, which testified to the profusion of his knowledge, the extent of his embracing of disciplines and his complete familiarity with the sciences. Among them was *al-Minhal al-'Adhb li Tlmi Asrāri Sifāt al-Rabbi*, regarding the science of divine unity (*tawhid*).²⁸ He composed an excellent commentary upon

26 Abdurrahman al-Sa'di, *Tārikh al-Sūdān*, trans. Muhammad Shareef b. Farid (SIASI, Pittsburgh, 2002), 35.

27 Ahmadu Baba ibn al-Hajj Ahmad ibn Ahmad al-Timbukti, *Nayl al-Ibtihāj bi Tatrīz al-Dībāj*, ed. Abdulhamid Abdallah al-Hirāma (Tripolo: Kulliyat ad-Da'wa al-Islamiyya, 1398/1989), 600-602.

28 Muhammad al-Wali b. Sulayman, *Minhal al-Ma'ī al-'Adhb li Tlmi Asrāri Sifāt al-Rabbi*, ed. Muhammad Shareef b. Farid (Bamako: Sankore University Press, 2023).

the *al-Sughra* of al-Sanusi called *al-Manhaj al-Farīd fī Ma'arifāt Ilm al-Tawhīd*²⁹ and his versification of the *al-Niqāya* of al-Suyūtī. Sheikh Muhammad al-Wali composed many Arabic poems commanding the good and forbidding the evils that had prevailed over the lands of Baghirma. All of his works are evidence of his contribution to the development of the movement of *tajdīd* in central *Bilad as-Sudan*.³⁰

There was Sheikh Abu Bakr ibn Taahir Taashi at-Tuwareg, the author of the *Tarīkh Ahir*. He was from the scholarly families that governed Ahir. He was among those scholars who commanded the good and forbade evil.³¹ From 1644 to 1674 (1054-1085 A.H.), a Zawāyā scholar by the name of Nasir al-Din Ashfaga initiated *tajdīd* through preaching, instruction, commanding the good and forbidding evil and which ended in the establishment of Islamic government throughout Futa Tooro and the Wolof people along the Senegambia River.³² Also, from 1690 to 1699 (1101-1110 A.H.), Imam Malik ibn Dawuda ibn Hamet Bakar, following the *tajdīd* methodology of Imam Nasir al-Din, established reform in Futa Bundu, which eventually led to the consolidation of Islamic government in the region.³³

Karamokho Alfa Ibrahima Sambeghu ibn Musa was another mujaddid who established Islamic *tajdīd* in Futa Djallon between 1726-1751/1138-1164 by consolidating the Islamic confederation of the region with its capital in Timbo. After he died in 1751, his cousin, Alfa Ibrahima Sori Mawdu was appointed as the religious leader (*almamy*).³⁴ During Ibrahim Sori Mawdu's period, Abu al-Husayn Abdur-rahman ibn Ibrahim Sori was captured, sold to the French and enslaved in Natchez, Mississippi. However, he eventually won his

29 Ibid.

30 Muhammad Bello b. Shehu Uthman Dan Fodiyo, *Infāq al-Maysūr fī Tārīkh Bilad at-Takrūr*, ed. Muhammad Shareef b. Farid (Zunyi, PRC: SIIASI, 2008), 7.

31 John O. Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa Vol. II: The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden - New York - Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995), 34.

32 For detailed information on the Jihad of Imam Nasir al-Din see B. Barry, "Senegambia from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century: Evolution of the Olof, Sereer and "Tukuloor," in *General History of Africa V: Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. B. A. Ogot (Heinemann/UNESCO, Oxford, 1992), 272-277.

33 P. D. Curtin, "Jihad in West Africa: Early Phases and Interrelations in Mauritania and Senegal", *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 1 (1971): 11-24; see also Michael A. Gomez, *Pragmatism in the Age of Jihad: The Precolonial State of Bundu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 32.

34 B. Barry, "Senegambia from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century," 291-292.

freedom by writing in Arabic and later had a major impact on the African American slave abolitionist David Walker.³⁵

In 1760/1173, as a result of repression from the Dhiankhanke rulers of Futa Toro, who were deeply involved with the Brakna and Trarza "Moors" in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, *Cheirno* Sulayman Baal, another student of the *mujaddid* Nasir al-Din arose to unite the Muslims.³⁶ Chierno Sulayman moved his followers to Futa Djallon and Futa Bundu, and in 1776/1190, he was able to consolidate Islamic sovereignty over the region. One of his first legal decisions was to forbid all English and 'Moors' attempts' to procure African slaves.³⁷ The griot Seegaa Nan gives us this picture of the *tajdid* method Chierno Sulayman Baal when he sang:

Sulayman Baal was the very first to come back to Futa.
 Right from Danaana, he began preaching, saying: "Hurry to prayer!"
 He spoke of the foundations of the religion that Allah had
 commanded.
 Once he had done this, people believed and came into Islam.
 At that time, the Moors used to come from the north
 They came to plunder the property of the blacks
 They did not consider the black people to be human beings,
 They would kidnap children and enslave them, take away cattle,
 They simply did that continually. At that time, praying was not
 common.
 He (Sulayman) came from Futa and encouraged them to pray. Futa
 prayed.
 He encouraged them to believe in Allah and they accepted.
 One by one, Futa altogether became Muslim.³⁸

With the 1776 confederated Islamic victory over Futa Toro, Futa Djallon, and Futa Bundu, Chierno Sulayman Baal died and the

35 Muhammad Shareef b. Farid, *The Lost & Found Children of Abraham in Africa and the American Diaspora: The Saga of the Turdabe Fulbe & Their Historical Continuity Through Identity Construct in the Quest for Self-Determination* (Zunyi PRC: SIIASI, 2nd Edition, 2008), 57-61.

36 Waziri Junayd b. Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Dabti al-Multaqaat min al-Akhbar al-Muftaraqat fi al-Mu'alifat* (Unpublished Manuscript), folio 11. The title *chierno* is a Fulbe title meaning sheikh or teacher.

37 B. Barry, "Senegambia from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century," 296-297.

38 Moustapha Kane and David Robinson, *The Islamic Regime of Fuuta Tooro* (East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1984), 37.

authority was given over to *Chierno* Abdulqadir Kan. He continued the policy of Islamic *tajdīd* among the *Fuutankoo*be' (the people of Futa).³⁹ Chierno AbdulQadir Kan was able to defeat the Moorish slave raiders and garner allegiance of the Wolof, Dhiankhanke' and Walo kingdoms.⁴⁰ The new confederation was known as the *Almamaagal* or the Imamate, where the *Turudbe*' under Abdulqadir redistributed lands, assigned local *imams* to villages and expanded *Turudbe*' Islamic influence over the entire region of Futa.⁴¹

It was not until 1807 that this *Turudbe*-led Islamic polity was destroyed by the combined efforts of the African pagans, Europeans and 'Moors'. This defeat is what led to the capture and enslavement of another *Turudbe*' Muslim erudite, *Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid*, who was enslaved in Fayetteville, North Carolina.⁴² This enslaved African Muslim was one of the key advisors to the leader of one of the largest African insurrections in the history of the United States, Denmark Vessey.⁴³

During the last part of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th century of the *hijra* throughout the regions of the western, central and eastern Bilād al-Sūdān, African Muslim scholars/warriors took upon

39 Waziri Junayd, *Dabti al-Multaqatāt*, ff. 11-12.

40 Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London: Longman, 1984), 142-143.

41 Kane and Robinson, *The Islamic Regime of Fuuta Tooro*, 6.

42 Muhammad Shareef b. Farid, *The Lost & Found Children of Abraham*, 21; also see Muhammad Shareef b. Farid, *The Autobiography of Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid 't-Turuudi: As Anthropological Evidence of the Rights of Self-Determination for Enslaved African Muslims* (Zunyi PRC: SIIASI, 2009).

43 David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey: The Buried Story of America's Largest Slave Rebellion and the Man Who Led It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 37-40. Robertson indicates that North Carolina was a key destination for many enslaved African Muslims captured as a result of the 1805-07 defeat of the Islamic confederation of Futa Toro, Futa Djallon and Futa Bundu: "The escaped slave Charles Ball, a native of Maryland who wrote a memoir of his South Carolina slavery in 1806, noted the "great many" Africans he had met during his bondage in South Carolina, and that "I knew several who must have been, from what I have since learned, Mohamedans [sic]." The percentage of slaves at least nominally Muslim imported from Africa to the great trading centers such as Charleston has been estimated at 10 percent of the total number brought in during the years 1711 to 1808. Proportionately, approximately 8,800 of these Muslim individuals must, therefore, have been sold in South Carolina market in these years. In his decades both as a slave and as a freedman, Denmark Vesey almost certainly knew or observed fellow blacks who continued to practice Islam in their bondage."

themselves the responsibility of *tajdīd* in order to establish the 'just society'. Murray Last narrates a poem that describes the revolutionary spirit which spread like a virus throughout the *Bilād al-Sūdān*:

Verily a cloud has settled on Allah's earth
 A cloud so dense that escape from it is impossible.
 Everywhere between Kordofan and Gobir
 And the cities of the Kindin [Tuareg]
 Are settlements of the dogs of the Fellata
 Serving Allah in all their dwelling places
 ...In reforming all districts and provinces
 Ready for the future bliss
 So, in this year of 1214 (1799) they are following their beneficent
 theories
 As though it were time to set the world in order by preaching."⁴⁴

Returning to the central *Bilād al-Sūdān*, one of the most important of the scholarly reformers of that region during the 11th-century *hijra* was Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Fayrammi ibn Ibrahim ibn Haruun ibn Malik al-Fulani al-Barnawi al-Tarazi. Sultan Muhammad Bello ibn Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio said in his *Infāq al-Maysūr*:

He was unparalleled, learned in the traditional sciences as well as the intellectual sciences, upright, fearfully aware and brilliant. The outcome is that he reached the level of the *rijal*. He grew up in a place called *Dhat al-Baqr* as a brilliant student. He took knowledge from Sheikh al-Bakri, and he returned to his land and initiated learning. Then, the ruler summoned him to the court of Bornu in order for him to live there. The ruler had a home and school built for him and gave him a grant of land. Sheikh al-Tahir composed many poems. Among them was his versification of the work of al-Bakri and its commentary. He composed a versification of the *al-Hikam*. He authored his poem called *al-Durari al-Lawāmi' wa Manār al-Jāmi'* on the science of verbal conjugation and the science of etymology. He, may Allah be merciful to him, had many who envied him among the people of his country...⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Humanities Press, 1977), 11.

⁴⁵ Muhammad Bello b. Shehu Uthman Dan Fodiyo, *Infāq al-Maysūr*, 11-12.

Shehu Uthman Ibn Fodio: The African *Mujaddid* of the 12th Century *Hijra*

Shehu Uthman was an African *Mujaddid* of the 12th century who formed a community/*jamaat* that also advanced *tajdīd* and became an urban community with a proclivity to nation-building. According to Shehu himself, as he indicated in his *Kitāb al-Wird*, it was during his fortieth year that he attained the station of *mujaddid* after his spiritual journey.⁴⁶ However, even before his spiritual opening, which happened in 1794/1209, Shehu Uthman Dan Fodiyo composed two books which confirmed for him the status of *mujaddid*. According to Imam al-Ghazali, one of the conditions of being *mujaddid* is the ability to write concise text which would reconstitute the religion in its entirety if all the knowledge of Islam were effaced from the earth. The Shehu Uthman produced which confirmed that he was a *mujaddid* and *mujtahid* were his *Sawq al-Umma ila Ittibi' al-Sunna*, *Mir'āt al-Tullāb* and *'Umdat al-'Ulama'*; texts which are referential works for *ijtihād*.

Sheikh Abdulqaadir ibn Mustafa corroborated this in his *Kitāb al-Khilāf*, where he said:

He (the Shehu) was a '*mujtahid*' (scholar of independent judgement) in this issue, who had attained the truth in his '*ijtihād*'. What becomes apparent to you in that, is his bounty, the perfection of his rank and the height of his station above all the scholars of his time ... Whoever peruses his books will realise this.⁴⁷

Here, the grandson of the Shehu, Sheikh Abd'l-Qaadir ibn Mustafa combines the idea of *tajdīd* with the concepts of *ijtihād* (independent judgment) as criterion for a *mujaddid*. This is similar to what was inferred with Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz, in the first century of the *hijra*.

The *mujaddid* in the eyes of the Shehu would be well known for the purification of his intention, his overall compassion for creation, his unique approach to educating and transmitting of the religious sciences, his purge of heretical innovations and customs, his rectification of problematic issues in the religion, his immense love for the Prophet (SAW) and his inward and outward connection with the

46 Shehu Uthman Dan Fodiyo, *Kitāb al-Wird: The Book of the Litany*, aka *Lamaa Balaghtu*, ed. & trans. Muhammad Shareef bin Farid, 15.

47 Abdulqaadir ibn al-Mustafa, *Kitāb al-Khilāf* (Unpublished Manuscript), ff. 7-8.

awliyya' of his time, those of the past and those who will appear in the future. This was comprehensively elucidated by *Sheikh* Mua'allahyede ibn Abdulqadir ibn Mustafa in his treatise entitled "*Nabdhāt Yasīrah*".⁴⁸

It is widely accepted that *Shehu* Uthman fulfilled each of the prerequisites of being a *mujaddid*. He was a descendant of the Prophet (SAW) from his mother, *Sayyidatu* Hawwa, and his maternal grandmother, *Sayyidatu* Ruqayya. He was a descendant of the Quraysh from his father, *Fuduye'* Muhammad, whose Turudbe Fulani clan traced its origin back to Uqba ibn Nafi', the Companion of Muhammad (SAW) and conqueror of North Africa. The *Shehu* was an *imam* in every religious science, and none shared his level of learning during his lifetime in his region. He joined within his person the sciences of the *sharia* and *haqiqa* (spiritual realities), the branches and the roots, logic and syntax, details and rights, knowledge and action. Like the Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz, the *Shehu* had been granted the political authority to bring about social transformation and implement social justice. Writing after the death of the *Shehu*, his son *Sultan* Muhammad Bello said about him in his *Dhikr al-Mujaddidīn*:

As for the two centuries after the thousandth year (1200 A.H.), it is not implausible that the reformer of this period is our *Sheikh* since he mentioned this himself. How is this not so when he had gathered in himself all the above-mentioned prerequisites for a *mujaddid*? May Allah gather us with him in the highest Gardens of Paradise and among those who attain the Abode of Mercy and Divine Pleasure.⁴⁹

The *tajdīd*, which *Shehu* Uthman ibn Fodiyo implemented in the *Bilād al-Sūdān*, was comprehensive and impacted every aspect of the religious and temporal life of society. Like the reformers Abu al-Hassan al-Ash'ari (d. 324/935-36), al-Razi (d. 606/1210), al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), and al-Bulqini (d. 805/1403), the *Shehu* clarified the realities of *tawhid*, the foundations of religion (*usūl al-dīn*) and the science of scholastic theology (*ilm al-kalām*). Like the reformers al-Shafi' (d. 204/820), Ibn Surayj (d. 306/918), al-Rafi' (d. 623/1226) and Ibn Daqiq al-'Eid (d. 702/1302), the *Shehu* delineated the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence and removed the obscurities from outward branch of

⁴⁸ Muhammad Mua'allahyede b. Abdil-Qadir ibn Mustafa, *Nubdhāt Yasīra Tushīr ila Ba'd Karamāt al-Sheikh Uthman ibn Fodiyo* (Unpublished Manuscript), ff. 3-6.

⁴⁹ Muhammad Bello, *Dhikr al-Mujaddidīn*, 8.

the religion. Like the reformers al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), the *Shehu* redefined the *sufi* path of the inward and elucidated the way of purification of the heart and gnosis of Allah. Like the reformers Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz, al-Baqilani (d. 403/1013) and al-Maghili (d. 909/1503), the *Shehu* revived the commanding of good, forbidding evil, establishing of social justice and political equity through just government.

The Characteristics of the *Tajdid* of *Shehu* Uthman ibn Fodiyo

Shehu Uthman ibn Fodiyo gave a clear description of the accomplishments that Allah (SWT) favoured him with in the process of *tajdid* in his book *Najm al-Ikhwān*. In it, the *Shehu* outlined the distinguishing marks of the Sokoto Caliphate and the essentials of any Islamic society:

As for what will clarify what Allah (SWT) has conferred upon us in these times of religious and worldly blessings so that the people of these times can be grateful for them. This will make us and them worthy of increase because Allah (SWT) says: '*If you are grateful, Allah will increase you in blessings.*' We also clarify these blessings so that every person of insight may know that we are following in the footsteps of Muhammad, the Chosen Prophet (SAW), in all affairs. Realize, o brothers! that Allah (SWT) has conferred upon us in these times: [1] a clear explanation of what is to be believed in (*‘aqīda*) from the religion of Allah; [2] a clear explanation of what is to be done (*‘amāl*) from the religion of Allah; [3] a clear explanation of what is to be avoided (*tark*) from the religion of Allah; [4] a clear understanding of what is highly recommended (*mubāh*) from the religion of Allah; [5] He has conferred upon us the removal of obscurities (*shubuhāt*) from the religion of Allah; [6] He has conferred upon us the favour of commanding all that is good (*al-amri bi al-ma'rūf*); [7] forbidding indecency (*al-nahyi ‘an al-munkar*); [8] frightening the people to cause them to leave disobedience of Allah; [9] giving good tidings to the people to urge them to the worship of Allah; Then He conferred on us [10] the favour of making the emigration (*hijra*); [11] the nominating of *Amir al-Mu'minīn*; [12] the taking up of the instruments of *jihād* which are cavalry horses, arrows, longbows, spears, swords, shields, armor, belts, helmets and other military equipment. He then conferred on us [13] the favour of making the *jihād* with them; [14] the appointing of prime ministers (*wazīr*); [15] appointing the amirs of the armies; [16] the

establishment of the public treasury (*khāzin*); [17] the appointing of regional amirs; [18] the appointing of government secretaries (*kātib*); [19] the appointing of ambassadors (*rusul*) to foreign kingdoms; [20] taking civil servants (*khuddām*) for domestic affairs; [21] appointing of the judiciary (*qudā*); [22] appointing of the *amirs* responsible for executing legal punishments (*hudūd*); and [23] the appointing of the *amir* of pilgrimage (*Hajj*). Thus, these 23 characteristics are the fundamental rites of Islam. And their number is like the number of years of the mission (*risāla*) of Muhammad (SAW). We are grateful to Allah who has favoured us with the manifestation of these fundamental Islamic rites during the Last Days.⁵⁰

This cohesive self-image of the Sokoto Caliphate, connected as it was to the primary model of Muhammad (SAW) and his early Caliphate, constituted the most steadfast and impervious shield of cultural security against cultural aggression and internal disintegration. This historical conscience and the historical continuity which it created helped to revitalise the Caliphate during its long history of development and consolidation. These twenty-three characteristics, so connected as they were to the reality of Muhammad (SAW), demonstrated that the *Shehu* had not only given life to the *Sunna* of the Prophet (SAW), but he had revived the very primordial reality of the Prophet as well. The *Shehu* redefined the concept of reviving the *Sunna* and renewal of the religion as an identity construct or cultural heritage for his *Jamaat*. At the same time, the *Shehu* in his final testament to his community, emphasised that it is an obligation to follow the path of one's righteous ancestors and not to abandon them. He stated in his *Wasiyya*:

Indeed, I am but a leader of his people, leading them to the restitution of their affairs, calling them to the religion of Allah, seeking His forgiveness and His exalted mercy, and seeking the means for His approval, following the ways of my fathers and imitating the traces of my grandfathers who have passed. This is because our ancestors were the people of uprightness, guidance, learning, and struggle in the Way of Allah in order to exalt the religion and make it expand and to deliver it.⁵¹

50 Shehu Uthman Dan Fodiyo, *Najm al-Ikhwān* (Unpublished Manuscript), ff. 9-10.

51 Shehu Uthman Dan Fodiyo, *Wasiyya's-Shaykh Uthman ibn Fodiyo* (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1989), 5-6.

The *tajdīd* of Shehu Uthman ibn Fodiyo was also defined as the cultural heritage of his people around which he and the government he established constructed their historical identity. His *tajdīd* was also a group solidarity or force which impelled the Shehu and his *Jamaat* to assert themselves, to struggle for primacy, to establish the hegemony of the Sokoto Caliphate.⁵² This *tajdīd* was the 'esprit de corps', which acted as the fundamental bond of the Sokoto society, and it was the basic motive force which guided their historical development. His *tajdīd* was the will to power and the pivotal factor that inspired the Caliphate to self-realisation. It is for this reason that Shehu Uthman ibn Fodiyo insisted on his followers adhering to the methodology of *tajdīd* that he carefully laid out over forty years. He also warned his people and the government that he established not to abandon the renewal (*tajdīd*) of the religion and the revival of the *Sunna* since these comprised their unique historical conscience. Waziri Gidadu ibn Laima comprehensively illustrated this in his *Rawd al-Janān*.⁵³

The Shehu stipulated that the continuity of the Sokoto Caliphate revolved around and depended upon the inhabitants adhering to methodology of *tajdīd* that he laid out for them. *Tajdīd*, as the Shehu defined it, was the most effective tool that his *Jamaat* could utilize in their defense against all spiritual, cultural, economic and political degeneration. *Tajdīd* was the historical conscience which would guarantee their inter-generational historical continuity. As the eminent African historian, Shiekh Anta Diop said:

The historical conscience, through the feeling of cohesion that it creates, constitutes the safest and the most solid shield of cultural security for a people. The essential thing for a people is to rediscover the thread that connects them to their most remote ancestral past. In the face of cultural aggression of all sorts, in the face of all disintegrating factors of the outside world, the most efficient cultural weapon with which a people can arm itself is this feeling of historical continuity.⁵⁴

52 *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, CD-ROM Edition, 1999).

53 Uthman Gidadu b. Muhammad Laima, *Rawd al-Janān*, trans. Muhammad Shareef b. Farid (Fairfield: SIIASI, 1994), 30.

54 Cheikh Anta Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, (New York), 112.

Tajdīd During the Zaman al-Nasara (the Hour of the Judeo-Christians)

Sheikh Muhammad al-Amin ibn Adam, Sheikh Muhammad Bello ibn Abdullahi, Sheikh Abu Bakr Basamba, Sheikh Umar ibn Ahmad Zarūk and Sheikh Bello ibn Abdurrazaq also informed me that on the victory of Tabkin Kwotto in 1803, the *Shehu* went into spiritual retreat for three days, thanking Allah for the victory that He has granted him and his *Jamaat*. When he came out of spiritual retreat, the people were rejoicing, but the *Shehu* told them not to rejoice because one hundred years after this day of victory would come the Zaman al-Nasara (the Hour of the Judeo-Christians). And indeed, in 1903, the Europeans entered all the lands of Islam without exception, and their power has remained until this day.

Thus, the 13th century passed while all the Muslim lands were under some form of European colonial dominance, either directly or indirectly. Great scholars and saints such as Sheikh Malik Cy, Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse, Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba, Sheikh Maa al- 'Aynayn, Waziri Junayd ibn Muhammad al-Bukhari, Sheikh Abdullahi Ilorin, Sheikh al-Amin ibn Ali al-Mazrui and many others emerged implementing *tajdīd* within the context of European imperialism. Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba, has been painted as a pacifist when, in actuality, he was adamantly opposed to European presence in Africa.⁵⁵ Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse was an essential voice during the independence movement throughout Muslim Africa.⁵⁶ While the *mujaddidūn* of the 13th century and the present 14th century have been responsible for the explosive growth of Islam in Africa and the Africans of the diaspora, they have had little impact upon the present atrophy effecting Western civilisation. *Shehu* Uthman Dan Fodiyo's model of *tajdīd* still remains as the prototype of a complete model of *tajdīd* throughout Africa.

In closing the *Shehu* said in his *Nasihah Ahl al-Zamān* in gratitude to what Allah (SWT) had favoured him with in area of *tajdīd*:

We praise Allah that our time is a time of illumination

55 Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Jawāb al-Sheikh al-Khādim li al-Musta'mirīn al-Faransiyyīn* (The Answer of the Sheikh Khadim Ahmadu Bamba to the French Imperialist Who Accused him of Gathering Weapons in Preparation for Jihaad), trans. Muhammad Shareef b. Farid (Bamako: SIIASI, 2019).

56 Antonio De Diego Gonzalez, "Es Africa Para los africanus? Un acercamiento a la polemica entre Marcel Lefebvre e Ibrahim Niasse," Universidad de Sevilla, 2014.

A time of the removal of darkness from all over the world
 We praise Allah that our time is a time of victory
 A time of the humiliation of the party of the disbelievers
 We praise Allah that our time is a time of glorious honour
 A time of joyfulness for the party of those who surrender to Allah
 We praise Allah that our company is the faction of Abd
 Al-Qadir, the redeeming spiritual master of the knowers of Allah
 We praise Allah that our time is a time of revival
 Of the Way of the Master of all the Messengers.⁵⁷

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57 Shehu Uthman Dan Fodiyo, *Nasihah Ahl al-Zamān*, f. 20.

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A River of Perpetual Praise: A Study of Five Poems across Five Regions in the Bilād al-Sūdān

Oludamini Ogunnaike*

The genre of Arabic *madīh nabawī* (poetry in praise of the Prophet (SAW)) has been one of the pillars of Islamic education, devotion, and literary expression in the *Bilād al-Sūdān* for centuries. As manuscript collections, historical accounts, and contemporary soundscapes of African Muslim cities and towns attest, poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) by authors both local and distant has been memorized, recited, studied, commented upon and expanded from the Atlantic to the Red Sea from at least the 4th/11th century to the present day. In addition to the uniquely enduring popularity of this tradition, Arabic *madīh* poetry is unique in the way it brings together the most popular forms of performance and devotion and the most elite strata of intellectual, literary, and spiritual attainment. This uniquely synthetic aspect of the tradition is perhaps one of the reasons why, until recently, it has received relatively little attention in Europhone scholarship.

Though the tradition of West African Arabic praise poetry is attested to as far back as the 12th century with the figure of Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Ya'qūb al-Dhakwānī al-Kānemī (from Kanem in contemporary Northeastern Nigeria)¹, it is only in the latter half of the

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1 John Hunwick, "The Arabic Literary Tradition of Nigeria." *Research in African Literatures* 28, no. 3 (1997): 21. Al-Kānemī traveled to Marrakesh in 1197/594, gaining recognition as a grammarian and a poet, writing verses defending his black color, and eventually settling in Andalusia, where he died sometime in the early 13th / 7th century. He befriended the Andalusian poet al-Fazāzī (d. 1230/627) and may be responsible for the enduring popularity of the latter's collection of poems in praise of the prophet, al-'Ishriniyyāt, in West Africa. Al-Kānemī is said to have improvised the following verse upon his visit to the Almohad Sultan Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Mansūr (d. 1199/595):

He removed his veil, but out of awe,
my eyes still saw him through a veil
His favour drew me near, but out of awe,
I found myself distant in this nearness.
(Ibid.)

20th century and early 21st century that this tradition has begun to receive serious scholarly treatment in the Europhone scholarship. In part, this neglect is due to the colonial, racial division of the African continent into a "white" region north of the Sahara (often grouped with the Middle East) and a "black" region south of the Sahara, obscuring the important, longstanding, and enduring connections of learning, literature, law, and commerce connecting these regions and the Saharan zone itself, which like the Indian Ocean, constitutes its own unique cultural zone that actually facilitates exchange along its shores. Early Europhone scholars of West African Arabic literature also imposed an exogenous division of the "literary" from the "devotional" onto these materials, which meant that the Sufi panegyrics for the Prophet, by far the most popular form of Arabic literature in the region, received short shrift.

However, Arabic-language scholarship has fared much better in this regard. Numerous Arabic commentaries, treatises, articles, and books by West African authors have detailed and studied this tradition for centuries. With the expansion of high-speed internet in the region, the early twenty-first century has witnessed an efflorescence of digital content related to this literature, with numerous social media groups dedicated to the performance and discussion of this genre of poetry. These developments have coincided with a newfound appreciation of West African Arabic poetry amongst audiences in the Middle East, with numerous West African Sufi poets given entries in the *Babtain Encyclopedia of Contemporary Arabic poets*,² and several finalists from West Africa appearing on the popular, Abu Dhabi-based, international televised poetry competition, *Emir al-Shu'arā'* ("Prince of Poets"), which the Senegalese poet, Mohammed Lamine Diop, won in 2019.³

This growing appreciation has been mirrored in recent English scholarship. Building on the earlier work of the likes of Mervyn Hiskett, John Hunwick, and Rasheed Raji, scholars such as Rudolph

2 See <http://www.almoajam.org/lists/inner/190>

3 See Seydi Diamil Niane, *Mohamed Lamine Diop: Le Prince Noir de la Poésie Arabe* (Vaudreuil-Dorion, Québec: Éditions Afrikana, 2021).

Ware, Zachary Wright, and Amir Syed,⁴ Sana Camara,⁵ Amidu Sanni,⁶ Muhammad Shareef,⁷ Imam Fakhruddin Owaisi, and especially Andrea Brigaglia,⁸ have brought the West African traditions of Arabic poetry in praise of the Prophet (SAW) to the attention of Anglophone academic audiences.⁹ The author of this article has also published a modest monograph on this subject.¹⁰ The work of a new generation of upcoming scholars promise to develop this field in important new directions, especially in the wider appreciation of the closely related traditions of 'Ajamī (non-Arabic) *madīh* poetry in the region.¹¹ The present study contributes to this burgeoning field by presenting translations of five celebrated poems, each by a different author from a distinct region and time period: "*Salātu Rabbi*" by Muhammad al-Yadālī (d. 1166/1753), the *Dāliyya* of Shehu Usman dan Fodio (d. 1232/1817), "*Alā Yā Rasūlillāhi Inniyya Mughramun*" by Muhammad al-Majdhūb (d. 1247/1832), "*Midādī*" by Ahmadu Bamba (d. 1346/1927) and "*Īwān al-Kisrā*" by Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (d. 1395/1975). After analyzing the literary and spiritual themes and references of each poem, the article will conclude with a comparison of the five works to

- 4 Rudolph Ware, Zachary Wright, and Amir Syed, *Jihad of the Pen: The Sufi Literature of West Africa* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2018).
- 5 Sana Camara, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba: Selected Poems* (Boston: Brill, 2017).
- 6 Amongst other works, see Amidu Sanni, "Again on *tadmīn* in Arabic theoretical discourse," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61, no. 1 (1998): 1-19.
- 7 "Digital Archive," Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, <https://siiasi.org/digital-archive/>. Accessed, June, 10th, 2023.
- 8 See Andrea Brigaglia, "Sufi Poetry in Twentieth-Century Nigeria: A Khamriyya and a Ghazal by Shaykh Abū Bakr al-'Atīq (1909–1974)," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 6, no. 2 (2017): 190-232.
- 9 The work of scholars such as Fernand Dumont, Amar Samb, Ravane Mbaye, Sam Mbaye (amongst others) have introduced Francophone audiences to this tradition. See especially Amar Samb, *Essai sur la Contribution du Sénégal à la littérature d'Expression Arabe* (Dakar: IFAN, 1972).
- 10 Oludamini Ogunnaike, *Poetry in Praise of Prophetic Perfection: A Study of West African Arabic Madīh Poetry and its Precedents* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 2020).
- 11 For previously-published work on African 'Ajamī *madīh* traditions see Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *The Collected Works of Nana Asma'u (1793-1864)* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997); Christiane Seydou (ed.), *La poésie mystique peule du Mali* (Paris: Karthala, 2008); Fallou Ngom, "Ahmadu Bamba's Pedagogy and the Development of 'Ajamī Literature," *African Studies Review* 52, no. 1 (2009): 99-123; and entries in Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (eds.), *Qasida poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa: Eulogy's Bounty, Meaning's Abundance, An Anthology*. vol. 2 (Boston: Brill, 1996).

suggest that they illuminate the contours of an important trans-regional spiritual/literary movement associated, but not co-extensive, with the Tariqa Muhammadiya movement and other movements of Prophetic devotion that blossomed from the 9th/15th that have received much greater scholarly attention.¹² That is, these poems invite us to consider the tradition of Sufism in Africa, in part, as a literary movement, and the literary tradition of *madīh* poetry on the continent as a spiritual movement as well. But first, a brief note about the wider traditions of Prophetic devotion across Islamic history and the much-debated phenomenon of the *Tariqa Muhammadiya* is in order.

Poetry and Prophetic Devotion

While the written record and genre of Arabic poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) (*madīh al-nabawī*) seems to blossom in the 7th/13th century with the appearance of massively influential works such as the Andalusian al-Fazāzī's (d. 627/1230) *'Ishriniyyāt* and al-Būsīrī's (d. 696/1296) *Hamziyya* and *Qasīdat al-Burda* (perhaps the most popular poem of all time), these masterpieces synthesize elements of much older traditions of Prophetic devotion. Recent scholarship has dated most of the earliest known mawlid texts as coming from 6th/12th

12 The 3 volume series, *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2022-2023 edited by Rachida Chih, Denis Gril, David Jordan, Stefan Reichmuth, and Dilek Sarmis) is a watershed contribution to this and related phenomena. Annemarie Schimmel's landmark study, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, although mainly focused on the "Balkans to Bengal" region, remains the most comprehensive work on the history, development, and spread of devotional literature focused on the Prophet Muhammad (Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: UNC Press Books, 1985). Constance Padwick's early study of Muslim Devotions also remains unsurpassed as a survey of popular devotional literature, although poetry is largely excluded (C. E. Padwick, *Muslim devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (London: Oneworld, 1997).) While more focused on the titular *Mantle Odes*, Susanne Stetkevych's volume offers an unsurpassed account of the early Arabic *madīh* tradition and explores important aspects of the legacy of the massively influential *Burdas* of Ka'b ibn Zuhayr and al-Būsīrī (Susanne Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), while Marion Katz's *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2007) traces the development and spread of mawlid celebrations and litanies across the Muslim world. Fritz Meier, Bernd Radtke, R.S. O'Fahey have authored numerous works on the Tariqa Muhammadiya phenomenon and translated works of its proponents.

century Maghrib and Andalusia,¹³ and as Annemarie Schimmel notes, most of the prominent themes of the *madīh nabawī* tradition¹⁴ are already present in the poems of Hassān ibn Thābit (many of which are included in the *sīras* of Ibn Hishām and Ibn Ishāq), one of the Prophet's companions and poets. But it was the famous *Burda* poem of another companion of the Prophet (SAW), Ka'b ibn Zuhayr (RA), whose wedding of the traditional Arabic *qasīdat al-madh* (praise poem) and its tripartite structure of *nasīb* (amatory prelude at the beloved's campsite bemoaning the passage of time)-*rahīl* (desert journey through difficulties)-*madh* (closing encomium praising the patron and requesting a gift) with the descriptions of the prophet's virtues and devotion to him that was to become a foundational model for the genre.¹⁵ This poem, which begins "*Bānat Su'ād*," seems to have been studied, commented upon, and copied continuously as a part of typical Arabic literary and *sīra* curricula from the North Africa to Khorasan since the 3rd/9th century.¹⁶ Since, according to the traditional accounts, the Prophet (SAW) gave Ka'b ibn Zuhayr his cloak (*burda*) in appreciation of the poem, promising him his protection and welcome into the Muslim community, this seal of prophetic approval helped make this poem a classic whose widespread fame was perhaps only eclipsed with the appearance of the even more famous *Burda* poem of al-Busīrī (who, upon the completion of his poem, miraculously received a cloak in a dream from the Prophet (SAW), curing his paralysis, and some traditions recount that he awoke with the physical cloak on him as well).

13 Marion Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 216. The genres of *khasā'is* and *shamā' il* literature recounting the special attributes and features of the prophet also seem to have arisen in Andalusia around this period.

14 See Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, e.g. The Prophet's heavenly pre-birth reality, miracles surrounding his birth and childhood, miracles and proofs of his prophethood, praise of his beautiful appearance and character/habits, his connection to the Qur'an and God's praise of him in it, his reflection of Divine Names and Attributes, accounts of the night journey and ascension and battles, intense longing and yearning for his presence, and requests for intercession.

15 See Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes* and Michael Sells, "*Bānat Su'ād*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21, no. 2 (1990): 140-154.

16 See, for example, the famous marginal commentary by Egyptian scholar, Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh b. Hishām al-Anṣārī (d. 833) and gloss upon this commentary by Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī titled *Ḥaṣhiyat al-is'ādalaḥānat Su'ād* (Cairo: Sharikat Maktaba wa-Maṭba'a Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabīwa Awlādihi, 1957).

So while Suzanne Stetkevych may be correct in noting that “the massive production of *madā’ih nabawiyyah* (praise poems to the Prophet), however, occurred not during the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW), nor even during the classical Arabic poetic period (1–5/7–12th centuries), but rather during the Post-Classical period (6–13/12–19th centuries),”¹⁷ as Emil Homerin has noted in his review of Stetkevych’s otherwise excellent work, her account does not take into account the history of the tradition of *madīh nabawī* between the time of Ka’b ibn Zuhayr (RA) and that of al-Busirī.¹⁸ For example, al-Busirī’s poem was preceded by the still-popular *qasīdas* and collections of *qasīdas* of al-Shaqratisī (d. 1073), Sanā’ī (d. 525/1131), al-Fazāzī (d. 627/1230),¹⁹ Ibn

17 Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes*, 66.

18 Homerin writes, “Stetkevych does mention as poetic precedents to al-Busirī’s *al-Burda*, earlier Shi’i verse on the *ahl al-bayt* that praised the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as the progenitor of the Shi’i imams. However, in this section she does not name, let alone discuss, any of a number of earlier Sunni poets who composed in the nascent genre of *al-mad īh. al-nabaw ī* and who may have influenced al-Busirī, including two of his Ayyubid predecessors, Ibn al-Sa’ati (1159–1209) and al-Sharaf al-Ansari (1190–1264), as well as al-Busirī’s older contemporary in Baghdad, al-Sarsari (1192–1258). In fact, Ibn al-Sa’ati had earlier modeled one of his odes on Ka’b’s *Banat Su’ad*, as had al-Sarsari, who composed scores of panegyrics to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), including one rhyming in “m” and based on the same ode by Ibn al-Farid used by al-Busirī for the opening to his *al-Burda*. Had Stetkevych been attentive to al-Busirī’s more immediate poetic context, she might have found that his *al-Burda* was not “a curious hybrid” (p. 105) but rather a predictable development in the *al-mad īh. al-nabaw ī* genre. As Mahmud Rizq Salim, ‘Umar Musa, and other scholars of Ayyubid and Mamluk literature noted decades ago, the themes of al-Busirī’s *al-Burda* were mainstays of earlier poems to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). References to the Prophet (SAW)’s life, his handsome physical features, his prophetic mission and miracles, Mecca and Medina, the triumph of Islam over its enemies, and prayers and supplication may be found scattered throughout earlier panegyrics. However, al-Busirī may have been one of the first poets to combine so many of these elements into an ode of praise and petition, which may account for *al-Burda*’s originality.” (T. Emil Homerin, “Review of Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad*” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 2 (2011): 361–362.

19 In Andalusia, al-Fazāzī was preceded by Ibn al-Sayyid al-Batalyawī (d. 521/1127) and Muhammad b. Mas’ūd b. Abī l-Khisāl (m. 540/1146) “qui, avec un poème de 366 vers intitulé : *Mi’raj al-manāqib wa-minhāj al-hasab al-thāqib*, aurait donné un élan décisif à ce genre.” (Brigitte Foulon, “Les poèmes d’éloge du Prophète de Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (713–776/1313–1374 ou 75) in Denis Gril, Stefan Reichmuth, and Dilek Sarmis (eds.) *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 379.

al-Fārid (d. 632/1234), what made al-Busīrī's *qasīdas*, especially the *Hamziyya* and the *Burda*, unique was their comprehensive combination of sources and influences from the *sīra* and *shamā'il* literature (of which Qādī 'Iyād's (d. 544/1149) *Shifā'* is the most famous example)²⁰, the *maghāzī* literature (that recounts the Prophet's battles, often embroidered with quotations of poetry and poetic descriptions of the Prophet (SAW), his character, and military exploits), early Shi'i praise poetry of the Prophet's family, early Sufi literature, especially the poetic prefaces invoking blessings upon the prophet, the sections of these works on the Prophet and the Muhammadan light (*al-nūr al-Muhammadi*) (such as those in al-Hakīm al-Timidhī's (d. 255/ 869) works and al-Hallāj's (d. 309/922) *Tawāsīn*), and even some of the early Sufi ghazals (mystical love lyrics) that can be read and are sometimes cited as referring to love and longing for the Prophet (SAW) as well as for God.²¹ Al-Busīrī's synthesis became definitive of the tradition of *madīh nabawī* after him.

Now, it is not coincidental that this poetic tradition (or at least its written traces) seems to have emerged alongside an increased focus in written sources on prayers upon the Prophet (SAW) (*tasliya*) and related shifts in Sufi literature on doctrine and practice in which waking visionary encounters with the Prophet (SAW), recitation of *tasliya* formulae, and direct spiritual connection with the Prophet (SAW) appear to have begun to take a more central role.²² However, this is a fine point that I believe has often been misinterpreted due to Orientalist, Reformist, and Salafi tropes of decline as well as the historicist tendency of some recent secondary scholarship (somewhat obsessed with the periodization of and discontinuities in traditions like Sufism) to view Sufism as a primarily as socio-historical phenomena emerging

20 See Michele Petrone, "Special Features of the Prophet (Khaṣā'is nabawiyya) From Jurisprudence to Devotion" in *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam*, vol. 1, 197-228.

21 Claude Addas, *La Maison Muhammadienne: Aperçus de la dévotion au Prophète en mystique musulmane* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).

22 See Mehdi Sajid, "Spiritual Legacy, Sufi Identity, and Mystical Knowledge in Tasliya formulae." *Die Welt des Islams* 1, no. aop (2022): 1-30; Rachida Chih, "Prophetic Piety, Mysticism, and Authority in Premodern Arabic Devotional Literature: al-Jazuli's *Dala'il al-Khayrat* (15th Century)." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 54, no. 3 (2022): 462-483; Padwick, *Muslim Devotions* for an account of these developments focused on the genre and ritual of *tasliya*.

from particular socio-politico-economic contexts as understood through the lens of the tacitly-assumed cosmology of modern social-science disciplines (as the socio-political and material-economic conditions change across different periods, the phenomena they give rise to must also change).²³ The views from inside the Sufi tradition, based on its very different epiphanic cosmologies—in which unseen spiritual realities (*haqā'iq*) can and do intervene in or as temporal/material phenomena (from one view, these material/temporal phenomena are just manifestations of these *haqā'iq*) even as these temporal/material phenomena shape, through their receptivity (*isti'dād*, *qābiliyya*) the manifestations of these realities—are quite distinct, emphasizing “vertical” continuity with these a- or semi-temporal realities over, but not necessarily against, “horizontal” continuity back through linear time.²⁴ Moreover, when studying traditions such as Sufism, it is of the utmost importance to remember that in such trans-discursive traditions, the absence of written evidence is not the same as the evidence of absence. Even from the written historical record, we can see that oral traditions, poetry, not-merely-discursive practices, and formulae are passed down without being committed to writing, and that our written archive is but the tip of a much larger iceberg of orature, devotion, and experience.

23 For example, see much of the early scholarship on Neo-Sufism or the German work on “Mohammedmystik”.

24 This is not to deny the importance of things like the availability of paper, trade routes, book cultures etc. in shaping devotional practices and traditions, merely to highlight that these phenomena are understood differently in the context of Sufi cosmology, and this need to be taken into account. As Rachida Chih writes, “Devotional beliefs and practices around the figure of the Prophet do not necessarily change in parallel with the rapidly shifting events of political history. The cult of the Prophet was built over time, and it obeys a complex dynamic of its own, although it does increase in importance during political crises, a sort of compensatory effect, reflecting a need for legitimization of the spiritual heirs of the Prophet, as well as his descendants (*ashraf/shurafa'*). Starting in the 12th century the production of devotional texts increased continuously. The religious policies of the Ottomans were based on a medieval heritage that reached its apogee in the 15th century, when Maghrebi and Egyptian Sufi scholars had a marked influence. Conquest and the subsequent development of commercial routes made the circulation of goods and people easier, and allowed the diffusion of a large number of devotional texts, some of which, such as al-Jazuli's *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, acquired quasi-international fame.” (“Prophetic Piety, Mysticism, and Authority,” 482).

Nevertheless, there does appear to be a shift in the role of the Prophet (SAW) from the early circles of renunciates (*zuhhād*) and Sufis for which he served as an exemplar to be imitated and followed in minute detail—but in which figures like Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Abū Bakr al-Wāsitī could be attributed with statements indicating that love for the Prophet (SAW) should not outstrip or compete with the love for God—to the consolidation of the Baghdādī and Khorasānī traditions in the 4th-5th/10th-11th centuries, in which the Prophet's cosmic roles as spiritual intermediary and intercessor and the Muhammadan light (*al-nūr al-Muhammadi*) began to be more strongly emphasized, as can be seen in the works of al-Hallāj, al-Qushayrī, 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadānī, etc. This trend was deepened and formalized in 6th-8th/12th-14th centuries, particularly in the Maghrib, where Arabic devotional literature dedicated to the Prophet (SAW) and rituals such as the regular group recitation of these texts, prayers, litanies, and poetry popularized these doctrinal, affective, and spiritual connections to the Prophet (SAW) as an ever-present spiritual reality guiding and caring for his community and all creation, and with whom spiritual adepts can communicate with directly through visionary encounters in either waking or dream states. This era witnessed the famous *Salāt* of Ibn Mashish, frequent statements of Sufis such as Abū'l 'Abbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1286) (the master of al-Busīrī) that "the Prophet (SAW) never leaves my sight for a single instant, and if he did I would no longer consider myself a Muslim,"²⁵ the elaborate Prophetology of Ibn al-'Arabī and his school as well as similar formulations among the Suhrawardī and Kubrawī Sufis in the Mashriq, in addition to the institution of mawlid celebrations and the rise in popularity of the poetic genre of *madīh nabawī*.²⁶

This trend of the increasingly central doctrinal and devotional role of the Prophet (SAW) seems to have intensified in the 9th/15th century as evidenced in the writings of Jalāl al-dīn al-Suyūṭī, Ahmad al-Zawāwī,

25 Ibn 'Ajība, *Al-Futuḥāt al-Ilāhiyyah fī Mabaḥith al-Aṣliyya* (Cairo: 'Ālam al-Fikr, n.d.), 6.

26 Schimmel notes that while this phenomenon was widespread throughout the Muslim world, the Maghreb was very "fertile in producing eulogies and prayers for the Prophet" that became "classics in their own right." (Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 188.).

and 'abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'arānī²⁷ and works such as al-Jazūlī's globally popular *Dalā'il Khayrāt*²⁸ and the proliferations of *madīh nabawī* poetry throughout the Muslim world, including the *Bilād al-Sūdān*. Timbuktu scholars such as Sīdī Yahyā al-Tadallīsī (d. 866/1461) reported having frequent waking visionary encounters with the Prophet Muhammad

27 Rachida Chih helpfully points out, "In his *Kitab Lawāqih al-Anwar al-Qudsiyya* (The Fecundating Sacred Illuminations), a textbook on Sufi ethics, Sha'rani writes, "Know that the true master (al-shaykh al-ḥaqīqī) is the Prophet." He informs us that his masters Nur al-din al-Shuni, Ahmad al-Zawawī, 'Alī al-Khawwas, and Muhammad al-Manzalawī all practiced the prayer on the Prophet to the point that they were initiated by the Prophet himself (*yakhudhuna 'anhu*), and that he educated them directly, without intermediary (*wasīta*). Sha'rani was given the following account by his master Ahmad al-Zawawī: 'Our path consists of the assiduous recitation of the *taṣliya* until the Prophet is by our side even when we are awake, and we become companions just like the Companions, and we are able to ask him about religious questions and about the hadith that our scholars have declared to be weak, this so that we may work according to his word; for as long as this does not come about, it will be because we are not among those who practise the *taṣliya* assiduously.' I mentioned earlier that, beginning in 1491, Nur al-din al-Shūnī instituted the majlis *ṣalat 'alā al-nabī* at al-Azhar, a whole night of prayers devoted to the Prophet, a practice that was attacked by certain fuqahā'. For Sha'rani, who is probably the most widely disseminated Sufi writer from the 16th to the 19th century, the waking vision of the prophet gives the saint the rank of jurist (*mujtahid*). Relying on a metaphysical principle derived from Ibn 'Arabi, he underlined the superiority of the mystical inspiration of the Sufi, who receives knowledge of legal judgments in its fullness by means of unveiling (*kashf*), while in a waking vision, directly from the Prophet. His idea that the mystic should have direct access to the source of the law (*'ayn al-sharī'a*) is theorized in his textbook, *al-Mizān al-Kubrā* (The Universal Balance). Sha'rani confirms, in the biographical note dedicated to his teacher al-Suyuti that appears in his *Tabaqat al-Sughra* (The Minor Book of the Generations), that al-Suyuti did lay some claim to the status of absolute mujtahid (*mujtahid muṭlaq*); he follows this information with a discussion of al-Suyuti's miraculous waking visions of the Prophet." (Chih, "Prophetic Piety, Mysticism, and Authority," 478-479).

28 Rachida Chih rightly emphasizes the mutual influence of the *madīh* and *tasliya* genres writing of al-Jazūlī's *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, "The collection borrows its poeticism, lyricism, and emotional power from the praise poetry addressed to the Prophet (SAW), and it is organized around an individual and privileged relationship with the Prophet (SAW), whom the believer addresses directly, humbly, and submissively, seeking the Prophet's mediation and expressing yearning and desire to see him. The supplication (*du'a*) attributed to al-Jazuli that ends the recitation of the names of Muhammad (*khitām al-asma'*) is worth examining, for it is written in a style that evokes the *hijāziyyat* poems that were particularly prevalent in the Maghreb; these poems dealt with the yearning due to separation and the desire to pay a visit to the beloved Prophet in his *rawḍa* in Medina." ("Prophetic Piety, Mysticism, and Authority," 474).

(SAW) and taught, recited, and composed *madīh* poetry.²⁹ Indeed, Hunwick notes, "We know that as far back as the sixteenth century there was a corps of *maddāhūn* in Timbuktu whose task it was to recite odes in praise of the Prophet on the occasion of his birthday and at other suitable times."³⁰

These trends emphasizing spiritual realization through direct encounter with the Prophet (SAW), culminated in the emergence in the 11th-13th/17th-19th century of various movements and spiritual/scholarly networks around the Muslim world bearing the name *Tariqa Muhammadiya*³¹ (and many earlier movements that did not adopt this name, but shared similar characteristics).³² These movements

29 Elias Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu: the role of Muslim scholars and notables 1400-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 135-136.

30 John Hunwick, "The Arabic Qasida in West Africa: Forms, Themes, and Contexts" in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa vol. 1: Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 92.

31 See Zachary Wright, "Secrets on the Muhammadan Way: Transmission of the Esoteric Sciences in 18th Century Scholarly Networks," *Islamic Africa* 9, no. 1 (2018): 77-105.

32 As Rüdiger Seesemann helpfully summarizes, "The purported new role of the Prophet (SAW) found its expression in the notion of the Muḥammadan Path (*al-tariqa al-muḥammadiyya*), defined by the nineteenth-century North African Sufi leader Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Sanūsī (d. 1275/1859) as the absorption (*istighrāq*) in the essential being (*dhat*) of the Prophet. This definition, widely discussed in the academic literature, certainly captures very well what it meant for many Muslims to embark on the Sufi Path in the nineteenth century. However, most likely the quote goes back to a seventeenth-century Sufi figure, Abū l-Baqā' Ḥasan al-'Ujaymī, who died in 1113/1702 in Mecca. Claims made by late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Sufis about daylight encounters with the Prophet Muḥammad, known as *ru'ya fī l-yaqza* (vision in the waking state, as opposed to a dream vision), also point us back to earlier centuries. As F. Meier has shown in his masterful analysis of a "resurrection of Muḥammad" in the work of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), such ideas are anything but a nineteenth-century innovation." (Rüdiger Seesemann, "A New Dawn for Sufism? Spiritual Training in the Mirror of Nineteenth-Century Tijānī Literature" in *Sufism, Literary Production, and Printing in the Nineteenth Century* ed. Chich, Mayeur-Jaouen, and Seesemann (Baden-Baden: Ergon Verlag, 2015): 280-281. Quoting from this later 17th-18th century formulation, Chih concurs, writing, "The method of spiritual realization through direct encounter with the Prophet would become formalized in the scholarly circles of Medina during the 17th century and take the name of "Muhammadan path" (*tariqa Muḥammadiyya*). Hasan al-'Ujaymi (d. 1702), who received this path from his master Ahmad al-Qushshashi (d. 1661) through a chain of transmission (*isnad*) that connects to Ahmad al-Shinnawī (d. 1619), Sha'rani, 'Ali al-Khawwas, and the Prophet, wrote down a definition passed

emphasized a direct spiritual connection with the prophet as the best means of spiritual wayfaring (*sayr*) and that spiritual training (*tarbiya*) and efforts should be directed towards establishing this connection. These shifts do not amount to, as some have claimed, a shift in focus from God to the Prophet, but rather a shift in the role the Prophet (*SAW*) plays in connecting the aspirant to God.³³ Moreover, these shifts seem to mark a change in emphasis or degree rather than in kind; just as there appear to be early figures such as al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī or al-Hallāj whose prophetology seems to anticipate later developments, there are some 20th and 21st-century examples of Sufi and other esoteric/ascetic movements and figures whose prophetology and ritual regimen seem to be “throwbacks” to earlier models.

Nevertheless, the efflorescence of rituals, doctrines, literature, and spiritual experiences focused around the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) in the 6th-7th/12th-13th centuries indelibly altered the popular Muslim devotional landscape and set the tone for the following centuries, and this is particularly evident in the tradition of Arabic poetry in praise of the Prophet (*SAW*) across the *Bilād al-Sūdān*, which, like many Islamic traditions in the region, appears to have its origins in this period. As Rachida Chih explains, “Beginning with Busiri’s *Burda* and under Sufi influence, poetry became the most powerful and efficient engine for the spread of the veneration of the Prophet (*SAW*) and the saints.”³⁴

Part of the unique efficacy of the poetry is due to its uniquely synthetic nature. While *salawāt*, especially the longer variety of the

on by the Moroccan Sufi Abū Sālim al-‘Ayyāshī (d. 1679), who was part of the intellectual circles of Medina during his stay in the Holy City: ‘Be with the Prophet like the disciple with his shaykh, you must fill your heart with an absolute love for him until you can see him present before you with the eyes of your interior vision (*timthalihi bayna ‘aynay baṣīratika*). . . . And if you persevere in the reciting of the prayer on the Prophet, God will cover you with graces and the pupil of your inner vision (*sawād baṣīratika*) will become the throne of divine manifestations and the receptacle of his agency on earth (*khilāfa*).’” (“Prophetic Piety, Mysticism, and Authority,” 479).

33 For a discussion of the epistemological and cosmological aspects of this trend and its precedents, see Oludamini Ogunnaike, “Annihilation in the Messenger Revisited: Clarifications on a Contemporary Sufi Practice and its Precedents,” *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 1, no. 2, (2016): 13-34 and Valerie Hoffman, “Annihilation in the Messenger of God: The Development of a Sufi Practice.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 3 (1999): 351-369.

34 Chih, “Prophetic Piety, Mysticism, and Authority,” 467.

later Sufi tradition, tend to focus on the metaphysical and cosmological dimensions of the Muhammadan Reality, *madīh* poetry tends to be characterized by “a continuous movement back and forth from the historical Muḥammad (SAW) (with references to his life or to his words reported in hadiths) to the metaphysical [and cosmological] Muhammad (SAW) (with references to *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*).”³⁵ This synthesis of the unseen and seen aspects of the Prophet (SAW) is facilitated by the nature of poetic language itself, whose very structure of rhythm, rhyme, metaphor, ambiguity and allusion make it a kind of linguistic *barzakh* (a liminal reality that both separates and unites opposites). Rhythm is a *barzakh* between motion and stillness, time and the timeless; rhyme is a *barzakh* between one sound and many sounds, metaphor, simile, and other figurative language serve as a *barzakh* or bridge between the signified and the signifier, just as poetry is a *barzakh* between feeling/experience (*ashwāq/adhwāq*) and thought/expression (*awrāq*), between music and prose. Similarly, the Prophet (SAW) is a kind of *barzakh* between the Real (*al-Haqq*) and creation (*al-khalq*), the Absolute and the relative, between Being and nothingness, the One and the many, and so poetry is a particularly apt medium in which to reflect his qualities of human perfection, which are ultimately God’s qualities reflected in the mirror of the perfected human substance. For many Sufi poets and authors, achieving this perfection in imitation of the Prophet (SAW) is the goal of human existence, as Ibn ‘Arabī wrote:

God did not create human beings *for sport* [23:115]. On the contrary. He created them alone to be upon His form. Hence everyone in the cosmos is ignorant of the whole and knows the part, except only the perfect human being. For God *taught him the names, all of them* [2:31] and He gave him the all-comprehensive words, so his form became perfect. The perfect human being [*al-insān al-kāmil*] brings together the form of the Real and the form of the cosmos. He is an isthmus [*barzakh*] between the Real and the cosmos, a raised-up mirror. The Real sees His form in the mirror of the human being, and creation also sees its form in him. Those who gain this level have gained a

35 Andrea Brigaglia, “Sufi Poetry in Twentieth-Century Nigeria, 197.

level of perfection more perfect than which nothing is found in possibility.³⁶

By combining within themselves all perfections, perfect human beings become thus worthy of all praises. This is one of the reasons for the proliferation of praise poetry of the Prophet (SAW) and Sufi saints believed to have attained this station. As Ibn al-Fārid wrote:

*If I say, I have each and every passion for you
He says, all charm is mine, and every beauty is in me*

...

*In the art of describing of his beauty, time expires
and yet there remains in him that which has not been described
I have spent all of myself for the sake of his love at the hand of his
beauty
So, I praise the goodness of my expense³⁷*

By virtue of their humanity, all human beings are potentially perfect, but only a few ever achieve this station of perfection which encompasses all of creation. The archetypal examples of the *insān al-kāmil* are, of course, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Adam—the archetypal human being and original microcosm—as Ghazālī writes, “God showed beneficence to Adam (AS). He gave him an abridged form that brings together every sort of thing found in the cosmos. It is as if Adam is everything in the cosmos, or an abridged transcription of the world.”³⁸ ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, whose work entitled *al-Insān al-Kāmil* exerted a tremendous influence on the development of this doctrine throughout the Islamic world, similarly writes, “The Perfect Human is, through his own self, the counterpart of all the existential realities (*muqābil li-jamī‘ al-haqā’iq al-wujūdiyya*), for he is a counterpart of the higher realities through his subtle nature, and to the lower realities through his lower nature.”³⁹ Thus for the Sufi poets and aspirants

36 Quoted in William Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (New York: Oneworld, 2007), 103. This also explains the Prophet's names (Ahmad, Muhammad, etc.), for if the perfect human being possesses all of the words of existence (*jawāmi‘ al-kalim*), and the words are praise, then he or she possesses all praise.

37 See Martin Lings, *Sufi Poems: A Mediaeval Anthology* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2004), 76-77 for an alternative translation.

38 Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide*, 102.

39 ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *al-Insān al-kāmil fī ma‘rifat al-awākhir wa’l-awā’il* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), 211.

seeking to pattern themselves after the “beautiful exemplar” (33:21) of human totality and perfection that is the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the patterned, synthetic, *barzakhī* language of poetry allows them to effectively depict, evoke, and connect with the transcendence-in-immanence and immanence-in-transcendence that is the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

These dynamics can be seen in the five “contemporary classics” by authors from the region translated below. Although they come from different times and regions in the *Bilād al-Sūdān*, these poems are widely recited, read, studied, and appreciated by contemporary communities in the broader region and beyond. Thus, although earlier figures such as Ahmad Bāba of Timbuktu (d. 1034/1624) penned Arabic poetry in praise of the Prophet (SAW), we begin with al-Yadālī’s (d. 1166/1753) celebrated poem, *Salātu rabbī ma’a al-salāmī*, one of the earliest known *madīh* poems from a local author that is still widely recited, studied, and found in manuscript collections throughout present-day Mauritania, Senegambia, and Mali. Its style has been imitated by many Sufi poets throughout the entire *Bilād al-Sūdān*, from Dakar to the Red Sea and increasingly by poets in the global diaspora as well.

Al-Yadālī’s *Salātu Rabbī*⁴⁰

Context

Muhammad al-Yadālī al-Daymānī was a prolific Western Saharan scholar and Shādhilī Sufi who was a pioneering author in several fields in West Africa: he was first author in the region to author a complete Holy Qur’an commentary, and his treatise on Sufism, *al-Khātimat al-tasawwuf*, strongly influenced and has been widely cited by West African Sufi authorities such as Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba (it forms the basis for much of his major poetic treatise on Sufism, *Masālik al-Jinān*), Sidi Mukhtar al-Kuntī, and Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse. But as Abubakar Abdulkadir and Mohamed al-Moktār Ould Bah have demonstrated, al-Yadālī is also regarded as one of the “founding fathers” of the much-celebrated Mauritanian classical Arabic poetic

40 For an outstanding introduction to al-Yadālī and this poem see Abubakar Abdulkadir, “Devotional Poetry and Religious Authority: Muhammad al-Yadālī and the *Salāt Rabbī ma’a al-salāmī* in Praise of the Prophet Muhammad,” *Journal for Islamic Studies* 38, no. 2 (2020): 75-101.

tradition. But even in al-Yadālī's time, the oral culture of poetic competitions and exchanges was highly developed among the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of the Western Sahara, as Ghislaine Lydon notes:

Saharans developed a very rich tradition of oral literature. Poetic expression was a favourite pastime, with family members competing in the art of creating best rhymes and line Poems were also written as means of communication for all occasions, good and bad. Oral traditions abound about quarrels between archenemies, or jurists, engaged in long-distance debates fought in eloquent literary contests. Battles were lost and won through pen and rhymes, and poets sometime spent years trying to outsmart their enemies with their pointed verse.⁴¹

These oral and Hassānī dialect traditions of poetry exerted a strong influence on the composition of al-Yadālī's *Salātu Rabbī*, as he explains in his commentary that the inspiration for this poem came when he was out on a walk and heard some *Iggawen* (griots) singing a poem in Hassāniyya in praise of a local ruler. The recitation was so beautiful and delighted him so much that he wanted to praise the Prophet (SAW) with a poem in classical Arabic set to the same tune. Al-Yadālī explains that this is why the metre of the poem (*Mafā'ilātun mafā'ilātun*) is not among the sixteen metres of classical Arabic prosody, but instead comes from Hassānī poetry.⁴² However, he defends his poem explaining that it is in the most eloquent of classical Arabic and that beautiful melodies are a means of arousing love and longing to be near the Prophet (SAW):

I appreciated this fine song because they say that among the motivating causes of love for him are hearing moving voices singing the qualities of prophecy. So if they [singers/musicians] begin to sing or play a beautiful musical mode, they evoke joy and ecstasy in the listener, because the voices themselves have a powerful sweetness in which the intellect is submerged, and in this way the soul is moved towards its beloved, and it obtains by this movement and longing,

41 Ghislaine Lydon, "Inkwells of the Sahara: Reflections on the production of Islamic knowledge in Bilād Shinqīṭ," in Scott Reese (ed.), *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 51.

42 This meter is known as *hathū al-jarād* and is popular amongst Mauritanian Hassānī poets.

imagining the beloved, calling him to mind and drawing close to his form in the heart and being occupied with him in thought. And in this is the sweetness that floods the intellect and grants the spirit the wonders of the sweetness of the drink on the tongue, and is sweeter than the embrace of the young.... It has been related that the people of paradise, whenever they hear the sweet voice of David, magnifying God Most High, are drowned in bliss. And greater than this, when they hear the speech of the Lord addressing them...the sweetness of that takes them away from paradise and its bliss with what expression cannot contain, nor allusion encompass.⁴³

The rhyme scheme and structure of this poem are derived from the Andalusian *muwashshahāt*, a strophic poetic form in which each *bayt* (line/verse) is divided into four *misra'* (tetrastiches), with each of the first three tetrastiches in the same verse having the same end rhyme, and the last tetrastich sharing the same end rhyme with all the other verses. For example, in the following three verses of the poem:

آيات طه	ليست تُباهى	ولا تناهى	على الدوام
قلبي لديه	شوقي إليه	يزكو عليه	أزكى السلام
ما الدهر لاح	ذكى وفاحت	صبا وناحت	ورق الحمام

The first three *misra'* of the first verse end with *hā* (ها), while the last ends with *mīm* (م); the first three *misra'* of the second verse end with *ayhī* (يه), while the last ends with *mīm* (م); and the first three *misra'* of the third verse end with *āhat* (اح), and the last ends with *mīm* (م). The opening *bayt* of the poem (by which the poem is known) is the exception to this rule and is often repeated as a kind of chorus in between recitations of verses. This mellifluous structure of internal and often polysyllabic rhymes, strong rhythm, repeated end rhyme, combined with al-Yadālī's unique poetic sensibility and skillful deployment of *badī'* (rhetorical poetic figures and flourishes) produces a delightfully hypnotic effect. In fact, al-Yadālī relates that when Ibn Hayb, the king about whom the griots were praising with the original poem, heard about al-Yadālī's poem, he furiously summoned the scholar and demanded an explanation for the impudent appropriation of his praises. Al-Yadālī responded that he merely set out to praise one

43 Yadālī, *al-Murabbī: Sharh salāt Rabbī*, (n.p., n.d.), 11, 14-15.

who was better than the king, and when he recited the poem, the king's anger dissolved and he set al-Yadālī away with gifts. But al-Yadālī did not attribute this and the many other miracles associated with the poem (including saving a ship from wreck in a storm off the Atlantic coast) to his poetic prowess, but rather attributing it "to the *baraka* of the one the poem praises."⁴⁴ However, this *baraka* is not unrelated to the poem's literary merit, as the poet himself explained in his commentary, "Composing it was easy for me in Arabic because of the *baraka* of the one it praised, the most noble of creation."⁴⁵

Translation:

The blessings of my Lord with peace
 Upon my beloved, the best of creation
 Pure and clear, close by at hand
 Kind, affectionate, the lion of the gallant
 Thus is the Hāshimī Prophet
 Thus is the exalted, the guide, the Tihāmī⁴⁶
 Thus, is the elevated, the saviour, invincible
 Thus, is the intercessor on the Day of Resurrection
 The essence of perfection, the essence of beauty
 The axis of majesty, the axis of nobility
 The negator of error, abundant in shade
 The purity of water, for each who thirsts
 Abundant in fine qualities, and abundant in distinctions
 Abundant in favours, his generosity is overflowing
 The finest of qualities, the finest of men
 The finest of deeds, the finest of names
 The exalted light, exalted in honour
 Of exalted origin, of exalted station
 The full moon of felicity, the fulfiller of promises
 The fulfiller of covenants, the fulfiller of rights
 The axis of existence, the sufficiency of guests
 Who brings the lions to the fate of death⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid, 15-17.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 11.

⁴⁶ The Prophet is commonly referred to as "al-Hāshimī," as he was a member of the Banū Hāshim tribe of the Quraysh, who traced their descent to Hāshim ibn 'abd al-Manāf. The Prophet is also known as "al-Tihāmī," as the Red Sea costal region of the Arabian peninsula (including Mecca and Medina) is called Tihāma.

⁴⁷ A word derived from the same root as "fate of death," *humma*, also means black or reddish-black, and "lions" (*al-usūd*) is orthographically identical to *al-aswad* ("black").

The guide of the servants, guide of the hands
 Victor over enemies, victor over oppression
 Protector of (spiritual) realities, the saviour of creation
 The purity of creatures, the sufficiency of the outcasts
 Most radiant of intermediaries, with exalted assemblies
 Advisor to the venerable, who refutes the accusers
 The mountain of majesty, evident courage
 Star of the message, the full moon of perfection
 Gentle of nature, abundant in virtues
 Amongst all creations, the most balanced in composition
 Revealer of wonders, the guide to the objects of desire
 He has troops, lions in their blows
 [They are] the black of battle, the green of the fields
 The white of *Sharī'a*, the red of arrows⁴⁸
 Beautiful of face, with eyelids adorned with kohl
 He shades and shelters all humanity
 The pride of a noble lineage and illustrious ancestry
 Smooth-cheeked, of sublime honor
 Of ancient glory and upright guidance
 With a face ennobled with peace
 His rank is magnificent, splendid to the core
 Totally generous and kind, without any severity
 Handsome of form, beautiful of character
 Eloquent of discourse, most brilliant of speech
 A lion of courage, the rain of the clouds
 Saviour of the innocent, from every accuser
 Trustworthy guide, impregnable stronghold
 The firm rope, without fissure
 The furthest reaches are enthralled by his call
 The master of his foes, the edge of the sword
 Possessed of miracles, clear and clarifying
 And judgements, great and unimpeachable
 God manifested the radiance of his sweetness
 His exaltation reached the gazelles of the desert⁴⁹
 The wolf spoke and the branches bow for him

48 An allusion to the famous verse of Safi al-dīn al-Hillī's *qasīda*, "Ask the Long Spears," (d. 749/1349), "White are our fields, black, our battles, green, our fields, red, our swords."

خَضِرَ مَرَايَعُنَا حَمْرَ مَوَاضِينَا بَيْضَ صَنَائِعُنَا، سَوْدَ وَقَائِعُنَا.

49 The following lines allude to a series of miracles recorded in the traditional biographies of the Prophet's life.

And lean close, as if they were in love
 And the moon was split for he who ascended
 By night and was greeted with respect
 The rocks greeted him and the sky grew overcast for him
 To him, the dead tombstones began to talk
 The well gushed forth for him, and the free-ranging flock followed him
 He prayed and the drought became fertile
 The sheep became glad and the sun was returned for him
 To him was promised the Abode of Peace
 The udders became full, the wild beasts became docile
 The lizard of the hills testified for him
 The tree trunk groaned [for him], the rain gushed forth
 When he pointed to the clouds
 The signs/verses of TaHa are unsurpassed in beauty
 And will never, ever come to an end
 My heart is in his hands, my longing is for him
 Offering him abundantly, the purest salutations of peace
 O how time has become fragrant and saturated with perfume
 On the East wind, and how the flocks of pigeons coo
 Upon the Imam, the highest of mankind
 Increase the blessings of peace from the Peace
 I, in order to hymn the praises the best of servants
 Can only hope for great help from him
 O You who granted to him what You granted to him
 Then purified him, grant me my wishes:
 Lord, efface from me, all my evil
 For I take refuge in Thee
 Diminish my sin and revive my heart
 For You are my Lord, who revives dead bones
 Cover my sins and veil my faults
 Remove my troubles and forgive my sins
 Fulfil our hopes in you graciously
 Forgive us our indecencies by this Imam
 Protect us from troubles, and open for us,
 O abundant of gifts, the ways of peace
 Grant us, O Creator of the creatures
 At the moment of death, a beautiful end

Discussion

While, a full discussion of all of the *badī'yyāt* (poetic and rhetorical flourishes) of this poem is well beyond the scope of this article, virtually every line is full of these poetic features, which contribute to its remarkable beauty and enduring popularity. To take but one example, the following line contains a lovely, complex *jinās* (pun) between *tubāhā* and *tunāhā* in that the words differ only by the placement of a dot:

آيَاتُ طه ليست تُبَاهِي ولا تنَاهِي على الدوام

The signs/verses of TaHa are unsurpassed in beauty
And will never, ever come to an end

This verse comes after several verses describing miracles associated with the Prophet (SAW), and so the first word of this verse, *Ayāt*, can be taken as referring to these miracles. It is significant that this list of miracles ends with a verse negating the end of the Prophet's miracles. But *ayāt* also refers to the verses of the Qur'an, considered the greatest miracle of the prophet (SAW), and as the Qur'an itself declares: "And if all the trees that are in the earth were pens, and the ocean were ink, with seven oceans swelling it thereafter, the words of Allah would not be exhausted. Surely, Allah is Mighty, Wise." (31:27). This verse can thus also be read as alluding to the inimitability of the Qur'an and to its perpetual protection (15:9), and to the fact that its verses as well as the Prophet's miracles and the accounts of his "signs" (such as this poem) will never cease to be recited.

The numerous commentaries on al-Yadālī's poem (including his own) contain many such descriptions of the literary devices and allusions of each verse and have been foundational to the study and composition of *madīh* poetry in West Africa. However, when compared to the later tradition of *madīh*, al-Yadālī's poem is marked by a focus on the miracles, appearance, and character traits of the historical Prophet, and less of an emphasis on the Muhammadan light/reality. This aspect is, however, not absent from this poem as can be seen in the following verses:

The exalted light, exalted in honour
Of exalted origin, of exalted station

...

The axis of existence, the sufficiency of guests

Who brings the lions to the fate of death

...

Protector of (spiritual) realities, the saviour of creation

The purity of creatures, the sufficiency of the outcasts

Most radiant of intermediaries, with exalted assemblies

Advisor to the venerable, who refutes the accusers

Although the poem doesn't follow the three-part *nasīb-rahīl-madīh* structure of the *qasīda*, like many other *madīh* poems of its time and after, the entire poem is essentially an extended *madīh* section with praise of the Prophet's qualities and deeds and concluding with requests for acceptance, salvation, forgiveness, and a good end.

Dan Fodio's Daliyya

Context

According to the traditions of the Sokoto Caliphate, the young Usman dan Fodio ('Uthmān ibn Fūdī in Arabic) composed this poem in 1188/1772 when he was sent home by his shaykh Jibrīl b. 'Umar after attempting to accompany the latter on his pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina without the permission of dan Fodio's father. Dan Fodio, who was only twenty lunar years old at the time, obeyed and returned home heartbroken to pen this poem, which was eventually to become something of an anthem for his followers and the Sokoto Caliphate he would go on to found. This poem was only dan Fodio's first or second Arabic poetic composition, and while the poet confesses his literary limitations in verses such as:

And I know well that I am no good

At praising the best of the worlds, Muhammad

However, I was afflicted with his love, thus I have manifested it

This is not a game for me. No! Nor am I a joker!

So, do not laugh at my poetry, for I know I am incompetent

Who is there that can perfect the praises of Muhammad?

His sincerity, passion, and longing for the Prophet (SAW) shine through. The deft use of many of the typical features of the genre of West African *madīh*, as well as the poet's spiritual and political authority and legacy have made this poem a classic of the West African tradition in and around the so-called central Sudan (Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Northern Cameroon, Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Ghana). Usman dan Fodio's younger brother Abdullahi made a *takhmīs*

(pentastich, by inserting three hemistiches of his own between each of the hemistiches of his brother's original poem), and a somewhat similar Fulfulde poem by Usman dan Fodio, written in 1804, was translated into Hausa, and became influential in the poetic traditions of both languages. Dan Fodio's poem belongs to the long tradition of poetry that became known as *hijāziyāt* in the Maghrib,⁵⁰ poems of longing for the lands of the hajj and the Prophet (SAW). Although Dan Fodio follows the classical *qasīda* structure of *nasīb-rahīl-madīh*, the poem has the unusual *qāfiyya* (end-rhyme) of the word "Muhammad" in most verses. In classical Arabic poetics, this is generally regarded as a grave shortcoming, with the exception of certain ultra-monorhyme Sufi poems by figures such as al-Hallāj and Ibn al-'Arabī.⁵¹ But this is not the case in Fulfulde⁵² and other 'Ajamī poetic traditions in West Africa (and Persian as well for that matter), and thus came to be accepted a regional style in West African Arabic poetic traditions. As Moshood Raji writes about Nigerian Arabic poetry:

a frequently committed fault which seemed to have assumed a literary aesthetic *sunna* was *al-ītā'*, probably introduced by Shaikh 'Uthman. In his *Dāliyya*, the same word, Muhammad is virtually repeated throughout the ode as its *qāfiyya* [end-rhyme]. In literary theory, a *qāfiya* may be repeated only after an interval of seven lines unless the word repeated conveys different significations.⁵³

But in the case of Dan Fodio's *Dāliyya*, the fact that most verses end with "Muhammad," facilitates group recitation where the Prophet's name becomes a powerful refrain or even *dhikr*, pronounced with increasing emphasis throughout the poem, as each verse builds in anticipation of its expected end in "Muhammad." Moreover, this structure echoes the poet's proclamation that the end of all his longings is Muhammad. In fact, each verse is like a verbal pilgrimage

50 See Chich, 474.

51 Denis McAuley, *Ibn 'Arabi's Mystical Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 141-159.

52 For an excellent study of Fulfulde/Pulaar Sufi poetry, see Christiane Seydou (ed.), *La poésie mystique peule du Mali*.

53 Moshood Raji, "A Modern trend in Nigerian Arabic Literature: The Contribution of 'Umar Ibrāhīm", PhD Thesis, University of London, 1986, 76-77. One should note that the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of a verse, however, is highly regarded in classical Arabic poetics.

ending in Muhammad, cycling back to the beloved Prophet (SAW) again and again, like the author's thoughts and wishes.

Translation

Is there a way for me to travel to Tayba swiftly
 To visit the grave of the Hāshimī Muhammad?
 The spread of his fragrance throughout its surroundings
 Has made the pilgrims all rush together towards Muhammad
 I left bathed in tears falling like rain
 Yearning for that Prophet Muhammad
 I swear by the Merciful that my every joint
 Is filled with love for the Prophet Muhammad
 I tell of the affliction of my longing for him, which is plain to see
 For me, there is no joy without visiting that lord
 I've been worn out yearning to fly to his grave
 For me, there is no sweetness in life without Muhammad.
 The sun of the morning, the crown of guidance, the sea of generosity
 There is no good save in following Muhammad
 He is the downpour whose blessings encompass all creatures
 Rather, all of God's creation is less than Muhammad
 Had I travelled to Tayba, I would have attained my goal and desire
 Covered in the dust of the sandals of Muhammad
 The tomb of Ahmad is covered in perfume
 The fragrance of musk is shamed by the sweetness of Muhammad
 The sun is nothing, nor is the eclipse which overtakes it
 For the light of this guide is never eclipsed
 My heart's desire is to visit his dwellings
 My tears flow for missing out on [visiting] this lord
 My tears overflow when I recall his passing
 For I have melted away in love for Muhammad
 Cursed be whoever refuses to follow his path
 His affliction will be prolonged here and likewise on the morrow
 Arise! Let us hasten to the sun of guidance
 Let us cross the open desert to visit the grave of Muhammad
 Let us tighten our saddles, hurrying towards the beauty of the Day
 of Resurrection
 Passing through the clouds of the dust of that mosque
 The fires of passion roam between our ribs
 I am carried off by love and longing for him
 Between the two worlds, we are made proud by his dignity
 And we melt away in longing for the Prophet Muhammad
 His swords have severed the necks of the idolaters

Who can contest the virtues of Ahmad?
 The stars of their elevation have fallen and set by his exaltation
 Who can attain the exalted elevation of Muhammad
 There is no consolation save in visiting his grave
 There is no abundance save in being beside Muhammad
 We are elevated above all creation by his elevation
 And we are sovereigns among them by the sovereignty of Ahmad
 In longing for him, our tear ducts overflowed
 Our sins of disobedience were wiped out by Muhammad
 How many wandering in darkness have been guided by him?
 His lights are in the heart of every unifier⁵⁴
 No creation has ever come with a character like his
 Who could possess the nobility of Ahmad?
 Who could enumerate his signs?
 Like the grains of sand are the multitude of miracles of Muhammad
 Everything beneath the throne of the Lord of the worlds is a part of
 his forces
 There is nothing in creation like the Prophet Muhammad
 The traits of our Prophet are written in the Torah
 The qualities of this guide are even in the Psalms
 The Gospel of Jesus bears witness to his traits
 The milk of the sheep indicated the one who was guided⁵⁵
 The pebbles glorified God while in his palm
 And water flowed from the fingertips of Ahmad
 And the wolf bore witness to his mission in truth
 The gazelle of the empty deserts responded to this guide
 The lizard accepted him and confirmed his mission
 The trees bent toward Muhammad
 The child bore witness to his mission in the midst of the crowd
 And the rejecters raged at the coming of Ahmad
 The disk of the sun was brought back by his supplication
 And the moon was split by the merit of this lord
 Likewise, the clouds shaded him in the midday heat
 And so did flocks of doves [shade] Muhammad
 The spider covered for him in his cave
 And the tree trunk groaned, mourning the departure of this lord
 Among those [miracles] are the multiplying of the few by his touch

54 Everyone who attests to Divine Unity.

55 As in the previous poem, the following verses allude to a number of miracles of the Prophet (SAW), such as sheeps' udders filling with milk whenever he tended them as a child.

And the cracking of the Iwan [of Chosroes] at the birth of
Muhammad

The rivers ran dry at his birth

Likewise, the kindled fire [of the temple in Fars] was extinguished

He came circumcised with God's circumcision

And it is also recounted that already cut was the umbilical cord of
Ahmad

O you who would count the wonders of Muhammad

Can you measure the foaming sea?

O you who would count the sand in its courtyards

The miracles of Muhammad surpass this

Glory be to He who gave him the greatest gift

Who is there who can enumerate the praises of Muhammad?

Do not deny, O people, what I have said about him

I am a simple imitator of what he who is guided said

I am an imitator, I am incompetent, I am ignorant

I am a sinner, [yet] I am a lover of Muhammad

And I know well that I am no good

At praising the best of the worlds, Muhammad

However, I was afflicted with his love, thus I have manifested it

This is not a game for me. No! Nor am I a joker!

So, do not laugh at my poetry, for I know I am incompetent

Who is there that can perfect the praises of Muhammad?

My sins are chains and the chains are heavy

How can one weighed down and chained rise up?

I am debased by my veiling sins

But I hope to be delivered from them by the rank of this lord.

I have hidden evil, while God sees to whom it belongs

O Knower of secrets, make sweet my destination

I am made nothing by my many errors,

There is no sanctuary except in the virtues of Muhammad.

And when I am asked: 'Who is the sinner?' I will say: 'Me.'

There is no hope for me except by the rank of Muhammad.

So, take hold of the hands of an insignificant, sinful slave

O my support, O my guardian, O my goal

O Lord, if you do not pardon, then destruction is my due

There, the torment of the fire closed-in will befall me.

I have come to your door O God, so deliver me!

On the Day of Resurrection from the burning torment

For I have known that my Lord has opened

His doors for the seeker out of His generosity

Be an intercessor for me with the dreadful questioning angels
 O my Creator, O my Saviour, O my Lord
 Make it easy for us to visit our Prophet
 Make it smooth, O Master, visiting Ahmad
 O Abū Bakr, take my right hand
 By God, bring me close, tomorrow,⁵⁶ to Muhammad
 O Fārūq [‘Umar], do the same, then draw me nearer
 O you for whom I am named [‘Uthmān] do so tomorrow
 Take, O husband [‘Alī] of the virgin [Fātima], my hand tomorrow
 Until you bring it into the hand of Ahmad
 And with the aid of the Lord of the worlds, I conclude it
 And I have made its number like the years of Muhammad⁵⁷
 In the year of ‘withering’ (qashsha=1100) after ‘hissing’ (fahha=88),
 so understand⁵⁸
 From the Hijra of the Guide, the Prophet Muhammad⁵⁹

Discussion

Dan Fodio’s *qasīda* adheres closely to the classical structure, beginning with a *nasīb* of the tearful poet’s longing and love for the abode of the beloved, then transitioning to the *rahīl* (journey section) with a classic *takhallus* (disengagement and movement towards action):

Arise! Let us hasten to the sun of guidance
 Let us cross the open desert to visit the grave of Muhammad

The *qasīda* quickly turns to the *madīh* section praising the prophet’s miracles and qualities and declaring the poet’s weakness and sinfulness, before concluding with a standard request for intercession and salvation, invoking the four rightly-guided caliphs, and ending by noting that the number of verses in the poem is that same as years of the Prophet (SAW)’s life, and a chronogram dating the poem. These concluding figures signal the poet’s (and wider tradition’s) symbolic approach to language, which establishes an ontological connection

⁵⁶ In the next life.

⁵⁷ The poem is sixty-three verses long, just as the Prophet lived for sixty-three years.

⁵⁸ The numbers combined together give 1188 (1772 C.E.) the Hijri year of composition of the poem, when the poet was a mere twenty (lunar) years old.

⁵⁹ See <https://siiasi.org/ad-daaliyya/> for the Arabic text and an alternative English translation of this poem. This text is based on the critical edition of the poem established by Shaykh Muhammad Shareef of the Sankore Institute of Islamic African Studies International.

between letter, number, word, and object. Like al-Yadālī's poem, Dan Fodio's poem demonstrates the mutual influence of 'Ajami and classical Arabic poetic traditions upon each other in West Africa, and the highly creative nature of the poets of the tradition, in contrast to some naïve assessments of the tradition as "stilted" or "uncreative." Also like al-Yadālī's poem, Dan Fodio's focuses on the historical miracles of the Prophet (SAW), but unlike the Mauritanian poem, the poet and his feelings are far more explicitly present in the Sokoto *qasīda*. This personal dimension is intensified in the following poem by a contemporary of Dan Fodio's, the great Sudanese Sufi and poet, Muhammad al-Majdhūb.

**Muhammad al-Majdhūb's "Alā Yā Rasūlillāhi Inniyya
Mughramun"⁶⁰**

Context

Muhammad al-Majdhūb ibn Qamar al-Dīn (d. 1247/1831) was originally from a renowned scholarly family of Shādhilī Sufis in al-Matamma in present-day Sudan (a town on the Nile, north of Khartoum). He left his hometown in 1821 to follow the famous shaykh Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghānī (founder of the Khatmiyya/Mīrghāniyya Tarīqa) on hajj in 1821, but differences of opinion led them to part ways. In Mecca, al-Majdhūb befriended the influential Moroccan Sufi scholar Ahmad ibn Idrīs, and took him as his shaykh without the formal pact of initiation, instead their relationship seems to have been more like that of an elder brother with a younger one:

al-Majdhūb used to say of Ibn Idrīs, "He is my shaykh." Asked, "Did you take an oath with him in the Sufi path?" He answered, "No."—"So how can he be your shaykh."—Through one word he said to me."—"What was that?"—"I was confused about my state compared to those of the friends of God. (Even) the most eminent of them are proud of (certain miraculous) things they have achieved through their progress on the spiritual path; but I never gave heed to those things and even regarded them with contempt. I was thus in a state of doubt over who of us was really on the right path. When I

60 For an excellent introduction to the life, practice, thought, and reputation of Muhammad al-Majdhūb see Albrecht Hofheinz, "Encounters with a Saint: Al-Majdhūb, Al-Mīrghānī and Ibn Idrīs As Seen Through the Eyes of Ibrāhīm Al-Rashīd," *Sudanica Africa* 1 (1990): 19-59.

consulted him [Ibn Idrīs] about this matter, he said: 'They are on a (right) path, and you are on a (right) path. However the fact that you don't pay any attention to these things clearly shows the gap between them and you. For their spiritual support (*madad*) comes from the shaykhs that educate them; while yours, my brother, comes from God and His Messenger.'" And upon this word, my innermost self became calm.⁶¹

After this al-Majdhūb took up residence in the Prophet (SAW)'s mosque in Medina, enjoying direct spiritual contact with the Prophet (SAW), which granted him a kind of independence from other spiritual authorities. He still visited ibn Idrīs annually during the hajj, and their letters testify to the profound spiritual kinship and love between the two,⁶² but unlike some of ibn Idrīs' other students (particularly al-Mirghānī), al-Majdhūb did not found a distinct Tarīqa, but his family lineage, the Majādhīb maintained and spread his litanies and poetry in praise of the prophet throughout Sudan from their bases in the Red Sea port of Suakin and the northern Nile town of al-Dāmar, where Muhammad al-Majdhūb moved in 1829, and died in 1831, respectively. Muhammad al-Majdhūb is said to have composed this poem after one of his waking encounters with the Prophet (SAW) in which the Prophet told him that any time he misses him, he need only say "O Messenger of God, I am so enamored with you," and the Prophet will appear to him so that they can hold intimate discourse (even though the Prophet assured him that he is never absent from anyone who remembers and loves him). The poem contains a beautiful and detailed description of the prophet's body from head to toe, poetically connecting his appearance with his virtues and unique qualities, and is popular throughout present-day Sudan, the Hijaz, Egypt, Chad, Niger, and Northeastern Nigeria, and Cameroon across various Sufi groups and orders. The poem's easy and flowing style, evocative and descriptive imagery, and expert use of the classical *qasīda* structure have made it a classic of the genre.

Translation

Upon you be God's blessing, and then His peace too
O Messenger of God, I am so enamored with you

61 R.S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, *The Letters of Ahmad ibn Idrīs* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121.

62 Ibid.

I shed tears from witnessing the sorrow that they
 Brought up from a heart in longing, enthralled
 But there is not, for this passion any relief
 Without seeing its beloved and greeting him
 The beloved said to me, "don't fear after this
 Any veil or exile, for my covenant is fulfilled
 Whenever you want closeness with me, then call on me
 O Messenger of God, I am enamored with you
 I will answer you from a distance while I am seated with
 Whomever is lovingly busy with my remembrance, describing me."
 I swear that a heart that loves you
 For it the torment of the fire is absolutely forbidden
 So what of one who waits on you at each hour?
 Such a one is certainly in paradise delighting
 Greetings of peace be upon you and this greeting grants me
 The perfection of witnessing Beauty, inspiring
 My tongue with salutations worthy of your rank
 Repeating them, saluting you, murmuring
 Greetings of peace be upon the head of the Messenger, Muhammad
 A majestic head with Majesty turbaned
 Greetings of peace be upon the face of Muhammad
 O what a wondrous face in brightness veiled!
 Greetings of peace be upon the eyes of the prophet Muhammad
 Eyes of the deepest black with black lined
 Greetings of peace be upon the nose of the prophet Muhammad
 A nose straight and bright and aquiline
 Greetings of peace be upon the cheeks of the Beloved, Muhammad
 Cheeks luminous, soft, and fragrant
 Greetings of peace be upon the mouth of the Prophet Muhammad
 A mouth in which precious pearls are arrayed
 For apart from God's speech and remembrance and the call
 to the presence of his Master, he would not speak
 Greetings of peace be upon the neck of the prophet Muhammad
 A neck flashing bright and shapely
 Greetings of peace be upon the chest of the beloved Muhammad
 A chest wide, with knowledge brimming
 Greetings of peace be upon the heart of the beloved Muhammad
 A heart in the Light of God perpetually abiding
 It witnesses the Lord of the Throne at every instant
 For if the eyes rest, it does not, so know this!
 Greetings of peace be upon the palm of the prophet Muhammad

A wide-open palm, how generous and ennobling
 By which how many a poor man became after his poverty
 Rich, and how many a tyrant by it was humiliated
 Greetings of peace be upon the feet of the Beloved, Muhammad
 By which that forerunner trampled the veils of glory
 By which he stood in the Mihrāb for God devoutly
 In intimate converse with the Lord of the Throne, while people slept
 His persistence continued every night
 Until they colored and swelled
 Greetings of peace be upon the essence/body (*dhāt*) of the prophet
 Muhammad
 For in its loveliness, all Beauty is completed
 Greetings of peace be upon all of the prophet Muhammad
 A magnificent prophet, by the Majestic, magnified
 A Prophet [who is] from His Exalted Master, a solicitude
 That appears as creation in the gathering is dumbfounded
 Raising the banner of praise as a standard
 While the prophets and messengers crowd beneath it
 In him, each wayward one in the resurrection is seeking refuge
 And each lover is triumphant and addressed
 By him, Majdhūb hopes to be delivered with his companions
 Without trial, O intercessor, safe and sound.
 Upon you be the blessings of God and then His peace too
 Including all [his] family, and here we conclude.

Discussion

The opening of this *qasīda*, "Upon you be God's blessing, and then His peace too" has become as standard refrain in *madīh* poetry written in the *tawīl* metre (for example, it is particularly prominent in Niasse's work). Similarly, the verse,

I swear that a heart that loves you
 For it the torment of the fire is absolutely forbidden

Recalls a similar celebrated verse of al-Fazāzī's *Ishriniyya*, "The fire is forbidden for a heart that loves him," which is a sentiment found in *shamā'il* and other devotional literature on the basis of the celebrated hadith that "A person will be [in the next life] with whom he loves."⁶³ al-Majdhūb's lovely *qasīda* follows the classical structure, beginning

63 Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 5817, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2641.

with a moving *nasīb* of tearful longing, but then the beloved appears and addresses the poet directly, prompting the poet to launch into a beautiful description of the Prophet's beautiful features and body parts, from head to toe, connecting them with his beautiful qualities. This section is marked by a strong anaphora (*takrār*) of "*Salāmun 'alā...*" ("Greetings of peace upon...") announced by the previous verse, "inspiring/ My tongue with salutations worthy of your rank/ Repeating them, saluting you, murmuring." However, the beauty of the descriptions and their occasional extension beyond a single line keeps it from becoming monotonous. But the real beauty of this section lies in the way it seamlessly combines descriptions of the prophet's inward and spiritual qualities with outward attributes and actions in verses such as:

Greetings of peace be upon the chest of the beloved Muhammad
 A chest wide, with knowledge brimming
 Greetings of peace be upon the heart of the beloved Muhammad
 A heart in the Light of God perpetually abiding
 It witnesses the Lord of the Throne at every instant
 For if the eyes rest, it does not, so know this!
 Greetings of peace be upon the palm of the prophet Muhammad
 A wide-open palm, how generous and ennobling
 By which how many a poor man became, after his poverty,
 Rich, and how many a tyrant by it was humiliated
 Greetings of peace be upon the feet of the Beloved, Muhammad
 By which that forerunner trampled the veils of glory
 By which he stood in the Mihrāb for God devoutly
 In intimate converse with the Lord of the Throne, while people slept
 His persistence continued every night
 Until they colored and swelled
 Greetings of peace be upon the essence/body (*dhāt*) of the prophet
 Muhammad
 For in its loveliness, all Beauty is completed

Niasse's popular *qasīda* that begins *Abarqun badā nahu al-marābi' yalma'u* ("Did lightning flash towards the meadows, gleaming?") is structured similarly, being essentially a versification of accounts of the Prophet (SAW)'s appearance found in al-Tirmidhī's *Shamā'il*, but the poetic gaze describing the prophet's body parts in descending order and the direct address of and to the beloved give al-Majdhūb's poem a

less formal, more intimate quality. al-Majdhūb concludes the poem with a description of the Prophet's intercession on the day of judgement, requesting deliverance for the poet and, by extension, the reciters of this poem. The poem concludes in the 33rd line with a repetition of the first *misra'* (a kind of *radd al-'ajuz 'alā al-sadr*), and 33 has multiple symbolic meanings in the science of *abjad* (being half of 66, the numerical equivalent of Allah, and one-third of 99, also being the numerical equivalent of (أُحِبُّكَ, "I love you"), and sura *al-Ahzāb*, the 33rd sura of the Qur'an is directly addressed to the Prophet (SAW) and contains multiple oft-cited verses about the Prophet such as, *Verily you have in the Prophet of Allah an excellent model, for him who fears Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah much* (33:21), *Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets; and Allah has full knowledge of all things* (33:40) and *Allah and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessings on him and salute him with the salutation of peace.* (33:56)). This highly stylized intimate conversation both with and about the beloved Prophet (SAW) is continued in a different style on the other side of the *Bilād al-Sūdān* a generation later by the prolific poet and Sufi shaykh, Ahmadu Bamba.

Ahmadu Bamba's "Midādī"

Context:

Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba (d. 1346 / 1927) is the celebrated founder of the Mouride movement, whose non-violent resistance, frequent exiles and persecution by French colonial officials, and successful socio-economic and educational adaptations to the French colonial system has inspired a great deal of academic and popular literature. But within the Muridiyya, and in broader West African Muslim scholarly and Sufi circles, Bamba is venerated more for his spiritual and poetic accomplishments from which the socio-political success of his movement is understood to derive. Taking upon himself the epithet of *Khadīm al-rasūl*, Bamba focused his spiritual path and seems to have interpreted his socio-political struggles and exiles as trials that purified him spiritually leading to God's pleasure and perpetual intimacy with the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). As Bamba wrote in the prologue to his most famous poem in praise of the prophet (written in a similar style to, and showing the influence of, al-Yadālī's):

Make these verses of praise lead to *Īmān*, *Islām*, and *Ihsān* and to perpetual felicity. And may the Messenger of God be gladdened by it wherever it is read, written, or regarded, forever. Amen, O Lord of the Worlds! And make it among the songs sung by the Houris of Paradise and youths of paradise who are promised to the righteous. Make it among the most beloved acts of gratitude to You and to him, blessings and peace be upon him.⁶⁴

While popularly attributed many dramatic miracles, Bamba himself wrote that “my miracles are the verses that I trace, in the service of he that I serve / I have become the joy of my age though my deeds and my speech,”⁶⁵ claiming that the spiritual efficacy of his poetry is only surpassed by the Qur’an and hadīth. As such, the regular choral (Wolof, *kurel* or *kuréli*) recitation of Bamba’s poems (Wolof, *Khassaïde* or *xassaayid*) is one of the most popular and distinctive Mouride rituals, the lilting melodies that float through the streets and across fields throughout Senegal and Dahiras in the diaspora said to have come from the poet’s own style of reciting his poems.⁶⁶ Bamba’s poems are widely believed to have healing, protective, and other talismanic properties, due to the *baraka* of the poet and the Prophet (SAW) praised in them, and are regularly recited to attract good fortune and bring prosperity, as well as catalyze spiritual development.⁶⁷ Bamba was an exceptionally prolific and gifted poet who experimented with several different poetic styles from the simpler *rajāz* poems of rhymed couplets used for his didactic works, to the more literary, complex, and musical poems he wrote as supplicatory prayers (*du’ā*) and praise of the Prophet (SAW).

64 Rudolph Ware, “In Praise of the Intercessor: *Mawāhib al-Nāfi’ fī Madā’ih al-Shāfi’* by Amadu Bamba Mbacké (1853–1927).” *Islamic Africa* 4, no. 2 (2013), 234–235.

65 Cheikh Ahmadu Bamba, *Qasidas du Cheikh Ahmadu Bamba* (Mauritius: Cercle Islamique des Mourides de l’Ocean Indien, 1995), 1.

66 These melodies, as well as many of the proverbs, images, and turns of phrase Bamba deploys in his poems are derived from local Toroodbe and Wolof oral traditions. See Fallou Ngom, “Ahmadu Bamba’s Pedagogy, 99–123 and Amar Samb, *Essai sur la contribution du Sénégal à la littérature d’expression arabe*.

67 See Christine Thu Nhi Dang, “Pilgrimage Through Poetry: Sung Journeys Within the Murid Spiritual Diaspora,” *Islamic Africa* 4, no. 1 (2013): 69–101; Alex Zito, “Prosperity and purpose, today and tomorrow: Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba and discourses of Work and Salvation in the Muridiyya Sufi Order of Senegal” PhD Diss. Boston University, 2012.

Regarding the composition of poetry as an essential part of his spiritual path, Bamba wrote in the poem below, "I began to traverse the path of the folk [the Sufis], the moment I began to praise him, he fulfilled my needs with discipline and liberality."⁶⁸ Indeed, many of Bamba's poems were written during his seven-year exile in Gabon (1895-1902) where by his own account he achieved the goal of his spiritual striving and close intimacy with the Prophet (SAW), writing, "It was while in the Island [Mayumba in Gabon] that I was shown and cured of all my imperfections" and "I became like the sun."⁶⁹ The poems written during this period are known as the "Poems of the Seaway" (*Yoonu géej gi* in Wolof)⁷⁰, and belong to the wider genre of Arabic "prison poetry" known as *al-habsiyāt*. Bamba's poems in this genre frequently refer to his exile and imprisonment both explicitly and through allusions to the sea, such as in the opening line of the poem translated below.⁷¹ Indeed, according to Murid legend and oral history, this poem, "Midādī", meaning "my ink," was written by Bamba in his own blood while he was chained on the French ship taking him into exile to Gabon, adding profound symbolism to the opening words and title of the poem. The very blood in his veins and his fingers ("my ink and my pens") was put in service of praising the Messenger of God.

Like many of Bamba's poems in praise of the prophet (SAW), this poem is an acrostic, in this case, of the Qur'anic verse *Whoso obeys the*

68 Cheikh Ahmadu Bamba, *Dīwān fī amdāh Khayr al-Mursalīn* trans. and ed. Sam Mbaye as *Recueil de Panegyriques du Meilleur des Envoyés* (Casablanca: Dar el Kitab, 1989), 84. Indeed, in a long poem written in praise of the Prophet after his return from exile, *Nūrū d-Darāyn fī Khidmāti l-Ḥāmi 'an al-'Ārayni* "Light of the Two Abodes in Service of the Protector Against the Two Shames" Bamba writes:

Make my writings from this day on
Excel accepted prayers and fasts
And unveil, by my writing what is hidden of knowledge
You are All-aware, great, and All-knowing...
Make my recitation and my writings more beloved
to you than great good, O Lover...
Make my recitation and my writings more beloved
to you than acts of worship, O Lover." (12, 108, 269).

69 Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007), 135.

70 Camara, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba: Selected Poems*, 6.

71 This terminology is also an allusion to the Qur'an 17:67, *And when affliction visits you upon the sea, then there go astray those on whom you call except Him; and when He delivers you to land, you turn away; man is ever unthankful.*

Messenger obeys Allah indeed (4:80).⁷² The poem is also in the rare and complex structure of a *Musaddasāt* ("sixes")⁷³ in which each bayt consists of six *misra'* and the first letter and last letter of each bayt are the same. Moreover, the first five *misra'* all end in the same end-rhyme, and the 1st, 3rd, and 5th *misra'*s all begin with the same letter.

Translation

Prologue:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the compassionate, O God send prayers and peace and blessings upon the one whom you praised and purified in your statement, *Whoso obeys the Messenger obeys Allah indeed*, our lord and master Muhammad (SAW), and also upon his family and companions. Grant his servant, who praised him with these verses in the sea and whom you returned to the land, favors that many of his servant's envy, now and in the future without difficulties or repetition, nor with anything offensive or harmful, ever. Amen, O Lord of the Worlds!

My ink and my pens belong to he who drove away the seas
 As he drove away Satan and ignorance and grief
 God abolished [for me] the harm that afflicts his creation
 My refuge is with the Everlasting who has aided my service⁷⁴
 From the Fire and Satan I have taken refuge with my Lord
 Joining the ranks of the most elevated servants in his presence
 I intend my praise to be for he who brought me His gifts
 While I, because of what He has chosen for me, am certainly among his people
 Living completely devoted to the Rich, glorified beyond there being any like Him,
 His Beauty guides me in this world and the next
 I renounced falsehood for the sake of God, mighty in Majesty
 By my praises of he whose praise drives away sorrow

⁷² من يطع الرسول فقد أطاع الله This gives the poem a total of 66 verses if grouped in the usual manner of two *misra'* per verse. 66 is the numerical equivalent of the name "Allah," and so this poem, an acrostic of the verse equating obedience to the Messenger with obedience to God, both implicitly and explicitly equates praise of the Prophet (SAW) with praise of God.

⁷³ The *Mukhammas* (five hemistich or pentastich verses) were more common, such as Dan Fodio's own *'Ishriniyyāt* and the Egyptian Muhammad Shams al-dīn al-Badamāsī's *qaṣīda* that became popular in Nigeria and Niger.

⁷⁴ Allusion to 8:17, *You did not throw when you threw, but rather God threw.*

God has made time subject to me by the grace of the Chosen One
 Upon him be the blessings and peace of the Everlasting in every place
 and time
 My certainty protects me from doubts, both in secret and the open
 And my Lord has granted me, through the Prophet, glad tidings and
 safety
 My right hand owes a debt of writings, making known the traditions of
 the intercessor
 Who sufficed me against the transgressors without harm

I rejoiced that I have become wise and fair under his attention
 I have drunk my fill from the purest of his waters
 My God folded up the distance of spiritual journey by his rank
 It is plain to me that the best of efforts is seeking to resemble him
 I began to traverse the path of the folk [the Sufis], the moment I began
 to praise him,
 he fulfilled my needs with discipline and liberality

I owe a beautiful deed to the splendid one, beautified
 For the sake of my God, the master of creation and its Beautifier
 I forgave for the sake of God with purity of heart
 And I said, for the sake of the hoped for, followed one
 "Upon the Chosen One be the most everlasting blessings and peace⁷⁵
 from He who perfects
 Together with his family and companions—whoever benefits them,
 benefits me"

My God, give to the Chosen what he's chosen
 Grant him blessings with peace and honor him
 Grant the Selected one joy and preeminence
 And for me, accept my service and magnify it
 I say, "Oh my God, bless and grant peace on my behalf
 To the Selected and to the party whose love is my secret

Direct lofty gifts to him from His gifts
 And increase him in refined beauty from His beauty
 Decree that my existence be a joy to him and his family
 And companions and glad tidings for him and his Men⁷⁶

75 This is an example *Taghlib*, the poem literally says, "the two salaams", meaning *salāt wa salām*, blessings and greetings of peace.

76 A reference to the *rijāl al-ghayb*, the saints of the unseen Sufi hierarchy who carry out the Prophet's commands in the world.

Decree a blessing with peace for him and his family
And companions, O One, exalted beyond compare

My profits are in praising the one whose praises are a prize
And I will be basking in joy until I enter the Garden
I raised my affair to God in service, entirely faithful and submitted,
with he who is a ladder
A noble messenger, unrivalled, ennobled
A bearer of glad tidings of blessings and warnings of harm

With the cup of the folk, he made me drink from the light of intelligence
By being a servant of the one who had consoled/rescued me before
I am safe from all my enemies by taking refuge with my Lord
And God's door is not closed
Greetings of peace be upon the Effacer who dispersed the darkness⁷⁷
Muhammad sent with counsel and courage

My Lord protected me from enemies by him, he is a fierce lion
Because of him, the criminal turned to others forever
Because of him, the lover and the Muslim follow my way
Muhammad, the chosen, infamous [among his foes], and honorable
A dignitary before the Master, Most High, preeminent
His is the kindness in severity, and joy in the attack

I am grateful to my Lord who granted what I wanted, absolutely
From the Effacer [of error] by whom I won elevation
By the Selected, every wretched one turns away to others
And by him, the felicitous and pious turn towards me
He has precedence, preeminence, proximity, and the [Divine] encounter
And he always humiliates whoever comes to me intending ill

God illumined my inner heart, so I am quit of all enemies
He pardoned and protected me from all evil and harm
My God ransomed me from evil by those who manifested enmity to me
And by the Selected, purified my totality from all faults
My felicity, by God's grace, is inscribed on his tablet
Permanently, without any ruse nor fear

⁷⁷ An allusion to Sa'adi's celebrated verse:
He attained eminence by his perfection
The darkness was lifted by his beauty
Lovely are all of his qualities
Blessings upon him and his family

My pens owe a debt of service to my delight
 While serving him cleansed me of my errors and disgrace
 By my Lord, I conquered those whom he requited with retribution
 And I said, "the best of creation is my all and my mercy"
 My desires are completely devoted to God in service of the best of
 mankind
 Who granted me the best freedom

I prayed to My God, who suffices the one who comes in need
 And by the Prophet, he led every transgressor away from me
 God responded to my prayer with the joy of the rightly guided one
 And for the sake of God, I display the truth of the followed one
 He called me to praising the followed one, Muhammad
 In obedience to the Lord who connected me with the Rightly-guided

The Everlasting gave me the most magnificent virtue
 And turned away from me forever, those who promote vice
 I say, "my beautiful deeds are [just] following the chosen one
 Who is a lamp for my people by [his] sublime sciences."
 I obey my God, serving his intermediary, Muhammad
 [This is] sufficient to ward off afflictions

I began to call on the Chosen with courtesy
 And he dispersed the enemies, the people to be avoided
 O Messenger of God, on my behalf, you asked God, my Lord, surpassing
 my request
 And my hopes have not been disappointed
 O Prophet, by God, you have dispersed the tyrants of mankind
 Away from me without compromise, out of appreciation for my writings

Before this year, before my enemies, I humbled myself before
 The One, the Overwhelming who grants guidance
 The Master responded to me, for your sake, fulfilling my prayer
 Guiding my tongue, as he purified my inner heart, to profess unity
 For your sake, the Master subdued those jealous of me forever
 And sent them away from me, regretting their hatred

Upon the Chosen one, who defeated the enemies in his battles
 The blessings and peace of the Generous who counts me among his Men
 I forgive and I am well-pleased among his family
 Happy, obedient, exultant in communion with him
 Upon him be a blessing with peace along with his family
 And his companions, lions in the face of the foes addicted to cruelty

You have ended the tribulations, ignorance, poverty and humiliation
 And granted me, O Chosen, the sweetest of riches
 "My praise is for God along with you, O you who are the subject of my
 eulogy"

I say, intending gratitude at all times
 O my God, by the rank of the Selected, you fulfilled me my desires
 So grant me gratitude and a long, healthy life

Yours is the gratitude and praise O best of Sovereigns
 for he whose companions are the most exalted of all spiritual wayfarers
 Yours is my gratitude for all time for he who gave me the rites of
 devotion

O you who are Unique, exalted beyond association
 Cover my faults and guide, by me, every devout one
 And on my behalf, send blessings eternally upon the best of humanity

Yours is my all, without doubt, for all time, O Everlasting
 And for my Master, I am neither dull nor weary
 Grant me Your favor and union all the way to the Garden
 And give me perpetual joy and virtuous security
 Yours is my soul for all time, purify it! And guide my people through
 me
 And send blessings and peace upon the best of messengers

Accept these gifts of praise for the Chosen one for the sake of my God
 and grant me the best of knowledge and increase my discernment
 Your gifts to me far exceed my gratitude's capacity
 Yours is the praise, O You who are unique beyond compare!
 You have guided my people by creed, Sufism, and law
 By remembrance and my prayers and praise

Discussion:

As the opening line suggests, this poem articulates a kind of immanent poetics or metapoetic reflection on the purpose, role, and function of poetry in Bamba's life. Poetry was far more than a mere pastime for Bamba, but rather poetry in praise of the prophet "drives away sorrow," "wards off tyrants," "repays the debt of gratitude," and is, in and of itself, "a prize" that makes the poet "bask in joy until the next life."⁷⁸ Praising the prophet in poetry was thus an integral part of

⁷⁸ My ink and my pens belong to he who drove away the seas
 As he drove away Satan and ignorance and grief

Bamba's spiritual regimen, and a means of drawing near to the Prophet in love and character-likeness:

My God folded up the distance of spiritual journey by his rank
 It is plain to me that the best of efforts is seeking to resemble him
 I began to traverse the path of the folk [the Sufis], the moment I began
 to praise him,
 he fulfilled my needs with discipline and liberality

In this poem, Bamba also portrays his poetry as a source of guidance for his people, concluding the poem with:

Accept these gifts of praise for the Chosen one for the sake of my God
 and grant me the best of knowledge and increase my discernment
 Your gifts to me far exceed my gratitude's capacity
 Yours is the praise, O You who are unique beyond compare!
 You have guided my people by creed, Sufism, and law
 By remembrance and my prayers and praise

The last word of this poem, *al-madhī* (praise) is a faint echo of the opening word, *midādī* (my ink), bringing the poem full-circle as the poet converts his ink into praise.

Although the poem contains several rhetorical flourishes (*badī'*)⁷⁹ and concludes with standard requests for forgiveness, salvation, and blessings coupled with invocations of blessings upon the Prophet (SAW), his family and companions, it is not written in the typical *qasida*

...

I intend my praise to be for he who brought me His gifts
 While I, because of what He has chosen for me, am certainly among his people
 Living completely devoted to the Rich, glorified beyond there being any like Him,
 His Beauty guides me in this world and the next
 I renounced falsehood for the sake of God, mighty in Majesty
 By my praises of he whose praise drives away sorrow

...

O Prophet, by God, you have dispersed the tyrants of mankind
 Away from me without compromise, out of appreciation for my writings

...

My pens owe a debt of service to my delight
 While serving him cleansed me of my errors and disgrace

...

My profits are in praising the one whose praises are a prize
 And I will be basking in joy until I enter the Garden

79 Particularly notable is the wonderful *jinās tāmm* in the third stanza, *Yaqīnī yaqīnī...*
 "My certainty protects me..." amongst many others.

structure. Rather, the poem displays Bamba's signature style that combines versified *munājāt* (intimate discourses with God), supplications, praises, declamations of gratitude, and first-person narrations of his spiritual states and actions. In nearly every stanza of the poem, Bamba combines praise of the Prophet and God, personal requests and boasts/declarations of gratitude, metapoetic reflections, and allusions to his mistreatment at the hands of his enemies and captors. The verses are characterized by frequent *iltifāt* (changes of addressee) between God, the Prophet, the imagined audience, and the poet himself. While not as ambiguous as some other *madīh* poetry, this simultaneous slippage and distinction between God and the Prophet, and the Prophet and the poet, both illustrates and instantiates the spiritual connections amongst these three figures as the acrostic verse upon which this poem is constructed suggests, "*Whoso obeys the Messenger obeys Allah indeed*" (4:80): The Prophet (SAW) is a perfect mirror of the Divine Attributes and Qualities, through which the poet experiences and accesses Divine Mercy, and the poet is striving to do his best to praise and resemble the Prophet, in so doing, please both God and the Prophet. For example, the following stanzas are typical: God has made time subject to me by the grace of the Chosen One

Upon him be the blessings and peace of the Everlasting in every place
and time
My certainty protects me from doubts, both in secret and the open
And my Lord has granted me, through the Prophet, glad tidings and
safety
My right hand owes a debt of writings, making known the traditions of
the intercessor
Who sufficed me against the transgressors without harm
...
My pens owe a debt of service to my delight
While serving him cleansed me of my errors and disgrace
By my Lord, I conquered those whom he requited with retribution
And I said, "the best of creation is my all and my mercy"
My desires are completely devoted to God in service of the best of
mankind
Who granted me the best freedom
...
I began to call on the Chosen with courtesy
And he dispersed the enemies, the people to be avoided

O Messenger of God, on my behalf, you asked God, my Lord, surpassing
 my request
 And my hopes have not been disappointed
 O Prophet, by God, you have dispersed the tyrants of mankind
 Away from me without compromise, out of appreciation for my writings
 ...
 You have ended the tribulations, ignorance, poverty and humiliation
 And granted me, O Chosen, the sweetest of riches
 "My praise is for God along with you, O you who are the subject of my
 eulogy"
 I say, intending gratitude at all times
 O my God, by the rank of the Selected, you fulfilled me my desires
 So grant me gratitude and a long, healthy life

Bamba's poetic reflections on his trials are particularly interesting because they contain not only expressions of gratitude for his deliverance, both physical and especially spiritual, from evil and harm, but also sincere appreciation for the very trials which granted the poet the spiritual intimacy he desired.⁸⁰ The poem also contains direct expressions of forgiveness alongside strong condemnations and even damnations of the wicked, envious, and profligate people who sought to oppress him. This theme of spiritual victory over temporal foes is taken up in another *qasīda* written just as Senegal was gaining its political independence from the colonial powers who had exiled and persecuted Bamba.

Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse's "Iwān al-Kisrā"

Context:

Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse, the initiator of the Fayda Tijāniyya, the largest Sufi movement on the continent, is also perhaps the most popular poet of the *Bilād al-Sūdān* (if not all of the African continent) in the 20th and early 21st century.⁸¹ In a certain sense, Niasse can be

80 God illumined my inner heart, so I am quit of all enemies
 He pardoned and protected me from all evil and harm
 My God ransomed me from evil by those who manifested enmity to me
 And by the Selected, purified my totality from all faults
 My felicity, by God's grace, is inscribed on his tablet
 Permanently, without any ruse nor fear

81 For more on Ibrahim Niasse see Ousmane Kane, "Shaikh al-Islam al-Hajj Ibrahim Niasse" in David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud, eds., *Les Temps des Marabouts*

considered as the *khatm* (seal/completion) of the West African tradition of *madīh* poetry, summarizing much of what came before him and bringing the tradition to new literary and spiritual heights. Moreover, the Fayda Tijāniyya has become a major literary movement of its own, inspiring a flood of literature from its members (and even detractors) in both prose and poetry, especially *madīh*.⁸²

Included as an addendum at the end of his last collection of poetry, *Sayr al-qalb*, Niasse wrote this poem on the occasion of a visit to the Iwan of Chosroes in Iraq, during a trip he had made to Baghdad in 1960 to visit leaders and religious sites, including the grave of 'abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. Chosroes' Iwan is the only visible structure remaining of the Sassanid capital of Ctesiphon (*Madā'in* in Arabic), about 35 km south of present-day Baghdad. Its Iwan, or arch is the largest vault of unreinforced brickwork in the world and is considered to be an architectural marvel. Possibly constructed during the reign of Anushirwan (Chosroes I) c 540 AD, the ruins of this palace have served as the inspiration for many poems, including the famous Persian *qasīda* of al-Khāqānī (d. ~596/1199) and the older, classical Arabic ode of the 'Abbāsīd court poet al-Buhturī (d. 284/897), particularly due to Islamic legends that this Iwan cracked upon the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), signaling the emergence of Islam as a new empire and civilization that would replace that of the Sassanids. Niasse's poem mentions many of the miracles surrounding the prophet's birth and life, weaving esoteric references in a movement reminiscent of the classical *qasida* structure: the poem begins with the *nasīb* that takes the cracked ruins of the Iwan as the *atlāl* (traces of the beloved's campsite), then takes the reader on a journey into the spiritual and pre- or atemporal presence of the Prophet (SAW), before coming back to the position of the poet, sleepless with longing for his beloved, praising the Prophet and making implicit requests of God and (or by means of)

(Paris: Karthala, 1997): 299-316; Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niasse* (Boston: Brill, 2015); Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Oludamini Ogunnaike, *Deep Knowledge: Ways of knowing in Sufism and Ifa, Two West African Intellectual Traditions* (College Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2020).

82 See Andrea Brigaglia, "Sufi Revival and Islamic Literacy: Tijani Writings in Twentieth-century Nigeria," *The Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 12, no. 1 (2013-2014): 102-111.

His beloved. The poem is a celebration of the coming of the spiritual reality of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) into the world, eclipsing all other temporal power, representing the miraculous—but inevitable—triumph of truth, justice and spiritual authority over seemingly invincible political authority and power.

Given Niasse's deep involvement in African independence movements (particularly those in West Africa (especially Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, and Senegal/Mali), the fact that this poem was written in 1960 is particularly significant as this was the year that Senegal, Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon, Madagascar, Congo, Somalia, Benin, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte D'Ivoire, Chad, Central African Republic, Mauritania achieved their official political independence, marking a turning point in the struggle for African sovereignty and heralding the realization of Niasse's declaration published in the same year in pamphlet entitled "Africa for the Africans" that "Africa must be governed by its own children."⁸³

Translation:

O Chosroes' Iwan were you struck, heralding
 The emergence of my Prophet and Chosroes' evanescence?
 O Chosroes Anushirvan, Muhammad has come
 With his greatest signs, while your castle bore witness
 O Chosroes Anushirvan, Muhammad has come
 Did the rivers run dry? Or did they gush forth?
 O Chosroes Anushirvan, Muhammad came
 Did not the Magi come to you extolling him?
 O Chosroes Anushirvan, Muhammad came
 Reciting a reminder, warning and giving glad tidings
 While the idols had prostrated to God, speaking [of his coming]
 And the soothsayers had told of what was hidden
 Greetings of peace to the light of God that
 Overshadowed, by his lights, the lights of Chosroes and Caesar
 Greetings of peace to he who brought, while he was in Mecca
 A light by which Chosroes' Iwan was cracked
 Greetings of peace to being's secret and its symbol
 For God's alone is what is more exalted, and precious, and dazzling
 Greetings of peace to he who came, while existence, all of it

83 See Zachary Wright, "Islam and decolonization in Africa: The Political Engagement of a West African Muslim Community" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46, no. 2 (2013): 205-227.

Was darkness, and from his lights it was illumined
 Greetings of peace to him from a lovelorn servant
 In Baghdad, exhausted from having spent the night in sleepless
 contemplation
 So he who razed this castle while he was a babe in Mecca
 will not leave behind any appearance of that infidelity
 So he who razed this castle while he was in Mecca,
 will demolish the castles of infidelity whenever he is remembered
 Upon him be the blessings of God and then His peace too
 For I see that a lot of Muslims is abundant fortune
 Upon him be the blessings of God and then His peace too
 And the share of the enemies of religion is a scourge of destruction

Discussion

One striking feature that separates this poem from the others in this collection is that it is written from Baghdad, north of Mecca. While poets from the Western *Bilād al-Sūdān* often made *hajj* and spent time in Egypt and the central lands of Islam, trips like Niasse's, while not unprecedented, only became common in the 20th-century with the advent of international air travel, and Niasse was a pioneer among Islamic scholars and poets in this regard, traveling and writing poems about his travels to China, Pakistan, Paris, and numerous cities throughout the Middle East, North Africa and the *Bilād al-Sūdān*.

This poem is marked by its strong anaphora (*takrār*) or repetition of the opening part of the verse and its *iltifāt* (switching of addressee), which divides the poem into four sections: the first addressing the Iwan and Chosroes, the second extending greetings of peace to the Prophet (SAW), the third describing the "one who razed this castle," and the fourth invoking the concluding blessings and peace upon the prophet. The poem begins with a rhetorical question to the implicitly personified Iwan, and the following lines in this first section can either all be read as rhetorical questions address to Chosroes or a direct vocative address to Chosroes followed by intermittent questions. These rhetorical questions demonstrate a simple version of the rhetorical device of feigned ignorance, (*tajāhul al-'ārif*), which only serves to dramatize and emphasize the miraculous coming of the Prophet (SAW), through the poet's interrogation of the cracked structure and its absent patron. These lines, like many others in the poem are studded with *tarsi'* (internal rhymes) in which the *qāfiya* (end-rhyme) of *rā* is

repeated throughout the poem, giving it a flowing and mellifluous quality, further augmented by *jinās* (puns) like *Kisrā takassarā* ("the castle was crushed"), "*Kisrā wa Qaysarā*" ("Chosroes and Ceaser"), *hadda hadha* ("razed this").

Like the first two poems, Niasse's recounts many of the miracles surrounding the Prophet's birth, but the references to the pre-cosmic Muhammadan light in this poem are even more explicit than in these antecedents:

Greetings of peace to being's secret and its symbol
 For God's alone is what is more exalted, and precious, and dazzling
 Greetings of peace to he who came, while existence, all of it
 Was darkness, and from his lights it was illumined

Likewise, while the other poems concluded with requests, Niasse's poem strikes a tone more triumphant and declarative even than Bamba's poem, not requesting, but rather announcing the victory of the truth and its followers, inwardly and outwardly, by the grace and power of the mere remembrance of the Prophet (SAW). The ruins of the Iwan become the occasion for the lovelorn poet's recollection of the appearance of the beloved and his overwhelming and inevitable victory of which the cracked arch is but an outward trace or reminder. In following the Qur'anic injunction to Say, '*Travel in the earth and see how evil was the end of those before you! Most of them were idolaters.*' (30:42)⁸⁴ *And how many a city have We destroyed, while it was given to wrongdoing, so that it is fallen down on its roofs; and how many a deserted well and lofty castle! Have they not travelled in the land, so that they may have hearts wherewith to understand, or ears wherewith to hear? But the fact is that it is not the eyes that are blind, but it is the hearts which are in the breasts that are blind* (22:45-46), Niasse's short poem of 15 lines connects the cracks in Chosroes' Iwan to the cracks in the colonial oppression to the cracks in spiritual darkness within hearts and on the horizons broken open by the dawning of the light of the beloved Prophet (SAW).

84 Also *Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? They were greater than them in strength. They tilled the earth and built upon it more than have they and their messengers brought them clear proofs. For God would never wrong them, but themselves did they wrong* (30:9).

Conclusion

The five poems presented and discussed briefly above are but a small sampling of the vast river of poetry that has flowed forth from the pens and tongues of the Muslims of the *Bilād al-Sūdān* for centuries. These particular poems were chosen because we believe they represent an important cross-section of time-periods, regions, and styles—even though each author presented here has numerous other poems (Niasse and Bamba each have numerous other volumes of poetry), we believe these selected poems are representative of certain trends characteristic of each poet and his particular milieu, and taken together, of the tradition as a whole. Although this selection of poems in no way proves this point, the subtle shifts in the role and portrayal of the Prophet (SAW) in these poems (increasing emphasis on the cosmological/spiritual reality of the Prophet) seems indicative of the general shifts in Prophetic devotion and Sufi cosmology discussed above as well as shifts in sociopolitical circumstances.⁸⁵ The thesis of Amiri Baraka's seminal *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, that "each phase of the Negro's music, issued directly from the dictates of his social and psychological environment,"⁸⁶ can be modified and applied to the "madīh people" of the *Bilād al-Sūdān* to suggest that each phase of the region's *madīh* tradition issues directly from the spiritual, psychological, and social environment of the poet, particularly his or her relationship to the Prophet (SAW). For example, while Niasse's poetry elucidates among the most explicit and daring accounts of the Muhammadan Reality and spiritual annihilation in the Messenger (*fanā' fī'l-rasūl*) of the whole tradition, reflecting these larger shifts in written Prophetology as well as his own unique spiritual intimacy with the Prophet (SAW), on the sociopolitical level, the colonial "enemies of religion" figure prominently in the poetry of Bamba and Niasse in ways that are unprecedented in the earlier tradition.

All of these poems demonstrate the creative reworking of the *madīh nabawī* tradition, responding to the centuries-long tradition of Arabic praise poetry while also adapting it using local and contemporary elements from the poets' own life experiences and linguistic, spiritual, social, and political contexts. While the traditions of 'Ajāmī praise

⁸⁵ Ibn al-'Arabi, last third of the night...

⁸⁶ Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999).

poetry have influenced the Arabic traditions of *madīh* in the *Bilād al-Sūdān* (as the first two poems demonstrate), the poets featured in this article have all chosen to praise the Prophet (SAW) through poetry in the Prophet's own language. While this demonstration of facility in Arabic poetry can serve as a powerful marker of their Islamic scholarly credentials and authority, the intimate devotional aspect of this choice of language should also not be overlooked. Likewise, much 'Ajamī poetry in praise of Sufi saints tends to be in their own mother tongues, although it is certainly not limited to these languages. While Arabic poetry may tend to have a higher social/religious status and wider global reach, 'Ajamī poetry tends to have an accessibility, immediacy, directness, and creativity matched only by the greatest poetry and poets of the Arabic *madīh* tradition, such as those presented here. Nevertheless, millions of people who are not fully fluent or even literate in Arabic frequently recite or listen to these five poems (and many others from these authors and this tradition) devotionally or recreationally, acquiring what Fallou Ngom has dubbed a "music-derived literacy"⁸⁷ in classical Arabic.

Considering these poems and poets together highlights their profound interconnection as a part of a shared spiritual and literary tradition that cuts across *tariqa* affiliation, region, and time period. Whether directly influencing each other or drawing on the same set of literary or spiritual sources of inspiration, the strong continuity of themes, vision, purpose, and even style amongst these poems illuminate the contours of a distinct tradition, vast, profound, and profoundly influential. Today, al-Yadālī's poem is sung across the continent and in the diaspora alongside Niasse's *qasā'id*, while Muhammad al-Majdhūb's poem is recited by lovers of the Prophet (SAW) from the Hijaz to Harlem. It's common to find comments such as "Je suis tidiane, mais j'adore cette khassida" or "Je suis mouride qui adore trop ce chant tidiane dafa nekh way" under YouTube videos of moving recitations of the poetry of Bamba, Niasse, or Malik Sy and Dan Fodio's Dāliyya still moves people to tears from Lagos to London. Taken together, the legacy of these poems and the tradition to which they belong invite us to consider not only the Sufi dimensions of the Arabic and 'Ajamī literary traditions in the *Bilād al-Sūdān* and the literary

87 Fallou Ngom, *Muslims Beyond the Arab world: The Odyssey of 'Ajamī and the Murīdiyya* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 26.

dimensions of the Sufi tradition in the region, but also to consider the region's Sufi tradition, in part, as a literary movement, and perhaps most saliently, to approach this literary tradition of *madīh* poetry as a spiritual movement of its own, in which poets, reciters, and listeners seek and weave a strong bond of love for and intimacy with the Prophet (SAW) through verse.

As Charles Hirschkind writes of music, quoting Giorgio Agamben:

By giving expression to that which cannot be said in language, to the limits of the sayable, music demarcates the foundation on which any word, language, or discourse will necessarily depend. Glossing the views of Plato and Aristotle, Agamben writes, "In every age, humans are always more or less intentionally educated to politics and prepared for it through music, even before this happens through traditions and precepts that are transmitted by means of language... Just as, for a soldier, the trumpet blast or the drumbeat is as effective as the order of a superior (or even more than it), so in every field and before every discourse, the feelings and moods that precede action and thought are musically determined and oriented. In this sense, the state of music defines the political condition of a given society better than and prior to any other index." In Agamben's view, music—at least potentially—reminds us, and celebrates the fact, that a fundamental aspect of our lives cannot be said in language, that language is not our voice, or not all of it.... I want to suggest, that [music] is also a new foundation (call it a sonorous foundation) for what we can subsequently articulate linguistically.⁸⁸

That is, if the Qur'an and its recitation are the deep ground of Muslim consciousness, in most communities in the *Bilād al-Sūdān*, the music of *madīh* poetry, as a *barzakh* between the discursive and non-discursive, is the sonorous foundation for the general world-sense and subsequent thought, feeling, and actions. This ability for *madīh* poetry to effectively shape people communally and depict and embody the person of the Prophet explains the prominent role it has played in nearly every reform movement in the region.

As numerous historians and scholars of Islam have noticed, for at least the past 800 years, whenever Muslim communities face difficulties and upheavals, the production and recitation of prayers

88 Charles Hirschkind, *The Feeling of History: Islam, Romanticism, and Andalusia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 110.

and poems on the Prophet (SAW) of mercy seem to increase.⁸⁹ The reasons for this are many, but the power of this poetry to inspire love, devotion, sacrifice, solidarity, and heroic efforts to emulate the beloved Prophet in spiritual states and outward actions across barriers of language, culture, class, and creed is simply unparalleled. As discussed above, poetry is a uniquely synthetic art in both form and function, and *madīh* poetry functions to bring us together, to unite us, in and with that which is finest within us, both collectively and individually. Tough times call for strong poetry; these present times of ours are indeed difficult, but the love that animates these poems is even stronger. They are love poems to the best of our humanity, not only to the best among us, but to that which is best within us. As we have written elsewhere, "Sufi poetry in praise of the Prophet (SAW) is essentially love poetry arising from longing for the perfection of the Prophetic Reality, identified with the essential perfection of each soul. Sufi *madīh* are love odes to our best nature, meant to provoke longing for and realization of this highest potential within us."⁹⁰ Part of the magic of this poetry is its ability to unite us with this common origin and archetype of human virtue, for which all other beauties appear as sparks from that fire or beams from that moon. It does so in a form—namely poetry—whose totality mirrors our own, moving us from the depths of our souls to the tips of our hair. As Jacques Maritain wrote, "Poetry is the fruit neither of the intellect alone, nor of imagination alone. Nay more, it proceeds from the totality of man, sense, imagination, intellect, love, desire, instinct, blood and spirit together. And the first obligation imposed on the poet is to consent to be brought back to the hidden place, near the center of the soul, where this totality exists in the state of a creative source."⁹¹ For these poets, this "hidden source" at the center of the soul is none other than the light of

89 Annemarie Schimmel cites a South Asian Muslim scholar, "The chaos and the unrest brought about by the Second World War has naturally created an urge for a new world order. This is apparently reflected in the efforts which are being made on a large scale for coexistence. The *na't* is a branch of literature which plays an important part in building up the type of character aiming at breaking the racial, geographical and class barriers" (Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 192).

90 Ogunnaike, *Poetry in Praise of Prophetic Perfection*, 121.

91 Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), 111.

Muhammad (SAW), from which everything else was created and *who is closer to the believers than their own selves* (33:6).

This river of perpetual praise has nourished and refreshed the souls of Muslims across the *Bilād al-Sūdān* for centuries, running not only across land and through time, but beyond space and time to the Divine Presence and Its Beloved. And we, as scholars standing on its banks, can only pray that it continues to flow forth, irrigating and perfuming our future as it has our past. As Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse wrote:

My tongue, remembering the Chosen, will offer him
 A perfumed and fragrant praise, spreading throughout all time
 I will serve him at every moment and instant
 To God grateful, singing and stammering
 For whenever I turn my thoughts to his praise
 I am freed from all sins and all disability
 I am freed from all infidelities, doubt, and deficiency
 To the paradise of knowledge, free and satisfied
 The repetition of the remembrance of the Chosen, forever
 Is my rest, spirit, and repose, both hearing and reciting
 The praise of other than the followed Guide is a disgrace
 And a lie, for all praise is gathered in him
 This world and this next are from his generosity, and his knowledge
 Provides the pens of the tablet some of what they contain
 With his beauty, the houris of paradise are adorned
 And from his lights, the light of the full moons are radiant
 And from his epitome, came all the prophets before him
 For only the Selected descended ascending⁹²
 [He is] the treasury of all creation, and he is the secret of his God
 If not for him, no person would be found enjoyable
 Should I mention my needs or be silent, my master?
 Upon you be blessing of God, and upon the companions altogether

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⁹² A reference to the account of the *Isrā'* and *Mi'rāj* in Sura Najm. 53:8, *thumma danā fatadallā*, can mean "then he drew nigh and came nearer" or "then he drew nigh and came down."

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The Institution of *Hajj* and Transcultural Encounters: Development of Cultural and Intellectual Networks between Bilād al-Sūdān, Maghrib and Hijaz

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Introduction

Over the years, the *Hajj* institution has established itself as a dynamic forum fostering robust intellectual and cultural exchanges between the Maghrib, the Hijaz, and Bilād al-Sūdān. Mecca, regarded as the holiest city in Islam, has long been a destination for Muslim migration, giving rise to a diverse array of migrant communities. Those migrating along scholarly networks undergo a process of transculturation, adopting the customs of their host communities and interacting with native Arab society, all while preserving elements of their own cultural identities. These migrant communities use their transcultural identities to facilitate cross-cultural encounters when millions of pilgrims gather in Mecca each year to perform the *Hajj*.

The Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca), serves as a crucial unifying force for Muslims, driving extensive movement across national borders. This religious obligation brings Muslims from all over the world together in Mecca during a particular period of the year. It has also grouped them for travel from specific points in West Africa. Historically, pilgrims integrated themselves into the trans-Saharan networks, that led either to Cairo or Red Sea ports such as Aydhab, Suwakin, or, more recently, Port Sudan. Major gathering points in the Nigeria-Niger region were Kano, Agades (earlier Takedda) or Birnin Gazargamo in Bornu. Pilgrims would travel to the nearest accessible hub, where they could join fellow pilgrims in caravan to undertake the arduous Saharan crossing.

In West Africa, as in the Maghrib, there was a firm belief that pilgrimages and visits to sacred sites provided sanctuaries for spiritual renewal. The rare instances of these movements that involved

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important personalities included, Sheikh Umar al-Fulani, Ahmad Bakatagume, and Alfa Hashim. Pilgrimage routes, particularly the 40-day path traversing Egypt and the Sudan Road, acted as vital conduits of connectivity. Egypt, in particular, served as a hub, where scholars and pilgrims from Andalusia, Maghrib, and Bilād al-Sūdān converged, before journeying through the Sinai Desert towards the Holy Land. This article explores how the institution of *Hajj* exacerbates many aspects of sociocultural and intellectual ties, with a focus on Bilād al-Sūdān, the Maghrib, and the Hijaz. It also examines how the *Hajj* institution strengthened ties to the outside world both intellectually and culturally.

Pilgrimage Tradition in Bilād al-Sūdān

There is a significant paucity of information regarding the historical development of pilgrimage in the Bilād al-Sūdān, mainly due to dearth of records and a lack of documentation on the subject. However, it is noteworthy that the borders of the entire Bilād al-Sūdān had established contact with Islam as early as the ninth and eleventh centuries. In the 19th century the majority of West African pilgrims comprised scholars, traders, and kings who coupled religious study (of Sufi mysticism or Islamic sciences) with economic or political contacts. Several factors influenced the pilgrim's journey, including their location, religious affiliation, awareness of the political climate in the regions they intended to visit, road safety, financial resources, and connections to the wider world through trade, academia, or politics.¹ The choices made by pilgrims in the 19th century were shaped by several major events. Beginning in the early 18th century, pilgrims from what is now Mauritania and Western Sahara organized special annual pilgrimage caravans, allowing entire families to travel to Mecca. By the 19th century, West African pilgrims had the opportunity to join larger trans-Saharan caravans, which offered organizational support, enhanced safety, and logistical assistance when necessary.

Wealthier pilgrims opted to travel by sea from the North African coast, using the trans-Sahara route to access maritime passages, which offered quicker and more comfortable journey compared to land

1 A. M. Kani, "The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān up to 1800" In *History of Learning in Katsina*, edited by Isma'il A. Tsiga and Abdalla U. Adamu (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1997).

routes. As early as the eighteenth century, maritime powers such as France and Britain, alongside smaller entities like the city-state of Dubrovnik, were actively involved in the transporting pilgrims. These unbelievers' ships were less prone to pirate attacks, making them a favorable option for pilgrims. With the gradual rise of the Tijāniyya Sufi order in West Africa, pilgrims affiliated with this brotherhood combined the *Hajj* with visits to the tomb of Sheikh Ahmad Tijāni, the founder of their order, in Fes.² Crossing the Sahara also enabled West African pilgrims to connect with key centers of Islamic scholarship in North Africa, such as the Qarawiyyîn, Zeytûna, and al-Azhar universities. After decades of insecurity, the establishment of the Jihad States in the 19th century, which restored peace in the central Sahel (as mentioned above), contributed to enhanced safety for pilgrims. This newfound stability encouraged people to leave the region, whether as refugees or for the *Hajj*, rather than being hindered by the ongoing religious conflicts and colonial conquests in the western Sahel.³

The institution of *Hajj* is unique in many respects. It brings together diverse population of Muslims from different parts of the world to discharge a time-honoured spiritual obligation. In the process, it has come to stimulate a complex web of relations in the aspect of culture, socio-economic, educational and political life of individuals and communities. In regions like West Africa, we should also appreciate another dimension of *Hajj*, i.e. as a veritable agent of Islamization. Scholars and their disciples from the Islamised parts of the region, in a bid to discharge this religious obligation, have had to traverse long distances through territories which were non-Muslim. Many of these scholars ended their journeys prematurely, settling in these territories and converting to Islam both the rulers and their followers. The most celebrated case is that of Sheikh Abdul-Rahman Jakhite who left Mali with over one hundred students with the intention of performing the pilgrimage.⁴ He went through the ancient

2 Lecocq Baz, *The Hajj From West Africa From a Global Historical* (African Diaspora, 2012), 187-214.

3 A. M. Gada, *A short History of Early Islamic Scholarship in Hausaland* (Kaduna: Nadabo Printing Production, 2010).

4 *Tarikh Arbab Hadha al-balad al-Musamma Kano*, known as *Kano Chronicle* in Herbert Richmond Palmer, *Sudanese Memoirs. Being Mainly Translations of Arabic Manuscripts Relating to the Central and West Sudan* (Lagos: Lagos Government Printer, 1928), 104-107; M. A. al-Hajj, "Asl al-Wangariin", *Kano Studies* I, no. 4 (1968): 7-16.

city of Kano and converted Sarki Yaji Dan Tsamiya to Islam and ultimately settled in the city and continued. Consequently, Kano came to play an important role in the Islamization of Hausaland and other parts of West Africa.⁵

Al-Bakri documented that the King of Takrur following his conversion to Islam, performed pilgrimage many times. Thus, the Takrur came to be regarded as the Muslims communities of West Africa to perform the *Hajj*. The historical record has it that the first Muslim ruler of Kanem, Mai Umme b. Abdul-Jalil died in the land of Misra, presumably on his way to perform the *Hajj*. However, his successor, Mai Dunama b. Umme conducted the pilgrimage two times, but died in the third attempt.⁶ During his first pilgrimage, he arrived in Egypt with over 300 servants and the same number on his second pilgrimage. But on his third pilgrimage, he was killed by the people of Egypt on the false assumptions that, he will occupy their land. They stated that, "if this King returns from Mecca to his country, he will take from us our land and country no doubt." So, they took counsel to destroy him. They opened a sea-cock in his ship, so that the sea drowned him by the command of God. His followers saw him in his white garments floating on the sea, till he vanished from their eyes, lost by the command of God, Most High, in the sea of Prophet Musa (AS).⁷ Many successors of Mai Dunama b. Umme performed the pilgrimage. During the reign of Mai Dunama Dibalemi, the institution of *Hajj* led to significant institutional developments, especially intellectualism. In the period, the Madrasat Ibn Rashiq was established by the Kanem ruling class in Cairo. For the rulers of Kanem–Bornu, the performance of *Hajj* was also taken equally seriously. According to the Mahram of Muhammed b. Mani, the first ruler to accept Islam in Kanem–Bornu was Mai Umme Jilmi. Yet, the sources are not firm, but only succeeded on illuminating our minds that Mai Umme died in Cairo. As for his son and successor, Mai Dunama b. Umme, the *Diwan* informs us that among his noble acts were pilgrimages to Mecca on two related instances. Ostensibly, the subsequent Sultans of Kanem–Bornu following Mai Dunama also made the pilgrimage. Indeed, it became so common in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth

5 M. A. al-Hajj, "Asl al-Wangariin", *Kano Studies* I, no. 4 (1968): 7-16.

6 Umar al-Naqar, *The Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa*, 26-33.

7 Herbert Richmond Palmer, *The Bornu, Sahara and Sudan* (London, 1936).

centuries that "the journey to Mecca," was described "as a night ride." The biographer of Mai Idris Alauma, Imam Ahmad b. Fartuwa, was very emphatic on the tradition of *Hajj* amongst the Mai of Bornu.

These early Kanem-Bornu pilgrimages apparently served as pioneers to the more well-known and broadly documented pilgrimages of the western Bilād al-Sūdān, including the pilgrimage of Mansa Musa and that of Askia Muhammad b. Abi Bakr Ture, which they undertook within two years.⁸ Both Mansa Musa and Askia Muhammad Ture on their return, brought back scholars and technocrats, including the Andalusian poet, Abu Ishaq al-Sahili who contributed significantly to the development of the tradition of architecture in West Africa. He was instrumental in the development of the famous Sankore University of Timbuktu. The North African and Middle Eastern scholars impacted greatly in the development of the distinctive scholarly and intellectual communities of Timbuktu. Even the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate who viewed the responsibilities of state as superior to discharging the obligation of *Hajj* used the occasion to invite Islamic scholars to the Bilād al-Sūdān. In his message to the people of Hijaz which was delivered through Haj Ali b. Nuh, the caliphate's *amir al-Hajj*, Caliph Muhammad Bello wrote: "We also ask of the *fuqaha* and the nobles there, those who can reach us to come to us so that we can benefit from what God had taught them. We also inform you that all those captured by the enemy from among the communities that followed us and who were sold to merchants who sold them to you, are free Muslims whose enslavement is forbidden, *haram*. You are to do your utmost to rescue their necks from bondage."⁹ As far as the substantive pilgrimages of West Africans were concerned; we may have to turn our attention to the Muslim Kingdoms of Mali and Kanem-Bornu in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to glean any useful information on the subject.

The pilgrimage of Mansa Musa and Askia Muhammad were very significant royal pilgrimages that attracted the attention of North African and Andalusian scholars as a result of the nature in which they combined and displayed piety and royal pomp and splendour; extremes of wealth, generosity and poverty; and eventually the

8 Ibid, 6-25.

9 Muhammad Bello b. Shaykh Uthman b. Fodio authored the *Tanbih al-Raqid lima Yactawir al-Haj min al-mafasid* see John O. Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature in Africa 2* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 141.

triumph of the extraordinary. The pilgrimage of Mansa Musa was undertaken to seek forgiveness for the murder of his mother by mistake, while that of Askia was to serve as remorse for the killing of Sonni Ali.¹⁰ Ibn Fadl Allah al-Umari moved to Egypt about twelve years following the pilgrimage of Mansa Musa. Subsequently, he conducted extensive documentation on the pilgrimage. He was able to discuss with Qarrafa Ibn Amir Hajib and *Mehmandar* al-Amir Abul-Abbas Ahmad al-Hak, who facilitated Mansa Musa's sojourn in Cairo and also assisted in the discharge of the pilgrimage. On the local side, the author of the *Tarikh al-Fattash*, Mahmud al-Mutawakkil Ka'ti was in the *Hajj* entourage of Askiya Muhammed and was indeed an eyewitness to the whole episode.¹¹ Mansa Musa, the Sultan of Mali, performed the pilgrimage in 724 A.H/1324 A.D. "He set off," according to local sources, "in great pomp, with a large party, including sixty thousand soldiers and five hundred slaves, who ran in front of him as he rode. Each of the slaves bore in his hand a wand fashioned from 500 *mithqal* of gold." Mansa Musa's pilgrimage route took him to Walata, Ghadames and Cairo. At the latter town, it was Ibn Fadl Allah al-Umari who gave us a vivid account of the Malian Sultan's exploits. Apparently, the *mehmandar* tried to persuade Mansa Musa to pay a courtesy call on the Mamluk Sultan, al-Malik al-Nasir, but he persistently refused. "I came for the pilgrimage and nothing else," said the Malian King. "I do not wish to mix anything with my pilgrimage." It is also probable that Mansa Musa found Mamluk court protocol, which required any visitor to prostrate and kiss the hand of the Sultan repugnant and obnoxious.

Pilgrimage and the Spread of Sufi Orders

The institution of the *Hajj* was instrumental in the diffusion of many *sufi* orders in West Africa and also in invoking cultural and intellectual relationships between the two regions. The dominant *sufi* orders in West Africa, Qadiriyya and Tijāniyya, owe their origins to Bilād al-Sūdān through the pilgrimage routes. In fact, the Mahdist ideology was diffused into Nilotic Sudan and North Africa through the dominant *Hajj* route popularly known as the Sudan Road that traversed from West Africa to Egypt. The institution has also played a

10 Umar al-Naqar, *The Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa*, 130.

11 Ibid, 18.

critical role in the spread and diffusion of Tijāniyya that found their way into West Africa through the famous pilgrimage routes. The Qadiriyya order was presumably introduced by the famous Timbuktu scholar Sheikh Mukhtar al-Kunti. While on the case of Tijāniyya, Sheikh Umar al-Fūtī planned to undertake a *Hajj* with his famous scholar, but his teacher died before the proposed pilgrimage. Finally, Umar al-Fūtī conducted the *Hajj* alone. However, while at Hijaz, Sheikh Umar al-Fūtī met Muhammad al- Ghālī who was appointed by Sheikh Ahamd Muhammad al-Tijānī, the founder of the Tijāniyya order, as the representative (*khadim*) of Tijāniyya in the east. Subsequently, Umar al-Fūtī became a disciple of Muhammad al- Ghālī in the Hijaz, and upon completion of his pilgrimage, he was appointed by his teacher Muhammad al-Ghālī as representative of Tijāniyya in West Africa. On his return Umar al-Fūtī began the spread of the order to West African communities. He stayed in Bornu for a short time, and issued 'ijāza to some prominent scholars of Bornu. Then from there he moved to Sokoto. He made an attempt to introduce the order in Sokoto, but it was not successful due to the fact that the founders of the Sokoto Caliphate were adherents of Qadiriyya order. It was presumed that the *jihad* organised by Umar al-Fūtī in the Senegambia region was a product of the *sheikh's* pilgrimage. Some scholars argued that the *Sheikh* drew inspiration for the *jihad* from his *Hajj* experience. Till date the progenies of Sheikh Umar al-Fūtī in West Africa, particularly in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria considered themselves as the orthodox Tijāniyya, custodian of the version of Sheikh Umar al-Fūtī Tijāniyya order in Bilād al-Sūdān.

As demonstrated in the preceding section, one of the significant factors that unifies Muslims and facilitates widespread migration across borders is the institution of the *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca). During a specific period each year, Muslims from all over the world gather in Mecca as part of their religious obligations. The movement of pilgrims has also historically been categorized based on their points of departure in West Africa. Pilgrims traditionally traversed trans-Saharan networks, which led either to Cairo or Red Sea ports such as Aydhab, Suakin, or, more recently, Port Sudan. Major congregation points in the Nigeria-Niger region included Kano, Agades (earlier Takedda) or Birnin Gazargamo in Bornu. Pilgrims would proceed to the most accessible center, where they could join fellow pilgrims in a

caravan to undertake the Saharan crossing. The greater presence of Islam in these regions associated with a growing distaste for the northern routes that were involved in the slave trade, made the route leading directly east through what is now Chad and Sudan increasingly popular since the 18th century.

During the colonial period, the easterly pilgrimage routes predominantly exited Nigeria by crossing the border into Cameroon. These routes passed through Garoua and Fort Lamy (now Ndjamena), then proceeded towards the south along the River Shari or northward through Abeche, eventually converging at El Obeid in Kordofan before continuing to the Red Sea ports of Suakin or Massawa on Ethiopia's coast. Over time, a substantial number of pilgrims found themselves compelled to settle for prolonged periods of time in various locations due to financial or political constraints. Consequently, communities of Nigerian origin are now dispersed across towns and villages from Lake Chad to the Red Sea, and many of them never moved beyond these points.

Pilgrimage and Scholarship

The development of Islamic scholarship and Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) in the region are deeply intertwined, both tracing their roots back to the scholarly traditions of ancient Timbuktu.¹² Communities across western Sudan greatly benefited from their interconnectedness and ties to centres of learning, particularly Timbuktu and the Ahir (Agades) region.¹³ The dissemination of the writings of prominent Islamic scholars from the 15th century onward significantly advanced the spread of Islamic knowledge throughout much of the Sudan.¹⁴ This era marked a period of intensive scholarly activity, where the focus extended beyond the mere memorization of standard texts and the Holy Qur'an for competitive purposes.¹⁵ Instead, emphasis was placed

12 Ahmad Moyi Gada, *A Short History of Early Islamic Scholarship in Hausaland* (Kaduna: Nadabo Printing Production, 2010), 5.

13 Ahmad M. Kani, "The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān," 28-31.

14 Ibid.

15 Marry Last, "The Book and the Nature of Knowledge in Muslim Northern Nigeria, 1457-2007" in *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, eds. Graziano Kratli & Ghislaine Lydon (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 175-212.

on cultivating the character of the student through a structured curriculum and pedagogy that was uniformly applied throughout the region.¹⁶ Consequently, a robust tradition of Islamic scholarship and reform flourished in Hausaland and the broader Bilād al-Sūdān throughout the 16th century, supported by the movement and settlement of eminent scholars, such as Sheikh Umar b. Aqit, the grandfather of Ahmad Baba al-Timbukṭī.¹⁷ Other prominent figures in the region included al-Sheikh al-Tadhikhti, and Makhluḥ b. Salih al-Bilbali, the latter of whom was appointed as qadi in Katsina in 1509.

Makhluḥ b. Salih al-Bilbālī, a distinguished scholar from Timbuktu, also held the position of qadi before his death in Timbuktu, sometime after 1533.¹⁸ By the 17th century, Hausaland and, more broadly, Bilād al-Sūdān in general, had nurtured a cadre of indigenous Islamic scholars whose contributions laid the groundwork for the 19th century *jihad* in Hausaland. The traditions of scholarly mobility between regions in Western and Central Sudan was firmly established along the Hausa-Bornu-Sudan axis and remains prevalent among the contemporary Muslim population. This practice recognizes that knowledge is not merely encapsulated in texts but resides within the scholar themselves. Such scholarly mobility facilitated extensive intellectual exchanges across the region, strengthening the network of learning centres.¹⁹ As indicated, there was a rich cross-fertilization of ideas between these centres, particularly Timbuktu, the Ahir region, and Agades which served as a vital intellectual conduit connecting the centres of learning in the Maghrib and Egypt, and extending even further. Likewise, several prominent '*ulama*', such as Dan Marina, traced their roots to Bornu but settled in Katsina and other scholarly hubs, including Kurmin Yan Ranko and Yandoto, thereby enriching the intellectual landscape of the area.

By this period, it had become customary for scholars in Hausaland to travel between various centres of learning and to study under different '*ulama*' (teacher/scholar), seeking further knowledge and

16 Usman Muhammad Bugaje, "Some Reflections on the Development of Islamic Learning in Katsina 1300–1800 AD" in *History of Learning in Katsina*, eds. Ismail A. Tsiga and Abdalla U. Adamu (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1997), 80–82.

17 *Ibid.*, 28.

18 Ahmad Muhammad Kani, "The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān," 28.

19 *Ibid.*, 31.

exchanging ideas and experiences with their hosts. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the scholars of Yandoto and Katsina had already become renown in fields such as mathematics and related disciplines, including the occult sciences, under the tutelage of 'ulama' in these regions. For instance, Kani suggests that Muhammad al-Katsinawi owed his mastery of 'ulūm al-hurūf, 'ulūm al-awfāq and the sciences of the calendar (*al-mawāqit*) -within the framework of the Maghribian system of calculation and the 'ulūm al-asrār according to its *harfī* and *waqfī* methods- to Sheikh Muhammad Bindo.²⁰ Al-Katsinawi is also said to have studied under Sheikh Muhammad Kuru in Bornu before embarking on his journey to the Hijaz. It was sheikh Kuru who introduced him to advanced knowledge in 'ulum al-asrar, *al-raml* (geometry) and 'ilm al-hisāb.²¹

Many scholars undertook the *Hajj* with a fervent desire to deepen their Islamic knowledge. The pilgrimage was often considered as a necessary component of completing one's education²² serving as evidence of wide knowledge and piety. Thus, the method of travelling in the ancient times, before the advent of air travel had afforded the pilgrims the opportunity to halt along the routes which lay across North Africa, Egypt and along the Nilotic Sudan. This exposed the pilgrim to different countries and people, which added impetus to his body of knowledge of the outside world. The most common places visited by the pilgrims included Jerusalem, Istanbul, Baghdad, and Andalusia. There is documented evidence that indicates that many pilgrims that found themselves in Cairo ended up studying at al-Azhar University.²³ The desire to further the educational attainment and obtained an *ijāza* in the Hijaz, had precipitated many West African scholars to perform the pilgrimage, especially the 'ulama' of Timbuktu. Among the most prominent scholars of Timbuktu who performed the pilgrimage are Ahmad ibn Umar Aqit, Mahmud ibn Umar Aqit, and Muhammad b. Ahmad ibn Abi Muhammad al-Tazukti. There was also Abubakar ibn Ahmad ibn Umar Aqit, who performed the *Hajj* with all members of his family. And later took up permanent residence in the Hijaz. Subsequently, he died in Medina. Another important scholar

²⁰ Ibid, 31.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 125.

²³ Ibid, 123.

was Aqit ibn Umar who was requested to measure the dimensions of the Kaba and on returned to West Africa, he reconstructed the Sankore Mosque. Another important section of scholars of high reputation who performed the *Hajj* and left an indelible mark in the Hijaz were Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Kashnawi, Muhammad Sambo, Muhammad b. Raji and Jibrilla ibn Umar (teacher of Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio). Al-Kastinawi made invaluable contributions in Islamic sciences in the Hijaz and Cairo. He died in Cairo in the house of al-Jabarti's family.

Pilgrimage and Migration to the East

The societies of the southern Sahara exhibit remarkably similar social, political, and economic structures, resulting in *zāwiya/insilimen* scholars emerging from comparable political and economic contexts. By the late eighteenth century, this convergence led these scholars to develop analogous patterns of scholarship that emphasized two highly functional Islamic sciences, jurisprudence and mysticism. This intellectual tradition was shared among scholars in the desert-edge economic region, fostering a fundamental unity in the intellectual traditions of many Islamic communities in Western and central Sudan. Thus, there was the mass migration of different layers of Arabs and West African communities it fostered. The bulk of the immigrants consisted largely of Islamic scholars (*'ulama'*), *sufi* orders, merchant class (*jallāba*) and pilgrims. And to some extent Fulbe ethnic group who ultimately end up taking permanent settlement in the Hijaz.²⁴ The movement of West African communities to Hijaz has been considerably affected by some impelling consequences, which include legendary beliefs, doctrinal conviction or historical occurrences of political significance as highlighted by al-Naqar.²⁵ Similarly, the fascination of the Hijaz amongst westerners generally as the homeland of Islam and coupled with the presence of two holy places²⁶ impacted greatly for many West Africans to feel that it is virtuous and equals to martyrdom to live and die near these holy places. Equally, Umar al-Naqar postulated that the *'ijāza* (certificate) normally obtained from the Middle East by West African scholars as a testimony of a wide range

24 I. A. Hassoun, "Western' Migration and Settlement in the Gezira", *Sudan Notes and Records*, (1952), 63.

25 Umar al-Naqar, *The Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa*, 120.

26 *Ibid.*, 122.

of knowledge has added impetus for making scholars to throng to the Hijaz.²⁷

Subsequently, these influxes had resulted towards making large proportion of the population of West African communities, especially 'ulama' (Islamic scholars) to reside permanently in the Hijaz, in Medina, Mecca and Jeddah. Those who cannot make it or cannot return stayed in Sudan and Massawa, Eritrea. The factor of pilgrimage and the fervent desire to stay close to the Prophet (SAW), especially by the adherents of the Tijāniyya has precipitated the movements of large Tijāniyya disciples and scholars to Medina.²⁸ This aspect was reinforced with the European conquest of West Africa following the defeat of the Sokoto Caliphate forces at Bormi in 1903, many scholars and their disciples found themselves in the Hijaz to stay away from infidel rule. Lethem observed that the nucleus of the Fulani residing in Hijaz were no doubt the remnants of Bormi malcontents, whether Mahdist of Jibrilla and Hayat or of the *Amir al-Mūminīn* Attahiru ibn Ahmad.²⁹ He further elucidated that a number of these people lived in the Hijaz for many decades and imbibed stoutly anti-Christian and anti-European leanings in the one country in their knowledge not ruled by an infidel power.³⁰ On this note it will be interesting to cite the classical example of Sheikh Muhammad al-Hashim ibn Ahmad ibn Said al-Fūti (Alfa Ibrahim Hashim, c.1866-1346/1931)³¹ a leading Tijāniyya

27 Ibid., 125, he discussed extensively the several scholars that had travelled to Hijaz but end up staying permanently in the Hijaz and also the categories of scholars that were driven by the urge to acquire the 'ijāzas (certification) that travelled to Hijaz and came back and become famous scholars in West Africa.

28 Ibid.

29 For details see G. J. F. Tomlinson and M. G. J. Lethem, *History of Islamic Political Propaganda in Nigeria* (Waterlow, 1927), 79.

30 Ibid, 80.

31 He is popularly known in the literature and colonial sources as Shaykh Alfa Hashim al-Futi. A learned Malle Fulani, who fled eastward after the battle of Bormi and had since been living in seclusion at Medina. The anti-British agitations endeavouring to secure his support are clear from a spiritual manifesto which he issued in 1919. In the documents he rejected the pretensions of the Mahdia and advised the faithful to support the British and King Hussain of Hijaz. For details see Lethem, Ibid. 41 and Umar al-Naqar, Ibid. See also *Tabaqat ul Tijāniyya*, in Arabic, is a compendium of Tijāniyya scholars from West Africa and their contribution to learning and scholarship in the Muslim world. Alfa Hashim took refuge in Medina with the colonial conquest of West African states at the beginning of the 20th century and

khalifa and a leader of West African communities in Medina, a nephew of Al-Hajj Umar al-Fūtī, founder of the Islamic State of Segu. Alfa Hashim became a teacher at the al-Masjid al-Nabawī and at the Madrasat al-Ulūm al-Shar'iyya in Medina.³²

However, in spite of his tremendous support and leanings to the Ashraf, he refused to follow the trodden path of the '*ulama*' of his time to flee to Jordan. Alfa Hashim was able to effectively accommodate to the new changing leadership in the Hijaz dominated by the *salaf*. He retained his Tijāniyya doctrine and refused to adhere to the teaching of Wahabiyya, the dominant creed of that time. Furthermore, the political leaders of Medina continued to recognize and respect him as the link and head of West African communities in Medina.³³

In addition to this, with the death of Sheikh Alfa Hashim his disciple Sheikh Sa'id b. Siddiq (1310/1892-1353/1934) succeeded him as the *muqaddam* of Tijāniyya and the leader of West African communities in Medina.³⁴ He was a famous scholar of the *hijra* from West Africa, who probably migrated with Alfa Hashim from Mali. He was reputed to have married the daughter of Sheikh Alfa Hashim. He was also accorded similar reputation of Alfa Hashim by leaders of Medina as the head of Tijāniyya and leader of West African communities in Medina. On this note he was nominated to serve as a member of *Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulama*' of Saudi Arabia.³⁵ Other scholars of the *hijra* that resided in Medina include Sheikh Ibrahim Khalil,³⁶

became the nucleus of a great deal of political intrigue. He was indeed the grand *mufti* of the Caliphate of Ahmadu Tall. It is interesting to note that while in Medina Alfa Hashim claimed to be the head of Tijāniyya. On this note he made frantic efforts to ensure that all Tijāniyya disciples from West Africa that went to pilgrimage to meet other Tijāniyya adherents from other countries. He also corresponded with Tijāniyya followers in Africa providing them political and religious directions. Consequently, he was accused several times of collaborating with the British, especially with the outbreak of the First World War. He was also credited with directing the Muslims communities of central Africa to submit to the European colonisers. For details see Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijāniyya. A Sufi Order in the Modern World* (London-New York- Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965), 142-143.

32 Ahmed Chanfi, *West African Ulama and Salafism in Mecca and Medina: Jawab al-Ifriqi - The Response of the African* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 26.

33 See G. J. Lethem, *History of Islamic Political Propaganda in Nigeria*.

34 Ahmed Chanfi, *West African Ulama and Salafism in Mecca and Medina*, 26.

35 Ibid, 25.

36 He became a deputy to Shaykh Alfa Hashim and assumed the Khalifa with the letter's death, but still little is known about him.

Sheikh Ahmad ibn Abd al-Rahman ibn Ibrahim Zaki (d. 1355/1936-7, popularly known in the Hijaz as Sheikh Ahmad Bakatagume),³⁷ and Sheikh Umar Gambo, who hailed from Kura in Kano Emirate (d.1918 in Medina³⁸ although other sources claimed that he died in Mecca).³⁹ These were amongst the few acclaimed scholars who moved to Hijaz with the European conquest and were noted for issuing *ijāzas* to prominent West African Tijānī scholars.⁴⁰ Similarly, these scholars were reputed to spend most part of their lives in Medina; undoubtedly Alfa Hashim was accompanied by large followers of Tijāniyya that impacted significantly towards the development of Medina school of *hadith*.

On the other hand, Muhammad Bunu ibn Attahiru ibn Ahmad⁴¹

37 For details, John O. Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa 2, The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*, Northwestern University, 1995), 265 and 285. Shaykh Ahmad Bakatagume was the predecessor of Shaykh Alfa Hashim the famous Tijāniyya scholar from Futa Toro that resided for many years in Medina. Sheikh Ahmad was fathered by the *Emir* of Katagum 1807-1814 with the political title of *Emir* Borno. According to Hunwick, Ahmad after the defeat of Sarkin Musulmi at Bormi in 1903, moved to Hijaz and settled in Medina, and became the *khādim* (disciple) of Alfa Hashim, and with the death of Alfa, he assumed the deputy of Shaykh Ibrahim Khalil the successor of Alfa Hashim, and after his death he succeeded becoming the leader of the West African Tijāniyya community in Medina. He later acknowledged the authority of Ibrahim Niasse, and Paden observed that this provided a link between Umarian and Niasse Tijānī's in Kano.

38 The Tijāniyya Sufi order was claimed to be introduced into the Sudan by Mallam Umar Gmabo a native of Hausa land from Kura town of Kano emirate, probably during last years of the old Egyptian government of Sayed Mahmud Wad el-Awlia. Umar Gambo was a pupil of Muhammad al-Saghir ibn Ali, a student of the founder of Tijāniyya order. He was reputed to have propagated the order in Darfur and Kordofan. He later travelled widely in the region and visited Cairo and Hijaz. Similarly, with the fall of Mahdist State in 1898-9, Mallam Umar Gambo moved to al-Fashir, which by then was under the political influence of Sultan Ali Dinar (reigned 1898-1916). The Sultan suspected Umar Gambo of plotting to kill him by making him ill through charm and magic. Consequently, Mallam Umar Gambo fled to al-Obaied and later to Omdurman. He continued later to Hijaz where he died and buried in Mecca. For details see NRO-Intelligence 2/3/270, *Religious Confraternities of the Sudan*, 26 and also see Ali S. Karrar, *Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1992), 121.

39 See Ibid, 21 and also see G. J. Lethem, *History of Islamic Political Propaganda in Nigeria*, 31.

40 See Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa 2*, 285.

41 Interview with Mallam Abubakar Karakai age 105, at his residence in Mai Wunro on the 7/05/2013.

moved and settled in Mecca with large *hijra* communities and settled permanently firstly at Jarwal then later scattered to other places within Mecca, according to the dominant tradition in the eastern Sudan and Hijaz.⁴² Lethem erroneously concluded that the influences and reputation Muhammad Bunu earned in the Hijaz are highly and entirely on the side of religious fanaticism.⁴³ On this premise Lethem concluded in his second report that "Muhammad Bunu, son of the Sultan of Sokoto, was another character whose activities in sending letters and messages to Nigeria should be observed closely."⁴⁴ The followers of Muhammad Bunu were attributed with the establishment of several quarters in Mecca, which include Jarwal, Tundubawi, Shari Sittin, Shari Mansur, Masfala, Jabalal Wilaya, Kidawi, Misiriyal and many other quarters in Mecca were few examples.⁴⁵

In addition to this, among the famous scholars who followed Muhammad Bunu and settled in Mecca, there was Mallam Abubakar Bakatsine, a onetime Chief Imam of Masjid al-Haram in Mecca.⁴⁶ Others included Mallam Shitu from Katsina, Sheikh Attahiru from Minna and Mallam Mai Gatarin Baki from Niger, Mallam Abubakar Khassāfi and Mallam Umar Khassāfi from Sokoto.⁴⁷ These were

42 Malam Abubakar Karakai, age 106, interview at Mai Wurno on 17/07/2014 and Mallam, See M.G.J. Lethem and M. G. J. Tomlinson, *History of Islamic Political Propaganda in Nigeria*, 32.

43 See Ibid, 83. This perception was further reinforced in his second report. He posited that pilgrims from West Africa were subjected to certain fanatical influences, which induces them to anti-european posture. These influences emanated from the irreconcilables emigrants (*muhajirin*) from Sokoto Caliphate, under the leadership of Muhammad Bunu.

44 G. J. Lethem, *Islamic Political Propaganda in Nigeria*, 62.

45 Interview with Mallam Muhammad Abdullahi Abubakar, a native of Kano, his forefathers were part of the *muhajirin* that migrated to Hijaz with Muhammad Bunu, age 86 years, on 15/06/2013 at Jarwal Mecca, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Also interview Mallam Muhammad Sagir, also a native of Kano that resides in Jarwal Mecca age 65 years. This point was also buttressed and highlighted in Mai Wurno by Mallam Abubakar Karakai, age 102, who provided useful information towards shedding a light on the nature of West African movement to Hijaz. He collected the information from his late father who actively participated in the migration to the Hijaz, before he later came back to Sudan and settled in Mai Wurno.

46 Ibid.

47 Interview with Mallam Muhammad Abdullahi Abubakar, age 86, at Jarwal, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 17/08/2013, he claimed that his grandfather was part of the group that made the *hijra* to Hijaz that opening decade of the 20th century.

famous scholars who moved to Hijaz with the colonial conquest of West Africa and contributed significantly to the development of Islamic scholarship in Mecca, but little is recorded concerning their history, and contributions to knowledge and scholarship in the Hijaz. The interesting aspects is that the bulk of Sultan Abd al-Aziz army and personal body guards were largely recruited and dominated by the West African communities, due to their honesty, strength, commitment to duty, and enterprising character.⁴⁸ Trimingham alluded to the fact that West Africans were enterprising people, which provided an outlet for their love of travel and trade in the diaspora and that has endeared them to many communities in the past.⁴⁹

However, the figure of those sent back to Sudan continued to telescope up to 1934 and the dominant route they were deported was through Massawa. This had contributed greatly to their permanent stay and accounted for the making of substantial number of West African communities in Eritrea till date. Another factor highlighted as playing pertinent role of making West Africans to return to Sudan from Hijaz was the fear being expressed of the likelihood of being conscripted into the Hijaz army. Lethem attempted to provide an approximation of West African communities residing in Hijaz at that time, but ended up with a misleading estimation of the population of West Africa in the holy land, because he failed to provide definite criteria for his approximation, which he put at about 6,000 at the time of his visit in 1924 with an annual pilgrimage of about 4,000.⁵⁰ It is the conclusion of this study that the figure might be higher and might also likely include those that left for Sudan since 1914.

There is fragmentary evidence regarding the formation of West African communities in Eritrea in the early period, coupled with the few permanent settlements that have been identified. The factors that influenced the settlements of West Africans in Eritrea were entirely insignificant and inconsequential in contrast to those in Sudan and Hijaz. In addition to this, in 1928, the Italian authorities requested the

⁴⁸ The role and contribution of Abdurrahman Zabarmawi played towards the development and growth of the Saudi Arabian army, who served as the Chief Commander of Air force for many years in Jidda, cannot be overestimated. Interview with Mallam Abubakar Karakai, op. cit., on 13/05/2013 and Mallam Muhammad Abdullahi Abubakar, age 86, 15/06/2013.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ G. J. Lethem, *Islamic Political Propaganda in Nigeria*, 61.

repatriation of West Africans upon their arrival in Eritrea, as they were seen as potential destitute with no prospects of acquiring substantial capital and coupled with the lax control over the pilgrims from Massawa. However, by 1927, there were few settlements largely inhabited by Borgube Sheikh in Massawa, and this reinforced the building of West African settlements at a later period, though at the micro level.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is crucial to recognize the role of the *Hajj* in establishing robust socio-cultural and intellectual connections between Bilād al-Sūdān, the Maghrib and the Hijaz. Since the advent of Islam in the 9th century the institution of *Hajj* has served as a powerful force binding these regions together. Pilgrimage has effectively dissolved imaginary borders, particularly those between religion and culture, fostering unity and harmony among diverse groups within the Muslim world. The major waves of interaction facilitated by the *Hajj*-one of the cardinal pillars of Islam-include Islamization, cultural exchange and integration, scholarly movements, and the establishment of scholarly communities across the Maghrib, Hijaz and Bilād al-Sūdān. The impact of the *Hajj* towards stimulating cultural and intellectual development, especially between Bilād al-Sūdān, Maghrib and Middle East is a long-standing theme of West African history. It had impelled many cultural integrations resulting from the Islamization processes, which requires an individual and society at large to abandon their way of life to that of Islamic practices. And more so *Hajj* constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam and enables every believer to discharge the onerous task one's in a lifetime. There was also the urge to live close to the Prophet (SAW). A factor which influenced the generality of the Tijāniyya adherents to move to Hijaz. There was also the fervent desire by the West African scholars to further their Islamic knowledge and obtained an 'ijāza (certificate), influenced many of the scholars to move to Hijaz. These aspects were prominent in the early period and continued unabated up to the present times.

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Part III: Colonialism and Cultural Revival

Indigenous 'Ulama' in the Historiography of Borno (1850-1995): Some Neglected Sources for Historical Reconstruction

Abdullahi Garba & Shettima Bukar Kullima*

Introduction

Borno, as one of the earliest polities in Africa to embrace Islam, is endowed with renowned scholars who excelled in different fields of Islamic scholarship. This prominence is due to its strategic location at the crossroads of economic and socio-cultural activities with Arabs, Berbers and Africans since the 7th century. Consequently, the history of Borno is indispensable to the history of Islam in western and central Bilād al-Sūdān. Research reveals that Borno has one of the largest collections of Arabic manuscripts in northern Nigeria, covering different fields of knowledge archived in different institutional research centres, archives and personal collections. Some of the 'ulama' of Borno have been documenting the history of their times as far back as the 15th century, with many of these writings surviving to the present day. The 'ulama' have served as the intellectual wing of the Borno society, guiding people in different facets of life. Besides their religious roles of preaching, teaching and advising the rulers on state matters, they worked as scribes in the courts and served in the administration of justice. Additionally, as learned men, they bore the responsibility of documenting crucial events in society. In western and central Sudan, the 'ulama' have been knowledgeable in Arabic and Islamic traditions of historiography. Some wrote in accordance with the *maghāzī* tradition of Arab historians, who focused on Arab wars known as *ayyām al-Arab*.¹ The 'ulama' of Borno were chroniclers who documented the chronology of events. The genealogists among them

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1 Imam Ahmad ibn Furtuwa, for instance, wrote *Tā'rikh Mai Idris wa Ghazawatihi* translated as "History of the First Twelve Years of the Reign of Mai Idris Alooma," and based on the propositions of Rasul, he should be classified as a *maghāzī* writer. For *maghāzī* writers, see Muhammad Gholam Rasul, *The Origin and Development of Muslim Historiography* (Pakistan: Muhammad Ashraf, 1976).

wrote about the families of significant personalities in the society. Similarly, treatises were written by the '*ulama*', usually by the *imams*, to serve as administrative guides for the rulers. In Kano, for instance, Sheikh al-Maghili wrote a treatise for the ruler Muhammadu Rumfa, which served as an administrative guide.² This was similar with the *idara* in Borno, which served as the third constitution of the Sayfawa Dynasty.³

Borno holds one of the largest collections of Arabic manuscripts on various fields of human endeavour written by the '*ulama*' and those of the neighbouring areas. These documents have been archived in national and institutional centres such as the National Archives, Kaduna and Jos; Northern History Research Scheme, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Centre for Research and Documentation in Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri; Centre for Arabic Documentation, University of Ibadan among others. The focus of this article is on the historical documents for which Borno has been renowned since the 15th century. Despite the abundance of the manuscripts, which serve as important internal sources covering the general aspects of the history of Borno, they have been under-utilized. Many university-trained historians rely heavily on secondary data rather than these rich primary sources. It should be noted that there is more insightful information contained in the manuscripts as primary sources than in the secondary sources. This study examines the contributions of selected '*ulama*', who documented the history of Borno from 1850 to 1995. The '*ulama*' whose works have been examined include Imam Ali Arkwayami,⁴ Sheikh Sheriff Ibrahim Saleh al-Hussain,⁵ and two anonymous authors.⁶

2 See Hamza Muhammad Maishanu, *Five Centuries of Historical Writings in Hausaland and Borno, 1500-2000* (Ibadan: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 2007), 58-9.

3 See Abubakar Mustapha, "The Contribution of Sayfawa Ulama to the Study of Islam: C.1086-1846. A.D." (PhD Thesis, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano), 240-3, 305-7, 315, 324, 326-65.

4 *Kitāb Dhikr Waqā'i al-Rabiḥ* (NAK/B/AR/18/15).

5 NHRS/150/2: *al-Islām fī Kānim-Bornū wa Dawr al 'Ulamā'*; *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Hayāt al-'Arab fī Imbaratūriyyat Kānim Barnū*; *al-Istidhkār limā li 'Ulamā' Kānim-Bornū min al-Akhbār wa al-Āthār*; NHRS/149/10: *Masādir Tārīkh Borno wa Kanem*; NHRS/148/18: *Inshā' Madīnat Ngazargamu*; NHRS/177/5: *Mūjaz Tārīkh Bilād Borno*.

6 *Kitāb Nazmu al-Jarād* (NAK/B/AR/18/14); *Kitāb Tārīkh Nguru* (NAK/B/AR/13/34) are anonymous.

In so doing, the article explores the contributions of the '*ulama*' to historical documentation and their methodologies, perspectives and convictions in writing history. Despite the significant role of the '*ulama*' in documenting Borno's history, their writings, which constitute the paramount first-hand internal sources, have been neglected by many scholars. Adopting a qualitative method, relying on primary and secondary sources using historical approach, the findings reveal some of the important historical works of the '*ulama*' of Borno and their significance in reconstructing the history of Borno.

Anonymous '*Ulama*' of Borno from 1850s -1900

The mid-19th century produced no major historical writing that could be compared to those of the 16th century, especially the work of Ahmad Ibn Furtua. The majority of the historical writings produced in Borno in the mid-19th century could be categorised into two genres: poetry and prose. These genres are important sources that provide information on the history of Borno. Moreover, there were other significant sources, such as the *mahrams*, which continued throughout the 19th century. One of the crucial works documented as an aspect of the history of Borno is *Kitāb Nazmu al-Jarād*, probably written in the 19th century, during the reign of Shehu Umar ibn Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi.⁷ The document was written in poetic form, comprising ninety-nine verses and a brief introduction. In the introduction the writer commences by praising the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The work has been referred to as the anonymous author's, although, in the introduction, the author identifies his name as Shettima Ibn Dausi. Saleh mentions Sheikh al-Dausi among the prominent scholars of Borno.⁸ It may, therefore, be surmised that he was the author of the *Kitāb Nazmu al-Jarād*.

The discussion on the main theme, which is locusts, starts from verse 18, where the author laments the destructive activities in the Chad Basin area comprising Wadai, Baghirmi and Borno. The author describes locusts as strong destructive forces that have invaded the area several times in the past. Their invasion was a horrendous

7 In verse nine, the writer praises his ruler, whom he described as pious from the family of Sheikh Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi. See Manuscript, verses 9-17 in NAK/B/AR/18/14: *Kitāb Nazmu al-Jarād*.

8 See *al-Islām fī Kānim-Bornū* (NHRS/150/2).

experience that engulfed the people of the Chad Basin region into famine and impoverishment. He proceeds with the analysis by noting that the 'ulama' held divergent opinions regarding the consumption of locusts. Some scholars held the view that consuming locust was lawful, while others objected to that position. Those who espoused the view of consuming locusts maintained that it is a cure for piles disease. However, an important point to note is the perspective from which the explanations are made in this book. *Kitāb Nazmu al-Jarād* is written from a theological standpoint, and it explicates causation as an expression of divine will. The author interprets the locust invasion in the Chad Basin area as a divine retribution from Almighty Allah (SWT), directed at society for straying from the tenets of Islam. This view can be buttressed from the author's conclusion where he wrote: "when the locusts invaded Borno, our leaders responded spiritually by praying to Almighty Allah (SWT) for protection. Verily, Allah (SWT) forgives those who repented and blessed them accordingly. May Allah grant our leader Umar his wishes."⁹

Another writing by an anonymous Borno author is *Kitab Tārikh Nguru*, written in classic Arabic, probably in the 19th century.¹⁰ It documents the chronology of the Galadimas of Nguru, numbering twenty-seven. The Galadima is one of the most important political titleholders in Borno and serves as one of its Governors. He was entrusted with defending Borno's western frontiers, particularly against the incursions from Hausaland, especially Kano. In addition to his role as a governor, the Galadima also held military responsibilities, serving as a military commander. The document reveals that the Galadimas reigned for three hundred and twenty-two years consecutively. It also identifies the number of years each Galadima served. It appears that there is an inaccuracy in the distribution of the years. When calculated, the period of the reign of the twenty-seven Galadimas does not tally with the total of three hundred and twenty-two years given in the document. However, it is useful in establishing the chronological order of their reigns. The activities of some of the Galadimas have been discussed, but not in detail. For instance, the document identifies the relationship between the Galadimas and

9 See *Kitāb Nazmu al-Jarād* (NAK/B/AR/18/14).

10 *Kitāb Tārikh Nguru* (NAK/B/AR13/34), translated as Chronology of the Galadimas of Nguru.

Borno, Damagaram and Sokoto. During the reign of Galadima Duna, the 14th Galadima of Nguru, Borno was attacked by the Fulanis. It is mentioned in the document that Nguru was destroyed, possibly by the Fulanis. As a consequence, the town of Bursari was built. This implies a shift in the defensive frontier of the western marches from Nguru to Bursari.¹¹ Three of the Galadimas are said to have waged war against Damagaram: Muhammad Kolomi (the 21st Galadima of Nguru), Galadima Kyari (the 22nd Galadima of Nguru) and Galadima Ibrahim (the 23rd Galadima of Nguru). Galadima Kyari was once detained by the King of Damagaram, but the reasons, the time and the impact of this conflict on the region's politics and economy remain unclear. Similarly, Galadima Umar (the 19th Galadima of Nguru) waged war against the Shehu of Borno but was defeated. He then fled to Hadejia, where he spent eight days before fleeing to Sokoto.¹² Also, the rationale behind the conflict between Galadima Umar and the Shehu of Borno remains unclear in the document.

Despite the lack of a date and clarity in the document, it has been of importance in identifying the chronology of the Galadimas of Nguru, who reigned for three hundred and twenty-two years. Furthermore, the document highlights some conflicts that ensued between Nguru and Borno, Nguru and Damagaram, and Nguru and the Fulanis. This prompts the necessity for further research to examine the causes of the conflict between the Galadimas of Nguru and Damagaram and between the Galadima and the Shehu of Borno. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to examine the relationship between Galadima Umar and the leaders of the Sokoto *Jihad*.

Sheikh Arkwayami's Historiography of Rabeh Fadlallah

Another significant historical document in the historiography of Borno is the account of the invasion of Borno by Rabeh, a Sudanese adventurer in the last decade of the 19th century. Rabeh's occupation of Borno prompted several '*ulama*' to document the events of that period.¹³ Among these scholars was Imam Ali Arkwayami of Gajibo, a prominent scholar in early 20th century Borno. He composed a historical poem in classical Arabic, titled *Waqā'i al-Rabih*, which

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Kitāb Tārīkh Nguru*.

¹³ *Waqā'i al-Rabih* (NAK/B/AR/18/15).

provides detailed insights into Rabeh's activities not only in Borno but also throughout the Chad Basin region.¹⁴ The poem, consisting of six pages and 88 verses arranged chronologically, was composed shortly after the demise of Rabeh and the restoration of the al-Kanemi Dynasty in Borno.¹⁵ The poem is dated 1901 (1318 A.H). Imam Ali Arkwayami's poetic work is a crucial and authentic source of information on Rabeh's activities.¹⁶

The invasion of Borno by Rabeh and his personality was perceived differently by various groups of people who were affected by it. The ruling class of Borno under the al-Kanemi Dynasty regarded him as an invader, marauder, brigand and terrorist who caused significant disruption on the social order. Some members of the general population welcomed the invasion of Rabeh. This can be attributed to the harsh economic policies pursued by the ruling dynasty, particularly the *kumoreji*.¹⁷ The policy entailed sharing of farm produce cultivated by the common people. The policy was an austerity measure to cushion the effect of the dwindling economic fortunes encountered by Borno in the late 19th century. For the common people, the invasion of Borno by Rabeh was a welcome phenomenon. Adeleye held the view that Rabeh was a nationalist.¹⁸ Adeleye's perspective was shaped by the fact that Rabeh engaged in armed conflict with the Europeans colonisers as part of the broader resistance movement against colonialist rule. However, one crucial aspect that Adeleye overlooked

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Arkwayami was an adult at the time Rabeh invaded Borno. He was an eyewitness of the activities of Rabeh and had participated in the movement from Dikwa to Gajibo as instructed by Rabeh. The people of Dikwa were asked to vacate the town for Rabeh and his invading compatriots as his capital. See Alhaji Mohammed Adam, *Dikwa: History of An African City* (NP. 2000), 38-48. I am indebted to acknowledge the contribution of Dr. Kasim Akali of Nigerian Arabic Language Village (N.A.L.V.) Ngala, who provided a translated version of Imam Ali Arkwayami's poem from his unpublished work titled "The Catastrophic Activities of Rabeh in the Chad Basin Area: Analysis on the Poetic Work of Imam Ali Arkwayami".

17 Literally, *kumoreji* means 'splitting of the calabash', severe taxation where a peasant farmer gives half of his produce to the government.

18 R. A. Adeleye, "Rabih b. Fadlallah, 1879-1893: Exploits and Impact on Political Relations in the Central Sudan," *Journal of the History Society of Nigeria* 5, no. 2 (June 1970): 223-242. Also R. A. Adeleye, "Rabih b. Fadlallah and the Diplomacy of European Imperial invasion in the Central Sudan, 1893-1902", *Journal of the History Society of Nigeria* 5, no. 3 (December 1970): 399-434.

was that Rabeh was not merely a nationalist; he was also an invader who destroyed an existing political system and caused significant hardship to many people in the Chad Basin area.

The poem by Arkwayami is informed by the author's theological perspective. He held the conviction that the invasion of Borno, in particular, and that of the Chad Basin region in general by Rabeh was a divine punishment for the society's deviation from the tenets of Islam.¹⁹ The rulers became unjust, selfish, corrupt and greedy.²⁰ Their courtiers competed with one another in order to gain favours from the rulers, which resulted in disaffection among them. On the side of the followers, they became disobedient to the authority. They engaged in immoral acts and deviated from the teachings of Islam.²¹ In consequence of the prevalence of sinful acts in the society, Arkwayami states, Allah (SWT) sent Rabeh as a punishment to ascertain whether the people would repent and seek His forgiveness.²² Arkwayami admonished the populace that the incursion should not be regarded as a sudden and unexpected occurrence, but rather as an opportunity to learn a lesson from it. Imam Ali Arkwayami observed that "when oppression permeated the land of Borno and disobedience became the order of the day, people became very selfish and wrongdoers! Allah (SWT) sent Rabih from the land of Darfur as a conqueror." In his poem, Arkwayami provides a detailed account of the wars of Rabeh, including the names of various location and the individuals involved. Furthermore, he elucidates the extent of Rabeh's destructions and specifies the date on which he seized Dikwa.²³ It is pertinent to highlight that Rabeh had previously occupied Dikwa before advancing to Kukawa, which served as an *entrepot* for Borno from the eastern axis. Additionally, he attacked Wadai, Baghirmi, and Logone before advancing into Borno proper. According to Arkwayami, Rabeh's incursion into Dikwa was disastrous. He states that "we were removed forcefully and at that time people were scattered like dry grass! Oh! It

19 *Waqā'i al-Rabih*.

20 *Ibid*.

21 *Ibid*.

22 *Ibid*.

23 The date given was in respect to the occupation of Dikwa, which happened on Saturday following a quit notice to the people of Dikwa. The poet identified Sunday, the 10th day of *Jumādā al-Thānī* as the day Rabeh occupied Dikwa with his compatriots. See *Waqā'i al-Rabih*; Adam, *Dikwa: History of An African City*, 38.

is a tragedy that overshadowed the inhabitants." This statement indicates that the migrants from Dikwa to Gajibo lacked any form of preparation or resistance, given the strength of Rabeh and the devastation he had already inflicted on some communities in the Chad Basin before advancing to Dikwa and subsequently invading Kukawa. The inhabitants of Dikwa, including their leaders, learned men, women, children, the aged and the young, abandoned their belongings and set out for Gajibo as ordered by Rabeh.²⁴

Sheikh Ibrahim Saleh al-Hussain 1960s-1995

The writings of the 'ulama' in the 20th century are different from those of previous centuries. The historical writings of this period are more critical in examining various historical events, causes and the impact of historical phenomena on the society. The 'ulama' of this period wrote histories that went beyond the chronicles and the histories of the royal class. Notwithstanding, the approach of the early Arab writers of *Buldān*, *Masālik* and *Ta'rīf* was maintained. It is important to note that the writings of the 'ulama' in the 20th century cover many subjects, and one such case and the field of study is the toponyms. On the etymological explanation of the names of the places 'Kanem and Borno', Tarkhan²⁵ and Saleh²⁶ attempted to explain their

²⁴ Waqā'i al-Rabih.

²⁵ Ibrahim Ali Tarkhan, *Imbrāturiyatu al-Borno al-Islamiyya*, translated as *Islamic Empire of Borno* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Arabiyya, 1975).

²⁶ Sheikh Ibrahim Saleh ibn Yunus, his full name is Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Salih b. Yunus b. Muhammad al-Awwal b. Ibrahim b. Yunus b. Muhammad al-Makki b. 'Amr al-Nawwi al-Hussayni, born 15 Jumada I 1358/3 July 1939. He is one of the modern and contemporary leading scholars of Borno. Saleh is a polymath known throughout the Islamic world. His writings are too numerous to mention in this work. This study attempts an examination of a few of his historical writings such as *al-Islām fi Kānim-Bornū wa-Dawr al-'Ulamā'* translated as *Islam in Kanem-Borno and the Role of the 'Ulamā'*; *Tārīkh al-Islām wa hayāt al-'Arab fi Imbarātūriyyat Kānim Barnū*, translated as *History of Islam and the Life of Arabs in Kanem-Borno Empire*; *al-Istidhkār limā li Ulamā' Kānim-Bornū min al-akhbār wa al-Āthār* translated as *Retrospect on the Stories and Legacies of Kanem-Borno Scholars*; *Masādir Tārīkh Borno wa Kanem* translated as *Sources of the History of Kanem-Borno*; *Inshā' Madīnat Ngazargamu* translated as *The Establishment of Birni Ngazargamu and Mūjaz Tārīkh Bilād Borno* translated as *An Abridge History of Borno*. See Hamidu Bobboyi and John Hunwick, "Borno, Wadai and Adamawa" in *Arabic Literature of Africa: The Arabic Writing of Central Sudanic Africa*, vol. 2, ed. J. O. Hunwick and R. S. O'Fahey (Brill Academic Publishers, 1995), 407, 411, 412.

origins and meanings.²⁷ Both scholars agreed that the name Borno was coined by the Shuwa Arabs who resided in the Chad Basin area.²⁸ The Shuwa Arabs called the Kanuri by this name (Bornu).²⁹ Both scholars confirm that the word "Bornu" is an adaptation of the word "Baran" or "Baram" (sing. Bar), which means men or warriors in some Saharan languages.³⁰ This nomenclature appears in many Arabic reference materials, and refers to the land or the people of Borno. As Tarkhan suggested, Kanem means a category of black race of Bilād al-Sūdān like Borno, which stands for both the place and the people. Saleh argued that the word "Kanem" is originally a Kanuri, or perhaps a Kanumbu word, referring to the people or settlers who inhabit the southern part of the Lake Chad.³¹ Tarkhan and Saleh suggested that Borno was once a province of Kanem.³²

In *al-Islam fi Kanim-Bornu wa Dawr al-'Ulama'*,³³ Saleh maintained that Islam was introduced to Kanem around the 9th century A.D. by Saharan migrant scholars travelling to the south. He was of the view that Islam came to West Africa from the Middle East, or from Egypt, by various routes leading to the establishment of Muslim dynasties. Saleh, on the other hand, contends that the people of Kanem-Borno embraced Islam willingly.³⁴ This claim was supported by the fact that Sheikh Abul Abbas Baba al-Sudani, in his book entitled *Mirāj al-Saūd*, stated that the people of Bilād al-Sūdān embraced Islam voluntarily without wars. Among them (the people of Sudan), some have been Muslims, like the people of Mali, Borno and Senegal, since the 5th century A.H. In *Masādir Tārikh Borno wa Kanem*, Saleh also states that

27 See Tarkhan, *Imbrāturīyatu al-Borno*; Saleh, *Masādir Tārikh Borno wa Kanem* (NHRS/149/10).

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid. However, none of them gave an example of any Saharan language to that effect.

31 *Masādir Tārikh Kanem-Borno wa Kanem*.

32 Tarkhan, *Imbrāturīyatu al-Borno*; Saleh, *Masādir Tārikh Borno*.

33 *al-Islām fi Kānim-Bornū wa Dawr al 'Ulamā'* is an unpublished work made up of 12 pages written in Arabic. The work is divided into three sections, which detail the introduction of Islam in Kanem-Borno, patronage of the Sayfawa rulers to scholars and scholarship and lastly, contributions of the *ulama* in politics and administration of Borno.

34 Islam was, thus, introduced through commercial contacts without waging war against the people of Kanem-Borno. See *al-Islam fi Kanim-Bornu*.

Islam entered the area around the 6th century A.H.³⁵ On the other hand, Baba al-Sudani noted that Kanem was endowed with scholars, saints, writers and poets.³⁶ Saleh also reported that Nasri stated that the people of Kanem, neighbours with Africa to the east, had communication with the "Hafs", just as Mali had communication with "Bani Mirrin".³⁷ Certainly, because of the communication network, traces of Islam could have been present in Mali and Kanem for a long time.³⁸

According to Saleh, Islam was established as the state religion in Kanem during the reign of Mai Umme Jilmi (1087-1097). He argued that Islam was introduced in Kanem before the reign of Mai Umme Jilmi. Moreover, the rulers of Kanem-Borno adopted Islam before the 11th century. Mai Umme Jilmi became a reference point for being the most famous of the early rulers since he was concerned with scholarship and employed the services of an Arab scholar, Muhammad Ibn Mani. It was this scholar who taught the Mai about Islam and Islamic culture in the context of the political administration.³⁹ Sheikh Saleh noted that the popularity and importance of Borno was made known worldwide, especially in the Arab world, due to the polity's Islamic identity. It was also one of the greatest Islamic states that established a stable political system which lasted for about 1000 years.⁴⁰ Ibn Mani taught Mai Umme Jilmi Arabic as well as the principles of administration. Ibn Mani asked the Mai to grant him a *mahram*, a letter of patent, as a means of protection. The issuance of the *mahram* eventually became a royal tradition. According to Saleh, the *mahrams* were, thus, granted to all scholars who came to Kanem from other parts of the world. Saleh argued that Islam had developed considerably in Kanem-Borno since the 11th century. He revealed that the first mosque built in Kanem-Borno and painted with a white wash was at "Bulak" in the eastern part of Kanem during the reign of Dunama Ibn Umme.⁴¹

35 Saleh, *Masādir Tārīkh Borno wa Kanem*.

36 *al-Islām fī Kanim-Bornu*.

37 Ibid. Saleh did not give a vivid explanation about Bani Mirrin and the nature of their relationship with the government or people of Mali.

38 *al-Islām fī Kanim-Bornu*.

39 Ibid.

40 *Masādir Tārīkh Borno wa Kanem; al-Islām fī Kanim-Bornu*.

41 *al-Islām fī Kanim-Bornu*.

In time Kanem-Borno established outstanding diplomatic relations with the Muslim world, especially with Egypt, which had been the centre of the Muslim empires and scholarship at that time.⁴² This was highlighted in *Mūjaz Tārikh Bilād Borno*, where the author narrated that Mai Umar ibn Idris wrote to Sultan al-Barquq al-Zahir in 1391. He asked for the Sultan's help against the Judham Arabs, who were an additional threat to the one unleashed by the Bulala.⁴³ This explains the first diplomatic contact the Borno rulers had with Egypt, which allowed the Borno people to go to the Hijaz to perform the *Hajj*. During the reign of al-Maghribiyyīn, Mai Dunama Dabalemi sponsored the building of a hostel for pilgrims and scholars from Kanem-Borno.⁴⁴ They additionally built a school named al-Fustat Misra in Cairo, popularly known as Madarasat Ibn Rashiḡ, for the training of jurists in Maliki law. The school was mentioned in various books such as *Masālik Absār* by al-Umari, *Subh al-'A'shā* by al-Qalqashandī and *al-Khudab al-Maghribiyya* by al-Maqrizī.⁴⁵ The commitment of the rulers of Kanem-Borno shows their passion for scholarship not only in Kanem-Borno but also in other parts of the world. The most famous book in Kanem-Borno was *Risāla ibn Abi Zaid* on the Maliki doctrine.⁴⁶ The book served as inspiration for Kanem-Borno scholars, leading them to produce other works such as *Risāla Malik Usman ila Barquq al-Mamlūkī* and *Risāla ibn al-Murabbid*. The Kanem-Borno scholars adopted the style and approach of Ibn Abi Zaid in writing the above-mentioned books. Although these books were written a long time ago, Saleh argues that they contain elements of *Risāla ibn Abi Zaid*.

On the question of the Sayfawa rulers' relationship with scholars and learning in Kanem-Borno, Saleh stressed that the rulers valued learning and scholars from all over the world. Migrant scholars were easily accommodated, honoured and given a special place by the Sayfawa Dynasty. As part of the tradition, most of the rulers employed the services of scholars to teach them how to read and memorise the Holy Qur'an and other sciences. Because of the concern of the rulers for scholars and learning, many scholars thronged Kanem-Borno.⁴⁷

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Mujaz Tārikh Bilād Borno*.

⁴⁴ *al-Islām fi Kanim-Bornu*.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *al-Islām fi Kanim-Bornu*.

Sheikh Abi Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Yaqub al-Kanemi, a renowned poet lived between the 16th and 17th centuries, visited the Almohad court. His fame has been documented in the book of Abu Abdullah al-Marrakash titled *al-Takhmila*.⁴⁸ Abi Ishaq was described in *al-Takhmila* as a "midnight star" that guides the traveller.⁴⁹ In *al-Islām fī Kanem-Borno* and *Masādir Tārīkh Borno wa Kanem*, Sheikh Saleh identified the renowned scholars of Kanem-Borno. These include, Sheikh Uthman al-Kanemī, who taught Sheikh Abdullahi al-Sali. Additionally, Sheikh Ahmad ibn Furtua and Sheikh al-Bakri, a student of Sheikh Najib al-Amsamoni al-Turkidawi popularly known as Sheikh Buba Njabmah, are worthy of mention.⁵⁰ Another important scholar was Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Abdulrahman ibn Bint al-Hajj, known as Sheikh Ajirammi, the writer of *Shurb al-Zulal* and *Nazm al-Kawkabuddurī*, who passed away in 1159 A.H.⁵¹ Furthermore, Sheikh Tahir ibn Ibrahim Feramma, the author of *Nazm al-Kubra* and *Nazm al-Hukm*, was a prominent scholar of Borno, as related in *al-Islām fī Kanem-Borno*. Additionally, Sheikh al-Yamanī ibn Muhammad ibn Abdulrahman, Sheikh al-Dausi, Sheikh al-Makeramma, popularly known as Shettima Makeramma were notable scholars. Other noteworthy figures included Sheikh Mustafa ibn Shettima al-Makaramī, Sheikh Ahmad al-Duri Ibn Muhammad ibn Abdulrahman and Sheikh Umar ibn Uthman Masfarma, a trusted advisor to Mai Idris Katakarmabe.

Saleh provided a detailed account of the contributions of the 'ulama' to the politics and administration of Borno.⁵² They were appointed as political advisers and subsequently came to be regarded as worthy of emulation due to their piety.⁵³ The appointment of the 'ulama' into the political administration of the state commenced during the reign of Mai Umar ibn Idris, the 31st ruler of the Sayfawa Dynasty.⁵⁴ Additionally, they served as judges in both the metropolitan and provincial areas of Borno. The 'ulama' were also responsible for organising Qur'anic competitions in various mosques with the permission of the rulers of Borno. Furthermore, the 'ulama' played a

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 *al-Islām fī Kānim-Bornū; Masādir Tārīkh Borno*.

54 Ibid.

pivotal role in community affairs including matters pertaining to marriage, funerals and naming ceremonies in Borno. Their significant contribution to the act of documentation was the writing of treatises and constitutions of Borno. Those who specialised in writing treatises were Sheikh Umar ibn Uthman Masbarma, Sheikh Tahir Ibrahim Feramma, and Sheikh Ahmad ibn Furtuwa, among others who were distinguished as accomplished writers.⁵⁵ Another important official function of the '*ulama*' was during the coronation of a new ruler in Borno. Those '*ulama*' who participated in the coronation included, the chief *imam*, chief judge, other *imams* (*imams* of daily, Friday and Eid mosques)⁵⁶ and prominent scholars. They gathered to perform certain rituals, which informed the ruler of his responsibility and reminded him of his mortality. The fear of Allah (SWT) was instilled in him by the '*ulama*' in order to encourage him to act justly, courageously and selflessly in discharging his duties as a ruler in accordance with Islamic injunctions. *Al-Islām fī Kanim-Bornu wa Dawr al-'Ulamā* has been unique in documenting some of the coronation rites of a new ruler in Borno. The '*ulama*' bathed the new *mai*, dressed him in white clothes (symbolising a shroud to remind him of his mortality), and placed him on a shield with a calabash beside him.⁵⁷ They also made some utterances of three words: *kana*, *kaua* and *ginas*. In the view of Saleh, the word *kana* refers to a calabash, which signifies that whenever the ruler dies, he will be bathed with calabash. This indicates that despite his nobility, a limited quantity of water would suffice to bath him.

55 *Al-Islām fī Kanim-Bornu*.

56 Traditionally, in Kanem and Borno, there were different (chief) *imams* for the *Eid*, *Jum'ah* and five daily prayers, mostly based on hereditary but in consideration of qualifications characterised by knowledge and piety.

57 *Al-Islām fī Kanim-Bornu*. The installation tradition continued to the al-Kanemi Dynasty with modifications. This was confirmed by Zaiwata, an official of the Shehu of Borno, in an interview (Ba Mala Kaumi Zaiwata, 50 years of age, at Gamboru ward, 31/10/2020). Zaiwata explained that some traditions, including bringing of the woods which would be placed in the tomb of the ruler of Borno and the calabash with which to bath him when he died, white cloth which would be used to wrap him up when he died are no longer in practice. The shield, as mentioned by Saleh, which the new ruler sits on during his coronation, is still in practice. Zaiwata added that a sword will be carried across the shoulders, lying on the chest of the new ruler. However, apart from the shield and sword, Hallam also pointed that a spear was handed over to the new ruler by the Kaigama. See W. K. R. Hallam, "The Shehu's Installation: Eventful Borno Ceremony", *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 99, December, 1968, 280-290.

Kaua refers to woods assembled over the deceased in his grave. *Ginas* shows how the ruler would be placed into his grave. In another disposition, the three words *kana*, *kaua* and *ginas* literally mean "you will enter into the earth; there is a king more powerful than you."⁵⁸ The interpretation of these words remains unchanged in its exhortation to the newly anointed ruler to be just and remember Allah in all his dealings.

In his analysis of the sources of the history of Kanem and Borno, Saleh observed that the important sources of the history of Kanem and Borno were written in Arabic.⁵⁹ He proposed that these sources could be classified into two broad categories. The first category comprises those written by the scholars of Borno themselves, or by the scholars of the neighbouring states or countries, such as Imam Ahmad ibn Furtua, Ahmad Baba al-Tumbukti, Muhammad Yambu, Sheikh Ibrahim Feramma, Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi, and Muhammad Bello etc. Secondly, other sources of the history of Borno were those written by Arab authors, such as al-Yaqubī, al-Idrisi, Ibn Said al-Maghribī, al-Muhallabī, al-Qalqashandī etc.⁶⁰ However, Saleh emphasised the significance of Arabic sources in reconstructing the history of Borno, whether internal or external. Although Saleh did not refer to early colonial sources in his classification, it can be argued that they constitute part of the external sources, particularly the works of Denham, Clapperton, Barth and Nachtigal, among others.⁶¹ In the context of Borno's intellectual legacy, it is noteworthy that numerous libraries existed with a substantial collection of Arabic manuscripts pertaining to various academic disciplines.⁶² However, a significant proportion of the manuscripts have been illicitly acquired over the course of the mid-19th and early 20th centuries.⁶³ Thus, Saleh lamented the swindling and illicit export of important collections of Arabic manuscripts to Europe.⁶⁴ Consequently, the number of Arabic

58 Bosoma Sheriff, Muhammad Fannami and Tijani Abba Rufai, *Functions of Shettima Kanuri: Instances in the Shehu's Palace* (Maiduguri: Desktop Publishers Investment Ltd., 2011), 38.

59 *Māsādir Tārīkh Borno*.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Tarkhan, *Imbrāturiyatu al-Borno*.

63 Tarkhan, *Imbrāturiyatu a-Borno; Māsādir Tārīkh Borno wa Kanem*.

64 *Māsādir Tārīkh Borno wa Kanem*.

manuscripts that have been preserved is relatively insignificant when compared to what is obtained in other regions such as Ghana, Mali and Songhai empires.⁶⁵

A significant episode in the history of Kanem-Borno was the conflict with Bulala. The Bulala Wars started during the reign of Mai Daud, approximately 1286. Subsequently, the Sayfawa experienced a series of crises up to the 16th century. The defeat of the Bulala was the result of a collective effort between different communities of Birni Ngazargamu. Saleh underscores the commitment of the Shuwa Arabs' dedication to this concerted effort.⁶⁶ Saleh identified significant settlements of the Sayfawa during their long sojourn in Borno before establishing a capital at Birni Ngazargamu approximately 1472. Among these settlements, Kagha or Kaga, Balak and Daal, were of particular note.⁶⁷ The new seat of the Sayfawa rulers, Birni Ngazargamu, was located to the north-west of Kukawa, which remained the capital of Borno up to the time when the Fulani entered it in 1808.⁶⁸ According to Saleh, the name Ngazargamu means a castle, and it is a large city with a considerable population of around 300,000.⁶⁹ It is comprised of big mosques and schools. Birni Ngazargamu is home to scholars, worshippers and pious people.⁷⁰ The town was inhabited by a diverse array of people including the Kanuri, Tubu, Kayi, Arab, Fulani, Berbers, Koyam, Mobber and numerous others.⁷¹ The social hierarchy of Ngazargamu was comprised of various classes of individuals such as the rulers, noblemen, workers, security personnel etc.⁷²

In *al-Islām fī Kanim-Bornu* and *Masādir Tārīkh Borno wa Kanem*, Saleh appears to have been more of a narrator than an analyst of the histories of Borno. He narrated the history of Borno as if it were a perfectly written account free from bias or shortcomings. For instance, the arrival of Islam in Kanem-Borno provides divergent views on the timing, manner and the location of this historic event. A similar narrative is also evident in the population view, whereby the Borno

65 Tarkhan, *Imbrāturiyatu al-Borno*.

66 *al-Islām fī Kanim-Bornu; Masādir Tārīkh Borno wa Kanem*.

67 *Insha' Madīnat Ngazargamu*.

68 *Ibid.*

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*

71 *Ibid.*

72 *Ibid.*

people are portrayed as having accepted Islam without compulsion. However, the establishment of Islam was a gradual process, occurring from the religion of the kings and merchants to a state religion, before eventually becoming a common religion. However, in Kanem, available evidence indicates that following the conversion of Mai Umme Jilmi, Islam became a state religion in ancient Kanem.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, the northern region in particular, Borno is one of the communities with the largest collections of preserved historical Arabic manuscripts written by the '*ulama*'. The Arabic manuscripts covered a wide range of historical topics, including especially natural phenomena, treatises, genealogical lists of kings, biographies, administrative procedures, trade practices, diplomatic relations, the growth of Islam and general histories of the region. The majority of these manuscripts contain firsthand information written by eyewitnesses. As internal sources, the writings of the '*ulama*' must to be consulted by professional historians as they contain exclusive and authentic information. Many historians, particularly those working in the field between the 1960s and 1990s, have relied on such sources for reconstructing the history of Borno. However, the utilisation of the Arabic manuscripts of Borno by university-trained historians and historical works, in particular, suffered a setback in the succeeding decades. Most university-trained historians currently, rely heavily on secondary sources, to the detriment of primary sources such as the Arabic manuscripts, which contain authentic information. It could be argued that some of the sources that have been neglected, despite the fact that not all of the authors were professional historians, contain information that could not be found in the works of university-trained historians. This article emphasises the significance of Arabic manuscripts for utilisation by the university-trained historians in order to achieve optimal results. This is because the history of Borno could not be complete without the Arabic manuscripts written by the '*ulama*'.

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The Tradition of Tafsir in Northern Nigeria: Genesis, Development, and Approaches

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Introduction

Tafsir is a deep-rooted tradition that began with the Prophet (SAW) and continues today. The development of the tafsir tradition in Nigeria was influenced by various factors and passed through several phases. Before delving into the thrust of this article, it is necessary to give a brief historical overview of the tafsir tradition and how it was transmitted to the Muslim world to get a clear picture of the development of this tradition in northern Nigeria. The tafsir tradition started from the early period of the Qur'anic revelation, continued to the present period and will sustain to the last day of this world. It is common knowledge that the Prophet (SAW) was the first exegete of the Qur'an. He (SAW) explicated the meaning of various Qur'anic expressions and passages to his Companions (Sahābah), in addition to the verses about which the Companions asked the Prophet (SAW) as they seemed ambiguous or difficult to understand.¹ However, because the Sahābah understood the classical Arabic language, and they witnessed the circumstances of its revelation, the Prophet (SAW) has not interpreted the complete Qur'anic text to them. After the Prophet (SAW) passed away, the Sahābah conveyed the traditions they learned to the Successors (tābi'ūn) and to the Successors of the Successors (tābi'ū al-tābi'īn). During this period, and as a result of the expansion of Islamic states through the Islamic conquests (*al-Futuhāt al-Islamiyah*), some of the Sahābah travelled to different parts of the world to convey the teachings of Islam. As a result of these conquests and the need for further training on what would later become the Islamic sciences, some of the Companions and later Successors would establish schools. A few of these include Abdullah b. Mas'ūd (d. 32/ 652-53), who established a

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1 For instance, the companions asked the Prophet (SAW) about the meaning of Qur'an 6/82 (al-An'am, 82) because they found it difficult to understand. For the meaning of the verse, the Prophet (SAW) referred the companions to the meaning of 'al-dhulm' in Qur'an 31/13 (Surah Lokman, 13), see Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Shakir Ahmad, (Muassasat al-Risalah, 1420), 11/495.

school of tafsir in Iraq, Ubay b. Ka'b (d. 33/654) in Madinah, Abū Mūsa al-Ash'arī (d. 42 / 662-63) in Syria, and Abdullah b. al-Abbās (d. 68 / 687-88) in Makkah. Famous exegetes like Saīd b. Jubāir (d. 94/713), Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 103/721), al-Hasan b. Yasār al-Basrī (d. 110/728), Qatādah b. Diāmah (d. 117/735) and Zayd b. Aslam (d. 136/754), among others, were students at these schools. It is interesting to note that most of the traditional tafsir narrations found today in the classical tafsir literature were mostly attributed to the students at these schools of tafsir.² The tafsir tradition witnessed another development in the second half of the second century. Thus, during this period, the tafsir started to be separated from hadith, compiled and recorded as an independent genre, and the tafsir work of Abū al-Hasan Mukātil b. Sulaimān (d. 150/767) was accepted as the first complete written commentary among the available tafsir literature today by many scholars. Subsequently, from this period (compiling phase of tafsir in the second half of the Sixth century AD) to the contemporary era (20th and 21st centuries), various exegesis genres evolved as a result of the needs of Muslim societies.

In northern Nigeria, the journey of tafsir culture can be divided into three distinct stages. The formative phase from the introduction of Islam to northern Nigeria until the end of seventeenth century; the golden phase from the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, and the contemporary phase, which is the 20th-21st centuries.

Formative Phase: The Tafsir Tradition in Borno and Hausaland³ from the Introduction of Islam to Northern Nigeria to the End of the Seventeenth Century

Despite the lack of data in the historical sources about the beginning of the tafsir culture in Kanem-Borno and Hausaland, the tradition can be said to have started in parallel with the introduction of Islam to that region. According to available sources, Islam reached the Kanem-Borno region earlier than the eleventh century AD through the Trans-Saharan trade routes. Merchants from the Maghreb and North Africa

2 For more information about these schools of tafsir see Muhammad Hussain al-Zahabi, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirūn* (Cairo: Maktabatu Wahbah, n.d.), 1/76.

3 Hausaland, also known as (*Kasar Hausa*), was a group of neighbouring Hausa-spoken states between the Niger River in the west and Lake Chad in the east. Hausaland was situated between the Western Sudanic kingdoms of Ancient Ghana, Mali and the Songhai and the eastern Sudanic kingdom of Kanem-Borno.

arrived in that region and brought with them not only the Holy Qur'an but several manuscripts on various Islamic disciplines, some of which were the tafsir manuscripts. At the end of the eleventh century AD, Kanem-Borno became an Islamic state, following the conversion of Hummi Jilmi b. Selemma, the 12th king of Kanem, to Islam.⁴ Subsequently and especially from the late fourteenth century AD, Kanem-Borno became an Islamic learning centre in the central Bilād al-Sūdān because of the enormous growth in Qur'anic studies and Islamic scholarship that the region witnessed.

The Borno ruler/*mai* Alī Gaji b. Dunama (r. 869–902/1465–97) was yet another figure that played a vital role in the development of tafsir in Borno. Thus, it was reported that Alī Gaji had contacts with Jalāluddīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), the influential Egyptian polymath, and these contacts had a substantial influence on the growth of tafsir, to the extent that Ali Gaji was ascribed as a proponent of *ilm al-tafsir* in Borno during his period.⁵

Another factor that played a crucial role in the growth of Islamic and Qur'anic scholarship was the Hajj, which was undertaken by the pilgrims to Mecca. It is not only *mai* Ali Gaji Dunama that had contact with some Islamic scholars on his pilgrimage journeys, but also many students from all parts of Bilād al-Sūdān took advantage of their travel to Hajj, either on the way or while returning, to visit and study with the renowned Islamic scholars in the Hijaz, Egypt and Maghrib. They returned with both Islamic knowledge and the available manuscripts they had found from their teachers. The significance of these journeys had been aptly illustrated by Abdullah Smith, where he noted that:

In Kanem, the performance of the pilgrimage... appears, even in those early times, to have had greater importance than in other parts of Sudan. The route by which pilgrims then went to the holy cities lay through Egypt which, from the 13th century AD onwards, was emerging as the greatest international centre of learning in the whole of the Islamic world. And the 'ulama' of Kanem had certainly

4 Galadanci, Shehu Ahmad Said, *Harakatu'l-Lugah al-Arabiyya fi Nigeria min Sanah 1804 ila Sanah 1966* (Kano: Dāru al-Ummah, 2016), 33.

5 Bondarev Dmitry, "Qur'anic Exegesis in Old Kanembu: Linguistic Precision for Better Interpretation," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 15, no. 3 (2013): 57.

established their reputation among the scholars who frequent Cairo in those days.⁶

Although the role of Muhammad b. Mani⁷ in teaching the Holy Qur'an to the prominent rulers of Kanem Borno, like Hummi Jilmi, *mai* Bulu, and *mai* Kade b. Arki and Abdul-Jalil b. Hume cannot be overemphasized, the efforts of itinerant Islamic 'ulama' and Muslim traders, who came to Kanem-Borno and taught the Qur'an to the populace, can be seen in their methods of Qur'anic recitation, memorization, and tafsir studies. Thus, the traditional Qur'anic learning in Kanem-Borno was divided into elementary and advanced stages. While the first stage emphasized Qur'anic recitation and memorization under five phases,⁸ the advanced stage stressed training in tafsir. To present the meaning of the Qur'anic passages to the students in the advanced stage of Qur'anic studies, the Islamic scholars at the time employed several interpretation processes and approaches, which were said to have survived among the contemporary Kanuri-speaking *mufasssirūn* (commentators).

The method starts with a philological study of the Qur'anic verses, which includes the *gharīb* and *mufradāt* analyses by giving the meaning of the difficult words and the translation of the Qur'anic expressions in the local language (Old Kanembu). This process is known as *tarjuman* among the experts of tafsir in Kanem Borno. However, some quotations from Arabic exegetical sources and the Arabic meaning of Qur'anic phrases were seen in the Qur'anic manuscripts of early Borno. This indicates that, in the process of the philological study of the Qur'anic verses, references had been given to leading Arabic tafsir authorities.

6 Abdullahi Smith, "The legend of the Seifawa"; cited in Sulaiman Shehu, "Islam in Kanem Borno: A Historical Review," in *Islamic History and Civilization in West Africa* (IRCICA, 2020), 138.

7 Muhammad Mani was the scholar who was credited with converting some of the early Kanem-Borno rulers to Islam, see Hamidu Bobboyi, "Relations of the Borno Ulama with the Sayfawa Rulers: The Role of Mahrams," *Sudanic Africa* 4, Special Issue on Kano (1993): 175.

8 For more detail on the Qur'anic recitation and memorization system see: Ahmad Mukhtar Adam, "Waqf Institution: Toward Financing Qur'anic Schools in Northern Nigeria," in *5th International Students Social Sciences Congress*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: ILEM, 2021), 409–13.

The second approach is the advanced study of tafsir for the students that have considerable progress in understanding the meaning of the Holy Qur'an. This method is known as *ma'hum* in the Borno Qur'anic tradition sphere. The process starts with a study of the classical tafsir books, where works such as *al-Jalālayn*, will be explained to the student in the local language (Old Kanembu). After that, the student will be trained on the necessary skills for good mufasssir to be a competent mufasssir and able to extract legal rulings, teachings, and implications from the Qur'anic passages.⁹

There is no comprehensive information about the sources of tafsir in the early Kanem-Borno's intellectual domain in historical sources. However, the history of Qur'anic and tafsir studies can be reconstructed based on the annotated Qur'anic manuscripts written by the early Borno scribes, in which linguistical analysis in the Old Kanembu language and quotations from the classical tafsir authorities were found. The studies of Dmitry Bondarev on these manuscripts demonstrated the tafsir sources in circulation among the experts and students of tafsir in Kanem-Borno.¹⁰

	Source	Author	Remark
1	<i>Bahr al-'ulūm</i>	al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983)	frequently cited in all or most of the manuscripts/predominant source
2	<i>Haqā'iq al-tafsir</i>	al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021)	cited in only one of the manuscripts/ infrequent source
3	<i>al-Kashf wa-l-bayān</i>	al-Tha'libī (d. 427/1035)	frequently cited in all or most of the manuscripts/ Predominant source
4	<i>al-Wajiz fī tafsir al-kitāb al-'aziz</i>	al-Wāhidi (d. 468/1076)	cited in some of the manuscripts/ infrequent source
5	<i>Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl</i>	al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122)	frequently cited in all or most of the manuscripts/predominant source
6	<i>al-Jamī' li-'ahkām al-Qur'an</i>	al-Qur'tubī (d. 671/1273)	cited in only one of the manuscripts/ Infrequent source
7	<i>Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-Ta'wīl</i>	al-Baydawī (d. 685/1286)	cited in some of the manuscripts/ infrequent source

9 For comprehensive details on tafsir tradition in Borno see: Yahya Oyewole Imam, "The Tradition of Qur'anic Learning in Borno," *The Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2004): 96–102.

10 Bondarev Dmitry, "Tafsir Sources in Four Annotated Qur'anic Manuscripts from Early Borno," in *Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Hirji Zulfikar (Oxford University Press, 2019) 27–64.

	Source	Author	Remark
8	<i>al-Tashīl li 'Ulūm al-Tanzīl</i>	Ibn Juzayy (d. 741/1340)	cited in some of the manuscripts/ Infrequent source
9	<i>Tafsir al-Jalālayn</i>	al-Mahallī (d. 864/1459) & al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)	frequently cited in all or most of the manuscripts/ Predominant source
10	<i>al-Jawāhir al-Hisān</i>	al-Tha'ālibī (d. 875/1471)	cited in only one of the manuscripts/ infrequent source
11	<i>Ghāyat al-Amānī fī tafsīr kālām al-rabbānī</i>	Molla Gūrānī (d. 893/1488)	cited in only one of the manuscripts/ infrequent source
12	<i>al-Tahbīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr</i>	al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)	'ulūm al-Qur'an/primary source

Table 1.1: Illustration of Tafsir Sources in the Early Tafsir Manuscripts

A few points are worthy of note here:

It is possible to describe the early Borno Qur'an manuscripts as examples of the Borno Qur'anic "madrasa style" of tafsir that emerged from the second stage of the Qur'anic learning tradition in Kanem-Borno. As mentioned earlier, the advanced phase of Qur'anic learning in Borno concentrated on training in tafsir under three stages: translation (*tarjuman*), understanding (*ma'hum*) and advanced studies of tafsir known as *ferno*. The students in the *tarjuman* phase write down Qur'anic passages in their original Arabic script on a wooden slab known as *allo*, leaving ample space between the lines to enable them to write the meaning of difficult words and annotations in the local and Arabic languages. So, it is reasonable to assume the Borno Qur'anic manuscripts as the lecture notes of the Islamic scholars that taught tafsir or the records of the students after their classes.

As seen in table 1.1., while Bahr al-'ulūm, al-Kashf wa-l-bayān, Ma'ālim al-tanzīl, and Tafsir al-jalālayn appeared to be predominant in the Kanem-Borno tafsir domain, works like Haqā'iq al-tafsir, al-Wajiz fī tafsir al-kitāb al-'azīz, al-Jamī' li-'ahkām al-Qur'an, Anwār al-Tanzīl, al-Tashīl li 'ulūm al-tanzīl and Ghāyat al-amānī were not used frequently. That might be because, at that time, the first set of exegetical works had been used as textbooks and always quoted in the tafsir classes, while the later books were unknown and only read by well-informed scholars. In other words, it is rational to accept the frequently cited set of exegetical books as the renowned works in circulation in the region that reached Kanem-Borno earlier. That is

because the itinerant scholars that arrived early in Kanem-Borno brought various manuscripts, some of which they used as lesson books and cited some in their classes. As some scholars quoted from several manuscripts that they have, other scholars used the only available sources with them. As a result, some of the above mentioned tafsir works were cited frequently in most or all of the manuscripts, while some appeared only in one or two of them.

Another point to mention here is that *al-Tahbīr fī ‘ilm al-tafsir* of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) is the only book on *‘ulūm al-Qur’an* that was cited in one of the Borno Qur’anic manuscripts. That might be because the book in question is the primary source that had been used among the scholars in Kanem-Borno, albeit it is possible not to be the only source of *‘ulūm al-Qur’an* that was in circulation in the traditional Qur’anic circle at the time.



Fig. 1. An example of the old Borno Qur’anic manuscripts that contain the beginning of surah al-Hud (11/1). Linguistic analysis and annotation quotations from al-Jalalayn and other tafsir authorities can be seen on the page. SOAS, University of London, SOAS Digital Collections, Kaduna Qur’an MSAR 33-1.

In the case of Hausaland, several factors accounted for the advent of Kano, Katsina, Zazzau, Gobir, and other Hausa states to become centres of Islamic learning and tradition in northern Nigeria.

However, the most significant element that resulted in the evolution of Islamic and Qur'anic scholarship is the arrival of itinerant Islamic scholars and the migration of people to Hausaland after the introduction of Islam to the region. Islam started to be accepted by the populace long before the kings. Thus, like the Ancient Ghana and Kanem-Borno kingdoms, Islam might have been introduced to Kano thanks to the Muslim merchants earlier than the eleventh century AD. However, Ali Yaji b. Samiya (750-787/ 1349-1385) was the first king to accept Islam.¹¹ Because of his immense contributions to the spread of Islam and its teachings in Kano and beyond, his reign was marked as a crucial period in the history of Islam in Hausaland, to the extent that some historians suggested that Islam came to Kano during his time.¹² Ali Yaji accepted Islam after the coming of the team of Abdurrahman Zayti, which consisted of about forty Wangarawa¹³ from Mali that were said to have arrived in Kano between 750-787/1349-1385.¹⁴ Consequently, itinerant scholars from Mali with books on divinity (*tawhid*) and etymology (*ishtiqaq*), a group of Arabs, Kanuri (known in Hausa as *Barebari*) and merchants from Gonja visited some areas of Hausaland during the reign of Yakubu b. Abdullahi Burja (856-867/1452-1463). According to the Kano Chronicle, prior to his period, only the Holy Qur'an, along with the books of fiqh and hadith, were available in Hausaland.¹⁵

Muhammad Rumfa's time (867-904/1463-1499) is yet another critical period regarding the development of Islamic and Qur'anic scholarship. Thus, the arrival of the second batch of Wangarawa and the coming of Sheikh Muhammad b. Abdulkarim al-Maghili al-Tilimsani (d. 909/1503) to Kano in 1493 had played an enormous role in the development of Islamic learning and scholarship in the

11 Galadanci, *Harakatu'l-Lugah al-Arabiyya fi Nigeria*, 40.

12 Muhammad Mustapha Gwadabe, "Islam in the Hausa States of Kano, Katsina, Gobir and Zazzau before 1804," in *Islamic History and Civilization in West Africa* (IRCICA, 2020), 85.

13 The Wangarawa are the Dyula branch of the Mande peoples who spread over West Africa as traders, scholars or conquerors, for detail information about Wangara and the Wangarawa see Muhammad Al-Hajj, "A Seventeenth Century Chronicle on the Origins and Missionary Activities of the Wangarawa," *Kano Studies* 1, no. 4 (1968): 7-16.

14 Galadanci, *Harakatu'l-Lugah al-Arabiyya fi Nigeria*, 40.

15 Palmer, Herbert Richmond Palmer, "The Kano Chronicle," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain & Ireland* 37, (1908): 76-77.

Hausaland because they brought with them various Islamic books and organized different classes on Islamic knowledge.¹⁶ Also, during the reign of Muhammad Kosoki b. Abdullah (914-972 / 1509-1565), Sheikh Tunisī and Sheikh Abdussalām brought *al-Mudawwanah* of Imam Malik b. Anas (d. 179/795) *al-Shifa* of the Qadī Iyāḍ (d. 554/1149), and *al-Jāmi' al-Sagīr* of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) and the tafsir of Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983).¹⁷

Though the first wave of Islamic scholars to Hausaland, thanks to whom some of the Hausa rulers accepted Islam, were from Mali in the west, much of the influence in terms of Islamic and Qur'anic scholarship came from Borno. Thus, by the middle of the fifteenth century AD, there were several waves of Borno scholars in some areas of Hausaland, especially Kano, Katsina, and Zazzau. Sheikh Karaski, Sheikh Magumi and Sheikh Kabi, among others, were said to have moved to Kano where they became prominent Islamic teachers. In Katsina, Abu Abdullah b. Masani b. Muhammad al-Barnawī and his student Danmarina were said to be among the scholars that revived the Islamic tradition during the reign of the king of Katsina, Muhammad Jan Hazo (1671-1685). Also, by the seventeenth century AD, communities like Lafiyan Barebari, Nasarawa, Makurdi, Akwanga, Shendem, Keana, and Bida, among others, were home to several Borno scholars who were actively engaged in Qur'anic and other Islamic studies. Mention was also made of the team of about two hundred migrants from Borno that arrived in Gumi and Saifawa, where they established a Qur'anic learning center that Uthmān b. Fodio (d. 1232/1817) and his brother Abdullah b. Fodio (d. 1248/1829) attended during their intellectual journeys.¹⁸

Regarding the pedagogical approach that had been used during this period, a note was made by El-Masri:

"After having attained a basic knowledge of the religion, reading and writing in boyhood, the aspirant scholar (*talib*) would then travel about to learned men and stay with them till he had perfected with each the particular science in which he had gained his fame; having completed his studies to the satisfaction of a master he would then be given a license (*'ijāza*) to teach the subject he had been taught, on

16 Galadanci, *Harakatu'l-Lugah al-Arabiyya fi Nigeria*, 41.

17 Palmer, "The Kano Chronicle." 78-79.

18 Shehu, "Islam in Kanem Borno: A Historical Review," 143-46.

the authority of the master. In this way, the *talib* would go round to collect 'ijāzas and thus establish fame as a recognized scholar. This process would not normally cease at a certain stage or age, for whenever a scholar was to be found, who had excelled himself in a branch of knowledge no matter whether a local man or a foreigner others would go to study under him..."¹⁹

It should be noted that the book of al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) entitled *Bahr al-'ulūm* was the only tafsir source that was said to have been brought to Hausaland during this period. However, some of the tafsir authorities used by Abdullah b. Fodio (d. 1248/1829) were perhaps among the tafsir sources in circulation in the traditional Qur'anic circle in the Hausaland. Because as mentioned earlier, Shehu Uthmān (d. 1232/1817) and Abdullah b. Fodio (d. 1248/1829) were said to have attended some Qur'anic classes during this period.

Second Phase (the Golden Stage): The Development of Tafsir Tradition During the Sokoto Caliphate Between the Late Eighteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

The Sokoto Caliphate, which began from the Gobir Kingdom of Hausaland and encompassed a significant part of modern-day northern Nigeria, Burkina Faso, northern Cameroon, Baghirmi and Bindir in Chad and Southern Niger between 1804-1903, was one of the largest and most influential states in Africa. Several aspects of the history of this state have been well documented. For the development of the tafsir tradition in the Sokoto Caliphate, references should be made to the period before the declaration of the Sokoto Jihad, especially the education life and sojourn of Shehu Uthmān Dan Fodio (d. 1232/1817), Abdullah b. Fodio (d. 1248/1829) and Muhammad Bello (d. 1253/1837) because of their immense contribution to the development of tafsir, Qur'anic studies, and Islamic scholarship.

Shehu Uthmān grew up in Degel, a town under the Gobir state, so it is likely that he was accommodated, like other children in that region, into an already standardized educational system of learning. In this system, as mentioned above, after they have learned reading and

19 El-Masri, "The life of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio Before the Jihad"; cited in Bugaje Usman Muhammad Bugaje, "The Contents, Methods and Impact of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio's Teachings (1774-1804)" (Masters diss., University of Khartoum, 1978), 15.

writing, the students progress with Qur'anic studies after which they would travel to prominent scholars to specialize in a particular science and obtain a license (*ijāzah*). Tafsir and hadith were the foremost among the subjects taught, followed by *sīra*, *tawhīd*, sufism, Arabic grammar, syntax, etymology, and other Islamic sciences. Shehu Uthmān's teachers, as reported by his brother Abdullah, were too many to be recorded. However, regarding the Qur'anic and tafsir studies, Shehu Uthmān was taught Qur'an by his father Muhammad Fodio, a renowned Islamic scholar, at a very early age. He studied tafsir and *sahih al-Bukhari* in the hands of two of his uncles: Hajj Muhammad Raji and Ahmad b. Muhammad. Also, he attended the classes of Hashim al-Zamfari, where he studied tafsir again.²⁰

On the other hand, Sheikh Abdullah b. Fodio (d. 1248/1829) and Sheikh Muhammad Bello (d. 1253/1837) went under sturdy training in a wide range of Islamic sciences that prepared them to be qualified scholars. According to his account, Abdullah b. Fodio learned reading and writing and memorized the Holy Qur'an when he was thirteen years old with his father, after which he proceeded to the advanced studies of Islamic sciences under the mentorship of his brother, Shehu Uthmān. Thus, under his brother, Abdullah b. Fodio studied the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an from *al-Fatiha* to the end several times after he read with him '*Ishriniyyāt*',²¹ '*Witriyyāt*',²² '*Shu'arā' al-sit*' (the odes of the six pre-Islamic poets). He also studied with him *tawhīd* and many books on syntax and several traditional books on *fiqh*. Besides Shehu Uthmān, Abdullah studied under many other scholars, including his uncle Abdullah b. Muhammad b. al-Hajj, Muhammad b. Muhammad, Ahmad b. Abī Bakr and Jibril b. Umar, among others.²³

20 For more information about the life and education of Shehu Usman see Galadanci, *Harakatu'l-Lugah al-Arabiyya fi Nigeria*, 55-57; Bugaje, "The Contents, Methods and Impact of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio's Teachings," 14-17.

21 *Al-Ishriyyāt* is a panegyric of the Prophet (SAW) entitled *al-Qasā'id al-Ishriyyāt fi Madh Sayyidina Muhammad* composed by Abu Zayd Abdurrahman b. Yakhluftan al-Fazazi (d. 627/1230).

22 *Al-Witriyyāt* is another eulogy of the Prophet (SAW) entitled *al-Witriyyāt fi Madh Afdhal al-Makhluqāt* composed by Muhammad b. Rashid al-Witri (d. 662/1263).

23 For the life, education and career of Sheikh Abdullah b. Fodio see Abubakar Aliu Gwandu, "Abdullahi b. Fodio as a Muslim Jurist" (PhD diss., University of Durham, 1977), 36-40; Galadanci, *Harakatu'l-Lugah al-Arabiyya fi Nigeria*, 71-74.

The importance of the subjects he studied, especially the Arabic syntax, cannot be overemphasized in preparing him to become a well-informed scholar and exegete. That is evident in his writings, especially his two tafsir works, where he dramatically used the rules of Arabic grammar and morphology and applied various Islamic sciences in the interpretation of the Qur'anic passages.

Although Shehu Uthmān and his brother Abdullah b. Fodio were reported to have studied tafsir for several years with various scholars, no account for the tafsir books they used in the tafsir classes was found. However, it can be concluded that they read *tafsir al-Jalālayn*, the popular tafsir in the traditional Qur'anic circle in Hausaland. Also, the tafsir of Abu layth al-Samarqandī and other classical tafsir works that appeared in the tafsir books of Abdullah b. Fodio and Muhammad Bello might have been among the available tafsir sources in the traditional tafsir classes during the Sokoto Caliphate period.

Because of the enormous contribution of the works of Abdullah b. Fodio to the development of tafsir and Qur'anic studies and to illustrate the nature and sources of the tafsir during the Sokoto Caliphate, a few notes are worth mentioning at this juncture on the contributions of Ibn Fodio to the development of tafsir.

Abdullah b. Fodio authored six books in the area of Islamic sciences, three on tafsir and three on Qur'anic studies (*ʿulūm al-Qur'an*). This was a significant growth in the history of tafsir in northern Nigeria, which can be considered as a turning point in the development of this genre. Thus, these were the first completed Arabic books in tafsir and *ʿulūm al-Qur'an* written in northern Nigeria. His first book is *ʿDiyaʿu al-taʿwīl fī maʿānī al-tanzīl*, one of the crucial tafsir works written in western Bilād al-Sūdān. As the author mentioned in the introduction, he wrote this book following the appeal of a group of his students, who urged him to write a Qur'anic exegetical book.²⁴ The book consists of two distinct volumes. The drafting of the first volume was completed on 28 Ramadan 1230/ 3 September 1815, while the second volume was finalized around 13 Shaʿaban 1231/10 July 1816. Although the book was published in Cairo in 1961, the work has not been critically edited. However, within the framework of IRCICA studies on the Holy Qur'an, there is an ongoing research project on the critical edition of the book.

24. Abdullahi b. Fodio Muhammad b. Usman, *Diyaʿu al-Taʿwīl Fī Maʿānī al-Tanzīl* (Cairo: Daru'l-Istiḳamah, 1961), 7.

After he critically discussed different opinions of the exegetes regarding a specific Qur'anic passage, the author selected the most accepted views of the *mufasssirun* in his book. And because of his vast knowledge of Arabic grammar, syntax and morphology, Abdullah b. Fodio, most of the time, comprehensively gave a linguistic analysis of many Qur'anic words and expressions.

Also, the tafsir was written based on the Qur'anic recitation version of Warsh (d. 197/812). However, references were made to other *mutāwatir* versions of recitation and sometimes to some *shādh* (anomalous) versions. Moreover, importance was given to the explanation of the nuances between different versions of the Qur'anic recitation.

One of the features of the book is that; because Maliki doctrine is the popular madhhab in West Africa, particular significance was given to the Maliki views in the context of the *āyāt al-ahkām* (those verses of the Holy Qur'an from which legal rulings are derived). However, in most cases, the opinions of Abū Hanīfah (d. 150/767), ash-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241/855) and other famous jurists were discussed comprehensively. The other tafsir works by Abdullah b. Fodio are as follows:

- '*Kifāyatu Dhu'afā' al-Sudān*' is the second tafsir work of Abdullah b. Fodio, which is an abridged version of the '*Diya'u al-ta'wīl fī ma'ānī al-tanzīl*'. The author stated in the introduction that he authored '*Diya'u al-ta'wīl*', which covered seven *mutawatir* versions of recitation with detailed discussions regarding the views of the four famous Islamic jurists and the comprehensive linguistic analysis. However, subsequently for the ill-informed Islamic students, he wrote this book, which is an abridged version of *Diya'u al-ta'wīl* and composed of only the Warsh recitation, the opinion of the Maliki School of Law, and the necessary knowledge of Arabic.²⁵
- '*Naylu al-sūl fī tafsir ar-rasūl*' is the third tafsir book of Abdullah b. Fodio. This book comprises prophetic traditions regarding the tafsir of some Qur'anic verses, some of which

25 Abdullahi b. Fodio Muhammad b. Usman, *Kifāyatu Dhu'afā' al-Sudān*, ed. Sani Musa Ayagi (Kano-Nigeria: Daru'l-Ummah, n.d.), 83–84.

were found in the *al-Itqān* of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), while others were from various tafsir literature.

The books of Ibn Fodio on ‘ulūm al-Qur’an are as follows:

- *al-Farā'id al-jamīla wasā'id al-fawā'id al-jalīlah*: This book is a poetry version of *al-fawā'id al-jamīlah fī al-ayāt al-jalīlah*, which was written by Abu Ali al-Husain b. Ali b. Talhah al-Shawshawī (d. 899/1494).
- *Miftāh al-tafsir*: is a verse version of two books of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) on ‘ulūm al-Qur’an: *al-Itqān* and *al-Nuqāyah fī ilm al-tafsir*.
- *Sulālatu al-miftāh*: an abridged version of *Miftāh al-tafsir*.

It should be noted that all three books of ‘ulūm al-Qur’an were in verse, which is particularly significant since poetry at that time was an essential instrument for teaching and occupied an important place in the curriculum. This is evident from *Ishriyyāt* and *Witriyyāt*, among other books that Abdullah b. Fodio himself read with his brother Shehu Uthmān.

Muhammad Bello (d. 1253/1837), who studied with his father Shehu Uthmān, his uncles, and some prominent scholars in Hausa states, was another scholar that contributed to the development of tafsir during the Sokoto Caliphate period through his book entitled ‘*Gāyatu al-sūl fī tafsir al-rasūl sallalhu alaihi wa sallam*’. And he wrote, in poetry form, on some aspects of ‘ulūm al-Qur’an which were found in the introduction of Ibn Juzayy al-Gharnāṭī’s (d. 741/1340) *al-Tashīl li ‘ulūm al-tanzīl*.

It can be concluded from the above discussions that the tafsir tradition during the Sokoto Caliphate witnessed tremendous growth. The ‘ulama’ of Sokoto wrote several books on tafsir and ‘ulūm al-Qur’an, which they used as teaching materials for their students, and which can demonstrate the tafsir sources in the intellectual domain during the Sokoto Caliphate.

	Source	Author	Remark
1	<i>Ma'ānī al-Qur'an</i>	<i>Akhfash (d. 215/830)</i>	Infrequently/Secondary
2	<i>Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'an</i>	<i>al-Tabarī (d. 310/923)</i>	Infrequently/Secondary
3	<i>Ma'ānī al-Qur'an</i>	<i>al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923)</i>	Infrequently/Secondary
4	<i>Lata'if al-Ishārat</i>	<i>al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072)</i>	Infrequently/Secondary
5	<i>Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl</i>	<i>al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122)</i>	Infrequently/Secondary
6	<i>al-Muharrar al-wajiz fi tafsir al-kitāb al-'Aziz</i>	<i>Ibn Atiyyah (d. 541/1147)</i>	Frequently/Primary
7	<i>Ahkām al-Qur'an</i>	<i>Abū Bakr Ibn al-Arabi (d. 543/1148)</i>	Frequently/Primary
8	<i>Mafātiḥ al-ghayb</i>	<i>al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210)</i>	Infrequently/Secondary
9	<i>al-Jamī' li-'ahkām al-Qur'an</i>	<i>al-Qurtubī (d. 671/1273)</i>	Infrequently/Secondary
10	<i>Anwār al-Tanzīl wa-Asrār al-ta'wīl</i>	<i>al-Baydawī (d. 685/1286)</i>	Frequently/Primary
11	<i>Madārik al-tanzīl wa haqāqiq al-ta'wīl</i>	<i>Abu al-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310)</i>	Frequently/Primary
12	<i>al-Tashīl li 'ulūm al-tanzīl</i>	<i>Ibn Juzayy Al Gharnātī (d. 741/1340)</i>	Primary by Bello
13	<i>Lubāb al-ta'wīl fi Ma'ānī al-tanzīl</i>	<i>al-Khāzin (d. 742/1341)</i>	Frequently/Primary
14	<i>Tafsir al-Bahr al-Muhīt</i>	<i>Abū Hayyān al-Gharnātī (d. 745/1344)</i>	Infrequently/Secondary
15	<i>al-Jawāhir al-Hisān</i>	<i>Abū Zayd al-Tha'ālibī (d. 875/1471)</i>	Frequently/Primary
16	<i>Tafsir al-Jalālayn</i>	<i>al-Mahallī (d. 864/1459)/ al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)</i>	Frequently/Primary
17	<i>Ghāyat al-amānī fi tafsir kālām al-rabbānī</i>	<i>Molla Gürānī/Kūrānī (d. 893/1488)</i>	Frequently/Primary
18	<i>al-Itqān fi 'ulūm al-Qur'an</i>	<i>al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)</i>	'ulūm al-Qur'an/primary
19	<i>al-Nuqāya fi 'ilm al-tafsir</i>	<i>al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)</i>	'ulūm al-Qur'an/primary

Table 2.1: The Core Tafsir Sources from Sheikh Abdullah b. Fodio and Muhammad b. Bello's works on tafsir and 'ulūm al-Qur'an

Table 2.1 shows that eight tafsir works by Ibn Atiyyah (d. 541/1147), Abū Bakr Ibn al-Arabi (d. 543/1148), al-Baydawī (d. 685/1286), Abu al-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310), al-Khāzin (d. 742/1341), Abū Zayd al-Tha'ālibī (d. 875/1471), al-Mahallī (d. 864/1459) and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) and Molla Gürānī (d. 893/1488) were cited frequently in the 'Diya'u al-ta'wīl and thus considered as the core sources of Abdullah b. Fodio. Since Muhammad Bello authored some aspects of 'ulūm al-Qur'an, which were found in the introduction of the *al-Tashīl li 'ulūm al-tanzīl* of Ibn Juzayy Al Gharnātī (d.

741/1340), Ibn Juzayy (d. 741/1340) can be considered as a primary source of tafsir for Muhammad Bello. The other eight works by Akhfash (d. 215/830), al-Tabarī (d. 310/923), al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923), al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), al-Qurtubī (d. 671/1273), Abū Hayyān al-Gharnātī (d. 745/1344), were seen, though infrequently, among the sources of Abdullah b. Fodio. Although they might also be considered core sources of tafsir in Sokoto Caliphate since most were also quoted in some Borno manuscripts, the transformation in the tafsir paradigm in northern Nigeria can likely be the factor that accounted for the change in the popularity of some of the tafsir authorities.

	Source and Author	Borno and Hausaland	Sokoto
1	<i>Ma'ānī al-Qur'an</i> Akhfash (d. 215/830)		√
2	<i>Jāmi' al-bayān</i> al-Tabarī (d. 310/923)		√
3	<i>Ma'ānī al-Qur'an</i> al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923)		√
4	<i>Bahr al-'ulūm</i> as-Samarqandī (d. 373/983)	√	
5	<i>Haqā'iq al-tafsir</i> as-Sulamī (d. 412/1021)	√	
6	<i>al-Kashf wa-l-bayān</i> al-Tha'ālībī (d. 427/1035)	√	
7	<i>Latā'if al-lshārat</i> al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072)		√
8	<i>al-Wajiz</i> al-Wāhidī (d. 468/1076)	√	
9	<i>Ma'ālim al-Tanzil</i> al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122)	√	√
10	<i>al-Muharrar al-wajiz</i> Ibn Atiyyah (d. 541/1147)		√
11	<i>Ahkām al-Qur'an</i> Ibn al-Arabi (d. 543/1148)		√
12	<i>Mafātih al-ghayb</i> al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210)		√
13	<i>al-Jamī' li-'ahkām al-Qur'an</i> al-Qurtubī (d. 671/1273)	√	√
14	<i>Anwār al-Tanzil</i> al-Baydawī (d. 685/1286)	√	√
15	<i>Madārik al-tanzil</i>		√

	Source and Author	Borno and Hausaland	Sokoto
	al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310)		
16	<i>al-Tashīl li 'ulūm al-tanzīl</i> Ibn Juzayy (d. 741/1340)	✓	✓
17	<i>Lubāb al-ta'wīl</i> al-Khāzin (d. 742/1341)		✓
18	<i>Tafsīr al-Bahr al-Muhīt</i> Abū Hayyān (d. 745/1344)		✓
19	<i>al-Jawāhir al-Hisān</i> al-Tha'ālibī (d. 875/1471)	✓	✓
20	<i>Tafsīr al-Jalālayn</i> al-Mahallī (d. 864/1459)/ al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)	✓	✓
21	<i>Ghāyat al-amānī</i> Gūrānī (d. 893/1488)	✓	✓
22	<i>al-Itqān</i> al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)		✓
23?	<i>al-Tahbīr fi 'ilm al-tafsīr</i> al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)	✓	
24	<i>al-Nuqāya</i> al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)		✓

Table 2.2: The Distribution of Tafsir Sources in Kanem-Borno, Hausaland and Sokoto Caliphate periods.

Third Phase: Tafsir Culture from the Beginning of the 20th Century to the Contemporary Period

From the first half of the 20th century to the 21st century, northern Nigeria witnessed another commendable evolution in terms of tafsir culture. In this period, a wave of significant new *mufasssīrūn* (exegetes) emerged, different tafsir trends appeared, and the Ramadan tafsir sessions evolved. Also, within this period, various written translations of the Qur'an developed. The already standardized educational system, which was seen during the Sokoto Caliphate period, was sustained, where the aspirant scholar (*talib*,) after he acquired the fundamental skill of reading and writing, attends the recognized *majlis* (sessions) of renowned scholars to study a specific book or set of books.²⁶ Although

26 These sessions used to take place either at the mosque of the palace, home of a rich person, or abode of some great scholars (*malams*). The Qur'anic schools were generally in the Borno region, Arabic language sessions in the Zazzau region, while classical schools of Maliki fiqh were popular in Kano. Tafsir sessions were conducted in most northern Nigerian societies, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

these educational sessions (*majlis*), to some extent, have a kind of curricular freedom, where the students generally choose the subjects and the books they want to study, the *mufasssirun* at the beginning of this phase attached themselves to a limited set of the Arabic exegetical works. A few notes on the exegetical activities of some famous exegetes may provide the necessary account for understanding the growth of tafsir in northern Nigeria through the 20th and 21st centuries.

Malam Muhammad Shamsuddin (d. 1947) was one of the notable exegetes who can be cited among the prominent scholars in Kano City from the late 1930s to the beginning of the 1940s. He was a great-grandson of Ali Abdullah, who, according to the local tradition, as narrated by Andrea Brigaglia, came to Kano from Gao Eastern Mali and settled in the Jar Kasa neighborhood, where he founded a school of tafsir and was appointed as the chief Qur'anic reciter (*amir al-Qurra'*) after the army of Shehu Uthmān conquered Kano. Malam Muhammad Shamsuddin, among Ali Abdullah's offspring, was the one that contributed immensely to the development of Jar Kasa School of Tafsir, to the extent that the school was later known as '*Makarantar malam Shamsu'* (in English, the school of Malam Shamsu). As the tradition of the Jar Kasa school of tafsir, *Tafsir al-Jalālayn* is the only curriculum of tafsir, where the students learn the translation of the book into Hausa. Malam Yusuf Makwarari and Malam Uthmān Shehū Mai Hūla (d. 1988), among other significant figures in the Islamic scholarship sphere, were said to have attended the tafsir classes of Malam Shamsuddin.²⁷

Another significant exegete was Malam Ahmed Tijāni b. Uthmān al-Kanowī (d. 1970), popularly known as Tijāni b. Uthmān Zangon Berebari. His tafsir class can be said to take tafsir culture from the indoor and individual-centered traditional learning system to a public intellectual sphere. He was among the group of scholars that travelled from Kano to Kaolack and studied under Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse. Upon his return from Kaolack at the beginning of the 1950s, Malam Tijāni Uthmān began a public Qur'anic exegesis during the month of

See Ahmad Mukhtar Adam, "Public Tafsir Gatherings in Northern Nigeria: A Study on Oral Tafsir Tradition," in *International Student Articles*, II (Istanbul: IBA, 2020), 56.

²⁷ For more on the Jar Kasa School of tafsir see Andrea Brigaglia, "Learning, Gnosis and Exegesis: Public Tafsir and Sufi Revival in the City of Kano (Northern Nigeria), 1950-1970," *Die Welt Des Islams* 49, (2009): 348–52.

Ramadan at the mosque of Zangon Berebari neighborhood. Later, his tafsir session was said to have moved to a spacious place in a street adjacent to the city's central market when his audience increased massively. For him to be visible even from afar, he starts to sit on a wooden platform and subsequently uses a loudspeaker so that he can be heard from afar. This marked a significant development at that time, as these innovations transformed the tafsir culture in Kano from an indoor to a public intellectual activity.

Also, Malam Tijāni Uthmān introduced a student that read the Qur'anic verses in the tafsir sessions (known as *mai jan baki/aya* in Hausa) and diversified the sources of his tafsir. Thus, besides *mai jan baki*, four of his students, each with one of the tafsir sources, accompanied him. His primary sources were: *Lubāb al-ta'wīl fī ma'ānī at-tanzīl* by Ali b. Muhammad al-Khāzin (d. 741 / 1341), Ismā'il Hakki al-Bursawī's (d. 1137 / 1725) *Rūh al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*, *Hāshiyah alā al-Jalālayn*, popularly known as *Hāshiya al-Jamal* by Sulaimān b. Umar b. Mansūr (d. 1204/1789) and *Hāshiya ala al-Jalālayn* by Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Sāwī (d. 1241/1825). Whenever he wanted to give a reference from any of the supra-sources, he called the student by saying, for instance, *mai sawi wuri kaza* (the holder of Sawi's tafsir read so-so pages).²⁸ This also indicates another legacy of the Tijāni Uthmān regarding the tafsir culture in northern Nigeria, where he transformed the tradition from individual-centered learning that concentrated on a single source to a public intellectual session with multiple sources.

Malam Nāsiru Kabara (d. 1996) was another exegete who played a fundamental role in the growth of tafsir culture in northern Nigeria. He began his public tafsir sessions at the house of Muhammad Sunusi (the first) in the first half of the 1940s. In 1953, after Muhammad Sunusi became the then emir of Kano, his tafsir session was moved to Kano Emir's Palace and continued there until his death (?) when his son Qarībullah succeeded him in 1990. Besides his significant role as the royal mufasssir (*mai tafsirin gidan sarki*), he also authored two books on tafsir: *Ihsān al-mannān fī ibrāzi khabāya al-Qur'an* in Hausa and *Tanwīr al-Jannah fī tabwīb ḡiya' at-ta'wīl li ibrāzi jawāhir al-Qur'an* in

28 For more information about Salgawa School of tafsir see Brigaglia, "Learning, Gnosis and Exegesis," 352–61.

Arabic, which is mainly based on the '*Diya' al-ta'wīl fī ma'ānī al-tanzīl*' of Abdullah b. Fodio.²⁹

Mention should be made of two other contemporary prominent figures in the tafsir circle of northern Nigeria, Malam Abubakar Mahmud Gumi (d. 1992) and Malam Tāhiru Uthmān Bauchi (b. 1929). Between 1962 and the 1970s, Malam Gumi became famous in northern Nigeria for his public tafsir sessions. He was said to start his tafsir sessions in the 1950s while he was still a student at the law school in Kano. Later in 1962, his tafsir sessions moved to the then-newly opened Sultan Bello Mosque in Kaduna State. Apart from his contributions to the public tafsir, Malam Mahmud Gumi also authored two works on tafsir: *Raddu al-adhhān ilā ma'ānī al-Qur'an* in Arabic and *al-Kurānī mai Girma da Kuma Tarjaman Ma'anoninsa Zuwa ga Harshen Hausa* in the Hausa language. Between 1967-1976, his tafsir sessions were broadcast by Radio Kaduna. This is, notably, a significant development in the history of tafsir culture, as this marked the beginning of radio tafsir since his tafsir was the first session that was said to have been aired by a radio station in northern Nigeria.³⁰ On the other hand, the tafsir of Malam Tāhiru Uthmān Bauchi (b. 1929) was another public tafsir that was broadcast by Radio Kaduna in the 1970s.³¹

From the 1990s to the 2000s, there has been a rapid rise in performing tafsir sessions in the holy month of Ramadan, remarkable among them is the tafsir of Malam Ja'far Mahmud Adam (d. 2007). Malam Jafar Mahmud was said to have begun his Ramadan tafsir sessions in 1986, at the Triumph Mosque Kano when he was twenty-five years old as a student at the Government Arabic Teacher's College (G.A.T.C). During that period, every Wednesday, he had tafsir sessions at al-Haj Lawan Atna mosque in Beirut Street, Kano State. Also, he was said to organize tafsir classes for his schoolmates at the Ihya' al-Sunnah school, Ajasa Street, Railway Kano. After he started his first

29 About the tafsir session of Nasiru Kabara see Andrea Brigaglia, "Two Published Hausa Translation of the Qur'an & Their Doctrinal Background," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35, no. 4 (2005): 431-34.

30 For the tafsir session of Mahmud Gumi see Brigaglia, "Two Published Hausa Translation of the Qur'an," 429-31.

31 See Andrea Brigaglia, "The Radio Kaduna Tafsir (1987-1992) and the Construction of Public Images of Muslim Scholars in the Nigerian Media," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 27, (2007): 201-203.

degree at the Islamic University of Madinah in the early 1990s, he performed public Ramadan commentary in Maiduguri State when he came to Nigeria for the holidays, which continued until he died in 2007. After he graduated from Madinah Islamic University in 1995, he established an Islamic Trust known as Uthmān b. Affān in Gadon Kaya neighborhood, Kano, where he had public tafsir sessions every Friday until he passed away.³² On the whole, the recent developments in the tafsir tradition can be divided into three distinct categories:

Traditional Tafsir Sessions (Orthodoxy)

These are sessions that strictly follow and maintain the traditional approach by explaining the meaning of a specific tafsir book in the Hausa language. The session of Shehu Zaruku Attahir Shehu Naliman, in the seat of the Islamic Caliphate, Sokoto, can be cited as an example of this category because *'Diya'u al-ta'wīl* of Abdullah b. Fodio is translated in this session.

Neo-Traditional Tafsir Sessions

These are the revived forms of the orthodox sessions, which started with the traditional approach but later transformed into the synoptic method by giving a summary of the information extracted from various tafsir sources. Malam Mukhtar Adam, a prominent *mufasssir* in Jos and Bukuru, Plateau State, can be considered an example of a neo-traditional *mufasssir*. His public tafsir was said to have begun in 1970; however, he travelled from Jos to Kano to further his Islamic education two years after he commenced his sessions. Upon his return from Kano to Jos around 1980, he continued his public tafsir sessions at Layin Zana (Zana neighborhood), Jos, until 1999, when the sessions were later moved to the central mosque of Jos in 2000. Malam Mukhtar Adam started his tafsir journey by explaining tafsir books such as *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'azīm* by Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373), *Safwah al-tafāsīr* of Muhammad al-Sabuni and the *Raddu al-azhān ilā ma'ānī al-Qur'an* by Abubakar Mahmud Gumi (d. 1992). However, after his tafsir sessions were moved to Central Mosque Jos in 2000, he employed the synoptic approach.³³

32 Ahmad Mukhtar, "Public Tafsir Gatherings in Northern Nigeria," 61.

33 Ibid, 60.

Modern Tafsir Sessions

These are sessions that emerged recently, some of which were conducted by well-grounded scholars who undergo modern academic education. One of the examples that can be cited is Dr Muhammad Sani Umar Rijiyar Lemo, a well-informed Islamic scholar in Kano. He performs a public tafsir in Gwallaga Mosque, Bauchi, during Ramadan as well as in Uthmān ibn Affan Foundation, Gadon Kaya, Kano, after the death of Malam Ja'far Mahmud Adam (d. 2007) every Friday.

Conclusion

This article attempted to trace the genesis and the developments of the tafsir tradition in northern Nigeria. The Journey of this culture started in parallel with the introduction of Islam in that region. Later, it witnessed a commendable development after the Kingdom of Kanem-Borno accepted Islam in the eleventh century AD. Also, similar growth happened in the Hausaland, especially during the reign of Ali Yaji (750-787/1349-1385) and Muhammad Rumfa (867-904/1463-1499), respectively. It is in this context that the article highlighted the effect of itinerant Muslim scholars who arrived in northern Nigeria from Maghrib, Egypt, and Mali, as well as the influence of the pilgrim's traveling to the Hajj on the development of tafsir culture in that region. The Sokoto Caliphate (1804-1903) can be regarded as the golden era in terms of the development of not only tafsir culture but also other Islamic Studies disciplines. Thus, as the study reveals, unique approaches, new sources, different theories, and substantial contributions to tafsir appeared in that period. At the beginning of the 20th century, precisely the late 1930s, the 1940s, and 1970s through to the 21st century, northern Nigeria witnessed another commendable evolution of tafsir culture. In this period, significant new exegetes emerged, important tafsir schools were established, different tafsir trends appeared, and the Ramadan tafsir sessions evolved.

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Intellectual Heritage of Timbuktu Scholarship in West Africa: The Pioneering Works of Alhaji Salim and Mama Sambou Gassama at Jakaba and Sutuko Centers of Learning

Ensa Touray*

Timbuktu was established in the eleventh century that coincided with a significant political turning point in West Africa. Firstly, the period saw the decline of Ghana as a regional trading and political power. Secondly, Western Sudan began to witness intense interactions with Middle Eastern and by extension the Arab Muslims.¹ Furthermore, it represents the medieval old-world system from the mid-seventh century and to the fifteenth century. This epoch was characterized by the expansion of the Muslim states in the Middle East.² Muslim states in the Middle East pursued an expansionist policy in commerce, seeking to create collateral sources for capital accumulation to finance their political consolidation as core powers in the Middle East.³ The Conquest of ancient Egypt was further pursued due to its strategic, ecological and geographical conditions.⁴

During the Medieval period, the expansion towards the south of the Sahara became a strategic goal. With the advent of Arab and Berber influence, the historical trajectory of West Africa in general and in particular that of Western Sudan underwent a profound transformation. It is crucial to recognize that the states and political actors in Western Sudan perceived the Muslim expansion as an endeavor driven by the desire to seize West African gold. This phenomenon prompted Western Sudanic political leaders to form alliances and reorganize their political structures in order to establish wider territorial polities, namely Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, from the

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1 Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa.: A History of Globalization in Nuimi, The Gambia* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 36.

2 George Von-der-Muhl, "Janet L. Abu-Lughod. Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350," *Comparative Civilizations Review* 29, no. 29 (1993): 125.

3 Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa*, 22.

4 Ibid., 36.

8th to 13th centuries. These states adopted policies designed to optimize their participation in this intricate commercial interaction with the Muslim states. This enabled them to become integrated into the evolving system. In this complex commercial interaction, Arab merchants supplied salt from mines in the desert north to the inhabitants of the savannah, who were experiencing a shortage of salt. They also provided dates, figs, woven cloths, and copper articles. In return, they transported gold from the west towards the north.

During the medieval period of the old world, West Africa was the primary source of gold. With the advent of the muslim faith in the western and central Sudanic regions, merchants were revealed as pivotal agents of Islamization, while Kings, artisans, free farmers, and slaves were perceived to have played comparatively less significant roles.⁵ This resulted in the accelerated growth of Islamic Scholarship in the Bilād al-Sūdān. The historical array of political, cultural, and socioeconomic settings provided fertile ground for the arrival and establishment of Islam. It would be inaccurate to state that Islamic expertise was distributed homogeneously among the diverse communities of Western Africa.⁶ In "The Rise of Clerical Lineages in the Sahara and the Bilād al-Sūdān," several groups who embraced the clerical vocations are introduced. Among these are the early "Ibadi Berbers, post-Almoravid Sanhaja, Zawāyā, Djula, Fulbe, and Wolof" who have been the main teachers and messengers of Islam.

In order to achieve their goal of establishing commercial and religious centers of learning, Muslims adopted an expansion policy based on both external and internal factors to enhance the control of major viable centers of commerce and Islamic scholarship. Accordingly, the legendary city of Timbuktu was established as a commercial hub in West Africa approximately a millennium ago. The city is now known for being deserted and ravaged by war. However, this was not the case historically. Timbuktu became a significant religious, cultural, and commercial center, with residents travelling to neighboring African countries during the height of the ancient Mali

5 Ibid., 38.

6 Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "Review of Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa, by Ousmane Oumar Kane; Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition of West African Islam by Lamin Sanneh," *African Studies Review* 60, no. 1 (April 2017): 228-232.

Empire to acquire knowledge and engage in commercial activities. In that period, Timbuktu was experiencing a golden age of commercial and intellectual development. Merchants from Libya, Algeria, and numerous other cities of North Africa congregated in Timbuktu to purchase gold and slaves, exchanging these commodities for salt from Taghaza in the Sahara and cloth and horses from North African.⁷ Timbuktu is renowned for its contributions to Islamic and global civilization, particularly in the realms of scholarship and the production of a vast corpus of books, dating back to the 14th century. The city was renowned for its educational institutions, which produced a number of prominent scholars whose reputations were widely recognized across the Islamic world. The city also boasted a considerable number of 25,000 scholars, many of whom had studied in Mecca and Egypt. The University of Timbuktu was held in high esteem throughout sub-Saharan Africa, renowned for its exceptional brilliance in the Islamic world.⁸

Arabic sources pay particular attention to commerce, for this was the vehicle of contact with Bilād al-Sūdān. One of the countries famous in this regard was ancient Ghana, and al-Ya'qfibi, writing in A.D. 872, speaks of the abundance of gold there. In their descriptions, first of Ghana and then of Mali, the Arab writers devoted a good deal of their chronicles to the commercial theme so that a detailed picture is presented of commercial life and activity in the medieval African kingdoms.⁹

Curriculum and Knowledge Transmission

The curriculum and the body of knowledge to be conveyed through teaching and learning usually take place within formal educational contexts. It comprises four dimensions of curriculum theory such as aims or objectives, content or subject matter, methods or procedures, and evaluation or assessment. The Timbuktu Learning Center introduced the major genres of West African Islamic learning, including scriptural studies, law, biographically informed Prophetic studies, theology, Sufism, the Arabic language, the "talismanic

7 Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013.

8 Ibid.

9 Lamin Sanneh, "The Origins of Clericalism in West African Islam," *The Journal of African History* 17, no. 1 (1976): 50.

sciences" of divination and healing, and the Islamic enrichment of vernacular languages.¹⁰

In addition to the religious courses, students were also required to study Grammar (nahw), lettering style and rhetoric (Balaghah), and Logic (Mantiq). Sankore University was one of the most notable institutions of Islamic learning in West African history, which was established in the 14th century and survived till today.¹¹ The structure was initially a mosque (Masjid in Arabic), built by the renowned Emperor of that time (Mansa Musa) in the year 1327. By the end of Mansa Musa's reign (early 14th century CE), the Sankore Masjid (a great tawny, pyramid structure laced with protruding wooden support beams) had been converted into a fully staffed Madrassa (Islamic school, or in this case, university) with the largest collections of books in Africa since the Library of Alexandria. Timbuktu's Sankore University was renowned for its superior level of learning, which surpassed that of all other Islamic centers worldwide. The Sankore Masjid was capable of accommodating 25,000 students and boasted one of the largest libraries in the world comprising between 400,000 and 700,000 manuscripts. Sankore University had successfully produced engineers, architects, astronomers, and renowned Scholars who were able to compete with their contemporaries in other dynasties. Al-Wazan discovered a considerable number of professionals, including doctors, judges, priests and other scholars, who had received their education at the city's renowned academic institutions.¹² Two brief references in early Arab sources confirm the growth of Islamic learning and practice in Africa. This evidence illustrates Islamic clerical movement and its influence.

The objective of Muslim scholars was to establish a distinct Islamic meaning and identity. The Muslim political community was delineated by a cohort of clerics who determined its boundaries and distributed resources. Over time, the definition of "Islam" became increasingly rigid, which resulted in the overthrow of previously Islamic states and

10 Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "Review of Beyond Timbuktu," 228-232.

11 Jennifer Lofkrantz, "Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa, History," *History: Reviews of New Books* 45, no. 5 (2017): 127-128.

12 Said Hamdun and Noël King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1975).

the enslavement of Muslim subjects.¹³ Furthermore, the study of Timbuktu and its intellectual heritage continues to be of great significance in the history of early West African education. It is therefore essential to consider the origins of scholarship and the legacy of scholars in modern Africa, with a particular focus on the contributions of Timbuktu scholarship.

Al-Hajj Salim Suwari: The Prototype Cleric and Foundation of Jakaba Learning Centre in Senegambia

It is important to recognize that the Serahuleh, a group of Soninke in Senegambia, constitute a discrete cultural and linguistic community that embraced Islam and established a distinct scholarly and clerical community within the broader Soninke ethnicity. In order to ensure the continued survival of their distinct scholarly and clerical profession, they adopted a range of strategies for sustaining themselves. In the wake of the destruction of Timbuktu, the Jahanke group of the Serahuleh, who had embraced Islamic clericalism as a profession, reidentified themselves as Jahanke, subsequently settling evacuated and settled in the ancient town of Masina under the Mali Empire. This information is derived from Ibn Battuta's account, which details his visit to Jaha-Masina in 1352. He provided a detailed account of the religious devotion and intellectual curiosity that characterized the inhabitants of the town. Jaha-Masina was the place of origin of the founder of the pacific Islamic clerical tradition, al-Hajj Salim Suwari. Thus, the area became known as Jaha Messina, and the Jahanke clerics employed an Arabic phrase, "*ahl al-Jaha*" to symbolize their ancient clerical origin.¹⁴ In this context, the Jahanke scholarly community utilized their clerical expertise and services in exchange for material support from their secular and affluent trading cousins and on the neighboring communities, in order to expand their personal following and patronage.¹⁵

Al-Hajj Salim Suwari was an exceptional religious figure, distinguished by his charisma and devotion, who served as the clerical

13 Abdi O. Shuriye and Dauda Sh. Ibrahim, "Timbuktu Civilization and its Significance in Islamic History," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 4, no. 11 (2013): 696-794.

14 Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 80-83.

15 Ivor Wilks, "Al-Hajj Salim Suwari and The Suwaris: A Search for Sources," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, no. 13 (2011): 1-79.

patriarch of the Jahanke clerical group. He epitomized the principles of Jahanke pacific clericalism. The tradition of Jahanke confirms that he performed pilgrimage seven times during which he decided to settle in Mecca as a watchman to the Holy House until his death. According to Lamin Sanneh, Al-Hajj Salim was in a vision by Prophet Muhammed (SAW) in which he was instructed to return to Africa with the intention of disseminating Islam. "He had not intended to return to Africa from Mecca, but the dream he had there urged him to return and undertake missionary work. Thus opened a chapter in his life which was to leave a permanent imprint on West African Islam."¹⁶ He adopted the non-violent Islamization model of Timbuktu, which was centered on teaching and preaching with the objective of ensuring the continuity and preservation of the community of intellect and scholars. His return to Africa was met with a warm welcome. Both the Jahanke chronicles and oral tradition confirm that he was sometimes referred to as M'bemba Laye Suware, meaning progenitor of the Jahanke clerical group and the founder of the Pacific clerical mission.¹⁷

The Jahanke trace their descent from the ancestor of the Soninke of ancient Ghana. Local traditions claim that after the Soninke were islamized by the descendants of Uqbah b. Nafic, the affairs of religion were left in the hands of a specialised religious elite. Patronized by affluent trading populations and powerful local chiefs, this religious elite developed into a separate caste, living by religion and tillage. The man who established the professional identity of this religious elite was al-Hajj Salim Suwari.¹⁸

In the wake of his seventh and final pilgrimage to Mecca, Al-Hajj Salim arrived in Diakha Masina, situated on the Niger bend. Upon his return, he settled in Diakha Masina, where he inspired numerous clerics who subsequently relocated to various other parts of Sudan. His influence extended towards southern Senegambia, disseminating the Suwarian tradition of peaceful Islam.¹⁹ Through their interactions and conversions of Manding Dyulas, Islam reached as far as the forest region, where they established trade networks. The clerical

16 Lamin Sanneh, "The Origins of Clericalism in West African Islam," 56–57.

17 Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad*, 80–83

18 Lamin Sanneh, "Futa Jallon and the Jakhanke Clerical Tradition, Part I: The Historical Setting," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 12, no. 1 (1981): 38–64.

19 Ibid.

personalities and the pacific character of Jahanke influenced a significant number of conversions to Islam. Jihad was not even a viable option at any given point in time. Al-Hajj Salim and his sizable community were compelled to evacuate Masina and settle in the Upper Senegambia region of Bambuk due to an unspecified political upheaval in Masina. Additional sources provide further insight into the reasons for this clerical migration to the Senegambia region of Bambuk, confirming Alhaji's dedication to avoiding assuming secular responsibilities and involvement in armed conflict. Consequently, in the examination of Jahanka clerical dispersion and migration, fundamental themes of political withdrawal and avoidance of armed conflict are explored.

Upon his departure from Jaha-Masina, al-Hajj Salim was accompanied by a number of followers including students, family members, clan members, sympathizers, and disciples. He initially took up residence in Jafunu and subsequently in Jaha-Bambuk. In his account, Charles Monteil mentions only three of al-Hajj Salim's disciples: Salla Kebe, Baba Kamara (also known as Wage), and Fa Abdullahi Marega, whose descendants subsequently settled in Mulline, near Kunyakari.²⁰

The Jakaba Learning Center adopted the Islamic calendar as a significant element in process of disassociating from animist sects and fortifying the Islamic tradition. However, for those living rural in areas, the decision was not so straightforward. Both calendar systems were adopted. The lunar calendar was used for Islamic rituals and ceremonies in civil society, whereas the solar calendar was employed for the duties and practices associated with the agricultural year. navigating between two different calendar systems requires making choices because Islam's lunar obligations - fasting during Ramadan, celebrating the New Year, and making the pilgrimage to Mecca do not align with the cyclical agricultural period.²¹ The ability to make informed choices is contingent upon awareness and its importance. It is within this context that the role of clerical leadership and guidance becomes pivotal. From this perspective, reform would entail a shift in values that is contingent upon the observance of agricultural rituals in accordance with the seasonal cycle. The Muslim cleric, armed with the

20 Sanneh, Lamin, *Beyond Jihad*, 92.

21 Ibid., 92.

scriptures, daily discipline, style of dress, and moral codes, offers an attractive religious option, that is supported by the values of the Holy Qur'an, a traditional knowledge system, regular public compliance, education, and international advantage.

The clerical community is subdivided into four principal segments, each under the pastoral guidance of al-Hajj Salim. The first segment is Suwarekunda, followed by Daramekunda, Fofan-Girasikunda and Fadigakunda. Each clerical segment is assigned a specific responsibility. The Suwarekunda were responsible for general supervision of the rabbinical office, the maintenance of vocations, and supervision of the daily affairs of the community.²² Al-Hajj Salim held the position of Imam Rattib, which is a religious superior. Additionally, he was tasked with the management of political relations with the rulers of Mali. The Suwari group was regarded as the prospective heirs of al-Hajj Salim. The Fofana family was responsible for trade and the provision of public goods. Fadiga was responsible for the oversight of student affairs, which encompassed a range of duties including the maintenance of student welfare, discipline, recruitment, the management of alumni relations, and the supervision of student deployment. In a recent interview, TSK, our source on the subject, described the leaders of the four divisions as *rijāl al-sālihīn*, or righteous leaders. By virtue of their dedication and sincere desire to receive blessings from al-Hajj Salim, they established the future course of Suwarian Islam. According to family stories, during the schism of Jaka-Bambuk in the fourteenth century, significant clerical migrations occurred towards Dentilia, Khasso, Bundu, and Upper Senegambia, with a notable diaspora extending to Hausa territory. The Bundu clerical centers, in particular Didecoto, were of considerable size and importance.

Mama Sambu Gassama and the Rise of Sutuko Learning Centre in The Upper Gambia Region of Wuli

Mama Sambou Gassama served as a clerical patriarch and was the founder of the Jabi-Gassama clerical lineage. His encounter with al-Hajj Salim Suwari marked the beginning of the adoption and adaptation of Jabi-Gassama clerics into a pacific tradition. The two clerical patriarchs split up and undertook westward migration with the

²² Ibid., 94.

objective of establishing reputable centers of learning.²³ Upon al-Hajj Salim's departure from Jakaba, Mama Sambou Gassama relocated his community to northern Senegambia, where he founded a center of Sutuko in the upper Gambia District of Wuli.

The two men who established the professional identity of this religious elite were both twelfth and thirteenth-century figures. From Jaha-Masina they proceeded to lead their religious followers first to Jafunu and then to Jaha-Bambuk on the River Bafing, where they established enduringly renowned and esteemed learning centers, namely Jakaba and Sutuko. During the zenith of the Mali Empire, Jaha-Bambuk was respected as a holy centre over which political proclamation had no force. The political autonomy of their towns was reinforced by a reputation for pacifism, which both leading figures emphasized as a fundamental principle of clerical life.

At the time of the supremacy of Mali, a town jurist called Jakaba was situated in the interior of Malian territory. The king of Mali never entered it, and no one exercised authority there over and above the qadi. Whoever entered the town was safe from injury or molestation by the king. It was known as the town of God.²⁴

The Jabi-Gassama clerical segment developed in similar circumstances, assuming an important role within the Suwarian tradition. It is attested in oral tradition and clerical chronicles that the founder of the Jabi-Gassama clerical founder, Mama Sambu Gassama ("sambu" is the corruption of Jola in "Shu'aybu"), ultimately diverged from the path of pacific clerical Islam espoused by al-Hajj Salim during their lifetimes in Jafunu.²⁵ Upon al-Hajj Salim's departure for Dikhaba, Mama Sambu moved his community to northern Senegambia, establishing a center at Sutukho in the Wuli district, where his tomb is located.²⁶ The 15th-century Portuguese sources

²³ Ibid., 94.

²⁴ Ivor Wilks, "Al-Hajj Salim Suwari and The Suwaris: A Search for Sources," 1-79.

²⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad*, 94

²⁶ Lamin Sanneh's genealogical illustration reveals the Jabi Jahanke biological connection to the Kunta clerical patriarch. According to local traditions in Senegambia, Uqbah b. Nafic is a widely recognized figure in African history. Al-Hajj Mbalu Fode, a Maliki mufti of Senegal and ex-Touba, traces his ancestry from the Jabi-Gassama lineage, of which he is a member, back to Uqbah. In a short historical memoir, he notes that the cradle of the Kunta is at Qayrawan, where there is a

describe the locations of Wuli, situated on the north bank of the Gambia River, and the neighboring state of Kantora, located on the south bank, as being approximately 300 miles from the river's mouth. Diogo Gomez (d. 1500), a Portuguese navigator, explorer, and writer, was the first European to visit the area in the 1450s. His records indicate that Wuli was superior to Kantora at that time.²⁷ Gomez's arrival at Sutukho occurred concurrently with the Malian suzerainty over Southern Senegambian principalities situated on the north bank of the Gambia River. He reported that the region was under the rule of the King of Mali. In 1508, Duarte Pacheco Pereira observed that Sutuko was the principal settlement in the region, with a population of approximately four thousand.²⁸

In his writing, Almada portrays a group of itinerant religious leaders known as "pious bixirins" (Arabic for "missionary"). These individuals resided in separate and remote settlements of a considerable size, which bore resemblance to monasteries. Almada's portrayal reflects his perception of the scholarly and devout nature of the African Muslims residing in the Upper Gambia region of the Wuli district. Sanneh reveals that,

The account of Andre Alvares de Almada, written in 1594, is the first to pay close attention to the distinctive clerical character of certain towns. Almada describes the class of traveling clerics known as "devout bixirins" (Ar. Bashirun), who lived in secluded "large major establishments," corresponding "which arouse great religious feeling and devotion in the blacks, [...] (also) those who are studying to become bixirins." One of these "large major establishments" is Sutukho (Sutuco) whose leading clerics assume the position of an abbot or provincial.²⁹

In his account of travelling up the River Gambia in 1620, Richard Jobson, an English adventurer, provided a detailed and comprehensive description of the clerical status of Sutuko. Lamin Sanneh posits that

mausoleum of their ancestor, Uqbah al-Mustajab b. Nafi, was famous in Islam and chosen by Allah to conquer Ifriqiya as far as Ghana. A local Kunta historian writes that Uqbah is the ancestor of the Kunta people. The descendants of Uqbah are listed in Norris's book, "The Tuareg: Their Islamic Legacy and Its Diffusion in the Sahel."

²⁷ Richard Jobson, *The Discovery of the River Gambia 1623*, ed. David P. Gamble and Hair P. E. H. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1999), 260-261.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad*, 96.

the account of Diogo Gomez, a Portuguese navigator, explorer, and writer who made first-hands observations regarding the same subject, has not been adequately incorporated into the discourse. Notwithstanding Jobson's assertion on the well-defined tradition of Islamic clerical practice that he observed in Sutukho, this aspect has been overlooked by scholars.³⁰ The religious life of the clerics, as described by Jobson, appears to be firmly established and not merely a matter of local idiosyncrasy. Jobson's engagement with the subject matter was sufficiently prolonged to provide us insights that are corroborated by analogous centers as documented in other sources across the centuries. The parents instill in their children with religious beliefs and educate them in reading and writing. However, given the scarcity of paper and its limited durability, a small smooth board was employed as a writing surface, with a black ink-like substance used for inscription. The writing implement they utilize was akin to a pencil. The language of instruction was Arabic. While the children of the clergy received greater emphasis on learning Arabic, this was not the case for the children of ordinary Muslim families, as observed by Jobson.

The Jahanke Education: Narrative on Curriculum and Teaching Methodology

The Jahanke conceptualize knowledge as an act of embodiment, which is instilled through practical instruction rather than through intellectual processes. Education, particularly Islamic education, was a central tenet of the Jahanke tradition, to the extent that it became a distinctive feature that they continue to safeguard to the present day. In his account of Jahaba, Ibn Battuta offers a fitting description of the city's educational enterprise. He notes that "The holy city of Jahaba whereby the leader of the city, the Alkadi, and his community lived entirely on the principles of Islam, they are people who study the Holy Qur'an and other religious texts assiduously and they train their children until they memorize the Holy Qur'an." This signifies that education was obligatory and that children were required to commit the Quranic verses to memory at the age of twelve.³¹ To this day, this

30 Richard Jobson, *Discovery of the River Gambia*, 265-267.

31 Imam Fode Drame, "The Jahanke Educational Enterprise: Past and Present," *Lecture at the University of Virginia*, October 10, 2022.

practice is jealously guarded. Prior to the advent of Islam, a rudimentary form of education existed, whereby young adults were initiated into the knowledge and wisdom of their society. The advent of Islamic education saw the adoption and reinforcement of this earlier model of knowledge transmission.³²

In Islamic tradition, circumcision is typically performed at an earlier age, usually around five or six, with the objective of enabling children to start their education in the "karangtaa". Upon the commencement of the academic year a ceremony is held in which the newly enrolled students gather in the mosque or the residence of the Imam. The Imam inscribed the first name of each child in his right palm and the second name in his left palm. Subsequently, salt is added to the palms, and the children lick it so that the ink is ingested. This distinctive practice is of particular significance as they perceive knowledge to be an act of embodiment rather than a process developed through the intellect. The acquisition of knowledge is a process that occurs at the level of the individual, becoming integrated into their identity and experience. It is therefore necessary to engage with the subject matter through direct experience. Subsequently, the children are instructed in the opening *sura* of the Holy Qur'an (Su rat al-Fatiha), which they recite after the Imam until they have committed it to memory. This marked the end of the inaugural ceremony and the official commencement of their instruction in the karangtaa. The entire curriculum was based on the teachings of the Holy Qur'an.³³

The Jahanke people were initially instructed in the alphabet as a means of reading and writing. Fode Drame posits that some form of alphabet or literacy existed prior to the advent of Islam. He asserts that, "Noon" of the Arabic alphabet exists, but that the same is not true of "Raa" and "Aa". It is possible that this alphabet was adopted from Egypt prior to the advent of Islam. Notwithstanding the provenance of this form of education, it was a distinctive feature of the Jahanke tradition. Once the Holy Qur'an had been completed from the last to the first *sura*, it was then revised two or three times before being fully memorised. Upon the Jahanke people having memorised the Holy

32 "Islamic Education System in The Gambia, Gambia," UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, last updated: 24 January 2014, <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/litbase/islamic-education-system-gambia-gambia>.

33 Imam Fode Drame, "The Jahanke Educational Enterprise."

Qur'an, they proceeded to the subsequent stage of their education, which involved learning Tawhid (theology) from a book called *Aqida*. This book was divided into volumes, with each volume concluding before the subsequent volume commenced. The language of instruction during this period was predominantly Soninke, with lesser use of Arabic and other local languages such as Mandingo, depending on the dominant subject matter. Subsequently, the students were instructed in the five pillars of Islam, which provided the foundation for their subsequent studies in Fiqh from the book called *al-Akhdari*. This book was inspired by the Maliki school of thought and primarily concerned with the performance of prayers and purification rituals. In the past, individuals typically began their legal education by studying higher-level texts. From there, they could pursue specialization in the field of language studies, encompassing grammatical and conjugational aspects. It is noteworthy that while Arabic texts were employed as a pedagogical resource, instruction was provided in the local language. Some students concentrated exclusively on Arabic grammar. Upon attaining proficiency in language skills, students would proceed to Tafsir, which is the study of interpreting the Holy Qur'an. Upon completion of the requisite criteria and associated process, students were conferred the title of "Fode."³⁴

At a formal ceremony, individuals who had demonstrated proficiency in Tafsir and successfully completed the requisite examination by a committee of scholars would be granted the title of Fode. For the Jahanke people, the acquisition of knowledge did not cease at the fundamental level. Some proceeded to pursue further studies in the field of medicine, encompassing both traditional (using herbs) and modern approaches. They also investigated the potential of integrating specific Quranic verses with herbal remedies for the treatment of ailments. This was a form of medical study that involved the application of certain esoteric knowledge. As a leader, it was crucial to be able to address the issues faced by the people, which included the capacity to heal those in need.

One of the key areas of study within the Jahanke intellectual tradition was the science of alphabet. Students in this field mastered the art of combining the letters of individuals' names or objects to produce specific outcomes, akin to a chemist's manipulation of

³⁴ Ibid.

chemical compounds to create new substances. Additionally, the esoteric knowledge surrounding the divine names of God was rigorously studied as this was believed to hold the potential for addressing various human challenges. However, it was acknowledged that such profound knowledge could also be misused to produce harmful consequences or misfortune. Therefore, this discipline was exclusively reserved for advanced, postgraduate degree, where students were expected to possess a deep sense of piety and an awareness of the moral and spiritual consequences of unethical behavior.³⁵

The acquisition of knowledge among the Jahanke people was intrinsically linked to learning and the development of good character. While the Jahanke educational system maintained a connection with Sufism, it did not affiliate with any specific Sufist order or tariqa, despite notable connections to the Qadiriyya. Nevertheless, the Jahanke held the principles of Sufism in high esteem, recognizing individual scholars as Sufis based on their contributions to Islamic scholarship and the dissemination of knowledge. Renowned for their peaceful disposition and political neutrality, the Jahanke tradition ultimately encountered challenges from certain jihadist factions and French colonial forces, which disrupted their educational institutions. Consequently, many Jahanke migrated to Gambia under British rule, where they found more favorable environment for the preservation of their traditional institutions.

Conclusion

A historical understanding of Muslim dominance within the Medieval World System is essential for conceptualization the the flow of human and material capital from the Middle East to Medieval Sudan. Therefore, the establishment of Timbuktu, coupled with the expansion of Malian political influence towards the Western Atlantic region in the Senegambia served as a catalyst for Jahanke Muslim scholars, led by al-Hajj Salim Suwari and Mama Sambou Gassama to migrate from the interior of Mali. This migration facilitated the creation of vibrant scholarly communities in Jakaba and Sutuko.

³⁵ Ibid.

The towns achieved political autonomy and were distinguished by their pacifist principles, which were prominently endorsed by key figures within clerical community. These centers of learning flourished, ultimately contributing to the emergence of Futa Touba in Guinea Conakry, as well as Sutukung, Barrow-Kunda, and Niani along the southern bank of the Gambia River.

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Colonialism and the Desecration of Islamic Studies in Sudanic Africa: The Northern Nigerian Experience

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Introduction

Islam represents a civilisation,¹ centered on the worship of none but Allah. The Holy Qur'an, the teachings, practice and silent approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) provide a clear articulation of Islam's core principles. These principles demand absolute loyalty, acceptance, obedience, belief and submission to the will of Allah.² This can be defined as a state of peace, characterized by the surrender of one's will. Islam is not only a path to eternal happiness but also a comprehensive guide to life, providing detailed instructions on all aspects, including nutrition, clothing, business practices, marriage, divorce, and interpersonal conduct.³ The history of this form of civilisation has an Arabian root⁴, yet its message is universal and applicable to humanity

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1 Michael Brett, "Islam and Trade in the Bilād al-Sūdān, Tenth-Eleventh Century," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1983): 431. JSTOR, downloaded on 2nd June 2023.

2 John Whitney Hall, ed., *History of the World: Earliest Times to the Present Day* (North Dighton, MA: JG Press, 2005), 170. See also Kamal Ahmad Adil (Compiled), *Atlas of the Islamic Conquests: From the Caliphate of Abu Bakr to the Height of Ottoman Caliphate, from Central Asia to Morocco, Spain and Central Europe* (Riyad, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2010), 51-52.

3 Abdulrahman Yusuf Maigida, "Historical Foundation of Islamic Education: A Contemporary Assessment," *Educational History & Policy/Comparative Education* (University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria), 3.

4 Geographically the Arabian Peninsula was divided into five physical parts of the Tihama, Hijaz, Najd, Yemen, and al-Urud. Tihama was the flat area or coastal plain on the Red Sea, also bordered by the mountains. Hijaz made up the mountainous areas also known as al-Sarat, stretching between Syria and Yemen. It is called al-Hijaz because it forms a barrier between the lowland region of Tihama and the interior (Najd). Najd, on the other hand, stretched from Yemen in the south to Sahra samawah in the north to Urud in the east. It was called Najd due to its elevated feature. Yemen lied to the south of Najd along the southern coast. Al-Urud was found along Yemen, Najd, and Iraq, stretching in rectangular form along the Gulf coast. It included highland and lowlands; mountains and valleys also called the land of al-

at all times. By the 11th century, Islam had reached the present-day Nigerian region through the Empire of Borno, spreading throughout Sudanic Africa, including Hausaland and beyond, with the support of African political settings, cultures, economies, and scholars.⁵ It was through these institutions that it spread and became established in the region long before contact with European imperialists.⁶ The *jihād* of the 19th century in Hausaland further entrenched Islamic principles within the administration, leading to the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate that successfully cultivated a culture of learning and scholarship. This effort produced a community of scholars, a rich body of Islamic literature, and the use of the Arabic script, *ajami*, as a means of communication and documentation. However, the arrival of European imperialism which aimed global dominance and control,⁷ significantly altered the trajectory of Islamic civilization in the region. The British colonial conquest of northern Nigeria in the early 20th century not only led to the termination of the Caliphal administration but also disrupted the traditional support for Islamic studies that had flourished for centuries.

The colonial powers, particularly the British and French, introduced new educational policies and systems that systematically

Yamamah and Bahrain. For additional information refer to Kamal, Ahmad. Adil, *ibid.* See also John H. Hanson, "Islam and African Societies," in *Africa* Third Edition, ed. Phyllis Martin and Patrick O'Meara (USA: Indiana University Press, 1995), 97.

- 5 Sudanic Africa stretches from the Red Sea coast of the present-day Republic of Sudan to the Atlantic coast of the present-day Republic of Senegal. Sudanic Africa reached its peak in scholarly activities during Songhai Empire, more specifically in Timbuktu. It was from this centre that Islamic learning produced most of the scholars of Hausaland, which made up the present northern Nigeria. Hausaland was part of central Sudan, now part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It was adjudged as the most literate area in the region at the time when it was conquered by the British. For more on this refer to Constance B. Hilliard, ed., *Intellectual Traditions of Precolonial Africa* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998), 1-3; See also Douglas E. Ferguson, "Nineteen Century Hausaland: Being a Description by Imam Imoru of the Land, Economy and Society of His People," PhD Thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 1973.
- 6 Gamal Mokhtar, ed., *General History of Africa: II, Ancient Civilisation of Africa* (London: UNESCO, 1990).
- 7 Gellar, Sheldon, "The Colonial Era" in Phyllis Martin and Patrick O'Meara, ed., 135. Also in Dan Nabudere, *The Political Economy of Imperialism* (London: Zed Press, 1978), 101-129; and in Bruce Fetter, ed., *Colonial Rule in Africa: Readings from primary Sources* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), Chapter 1-6.

marginalized Islamic tradition. In Northern Nigeria, the British colonial administration implemented policies that promoted Western education and the Latinization of the Hausa language, thereby undermining the use of *ajami* and diminishing the role of Islamic studies. This was part of a broader strategy to impose cultural domination and control, ensuring that the colonial state could maintain its authority over the colonized populations. The French colonial authorities were similarly hostile to Islam, particularly in West Africa, where they imposed strict controls on Islamic scholars and institutions. Their policies were shaped by a deep-seated distrust of Islam, influenced by the resistance encountered in regions such as Algeria. The French sought to replace Islamic education with a system that promoted a French identity, effectively stifling the growth of Islamic scholarship. These colonial interventions had profound consequences for Islamic education and the broader Islamic civilization in Sudanic Africa. The well-established culture of scholarship and learning, which had flourished in the region for centuries, was systematically dismantled and replaced with a Western-oriented educational system. This not only weakened the influence of Islam but also disrupted the social and cultural fabric of the communities in the region. By interrogating available primary and secondary sources using historical methodology, this article seeks to explore the historical impact of European imperialism on Islam and Islamic studies in Sudanic Africa, with a particular focus on northern Nigeria. The article examines what occurred, why it happened, and its long-term consequences for the development of Islamic scholarship in the region.

Trade Networks and the Spread of Islam in Africa

Contacts between Africa and the Arab world existed prior to the advent of Islam. A long history of commerce was documented by Arab writers.⁸ It was through this commercial network that Islam first made an impact, spreading along the coast of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean into the Horn of Africa and the eastern coast of Africa. Arab merchants, religious leaders, and traders, who arrived in these regions individually and collectively, settled peacefully and contributed to the

8 Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London/New York: Longman, 1984).

local communities. Subsequently, Islam spread from the north to the south across the Sahara, largely through peaceful migration and trade from around the middle of the 11th century⁹ onwards.¹⁰ Unlike the trade across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to the eastern seaboard of the African continent, which was carried out via ships, the trade across the Sahara to Bilād al-Sūdān was conducted by caravans, with camels loaded with goods.¹¹ Islam first reached Bilād al-Sūdān in the eighth century, but its spread across the region was gradual and unfolded through a complex process that lasted until the 11th century. The reasons for the conversion to Islam were diverse and multifaceted.¹² Collectively, these factors contributed to the spread of Islam, including economic, spiritual, and social considerations, as well as the prestige and influence of Arabic literacy in facilitating state building. Nevertheless, the importance of trade and commerce with North Africa cannot be overlooked. The Berber merchants, who settled as traders in some of the major towns and established trading centres, were the first agents to promote the spread of Islam in the region. The following groups were the various nomadic communities who traversed the region in search of pasture for their herds. The ruling dynasty at Tekrur was the first to embrace Islam, having been influenced by the Sanhaja Berber state of Audaghast.¹³ This subsequently extended to Kumbi Saleh, where the skill of the Muslim merchants in trade and their ability to read and write earned them respect and position as advisers of the rulers. In the 11th century Islam reached the Senegal Valley, Mali, Kanem-Borno, Songhai, and

9 The exact date when Islam was introduced into Western Sudan is not known due to extinct records which made corroboration difficult. Indeed, most of the other sources on the issue derived their legitimacy from the same sources. An earlier date was given of the 8th century, but the spread and dominance of the practice was only noticed in most parts of the Sudan by about the date of the 11th century as most historians agreed on.

10 Michael Brett, *Islam and Trade in the Bilād al-Sūdān, Tenth-Eleventh Century*, 431.

11 I. M. Jumare, "The Spread of Islam in Bilad al- Sudan, 900-1500", 198.

12 Nehemia Levtzion, *Pattern of Islamization in West Africa* (Holms and Meier Publishers, USA: 1979), 207-9, also in Paul E. Lovejoy, "Islamic Scholarship and Understanding History in West Africa before 1800," *This chapter was originally presented as the inaugural William A. Brown Memorial Lecture on Islam in West Africa at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, on 12 March, p. 2009.*

13 John O. Hunwick, "The Nineteenth Century Jihads," in *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, ed. Joseph C. Anene (Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1966), 305.

Hausaland in the 14th century. It is pertinent to note that until the 16th century, Islam was primarily associated with urban areas and the ruling class. The activities of prominent rulers such as Mansa Musa of Mali, Askia Mohammad of Songhai, Idris Alooma of Borno and Mohammad Rumfa of Kano facilitated its dissemination when they implemented reforms in their respective states.¹⁴

Trade played a crucial role in cultivating a sense of community and solidarity across Western Sudan. The respective communities benefited from the opportunity to interact with one another and with the various centres of learning in the region. As a meeting point for scholars, Timbuktu emerged not only as a centre of learning, but also as a hub for the publication of Islamic texts. Published studies on Islam were disseminated to other parts of the Sudan through the movement of scholars and students, who engaged in activities such as trade, preaching and education. Individuals from diverse backgrounds travelled across cultures and regions to obtain or expand their knowledge.¹⁵ Notable scholars throughout the region have traced their intellectual roots to this formative period and its defining experiences. The persistent movement and settlement of scholars, merchants and students across Bilād al-Sūdān during the 16th century further catalysed the spread of Islamic scholarship and reform. This, in turn, engendered a socio-cultural and economic matrix that deeply integrated the precolonial communities of the Western Sudan.¹⁶

14 Michael Brett, *Islam and Trade*, 431-4.

15 Paul E. Lovejoy, "Islamic Scholarship and Understanding History in West Africa before 1800", 214; See also M. Mustapha Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam, the State and Muslims in Nigeria and Niger," in *Transnational Islam: Circulation of Religious Ideas, Actors and Practices between Niger and Nigeria*, ed. Elodie Aparé (IFRA/Nigeria: Africa Study Centre, 2021), 15-16.

16 Usman M. Bugaje, "Some Reflections on the Development of Islamic Learning in Katsina, 1300-1800 AD," in *Islam and the History of Learning in Katsina*, ed. Isma'ila A. Tsiga (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, Ltd, 1997), 80-82. Similar highlight is made in Ahmed M. Kani, "The Place of Katsina in the Intellectual History of Bilād al-Sūdān up to 1800," *Ibid*, 24-34; and also, in Murray Last, "The Book And The Nature of Knowledge in Muslim Northern Nigeria, 1457-2007," in *The Book and the Nature of Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, ed. Graziano Krätli and Ghislaine Lydon (Leiden: Brill), 175-212.

Development of Islamic Education and Scholarship

The spread of Islam was accompanied by the advent of formal Islamic education. This has consistently been the tradition in all societies that came in contact with Islam. It is important to note, however, that Islamic studies constituted the sole form of formal education known throughout the West African coast for a considerable period of time. In Islam, the motivation for the pursuit of knowledge is fundamentally motivated by the desire to know and serve God. Consequently, both young and old are actively engaged in seeking knowledge about God. The common culture and practice throughout the region was to send children to Quranic schools from an early age, where a wooden slate served as the primary learning tool.¹⁷ This tradition was characterised by a clear understanding of the natural environment and the nature of the knowledge to be imparted.¹⁸ Generally, the tradition that emerged in the region involved communities at the district, town, and village levels being served by a team comprising both political and religious leaders, such as an imam and an Islamic teacher. The political leaders were responsible for administering the communities and ensuring justice among the people, while the imams led prayers, officiated marriages, presided over naming ceremonies and served as judges (qadis). Islamic scholars on the other hand, were entrusted with teaching the religion to both children and adults within the community.¹⁹ There was, therefore, a very close link between the communities and the Islamic schools. It was customary for travelling Islamic teachers to be hosted and provided for by the authorities before they settled down. In contrast, students were supported by individual community members, who provided them with sustenance. In return, the teacher would enrol children from the community into his school. In particular, under the Sokoto Caliphate, Islamic schools (also known as *tsangaya* schools)

17 A. Brigaglia, "Fi Lauhin Mahfuz: Toward a Phenomenological Analysis of the Qur'anic Tablet," <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110541441-003>, Published by De Gruyter, Downloaded, 9/13/2017, 10:45am

18 Amidu Sanni, "Rethinking and Repackaging Islamic Studies in sub-Saharan Africa: Responses to Modernity and Globalization –the Nigerian Example," Lagos State University, Nigeria, 4. (Accessed Via Academia, June 2023).

19 Mary F. Smith, *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa* (New York, Washinton, Printed in Great Britain: Frederick Praeger Publishers, 1964), 131-134.

were fully funded by the state treasury.²⁰ According to Baba of Karo town, whose husband was an Islamic teacher (*alaramma*) during those days, the learning system was supported by a vibrant and functional rural economy. The teacher and his students would take no food with them while on such long journeys in search of knowledge. At best, they carried a small amount of pocket money, which was often insufficient to meet their immediate needs.²¹ This was the first stage of the learning process,²² followed by a more advanced stage focused on Arabic and Islamic sciences.²³ Among the books studied was *Kitab Qawā'id al-Salat*, which deals with how to know and worship God. Other texts included *Mukhtasar al-Akhdarī*, covering purification and prayer (*salat*), *Muqaddima fī al-fiqh*, which teaches about the pillars of Islam and fasting (*siyām*), and various books on Arabic grammar. Through the study of *al-Muqaddima al-'Iziyya*, which teaches advanced *fiqh*, students were equipped with sufficient vocabulary on a range of topics, including marriage and divorce, commercial transactions, inheritance, etiquette, bribery, and corruption, as well as explanations of Prophetic traditions. Additionally, the curriculum included *Ta'lm al-Muta'allim* which addresses the ethical principles of learning, and the *al-Nawawi* collection of *hadith*.²⁴

At a more advanced stage²⁵ of the 'ilm schools, students studied *Bākūrat al-Sa'd wa Zubdat al-Madhab*, translated as *The Beginning of Happiness and the Essence of the School*. Works such as *al-Burda*, *al-*

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 This is the stage of *karatun allo* (learning using the wooden slate) which made up the beginning of the learning process. It was at this stage that pupils were introduced to the alphabets and into the deeper Qur'anic learning process.

23 In the Indian sub-continent, a similar situation obtains. A Muslim child's Islamic education begins with the *bismillah* ceremony when he is 4 years, 4 months and 4 days old. For details see Amidu Sanni, "Rethinking and Repackaging Islamic Studies in sub-Saharan Africa".

24 I. Ado-Kurawa, "The Jihad and the Consolidation of Sudanic Intellectual Tradition," in H. Bobboyi, (et. al.) (ed.) *The Sokoto Caliphate: History and Legacies, 1804-2004*, Vol. 2, *Intellectual Traditions and Contemporary Significance* (Zaria Arewa House, Ahmadu Bello University: Baraka Press and Publishers, 2006), 90.

25 This is the stage of *Karatun Zauze*, which is about going deep into studying Qur'anic sciences. In northern Nigeria this stage produces Islamic teachers (*Alaramma*), judges and the likes, who picked interest in Islamic learning and rendering of services to Islam.

Witriyyāt, *Marmūz al-Tantarānī*, and *al-Ishrīnīyyāt* were introduced, focusing primarily on poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). At this juncture, students delved into the intricacies of Arabic grammar, starting with texts like *al-Ājurūmiyya*, *Riyād al-Sālihīn*, and *Mukhtasar al-Ahādith al-Nabawiyya wa al-Hikma al-Muhammadiya*. Advanced studies in *fiqh* included texts such as *Irshād al-Sālik fī Fiqh Imam Malik* and the *Mukhtasar* of Sidi Khalil, marking the transition into the highest levels of the 'ilm schools. Additional texts at this level included the *Alfiyya* of ibn Malik, which focused on Arabic grammar, and *Maqāma* by al-Qasim b. Ali b. Muhammad al-Hariri, which covered Arabic literature. In the field of theology, *Nazm al-Kubra* was regarded as one of the most advanced works. These stages of the study system led to the emergence of a scholarly community with individuals specializing in various fields of study.²⁶ Some graduates went on to become judges, and others turned out to be Islamic scholars and teachers who provided guidance both to the authorities and the general populace on matters of existence and daily living within a shared community.

This system of learning resulted in the formation of a community with a certain degree of proficiency in Arabic, which they used to write and communicate fluently. It fostered the growth of an enlightened community and a medium of documentation in most of the major towns of the region. This was achieved through the use of Arabic script to write in Hausa language (*ajami*)²⁷, a development which facilitated communication, enabled the sending messages (such as letter writing) and supported record-keeping. Muslim scholars were employed by the ruling class as documentation agents in palaces and courts. The development of the *ajami* thus laid the foundation for an organised system of governance based on clearly defined principles of law and

²⁶ Ibid, 91.

²⁷ *Ajami* is a localised form of writing using Arabic alphabets. It served as a medium for recording minutes and composing letters in most administrative offices, particularly in Hausaland. When the Europeans took over the administration of the Caliphate in Hausaland, they found in place knowledge and a form of documenting knowledge using the *ajami*. For details refer to D. M. Shehu, "Hausa Ajami Writing in Hausaland: Origin and Development," in *The State and Society in Historical Perspectives: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Aminu Isyaku Yandaki, 1962-2019*, ed. U. A. Daniya (Department of History and International Relations, Usman dan Fodio University, Sokoto, 2022), 252-253.

order. Scholars seized this opportunity to support the institutionalisation of a fair administrative system which played a crucial role in liberating the community from ignorance. Their intellectual contributions, particularly evident in their writings across diverse fields of knowledge, serve as clear evidence of this effort.²⁸ In Hausaland, this tradition was further developed following the *jihad* that established the Sokoto Caliphate, leading to the creation of a centralised educational institution (university) in Salame that attracted students from all parts of the Sudan. Alumni of this institution became prominent figures within the Caliphate's bureaucracy, as well as in other domains.²⁹ Similarly, in most parts of Sudan, Islamic learning reached a comparable level of advancement to that observed in northern Nigeria which resulted in the production of notable scholars and significant texts on Islamic knowledge.³⁰ This system of education remained intact until the mid-19th century, when the influence of Christianity began to take hold, followed by colonialism. It was under colonial rule that this educational system was effectively dismantled, as the separation of state and religion discouraged direct government involvement in Islamic education.³¹

Colonial Rule and Islamic Studies

The colonization of Africa was a consequence of the 18th century developments in Europe, which gave rise to a distinctive form of civilization characterized by an overreliance on science and technology. The motivation for this endeavour can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution and the competitive nature of the era. The objective was to safeguard the interests of those who had invested

28 Ibid, 255.

29 Ado-Kurawa, "The Jihad and the Consolidation of Sudanic Intellectual Tradition," 88.

30 It did not just produce scholars and books, it also motivated communities based on their understanding of the needs of the faith. See I. M. Jumare, "The Spread of Islam in Bilad al- Sudan, 900-1500," 201-210.

31 Çağrı Tuğrul Mart and Alpaslan Toker, "How did British Colonial Education in Africa become a Reason for Decolonization?", *2nd International Symposium on Sustainable Development*, (June 8-9, 2010) Sarajevo. See also Abdullahi Sule-Kano, "The Almajiri Phenomenon: Understanding the Traditional Quranic System and General Education Crisis in Northern Nigeria", paper presented at the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) branch of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, public lecture series, Bauchi – Nigeria April 7th 2017, 7-8.

capital in the emerging industries.³² This effort to protect the growing industries from collapse, due to the tendency of profit decline, forms one of the most scientific explanation of the European conquest and colonization of Africa.³³ The objective was to identify regions with large populations and, consequently, sizeable markets for the finished products of the European industries. In this way, colonization became a civilizing mission, shaped by a capitalist culture of making profit at any cost, as well as the mission of spreading Christianity. The 19th century thus saw the expansion of Western imperialism, led by Britain and later joined by other European powers such as France, Germany, Portugal, and Belgium. This period also witnessed the spread of Christianity in Africa, which set the stage for the stagnation of Islamic learning.³⁴ The establishment of colonial borders disrupted the longstanding relationships that existed between the states.³⁵ It introduced and enforced new models in almost every aspect of society, including justice system, cultural life, Islamic studies, and Muslim education in general.

The introduction of new curricula and a revised school system effectively marginalised Islamic tradition which created an environment that was incompatible with the past. French policy toward Islam and Islamic society was clearly driven by distrust, leading to the imposition of a French identity in French Africa. The French colonial authorities exercised persistent and unyielding control that severely limited the activities of Islamic scholars. This hostility can be traced back to the French Revolution, which was openly hostile to religion, including Christianity. The separation of church and the state, as a result of the revolution, was accompanied by a condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church, which was characterised as obscurantist, feudal and authoritarian. The same outlook was applied to Islam, resulting in policies that were hostile to all its

32 Dan Nabudere, *The Political Economy of Imperialism*; see also Fetter Bruce, *Colonial Rule in Africa*; and Gellar Sheildon, "The Colonial Era," 135.

33 Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1979.

34 Çağrı Tuğrul Mart and Alpaslan Toker, "How Did British Colonial Education in Africa," 365.

35 Gwadabe "Reformist Islam," 16-7.

activities.³⁶ This stance was also influenced by the resistance mounted in Algeria against French colonization in the 19th century. Consequently, the French colonial office issued a publication that served as a model for administering French Muslim-dominated colonies. Following this, all anti-colonial resistance movements were banned, and the French colonial authority revoked all permits for religious activities. In French West Africa, this policy resulted in the prohibition of fully established brotherhoods and marabout structures, with even the slightest threat from an individual cleric being intolerable.³⁷ In the case of the Niger Republic, this policy prompted numerous scholars and students to migrate to Nigeria in search of Islamic education.³⁸

A distinction can be made between the British and French colonial policies. Unlike the French, the British colonial policy relied on the use of the existing political structure (implementing it as indirect rule), which appeared more tolerant, but was ultimately illusory.³⁹ The British policy was structured on the strategy of *appropriation*, *containment* and *surveillance*. In Nigeria, these strategies were particularly significant given the region's deeply rooted culture of scholarship and learning. As a result, the British adopted a middle-ground approach, balancing their colonial interests with missionary ambitions. To further their imperial and missionary objectives, Colonel Frederick Lugard was appointed as the High Commissioner of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1900.⁴⁰ Given this strategic stance, the British exhibited no interest in advancing Islamic studies. Their mission was fundamentally shaped by the conviction, widely held by missionaries, that Islam, if permitted to flourish, had the potential to exert dominance across Africa. This was corroborated by

36 Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam," and also Remi P. Clignet and Philip J. Foster, "French and British Colonial Education in Africa," *University of Chicago Press Journal, Source: Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Oct., 1964): 191-198.

37 Roman Loimeier, "Political Dimensions of the Relationship between Sufi Brotherhoods and the Islamic Reform Movement in Senegal," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. Frederick de Jang and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 341-56.

38 Mustapha Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam".

39 Ibid.

40 Fetter Bruce, *Colonial Rule in Africa*, 96, also in Sanni Amidu, "Rethinking and Repackaging Islamic Studies," 4.

the European-Muslim encounters in the Maghreb, which demonstrate that Islam is a competing religion and civilization, posing as a superior, universal, comprehensive way of life, endowed with an inherent power of resistance.⁴¹ The massive resistance encountered in the Sokoto Caliphate and the Emirate of Borno further demonstrated the people's determination to maintain their independence.⁴²

The longstanding literary culture in northern Nigeria presented the British with a relatively straightforward challenge. As Bugaje notes, the writing of poems known as *madīh*, highly developed and became popular in northern Nigeria since the 17th century. A number of scholars employed the Arabic alphabet (*ajami*) to compose poems on admonition and other related Islamic subjects.⁴³ The literary tradition was so advanced that it served as a means of educating and enlightening the populace on Islamic religious doctrine, as well as a mobilizing force against British colonialism. Among the issues highlighted were the decline in the observance of the daily prayers, and moral lapses in daily interactions. Scholars attributed these violations of fundamental Islamic tenets to colonialism, which introduced modern leisure and entertainment facilities.⁴⁴ As colonialism is dependent on the establishment of monopolies, the imposition of control, the maintenance of order, and the exertion of cultural domination to sustain itself, the development of Islamic studies, a form of literary culture, had to be undermined if colonialism were to survive. This consideration informed the British education policy. However, undermining Islamic studies was not a viable option at the time, given the deeply entrenched Islamic tradition in northern Nigeria. Consequently, the British colonial administration was compelled to adopt a more pragmatic approach, integrating Islamic education alongside the Western model in accordance with colonial

41 Gwadabe, "Reformist Islam," 17.

42 S. U. Lawal, "The Caliphate of the Subject-peasantry to the Colonial State: The Case of the Satiru Revolt of 1906," in *Shehu Usman Lawal: An Icon of Scholarship and Public Servant*, eds. I. M. Jumare (Sokoto: Department of History, Usman Danfodio University, 2007); see also Mohammad Abubakar Sokoto, "A Social Interpretation of the Satiru Revolt of c. 1894–1906," (M.Sc. thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, 1983).

43 Usman M. Tukur, *Muslim Scholars of Sokoto Emirate under British Rule, 1903–1960: A History of Reaction and Compromise in Northern Nigeria* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 2013), 63.

44 Ibid, 65.

educational policy.⁴⁵ This decision by the British colonial authority was the result of the efforts of the Advisory Committee on Education in the colonies, which was tasked with devising the most appropriate approach to the situation in northern Nigeria. The committee was under considerable pressure to address this issue, given the French response to their colonies and the push from the Christian missions for the British colonial authority to collaborate with missionaries. The rationale behind the missionary initiative was to benefit from government funding, as that they lacked the financial resources to support their activities. Thus, the collaboration between the British colonial office and the missionary community led to the formulation of the British educational policy.⁴⁶

Northern Nigerian Experience

It is a well-documented historical fact that European colonialism, whether by the French, British or Germans, was designed to address the crisis of capitalism.⁴⁷ In northern Nigeria, colonialism utilized the church to undermine Islamic studies. Of particular note in this regard are the roles played by Hanns Vischer and the missionary Dr. W. R. S. Miller, who were instrumental in this effort. Both were the intellectual architects of Lugard's educational policy.⁴⁸ It is therefore not surprising that British educational policy aimed to replace Islamic civilization and provide an education designed solely to instil a slave mentality in the colonized. This process began with the popularisation of the Latin script through indigenous literature. The objective was not to enrich literary study in northern Nigeria, but rather to ensure the dominance of the Latin script while marginalizing the Arabic and *ajami*, which were traditionally used by scholars in literary production.⁴⁹ This was evident from the information available about the individual appointed to oversee the project: Dr. Rupert Moultrie East (1898-1975), the grandson of John Moultrie, who was instrumental in establishing one of the oldest Churches in Southleigh,

45 Gwadabe "Reformist Islam", 17.

46 F. James Clatworthy, "The Formulation of British Education Policy 1921-1961 Final Report," Office of Education, Washington DC Bureau of Research (1969), 11-16.

47 V. Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

48 Sanni Amidu, "Rethinking and Repackaging Islamic Studies in sub-Saharan Africa", 5.

49 Usman M. Tukur, *Muslim Scholars of Sokoto Emirate under British Rule*, 88-9.

in Oxford. Dr. East's father was a Catholic Priest at Saint James 'The Great' Church at Southleigh, Oxford, while his mother was a sister in the same church.⁵⁰ Dr. East began his early education (nursery) at Dragon School, Oxford, and continued his primary education at Saint Edward's, also in Oxford. This background influenced the person Dr. East became, which explains his decision to join and support Britain's war effort during the First World War (1914-1918), and to volunteer for work in the colonial office in Africa. One of his initial recommendations as a colonial official was to encourage all colonial personnel to learn to speak and write in Hausa. Indeed, the Provincial Residents were instructed to establish educational institutions where student would be taught to read in Hausa, using the Latin alphabet. It can be argued that Christian missionaries played a significant role in introducing the Latin script in colonial schools, with the intention of weakening the influence of Islam in northern Nigeria. It is also pertinent to highlight that Christian missions were competing to convert the populace, and thus the introduction of this language policy was deliberately designed to impede the continued expansion of Islam. Through this strategy, the British colonial authority set the stage for the ascendancy of literacy in Latin script.

The strategy involved establishing modern printing facilities in northern Nigeria with the objective of generating literature for the colonized populace. According to the colonial office, this initiative followed an increase in the number of students enrolling in Western schools and the perceived need for reading materials. As previously noted, the objective was to shape the perceptions of the educated elite, with the intention of nurturing the next generation of leaders in northern Nigeria.⁵¹ The initiative to establish the institution commenced approximately two decades after the conquest, coinciding with the apex of colonial rule consolidation efforts. However, the establishment was only realised in 1929. Its operations started at a provisional location in Gidan Dan Hausa, situated in Nassarawa, Kano city, before relocating to its permanent site in Tukur Tukur, in the

50 Aliya A. Adamu, *Rupert Moultrie East 1898-1975: Tarihin da Sharhi A Kan Gudunmuwarsa ga Adabin Hausa," Juzu'I na Farko* translated as (*History and Contributions of Rupert Moultrie East (1898-1975) to the Development of Hausa Literature, Book Two*), (Kaduna, Nigeria: Whales Adverts Limited, 2017), 6-9.

51 Ibid, 91.

outskirts of the Zaria city. Three years after its establishment, Dr. East was reassigned to take over the leadership of the office. Among the responsibilities he was:

1. To produce sufficient reading materials to meet the needs of the growing number of Western-educated students and other interested individuals in northern Nigeria.
2. To oversee the production of reading materials for Christian missionary organisations within the churches.
3. To edit and produce books and facilitate their subsequent marketing in northern Nigerian marketplaces.
4. To prepare examinations in various languages of Northern Nigeria for newly arrived colonial personnel.
5. To translate colonial government policy documents, rules and regulations from English to Hausa.

A policy that supported this initiative was assigned to the Vernacular section of the Adult Education Department in the Ministry of Education of the northern provinces, where Dr. East was based. The objective was to promote literacy and generate reading materials. One of the initial tasks undertaken was the implementation of the Latinization of the Hausa translation, transliteration and transcription of the Arabic and *ajami* manuscripts. Prior to the conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate, the languages of instruction in the Qur'anic School system –Hausa, Fulfulde, Zarma, and Kanuri– were written in Arabic script, known as *ajami*. Even after the declaration of Northern Nigeria as a protectorate in 1903, the use of *ajami* was reported to be pervasive in the administration of the Native Authority. Subsequently, the colonial authorities reversed the initial policy. Lord Lugard ordered the use of Latinized Hausa instead. Two decisive measures were implemented to prevent the continued use of *ajami*. The initial measure was the designation of the English language as the sole official language of the colonial authorities. The second was the introduction of the Latin alphabet to replace the Arabic script. The consequence of this policy was that traditional scholars were effectively rendered "illiterate" in an official capacity. The colonial state deemed the traditional Qur'anic school system to be irrelevant in the dispensation of knowledge as far as the colonial state was

concerned.⁵² This represented a significant obstacle to the continued development of the traditional Qur'anic school system and constituted a serious hurdle in preparing younger students to navigate the challenges of modern times. This, in turn, has contributed to the system's current decline and, arguably, its failure.

The advent of the printing press facilitated the production of books in Hausa with Latin script. Dr. East devised another plan, which involved a writing competition among the Western-educated northern Nigerians. This task initiated the production of the Latinized books, including *Shehu Umar* by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, *Ruwan Bagaja* by Abubakar Imam, *Gandoki* by Bello Kagara, *Idon Matambayi* by Muhammadu Gwarzo and *Jiki Magayi* by Rupert East and John Tafida. These books did not address the pressing issues of colonial domination and economic deprivation in northern Nigeria in a meaningful way.⁵³ Instead, they contributed to diverting public attention from the pernicious effects of colonial rule, lulling the populace into a state of complacency.⁵⁴ To this day, the majority of readers have failed to grasp the deeper meanings of these books beyond their entertainment value. However, they were published at a time when the Nigerian communities were being subjected to naked colonial exploitation. Notwithstanding, the colonial authority sought to replace Islamic institutions that supported and encouraged the learning of Islamic tenets with the Western models.⁵⁵ Although Islamic studies continued, the subjects taught were simplified, with a primary focus on learning the Arabic language alone.⁵⁶

52 D. M. Shehu, "Hausa Ajami Writing in Hausaland: Origin and Development," in *The State and Society in Historical Perspectives: A festschrift in Honour of Professor Aminu Isyaku Yandaki, 1962-2019* (Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto, Department of History and International Relations, Printed by Gaskiya Corporation limited, Zaria, 2022), 259.

53 Muhammad S. Umar, argued against this view where he drew attention to the writings of Bello Kagara, Abubakar Imam and Abubakar Tafawa Balewato have said something about the colonial situation. See for details *Islam and Colonialism - Intellectual Response of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), 251.

54 Ibid, 91.

55 Amidu Sanni, "Rethinking and Repackaging Islamic Studies in sub-Saharan Africa,"

56 T. M. Muktar, "The Colonial State and the Desecration of Shari'ah Education in Northern Nigeria," *The State and Society in Historical Perspectives: A festschrift in Honour of Professor Aminu Isyaku Yandaki, 1962-2019*, (Usman Danfodio University,

The first advanced educational center to be established was the Shahuci Judicial School, which was founded in 1928 with the objective of training men for posts in the Kano Judiciary. Instructions in Arabic and Islamic studies were provided in Latinized Hausa and Arabic, while arithmetic and literacy in English were also taught. Katsina College, established in 1922, made a further contribution to this development by introducing Arabic language (but not Islamic studies) as a curriculum subject in 1932. This was followed by the establishment of Northern Provinces Law School. The aim was not to educate in the shari'a legal system, which was regarded as an obstacle, and but to transform it into the British Common Law. In 1947, the school was transformed into the School for Arabic Studies (SAS), with arithmetic and English added to the existing curriculum, which had previously comprised subjects of Arabic and Islamic studies. From that point onwards, the school received comprehensive government support, which sponsored its transformation into an institution specializing in teaching the Arabic language. A significant political event that supported this transformation was the conferral of autonomy upon the regions by the 1945 Constitution, which subsequently enabled the integration of the school's graduates into public service. Teachers graduated from Arab countries, particularly from Sudan and Egypt, were subsequently employed at the school. A select group of students were sent abroad, particularly to Sudan and England, to pursue further studies in law, Arabic and Islamic studies.⁵⁷ By 1954, the government had established a training program at the school for junior primary school teachers, and by the time of independence in 1960, a post-secondary course in Arabic and Islamic studies had been organized to lay the groundwork for the establishment of Abdullahi Bayero College. This new college of advanced studies in Arabic and Islamic studies subsequently became part of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (founded in 1962). However, it soon developed into a fully-fledged multi-disciplinary university in the mid-1970s.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the teaching of Islamic studies was

Sokoto, Department of History and International Relations, Printed by Gaskiya Corporation limited, Zaria, 2022), 91-104.

57 Amidu Sanni "Rethinking and Repackaging Islamic Studies in sub-Saharan Africa,".

58 Ibid.

transformed into a mere instrument for acquiring knowledge about the religion, rather than a means of serving Allah (SWT).

Conclusion

The objective of colonial rule was to establish sources of raw materials, markets for their products, and a supply of inexpensive labour. This objective proved particularly challenging for established Islamic societies in Africa, making it difficult for them to operate effectively and achieve their mission. Islam, a belief system that has been present in Africa since roughly the 8th century, gradually became deeply rooted across the continent. By the 15th century, it had not only permeated the fabric of most states but had also carved out a distinctive niche, solidifying itself as an integral way of life for many communities. As a religion with a divine text at its core, Islam places great emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge as a means of sustaining itself. Consequently, when colonialism arrived in Africa alongside Christianity, it encountered considerable resistance from all sides. In order to ensure the continued existence of their colonial rule, the European powers did not rely solely on the use of military force; they also employed strategies designed to weaken the influence of Islam. In this regard, colonial education policy promoted Western education, shifted the learning culture to the use of Latin script in place of *ajami*, systematically de-emphasized the study of Islamic studies, encouraging the focus on the Arabic language instead. Therefore, regardless of the specific imperial power in question, the underlying objective remained consistent: the establishment of a colony for domination and exploitation. In the case of northern Nigeria, this understanding informed the introduction of the Latinization policy and other related measures. Similarly, French policy, which claimed to disseminate a civilizing influence, instead constituted a form of cultural imperialism that actively discouraged the pursuit of Islamic education.

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The Digital Revival of Islamic Education

Nimmo Elmi* & Wambui Kabage**

Introduction

The genesis of Islamic education can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammed (SAW), who transmitted the Qur'an to his companions and to subsequent generations of righteous scholars until the present day. The modes of transmission and dissemination of Islamic education were face to face, writing on tablets of stone and paper where available. Students of knowledge typically travelled to the scholars and learning institutions that facilitated the dissemination of Islamic education. These institutions, to date which are mainly concentrated in certain locations around the world, have historically played a pivotal role in the transmission of Islamic knowledge. This remains the primary mode of transmission and acquisition of Islamic knowledge to this day. It is an immersive educational process where students literally travel to learn at the feet of the scholars; a beautiful and valuable tradition; but a tradition that must also adjust to accommodate a different type of learner that is emerging in the continent: the African children and youth of today.

Statistically, the African demographic structure is predominantly comprised of youth and children, despite the presence of a Muslim population.¹ This then informs our approach to the production of policies and mechanisms that will contribute successfully to the growth of Islamic education, with a specific focus on this demography. In the current digital age, learners are confronted with a deluge of unverifiable, unreliable, and often dangerous information, which has the potential to overwhelm them. This is occurring at a time when they

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1 The median age in Africa is 19.7 in 2020, making it the youngest population in the world. This is a significant age gap compared to 31.0 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 32.0 in Asia, 33.4 in Oceania, 38.6 in Northern America and 42.5 in Europe, the oldest continent. Currently, around 60% of Africa's population is younger than 25 years, and more than a third between 15-34 years old. By 2100, Africa should still have the youngest population worldwide with a median age of 35 (Mo Ibrahim Foundation).

are expected to navigate the rapidly changing landscape of technology. We propose a digital revival of Islamic education using a repository of authentic, reliable, and peer-reviewed Islamic knowledge. Islam came to revive the spirit of mankind through the dissemination of spiritual knowledge that was both enlightening and accessible to all. At the core of this tradition was the practice of reading, writing, and attaining academic excellence, which we believe can only now be preserved and made accessible to the world through the digitalization of Islamic knowledge. Failure to implement this strategy could result in the deterioration of the Ummah (the Muslim community) and the loss of our rich Islamic tradition. "Islamic education" is defined as *"an integrated process of imparting Islamic knowledge such that its recipients are equipped spiritually, intellectually and physically in order to execute their God-ordained roles"*.²

Abdul Hamid (2010) describes this as being connected to the Arabic word *tarbiya* which has been used to describe the process of "bringing out", "developing", "nurturing", "fostering", "nourishing", "rearing" and "cherishing" as applied to objects under one's possession. This being the point of departure in this article, we wish to argue for the preservation of transmitting education or *tarbiya* using digital methods. We argue that especially in the African continent, Islamic education is no longer as transmissible through oral tradition as it has been in the past due to the processes of post-colonial state-building. It can be argued that secular education has superseded traditional Islamic education, with a large population of Muslims in the continent having access to secular education as a result of public policies that have sought to relegate Islamic knowledge to the private school (madrassas) which are typically operated on weekends and school holidays. The authors posit that by digitizing Islamic knowledge, it can be made accessible throughout the continent and the world. The question that we seek to address is whether Africa is prepared for this transition and, if so, what would be the most effective methodology for achieving this goal.

Why Digital Revival?

Digitalisation is defined by Gartner's glossary as the "use of digital technologies to change a business model and provide new revenue and

2 Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, *Islamic Education in Malaysia*, RSIS Monograph number 18 (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2010), 7.

value-producing opportunities.³ Although this definition is frequently cited and utilized, it can also be employed to signify the utilization of digital technology in the fulfilment of tasks such as governance, education and even health. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda on Quality Education is defined as, education that is inclusive and equitable. The United Nations (UN) proposes that digital technologies are a pivotal instrument to achieve this goal. The recent COVID-19 Pandemic has further institutionalised the applications of digital technologies in education. These digital technologies have led to a paradigm shift in the entire education system. The role of technology in education is perceived to be dualistic, with the capacity to disseminate knowledge on the one hand and to act as a co-creator and organiser of knowledge on the other.⁴ Haleem et al. (2022) argue that the advancements in educational technology have facilitated a more convenient learning experience for students. Instead of relying on traditional methods such as pen and paper, students are now equipped with a plethora of software and tools to create presentations and projects. Furthermore, Haleem et al. (2022) also argue that an iPad is relatively lighter than a stack of books, making the use of technology more appealing to the younger generation. Additionally, the younger generation is also more aware of the impacts of climate change and posits that the transition towards technology could facilitate its mitigation.

Technology has also proven to be an effective tool in the context of crises, as evidenced by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, technology led to the emergence of new educational platforms– which significantly altered the way in which learning and teaching were conducted. The pandemic has transformed the ways of working, living, and social interaction patterns around the globe. As a result, the education sector has been compelled to adapt, driven by the necessity to digitise education and training in order to remain competitive and provide high-quality education. If the world has learnt anything in these past few years, it is that the traditional approach to education is unsustainable, and the dissemination of knowledge must change. Also, while online education existed before Covid-19, what the

3 <https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/digitalization>

4 Abid Haleem (eds.), "Understanding the role of digital technologies in education: A review," *Sustainable Operations and Computers* 3 (2022).

pandemic has done is to place a firm spotlight on the necessity for alternative access points to education. Students would have engaged with free Islamic content had it been digitalised.

The authors and directors of Zuri, who have run and operated the school for three years, became increasingly aware of the potential dangers of placing undue reliance on individual personalities to disseminate knowledge, particularly in the context of Islamic education. This was evidenced by the school's experience of a lack of commitment from the Islamic Faculty, which resulted in a high turnover of staff. The directors came to understand that the traditional mechanism of disseminating Islamic education was impeding the advancement of Islamic knowledge. The authors conducted interviews with numerous of school owners of Islamic schools, who also expressed their own concerns regarding the high turnover of Islamic educators. These owners identified several reasons for this high turnover, which they believed was negatively affecting the quality of Islamic education. The authors concluded that digitalising Islamic education and making it accessible to schools like Zuri would not only make this knowledge not only accessible and reliable, but also motivate the students to study independently, fostering an attraction to and eventual desire to engage and acquire Islamic knowledge. This drive was already present for secular education, which the authors attributed to the interactive and attractive digital educational platform that students were already engaging with.

In our view, Islamic education has been the preserve of scholars who have been required to be physically present in order to transmit the knowledge to their students. In the context of the fourth revolution, which is often referred to as the digital revolution, all information is readily accessible in real-time and in a timely manner from any location and at any time. Consequently, the digitalisation of Islamic knowledge would allow students to access scholars from across the African continent and beyond. This is in contrast with the current limitations of localised Islamic knowledge resources. The advent of search engines has made it possible to rapidly and economically identify desired reference materials. This is due to the development of technology, which has facilitated the digitization of educational resources and the incorporation of interactive activities. The utilisation of digital media to enhance student comprehension has

implications for the design of learning in the digital age, particularly in higher education. Digital media can provide contextual, audiovisual, and dynamically engaging learning materials.⁵ As constituent parts of institutions of higher education, Islamic schools must integrate digital learning processes.

Islamic education in this digital era is designed to cultivate a generation of Muslims who are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead a fulfilling, secure, prosperous and harmonious life. Islamic education aims to empower and nurture every Muslim to become an active, skilled, and intelligent scholar in Islamic studies and to cultivate expertise in applied sciences, particularly those related to the management of natural resources and the fulfilment of inner aspects closely related to faith and character. The current imperative is to adopt an appropriate approach that will enable a rapprochement with the digital realm, thereby ensuring a harmonious coexistence between Islamic education and the digital domain. This will facilitate the formation of individuals imbued with both spiritual and moral virtues. This is necessary because human life continues to evolve and adapt to changing times.

In the contemporary educational context, students are inclined to express their thoughts digitally, given that they were born into a digital era. They are described as digital natives.⁶ According to Prensky (2001) people born after 1980 are more likely to adopt a digital mindset when learning, diverging from their parents, who were largely unexposed to the digital realm. The digital revolution necessitated a shift for the latter, requiring them to adapt to the world of information technology and its associated patterns. This transition was gradual and complex. Those educators, who are unfamiliar with the digital world, and therefore unprepared are not prepared to accept the challenge of increasing their abilities to a level that follows their students' capacity will inevitably be left far behind. One significant challenge facing Islamic education is the limited role of the teacher as a source of knowledge, a facilitator of skill development, and an instigator of value formation. In the modern era, students have access to a vast array of resources that can meet their educational needs independently,

5 Petterson, 2021.

6 Ellen Johanna Helsper and Rebecca Eynon, "Digital Natives: Where Is the Evidence?", *British Educational Research Journal* 36, no. 3 (2010): 503–20.

negating the necessity for expert guidance within the classroom. In response to this reality, Islamic education must be designed in such a way that it can be accessed 24 hours a day, using digital features that are always available.⁷ It is imperative that Islamic religious education acknowledges the significance of digital technological infrastructure in order to facilitate classroom learning activities. It is not uncommon for the challenges encountered in educational, learning, and administrative operations to be attributed to the unavailability of requisite infrastructure. This issue must be addressed in order to facilitate more effective discussions of Islamic religious education in the future.

The process of refinancing presents a significant challenge for Islamic educational institutions engaged in the construction of digital technology-based infrastructure. Consequently, a competitive financial strategy and plan are required. In such a scenario, the government and private sector can be enlisted to provide the necessary financial resources to facilitate the requisite infrastructure development. Thirdly, the utilisation of digital learning resources is a further avenue for consideration. The advent of the Internet has transformed the way in which modern communities' function. It is undisputable that the utilisation of digital media, specifically the Internet, is essential for educational and learning activities. It is not possible to educate the generation of the digital era/industrial revolution 4.0 with only traditional media. It is of paramount importance to integrate traditional and digital media in order to enhance outcomes. An educator must be able to employ and maximise digital media to support the success of education and learning, as the success of education and learning in Islamic religious education is also impacted by the usage of media that supports and is consistent with the learning context.⁸

In the context of the current digital landscape, it is essential to recognize the distinction between two groups of individuals: digital immigrants, and digital natives. Those who fall into the former

7 W. I. N. Windy, "Modernization of Islamic Education Based on Learn from Anywhere to Build the Character of Students in the Digital Era," in *Proceeding International Conference on Islam and Education (ICONIE)*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (July 2022).

8 Mustaqim Pabbajah & all, "From the Scriptural to the Virtual: Indonesian Engineering Students Responses to the Digitalization of Islamic Education," in *Teaching Theology & Religion*, Vol.24, no. 2 (2021).

category were born prior to the advent of the internet and, consequently, lacked access to the digital world during their formative years. In contrast, digital natives, born in the era of the internet, were fully integrated into the digital realm from the very beginning of their lives.

Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants

This article makes a distinction between "digital natives" and "digital immigrants".⁹ The term "digital natives" is used to describe the new generation that has grown up in the digital age. "Digital immigrants" on the other hand, are adults who have engaged with computers during their adulthood. The underlying assumption here is that the digital natives are inherently technology-savvy, while digital immigrants may experience some difficulty with information technology. The authors use this distinction to argue that most of the policymakers within African countries with regards to educational policy are digital immigrants who fail to understand that the youth, regardless of background have a deeper understanding of digital technology than their parents. We concur that there is a disparity in access and infrastructure, yet we maintain that this digital divide can be bridged through the implementation of appropriate policies and a conducive mindset. The authors are aware that there are questions that arise as to the sustainability, viability and even acceptability of digitising Islamic education for African children. It has been argued by Faturoti et al (2022) that the African Continent lags behind the modern world in internet connection, which is currently expensive and unreliable. This is evidenced by the fact that the Continent was severely affected by the 2020 shutdown due to the global pandemic of COVID-19. This proved that most countries in Africa have not effectively integrated the Internet into the learning process, due to a lack of political will, outdated policies and the failure of African governments to implement the UAS objectives. These factors have contributed to the continent being labelled a "digital desert".

Despite the seemingly bleak outlook drawn by Faturoti et al 2022 where Africa is described as the digital desert, Rademacher, U., Grant, T (2019) observed that many African countries have leapfrogged into

9 Q. Wang, M. D. Myers & Sundaram, "Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants," *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, Vol. 5 (2013).

the world of smartphones and apps without passing through the stage of wired telephone usage. This has facilitated internet access for a larger proportion of Africans, and in technological terms, the internet revolution is booming in Africa.

According to the United Nations' International Telecommunication Union (2018), the African Continent may have the lowest internet penetration but, it also boasts the fastest increase in internet accessibility. Rademacher, U., Grant, T (2019) opine that the African values of sharing information for the benefit of the community, coupled with the adaptability and agility of our cultures makes Africa ready to be regarded as a starting point rather than a mere recipient of the ICTs.

Two African digitization success stories provide empirical evidence that supports the authors' proposition that Africa is ready for the digitization of Islamic education. Both cases are discussed by Rademacher, U., and Grant, T (2019). The first case study is GetSmarter, a small South African educational start-up that provided premium online courses with data-driven educational focus. It was founded by brothers Sam and Rob Paddock in 2008, and its business model was based on the principle that "the best learning takes place with support from and in collaboration with, other people." GetSmarter was highly successful in developing a service that delivered a more learner-centric approach to online learning. This was achieved by providing high-quality, technically reliable short courses, with the students receiving personalised support in terms of academic performance and technical and administrative assistance based on real-time learning analytics. The mission of GetSmarter was not only to provide knowledge but also to "improve lives through better education". In 2017, GetSmarter was acquired by the US-American edtech company 2U, who have maintained the GetSmarter brand.

The second case study considered by Rademacher, U. and Grant, T (2019) was GetSchool', one of a series of cutting-edge product propositions that African computer science honours students at the University of Cape Town in 2018. The product aims to provide online tutoring service that offers a rapid, one-on-one learning experience. Its distinctive feature is a multilingual student team that will undergo training in competencies required for tutoring. This will enable them to provide support to African students who require assistance,

matching them with senior student tutors who are suitably qualified and experienced. In addition to English the platform offers tutoring in Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, and other less common African languages. This initiative would assist African students from various backgrounds in achieving their academic goals and finding jobs that reflect their abilities, rather than their language skills.

The two case studies show that, despite Africa's connectivity challenges this is far from being a barrier to the Continent's capacity for ingenuity and the creation of digital solutions, both for its own benefit and for the benefit of the global community. The authors, therefore, propose the digital revival of Islamic education through the collaboration of Islamic scholars and educators from across Africa and the world. This collaboration would result in the creation of a repository of authentic and peer-reviewed information, with the aim of "Strengthening the Muslim Identity through better Islamic education".

The irony is not lost on the authors; where we are proposing to digitise Islamic education in Africa as a *digital desert*, but we already have precedent from our very own Prophet Muhammad (SAW), chosen by Allah (SWT) to communicate the Holy Qur'an to the people of Arabia, who at the time had little to no literacy. Nevertheless, the deserts of Arabia were from where the most sophisticated light of enlightenment would rise to impact the whole world. While the case for the African Continent may not be as overtly clear, it is quite obvious when one considers the numbers. Africa boasts the youngest population in the world, the majority of whom are Muslims. It is therefore clear that this is the demography that needs to understand this faith properly to effectively carry forward our beautiful Islamic tradition. To the authors, therefore, the answer to the question of whether Africa can digitise Islamic education is a resounding yes.

African countries are poised to leapfrog provided they embrace their cultural diversities which will allow the digital platforms to be used when designing and creating innovative ICT solutions. As cited, Africa is not only prepared for digital transformation but is poised to become a pioneer based on several factors that currently favor its strengths. A significant proportion of the Continent's population is comprised of young people. Despite the Continent's socio-economic challenges, the youth have been able to access technological solutions,

which have become quite affordable. This contrasts with the initial rollout of these solutions on the continent. Additionally, young people have access to cyber cafés, which are small shops with a few desktop computers that can be accessed for very low amounts. African youth are particularly active on social media, with the Continent's high rate of mobile phone ownership. According to the UN approximately 80% of Africans own a mobile phone.¹⁰ Africa that is depicted in the popular media that is not accurately reflect the reality of the continent today. Currently, Africans are at the vanguard of digital finance, with the rest of the world studying the phenomenon. Furthermore, the continent has been described as an incubator for digital technology.

The advent of the digital age presents an extraordinary opportunity for Islamic education to optimise its resources, even though there are still numerous deficiencies in the mental formation of students that must be addressed. By developing and implementing precise and exhaustive plans, Islamic education is expected to contribute to world civilization and demonstrate its existence by proposing innovative responses to a variety of challenges in the global arena that will arise in the future. Instilling character in children from an early age is a means of preparing a generation of the nation with character. These future generations who are expected to be able to lead the nation and create a civilised country, uphold the nation's noble values with good character, become a generation of knowledge, and adorn themselves with faith and piety. Consequently, the most effective approach to instilling character in children is through Islamic religious instruction in schools, which should be informed by a pervasive religious consciousness manifesting in all aspects of national behaviour. The integration of Islamic education with all subjects, including science and technology, is essential for the growth and development of religious behaviour. The combination of Islamic religious education with science and technology is essential, as religion is responsible for guarding and controlling the negative impacts of technology itself.

Conclusion

Initially, researchers were convinced on the dissemination of Islamic education through traditional face-to-face teaching methods

10 <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-july-2017/africa%E2%80%99s-digital-rise-hooked-innovation>

that had been used for over 1,400 years, and overlooked the possibility that Islamic education would benefit from a switch to digital, fearing that African children were not ready for this transition to digital education. However, these children have proven that the digital mode of education has not only been accepted by them but transformed their education and the way they view education. Their secular education is more student-centred as opposed to their Islamic education, which was traditional and teacher centred. We are convinced that if the Muslim identity is to be strengthened through Islamic education it must be digitalized. This would perhaps controversially transform the Islamic educators from the role of knowledge disseminators to that of knowledge facilitators. But without this digital revival, we remain hostage to the whims, capacity and location of our educators, which should never be the case as Islamic education was intended for all of humanity, accessible to all, for the transformation of humanity.

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Al-Hajj Umar Tall: Contribution to Islamic Revivalism and Resistance to French Colonization in West Africa in the 19th Century

Samba Diop*

Introduction

Al-Hajj Umar Tall has become a symbolic figure who played a critical role in the Islamic revival and resistance against European expansion into West Africa. Consequently, he was celebrated by the famous griots, *guelwels*,¹ *jelis*, performers, oral composers, and masters of the word (*Maîtres de la parole*) hailing from the Senegambia region. In turn, the patrons give gifts and money to these oral performers, a kind of *potlatch*.² Over the years, since 1989, the author of this article have conducted fieldwork bearing specifically on the two historical and mythical figures of Ndiadiane Ndiaye and El Hadj Omar Tall. This fieldwork took place in the Waalo region, northern Senegal. It is important to note that as a specialist of epic poetry, we derived our sources from oral traditions and literatures. According to C. Seydou, "The epic is the genre that condenses the maximum amount of cultural data elements which, in turn, are ordered in a precise form conducive to a semantic and pragmatic vocation: That of symbolizing an identity and that of calling to live this identity within the community that identity defines."³

As for the expression of 'tradition,' it is harder to define; in his work on South Slavic oral tradition, Lord highlights both the comprehension and appreciation pertaining to individual idiosyncrasies within the term 'tradition' because they (the idiosyncrasies) are so flexible and

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1 From the Arabic *Qawwal*, meaning a narrator who belongs to the Sufi order.

2 We narrate a similar story in *Épopées Africaines: Ndiadiane Ndiaye et Hadj Omar Tall*, (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 2003). The great writer Birago Diop also depicts a similar experience around 1934, when he returned from France after completing his veterinary studies. (cf. Birago Diop, *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba*, (Paris: Éditions Présence Africaine, 1947).

3 See Christiane Seydou, "Comment définir le genre épique? Un exemple: l'épopée africaine," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 13, 1 (1982): 86.

complex. He notes: "A tradition is easy to define, but not easy to know. It is the sum of all its parts, by which I mean that it consists of all the singers of epic, good and bad and all the performances, also good or bad, of all the songs, likewise of variable quality, in the course of the life of a culture."⁴

Africa in general —and the Senegambia region in particular— abounds with oral traditions; for millennia, the Word (*La parole*) has been used —and still is, to some extent— in order to create, compose, perform, transmit, and preserve stories; tales; epic narratives; legends; proverbs and sayings; poetry; genealogies, etc. Writing was hardly used, except in a few regions. In the West African Sahel region, the Arabic script has been used to transliterate and transcribe African languages. To cite two examples, we have *wolofal* in Senegal with the transcription of the Wolof language using the Arabic script; the Pulaar language has also been widely transcribed thanks to Arabic. The other example is *Ajami* which is the transcription of the Hausa language using the Arabic alphabet in northern Nigeria, present-day Niger, northern Cameroon and as far afield as present-day Mali. It is important to take stock of the two instruments played in these narratives, namely the *kora* and the *xalam*. Thus, epic narration and music go hand in hand. In ancient Greece for instance, many musical instruments were used during the oral composition and performance of oral poetry: the *kithara*, a plucked string instrument, the *lyre*, also a string instrument, and the *aulos*, a double-reed instrument. Some of (or all) of these instruments were probably used in Homer's *Odyssey*. The soundtracks contain the recitations of the epic narratives from Gambia, along with notes of the *kora* and *xalam*. Thus, these soundtracks merrily complement and enrich the written texts at once because these texts can be very dry; as is obvious, reading involves only

4 Albert Bates Lord, *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 78. Beyond tradition, one can consider writing history from the angle of 'regressive history,' a concept developed by Philippe Descola in his book titled *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005), 16; here is how the author defines this concept: "Look first to the present in order to better interpret the past." (Ibid. 17). Thus, with the enthusiasm that the disciples of Omar have for the latter, in the present time, their posturing can provide a better understanding of the past.

one of a human being's five senses, i.e. eyesight, whereas music adds hearing.⁵

It is being presumed that it is very difficult to distinguish between the historical and legendary (epic) figures. In other words, to separate fact from fiction is not an easy task. In a chapter of his book titled *Odysseus' Scar*, E. Auerbach starts by acknowledging that to write history is so difficult that most historians are forced to make concessions to the techniques of legend.⁶ He further stressed that in the "Old Testament, in so far as it is concerned with human events, ranges through all three domains: legend, historical reporting, and interpretative historical theology." In our discussion and analysis below, we discuss "the Life and Times of Omar," a section which provides a descriptive analysis of his birth, family background, childhood, adolescence, travels across the length and width of West Africa as well as his pilgrimage to Mecca. We also discuss Umar's encounter with the French colonizers and his subsequent disappearance in the cliffs of Bandiagara in present-day Mali.

In order to close these introductory remarks, we concur with G. Meyer to the effect that: "Epic tales are not historical tales, they are ideological reinterpretations to exalt the specific qualities of heroes."⁷ In addition to ideology, the main marker of these Senegambian epic narratives is Islam; the reader will come across numerous references to the Holy Qur'an and to the Islamic faith in general, which leads us to believe that these narratives belong to the category of the 'Islamic epic,' defined by J. Knappert as "a crucible in which various oriental motifs have been incorporated."⁸ In the final analysis, Umar –the

5 See Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by George Chapman, Introduction and Notes by Adam Roberts (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2002).

6 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 20-21. To complement Auerbach's remarks, one can read Paul Ricoeur who, in his book entitled *Temps et récit Vol. III- Le temps raconté* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1985) defines the reality of historical time, along with the concept of the configuration of time, as well as historical knowledge of the 'real' past. In addition, the author poses the following question: what does the term 'real' mean when applied to the historical past (see 203).

7 Gérard Meyer, *Récits épiques toucouleurs* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1991), 9. For a detailed analysis related to the interaction between history and oral sources, cf. Théodore Nicoué Gayibor, *Sources orales et histoire africaine: Approches méthodologiques* (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 2011).

8 Jan Knappert, "The Epic in Africa," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 4, 2-3 (1967): 190.

central character who is featured throughout these narratives— is hailed as a hero by members of his constituency, in addition to being sung about and celebrated in various languages by various cultures. According to Oumarou Watta, the epic of El Hadj Omar is found “among the Fulfulde, Bambaras, Songhais and Zarma as well as among the Peuls and all these societies appropriate for themselves and adapt to their realities the epic of Omar.”⁹ Indeed, he is both a complex historical personality and a legendary epic figure.

The Life and Times of Omar

The history of Shaykh Umar Tall, popularly known in the literatures as El Hadj Omar, is well documented in many history books. In a recent book written by Thierno Mountaga Tall, the author asserts that when he was born, Omar’s mother wanted to name him after her maternal uncle; thus, she chose the name El Hadji Yakhya Mandiaye Diop.¹⁰ However, a marabout (holy man) came to the house and, instead, chose another name for the baby, namely Thierno Mountaga Daha Cheikh Oumar Tall. This is his full name, shortened to Oumar or Omar Tall. Actually, a slight differentiation is to be made here to the effect that when it comes to naming the historical figure—that is, the person that actually existed—the name El Hadj Omar Tall or Sheikh Omar Fūtiyu is used, whereas the legendary epic figure is referred to simply as El Hadj Omar (in the French-speaking world). There are other examples of famous historical or quasi-historical figures who have really existed; naturally, their name, actions, and fame gave rise to an epic treatment; that is the case of Roland, said to be the nephew of Charlemagne. Roland is mentioned in the famous biography of Charlemagne titled *Vita Karoli Magnus* (Life of Charles the Great). Thus, in medieval France, *The Chanson de Roland* was born in the 11th century.¹¹ In most narratives, Umar as an historical figure, is

9 Oumarou Watta, *Rosary, Mat and Molo: A Study in the Spiritual Epic of Omar Seku Tal* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1993), xiii.

10 Thierno Mountaga Tall, *El Hadji Oumar Tall: L’aigle de Alwar* (Paris: Éditions l’Harmattan, 2018), 27. See the book by Samba Dieng, *La geste d’El-Hadj Omar et l’islamisation de l’épopée peule* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2018). see also Mohammadou Aliou Tyam, *La vie d’El Hadj Omar, qacida en poular*, transcription, traduction, notes et glossaire par Henri Gaden (Paris: Institut d’ethnologie, 1935).

11 In the final analysis, we can borrow the two expressions of ‘ancestrality’ and ‘ancestralized’, as developed by Djibril Samb, *L’heure de philosopher la nuit et le jour*

referred to as Seeku Umar; 'Seeku' (spelled in French as Sékou) is a deformation of 'Cheikh.' In the English-speaking world, the name is usually spelt as Al-Hajj Umar with the spelling adopted henceforth in this article. It is important to note that Al-Hajj Umar is named after Umar Ibn al-Khattab (RA); the latter was a leading companion to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Umar (RA) became the second Caliph after the passing away of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). He ruled the Islamic state for ten years.

In our article titled "The Wolof Epic: From Spoken Word to Written text,"¹² we recounted the circumstances surrounding the birth and life story of the hero. He is born during Ramadan, the holy month of fasting for Muslims. He refuses to be breast-fed during the day—in effect, fasting just like the adults. His worried parents consult with a marabout who tells them that the baby is not an ordinary one. As a child, Umar quickly memorizes the Holy Qur'an, thus showing his precious extraordinary intellectual skills. When he is somewhat older, he starts his holy wars (*jihad*). Umar travels eastwards, into present-day Mali, fighting and converting the natives to Islam. He continues his trip to Sokoto (present-day Nigeria) and then makes it all the way to Mecca; he performs the pilgrimage and, on his way back to West Africa, he makes a stopover in Cairo at the famous Al-Azhar University where he is challenged to demonstrate that he is a learned man. His hosts underestimate Umar's learning and show bias vis-à-vis the Tukolor chief being a black man, thinking that because of his sub-Saharan African origins, Umar would not be able to retain an adequate knowledge of the Holy Qur'an. Umar successfully shows his vast knowledge and erudition, gaining respect in the process.

Umar probably visited Gambia region after having accomplished the Mecca pilgrimage and, subsequently, returning to West Africa. According to one of our sources, —Landing Janneh, an inhabitant of Bakau, a town situated on the coast, a stone's throw away from the capital-city of Banjul— Umar was informed that there are seven (7) holy stones in the world, and one of them was situated in Gambia,

Tome 5: Qu'il est difficile de rester humain (Dakar: Éditions l'Harmattan, 2019), 107. All this to say that Umar was 'ancestralized,' therefore he became an ancestor, which fact, in turn, reinforces the character of legend built around his character.

12 Samba Diop, "The Wolof Epic: From Spoken Word to Written Text," *Research in African Literatures* 37, 3 (2006): 120-132.

(more precisely in Gunjur, nowadays a coastal town situated 56 kms south of Banjul). This was the mission that compelled Umar to go to Gambia. In those days, the concept of country borders was non-existent; Senegal itself was just about to become a French colony; thus, the region was experiencing the last stage of the vestiges of pre-colonial Africa. He encountered various ethnic groups across the vast region of the Sahel: Fula, Bambara, Mandinka, Moors, Soninke, Sereer, Wolof, etc. Today, The Gambia is a modern independent republic, after having been a British colony from 1821 to 1965. One must differentiate between 'Gambia' and 'The Gambia'. The former term refers both to the pre-colonial space which extended all the way into present-day Senegal and to the British colony, whereas the latter alludes to the independent country. Therefore, within the frame of these epic narratives, the term 'Gambia' is the appropriate one because the events took place before independence.¹³ During the colonial epoch, Banjul was called Bathurst; Henry Bathurst was a well-known English Member of Parliament and one of the stalwarts of the British colonial policy. The city was renamed Banjul in 1973.

It is important that we narrate some anecdotes relating to our fieldwork in Gambia which, in turn, hopefully shed light on Umar's arrival there. Umar was arriving from Senegal, thus traveling in a north-south direction. When he reached the village of Barra, situated at the tip of the north bank of the River Gambia, he wanted to cross to Banjul. Prior to that, according to our sources, Umar approached some men who were playing drafts (*yooté* in Wolof) wanting to talk to them; however, they were so engrossed in their game that they scarcely paid attention to him. He turned to the women and asked for water for his ablutions before performing his prayers; the women also ignored him. Thereupon, he decided to cross into Banjul. The reason he was ignored was probably due to his appearance for it is said that Umar was a humble man, poorly dressed, with a cotton-made boubou and leather sandals at his feet. Therefore, many people underestimated him, and quite a few even went to the extent of scorning him and showing him contempt.

13 On the Wolof in Gambia, see David Gamble & Linda K. Salmon with Alhaji Hassan Njie, *Peoples of The Gambia I, The Wolof* (San Francisco: Gambian Studies No. 17, 1985), pp. 41-43.

At this juncture, there are different versions of events: the first one states that Umar approached the owner of a dug-out and the man transported him across the river; the second version from Mansour Njie when we interviewed him in 2009: according to Njie, a man from Saint-Louis (Senegal) called Macoumba Diallo is the one who ferried Umar from Barra to Banjul. Diallo's family possessed dug-out canoes scattered between Saint-Louis and Gambia. Still, according to Njie, there is another version which proclaims that Diallo carried Umar in his canoe from Saint-Louis to Banjul. When he arrived in Banjul, it was a poor small village situated on an island that the British named Saint-Mary. Umar was welcomed by the Faye family, in particular Ibrahima Faye, the patriarch of the family. The house still exists today and is situated on Dobson Street; we visited it. It is a traditional compound with a vast yard surrounded by low separate houses; at the back, there is a small mosque; we were told that Umar's room was situated next to the mosque. That room does not exist anymore. The first night, Ibrahima asked his wife to bring an oil lamp to the guest; a few minutes later, the woman returned and said that Umar did not need the lamp because the room was illuminated by a bright light. Before leaving Banjul, Umar told his host Ibrahima that his wife was pregnant, an early pregnancy that the wife herself did not know of. Umar gave instructions to Ibrahima that, when the baby was born, he should be named after him (Umar).

That is exactly what took place for the current Minister of Defense is called Sheikh Umar Faye, named after his ancestor. All in all, Umar was well treated, be it in Banjul, Bakau, or Gunjur, so much so that it is said that he prayed for the women of the Kombos. Banjul and the rest of the Western Region, going southwards towards the sprawling neighborhoods of Serrekunda, Kanifing, Talining, Churchill's Town, Fajara, Bijilo, Brufut, etc. are all comprised within a geographical zone traditionally called the Kombos. According to one of our sources, the women of the Kombos are the wealthiest in the country, whereas the women in Barra are the poorest, this state of things is attributed to Umar's prayers. This illustrates the saying that a good deed is paid with a good deed and a bad deed with a bad one.

In adhering to the prevalent and extant chronology, it appears that after coming to Gunjur in order to see the rock, he found it, prayed there, built a small mosque and then left. The rock still exists and all

our sources mentioned it (Mansour Njie, Landing Janneh, and El Hadj Cham Joof). Needless to say, this rock is entrenched in oral popular lore. The rock is now enclosed inside a big new mosque that was built in the 2010s by the then President Yahya Jammeh. Prior to that, when we first visited the site in 2000, the rock was in open air and next to it there was an old mosque. People come from all over the West African sub-region (and beyond) in order to pray on top of the rock and then make their wishes. Before the prayer, they would perform their ablutions with sea water on the beach, the same spot where it is said that Umar did his ablutions but with fresh water because when he came there and needed fresh water, he had a spring splash from inside the ground up. Nowadays, that spring does not exist any longer; thus, people use sea water in order to perform their ablutions before doing the prayers atop the rock. During our interview with Mansour Njie, he said that in those days, the area where the rock is situated was a dark place, full of trees and wild animals.¹⁴ According to Njie, when he came to Gunjur, Umar was accompanied by his disciples; one of them died and was buried on the spot. Still according to Njie, Umar was in Fuuta when the existence of the rock was revealed to him thanks to a trail of light which he followed all the way to Gambia.

It is important to consider that the epic, in addition to its literary, poetic, and historical value, is filled with valuable information relating to nature (flora, fauna, waterways, etc.) Thus, many epic texts reveal to us the state of planet Earth before the Industrial Revolution and the advent of the machine; at that time, the earth was equated with the Garden of Eden. Thus, in traditional African societies —partly represented in the epics— communion, communication, and life in symbiosis with nature are established facts; thus, the Western conception of the naturalization of the world is not universal. According to Descola, "the way in which the modern West represents nature is the least shared thing. In many parts of the planet, humans and non-humans are not conceived as developing in incommunicable worlds and according to separate principles; the environment is not objectified as an autonomous sphere; plants and animals, rivers and

rocks, meteors and seasons do not exist in the same ontological niche defined by its lack of humanity."¹⁵

According to these oral epic texts, to various chronicles, and to oral lore and folklore, Umar headed east, toward Dinguiraye (in present-day northern Guinea) where he encountered various people (including his nemesis Tamba Bukari). After that he fought against the Peul chief Amadou Amadou of the Macina Kingdom¹⁶ and, finally, arrived in Bandiagara. The narrator often invokes another important town of knowledge, namely Timbuktu (in present-day Mali). Starting in medieval times, around the 12th century, Timbuktu gradually became an important trading and commercial center. However, it was mostly known as a radiant learning center to where students, scholars, and teachers flocked; needless to say, these people hailed from all corners of Africa and beyond. There, he confronted the French colonizer but was defeated by superior European fire power. Interestingly, M. Kane and D. Robinson give a vivid account of the encounter between Umar and Faïdherbe: "The portrayal of the two protagonists suggests that Umar and the clerical tradition rely on faith, while Faïdherbe and the Europeans look immediately to the question of material resources."¹⁷

Other famous West African figures are invoked by the griot, namely Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba (1853-1927) the founder of the *Mouridiya* brotherhood in Touba (Senegal). Likewise, Samory Touré (1830-1900) is also cited; however, these two leaders have not met with Umar Tall who preceded them. The most likely reason for the *jeli* to bring Bamba and Samory into the fray of his performance is to give more prestige to his narration. The authors conclude their remarks by establishing a virtual evenness between the two standard-bearers: "The encounter of the two men gives added legitimacy to the Umarian cause; the pilgrim cleric is 'equal' to the 'founder' of colonial Senegal." Are we in the presence of the opposition between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the layman? Not really, because Umar is at once a religious figure and a political chief who wants to establish an Islamic state, thus following in the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

15 Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, 70.

16 According to Hampâté Bâ, it was in 1862 that Umar conquered the Macina Kingdom (cf. *Vie et Enseignement de Tierno Bokar* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1980), 15).

17 Moustapha Kane and David Robinson, *The Islamic Regime of Fuuta Tooro: an Anthology of Oral Tradition* (Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1984), 107.

What gave additional power to Umar's leadership status was the fact that he belonged to the *Tijāniyya* Sufi brotherhood. He is referred to as 'The Grand Master of the Tidjānī Order.'¹⁸

According to H. Bâ, this Sufi brotherhood was created by Cheikh Ahmed Tidjānī who was born in 1737 in Algeria and died in 1815 in Fès (Morocco).¹⁹ Up to today, the *Tidjāniyya* brotherhood is very famous and alive across the West African Sahel in general and Senegal in particular. In Senegal, their headquarter is situated in the hinterland, in the city of Tivaouane, about 95 kms far from the capital-city of Dakar. It was founded by El Hadj Malick Sy (1855-1922), a well-known Sufi Malikite spiritual leader. Both Malick Sy and Umar Tall are the inheritors and spreaders of the teachings of Cheikh Ahmad Tidjānī in Senegal and beyond. Other religious brotherhoods such as the Niasse family of the city of Kaolack also belong to the *Tidjāniyya* larger brotherhood. Furthermore, the same author asserts that Ahmed Tidjānī and his new brotherhood were the synthesis of the previous brotherhoods (known as *turuq*-plural in Arabic) such as the Qadiriyya, Shadhiliyya, etc. Bâ also mentions a very important fact, namely that, Tidjānī's teachings were characterized by a high spirit of tolerance, coupled with open-mindedness. The reason why we insist on Bâ's idea of tolerance is the fact that the proposition does not match the idea spread by the French colonizers—that Umar was a bloodthirsty, ruthless chief. That is primarily what school children, including myself, are taught. Of course, that description is far from being accurate. The European colonizers portrayed all the African resistants (Samory Toure, Usman Dan Fodio, Umar Tall, Lat Dior Diop, Shaka Zulu, Maba Diakhou, Aline Sitoe Diatta, just to name a few) as bloodthirsty mindless killers. This description was understandable given the fact that propaganda and ideology constitute elements of war and domination. Additionally, this negative presentation is meant to undermine the self-confidence of the Africans and make them feel inferior to the European invaders.

The episode recounted above, in which Umar faces Faidherbe, encapsulates the demise of all the kingdoms of the Sahel, through their defeat at the hands of the French, and thus heralds the advent of a new territorial and geopolitical order in West Africa with the new

¹⁸ See Bâ, *Vie et Enseignement de Tierno Bokar*.

¹⁹ Ibid. 244.

boundaries that, in great part, still survive. Concerning Umar's disappearance into the cliffs of Bandiagara, up to today, his disciples and followers emphatically claim that Umar did not die; he just vanished into the cliffs of Bandiagara. Nobody has ever seen his body, much less his grave.²⁰ A major geostrategic shift took place in 19th century West Africa, i.e. the gradual abandonment of the Trans-Saharan trade in favor of the Atlantic trade; at the dawn of the Renaissance, the Europeans started navigating to and around Africa thanks, to sail ships at first and, later, to modern and more powerful marine ships and boats with steam engines. Ports were also developed along the West African Atlantic Ocean shorelines.²¹

The reader will also come across numerous wars that Omar waged across the length and breadth of the West African Sahel region, a vast area which covers portions of territories that belong to the present-day countries of Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso. What were the causes of these wars? According to R. Smith, "a fundamental cause of most West African wars—and, indeed, the most prevalent cause of wars in any part of the world—was the desire of the more vigorous societies for territorial expansion and to exercise a

20 cf. Diop, "The Wolof Epic: From Spoken Word to Written Text," 122. Here's a savory anecdote: In the late 1970s, one day, one of my father's friends came to visit us at lunch time which was very common because that was the best time to find my father at home. The man was agitated, shaking and even livid in appearance. My father asked him what was bothering him; the man replied that he was sure that the man he had just encountered was Umar Tall because he was wearing that famous white boubou, and wore his leather sandals and, last but not least, Umar's famous long white beard. Pursuing his narration, my father's friend unequivocally said that as soon as the man walked past him, upon realizing that it was Umar, when he (the man) turned and wanted to greet him and asked for his prayers, he (Umar) has disappeared! It is pointless to say that, that day, my father's friend was inconsolable; he did not have lunch with us and left soon after his hurried arrival.

21 Gérard Chenet, *El Hadj Omar. La grande épopée des Toucouleurs* (Dakar, Sénégal: L'Harmattan, 2009), 18. On page 19, the same author writes: "Omar managed to reach the Atlantic coast by taking the natural route of the river [it can be the Senegal River or the Niger River, or both] and, despite the resistance opposed by a European colonization in full expansion under the command of Faïdherbe, he tried to establish his sovereignty there in order to take part into the trade circuit." It's important to keep in mind that Chenet's book is a play; thus, room must be made for fictional elements.

measure of physical control over their neighbors."²² In the same author's opinion, in addition to the fact that war confers a degree of legality, other preeminent reasons were the acquisition of wealth and the capture of slaves. Concerning West Africa proper, Smith writes: "Once a properly constituted Islamic state had been established, these Muslim conquerors [such as Usman dan Fodio, El Hadj Omar, Askia Muhammad] aimed primarily at ensuring the provision of tribute and levies rather than conversion or political domination."²³ Smith's remarks may be accurate in many instances; however, in my opinion, in the case of Umar Tall, the latter was more interested in converting the natives than anything else; additionally, the very nature of Islam lends itself to conversion.²⁴

As is evident in the epic narratives, Umar's main aim was to weaken the native indigenous religions which, by definition, were not interested in conversion. As is also obvious in the narratives—as well as in real life—the co-existence of both the Islamic and animist worlds is testimony to the syncretic reality that obtains—up to today—in these societies. The animist world is usually associated with magic, divination, witchcraft, amulets, charms, sorcery, etc. Epic texts are replete with myths, supernatural, and superhuman feats that illustrate the pre-Islamic African world as well as all pre-Christian societies and cultures.²⁵ In the Arab world, the pre-Islamic period is known as *Jāhiliyya*, the so-called period of ignorance and barbarism.

22 Robert S. Smith, *Warfare & Diplomacy in Pre-colonial West Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989), pp. 29-30.

23 Ibid. 33.

24 This evangelization process was not confined to Islam; still according to Smith (*Warfare & Diplomacy in Pre-colonial West Africa*, 32), "Christianity came to West Africa peaceably, and until the missionary impetus of the nineteenth century got under way its influence was on a very small scale."

25 Divination and orality go hand in hand, as illustrated by the author Ibrahima Sow who, on page 175 writes: "Divination is only operational and has meaning for the individual in the cultures of orality, in the civilizations of the Word in which exchanges, relationships, arts and techniques are focused or interdependent on rites and myths that feed the collective mentality." (see Ibrahima Sow, *Divination marabout destin: aux sources de l'imaginaire*, (Dakar: IFAN Ch. A. Diop, 2009). In *The Odyssey*, the famous soothsayer Halitherses is described in these glowing words: "The old hero Halitherses, the son of Mastor, that of all old men, his peers in that court, only could foresee by flight of fowls man's fixed destiny." (see Homer, *the Odyssey*.) One may add the concept of 'primitive mentality' as defined by the French scholar

In the final analysis, in the epic narratives, Umar is a syncretic hero because he partakes in that supernatural world, mixed with Islamic tenets; in effect, he performs miracles as we mentioned above. All in all, our epic hero is part and parcel of the world of orality. In order to conclude this section, we revert back to E. Auerbach who was above the tripartite division. Likewise, we posit that these three elements (legend, historical reporting, and interpretative historical theology) collapse inside both the epic character and the real-life human being of Umar. In the next section, we provide Islamic religious elements culled from the Holy Qur'an and as featured in the epic narratives themselves.

The Holy Qur'an and Its Insertion in Epic Narratives from Senegambia

The insertion of the Holy Qur'an in the oral epic narratives from Senegal and Gambia is an established and verifiable fact. Actually, the same thing obtains in the other epic texts in whose collection, transcription, and translation we were involved. Cheikh Niang the reciter of *The Epic on Ndiadiane Ndiaye* is well versed in Qur'anic and Islamic matters whereas Birahim Thiam (performer of *The Epic of El Hadj Omar Tall* in 1998) is a Qur'anic erudite. To come back to Niang, the latter joined the French army in the 1950s as a conscript and was exposed to French military officers and the French language, thus, in a small measure, to French influence. In the epic narratives from Gambia, in one episode, Umar pays a visit to a man called Pasil Manka; while the guest is about to take his leave, the host accompanies him. On their way, Umar declared: "I am smelling the Holy Qur'an." Sure enough, when they look up a tree, they saw a *taalibé*²⁶ sitting on a branch and reciting the Qur'anic verses written on a wooden slab. Upon closer inspection, Umar and his companion saw that the Sura

and philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) in his book *How Natives Think* (1910); that mentality is opposed to 'modern,' i.e. European/Western mentality. Additionally, according to Lévy-Bruhl, the primitive mind does not differentiate between the supernatural and reality; in addition to the fact that the primitive mind does not address contradictions and relies entirely on mythical systems. (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think (Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés primitives)* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

26 A word that comes originally from the Arab *tālib*, طالب. In West Africa, they are learners at Qur'anic schools.

Yāsin²⁷ was written on the slab. Yāsin is considered as 'the heart of the Holy Qur'an' and plays a central role in the teaching of Islam—it also relates to the doctrine of Revelation and the Hereafter. This surah puts great emphasis on the oneness of God and denounces unbelievers and polytheism. Additionally, Sura Yāsin contains commandments and historical elements about the prophets.

Slightly over twenty-five years ago, during the research related to our PhD thesis, we came across a translation of the Holy Qur'an by the Pakistani scholar A. Yusuf Ali. In the Introduction, Ali points to "a little perfume from the garden of the Holy One [Allah/God] that has already gladdened our nostrils."²⁸ What catches our attention here is the association made between the text and the sense of smell; normally, the eyesight is associated with writing and a text. The mention of the two words 'perfume' and 'nostrils' by Ali can be closely associated with the passage in the epic narrative in which Umar smells the Holy Qur'an. This is a powerful representation of a holy text and, in our opinion, this amalgamation of text and sensory input is meant to showcase the prestige of the Holy Qur'an while invoking, at the same time, the idea of Paradise.

A prominent feature in African religions and beliefs —whether traditional, Islamic, or else— is the syncretism that they carry in them. That syncretic characteristic is highlighted by the blending of elements hailing from the revealed religions (primarily Islam), on the one hand, and paganism and animism, on the other. A few examples culled from the epic narratives from Gambia indicate a strong presence of nature: the sun, rainstorms, rivers and waterways, trees, etc. There is an interesting scene in which Umar's baby son called Lamin Julde was sleeping while the man and his wife were praying; a hyena came and started sniffing the baby, but surprisingly does not eat it, considering that the hyena is one of the most ferocious and carnivorous beasts in the jungle. When he finished his prayer, Umar asked the wife why she

²⁷ Surah Yaasin contains 83 verses. In his translation of the Qur'an and in his introduction to the surah Yaasin M. A. S. Abdel Haleem writes: "Ya Sin is a Meccan sura that emphasizes the divine source of the Qur'an and defends it from the charge of being poetry made by man." (*The Qur'an: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text*, translated with an Introduction by Abdel Haleem, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 441).

²⁸ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an, An English Interpretation of The Holy Qur'an with a Full Arabic Text* (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publisher, 1975), viii.

did not interrupt her prayer and look after the baby; she replied that since she is praying behind her husband, she must respect the Islamic tenet.²⁹ The overtone to this episode is that the baby is protected by God thanks to the father's strong spiritual powers.

Embedded in the Umarian epic narrative is the salient twin concept of nemesis and pairing. Most great epics feature the twin concept of nemesis and pairing: Roland faces Ganelon in *The Song of Roland*. In the ancient Indo-European epic *Gilgamesh*, the hero Gilgamesh has a powerful enemy called Enkidu whereas in the ancient Greek epic, Poseidon is Odysseus's mortal antagonist. In the African epic texts, Sunjaata is known to have confronted and killed his biggest enemy called Soumangourou Kante, king of Sosso. At the heart of the epic story is the battle between good and evil. In the epic narratives from Gambia, Umar's archenemy is Tamba Bukari. As is expected, the former defeats the latter. Additionally, the enemy must be labelled as a *kāfir*; thus, the nemesis must be the absolute representative of evil and darkness in order to deserve to be killed. From the Arab *kāfir*, meaning an infidel. In southern Africa, white people refer to Blacks as *kāfir*. The issue of race is raised in the epic narratives from Gambia; the singer narrates the episodes related to Umar's pilgrimage to Mecca. There, he is challenged by his hosts for the latter wanted to know if a black man can be cognizant of the Islamic tenets. Umar rose to the challenge by showcasing his Qur'anic erudition; thus, he imposed respect, in addition to the admiration shown by his hosts. In *The Epic of Omar Tall* as sung by Birahim Thiam, the same matter arises, namely Umar being tested by the Muslims in Mecca. On the reverse, Umar represents light, righteousness, justice, etc. Interestingly enough, in one episode, the narrator says that a *kāfir* should not listen to the *taara* which is a tune intended solely for Umar's ears. Consequently, according to L-J. Calvet, "the text of oral tradition is steeped in a culture and an ideology which give it most of its characteristics."³⁰

Another specific feature of these epic narratives is humor; in an episode, Umar's griot prods the hero and encourages him; however, the funny thing is that the griot does so while scoffing and mocking him. In this instance, the griot derisively tells Umar that he has

29 In Muslim prayers, one is not supposed to interrupt one's prayer once the latter has started. That is, unless a life-threatening event occurs which must be the exception.

30 Lous-Jean Calvet, *La tradition orale* (Paris: PUF, 1984), 92.

anointed his head with oil and wears a turban, but that is all he can do; he must get up and fight his enemies. The attitude of the griot is understandable if we take into account the remarks by Mazisi Kunene. In the "Introduction" to his book bearing on the South African Zulu epic, Kunene calls attention to the eminent role of the performer: "It is through the poet and the singer that the criticism and the evaluation of the heroes and rulers are fully and freely expressed."³¹ In the epic narratives from Gambia, humor is also wrapped in proverbs; this is an apt way for the performer to avoid being too blunt, for proverbs provide secondary meanings and allusions.

Conclusion

Al-Hajj Umar Tall's legacy stands as a powerful testament to the complex interplay of history, religion, and oral tradition in West Africa. His life and deeds have been immortalized not only through the written word but also through the vibrant oral epics that continue to resonate among the people of the Senegambia region. These epics create a rich tapestry that reflects the multifaceted nature of Umar Tall's influence. As a leader, a religious reformer, and a resistance figure, Umar Tall's impact extends beyond his immediate historical context, offering insights into the broader dynamics of Islamic revivalism and resistance to colonialism in the 19th century. It is not surprising that, with the passing of time, Umar Tall has become a towering epic figure who embodies a unique mixture of legend, mythology, oral tradition, oral history, folklore, hagiography, and history. The history of Umar's feats and achievements is sung by specialist narrators—*griots* and *jelis*—hailing from various ethnic groups of the Senegambia region: Fula, Hausa, Mandinka, Wolof, and others. These narrators have kept his story alive across generations, ensuring that his legacy remains a solid living tradition held in high esteem by his community. In the final analysis, the story of Umar Tall is not just a relic of the past but a narrative that still holds relevance in the contemporary world, resonating with current issues and continuing to inspire. His portrayal as both a historical figure and an epic hero reflects the complexities of his legacy, as well as the diverse ways in which different communities have sought to understand and

³¹ Mazisi Kunene, *Emperor Shaka The Great: A Zulu Epic* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 36.

honor his contributions. Through the lens of these epic narratives, we gain a deeper appreciation of the cultural, spiritual, and political forces that shaped West Africa during a pivotal period in its history.

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