



Islamic Scholarship in Africa

New Directions and Global Contexts

Edited by
OUSMANE OUMAR KANE

RELIGION IN TRANSFORMING AFRICA

Islamic Scholarship in Africa

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Ousmane Oumar Kane

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Cover image: Studying the Qur’ān in a mosque in Cairo, Egypt (kharps/istock)

To Sister Khadija and Nanouna

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2020), *Jihad of the Pen: the Sufi Literature of West Africa* (with R. Ware and A. Syed, American University in Cairo Press, 2018), and *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: the Sufi Community of Ibrahim Niasse* (Brill, 2015). He has also translated a number of West African Arabic texts into English, such as Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse's primary work on Sufism, *The Removal of Confusion Concerning the Saintly Seal* (Fons Vitae, 2010, reprint 2019).

Note on Transliteration and Calendar

We have sought to make the transliteration as consistent as possible without modifying bibliographic titles or changing known usages. Arabic long vowels and emphatic letters have been transliterated according to standard norms of transliteration, with the exception of well-known Arabic words in the English language which we maintained in their best-known form. We have opted for Sufi (instead of *Ṣūfī*), Islam (instead of *Islām*), Ramadan (instead of *Ramaḍān*) except when mentioned otherwise in bibliographic titles.

For the Muslim Holy Book and derived adjective, we have transliterated ‘Qur’ān’ and ‘Qur’ānic’ except when mentioned otherwise in bibliographic titles. We have also maintained names of famous people in their best-known form, thus Ibrahim Niasse (instead of *Ibrāhīm Niyās*), Gamal Abdel Naser (instead of *Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāsir*) except when mentioned otherwise in bibliographic titles.

Names of places have also been kept in their known orthography, thus Madinat Nasr (not *Madīnat al-Naṣr*) and Hadiqatul Dawliya (not *Ḥadīqat al-dawliyya*).

In most cases, we have pluralized with an ‘s’ Arabic words known in English. Thus we opted for ‘*qāḍīs*’, ‘*ḥadīths*’, ‘*du‘ās*’ instead of the Arabic plural form ‘*quḍāt*’, ‘*aḥādīth*’, ‘*ad‘iya*’. Some chapters have used the Gregorian calendar only and others have used both dates of the Gregorian calendar and their equivalent in the Islamic calendar, which starts with the year of emigration (*Hijra* in Arabic) of Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Medina in 622. For example: 1741–42 (1154 A.H.). Finally, the ‘ayn has been transcribed [‘] and the marker of femininity [h] final has been omitted. For example we have opted for *qaṣīda* and not *qaṣīdah*.

Abbreviations

ACI	African Citation Index
ACT	American College Testing
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
b.	bin, i.e. son of
bt.	bint, i.e. daughter of
c.	circa
CE	Current Era
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
d.	died
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
<i>GHA</i>	<i>General History of Africa</i>
HDS	Harvard Divinity School
ICT	information and communications technology
IDEAs	International Development Economics Associates
IQRABA	IQRA Bilingual Academy
ISERI	Islamic University in Nouakchott
lit.	literally
n.p.	no publisher
NYFACS	New York French American Charter School
SABS	Senegalese American Bilingual School
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test
Sh.	Shaykh
trans.	translator
vss.	verses
WACA	West African College of the Atlantic

Acknowledgements

In 2012, I was appointed to the Alwaleed Bin Talal chair of Contemporary Islamic Religion and Society, whose mission is to contribute to the development of the field of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and especially its intellectual history. Pursuing such an objective required mobilizing a community of scholars and students around extra-curricular activities such as conferences, symposia, lecture series, etc. This in turn requires financial and logistical resources.

I was fortunate that Harvard University provided such resources, and many colleagues near and far agreed to join us in an ongoing intellectual conversation around an annual conference series and an annual lecture series on Islam in Africa, both of which I initiated, and which have been meeting regularly in the last several years. This volume is the product of the first two conferences: 'Texts, Knowledge and Practice: The Meaning of Scholarship in Muslim Africa', convened in February 2017, and 'New Directions in the Study of Islamic Scholarship in Africa', in October 2017. A follow-up volume on Africa, Globalization and the Muslim World, based on the third annual conference, 'West Africa and the Maghreb' (September 2018), and the fourth, 'Africa, Globalization, and the Muslim World' (September 2019, the last co-organized with Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salam at Northwestern University), is forthcoming as a special issue of the journal *Religions*. In addition to the annual conference, the Islam in Africa lecture series provides a platform for the discussion of cutting-edge research in the field of Islam in Africa and brings authors of newly published books and advanced PhD students to campus to discuss their work.

For tirelessly and generously pumping money to make these activities happen, I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of many schools, departments, institutes and centres at Harvard, including Harvard Divinity School, the Hutchins Center, the Alwaleed Bin Talal Program of Islamic Studies, the Department of African and African American Studies, the Center for African Studies, the Provostial Fund for the Arts and the Humanities, the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University and the Radcliffe Institute.

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logistical support, from booking flights and hotel rooms, and dinner tables in restaurants, to producing posters, arranging for venues, and video-recording the events for wide dissemination. I especially would like to acknowledge the support of Matthew Turner, Marlon Cumming, Jennifer Conforti, Bob Deveau, Karin Grundler Whitacker, Herchel Blemur and Kristin Gunst.

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Several of our graduate students, some of whom have now become colleagues, have been part of this conversation. I would like to thank Ayodeji Ogunnaike, Oludamini Ogunnaike, Kimberly Wortmann, Farah El-Sharif, Armaan Siddiqi, Matthew Steele, Norbert Litoing, Abtsam Saleh and Adnan Wood-Smith. Mamadou Diouf, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Mahmood Mamdani, Zachary Wright of Northwestern University in Qatar and Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem, who co-organized the fourth Islam in Africa conference, have been wonderful conversation partners and friends for well over a decade.

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Finally, I thank my family, and especially Sister Khadija, for her tireless effort in hosting conference and lecture series participants.

To her, and our assistant Nanouna, this collective volume is dedicated.

INTRODUCTION

Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going in the Study of Islamic Scholarship in Africa?

Ousmane Oumar Kane

When I performed my first pilgrimage to Mecca in 1937, sixteen Muslim scholars from different parts of the World and I were invited for dinner by King Sa‘ūd b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz of Saudi Arabia. During our conversation, one Egyptian scholar apparently impressed by my erudition, asked me where I lived in Egypt. I replied that I have never been to Egypt. Surprised, he then asked me where I did study, and I replied with my father in Senegal. He then asked when my father did graduate from Egypt? I replied he never studied in Egypt. He studied only with his own father. Sadly, the Egyptian scholar believed that it is only in Al-Azhar that one can acquire solid Islamic knowledge.

Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse

To introduce this collection of essays, a personal note is much in order! In July 2012, I was appointed to the Alwaleed Professorship of Contemporary Islamic Religion and Society at Harvard Divinity School (HDS) to develop the field of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, and especially its intellectual history. One of the first courses I taught was entitled ‘Readings in the Islamic Archive of Africa’. Its purpose was to explore the intellectual production of Arabophone intellectuals, especially those from West Africa. I contacted the librarian of HDS to order the relevant course material. He informed me that he specialized in Christianity and did not have the expertise to deal with Arabic books, and referred me to the Middle Eastern librarian at the Widener Library of Harvard University. The latter could not order Arabic books from sub-Saharan Africa because he specialized in the Middle East and North Africa, but referred me in turn to his colleague the librarian of sub-Saharan Africa, who could not order Arabic books either. Since Arabic was supposedly not a language of sub-Saharan Africa, it did not fall within

her field.¹ This difficulty of acquiring books had of course confronted graduate students working on Islam in Africa before my arrival at Harvard. To solve the problem without stepping on anybody's toes, the Dean of HDS offered some of his discretionary funds to acquire the books that I needed. A kind gesture – but it did not address the root of the problem.

This anecdote speaks volumes about the ways in which the academic division of labour in the study of Africa in Western universities makes the study of the Islamic scholarship of sub-Saharan Africa difficult. This problem is not specific to Harvard. It is the same everywhere, and is further illustrated by the programming of centres of African Studies and centres of Middle Eastern Studies. The former focus on sub-Saharan Africa and typically exclude North Africa, and the latter centre their programming on North Africa and some parts of Western Asia. In fact, the roots of this particularly regional division lie in the racial bias of Enlightenment European thinkers such as Hegel,² who felt the need to separate a 'black' and uncivilized Africa from one that contributed to and shared some of Europe's Mediterranean heritage. Thus, the interconnections between these two regions are largely ignored. Such a division and its underlying assumptions overlook the fact that for centuries the Islamic faith and the Arabic language cemented relations between large populations in the Maghreb, the Sahara, and West Africa. Furthermore, to this day many African Muslims imagine and understand their communities in ways that directly contradict this largely Western division of sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa.

It is now well known that, with the spread of Arabic literacy, African scholars developed a rich tradition of debate over orthodoxy and meaning in Islam. The colonization of the African continent at the turn of the twentieth century and the establishment of European colonial rule and Western types of schools did not eradicate the Islamic scholarly tradition in Africa. It rested on the faulty assumption that the Sahara was a physical barrier to intellectual exchange between a literate North Africa and an oral sub-Saharan Africa. The growth of literacy in Arabic in sub-Saharan Africa was not at all disconnected from centres of Islamic learning elsewhere in the Muslim world. As will be obvious to the readers of this volume, West African scholars participated in the development of virtually every field of Islamic sciences. Some of the essays featured in this volume constitute major

¹ The situation has now thankfully changed at Harvard and we are grateful to the librarian of sub-Saharan Africa for her diligence in ordering books that we need.

² In an infamous series of lectures he delivered on the philosophy of world history in 1822–23, Hegel claimed that Africa south of the Sahara was 'outside history'. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Willey Book Co., 1900) 99.

contributions to astronomy (chapter 2),³ political theory (chapter 5),⁴ philosophy (chapter 6),⁵ and jurisprudence (chapter 7),⁶ to cite just a few. In addition, a glance at the curriculum and the writings of scholars of sub-Saharan Africa, including those who never travelled beyond their homeland, shows that many of them were extremely learned, but also engaged with the works of authors from all over the Muslim world, proving that they had long been integrated in a global network of intellectual exchange.

For most of the twentieth century, this literary tradition had remained unknown to the Western world and scholarship outside a small circle of specialists. At the turn of the twenty-first century, however, many commendable efforts have been made to document this literary tradition. Dozens of doctoral dissertations have been produced on Islamic scholarship in Africa. They have documented the rise of clerical lineages in sub-Saharan Africa, the role of these lineages in societal reform and state building from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and their intellectual production. In addition, dozens of catalogues of sub-Saharan African Islamic manuscripts have been produced, and thousands of Arabic manuscripts digitalized, some of them even translated into European languages.⁷

Despite this huge scholarly endeavour, Islamic scholarship in black Africa had remained invisible in the larger field of Islamic studies and African studies, but also in major debates of the social sciences. Between 2004 and 2016, the publication of three volumes of essays gave significant visibility to the study of Islamic

³ Dahlia Gubara, 'Muhammad al-Kashnāwī and the Everyday Life of the Occult', presents the *Durr al-manẓum* by Muḥammad al-Kashnāwī from Nigeria, which 'displays extensive knowledge of scientific and cosmological theories that had prevailed over the centuries in all of the Islamic, Christian and Jewish traditions, as well as their precursors in classical Antiquity'.

⁴ Ismail Warscheid, "'Those Who Represent the Sovereign in his Absence": Muslim Scholarship and the Question of Legal Authority in the Pre-Modern Sahara (Southern Algeria, Mauritania, Mali), 1750–1850', featuring the *Kitāb al-Bādiya* by Muḥammad al-Māmi (d. 1865–66), which is a major contribution of a Saharan scholar to political theory and to the development of Islamic legal thought.

⁵ Oludamini Ogunnaike, 'Philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate: The Case of Shaykh Dan Tafa', examines the work of Shaykh Dan Tafa (d. 1864) to show that the study of philosophy is part and parcel of the intellectual history of West Africa.

⁶ Farah el-Sharif, "'If all the Legal Schools were to Disappear": 'Umar Tāl's Approach to Jurisprudence in *Kitāb al-Rimāh*', which is one of the most important – yet understudied – works of the nineteenth century in the Muslim world.

⁷ See Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu. An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016) chapter 1. Charles Stewart and Bruce Hall have put online a database of more than 20,000 manuscripts, giving a good idea of the breadth of Islamic scholarship in the Sahel. See <https://waamd.lib.berkeley.edu/home> <https://waamd.lib.berkeley.edu/home>. Accessed 1 March 2020.

erudition in Africa. The first, edited by Scott Reese,⁸ is entitled *The Transmission of Learning in Muslim Africa* and the second, by Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *The Meanings of Timbuktu*.⁹ The latter came out of an international conference convened at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, in which the most prominent scholars who shaped the field of Islamic scholarship in Africa in the last fifty years participated, including John Hunwick, Sean O'Fahey, Charles Stewart, Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, Yahya Ould el-Bara, Timothy Cleveland, Shamil Jeppie, Murray Last, and others. Many 'traditional' scholars of Timbuktu like Hamu al-Arawānī, 'Abd al-Qādir Haidara, also attended the conference and authored chapters in the resulting collective volume. Themes they explored included the Timbuktu libraries, African Arabic literature as a source of history, and the biographies of prominent scholars of Timbuktu. The third, edited by Robert Launay,¹⁰ is entitled *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards*. Since the publication of these books, the field has grown considerably and attracted younger, talented scholars whose work is transforming not just the larger field of Islamic studies and African studies, but is also beginning to inform debates in many disciplines in the social sciences. Dozens of articles and monographs have been produced, documenting various aspects of this intellectual tradition, but there has been no recent state-of-the art volume.

To take stock of these developments, I convened an international conference entitled 'Texts, Knowledge, and Practice: The Meaning of Scholarship in Muslim Africa' at HDS in February 2017, which brought together twenty-five scholars from twenty-one universities in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the United States.¹¹ Drawn from a variety of disciplines including history, Islamic studies, anthropology, philosophy, religious studies, and political science, these conference participants explored the literary cultures expressed in the Arabic language or in African languages written with the Arabic script. Like the pioneers in the field, participants refuted the notion that Muslim societies in black Africa were essentially oral prior to the European colonial conquest of the turn of the twentieth century. Their analysis of the movement of texts and ideas across and between West and North Africa through the Sahara and between East Africa

⁸ Scott Reese (ed.), *The Transmission of Learning in Muslim Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

⁹ Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Bachir Diagne (eds.), *The Meanings of Timbuktu* (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2008).

¹⁰ Robert Launay (ed.), *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

¹¹ I acknowledge the assistance of Matthew Steele, a PhD candidate at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University for the planning of this conference.

and the Arabian Peninsula across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean further confirmed that Muslim scholars south of the Sahara have never been isolated. On the contrary, they have long interacted and been integrated with other parts of the Muslim world.

In October 2017, I hosted a follow-up workshop at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University. Entitled ‘New directions in the study of Islamic scholarship in Africa’, it brought together half of the scholars who attended the February 2017 international conference and a few more to continue the conversation started in the previous February. This volume results from the conference and follow-up workshop. Panelists assessed the achievements in the study of Islamic scholarship in Africa, addressed the limitations in the emerging scholarship, and charted new directions for the field. Among the issues that they interrogated, the following were paramount: are sub-Saharan Africans mainly consumers of knowledge produced elsewhere or have they contributed as equal partners to knowledge production? Is the textuality versus orality paradigm relevant in African Islamic scholarship? Is *‘Ajami* essentially about the transmission of basic religious knowledge? What is the relevance of this Islamic scholarship for larger debates in the social sciences about epistemology, postcolonial, and decolonial studies? Last but not least, are scholars working in the field of Islamic scholarship in Africa on the cutting edge of the debates about the epistemology of knowledge production?

Sub-Saharan Scholars and the Production and Global Transmission of Islamic Knowledge

The emerging literature addresses the intellectual linkages between Arabs and Africans by looking at the movement of sub-Saharan Africans to major centres of learning in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to study and perform the pilgrimage. Yet, there was also movement in the opposite direction when Berbers and Arabs came to study among black African shaykhs. Furthermore, many prominent sub-Saharan African scholars taught in Fez, Egypt, and the Holy Lands. The workshop challenged the implicit assumption that sub-Saharan Africans tend to be junior partners in these intellectual relations.

The vignette in the introduction (Figure 0.1) features the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (1900–75), a towering figure of twentieth-century African Islam, whose following runs in the millions in the African continent and beyond.¹² He

¹² A dozen monographs have been devoted to the impact of his teaching and his disciples in Africa in English or French. Notable among them are Cheikh Niang, ‘Le transnational pour argument. Socio-anthropologie historique du mouvement confrérique tidjane de Cheikh Ibrahim Niasse (Sénégal, Niger, Nigeria)’, PhD diss. in Anthropology, Université de Toulouse, 2014; Oludamini Ogunnaike, *Deep Knowledge: Ways*



Fig. 0.1 Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (Credit: Djim Diop)

occupied prominent positions in pan-Islamic organizations such as the World Muslim League, the World Muslim Congress based in Karachi, Pakistan, and the Research Academy of the Al-Azhar University, and made major interventions in all important matters affecting the affairs of the global Muslim community. Shaykh Ibrahim taught in the Wolof language to his Senegalese disciples and in Arabic to Arabic-speaking Mauritanian students and non-Senegalese African disciples.¹³ Yet, the Egyptian scholar he met in Mecca could not possibly

of Knowing in Sufism and Ifa, Two West African Intellectual Traditions (Penn State University Press, forthcoming); Adam Barnes, 'A comparative spirituality of liberation: The Anti-Poverty Struggles of the Poverty Initiative and the Tijaniyya of Kiota', PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary New York, 2014; Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrahim Niasse* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2014); Rudiger Seeseman, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-century Sufi Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Antonio de Diego González, *Ley y Gnosis. Historia Intelectual de la tarīqa Tijāniyya* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2020); Yasir Anjola Quadri, 'The Tijaniyyah in Nigeria. A Case Study', PhD diss., Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, 1981; Britta Frede, *Die Erneuerung der Tiġānīya in Mauretanien. Popularisierung religiöser Ideen in der Kolonialzeit*. ZMO Studien; 31. (Berlin: Schwarz-Verlag, 2014); Abdul Ganiy Muhammad Raji Abiodin, 'Shaykh Ibrahim Niass: His Revival of the Tijaniyya Sufi order and response to colonialism', PhD diss., International Islamic University Malaysia, 2016. For Arabic sources, see following footnote.

¹³ One of his Arabic-speaking disciples has collected and edited his entire work, consisting of a multi-volume exegesis of the Qur'ān in Arabic; an encyclopedia of his prominent disciples in Africa, and the collection of all his poetry and poems written in praise of him in Arabic. On his exegesis of the Qur'ān, see Ibrahim Niasse, *Fī Riyāḍ al-Tafsīr li'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (M. Ibn al-Shaykh 'Abdullāh, compiled and edited, 2014). Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh 'Abdullāh, *Mādhā 'an al-Shaykh Ibrāhīm* (Lemden Mauritania, Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh 'Abdullāh, 2014). On his disciples, see Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh 'Abdullāh, *Rijāl wa Adwār fī Zill Šāhib al-Fayḍah al-Tijāniyyah: Al-Milaff al-Gharb Ifrīqī*. (Lemden Mauritania: Muḥammad ibn

have imagined that he (or for that matter his father) could receive advanced learning outside Al-Azhar, let alone in West Africa.

Yet, that Shaykh Ibrahim acquired his knowledge with his father in Senegal, and his father with his grandfather, stands to reason. Before the erection of colonial borders in West Africa, there existed wide translocal scholarly networks in the Sahelian region, within which texts and scholars circulated unrestrained, and any text could be taught in any region. The analysis of the core curriculum of Islamic studies in the Sahel¹⁴ reveals that the same works were taught in North Africa, Egypt, and West Africa. Shaykh Abdallah Niasse (1845–1922), the father and teacher of Shaykh Ibrahim, also acquired all his knowledge in Senegal. Yet, he did receive honorary knowledge certification in Egypt during his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1891. As was the custom with scholars visiting Egypt, Shaykh Abdallah, according to his Mauritanian biographer Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. al-Ṣaghīr al-‘Alawī,¹⁵ met with Al-Azhar ‘Ulamā’. After extensive conversation with him, they awarded him honorary certificates (*ijāza al-tabarruk*)¹⁶ acknowledging his competence in Islamic sciences. Furthermore, the fact that

al-Shaykh ‘Abdullāh, 2014); Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh ‘Abdullāh, *Rijāl wa Adwār fī Zill Ṣāhib al-Fayḍah al-Tijānīyah: Al-Milaff al-Mūrītānī*. (Lemden Mauritania: Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh ‘Abdullāh, 2014); Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh ‘Abdullāh, *Rijāl wa adwār fī zill Ṣāhib al-Fayḍah al-Tijānīyah: Al-Milaff al-Singhālī*. (Lemden Mauritania: Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh ‘Abdullāh, 2014). On his poetry, Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh ‘Abdullāh, *Āfāq al-Shi'r fī al-Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyās* (Lemden Mauritania: Muḥammad ibn al-Shaykh ‘Abdullāh, 2018. (Vols. 1–6).

¹⁴ See for example Deddoud Ould Abdallah, *Dawr al-Shanāqīṭa fī-nashr al-thaqāfa al-‘arabiyya al-islāmiyya bi-Gharb Ifrīqiyya ḥattā nihāyat al-ḳarn al-thāminā ‘ashar li ‘l-mīlād*, *Annales de la Fac. des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de l’Univ. de Nouakchott*, 1989, 13–33; A.D.H. Bivar; Mervyn Hiskett, ‘The Arabic Literature of Nigeria to 1804: a provisional account’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, xxv, 1962, 104–48; Mervyn Hiskett, ‘Materials related to the state of learning among the Fulani before their jihad’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 19, 3, 1957, 550–78; Bruce Hall; Charles Stewart, ‘The Historic “Core Curriculum” and The Book Market in Islamic West Africa,’ in Graziano Krätli; Ghislaine Lydon (dirs.), *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011) 109–74; Thierno Ka, *Ecole de Pir-Saniokhor et culture arabo-islamique au Sénégal du XVIIe au XXe siècle* (Dakar: GIA, nd).

¹⁵ Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. al-Ṣaghīr al-‘Alawī, *Muṭrib al-sāmi‘īn al-nāzirīn fī manāqib al-Shaykh al-Ḥājj ‘Abdallāh b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad* (Kaolack, Senegal: Maktabat al-Nahḍa, 2004).

¹⁶ In Islamic learning there exist two types of certificates. The first is a licence to teach a book given by a master to a student who studied a book with him, and the second *ijāza al-tabarruk* or honorary certification is given to peers in recognition of their erudition.

the author of the unique and extensive biography of Shaykh Ibrahim's father was a prominent Arab scholar testifies to the close interactions and intellectual friendship between scholars of different parts of West Africa. The city of Kaolack, where Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse grew up, was an economic and intellectual hub at the turn of the twentieth century. It attracted scholars from West and North Africa, some of whom were the guests of his father. All this proves that the Niasse family had been at the cutting edge of Islamic scholarship for generations and were a living contradiction of the balkanization of sub-Saharan Africa in the academy as well as in the perspective of many Arabs like the Egyptian scholar from the beginning of this introduction.

It is true that Al-Azhar has been a major centre of Islamic learning for over a thousand years and attracted students from all over the world, including black Africans. The first residence (*riwāq*)¹⁷ for West African students and pilgrims was established in Al-Azhar in the mid-thirteenth century for Borno students and pilgrims (*Riwāq al-Burnīya*). In the eighteenth century, three of the twenty-five residences of Al-Azhar hosted students from West-Central Africa. The above-mentioned *Riwāq al-Burnīya* for students of the Borno Region of Central Africa,¹⁸ the *Riwāq al-Dakārinah* for students from Takrūr, Sinnār, and Darfūr, and other places in the Sudan and Central Africa,¹⁹ and the *Riwāq Dakārnah Sālīh* for students from the Lake Chad Region of Africa²⁰ are a testament to the long-standing presence of sub-Saharan Africans in the most prestigious institutions of higher Islamic education. But Muslims from black Africa have also been prominent teachers at Al-Azhar, and for that matter, other major centres of Islamic learning all over the world. Two centuries before Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, Muhammad Al-Kashnāwī (d. 1741), whose biography Dahlia Gubara covers in this volume, received his entire education in present day northern Nigeria²¹ before travelling to the Holy Lands and settling in Al-Azhar, where he stayed till the end of his life. Yet, he taught many people in Egypt. His name was immortalized by a necrology featured in one of the most renowned historical works of Ottoman Egypt:

¹⁷ As noted by Dahlia Gubara, 'Al-Azhar and the Orders of Knowledge', 33: *riwāq* pl. *arwiqa* in Arabic 'are the basic administrative units – denoting residential and study quarters of students – around which al-Azhar remains organized, and are mostly classified according to the students'. See also Bayard Dodge, 'Principal Units of the *Riwāq* system', in Dodge, *Al-Azhar. A Millennium of Muslim Learning* (Washington, DC: The Muslim Institute, 1961), Appendix IV, 201–07.

¹⁸ Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 203.

¹⁹ Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 202.

²⁰ Dodge, *Al-Azhar*, 205.

²¹ See Dahlia Gubara, chapter 2 of this volume; and Gubara, 'Al-Azhar and the Orders of Knowledge', 257–58.

the '*Ajā'ib al-Āthār fi al-tarājim wal akhbār* ('The Marvellous Compositions of Biographies and Events') by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī (1753–1825).²²

There are tales of other influential West African teachers in North Africa. Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti (d. 1627) was one of them.²³ Deported to Morocco following the Saadian invasion of Songhay, he resided there between May 1594 and February 1608. During his stay, he taught in the most reputed schools in Marrakesh. His students included luminaries such as Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maqqarī al-Tilimsāni (d. 1041/1632), the author of *Nafḥ al-tīb min ghusn al-Andalūs al-raṭīb wa-dhikr wazīrihā Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb* ('The Breath of Perfume from the Branch of Flourishing Al-Andalūs and Memories of its Vizier Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb'), the most important reference work on the intellectual history of Muslim Spain; Ibn Abi Nu'aym al-Ghassani, qadi of Fez (d. 1032/1623); and Ibn al-Qāḍī, qadi of Meknes (d. 1025/1616).²⁴ A leading authority in Mālikī jurisprudence, Ahmad Baba authored a much-cited bibliographic dictionary of Mālikī jurists.²⁵

²² 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *'Ajā'ib al-āthār fi'l-tarājim wa'l-akhbār* (4 vols., Cairo: Bulaq, 1880). It was translated as Thomas Philipp; Moshe Perlmann, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī's History of Egypt: *'Ajā'ib al-thar fī 'l-Tarājim wa 'l-Akhbār* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994).

²³ On Ahmad Baba, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, IV: 17–31; Brockelman, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur* II: 618; Supplementbänden II: 715–16; Mahmoud A. Zouber, *Ahmad Baba (1556–1627). Sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1977); John Hunwick, 'Ahmad Baba and the Moroccan invasion of the Sudan (1591),' *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 2, 1, 1962, 311–28; John Hunwick, 'A New Source for the study of Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti (1556–1627),' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 27, 1964, 568–93; Mohamed Zaouit, 'Mi'raj as-su'ud et les Ajwiba: Deux consultations juridiques d'Ahmad Baba de Tombouctou relatives à l'esclavage des Noirs au Bilad al-Sudan au XVIème et début du XVIIe siècle: édition critique et analyse historique', PhD diss., Université de Paris 1, 1997; ISESCO, *Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti: Buhuth al-nadwa allati 'aqadatha ISESCO bi-munāsabat murūr arba'a qurūn wa niṣf 'aā wilādatihī*, Actes du colloque organisé par l'ISESCO quatre siècles et demi après la naissance de Ahmed Baba (Marrakesh: ISESCO, 1993); M.A. Cherbonneau, 'Essai sur la littérature arabe au Soudan d'après le Tekmilet ed-Dibaje d'Ahmed Baba le Tombouctien', *Annales de la Société archéologique de Constantine*, ii, 1854–55, 1–42; Tim Cleaveland, 'Ahmed Baba and His Islamic Critique of Slavery in the Maghreb', *Journal of North African Studies*, 20, 1, 2015, 42.

²⁴ Paulo F. de Moraes Farias, 'Ahmad Baba', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* III (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007).

²⁵ Titled *Nayl al-Ibtihāj fi Taṭrīz al-Dibāj*, it was written as a supplement to *Al-Dibāj al-Mudhahhab fi ma'rifat a'yān 'Ulamā' al-madhhab* by Ibrahim b. Ali b. Farhun. See John Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, IV, 23.

It is also well known that Sufi orders played a major role in Islamic education and intellectual production in sub-Saharan Africa.²⁶ Yet there is a perception that the Sufi orders were a gift to black Africa from the Middle East and North Africa. This story, according to Zachary Wright,²⁷ is incomplete. Instead, ‘Black African scholars had long been involved in articulating the constituent elements of the *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* phenomenon that the Tijāniyya drew upon so heavily’.²⁸ In fact, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh, an important source for the *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*’s emphasis on direct contact with the Prophet Muḥammad²⁹ and whose teaching exerted considerable influence on Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī, studied with a Borno scholar named ‘Abdallah al-Barnāwī.³⁰ The same cliché is true for Salafiyya/Wahhābiyya doctrines, which are assumed to have been brought to Africa by returning pilgrims. Chanfi Ahmed demonstrates that scholars from West Africa have helped the nascent regime of Ibn Sa‘ūd in the field of teaching and preaching in Saudi Arabia but also outside Saudi Arabia and were instrumental in the development of Wahhābī theology (chapter 4 of this volume).³¹

Beyond the Orality/Textuality Dichotomy

By documenting the literary cultures of Africa through the study of manuscripts and biographies of prominent Muslim scholars, pioneers in the field of Islamic scholarship in sub-Saharan Africa have refuted the notion that Africa had no written literary tradition prior to European colonial rule. In the process, however, they have failed to clarify the ways in which orality and textuality interact in the

²⁶ Rudolph Ware; Zachary Wright; Amir Syed, *Jihad of the Pen Sufi Scholars of Africa in Translation* (Beirut: Oxford University Press, 2018) 11.

²⁷ See Wright, ‘African Roots’, chapter 1 of this volume. See also Wright, *Realizing Islam: The Tijaniyya in North Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Muslim World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), in which he fully develops the argument.

²⁸ Wright, ‘African Roots’.

²⁹ Wright, ‘African Roots’.

³⁰ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh is reported by his student and compiler of his thoughts Al-Lamāṭī (1679–1743) to have said: ‘Sayyidi ‘Abd Allah al-Barnāwī remained with me. He guided me, directed me and strengthened me, and the fear in my heart ... was removed.’ See Aḥmad b.al-Mubārak Al-Lamāṭī, *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidi ‘Abd al-Aziz*, translated by John O’Kane and Bernd Radtke with notes and an outline (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 133.

³¹ See also Chanfi Ahmed, *West African ‘ulamā’ and Salafism in Mecca and Medina: Jawāb al-Ifṛīqī – The Response of the African* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Chanfi Ahmed, *AfroMecca in History. African Societies, Anti-Black Racism, and Teaching in al-Haram Mosque in Mecca* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2019).

transmission of knowledge. As documented in many chapters in this volume, orality has always been central in this tradition and, for that matter, Islamic epistemology. Lidwien Kapteijns and Alessandra Vianello (chapter 14) document very well the ways in which Somali Sufi Shaykhs in Brava composed religious didactic poems orally or in writing. Yunus Kumeke (chapter 9) shows that in the everyday life of Egyptians, the Qur'ān is performed orally. In his analysis of the traditions of oral commentary and teaching in the Islamic sciences, especially philosophy and Sufism, Oludamini Ogunnaike (chapter 6) demonstrates that there can be significant creative intellectual activity that does not necessarily leave behind written traces.

Unlike the modern context where students learn much from reading books alone in their rooms, the direct oral transmission of knowledge from master to students had always been deemed the most reliable form of transmission in Islam,³² as it had been in most traditional African cultures as well. Simply put, African Muslims had a deep and intimate knowledge of the relative strengths and drawbacks of both oral and written expression and knowledge transmission and intentionally used each – and often both simultaneously – when necessary or advantageous. Thus, the orality/textuality dichotomy which continues to be a trope in this field is misleading. Islamic scholarship in particular has embraced both oral and written transmission and merged the two in some ways, presenting an important and direct challenge to the teleological process of development from orality to literacy that is often taken for granted in the West.

The abovementioned Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse is one of the most prolific and influential Sufi authors of the twentieth century. He wrote abundantly in all fields of knowledge. Yet, the most lasting impact of his teaching was conducted orally. He conducted exegesis of the Qur'ān in Arabic for his Arabic-speaking disciples, some of whom were Arabs and other non-Senegalese West Africans, and in Wolof for his Senegambian disciples. Both exegeses were recorded and circulated widely among his disciples.³³ It was only in 2010, thirty-five years after his passing, that his Arabic *tafsīr* was transcribed and started circulating in printed form.³⁴

³² See Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 45; Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 145.

³³ For the oral *tafsīr* in Wolof, see Ibrahim Niasse, *Traduction et interprétation du Saint Coran en Wolof 1950–1960* (New York: Sall Family Publishers, 1998) 30 cassettes, with a preface by Ibrahim Mahmoud Diop. It is also now on YouTube. See <https://www.youtube.com/user/CheckhIbrahimNiass>. Accessed March 2020.

³⁴ Ibrahim Niasse, *Fī Riyāḍ al-Taḥsīn li'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Vols. 1–6) (M. Ibn al-Shaykh 'Abdullāh, Ed.).

Nigerian disciples of his who listened to the *tafsīr* either in Arabic or Wolof taught it in turn orally in Hausa when they returned to their home country.³⁵

On a related note, the workshop addressed the ways in which orality has regained momentum with the spread of the new technologies of information. The affordability of cellphones and internet connection and the availability of social media such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook is transforming the transmission of Islamic knowledge and the modalities of spiritual cultivation in a fundamental way and significantly expanding the reach of the teaching of West African scholars. Students enrolled in modern urban schools are using social media apps, Skype for example, to simultaneously study a traditional Islamic curriculum with a teacher based in rural areas. Teachers based in Africa are offering online classes to students residing hundreds if not thousands of kilometres away on a regular basis covering a substantial amount of material. The process of spiritual initiation or *tarbiya*, which typically required bodily encounters between the master and the disciple, now takes place via social media apps. This dynamic and adaptation of the traditional system of Islamic education demonstrates that it is not dying out with increased globalization, but is rather absorbing features of the new technological era to increase its reach and allow its students to participate in both arenas. De Diego González (chapter 8) shows how the current generation of Tijānī shaykhs, and especially Shaykh Muhammad Mahi Cisse, whose following includes Muslims from not just Africa, but also America and Asia, uses these media to connect and answer the questions of his disciples.

‘Ajamī as Vehicle of Transmission of Sophisticated Knowledge

The spread of Islam paved the way for the development of ‘*Ajamī* – the use of Arabic script to transcribe African languages. There is virtually no region that has been under Islamic influence that has not adopted the Arabic alphabet for transcribing local languages. Current research on the African manuscript heritage attests to the usage of the Arabic script in eighty languages and in all parts of Africa.³⁶ It is well documented that literate Africans have written in ‘*Ajamī*

³⁵ Andrea Brigaglia, ‘Learning, Gnosis and Exegesis: Public Tafsīr and Sufi Revival in the City of Kano (Northern Nigeria), 1950–1970’, *Die Welt des Islams*, 49, 2009, 334–66.

³⁶ Meikal Mumin, ‘The Arabic Script in Africa: Understudied Literacy’, in Meikal Mumin; Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Script in Africa. Studies in the Use of a Writing System* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2014) 41–76; Mahmud Hamu, *Al-kashf ‘an al-makhtūṭāt al-‘arabiyya wa al-makṭūbāt bil-ḥarf al-‘arabī fi minṭaqat al-Ṣāḥil al-Ifriqī*, Timbuktu, undated and unpublished manuscript. I am grateful to Andrea Brigaglia for supplying me with a copy of this manuscript.

to explain complex notions of Islamic theology to the masses of Africans who knew no Arabic. Most of the 'Ajamī literature addresses very old manuscripts and almost treats 'Ajamī as a thing of the past. However, in many areas 'Ajamī is still very much a living tradition that people at various intellectual levels use to transmit information of all types.³⁷ A new body of sophisticated 'Ajamī writings is challenging the idea that the main goal of 'Ajamī was to transmit basic knowledge. This body of writings includes elaborate poetry, exegesis of the Qur'ān, and theology that together articulate sophisticated knowledge intended for an erudite audience. A close examination of this body of 'Ajamī writings challenges the assumption of a language hierarchy that informs most of the study of 'Ajamī in Africa.

As noted, Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse produced an exegesis of the Qur'ān in both Arabic and Wolof in an equal degree of lexical and epistemological sophistication. By no means was the Arabic exegesis more sophisticated than the Wolof one. Some of the 'Ajamī exegeses of the Qur'ān were delivered only orally. But others were produced in written form and destined for a learned audience. Such is the case of the exegesis of Muhammad Dem, a Murid scholar entitled *mawrid al-ḍama'ān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* ('Springs of the Thirsty. A Qur'ānic Exegesis').³⁸

Islamic Scholarship in Africa and the Social Sciences Debates

In the debate among social scientists about the production of knowledge on Africa, Islamic scholarship has for a long time been completely ignored among Europhone intellectuals.³⁹ The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), a leading pan-Africanist consortium founded in 1973, took it from the ghetto into the major debates.⁴⁰ Indeed, at the turn of the twenty-first century, CODESRIA commissioned a working paper aimed at

³⁷ Fallou Ngom, *Muslims Beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of Ajami and the Muridiyya* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³⁸ See Jeremy Dell, 'Unbraiding the Qur'an: Wolofal and the *Tafsīr* Tradition of Senegambia', *Islamic Africa*, 9, 2018, 55–76.

³⁹ The phrase 'Europhone' was coined by Kwame Appiah to refer to intellectuals trained in European languages and especially French, English, and Portuguese in sub-Saharan Africa. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992) 4. 'Non Europhone' refers to those scholars who use African languages as a medium of knowledge transmission. See Ousmane Kane, *Non-Europhone Intellectuals* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2012).

⁴⁰ For more on CODESRIA's role in promoting the social sciences in Africa, see the conclusion of this volume by Ebrima Sall entitled 'The Study of Islamic Scholarship and the Social Sciences in Africa: Bridging Knowledge Divides, Reframing Narratives'.

setting a research agenda bringing Islamic scholarship in Africa into the debate among social scientists about knowledge production in Africa. Published initially in French as ‘Intellectuels non europhones’, it was translated and published in Arabic, English, and Spanish.⁴¹ CODESRIA subsequently partnered with the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa and the University of Cape Town to sponsor the collective volume *The Meanings of Timbuktu*, which brought African Islamic erudition to the attention of African social scientists. To ensure wide dissemination, the volume was also published in French.⁴²

A few groundbreaking studies with considerable theoretical sophistication were accomplished by intellectual historians of Islam in Africa.⁴³ Yet the majority of scholars in the field of Islamic scholarship failed to put the study of Islamic scholarship in Africa in conversation with cutting-edge debate in the social sciences. In that respect, Dahlia Gubara remarks that ‘the lack of attention to concepts mars many of their approaches, and the absence of a sustained analysis of the guiding proposition that “Africa” could or should be integrated through texts, libraries, and above all the Arabic language, into a domain defined as “Islamic”, does little to subvert disciplinary thinking’. Reading intelligently al-Jabartī’s *‘Ajā’ib al-āthār*, she shows for example that ‘instead of the singular all-encompassing modern designation “black”, there existed a variegated palette of skin-colours – aşmar, aswad, abyad, aḥmar, qamḥī, etc. Similarly, in place of the distinct category of African, there existed an assortment of identity-markers (zanj, sūdān, aḥbāsh, nūba, barābirah, takārnah, etc.) partaking of a different geographical imaginary that is reflected in the organization of al-Azhar itself.’ ‘The very search for Africans in al-Jabartī,’ she argues, ‘is contingent upon the presence of a unitary “Africa” (black or not), which

⁴¹ Ousmane Kane, *Intellectuels non Europhones* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2003), translated in English as *Non Europhone Intellectuals* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2012); in Arabic as *Al-muthaqqafūn al-ifriqiyyūn al-mutaḥaddithūn bi-lughāt ghayr urūbiyya* (Cairo: Center for Arab Studies, 2005), and in Spanish as *Africa y la producción intelectual no eurofona. Introducción al conocimiento islámico al sur del Sahara* (Madrid: Oozeabap, 2011).

⁴² Shamil Jeppie; Souleymane Bachir Diagne (eds.), *Tombouctou: Pour une histoire de l’érudition en Afrique de l’Ouest*, trans. Ousmane Kane (Dakar and Cape Town: CODESRIA and Human Sciences Research Council, 2012).

⁴³ To cite some of them: Rudolph Ware, *The Walking Qu’ran. Islamic Knowledge, the Body, and History in West Africa, 1000CE–present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (London: Hurst, 2000); Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

does not exist in the '*Ajā'ib* quite simply because there was no place for a continentalist vision in al-Jabartī's worldview.'⁴⁴

Road Map

This volume is organized in one general introduction, four parts, and a general conclusion. Each of the four parts is preceded by an introduction presenting the articles in that part and the ways in which they serve the general topic of the book, which is to present new and exciting work in the field and to chart new directions in the study of Islamic scholarship.

Part I, 'History, Movement and Islamic scholarship', introduced by Zachary Wright, comprises four articles. The African presence in centres of learning and pilgrimage, including many prominent teachers, is documented with Zachary Wright's 'The African Roots of a Global Eighteenth-Century Islamic Scholarly Renewal', Dahlia Gubara's 'Muhammad Al-Kashnāwī and the Everyday Life of the Occult', and Chanfi Ahmed's 'African Community and African '*Ulamā*' in Mecca'. Ousmane Kane's 'Transformation of Pilgrimage in West Africa' shows how the pilgrimage tradition which for centuries was linked to intellectual pursuits became divorced from erudition, and linked to trade and tourism.

Entitled 'Textuality, Orality, and Islamic Scholarship', Part II, introduced by Oludamini Ogunnaike, includes five chapters. Some of these address major intellectual contributions by West African scholars, including Mami's *Kitāb al-bādiya*, Dan Tafa's many works on philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate, and 'Umar Tāl's *Kitāb al-Rimāh*. Other chapters demonstrate that textuality had never been divorced from orality and address the specific advantages of both orality and textuality and how they are strategically employed in the transmission of knowledge and the performance of spirituality. De Diego González shows that orality has regained momentum with the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to transmit knowledge, especially esoteric knowledge. Yunus Kumek's chapter on the Qur'ānic performance in Egypt also shows how spirituality and the reading of the Qur'ān in particular contributes to the peace, serenity, and tranquillity of Egyptian populations.

Part III, introduced by Britta Frede, is entitled 'Islamic Education'. All four chapters in this part address the ways in which Islamic education has been transformed in West and East Africa. Caitlyn Bolton's 'Modernizing the Madrasa: Islamic Education, Development, and Tradition in Zanzibar' and Laura Cochrane's

⁴⁴ See Gubara, 'Al-Azhar and the Orders of Knowledge', 242; same author, 'Al-Azhar in the Bibliographic Imagination', *Journal of Arabic Studies*, 2012; and same author, 'Revisiting Race and Slavery Through Abd al-Rahman al-Jabartī's '*Ajā'ib al-āthār*', *Comparative Study of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 38, 2, 2018, 230–45.

‘A New *Daara*: Integrating Qur’ānic, Agricultural and Trade Education in a Community Setting’ look at how development concerns are reconfiguring the curriculum of Islamic education in Senegal and Zanzibar, while Britta Frede, who focuses on women’s education in Mauritania, traces similar transformations. Finally, Hannah Hoechner’s chapter documents how the demand for Islamic education by Senegalese immigrants in the United States has contributed to the emergence in the home country of a new type of school in Senegal that is both Islamic and international in outlook.

Part IV, entitled ‘*Ajamī*, Knowledge Transmission, and Spirituality’, deals with the role of African languages in the production of Islamic knowledge. Introduced by Jeremy Aaron Dell, and focusing on the writings of Sufi scholars of the ‘Alawiyya and the Qādiriyya in East Africa, or the Murīdiyya in West Africa, these chapters offer a fascinating window into the elaborate devotional poetry produced in ‘*Ajamī*. Lidwien Kapteijns and Alessandra Vianello’s ‘Bringing *‘Ilm* to the Common People: Sufi Vernacular Poetry and Islamic Education in Brava, c. 1890–1959’, Khadim Ndiaye’s ‘A Senegalese Sufi saint and ‘*Ajamī* poet: Sērīñ Moor Kayre (1874–1951)’ and Abdulkadir Hashim’s ‘Praise and Prestige: Significance of Elegiac Poetry among Muslim Intellectuals on the Late Twentieth Century Kenya Coast’ all contribute to that effort. Hashim’s article shows notably that the composition of elaborate Swahili poetry in the Arabic script, as testified notably by the globetrotter Ibn Battuta who visited the Swahili Coast in the fourteenth century, spans a period of at least eight centuries.

Last but not least, the general conclusion is authored by Ebrima Sall, who served twenty-five years in CODESRIA, directing various research programmes and also heading the organization for eight years. It was under his leadership of CODESRIA that Islamic scholarship in Africa became a priority in the research agenda of the Council. Entitled ‘The Study of Islamic Scholarship and the Social Sciences in Africa: Bridging Knowledge Divides, Reframing Narratives’, the conclusion reflects on the ways in which debates in the social sciences and post-colonial and decolonial studies can be enriched by close attention to the study of Islamic erudition.

PART I

HISTORY, MOVEMENT, AND ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP

Introduction

Zachary Wright

Islamic learning in Africa has always been in fruitful dialogue with broader developments in Islamic intellectual history elsewhere in the world. African Muslims travelled or migrated to the Middle East and other places in the Muslim world. Arabs and others visited or came to live in Africa. Africans read the literatures of Muslims around the globe, and sometimes studied under the great scholars of their time in Cairo and the like. So too did non-Africans read the works of African Muslim scholars, and apprentice themselves to them when given the chance. Historical dynamism, travel, and circulation have been consistent themes of African Islamic intellectual history.

This story is important because understandings of African Muslim societies often privilege the reading of local contexts in preference to global exchanges. Of course, local contexts, in Africa and elsewhere, ultimately remain indispensable for understanding the reception and performance of Muslim identities. But sometimes the artificial circumscription of African places returns us unwittingly to older colonial mentalities of an *Islam Noir*: a ‘black Islam’ that, unlike its Arab counterpart, was thought to be illiterate, superstitious, static, and servile. It is thus important to recognize African Islam as scripturally informed, unbound by place, responsive to racial stereotypes, adaptive to changing pedagogical priorities, and often self-perceived as authoritative.

It is related, by way of example, that the formative black African (*sūdānī*) scholar of Timbuktu, the fifteenth-century Muḥammad al-Kābarī, was once slandered by a Moroccan scholar jealous of the Timbuktu scholar’s renown, and called ‘*al-Kāfirī*’ (infidel) instead of al-Kābarī. According to al-Sa’dī’s *Tārīkh al-sūdān*, God punished the Moroccan man for his affront against one of God’s saints, afflicting him with leprosy. The man became desperate and consulted a soothsayer who advised him to eat the heart of a young boy to cure himself. This he did, and for this lapse into the ways of infidels, God caused him to die in a ‘most pitiable condition’.¹ From the perspective of some West African intellectuals,

¹ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa’dī, *Tārīkh al-sūdān*, in John Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 69–70.

then, Arabs or others disrespected the scholarly credentials and sainthood of black African Muslims at their own peril.

Zachary Wright's 'The African Roots of a Global Eighteenth-Century Islamic Scholarly Renewal' highlights the importance of African scholars in articulating the central ideas debated at the dawn of the modern era in the Muslim world. Recent research has redeemed the intellectual vibrancy of this period, and suggested that ideas on legal theory, *ḥadīth*, Sufism, and esotericism equalled or even transcended earlier articulations. African Muslim scholars sometimes preceded their Arab and Indian counterparts in these articulations, other times they were present in Cairo or Medina at the time of development of these ideas, and still other times they corresponded with the key interlocutors of these scholarly networks. This chapter uses the background of West African participation in discourses of global Islamic scholarly exchange to reflect on the spread of the Tijāniyya Sufi order in the region. While founded in North Africa with little direct connection to West African scholars, many Muslims south of the Sahara readily accepted the Tijāniyya because they had prefigured the main ideas of 'Muḥammadan Sufism' (*Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*), independent scholarly reasoning (*ijtihād*), and saintly authority that Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1815, Fez) himself articulated.

In 'Muhammad al-Kashnāwī and the Everyday Life of the Occult', Dahlia Gubara provides a valuable case study of a notable Central African scholar in the early eighteenth century. After accomplishing the pilgrimage to Arabia, al-Kashnāwī settled in Cairo. There he had a wide intellectual influence, most particularly on an Egyptian scholar who would later produce arguably the most important text of eighteenth-century Egypt: al-Jabartī's 'History of Egypt' (*ʿAjā'ib al-athār*). Gubara shows how 'modern reconfigurations' concerning the Islamic esoteric or talismanic tradition serve to marginalize the intellectual contributions of scholars like al-Kashnāwī. But in his time, al-Kashnāwī was appreciated for his broader scholarly expertise in theology, Islamic law, and mysticism, as well as in esotericism. His fascinating work, *al-Durr al-manẓūm*, is a commentary of one of the Islamic literary tradition's most difficult works, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 1209) *al-Sirr al-maktūm*. It was begun in response to the request of al-Kashnāwī's Arab student in Mecca. Aside from clarification of al-Rāzī's lengthy philosophical and esoteric mediations, al-Kashnāwī makes several important additions that underscore the originality of his work. The book also contains useful historical information about eighteenth-century scholarly networks, summarizes the esoteric scientific understandings of the day, and reflects on the occult practices of a variety of religions.

Chanfi Ahmed shows in 'African Community and African 'ulamā' in Mecca' that some African scholars have made names for themselves in the highest echelons of the Saudi clerical establishment. While pejorative Saudi stereotypes of Africans residing in the Hijaz do persist, many Saudi citizens push back against

the structural marginalization of those of African descent in contemporary Saudi society. And in a country styling itself as the bastion of pure Islam, several Afro-Saudi scholars have insisted on their unique positionality for the desired spread of Islam on the African continent: a claim that no doubt ensures their reputational as well as their financial well-being. Overall, Chanfi's chapter demonstrates that African scholars were not limited in their global influence to traditional juristic (*madhhab*) or Sufi (*ṭarīqa*) networks. Even if they traded their traditional African clothes for the uniforms of contemporary Arab Salafism, African intellectuals inscribed themselves into the centres of the modern Wahhābī reform movement and expanded its reach far beyond the Arab Gulf.

Ousmane Kane's 'The Transformation of the Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa' tracks how changes in the pilgrimage tradition became divorced from intellectual pursuits. Unlike in the pre-modern period when pilgrimage was closely linked to scholarship, it has become linked more to tourism in the contemporary world. African *ḥujjāj* now return from the pilgrimage with bags full of gifts from Mecca and other global cities visited en route, influencing dress styles in their places of origin. New technologies permit increasing numbers of people, including women, to make this prestigious journey. While nation-state restrictions on visas and the length of stay no longer permit substantive knowledge exchanges while on pilgrimage, African Muslims have responded by applying for separate student visas to study in the Muslim world, or to organize their own pious visitations (*ziyāra*) to centres of scholarship in West Africa. Some of these gatherings of African Muslims, to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad for example, are today almost as large as the *Hajj* itself, with millions of people coming to hear lectures, buy books, and exchange knowledge. African Muslims are not only some of the *Hajj*'s most enthusiastic participants, they also build on the pilgrimage tradition to inspire large-scale regional movements and exchanges of people and knowledge for religious purposes.

This section on the 'History, Movement, and Islamic Scholarship' thus speaks to the exchange of ideas, people, representations, and pedagogies in ways that highlight the adaptability, ingenuity, and authority of African Muslim subjects. While African Muslim identities must also be understood with reference to local contexts and discourses specific to bounded African places, such local conversations are inevitably shaped by global conversations. African Muslims have always been active participants in trans-regional exchanges associated with the global Muslim world.

CHAPTER 1

The African Roots of a Global Eighteenth-Century Islamic Scholarly Renewal

Zachary Wright

Islam noir, the notion that ‘black’ Muslims inherently practise a different (less orthodox, less scriptural, less warlike) form of Islam than their Arab coreligionists, cannot be fully destabilized without a deeper intellectual history of African Muslim scholarship. Many African and Islamic Studies researchers continue to ignore black Muslim scholars as constitutive participants in global Islamic discourses. Failing to insert a global Islamic perspective, appropriately historicized, persistently localizes and trivializes African Muslim scholarship inconsonant to the ways African Muslim scholars see themselves.

The current academic excitement surrounding African ‘*Ajamī*’ literatures, for example, ignores the high probability that a greater percentage of Islamic scholarly production in Senegal, for example, happens in Arabic versus Wolofal, than does Arabic versus Persian in Iran, or Arabic versus Urdu in Pakistan. Islamic scholarship among West African Muslims is arguably more Arabicized than any other non-Arab Muslim population. As Ousmane Kane has observed, ‘Islam and the Arabic language are no more foreign in Africa than they are in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq ... Arabic is by far the most widely spoken African language.’¹ The translation and articulation of Islamic identity in local African languages remain important, especially for a non-scholarly audience, but this process is no more pronounced in West Africa than is Muslim scholars’ use of Arabic vernaculars to explain Islamic learning in Egypt, Morocco, or other Arabic-speaking countries. Another example of the misleading localization of African Islam would be studies of Islamic talismanic sciences in African Muslim societies that very seldom take up the challenge of comparing such practices to similar ‘occult’ expressions in Arab, Turkish, or Iranian societies. The enduring strength

¹ Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016) 207–8.

of shaykh–disciple relationships in many African Muslim communities can also be misinterpreted: my earlier work on the community of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse demonstrated that such practices were in fact at the core of classical Islamic pedagogical techniques throughout the Muslim world.² The disciple’s willing submission to his shaykh was an attempt to fully actualize Islamic identity; it did not invoke some sort of African authoritarianism said to define ‘*Islam noir*’.

Like other stories of Islamic intellectual history since the spread of Islam in Africa, the dramatic scholarly activity of the eighteenth century involved Sudanic Africa in significant ways. Many have readily observed, of course, that the nineteenth century witnessed a flurry of Sufi activity on the African continent, with a number of ‘reformist’ Sufi orders expanding the social involvement of clerical communities and even engaging in jihād against the perceived injustices of local rulers and encroaching colonial interests. From ‘Uthmān ibn Fūdī of the Qādiriyya in Nigeria, to ‘Umar al-Fūtī Tāl of the Tijāniyya in Senegal and Mali, to Muḥammad al-Sanūsī of Sanūsīyya-Shādhiliyya in Libya, to Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥasan of the Ṣālihiyya-Shādhiliyya in Somalia, activists were connected through global networks of teacher–student relationships that had culminated in the eighteenth century and which shared lines of knowledge transmission and similar (though not identical) perspectives on Sufism. But eighteenth-century scholarly revival is often narrated as emerging from the Hijaz and Cairo, with resonance on the peripheries of the Muslim world. Like so many other stories of Islamic intellectual history, Africa appears as the receiver of external trends, not as the constitutive interlocutor with these trends. Returning to such narratives is essential for locating African Muslim scholars in global intellectual exchanges, and thus for decentring the lingering racialization of African Islam.

This paper argues that sub-Saharan African scholars were active participants in a sphere of scholarship linking West Africa with Morocco and Egypt, one that dated back at least to the sixteenth century. While John Hunwick, Stefan Reichmuth and others have earlier highlighted such remarkable exchanges, I go further here in suggesting that sub-Saharan Africa was a determinative source for the emergence of an eighteenth-century scholarly revival centred on the idea of the *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*. Thus, the reception of new, ostensibly ‘foreign’ Sufi orders – most notably the Tijāniyya – cannot be explained by a supposed racialized pre-disposition of ‘black’ sub-Saharan Africans to follow the lead of ‘white’ North Africans. Rather, black African scholars had long been involved in articulating the constituent elements of the *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* phenomenon that the Tijāniyya drew upon so heavily.

² Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: the Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niasse* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 32–3.

The *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* refers to the increasing tendency of Sufi intellectuals in the eighteenth century to invoke a pre-eminent ‘Muḥammadan’ Sufi path that 1) bound aspirants to following the behavioural ideal of the Prophet, 2) stressed the Sufi’s worldly involvement, and 3) held the promise of the aspirant’s direct connection to the enduring spirituality of the Prophet Muḥammad through the practice of ‘prayer on the Prophet’ (*ṣalāt ‘alā al-nabī*). The combination of these ideas often led *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* scholars to criticize excessive veneration for a particular school of law (*madhhab*), to temper some of the perceived excesses of ‘popular Islam’ (including fascination with esoteric sciences such as talismans and geomancy), and to articulate remarkable claims of spiritual authority. Nonetheless, none of these notions – by themselves – were particularly new in the intellectual history of Sufism.³ And as an idea rather than a movement, various Sufi communities forwarded their own interpretations of the ‘Muḥammadan Way’.⁴ But the fact remains that the eighteenth-century flourishing of Sufism usually invoked a pre-eminent *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* with a relatively standard set of practices and doctrines. Scholars in sub-Saharan Africa were leading proponents of these ideas from at least the sixteenth century, and they may have influenced their Arab counterparts in the Middle East.

This chapter draws upon source materials that reference Islamic scholarly exchanges between North and sub- (or perhaps trans-) Saharan Africa prior to the nineteenth century. Primary centres of scholarship include Timbuktu, Fez, Kanem-Bornu, and Cairo. Leaving aside the more impressionistic glosses that can be found elsewhere, I am more interested in evidence of the particular ideas that were common to the eighteenth and nineteenth century spread of *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* movements, ostensibly from the Middle East and North Africa to sub-Saharan Africa. This exploration is part of a larger historical inquiry into the origins of the Tijāniyya, probably Africa’s most popular Sufi order since the nineteenth century. I thus include reference to specific Tijānī invocations of this earlier trans-Saharan intellectual history, as a means to better understand the Tijāniyya’s rapid spread south of the Maghreb. A summarized version of this research has been included in the first chapter of my recent monograph of the Tijāniyya,⁵ but this paper broadens the analysis of intellectual exchange between sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa.

³ R.S. O’Fahey; Bernd Radtke, ‘Neo-Sufism Reconsidered’, *Islam*, 70, 1993, 52–87; Bernd Radtke, ‘Sufism in the 18th Century: an attempt at a provisional appraisal’, *Die Welt des Islams*, 36, 3, 1996, 326–64.

⁴ John Voll, ‘Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 42, 2/3, 2008, 314–30; Zachary Wright, *Realizing Islam: the Tijāniyya in North Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Muslim World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020) 6–7, 48–52.

⁵ Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 24–30.



Fig. 1.1 The *Ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* (the prayer of opening) displayed on the wall of the room in which Aḥmad al-Tijānī performed spiritual retreat in Boussemghoun, Algeria in the 1880s (Credit: Ousmane Oumar Kane)

Muḥammad al-Bakrī and the Scholars of Timbuktu

The Egyptian Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Bakrī (d. 1585) was a shaykh at Al-Azhar and one of the most renowned scholars of sixteenth-century Egypt. He is celebrated within the Tijāniyya as the source for the legendary prayer on the Prophet Muḥammad, *Ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* (the prayer of opening – see Figure 1.1),⁶ which later became a pillar of Tijānī litanies. Al-Bakrī was so named because his family claimed descent from the Prophet’s companion Abū Bakr Siddīq. His grandfather originally hailed from the Fayyum oasis in the Egyptian desert. He was extremely wealthy, and his father was the first to perform the pilgrimage rituals while being carried in a palanquin. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī (1493–1565) referred to al-Bakrī as the ‘reviver’ (*mujaddid*) of the sacred law, and esteemed his famous collection of Sufi prayers, the *ḥizb al-bakrī*.⁷

⁶ This illustration shows the *Ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* displayed in the wall of the room in which Aḥmad al-Tijānī performed spiritual retreat in Boussemghoun, Algeria in the 1880s.

⁷ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009) 170.

Interestingly enough, Muḥammad al-Bakrī also makes an appearance in chronicles of Timbuktu. He is described in ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sa‘dī’s *Ta’rīkh al-Sūdān* in several places as ‘the friend of God’ (*walī Allāh*) and ‘axial saint’ (*qutb*) of his time ‘who had great affection for the scholars of Timbuktu’.⁸ This glowing description led Nehemia Levtzion to conclude ‘The Bakri shaykhs were spiritual mentors of the scholars of Timbuktu, who were themselves [like al-Bakrī] practising Sufis without an affiliation to a brotherhood.’⁹ While al-Bakrī apparently did provide a close spiritual mentorship for several scholars of Timbuktu, he clearly held their scholarly credentials as equal to his own. He thus addressed the Timbuktu *ḥadīth* scholar and jurist, Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Umar Aqīt in verse:

I swear by God that I am true to you, with love for you unchanged,
affection likewise true.

The sweetness of our days together I recall, those times our talk
was grave and deep.¹⁰

Al-Bakrī was one of many Arab scholars that Timbuktu pilgrims visited in Egypt on their way to Mecca in the sixteenth century. For his part, al-Bakrī attested to the sainthood of Timbuktu scholars, especially of the line of ‘Umar Aqīt. Some of these latter scholars spent time in Egypt studying with al-Bakrī, such as ‘Umar Aqīt’s grandson Abu Bakr (d. 1583), ‘who remained particularly close to the father of honor Muḥammad al-Bakrī, from whom he derived blessing, and on whose teachings he made notes’.¹¹

Aside from the practice of Sufism disconnected from a formalized Sufi brotherhood,¹² al-Bakrī evidently shared several characteristics with the scholars of Timbuktu. Al-Bakrī emphasized the Sufi’s involvement in society, the study of the law unbound by one *madhhab*, and the propensity for direct spiritual unveiling, particularly in relationship to the spirituality of the Prophet. Al-Bakrī was a gifted poet and accomplished mystic, who apparently preceded Aḥmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) in qualifying Ibn al-‘Arabī’s concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*: ‘The unity

⁸ John Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: al-Sa‘adī’s Ta’rīkh al-Sūdān down to 1613 and other contemporary documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 43, 87.

⁹ Nehemia Levtzion, ‘Eighteenth Century Sufi Brotherhoods: Structural, Organizational and Ritual Changes’, in Peter Riddell; Tony Street (eds.), *Islam: Essays on Scripture, thought and society: a festschrift in honour of Anthony Johns* (New York: Brill, 1997) 154.

¹⁰ Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, 47.

¹¹ Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, 61.

¹² This may have been the case of most Sufi practitioners prior to the eighteenth century, such as al-Ghazālī and al-Suyūfī. See Levtzion, ‘Eighteenth Century Sufi Brotherhoods’, 147–60.

is experiential, not ontological.¹³ Nonetheless, he was well regarded by Ibn al-‘Arabī’s primary popularizer ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī, who apparently shared with al-Bakrī a nominal association with the Shādhiliyya.

Despite al-Bakrī’s affiliation to the Shāfi‘ī *madhhab*, the scholars of Timbuktu perceived him as sympathetic to their Mālikī expertise. The *Ta’rīkh al-Sūdān* has al-Bakrī appearing in a spiritual vision to bless the young Timbuktu scholar ‘Uryān al-Ra’s’ study of the key Mālikī text, al-Qayrawānī’s *al-Risāla*:

Sidi Muḥammad al-Bakrī came across him [al-Ra’s] sitting at the door of the Sankore mosque in the early afternoon ... The divinely favored shaykh stopped beside him and inquired what the book was in his hand, and was told it was the *Risāla*. Stretching out his blessed hand the Shaykh asked to see it, and after examining it for a while, gave it back to him saying, ‘May God bring blessing upon you through it,’ and continued on his way.¹⁴

The text goes on to suggest that al-Bakrī was a regular visitor to other scholars of Timbuktu, despite his physical presence in Egypt.

According to Levtzion, a later generation of Timbuktu scholars, represented by the famous Aḥmad Bābā, began to favour Egyptian scholarship over their Moroccan counterparts for the latter’s exclusive interest in Mālikī texts.¹⁵ While al-Suyūfī’s writings were no doubt influential in Timbuktu, the more sustained contact with al-Bakrī may have been the more direct scholarly exchange with Egypt from the sixteenth century that influenced Bābā’s criticism of Morocco. Moreover, the scholars of Timbuktu had other subsequent contacts with (non-Mālikī) Arab scholars of note. A certain Ahmad Bābā (different from the original) from Timbuktu met the Syrian Naqshbandī Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī in Medina in 1694, and at the Timbuktu scholar’s request composed a commentary on the versified rendition of Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī’s (d. 1490) *Aqīda al-ṣughra* by the Timbuktu student of the original Aḥmad Bābā, Muḥammad Baghrū‘u.¹⁶ The contact between Ahmad ‘al-Timbuktī’ and Nābulusī is significant, as the latter’s ideas on the *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, transmitted through a

¹³ Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 244.

¹⁴ Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, 76.

¹⁵ Nehemia Levtzion, ‘Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan to 1800’, in R. Pouwels; N. Levtzion (eds.), *History of Islam in Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000) 72.

¹⁶ Al-Nābulusī named this work *al-Laṭā‘if al-unsīyya ‘alā naẓm al-‘aqīda al-sanūsīyya*. See Stefan Reichmuth, ‘Islamic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa’, in R. Pouwels and N. Levtzion (eds.), *History of Islam in Africa*, 428.

book on the subject and through his Khalwatī student Muṣṭafa al-Bakrī (d. 1749), helped define eighteenth-century articulations of the concept.¹⁷

While Timbuktu's scholarly exchanges with al-Bakrī are of note, the Sufi credentials of this Egyptian notable deserve emphasis. Despite his great wealth and expertise in Islamic law, he had a reputation for spiritual unveiling (*kashf*) that resonated in Timbuktu. The ability to 'see' God, the Prophet Muḥammad, and absent saints were all miracles of wide circulation in Timbuktu. Yaḥyā al-Tadilisī, for example, used to see the Prophet Muḥammad every night, until he was deprived of it on account of questionable business practices.¹⁸ Al-Bakrī attested to the aforementioned 'Uryān al-Ra's' ability to see God, even if the vision had temporarily confused his mind: 'He has seen a sight that cannot be endured. The final outcome of it will be good for him.'¹⁹

Tijānī sources also reference the saintly unveiling of Muḥammad al-Bakrī, namely as the source for the central Tijānī prayer, *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*. Here is Aḥmad al-Tijānī's testimony to al-Bakrī and the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* as related in 'Alī Harāzīm's (d. 1802) *Jawāhir al-Ma'ānī*:

I occupied myself with the remembrance of *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ limā ughliq* upon returning from *Ḥajj* until I reached Tlemcen, because of what I perceived of its bounty. Namely, that one recitation is worth six hundred thousand prayers (of blessing on the Prophet), as is related in *Wardat al-Juyūb*.²⁰ The author of the *Wardat* mentions that its author, Sīdī Muḥammad al-Bakrī al-Ṣiddīqī, lived in Egypt and was an axial saint (*qutb*), may God be pleased with him. He said, 'Whoever recites it one time and does not enter Paradise, let him arrest its author in the presence of God.' I continued to recite it until I traveled from Tlemcen to Abī Samghūn. Then I saw a prayer equivalent to seventy thousand times of *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*²¹ and I

¹⁷ For al-Nabulusī's influential work on the subject, see 'Abd al-Ghānī al-Nabulusī, *al-Ḥadīqa al-Nadiyya Sharḥ al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya wa l-Sayra al-Aḥmadiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2011).

¹⁸ Levtzion, 'Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan', 73. Levtzion is here quoting from the *Ta'rīkh al-fatāsh*.

¹⁹ Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, 76.

²⁰ I believe this is a reference to 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jazūlī, *Wardat al-juyūb fī ṣalāt 'alā l-ḥabīb*, a text available for download online from <https://www.wdl.org/ar/item/11234/>. Accessed 30 November 2016, originally sourced from the Library of Congress. The final pages reference the date of compilation as 1146 AH (1733 CE), although the final number of the date (6) is difficult to make out. The *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* appears as the twenty-fourth of roughly forty prayers compiled in this manuscript, page 76. There is no mention in this copy of the manuscript of the benefit of different prayers included in the text, as evidently was the case for the copy al-Tijānī possessed. This manuscript may in fact be the first textual reference to *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*.

²¹ The famous collection of prayers on the Prophet authored by the North African

left aside *al-Fātiḥ limā ughliq* ... But then the Prophet commanded me to return to *Ṣalāt al-fātiḥ limā ughliq* ... and he informed me that one recitation of it was equivalent to all the glorifications ever uttered in creation, and all remembrances and all supplications, large or small, and of the Qur'ān six thousand times, since it (the Qur'ān) is among the remembrances.²²

While al-Bakrī's prayer was apparently known before the emergence of the Tijāniyya, it was no doubt the Prophet's testimony of its merit to al-Tijānī that popularized it. Indeed, al-Tijānī goes on to assert the divine provenance of the prayer:

The Prophet informed me that it was not the authorship of al-Bakrī. He devoted himself to God for a long time, asking that he be graced with a prayer upon the Prophet that contained the reward of all other prayers (upon the Prophet), and that was the secret of all prayers. And he persisted in his request for a long time. Then God answered his supplication, and an angel came to him with this prayer written on a sheet of light.²³

The Tijāniyya thus claimed to have accessed the most treasured inheritance that al-Bakrī had left. The Prophet's appearance to al-Tijānī rescued *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* from relative obscurity and purported to tell the real story of an exceedingly valuable prayer. Indeed, al-Bakrī seems to have kept *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* more or less hidden during his lifetime. If he taught it to the scholars of Timbuktu, they neglected to pass it on themselves, and its mention is absent from biographical dictionaries of the period. The Tijāniyya's investiture of a prayer linked to al-Bakrī as the best of all prayers must have struck a chord with West African Muslim scholars who remembered the mutual affection between al-Bakrī and the scholars of Timbuktu.

Sub-Saharan Scholars in Egypt and the Hijaz

There is no doubt that Egypt in the eighteenth century, as earlier, was one of the great centres of Islamic learning. The revival of the Khalwatiyya in Egypt, which in the eighteenth century 'spread like a brush fire',²⁴ certainly influenced Sufi activism in sub-Saharan Africa. Aḥmad al-Tijānī was notably initiated into the Khalwatiyya at the hands of the Iraqi scholar Maḥmūd al-Kurdī. Al-Tijānī's relationship with Kurdī involved him in Middle Eastern networks of Sufi-scholarly exchange that involved sub-Saharan Africa long before the spread of the Tijāniyya south of the Sahara.

Shādhilī Sufi Muḥammad al-Jazūlī (d. 1465).

²² 'Alī Ḥarāzīm al-Barāda, *Jawāhir al-Ma'ānī* (Beirut: Dār ak-fikr, 2001) 100.

²³ Al-Barāda, *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī*, 101.

²⁴ Levtzion, 'Eighteenth Century Sufi Brotherhoods', 150.

Sub-Saharan African scholars were long present in Egypt, and the Middle East more generally, as both teachers and students. By the eighteenth century, three out of Azhar's twenty-five student dormitories were dedicated to students from central or western Africa. Students from the Maghreb had one dormitory.²⁵ Prominent African scholars resident in the Middle East for the period included Muḥammad al-Kashnāwī (d. 1741, Cairo), a mysterious 'Shaykh al-Barnāwī' (alive late eighteenth century, Cairo), and Ṣāliḥ al-Fullānī (d. 1803, Medina). The establishment of African scholars in Cairo is further attested by more quotidian mention in nineteenth-century Egyptian records. 'Umar Muḥammad al-Burnāwī al-Takrūrī (d. 1824, Cairo) died leaving a slave-girl and an extensive library that included a Qur'ān, the prayer-poem *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*, a commentary on the Mālikī legal text *Mukhtaṣar al-Khalīl*, several collections of Prophetic narrations, and books on 'spiritualism' (*rūḥāniyāt*).²⁶ An 1848 Cairo census mentions a certain 'Abdallah al-Dakrūrī (Takrūrī), 'a mufti and student at al-Azhar' who owned his own house in the city.²⁷ Travelling scholars from sub-Saharan Africa also frequently appeared in Egyptian *ijāza* literature, from al-Suyūṭī to Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī. Among al-Zabīdī's visiting students in Cairo from the Western Sudan, for example, were several direct students of Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d. 1811), with whom the later Tijāniyya would have close (if not always congenial) interactions, and Jibrīl b. 'Umar, the teacher of 'Uthmān b. Fūdī in central Sudan.²⁸ But it is the resident African scholars that deserve further mention for their more sustained dialogue with eighteenth-century intellectual developments in the Middle East.

The central Sudanic scholar Muḥammad al-Kashnāwī became well known in Egypt as the teacher of Ḥasan al-Jabartī, the father of the famous Egyptian historian 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, and as the author of an important treatise on the esoteric sciences: *al-Durr al-manẓūm wa khulāsat al-sirr al-maktūm fī l-siḥr*

²⁵ Dahlia Gubara, 'Al-Azhar and the Orders of Knowledge', PhD diss., Department of History, Columbia University, 2014, 229–30.

²⁶ Terence Walz, 'Trans-Saharan Migration and the Colonial Gaze: The Nigerians in Egypt', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 26, 2006, 94–118, 102.

²⁷ Terence Walz, 'Sudanese, Habasha, Takarna, and Barabira: Trans-Saharan Africans in Cairo as Shown in the 1848 Census', in Terence Walz; Kenneth M. Cuno (eds.), *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in 19th-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011) 55. Walz reminds us that names such as Takrūrī or Burnāwī in Egyptian sources are sometimes misleading. Takrūrī, for example, could have included Bornu, Wadai, and Darfur, as well as the lands of Western African traditionally associated with the ancient kingdom of Takrūr.

²⁸ Stefan Reichmuth, *The World of Murtaḍa al-Zabīdī* (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2009) 190–4.

wa l-ṭalāsīm wa l-nujūm.²⁹ While certainly known as an esotericist in Egypt, he boasted a comprehensive scholarly training before leaving Katsina sometime before 1730. Among his teachers were Muḥammad al-Walī al-Burnāwī and possibly Muḥammad Fūdī, the father of ‘Uthmān b. Fudī.³⁰ Al-Walī (flourished late seventeenth century) was among the most famous scholars of Kanem-Bornu. Aside from his writings on ‘Ash‘arī theology, his legal opinions prohibiting smoking made him one of the few Mālikī scholars of his age to take such a stance.³¹ Indeed, al-Walī’s prohibition may have signalled a shift against tobacco in sub-Saharan Africa, still largely tolerated in the eighteenth-century Middle East, that endeared the Tijāniyya to the region. Al-Nabulusī, for example, argued against the prohibition of smoking.³² Al-Jabartī’s description of the Egyptian Khalwatī Sufi and Mālikī jurist, ‘Alī al-Sa‘īdī al-‘Adawī (d. 1775), thus highlights the aversion of some of his peers for al-‘Adawī’s campaigns against smoking.³³ Al-Walī’s moral rigour also characterized Kashnāwī’s writings, as it did later Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya movements like the Tijāniyya.

Al-Kashnāwī’s disposition towards the esoteric sciences appears to resonate with later Tijānī articulations:³⁴ he accepted their role in the actualization of religious knowledge, but he cautioned against their misuse. Al-Kashnāwī was hesitant to teach students his esoteric knowledge, having been warned previously:

If I reached the countries of the East and especially the Ḥaramayn, I should not reveal to any of their inhabitants that I know something of those letter-based sciences, and what resembles them of the sand-based sciences, on account of their prevalent uses in these countries for causing corruption, tribulations and dissension [among people] in plain sight of those of discerning minds.³⁵

²⁹ An important summary of Kashnāwī’s life and work can be found in chapter four of Dahlia Gubara’s fascinating dissertation, ‘Al-Azhar and the Orders of Knowledge’. Subsequent information on Kashnāwī is borrowed from Gubara’s research.

³⁰ Gubara, ‘Al-Azhar and the Orders of Knowledge’, 259–60.

³¹ According to Van Dalen, ‘By the end of the seventeenth century, most jurists in the centers of the Middle East as well as the Maghreb, and certainly most Mālikī jurists, had come to the conclusion that smoking tobacco was allowed.’ See Dorrit Van Dalen, *Doubt, Scholarship and Society in 17th-Century Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2016) 166.

³² Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus: ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, 1641–1731* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 7.

³³ Al-Jabartī, *History of Egypt*, I: 697.

³⁴ For more on the esoteric sciences in the Tijāniyya, see Zachary Wright, ‘Secrets on the Muhammadan Way: Transmission of the Esoteric Sciences in 18th century scholarly networks’, *Islamic Africa*, 9, 1, 2018, 77–105.

³⁵ Al-Kashnāwī, *Durr al-manẓūm*; cited in Gubara, ‘Al-Azhar and the Orders of Knowledge’, 319.