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Editorial

From a Neglected to a Crowded Field—The Academic Study of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa

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1. Introduction

An estimated five hundred million Muslims—close to a third of the global Muslim population and half of the African population—live on the African continent. The overwhelming majority of them live in the northern half of the continent, above the equator. In the last hundred years or so, Western interest in Islam in Africa led to the production of a substantial academic literature establishing the study of Islam in Africa as an important field of academic inquiry. This article attempts to identify the main trends of this intellectual history.

A substantial body of Western academic scholarship has undoubtedly been produced on Islam and on Muslim communities in West, East, and Southern Africa. In 2006, Paul Schrijver compiled a list of four thousand titles of books and articles on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa (Schrijver 2006). Since then, the secondary literature itself has grown exponentially, and no doubt thousands more titles are now available in European languages alone. The Encyclopedia *Arabic Literature of Africa*, coordinated by John Hunwick and Sean O'Fahey and modeled on the *Geschichte der Arabishen Literatur* of German Orientalist Carl Brockelmann, has compiled several thousand titles written by African scholars in virtually all fields of knowledge (O'Fahey 1994, 2003; Hunwick 1995, 2003; Stewart 2015). We also know that a substantial body of Islamic literature has been produced in African languages such as Hausa, Swahili, Fulfulde, and Yoruba though, to my knowledge, there is no comprehensive compilation available similar to the ones in European languages or Arabic. A thorough review of all of this literature is beyond the scope of any book, let alone an article. The goal of this paper is far more limited: to review the secondary literature in French and English that deals primarily with Francophone and Anglophone West Africa and to introduce the papers of this Special Issue centered on Islamic globalization and transnationalism. I will refer frequently in this article to Senegal and Nigeria, as these were the topic of most research on Islam in Africa, and because this literature gives a good sense of the major trends in the field of Islam in Africa as a whole.

My argument is that the field has been subject to successive reconfigurations driven by a combination of changing policy interests, involvement of new players and paradigm shifts in the social sciences. I look first at colonial writings aimed at the surveillance of Muslim communities. Then, I discuss the interventions of social scientists seeking to make sense of the role of Islam in the process of nation building. Subsequently, I address the ways in which globalization, transnationalism studies, gender studies, and decolonial studies have affected the field. I conclude that it has become a crowded field and is likely to grow in complexity due to a combination of factors, including the involvement of a larger number of African and non-African scholars in the field, the shift in the center of gravity of Islam to sub-Saharan Africa (Mcclendon 2017), the emergence of new sites of research, and increasing opportunities for research dissemination including via new platforms facilitated by information and communication technologies.

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2. Mapping Muslim Communities and Surveying Leaders

Arab geographers provided the earliest information about the spread of Islam in Africa, collecting it from merchants attracted by African gold (Nehemia and Hopkins 1981). Between the ninth and the seventeenth centuries, they produced more than seventy-five maps detailing the traveling distance between each of the main trading posts in the Sahara (Loimeier 2013). Beginning in the sixteenth century, African Muslims began to contribute to this field, writing either in Arabic or in Ajami.

While some information about African Islam is found in travel narratives of precolonial European explorers such as Hugh Clapperton, Mungo Park, Heinrich Barth, and others (Clapperton 1826, 1829; Barth 1857–1858; Park 1858), sustained European interest in collecting information on African Muslims commenced only with the onset of colonial rule. Colonial officials whose mission was to monitor the activities of Muslim communities produced short reports, but also lengthy academic studies. The need of knowledge to rule but also the fear of anticolonial resistance especially pan-Islamism, or mobilization of Muslims from different African regions against European colonial rule, was what motivated this surveillance. In the French colonies, Paul Marty produced several monographs on Islam and Muslim communities (Marty 1916, 1917, 1920–1921, 1921, 1922, 1926) including on the Murids whose leader Ahmadou Bamba, was exiled twice in his life to Gabon and Mauritania, and kept in mandatory residence upon his return until his death in 1927 (Marty 1913). A look at the French surveillance files of Muslim leaders in the colonial archives of Aix-en-Provence suggests that the French never trusted them. Indeed, the French produced detailed reports not only on "subversive" leaders such as Ahmadu Bamba and Cheikh Hamallah (d. 1943), both of whom French colonial authorities exiled for years, but also on leaders such as Malik Sy (d. 1922), Seydou Nourou Tall (d. 1980), and Ibrahim Niasse (d. 1975), who were part of the colonial establishment.[1] British colonial officials in Nigeria undertook similar surveillance of Mahdist movements (Al-Hajj 1973; Said 1992). Later, in the twentieth century, missionary John Spencer Trimingham produced a series of the studies on Islam in Africa in English, which parallels, in terms of scope, the work of Paul Marty on French West Africa (Trimingham 1968, 1964a, 1964b, 1952, 1949).

This surveillance literature assumed that Islam in Africa was different from Arab Islam. Labels such as "Islam noir" (Monteil 1964) or an "Islam du terroir africain" (Cardaire 1954) used in colonial reports assumed that Islam in Africa was a superficial, less erudite, less warlike Islam than its Arabic counterpart. Colonial policy acted on this knowledge to prevent Muslim transnational solidarity, restrict movement of population between North and sub-Saharan Africa, and create the idea that the Sahara was a physical and a cultural barrier that explained why African Islam was different from Arab Islam. Despite their biases, colonial studies provided the foundation for the more rigorous academic study of Islam in Africa after the independence of African countries.

3. Nation Building and the Study of Islam

The end of the Second World War paved the way for the decolonization of the African colonies of France, Britain, Belgium, Portugal, and Italy. In the following decade or so, they all became independent with the notable exception of the Portuguese colonies whose decolonization was completed in 1974. While colonial studies of African Muslim communities were accomplished mostly by officials on behalf of the "Metropole," post-independence studies involved scholars from different nationalities and with different motivations. Among them, first and foremost were African intellectuals committed to rewriting their own history. In an effort to distance themselves from the colonial legacy, they searched for new paradigms for African studies and development. In Nigeria, the most populous African country, a new school of historiography was started by Abdullahi Smith, a British scholar who first served at University College, Ibadan, and later relocated to Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. The main goal of Smith and his students was to reinterpret the history of the nineteenth-century Islamic movements of reform and state building in West Africa. They drew extensively from local Arabic writings to document the nineteenth-

century Sokoto Caliphate founded by Uthman Dan Fodio. The first doctoral dissertation in any Nigerian university was defended by a British student of Smith's named Murray Last (Last 1967). In the course of his doctoral studies, Murray Last collected thousands of Arabic manuscripts, and these formed the basis of an archive of Arabic manuscripts named the Northern History Research Scheme, subsequently housed at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. Further doctoral dissertations documented the history of other emirates of Northern Nigeria that were part of the Sokoto Caliphate. Among the claims rooted in the colonial library that they rejected is the notion that the nineteenth-century jihads were mostly an ethnic affair (The Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research 1987). These works instead made a convincing case that they were movements of socio-economic revolt or religious reform (Tukur 1979; Mahadi 1982; Usman 1981).

In addition to historians seeking to reinterpret precolonial history, a number of political scientists looked at the role of religion in the nation building process. Their approaches were informed by the competing paradigms of the time: modernization theory and Marxist political economy. John Paden's doctoral dissertation defended at Harvard university in 1968 examines the "Influence of the Religious Elites on Political Culture and Community Integration in Kano Nigeria." Paden looks at the ways in which Sufi brotherhoods of the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya acted to integrate different ethnic groups in post-independence Kano.[2] In an emerging American tradition of fieldwork with strong interest in local sources, Paden was fluent in Hausa and Arabic and made use of these sources. He also collected hundreds of manuscripts to establish a collection of African Arabic manuscripts at Northwestern University. Other social scientists interested in religion and nation building looked at the relations between Sufi orders and the state. Several such studies were published on Senegal (Coulon 1981; Behrman 1970; O'Brien 1975; Villallon 1995). These studies were centered on the political role played by the Sufi orders in Senegal and the ways in which, as civil society, they acted as counterpower to the state and guaranteed the political stability which made Senegal a success story in Africa.

Other studies inspired by Marxist political economy focused on the Murids of Senegal and their involvement in peanut production (Copans 1988), which made them major players in the nation's political economy. At the turn of twenty-first century, Muridology, or the study of the Murids of Senegal, became the most important sub-field in the study of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa.[3] Things changed at the turn of twenty-first century when Murid scholars trained in the Western academy joined the field with the purpose of writing their own version of Muridism based also on Murid internal sources and self-understanding of Murid history (Babou 2007; Gueye 2002).

While Sufi orders formed the bulk of the study of Islam in Africa until the 1980s, a number of studies of religious reform movements, especially Wahhabism, were added to the literature at the turn of the twenty-first century. The first is the landmark study of Wahhabism in West Africa by Lansine Kaba, which examines the role of Shubanu and UCM in the anti-colonial movement.[4] It took another two decades before more studies explored the expanding influence of Wahhabism and other Islamist movements in West Africa. Founded in 1978 in Nigeria, the Jama'a Izalat al-Bid'a wa Iqamat al-Sunna (Society for the Study of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition) received the lion's share of attention in those studies.[5] It became the larger such movement in West Africa spreading in neighboring Ghana, Cameroon and Niger and found considerable support among the urban middle classes and Western educated elites.

4. Globalization and Transnationalism Studies

Most of the research produced on Islam in Africa in 1960s and 1970s took place within the boundaries of nation states and was informed by what Jan Aart Scholte named methodological territorialism, which consists of "formulating concepts and questions, constructing hypotheses, gathering and interpreting empirical evidence, and drawing conclusions all in a territorial spatial framework"(Scholte 2003). Starting from the late 1980s, two developments provoked a paradigm shift in the study of Islam in Africa. The

first was the globalization turn in the social sciences. Indeed, the perception that global interconnectedness had increased significantly due to technological progress, making communication at distance possible, led to a fundamental rethinking of methodological territorialism. Scholars in all the field of the social sciences and humanities began to pay attention to transnationalism and the intensification of global interconnectedness. This, as proven by the papers in this Special Issue, prompted scholars of Islam in Africa to look at the larger global context in which African Muslims interacted with the world.

The second development was the settlement of millions of Muslims, including Africans in the West. Labor migration from Muslim countries of Africa started after the second world war, which decimated Europe. In need of manpower for their reconstruction, former European imperial powers turned to their colonies for labor supply. Muslims from North and West Africa settled in Europe. Their presence in the host societies, initially envisaged as temporary, became permanent with the arrival of a sizable second and third generation. Dozens of monographs and articles documented the presence of the African Muslims in Europe as well as the transnational links which they created, connecting their homelands and societies (Diouf and Leichtman 2009). Again, a substantial portion of this research was devoted to Senegalese and more specifically Murids.[6]

From the 1980s, the economic recession and the adoption of tough immigration laws in Europe along with the creation of the lottery visa system in the United States prompted many West African francophone Muslims to immigrate to the United States. While West Africans from English-speaking countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and the Gambia have been attending institutions of higher education in the United States from the early twentieth century, their francophone counterparts tended to migrate to France. In the 1980s, a sizable number of Senegalese, Malians, and Ivorians started to settle in New York City, where they created an African neighborhood in the Upper West Side of Manhattan named Little Senegal (Kane 2011).

With the settlement of this African diaspora, the Sufi orders of the Tijaniyya and the Muridiyya were exported to Europe and the United States. A large number of institutions such as Sufi lodges (zawaya), Sufi festivals (Magal and Gamou) were being celebrated in in the US (Ebin and Lake 1990, 1993, 1996). A related development was the circulation of the religious elites traveling back and forth between Africa and the West to strengthen the ties, raise funds, and offer fee-for-service prayers in a flourishing prayer economy. Muslim communities in Europe also strove to recreate their religious institutions in the West and to build connections with the homeland (Soares 2004; Kuczynski 2002; Diallo 1984). As this transnational migration literature was documenting the ways in which the African Muslim diaspora is able to engage Western societies peacefully and productively while simultaneously benefitting their home societies, a parallel body of literature emerging at the beginning of the twenty-first century began to document a transnationalism of a very different type.

Globalization and transnationalism provide the theoretical framework informing the papers in this Special Issue. Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem documents the ways in which Islamic scholarship in Mauritania "has continued to assert its relevance and scholarly authority on a global scale", while Cheikh Abdoulaye Niang discusses the Fayda Tijaniyya Sufi community, which by the end of European colonial rule was the largest single Muslim organization in West Africa. Niang shows how it has spread beyond the African continent to Europe and America in the twenty-first century.

Focusing on the Mustafawi Sufi order founded in Thies Senegal by Mustafa Gueye Haidara (d. 1980) and brought to Moncks Corner South Carolina by Shaykh Arona Faye, Yusuf Carter examines also West African Sufism in a diasporic context. In the American south, Carter argues that spiritual cultivation "becomes possible through varying forms of care and bodily practice that take place in a mosque that is situated on a former slave plantation." Along similar lines, Ayodeji Ogunnaike who looks at Islamic scholarship in Brazil argues that, "in much the same way that scholars have argued that the Sahara constituted an avenue of exchange and connection between North Africa and Bilad al-

Sudan . . . the Atlantic Ocean was not an insurmountable barrier but provided opportunities for African Muslims to extend the traditions of Bilad al-Sudan into Brazil—albeit to a much lesser extent."

Indeed, intellectuals in the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa have exchanged for centuries. Mansour Kedidir examines the ways in which Afro–Arab relations have evolved in last decades as well as new pan-African fora for intellectual exchange such as the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa.

Steve Howard analyzed the Sudanese Movement of the Republican Brothers founded by Mahmoud Mohamed Taha (1909–1985) who was executed by Sudanese President Gafar al-Nimeyri. Following his execution, the Republicans have kept a low profile in Sudan. However, as Howard shows, many of them have joined the Sudanese diaspora abroad, and established communities of Republicans in the Gulf States of Qatar and UAE, as well as the United States.

The new globalization era is no doubt the era in which NGOs are playing an important role in development. How has Islamic humanitarianism been affected by NGOs operating in the African continent? This question is answered by Rhea Rahman and Ezgi Guner. Rahman examines the Islamic Relief, which is "today the world's largest and most-recognized Western-based Islamically-inspired non-governmental organization." Ezgi Guner looks at the Islamic schools of Erenköy Cemaati and argues that "they are produced by the overlapping processes of the NGOization of Sufi orders in response to earlier state repression in Turkey and the NGOization of education in the wake of the neoliberal restructuring in Africa".

5. The War on Terror and Islam in Africa

Colonial states faced serious resistance from Muslim groups at the eve of the colonial conquest of Africa, a story well documented by historians.[7] African Muslims, however, accommodated to European colonial rule by the second decade of the twentieth century, leaving the political sphere to the colonial state to devote themselves to their mission of educators during the rest of European colonial rule.[8] From the third decade till the end of the twentieth century, neither colonial states nor African independent nation states faced any serious threat from militant Islam. Although a few Muslim militants challenged the secular claim of the African states and called for an Islamic state, they were marginal. The more serious threat to national unity in the first few decades after independence was ethnic irredentism. At the turn of the twenty-first century, this situation changed. Sahelian Africa from Mauritania in the Atlantic Coast to Somalia in East Africa has become the theater of operation of non-state armed Islamic groups.

In Algeria where the democratic process initiated by President Chadli Benjedid was derailed by the army, "Algerian-Afghans" joined armed Islamic groups and resorted to large-scale violence against the government and also some civilians. The massive repression from the Algerian army which ensued forced the jihadis to redeploy in the so-called "ungoverned spaces" of the Sahara. In Northern Mali in particular, they procured huge amounts of resources through kidnapping and various forms of trafficking in the 1990s. They also infiltrated the social fabric and built alliances with marginalized groups of the area. With limited resources and possibly a lack of political will to address this threat, the Malian State did little to prevent the growth of these groups. In 2011, the jihadis defeated the Malian army and occupied Northern Mali for almost a year. With the military assistance of France, the jihadists were defeated but continued to wage guerrilla warfare.

Under the influence of the globalization paradigm and security studies, several studies were produced on jihadists in Mali.[9] Similar security concerns in Northern Nigeria were generated by an insurgency group, namely, Boko Haram. In 2009, the Nigerian army suppressed Boko Haram, forcing the group to go underground. This provoked the most serious insurgency led by a non-state actor in postcolonial Africa. The Boko Haram group acquired enormous financial resources through various means, sophisticated training and weapons, and engaged in long-term guerilla warfare, not just in Northern Nigeria but

also in the greater Lake Chad Region. They are still operating to this date, despite the formation of a coalition of several neighboring West African states (Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon) that aim to suppress them. Just like the Jihadis of Northern Mali, a number of studies have investigated Boko Haram.[10] Informed by the global jihad paradigm, they sought to explain the spread of Boko Haram, its sources of funding, bases of recruitment, and transnational linkages. The greatest challenges that researchers confronted when studying these groups is that the situation on the ground did not allow them to conduct reliable ethnographic fieldwork. Furthermore, many of the Nigerians who had true insights of the activities of the group abstained from providing information because they feared retaliation. As a result, the findings of most of these studies on Jihadi groups in Africa is likely to be falsified when more reliable information comes to light in the future.

6. Gender Studies

As shown by the writing of its founding fathers, social sciences scholarship, from its initial stages until well into the twentieth century, showed little sensitivity to gender. Over the course of the twentieth century, the growth in feminist scholarship challenged the gender bias of social sciences scholarship. At the same and in much the same way as globalization and transnationalism studies challenged methodological territorialism, gender studies forced scholars in all fields of social sciences and humanities to be sensitive to gender. This paradigm shift was also perceptible in Islamic studies. Among the myths that some feminist scholarship in Islamic studies challenged was the idea that patriarchal Muslim societies gave little room to Muslim women to exercise agency. A landmark study along those lines was Saba Mahmood's *The Politics of Piety*, which addressed Islamist women in Egypt and challenged many assumptions of feminist scholarship about Muslim women's submissiveness. Mahmood argued that piety, far from alienating Muslim women, in fact gave them greater freedom (Mahmood 2004).

Feminist scholars in Africa formed a coalition to engender the social sciences in Africa. Sponsored by CODESRIA—the Council for the Development of Social Sciences, a major social sciences consortium based in Senegal and bringing together African scholars from all regions (North, West, East, Central and Southern Africa) and linguistic traditions (Arabophone, Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone)—they produced a substantial body of research starting with a landmark study on the need to bring a gender perspective to African social sciences (Imam et al. 1997). The CODESRIA subsequently launched an annual gender institute, which became a very influential forum and led to several publications, including on Gender and Fundamentalisms (Sow 2019). Leading African feminist scholars such as Fatou Sow and Aicha Imam were also involved in an international solidarity group named *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, which "provides information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam."[11] This is an example of engaged scholarship seeking to document the challenges faced by women "living in countries or states where Islam is the state religion, in secular states with Muslim majorities, as well as those from Muslim communities governed by minority religious laws; in secular states where political groups are demanding religious laws; in migrant Muslim communities . . . around the world; and non-Muslim women who may have Muslim laws applied to them directly or through their children, and women born into Muslim communities/families who are automatically categorized as Muslim but may not define themselves as such".[12]

Another set of academic studies explored women's leadership in precolonial Muslim societies. In Northern Nigeria, the literature challenging colonial historiography on the nineteenth-century jihad movements was centered on men—particularly Usman Dan Fodio, his brother Abdullahi Dan Fodio, and Usman Dan Fodio's son Mohamed Bello, who led the nineteenth-century reform and state building movement culminating with the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate. The reform movement, however, was not entirely the business of men. Women played an important role not just as mothers and spouses and sisters who supported men, but also as teachers and writers in their own

right. The works of Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack (Boyd 1989; Boyd and Mack 2000; Boyd and Mack 1997) highlighted the fact that women's education was not uncommon even in precolonial Muslim societies. In the family of Uthman Dan Fodio, women were well educated, including his mother and all of his daughters. Nana Asmau (Dan Fodio's daughter) and her sisters wrote in Arabic, but also in Hausa and Fulfude, so that their knowledge could be shared with grassroots communities. Nana Asmau created a group of women named Yan Taru, to whom she taught Islamic knowledge in the form of didactic poems composed in Hausa and Fulfulde. These women memorized the poems and, in turn, taught them to other women when they returned home. Furthermore, Mack persuasively argued that the lack of texts signed by women does not necessarily indicate the absence of female authorship. Many women may not have signed their work or could have signed in the name of their husband out of sheer humility. However, more importantly, textual knowledge was just one form of knowledge, and not even the superior form. Other forms of embodied knowledge were transmitted orally between masters and disciples. Women acted as Sufi masters and led study circles in which they transmitted esoteric knowledge to other women (Mack 2008).

With the expansion of Islamic education after colonialism, women became more involved in education as they trained as ulama and created their own schools and a number of other fora in which to promote Islamic spirituality. In Nigeria in particular, a new trend of establishing modern Islamic schools in Nigeria starting in the 1970s resulted in widespread literacy among women and the emergence of female ulama (Umar 2003). In nearby Niger, Muslim women's leadership in education and development is now receiving academic attention (Alidou 2005).

7. From Timbuktu Studies to Decolonial Studies

As previously mentioned, a few historians and Islamicists have been working for decades on the scholarship produced by African Muslims in Arabic and Ajami. Their work was neither cited by scholars of Islam outside Africa nor by social scientists reflecting on the production of knowledge in Africa. At the turn of the twenty-first century, however, there was a renewed interest in this scholarship, and this for a variety of reasons. The first was the availability of funding to catalogue the libraries. The former Minister of Oil of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh Ahmad Zaki Yamani, created the Al-Furqan Foundation in London to document and preserve the Islamic written heritage, principally through surveying, imaging, cataloguing, editing, studying, and publishing Islamic manuscripts. Al-Furqan sponsored the cataloguing of dozens of private and public collections of African manuscripts in Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, etc. Building on the work of Al-Furqan, a few scholars based in North America subsequently undertook the task of making these works available to the larger public. Charles Stewart and Bruce Hall established a West African Arabic manuscripts online database at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. John Hunwick, another leader in the field, mobilized a large network of scholars in Europe and Africa and the United States around a project to map Islamic intellectual history in Africa, and this led to the publication of the previously mentioned *Arabic Literature of Africa*, which runs to thousands of pages in several volumes (O'Fahey 1994, 2003; Hunwick 1995, 2003; Stewart 2015)

Owners of private libraries in Africa, and especially in Timbuktu, also did their part to promote knowledge about Islamic scholarship in Africa. They created an NGO named SAVAMA-DCI to work collaboratively to preserve these manuscripts. All these developments forced social scientists, including in Africa, to pay attention to this scholarship. The Council for the Study of Social Sciences in Africa and the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, in partnership with the Humanities Institute at the University of Cape Town and some Timbuktu ulama, produced a number of influential studies, the most important of which is the volume *The Meanings of Timbuktu*, a landmark study in the field of Islamic scholarship in Africa (Jeppie and Diagne 2008). The involvement of CODESRIA, a leading social science consortium in Africa in commissioning studies and convening

working groups destined to bring this Islamic intellectual tradition to the attention of social scientists, was a significant development.

In fact, a few of the founding fathers of CODESRIA, such as celebrated Senegalese Egyptologist Cheikh Anta Diop who attended traditional Islamic institutions of learning, were well aware of the existence of an Islamic library in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, several decades after the creation of CODESRIA had passed before it started to sponsor the study of Islamic scholarship in Africa. The reason for this was that the introduction of social sciences and humanities scholarship in Africa in the aftermath of the colonial conquest led to the imposition of what Valentin Mudimbe called a Western epistemological order (Mudimbe 1988). This led to the de facto marginalization of intellectuals and knowledges outside this tradition. As the writings of decolonial scholars such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Walter Mignolo, and Sabelo Gatsheni-Ndlovu (drawing attention to the loss caused by what they call "epistemicides") (de Souza Santos 2014; Mignolo 1995; Mignolo 2011; Gatsheni-Ndlovu 2013) became influential, social scientists in Africa acquired greater awareness of the need to extend the frontiers of the study of Africa, and of African scholarship, and thus the need to pay attention to non-Europhone knowledges. Therefore, the study of Islamic scholarship in Africa is now perceived as part of the larger struggle for epistemic justice advocated by decolonial thinkers.[13]

8. New Sites of Knowledge Production on Islam in Africa

In the second half of the twentieth century, most of the academic study of Islam in Africa was conducted essentially in Western and some African public universities. At the turn of the twentieth-first century, however, the number of institutions producing research on Islam in Africa and the opportunities to disseminate their research expanded significantly. One reason was the creation of modern Islamic universities. At the beginning of the 1980s, the sole modern Islamic university of sub-Saharan Africa was the University of Umdurman in Sudan. In 1986, the Organization of the Islamic conference created the first modern Islamic university to offer instruction in the Arabic language at Say in Niger. Between 1986 and 2020, dozens of Islamic colleges and universities were created that made an important contribution to the production of knowledge on Islam and Muslim societies in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, North African institutions also developed an interest in the study of sub-Saharan Africa and especially its relations with North Africa. Though Sufi orders such as the Senousiyya, the Qadiriyya, and the Tijaniyya had their beginnings in North Africa, the overwhelming majority of their followers are based in sub-Saharan Africa. North African states such as Morocco, which want to expand their cultural and political influence, have revived such relations by hosting conferences, providing scholarships to students of West Africa to study in Morocco, and producing research on North African/sub-Saharan relations. In the early 1980s, at the suggestion of a Senegalese scholar Ibrahim Mahmood Diop (d. 2014), a sought-after speaker for the Royal Ramadan lectures of King Hassan II, the latter created an Institute of African Studies whose mission was to promote the study of the shared heritage of North and West Africa, especially its religious and intellectual history. The Center of African Studies of the University of Rabat mobilized a large community of North and sub-Saharan intellectuals around conferences and publications and documented trans-Saharan relations in a significant way, in so doing challenging the balkanization of Africa and sub-Saharan Africa in the academy.

9. Conclusions

In 2000, a state-of-the-art review of Islam in Africa was edited by Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels (Levtzion and Pouwels 2000). It brought together the most established scholars of the preceding four decades. As the contributors made clear, Western historians overwhelmingly dominated the field. Twenty years later, in 2020, Fallou Ngom, Mustafa Kurfi and Toyin Falola (Ngom et al. 2020) coordinated another such review. However, this time it included a significantly larger set of themes, disciplines, and scholars, the majority of whom were African scholars, many of them teaching in Western universities. This

testifies to the growth and complexity of the field, a growth and complexity that is likely to continue to accelerate as the center of gravity of Islam shifts from Asia and North Africa to sub-Saharan Africa.[14]

The growth of the field is also evidenced by appointments of experts of Islam in Africa at many major Western universities, and flourishing journals and book series with major publishers. The field has also attracted a large number of social scientists including anthropologists, political scientists, historians, geographers, as well scholars of religion. It has also grown in complexity and sophistication, for most of these scholars combined a rigorous academic training in the social sciences and humanities with a knowledge of the languages of scholarship (English, German, and French in which a huge secondary literature in Islamic studies has been produced) and languages of field research (Arabic of course, but also languages of Muslim people in Africa such as Hausa, Fulfulde, and Swahili).

While Western scholars monopolized the field in the early independence period, the proliferation of universities in Africa and the appointment of many Africans at those universities and at Western universities, some of whom bringing their own (emic) perspective in their research, has led to greater sophistication in the field. Unlike before when research on Islam in Africa was largely ignored in the broader field of Islamic studies and African Studies, pathbreaking works produced in the field in recent years and published in major university presses are engaged by Islamicists whose geographic interests heretofore have not focused on Africa. E. J. Brill, the world's leading publisher in Islamic Studies, established an Islam in Africa series which had released two dozen volumes, widely cited in the field of Islamic studies. The expanding literature and increasing demand led to the creation of other specialized series.

The Encyclopedia of Islam is the most important reference work on Islam, of which two complete editions have been published and a third one is being compiled. The first edition was started at the beginning of the twentieth century and completed in 1938. The first edition was published in the heyday of European imperial hegemony and consequently influenced by its epistemologies and stereotypes. African Islam was largely absent from that edition. To a great extent, the same prejudice affected the second edition, work on which started in the early 1960s. It was only from the 1990s onward, when Islam in sub-Saharan African became a recognized field of research, that its experts were invited to contribute entries to that second edition. The ongoing third edition is devoting greater attention to African Islam.

In the 1970 and 1980s, most scholars in the field of Islam in Africa published their findings in journals such as the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, the *Revue du monde musulman*, the *Bulletin of the Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire*, *the Journal of African History*, *Kano Studies*, and the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*. In 1984, a research program was established at the Maison des Sciences de L'Homme in Paris entitled Islam Tropical which started a specialized journal entitled *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*. It has published a couple of dozen volumes in the last thirty years featuring the work of scholars from Europe, America, Asia and Africa which significantly improved our understanding of Islam in Africa. In America, a similar journal was created in 1990. Initially named *Sudanic Africa*, it was later acquired by Brill and renamed *Islamic Africa*, and has become a major journal.

The creation of dozens of colleges and Islamic universities in Africa from the mid-1980s increased research outputs significantly, especially in Arabic. In the last thirty years since the creation of the journal *Les Annales de l'Université Islamique de Say* in Niger, faculty members of that university had produced substantial research about Islam in Africa. Several volumes totaling thousands of pages and carrying several dozen articles of a respectable academic standard have been published in Arabic, a large number of which deal with the history and anthropology of Muslim societies in Africa. In addition, Africans trained in Arabic have written hundreds of theses, books and pamphlets in Arabic, an analysis of which is beyond the scope of this article.

Finally, the use of the ICT significantly disseminated the findings of Muslim public intellectuals in Africa. Affordable online journals and websites of African Islamic societies have put a large volume of writings and oral documents on the world wide web. Much of the work of Muslim intellectuals has been translated into Western languages and made available online. WhatsApp groups circulate a significant amount of that literature. Two other platforms disseminating the knowledge about Islam in Africa are YouTube and Facebook, as audio and video recordings of sermons and commentary on scholarly works. Study groups via platforms such as Skype and Zoom enabled masters to teach students remotely worldwide. A number of strong programs on African Islam have been established in many Western universities. These programs sponsor annual conferences as well as lecture series featuring newly published books about Islam in Africa. Islamic Studies faculty search outside Africa increasingly express in their job description an interest in Islam in Africa. If Islam in Africa was a neglected field a few decades ago, the least that can be said is that it is now a crowded field.

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Notes

1 For biographies of these and other Muslim figures during colonial rule, see (Robinson and Triaud 1997).

2 (Paden 1968), published as (Paden 1973).

3 In its initial stage, it involved mostly non-African scholars with one notable exception: (Sy 1969).

4 (Kaba 1974). This was complemented by Jean Loup Amselle's work on the role of the pilgrimage to Mecca in the spread of Wahhabism, especially in Mali. See (Amselle 1977, 1985).

5 For the study of the Izala movement in Nigeria, see (Loimeier 1997; Kane 2003; Ben Amara 2020); for Ghana and Burkina Faso, see (Kobo 2012).

6 Most of this research was devoted to Murid presence in France, Italy and Spain. For France, see (Bava 2017, 2002); For Italy, where Senegalese represent one of the largest foreign populations, see (Riccio 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006). For Spain, see (Evers Rosander 2000, 2004).

7 Notable accounts of such episodes of resistance are provided by the work of Jean-Louis Triaud on the Senousiyya, David Robinson on Umar Tall of the Tijaniyya, and Ives Person on Samory Toure. See (Triaud 1995; Robinson 1985; Person 1975).

8 David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud, eds. *Le Temps des Marabouts.*

9 (Thurston 2020; Daniel 2012; Laurent 2013; Galy 2013; Lasserre and Oberlé 2013; Tazaghart 2011; Keenan 2009); (Wehrey and Boukhars 2013); (International Crisis Group 2013; CERI 2013).

10 See (Mustapha and Meagher 2020; Thurston 2018; Smith 2015). See also (Perouse de Montclos 2014); (Ostien 2011; Higazi and Brisset-Foucault 2013; Anonymous 2012; Abimbola 2011; Adesoji 2010; Loimeier 2012; Brigaglia 2012).

11 http://www.wluml.org/node/5408, (accessed on 1 December 2020).

12 http://www.wluml.org/node/5408, (accessed on 1 December 2020).

13 In the conclusion of a recent state of the field volume on Islamic scholarship in Africa, Ebrima Sall (former Executive Secretary of CODESRIA who supervised most of CODESRIA's initiatives in promoting Islamic scholarship) reflected on the lessons the social sciences can learn from Islamic scholarship in Africa (Sall 2021).

14 According to historical estimates from the World Religion Database, there were 11 million Muslim in Sub-Saharan Africa at the beginning of the 20th century. In 2010, that number has increased to 234 million, about 15.5 percent of the Muslim global population. This ongoing shift will peak in the coming decades of the 21st century as it is estimated that by 2050, the number of Muslims worldwide will grow from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.76 billion, almost 30% of the world's population. The share of the world's Muslims who live in sub-Saharan Africa will increase from 15.5% in 2010 to 24.3% in 2025. Asia, which is currently home to more of the world's Muslims (61.7%) than all the other regions combined, will continue to host a majority of the world's Muslims, albeit with a smaller share (52.8%). As for the Middle East and North Africa, they will roughly maintain their share of the world's Muslims, rising only slightly from 19.8% to 20.0% in 2050. With this demographic shift of the global Muslim population, Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to generate greater academic attention in Islamic studies. See http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/19/sub-saharan-africa-will-be-home-to-growing-shares-of-the-worlds-christians-and-muslims/ (accessed on 1 December 2020).

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