



## Islam

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## CHAPTER 13

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# ISLAM

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MARIE MIRAN-GUYON AND JEAN-LOUIS TRIAUD

ISLAM has had a centuries-long presence in Africa, both north and south of the Sahara, before colonial encounters added a new layer to the continent's richly textured Muslim history. The extent to which nineteenth- and twentieth-century European domination brought about meaningful changes in Muslim lives and outlooks—and not simply within the religious domain—cannot be underestimated. Yet, at the same time, Muslim communities and Islamic thought continued to evolve in their own, enduring ways. Weaving together local, endogenous initiatives, on the one hand, and global, cosmopolitan influences from the *umma*, the world Muslim community in and out of Africa, on the other, Muslim actors went on making and remaking their own histories of religious renewal and crises, expansion and downturn. This goes beyond acknowledging the importance of the *longue durée* in comprehending Islam's colonial past or questioning the Eurocentric division of African history centred on the colonial moment. It underlines that Muslim Africa's colonial trajectories concurrently belonged to different, and partly overlapping, 'regimes of historicity'—Western imperial, Islamic, and African—and that these various trajectories cannot be reduced to a single aspect.<sup>1</sup>

As with conceptions of time, diversity characterized Muslim Africa's vast spaces, the southern frontiers of which were mapped anew on an unprecedented scale in the colonial period under the twin processes of migration and conversion. A major ecological fault line runs between countries north and south of the Sahara. Medieval Arab historiography portrayed the desert as an inner sea, imagining the Maghrib (the 'West' in Arabic, for North Africa was then Islam's westernmost lands) as an island, remote from the *bilad al-Sudan*, 'the land of the Blacks', stretching from modern Senegal to Ethiopia. The Maghrib itself was distanced from the heartlands of Islam by the interposition of Egypt—the gateway to the 'Orient' of olden days, today's Middle East—with the metropolis of Cairo as a high place of Islam in its own right. But the colonial interlude did reify this fault line to a certain extent, as British and French policies were bent on keeping Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa as separate as possible, even when their empires bridged both sides. This divide also translated into an academic split between specialists of both cultural areas, which never fully receded despite recent claims that the contrary would be more fruitful.

This binary vision, however, unduly downplays the far-reaching networks of scholarly and other contacts which have nurtured the intellectual and social life of sub-Saharan Muslim leaders, students, pilgrims, and traders over generations. Such networks paved the way for the integration of these societies into a broad moral community of African followers of Muhammad, in the Sunni branch of Islam and predominantly the Maliki school of law, even though Egypt, the Horn, and eastern Africa follow the Shafi'i *madh'hab*, as in parts of the Indian Ocean world. Under colonial pressure, some of these long-distance networks faltered. Yet many proved resilient, while others were transformed or moved in new directions.

Islam's foundational principle of unity of creed and *umma* does not negate the breathtaking diversity of Muslim Africa's vast spaces. Unity does not mean uniformity. Indeed, physical and cultural ecologies have always marked out porous territories where local societies ceaselessly endeavoured to domesticate Islam's universal message. It is clear that Muslim life in cosmopolitan urban centres such as Cairo or Zanzibar contrasted strongly with that in a Berber village in Morocco or in a settlement of new converts in coastal West Africa, to the extent that the value of the term 'Islam' itself as an analytical category has been questioned by both historians and social scientists. Alternate heuristic phrasings include 'discursive tradition' and 'Islamic religious culture', along with their plural forms.<sup>2</sup> Recent demographic statistics (in the absence of accurate ones for the colonial period) allude to the scale of Islamic pluralism: roughly half of Africa is Muslim and one in four Muslims worldwide is African.

All this points to the limits of our task of synthesis, at a time when grand narratives on Islam in Africa no longer feature in the research agenda. This chapter therefore privileges the Maghrib and West Africa, and British and French colonial situations. Within those zones it concentrates on Muslim religious elites and self-made entrepreneurs, almost exclusively male, although this does not mean that ordinary believers, in particular women, were any less Muslim. The focus on the *modi operandi* of colonial states and on Muslim experiences where the symbolic reference of Islam played a central role, moreover, is not to say that religion was the only factor defining Muslims' personal or collective engagements: many historical actors discussed throughout the chapters of this book happened to be Muslim, although they did not always act primarily *as* Muslims. The chapter begins with a review of past and current historiographical trends and methodological issues, before delving into major historical themes in order to sketch a composite picture of the interactions between Islam, imperial power, and religious change in the era of colonial encounter.

## STUDIES IN AFRICAN ISLAM: CONSTRUCTION OF THE DISCIPLINE

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Local Muslim societies never failed to produce their own internal knowledge in literate, oral, or material forms. But what we may call 'African Islamic studies' only began in earnest within the colonial sphere. It is important to discuss the historicity of

this field of research, not only because the early period was foundational for the discipline in and of itself but because it had a direct impact on the unequal power relations that unfolded between the infidel colonizers and the Muslim colonized—especially, but not only, under French rule. It also matters because the colonial production of knowledge on African Islam has had a lasting legacy within the discipline well past the threshold of independence, to the point that recent research trends continue to situate themselves in contradistinction to it. Returning to early elaborations in the historiography of Islam in Africa is thus more than an erudite exercise: it speaks to the genesis of our current knowledge.

Egypt was the first focus of African Islamic studies and the ten-volume *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–28) its first major work. As the scholarly by-product of the 1798 Bonaparte expedition, it inaugurated a distinctive French tradition of exploration and encyclopedic output under the sacrosanct guise of 'science', soon to become the norm in newly conquered lands. In contrast, the writings of the leading British Arabist scholar, Edward William Lane (1801–76), were far less imbued with imperial-minded Orientalism. His work included the anthropological bestseller *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) and the reputable *Arabic–English Lexicon* (1863–93).

After the 1830 conquest, Algeria became the French laboratory for Muslim policies and 'Islamological' theories, similar to the role played by India and later Sudan and Nigeria for the British. Algiers was a key site for the production of Islamological studies, geographical and historical works, and translations from medieval Maghribi scholars such as the famous Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406). The French devoted particular attention to the translation of treatises in Islamic law, so essential to colonial jurisdiction. This project focused on the key *kutub* or authoritative Islamic 'books' used in the Maghrib (but authoritative in sub-Saharan Africa too) from as early as the eleventh century; so important were these books for local societies that they were—and often remain—essential readings in advanced Quranic education. Prominent among these *kutub* were the *Mukhtar* (published 1848–57), a concise handbook authored by Khalīl b. Ishāq (d. 1374), and the *Risāla* (1914), a treatise in Maliki Law by Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 996). With the exception of Maliki-oriented Nigeria, the British drew more attention to the Shafi'i and Hanafi legal systems of their East African and Middle Eastern empires. This intense colonial literary production had a major impact throughout the twentieth century in that it induced a specifically text-based representation of African Islam, encompassing all of its history, geography, customs, and institutions.

This strong Orientalist trend to some extent continued south of the Sahara in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Sub-Saharan Africa became more of a research ground for ethnologists and linguists who put orality first and saw Islam as alien to what they imagined to be the pristine 'authenticity' of African society.<sup>3</sup> Only a few scholars looked to local manuscripts written in Arabic or in vernacular languages transcribed in the Arabic script (known as *ajami*). Nonetheless, these pioneers were noteworthy. Among them were the Maurice Delafosse, Octave Houdas, Henri Gaden, and Herbert Palmer; the well-known Orientalist Louis Massignon also worked for a while on Mauritania.

*Primus inter pares* was Delafosse (1870–1926), one of the founding fathers of African studies in France. Trained as a linguist, ethnologist, and historian, he served as the Director of Political Affairs for the government of French West Africa and worked together with his professor (and later father-in-law), the Arabist Houdas, whose career had begun in Algiers. Between 1898 and 1901, either alone or with Delafosse, Houdas edited both in Arabic and in French translation the three famous historical chronicles written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Sudanese intellectuals from the Niger bend: the *Ta'rikh al-Sūdān*, the *Ta'rikh al-Fattash*, and the *Tadhkirat al-Nisiān*.<sup>4</sup> These works would play a central role in the writing of the history of the great 'Sudanese Empires' and, made available in print to a majority non-Arabophone African readership, in public memory and the self-fashioning of identities, in postcolonial Mali. This ongoing process is a reminder that colonial encounter served to intertwine African and European destinies in often unforeseen ways, linking the precolonial past to the post-colonial present.

Herbert Richmond Palmer (1877–1958) was Delafosse's distinguished British counterpart. A Cambridge graduate, he spent twenty-six years in Northern Nigeria, becoming its lieutenant-governor at the end of his stay. Colonial Northern Nigeria was unique in many ways. West Africa's most densely populated Muslim area, it bore the legacy of the 1804 jihad of 'Uthman dan Fodio that gave rise to the Sokoto Caliphate, sub-Saharan Africa's principal shari'a-minded Islamic state. Defeated by British forces in 1903, the caliphate was largely incorporated into the protectorate of Northern Nigeria under the governorship of Sir Frederick Lugard (1900–1906), later to become Nigeria's governor general (1914–19). Born in India, with service in Sudan and East Africa, Lugard is a central figure of British imperialism in Africa. He is best known as the architect of indirect rule, as expounded in his manifesto *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922). Northern Nigeria witnessed the emergence of what Murray Last called the 'Colonial Caliphate': a hybrid arrangement in which Islamic institutions and leading ruling families were kept in place under discreet British control.<sup>5</sup> Northern Nigeria also houses one of Sudanic Africa's richest bodies of Arabic and *ajami* written sources, mostly about Sokoto. This was the peculiar political and intellectual context in which Palmer was able to write extensively on Muslim states and societies, making use of manuscripts collected throughout the region.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding later critiques, these documents too, most importantly the Kano Chronicle, became reference works for later generations of scholars and African actors alike.

French and British translation endeavours receded by the late 1920s, although they resumed on a smaller scale in the nationalist period at the initiative of Abdullahi Smith (1920–84), a British-Nigerian professor at the University of Zaria and a convert to Islam. Smith launched a systematic exploitation of Sokoto manuscripts, promoting at the same time a rich historical 'mine' and the caliphate's political position within the new and turbulent federation of Nigeria.<sup>7</sup> Albeit no longer a central endeavour, the concern to catalogue, preserve, and translate Muslim Africa's primary sources has not been relegated to the past, as demonstrated by the series of regional volumes edited by Rex O'Fahey and John Hunwick.<sup>8</sup>

Concomitantly to the textual approach based on scholarly translations, African Islamic studies further developed with the writings of colonial officials in charge of monitoring Muslim societies. Collectively, these writings were more 'discourses' on Islam, often ideological in nature in their articulation of the colonial perception of Islam (sometimes mere Eurocentric fantasies or paranoia) at the expense of local developments. Nonetheless, these writings played a major role both in colonial politics and in shaping the field's historiography on an enduring basis.

The French stand out in this respect. Two main themes emerge from this literature: the *confrérie* or 'brotherhood' theme (*tariqa* in Arabic) and the concept of *Islam noir* or 'Black Islam'. The former was born in Algeria. In the face of half a century of armed resistance to French conquest, specifically the lengthy struggle led by 'Abd al-Qādir, *shaykh* of the Qādiriyya brotherhood in western Algeria between 1832 and 1847, French army officers developed the influential theory of a 'brotherhood plot'. This fell within broader fears about the danger posed by Islam, as if brotherhoods were in a way coextensive with Islam itself. More than the British—even though they too fought Islamic leaders and organizations in Nigeria, the Sudan, and Somalia—the French were convinced that Islam was a dangerous transnational religion. This persuasion was in part built upon the anticlericalism of the Third Republic and civic officials' deep distrust of 'clerical' or 'feudal' Muslim hierarchies: Islamic brotherhoods were viewed as the Oriental equivalent of nineteenth-century European revolutionary secret societies.

In Algeria, the administration established a process of systematic data collection in an effort to distinguish friendly from hostile brotherhoods. The Tijāniyya, which had been 'Abd al-Qādir's foe and whose *shaykh*, a grandson of its founder Ahmad al-Tijani, married a French woman in 1870, progressively appeared as the model of the 'good' brotherhood, meaning one which could work with the French for the latter's interests. In Cyrenaica in western Libya, in contrast, the Sanūsiyya, whose founder was from Algeria and which was open to fleeing emigrants from Algeria, became the epitome of the 'bad' brotherhood, meaning one so drastically hostile to the French that it had to be suppressed.<sup>9</sup>

The brotherhood theme subsequently crossed the Sahara. Alfred Le Châtelier, a soldier and scholar who became a professor at the Collège de France, is a telling example of this process. Although Le Châtelier worked primarily on Morocco, he published the first survey of Islam in Senegal and the French Sudan (now Mali), *L'Islam dans l'Afrique occidentale* (1899). His preface explains how he travelled south of the Sahara in the 1880s in search of brotherhoods, but finding few traces of them concluded that the anxieties of the Algiers school were misplaced. Yet the French administration never ceased cataloguing and monitoring brotherhoods (as it also catalogued 'races', 'tribes', and 'ethnic groups'), despite the fact that mass brotherhood organizations which arose at the dawn of the twentieth century—in the Senegalese context at least—never actually threatened the colonial regime.

As situations and interests changed over time and space, so did the specific actors classified under the categories of 'good' or 'bad' Muslims. In French West Africa, the Tijāniyya was first deemed hostile because of its association with the nineteenth-century

jihadist al-Hājj 'Umar, whose militarized state-building project had clashed with that of the French. By the early twentieth century, that perception was beginning to change, due in large part to the efforts of more 'accommodationist' Muslim cultural brokers. By the 1950s, young graduates returning to French West Africa from Arab universities, referred to as 'Wahhabi', became the new 'bad' Muslims, while 'traditionalist' Sufis were promoted to the rank of 'good' ones. But the Manichaean vision itself persisted, remaining in place well past decolonization under the new binary of 'moderate'/'tolerant' Muslims versus 'radical'/'extremist' Islamists.<sup>10</sup> The single most prominent theme in recent scholarship on African Islam is the attempt to deconstruct such brazenly ideological fabrications and to suggest more nuanced interpretations of complex realities.

It was Delafosse who in the 1910s can be credited with coining the concept of 'maraboutisme'; that is, the notion that *marabouts* (the French label for all types of Muslim clerics but especially the leaders of brotherhoods), were the pivotal figures behind the structuring of West African Muslim communities. The French colonial state went on to bestow such an inflated prominence upon this Muslim elite (provided, that is, that it was of the 'good' type) that it can be argued the figure of the *grand marabout* was in large part a colonial invention. This too proved to be an astoundingly enduring colonial legacy, with the *grands marabouts*—despite the recent challenge to their authority in some regions from more radical clerics—remaining influential leaders within many West African Muslim societies.

Although less prominent in British colonial discourse, the brotherhoods were not entirely ignored. C. Armine Willis, for instance, depicted Sudanese Islam through the sole prism of its brotherhoods, his dispassionate reportage standing in contrast to the conspiracy theories that characterized French accounts.<sup>11</sup> The concept of *Islam noir*, however, was the exclusive elaboration of French imperialism. It was meant to cut off sub-Saharan Islam from its supposedly subversive Arab connections, at a time when Arab nationalism was on the rise in the Middle East. According to French colonial theory, 'Black Islam' was heavily influenced by traditional animist practices and was therefore a milder, less radical version of the faith than that found elsewhere in the Islamic world. That this perception contradicted the brotherhood theory of bad *marabouts* did not seem to bother the colonial state, which even attempted, without great success, to induce religious syncretism in some areas. Yet the concept of *Islam noir* has also persisted, continuing to pervade not only French views of Africa and its own Muslim citizens but paternalistic Western public opinion at large.

The main propagator of the concept of *Islam noir* was the prolific Paul Marty. An official at the Bureau of Muslim Affairs in Dakar, Marty gathered intelligence reports about Muslims and Islam from the four corners of French West Africa. Over the course of eighteen years, he produced ten publications on Muslim societies in each of the federation's colonies, from *Les Mourides d'Amadou Bamba* (1913) to *L'Islam et les tribus dans la colonie du Niger* (1930–31), which were authoritative works of reference throughout the colonial period. Although Marty's interpretive framework has subsequently been critiqued, his corpus contains a great deal of material useful to the historian, when handled with caution. British overviews of African Islam came later, in the form of a

series of works by John Spencer Trimmingham (b. 1904). Trimmingham's perspective was different: a member of the Church Missionary Society who worked successively in Sudan, Ethiopia, and West Africa, he gathered a large amount of field data and between 1949 and 1971 published seven books on Islam in different countries.<sup>12</sup> His method, like that of Marty, was later contested, but his books were the only available reference works of the kind in English before the 1970s, bestowing a scholarly status on the study of sub-Saharan Islam.

The era of decolonization in the 1960s opened up a new chapter for African Islamic studies, as it did for African history generally. Breaking free from the colonial stranglehold was the new ideological order of the day, carried along by nationalist sympathies and humanistic ideals. One way out of the colonial predicament was to focus anew on precolonial Islamic history by means of Arabic manuscripts, which located the now academic rather than administrative experts in Muslim matters in an erudite, philological enclave. Although the political focus of early nationalist historiography and the prediction by the modernization paradigm of the social irrelevance of religion served to confine Islam to the margins of the new Africanist project, pioneering historians such as Nehemia Levtzion excelled in the re-engagement with Arabic sources.<sup>13</sup> It would be the 1979 Iranian revolution, a defining moment in the recent history of Islam, which served to propel the faith and its followers to the centre of the scholarly stage.

In this early period, nonetheless, contributions from fields of inquiry as varied as anthropology, sociology, and geography have to be reckoned with. Most shared a concentration on Egypt, Morocco (and even more restrictively, on societies of the Atlas mountains), and Senegal. This narrow focus—to which we may add English-language literature on Northern Nigeria—lasted until recently, when dissonant voices began to argue that these areas do not encompass the whole spectrum of Muslim Africa and that, transnational phenomena notwithstanding, one should avoid the extrapolation of analyses from one region to another. One legacy of these geographical monopolies remains a deficit in studies on East African Islam. In line with E. E. Evans-Pritchard's functionalist and structuralist approach was Ernest Gellner's *Saints of the Atlas* (1969). Among the first anthropologists to put 'Islam' in a book title was Clifford Geertz: his seminal *Islam Observed* (1968) discussed the fertile tensions between Islamic texts and local contexts in a broad comparison between Moroccan maraboutism and Indonesian Sufism, at the polar ends of the Muslim world. South of the Sahara, Donal Cruise O'Brien's *The Mourides of Senegal* (1971) and Paul Pélissier's *Les Paysans du Sénégal* (1966) signalled an emerging 'mourido-centrism' (i.e. focus on the Muridiyya brotherhood) within studies of Senegalese Islam.

The dramatic arrival of 'political Islam' onto the international stage following the Iranian revolution has had a huge and complex impact on African Islamic studies. Never before has the field attracted so much intellectual interest. Scholarly output continues to grow by leaps and bounds, to the extent that it would be reductive to chart the achievements of individual scholarship, even when limiting oneself to works on the colonial period. If the field's multidisciplinary and international collaborative edge is more critical than ever, however, it is far from being univocal. Exemplary of this trend



are the bilingual journals *Islam et sociétés au Sud du Sahara* launched in 1987 by Jean-Louis Triaud and the more recent *Sudanic* (now *Islamic*) *Africa*.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Brill—the Netherlands-based publishing house which supervises the ongoing rewriting of the revered multi-volume *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (first edition 1922)—recently created a new space for the field's output in its new series 'Islam in Africa'.<sup>15</sup>

On the downside, the anxiety associated with the rise of political Islam in Iran and the Arab world and later in Muslim diasporas in the West has at times threatened to return the discipline to its early colonial concern with the monitoring of radicalizing external influences on the local, grassroots forms of the faith. This was especially true for the Maghrib and Egypt, where an avalanche of contemporary political science almost buried historical research on Islam in earlier periods. Sub-Saharan Africa was generally spared this fate, although studies of Islam there in the 1980s and 1990s did share a bias towards the faith's socio-political aspects. Recently, calls have been made to cease neglecting the intellectual, spiritual, material, and economic dimensions of the Muslim African experience. New studies addressing Muslim architecture, visual arts, music, or creative literature are among those starting to fill the gap—which may well in turn fuel a counter-critique of an all-out 'cultural turn'.<sup>16</sup>

In reality, the shift in the historiography of African Islam was more than the mere by-product of the faith's worldwide resurgence. It was part of the major intra- and trans-disciplinary 'turns' of the time: the postmodern, the postcolonial, the subaltern, and, especially, the debate generated by Edward Saïd's book *Orientalism* (1978). Full discussion of these intellectual currents lies beyond the scope of this survey, but it is crucial at least to note the ways in which they contributed to the renewal of the epistemology and methodology of African Islamic studies.

The most important advance is the injunction to avoid the reification or essentialization of Islamic experience across time and space. As already noted, the use of the concept 'Islam' itself is not unproblematic; Muslim actors continue to use and cherish it, of course, but in ways and for reasons that need carefully to be deconstructed *in situ*. New studies insist on Islam's dazzling diversity, with multiple interpretations coexisting in any given context. Though prone to dogmatic dispute or genuine conflict, hegemonic interpretations of Islam may exert reciprocal influences on one another and thus have overlapping and shifting boundaries. So, we need to reconsider our entrenched visions of a mystical Sufi version of Islam in contradistinction to a Wahhabi, Salafi, or reformist one. As Roman Loimeier argues with regard to the concept of the Sufi brotherhood or *tariqa* (but the same argument would hold true for 'Wahhabi' movements too), it may well be a mere 'essentialist abstraction, an idealization of realities, since a *tariqa* should more properly be viewed as a spectrum of potentially competing branches and networks loyal to prominent families of scholars or charismatic personalities (saints) who themselves embody a multitude of Sufi teachings'.<sup>17</sup> Even more broadly, Islam cannot be abstracted from the all-encompassing environment in which Muslim societies evolve. Muslim dynamics, moreover, have to be studied through their multifaceted interactions with both Christianity and indigenous African belief systems—and not simply in terms of conversion.<sup>18</sup>

Internal plurality extends to just about everything: from ritual practices and religious imaginaries to the micro-political strategies of agonistic Muslim actors. The impact of these strands of Islam on different social groups varies widely, yet all are worthy of academic inquiry: the learned and the powerful, but also ordinary Muslims and subalterns such as slaves, women, and even children. In fact, most studies on African Islam now take pains to include at least some discussion of women's roles (while the academic profession has become much more open to women). In tune with recent gender theory, a new focus on Muslim masculinities is also emerging, as in the milieu of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* or other colonial conscripts.<sup>19</sup> The question whether the latest cutting-edge research is commensurate with Muslims' own preoccupations or arises more from postmodern Western anxieties is open to debate. But the new celebration of Muslim complexity is welcome indeed.

Elaborating on the concept of 'agency' so central to subaltern studies, the new scholarship on African Islam's interface with colonialism further maintains that Muslims, both individually and collectively, remained to varying degrees masters of their own destinies rather than passive victims. It goes without saying that colonial oppression was no fiction. But colonialism was rarely powerful or coherent enough to prevent Muslims from manoeuvring through its contradictions and shortcomings. Muslims were thus able to take initiatives for their own benefit—or to the disadvantage of local rivals. These goals were often pursued openly via a working understanding—and sometimes misunderstanding—with the colonial state, which has been labelled 'accommodation' by David Robinson and others.<sup>20</sup> More subtle, discreet, and subversive tactics were also employed, often unbeknownst to colonial rulers and therefore often more resistant to historical reconstruction. Accordingly, today's priority is to rewrite the colonial past from the indigenous perspective, as opposed to that of the colonial state. Recent studies tend to relegate the colonial apparatus to the background: a faint presence not quite meaningless but certainly not central to Muslims' daily lives.

To shed light on these daily lives and on semi-hidden initiatives, the injunction is to pay close attention to Muslim voices. This requires a new combing of colonial (and in some cases, Christian mission) records to decipher untapped echoes between the lines; the interpretation of neglected written sources in Arabic, *ajami*, and colonial languages such as devotional poetry, treatises, prayers, *fatawa* or legal opinions, narratives of pilgrimages and other journeys; and the construction of a corpus of oral accounts. A new ethics of writing further invites scholars, especially non-Muslims based in the West, to deploy polyphonic devices in order to accentuate the concert of variegated indigenous voices. It has been anthropologists of Islam who have taken the lead in reflecting on many of these methodological issues. Dale Eickelman, a specialist of Morocco and the Arab Middle East, dubbed this new approach a 'political economy of meaning'.<sup>21</sup> A notable recent shift has been the emergence of a respected Muslim African academic voice in African and in Western universities, especially among historians. This voice, combining scholarly rigour with internal knowledge and respect for religious sensibilities, is beginning to redefine the field in yet uncharted ways.

## UNFOLDING HISTORIES: AFRICAN MUSLIMS AND COLONIAL RULE

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As with other colonized peoples, for most African Muslims the loss of sovereignty was a cruel condition. What was specific to Muslims was that they were defeated and subdued by Christian *kuffâr* (infidels): the conquest was therefore experienced as much as a spiritual as a political calamity. If this reality was plainly shared by all Muslims, reactions to it were more complex. As discussed above, however, contemporary interpretations were unsubtle: colonial administrations accounted for Muslim actors' varied strategies through the distorting prism of surveillance, often caricaturing both initial opposition and later forms of cooperation. Conversely, nationalist historiography from the 1960s tended to celebrate Muslim warrior chiefs as resistance heroes. Among them was the Senegal valley-born *shaykh* Al-Hâjj 'Umar (d. 1864), the principal propagator of the Tijāniyya in West Africa.<sup>22</sup> 'Umar was an important and complex figure. He launched a jihad of the sword against 'pagan' populations between the Senegal and Niger rivers, but also against a rival Muslim power, the Qādiriyya-oriented Dina of Masina. Recalling his confrontation with expansionist French forces, postcolonial Senegal mainly celebrates the staunch resistance hero, whom the French typified as a dangerous *marabout*. Both historical interpretations tend to overlook a more complex reality: the fact that 'Umar, like 'Abd al-Qādir in Algeria, once also signed a truce with the French.

Further south was Samori Touré (d. 1900). Originating from Upper Guinea, Samori created an empire extending to northern Côte d'Ivoire. He proclaimed himself *almamy* (imam), but this did not stop him from destroying the town of Kong, a centre of Islamic scholarship, and his later policy of forced Islamization also met with strong opposition. If Samori has featured strongly in the resistance fighters' hall of fame (albeit more ambiguously on the Ivorian side than in Sékou Touré's Guinea), it is owing to his direct clashes with the expanding, rival imperialism of the French.<sup>23</sup> It can be noted that Samori's framed portrait can be seen today looking down from the wall of the Moroccan-style central mosque in Paris—a building of historic interest in itself, inaugurated in 1926 and funded in part by metropolitan taxpayers to thank Muslim conscripts who fought in defence of France in the First World War.

In Sudan, the British faced Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abd Allah, aka the Mahdī (d. 1885) and in Somalia, Muhammad 'Abdallah Hasan, aka the 'Mad Mullah' (d. 1920).<sup>24</sup> From 1911, when they set in motion the conquest of the Ottoman province of Libya, the Italians confronted the opposition of the Cyrenaica-based Sanūsiyya brotherhood. A peaceful missionary organization in origin, the Sanūsiyya effectively assumed control of much of eastern Libya following the collapse of Ottoman power. From the turn of the twentieth century, Sanūsī troops fought against the French, the Italians, and the British in Libya, Egypt, Algeria, and Niger. The final defeat came in 1931 with the execution of military commander 'Umar al-Mukhtār and the exile of the brotherhood's surviving leaders. A year after the United Nations voted for the creation of the Libyan state

in 1949, the *shaykh* of the Sanūsī order became its new king. King Idris was deposed in 1969 by Muammar al-Qaddafi, a pan-Arab and pan-African leader with 'Islamic socialist' tendencies and a new spirit of non-compliance with Western imperialism.

On a smaller scale, messianic figures self-proclaimed as the *mahdī* or 'Promised Saviour' led local and sometimes bloody insurrections against colonial conquest. Muslim-led armed resistance against colonial encroachment, then, was real enough. But in no way was it peculiar to Muslim societies: in many regions, non-Muslim communities often offered much tougher resistance. Muslim responses, moreover, varied hugely. Facing the unprecedented situation of *kuffār* rule over the *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam), Muslim clerics resorted to the vast resources of Islamic casuistry to devise canonical solutions: jihad; physical emigration (or mental withdrawal) on the model of the Prophet Muhammad's *hijra* or exile to Medina; and *taqiyya* or dissimulation in the face of repression.<sup>25</sup> Clerical families sometimes divided over the best course of action to adopt for safeguarding the same Islamic ideals. In the Senegal valley, for instance, the more conciliatory Sa'ad Būh was pitted against his *mujahid* brother Mā al-Aynīn; meanwhile, Agibu, al-Hājj 'Umar's seventh son, stayed and cooperated with the French, while his cousin Hashimi led his followers eastwards towards Mecca. The Sanūsī and other Algerian families were similarly divided.<sup>26</sup> When armed jihad was finally defeated, compromise prevailed as an alternative option. Most *hijra* episodes were discreet and quiet, but some are well documented. Muhammad Bello Maiwurno, fifth son of Sultan Al-Tāhiru—Sokoto's eleventh sultan who was killed in action against the British in 1903—led a massive migration towards the Sudan (where he happened to be well received by the same British). Algeria was the scene of a similar exodus in 1911, when hundreds of Tlemcen Muslims fled military recruitment and other woes.

*Ulamā* also mobilized the concept of *taqiyya*—derived from a Quranic term meaning 'fear'—to legitimate strategies of accommodation. It refers to Muslims facing a major danger, in which case it becomes permissible to interact with an adversary 'with the tongue, not the heart'. Another legitimizing concept borrowed from Islamic law was *maslaha*, meaning the common good of the community. With these canonical references in mind, individual spiritual guides had to adjust their tactical choices, juggling their own convictions with the local balance of power. Based upon mutual—albeit unequal—advantage, these compromises offered valuable interlocutors to colonial powers as well as an opportunity for Islamic leaders to create or secure their own clienteles through protection and mediation. In this respect, 'accommodation' should be analysed as a long-term process of Muslim reappropriation and renewal of older forms of power, paving the way for postcolonial forms of empowerment.

Where and when colonial authorities endorsed such policies of mediation, it led to many different Muslim 'paths of accommodation' in French and British territories. This was also the case in Italian-ruled Eritrea (1890–1941) and Ethiopia (1935–41), where, unlike in Libya, the Italians favoured the development of Islam and protected its institutions as a counterbalance to the Amhara monarchy, local powers, and the Orthodox Church.<sup>27</sup> One major difference must nonetheless be noted between French and British colonial situations. In the French Empire, the potential agency of Islamic leaders was

curbed by the requirement publicly to acknowledge subservience to the colonial state—at one and the same time a secular republic and a self-proclaimed ‘Muslim power.’ Some Muslim leaders only paid lip service to this requirement, while others agreed to it unabashedly as a means to other ends. A list of accommodationist *marabouts* from the four corners of French West Africa would include Sa’ad Būh (d. 1917), Sidiyya Shaykh Baba (d. 1924), Amadu Mokhtar Sakho, Boghé’s *cadi* (d. 1934), Shaykh Fanta Madi Cherif of Kankan in Guinea (d. 1955), al-Hajj Malik Sy (d. 1980), and Seydu Nuru Tall (d. 1980). A grandson of Al-Hājj ‘Umar, the latter may have appeared the most obsequious of them all. Yet the conviction of his modern-day peers that he rendered invaluable services to his transnational Tijani community now supersedes this perception.<sup>28</sup> Those who evaded the colonial pledge of allegiance faced repression, as in the best known cases of Amadu Bamba, founder of the Muridiyya, in his early preaching career, and Sheikh Hamallah, founder of the Hamawiyya, a peculiar branch of the Tijāniyya, who died in 1943 in exile in France. Yet neither ‘resistance’ nor ‘collaboration’—oversimplified binary terms fraught with value judgements—were on the agenda of any of these Islamic actors as an end in itself. What mattered urgently for them was to safeguard Islamic social ties as best as possible given the uneasy circumstances, and preserve a future while waiting for *kuffār* rule to come to an end.

In British colonies, Islamic elites could have greater autonomy and visibility. Unlike the French, the British did not abhor religious fiefdoms. Rather, they developed elective affinities with local aristocracies, in the political as much as the religious domain. The outstanding French exception was Hubert Lyautey, Morocco’s *résident* general from 1912 to 1925, who conducted an experiment in indirect rule similar to that in Northern Nigeria by retaining and protecting established political and religious institutions.

In short, complexity now prevails in the treatment of Muslim–colonial encounter; nowhere and at no time was there an automatic and unique Islamic response, and trajectories must be contextualized carefully. The variety of Muslim adaptive responses to colonial conquest and rule provides a key theme for ongoing historical analysis.

## HISTORY FROM WITHIN: ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS IN COLONIAL SITUATIONS

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The conventional outlook long held that the ‘colonial interlude,’ in Africa and elsewhere, had an overall negative impact on the inner workings of Islamic religious culture. The fact that young cohorts of reform-minded Muslim activists held discourses in the same vein seemed to corroborate this scholarly conclusion. At worst, the colonial era amounted to a dark age of disruption and crisis, when ‘larger or smaller doses of western secular thought and “methodological atheism”’ were perfidiously injected into Muslim

'intellectual horizons', relegating believers to social marginality in an all-encompassing imperial political economy.<sup>29</sup> Traditional Quranic education based on rote memorization of sacred texts in Arabic (a language few sub-Saharan pupils were taught to master) seemed doomed to irrelevance.<sup>30</sup> Everywhere, those trained in secular or Christian schools seemed to hold the upper hand.

Overtaken by events, gullible crowds of devout Muslims were characterized as easy prey for new entrepreneurial *marabouts* displaying their newfound material wealth as *baraka*, or blessing. Admittedly, nowhere did the colonial yoke break down deep-rooted feelings of belonging to Islam or the transmission of the faith. This was especially true in North Africa, where the Arabic language added to the shaping of the religious realm into a spiritual refuge. It was also the case south of the Sahara, where local communities kept living their daily lives clinging to their own rules. Yet the colonial environment was seen as unpropitious for Islamic development, to say the least.

Recent post-Orientalist literature, while not completely overthrowing this view, is more nuanced and positive in outlook. It shows that, in continuity with precolonial experience, Muslim leaders and societies never ceased to question the relevance of Islamic laws and values to the context of colonial modernity. This emerges from new studies that seek to understand Muslims on their own terms. Debates on Islamic dogma and orthodoxy, and on practice and ritual differences, proper guidance and leadership, and means to achieve social justice can be seen to have been as intense in the colonial period as before, producing new, fruitful responses. Colonial times were thus also a period of renewal (*tajdid*) and reform (*islah*).

Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *tariqa* landscape had undergone major transformation in many regions of the Muslim world, including Africa, as exemplified by the legacy of the Moroccan mystic and theologian Ahmad b. Idrīs. Idrīs inspired numerous followers throughout the continent and as far away as South-East Asia; some of his disciples founded new brotherhoods, including the Sanūsiyya and the Sudanese Khatmiyya.<sup>31</sup> Sufi thought and practice tended to restate the centrality of shari'a (the exoteric legal code) and 'ilm (knowledge through Islamic books) as foundational steps towards *tasawwuf* (mysticism or spirituality) and *ma'arifa* (inner esoteric knowledge): a complex movement towards 'a less mystical mysticism, a more rigorous orthodoxy, ... or a marrying of Wahhabism with a reformist form of Sufism'.<sup>32</sup> In an authoritative article, Rex O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke debunked the label 'neo-Sufism' coined to describe those transformations, arguing that they did not represent doctrinal innovation; rather, they were inscribed in the history of older Sufi renewals.<sup>33</sup> Yet both agreed that brotherhoods were significantly reshaped as they became more centrally institutionalized and moved from being exclusive elite circles confined to a few ascetics to become more like mass movements.

This landscape continued to evolve in the colonial period. Brotherhoods segmented according to their time-honoured fissiparous nature, with the emergence of new charismatic *shaykhs* and devout communities of *talaba* (sing. *talib*, student), but also along new intra-Sufi lines of division. In Senegal, Amadu Bamba Mbacké (1853–1927) founded the Muridiyya, named after the collective term in Arabic for disciple or *murid*: the most

important brotherhood founded in sub-Saharan Africa. Ascetic and erudite, Amadu Bamba preached the 'greater jihad' or *jihād al-naḥs* in Quranic terminology (as opposed to the lesser jihad of the sword), stressing spiritual devotion, study, and disciplined work in a quest for personal piety and exemplary behaviour in this world, and salvation in the hereafter.<sup>34</sup> Central to the Muridiyya's socio-religious architecture was the *dara* or rural *zawiya* (Sufi lodge), where Murids working in the community's peanut fields received spiritual guidance as part of *khidma* or service in the name of the *shaykh* (and later of his *khalifa* or successor). When Murids began moving to towns after the Second World War and diversifying their occupations, they founded *dairas*, the urban equivalent of the *dara*, also tied by hierarchical networks of *marabouts* caring for their local religious clientele. Confronted by the polluted colonial environment, Murids endeavoured to Islamize their own sacred space. This included the growing settlement of Touba (today Senegal's second largest city), which after Bamba's death became the destination of a yearly pilgrimage known as the Great Maggal.

New branches of the Tijaniyya also developed in French West Africa. Shaykh Hamallah (1883–1943) founded a distinct path in Nioro (in what is now Mali) known as the 'eleven-beads' Hamawiyya, which the 'twelve-beads' Tijaniyya of the Al Hājj 'Umar line fiercely opposed from the outset.<sup>35</sup> In Senegal, the long understudied but highly influential Ibrahima Niassé of Kaolack (1900–75) launched his own Tijani community (though not a separate *tariqa*) variously known as Niassene, Ibrahimiyya, *Tarbiya* (Arabic for education), and *Fayda* (spiritual flood). At its centre was the peculiar *tarbiya* developed by Niassé: a new kind of spiritual training reserved for the initiated which accelerated the attainment of *ma'arifa* (ecstatic knowledge). Though Niassé himself insisted on strict rules in the transmission of his *tarbiya*, it soon fuelled controversy as an increasing number of believers joined the ranks of his community and claimed to have seen God. While the Muridiyya remained tied to its Wolof base in Senegal, the more cosmopolitan *Fayda* expanded throughout West Africa and especially in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, which Shaykh Niassé regularly visited from the early 1950s.<sup>36</sup> A few of the *Fayda muqaddam* (authorized transmitters of Niassé's path) were women.<sup>37</sup> Both Amadu Bamba and Ibrahima Niassé aimed at spiritual *tajdid* (renewal) through education and were prolific writers of religious texts in Arabic.

Straddling the precolonial and the colonial periods, the Salafiyya (from the Arabic *salaf* or 'pious forebears') inaugurated another major course of change within Islamic thought. Starting as an intellectual trend associated with Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97), Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), and Rashid Rida (1865–1935), who called for the renewal and reform of Islam in order to resist Western cultural and scientific domination, its late nineteenth-century African bastion was Egypt. All three criticized *taqlid* (blind adherence to tradition) and some non-Islamic practices labelled *bid'a* (innovation), which they associated with Sufi excesses. Instead, they advocated *ijtihad*, the individual effort based on the Qur'an and Sunna, with a view to adapting Islamic law to modern problems.

Salafi teachings inspired the Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-Ikhwān*), which began as a socio-religious movement when it was founded in 1928 by the Egyptian primary

schoolteacher Hasan al-Banna. By the 1940s, it claimed to have one million members and sympathizers, and had turned to political activism. After resorting to terrorism, it was severely repressed and Al-Banna was executed in 1948. Sayyid Qutb, who had joined the Brotherhood in 1953 and published influential writings condemning Nasser's and other Arab regimes as *jahili* (pre-Islamic idolators), was also put to death in 1966. The radical wing of the Salafiyya later inspired many so-called 'Islamist' groups in different parts of the Muslim world.<sup>38</sup> In Algeria, Salafi ideas influenced Shaykh Abdelhamid Ben Badis (1889–1940), who founded the Association of Muslim Algerian Ulama in 1931. Despite its impact remaining limited, the association was noteworthy for defending the Arabic language, establishing new Islamic schools, and coalescing religious, cultural, and nationalist sentiments. Its leader Tawfiq al-Madani authored the famous slogan 'Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, Algeria is my fatherland.'<sup>39</sup>

The reformist wave gained some ground in the 1950s in West Africa, mostly in cities where a new generation of graduates from al-Azhar and other Arab universities, as well as pilgrims returning from Mecca, began questioning the competence and legitimacy of the old, often hereditary, religious guard. It swept through the Malinke/Jula world, bridging the present-day states of Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea, leading to violent clashes for the control of mosques in cities such as Bamako, Bouaké, and Kankan. Shaykh Ture (1925–2005), who founded the Muslim Cultural Union in Dakar in 1953, was vigorous in his condemnation of the alleged collaboration with the colonial state of some *marabouts*, who were prompt to denounce in return the assumed Arab-fomented sedition of these young sub-Saharan Muslims misleadingly labelled 'Wahhabis'.<sup>40</sup> In East Africa, the main reform-oriented movement was led by the Zanzibari Shaykh al-Amîn b. 'Alî al-Mazrû'î (1890–1947) and 'Abdallâh Sâlih al-Farsy (1912–82).<sup>41</sup>

Although Salafis remained a minority, their concern to reform Islamic education had a broad, long-term impact on local Muslim societies. To borrow Louis Brenner's terminology, classical Quranic schools or *majlis* were part of an 'esoteric episteme' where the transmission of knowledge was hierarchical, restricted, and centred around a teacher whose legitimacy derived from his *silsila*, i.e. genealogical chain of previous masters.<sup>42</sup> Reformed Islamic schools or *madrasa*—with classrooms, timetables, and exercise books as in colonial and Christian schools—introduced an epistemic shift towards a 'rationalistic episteme' characterized by a democratization of knowledge though printed books in Arabic, now taught as a foreign language along with some secular topics. Generalizations about the '*madrasa* turn' have their limits, however, for it had hybrid roots and distinct developments according to local context. A case in point is the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria, the oldest and largest educational association of Yoruba Muslims, founded in Lagos in 1923, which brought together influences from the Indian Ahmadiyya, Protestant missions, and local Yoruba dynamics.<sup>43</sup>

In short, beyond the variety of sectarian differences, Muslim communities underwent broadly analogous changes over the colonial interlude. Such change typically involved the revisiting of old notions of religious truth and ignorance; finding relevant means to forbid the wrong and command the right; the redefinition of *irshad* or religious



guidance; the rise of new religious entrepreneurs and communities of knowledge; the restructuring of community organization and new means of communication; a relative empowerment of Muslim youth and to a lesser extent of women; and the emergence of less local and more generic or standardized ways of 'being Muslim'. In the context of French West Africa, Robert Launay and Benjamin Soares advance the idea of the emergence of an 'Islamic sphere', autonomous from and evading the control of the colonial state, and where Muslims debated, disagreed, and, at times, divided on all these matters.<sup>44</sup> Whether all of these transformations meant a modernization of Islam or the making of a vernacular Islamic modernity will be the subject of ongoing academic debate.

## COLONIAL CONVERSION: SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA'S EXPANDING ISLAMIC FRONTIERS

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The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century jihads and the rise of mass Sufism resulted in a new wave of Islamization in those regions of Sudanic Africa where Muslims had hitherto formed a minority. In what has been described as one of the greatest albeit unintended and paradoxical consequences of European imperial conquest, this expansion continued on an even broader scale throughout the colonial period. Oddly, the issue of conversion to Islam remains poorly researched despite the debate on African conversion to world religions initiated by Robin Horton and Humphrey Fisher in the 1970s.<sup>45</sup> One reason for this is that historical data are not readily available. Conversion tended not to be publicly visible and was a gradual, sometimes life-long, and often instable process which did not preclude reversion to the older or further change to another faith (this holds true for conversion to Christianity too). If the sometimes alarmist vision of Christian missions and colonial officials of the inexorable progress of Islam should not be taken at face value, the phenomenon was striking nonetheless. Despite the lack of reliable religious statistics, it can be estimated that the Muslim population from Senegal to Cameroon and from Sudan to Mozambique probably at least doubled in the era of colonial encounter.

In the late nineteenth-century *bilad al-Sudan*, Islam tended to be concentrated in distinct towns, territories, and ethnic groups, notably the Jula and Hausa tied by their long-distance trading networks. As the colonial economy developed new axes of communication through plantation agriculture, the monetization of exchange, and new urban centres in the forest belt and along the Gulf of Guinea, Muslim merchants and migrant workers sought to seize new opportunities. Clerical lineages benefited from the loss of power of established warrior clans after colonial conquest. Some followed in the paths forged by mobile merchants to serve a heterogeneous clientele of forced and voluntary labour migrants from all walks of life, many of whom left the 'microcosm' of their ancestral cults for Islam and the 'macrocosm' of the colonial world.<sup>46</sup> Mossi migrants became Muslim in southern Côte d'Ivoire and contributed via circular

movement to Islamize their native regions in Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso). In eastern Africa, Islam made inroads in a reverse direction, from the Swahili coast into the hinterland. In need of social reconstruction after colonial conquest, the Yao of the Tanganyika, Nyasaland, and Mozambique frontier converted en masse to Islam. In both West and East Africa, many freed slaves became Muslim in a quest for a new identity and enhanced social status. Some iconoclastic Muslim preachers advocating a break with past practice burnt fetishes, as among the Baga in French Guinea.<sup>47</sup> In Accra in the 1930s, some members of the Methodist Church converted to Islam, many citing dreams as their inspiration. In a striking example of ongoing dialogue between the two world religions, these new Muslims interpreted certain passages in the Bible as foretelling the rise of Islam, launching Islamic Sunday schools in which they continued to use their Bibles to preach in the name of Muhammad.<sup>48</sup> Everywhere, peripatetic Muslim healers and proselytizing Sufi *shaykhs* contributed to expanding the African Muslim map space.

Independence, moreover, did not represent a watershed in the history of Islamic societies and religious cultures in Africa. As in their response to colonial intrusion, Muslims were neither united nor collectively mobilized in nationalist struggles. Postcolonial state power fell into secular hands and Islam generally kept evolving away from the public scene. As in the scholarly literature, a change of course would come later with the post-1979 international Islamic revival. Meanwhile, the diversity of Africa's Islamic movements—the Sufi brotherhoods, the Egyptian *Ikhwān*, the 'Wahhabis,' and all the rest—continued to be reshaped by the dialectic between internal patterns of development and new global contexts.

## NOTES

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9. See J.-L. Triaud, *La Légende noire de la Sanūsīyya* (Paris: Éditions de la MSH, 1995).
10. See O. Kane, 'Islamism: What is New, What is Not? Lessons from West Africa,' *African Journal of International Affairs*, 11/2 (2008).

11. C. A. Willis, 'Religious Confraternities of the Sudan', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 4 (1921).
12. Trimingham's books include *Islam in the Sudan* (1949), *Islam in East Africa* (1964), *Islam in Ethiopia* (1965), and *The Influence of Islam on Africa* (1968).
13. See esp. N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins, eds, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981; repr. by Markus Wiener, 2000).
14. See <http://islamicafricajournal.org>.
15. See <http://www.brill.nl/isaf>.
16. See e.g. T. Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); A. F. Roberts and M. N. Roberts, *A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum, 2003); K. Harrow, *Faces of Islam in African Literature* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991).
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18. B. Soares, ed., *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
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36. R. Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).
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40. See L. Kaba, *The Wahhabiyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974).
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43. S. Reichmuth, 'Education and the Growth of Religious Associations among Yoruba Muslims: The Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26/4 (1996).
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