HĀSHIYA

Islamic Thought in West Africa

From the Colonial Era to Present Day

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The African continent holds more than a quarter of the total Muslim population,[1] as well as four of the ten countries with the largest Muslim populations.[2] North Africa has an overwhelmingly Muslim majority, of course, but Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa are also home to hundreds of millions of Muslims, particularly above the equator. There are also significant Muslim minorities in parts of southern Africa, including South Africa.[3]

Despite the huge population of Muslims and the rich history of Islamic civilizations on the continent, Islam in sub-Saharan Africa has been treated as a secondary topic in accounts of global Islamic history. Meanwhile, in media and policy circles—and even in some academic works—Islam in Africa is often caricatured as a syncretistic "African Islam," a supposed veneer over an underlying animist worldview. With the rise of violent movements claiming to speak in the name of Islam, such as Boko Haram, journalists and policy analysts often depict militants as "strict," while implying that other Muslims in Africa are "unorthodox."[4] These portrayals echo and inherit colonial discourses that framed Muslims in Africa as either "fanatical" or barely Muslim.[5]

Academia has produced several serious correctives to the superficial and misleading portrayals of Islam in Africa. For example, the *Arabic Literature in Africa* series, published by Brill, is documenting—in vast detail—the continent's wealth of Arabic writings, most of which are Islamic in orientation. There are also growing efforts to study and document the continent's rich heritage of Islamic works in other languages, such as Wolof, Hausa, Fulfulde, and Somali, including works written in *ʿajamī* (Arabic script for non-Arabic languages).[6] Meanwhile, major publications such as Roman Loimeier's *Muslim Societies in Africa* and Ousmane Kane's *Beyond Timbuktu* have offered wide-ranging histories,[7] while specialized studies have delved into

1. Estimating the global Muslim population is an exercise in approximation, but there are likely around 1.9 billion to 2 billion Muslims worldwide. The combined Muslim populations of North and sub-Saharan Africa exceed 500 million—Nigeria alone likely has at least 95 million Muslims and Egypt 85 million or more.

2. Namely, Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria, and Sudan.

3. See, for example, Abdelkader Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons* (University Press of Florida, 1999); and Brannon Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (University of California Press, 2018).

4. For one example of such framings, see Yaroslav Trofimov, "Jihad Comes to Africa," *Wall Street Journal*, 5 February 2016, https://www.wsj.com/articles/jihad-comes-to-africa-1454693025.

5. For one example of these colonial discourses, see Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*, Third Edition (William Blackwood and Sons Ltd., 1926), especially 77 and 210.

6. See Fallou Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of ʿAjamī and the Murīdiyya* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

7. Roman Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology* (Indiana University Press, 2013); Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

topics ranging from African Muslim women's experiences to Islamic education and Shariʿa implementation in postcolonial African states.[8]

When positive images of Islam in Africa do break into the mainstream, they often draw on images of the past. The manuscripts of Timbuktu—located in present-day Mali—have become particularly famous,and for good reason, given the wealth of materials preserved there and in other storied centers of learning such as Chinguetti (Shinqit) and Walata in Mauritania. Yet the continent's Islamic present deserves attention too.

To this end, this paper aims to shed light on the intellectual contributions of Muslim thinkers in Africa in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Rather than attempting to cover the entire continent, the paper narrows in on West Africa to trace its intellectual landscape. The paper sketches the biographies of key scholars and discusses their central works, showing how the traditions of *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, Sufism (and anti-Sufism), and what might be called "Islamic social science," have taken shape over time.

A History of Islam in Africa

Muslims migrated to Africa, specifically Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia), during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Some of the most famous Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, who made the journey to Abyssinia include Ruqayya, daughter of the Prophet ﷺ and her husband and future caliph, ʿUthmān bin Affān. The Prophet ﷺ himself was aware of developments in Abyssinia and prayed for the Abyssinian king, Najāshī, when he died.[9]

During the early centuries of Islam, Muslim rule expanded outward from the Hijaz under the Rashidun Caliphate and later the Umayyad Caliphate, reaching as far as North Africa. The Muslim conquest of North Africa set the stage for the introduction of Islam to Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa. Historians debate exactly how this process unfolded, but there is broad agreement that Muslim traders and scholars initially established minority enclaves, gradually won conversions among rulers in what is sometimes called "court Islam," and subsequently influenced wider societies through broad-scale processes of conversion and, in some cases, movements claiming to bring *tajdīd*, or revitalization.[10] Such processes could take centuries; in what is now Mali, for example, many peoples in the southern part of the country did not embrace Islam until the twentieth century.

8. On Muslim women in Africa, see, for example, Ousseina Alidou, *Engaging Modernity: Muslim Women and the Politics of Agency in Postcolonial Niger* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Ousseina Alidou, *Muslim Women in Postcolonial Kenya: Leadership, Representation, and Social Change (University of Wisconsin Press, 2013)*. On Islamic education, see Robert Launay, ed., *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards* (Indiana University Press, 2016). On *shariʿa* in postcolonial Africa, see Brandon Kendhammer, *Muslims Talking Politics: Framing Islam, Democracy, and Law in Northern Nigeria* (University of Chicago Press, 2016) and Mark Fathi Massoud, *Shariʿa, Inshallah: Finding God in Somali Legal Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

9. See, for example, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, nos. 1245, 1317, 1318, 1320, and 1333.

10. For a summary of different theories, see Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa*, 27–34.

Ironically, colonial rule sometimes spurred on conversions to Islam, which was not the intention of the colonizers; colonialism triggered forms of social upheaval and movement through conscription, forced labor, emancipation of slaves, and the expansion of the market economy, all of which became forces that contributed to mass conversions in some places.[11]

Islam in Africa broadly comprises two overlapping geographical "worlds." One is northwest Africa. Commodities, people, and ideas flowed across the Sahara, making the desert a "connective space."[12] The other world bordered and flowed across the Indian Ocean, connecting Somalia and the Swahili coast to trade routes and religious networks linking East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian subcontinent, and southeast Asia.[13]

Above: Map of the western and northern regions of Africa. Modified from image by Tindo/Adobe Stock.

11. Brian Peterson, *Islamization from Below: The Making of Muslim Communities in Rural French Sudan, 1880-1960* (Yale University Press, 2011).

12. Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa*, Chapter 3. See also Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

13. See Roman Loimeier and Rüdiger Seesemann, eds., *The Global Worlds of the Swahili: Interfaces of Islam, Identity and Space in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century East Africa* (Lit Verlag, 2006). See also Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (University of California Press, 2006).

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The present-day landscape of Islam in Africa, as with most of the rest of the Muslim world, has been marked by colonialism. British, French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Portuguese colonizers redrew the map of Africa. Colonial rulers did not merely topple empires, they also introduced social engineering projects that sought to shape and contain Islam, notably through education, law, and the control of movement. Europeans did not always seek to convert Muslims to Christianity—in some places, such as colonial Northern Nigeria, "Indirect Rule" was partly premised on keeping missionaries out of Muslim territories in order to secure the goodwill of Muslim rulers. Yet European colonizers had their own ideas about what Islam should be, promoting European ideals of the "modern" Muslim. In law, colonial authorities severely restricted the scope of the Shari'a's application and sought to "reform" the law.[14]

Colonial authorities also intervened in internal Muslim political affairs, deposing unfriendly rulers and branding particular sects and Sufi orders as troublemakers (to make matters even more complicated, the very same order might be considered a threat in one colony and an ally in another). Colonial authorities also curtailed contacts between non-Arab Muslims in Africa and the Arab world, especially Al-Azhar University, which the British viewed as a hub of dangerous "propaganda."[15] Colonial rulers rewarded those Muslims who endorsed the colonial project or at least tolerated it, offering access to Hajj, prominent positions in the colonial administration, or financial support. Meanwhile, colonialism restricted but did not kill the intellectual freedom of more independent-minded Muslims, many of whom produced scholarship even under the shadow of colonial rule. Some Muslims even voted with their feet, making a kind of *hijra* to the Hijaz or elsewhere in an effort to escape colonial domination.

14. See Rabiat Akande, *Entangled Domains: Empire, Law and Religion in Northern Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

15. See, for example, G.J.F. Tomlinson and Gordon Lethem, *A History of Islamic Political Propaganda in Nigeria* (Colonial Office, 1927).

At independence in Africa, as in many other parts of the decolonizing world, nationalist visions were often expressed in mostly secular terms. Many African states soon evolved into single-party states, paralleling a pattern also observable in many parts of Asia. These single-party states developed structures that sought to regulate Islam, such as state-backed "Islamic Affairs" councils. In the shadow of single-party states and military dictatorships, Islamic thinkers and movements nevertheless flourished. The democratic openings and media liberalization of the 1990s—which swept across much of the continent as the Cold War ended—brought further opportunities for Muslims to express themselves in politics and society. Today, the continent is home to a remarkable diversity of perspectives on what it means to be Muslim.[16] With this brief background in mind, we can now turn to some of the foremost West African Muslim thinkers from the past century.

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Tafsīr

Tafsīr has long been a part of the "core curriculum" studied and taught by Muslim scholars in northwest Africa,[17] with the *tafsīr* of the "Jalālayn"—Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī—having been particularly influential in this region. As in other parts of the Muslim world, past and present, much *tafsīr* in West Africa has proceeded orally, but there have also been written exegeses.

The two best-known *tafsīr*s written by West Africans in the post-colonial period are *Ḍiyāʾ al-nayyirayn al-jāmiʿ bayn ʿulūm al-ṭāʾifatayn* (The Light of the Sun and Moon, Combining the Sciences of the Two Factions) by Ahmad Déme (d. 1973) of Senegal and *Aḍwāʾ al-bayān fī iyḍāḥ al-Qurʾān bi-l-Qurʾān* (The Lights of Explanation in Clarifying the Qur'an Using the Qur'an) by Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shinqīṭī (d. 1973) of Mauritania and then of Saudi Arabia. Déme, the son of a trader, was born around 1890 and received a traditional education in the Sine Saloum and Futa Tooro regions

16. One book that captures such diversity well is Benjamin Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (University of Michigan Press, 2005).

17. Bruce Hall and Charles Stewart, "The Historic 'Core Curriculum' and the Book Market in Islamic West Africa" in *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, ed. Graziano Krätli and Ghislaine Lydon (Brill, 2010), 109–174.

of present-day Senegal. He went on Hajj in 1922–1923 and had a long scholarly career, writing numerous works. He worked on *Ḍiyāʾ al-nayyirayn* for nearly twenty years, completing it in 1959—although it was not published in print form until 2006. The "two factions" referred to in the title are scholars of the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, meaning the outer and the inner dimensions of religiosity.

Al-Shinqīṭī, meanwhile, was born in French colonial Mauritania in 1905 and received a traditional education there, eventually becoming a judge. In 1948, he set off for Hajj, and was based in Saudi Arabia for the rest of his life—his account of his travel offers a rich view of the shaykh's learning, with much of the book comprising his answers to various theological, legal, and other questions that people posed to him on the road.[18] Once in Saudi Arabia, the scholars and royals there took note of his learning, and he taught at major institutions such as the Islamic University of Medina. Indeed, he was one of a series of West African scholars to influence and contribute to the development of the contemporary Salafi movement in Saudi Arabia and beyond.[19] He was also a founding member of the Muslim World League. His *tafsīr* is, as the title indicates, in the genre of using different parts and aspects of the Qur'an to help explain the Qur'an; his *tafsīr* is also strongly anchored in the use of hadith reports. Shaykh al-Shinqīṭī completed approximately 7/9 of the explanations of the Qur'an, and his student ʿAṭiyya bin Muḥammad Sālim (d. 1999) finished the rest.

Al-Shinqīṭī explained in his introduction that he wrote the *tafsīr* because, in his view, many Muslims were turning away from the Qur'an; he bemoaned "their lack of hope in His promise, and their lack of fear for His threat."[20] He had two main goals in completing the *tafsīr.* First, as his title indicated, he wanted to pursue the method of explaining the Qur'an by means of the Qur'an, "for no one is more knowledgeable about the meaning of the speech of Allah, the Exalted and the Most High, than Allah." Second, he wrote, he wanted to explain the legal implications of the Qur'an's verses: "We explain the rulings they contain, and their evidences from the Sunna, and the statements of the scholars regarding that, and we give weight to what appears to us to be the best supported by the evidence, without partisanship for a specific school."[21] Al-Shinqīṭī's *Aḍwāʾ al-bayān* quickly became one of the most famous and respected *tafsīr* works of the late twentieth century.

Alongside works of *tafsīr* in Arabic, West African Muslims have also published translations of the Qur'an into regional and local languages. Oral translations unfolded for centuries, but written translations

18. Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shinqīṭī, *Riḥlat al-ḥajj ilā bayt Allāh al-ḥarām* (Dār ʿĀlam al-Fawāʾid, 2005).

19. See Chanfi Ahmed, *West African ʿulamāʾ and Salafism in Mecca and Medina: Jawāb al-Ifrīqī—The Response of the African* (Brill, 2015).

20. Al-Shinqīṭī, *Aḍwāʾ al-bayān fī iyḍāḥ al-Qurʾān bi-l-Qurʾān*, 9 vols. (Dār ʿĀlam al-Fawāʾid, 2012), 1:7.

21. Al-Shinqīṭī, *Aḍwāʾ al-bayān*, 1:8.

were uncommon. In the twentieth century, Nigerian scholars produced two major translations into Hausa, namely the 1979 translation by Abubakar Gumi (d. 1992) and the 1988 translation by Nasiru Kabara (d. 1996). Gumi, chief judge of the Northern Region of Nigeria in the 1960s, became a pioneer of the Salafi movement in the country, whereas Kabara was a major shaykh within the Qādiriyya Sufi order. In a compelling analysis, the scholar Andrea Brigaglia points to how the two texts became a field of debate over the legitimacy of Sufism, as well as over the proper theological and exegetical framework for interpreting the Qur'an.[22]

22. For a comparison of the methodologies used in these translations, see Andrea Brigaglia, "Two Published Hausa Translations of the Qur'ān and Their Doctrinal Background," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4:35 (2005): 424-449.

Fiqh and *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*

In terms of *fiqh*, West Africa has long been a primarily Mālikī zone, with core Mālikī texts such as the *Risāla* of ʿAbd Allāh bin Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 996) and the *Mukhtaṣar* of Khalīl bin Isḥāq (d. 1374) enjoying wide influence. From precolonial times, some of the most famous West African jurists include Aḥmad Bābā (d. 1627) of Timbuktu, Sīdī ʿAbd Allāh bin al-Ḥājj Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī (d. 1818) of what is now Mauritania, and Muḥammad Yaḥyā al-Walātī (d. 1912), also of present-day Mauritania. The latter two are particularly well known for their contributions to *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Al-ʿAlawī authored the 1,000-line poem *Marāqī al-suʿūd* (Ladders of Good Fortune) and also wrote a prose commentary on it called *Nashr al-bunūd* (Unrolling the Clauses). Al-Walātī wrote various works, including a commentary on *Marāqī al-suʿūd*, as well as a widely used teaching text on *uṣūl al-fiqh* titled *Iyṣāl al-sālik fī uṣūl al-imām Mālik* (Leading the Seeker to the Methods of Imam Mālik).

One authoritative work of *fiqh* written by a West African in the twentieth century was *Ashal al-madārik* (The Easiest of the Faculties) by Abu Bakr al-Katsināwī (d. 1977) of Nigeria and then of Saudi Arabia. Al-Katsināwī grew up as a student of knowledge in Nigeria, then left for the Ḥaramayn in 1922–1923 and studied with some of the most prominent Mālikī shaykhs there, such as ʿAbbas bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Ḥasanī (d. ca. 1934) and his son ʿAlawī (d. ca. 1971). Al-Katsināwī's *Ashal al-madārik* is a commentary upon *Irshād al-Sālik* (Guiding the Seeker) by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin Muḥammad bin ʿAskar al-Baghdādī (d. 1332). Ibn ʿAskar's text is a terse manual in the genre of the *mukhtaṣar* (abridgment), giving the perspective of the Iraqi Mālikīs, who differed from the majority opinions of the school on various points. Al-Katsināwī's commentary opens up the original text in a sprawling, three-volume treatment that not only explains Ibn ʿAskar's

meanings but also brings numerous quotations and both complementary and contrasting points of view from other Mālikī texts, ranging from the earliest authorities to later scholars.

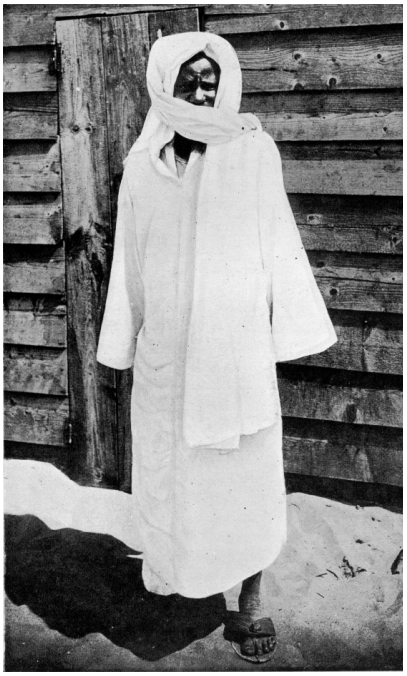
Another, similarly accomplished text from the contemporary period is the versification of the *Mukhtaṣar* of Khalīl by the Mauritanian scholar Muḥammad Sālim Wuld ʿAddūd (d. 2009). Wuld ʿAddūd hailed from a famous scholarly family in Mauritania. His father was also a prominent shaykh, Muḥammad ʿĀlī bin ʿAbd al-Wadūd (d. 1982), and his nephew is the world famous Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ḥasan Wuld al-Dedew (b. 1963). Wuld ʿAddūd, at a time when few Mauritanians had opportunity for formal studies, and even fewer to study outside the country, was part of a delegation of young judges sent to study in Tunisia in 1961. Rising through the hierarchy of judges back home in Mauritania in the 1960s and 1970s, he pushed for greater implementation of what he saw as the dictates of the Shariʿa. He lamented in a letter to Mauritania's then-president, Mukhtar Ould Daddah (d. 2003, r. 1960–1978), that the country's law codes sometimes put judges in the position of ruling in ways that clearly contradicted "a clear ruling based on obvious evidence from the speech of Allah Most High, or the Sunna of the Messenger, peace and blessings upon him and his people, or the consensus of the pious predecessors." Wuld ʿAddūd continued that he feared such contradictions "have entered us—and refuge is in Allah—under the punishment of the verses from Sūrat al-Māʾida,"[23] namely verses 44, 45, and 47 concerning "those who do not judge based on what Allah has revealed."

Ultimately, some elements of the Shariʿa were introduced under the military regime of Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah (r. 1980–1984), although the exact place of the Shariʿa in Mauritania and the meaning of the country's official status as an "Islamic Republic" both remain objects of considerable debate and reflection. Meanwhile, Wuld ʿAddūd went on to serve in high roles under the military regime of Maaouya Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya (r. 1984–2005), including as head of the Supreme Court (1984–1987), as well as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance (1987–1992) and head of the High Islamic Council (1992–1997). Wuld ʿAddūd's versification of the *Mukhtaṣar,* entitled *al-Tashīl wa-l-takmīl* (Facilitating and Completing), was accompanied by his own commentary, *al-Tadhlīl wa-l-tadhyīl* (Surmounting and Supplementing). The finished project is a staggering, six-volume set of over 4,000 pages. He completed the work during the last decades of his life, even amid substantial responsibilities connected to his high positions in the state.

23. Quoted in the introduction to *Al-Tashīl wa-l-takmīl*, 6 vols. (Dār al-Riḍwān, 2012), 1:43.

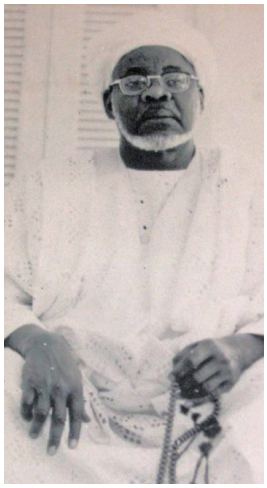
Sufism

Sufism has been a major religious, social, and political force in West Africa. Far from the caricature of the African Sufi "marabout" as an ignorant charlatan,[24] major studies have shown that Sufi leaders—such as Ahmadou Bamba (d. 1927) and Ibrahim Niasse (d. 1975)—were immersed in the wider Sunni scholarly tradition.[25] Bamba, who founded the Muridiyya Sufi order in what is now Senegal, left a substantial literary legacy, as did Niasse, who led an important branch of the Tijaniyya Sufi order and won followers from Senegal to Sudan and beyond. Both Bamba's and Niasse's works include praise poems about the Prophet ﷺ, as well as poems and manuals focusing on spiritual discipline and the Sufi path. Both Bamba and Niasse wrote in other genres as well. In poems such as *Masālik al-jinān* (Paths of Paradise), Bamba hearkened back to great Sufi masters of the past, connecting himself to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin ʿAṭā Allāh (d. 1310) of the Shādhiliyya Sufi order, Muḥammad al-Daymānī (d. 1752) of the Shādhiliyya, and Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d. 1811) of the Qādiriyya Sufi order; *Masālik al-jinān* versified and expanded upon al-Daymānī's *Khātimat al-taṣawwuf* (The Seal of Sufism).



Ahmadou Bamba (d. 1927)

In one notable section of the poem, Bamba cautioned the reader against racism, saying his being "of the blacks" should not deter the reader from heeding his words: "For the noblest of servants according to Allah/Is the most pious among them, without a doubt (*bi-lā i'shtibāh*)/And the blackness of the body does not entail/The idiocy of the person or poor understanding." The poetry of Bamba, Niasse, and other West African Sufis has been translated and analyzed extensively. For example, South Africa's Shaykh Fakhruddin Owaisi maintains a blog with numerous translations of Niasse's poems, supplications, and other statements,[26] and a 2018 collection by three major scholars included analyses and translations of various Sufi works from West Africa.[27] Indeed, literary production in terms of editing, disseminating, and commenting upon the works of Bamba, Niasse, and other major shaykhs constitutes a whole genre in and of itself. Meanwhile, both the Muridiyya and the Tijaniyya have tremendous followings within the West African diaspora, including in the United States.[28]



Ibrahim Niasse (d. 1975)
Marabate, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

24. The French word "marabout" is a corruption of the Arabic *murābiṭ*, meaning one stationed at a frontier post.

25. On Bamba, see Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913* (Ohio University Press, 2007). On Niasse, see Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niasse* (Brill, 2015).

26. See https://fakhriowaisi.blogspot.com/.

27. Rudolph Ware, Zachary Wright, and Amir Syed, *Jihad of the Pen: The Sufi Literature of West Africa* (The American University in Cairo Press, 2018).

28. See Ousmane Kane, *The Homeland Is the Arena: Religion, Transnationalism, and the Integration of Senegalese Immigrants in America* (Oxford University Press, 2011); and Cheikh Anta Babou, *The Muridiyya on the Move: Islam, Migration, and Place Making* (Ohio University Press, 2021).

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the dominance of Sufi orders in West Africa has been challenged by other Muslims. Anti-Sufi writings accused Sufis of introducing blameworthy innovations (*bidaʿ*, singular *bidʿa*) into the religion, making unsupportable theological claims, and exploiting followers for personal gain. Wherever one stands on Sufism, anti-Sufis have become significant voices in the region and thus must be taken into account when examining contemporary Islamic thought there. Key anti-Sufis of the twentieth century include Nigeria's Abubakar Gumi, notably in his work *al-ʿAqīda al-ṣaḥīḥa bi-muwāfaqat al-sharīʿa* (The Correct Creed in Accordance with the Shariʿa). Gumi held a number of influential roles in his lifetime, from senior Islamic judge of the Northern Region of Nigeria (1962–1966) to the spiritual mentor of the anti-Sufi mass movement Jamāʿat Izālat al-Bidʿa wa-Iqāmat al-Sunna (The Society for Removing [Blameworthy] Innovation and Establishing the Prophetic Model—a loaded name, to be sure).[29] His autobiography *Where I Stand*, published during the year of his death in 1992, offers a fascinating look at how colonial education, social change, independence-era politics, and the influence of Saudi Arabia all combined to shape his anti-Sufism.[30] The Tijaniyya in particular has attracted intensive criticism due to the intensity of some of the order's spiritual claims, and those criticisms have in turn generated intensive efforts to defend and justify the order's teachings.

29. See Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Brill, 2003) and Ramzi Ben Amara, *The Izala Movement in Nigeria: Genesis, Fragmentation and Revival* (Göttingen University, 2020).

30. Abubakar Gumi with Ismaila Tsiga, *Where I Stand* (Spectrum Books, 1992).

Islamic Social Science

Starting in the mid-twentieth century, various West African authors became interested in applying tools drawn from Western social science—particularly history but also anthropology and literary studies—in order to chronicle and analyze their region's Islamic intellectual heritage. Such writers were not only Muslims by background but wrote *as* Muslims, giving their works a different valence and orientation than those of non-Muslim Western academic writers who were covering the same broad topics.

There are several important works in this genre from Nigeria. In British colonial Northern Nigeria, where the British made an awkward pact with local Muslim emirs to allow a version of the *Shari'a* to be enforced, elite colonial schools sought to train future *shari'a* judges. Some of the graduates of such schools became formidable intellectuals, going on to study in the Arab world and ultimately taking advantage of their hybrid educations to produce major works of history. Key works from Northern Nigeria include *Al-Islām fī Nayjīriyā wa-l-shaykh ʿUthmān*

bin Fūdī al-Fulānī (Islam in Nigeria and Shaykh ʿUthmān dan Fodio the Fulani, 1950) by Adam al-Ilori (d. 1992), *al-Thaqāfa al-ʿarabiyya fi Nayjīriyā* (Arabic Culture in Nigeria, 1972) by ʿAlī Abū Bakr, and *Ḥarakat al-lugha al-ʿarabiyya wa-ādābihā fī Nayjīriyā* (The Movement of the Arabic Language and Its Literatures in Nigeria, 1977) by Shehu Galadanci (b. 1933). In addition to the Nigerian scholars, other West Africans have also produced works in this genre such as *al-Thaqāfa al-ʿarabiyya al-islāmiyya fī gharb Ifrīqiyā* (Arabic Islamic Culture in West Africa, 2015) by ʿUmar Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Fulānī.

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To take ʿAlī Abū Bakr's book as an example, the author chronicled key developments in Islamic thought in what is now Nigeria from 1750 to 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence. Based on the author's Ph.D. dissertation completed at the University of Cairo in 1967, *al-Thaqāfa al-ʿarabiyya fi Nayjīriyā* comprises six main chapters, notably the early history of Islamic northwest Africa, the career of ʿUthmān dan Fodio (the reformer and jihad leader who established the Sokoto Caliphate) and some of his successors, models of Arabic and Islamic instruction in Nigeria, literary production in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, poetry and prose in the same period, and the influence of Arabic upon local languages. As a kind of insider-outsider researcher and the son of a major shaykh himself, Abū Bakr brought both a critical and a religious sensibility to his work, which is striking in its blend of Western academic methods, Islamically oriented fieldwork, and wide consultation of unpublished manuscripts. Abū Bakr also interspersed his own reflections, deeply influenced by Islamic modernism, on the state of Islamic learning in Nigeria in his own time—the pivotal period around independence.

Conclusion

The outlook for Islamic intellectual production in West Africa is, *in shāʾ Allāh*, quite bright. The region has a still somewhat neglected Arabic and ʿajamī literary heritage, but more of that heritage is coming to light now amid efforts to catalogue, digitize, and publish manuscripts. Meanwhile, there is a slow but steady integration of West African Muslim thought into global Muslim consciousness, as the internet, diasporic movements, Arabic-language publishing, and Western academia bring greater awareness to the region's contributions. At the same time, considerable challenges remain for this region as elsewhere, including armed conflict in Nigeria and the Sahel as well as tight restrictions on political activity and religious expression in some West African countries. As Allah says in Sūrat al-Sharḥ, "Surely with hardship comes ease" (Q. 94:6). Crises may yet produce more great works of scholarship, with the permission of Allah. West Africa, a key zone of the *umma*, has a tremendous amount to offer.