



The Palgrave Handbook of Islam in Africa

Edited by

Fallou Ngom · Mustapha H. Kurfi · Toyin Falola

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*In gratitude to these
friends, colleagues, and mentors
for their tireless support*

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PREFACE

The Palgrave Handbook of Islam in Africa builds on the existing knowledge on Islam in Africa, including Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels' edited volume, *The History of Islam in Africa*, published in 2000. It generates new insights that enriches our understanding of the history of Islam in Africa and the diverse experiences and expressions of the faith in the continent. The volume covers key themes that reflects the preoccupations and realities of many African Muslims. It provides readers access to a comprehensive treatment of the past and current traditions of Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa, offering insights on different forms of Islamization that took place in several regions, local responses to Islamization, Islam in colonial and post-colonial Africa, and the various forms of *Jihād* movements that occurred in the continent. It provides updated knowledge on various social, cultural, linguistic, political, artistic, educational, and intellectual aspects of the encounter between Islam and African cultures reflected in the varied lived experiences and the corpus of African Islamic texts.

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Acknowledgments The project took much longer than expected due to the number of chapters we received and had to edit. We are grateful to all the scholars who have contributed to the volume. The volume would not have been a reality without their commitment and patience. We are also grateful to the reviewers for their useful feedback that improved the quality of many chapters and to Gana Ndiaye for translating Bernard Salvaing and Omar Gueye's chapters from French to English in addition to contributing a chapter to the volume.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The volume required working with multiple language materials. We opted for the EI³ transliteration system for Islamic concepts and names of Arab scholars. For African actors, if the name is partly of Arabic origin but is commonly presented in French or English historical materials without diacritics (such as “Usman Dan Fodio”), we have applied EI³ transcription rules in the first part of the names and kept the name the way it is pronounced locally. Thus, “Usman Dan Fodio” is rendered as “‘Uthmān dān Fodio,” Omar Tall is rendered as “‘Umar Taal,” and “Amadou Bamba Mbacké” is rendered as “Aḥmadu Bamba Mbàkke,” etc. Names of Sufi orders such as the Murīdiyya, Tijāniyya, Qādiriyya, and others are transcribed following the EI³ system. Arabic words such “Al-Ḥājj” and “Qāḍī,” whether they are titles or parts of first names, are transcribed following EI³ rules with initial letters always capitalized. For names such as “Muḥammad al-Kabārī,” we have applied the EI³ rules, but use “Al-Kabārī” with the first letters capitalized when it is used alone to refer to the same person. Names of people and places in published materials in French, English, and Portuguese are generally kept as they appear in published materials. We have used “Fuuta Jalon” and “Fuuta Tooro” as they are pronounced by native speakers, rather than their various French or English spellings. Finally, mixed words like “‘Ajamization” lose their final long vowel diacritic (“ī”).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Fallou Ngom, Mustapha H. Kurfi and Toyin Falola

Adduna, *Wa-Xa-Ja* [in Wolof]. Life is about *Wa-Xa-Ja*. *Waxante*, to speak to each other; *Xamante*, to know each other; and *Jariñante*, to be useful to each other. God could have created human beings as trees or rain, but it is because He intended them to enrich each other that He created them as different ethnolinguistic groups.

Sëriñ Masoxna Lo, Imām of the Mosque of Diourbel, Senegal.

The numerous publications, conferences, symposia, workshops, and scholarly networks devoted to various aspects of Islam in Africa around the world in the last two decades testify to the global interest in African Muslim communities, their histories, traditions, belief systems, organizations, and evolving modes of expression. The recent growing interest in Islam in Africa partly results from the activities of militant groups such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and others, and partly from the “discovery” of the rich African Islamic intellectual traditions reflected in the old manuscripts found in the fabled city of Timbuktu, Mali and the publicity they have received.¹ The current activities of Islamic militant groups in the Sahel region that resulted from the killing of the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, in 2011 and the ongoing discoveries of additional manuscript archives in several parts of

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sub-Saharan Africa continue to generate more interest in Islam in Africa globally.

The recent academic works highlight the significance and vibrancy of Muslim communities in Africa and abroad and their enduring embeddedness in the larger global story of Islam.² Significant progress has been made on the study of Islam in Africa because some important hurdles that traditionally impeded the field have been seriously challenged, though not completely erased. These include the following hurdles: (a) the usual treatment of the Great Sahara Desert as an insurmountable barrier that sealed off North Africa from sub-Saharan Africa³; (b) the traditional racial separation of Muslims in Africa between Arabs and Moors who supposedly practice “pure Islam” (“White Islam/Islam Blanc”) and Blacks who allegedly practice “corrupt Islam” (“Black Islam/Islam Noir”) that the French colonial administrator Paul Marty championed⁴; and (c) the overemphasis on African oral traditions at the expense of the equally important and rich multilingual non-Europhone sources of Africa in Arabic and ‘*Ajamī* (African languages written with the Arabic script).⁵

Furthermore, studies on Islam in Africa are still dominated by the *Arabic-centric monoglossic ideology of language* that values the Arabic language and texts over African languages and texts in ‘*Ajamī*. Though Arabic has served for centuries as the *Latin of Africa* for Muslims, to use Hunwick’s words,⁶ many African Muslims live in societies where multilingualism is the norm and they have authored and will continue to produce multilingual texts of equal value in Arabic and ‘*Ajamī* depending on their goals and targeted audiences.⁷ These African Muslims subscribe to the *polyglossic or pluralist ideology of language* and believe that God is multilingual and that all languages are equal in their capacity to become vehicles of Islamic and non-Islamic thoughts. They view the functions of Arabic and ‘*Ajamī* as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive.⁸

To do justice to the knowledge systems of these Africans, we must consider all the multilingual sources they produce by investing in learning, not only Arabic, but also their local languages and developing the cultural and literacy skills necessary to access the insights in their ‘*Ajamī* texts. To do this, we need to overcome what has been termed the *old linguistic paradox* in the production of knowledge about sub-Saharan African societies.⁹ Only few specialists of Islam in Africa and Africanists in general speak fluently and are literate in the languages and scripts used in the communities they study while it is unthinkable to study Chinese, Americans, Arabs, French, German, or Russian communities without the fluency and literacy in their languages and scripts necessary to access the insights in their sources of knowledge. As the rich ‘*Ajamī* archives in Africa demonstrate,¹⁰ if knowledge production about African Muslims and others who live beyond the Arab world and who have rich ‘*Ajamī* traditions is to be greatly enhanced and more accurate and objective, this double standard has to be addressed and their ‘*Ajamī* materials

have to become a full part of the primary sources used to produce knowledge about them.¹¹

Though the lingering effects of these hurdles are still perceived in the Western media and in studies on Islam in Africa and African studies at large, more scholars in the humanities and social sciences are now recognizing the enduring historical, cultural, educational, intellectual, and religious ties between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, the arbitrariness of the colonial racial classifications of African Muslims, and the wealth of insights covering vast areas of human knowledge to be gained when non-Europhone written archives in Arabic, *‘Ajamī*, and indigenous scripts such as N’ko and others are put in conversation with oral and Europhone sources on Africa.¹²

Today, Arabic and *‘Ajamī* sources produced by African Muslims are more readily available to scholars than ever before thanks to digital technology. African manuscript archives collected during the colonial era and microfilms of African Islamic texts collected in the postcolonial era are supplemented with thousands of new digital texts in Arabic and *‘Ajamī* from Muslim Africa.¹³ Thanks to the British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme and other institutions, important Arabic and *‘Ajamī* archives that reflect the intellectual histories and preoccupations of many African communities, hitherto inaccessible to scholars, are being preserved and made accessible to students and scholars studying Africa around the world.¹⁴ The existing digital collections, preservations, and studies of the forms and contents of the rich non-Europhone sources of Africa are undeniably enhancing teaching and research on Islam in Africa in the twenty-first century, fostering emerging fields of scholarly inquiry such as *‘Ajamī Studies* and *Timbuktu Studies*.¹⁵

However, despite the progress made to date on the studies on Islam in Africa, much remains to be learnt from the various Muslim communities in Africa. In reality, the long *durée* history of Islam in Africa, which started with the first arrival of Muslim refugees seeking protection from Al-Najāshī, the King of Aksum in present-day Ethiopia in the seventh century to now, is long and complex. So too are the subsequent multiple adaptations of Islam in the various linguistic, cultural, epistemological, and political ecologies in different parts of Africa.

The current research and multilingual textual archives in Arabic and African languages continuously being uncovered show how the faith has traveled and subsequently adapted to different ethnolinguistic, political, and cultural environments in Africa, resulting in Muslim communities where there is no single center of Islam, but multiple centers; where there is no single language of Islam, but multiple languages of Islam (Arabic and local languages); and where there are no single monolithic *Umma* (the worldwide Muslim community), but an imagined *Umma* where ethnolinguistic diversity is often celebrated as a form of divine mercy by local revered leaders and poets.¹⁶

In reality no book can do justice to the diversity of the trajectories of African Muslim communities, their Islamic traditions and lived experiences.

The Islamic faith, sciences, education system, art, and worldview have spread across Africa in multiple ways, interacting in the process with local traditions, languages, cultures, political systems, and worldviews in ways that resulted in a variety of societies and communities that are united by the faith, yet distinct in the way they individually express their Islamic orthodoxy, religiosity, and identity in private and public spaces.¹⁷

This volume contributes to the scholarship on the various trajectories and manifestations of Islam in Africa by bringing together thirty-three chapters that reflect different voices from various disciplines and locations around the world. The international group of scholars who have contributed to the volume consists of established and emerging scholars. They offer diverse perspectives on past and contemporary issues on African Muslim communities. The chapters are written by men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, outsiders and insiders. All have worked or lived in an African Muslim community. The chapters are organized thematically in five parts.

PART I: HISTORY AND DIFFUSION

The first part of the volume brings together nine chapters dealing with various aspects of the history and multiple adaptations of Islam in Africa. The themes discussed in this section include the important works and legacies of prominent Muslim scholars, local textual traditions, the formation of African Muslim identities, the different interpretations and implementations of *jihād* and their consequences, the emancipatory role that Islam played to free some oppressed people from traditional non-Muslim rule, and the spatial distribution of the faith in Africa.

Chapter 2 by Bernard Salvaing sets the historical and geographical stage for the subsequent chapters. In his chapter, Salvaing provides a history of the spread of the faith in sub-Saharan Africa from the eighth century to the end of the nineteenth century, on the eve of the generalization of colonial rule. He documents the spread of Islam throughout sub-Saharan Africa chronologically and regionally, showing the patterns of conversion, and offering useful insights on the contents of the resulting Islamic African cultures and literatures.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the legacies of two prominent African Muslim scholars: The renowned thirteenth-century Mande scholar, Al-Ḥājj Salim Suwari, and the fifteenth-century Timbuktu scholar, Muḥammad al-Kābarī. In Chapter 3, Alfa Mamadou Diallo focuses on the life and work of Al-Ḥājj Salim Suwari whose most well-known and enduring legacies include his call for a peaceful cohabitation between Muslims and their neighbors of different creeds. By closely reading the available evidence on Al-Ḥājj Salim Suwari, Diallo offers new perspectives on a key African scholar who founded African Muslim communities that are characterized by outstanding Islamic knowledge, political autonomy, pacifism, and above all mobility. In Chapter 4,

Zachary Wright shows how African Muslim scholarly voices reflected in local textual traditions demonstrate the continent's depth of intellectual inquires, and an engagement with global Islamic discourses in a variety of disciplinary specializations. Wright shows how the fifteenth-century Timbuktu scholar, Muḥammad al-Kābarī, left an important summary of theology, asceticism, and esotericism—"The Garden of Secrets" (*Bustān al-Fawā'id*)—that offers insight into the formation of African Muslim identities.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the multiple interpretations and implementations of *jihād* in Africa, and Chapter 7 discusses how the Islamic faith served as a liberating force for the Fulakunda Fulbe of Senegambia. In Chapter 5, Fulera Issaka looks at the various interpretations and manifestations of the concept of *jihād* in Africa. She examines the patterns, motives, and consequences of *jihād* in the continent, discussing the different modes of *jihāds* that have taken place in the African continent from the precolonial period to now. She shows that the historical trajectory of the interpretations and implementations of *jihād* in Africa reflects the polycentric nature of Islam. In Chapter 6, Amir Syed interrogates some common interpretations of *jihād* in Africa as "Islamic revolutions." Syed notes that while many of the leaders of these movements used the language of *jihād*, and drew on the broader Islamic legal tradition, they did so in response to differing historical circumstances. Instead of focusing on the discourse of *jihād*, he argues that it is important to also investigate the social, political, and economic contexts within which these *jihād* movements emerged, and analyze their differences, since they all unfolded separately in space and time. In Chapter 7, Alpha Oumar Ba discusses the lesser-known role of Islam in the liberation of Fuladu Fulani people from the non-Muslim Mandinka Empire of Kaabu in Senegambia (ca. 1537–1867). Drawing on the history of the Kaabu Empire, the local epic, and the collective memory of the Fuladu Fulbe, Ba shows how the oppressed people saw Islam as a liberating religion and took advantage of it to escape from their centuries-old domination by the non-Muslim Mandinka ruling elite of the Kaabu Empire.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 deal with the spatial diffusion and reasons that facilitated the spread of Islam in different parts of Africa. In Chapter 8, Karen S. Barton examines the relationship between geography and Islam in Africa. Using data and maps from the Pew Forum, she highlights the contemporary distribution of Islam at the national and regional scales. Her chapter includes a discussion of the role that *expansion diffusion* played in creating contemporary religious spatial patterns across the continent. The chapter lays out a geographical explanation of where Islam is most dominant in contrast to Christianity or traditional African religions and why. The second central theme of Barton's chapter deals with Islamic sacred spaces in Africa. She describes how the siting of holy places influences the movement of people. Barton argues that cartography can deceive, and that

spatial phenomena must be ground-truthed in order to yield the most accurate results on Islam's distribution and dynamics. In Chapter 9, Bala Saho describes the processes of Islamization in West Africa as a combination of factors, including the attitudes of West Africans toward Islam as the faith continues to provide a multitude of opportunities. Saho shows how the process of Islamization gained momentum in West Africa once colonialism was established because Islam's utilitarian values such as the spiritual and social services and its tolerance to accommodate West African customs and traditions and its promise of heaven persistently made the faith attractive to many West Africans.

While Saho's chapter focuses on the diffusion of Islam in West Africa, in Chapter 10, Muhammed Haron shifts the focus to Muslim communities in the southern African region. Haron's chapter deals with Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe while offering an overview and demographics on Muslim communities in other countries of the SADC zone (Southern African Development Community). Haron shows that while Muslim communities in the SADEC countries form part of the citizenry in the region's diverse states where they were born and reside, their Muslim identities set them apart from their fellow citizens socially, politically, economically, culturally, and religiously.

PART II: INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES

The second part of the volume consists of five chapters dealing with *shari'a law*, female Muslim scholars, Christianity and Islam, Islam and West African Religions, and an important Islamic philosophical tradition in Africa. In Chapter 11, Erin E. Stiles examines how different African societies and states have used *shari'a* to regulate aspects of social life. She first considers *shari'a* in the early historical period, then moves to *shari'a* in the colonial period, and finally explores the ways in which some modern African states have differently incorporated *shari'a* into state legal systems. The final section of her chapter looks at contemporary challenges regarding *shari'a* in Africa.

In Chapter 12, Britta Frede deals with female Muslim scholars in Africa from a historical perspective. After discussing some factors that led to the fact that our knowledge about female Muslim scholars in Africa remains scattered, Frede gives a historical overview of the development of female Islamic scholarship in Africa. She notes how women have often played important roles in diverse religious institutions in Muslim Africa as teachers, spiritual guides, and founders of institutions. She also highlights how the twentieth century saw major changes in the training of Muslim scholars through educational reforms that created new Muslim scholars who were no longer exclusively trained at traditionalist institutions but received modern state education. She argues that the recent increasing governmental involvement in the religious sphere has created new opportunities for a more visible engagement