

11

Conclusion

Mudimbe's interpretation of what he calls the African gnosis, 'the ideological and scientific discourse on Africa', is based essentially on a Western epistemological order. This is also true of Appiah's analysis of African intellectuals. However, while there is little doubt that there is a Western epistemological order in Africa, it is certainly not as dominant as Mudimbe and Appiah would suggest. Like the great majority of Europhone intellectuals in sub-Saharan Africa, these two authors do not seem aware of their region's important Islamic library. As a result, they do not sufficiently integrate the epistemological references of this Islamic library in their syntheses on the production of knowledge in Africa – which are indeed remarkable. In his book which refers to several hundreds of European and Europhone African authors, Mudimbe (1988:181) mentions only in one paragraph that Islamic sources have always been important in the research for and invention of African paradigms, and that Islamic culture has made a great contribution to the passion for Otherness, particularly in West Africa. In illustrating the importance of these sources, Mudimbe cites six authors: Ibn Hawqal (10th century), Al-Bakri (11th century), Idrisi (12th century), and Ibn Batuta, Ibn Khaldun and Maqrizi (14th century) – all Arab authors. He does not cite any Arabist Africans, some of whose works have been translated into Western languages. Such summary treatment does not do justice to the Islamic library of sub-Saharan Africa consisting of writings in Arabic and in *ʿjami*. Medieval Arabic texts about Africa and fundamental books on Islamic knowledge taught in medieval Arabic colleges constitute the nucleus of the Islamic library (see Annexure). This library was enriched by the writings of African scholars in Arabic or *ʿjami* of the last five centuries, of those of Arabists trained in African and Arabic countries more recently, and finally the writings of intellectuals fluent in both Arabic and some Western languages.

It is impossible to reconstitute this library completely. As the texts date over centuries and are mostly in the form of circulating manuscripts, only some of them have been transmitted to us while others have perished because of poor

conservation conditions. Work on collecting them continues and the documents that have already been gathered attest to an intense intellectual life and important debates on society that are completely ignored by the overwhelming majority of Europhone intellectuals.

Traditional Muslim scholars have left us a library that contains writings in various fields of Islamic sciences, as well as historical documents of all kinds. That the historical documents are invaluable sources for the study of the economic and social history of sub-Saharan Africa is obvious.

Some might argue that the texts concerning traditional Islamic sciences are of little interest for social sciences and humanities scholars, as they are part of a scholastic tradition in which the thinking of the authors is not autonomous. To this objection, there are two counterarguments: firstly, the term 'religion' in the modern West has not the same meaning as that of *din* in Arabic, which is believed to be its equivalent (Asad 1993:1 et seq.). Secondly, the mode of legitimation of knowledge is a function of the epistemological universe in which one is situated.

To corroborate the first counter-argument, let us consider the texts of Maliki jurisprudence (*fiqh maliki*) which take up a large part of the corpus studied here. These texts are not religious in the same sense as canon law in the modern West where positive law governs all aspects of social life. In West Africa, for example, Maliki jurisprudence is the basis of legislation concerning personal status. The ways in which one prays, marries, divorces, or organizes inheritance are aspects of life for dozens of millions who are governed by this jurisprudence. Given the role of Islam in structuring the political and social order of peoples and their imagination, the study of Islamic jurisprudence texts does not have the same epistemological and philosophical meaning as a similar study of canon law in the modern West.

The objection regarding the scholastic nature of many of the texts of this Islamic library poses another important epistemological problem: the legitimation of knowledge which varies according to the epistemological order in which one is located. The Western epistemological order, inherited from the Enlightenment, values originality as a way of legitimizing knowledge. The Islamic epistemological order, according to its classical tradition, which shapes the imagination of the traditional scholars in Africa, emphasizes rather the following of precedent as a way of legitimizing knowledge. This is the case to such an extent that, in order to legitimize themselves, the authors of innovations, who certainly exist in this Islamic tradition, must present their innovation within an established tradition. As a consequence, from the heuristic point of view, the fact that some of these texts fall within the scholastic tradition in no way diminishes their interest, if they are placed in their epistemological context of production.

Underlying these two objections is a more fundamental question, that of a universal definition of the intellectual. Looking at the history of modern Europe and the role that the Enlightenment has played in the intellectual construction of the idea of modernity, the idea of the sovereignty of reason is paramount. The thinking of intellectuals to whom most of this paper is dedicated is not autonomous as such: it is to some extent shaped by religious dogmas. Two observations are in order here. First, the interpretation of texts is not always the same and immutable. In certain circumstances, it can change (Foucault 1969:135) and intellectuals in the Islamic tradition have often shown their capacity to innovate. One example concerns slavery, which the Koran never abolished but which is considered by almost all current Islamic thinkers and theologians as null and void. Thus, the thinking inspired by religion is not as rigid and imprisoned by dogma as is often thought.

Second, the notion of the autonomy of reason is not neutral. It is a philosophical and political position aimed at contesting the dominant beliefs and values of a society at a given historical moment. The intellectual and political agenda of the Enlightenment philosophers was motivated by their desire to contest the traditional figures of authority in pre-modern Europe, particularly the clergy and, to a lesser degree, the monarchy. The educated militants of pre-colonial Islam who denounced the African kings, accusing them of pagan practices or of being bad Muslims, had similar aims, even if they used a different language. In the same way, the Islamists of the post-colonial period blamed the authorities of the modern state (the post-colonial political elites) and the project of a secular society that these elites tried to promote.

The growth of education in Western languages has not led to a decline in Arabic – quite the contrary. In West Africa, the intellectual tradition expressed in Arabic has been greatly reinvigorated through both the modernization of local Arabic teaching and the availability of networks for training Arabists in the Arab countries. While the first generation of Arabists trained in Arabic universities obtained mainly religious knowledge, more recent Arabists, as in Sudan, enjoy many more opportunities, including the possibility to learn Western languages and study the hard sciences. Some of the Arabists, conscious of the importance of European languages, are doing their best to acquire a mastery of them. More open-minded than most of the pure products of the traditional Arab-Islamic scholarship, some (although not all) of the new Arabists are computer literate and are aware of cutting edge developments in the new information and communication technology. They are creating journals, newspapers and magazines. In Senegal, the founder and president of one of the most important press groups, Sidi Lamine Niassé, is an Arabist by training. At first, the daily product of his press group, *Walfadjri*, was an Islamic information bulletin imprisoned in the

waffle of Islamist militants. In time, the bulletin became a daily in French and, with its team of highly professional journalists, one of the most respected papers in Senegal. The group's radio, Walf FM, is also one with the largest audiences in Senegal, transmitting programmes not only in French but also in local Senegalese languages. The press group has recently acquired a television station. Sidi Lamine Niassé has written books and numerous articles in French.

To return to the debate started up in the introduction, while it is true that the expanded colonial library structures a Western epistemological order that shapes the thinking of Europhone intellectuals, it is no less true that the expanded Islamic library is creating an Islamic space of meaning. This library contains the writings of non-Europhone and 'hybrid' intellectuals. Among the latter is a group that studied Arabic first and then Western languages, and another group who did it the other way round, plus a third group that studied Arabic and Western languages at one and the same time. Some intellectuals are at home in several intellectual traditions: for example, the late Amadou Hampathé Bâ and Saada Umar Touré in Mali, Amar Samb, El-Hadji Madior Cissé in Senegal, Abubacar Gumi, Haliru Binji and Naibi Suleyman Wali in Nigeria. These personalities are unquestionably well-known intellectuals who are neither just Europhone nor just Arabophone. They are polyglots, able to express themselves in several scholarly languages. And whether they are Europhones, non-Europhones or 'hybrids', these intellectuals share an Islamic space of meaning.

Appendix I

A Research Project

The intellectual history of sub-Saharan Africa cannot be reduced to a study of Europhone intellectuals alone. It is important to study the other intellectual traditions, and therefore necessary to continue the listing of texts in non-Western languages, including Arabic and *ʿjami*. This task is all the more urgent in that some of these writings have not been microfilmed or published. They are rotting away in private libraries in poor conditions and risk being lost forever.

It is important to overcome two kinds of barriers in the effort to de-compartmentalize knowledge and renew our thinking about the production of knowledge in Africa. The first barrier is disciplinary: there is no conversation between intellectual historians of sub-Saharan Islam such as Islamicists and Europhone social scientists concerned with the sociology of knowledge, such as Mudimbe or Appiah. From reading the works of both, it is obvious that they hardly communicate at all. As discussed earlier, there exists abundant information about the Islamic library in Western languages. But the rare Europhone intellectuals who mention Arabic sources in the history of Africa cite hardly more than the two *tawarikh* of Mahmoud Kaʿti and Abderhamane Al-Saʿdi (*Tarikh al-Fattash* and *Tarikh al-Sudan*).

The other kind of barrier is linguistic, and it separates the Europhone from the non-Europhone intellectual. To overcome it, there has to be an effort to collect and translate Arabic and *ʿjami* texts into Western languages, particularly those dating from the pre-colonial or colonial periods, of which there are very few copies extant. Very praiseworthy initiatives are underway in Africa, which complement the work carried out in Western countries. Among them, two – both focussing on Mali – are worthy of mention.

In August 2002, the Malian Association for Research and Action for Development organized an international symposium on the theme *Les chemins de l'encre* (Ink Paths). It aimed at 'setting up and running an institutional arrangement for the protection, exchange and conservation of the corpus of ancient African

manuscripts', and at starting 'the sharing of experience in conservation and the initiatives in scientific research to safeguard and promote the written heritage'.¹⁰ The other initiative was taken after the visit to Mali of the South African President Thabo Mbeki in November 2001, following which he pledged to support the preservation of Malian manuscripts. South Africa and Mali have ratified an agreement called the Timbuktu Bi-National Presidential Project: South Africa and Mali. It aims at restoring all the libraries and collections of manuscripts in Timbuktu, and is already at work.¹¹ The cost is estimated at R320,000,000.

The number of books, newspapers, journals, magazines and other publications in Arabic and African languages, in *ʿjami* and in Latin characters, has grown enormously over the last two decades. The study on non-Europhone intellectuals must therefore pay particular attention to the growth of this literature, its dissemination networks, its authors and its contents. Unlike the manuscripts upon which numerous researchers are working, there has been no systematic attempt, so far, to collect this more recent printed material.

There should also be a study of the positions taken by non-Europhone intellectuals on some universal principles invoked by Enlightenment thinkers to see how the former approach the notion of 'modernity', and whether this approach has changed over time. Most contemporary Islamic movements have appropriated modern technology. Is their acceptance of modernity limited to the use of technology alone or does it include the recognition of the universality of certain values and freedoms and a greater autonomy for reason? The answer to this question cannot be very clear-cut as the Islamist movements are far from being monolithic. Because classical Islamic thought recognizes the need for innovation, the principle that legitimizes it is *ijtihad* (intellectual effort exerted to find solutions to new problems and challenges that are faced by the Muslim community).

Contemporary struggles within Islamist movements oppose conservatives to the partisans of a greater opening up. Alongside Islamists educated in the traditional system, there are also others who are products of the modern world; either through a modern education or through the combination of traditional and modern training. Some have been followers of secular ideologies (socialism, communism, liberalism) before converting to Islamism. The outlook of the latter on the modern world can continue to evolve, but even among the purest products of the traditional system of education, there are audacious thinkers capable of rethinking the 'dogmas'. It is thus imperative to move beyond the notion that Arabists, even if they have been completely trained in the classical tradition, are prisoners of dogma from which they cannot free themselves.

Similarly, one might wonder whether the decline of radical Islamism, which can be seen almost everywhere in the Muslim world, signifies the triumph of the more open-minded groups among the militant Muslims. This question can be studied by analyzing the ongoing conversations among militants. Radio programmes, newspapers, books and journals in the languages of communication of these intellectuals would be appropriate material for such an analysis.

As we are dealing with the Islamic intellectual tradition, its recent impact on African society would merit study. To do this, one should go beyond analyzing the manuscripts and printed works to study the way in which groups re-appropriate, manipulate, transform and adapt Islamic concepts to promote their agenda. Over the last decades, the proposal for the inclusion of *shari'a* in the Nigerian Federal Constitution has provoked one of the most stormy debates in post-colonial Nigeria, started with the application of 'full shari'a' in Zamfara state. Since then, most other states of northern Nigeria, under the pressure of public opinion, have adopted the same approach. Thus, the questions that arise from the so-called 'religious' texts are part of the major debates on society in post-colonial Africa. They need careful study.

The development of new information and communication technologies facilitates a more rapid dissemination of debates on Islamic knowledge. The different transmission systems should be identified and studied systematically. Radio-cassettes, video-cassettes, radio and television programmes have integrated non-Western languages into an oral and visual basis, and the debates taking place on the worldwide web have become commonplace.

A study of non-European intellectuals and their knowledge in sub-Saharan Africa should not be limited to the Arabic intellectual tradition and to the *al-jami*. It is also necessary to include those writing in African languages transcribed in Latin characters. Apart from West Africa, with which this study has been mainly concerned, it would be advisable to integrate the views of specialists from East Africa, the islands of the Indian Ocean and Southern and Central Africa, if not North Africa, where there is, though to a lesser degree, a marginalization of non-Europhone intellectuals.

The work of such a group should not be restricted to those who write. It should also include other actors who are making the world intelligible (Copans 1993:17), including those who do not necessarily belong to the Europhone or Arab-Islamic intellectual traditions.

Such a research group should examine the extent to which intellectuals belonging to the different linguistic traditions share the same epistemological points of reference. Intellectuals who are trained today in the social and human sciences in Arabic countries or the Arab Universities of Niger and Uganda share the same space of meaning as those trained at Berkeley or the Sorbonne, even if

they do not speak English or French. The Arabists training in sociology in the Arab universities know as much about Weber, Marx and Durkheim (who have been translated into Arabic) as the sociology students of Nanterre or the University of Dakar.

Moreover, there are graduates who have received all their training in the traditional Islamic schools who are not however restricted to medieval theology. They have been listening to foreign radio programmes in Arabic or African languages for decades now and they are thoroughly conversant with the most recent debates on modernity and globalization. They have therefore the same degree of sophistication as the intellectuals trained in other traditions. Thus, even if the corpus of the traditional Islamic teaching remains unchanged (see Annexure), it would be a mistake to say that those who have received such training in 1900, 1950 and 2000 have exactly the same epistemological points of reference.

In the same way, because of the diffusion of information programmes in African languages (the BBC, for example, has been broadcasting in Hausa since the 1950s), it is not rare to find individuals in Northern Nigeria without any formal intellectual training able to undertake a completely coherent discourse on globalization, structural adjustment, political liberalization and secularism in Hausa. What is true in Nigeria also goes for the other African countries where radio, television and newspapers are making considerable efforts to spread maximum information and other programmes in non-Western languages. The growth of the new information and communication technologies and the growing place of national languages in this framework give the impression that among the speakers of non-Western languages, there are numerous people who share the same space of meaning as Europhone intellectuals.

Finally, it should be said that the English, French and Portuguese languages have evolved in Africa to express local ideas and concerns. For example, some phrases in the French or English spoken in Africa may not be understood in France or in England. Thus, the very notion of Europhone intellectuals is problematic and should be reconsidered.

Given the breadth of this research agenda and the pluri-disciplinary approach required to pursue it, no single research methodology can be proposed. Some researchers will rely more on quantitative methods, other on qualitative ones and a third category will combine the two. Some members of the research group will be Europhone intellectuals and others non-Europhone, and still others will be a blend of the two. Such collaboration, one hopes, will help change the terms of the debate on the production of knowledge among both Europhone and non-Europhone intellectuals.

Appendix II

Some Elements of the Corpus of Traditional Arab-Islamic Teaching

Koranic Exegesis

- *Tafsir al-jalalayn* of Jalal al-din Al-Suyuti (died in 1505) and of Jalal al-din Mahalli
- *Hashiyat al-Sawi*, which is a commentary on *Tafsir al-jalalayn*

Hadith

- *Jami' al-sahih* of Muhammad b. Isma'il Bukhari (died in 870), a work known as the *Sahih* of Bukhari
- *Jami' al-sahih* of Abu 'l-Husayn b. Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Nisaburi (died in 875), a work known as the Muslim *Sahih*

Sufism

- *Jawahir al-ma'ani wa bulugh al-amani fi fayd Ahmad al-Tijani* of Ali Harzim Barrada (died in 1799)
- *Rimab hizb al-rabim* of Umar al-Futi (died in 1864)
- *Al-Qasq'id al-'ashriyat fi 'l-nasa'ib al-diniyya wa 'l-bikam al-zuhdiyya* of 'Abd al-Rahman b. Yakhlaftan al-Fazazi known as Al-Fazazi (died in 1230)

Grammar

- *Al-muqaddima al-ajurrumiyya* by 'Abdallah b. Muhammad al-Sanhaji known as Ibn Ajurrum (died in 1323)
- *Alifiyya fi 'l-nahw* of Jamal-al-din Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah al-Tai al-Jayyani, known as Ibn Malik (died in 1273)

- *Muqadimma al-ashmawiyya* of ʿAbd al-Bari al-Rifaʿi al-ʿAshmawi (16th century)
- *Lamiyyat al-afal* of Jamal-al-din Muhammad b. ʿAbd Allah al-Tai al-Jayyani, known as Ibn Malik (died in 1273)
- *Irshad al-salik* of ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Muhammad Ibn ʿAskar al-Baghdadi (died in 1332)

Panegyrics of the Prophet

- *Al-Kawakib al-duriyya bi fi madh khayr al-bariyya*, also known as the *al-burda* of Sharaf al-din Muhammad al-Busiri al-Sanhaji (died in 1296)
- *Dala'il al-khayrat wa shawariq al-anwar fi dhikr al-salat ʿala al-nabi al-mukhtar* of Muhammad b. Suleyman al-Jazuli (died in 1465)
- *Al-Qasa'id al-isbriniyya fi madh sayyidina Muhammad* of ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Yakhlaftan al-Fazazi known as Al-Fazazi (died in 1230)

Maliki Jurisprudence

- *Mukhtasar fi 'l-furu'* of Diya al-Din Khalil b. Ishaq al-Jundi (died in 1374)
- *Risala* of ʿAbd Allah b. Abi Zayd ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Qayrawani (died in 996)
- *Mukhtasar fi-l-ibadat ʿala madhhab al-imam Malik* of ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Muhammad al-Saghir al-Akhdari (died in 1585)

Theology

- *Al-muqaddima al-jazariyya fi ʿilm al-tawhid* of Shams al-Din ʿKhayr al-Dimashqi al-Jazari, known as Ibn al-Jazari (died in 1429)
- *Al-jumal* (also called *al-murshid* or *Wusta*) of Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Hasani al-Sanusi al-Tilimsani (died in 1486)
- *Umm al-barahin* (Source of proofs), also known as *al-sugbra* (little dogma) of Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Hasani al-Sanusi al-Tilimsani (died in 1486)
- *ʿAqida ahl al-tawhid wa l-tasdid, al-mukhrija min zulumat al-jabl wa raqabat al-taqlid* known also under the name *al-kubra* (great dogma) of Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Hasani al-Sanusi al-Tilimsani (died in 1486)
- *Ihya ʿulum al-din* of Abu Hamid Muhammad b. Muhammad Al-Ghazali (died in 1111)
- *Al-madkhal ila tanmiyat al-ʿamal bi bahsin al-niyyat* of Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Hajj al-Fasi al-Adbari (died in 1336)
- *Urjuzat al-wildam* of Hahya b. ʿUmar al-Qurtubi (died in 1171)
- *Al-Tuhfa al-wardiyya* of ʿUmar b. Muzaffar al-Shafiʿi, also called Ibn al-Wardi (died in 1349).

Notes

1. In the meaning given it by Foucault (1969-70), the library refers to 'a documentary field that comprises books and treatises traditionally recognized as 'valid' in a specific field. The library also contains a mass of statistical information, as well as a collection of accounts and observations published or transmitted, that concern this field. As they constitute a group of statements 'belonging to the same discursive formation (Foucault 1969:44 et seq.), the writings of a given library create a system of representation'.
2. In the Western meaning of the term, the birth of the social sciences can be traced to the works of Western philosophers such as Montesquieu, Diderot, Rousseau, Adam Smith, David Hume, just to cite some of them, whose common denominator is their critical attitude towards the structures of the authorities of medieval Western Europe, i.e. the monarchy and the clergy. At the end of the nineteenth century, the contributions of authors like Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Ferdinand Tonnies gave to the social sciences their current form, i.e. a focus on the study of the real world as opposed to the speculation characteristic of the Enlightenment philosophers, and the emergence of different specializations created by the intellectual division of labour. See Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, Kenneth Thompson, *Modernity. An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell, 1996:4.
3. Commenting on the article of Achille Mbembe 'African Modes of Self-Writings' in *Identity, Culture and Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue*, No. 2, 2001:1-35, Nira Wickramasinghe (2000:38) points out that the title 'African modes' is problematic: it would make no sense in Asia because there no-one would identify themselves as Asian.
4. There were 300 bishoprics in North Africa before the invasion of the Vandals who de-Christianized the region, thus preparing the terrain for the expansion of Islam.
5. See the later section on Political/Intellectual Revolutions.
6. Accessed on October 2002.
7. Even if it is better known as the *Burda* (Mantle, in Arabic), the title of this panegyric of the Prophet is *al-kawakib al-duriyya fi madb kbayr al-bariyya* (The shining planets, or the eulogy to the best of all creatures). Its author was Sharaf al-din al-Busiri al-Sanhaji (1226-1294). For a French translation, see Boubakeur (1980).
8. The name of the movement *Jam'at izalat al-bida wa iqamat al-sunna* (The Society for the Removal of Heresy and Reinstatement of Tradition), which is the largest single reform movement in post-colonial West Africa, is inspired by the title of this book (Kane 2003).
9. Our information on this university is based on data supplied by this author.
10. See the papers of the international symposium.
11. See 'Timbuktu Bi-national Presidential Project: South Africa and Mali', in *Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal Noticeboard*, 22 February 2002 in www.islamsa.org.za/noticeboard/html.



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