ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Over the span of fifteen chapters in this edited collection, Robert Launay presents the reader with an ambitious project. The volume is dedicated to Ivor Wilks, John Hunwick, and Jack Goody for their trailblazing scholarship on the history of Islam and literacy, especially in West Africa. This generation of scholars often focused on Muslim clerical activities that contributed to the spread of Islam. From their accounts, we encountered clerics who established schools in their respective learning traditions at various commercial centers in precolonial Africa. Some also provided religious services to rulers — Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

In his book, *Controlling Knowledge* (2001), Louis Brenner explores Malian Muslim community responses to French colonial rule. Although this book was not the first published work to examine the interaction of Western secular educational programs with Qur'anic schools, several case studies have been published on Islamic education in other African countries since Brenner's. Taken together, they illustrate the evolution and changes in Islamic educational institutions across Africa. Noah Butler reiterates this point in the present volume in his chapter on Niger, when he notes the range of educational possibilities to which Muslims can avail themselves in that francophone country; there are Qur'anic schools, madrasas, franco-arabe institutions, as well as purely secular schools (289). This educational spectrum is certainly not unique to Niger.

The book under review here, *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards,* is organized into four sections: 'The Classical Paradigm'; 'Institutional Transformations'; 'Innovations and Experiments'; and 'Plural Possibilities?'. In the introduction, Launay notes that he resisted the temptation to use a chronological description to characterize the book, as in 'From Writing Boards *to* Blackboards' [emphasis added]. The book is instead subtitled 'Writing Boards and Blackboards' (2-3). That precision signals a more general theme: the editors and authors eschew relegating Quranic education to the realm of the 'traditional'. Nonetheless, the volume's contributors productively delineate the broad differences between the wooden writing board and the blackboard. This analysis suggests a historical process whereby the writing board was preserved for sacred text and used almost exclusively for recording passages from the Qur'an. The board makes possible the individualized instructional traditions that link the student intimately to the master. Students typically memorize passages written specifically for them by their master, and they are then directed on how to recite the material in its full disposition.

Several authors focus on this particular form of Qur'anic education. Tal Tamari's contribution on the various styles of Islamic education in The Gambia, Mali, and Guinea along with Corrinne Fortier's piece on orality and the transmission of Qur'anic knowledge in Mauritania reveals that while there are common features in the modes and content of Qur'anic education, there are also local differences in pedagogical techniques and styles.

Fortier, in particular, focuses on the art of memorizing and reciting the Qur'an, and she emphasizes its fundamentally purposeful intent. It is a mode of remembrance that 'relies essentially on the sense of hearing and on oral ingestion' (75). In other words, the colonial and missionary criticism of text recitation as rote learning missed both the purpose and the profundity of this way of acquiring knowledge. Various forces, including local economies, social and educational networks and relationships, and even gender relations shaped the act of transmitting religious knowledge.

In another chapter, Muhammad Sani Umar uses the intellectual pedigree of al-Hajj Muhammad Falke to demonstrate differences in Islamic pedagogy and technique. Umar classifies the Islamic learning tradition into different types: the corporeal (where education entailed significant bodily practices), the corpus (where students were introduced to a variety of genres, disciplines, and specializations), and the corporate (where knowledge production and its transmission belonged to a larger network).

Contributors of the remaining chapters of this volume move from the writing board to a more recent medium of instruction — the blackboard. Here, the blackboard symbolizes the colonial and modern phase of schooling, even when it is employed at Muslim schools. However, the blackboard did not produce a singular educational tradition. As Launay notes, differences existed among the various colonial powers in their policies toward Muslim schools, just as certain colonial governments favoured certain missionary denominations to manage Western-style schools. In subsequent chapters, the authors discuss the unique influences, history, and legacy of the 'shifting field of educational alternatives' (3). As Butler points out, the writing board and the blackboard represent divergent pedagogical traditions — 'the difference between rational and esoteric epistemes' — which can be variously aligned complementarily, in competition, or in sequence, one following the other (289).

For readers who are already familiar with the research on Islamic education in West Africa, there are illuminating entries on other parts of Africa, including two entries on Kenya (Rüdiger Seeseman and Ousseina D. Alidou), one on the Democratic Republic of Congo (Ashley E. Leinweber), one on Northeastern Mozambique (Liazzat J. K. Bonate), and another on Zanzibar (Roman Loimeier). Overall, the theme of transformation and modernization of Islamic education is captured by reference to, as Loimeier describes it, 'organic intellectuals'. This perspective reveals the historic impact of local teachers (the *walimu*) — those in the Qur'anic schools and madrasas — who offer innovative and successful alternatives to government secular schools. Examples of such organic leadership is demonstrated in Cheikh Anta Babou's discussion of the al-Azhar teachers and their networks, which makes possible a combined religious, secular, and vocational curriculum in Muridiyya schools in Senegal. Alex Thurston's piece appraises successive generations of Western-educated Nigerian Muslim elites and their role as local agents who embrace various forms of combined secular and religious learning. And Ashley Leinweber's chapter on the Democratic Republic of Congo reminds the reader that the continued financial challenges faced by African governments in funding public schools present opportunities for Muslim educators and Islamic education.

This volume is illuminating and thought provoking, and Launay's editing seamlessly integrates the chapters together.

DAVID OWUSU-ANSAH
James Madison University

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION IN AFRICA

'Africa clearly needs histories and philosophies of technology, but which ones?' editor Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga asks in the volume, *What Do Science, Technology, and Innovation Mean from Africa?* (7). In nine chapters, a group of interdisciplinary scholars provides compelling answers to this question from the deep past to the near present through a focus on 'Intellectual Africa'. This term references the notion that we 'should take Africans as intellectual agents whose perspectives constitute authoritative knowledge' (ix). For Mavhunga, this means scholars should not only emphasize the ability of African societies to actively appropriate, make, and remake the 'white' tools and ideas most readily associated with science, technology, and innovation (STI) in Western scholarship (7). Rather, Intellectual Africa also serves two other purposes that emphasize the 'from Africa' in the title.

First, the stress on Intellectual Africa provides an opportunity to reframe the definition and constitution of STI, in scholarship and in policy. 'The dilemma of knowledge production in Africa', Mavhunga observes, 'centers on how its structures, practices, and concepts came to be informalized while inbound European ones were rendered formal' (10). To combat narrow Eurocentric definitions of STI — and their privileging of northern spaces, timelines, and ontologies — the editor calls upon scholars of all disciplines to reconceptualize familiar terms and stories from deeper historical perspectives, from an era before societies from the Global North made monopolistic claims upon science, technology, and innovation.

Second, Intellectual Africa asks authors to move beyond a critique of Western narratives to write and research, theorize, and plan *from* the continent without seeking validation from external reference points. This point is the book's most important contribution. Without universalizing about STI from or within Africa, Mavhunga calls scholars to explore these topics through 'African self-perception' (27). The volume thus pushes back against 'Africa rising' narratives that position the continent's societies as relevant knowledge communities only when they adopt the tools and institutions deemed important by foreign modernizers and African elites.