‘Ajamization of Islam in Africa

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Human beings are not superior to one another based on their tongues.
Superiority only lies in one's faith and submission to the will of God.

—SHAYKH AḤMADU BAMBA

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Introduction

The articles in this volume result from a symposium titled *Sacred Word: The Changing Meanings in Textual Cultures of Muslim Africa* held at Northwestern University from April 21–22, 2016 in honor of the late Professor John Hunwick.¹ The volume is very special because it is a collective tribute to Professor Hunwick's work and an attempt to pick up his heavy baton from where he left it. *‘Ajamization of Islam*, the multiple *tangible* and *subtle* enrichments of Islamic traditions that result from their dynamic interplay with local customs in the Muslim world, is the framework that guides the articles in the volume.²

- 1 Thanks to Anne Bang, Brian Johnson, Charles Stewart, Karen Barton, Maimouna Barro, Rebecca Shereikis, and the anonymous external reviewers for their assistance. Special thanks to Scott Reese for his support throughout the editing process of the volume.
- 2 For more on the concept of ‘Ajamization, see Abdalla Uba Adamu, “‘Ajamization of Knowledge as a Universal Basic Education Process for Makarantar Allo Pupils in Northern Nigeria”, *Kano Journal of Education*, 6/1 (2000), pp. 318–330; “‘Ajamization of Knowledge: Challenges

Before delving into the central foci of the volume, the multiple dimensions of the 'Ajamization of Islam in Africa, it is necessary to provide a synopsis of the emergence of 'Ajamī traditions in the Muslim world and the contents of African 'Ajamī sources.

Synopsis of 'Ajamī Traditions

The word *'Ajamī* has undergone several important semantic changes since its initial usage by Arabs during the Islamic Golden Age between the eighth and thirteenth century. Originally, the term was used in a pejorative sense to convey a meaning analogous to that of the word "barbarian", to imply the ethnolinguistic and cultural inferiority of peoples regarded as "Other". The disparaging meaning of the term became associated with the Persians, the close neighbors of the Arabs. The meaning of *'Ajamī* evolved to refer broadly to the use of modified Arabic script to write the languages of non-Arab Muslims. Today, the term is most often associated with the modifications of the Arabic script to write African languages.³

The modifications of the Arabic letters by non-Arab Muslim scholars to write their own languages have resulted in numerous tangible enrichments of the Arabic script in Africa, Asia, and Europe.⁴ These orthographic enrichments developed in the Muslim world as local scholars added innovative diacritics to the basic twenty eight Arabic consonantal letters and the three vocalization marks (fathā, kasra, and ḍamma) to represent the idiosyncratic sounds of their languages that did not exist in Arabic. As Islam spread from the Ḥijāz to other parts of the world, the faith also spread the Islamic sciences, Qur'ānic and higher Islamic studies, and classical Arabic, the language of the Qur'ān.⁵ Arabic has been central to the social and intellectual life of Muslims since the

and Prospects of an Educational Strategy", *Al-Ijtihad: The Journal of Islamization of Knowledge and Contemporary Issues*, 1/3 (2000), pp. 1–24; and Fallou Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World: the Odyssey of 'Ajamī and the Muridīyya*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 19–20. Note that the transliteration system used in the volume is based on EI³. Mixed words such as "Ajamization" lose their final long vowel diacritic "ī".

3 Fallou Ngom and Alex Zito, "Sub-Saharan African literature, 'Ajamī", in *Encyclopedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson, Leiden, Brill, 2012.

4 Meikal Mumin and Kees Versteegh, ed., *Arabic Script in Africa: Studies in the Use of a Writing System*, Leiden, Brill, 2014. For Portuguese and Spanish 'Ajamī, see David Lopez, *Textos em Ajjamía Portuguesa: Documentos para a História do Domínio Português em Safim*, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1897; and <http://arauco.org/sapereau/terraaustralisincognita/histori asdealandalus/literaturaljamiada.html>.

5 See Ousmane O. Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, pp. 10–13; and pp. 119–139.

nascent days of Islam.⁶ It has served as the *Latin of Africa* for over a millennium.⁷ Arabic and ‘Ajāmī writings have co-existed in Muslim communities around the world and have been complementary in Islamic proselytizing and education for centuries.

While some ‘Ajāmī traditions (including Urdu, Pashto, and Persian) have become standardized and used as official writing systems, others have been replaced by the Roman script for cultural, political, and ideological reasons, as the case of Turkish under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) demonstrates. While some ‘Ajāmī traditions in Asia (especially Urdu, Pashto, and Persian) are fairly well known, their numerous African counterparts remain largely neglected, despite the recent efforts made by scholars to preserve and study them.⁸ In some cases, the Roman script introduced through colonization and supported by post-colonial African governments stifled and replaced ‘Ajāmī literacies, as the case of Swahili ‘Ajāmī illustrates.⁹

Nevertheless, there are vibrant ‘Ajāmī traditions across Muslim Africa that the enduring promotion of Roman script literacy by Christian missionaries, colonial officials, and post-colonial African governments have not been able to obliterate. However, despite widespread ‘Ajāmī literacy in Muslim Africa, there is no comprehensive census of ‘Ajāmī users. By the same token, there is no consensus among scholars on when the first ‘Ajāmī texts were written in the continent. Old Tashelhit (Medieval Berber), Songhay, and Kanuri are believed to be the first West African languages to have been written in ‘Ajāmī between the tenth and the sixteenth centuries, followed by Fulfulde, Hausa, Wolof, and Yoruba.¹⁰

Archives with ‘Ajāmī manuscripts abound in Africa. There are over 80 languages with attested usage of ‘Ajāmī in Africa (from Afrikaans in South Africa

6 Ibid., pp. 7–9.

7 John O. Hunwick, *West Africa, Islam, and the Arab World*, Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006, pp. 53–62.

8 For digital and non-digital archives with ‘Ajāmī manuscripts, see Fallou Ngom, “West African Manuscripts in Arabic and African Languages and Digital Preservation”, *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: African History* (forthcoming).

9 See John M. Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2015.

10 Meikal Mumin, “The Arabic Script in Africa: Understudied Literacy”, in *The Arabic Script in Africa*, pp. 43–44; Hunwick, *West Africa, Islam, and the Arab World*, pp. 4–5; Amidu Sanni, “The Indigenization of an Intellectual Tradition: A New Tradition in Contemporary Islam in Yorubaland (Nigeria)”, *Contemporary Islam*, 3/2 (2001), pp. 31–48; and Fallou Ngom, “Murid Ajami Sources of Knowledge: The Myth and the Reality”, in *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme*, ed. Maja Kominko, Cambridge, UK, Open Book Publishers, 2015, pp. 119–164.

to Zarma in Niger).¹¹ However, many old 'Ajamī manuscripts are currently endangered. Some of the oldest have been lost due to poor preservation conditions. Important digital and non-digital archives of African 'Ajamī materials are preserved in some African, American, and European institutions.¹² 'Ajamī texts, however, are not relics of the past as the tradition continues to flourish in Africa. They are still produced and kept in private libraries in Muslim Africa. Similarly, devotional and didactic Arabic and 'Ajamī texts, what Hunwick called "market editions", can frequently be purchased in local markets and Islamic bookstores.¹³

African 'Ajamī materials deal with religious and non-religious subjects. While the bulk of the materials consist of Islamic prose and poetic texts, there is a rich corpus of 'Ajamī texts dealing with all forms of knowledge deemed important to local communities. Because bilingualism (and multilingualism in some cases) has been the norm for many African Muslim scholars, they have produced Arabic and 'Ajamī materials of equal importance for religious and non-religious purposes. The forms and contents of their 'Ajamī materials mirror those of their Arabic documents. The 'Ajamī materials include key texts of the "Core Curriculum" (the most widely studied subjects and texts across the Sahel).¹⁴

African 'Ajamī materials are varied in form and content. They include prose and poetry. They deal with Islamic sciences and rituals, incantations, literature, Sufism, theology, translations and commentaries of the Qur'ān, and jurisprudence. They also contain official correspondences, private letters, business records, and materials dealing with geomancy, Arabic language and grammar, African languages, politics, medicine, philosophy, ethics, astrology and astronomy, and the science of calendars, among many other subjects.¹⁵ When the forms and contents of Arabic and 'Ajamī in Africa are scrutinized, they reflect many tangible and subtle dimensions of the 'Ajamization of Islam.

11 Mumin, "The Arabic Script in Africa", pp. 63–76.

12 Ngom, "West African Manuscripts" (forthcoming).

13 See John O. Hunwick, "Catalog of Arabic Script Manuscripts at Northwestern University", *Sudanica Africa*, 4 (1993), pp. 210–211; and Hunwick et al., *Arabic Literature of Africa*, Vol. 2, pp. 7–8.

14 For the "Core Curriculum", see Bruce S. Hall and Charles C. Stewart, "The Historic 'Core Curriculum,' and the Book Market in Islamic West Africa", in *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Arabic Literacy, Manuscript Culture, and Intellectual History in Islamic Africa*, ed. Graziano Krätli and Ghislaine Lydon, Leiden, Brill, 2011, pp. 109–74.

15 For an expanded list of the subjects treated in 'Ajamī materials, see Ngom, "West African Manuscripts" (forthcoming).

Tangible and Subtle Dimensions of the ‘Ajamization of Islam

‘Ajamization of Islam is construed in this volume as the enrichment of Islamic traditions (including the Arabic script) resulting from the interactions between Islamic and local customs around the world as Islam adapts to new ethnolinguistic, cultural, artistic, and epistemological ecologies. As such, the ‘Ajamization framework subsumes and transcends the current meaning of ‘Ajamī from which it is derived.¹⁶

The dimensions of the ‘Ajamization of Islam are not only reflected in writing. The orthographic enrichment of the Arabic script (‘Ajamī) is only one dimension of ‘Ajamization. The ‘Ajamization framework assumes that, in the same way the Arabic script has been modified and enriched for centuries in the Muslim world to write consonants and vowels that Arabic lacked, Islamic traditions (architecture, ethics, calligraphic and decorative arts, Islamic sciences, scribal practices, cosmology, theology, and so forth) have also been modified and enriched by local Muslim scholars around the world to make them more meaningful to their communities. The existing corpus of Arabic and ‘Ajamī texts and the diversity of Muslim practices that developed since the early days of Islam bear testimony to the multiple dimensions of ‘Ajamization, the various ways in which the Arabic script and other Islamic traditions have been appropriated, enriched, and effectively localized in different communities.

The enrichment processes of ‘Ajamization are numerous. Some are visible while others are inconspicuous. They have operated both in the Arab and non-Arab Muslim world. One of the most enduring and tangible dimensions of the ‘Ajamization of Islam is the orthographic enrichment of the Arabic script. The history of the Arabic script shows that the orthographic dimension of ‘Ajamization is not exclusive to non-Arab Muslims. Its origin predates the birth and spread of Islam and, somewhat ironically, the Arabic script itself. As Daniel notes, the Arabic script resulted from the orthographic ‘Ajamization of the ancient Aramaic script. He shows how Nabataean Arabs modified and enriched the ancient Aramaic script to represent the sounds in their language that did not exist in Aramaic.¹⁷ The Arabic script was, as a result, born from the orthographic ‘Ajamization of Aramaic in the same way as Fulfulde, Hausa, Mandinka, Persian, Swahili, Urdu, Yoruba, Wolof and other ‘Ajamī traditions. Muslims have perpetuated the ancient orthographic ‘Ajamization process that once engendered the Arabic script as it spread around the globe through Islam.

16 See Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, pp. 19–20.

17 Peter T. Daniels, “The Type and Spread of Arabic Script”, in *The Arabic Script in Africa: Studies in the Use of a Writing System*, ed. Meikal Mumin and Kees Versteegh, Leiden, Brill, 2014, pp. 25–39.

An important orthographic 'Ajamization process took place in the early days of Islam within Arabia and is perpetuated to this day in many parts of the Muslim world. This process has resulted in major regional scripts. These scripts bear testimony to initial concrete dimensions of the 'Ajamization of Islam within Arabia and are attested in copies of the Qur'ān that reflect influences of the *Qirā'āt* (methods of reciting the Qur'ān). It is reported that as Prophet Muḥammad taught his companions to recite and memorize the Qur'ān by heart, he tolerated variations in the reading styles, noting that the holy book was revealed in seven *ahrūf* (styles).¹⁸ Some of the most distinctive features that exemplify this early orthographic dimension of 'Ajamization in Arabia are the salient dialectal differences between Imām Warsh and Imām Ḥafṣ' recitations of the Qur'ān.

These two modes of reciting the Qur'ān have left indelible marks on various copies of the Qur'ān and numerous other liturgical Islamic texts, which resulted in distinct Arabic and 'Ajami writing systems in the Muslim world. The use of the *fā'* (ف) with the dot below, the *qāf* (ق) with one dot above, and the *imāla* (a large dot below letters representing the sounds [e] and [ε]), which are based on the Warsh recitation of the Qur'ān have resulted in dual Arabic and 'Ajami literacies predominantly found in the Western part of the Muslim world (including North and West Africa). In contrast, the *fā'* (ف) with one dot above, the *qāf* (ق) with two dots above, and the absence of *imāla*, which characterize the Ḥafṣ recitation of the Qur'ān, have resulted in Arabic and 'Ajami literacies predominantly found in the Eastern part of the Muslim world (including East Africa). The variations found between the Maghribī, Mashriqī, Sahrawī, Barnāwī, and Kanawī scripts used in West Africa and others currently found in many parts of the Muslim world reflect other tangible dimensions of 'Ajamization.¹⁹

There are other conspicuous aspects of the 'Ajamization of Islam in Arabic and 'Ajami texts in Muslim Africa. These include intra-lingual and inter-lingual functional complementarities reflected in the switches between Arabic dialects, and between Arabic and 'Ajami. In Mauritania, the renowned poet, al-Māmi,

18 For an insightful history of the Arabic script, numerous linguistic variations in the recitations of the Qur'ān, and useful references, see Saleh Sulaiman al-Wohaibi, *Qur'ānic Variants ('Im al-Qirā'āt): An Historical-Phonological Study*, PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 1982.

19 For variations in scripts used in Africa, see Andrea Brigaglia, "Central Sudanic Arabic Scripts (Part 1): The Popularization of the Kanawī Script", *Islamic Africa*, 2/2 (2011), pp. 51–85; Andrea Brigaglia and Nobili Mauro, "Central Sudanic Arabic Scripts (Part 2): Barnāwī", *Islamic Africa*, 4/2, (2013), pp. 195–224; and Mauro Nobili, "Arabic Scripts in West African Manuscripts: A Tentative Classification from the de Gironcourt Manuscript Collection", *Islamic Africa*, 2/1 (2011), pp. 105–133.

often used standard Arabic (*fuṣṣḥa*) when addressing the ‘*ulamā*’, and utilized the local variety of Hassāniyya when talking to more popular audiences.²⁰ The shift from the standard to the local variety of Arabic in his speech community further shows that ‘Ajamization processes are not restricted to non-Arabic speaking communities. Another form of observable inter-lingual functional complementarity is visible in the works of some African Muslim scholars. While al-Māmī alternated between the prestigious classical Arabic variety and the local vernacular dialect of Hassāniyya, some West African Muslim scholars shift between languages: classical Arabic and African languages. They use the former when addressing their peers and learned audiences, and the latter when teaching and addressing the masses.²¹

The complementarity between Arabic and ‘Ajamī is apparent in Islamic pedagogy and proselytizing in Muslim Africa.²² While classical Arabic has been the primary language of Islamic education, ‘Ajamī also played an important role in this domain. The use of ‘Ajamī in pedagogy and proselytizing in Muslim Africa is widely documented. Devotional and didactic ‘Ajamī prose texts as well as read, recited, and chanted poems have been used to spread Islamic teachings around the world. Šufi rituals and traditions of reciting and chanting devotional Arabic and ‘Ajamī poetry remain vibrant in Africa and South Asia, and exemplify the ‘Ajamization of the performing arts (the blending between Islamic and local performing arts).²³

- 20 Ghislaine Lydon, “Inkwells on the Sahara: Reflections on the Production of Islamic Knowledge in Bilād Shinqīt”, in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa, Islamic Africa, Vol. 2*, ed. Scott S. Reese, Leiden, Brill, 2004, p. 67.
- 21 Louis Brenner, “The Role of Language in West African Islam”, *Africa*, 55/4 (1985), pp. 432–446; Jean Boyd and Beverly B. Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma’u, Daughter of Usman ‘dan Fodiyo (1793–1864)*, East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1997; and Beverly B. Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman’s Jihad: Nana Asma’u-Scholar and Scribe*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000.
- 22 Ibid.; Tal Tamari and Dmitry Bondary, ed., *Qur’anic Exegesis in African Languages, Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, 15 (2013), pp. 1–297; and Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*.
- 23 A comparative study of the longue durée ‘Ajamization processes that African and South Asian Šufi traditions share and the idiosyncratic patterns that set them apart would be fascinating. For a few insightful readings on South Asian Šufi traditions that mirror those in Africa, see Bruce and Laurence, “The Early Chishtī Approach to Samā”, in *Islamic Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Professor Aziz Ahmad*, ed. Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle, New Delhi, Manohar, 1983; Carl W. Ernst and Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishtī Order in South Asia and Beyond*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; and Ali S. Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia*, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2002.

By using 'Ajamī poems and prose texts that include local worldviews, maxims, heroes, saints, metaphors of fauna and flora, and other aspects of local cultures to convey Islamic teachings, African Muslim scholars spoke directly to their local audiences and made their messages resonate with the masses. The spread of Islam in many parts of the Muslim world resulted from such functional complementarities between 'Ajamī and Arabic in Islamic pedagogies and proselytizing. The recitation and chanting of 'Ajamī poetry expanded 'Ajamī literacy and Islamization in some parts of Muslim Africa through an 'Ajamization process termed *music-derived literacy*; some have acquired Arabic and 'Ajamī literacy through recitation and chanting of devotional and didactic Islamic texts in their communities.²⁴ Nowadays, music-derived literacy continues online. For example, some classical Arabic odes of Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba (1853–1927), the founder of the Murīdiyya Ṣūfī order of Senegal, are time-aligned with their recitation and chanting allowing his followers around the world to be able to listen to and read the odes simultaneously. These digital materials have expanded the Murīdiyya and dual literacy in the Warsh-based Arabic and Wolof 'Ajamī beyond the traditional epicenter of the Ṣūfī order in Senegal.²⁵

The complementarity between Arabic and 'Ajamī is equally evidenced in the forms and contents of the Islamic literatures of Africa. The complementarity is noticeable in two types of hybrid (bilingual or multilingual) texts commonly found in Muslim Africa: (1) 'Ajamī manuscripts with Islamic doxologies, loan-words, and phrases in Arabic drawn from Islamic texts, and (2) Arabic texts with explicative marginalia and glosses in 'Ajamī.

Besides these tangible dimensions of 'Ajamization, there are subtle complementarities between Islamic and local knowledge systems reflected in the contents and symbolic meanings assigned to Arabic and 'Ajamī in Muslim Africa. Such complementarities are reflected in the functions assigned to Arabic and 'Ajamī in esoteric and numerological recipes such as medicinal texts and *khātim* (magic squares). These esoteric materials are generally used to appeal to the supernatural powers of God, angels, prophets, saints, and jinn for medicinal purposes, divination, protective and good luck amulets, casting or removing spells, and so forth. Because of the sacredness of Arabic as the language of the Qur'ān, unmodified Arabic letters, words, and numerals are regarded as imbued with binary potency (the power to bring fortune and misfortune).²⁶

24 Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, pp. 32–34.

25 Fallou Ngom, "Ajamī Literacies of West Africa", in *Tracing Language Movement in Africa*, ed. Ericka A. Albaugh and Kathryn M. de Luna, New York, Oxford University Press (forthcoming).

26 For the "binary potency" of words, see Ngom, "West African Manuscripts" (forthcoming).

Therefore, they constitute the pivotal ingredients in the esoteric and numerological recipes designed to address the local preoccupations described above.

In contrast to the symbolic value assigned to unmodified Arabic letters, words, and numerals, the instructions on how to prepare or use such esoteric recipes are often provided in ‘Ajāmī (with modified Arabic letters), which can include Western numerals. A good metaphor of this functional complementarity between Arabic and ‘Ajāmī in these esoteric and numerological recipes is modern medicine’s chemical ingredients and its directions for use. The Arabic words and unmodified Arabic letters in these esoteric materials represent the potent chemical ingredients listed on a bottle of Advil (written in a technical language accessible only to the specialist), while the ‘Ajāmī texts symbolize the plain English used to provide instructions on how to use Advil (which is made accessible to the consumer). Orthographic ‘Ajamization (modifications of Arabic letters) and the use of Western numerals in these esoteric recipes constitute a means to remove the sacredness and potency of the Arabic letters, words, and numerals in order to assign a specific informational function to ‘Ajāmī writing.²⁷

Other subtle dimensions of the ‘Ajamization of Islam observable in the writing of African Muslim scholars include the blending of Islamic ethical traditions with local ones, which often results in elevating the latter into religious traditions. This is the case in the elevation to sacredness of the traditional Wolof virtue of *muñ* (perseverance in the face of adversity) that blends with its Islamic counterpart of *ṣabr* in Senegambia.²⁸ Naturally, a different virtue may be elevated and sanctified in the same manner elsewhere in the Muslim world. In many cases, the blending of Islamic and local traditions is old and entrenched to the extent that average local Muslims are often unable to distinguish what is originally Islamic from what is local in their own cultures. This is because the Islamic and the local traditions have fully blended and have become integral parts of their identities acquired through socialization and education in their communities.

‘Ajamization of Islam and ‘Ajāmī Studies

The concept of *syncretism* often associated with Muslims who live beyond the geographic boundaries of Arabia does not do justice to the multiple processes

27 For an insightful discussion of the use of Arabic letters and numbers in magic in the Muslim world, see: Constant Hamès, ed., *Coran et Talismans: Textes et Pratiques Magiques en Milieu Musulman*, Paris, Karthala, 2007.

28 Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, pp. 151–152.

of the 'Ajamization of Islam reflected in the interplay and complementarity between Islamic and local traditions. The 'Ajamization framework seeks to address the limitations of "syncretism" and to move the conversation on the interactions between the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and local ones beyond the assumptions of loss of value that "syncretism" often suggests.²⁹ 'Ajamization of Islam entails no assumption of loss of value of pristine Islamic traditions, for the simple reason that these traditions have been subjected to modifications and enrichments since the beginning of the faith within and beyond Arabia. To the contrary, it assumes multiple enrichments of the faith and its traditions (including the Arabic script) as they spread around the globe and interact with other belief systems and traditions.

The 'Ajamization framework is therefore meant to do justice to the various localizations of Islam reflected in the "whatever-izations of Islam" ("Africanization" and other similar words), to use David Robinson words.³⁰ It follows Robinson's argument that "Africanization of Islam" does not entail diminishing or compromising the faith as some Islamicists and Islamic purists would have us believe; rather, the process is analogous to the one that Christianity and other faiths have undergone as they spread from their birth regions and take root around the world.³¹ The 'Ajamization framework fosters new approaches to the study of Islam in ways that transcend the common dichotomies of "center/periphery", "esoteric/rational episteme", "Islam Noir/Islam Blanc", "orthodoxy/heterodoxy", and so forth. In this framework, these categories are treated as fluid and forming continua.³² Thus, it challenges the traditional treatment of the Sahara as a barrier and the corollary separation of sub-Saharan Africa from North Africa and other parts of the Muslim world.³³

29 Ibid., pp. 19–20.

30 David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 42.

31 David Robinson, "Muslim Societies in West Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives in Digital Form", *Islamic Africa*, 5/1 (2014), pp. 104–105.

32 For critiques of these dichotomies, see David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and the French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2000, p. 11; Robert Launay, "An Invisible Religion? Anthropology's Avoidance of Islam in Africa", in *African Anthropologies: History, Critique, and Practice*, ed. David Mills, Mustafa Babiker and Mwenda Ntarangwi, New York, Zed Books, 2006, pp. 188–200; Rüdiger Seesemann, "African Islam or Islam in Africa? Evidence from Kenya", in *The Global Worlds of the Swahili: Interfaces of Islam, Identity and Space in 19th and 20th-Century East Africa*, ed. Roman Loimeier and Rüdiger Seesemann, Berlin, LIT, 2006, pp. 229–250; and Benjamin F. Soares, "Notes on the Anthropological Study of Muslim Societies in Africa", *Culture and Religion*, 1/2 (2000), pp. 277–285.

33 For a good challenge of this Orientalist legacy, see Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu*.

'Ajamization processes are central to the preoccupations of the field of *'Ajamī Studies*, a domain of reconciliation and cross-pollination of disciplines, including African Studies, Anthropology, Codicology, History, Islamic Studies, Linguistics, and Literature. This field complements Professor Hunwick's legacy in the Arabic literature of Africa. It charts more distinctly a promising terrain of investigation that seeks to better understand the longue durée evolutionary processes of Islam that unite Muslims around the globe as well as the idiosyncratic traditions that set them apart, with new concepts and frameworks informed by the corpus of understudied local written and oral sources.³⁴

The seven papers in this volume contribute to the effort of establishing the field of 'Ajamī Studies. They exemplify an array of tangible and subtle dimensions of the 'Ajamization of Islam reflected in Arabic and 'Ajamī texts from West and East Africa. The first four papers focus on West Africa and the remaining three on East Africa. Mustapha Kurfi's article deals with calligraphic and decorative arts. It illustrates important dimensions of the 'Ajamization of Islamic aesthetics in Northern Nigeria. Kurfi shows how some contemporary Hausa artists extend sacred Islamic calligraphic and decorative arts to social domains such as the human body, clothing, houses, and other objects. In doing so these artists creatively appropriate and enrich the Islamic calligraphic and decorative traditions in response to their local realities and preoccupations.

Nikolai Dobronravina examines, among other issues, 'Ajamization as reflected in Arabic and 'Ajamī "market editions" in Northern Nigeria, including writing styles, colophons, and glosses. Bernard Salvaing and Alfa Mamadou Diallo Lélouma examine 'Ajamization traits in Fuuta Jaloo scholars' scribal traditions. Their paper highlights the wealth of new information to be gained from colophons, marginal notes, and other material elements in Fuuta Jaloo scholars' manuscripts. By analyzing several versions of a nineteenth-century treatise on astronomy, they open a new window into the 'Ajamization of Islamic sciences in Muslim Africa. Darya Ogorodnikova's paper focuses on two Mande languages in manuscripts from Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso. She uncovers key tangible dimensions of 'Ajamization reflected in layouts of annotations, linking and labelling techniques, and transnational techniques in parsing Arabic texts, among other innovative idiosyncratic practices.

Sara Fani's article illuminates important 'Ajamization processes reflected in the scribal practices in Ethiopian Islamic manuscripts in Arabic from the region of Harar. She highlights the cultural interplay between the acquired Islamic scribal models and their local reinterpretations. Her paper shows, among other things, regional Ethiopian scribal differences (between Harar in the East and Gibe in the West), key orthographic traits that Ethiopian scholars

34 For more on 'Ajamī studies, see Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, pp. 247–251.

share with their Persian and Sindi counterparts as well as their own local innovative practices. Her paper sets the stage for further comparative studies of scribal practices between different Ethiopian regions and other areas of the Islamic world.

Adday Hernandez-Lopez's article also focuses on the 'Ajamization processes reflected in Ethiopian manuscripts written in Arabic. By examining Ethiopian Islamic texts dealing with the use of Arabic letters, numbers, and names of God in magic, invocations of jinn, and the blending of traditional local deities with the Islamic God, she uncovers important cultural, cosmological, and theological dimensions of the 'Ajamization of Islam in Ethiopia. By highlighting Ethiopian Christian magical traditions and the influences of Islamic knowledge on their practices, Adday demonstrates that 'Ajamization processes can transcend Islam. The last paper by John Mugane looks at the history of Swahili 'Ajamī writing and highlights the orthographic dimensions of 'Ajamization reflected in the records of Arabic and 'Ajamī texts produced by Swahili scholars. Mugane concludes his paper by highlighting the significance of the Swahili 'Ajamī records as major sources of human knowledge.

These articles confirm Souleymane Bachir Diagne's view that "Islam is one and plural, that it speaks Arabic, the language of the Qur'ān, but other languages as well."³⁵ By focusing on the 'Ajamization processes reflected in selected West and East African Arabic and 'Ajamī manuscripts, the articles supplement the work of Professor Hunwick and his colleagues on the Arabic literature of Africa.³⁶ They highlight the significance of *The 'Ajamī Library of Africa* (the corpus of works primarily written in 'Ajamī), which complements the *Arabic Library of Africa* (the corpus of works primarily written in Arabic).³⁷

35 See back cover of Ngom's *Muslims beyond the Arab World*.

36 See John O. Hunwick et al., *Arabic Literature of Africa, Vol. 1: Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa to c. 1900*, Leiden, Brill, 1993; *Arabic Literature of Africa, Vol. 2: Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*, Leiden, Brill, 1995; *Writings of Western Sudanic Africa, Vol. 4*, Leiden, Brill, 2003; R.S. O'Fahey et al., *Arabic Literature of Africa, Vol. 3: Writings of the Muslim People of Northeastern Africa*, Leiden, Brill, 2003; and Charles C. Stewart et al., *The Arabic Literature of Africa, vol. 5* (2 vols), Leiden, Brill 2016.

37 For discussions on "*The African Library*" and its "Europhone", "non-Europhone", Arabic, 'Ajamī, and oral sources, see Ousmane O. Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu*, pp. 1–20; *Non-Europhone Intellectuals*, Dakar, CODESRIA, 2012; and Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, pp. 247–251.