EXAMINING THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ISLAM AND HERITAGE IN WEST AFRICA

BATI AFRIKA'DA İSLAM TARİHİ VE MİRASININ İNCELENMESİ

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Yahaya HALIDU

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü; İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi, Tarih Anabilim Dalı, Ankara, Türkiye. greatsymbo@yahoo.com,
ORCID: 0000-0002-5290-6379

Abstract

Heritage is broadly viewed as a cultural construction of the present that is deeply ingrained in the past. Since the 1990s, Africanist scholars, mostly historians, have engaged with the concept of heritage in Africa, focusing on how post-colonial African countries conceptualized heritage after many of them achieved independence in the 1960s. Presently, there are many works on how local and national as well as international movements, have complicated the concept of heritage in Africa. However, most of these works have concentrated on the national and cultural constructs of heritage with very few on religion, especially Islam. This paper explores how scholars have presented the subject of Islam and Heritage in West Africa. It is a historiographical essay that argues that Islam and Muslims in West Africa are not aliens to the conceptualization and the development of heritage in Africa. They have played several roles in safeguarding their intangible and tangible heritages and in some ways, assisted in conserving cultural heritage of their respective regions. Thus, this work does not only allow us to appreciate the contribution of religion (Islam) to the construct of heritage, but it also contributes to the literature on the history of Islam and Muslim societies especially in West Africa.

Keywords: Heritage, West Africa, Islam, Shariah, Conceptualization, World Heritage, UNESCO.

Öz

Miras, geniş anlamda, geçmişe derinlemesine kök salmış, günümüzün kültürel bir inşası olarak görülmektedir. 1990'lardan bu yana, çoğunlukla tarihçiler olmak üzere Afrikalı akademisyenler, Afrika'daki miras kavramıyla ilgilendiler ve sömürge sonrası Afrika ülkelerinin birçoğunun 1960'larda bağımsızlığını kazanmasının ardından mirası nasıl kavramsallaştırdığına odaklandılar. Günümüzde yerel ve ulusal olduğu kadar uluslararası akımların da Afrika'da miras kavramını ne kadar karmaşık hale getirdiğine dair pek çok çalışma mevcut. Ancak bu eserlerin çoğu mirasın milli ve kültürel yapısına yoğunlaşmış, çok azı ise din, özellikle de İslam üzerinedir. Bu makale, Afrika'daki tarihçilerin, araştırmacıların ve aynı zamanda bilim insanı Batı Afrika'da İslam ve miras konusunu nasıl sunduklarını incelemektedir. Bu yönüyle çalışma, Batı Afrika'daki İslam'ın ve Müslümanların Afrika'daki mirasın kavramsallaştırılmasına ve gelişimine yabancı olmadığını savunan tarihyazımsal bir makaledir. Din Tarihi araştırmacıları sıklıkla maddi kültürleri ihmal ederek dinin maddi olmayan kültürü üzerinde yoğunlaşırlar. Ne var ki, çalışmada tarih, yerli dini toplulukların, tarihlerinin maddiliği ve dini deneyimleriyle güçlü bağları olduğunu gösterdi. Dolaysıyla çalışmada unutulmuş, var olmayan, susturulan ve sıklıkla ihmal edilen bazı materyallere aracılık yaparak, sadece maddi kültürün İslami dini uygulamalar için önemini göstermekle kalmıyor, aynı zamanda İslami bilginin nasıl edinildiğindeki nesnelerin merkeziliğini de gösteriyor. Böylece sayede makale dinin (İslam'ın) somut ve soyut mirasının inşasına katkısını takdir etmemize olanak sağlamanın yanında İslam tarihi ve Batı Afrika'daki Müslüman toplumlara ilişkin literatüre de katkıda bulunuyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Miras, Batı Afrika, İslam, Şeriat, Kavramsallaştırma, Dünya Mirası, UNESCO.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Scholars of religion very often concentrate on the non-material culture of religion at the neglect of its material cultures. Meanwhile, history has shown that religious communities have had strong connections with the materiality of their religious experiences. In this work, the overall objective is aimed at showing how material culture has shaped Islamic education and heritage in Africa. The paper adopts strategies of collecting practices to assemble objects that have historical value in the *longue duréé* (long duration/long period of time often used to depict how social processes develop or how social structures evolved) history of the transformation of Islamic education in Africa. It argues that material culture has been very much involved in the history of Islamic education in Africa not only as an epistemological basis for showing the shifts in pedagogy, but also indicating the extent to which knowledge is applied to the daily religious and secular lives of teachers and their students. By giving agency to the materials, the paper does not only show the importance of material culture and heritage to Islamic religious practices, but also shows the centrality of the objects in how Islamic knowledge was acquired.

Indeed, academic study of religion has often treated material culture as anti-religious. Scholars of Religion in Africa mostly specialize in non-material elements of religion. It is common to read scholarly works on religious experiences, doctrines, textual history, and ethics as well as mythology and religious philosophies, without touching on heritage in West Africa especially. Meanwhile, a careful examination of the two fields, religion, and material culture, reveals that material culture plays very important roles in religious beliefs and practices. Most crucially, just as Julian Droogan argues, these two are inseparable. Various religious denominations continue to connect to past religious sites, relics of the past, shrines, and historical places of worship not only to establish their identity as members of that faith, but also to use them, when possible, to enhance their socio-economic status. In Islam, for instance, the Ka'ba, as a religious sanctuary, receives pilgrims annually. The pilgrims undertake the religious obligation known as Hajj where they circumambulate the Ka'ba as well as other religious practices at Safa and Marwa and the Jamarat. Thus, material culture is not antithesis to religion in general and Islam in particular.

Muslims have had a constant connection with their material culture in their daily lives but, how far these materials have impacted Islamic religious practices is yet to be explored extensively. This paper seeks to explore an aspect of these connections in the area of the history of Islamic education in Africa. It argues that material culture has been very much involved in the history of Islamic education and heritage in Africa not only as an epistemological basis for showing the shifts in pedagogy, but also as indicating the extent to which knowledge is applied to the daily religious and secular lives of both teachers and their students. The agency of material culture to knowledge acquisition and transmission as well as its application, shares some perspectives with other fields including collecting. Not only does the field of collecting collect objects, but also it sometimes explores the agency of objects to show how objects shape human experiences and actions.

Collectors and curators collect artifacts and materials for various reasons. Sharon Macdonald, a British anthropologist and a museologist, defines collecting as "a self-aware process of creating a set of objects conceived to be meaningful as a group.". This definition shows not only that collecting is a deliberate attempt to collect objects, but also an underlying reason for collecting such objects. The definition also shows that objects are not collected in isolation but are grouped based on defined characteristics either for aesthetic purposes or for purposes of research or to help in historical narrations. Macdonald adds that although museums play important roles in the 'conception of collection' it is not the same as collecting. Museums rather contextualize objects and give them new meaning and interpretations. From the 1990s, historians began to explore the history of collecting and why people collected. As Macdonald shows, although historians, especially of collecting practices, acknowledge that collecting started many centuries ago in various periods and places including Ancient Greece, and Rome as well as medieval Europe, collecting in Renaissance and early modern Europe was unique. This period is not only

widely accepted as the foundation of modern museum collecting, but also that it is distinct from earlier efforts of collecting in many ways. Collecting in this period involved a new set of educated elites who extended collecting from specific royal or religious recognition to the act of displaying the objects in specialized cabinets or rooms. Moreover, there were new collecting technologies and revised administrative mechanisms in inventory and cataloging.

In arguing the case for more agency, Paula Findlen, who is among the earliest historians to write on the subject of collecting showed how collecting overlapped with the evolution of scientific culture in early modern Europe (Italy). She argues that Naturalist collectors such as Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605) and Athanasius Kircher (1602- 1680) turned nature into collectibles to facilitate the development of natural history. James Delbourgo also contributed towards showing objects of scientific value in his examination of Sloane's biography. Delbourgo's account includes a new set of objects such as specimens of cocoa that Sloane collected from Jamaica and the Caribbean. Susan Crane, another historian of collecting, focused on nineteenth-century Germany to explore the phenomenon of historical consciousness. She also provided a new way to think about collecting. She primarily gave agency to the ruins that were left after the Napoleonic wars to show how the objects literally awakened historical consciousness. These works and many others have shown how collecting has engaged with material culture and heritage.

The material culture in the history of Islamic education in Africa, I explore, involves objects with a set of culture as objects in mainstream collecting, albeit the objects do not necessarily end up in museums, but are used daily in the practical acquisition of knowledge. Like Crane, I explore the agency of the objects in shaping the development of Islamic education in Africa. Robert Launay argues that the materiality of Islamic education helps us to understand two major transformations of Islamic education in Africa. He asserts that while heritage shows a classical paradigm of knowledge delivery up to the nineteenth century, other Islamic materials signify a modern trend of education introduced by colonial educational institutions. This paper gives agency to the materials while applying Launay's epistemological transformation of Islamic education. It explores how materials complicated Islamic education in Africa and argues for an integration of materials from both classical and modern paradigms of Islamic education in Africa.

There is also a strong case for the material significance to classical Islamic education in Africa. As Launay argues, classical Islamic education dominated the scene before the exposure of Muslim communities to colonial rule and missionary education in the nineteenth-century. This timeline resonates with Wadad Kadi's identification of shifts in a *longue duree* history of Islamic education in its broader sense. Kadi identifies three stages and asserts that the first stage took the form of institution and compilation from the seventh century to the nineteenth century. The second stage followed from the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century when new world colonial systems emerged. This period saw the introduction of secular systems into Islamic education. The third stage followed from the middle of the 20th century to the present. Muslims in the third stage had to deal with colonial legacies and challenges of modern nations that wholly or partly relegated Arabic education to the background.

Introduction

Material culture has been very much involved in the history of Islamic education in Africa not only as an epistemological basis for showing the shifts in pedagogy but also indicating the extent to which knowledge is applied to daily religious and secular lives of both teachers and their students. By giving agency to these forgotten, some non-existent, silenced and often neglected materials, this paper does not only show the importance of material culture to Islamic religious practices, but also shows centrality of the objects in how Islamic knowledge was acquired. In attesting to the crucial nature such objects play in the larger context of enriching Islamic heritage in Africa, many scholars have explored the centrality of these objects. For example, in Hossam Mahdy's view (Mahdy, 2007), three main factors have influenced heritage

preservation in Islam. The first is the challenge of the Eurocentric construct of heritage located in the concept of value and views about intrinsic value as well as issues of integrity and authenticity. The second is the *shariah* provision of what to preserve and what to neglect, located in scriptural texts and thirdly, challenges of modern-nation-state on the institution of *waqf*. The concept of value, he argues, is used to refer to the positive qualities and characteristics, both actual and potential, as the foundation for conserving objects. In defining "value-based" approach to conservation, Randall Mason for example excluded ethical and philosophical values as well as normative codes of behavior from the assessment of values in objects. Mason further contends that "Islamic values should be considered under social and spiritual values." For Mahdy, this monolithic construction of heritage is problematic because "value" means different things to different people. Moreover, the Islamic worldview defines values by exactly what Mason and other heritage world conventions exclude from their definition. He insists that *"Islamic values are not limited to religious, spiritual, or cultural aspects, as they stem from a worldview formed by Islam."* Muslims are therefore, called upon by the Qur'an in chapter 7: 199, to respect local traditions that do not conflict with Islamic principles.

Besides the Islamic worldview of heritage and conservation, the centralization of *waqf* which served as a means to preserve heritage, set the tone for bureaucrats, politicians, and decision makers to prioritize what *waqf* revenues were to be used for without any regard to what the founders of or individual *waqf* proponents stipulated in their *waqf* documents. The effects of this were readily seen in the management and maintenance of historic mosques and heritage sites. Examples of these management problems are easily noticeable at historic mosques such as the Sinan Pasha Mosque in the historic city of Cairo. Not only are they left empty without being used by local communities, but are also sometimes isolated from their urban surroundings for purposes of tourism. Another example is the way historic *sablis* (drinking fountains) are kept in Egypt. For Mahdy, although the *sablings* were part of non-religious historic structures in the context of Islam, they carried the notion of 'serving water as a form of charity.' Thus, they were to be maintained and kept well, but they were either robbed of their architecture or left as places for collecting cabbages.

Consequently, scholars like Mahdy have provided several arguments to show that Islam is a worldview and must be understood in its own right. In this worldview, heritage values and ethics are inseparable. Moreover, heritage values should neither be stated as intrinsic values nor should be prioritized over other socially constructed values. Although Islam recognizes scientific values, archaeological (see De Jong and Rowlands, 2007) values could be accepted when identified as scientific. Concluding his discussion, Mahdy calls for the recognition of Islamic approaches to heritage and studies in the intellectual history of conservation of cultural heritage, especially on pre-Islamic heritage. He is optimistic that this will correct misconceptions that Muslims are adamant about the cultural remains of pre-Islamic civilizations.

Although Mahdy's discussion focuses on some Muslim-majority countries in the Arab- world including Egypt, his theoretical foundations of Islam and Muslims with regard to heritage are relevant to the discussion of Islamic heritage in Sub-Saharan Africa. It must be noted that heritage and what it means to conserve a particular set of tangible and intangible objects is so much contested in Africa, especially during the post-colonial period. *Reclaiming Heritage: Alternative Imaginaries of memory in West Africa* (2007), edited by Ferdinand De Jong and Michael Rowlands (2007) and *The Politics of Heritage in Africa ...* (2015), edited by Derek Peterson, Kodzo Gavua and Ciraj Rassool (2015) as well as *African Homecoming ...* by Katharina Schramm (2016) have provided myriad ways heritage is viewed and applied in Africa. *Reclaiming Heritage…* as a case in point, for instance, emphasized non-tangible heritage preservations to divert attention from the over-stressed tangible ones since the post-colonial period. *The Politics of Heritage in Africa …* explored both national and local manifestations of heritage construction and preservation, highlighting the various controversies in the application of heritage, sometimes within the same geographical areas. African Homecoming focused on an international construct of heritage

located in the phenomenon of "homecoming" mainly by Africans in the Diaspora. The perspectives provided in both Mahdy's work and those of the Africanist historians help to explore Islamic heritage conservation in West Africa in both specific and broad terms. In extending the discourse further, I will try to group the heritage conservation efforts of Muslims into two namely, ***The Intangible and The Tangible.***

The Intangible Heritage

As seen from the afore-mentioned discussion above, Mahdy argues that the intangible heritage mainly consists of social and ethical values, not defined by Eurocentric models, but defined by Islamic principles. But before Mahdy, *Reclaiming Heritage: Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa* (2007) gave us an extensive account on intangible cultural heritage, outlining how UNESCO's 1972 convention framed and contextualized the discourse on heritage and memory in West Africa. Contrary to the Eurocentric framing of heritage conservation perpetuated by UNESCO and imposed on Africa, the editors in the introduction argued that alternative imageries of heritage existed in Africa to counter Western imaginations. The anthology places memory (memory herein implies politics of remembering and forgetting that stresses repetition and continuity) at the center of the heritage discourse. It forces us to accept that "Memory is located in material sensory practices such as songs, performances, and photographs, *as well as* in sites where the past is conserved, mediated, and authorized." (De Jong & Rowlands, 2007). Both Mahdy and Ferdinand De Jong & Michael Rowlands help us to contextualize aspects of intangible cultural heritage in West Africa (2007, P.19). From their works, it becomes apparent that the intangible Islamic heritage include Muslim's efforts to maintain Islamic spirituality, education, the socio-economic and political models of life as well as the individual and collective memories. The earliest works by Africanist scholars focused on these intangibles, yet the very necessary aspects of Islamic heritage in West Africa.

In "The historiography of Islam in West Africa: An anthropologist's view", Benjamin Soares noted that during the colonial rule, *jihad* became a major theme in the history of Islam in West Africa, produced by colonial imperialists. Colonial powers were preoccupied with the history of the *jihad* movements, carefully framing it as the only way Muslims are destined to reform their societies, to curtail any threat to colonial dominance (2014, p.30). To address colonial misrepresentation of Muslim's reform movements, Africanist historians in the early years of the development of African History as a discipline in the 1960s, picked up themes of *jihad*. Their works reflected availability of sources in the reconstruction of a detailed history of the *jihads*. They treated the 18th and the 19th century *jihad* movements among other things, as 'revolutions,' forms of anti-colonial movements and social movements aimed at creating an Islamic space as well as seeking better lives for Muslims. These works began with Muray Last's PhD thesis published as The Sokoto Caliphate in 1967 and Mervin Hiskett's *Sword of Truth* in 1973. Both works concentrated on Shehu Usman Dan Fodio (d.1817) and his reform movement that led to the founding of the Sokoto caliphate in the early 19th century. Later, in 1985, David Robinson also published *The Holy War of Umar Tal,* tracing Al-Hajj Umar Tal's holy war (jihad) in the Western Sudan between 1852 and 1864.

Soares noticed further that, in the Francophone regions, key actors of the 19th-century *jihads* were associated with specific Sufi orders. Usman Dan Fodio, for instance, was of the Qadiriyya Sufi order while Al-Hajj Umar Tal was a Tijaniyya. The Mouridiyya, founded by Cheikh Amadou Bamba Mbacke (d. 1927) in Senegal, followed later after the earlier two were established. Therefore, these works not only highlight histories of the *Jihads*, but also include histories of the mystical tradition of Islam in West Africa. From the 1970s, new studies delved into second wave reform movements which were largely anti-Sufi. Among the earliest was Lansine Kaba's PhD, published in 1974 as *The Wahhabiyyah: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa*". Although these studies continued into the 1990s, the narratives after the bombing of the World Trade Center in 2001 which targeted Salafi/Wahhabi reform movements, intensified studies into the activities of these new reform movements as wells as their engagements with "Sufi Islam" in West Africa. Ousman Kane, Ousman Kobo, and Roman Loimeier, among others, have done extensive studies,

aiming at portraying how the reform movements, framed within the context of modernity, negotiated change in their communities (Kane, 2003; Kobo, 2012; Loimeier, 2000).

Another area of Islamic heritage conservation in West Africa has been the transformations in Islamic education. From the late 1970s, many Africanist scholars started researching into the transformation of Muslim education in Africa. Pioneering works (Kaba, 1974; Skinner, 1976, pp. 499-520; Sameh, 1997) analyzed the transition from Qur'anic schooling characterized by rote learning to a madrasa system that included the study of Arabic grammar and other aspects of the Islamic sciences which were organized in an improved curriculum. In his *"Paths to Progress …*", Kobo identifies four factors from the historiography that led to the transformation from Qur'an schooling to madrasa education that began during the colonial period. Firstly, colonial administrators were interested in training Muslim cadets for colonial administration during Muslims' resistance to Christian mission schools. Secondly, with the introduction of Western styled schools, operated by the missionaries, Muslims from the 1950s began to regard the Qur'an school system as outmoded. Thirdly, West African Muslims' exposure to new models of madrasa education in Northern Africa, especially in Egypt, shaped their thoughts about new pedagogical foundations. The fourth is the early 20th-century modernizing discourse by the Salafi leaders (Kobo, 2016, p.162).

From the late 20th century onwards, attention shifted from purely focusing on the madrasa education to studying the history and processes of the inclusion of secular curriculum into madrasa schooling, especially the Franco-Arab schools in the French-speaking West Africa that began as early as the 1950s (Alidou, 2005). Several scholars (Kobo, 2022, pp. 334-350; Umar, 2001, pp. 223-229; Owusu, 2019, pp. 50-72) have also done similar studies in the English-speaking countries as well. The principal reason that led to the inclusion of secular education into the madrasas is that Muslims realized the inadequacies of the madrasa system to the realization of their socio-economic needs, especially during the late 1980s and 1990s. Kobo argues further that, the effects of the Economic Recovery Programs, coupled with the lack of language skills in English to aid employment opportunities especially for the graduates of Arab universities, necessitated a campaign to include a secular curriculum into the madrasa schooling. Consequently, the inclusion of secular education "resulted in a new system of madrasa often described as Franco- Arabic and Anglo-Arabic schools, a system the colonialists' had attempted to establish but failed." (p.168).

In point of fact, serious efforts to preserve Muslim heritage in West Africa have not been limited to men without Muslim women playing significant roles. Earlier works though are critiqued by some scholars as elitist focused, provide significant information of Muslim women who worked hard to preserve either Islamic knowledge or Islamic mystical orientation in West Africa. Among the earliest works is "The Role of Women as 'Agents Religieux' in Sokoto," (1985) by Jean Boyd and Murray Last. It focused primarily on Nana Asma'u, the daughter of Ousman Dan Fodio and her contribution towards Islamic knowledge. From the 1990s, scholars started engaging with studies that focused on Muslim women and the ways in which they organized, mostly collectively, to address the challenges they faced in their communities. Ousseina Alidou and Adeline Masquelier are among the few scholars who have done extensive studies on Muslim women's contribution to the development of their communities in West Africa to be specific, and Africa in general. In showing how some Muslim women in Kenya transformed the existing Islamic educational system, Alidou provides that Bi Swafiya Muhashamy-Said, a trained professional teacher worked tirelessly in pioneering the incorporation of an Islamic religious epistemology into a secular educational framework. Similarly, Mwalim Azara Mudira established an Islamic institution she named, the *ma'had*. This institution did not only engender Islamic education in favor of Muslim women in Kenya but also challenged the often-emphasized narrative by Kenyan male spiritual leaders that Muslim women are passive recipients of ritualist knowledge (epp.327-329).

Besides conserving spirituality and education, Muslims have also conserved their societal norms through praised songs. In "Islam and popular music in Senegal…" (Mclaughlin, 1997, pp. 560-581) and

"The name of God I will sing again" (Mclaughlin, 2000, pp. 191-207), Fiona McLaughlin, a professor of African Languages and Linguistics, explores the transformations in Islamic praised-singing tradition in Senegal. While these papers do not specifically focus on heritage, they are useful to the discussion on heritage conservation in West Africa. The papers stress the role of griots (verbal artists) and 'popular song' musicians in conserving the ideals of marabout's historical value and their behavior. While the griots have a long history in most African societies, popular songs emerged in Senegal in recent years as a new genre, ranging between the sacred and the secular. It inculcated aspects of American popular songs into the traditional praised singing which was either used to praise Prophet Muhammad or the marabouts.

On memory, two papers (Entangled Memories and Parallel Heritages in Mali by Micheal Rowlands and 'Enchanting Town of Mud': Djenne, A World Heritage Site in Mali by Charlotte Joy) in *Reclaiming Heritage: Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa* (2007), include arguments of different notions of heritage among Muslims in Djenne. Micheal Rowlands specifies that UNESCO's World Heritage program in Mali created conserving impulses of nostalgic memory as well as posing socio-economic challenges to both the post-colonial state and its inhabitants. As the program led to a division between tangible and intangible heritage, Muslims' response to the nostalgia yielded two main views. While Muslim conservatives as well as the Minister of Culture refused major transformation of the Djenne mosques as well as other buildings, some Muslims including the Imam of the mosque argued for an adoption of a *Wahhabi*- inspired architecture that included glazed tiles and minaret (2007, pp.127-145). Similar to Mahdy's arguments about intrinsic value, the Imam of the mosque argued that Islam did not designate a fixed architecture for mosques. Thus, for Micheal Rowlands, although the mosque was a tangible heritage, the imagery of its transformation remained a matter deeply rooted in the Islamic reformists' discourse of modernity (2007, p. 127).

The foregoing discussion is a glimpse of Muslim's efforts to preserve intangible forms of heritage. Muslims facilitated the maintenance of both spiritual and ethical values, such as establishing the Islamic faith and practices in West Africa and helping to transmit them to the younger generations. Ousman Dan Fodio, for example, is one of the major contributors towards the establishment of the Islamic faith in West Africa, especially in today's Northern Nigeria. Thus, as Mahdy argues, Islamic knowledge is one of the major aspects of heritage that needs to be maintained. After taking time to highlight some of the intangible aspects of heritage, I will now turn my attention to the tangible ones.

The Tangible Heritage

Muslims in West Africa have not only engaged with the preservation of intangible heritage. They have also made several efforts to maintain the material culture as well. Although this aspect of Muslims' effort is under-represented in literature, there are some works that have mentioned some of these efforts. However, most of the available literature take a general study of West African communities and mention some aspects of Muslim's heritage conservation cultures. A significant way of conserving heritage among Muslims is the daily and ceremonial use of historical artifacts. For example, in "Islam and popular music in Senegal…" (1997), and "The name of God I will sing again" (2000), Fiona McLaughlin does not only discuss about songs, but shows how names of marabouts are either written, tired or embossed on vehicles and other socially used objects. McLaughlin's observation is further emphasized in Nicole Crowder's online article where she provides photographs to show details of how Mourides in Senegal dressed and maintained objects and sites to show the essence of their history and their religious beliefs (2000, pp.191-207).

More so, *Museums and History in West Africa* (Ardoiun & Arinze, 2000) is an anthology containing papers that emanated from a workshop organized by the West African Museums Program (MAMP) on "Museum and History' in 1995 at Ouida (Republic of Benin). The papers addressed intellectual,

methodological, and institutional challenges that affect ‘‘research and communication in museums’’ in West Africa and in some parts of Africa, including South Africa and Zanzibar. Mamadou Camara’s paper, “Common Histories and Heritage” in Guinea and in Mali, and Boubakar Diaby’s paper, “Fixed and Moveable Cultural Heritage in Jenne (spelled also as Djenne) include discussions on Islamic heritage preservation.” Camara identifies two types of museums; traditional museums in animist (it is not clear why Camara uses a contested term “animist” instead of African traditional settlements) areas and traditional museums in Islamized areas. While those of the animist areas emphasized sacred sites and ritual objects, those of the Islamized areas contained heritage associated with the wars of Islamization during the 18th century. Items contained include flags of *jihad*, weapons, dresses, sacred turbans, and manuscript writings and documents. Others include the mosque of Al- Hajj Umar Tal at Dinguiraye and a sword used in the *jihad* movements. These objects, as argued by Camara, are part of the heritage of Muslims, and they possess useful knowledge transmitted through various generations.

Jenne’s (Djenne) experience of heritage conservation, as Diaby describes, overlaps in some ways with Trevor Marchand’s The Masons of Djenne, (2009) but diverts from each other in significant ways. Among the ways they overlap is the cultural heritage located in public and private buildings and craftsmanship. A classic example is the Jenne mosque. The mosque in both accounts is one of the most important public architectures in Jenne. Marchand describes it in detail and stresses that the people of the city had an annual community plastering of the mosque. This activity symbolized their unity and showed their reverence to the house of God and their aim of seeking the blessings of God. While Diaby highlights the history of specific fixed and movable objects such as the mosque (fixed) and written documents known as *tariks* (movable objects), Marchand provides an extensive history of Jenne and its inhabitants with special reference to the masons of Djenne. He provides an extensive description of masonry, focusing on the masons’ identities, and building procedures including their tools and how they connect with other crafts such as potting and blacksmithing as well as the *marabouts* (Islamic religious scholars, normally of the ‘Suffi’ origins) and their *maraboutage* (the various magical- religious practices such as performing divinations and making amulets).

Besides the grand central mosque of Djenne, heritage is located in many other areas including, craftsmanship, collecting, spiritual power and praise singing. Marchand clarifies that before beginning any building in the city, the construction sites were blessed. This involved a collection of mixed- grains, melon-sized stones, and a composed mix of Qur’anic verses as well as potent incantations in *Djenne-Chiini*. The grains and the stones were blessed with the Qur’anic verses and the incantations and were then put in the foundations before constructions were made. By doing so, Islamic knowledge and traditional knowledge used to seek for spiritual protections for these buildings and for the overall sustenance for their inhabitants. In addition to facilitating the blessing of sites, Marabouts played significant roles in the production of amulets imbued with the protection of individuals, properties, and houses. Although Marabouts acknowledged the spiritual powers of masons and others, they identified their spiritual power to be Islamic, while others were not. This contestation is important as it shows that the Djenne community is not a monolithic community. While its people are of different religious backgrounds though, a Muslim majority, others also belong to different crafts. The three most important crafts that contribute to heritage conservation in Djenne are potting, blacksmithing, and masonry.

Conclusion

Muslims have been very central to the discourse of heritage conservation in West Africa, not only as contributors at the national and international levels, but also in the development of Islam in Africa. Albeit their direct efforts to the overall heritage preservation in their respective regions in Africa have yet to receive major scholarly attention since academic study of religion has often treated material culture as anti-religious. Scholars of religion primarily specialize in non-material elements of religion. It is common to read scholarly works on religious experiences, doctrines, textual history, and ethics as well as mythology

and religious philosophies. Meanwhile a careful examination of the two fields, religion, and material culture, reveals that material culture plays very important roles in religious beliefs and practices. I argue that the two are actually inseparable. Various religious denominations continue to connect to past religious sites, relics of the past, shrines, and historical places of worship not only to establish their identity as members of that faith, but also to use them, when possible, to enhance their socio-economic status. The paper asserts that, in Islam, for instance, the Ka'ba, as a religious sanctuary receives pilgrims annually. The pilgrims undertake the religious obligation known as Hajj where they circumambulate the Ka'ba as well as other religious practices at Safa and Marwa and the Jamarat. Thus, material culture is not antithesis to religion in general and Islam in particular.

Muslims have had constant connection with their material culture in their daily lives but how far these materials have impacted Islamic religious practices is yet to be explored extensively. This paper tried, explored, and pointed out an aspect of these connections in the history of Islamic education in Africa. It argued that material culture has been very much involved in the history of Islamic education in Africa not only as an epistemological basis for showing the shifts in pedagogy, but also indicating the extent to which knowledge is applied to the daily religious and secular lives of both teachers and their students. The agency of material culture to knowledge acquisition and transmission as well as its application shares some perspectives with other fields including collecting. Not only does the field of collecting collect objects, but also it sometimes explores the agency of objects to show how objects shape human experiences, historical writings, and actions. These sample handwritten historical documents in the archives showcase West African ingenuity towards faith and knowledge. As a personal learning tool, it does not only portray a writing ability, but also emphasizes the quest for knowledge. As suggested in the history of the Islamic exhibits, the Quran and "the case appear to be a hybrid of northern and West African influence" while the case typifies a northern influence, especially Chad. Besides the knowledge that these objects provide, also emphasizes other materials including pen and ink as well as a paper without which its production wouldn't have been possible at a time when machine printing was not widespread or non-existent in many parts of Africa. The description of some of these exhibits in showing Islamic heritage emphasizes the importation of the paper, showing that by the mid-20th century, paper was either not produced in many parts of Africa or was hard to come by. The scarcity of paper will be relevant in discussing other materials, such as the writing boards which were used to acquire knowledge before the 19th century. Thus, besides memorization of the Qur'an, the materials enabled the recording of the knowledge as well. African Muslim scholars and their students provided manuscripts on Islamic law, Arabic poetry, and commentaries of the Koran as well as Islamic ethics.

In summation, this paper asserted that, the materiality of Islamic education facilitated the connection between education and other crafts including leather work and sewing. It also enhanced economic activities and craftsmanship by those involved in the heritage and objectification of these materials. The Quran case might be a typical example of this connection. The aim of protecting the Qur'an and other manuscripts of knowledge necessitated the production of other materials including leather. As already known, Quranic cases are made from three materials, namely, leather, cloth, and cardboard. Whereas all these materials are not directly involved in the acquisition of knowledge, their connection to the preservation and protection of a product of knowledge was highly significant too. In enriching the scholarly tradition of the discourses of Islamic heritage in West Africa, and overall Islamic Education in Africa, this paper argued and showed that some objects in educational paradigms that have been silenced, forgotten, neglected, and hidden in the sands of time, are understood in their own rights without casting doubt on any of them with respect to the other. The forgoing discussion, with its centrality on the materiality of Islamic education, argues for a kind of integration between the two paradigms. Writing materials in Islam, such as boards still play both physical and spiritual roles in the acquisition of Islamic knowledge that are unique and important to the core of the Islamic message. Many Muslim students today hardly know how to write Arabic or are particular about the memorization of the Qur'an. Meanwhile, both Arabic and memorization of the Qur'an are integral aspects of Islamic knowledge and its message. All these are enhanced through material culture. This paper

has provided various trends in the historiography on how both intangible and tangible Islamic heritage conservation efforts have been implicated by socio-cultural as well as international discourses. It will be interesting to have studies that will focus primarily on Muslims' contribution towards national archives or museums in Sub-Saharan African countries to be specific or within the various regions in Africa in general.

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