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Recent escalation of violence associated with ‘Militant Islam’ has largely exposed the ideology of Salafism as the real cause of extremism. Cited scholarship in the field has often depicted Africans as docile apathetic consumers of the ever-widening propaganda machine of Wahhabi-Salafism associated with revivalist Islam in the Arabia (Kaag 2007). Ahmad Chanfi's book, *West African ‘ulamā’ and Salafism in Mecca and Medina,* puts these speculations to rest. His aim is to highlight "the contribution of the West African 'ulama' of the Hijaz to spread of the Wahabi teaching in Saudi Arabia, as well as in the their countries of origin in Africa," (p.6). Chanfi's argument implies that Africans were not mere consumers of Salafism, but rather they were actually active thinkers and contributors to its making and dissemination.

To illustrate his argument, Chanfi turns to seven chapters to "study the lives of a number of West African 'ulama' from northern Nigeria, Mali, and Mauritania, who, after seeing the defeat of the Muslim jihad against European colonizers, chose to undertake the hijra (emigration) to Mecca and Medina," (p.1). Chapter One discusses the concept of *hijra* and its centrality in Islamic teaching among African Muslims, and the politics of colonial authorities toward the *hijra* phenomenon. Chapter Two discusses the first generation of West African 'ulama' who settled in the mosque of the Prophet in Medina, (Saudi Arabia), and Chapter Three examines the second generation of these African 'ulama' with a lengthy biographical discussion of their journeys and intellectual contributions; and Chapter Four discusses institutions of Wahhabi canon of Hadith in the respective cities of Medina and Mecca, highlighting the contribution of the African 'ulama' in these institutions. Chapter Five examines the third generation of these African 'ulama' and their role in the newly established Islamic Universities of Saudi Arabia. Chapter Six discusses the importance of Africa and Africans in the mission of the Islamic University of Medina; and the last chapter examines the concept of Biographical notes (**Tarjama**) in Islam’s intellectual tradition, and then uses some bibliographical notes of the African 'ulama' as a case study for their intellectual contribution to the Wahhabi doctrine.

The book also brings new voices to the debate on Islam and colonialism. African studies literature on Muslim responses to colonialism features heavily on David
Robinson's (2000) accommodation thesis in which leaders of Sufi orders in Senegal and Mauritania accommodated French colonial rule in exchange for socio-economic and religious autonomies. If Robinson's argument holds sway over the Federation of French West Africa, Muhammad Sani Umar's multifarious paths’ thesis is often the main reference in capturing Muslim responses to British West Africa. In the northern Nigerian context, he argues that there was no single British colonial policy toward Islam, as such "Muslims authorized multiple responses through Islamic legal discourse and Hausa literary discourses"(p.6) (Umar 2006). In fact, Chanfi does not refute Robinson's accommodation thesis, and neither does he disprove multifarious thesis of Muhammad Umar. However, his arguments suggest another venue for ordinary Muslims who chose to migrate to the Hijaz rather than accommodating or engaging the colonial authority. Both Robinson and Umar tackle institutional and legal Muslim responses to colonial authorities, but what happens to ordinary Muslims who, as Chanfi alluded to "did not have an "anti-colonial agenda in their countries of origin, contrary to what the colonial administration believed and propagated," (p.2)?

Chanfi's text suggests a new venue of opening up the discourse of Muslim responses to colonial authorities beyond the official cadres and Sufi orders. From the writings of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) to the writings of Sheikh Umar Fuuti Tall (1797-1864), hijra was characterized as the only permissible option for a defenseless Muslim who became a subject of a non-believer’s rule. Chanfi's text postulates that this belief might have been popular among ordinary Muslims since, "the hijra en mass of many Muslims who moved from Mali to northern Nigeria and then to the Hijaz through Sudan; this mass emigration was caused by the colonial invasion of the region," (p.10).

In spite of the book's creative thesis, there seems to be two incomplete or rather problematic assumptions in Chanfi's argument. First, although Chanfi's central concern is the contribution of the West African 'ulama to spread of the Wahhabi teaching in Saudi Arabia, he has promised too much by committing to show how their influences reached "their countries of origin in Africa," (p. 6). This promise was not adequately addressed in the book. Needless to say, for the argument of a reverse hijra of people or of ideas and practices from Hijaz to West Africa to be acknowledged he has to provide more evidence beyond a selected few disciples and scholars who continued to navigate between hijaz and West Africa. Was there a Salafi movement in West Africa as a result of this reverse migration? Most current movements that Kane (2003) discussed in his seminal Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria (2003) and in Alex Thurston's Salafism in Nigeria (2016) are modern movements that are rooted in post-colonial African graduates of Arab and Islamic universities. In Alex Thurston's observation "The wide spread of what might be called “full” Salafism in northern Nigeria – a kind of Salafism infused with references to the canon, and attuned not only to anti-Sufism but also to anti-madhhabism – began with graduates of the Islamic University of Medina who returned home in the 1990s and 2000s" (p.92).

To his credit, Chanfi discusses descendants and disciples of some of these African 'ulama who went back to Africa–Mali in particular (discussed in chapter 3). However, this discussion as entitling influence is not enough. A mere return and teaching cannot be used as evidence for the spread of Salafism in the region. Yet, chapter 6, Africa in the Islamic University of Medina could have offered a strong perspective on the spread of modern Salafism in Africa. However, the chapter, although uniquely important for the
discussion, and directly central to the role of Muslim higher education in the spread of Salafism, was inadequately developed. Chanfi leaves the reader with more questions than answers vis-a-vis the role of the Islamic University of Medina in Africa. The chapter no doubt presents a variety of primary documents on the mission of the University, institutional procedures and objectives of the University, and how its premier administrators prioritized Africa as "the first mission of dawa' that the university sent abroad was to sub-Saharan Africa." (146). However, it is crucial to note that administrators of the first class of Islamic Universities in most Muslim majority countries were mostly members in the Muslim Brotherhood organization, and certainly not mere Salafists as we currently perceive it. There are good evidences from other authoritative texts to support our claim. Among these valuable texts we can mention Miriam Cooke's Women Claim Islam (2011), Stéphane Lacroix's The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia (2011), and Itzchak Weisman's 'Sa'id Hawwa and Islamic Revivalism in Ba'th Syria' (1997). One finds in these texts how figures of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were persecuted in Egypt under President Anwar Sadat (1918-1981) and Mubarak's rule (1928-2011), represented the soft powers in Salafi institutions in the Arab Gulf. Chanfi seems to be aware of this reality by highlighting the role of some senior Muslim Brotherhood figures in the administration or advisory capacity of Salafi institutions in Saudi Arabia. He has discussed figures such as Muhammad Qutb of Egypt and Hassan Turabi of Sudan (p.156).

Another apparent problem in Chanfi's analysis has to do with the ostensibly limited discussion of the concept of Salafism, and its evolving meanings. Chanfi uses the term loosely, echoing modern sensitivities while evoking theological meanings of the term. His analysis of the concept (p. 3) is limited mostly to linguistic description of the term within a selected narrative. In this duality, Salafism, as a body of ideologically and politically conflated ideas and practices, loses a great deal of authenticity and clarity. It is worth mentioning that Muslims across times and places have often authenticated their orthodoxy and orthopraxy by clinging to some notion of literal Salafism (the salaf—the devout followers of the prophet). Henri Lauzière (2016, p.3) was right in observing that "the presence of cumulative errors and hasty judgment in the scholarship" on Salafism.

This particular issue raises a set of relevant questions such as was Salafi-Wahhabism the same Salafism of the African 'ulama' of the Hijaz? Was 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ifriqi's criticism of Tijaniyyah (discussed in chapter 3, p. 60) reflective of a Salafi-Wahhabi polemical logic or a Qadiri Sufi logic? Don't we need an in-depth examination of the evolution of the canon of Salafism in Saudi Arabia before qualifying African disciples and students as Salafi-Wahhabi? This problem becomes more evident in Chanfi's text as he sums up some three main points about these African scholars; first of them is that, they "were not working for an international Islamic project, but were rather performing the Islamic duty of da'wa' (missionary work or propaganda), which for them was to spread the Wahhabiyya—the version of Islam they came to embrace and they regarded as the only correct and valid doctrine," (p.1). Given the versatile background and training of these African 'ulama' as discussed in chapters two, three and five, they must have been aware of the global project of Wahhabiyya or at least recognize the existence of other valid da'wa doctrines.

It is more likely than not, that students of Islam in Africa, Arabists as well as Africanists will find Chanfi's work rich, engaging and, at the same time, stimulating. His
scholarly horizons as well as his wit reading of Arabic texts bring excitement to observers of the African condition who are interested in finding today's questions in yesterday's answers. *West African 'ulamāʾ and Salafism in Mecca and Medina* evokes what is achievable in the task of retrieving Africa's reservoir of history when multidimensional linguistic skills are summoned to exhume the corpus of the African past.

**References**


