CHAPTER 23

'Francophone' Education Intersectionalities: Gender, Language, and Religion

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Introduction

This chapter explores how multiple educational spaces coexist, intersect, and sometimes compete in 'Francophone' West African countries with majority Muslim societies. The study focuses on Niger Republic with references to Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal, which together form an uninterrupted stretch of land that connects Africa south of the Sahara to the Maghreb. This region that came to be known as the Sahel—*sāḥil* which means shore or coast in Arabic—was a frontier as much as a bridge.[1] Beginning in the tenth century, the trans-Saharan trade developed, and commercial hubs flourished in parallel with Islamic centers of learning which fostered a significant amount of sociocultural exchange between previously unconnected communities.[2] One of the most significant developments during the trans-Saharan trade was the rise of the Arabic language as the language of trade; with the spread of Islam, the Arabic language also became that of written scholarship and mass literacy (Kane 2016, 6–7, 44–45).[3] If the region already had a long-standing tradition of orality (Lydon 2004, 43–44, 51) and literacy in indigenous scripts such as Tifinagh, the naissance of Ajami cemented the development of a robust scholarly culture.[4]

The confluence of these cultural interactions transformed the Sahel region into a dynamic blend of diverse linguacultural influences, which over centuries shaped distinct social identities and educational spaces.[5] The idea that knowledge must be systematically disseminated had grown into the fabric of most

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Islamic societies in the Sahel.[6] The life story of Nana Asma'u Fodio, a Muslim woman from the nineteenth century in the Sokoto Caliphate (parts of present-day northern Nigeria and southern Niger), conveys the existence of learning sites where individuals, regardless of gender, could become literate, learn, and critically engage with developments in their communities (Boyd 1989; Mack and Boyd 2000). The educational spheres, although gendered, provided both men and women with an opportunity to cultivate what Ousseina Alidou (2002) refers to as "a consciousness of their collective identity". If such spaces persisted during European colonization, the Western-style francophone education that emerged out of the colonial encounter undermined the legitimacy of the rich scholarship that existed in that part of the world.[7] Notions of illiteracy began to define hitherto literate spaces. As learning and educational sites became a ground for ideological conquest and control, communities resisted and, in some cases, embraced new influences—exercising agency in ways that transformed the educational sphere across the region.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion on the use of the term 'Francophone' in the context of this study. The chapter then looks at the early interactions between traditional, Islamic, and francophone education and traces how and why perceptions and attitudes toward these various educational spaces evolved. In doing so, the chapter gives an overview of major historical shifts in educational policies in Muslim majority countries in West Africa. At its inception in the early 1900s, the main intent of the Western-style schooling was to further the colonial project. In the case of former French colonies, access to schools was exclusive and reserved to a small number of (mostly male) elites who would serve as administrative officers for the colonial powers.[8] The growing hegemony of Western epistemologies and languages in the production of knowledge may have decentered preexisting sites of intellectual pursuit, but it did not interrupt the occupation of Afro-Islamic and animist sites of learning.[9] The interactions between these educational systems induced several major developments: First, while parents continued to value Qur'anic and Islamic education, they also understood that francophone education could be a means for rapid socioeconomic mobility and were, therefore, more willing to send their children to school.[10] The initial resistance to francophone Western-style education had gradually shifted, albeit in ways that maintained girls at the periphery of learning. By the 1960s at independence, the prospect of the popularization of Western-style education (henceforth used interchangeably with 'formal francophone education') occupied a central role in the national policy in most African countries.[11] Second, the tensions between Afro-Islamic and French education facilitated the naissance of new teaching institutions such as *médersas* and Franco-Arab schools which further altered the political economy of education in West African Sahel countries. The chapter's first section, therefore, primarily focuses on the major transformations that characterized formal and informal learning sites and that continue to influence the nature of the current educational sphere.

The chapter's second section explores the major trends that characterize contemporary educational spaces. It is argued here that sociocultural cultural considerations intersect with religion and gender to shape demand for formal francophone education even as the desirability for schooling remains high. Countries discussed in this chapter have some of the world's lowest rates of retention in primary as well as secondary schools: While there are structural challenges that limit access to formal education and learning, there is a deliberate social discourse about the value and social worth of schooling which often goes uncaptured. Communities exercise agency in ways that signal their preferences. The first part of this section assesses how shifts in the quality of formal education affect communities' perception about schooling and the desirability for Afro-Islamic education. The disengagement with formal education is not always the desired outcome: Yet, when the expected rewards of engagement with basic formal education become harder to attain or remain uncertain, communities begin to question its relevance, and often in ways that are gendered. This is particularly relevant in a context where long-standing alternative learning sites exist—in this case, Afro-Islamic sites of learning. The poor quality in formal education and perceptions about its inadequacy could accentuate the reticence to schooling, particularly for girls. In most societies in that geo-cultural region (Hausa, Wolof, Bambara, Fulani, and Zarma), girls are considered to be the prime recipients (and as future mothers, the guardians) of a community's values, 'social conduct' (*tarbiyya* in Hausa), and dignity (*daraja* in Hausa).[12] The chapter demonstrates that when preexisting sociocultural factors combine with poor quality of education, the result is not merely the persistence of gendered disparities—it is the cementing of an enduring perception about the uselessness of schooling.

The second part of this section looks at how the growing interest for Afro-Islamic education, particularly among young adults, is shaping new learning sites. Drawing on an extensive multiyear research in Niger, this chapter demonstrates, with empirical data, that the youth in formal francophone education increasingly value *advanced* Islamic studies, not instead of but in addition to francophone education. This is a recent phenomenon among 'educated' urban youth: Until the early 1990s, the systematic quest for Islamic studies seemed to principally be the purview of two age groups, children who are learning the basics and the elderly who would be 'getting ready for the grave'. The thread in between was mostly comprised of male clerics. Afro-Islamic educational spaces, which were marginalized under colonization and early postcolonial era, have gained an increased presence and sometimes in new 'modernized' forms and in ways that defy previously existing gender divides in access to knowledge (Sounaye 2016; Alidou 2005). In the deliberate act of striving for (Islamic) knowledge, we see the refashioning of new social identities and the desire for a more meaningful educational experience. It is, among the youth, the need to mediate identities and positionalities within a shifting social context marked by an increasing respect

for visible religiosity (Sounaye 2009) and an attempt at reclaiming identities that are recognized only superficially in formal educational spaces. There is, in the discourse around access to Islamic education, a set of values and intangible matters that give meaning in ways often overlooked in discourses that focus solely on the material and economic benefits of being and becoming educated. The chapter's second section shows that at the core of the 'disengagement' with formal education and the revival of Afro-Islamic learning sites is the value placed on learning—that is, learning and a path to learning as the expected outcome of instruction in any form.

The interplay between various educational systems oscillates between competition and complementarity, but in most cases, it intersects in ways that the nature, content, and teleological intent of formal educational systems do not yet fully capture. Among communities where the benefits of formal schooling including in its most basic form (learn, read, write, and count) remain difficult to attain, Islamic and Qur'anic education provides an alternative space to learn and reclaim the dignity in the act of learning something of value. This is particularly true among poorer families where a narrative of failure often surrounds the quest for formal francophone education: Qur'anic education provides an avenue for learning where the concept of failure does not necessarily exist and where every attempt, in the eyes of the learner, would get rewarded with divine recompense (and increasingly social respectability and voice). Among 'educated' young adults, scholars situate these shifts in educational aspirations as part of a larger reform movement (Loimeier 2016, 6–8) but also as the articulations of new social realities where religiosity, anchored in the act of learning and the quest for knowledge, matters (Sounaye 2016). Beyond religiosity, however, what these neo-Islamic educational spaces offer also is a fragment of the past, a place for intergenerational discourse, an opportunity to gain respectability, and, often, a space to forge new social networks anchored in spiritual (or sometimes socioeconomic) solidarity, particularly for women, young and old.

The inquiry in this chapter casts light on issues related to education, social dynamics, and gender in the context of Muslim majority societies in West Africa and how they have evolved overtime. The analysis hopes to validate and recognize the experiences and agencies of communities and individuals as they construct and deconstruct the meaning of the quest for *ilimi* or *'ilm*.[13] In engaging with these questions, the idea of intersectionality matters: It is one of honesty and of necessity in the face of the complex intersecting identities that *Sahélians* navigate, sometimes with duality, and other times, in harmony. The use of an intersectionality framework draws on Crenshaw's (1991) call to consider this concept as a useful way of "mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics". In the process of conducting this work, I, as a *Nigérienne Sahélian almajira,* sit in between numerous spaces and carry these intersecting positionalities and identities.[14] In the Hausa language, *almajira* (female) and *almajiri* (male) mean a student/scholar who travels, literally or metaphysically, on a quest, seeks, and searches.[15]

A Brief Deconstruction of the Term 'Francophone' as an Identifier in African Countries

In laying the groundwork for this chapter, it is important to, first, discuss the cultural capital and epistemic implications of retaining 'Francophone' as an identifier in African countries with languages such as Hausa, Bambara, or Wolof as dominant lingua franca.[16] The term 'Francophone' carries a polysemous character. It is understood as the ensemble of countries that have adopted (and adapted) French as an official language and as one of the prime languages of instruction in formal educational spaces.[17] It is also a literary and linguistic space which, amidst its diversity, carries the filaments of the postcolonial nature of the context within which it had been constructed and shaped: The term 'Francophone' engages worlds apart in a disruptive quest for legitimacy and a constant redefinition of the term itself.

Some of the earliest African writers who wrote in French in or outside of Africa have deconstructed what it means to be 'Francophone' or to belong to the 'Francophone' space. Must she, out of necessity and duty to contextual political struggles, begin from a place of contestation and resistance? Must she always question, deconstruct, and resist? What does that look like? Does the 'banal' articulation of creativity or the absence of (explicit) political agenda render the writing invalid? In the context of the post-independence era, isn't the portrayal of African lives and poetry, as in Camara Laye's (1953) *L'Enfant Noir* or Oumar Bâ's (1977) *Paroles plaisantes au cœur et à l'oreille*, itself a revolutionary act? In Mongo Beti's (1954) criticism of Laye's (1953) *L'Enfant Noir*, we see an interrogation about the notion of what is, could be, or must not be 'Francophone': In Beti's eyes, the African writer must, out of responsibility, question and engage with the postcolonial conditions and construct of their societies.[18] Beti argues for a distinction between being francophone and belonging to 'Francophonie', which is an entity with a political agenda.[19] From its beginnings, the francophone literary discourse has been one of (re) invention (Gauvin 2016; Beniamino 1999) and of resistance to epistemic hegemony (Moura 2013). From self-representation to the active dislocation of notions of periphery and centers in the production and distribution of knowledge, this discourse continues to articulate the presence of African Francophile and francophone spaces.

The linguistic considerations cannot be divorced from questions of coloniality with respect to the term 'Francophone', what it represented, at its inception, how it has evolved, and what it continues to represent. The notion of 'oneness' and 'unity' (as 'Francophone') had been used to consolidate and perpetuate neocolonial relations including the ambition of a philological and cultural assimilation of African populations with the French language as one of its instruments (Alidou 2002). During the colonial era, schools were the main site of preservation and dissemination of the French language: The colonial enterprise had created new class hierarchies on the joint basis of access to economic opportunities and political power. Formal education and ability

in the French language guaranteed access into the coveted circle of the élite which fulfilled auxiliary duties in the colonial administration and served, in the case of literate sons of chiefs, as intermediaries with communities. Language was, therefore, a vector as much as a means for cultivating and consolidating the idea of difference, belonging, and exclusion. Throughout the colonial and early postcolonial era, the proportion of functional Francophiles in West Africa was extremely low owing to the limited access to formal education and literacy in the French language: from 1945 to 1952, school enrollment rate in AOF (*Afrique Occidentale Française*) or 'French West Africa' went from 2.5 to 7.6% (Autra 1956).[20] Literacy rates in formal education in the region still remain some of the lowest in the world, especially among adults in rural areas.[21] Therefore, it was not a popular uptake in the French language, in the early years of decolonization or even after, that made African countries 'Francophone'. Countries had become 'Francophone' because the African elites were and because France said so.[22]

Scholars such as Mbembe (2013) have problematized the coevolution, transformation, and erosion of formerly colonial institutions in favor of novel sociocultural realities and identities shaped by Africans, with Africa, not as the center but as a reference point. Speaking about the linguistic institutions, Mbembe argues that, after years of interactions and embeddedness, Africans have adopted as much as adapted the French language, thereby refashioning French as an African dialect. Many Africans in former French colonies from the elites and middle-income families have adopted French as the colloquial dialect with their children: it is a way to advance the children's mastery of the language but also to signify their appurtenance to a 'different' class (Alidou 2003, 108).[23] The gradual 'Africanization' of the French language (whether on the streets of Bamako or Niamey or in formal spaces) was made, in part, possible by communities' desire to communicate within and between plurilingual populations and nations. With various forms of local adaptation, African communities also demonstrate that the local use of formerly colonial languages need not happen at the expense of indigenous African languages. The linguistic diversity found on African streets, markets, and communities hardly gets reflected in formal educational institutions: often monolingual education dominates (and in the case of former French colonies, francophone-based instruction)—making the production of knowledge in African languages scarce.[24]

The medium and language of knowledge production matter, even more so in postcolonial states. Moumouni (1968, 55) points out that, "one of the cornerstones of the '*dépersonalisation*' of educated Africans was the relegation of African languages to the back seat and their more or less complete elimination from the educational process". Mazrui (1993, 2003, 101) furthers the interrogation of the linguistic and sociocultural institutions and argues for a more nuanced examination and for "the possibility of the transformability of imperial languages from instruments of domination to instruments of liberation". However, as many linguists and philosophers point out, language is not simply a means, it is a commonwealth. Menkiti (1984) writes that, in traditional

African thought, language transcends the living and connects generations across time and space. Language gives meaning to stories and histories that encompass the past, the present, and the future. Language therefore is not a neutral medium of instruction or communication—it instils values. Related to the question of transformation remains, in the words of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2005, 157), the need to elevate African languages and to reconnect with 'African memory' in the production and the organization of knowledge and written scholarship. Even as scholars and contemporary urban cosmopolites have Africanized formerly colonial languages, the need to re-center African languages in sites of knowledge production lingers as an unfinished undertaking of the decolonization process in African countries.

The use of the term 'Francophone' to qualify formerly colonized African countries does remain contentious in light of some of the arguments raised above—it implies the acceptation of some of the unresolved coloniality, which acts in duality with African languages and, sometimes even, with epistemic thought in institutions of knowledge production. However, the use of French as the prime language of instruction in formal educational systems (which, in this case, warrants the epithet of francophone education) remains a common thread among some of the West African countries of the Sahel. It is with this multilayered baggage as a backdrop and with the validation of these shifting constructs that this chapter uses the term 'Francophone' more as an identifier for the educational systems than for the countries themselves—an element which, as briefly discussed in this section, remains complex and defies binary interpretation of belonging.

Early Interactions Between Traditional, Islamic, and Francophone Education in Muslim Majority Countries in West Africa

This section first highlights the contours of traditional education in the Sahel West African communities and assesses how the advent of francophone formal education intersected with existing educational systems. In his pioneering work entitled 'Education in Africa', Nigerien scholar Abdou Moumouni (1968) describes traditional education in most African societies as one where "instruction and education happened simultaneously": learning was effective because of its close relationship with life and progressive because of its symbiotic evolution with the child's stages of physical, emotional, and mental development. Traditional education interweaved teachings on the social, political, and spiritual conditions with the evolving needs of the learner. It was locally embedded and non-exclusionary although conditioned because children often studied and received instruction in line with their forefathers' occupation and mothers' roles. The intent of traditional education was as much to mold character and prepare for a specific occupation as it was to maintain social 'harmony' and hierarchies—it, therefore, did not systematically offer the possibility

to chart new paths away from the expected. The sons of the griots would grow to become a griot, just as the sons of the blacksmith grow into their family's occupation. Women could, however through marriage alliances, sometimes redefine their social status and their children's lineage.

Education, with social conditioning at its core, was part of 'being' and 'becoming' a complete person. For instance, a defining principle in indigenous educational philosophy in the Hausa culture is the idea of the cultivation of *tarbiyya*, *hankali* (which could mean mind, intellect, and emotional intelligence), and *biyayya* (obedience and respect in the act of obedience) as being intractably linked with education. In the Fulani culture, a child, from a young age, is taught to respect the societal honor code known as *Pulaaku*; Hampâté Bâ (1991, 10) writes that a Fulani child grows up with a double loyalty, one to a veritable honor code and an absolute respect of maternal will.[25] In most of the societies in the Sahel region, the conception of personhood finds meaning when rooted in community, which serves as the foundation for the "long process of social and ritual transformation" in the journey from 'humanhood' to personhood (Menkiti 1984; Mbiti 1990).[26] Being born does not necessarily confer personhood (*mutunci* in Hausa): it is the ability to exhibit certain values and embody a role in maintaining social order in "the art of living together" (*zumunci* in Hausa) that do.

The responsibility of instructing and educating was a communal act. Adults or elders from the community, depending on their relationship to the child or to the group of children, had a specific role to play as did older siblings. Some were tasked with imparting moral values while others would teach specific manual and life skills. With references to the Hausa culture, Alidou (2002) writes about the central role that old women played in the transmission of knowledge and in the shaping of moral values:

> In Hausa tradition, the oldest woman of the household or neighborhood – the grandmother – is the "master" storyteller. Her advanced age is a symbol of a deep experiential understanding of life as it unfolds in its many facets across time and she is culturally regarded as an important source of knowledge production, preservation, and transmission. This matriarch becomes the mediator/transmitter of knowledge and information across generations. Her audience cuts across gender, until the adolescent age at which the socialization of a female child into her role as a woman becomes the task of her mother and that of the male child is the responsibility of the father … The grandmother storyteller is somewhat akin to Gramsci's "organic intellectual" – an embodiment of the experiential and collective wisdom of her community for whom colonialism is not the beginning nor the end of history. She speaks, and continues to speak in spite of the march of "modernity" that attempts to make her invisible even as it feeds on her heritage. (139)

Grandmothers, uncles or adult-neighbors, among other members of the community found meaning in their individuality and what it represents but also in exercising their roles as educators and instructors. In Wolof culture,

for instance, the maternal uncle plays a key role in the education of his nephews and becomes a complementary source of parental influence which would counterbalance paternal authority.[27] For important life episodes such as marriage, biological parents often become 'invisible' and leave the place for uncles and aunts: in Zarma communities, the paternal aunt plays the role of surrogate mother and would simultaneously carry the voice of fatherhood and the mothering character of an aunt. While some of these roles would become more visible on given social occasions (childbirth, marriage, etc.), whether private or public, the extended family and community members continuously would play a role in the upbringing, instruction, and education of the African child.

With the advent of the Western-centric educational system, a long-standing system of knowledge acquisition would be partially dislocated, disregarded, and muted, and with that a disruption and transformation of social hierarchies and ways of doing, being, and bringing up. Instead of learning from community members in various locations as was the case in most Sahelian societies, children had to relocate to a given physical space (the school) to learn in specific locations (the classroom) that rarely involved traditional educators.[28] Further, the nature of labor organization would also gradually change: farming, at that time and to a large extent still today, relied on manual labor force among which children of schooling age.[29] Children, especially when older, played a significant role in labor provision in the household, in the community, and on the farm. The nascent shifts in the societal organizations of instruction would affect the nature of interactions between age groups and gradually altered how knowledge was transmitted. While some of the traditional educators and instructors adapted and devised creative ways of resisting their institutional effacement in formal education, the developments in the educational sphere demanded a readjustment of roles and positions that generated real and potential socioeconomic losses in authority, legitimacy, and sometimes livelihood.

When the francophone system of education came into the Sahel region, the resistance to that system was not simply in response to its agenda, nor simply to the epistemic dislocation it imposed unto communities. The resistance also stemmed from the fact that formal francophone education unsettled social hierarchies and disregarded the role of community members in the shaping of what children would learn, why they learnt, and how. Because French colonial education was perceived as disruptive of the traditional education that children would receive in their communities, some of the African chiefs and rulers would enroll their servants' children instead of their own daughters and sons (Le Goff 1947). Ruling chiefs could not conceive of a system where their children and those of their servants would receive the same training.[30] Yet by sending their servants' children, African chiefs would unintentionally contribute to unsettle socioeconomic hierarchies in the postcolonial economic order, which placed 'educated' Africans as central players in their countries' political economy.

The Attempted Dislocation of Afro-Islamic Sites of Knowledge Production

During the precolonial and colonial era, the long-standing presence of formal Islamic and traditional educational systems rendered the task of instituting the Western-style francophone education system challenging. Islamic and Qur'anic education has been a constant in the educational landscape in much of West Africa's Sahel although not uniformly since the eleventh century (Zakari 2009; Kane 2016). It occupied a central position in knowledge production and dissemination, nearly eight hundred years before the advent of formal francophone education in the region. Although access to advanced Islamic education was initially elitist, the emphasis on the notions of equality, regardless of class and gender, in the necessary quest for knowledge opened unprecedented access to written literacy to large numbers. There are many *ḥadīth* that underpin the value of knowledge and that urge all Muslims to search for knowledge: "Seek knowledge from cradle to grave"; "Seeking knowledge is compulsory upon every Muslim".[31] In a religion whose opening command is "*iqra*" ('read' in Arabic), Qur'anic schools developed as spaces that provided mass literacy and Islamic education. Universities such as the Sankoré Madrasah in Mali and the reputed *mahadras* in Mauritania among other institutions of higher learning provided a training ground for primarily advanced Islamic studies but also in subject such as astronomy, history, and mathematics.[32,33] The Sankoré Madrasah and the city of Timbuktu played a central role in the formation of the intellectual elites in the region.

From the onset, there were clear tensions between Western and Afro-Islamic education and sites of learning. The colonial administration feared that Qur'anic schools would hamper the progress of the Western-style schooling and, therefore, treated Islamic sites of learning as a threat and a competitor in the colonial project, a cornerstone of which was education. In order to accelerate the expansion of francophone schools, the colonial administration instituted several reforms that primarily targeted Muslim communities given the resistance to Western education and the slow progression (and in the case of girls, regression) of enrollment. Among these measures, a colonial decree attempted to restrict the existence of Qur'anic schools and outlawed the majority of them, not without friction (Harrison 1988, 58–59); the teaching of Arabic was gradually removed from the curriculum at *École Normale* in St. Louis (Harrison 1988, 51); and a ban was issued on the use of Arabic as a means of communication for administrative matters—which was a significant measure since much of the written missives between African Muslim chiefs and the French colonial administration, in the early precolonial and colonial times, happened in Arabic. Further, the production of scholarly materials in Arabic had become the subject of an intense scrutiny (Harrison 1988, 50–55), and the marabouts were closely monitored and surveilled, "whether considered peaceful or deemed dangerous" (Diallo 1997). Ware

(2014, 110–160) writes that the 'desecrations' of the Qur'an also manifested, at various moments of the colonial encounter, in the enslavement of *ḥuffāẓ* (or guardians and keepers of the Qur'an) who were, in the eyes of their communities, a "Walking Qur'an". Yet, targeting the main actors involved in Islamic education (marabouts and African rulers) did not diminish its social and political influence and did also not affect communities' occupation of these learning spaces.

The differences in attendance in the two schooling systems were not purely indicative of how long the system had been in existence: it was an indicator of local preferences at that time as much as of the epistemic, spiritual, and cognitive dimensions that Islamic education occupied in the formation of children and in the communities' organization. The idea of loss of memory, alienation, and dislocation of identity was at the core of the discomfort with and resistance to Western-style education. Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure Ambiguë* captures the anxiety that accompanied the decision to 'submit' a child to Western-style education, "The school in which I would place our children will kill in them what today we love and rightly conserve with care. Perhaps the very memory of us will die in them. When they return from the school, there may be those who will not recognize us" (Kane 1972, 47). The fear that Western education would uproot their children, alienate them from traditional ways of life, and possibly convert them to Christianity sustained the resistance to schooling in Muslim majority societies (Kane 2016, 2). Since most of the early Western-style schools were run by Christian missionaries, these fears of conversion were a concern in Muslim majority communities as much as among minority Muslims in other parts of Africa—leading to disparities in access to Western-style education between communities on the basis of religion.[34]

Qur'anic schools were omnipresent. They were socially embedded institutions of learning which, even if often rudimentary in appearance, were highly developed. In 1905, there existed 800 *mahadras* in Mauritania (an average of a *mahadra* for every 500 inhabitants) including 45 institutions of higher learning (Maouloud 2017). In 1914, in Senegal alone, there were a recorded 1385 Qur'anic schools with 11,451 students and about 4014 students in French schools, which had experienced a decline in girls' attendance compared to earlier years (see Table 23.1).[35] In other parts of the region, Qur'anic education flourished, especially at advanced levels of studies: in 1903, Mopti had 20 Qur'anic schools with 500 students (for a total population of 3116), and in Bamako, there were eight Qur'anic schools with 90 students (for a total population of 4000). Some of the universities housed thousands of students who would have traveled to relocate in search of knowledge: at the height of Islamic scholarship in the sixteenth century, the Sankoré Madrasah had between 15,000 and 20,000 students in a town with a total population of 70,000 to 80,000 people (Cissoko 1975, 205). These numbers demonstrate key features in what could be defined as cities of knowledge: these cities were scholarly towns, and the presence of such a high

Table 23.1 Primary education in Senegal 1903–1914

	1903				*1913/1914*			
School Type	Number of schools	Number of students			Number of schools	Number of students		
		Boys	Girls	Total		Boys	Girls	Total
Qur'anic					1385			11,451*
Francophone	9	903	533	1436	41**	3758	256	4014

*Among which 633 went to both Francophone and Qur'anic schools
**41 schools in 1913 including 29 in rural areas although by 1916 with World War I, the colonial administration closed down many schools and the number of schools went from 41 to 28
Source Bayet (1972)

proportion of scholars and students gave these cities the character of an ecosystem built around the pursuit of *'ilm* and of a fertile ground for linking and cementing ties between scholars from across the region.

In contrast to Qur'anic schooling which continued to thrive despite the colonial administration's attempts at diminishing its influence, Western-style francophone schooling faced difficulties in recruiting and retaining students. The progression in francophone schooling was subject to several difficulties including the limits of its own investments in hostile lands: for instance, during the first World War, the colonial administration substantially reduced the investments in education and focused on its military expansion. Additionally, while the colonial administration harbored the desire to provide basic schooling to a great number of children in the colonies, the primary emphasis was on the formation of an élite. According to the "*Bulletin de l'Enseignement de l'Afrique Occidentale Francaise*"—Bulletin of Education of French West Africa, in 1914, there were seven (7) regional schools and fifty (50) rural schools in the entire 'French West Africa' federation (see Table 23.2). The colonial administration had understood that their efforts with schooling would be a lengthy endeavor: then governor-general Brévié wrote in the Bulletin of Education of French West Africa (1930),

> An undertaking as diverse in its manifestations, as profound in its action, as prolonged in its consequences as is the work of education in the native country is not a simple question of statistics […] Without doubt, to only consider numbers may lead us to believe our progression too measured and too slow […] But the progress of our work of education must be measured with some perspective.[36]

The slow uptake in enrollment in Western-style francophone education continued well into independence for African countries as did the colonial administration's overt efforts to control Qur'anic schools. The inspector in charge of "Public Instruction and Islamic Education in French West

Table 23.2 Regional and village schools—'French West Africa' (AOF)* 1914

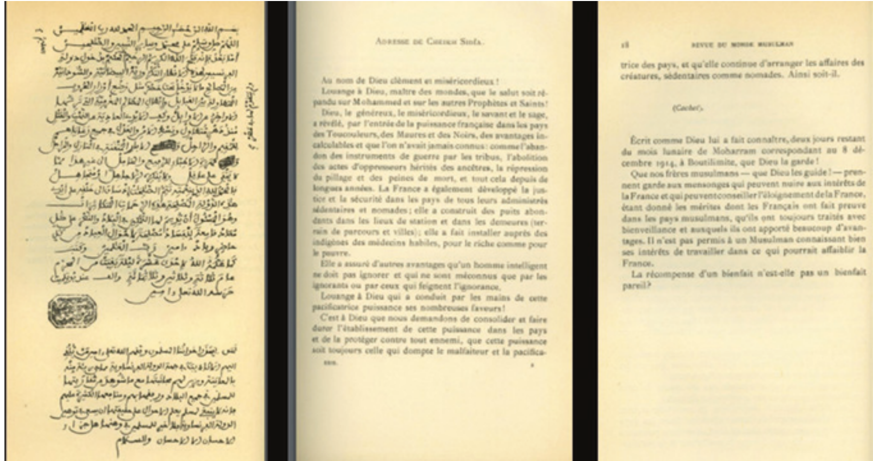
Regional schools	*Village schools*
École régionale de Bamako	Écoles de village de Kati, Koulikorô, Nyamina, Banamba, Kita, Toukoto, Gambou, Bougouni (pour les cercles de Bamako, Kita, Goumbou, Bougouni)
École régionale de Kayes	Écoles de village de Médine, Niôro, Bafoulabé, Satadougou (pour les cercles de Kayes, Nioro, Satadougou)
École régionale de Ségou	Écoles de village de Sansanding, Barouéli, Sokolo, Koutiala, San (pour les cercles de Ségou, Sokolo, Koutiala, San)
École régionale de Djenné	Écoles de village de Bandiagara, Sangha, Douenlza, Sofara; Mopti (girls), Mopti (boys), Dédougou, Boromo; Niafunké, Saraférè (pour les cercles de Djenné, Bandiagara, Mopti, Koury, Issa Ber)
École régionale d'Ouagadougou	Écoles de village de Koudougou, Léo, Kaya, Tenkodogo, Ouahigouya, Fada N'Gourma, Diapage (pour les cercles de Mossi, Ouahigouga, Fada N'Gourma)
École régionale de Bobo Dioulasso	Écoles de village de Banfora, Sikasso, Gaoua, Diébougou (pour les cercles de Bobo Dioulasso, Sikasso, Gaoua)
École régionale de Tombouctou	Écoles de village de Bamba, Goundam, Hombori, Gao, Ansongo, Araouan, Bourem, Onalata, Dori, Djibo, Téra, Say (pour les cercles de Tombouctou, Goundam, Dori, Say, les Secteurs Oualata, les régions de Gourma et de Gao)

*The AOF (*Afrique Occidentale Française*) or 'French West Africa' was comprised of eight territories: Mauritania, Senegal, French Sudan (later Mali), Guinea, Upper Volta (later Burkina Faso), Ivory Coast, Dahomey (later Benin), and Niger. Togo which was occupied by Germany was later placed under French administrative control

Source ("Bulletin de l'enseignement de l'Afrique Occidentale Française" 1914), gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Africa"—*Inspecteur de l'instruction publique et de l'éducation Islamique en AOF*—reported in a seminal policy paper on education that, the expansion of the French schooling depended on the colonial administration's ability to monitor Qur'anic schools, which continued to draw a great number of students (Harrison 1988, 57–67).

The history of the colonial encounter, as it pertains to the educational sphere, is complex. It involved instances where in the face of fear or to further certain interests, some African rulers and religious authorities had chosen to collaborate with the colonial administration and facilitated the development of francophone education. One such example was Sidiyya Baba (1862–1924) who was from a family of respected Muslim clerics and traders in present-day Mauritania.[37] His contribution would be critical to the French colonial administration in the conquest of Mauritania: he offered the French military a terrain in Butilimit to set up a base (Robinson 2014) and facilitated the uptake



Adresse de Cheikh Sidia.

Au nom de Dieu clément et miséricordieux !

Louange à Dieu, maître des mondes, que le salut soit répandu sur Mohammed et sur les autres Prophètes et Saints!

Dieu, le généreux, le miséricordieux, le savant et le sage, a révélé, par l'entrée de la puissance française dans les pays des Toucouleurs, des Maures et des Noirs, des avantages incalculables et que l'on n'avait jamais connus : comme l'abandon des instruments de guerre par les tribus, l'abolition des actes d'oppresseurs hérités des ancêtres, la répression du pillage et des peines de mort, et tout cela depuis de longues années. La France a également développé la justice et la sécurité dans les pays de tous leurs administrés sédentaires et nomades ; elle a construit des puits abondants dans les lieux de station et dans les demeures (terrain de parcours et villes) ; elle a fait installer auprès des indigènes des médecins habiles, pour le riche comme pour le pauvre.

Elle a assuré d'autres avantages qu'un homme intelligent ne doit pas ignorer et qui ne sont méconnus que par les ignorants ou par ceux qui feignent l'ignorance.

Louange à Dieu qui a conduit par les mains de cette pacificatrice puissance ses nombreuses faveurs !

C'est à Dieu que nous demandons de consolider et faire durer l'établissement de cette puissance dans les pays et de la protéger contre tout ennemi, que cette puissance soit toujours celle qui dompte le malfaiteur et la pacificatrice des pays, et qu'elle continue d'arranger les affaires des créatures, sédentaires comme nomades. Ainsi soit-il.

18 REVUE DU MONDE MUSULMAN

(Cachet).

Écrit comme Dieu lui a fait connaître, deux jours restant du mois lunaire de Moharram correspondant au 8 décembre 1914, à Boutilimite, que Dieu la garde !

Que nos frères musulmans — que Dieu les guide ! — prennent garde aux mensonges qui peuvent nuire aux intérêts de la France et qui peuvent conseiller l'éloignement de la France, étant donné les mérites dont les Français ont fait preuve dans les pays musulmans, qu'ils ont toujours traités avec bienveillance et auxquels ils ont apporté beaucoup d'avantages. Il n'est pas permis à un Musulman connaissant bien ses intérêts de travailler dans ce qui pourrait affaiblir la France.

La récompense d'un bienfait n'est-elle pas un bienfait pareil ?

Fig. 23.1 Babas 1914 declaration of support for French in WWI (*Source* Original source *Revue du Monde Musulman*. Paris: Mission Scientifique du Maroc, vol. 29 (1914, 16–18) available at Hath Trust Digital Library. Public Domain Site. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=msu.31293028767113&view=1up&seq=16)

of francophone education in the country. Sidiyya Baba even issued a *fatwa* and an official declaration of support to the French—calling local populations to welcome "the entry of the French power" and "the incalculable advantages" of their presence (see Fig. 23.1).[38] The expansion in the Western-style francophone education system would not have happened without the collaboration of local chiefs—who even Sidiyya Baba was, in many respects, the antithesis of Amadou Bamba Mbacké, founder of the Muridiyya *ṭarīqa* who had continuously exerted fierce opposition to the French colonial occupation through the "greater jihad" of the reformation of the self and the development of spiritual strength (Babou 2003, 2007).

In the geopolitical struggle for control including in the educational sphere, the discourse between Muslim majority societies in the Sahel region and the colonial administrators was, therefore, nonlinear and often vacillated on a spectrum between resistance and collaboration. Collaboration with the colonial administrators was sometimes a means to exercise their agency and paradoxically exert resistance to the ideological and cultural impact of colonization.[39] It is worth noting that, in the West African Sahel, there were ideological instances of resistance which were not necessarily rooted in the Islamic faith. However, the joint rapid expansion of Islam and Western European colonization in the early twentieth century made a resistance on the basis of religion an important unifying factor for the struggle for sociocultural independence and political autonomy.[40]

The Impossible Conquest: Failing to Control Islamic and Qur'anic Education

The inability to control Qur'anic education, and by extension Islam, in West Africa frustrated the French colonial administration. At the time, the colonial attempt for control in the Afro-Islamic educational sphere was akin to an impossible conquest, I argue, for five main reasons. First, Qur'anic education had grown into the social fabric of communities. With the spread of Islam in West Africa, Qur'anic schooling had become complementary in the formation of personhood, found in traditional African education. In addition to imparting certain highly regarded social values, Qur'anic education responded to families' need to see their sons and daughters gain religious knowledge that prepared them to be part of the *Ummah* (the Muslim community). Qur'anic education had, therefore, became "an instrument of socialization, both political and ideological, which was functional and effective" (Meunier 1997, 13).[41] Providing one's children with Islamic education is considered to be one of the prime religious responsibilities of parenting in Muslim communities; therefore, the sheer act of sending children to Qur'anic schooling fulfilled several objectives among which the spiritual duty of educating children in a certain way in a trusted space of socialization and learning.

Second, the actors involved in Islamic and Qur'anic teaching belonged, for the most part, to the community. There often is a deep level of connection between the student and the teacher who, in most cases, remains a constant presence in the life of his students (Kane 2016, 12–14).[42] This relationship is strong particularly at advanced levels of study where the Qur'anic teacher becomes a guiding force as much as a mentor and a parent. Because the Qur'anic teacher usually is from the students' communities, he would often share similar social values with the students' parents—making the teacher an even more trusted source of added authority unto the children's upbringing. Qur'anic teachers hold a high moral authority: in addition to teaching, they would often hold other visible positions in the community (such as leading the five collective daily prayers and giving the blessings and prayers on major occasions). When a Qur'anic teacher develops a solid reputation, it gives parents pride in knowing that their children are learning under his shadow—some teachers would, therefore, draw students from distant places. The multilayered role of the Qur'anic teacher places him as an immovable character in the social construct in these communities.

In addition to the visible and spiritual role that male Qur'anic teachers played, women Islamic teachers (or *malamas* in Hausa), in defiance to the myth of the invisible Black Muslim woman, were an indivisible presence in their communities both in public and in private spheres. While the domain of Qur'anic teaching had been predominantly male, there were some notable women teachers: one such notable example was Nana Asma'u Dan Fodio who was a royal in the Sokoto Caliphate, a scholar fluent in five languages and literate in three, and an erudite who turned her privilege into a force for

social transformation beyond the confines of her own community.[43] Nana Asma'u has been, alongside other women of the court and Qur'anic schools, a transformative social force: she has left behind an extensive library of diverse works including poems in Arabic, Fulfulde, and Hausa and has established a system of itinerant teachers known as *jaji* that would travel far and wide to provide literacy and instruction. While Nana Asma'u was certainly outlier in many respects, she stood as one of many women who have turned their communal spaces into sites of learning where women debated on social matters, learned, and cemented valuable networks. The social roles of female Qur'anic teachers would often differ from that of their male counterparts, arguably, in ways that had the potential to alter and condition (new) societal constructs. Scholars such as Steady (2006, 2007, 2011) who have theorized on women and leadership in Africa write that one of its defining characteristics is that African women with authority do not shy away from embracing the idea of motherhood and mothering (even without children of their own). Steady (2011) writes,

> Motherhood [...] did not convey the notion of servant leadership but rather an elevated and symbolic form of service through protection and collaboration, and by sustaining society in the highest possible order [...] The concept of motherhood and leadership is not limited to reproductive and nurturing roles in households, but reflects the normative values and humanistic ideologies that embrace notions of preservation of past, present, and future generations; prosperity and well-being of society as a whole and the promotion of equality, peace, and justice. It is viewed as a metaphor for humanizing the state [...] where the image of motherhood can have political resonance and be linked to leadership in a real way. (8, 22–23)

The intersection of the role of a teacher with the nurturing character of 'mothering' and motherhood in an African Muslim context makes the *malamas* an esteemed figure in the community, an embodiment of 'the one under whose feet lie paradise'.[44] Such figures can be found in contemporary times across the Sahel region, and some of these women provide highly structured learning in the confines of their homes. Ousseina Alidou (2005, 36–37) has written about a prolific Nigerien Muslim scholar and teacher, Malama A'ishatu, who had never had a child of her own yet was the mother of hundreds of pupils.[45] The preeminent role that women Islamic teachers played did not, however, overshadow the fact that few women had had the possibility to achieve advanced Islamic knowledge—owing to patriarchal conditions within most societies in the Sahel (with some exception) and the sheer weight of social responsibilities (caring for children, household responsibilities, farming for some, etc.).[46]

Third, some of the reasons that have made Qur'anic and Islamic education an embedded site of learning in communities are intangible, therefore difficult to control and encompass. In most Muslim communities, Islamic education

holds a metaphysical character. It is a space where the familiar meets the mystical in a manner that makes the student devoted to learning, and the parents supportive of that quest. There is a spiritual element to learning: most lessons with the teacher would begin and end with a *du'a* (prayer for good wishes). In much of West Africa, the *marabout* or *malam* is thought to have powers that transcend human understanding; therefore, the marabouts commend respect, and at times a sense of fear. It was not uncommon for the marabout to prescribe amulets (known as *laya* in Hausa) or medicinal potions (*rubutu* in Hausa or *hantum hari* which translates into the liquid-word in Zarma) that, if drunk after saying *bismillah* (in the name of Allah), could protect, ward off the evil eye, heal in time of sickness, and bring good luck.[47] In a literal sense, the Muslim would drink Qur'anic verses and become an embodiment of the healing that Muslims believe passages of the Holy Book bring. If the *marabout* could do good, he is also believed to be capable of sending wraths unto individuals with prayers and incantations—which some associate with remnants of animist practices that influenced how Muslim Africans practice and live their faith.[48] The performance of these sociocultural and spiritual dimensions has positioned the Qur'anic teacher as a healer, a guide, and a scholar—as Qur'anic schools were indivisible from the role of the Qur'anic teacher, they were difficult to dislocate, particularly with 'formal' policies and decrees.

Fourth, advanced Qur'anic schooling provided literacy and fluency in the Arabic language which was advantageous for a number of pedagogical, political, and socioeconomic reasons. The mastery of Arabic granted access to new knowledge written in Arabic and in other African languages with Ajami.[49] Similarly, being literate in Arabic could give voice into the world of scholarship—opening up a space to contribute to knowledge with among others the writing of poems, elegies, biographies, the keeping of family and historical records, commentaries on political affairs, legal matters, and social conditions, and *al-tib al-mahali* or the knowledge for the treatment of illness (Diallo 2012; Hassane 2008; Hunwick 1964, 2004). In addition to being the language of scholarship, Arabic was, for a long time, the prime language of communication among educated elites (Diallo 2015), for state correspondences between African rulers, and between the early European colonial administrators and African rulers in Muslim majority regions (Lefebvre 2014; Smith 1973; Mbaye 2006).[50] Some of the earliest instances of the use of Arabic for state correspondence were recorded in the eleventh century in Kanem (parts of present-day Niger, Nigeria, and Chad) (Hunwick 1964). From Agadez to Timbuktu and Katsina and beyond, the Arabic language had grown into a major medium of interstate communication, among West African societies in the Sahel region well into the eighteenth century. As an example, Al-Qalqashandi's 1915 *Subh al-A'shā*, which could be defined as an encyclopedia for diplomacy, governance, and statecraft, displays a letter that the ruler of Bornu sent the Mamlūk Sultan of Egypt in 1391 (Hunwick 1964). If the Arabic language had firmly cemented itself as the language of scholarship, the

Arabic script, in turn, became the medium through which West Africans in those societies kept records of their own history with their own voices and in their languages—some eminent examples include the Timbuktu chronicles, among which Al Sa'di's *Ta'rikh al-Sūdān* and Kati's *Ta'rikh al-Fattāsh* (Kati et al. 2011; Hunwick et al. 2008; Hunwick 2003; Walker 2006). Muslim clerics and scholars who were fluent in the Arabic language were solicited even in states that did not have majority Muslim societies—although to a lesser degree (Şaul 2006). Fluency in the Arabic language was also advantageous for commerce across the Sahara and allowed for ease of trade between Black Africans from *Bilad-as-Sudan* with Arab and Berbers merchants in the north. The Arabic language was an asset and a bridge toward potentially better socioeconomic conditions, access to coveted circles of political power, and high social status. Qur'anic schools and Islamic institutions were key to the study of the Arabic language in these contexts and would, therefore, be difficult to dislocate.

Lastly, by the nineteenth century, Islam had become a manifest presence in the geopolitical space of the West African Sahel even though some parts of the region remained faithful to traditional animist practices. The influence of major Islamic figures bolstered the resistance to the European military and political invasion but also its manifestation in the educational sphere. The *Jihād* of Shaykh ʿUthmān ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿUthmān ibn Ṣāliḥ (d. 1817), known as Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, and of Al-Ḥājj 'Umar Tall (d. 1864) have greatly contributed to cementing the place of Islam as the major religion in the region. At the turn of the twentieth century at the height of European colonial conquest, the Islamic religious ethos had become that of many communities, and with that the systematization of teachings in Qur'anic schools.

The embeddedness of Islamic and Qur'anic education within communities—as a space of spiritual cultivation, socialization, and identity formation—was one of its biggest anchors in the face of colonial invasion. As such, the defeat of the precolonial West African Sahelian states by colonial entities did not immediately translate into a fundamental transformation of communities' religious practices and beliefs, which continued to inform educational aspirations. One Hausa idiom says, "*Idan rua ya zubar, ya bar tulu, ya yi kau*" which literally translates into, "When the water is spilt, but leaves the *tulu* [a container made of clay or of calabash fruit to carry water, milk, or other liquids], then there is no harm". What this means is that as long as the fundamental vessel and ethos remain, then there is hope for remedy and reconstruction—because you can always go back to the source for more water with the unbroken *tulu*. In this instance, the colonial invasion and rule may have spilt 'waters' but the *tulu,* in most Sahelian societies, remains albeit it is undeniable that the colonial encounter with Western Europeans transformed what would become, particularly in the educational spheres—as did other major influences and interactions, whether coerced, accidental, or deliberate acts

of exchange. Ultimately, whether the figurative '*tulu*' of these communities remained unbroken, was broken and underwent reconstruction, was simply transformed, or whether some given communities remained closer to their authentic '*tulu*' goes beyond the scope of this study.

The Naissance of New Teaching Institutions: An Act of 'Good' Faith?

In the forthcoming formation and transformation of African nations, Tidjani Alou (1992) argued that, schools and educational spaces would become a site for asserting the legitimacy of the state. The colonial 'moral conquest' depended on its ability to permeate the educational sphere—even if that entailed novel collaborations (under the joint agenda of 'pacification', assimilation, and integration) with the very spaces that were deemed a barrier and a threat to the advancement of francophone education.

Beginning in 1907, the French colonial administration recognized the need to 'adapt' the educational system to local conditions.[51] However, this adapted teaching would place European episteme at the center, deliberately exclude anticolonial historical facts, and engage on a politics of moral conquest—'*conquête morale*'.[52] This moral conquest remained closely aligned with the political and economic objectives of the colonial administration even if the discourse on republican ideals were put forward to justify investment in education (Conklin 1997). From a politics of opposition to Qur'anic schools and Islamic education, the discourse in educational reform became that of collaboration. Xavier Coppolani, who had been tasked with formulating an 'Islamic Policy for West Africa', wrote in an official report, "Let us collaborate with the marabouts in the education of the Muslim youths… Let us make our collaboration serve the development of French influence, otherwise the Muslims will continue to raise their children away from us and left to themselves the Coranic schools will conserve their predominantly religious influence" (Harrison 1988, 58–59). Proposed changes in the formal educational systems were, then, the results of a triple influence: first, it was the communities' demands for a more culturally relevant education and their reticence to engage with an alienating educational experience; second, the substantial competition from Qur'anic schools; and third, the colonial administration's realization that it could use the existing social capital of Qur'anic educational spaces as an instrument of '*rapprochement*' (conciliation). The first schools that would combine Islamic education and francophone schooling (médersa) opened in Djenné in 1906, St Louis in 1908, and Timbuktu in 1910 (Brenner 2001, 41).[53] Médersa comes from the Arabic word *madrasa* which means 'a place for studying and learning'. Brenner (2001, 18) writes that, "The médersa as an innovative teaching institution is therefore both the product of changing social and political forces and a potent vector for reinforcing the epistemic shift which is taking place and contributing to the production of new forms of Muslim subjectivity".

Médersas would steadily become an important player in the provision of formal education in West African Sahel countries and would allow the entry of new actors in the political economy of formal education. In the communities, the development of médersas was significant for several reasons: first, many parents who viewed the professed secular nature of formal francophone education as problematic could now find an avenue to engage with formal education in a more intentional manner. Médersas provided parents with more choices in their children's formal educational experience. Second, Muslim parents perceive the provision of Islamic education as a duty; with the médersas system, they could achieve the double objective of providing Islamic teaching and the opportunity to learn other life skills in a formal setting. Third, the students themselves find meaning and respectability in becoming fluent in the Arabic language and in acquiring a deeper knowledge of Islamic precepts. In this context, being perceived as pious, religious, or a reservoir of Islamic knowledge (*mai ilimi* in Hausa or *beyrey koy* in Zarma), especially when literate in the Arabic language (LeBlanc 1999), could confer social recognition and even commend respect.

The history of the progression of médersas was not linear both in its pedagogical development and in its implantation. For instance, in its 1914 issue no. 11, the *Bulletin of Education of French West Africa* announced that the médersa of Djenné would be 'closed down', and that students in the Djenné médersa could transfer to Timbuktu or to the regional school in Djenné. Bouhlel Hardy (2010) points out that the dynamics around médersa would greatly evolve over the years with some variations across countries. In Mali, for instance, beginning in the early 1940s, Muslim educationalists spearheaded the naissance of a 'new' type of médersas that asserted their departure from the initial médersas, which were built by the colonial administration to "secularize" Muslim education (Harrison 1988, 64). As the actors involved in the provision of privately owned médersas evolved to include investors and educators from Arab countries, graduates from these schools would become an important link with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf just as the médersas served as an avenue to cement the presence of these countries into West Africa and to introduce orthodox Wahhabi and Salafi-inspired ideologies.[54] The new Islamic médersas would, therefore, become a source of contention and would experience various oppositions: first, from the colonial administration that viewed the new médersas as potential sites of politicization, of breeding nationalist ideals, and of rapprochement to Maghreb and Middle Eastern Arab countries; second, from 'conservative' Muslims who viewed the strict departure from traditional Islamic studies as a heresy; and lastly, from national administrations that feared the potential political power of an entity they had little control over (Bouhlel Hardy 2010; Brenner 2001, 5, 39–83). In Niger, the government created the first médersa in the city of Say in 1957 to encourage schooling for families reticent to francophone schools but also to indirectly control the discourse on Islam (Triaud 1981, 1982; Zakari 2009).[55]

It was, therefore, no accident that in Niger formal Islamic educational institutions were initially placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior rather than the Ministry of Education. In the 1990s, médersa schools experienced a boom in part with the support from private investments such as the *Izala* movement and from international financial institutions: with the democratization process in the early 1990s, West African states opened up spaces for the participation of more actors including Islamic associations in the geopolitical and social landscape (Idrissa 2015; Malam Sani 2017; Masquelier 1999; Villalón et al. 2012). Additionally, families began to appreciate the opportunities that could come with médersa education in the form of scholarships in Arab countries. The presence of médersas also opened up possibilities for schooling a greater proportion of girls as parents valued the emphasis on Islamic teaching (Villalón and Tidjani Alou 2012). If private investments soared during the same period, the médersa school system had benefited from low investments from government compared to francophone schools: state-owned médersas have become "*le parent pauvre de l'éducation nationale*"—the neglected and poor parent of national education (Villalón et al. 2012).

The structure, pedagogy, and content of the teaching in médersa vary depending on the location and the school's underlying *ṭarīqah* (spiritual order), doctrine, or ideology. However, there is some uniformity across most médersas. They use both French and Arabic as the prime languages of instruction, and increasingly some also teach English as a major subject. Some of the main components of the teaching are: memorization and learning of the Qur'an's literal words in Arabic (*hizb*); history of Islam (*al ṭarīqah al islam*); stories from the life of Prophet (*sira*) including words from the Prophet known as *hadiths*; recitation and other subjects found in conventional francophone schools (Bouhlel Hardy 2010; Meunier 1997, 240). Unlike Qur'anic schools where the instructors are primarily Qur'anic teachers, médersas could bring in teachers that were not necessarily Islamic scholars for 'secular' subjects. Médersas also adopt a style of teaching that is closer to that found in formal francophone schools while most Qur'anic schools have remained faithful to the traditional ways of learning—seating on mats with repetition until memorization as a key component of the pedagogy, especially in the early years. It is worth noting, however, as Sounaye (2016) and Alidou (2005) point out that the notion of traditional Qur'anic school has experienced major changes, especially in urban spaces, with the crafting of and visibility of novel Qur'anic schools (*makarantu Islamiyah* in Hausa), mostly driven by women and the youth. These 'new' *makarantu* are neither *médersa*, as we know them, nor traditional Qur'anic schools.

This section has given but an overview of the major transformations that led to the formation of the médersas system and of the possibilities that médersas created for many in the context of Muslim majority societies where people remain attached to sound Islamic education as essential. The hybridity of the médersas and its potential for transformability have made this schooling

system an integral part of the educational landscape in Sahel countries. Somewhere between its character as a state-regulated faith-based institution, both public and private médersas continue to draw a large number of students and have experienced a sharp increase in enrollment in the countries in this study.[56] According to the Ministry of Education in Mali, the annual growth rate of médersas oscillates between 13 and 15% in recent years while that of francophone public schools has grown by only between 4 and 6% (Bell 2015) and, by 2006, over a third of children enrolled in primary school go to médersas (Bouwman 2006). In Niger, the number of students in médersas has more than doubled within five years between 2000 and 2005 (Villalón et al. 2012): some of the latest data from the national institute of statistics show a steady increase in médersas enrollment till date, and to a faster degree compared to francophone public schools (INS 2010; INS-Niger 2019). In Senegal, it was in 2002 that the Ministry of Education approved the creation of public Franco-Arab médersas as means to improve access to schooling but also to bring some of the students from the existing Qur'anic schools (*daaras*) into the formal sector—while médersas occupy a relatively small proportion of the demand for formal schooling, they remain a central part of the 2012–2025 national education plan (D'Aoust 2013; Chehami 2016).[57] Médersas would not replace the space that traditional Qur'anic schools occupied in the communities; they, however, provided a new avenue for the joint pursuit of Islamic teaching and 'secular' education.

The Long History of Keeping Girls at the Periphery of Learning in Formal Education

Schooling for girls was subject to a number of contradictory dynamics. The colonial administrators acknowledged that schooling girls would be essential in the 'moral conquest' because women would exercise great social influence as mothers: "when we bring a boy in French school, you gain a unit; when we bring a girl, we gain a unit multiplied by the number of children that she would have" (Georges Hardy, cited in Barthélémy 2010).[58] Access to education for both boys and girls was, therefore, a means to further the colonial project. Although the intent of francophone schooling has evolved since the early days of colonization, it did so in ways that maintained girls at the margin in the new order and created a hierarchical divide along gendered lines: this further deepened certain cultural practices and beliefs.

When the first schools were set up in the early 1900s, the idea was to prepare girls for their future role as model wives for the local 'educated' male elites and to provide the young women with just enough instruction to raise the next generation (Barthélémy 2010, 33–40). The colonial school for girls, therefore, attempted to strike the difficult balance of acculturation, instruction, and 'partial' de-personification: efforts were made toward turning African girls in francophone schools into perfect 'French subjects' as the prime

ambassadors of the 'moral conquest'. These young women were explicitly encouraged, in some instances, to combine their African identity with Western values (Barthélémy 2003). Most of the African women educated in the French system from 1918 until independence in 1960 trained to become teachers, midwives, and nurses (see Table 23.3).

The number of girls in francophone education was extremely low and consistently lagged behind that of boys. By 1921, there were only ten public primary schools in the entire AOF, and mixed schools had few girls, if any. Two out of 1000 girls of schooling age were in (francophone) schools (Barthélémy 2010, 33–35). Of the 2477 girls in primary schools in the eight AOF 'territories', more than half were in two 'territories', Dahomey (Benin) and Senegal; the other six 'territories' had a handful of students; Mauritania had none (see Tables 23.4 and 23.5). The context and, to a major extent, the intent and content of francophone schooling have since changed. However, the disparities in access on the basis of geography, gender, and sociocultural class that emerged at that time continue to define the educational landscape in the Sahel—as evidenced by the continued marginalization of girls in the formal education system as well as the urban-rural and poor-privileged divides.

The slow uptake on girls' schooling was the result of several influences: first, the weight of patriarchal attitudes toward women's place (as primarily restricted to the private domain of the household) among the colonial administration and, with that, the prioritization of schooling for boys; second, African parents who witnessed the enculturation that happened with young women that went to francophone schools; third, because girls constituted a major source of labor in the household and early would begin to contribute to domestic chores; and fourth, the girls themselves who witnessed how 'educated' young women struggled to fit and to find suitable partners (husbands)—these young women were unavailable to the unschooled men, and deemed too "cold" or "superior" by schooled men. Lastly, the fact that classrooms were mixed in most schools discouraged parents because in the conception of traditional education, in most communities, girls and boys would receive instruction in separate avenues after a certain age. Sidibe (1995) writes that the recruitment process for colonial school was a nightmare for villagers because they viewed French schools as a constraint, a threat that would have the same effects as forced labor, vaccinations, or taxes.

The physical location, ideology, and epistemological disconnection rendered schools even less accessible to girls from Muslim families, particularly in the non-coastal West African countries. The early francophone schools for girls were mostly on the coast and were, until 1905, exclusively run by Christian missionaries; therefore, most Muslim parents were wary about sending their daughters for fear that they would be converted. Even when francophone schooled were set up in much of the AOF, one fundamental question many Muslim families faced was articulated in a report on colonial education in Niger, "Why, in effect, entrust the education of their children to 'infidels'

Table 23.3 Young women in 'Ecole Normale' School Medicine, 1918–1957

	1918–1937			*1938–1957*			*Total*		
	Admitted	*Graduated*	***G/A****	*Admitted*	*Graduated*	***G/A***	*Admitted*	*Graduated*	***G/A***
School of medicine—midwifery	388	273	**70%**	482	360	**75%**	870	633	**72%**
School of medicine—visiting nurses	28	63	–	–	–	–	28	63	–
Teaching school	–	–	–	388	294	**76%**	388	294	**76%**
Total	416	336		870	654	**75%**	1286	990	**77%**

Source Cited in Annex V, page 291 (Barthélémy 2010)
*G/A measures the proportion of students who graduated out of all admitted, and the sign (-) indicates missing data

Table 23.4 State of girls in primary schools in 'French West Africa', 1922

	Côte d'Ivoire	*Dahomey (Benin)*	*Guinea*	*Haute-Volta (Burkina Faso)*	*Mauritania*	*Niger*	*Senegal*	*French Sudan (Mali)*	*Total*
Number of girls	172	1158	123	93	0	53	797	81	2477
Proportion (girl/boy) in schools	1/22	1/2	–	1/30	–	1/11	1/6	1/50	1/45

Source Report entitled «L'enseigne ent des filles, l'enseigne ent professionnel» 1922, cited in (Barthélémy 2010), "Africaines et diplômées à l'époque coloniale (1918–1957)"

Table 23.5 Number of students in primary schools, 'French West Africa', 1910, 1922, 1933, 1935

	Girls			*Boys*			*(G+B) Total*	*Percentage of girls (%)*
	Public	*Private*	*Total*	*Public*	*Private*	*Total*		
1910	1000	638	**1638**	10,484	2324	**12,808**	14,446	11%
1922	1003	1179	**2477***				–	–
1933	4928	2916	**7844**	41,633	5145	**46,778**	54,622	14%
1935	5390	3405	**8795**	47,216	6053	**53,269**	62,064	14%
1939	–			–			108,000	–
1947	–			–			150,000	–

*Including 295 girls for whom it was not clear whether they attended public or private school (Barthélémy 2010, 40)

Source «Annuaire Statistique de l'AOF» cited in (Barthélémy 2010), "*Africaines et diplômées à l'époque coloniale (1918–1957)*" and (Momar Diop 1997), "*Enseignement de la jeune fille indigène en AOF,1903–1958*"

when, until then, the marabouts had the task of educating children in the way of the Qur'an?" (Sidibe 1995, 156).[59] The crafting of colonial francophone education policies did not involve communities as the educational agenda was a full component of the colonial project, and by extension, an instrument of control, pacification, and conquest. That families had no voice in the running of an institution, which was otherwise crucial to identity and value formation, further alienated them.

The aftermath of World War I marked an important departure in the educational policies in 'French West Africa' including vis-à-vis girls' schooling.[60] In the inaugural Bulletin of Education of French West Africa in January 1913, George Hardy, inspector of education in the AOF, recognized the difficulty of the task ahead and further emphasized the need to adapt the educational programs to local contexts and conditions, "We are developing little by little an indigenous pedagogy, very different from the other [in the Metropole], and no one of you would dare to maintain that we see clearly, not only the means, but also the purpose of our teaching".[61] In the subsequent bulletins of education, which give an insight into the direction of the educational policies, the necessity to school more girls became a pressing demand. It was not until 1938, however, that *l'École normale de Rufisque*, the teaching-training school for women would be created—thirty-five years after the founding of *l'École normale William Ponty* which trained men (Barthélémy 2003; Momar Diop 1997).

In her book entitled, "*Africaines et diplômées à l'époque coloniale (1918-1957)*", Pascale Barthélémy traces the trajectory of the young women who attended the two "*grandes écoles de filles*", namely *l'École normale de Rufisque* which trained teachers and *l'École de médecine de Dakar* which trained midwives. These young women navigated between several worlds in their communities, in their schools which was a proxy for the presence of the colonial administration, and in their families. Once they leave their boarding

schools in Dakar, these women would be sent to all parts of the AOF or to their countries and went back changed to communities that, for the most part, remained patriarchal in construct. In *Une Si Longue Lettre*, Mariama Bâ (1980) who was herself a student at *l'École normale de Rufisque* highlights how some of these women resisted their condition in ways that transformed social relations in their communities and that induced changes in gender norms in their relationships with their families, particularly their spouses. These women 'who wore pants' were as much a subject of envy as they were demeaned: they achieved a degree of financial autonomy that few women enjoyed in the new political economic order that emerged in the early postcolonial era.

The advent of francophone education in the early 1900s has induced major social transformations and radically changed the educational sphere. Understanding that history matters in deconstructing how various educational spaces interact and intersect in complementary or sometimes contradictory ways in the lives of people and communities. In the context of Muslim majority countries in the West African Sahel, which have had a long history of Islamic influence and scholarship, the transformations in education happened in ways that challenged novel forms of schooling; that legitimized what may be categorized as informal spaces of identity formation; and that changed the political economy of knowledge production in the region.

Major Trends in the Contemporary Educational Landscape: Increased Access, Low Outcomes

This section looks into some of the features that characterize the current educational landscape in West Africa Sahel countries and focuses on two strands that help understand how the interactions between various educational spaces occur. After briefly outlining how there has been a convergence in access to formal education, the analysis demonstrates why and how the divergence in access to *quality* education could generate social costs in gendered ways. In a context with long-standing alternative educational spaces, the perception that formal schooling may be 'useless' or incompatible with local realities could further disengagement from communities, particularly when it comes to schooling for girls. While the analysis here considers the often-cited sociocultural conditions that render girls' education challenging in these contexts, it furthers the discourse and argues that, after years of engagement, families have understood the value of formal schooling. However, when schooling consistently delivers suboptimal learning in a manner that accentuates existing inequalities, the value of schooling comes into question on the basis of a rational analysis for families and, sometimes, the girls themselves. The second part of the analysis in this section assesses how the re-emergence of Afro-Islamic sites of learning among 'educated' young adults in part links with the desire for quality and a more meaningful educational experience. In both cases, this

section highlights the significance that communities and individuals place on learning as one of the key drivers of their (dis)engagement with educational spaces.

The current educational landscape in West Africa Sahel countries, at the elementary level, is comprised of primarily four broad categories of schools: Qur'anic schools which, for the most part, remain outside of government control, hence in the non-formal sector; *médersas* (private or public) which are regulated by a government ministry and may benefit from state funding; francophone formal education which could be private or public and constitutes the main form of education funded by states and partners; and the existence of socially institutionalized informal spaces where esoteric or specific value systems get transmitted.[62] There are some ramifications to all of these types of schooling; for instance, francophone formal education could be bilingual or monolingual and would sometimes cater specifically to children with disability; Qur'anic schools could be modern or traditional; médersas may or may not offer diploma recognized by the government and could be bilingual Franco-Arab or Arabo-Islamic. As several studies and reports show, there are also variations between the countries in the Sahel (Compaoré and Kabré; Lozneanu and Humeau 2014; Brenner 2010; Charlier, 2002; Meunier 1997; Moussa and Benett 2007). However, some similarities remain across the various schooling systems (see Table 23.6 for an overview).

Convergence in Access with Unequal Learning Outcomes and Possibilities for Learning

During the colonial era, countries at the peripheries of the AOF's headquarters benefited from little investment in education. In 1945, schooling rates diverged greatly: from 0.8% in Niger to 4% in Senegal, which was the federation's capital (Autra 1956). In the case of Niger, the early attempts to set up French schools during the colonial conquest were unsuccessful and short-lived: Dosso (1889), Doulsou (1898), Sorbon Hausa (1900), and Niamey (1902) (Chekaraou and Goza 2015). In Doulsou, the school was set up on an island—the location of the school as an island on an island revealed the difficult implantation of the "new" school. Families were coerced to give their sons to the school, and once they did, deserting from the school without the knowledge of the administration was unlikely since it was on an island. The school that was established in Filingué in 1903 would be the first to survive longer than the previous ones. In 1936, there were 22 rural schools in Niger, four regional schools (including one for girls), and one upper primary school and a total of 1803 students among which 95 girls—this was markedly lower than in other West African countries (Sidibe 1995). Countries at the periphery experienced a compounded marginalization in access to francophone education: one from the relatively lower investment (both human and financial resources) on the part of the colonial administration; second,

Table 23.6 Broad categories of school systems—Muslim majority West African countries

	Religion-based schooling system		*Combined religious and secular*			*Secular*	*Traditional*
Main categories	*Traditional Islamic schools*	*New Islamic schools*	*Médersas (Franco-Arab)*	*Médersas (Arabo-Islamic)*	*Francophone catholic Schools*	*Francophone formal education*	*Socially-institutionalized informal spaces*
Schooling types	Qur'anic schools Qur'anic memorization centers (*Maglises*)	Modernized Qur'anic Schools Reformed Qur'anic Schools	Formal and combines Islamic education with government schools' curriculum	Formal and may include state official curriculum although emphasis is on Islamic education	Formal and mostly focuses on state official curriculum with optional religious education	Bilingual schools Schools for special needs 'Regular' schools (mixed or single sex, public or private)	Within families, communities
Teaching focus	Qur'an recitation, memorization, and advanced Islamic studies (at later stages)	Qur'an recitation, memorization, advanced Islamic studies, and other subjects found in state approved 'secular' curriculum. Reformed Qur'anic schools sometimes include occupational training	Government 'secular' curriculum with Islamic teaching (history, law, hadiths, etc.)	Islamic teaching and other subjects (history, mathematics, etc.) with the optic of preparing pupils for advanced Islamic studies at university level	Government curriculum with optional religious education—most catholic schools in West Africa in Muslim majority countries have adapted to context	'Secular' curriculum with subjects such as history, mathematics, geography, etc.	Continuous instruction—through storytelling, performance, role modelling, etc.
Language of instruction	Arabic, local languages	Arabic, local languages, French	Arabic and French (officially) and in practice with local languages	Mostly Arabic with the use of local languages and French	French mostly	French mostly	Varies—depending on the context, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, etc.

(continued)

Table 23.6 (continued)

	Religion-based schooling system		*Combined religious and secular*			*Secular*	*Traditional*
Main categories	*Traditional Islamic schools*	*New Islamic schools*	*Médersas (Franco-Arab)*	*Médersas (Arabo-Islamic)*	*Francophone catholic Schools*	*Francophone formal education*	*Socially-institutionalized informal spaces*
Assessment	Regular assessment on individual progress	Cohort with regular assessment on individual progress	End of term, examinations	End of term, examinations	End of term, examinations	End of term, examinations	Lifelong
Periodicity	Full time or part-time: Individual progress—may include some group teaching—"each learner progresses in his/her studies at his/her own rate, depending on his/her achievements and on the amount of time that he/she can devote to the studies"	Full time or part-time: Individual progress—may include some group teaching	Full time (with designated vacation time): Group teaching—cohort progression. Primary to high school usually lasts 13 years	Full time (with designated vacation time): Group teaching—cohort progression. Primary to high school usually lasts 13 years	Full time (with designated vacation time): Group teaching—cohort progression. Primary to high school usually lasts 13 years	Full time (with designated vacation time): Group teaching—cohort progression. Primary to high school usually lasts 13 years	Continuous

Source Table adapted by Halimatou Hima. *Data source* Moussa and Benett (2007)

the early divergences meant communities had few examples they could relate to and may therefore exert even greater resistance to schooling; and third, because fewer people from those countries were trained, there were fewer available local teachers. This had consequences on access, particularly for girls: social expectations and legitimate fears about unwanted pregnancies made it much more difficult for parents to allow their daughters to go to the regional school or to Dakar for further studies (Barthélémy 2010).

Since Dosso's and Doulsou's attempts, the number of schools as well as enrollment rates has multiplied in Niger as in other Sahel West African countries (see Table 23.7). However, the early disparities continued to define the trends in educational access in these countries until the late 1990s. The Jomtien conference's global commitment to provide education to all by 2015 would induce national policies that changed the trajectory for most countries—leading to a certain convergence in terms of access, even if retention rates remain low in places such as Niger and Mali, particularly after primary school (World Conference on Education for All 1990).

Despite increased access to the classroom, particularly at the primary school level, many children are struggling to learn. The poor quality of education manifests itself in several ways, but its most basic expressions are the inability to read, write, and count. An increasing number of children do not acquire basic functional literacy even as they sit in the classroom for several years (PASEC 2015a). The PASEC study (2015) conducted in ten African countries has found that in Niger, 92% of sixth-grade students cannot read at grade level; in Senegal, nearly 40% of students are concerned.[63] Empirical data from doctoral fieldwork research that I conducted in Maradi and Niamey between 2016 and 2018 show similar results.[64] When disaggregated for gender, socioeconomic class, and school type, results show an even more alarming picture that conveys the systematic disenfranchising of students from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, both in rural and urban areas. It was common to find children in the sixth grade who could not read at all or write their names, particularly in public schools.

Table 23.7 Gross intake ratio to grade 1 of primary education (%), 1979–2017

	Mali		*Mauritania*		*Niger*		*Senegal*	
	Female	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*
1979	19.22	31.18	24.39	39.88	15.90	24.68	33.68	47.45
1989	18.25[a]	29.69[a]	39.90	53.65	20.81	34.53	41.82	52.52
1999	47.67	62.51	90.34	91.26	34.08	48.82	67.36[b]	73.56[b]
2009	74.36	85.02	105.45	102.35	76.26	90.00	99.78	93.82
2017	76.04	83.86	104.45	102.47	82.44	93.48	102.18	92.23

[a]Statistics from the year 1988; [b]Statistics from the year 1998
Source data Country education statistics (UNESCO 2019)

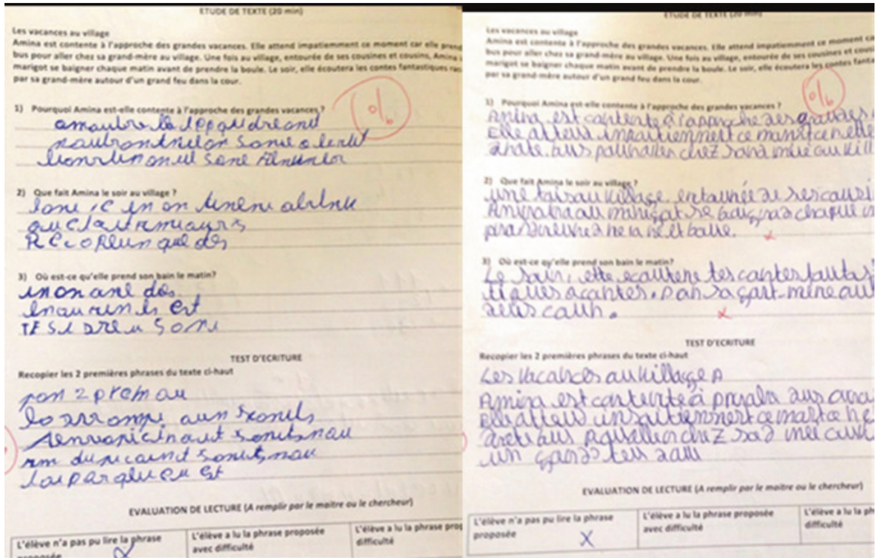


Fig. 23.2 Two students' writing and reading comprehension segment (*Source* Halimatou Hima)

These two comprehension segments (Fig. 23.2) show the unintelligible writing of two sixth-grade students. While these are among some of the most extreme cases, they are not unusual (Hima, dissertation data).[65]

These students who face difficulties often become silent spectators in the classroom: most of them would have faced a barrier with learning from the onset, owing to the language of instruction. Many children struggle to overcome the initial disruption that comes with learning in a foreign language (in this case, French). When the primary tool of instruction becomes a barrier to learning (and sometimes teaching alike), students silently attend a scripted performance they cannot understand. In many African countries, the early years of formal schooling mark a sharp disruption from the initial sites of learning, the home. Children go into a school that many perceive as foreign to learn new concepts in a foreign language (in this case, French), and go home to speak in Hausa, Fulfulde, Wolof, Zarma, or other languages. The low adult literacy rates in most Sahel countries mean that there is often a rupture between what students learn in school and their ability to cement this learning in their own homes and communities (see Table 23.8). Studies conducted in rural areas in Burkina Faso and Mali have found that the use of French as the main language of instruction often isolates schools from the rest of the community (Trudell 2011; Kone 2010). Trudell (2011) equates the language of instruction to a gate: a gateway for children from privileged socioeconomic background (and likely to speak French) and a gatekeeper for the majority

Table 23.8 Literacy rates by country (% of people ages 15 and above)[a]

	Mali		*Mauritania*		*Niger*		*Senegal*	
	2003	*2015*	*2000*	*2007*	*2001*	*2012*	*2002*	*2017*
Female	15.9	22.2	43.4	35.4	9.4	22.6	29.2	39.8
Male	32.7	45.1	59.5	57.4	19.6	39.1	51.0	64.8
Total	24	33.1	51.2	45.5	14.4	30.5	39.3	51.9

[a]The table shows different years for the countries: it captures the most recent available data for literacy rates and the available data for the early 2000s in order to highlight progression
Source data World Bank Country Statistics (World Bank Data 2019)

who only hear French in the classroom. The dynamics around the language of instruction is changing as an increasing number of young adults have become literate in French including in rural areas, albeit not fast enough. Engaging with the long-debated issue of the language of instruction in schools validates fundamental questions where culture, identity, and quality education intersect (Brock-Utne and Skattum 2009).

Table 23.8 above shows different years for the countries: it captures the most recent available data for literacy rates and the available data for the early 2000s in order to highlight progression. In functioning educational systems, learning gradually replaces the initial disruption that comes with schooling in a foreign or new language. Scholars across disciplines have echoed early works by Fafunwa and Moumouni (1968, 1969) on language and education in Africa and have stressed that improvement in educational quality could not be divorced from the issue of language of instruction (Dembélé and Oviawe 2007; Tikly 2016; Trudell 2009; Alidou 2009). In an extensive study covering several West African countries, Alidou (2003) underscores the systematic exclusion experienced by many students from poor families, "Owing to a lack proficiency in French, they are silenced and spend most of their time listening to the teacher and the very few students who can speak French". While the question of the language of instruction is but one of many challenges facing educational systems, it constitutes the first instrumental barrier or gateway to students' ability to learn—in the early years.[66] When such basic elements as being able to read and write are missing, especially after years of schooling, parents especially from poor socioeconomic backgrounds begin to question the value of formal schooling, and often in ways that are gendered, as the next section shows.

The Social Costs of Inequality in Access to Quality Education

Failing to provide quality education, particularly in a place where schooling had started from a place of contestation, could have several consequences. This section focuses on the social costs of unequal access to quality education and how these costs manifest in communities and families in Muslim majority countries. The analysis takes a gendered approach and looks into why girls

tend to be the first to leave or to be removed from schools when formal education is perceived as (or is, in effect) dysfunctional. It matters to specify that these communities are in a Muslim majority context: the crises in learning in formal education in the Sahel countries of West Africa unfold against the backdrop of societies that have had a long-standing history of alternative educational spaces, which influence how communities respond to schooling.

Poor quality of formal education could have severe effects on access and retention for girls in schools. There is so much at stake when a girl 'fails' that some communities may not want to take a chance or a risk on her—especially if the chances of success in formal education remain uncertain.[67] So much about the societies' ability to maintain their ethos, produce, and reproduce social behaviors depends on the social standing of the girl. Mernissi (1987, 101, 123) has written extensively about the particular experiences of girls in Morocco; the analysis with respect to the social expectations on girls applies to most ethno-cultural and linguistic groups in the Sahel. In the traditional construction of gender roles, which continues to inform social relations in some communities, girls are expected to marry young and, in doing so, honor their family and subsequently raise children of their own soon after. The 'traditional' social expectations that rest on the shoulders of girls would have made their engagement with formal education challenging and a less optimal choice: in the eyes of most communities, a secular schooling system that would not provide 'home training' nor religious education would not have stood as the prime site for learning and for identity formation.[68] This is what made the development of hybrid systems such as médersas schools significant; Villalón and Tidjani Alou (2012) highlight that, "the emphasis on religion has proven particularly attractive to parents of girls. In many hybrid schools, girls outnumber boys, sometimes significantly". When schooling does not seem to further the definition of what being a successful young woman means (which is a shifting construct) nor provide basic learning, then the engagement with formal schooling seems less attractive. This makes the investment on learning in schooling (and not schooling alone) so much more important: when learning does not occur consistently, then it confirms preconceived ideas about schools and further legitimizes the choice of (limited) engagement with formal education.

Formal schooling therefore competes with some entrenched social, cultural, and sometimes religious considerations. In Hausa and Fulani cultures, for instance, girls are expected to marry by 'adulthood' since, traditionally, the notion of an unmarried adult woman is one which does not exist (Smith 1981). Formal schooling in a way clashes with the need to conform to expectations to marry young and/or enact culturally defined functions of belonging and self-presentation. When girls stay in school into their teenage years, they simultaneously lengthen their passage on the bridge of ambiguity—the period between childhood and adulthood—where they no longer belong to the circle of children nor to that of married women. Countries in the West African

Sahel have among some of the highest rates of child marriage in the world: in Niger, three in four girls are married before they are eighteen of age, and in Mali, a little over half of the girls are married by age eighteen (UNICEF 2018). As much as child marriage is often driven by families, many girls see marriage as an escape from a position loaded with social ambiguity: marrying young allows them to integrate the coveted circle of 'married women' and to earn what confers societal respect and authorization for more meaningful participation in greater community discourse. Many girls that I interviewed in rural areas spoke about the value of being celebrated, even if temporarily, but also the value of owning their own house, kitchen utensils, and bedroom—and also because that is what is expected of them and their peers, agemates. Some girls, however, are deconstructing the paradigm in a way that legitimizes that period of ambiguity, and in the process, are redefining collective discourse on access to education, social expectations, and their roles in their societies. As more and more girls access formal education and as socioeconomic realities change, social expectations too are changing.

The road to systemic engagement with formal education, particularly for girls in some Muslim majority communities in the Sahel, has been a long one. The dominant global discourse in the 1980s and 1990s was that communities with low rates of access to formal education needed sensitization programs in order to curb resistance to schooling. The discourse on gender and education consistently has shifted in communities as much as within the global development and research community. There has been on the part of the global education research and development community efforts to align programs with national and local contexts and the everyday lives of people within the communities (Unterhalter and North 2011; Subrahmanian 2003, 2005; Mlama et al. 2005). It is an approach that Fennell and Arnot (2008) point to as essential to redefine a new way of engagement in tune with "existing community pathways of knowledge dissemination". There has been, as a result of combined efforts, some remarkable progress in access and retention for both boys and girls, and with that a change in attitude toward schooling. Where schools do exist and operate, the demonstrated ability to provide learning remains paramount to guarantee continued engagement from communities. It is worth noting that parts of the Sahel region have become the hotbed of major security challenges that render the provision of formal education extremely difficult (OCHA 2018; UN 2018; GPE 2019). Such challenges could combine with some communities' deficit of trust in the ability of educational system and jeopardize years of efforts.

When consistently formal education fails to achieve its most elementary promise to provide basic literacy and numeracy, then not attending school becomes less costly while the cost of going to school increases in relative terms. Failure rates are extremely high, particularly among poor families, and learning outcomes remain low (UNESCO 2017; PASEC 2015b). Access to formal education does not necessarily guarantee learning, particularly for the

poorest nor does a good education guarantee access to a job in the future. Formal schooling could, in essence, become a potential site of capability deprivation in ways that discourage engagement (Unterhalter 2003). Therefore, while going to school could, by serendipity, provide an avenue for better socioeconomic conditions, the time lag is long, and it is uncertain. A mother in Talladjé, a neighborhood of Niamey, explained why, despite her belief in formal education as a potential ladder for socioeconomic mobility, she had come to perceive formal schooling as a double loss:

> They take our girls for seven years or more and then they come back to us too grown. She went to school. She does not write. She did not learn housework. She does not know anything about our cultures. She may never seat in an office. School is a double loss.

By questioning whether schooling is worth it since her thirteen-year-old daughter cannot write her name after seven years in school, this mother is asking fundamental questions about equity in learning and the sociocultural and economic relevance of formal education. The continued engagement with formal education is a complex arena where cultural values intersect with socioeconomic realities and religious considerations to influence perceptions and choice—in a way that is very much rationale within context. Much of the conventional analysis on educational access and quality does not capture the opportunity cost of the time of the student as an individual but also in relations to other social actors responsible for her time, upbringing, and education (Moore 2006). Formal schooling system would occupy children for the better part of the day—away from other socially valued communal and familial occupations that they could perform, even at a young age. Regarding the religious factors, a recent PEW research report has shown that while differences in access to formal education vary on the basis of religious affiliation in many African countries, religion itself is less a predictor of educational attainment than economic well-being and the educational infrastructure and historical divergences around access to formal education (Pew Research Center 2016; McClendon et al. 2018).

With the convergence in access to formal education, increasingly one of the defining factors in shaping desirability for schools, particularly among families with low socioeconomic status, is the possibility of learning while schooling.[69] There are, of course, important dimensions such as poverty and entrenched gender norms that continue to influence the demand for formal education; however, ending the conversation there may equate to saying that the poor does not have agency. When faced with inadequate access to quality education with seemingly limited added benefits, some communities may demonstrate less interest or altogether withdraw from formal educational systems and invest in alternative learning spaces which may not be recognized as valid in conventional epistemic systems—yet provide socially valued benefits.

In a Space Where Failure Doesn't Exist and Where Learning Comes with 'Divine' Benefits

The dialectic of competition that characterized the relationship between formal and Qur'anic education in the colonial and early postcolonial era has changed. Both educational spaces have come to occupy a given role in Muslim majority communities, Qur'anic education for the religious training it provides and formal schooling for how it could equip to capitalize on 'worldly' gains (Malam Sani 2017). If the educational spaces are more complementary than in competition (in most cases), the dynamics and shifts in one system affect the other even if in perception and desirability. Some of the benefits associated with schooling may not necessarily be tangible and measurable but the perception that learning does occur matters. One important factor in the pursuit of knowledge in Qur'anic schools is the absence of the concept of failure and the value placed on the process of learning as much as learning itself: in contrast to the narratives and fear of failure that characterize the quest for knowledge in formal education, particularly among poorer families, the notion of failure in the quest for (Islamic) knowledge does not exist. Failure does not come with giving up nor with missing lessons. There is no notion of a limiting temporality or spatiality: searching for knowledge and learning is intended to be a perpetual quest and a lifelong obligation.[70] In the construction of Islamic pedagogy, reciting the letter *alif* alone or even struggling to recite could increase one's 'divine rewards'—*lada* (Hausa), *sufurey* (Zarma), or *baraji* (Bambara)—in immeasurable ways. Bell's (2015) analysis points to the necessity to incorporate such principles in understanding how Muslim communities weigh the value of education. It is, in part, the unconstrained possibility for learning and growth (and the adaptive nature of its pedagogy) that has made Qur'anic schooling a constant in the sociocultural construct in Muslim majority African societies.

Yet, despite their ubiquitous presence and the fact that Qur'anic schools are among the oldest systems of schooling in the region, little data exist on the number of traditional Qur'anic schools and of students who attend these schools (d'Aiglepierre and Bauer 2016, 2018).[71] The lack of data stems from several factors: first, the historical conditions under which other competing educational systems emerged; second, the fact that Qur'anic schools are embedded within communities and do not necessarily require an official authorization to exist; third, in the global education research discourse, Qur'anic schools have been framed as informal, thereby usually excluded from 'official' education statistics (although that is changing in some countries); and lastly, there has been limited demand from heads of Qur'anic schools for their 'entry' into a government-regulated formal sector in part for fear of the intervention of states, which are for the most part legally secular.[72] On this latter point, Newman (2016) writes that, in the case of Senegal, there has been a heterogeneous response to the government's proposed reforms on Qur'anic

schools for reasons ranging from access to information, the diverse ideological stances of Qur'anic teachers, as well as the socioeconomic conditions of the families.

The majority of Muslim children in the Sahel West Africa region go through some sort of Qur'anic schooling. From an early age, children would learn to recite the *surahs* (Qur'anic chapters) that are necessary to perform the second pillar of Islam, the five mandatory daily *Salah/Salat* or prayers.[73] Children (as young as three years old) would go to their neighborhood's Qur'anic school, which could be a space by the corner of a mosque, any open public space, or inside a house with a compound. If traditionally, children are expected to walk to Qur'anic schools to learn (and by doing so to signify respect for the teacher), increasingly, in middle-class families in urban centers, it is the *malam* that goes toward the students and would teach them in their own homes. Children would seat on mats (*tabarma* in Hausa or *tangara* in Zarma) which is symbolic of the state of mind of humility required to learn; they would hold their *aloh* (wooden tablets) or notebooks and repeat specific *ayats* or verses of the Qur'an with the intent to mark those words unto their memories. Girls and boys would usually learn in the same spaces until they reach their teenage years when teaching would become segregated. If Qur'anic schools are a constant in the learning journey of most Muslim children in the Sahel, parents and elder siblings are often a child's first Qur'anic teachers in the home. Some children remain exclusively in Qur'anic schools while others simultaneously attend francophone formal and Qur'anic schools.[74]

In some families, sons would be untrusted to reputable *malams* or *shaykhs* (teachers) and become itinerant learners. The name of these itinerant students varies depending on the ethnic group and context: *almajirai* (in Hausa, plural of *almajiri*), *almudos* (in Fulfulde), *talibés* (in Wolof), or *talibizey* (in Zarma). This traditional form of Qur'anic education system (*almajiranci*) has developed primarily in the West Africa region: in its cotemporary form, the phenomenon of *almajiranci* or *talibes* mostly concerns poor families in rural areas who send off their boys or young men (Hoechner 2011, 2014). However, the socioeconomic makeup of the *almajirai* may vary in some cases: some wealthy merchants' families from Maradi, for instance, view *almajiranci* as a necessary step in the formation and upbringing of their sons—so that they could learn humility and patience (*hakuri* in Hausa), endurance and resilience (*karfin hali* in Hausa), and also understand the importance and ephemerality of worldly possessions. While *almajiranci* was once highly respected for providing young men with an advanced degree of Islamic knowledge and a solid training ground for character development, this practice is today subject to harsh criticisms. Scholars, child rights groups, and even governments have written about the, at times, exploitative nature of the system (Awofeso, Ritchie, and Degeling 2003). Some *malams* are accused of abusing their power, using the children for begging on the streets, and exposing them to various forms of mental and physical abuses (Zakir et al. 2014; Magashi 2015; Isiaka 2015;

Zoumanigui 2016; UCW 2007; Aluaigba 2009). In most major urban cities, the identity of the beggar has become the visible manifestation of *almajiranci* and defines societal perceptions about the learner (*tālib*). It is a system of education which, in its most traditional form, seats at the intersection of epistemic marginalization, long-standing societal preferences, and the realities of unequal access to quality formal education.

There is an emerging literature that deconstructs the contemporary narratives around this classical Qur'anic education system. In an extensive study covering parts of northern Nigeria, Hoechner (2018) looks at how the *almajirai* "actively construct the social worlds around them" and navigate daily between being on a quest for knowledge and social exclusion. This exclusion also occurs on an epistemic level: often, the parents and families who send their boys to traditional Qur'anic schools are depicted as destitute or ignorant. Einarsdóttir and Boiro (2016) write that, sometimes, socially marginalized families such as descendants of former slaves in Guinea-Bissau would send their favorite sons to Qur'anic schools in Senegal with the hope that Islamic scholarship would provide an avenue for social respectability. In the eyes of these families, their sons—who are often carefully chosen for their demonstrated strong will, intelligence, and resilience—are studying abroad to become learned scholars (Einarsdóttir et al. 2010). In some cases, children themselves would challenge parental expectations that they should attend francophone formal education and choose Qur'anic schools (Newman 2017). While acknowledging the challenges associated with the contemporary manifestation of traditional Qur'anic schools, Hadiza Kere Abdulrahman (2019) argues in her doctoral dissertation that *almajiranci*, which is often perceived as a backward and retrograde system of education, could produce men who meaningfully contribute to their society and who uphold a unique moral code of conduct.

The persistence of Qur'anic schools including in their most traditional forms gives a window into the multilayered nature of the educational sphere in Muslim majority countries in West Africa. The associated discourse also shows that a proper assessment of Qur'anic schools and their place in these societies could not happen without accounting for individual and societal aspirations for a sound Islamic education and formal schooling.

Becoming and Learning "More Than What Is Necessary"[75]

If Islamic education in the Sahel region of West Africa has flourished and persisted since the early days of Islamization (Kane 2016; Sanankoua 1985; Robinson 2004, 27–59; Lovejoy 2016, 16–20), its form, teleological intent, and scope varied greatly depending on gender, socioeconomic class, and sometimes an interplay of all these factors. As the previous section shows, it is common for most Muslims, as children, to attend Qur'anic schooling in one form or another, and often, concurrently with Western-style education.

However, Sounaye (2014, 2016) and Alidou (2005) have pointed out that the participation in 'advanced' Islamic studies used to be highly gendered with boys often staying in Qur'anic schools longer than girls. Additionally, urban 'educated' youth (*yan birni* in Hausa) who would have had access to formal education tended to embark less in advanced Islamic studies (Amselle 1985; Sounaye 2009). A wealth of emerging scholarship on contemporary educational dynamics shows that, for most Muslim African women, particularly in large urban centers, "learning just enough for prayers" is no longer enough (Sounaye 2016). The set of circumstances that inadvertently molded prolific scholars such as Malama A'ishatu in Niger (Alidou 2005, 36–37) is becoming a systematic quest as an increasing number of young men and women invest in furthering their Islamic studies, often on weekends, evenings, or during school vacation for students. This section builds on the existing literature and shows why and how young men and women weave in Islamic studies with Western-style francophone schooling. The analysis draws on years of research in Niger, and the empirical data shown here have been collected with surveys and focus groups in three high schools in Niamey with approximately three hundred students aged between fifteen and seventeen.[76]

The novel forms of engagement with Qur'anic and Islamic education among 'educated' youth represent a sort of revival of the spaces which educated Muslim elites occupied at the height of Islamic scholarship during the precolonial era. The occupation of these spaces is not in opposition to formal education but comes as a complementary source of knowledge which often extends into schools since students would often share notes from *makaranta* and Islamic 'reminders' or sermons via e-media platforms such as WhatsApp. Among the students who were surveyed, two-third attend some sort of Islamic schooling in addition to formal education: this supports the argument that the continued quest for Islamic studies is important for the youth educated in formal schooling. About 88% think that formal schooling is important to have a better life. Some of the reasons and most recurrent themes when asked why they thought schooling was important were: (a) improving one's knowledge, (b) becoming somebody because 'you are nothing without school', (c) getting a successful life and having a future, (d) being independent, and (e) finding a job and helping others. About 48% thought that Qur'anic and Islamic education was more important than formal schooling; 51% thought that the two educational spaces were equally important; and less than 1% thought that formal education was more important than Islamic education. Some of the reasons that the students have given for the importance to Islamic education were: (a) learning about their religion, become close to God, and prepare their afterlife; (b) learning the Qur'an and become better Muslims; (c) investing in something that matters to them; (d) properly learning somewhere without strikes; and (e) understanding how to live better in society. The youth educated in formal education view the intersection of two systems as complementary for a more encompassing educational experience.

Most of the students have reported going to both formal francophone and one form or another of Qur'anic schools.

When the respondents were asked about perception of schooling, competency, and possibility to achieve one's potential, there were clear differences on the basis of gender. Unanimously, the majority of responders thought that Islamic education was more important for girls: during the focus group discussions, while respondents acknowledged that the quest for Islamic knowledge was important for both girls and boys, the discussion centered around the fact that women would have the responsibility of passing on the knowledge and values to their children, 'the future of society'. Among the surveyed youth, 63% thought that formal schooling for girls and boys was equally important; about 25% thought that schooling boys was more important while 12% thought that schooling girls was more important. Of the boys who were surveyed, 42% thought that schooling boys was more important, and of the girls who were surveyed, 70% thought educating girls and boys was equally important (see Table 23.9). When asked about the perception they had with regard to general competencies in schooling, about 59% of respondents thought that girls and boys were equally competent and close to 40% of the girls thought that girls were more competent than boys although the perceptions about the possibility to realize one's potential differed (see Tables 23.10 and 23.11). What these statistics convey, among other inferences, is that the perceptions about the utility of formal schooling and Islamic education varied along gendered lines in a manner that validates the quest for advanced Islamic learning for young women and that confirms the current trends in access and engagement with these educational spaces. Assessing these gendered differences

Table 23.9 Perception about importance of schooling

Perception about the importance of schooling	*Girls (%)*	*Boys (%)*	*Total (%)*
Schooling girls was more important than schooling boys	15.98	5.77	12.09
Schooling girls and boys was important equally	69.82	51.92	63.00
Schooling boys was more important than schooling girls	14.20	42.31	24.91

Source Halimatou Hima, dissertation fieldwork from four sample secondary schools (N = 378 students), Niamey, Niger

Table 23.10 Perception about competencies in schooling

Perception about competencies in schooling	*Girls (%)*	*Boys (%)*	*Total (%)*
Girls are more competent than boys	39.26	3.13	25.87
Girls and boys are equally competent	53.99	66.67	58.69
Boys are more competent than girls	6.75	30.21	15.44

Source Halimatou Hima, dissertation fieldwork from four sample secondary schools (N = 378 students), Niamey, Niger

Table 23.11 Perception about the opportunity to realize potentiality

Perception about the opportunity to realize potentiality	*Girls (%)*	*Boys (%)*	*Total (%)*
Girls have a better opportunity to realize their potential	21.08	8.33	16.41
Girls and boys have an equal chance to realize their potential	56.63	61.46	58.40
Boys have a better opportunity to realize their potential	21.69	30.21	24.81

Source Halimatou Hima, dissertation fieldwork from four sample secondary schools (N = 378 students), Niamey, Niger

matter as much in efforts to predict future trends as in understanding the current trajectory in the occupation of educational spaces.

The occupation of educational spaces, particularly at higher levels of studies, must be understood in light of the societal expectations and perceptions. The important work done by scholars such as Ousseina Alidou (2005) speaks to a shift in the knowledge production and dissemination in both formal francophone and Islamic spaces in a manner that validates the long-standing presence of women. For instance, Alidou writes that the *makaranta* has become a space for identity formation as much as one that gives meaning to the idea of belonging: most of the modern Qur'anic schools offer the opportunity to engage in acts of solidarity toward members of the *makaranta* (who often refer to each other as 'sisters') and communities in rural areas including the funding of water infrastructure such as wells. Additionally, young women who excel in the quest for Islamic learning find an opportunity to exercise authority in ways that other spaces do not always offer: when in traditional learning spaces, hierarchy strongly correlates with age, in these new Islamic sites of learning, the ease of acquiring and imparting knowledge confers respect even vis-à-vis the elders. Going to the traditional Qur'anic school at the elementary level is often a decision that parents take for their children. However, with the modern Qur'anic spaces, the act of going is often not the parents' decision. Most of the young women that were surveyed mentioned that they go because their friends go, and it is good for the religion (*adini*); therefore, these learning sites have increasingly become an important space of socialization but also of policing of behaviors, dressing, and social conduct. It is also a space that offers an unprecedented opportunity to expand social networks. This is a valuable element specially as social safety nets erode in urban settings: a platform built on the basis of trust without a formal written contract could open possibility for beneficial socioeconomic exchanges (Woolcock 1998; Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Lastly, in the *makaranta*, women of all ages seat together around the same circle or on the same benches (or mats) to learn something that would benefit them *lahira da duniya* (in this earth and the hereafter). Men would have the mosque where they gather for daily prayers to engage regularly in discourse, and women (in urban centers) usually have the informal women gatherings which are periodic but not as frequent as

going to the mosque would be for men. Therefore, these Islamic spaces allow women to fill a significant gap left by the collapse of traditionally existing spaces that brought women, old and young, together. In the traditional, often hierarchical, spaces, older women would give lessons to the younger ones; the *makaranta* seems to offer that and more: a constant connection with the divine and an opportunity to 'reduce sins'—most of the young women and men stated this, citing *hadiths* that highlight that every step in the direction of the *makaranta* is a step toward learning, and every step toward learning is a step in the way of the divine.[77]

The fluidity of boundaries between various educational systems challenges a scheme that favors dichotomy and creates pluralistic intermediary spaces that validate complex knowledge systems in a discursive push and pull for novel and old identities. This is a movement of deconstruction and of construction about an imagined ideal, which would encompass the diverse ideologies in those societies.

Conclusion

From Djenné in Mali, Agadez in Niger, Kaolack in Senegal, and Chinguetti in Mauritania, the legacies and interactions of indigenous multi-ethnic, Islamic, and Western epistemologies continue to inform what people learn and value, how they learn, and in what locations. In their choices, even if conditioned, and disengagement (which are themselves choices), communities and individuals articulate their developmental and educational aspirations which may, sometimes, unsettle epistemic boundaries and challenge societal norms. The rising demand for and the crafting of educational spaces anchored in a renewed Afro-Islamic consciousness are subject to larger social dynamics that shape their role in knowledge acquisition and education. These shifts are happening in the context of changing realities in formal education which sometimes struggle to deliver basic learning, particularly for the poorest segments of the population. The crises in formal education in the Sahel countries of West Africa unfold against the backdrop of societies that have had a long-standing history of alternative educational spaces, which influence how communities respond to schooling. This situation combines with shifting social norms to reify the relevance of alternative educational spaces: sociocultural factors combine with the crisis of education and communities' desire for a more culturally relevant education to reinvigorate interest in various forms of Afro-Islamic education among young men and women. The proximity with this episteme with indigenous episteme, to the point of blurring, makes it a natural choice that people go for even without state intervention, coercion, or 'sensitization' from international organizations as was historically the case for Western-style education in many African countries.

Notes

1. 'Sahel' comes from the Arabic word which means shore or coast. The Sahel region spans 500 kilometers from west to east of the African continent and covers parts of 10 countries: Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. This region has been home to flourishing trans-Saharan trade and ongoing interactions that have fostered "linguistic, cultural, and ethnic convergences between populations of the Sudanic Belt (the southern fringes and south of the Sahara) and those of the so-called North Africa and the Mediterranean" (Alidou 2005, 6).
2. Berber nomads were key to connecting Maghreb and Africa south of the Sahara: they were traders, and they moved between the north and the south of the Sahara, bringing Islam to the southern shores of the Sahel. However, as Levtzion and Pouwels point out, "Though merchants opened routes and exposed isolated societies to external influences, they did not themselves engage in the propagation of Islam" (3). Because of what Alidou (2005) refers to as the long-standing *brassage*, a trans-ethnic dimension in a study of the Sahel space is a necessity—the *brassage* in the Sahel is "a child of several millennia of sociocultural, political, and economic history in this wide region" (Alidou 2005, 8–10). Also see Jean Ensminger (1997) on the economic rationale for conversion to Islam and how a common religion provided a basis for trust and "more secure institutional structures" which helped to intensify trade in that region. Hiskett (1984) writes some evidence suggests the presence of Islam in the Kanem Borno empire (parts of present-day Eastern Niger, northeastern Nigeria, and Chad) as early as the seventh century.
3. Since practicing Muslims pray at least five times a day with verses in Arabic, the Arabic language became a constant in the daily religious rites of millions of people across the Sahel. *Ajami* is the writing of African languages such as Hausa, Zarma, Fulfulde, Nupe, Kanuri, and Wolof with Arabic scripts.
4. See Larrier and Alidou (2015) for a brief discussion on *Tifinagh* literacy which among the Tuaregs and Amazigh populations and Elghamis Ramada's (2011) extensive doctoral thesis entitled "*Le Tifinagh au Niger contemporain: étude sur l'écriture indigène des Touaregs*" completed at Leiden University in 2011. See Ruth Finnegan's books entitled "Oral Literature in Africa" (2012) and "Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices" (1992) for an account of the rich history of oral scholarship in Africa.
5. For instance, the people of wangara/wangarawa, the Juula (Dyula, Dioula) established a rich 'commercial diaspora' that became instrumental in the spread of Islam. See Lovejoy's (1978) article entitled "The Role of the Wangara in the Economic Transformation of the Central Sudan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries".
6. It is worth noting that some communities have resisted conversion to Islam and remained faithful to animist religions as was the case of the Azna's in present-day southwestern Niger. The Aznas resisted both Islamisation attempts from neighboring empires and colonization. For more on Sarraounia Mangou, see Antoinette Tidjani Alou's (2009) article, "Niger and Sarraounia: One Hundred Years of Forgetting Female Leadership" and a forthcoming chapter on the Oxford Encyclopedia of Women entitled "Women in Niger" (Alidou and Hima 2020).

7. Other major historical events (including empires formation, transformation, and dis-formation and the slave trades) had an influence on the development of Islamic educational spaces in the Sahel region. However, the difference after the eleventh century is that a great number of indigenous populations had themselves 'become' and endorsed the new religion as their own.
8. See Denise Bouche (1974, 1997), Pascale Barthélémy (2003, 2010), Papa Momar Diop (1997), and Laurent Manière (2010) among others for more information on colonial education.
9. Animist practices predated Islamic scholarship and remained a fundamental part of the social construct in many societies in the Sahel. See Nicole Échard's (1992) «*Cultes de possession et changement social. L'exemple du bori hausa de l'Ader et du Kurfey (Niger)*» and Adeline Masquelier's (2001) "Prayer has spoiled everything: possession, power, and identity in an Islamic town of Niger" for rich studies of how Bori spirit possession relates to Islam, the state, and colonialism in a changing social and political context.
10. For the socially marginalized groups perceived as "socially inferior" castes such as "slaves" and "griots", school presented a unique opportunity to reconfigure the social makeup—even if in societies and everyday interactions, prejudices could remain.
11. See the proceeding of the final report (UNESCO and UNECA 1961) of the first conference of African states on education held in Addis Ababa in May 1961. Also see Gashaw Weyneshet Lake's (1981) doctoral thesis entitled, "The Addis Ababa Conference: Implications for Inter-African Cooperation in Education, 1961–1979".
12. Hausa are an ethno-linguistic group present in central and west Africa. After KiSwahili, Hausa is the second largest language spoken in Africa. Officially, Hausas and Zarma respectively constitute about 48 and 19% of Niger's population although a culture of interregional '*brassage*' and interethnic marriage have rendered a strict classification at times difficult: an individual could carry many ethnic identities.
13. *Ilimi* (in Hausa) derives from the Arabic word '*ilm* which means knowledge.
14. Related to notion of researcher doing research 'back home', refer to Mwangi's (2019) chapter entitled "'Good That You Are One of Us': Positionality and Reciprocity in Conducting Fieldwork in Kenya's Flower Industry". Her chapter gives rare insights into some of the positionalities and multiple identities that African (women) researchers navigate or embody, emphasize or deemphasize when conducting research 'back home' as scholars based in the global north in a top research institution.
15. I am grateful to the Centre of Development Studies, the Department of Politics and International Studies, Lucy Cavendish College (Cambridge), the Cambridge Trust and the Cambridge-Africa Programme, the Centre of African Studies, the SMUTS Memorial Fund, the Sylvia Lynn-Meaden Fund and LASDEL Niger (Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local) and the Ministries of Education for supporting the fieldwork for my research. I am also grateful to my supervisor Dr Shailaja Fennell (University of Cambridge), Professor Mahaman Sanoussi Tidjani Alou (Université Abdou Moumouni of Niamey), Professor Ousseina Alidou (Rutgers University), Dr Nafisa Waziri and Dr Abdelkader Amir Lebdioui for offering critical perspectives in the process of writing this chapter.
16. The most widely spoken languages in Mali, Niger, and Senegal are respectively Bambara, Hausa, and Wolof. While there seems to be strict categories, most

people in that region would speak more than one language—the century-long history of intercultural interactions has contributed to this.

17. There are currently 29 African countries that are officially, as of 2018, full members of the "Francophonie" organization (Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Togo, and Tunisia). However, there are countries such as Algeria that are not officially part of the Francophonie but have a significant number of French speakers. Also, it is not all countries that are part of the "Francophonie" that have French as an official language. Lastly, appurtenance to the "Francophonie" has sometimes shifted because of geopolitical considerations.
18. Mongo Beti wrote in his critique of Camara Laye, «*Laye ferme obstinément les yeux sur les réalités les plus cruciales… Ce Guinéen n'a-t-il rien vu d'autre qu'une Afrique paisible, belle, maternelle ? Est-il possible que pas une seule fois Laye n'ait pas été témoin d'une seule exaction de l'administration coloniale?» which translate as* "Laye stubbornly closes his eyes to the most crucial realities … Did this Guinean see anything but a peaceful, beautiful, maternal Africa? Is it possible that not once did Laye witness a single exaction by the colonial administration?"
19. Mongo Beti (2005) writes here about being a French speaker and writer without necessarily being a francophone, «*Je le répète, francophonie, discours officiel de la Françafrique, et langue française ne sont pas solubles l'une dans l'autre, ne doivent pas se confondre. La francophonie est une politique, c'est-à-dire un marécage de calculs inavoués, de croisades archaïques, de magouilles malhonnêtes pouvant aller jusqu'au crime*; *le français est un sacerdoce, c'est-à-dire l'occasion de se dévouer sans contrepartie pour les populations.*» which translates as "I repeat, Francophonie – official rhetoric of Françafrique – and the French language are not the same and must not be confused. The Francophonie is a policy, that is to say, a swamp of unwritten calculations, archaic crusades, dishonest shenanigans that can go as far as crime; the French language is a vocation, that is to say an opportunity to devote itself without compensation for the people".
20. AOF (*Afrique Occidentale Française*) or 'French West Africa' was comprised of eight territories: Mauritania, Senegal, French Sudan (which became Mali), Guinea, Upper Volta (which became Burkina Faso), Ivory Coast, Dahomey (which became Benin), and Niger. Togo which was occupied by Germany was later placed under French administrative control. The governor-general governed from the capital of the federation which was in Dakar. See Michael Crowder for details on AOF's administrative structures (1978, 235–239).
21. It is worth noting that much of the existing statistics on education and formal literacy in West Africa does not capture literacy in Arabic (often acquired through prolonged learning in Qur'anic schools or spaces with Islamic education). The proportion of people who are literate in Arabic can be high in some regions.
22. For more on "*La Francophonie*", see Claire Tréan's (2006) book with a forward from Abdou Diouf, former Secretary General of the Francophonie organization. An aspect on the discourse on "*La Francophonie*" has been that it has been used as an instrument of neocolonial influence and relationships as part

of the politics known as *FrançAfrique*—see Francois-Xavier Verschave's (1998, 2000) books entitled "La Françafrique: le plus long scandale de la République" and "Noir silence: Qui arrêtera la Françafrique?"; Fanny Pigeaud and Ndongo Samba Sylla's book (2018), "L'arme invisible de la Françafrique: Une histoire du franc CFA"; and Patrick Pesnot's (2014) "Les dessous de la Françafrique".

23. It is common, however, that most people including children would speak several languages from a young age—given the diversity of languages they are exposed to and the position of the Sahel African countries at the meeting point of several linguistic families. This is fast changing in urban areas where some families adopt the French language with their children most of whom might have difficulty speaking indigenous African languages.
24. Scholars like Ousseina Alidou have written about the need to recognize oral literature as a formal and valid form of knowledge production: oral literacy has played an important space and continues to be a vector in keeping, cementing, and creating knowledge. Oral literature (and by extension oral literacy) has been and remains of the defining features of many African societies.
25. Translated from French, "Un enfant peul grandira dans une double fidélité: à un véritable code de l'honneur et à un total respect de la volonté maternelle" Hampâté Bâ (1991, 10).
26. The concept of Ubuntu (*ùɓúnt'ù* in Zulu), "I am because we are" could be found in other African cultures. One example among the Hausa is the concept of *Zumunci* which I translate as "the art of living together and caring for others' wellbeing as ours".
27. See Abdoulaye Diop (1985) for more on the structure and concept of Wolof family culture.
28. Most of the earlier schools in colonial and early postcolonial era were boarding schools.
29. Some of my research finds that, in rural areas in Niger, the number of days children spend in school sometimes depends on the rain cycles; if rains come early, whether official vacation has started or not, children usually desert the classroom to help their families in the field.
30. To accommodate the social hierarchies found in many West African societies, the colonial administration had, at one point, created a separate school for "sons of chiefs".
31. Hadiths are "words, deeds and tacit approvals attributed to the Prophet [Mohammed]" (Abd al-Rauf 1983, 271). For more on Hadiths, see Abd al-Rauf (1983) and Brown (2009).
32. Ennahoui (1987) cited in Maouloud (2017) emphasizes the difference between *Mahadras* and Qur'anic schools: *Mahadras*, he writes, are popular, nomad, and scholastic universities with individualized teachings that welcome men and women; *mahadras* are universities because they provide a ground for learning on various subjects touching on literature, poetry, 'secret of letters' or esoterism, arithmetic, geometry, geography, astronomy, medicine, in addition to pure Qur'anic studies, hadiths, *Fiqh* and *Sira*. The *mahadras* have facilitated the development of an extensive written scholarship of over 40,000 manuscripts according to the Mauritanian Institute of Scientific Research (IMRS). For more on the *mahadras* in Mauritania, see Ould Ahmedou (1997), Maouloud (2017), Bih et al. (2009), and Ladjal and Bensaid (2017).

33. For more on the role of the Sankoré Madrasah on the formation of the intellectual élite, see Saad (1983), Kane (2016), Cissoko (1969).
34. Scholars have written about families' fear of children conversion by way of schooling in many countries including Sierra Leone (Singleton 2009), Nigeria (Abernethy 1969), Malawi (Bone 1982), Uganda (Kasozi 1986), Burkina Faso (Werthmann 2012), and the Gambia (Jammeh 2015) among others (Nunn 2012; Izama 2014; Csapo 1981).
35. As noted by Marie-Laurence Bayet (1972) in her article, "L'enseignement primaire au Sénégal de 1903 à 1920", these official numbers probably underestimated the number of children in Qur'anic schools given their omnipresence in the local ecosystem but also because the colonial administration had very little information and input into the functioning of these schools.
36. The original quote in the 1930 Bulletin of Education of French West Africa read, "Une œuvre aussi diverse en ses manifestations, aussi profonde en son action, aussi prolongée en ses conséquences que se révèle en pays indigène l'œuvre d'éducation n'est pas une simple affaire de statistiques […] Sans doute, à ne considérer que les chiffres, pourrait-on croire notre progression mesurée et trop lente […] Mais les progrès de notre œuvre d'éducation doivent être mesurés avec plus de recul".
37. See David Robinson's (2000) "Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920" and Chapter 5 in Tamba M'Bayo (2016) for more information on the role that Sidiyya Baba played in the 'pacification' of Mauritania. It is worth noting that Saad Buh (ca. 1850–1917) and his elder brother Ma El Ainin (1838–1910) were, with Sidiyya Baba, three Muslim clerics and marabouts that played a critical role in the early mediations (and by extension conquest) in that part of the Sahel during the colonization period, albeit in different roles. Ma El Ainin continuously called for military jihad against the French while his brother Saad Buh initially supported collaboration. M'Bayo also highlights how the alliance between African diplomats and interpreters (in this instance, Mahmadou Seck from Saint Louis) and the French colonial administrators (in this case, Xavier Coppolani) was key to conveying and deploying the strategy of 'pacification', negotiation, and intimidation in Mauritania.
38. A translation of the text that Baba Siddiya issued in support of the French may be found on the African Online digital Library (Robinson), https://www.aodl.org/.
39. See Hamidou Diallo's (1997) chapter entitled "*Pouvoir colonial, islam et première guerre mondiale en AOF*" and Jean-Louis Triaud's (2012) "*Le temps des marabouts: Introduction*" for more on the use of collaboration as a subversive method to maintain space for maneuvering within the colonial state.
40. For more on this, see Robinson and Triaud, eds., 1997, *Le temps des marabouts: Itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique Occidentale Française v. 1880–1960*.
41. The actual quote in French reads, "De ce fait, elle est devenue un instrument de socialisation (politique et idéologique) fonctionnel et efficace" (Meunier 1997, 13).
42. Teacher is *malam* (men) or *malama* (women) in Hausa from *mu'allim* in Arabic, *cierno* in Fulfulde, *serigne* in Wolof, *marabout* in French. Also referred to as *ustaz* or *ustaza* in formal Islamic educational spaces.

43. Nana Asma'u Dan Fodio was an extraordinary scholar born in 1793 in Degel. She has left behind an extensive library of works including poems in Arabic, Fulfulde, and Hausa. Some of her poems, in many ways, give a timeline into the personal tragedies and successes that marked Nana Asmau's life; they also are a marker of major historical events in the Sokoto Caliphate from the perspective of a woman. Nana Asma'u was the daughter of the *Shehu* (chief) and the wife of the *Waziri* (chief executive). Although she was extraordinary, she was not an exception as her sisters, although not well known, were also highly educated. In the face of major political, Nana Asma'u was a private special advisor, and in public spheres, she was an educator of the masses as the '*sarkin mata duka*' (the chief of all women). She established and developed a system of itinerant teachers known as *jaji* who would travel far and wide to provide literacy and instruction. Remnants of the system are still visible today in parts of southern Niger and northern Nigeria.
44. The role of mothering and motherhood carries a particular meaning in Islamic epistemic thought. Two hadiths that capture the importance of the mother-figure are, "Paradise lies beneath the feet of the mother". The second is a hadith that goes as follows, "A man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Messenger of God! Who among the people is most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet (PBUH) said: Your mother. The man said, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your father". The mother is repeated three times before the father stating just how important her position is.
45. For more on women Islamic teachers and leadership, also see among others Hill's (2018) "Wrapping Authority: Women Islamic Leaders in a Sufi Movement in Dakar, Senegal" and Kang's (2015) "Bargaining for Women's Rights: Activism in an Aspiring Muslim Democracy".
46. This has changed with the entry of women in the sphere of Islamic scholarship. Some would argue that women had always been present albeit in less socially visible roles. What is different in contemporary times is that women scholars are systematically shaping social discourse in private as much as public spheres of influence.
47. *Rubutu* (the written word) is often written on the *aloh* board or on a piece of paper with traditional black ink (made of Arabic gum) then washed up with water in a container.
48. Some of these practices would later be dislocated or reprimanded as *bid'ah* (innovations) by the surge of the different currents of Islamic practice; however, they still remain a fundamental part of the way most West African Muslims live their faith or seek protection.
49. See Fallou Ngom (2016) for more on the development of Ajami.
50. For more on the role of Muslim interpreters, see Tamba M'bayo's (2016) edifying book entitled, "Muslim Interpreters in Colonial Senegal, 1850–1920: Mediations of Knowledge and Power in the Lower and Middle Senegal River Valley".
51. The year 1903 marked the beginning of a structured educational francophone system in AOF. See Lange (2000), Bouche (1997), and Fall (1997) for a description and an analysis of the context within which this restructuration occurred.

52. See Little's (2005) "*Georges Hardy - Une Conquête Morale: l'Enseignement en AOF*". She writes that in the teaching of History, parts of written or oral history which was anti-French was side-lined in an effort to impart a certain legitimacy for the French colonial domination in Africa. The effect at legitimizing colonial rule in the teaching also touches on subjects such geography which became a tool. She quotes Hardy who said, "*Ce n'est pas la géographie de la France que nous proposons à notre auditoire, c'est la puissance française, étudiée d'un point de vue géographique*" (193) which I translate as "It is not the geography of France that we bring to our audience, it is the French power, studied from a geographical point of view".
53. In "France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960", Harrison (1988, 63) writes about the colonial administration's rational for investing in medersa. Roume, then governor-general of the AOF, wrote in a letter to the director of the médersa in St Louis, "the médersa will always be the most logical form of education in Muslim country, the only one capable of usefully serving our policy whilst at the same time flattering the vanity of the natives" (translated).
54. For more on the introduction and rise of Wahhabi ideologies in West Africa including its implication for the education sector, see Kaba's (1974) "The Wahhabiyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa".
55. Villalón et al. (2012) write that the city of Say was chosen to host the first médersa in Niger because the illustrious Muslim cleric, Mamane Diobbo, set up his Qadiriyya congregation there at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
56. In Mauritania, the notion of Franco-Arab médersas, as it exists in the other countries in this study, may not necessarily apply since the educational system in the public sector combines Arabic and French starting primary school. Prior to the 1966 policies of Arabisation that instituted Arabic as a language of instruction, the Franco-Arab médersas have occupied a particular space in the complex educational system where the question of the language of instruction intersects with geopolitical and ethnic considerations (Taine-Cheikh 1994). The country has undergone a series of policy changes in the educational sector with at its core attempts to balance, counterbalance, and, sometimes, reflect the presence of the four main languages (Arabic, Pulaar, Soninké, and Wolof) alongside French as language(s) of instruction. For more on the successive policies in the educational sector, see Ould Zein and Queffélec's (1997) "Le Francais en Mauritanie", Taine-Cheick (2004), Ould Cheick (2007), and Candalot (Candalot 2005).
57. It is worth noting that the first public Franco-Arab médersa, in the postcolonial era in Senegal, dates back to 1963. It was, however, in 2002, following the 'Education for All' movement that the Ministry of Education decided to bring the Franco-Arab schools as a central element in reaching a higher gross enrollment rate (D'Aoust 2013).
58. Here is the original text (translated in English) from Hardy G. cited in Barthélemy's book (2010, 33), "Quand nous amenons un garçon à l'école française c'est une unité que nous gagnons, quand nous y amenons une fille, c'est une unité multipliée par le nombre d'enfants qu'elle aura".
59. The document in Niger's National Archives in Niamey reads "*Pourquoi en effet confier l'éducation des enfants à des infidèles alors que jusque-là les marabouts avaient eu la charge d'éduquer les enfants dans la voie du Coran*" (156).

60. Rokhaya Fall (1997) divides the colonial education policies into four interlinked phases: (1) from 1903 to 1918 as that of purely utilitarian policies for government schools and the teaching of primarily basic reading and writing for missionary schools—the investment in education of the "indigenes" was an enterprise to further the economic benefits of the colonial project; (2) starting 1918, distinct efforts were made to increase enrollment; (3) after 1924, there was a reorganization of the education in the AOF which included the introduction of practical courses such as agriculture teaching and a greater emphasis on rural schools; (4) with the aftermath of World War II, there was, beginning 1944, another reorganization of the educational system which aligned the teachings in the AOF to those in the 'Metropole'—with increasing demands from the highly connected African educated elites for the opening of more schools including universities.
61. In the inaugural Bulletin, Hardy (1913) wrote about the agenda for 'refashioning' education, "*Nous taillons dans le neuf, comme on dit ; nous connaissons mal encore cette rude étoffe qu'on nous confie, et nos ciseaux, ne craignons pas de l'avouer, hésitent souvent dans nos mains. Nous élaborons petit à petit une pédagogie indigène, très différente de l'autre, et personne de vous n'oserait assurément soutenir que nous voyons en toute netteté, non seulement les moyens, mais le but de notre enseignement*" translates as "We are cutting into the new, as they say; we still know very little of the rough stuffs that are entrusted to us, and our scissors, let us not hesitate to admit it, often shake in our hands. We are developing little by little an indigenous pedagogy, very different from the other, and no one of you would dare to maintain that we clearly see, not only the means, but the purpose of our teaching" (Bulletin de l'Enseignement de l'Afrique Occidentale Française).
62. The categorization of 'primary level' may not apply to Qur'anic schools and informal socially institutionalized learning spaces because Qur'anic schools are not structured by strictly divided levels. Socially institutionalized learning spaces sometimes involve major life events or transitions which may not apply to all.
63. Mali and Mauritania have not participated in the 2014–2015 PASEC study.
64. Data collected by author for doctoral thesis entitled "*Ilimi Haske*: Learning Gaps in Unequal Worlds".
65. Data collected by author for doctoral thesis entitled "*Ilimi Haske*: Learning Gaps in Unequal Worlds".
66. It is worth noting that this discourse is much more complex. For students from middle-income families who hear French at home, the language of instruction does not constitute a barrier per se. Additionally, research in linguistics and education has shown that starting with the mother tongue, while advantageous, is not always optimum if the transition to French (in this case) is mismanaged. The analysis in my (forthcoming) doctoral thesis builds on existing literature and argues that merely switching to a bilingual system would not suffice if the inherent inefficiencies in the system are not addressed.
67. Here the reference is made what could be considered 'social failure' rather than academic failure which are not necessarily the same.
68. An interesting related study by Ogunjuyigbe and Fadeyi (2002) looks at the gender differentials in access to education and literacy among Yorubas in southwest Nigeria and finds that "gender disparity in education were related

to women's traditional roles and their personal attitudes, which may also stem from their religious orientation […] The fear of pregnancy and early marriage was second in importance in this local government area".

69. My forthcoming doctoral thesis shows a great divergence in learning on the basis of socioeconomic background regardless of geographical location (rural or urban), gender, or religious affiliation among other factors.
70. There is a popular Hadith (authentic saying from the Prophet Mohammed) that says "Seek Knowledge from Cradle to Grave".
71. Qur'anic schools have been institutionalized as a system of mass education in the West Africa region since the fifteenth century and have known a rapid expansion in the nineteenth century (Boubé and Rabiou 2009)
72. It is worth noting that there are 'modern' and sometimes fee-paying boarding Qur'anic schools. These modern Quranic schools are well developed in the educational sphere in Senegal where in 2002 the government introduced reforms including (a) accounting for students in modern Qur'anic schools when measuring school attendance; (b) the inclusion of modern *daara* in formal schooling; and (c) the introduction of (optional) religious teaching in primary schools among other measures. For on the context within which these reforms took place, see Hugon (2015). Niger also has attempted a modernization of traditional Qur'anic schools under the PAREC (*Projet d'Appui à la Rénovation des Ecoles Coraniques*) program with the financial support of the Islamic Development Bank. In Nigeria, the state of Sokoto is attempting a program entitled "Sokoto Almajiri Integrated School" under the Sokoto State Universal Basic Board (SUBEB). See Garba Abubakar and Njoku's (2015) for more on the Sokoto Almajiri Integrated School.
73. After the *Shahadah* (which is the profession of faith), prayer (*Salah*) plays a pivotal social and spiritual role in the conception of the Muslim identity. Its frequency makes it a constant in the life. Collective prayers hold an important role in socialization within these societies, especially among men. Also, the *azan* (the call to prayer) is a defining feature in most of these communities.
74. While the format and cycles of learning could take various forms depending on the school's teleological or philosophical disposition, Gandolfi (2003) gives five broad cycles of learning in Qur'anic education.
75. This expression is inspired by a quote found in Sounaye's (2016) chapter entitled "Walking to the Makaranta". It is a common saying among adults to justify the choice to embark on a quest for a more profound Islamic knowledge.
76. Data collected by author for doctoral thesis entitled "*Ilimi Haske*: Learning Gaps in Unequal Worlds". All consent protocols were completed to inform and protect participants. All participants are anonymous in the represented data. The four high schools are in four different neighborhoods of Niamey. One of the high schools is all-women. The sample is not meant to be 'representative' statistically speaking. It, however, does give an insight how young people are engaging with various educational spaces.
77. There are several hadiths that speak to this: (1) Reported by Abud-Darda and states: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "He who follows a path in quest of knowledge, Allah will make the path of Jannah easy to him. The angels lower their wings over the seeker of knowledge, being pleased with what he does. The inhabitants of the heavens and the earth and even the fish in

the depth of the oceans seek forgiveness for him. The superiority of the learned man over the devout worshipper is like that of the full moon to the rest of the stars (i.e., in brightness). The learned are the heirs of the Prophets who bequeath neither dinar nor dirham but only that of knowledge; and he who acquires it, has in fact acquired an abundant portion". (2) Reported by Abu Hurairah and states, "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, Allah makes the way to Jannah easy for him who treads the path in search of knowledge". (3) Reported by Anas states, "He who goes forth in search of knowledge is considered as struggling in the Cause of Allah until he returns". Please note that the added epithet (peace be upon him) is one that follows in Islamic tradition the mention of the name of the prophet.

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