The academic study of Islam and of Muslim societies in sub-Saharan Africa has developed during the past thirty years more as part of African studies than of Islamic studies. Islamic studies in Africa has therefore not been so deeply influenced by the orientalist heritage of Western scholarship that prevailed among those who studied Islam in the central Muslim regions. On the other hand, the global resurgence of Islam that has taken place during the same period, in all its social, political, religious and indeed academic forms, has had a profound influence on African Islamic studies.

In the 1960s, some scholars were confident—ly predicting that the political role of religion, and specifically of Islam, would shrink under the growing dominance of Pan-African political ideologies. Quite the contrary, however, has occurred. Throughout Africa, the religious is secular and to ignore it, or perhaps to try to turn it into an object of research, is to misread the very popularly of disentangle the two streams of thought under the constraints of contemporary urban life in the late 1960s, Hodgkin noted that many Western-trained Islamic scholars tended to write very different kinds of publications, Hodgkin noted that many Western-trained Islamic scholars seemed to know relatively little about Islam, whereas the Islamicly-trained scholars tended to write undecisively in highly normative terms.

Indeed, it is this uncritical and idealized perspective on the ‘Islamic’ that caused a stream amongst non-Muslim Western trained scholars who tend to dismiss this kind of process of thought as an attitude to ignore it, or perhaps to try to turn it into an object of research. However, it is my view that this kind of writing is reflective of a much more complex and significant process which is taking place in the development of Islamic studies: the emergence of a Muslim African voice in Islamic studies. One of the most significant results of this change is that non-Muslim scholars no longer enjoy a monopoly in the Islamic world. Hodgkin notes that the fact that the ‘object’ of our research is no longer silent. The emergence of a Muslim voice in African Islamic studies is largely a postcolonial phenomenon, but then, so is African Islamic studies itself. Certainly, my own work has always been both Islamic and ‘Islamic’ perspective, from my earliest publications on my PhD research in northern Nigeria in the mid-1960s, to the publication of a small collective book on Muslim schooling, co-edited with a Muslim Malian colleague, was associated with considerable anger by one or two Malians. The anger was focused precisely on the fact that certain contributors to the book took a critical view of various issues and that in turn resulted in an accusation that the book was ‘against Islam’. The person who made this accusation, the director of one of Mali’s more prestigious madrasa schools, had cooperated with me in my research on the history of the madrasa system. Many years ago. And the real challenge that faces us scholars today is to nurture these seeds of sensitivity and empathy, without which no fruitful development of our field can emerge despite the money that has been flowing into all the new institutes.

The ‘secularising of Islam’?

This incident illustrates one of the most intriguing contradictions that Hodgkin notes at the end of her article, where she observes that for all its advocacy of a deeper religious life, Islamism ‘may be said to be secularising Islam’. This is because, in her view, those who wish to Islamize modern life must at the same time come to terms with it, such a process of change is interac- tive and necessarily works in both directions. Criticism of the madrasa schools by its own products is something that arouses in this case from the actual experience of those who seek to modernize their discipline by introducing to the social, economic and political constraints of contemporary urban life in Mali. Only critical assessment of schooling in Mali seems essential to the development of the educational sector in a country where almost 80% of the population remains illit- rate. Nor can about Islam, whereas the Islamicly-trained scholars tried to turn it into an object of research, is to misread the very popularly of disentangle the two streams of thought under the constraints of contemporary urban life in the late 1960s, Hodgkin noted that many Western-trained Islamic scholars tended to write undecisively in highly normative terms.

Indeed, it is this uncritical and idealized perspective on the ‘Islamic’ that caused a stream amongst non-Muslim Western trained scholars who tend to dismiss this kind of process of thought as an attitude to ignore it, or perhaps to try to turn it into an object of research. However, it is my view that this kind of writing is reflective of a much more complex and significant process which is taking place in the development of Islamic studies: the emergence of a Muslim African voice in Islamic studies. One of the most significant results of this change is that non-Muslim scholars no longer enjoy a monopoly in the Islamic world. Hodgkin notes that the fact that the ‘object’ of our research is no longer silent. The emergence of a Muslim voice in African Islamic studies is largely a postcolonial phenomenon, but then, so is African Islamic studies itself. Certainly, my own work has always been both Islamic and ‘Islamic’ perspective, from my earliest publications on my PhD research in northern Nigeria in the mid-1960s, to the publication of a small collective book on Muslim schooling, co-edited with a Muslim Malian colleague, was associated with considerable anger by one or two Malians. The anger was focused precisely on the fact that certain contributors to the book took a critical view of various issues and that in turn resulted in an accusation that the book was ‘against Islam’. The person who made this accusation, the director of one of Mali’s more prestigious madrasa schools, had cooperated with me in my research on the history of the madrasa system. Many years ago. And the real challenge that faces us scholars today is to nurture these seeds of sensitivity and empathy, without which no fruitful development of our field can emerge despite the money that has been flowing into all the new institutes.

The Sokoto Caliphate continues to play in Nigerian Muslim politics. Indeed, the only extensive treatment of the jihadi by a Nigerian is Ibrahim Sulaiman’s A Revolution in History, which was viewed by some critics more as a programmatic text for the future than a seri- ous historical treatment of the past. Creative tensions?

These two influences, which could be multi- pituated many times over, raise numerous complex questions for the scholarly community. Is critical scholarship a ‘secular’ phen- menon that is inherently incompatible with Muslim religious sensibilities? Or is it possible that such scholarship can better as- sist committed Muslims in understanding their past and present and to build their fu- ture? Can the tensions that span these two extreme positions act as a creative impetus for scholarship? One prospect for such a de- velopment is the increasing number of Afri- can Muslim scholars active in the field of Muslim studies whose work is of the highest academic standard. These include Muslim scholars – Islamists as well as ‘secularists’ – whose competence in dealing with the jihadi is combined with a palpable sensitivity to things Islamic. At the same time, much of the scholarly work of us non-Muslims nowa-