The Islamic education system in sub-Saharan Africa. A journey through politics and religion
Organizers:
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Date and place: September 25 to October 2, 2021, LASDEL in Niamey (Niger), if the health situation allows. Otherwise, the workshop will be held in a reduced virtual format from September 25 to September 27.

Argument
Although important reforms were introduced on the status and role of Islamic education in various countries, and the actors in these learning environments have changed significantly in recent decades, the issue of Islamic education in West Africa remains at the centre of public debate, while little scientific work examine these schooling institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. However, since the early 1990s, an increasing number of researchers have been interested in the history, dynamics and networks of Islamic education in West Africa.

The workshop proposes to focus on the issues relating to Islamic secondary and university education. An update of scientific knowledge on the dynamics that characterize contemporary Islamic education is essential, especially considering that most of the scientific literature has been published several years ago. Moreover, very little (or knowledge is available on countries such as Benin, Gambia, Guinea, Togo, Sierra Leone, etc.

The workshop has three main objectives: 1. bringing together junior and senior researchers that work on Islamic education in West Africa; 2. update the available knowledge, taking into account national specificities and disparities, as well as political, social, cultural and economic dimensions tied to the expansion and networks of these schools; 3. to define a common research programme centred on the creation of a directory of these places of formation. The creation of this directory will be an opportunity to test a multidisciplinary and mixed methodological approach. This directory will be useful both for researchers and socio-political actors.

Junior and senior researchers, French, English and Arabic speakers, that have recently empirical research on Islamic education are invited to submit a proposal. To encourage the participation of women and a balance between French- and English-speaking expertise, we are strongly encouraging women and researchers from English-speaking West Africa countries to submit a proposal. Candidat.es with knowledge of Arabic-speaking scientific circles are also strongly encouraged to submit a proposal.

Proposed themes for discussion:

a) Islamic schools, local actors and perceptions of the public
The Islamic education system is based on a set of actors divided between school promoters, parents of pupils and pupils. However, these sets of actors are very diverse and pursue different agendas and strategies. For instance, some of the promoters belong to locally embedded charismatic lineages and bear responsibility for perpetuating religious teaching, while other belong to other types of religious networks (some trans-regional and transnational). The goal of this discussion in the theme of actors and perceptions will be to build a typology of these schools, establishing a directory of these leaders (identities, localities, training trajectories and professional networks) and analyzing the social dynamics that are associated with the different types of schools and promoters.
b) Islamic teaching, institutional integration and support
Since Independence, West African countries witnessed the exclusion of Islamic religious values from national teaching programs. From the 1980s onwards, reforms took place in a number of countries to take into account and include Islamic teaching into national educational programs. Mechanisms of recognition and integration for Islamic schools into national education are highly diverse. They vary from country to country; national programs and policies range from the establishment of mechanisms for the recruitment of Arabic-speaking graduates into the civil service, as well as to support projects oriented towards the official recognition and upgrade of Islamic schools into national school systems, including strategies of staff capacity building, financial grant agreement, etc.). This second theme of discussion aims at describing the numerous national policies in regards to Islamic education and analyzing the institutional mechanisms put into place by governments.

c) Transnational networks and social dynamics
Despite the history of their community-based character, Islamic teaching and schools have not only developed in an isolated fashion. The chains of knowledge transmissions, or Isnad, which act as “certificate”, assigned to students at the end of their studies, put into light a network of schools and actors in the West African sub-region. With the Arabization of curricula, following the return of graduates from training institutes in the Arab-Muslim world in the early 1950s and more recently through Turkish social entrepreneurs, these networks of mobility have expanded beyond this part of the continent. Through this theme, which proposes to explore the multiple networks of partners, actors and organizations, the description and analysis of the forms of exchanges and the social dynamics created by mobility (for instance: South-South and North-South) will be emphasized.

Submission terms
Proposals must include the following information:

Title of presentation, 1500 words description, institutional affiliation and a 100 words bio. The 1500 words description must address the context of the study, the research problem and the methodological approach. Proposals are due June 15th 2021 and must be sent to: leblanc.marie-nathalie@uqam.ca ; binateissouf1981@yahoo.fr ; sorefils@gmail.com

Calendar
- June 15th, 2021: Date of submission of communication proposals
- June 30th, 2021: selection of proposals and return to authors.
- 26 August 2021: Communications sent
- September 25 to October 2, 2021: workshop held in Niamey