

## SCRIPT CHOICE, POLITICS, AND BIBLE AGENCIES IN WEST AFRICA

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Soon after joining the Bible Society of Nigeria (BSN) in 2003, I was asked to look into the technical feasibility and marketability of Hausa Bible products in Arabic script (or *اَعْجَمِيّ* *a'jamī*, that is, Arabic script used for a non-Arabic language), continuing work which had been done by Rob Koops, especially in the period 1987-1991. At that time, Jeremy Hinds, an expert Islamicist known widely for his work with the Joint Christian Ministry in West Africa (JCMWA/MICCAO<sup>1</sup>) and the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), was seconded by the Church Mission Society (CMS) to work with BSN.<sup>2</sup> Together, Koops and Hinds produced a number of Hausa Bible portions in Arabic script, including *سُورَةُ عَبَسَ إِبرَاهِيمَ* – *The Story of the Prophet Abraham*, *سُورَةُ خَلْقِ دُونِيَا* – *The Story of Creation*, and *زُورَاتِ عَنِّي دُوْدَ* – *Psalms 119*. The last of these was computer-generated, using a conversion program which had taken years to develop but then became forgotten when the key individuals left—Jeremy Hinds in 1991, then the very expert Manuscript Examiner Daniel Fom, and finally also Rob Koops himself. Subsequent consultants did not take up the work, largely because it requires an unusual combination of computer skills and some knowledge of Arabic.

I became involved at a time when the *technical* aspect of the work had just become much easier, with the advent of Unicode, better right-to-left functionality in Microsoft Windows, and conversion programs such as TECKit and SILConverters, which allow conversion of formatted text in Paratext or Microsoft Word from Roman script to Arabic script (RS to AS) in seconds, after one has written a simple conversion table. And a lot of work had already been done by Africanist researchers into historical conventions and the documentation of early manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> But the

1 *Ministère chrétien commun en Afrique occidentale* is the French name of the organisation.

2 On Jeremy Hinds' life and work, see R. Petch, "Jeremy Hinds: Teacher and Apologist to Christians and Muslims," *TCNN Research Bulletin* 47 (2007): 5-15.

3 In 1968, Bivar wrote, "One of the most exciting features in the rapid development of African studies which has been taking place during recent years is the progress being made in the finding, reproducing and interpreting of the manuscript literature of West African Islam." (A. D. H. Bivar, "The Arabic Calligraphy of West Africa," *African Languages Review* 7 [1968]: 3-15 [3]). The pace appears to me to have slowed rather since then, particularly among African scholars, due probably in part to the very sociolinguistic factors discussed below. Other useful works include: M. Alio, "La place des documents en langue arabe dans l'histoire du Niger," *Mu kara Sani* 10.1 (2002): 98-110; A. S. Arif, *Arabic Lapidary Kufic in Africa: Egypt*,

*sociolinguistic* issues were becoming ever more complex. Subsequent involvements in training and consultancy with Bible Societies and SIL/Wycliffe branches in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, with JCMWA, and with individual Bible translation projects all across the region have brought to light a number of complex and serious sociolinguistic issues relating to the use of AS, which are the focus of this paper.<sup>4</sup>

## History of AS use in West Africa

From around the tenth century, trade carried puritanical Kharijite Islam, Arabic, and AS down the two coasts of Africa (the *Sahel* region and the *Swahili* language both derive their names from the Arabic word ساحل *sāhil*, pl. سواحل *sawāhil* “coast”).<sup>5</sup> Islamic influence deepened under the Almoravids (from whom today’s *marabouts* derive their name) in the subsequent centuries of the Ghana, Kanem-Bornu, Mali, and Songhay empires (eleventh-seventeenth centuries), especially in the flourishing of Islamic scholarship centred around Timbuktu (twelfth-thirteenth centuries); and new influences came in the spread of the Sufi Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya *ṭarīqāt* “dervish orders” (eighteenth-nineteenth centuries) and in the Fulani *jihad* under Sheikh ʿUthman ḍan Fodio (1804-1808).<sup>6</sup> Correspondingly,

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*North Africa, Sudan: A Study of the Development of the Kufic Script 3rd-6th Century AH / 9th-12th Century AD* (London: Luzac, 1967); A. L. Bako, “The Hausa Scripts and Orthographies: Any Lessons for Us?” (Paper presented at Annual Translation Workshop, BSN, Jos, Oct-Nov, 2005); A. Brockett, “Aspects of the Physical Transmission of the Qurʾān in 19th-Century Sudan: Script, Decoration, Binding and Paper,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 2 (1987): 45-67; A. Brockett, “The Value of the Ḥaḥḥ and Warsh Transmissions for the Textual History of the Qurʾān,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān* (ed. A. Rippin; Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); M. Chtatou, *Using Arabic Script in Writing the Languages of the Peoples of Muslim Africa* (Rabat: Institute of African Studies, 1992); N. A. Dobronravina, *Arabic-Script Written Tradition of West Africa* (in Russian) (Russia: St. Petersburg University Press, 1999); J. O. Hunwick, “African Language Material in Arabic Sources: The Case of Songhay (Sonrai),” *African Languages Review* 9 (1970-1971): 51-73; J. O. Hunwick, “The Arabic Literary Tradition of Nigeria,” *Research in African Literatures* 28.3 (1997): 210-23; online: <http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/journals/ral/ral28-3.html>; J. Knappert, “Swahili Literature in Arabic Script,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 (1989): 74-84; N. Levtzion, “Early Nineteenth Century Arabic Manuscripts from Kumasi,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 8 (1965): 99-119; N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (International Academic Union: Fontes Historiae Africae: Series Arabica IV; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); F. Ngom, “Ajami Scripts in the Senegalese Speech Community” (unpublished Ms., n.d.); idem, “The Contribution of Serigne Moussa Ka in the Murid Wolofal Literary Tradition” (unpublished Ms., n.d.); idem, “Non-Religious Functions of Wolof and Pulaar Ajami Writings in West Africa” (unpublished Ms., n.d.); J. E. Philips, *Spurious Arabic: Hausa and Colonial Nigeria* (Madison: University of Wisconsin African Studies Center, 2000) 19-20; N. van den Boogert, “Some Notes on the Maghribi Script,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 (1989): 30-43; P. Zima, “Language, Script and Vernacular Literature in West Africa,” *African Languages Review* 8 (1969): 212-24; Y. N. Zavadlovskii, *Arabic Dialects of the Maghreb* (in Russian) (Moscow: Izd-vo vostochnoiy lit-ry, 1962).

4 This paper was first presented at the UBS AFRATCON, Nairobi, Kenya, May 10, 2007, then at Jos Linguistic Circle, Jos, Nigeria, May, 23, 2007. I am grateful to the UBS Africa Area Translation Coordinator for submitting this paper for publication to *The Bible Translator*. A PowerPoint file, which accompanied the original oral presentation with images of the beautiful old manuscripts referred to, is available on request from [andy.warren@biblesocieties.org](mailto:andy.warren@biblesocieties.org). A more detailed discussion of audience, sociolinguistic, and technical issues is being developed in the form of *A TAZI & Ajami Handbook for West Africa* (in preparation).

5 Bivar, “Calligraphy,” 5.

6 For more on the history, see I. Hrbek, *Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century* (The UNESCO General History of Africa, Abridged Edition 3; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1988) and J. Ki-Zerbo and D. T. Niane, *Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century* (The UNESCO General History of Africa, Abridged Edition 4; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1988); J. M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: A Sufi Order in the Modern World* (Royal Institute of International Affairs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Y. Schaaf, *On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa* (All Africa Conference of Churches: Africa Challenge 5; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), ch. 37 “The Book from Heaven.”

rather like Latin in mediaeval Europe, Arabic became the language of religious, legal, and scientific writing,<sup>7</sup> lending a vast amount of vocabulary to neighbouring languages.<sup>8</sup>

Though other parts of Africa have indigenous scripts, such as Tifinagh (Berber), Ethiopic, and Osmania (Somali), West Africa has only some smaller traditions such as “secret” scripts of royal houses, etc.<sup>9</sup> As a result, AS quickly became the only script used to write languages of all three major African phyla—*Afroasiatic* Hausa (Chadic) and Tamasheq (Berber), *Nilo-Saharan* Kanuri-Kanembu-Zaghawa (Saharan) and the Songhai languages, and *Niger-Congo* Fulfulde-Wolof (Atlantic-Congo), Mandinka-Jahanka-Bambara-Jula (Mande-Manding), Soninke (Mande-Samogo), Yoruba (Benue-Congo), and KiSwahili-Comorian (Bantu).<sup>10</sup> Thus all the old classics of Fulfulde, Hausa, and Swahili religious literature are preserved in AS manuscripts, including the Fulfulde poems of ‘Uthman dan Fodio (which were translated into Hausa by the middle of the century), and the Swahili *Al-Inkishafi* by Sayyid Abdalla. However, the widest distribution of Ajami in West Africa was perhaps in the Fulfulde *kabbe* (Arabic عَقِيْدَة ‘*aqida* “creed”), which came to be connected in some places with esoteric beliefs and practices (rather like Christian gnosticism) and so were suppressed under the conservativist علماء ‘*ulama-ist*) *jihad*.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, despite his own famous Fulfulde compositions, Sheikh ‘Uthman’s caliphate in general replaced Fulfulde with Arabic.<sup>12</sup>

Eventually,

At the start of the colonial period in northern Nigeria [declaration of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria by Frederick Lugard on 1 Jan 1900 in Lokoja] Arabic was the written language of administrative documents—correspondence, legal records, tax and inheritance documents—while Fulfulde had given way to Hausa as the oral language of administration (though no doubt many officials were still trilingual, able to use Arabic, Fulfulde and Hausa). The British colonial administration continued this linguistic practice, but after an initial period substituted English or Hausa for Arabic in administrative work. Similarly, written Hausa was substituted for Arabic in other specific areas: Hausa in *ajami* script was used where the general public were concerned (for example, on currency notes or in commercial advertising,

7 L. Brenner and M. Last, “The Role of Language in West African Islam,” *Africa* 55.4 (1985): 432-46 (435-7).

8 There is a huge literature on this, including scholarly articles with lists of Arabic loans in Chadic in general, Hausa (including several articles by Sergio Balđi), Zarma, Kanuri, the Sar languages, Mandinka, Yoruba, and Swahili; and the impressive D. Sallum, معجزة اللغة العربية المستعمرة في اللغة الأجنبية *Mu‘jamat al-lughah al-‘Arabiyah al-musta‘arah fi al-lughah al-‘ajnabiyah* (*Dictionary of Arabic borrowings into foreign languages*) (Beirut: ‘Alam al-Kutub, 2000), which contains extensive lists of Arabic loan-words in Malaysian, Indonesian, Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, Turkish, Persian, and Kurdish.

9 Zima, “Language,” 213, lists eleven such scripts in West Africa; Vai is a modern invention (nineteenth century); see also the beautiful S. Mafundikwa, *African Alphabets: The Story of Writing in Afrika* (New York: Mark Batty Publisher, 2007).

10 Zima, “Language,” 213, also lists Dagbani, Mamprule, and Guang. ISESCO’s online “Project for transcription of African Languages in Arabic Script” ([www.isesco.org.ma](http://www.isesco.org.ma)) also lists Dinke, Oromo, Nobia (Sudan); Luganda, Lugbara (Uganda); Somalian; Soso, Tajrini, Alamba/Woday.

11 Brenner and Last, “Role,” 434; Philips, *Spurious Arabic*, 19-20.

12 Brenner and Last, “Role,” 435-7.

for which stencils were used), but Roman script (*boko*) was substituted where officialdom—and printing—were current.<sup>13</sup>

Within just a few years, Lugard made a unilateral and ill-informed decision that his administration and government schools should use RS Hausa,<sup>14</sup> and this has remained government and missionary educational policy to the present, despite the generally agreed awkwardness of RS for Hausa (which, after all, being Afroasiatic, is genetically related to Arabic). Though the first Hausa dictionaries had included AS and RS (the latter initially intended as a phonetic pronunciation guide for missionaries and colonial officers), the 1913 edition of Robinson's *Hausa Dictionary* and the 1925 edition of his *Specimens of Hausa Literature* removed all AS, marking the rapid decline of AS from public administration. A similar story can be told for Swahili in East Africa and Wolof in Senegal.<sup>15</sup>

### Distribution of AS in West Africa

Today, though almost all non-Muslims and perhaps up to half of Muslims cannot read AS, it can still be seen in a number of contexts in West Africa, mostly within the parameters of international trade, poor rural Islam, and evangelistic urban Islam.

AS is most widespread in the Arabic or other names of household products. Some of these are produced in West Africa for West Africa, such as Nigeria's دانو Dano and هولنديا Hollandia milk, ناسكو Nasco cornflakes and biscuits, لفلنك La Voltic mineral water, and كاپري سنن Capri-Sonne apple juice. Others are produced elsewhere but intended primarily for the Middle East, such as France's لاکستار Lacstar Prolac milk, بريزيدن Président butter, كالفي Calvé mayonnaise, and سسكسو [sic!] SIPA couscous. And others are imported from the Middle East, such as the international كوكا كولا Coca-Cola, كلوس اب CloseUp toothpaste, and بروكتر وجاميل بامبرز Procter and Gamble Pampers, and the products of Egypt's بسكومصر Biscomisr, Saudi Arabia's ديمه DeemaH and جندور Gandour, and Lebanon's مپتكو Meptico. Since many such product names are derived from English (e.g., CloseUp) or French (e.g., Président), and contain sounds not present in modern standard Arabic (e.g., *p*, *g*, *v*, *zh*, *ch*), modified forms of Arabic letters are used (just as diacritics or "special characters" are used to modify the Roman alphabet for West African languages). These may sometimes suggest possibilities for writing African languages too, in cases where strong AS conventions do not already exist.

Arabic language itself is also found on these product labels—the ubiquitous حلال *halaal*, of course, but also in the ingredients, directions for use, etc. However, only a few Arabic-literate West Africans buy such expensive products, and probably only very few of them actually do read the label, as is suggested by some of the simple mistakes which regularly appear.<sup>16</sup> The case may be different with the Arabic subtitles to American films on middle-eastern cable networks and on pirated video cassettes; these can be seen in almost every small village in northern Nigeria, and I imagine that children who do not understand the English soundtrack anyway may occasionally be distracted from the action on screen to glance at the letters which they have learnt in the *madrasa*.

13 Brenner and Last, "Role," 438.

14 Phillips, *Spurious Arabic*.

15 Knappert, "Swahili"; Ngom, "Ajami Scripts."

16 Nasco spells "vanilla" with a wrong character for the "v," La Voltic misspells "mineral water," and Oldenburger butter sometimes prints the Arabic letters from left to right!

Then there are specifically Islamic uses, such as on the signs of Mosques, Islamic schools, and other institutions (e.g., most famously *جامعة أحمد بello*, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, though of course this is in fact now a secular institution), qur'ānic texts or Islamic slogans on car stickers, trucks, and increasingly also posted by the *Sharia Commission* and *Nasrul Ilahi il-fathi Society of Nigeria* in the streets in Zamfara, Sokoto, Bauchi, and Lagos (e.g., *وَمَا لِلَّهِ تَوْفِيقٌ*, *wabilahi taofeek* “with God there is success,” *ما شاء الله* *maa sha' Allah* “whatever God wills,” *الله أكبر* *Allah akbar* “God is greater”), and, moving northeast towards Chad, road signs and public health notices about HIV/AIDS.

AS Hausa remains a common medium of communication in Islamic communities. It appears on certain product labels (e.g., *ب غي با Ba giya ba* “non-alcoholic” on Royal Malt, and the recent *Arewa* series of school exercise books), on mute beggars' signboards, public toilet signs, and personal letters.<sup>17</sup> Specifically religious are the interlinear Qur'ān commentaries produced by the Tijani order in Kano and sold outside mosques at least as far apart as Niamey and N'Djaména, but there is also a much wider literature, including a weekly newspaper *الفجر Al-Fijir*,<sup>18</sup> and a regular column in the Hausa/English magazine *المهجر Al-Buhran*; Yahaya's history of Hausa literature lists over 50 works in Ajamin Hausa, published in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, AS Hausa had its widest distribution on all Nigerian currency, alongside English (including the ₦1,000 note, introduced as recently as 2006), though perhaps 90% of Nigerians cannot read it and so assume it is Arabic.<sup>20</sup> However, in March 2007, in a controversial move by the Central Bank of Nigeria, a new series of currency was introduced (for now, just smaller denominations) bearing the denominations only in RS Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and English.

Other West African languages such as Kanuri (mostly in Niger) and Yoruba (in northern Oyo State, Nigeria—especially Ilorin and Šaki) also have strong and continuing traditions of AS use. Some also appear on national currencies (e.g., in Gambia), and Fulfulde appears in AS in several of the above-mentioned contexts, as well as at least one other—veterinary health notices.

Finally, a note on literacy teaching is in order. AS is primarily taught in Islamic contexts, outside of state formal education, and for this reason, those who can only read AS—even if they can do so well—may be formally classed as “illiterate,” and excluded from official national literacy statistics. This is particularly ironic in view of the fact that the materials available, though starting at the most basic, locally-produced pamphlets printed in Kano or Zaria in used paper covers and with old colonial drawings from the Middle East, also include high-quality imports from Egypt or Saudi Arabia as well as formal publications for Nigerian schools by Longman Nigeria and Ibadan University Press. Still, it remains the case that most teaching is done in qur'ānic schools, often starting with *جزء عمّ Juz Amma*, the thirtieth and last portion of the Islamic lectionary, and focussing more on recitation

17 I have a friend from Niger who sends me emails in AS Hausa.

18 There was reportedly also an Ajamin Hausa *Jaridar Gommatin Kano* published 1979-1983 under Kano Governor Abukarimi and President Shagari (Mohammed Abubakar pers. comm.).

19 I. Y. Yahaya, *Hausa a Rubuce: Tarihin Rubuce Rubuce cikin Hausa* (Zaria: NNPC, 1988), 236-9.

20 Wole Soyinka, “Is It Incidental That the Other Language on Our National Currency is Arabic?” n.p., October 16, 1998. Online: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200703070575.html>.

than on understanding. And the common Ajami Hausa primers available are intended as bridges to Arabic itself.<sup>21</sup>

This survey reveals a very patchy distribution of AS, which it is very difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, it is probably fair to say that centuries-old traditions of AS use for African languages are currently on the decline, just as their associated handwriting styles are being supplanted by modern computer fonts (and computer literacy requires literacy in English, French, or Arabic, of course). Furthermore, the theological movements which maintained these traditions are under pressure from modern internationally-minded forms of Islamic belief and practice (which prefer Arabic itself to Ajami). But these kinds of trends are nothing new in the language development and Bible translation worlds. It is well known that minority local languages are on the decline in public use throughout West Africa—in markets, schools, churches, and other public centres, they are giving way to national or regional languages even where they were adequate for communication (that is, where everyone speaks the minority language, they may still prefer a majority language in certain larger contexts). But this does not mean that these languages are threatened—their continued use is secured as long as they remain the language of the home. Similarly, the minority AS is on the decline in public use throughout West Africa—businesses, institutions, and even mosques are increasingly using RS alongside or even in place of AS. But this does not mean that AS is threatened—its continued use is secured as long as it remains the script of Islam.

### Sociolinguistic issues

All of the above activity both reflects and shapes a complex religious, political, and economic environment, shot through with intersecting sociolinguistic issues, including attitudes to the Arabic language and script, the problem of digraphia, and the existence of alternative forms of AS use.

### Attitudes to Arabic

Islamic attitudes towards Arabic language and script are derived in large part from those of Jews towards Hebrew, which are well expressed as follows:

the Torah—the visible Torah, that is—is only one of the possible permutations of the letters of the eternal Torah, as God created it and delivered it to the angels. By rearranging the letters of the book over the centuries, we may someday arrive again at the original Torah. But the important thing is not the finding, it is the seeking, it is the devotion with which one spins the wheel of prayer and scripture, discovering the truth little by little. If this machine gave you the truth immediately, you would not recognize it, because your heart would not have been purified by the long quest. And in an office! No, the Book must be murmured day after day in a little ghetto hovel where you learn to lean forward and keep your arms tight against your hips so there will be as little space as possible between the hand that holds the Book and the hand that turns the pages. And if you moisten your fingers, you must raise them vertically to your lips, as if nibbling unleavened bread, and drop no crumb.

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21 H. Binji and N. S. Wali, *مُ كُوِي اَجَمِي دَ لَارَبِي Mu koyi ajami da larabci* (Zaria: NNPC on behalf of Gaskiya Corporation, 1969), and Y. Amudani, *Koyi da Kanka Harsuna uku: Turanci da Hausa da Larabci (Teach yourself three languages: English, Hausa and Arabic)* (Kano: Ayab General Enterprises, 2001), a series of primers at different levels, published since the 1980s, and also available in French.

The word must be eaten very slowly. It must melt on the tongue before you can dissolve and reorder it.<sup>22</sup>

To most Muslims, Arabic is the only language of God, of Eden and heaven, of revelation, of prayer, of text-drinking rituals (Hausa *rubutu*, Fulfulde *mbindi*, Kanuri *ruwu*) and of the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān's language is as much a part of its essence as its meaning; hence it is untranslatable and must be recited in Arabic to have spiritual value. Whilst Christians may in different periods have taken Greek, Syriac, Russian, or Latin as their holy language,<sup>23</sup> and even Jews have flirted with Aramaic, Arabic, Yiddish, and Ladino, Islam has never admitted of any rival to Arabic:

Arabic language is the receptacle of Islamic Culture. It is the ideal instrument of knowing the tenets of the true religion of Islam and understanding its rules, since it is the sole language in the world that is inextricably linked to religion. Arabic language is the language of Islam, for it is the language of the Holy Qurʾan, the language of the Hadith of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the language of his pious followers, who made the history of Islam, conquered countries and spread the righteous religion there. It is furthermore the language of the Arab and Islamic heritage whose big edifice was built by the unrivalled scholars and thinkers of the Ummah. Most of these men did not have Arabic as mother tongue. But this fact did not prevent them from writing books in Arabic, and from excelling in thought and creation of the Islamic civilization through the gems they have compiled.<sup>24</sup>

### Scripts are ships

It has been said that, “A language is a dialect with a navy”; that is, national status elevates what might otherwise have been commonly described as a “dialect” to the status of a “language.” By analogy, one might say, “A language is a dialect with a distinct script.” Even when language unites, script can divide—Arabic as an international scholarly *lingua franca* in mediaeval Europe was written by Muslims in AS, Christians in RS, and Jews in Hebrew script! And if language is definitive of cultural and religious identity, how much more script—Hebrew square script, for example, has been maintained by Jews throughout all their travels into Arabic, Yiddish, and Ladino. So our generation's “clash of civilisations” actually has less to do with languages<sup>25</sup> than it has with scripts (Roman, Arabic, Cyrillic, Chinese, etc.)!

To most Muslims, AS is as holy as the Arabic language, and each letter has hidden, mystical qualities. Failing Arabic itself, AS is the only acceptable medium of religious communication, even though they may be prepared to receive other types of communication in RS English or French. There are Hausas and Fulanis in West Africa for whom seeing their own language written in RS is even stranger than is, for most of us, seeing كوكا كولا Coca-Cola written in AS—in both cases,

22 U. Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum* (New York: Ballantyne Books, 1988), 28-29.

23 J. A. Fishman, *In Praise of the Beloved Language: A Comparative View of Positive Ethnolinguistic Consciousness* (Contributions to the Sociology of Language 76; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997), 18, 20, cites evidence which suggests that—contrary to all that Christians claim to stand for—the association of language with religion, and the characterisation of a language as somehow “holy” is more pronounced in Christian-influenced cultures than in others.

24 ISESCO, “Project for Transcription of African Languages in Arabic Script.”

25 S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 59-64.

the reaction is not just to a clash of language and script, but to a clash of the associated ideologies, and the Hausas and Fulanis face the additional gut-wrench of seeing a sacred script replaced with what they call *karfeeje kefeero* “pagan writing.” By contrast, texts presented in AS can provoke an unexpectedly positive response—a Cameroonian Muslim woman was recently reported to have memorised a Fulfulde leaflet about AIDS simply because it was written in AS!

In addition to this religious devotion to AS, political pressure is coming to bear on West African communities through the *Islamic Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organisation* (ISESCO), which is promoting a particularly purist use of AS for other languages, on the principle that no letter should be used for a sound other than that which it has in Arabic (contrary to centuries-old traditions for Hausa and Fulfulde). Meanwhile, at the other end of the scale, a number of language communities along the northern edge of the region (Niger, Chad, Darfur) reject AS as an Arab cultural symbol, and prefer RS for their languages as culturally neutral and “international.”

### Digraphia is divisive

Digraphia (the concurrent use of two writing systems for one language) is divisive, as we have seen above for mediaeval scholarly Arabic, and we see today in Hindi-Urdu (Devanagari script for Indian Hindus and AS for Pakistani Muslims)<sup>26</sup> and Serbo-Croat (Cyrillic script for Eastern Orthodox Serbs, RS for Roman Catholic Croats and AS—at least until the early twentieth century—for Muslim Bosnians).<sup>27</sup>

Nigerian government romanising policy from Lugard in 1902 to the Central Bank of Nigeria in 2007 has filtered through official publications and school textbooks, thereby promoting RS Hausa and Fulfulde to the status of official languages, whilst relegating AS Hausa and Fulfulde to the more restricted range of—mostly culturally Islamic—uses detailed above. A *digraphic* situation exists—something like a literary “iron curtain” across Northern Nigeria,<sup>28</sup> corresponding broadly to that between the Islamic, *shari‘a*, mother-tongue AS Hausa north, and the mixed Islamic-Christian-Traditionalist, Federal-law, second-language RS Hausa Middle Belt.

Hausa need never have used RS, and national-level digraphia (Hausa using AS, Igbo using RS, and Yoruba going either way) need never have been a problem (any more than it is in southern India, for example). But Lugard at the start of the twentieth century and the Central Bank of Nigeria at the start of the twenty-first, by pursuing RS *uniformity* at the *national* level, have inadvertently contributed to *diversity* within the northern region and Hausaland itself, with quite disastrous consequences for education and Bible work. In 100 years, AS has gone from being the standard medium of indigenous literacy to a ubiquitous mark of globalisation

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26 R. Ahmad, “Scripting a New Identity: The Battle for Devanagari in Nineteenth Century India” *Journal of Pragmatics* 40 (2008): 1163-83.

27 R. O. Collin, “Revolutionary Scripts: The Politics of Writing Systems” (Paper presented at the Vernacular 2005 Conference on Language and Society, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, Mexico, Oct 26, 2005), 15-16.

28 Collin writes similarly of “the Roman and the Cyrillic alphabets, which have traditionally provided the fault line between Europe’s Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian communities,” that “Digraphia is regularly an outer and visible sign of ethnic or religious hatred” (Collin, “Revolutionary Scripts,” 10, citing R. D. King, “The Poisonous Potency of Script: Hindu and Urdu,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 150 [2001]: 43-59 [44]).

on the one hand (imported products), and a powerful Islamic religio-cultural symbol on the other.

AS is here to stay in northern Nigeria—at least as long as Islam is here. Nevertheless, my impression is that most Nigerian Muslims are not bothered to fight for AS Hausa—they regard it as old-fashioned and too closely associated with the Sufi Tijani order. Whilst the Tijani continue to publish handwritten Qurʾān portions with interlinear AS Hausa, the two complete published translations of the meaning of the Qurʾān into Hausa—by Sunnis (Gummi) and Ahmadiyyas (Agboola) respectively—are both in RS.<sup>29</sup> The most dynamic young Islam in Nigeria is learning the official RS Hausa and English for convenience and power, but for religious purposes is much more interested in Arabic itself.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, ironically, contrary to the aspirations of Lugard and CBN, the emotional attachments of Christian and Islamic communities may be being yet further polarised at the national level, as both communities desert the RS *wazobia* (Yoruba-Hausa-Igbo)<sup>31</sup> “common ground” for English on the one hand and Arabic on the other.

### Alternatives for Ajami

One language may use two writing systems (digraphia), and also use a number of varieties within each system. This variety is relatively common in modern RS use in the region—for example, when a cross-border language follows both francophone (e.g., ch, r, é, è) and anglophone (e.g., sh, gh, e, ε) conventions, or when a particular set of vowels is marked by one church with subscript dots (ẹ ị ọ ụ) and by another with special characters (ε ι υ υ). But even the centuries-old use of AS is prone to regional and sectarian inconsistencies, most notably that between traditional African Tijani Islam which prefers *Maghribi*-style square AS and the minority Imam Warsh edition of the Qurʾān, and modern international Sunni Islam which prefers Egyptian *Naskhi*-style modern standard AS and the international standard Imam Ḥaḥḥ edition of the Qurʾān. The main differences involve the use of *nuktas* (diacritics) on *f* (ف/ف) and *q* (ق/ق), and final *n* (ن/ن) and *k* (ك/ك), and the use of the *umlaut* symbol *imāla* to mark an *e* vowel (usually together with “dagger *alif*” and *alif maksuraa* (أى), and these, together with the shape of the script can make a text unreadable to someone used to the other of the two styles.<sup>32</sup>

29 A. M. Gummi, *Tarjamar ma'anōnin Alkur'ani Maigirma zuwa harshen Hausa* (Beirut: Dar al-Arabia, 1980); M. A. R. A. Agboola, *Al-Kur'ani mai Tsarki: Talifi cikin Larabci da Fassara cikin Hausa, na Jama'ar Musulmi ta Ahmadiyya reshen Nigeria* (Tilford: Islam International Publications Ltd., 1992).

30 “In the second half of the twentieth century, usage of Arabic as a literary language and as a general language of written communication has become more widespread, even as literacy in English or in certain African languages has increased. . . . The use of Arabic as a literary and scholarly language has a historical depth of over five centuries and shows no sign of diminishing. The ratio of Muslims to non-Muslims in Nigeria continues to increase and hence education in Arabic and Arabic writing skills are likely to expand.” (Hunwick, “Arabic Literary Tradition”).

31 The term *wazobia* is derived from the word for “come” in each of the three major national languages and is an important symbol of national unity. Though originally the name of an artificially-created composite language (Nigeria’s Esperanto), it has come to be used for any national-level initiative based on these three largest languages. Not only CBN, but most recently also Linux and Nokia, follow *wazobia* language policies.

32 Bible translation projects across the region have to decide whether to follow a Ḥaḥḥ or Warsh orthography, though the latter is only really suitable for those communities with strong existing Sufi and Warsh conventions (e.g., Fulfulde, Hausa). Even when Warsh is chosen, it is currently not possible to print in *maghribi* script, since no suitable computer font exists (all local *maghribi* script publications are still handwritten).

Historically, “there has never been a standardized Ajami orthography. Different innovations were made and used in different places, and scholars were free to use or ignore the innovations of other scholars as they saw fit.”<sup>33</sup> But today, young Nigerian Islam (especially in the Middle Belt)<sup>34</sup> and the *Islamic Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organisation* (ISESCO) are pushing for international standards, which are sometimes unreasonable when applied to African languages, leaving linguistic and literacy agencies hamstrung by their own agreements with national governments which follow ISESCO.<sup>35</sup> Missionary agencies such as SIL’s Fulfulde Harmonisation Project (FHP) and JCMWA, NGOs such as SAFEFOD in Senegal and the *Association pour la Promotion de l’Élevage au Sahel et en Savanne* (APESS), and even academic institutions such as the *Institut Nationale des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* (INALCO) in Paris are promoting standards for the benefit of their constituencies and often to the great irritation of each other. As a result, certain non-Arabic sounds such as those written in English-based RS as *b, y, ng, ny, p, ch, zh, e, o*, etc., are written in many different ways across the region, sometimes for the same language, and often for neighbouring, overlapping, or cognate languages.<sup>36</sup>

### Bible agencies

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Bible agencies and other Christian missions have been among the most significant players in publishing for West Africa—in both RS and AS. Some of the earliest Bible publications were:<sup>37</sup>

1853 Matthew 2–4 in polyglot AS Hausa / AS Kanuri / English<sup>38</sup>

1877 John in digraphic AS/RS Hausa (CMS)<sup>39</sup>

1894-1902 Matthew, Mark, John in AS Hausa (CMS/BFBS)<sup>40</sup>

33 Philips, *Spurious Arabic*, 21.

34 “Members of the younger generation of Nigerian Arabic writers have often spent many years studying in Arabic-speaking countries and have acquired new perspectives on Islamic culture and on the way in which Arabs use their language.” (Hunwick, “Arabic Literary Tradition”).

35 A history of UNESCO’s and then ISESCO’s work in this field is given in Chtatou, *Using Arabic Script*. Key points are a UNESCO BRED (Bureau Régional d’Éducation pour l’Afrique) and Malian government-sponsored workshop, *Séminaire national sur l’utilisation de l’alphabet arabe dans la lutte contre l’analphabétisme* (Bamako, July 21–26, 1986) (the resulting report is entitled *Rapport général du séminaire atelier sur l’élaboration d’un système unifié de transcription du Songhoy en caractères arabes, du 14 au 19 mars 1987, Bamako*), a follow-up workshop on standards for Fulfulde and Songhai (Bamako, March 9–14, 1987), a Senegalese government-sponsored workshop on standards for Pulaar and Wolof (Dakar, March 16–21, 1987), and a Niger government-sponsored workshop on standards for Hausa and Zarma (Konni, April 21–25, 1987). ISESCO itself organised two colloquia, *Standardisation de l’utilisation du pulaar/fulfulde et zarma/songhoy* (Bamako, November 11–14, 1987; Rabat, March 11–13, 1988).

36 The *Glyphologue* project is cataloguing the use of AS by languages and organisations throughout the world.

37 Copies of these are kept in the United Bible Societies archive in Cambridge University Library, UK.

38 E. Norris and J. Richardson, *Dialogues, and a Small Portion of the New Testament, in the English, Arabic, Hausa, and Bornu Languages* (London: Harrison & Sons, 1853); the catalogue entry reads: “The Dialogues are printed in four columns: (1) English, (2) Arabic, (3) Soudanese (i.e. Hausa), (4) Bornouese; 102pp. Pp. 103 to 116 contain Matt. ii.-iv. 5 in Soudanese and Bornouese, with a literal English version. Translated by James Richardson the African traveller and edited by Edwin Norris.”

39 J. F. Schön, *تَرْجُومَةُ نَبِيِّنَا مُحَمَّدٍ ﷺ Labari Nagari (ko Linzila na Yahaya) (The Gospel of St. John)* (London: Church Missionary House, 1877).

40 J. A. and C. H. Robinson, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew Translated into the Hausa Language* (1894); the catalogue entry reads: “The translation was prepared by J. A. Robinson, based on a version made by D. John of the Church Missionary Society. The MS. was revised and transcribed into Arabic characters by C. H. Robinson, assisted by Herman G. Harris, an independent missionary in N. Africa. The volume was

1911 portions in diglot Arabic / RS Yoruba (CMS)<sup>41</sup>

1927 Psalms selections in AS Fulfulde<sup>42</sup>

1929 1 John in AS Bambara (BFBS)<sup>43</sup>

The choice of AS for the earliest of these has of course in itself nothing to do with addressing an Islamic audience—AS was the only script used for these languages at that point. However, other features indicate that these were clearly intended for Islamic audiences. The 1894 Hausa Matthew and 1927 Fulfulde Psalms both included, at the end, an extract from the Qurʾān. In the first of these, the extract reads:

The Gospel containing direction and light . . . that they who have received the Gospel might judge according to what God hath revealed therein; and whoso judgeth not according to what God hath revealed, they are transgressors.

The 1899 Hausa John was translated not from Greek or English, but from Arabic. And in 1911, concurrent with their Bible portions, and in the same format, CMS published Sura 12 of the Qurʾān (Joseph), adding an Islamic—though not Qurʾānic—prayer of Jacob, ending with “and he prayed for Muhammad.”<sup>44</sup>

Government romanising policy led to a decrease in such publications for most of the twentieth century, such that the only Bible portion in AS Hausa which has stayed in print for more than a few years is the Gospel of John in a handwritten version from 1925, which has been reprinted many times up to the present (most recently in 2003!).<sup>45</sup> Similar tendencies are observable elsewhere in the region.<sup>46</sup> In many parts of Africa, missionaries and Bible agencies have tended to promote RS, due in some cases to over-alliance with colonial, governmental, and educational authorities, and in others to straightforward thoughtless neglect of existing traditions.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, there has been something of a revival of AS Bible publications in the last two to three decades. Now, just as Bible products still account for much of the RS literature market in West Africa (including English and French), so they also represent a significant proportion of the AS market (with the exception of imported Arabic publications). New AS Bible products are being developed in Gambia (Wolof, Mandinka), Togo (Tem), Nigeria (Hausa), Niger (Hausa, Zarma, Kanuri, Dazaga, Tadaksahak, etc.), Cameroon (Kotoko), Chad (Maba, Chadian Arabic—digraphic with RS) and all across West Africa from Guinea to Cameroon in the various Fulfulde languages (at least Guinea’s Fuuta Jalon [fuf],<sup>48</sup> Mali’s

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lithographed in Tunis and published at Cambridge.” C. H. Robinson, *إنجيل يوحنا*. *St. John in Hausa* (London: BFBS, 1899). C. H. Robinson, *إنجيل نمرؤس*. *St. Mark in Hausa* (London: BFBS, 1902).

41 C. Wakeman, *كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ Awon oro Olorun li ede Larubawa ati Yoruba* (Lagos: CMS Bookshop, 1911); the catalogue entry reads: “Pamphlet containing the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer and certain texts in Arabic (lithographed in the Aljemi script current in W. Africa) with a literal Yoruba translation.”

42 A. W. Olsen and Malam Muri, (*Psalms selections*) (s.l.: s.n., 1927).

43 n.n., *يوحنا كلتر هل*. *1 John in Bambara, Arabic Character* (London: BFBS, 1929).

44 Th. A. J. Ogunbiyi, *سورة يوسف Suratu Yesufu* (Lagos: CMS Bookshop, 1911).

45 n.n., *بَشَارَ دَعْمَشَ يُوْحَنَّا*. *Hausa [Aljemi] John* (London: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1967; Lagos: The Bible Societies in West Africa, 1988ff.; Lagos: BSN, Printed Jos: NBT, 1925, 1937, 1967, 1988, 2003).

46 There have been many smaller tracts produced in African languages in AS by Scripture Gift Mission (SGM) and others, but I am aware of next to nothing before the 1960s.

47 AS orthographies are almost completely ignored in *Alphabets of Africa* (ed. Rh. L. Hartell; Dakar: UNESCO, SIL, 1993)!

48 Three-letter codes in square brackets are Ethnologue language codes.

SUDANESE AND BORNUESE

St. Matthew, Chap. 2. 3. 3. & Part of 4.

103.

2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter  
1<sup>st</sup> Verse

Magi	King	of Herod	days	in	Jerusalem	Jesus	was born	And when
اذ جوس	تدركه	هبرودس	كائيك	شكين	قعا كح	يسوع	يا هيفد يسوع	توكينه
اذ جوس	بيي	هيرودس	يفر	شرو	قتر كح	يسوع	شنتبي يسوع	افيتي

king	the born	where	Saying	(2 <sup>nd</sup> Verse)	Jerusalem	to	east	from	time
توكين	شكوي يار	آينا	صاقتي	قلستين	اورشاليم	الى	قصر	دقا	دمتني
ميت	في بتيته	اندر	اندر	اورشاليم	الى	قديس	تا	موايم	

When	(3 <sup>d</sup> Verse)	to worship him	we are come	east	in	his star	have seen	We	of the born
توكين	متلاين شرو	مطلا ممد	منر ديم	قندر	شكن	شمرا نعر	هو	صنف	الهر
افيتي	ملاين شرو	اشبي	شرو	قيم	شرو	مفني	زي	شرو	المهر

Matthew 2 in AS Hausa ("Soudanese") and Kanuri ("Bornuese") (Norris & Richardson, 1853)

**الحمد لله**

لئلا تاصلن عيسى المسيحى ان اوج ان اير اصبح اير صبح  
 يهيو اشكاف اشكاف يهيو يعقون يعقون يهيو يعقون  
 كنوننسر يهيو يهيو نمر فارصن اير فارص يهيو حصرون  
 حصرون يهيو ارم رام يهيو عيبنن عيبنن يهيو كشنون  
 كشنون يهيو سلنمون سلنمون تهيون اراجن بوعر بوعر  
 يهيو اراعت عويبن عويبن يهيو يسى يسى يهيو اوج  
 لسرك اوج يهيو سلنن اعاثن تاكني خاتلن اوزن  
 سلننن يهيو اجعلم اجعلم يهيو اينا اينا يهيو انا  
 انا يهيو يهوشوط يهوشوط يهيو يورام يورام  
 يهيو عزبا عزبا يهيو يوتلم يوتلم يهيو اكار  
 اكار يهيو حرافيا حرافيا يهيو ملسى ملسى يهيو  
 امون امون يهيو يوشيا يوشيا يهيو يكتيا

سنكتار تار نو سنكتار سبور سبور كورن ديواو غيانيك  
 سنكتار كتي المحرر سبور سبور سنكتار لوكتار  
 مكي يارثي ان كورن لبارن ديواو غيانيك  
 مخرن نيك ان ون سنكتار كورن سنكتار كورن  
 انكوبس محسن سن كورن كورن نكن يهيو هر يو اما  
 المحرر غوم شرار سنكتار غيلن غيلن ان عيسى يحكم  
 ملس سنكتار سنكتار ملس سبور اما وس سنكتار يارثي  
 عيسى يارثي عيسى ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس  
 الجتا يسر مويبي ان ون فاكتار كتي المحرر يعزر  
 كورن ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس  
 ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس  
 كورن ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس ملس



الاصل يهيو صهي وور ليحج اصل الاصل يهيو انزل  
 الله يهيو مصلح الحكم يهيو انزل الله فالانك مع  
 العذر

Matthew in AS Hausa (Robinson, CMS, 1894) with a closing quotation from Qur'ān 5:46-47.

Maasina [ful], Burkina Faso's Jelgooji [ful], Western Niger [fuh], Nigeria [fuv] and Cameroon's Adamawa [fub], where the entire Bible, *Deftere Allah*, is soon to appear in AS. Literacy primers in AS have been produced by missionaries<sup>49</sup>—though there is usually less need for them, since AS Bible products are usually aimed at communities which are already literate—and the Cameroonian Fulfulde and Chadian Arabic projects have produced many non-religious publications. Finally, missionary projects have even produced booklets of the “99 glorious names of Allah” as bridges to Bible products, reminiscent of the inclusion of Qurʾān portions in the early Bible publications referred to above.

All this activity throws up a number of distinctive sociolinguistic issues even within the missions, churches, and Bible agencies.

### Trepidation over TAZI

Christian majorities in the West African savanna (the southern half of most countries between Ivory Coast and Cameroon) tend to fear political Islamisation and *shariʿa*, and are very aware of the importance of culturally Christian centres such as Nigeria's Plateau State and southern Chad to serve as bulwarks against the southwestward march of Islam.<sup>50</sup> The success of cultural Christianity is closely tied to the promotion of western cultural symbols such as education, healthcare, broadcast media (American films and music), western dress, the English and French languages, and RS. Equivalent Islamic symbols therefore represent a threat, so even when wearing traditional Hausa dress, Nigerian Christian men tend to avoid wearing a cap since the ethno-religious crisis of 2001.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, the removal of AS from the banknotes in their pockets is a relief to many such southern Nigerian Christians, and it is of great significance for AS work in the region that the leadership of most major church denominations and Bible Agencies tends to be southern.

TAZI work (the presentation of the Bible—the *Tawrat*, *Anbiya*, *Zabur*, and *Injil*—in formats acceptable to Muslims) depends on the use of religio-cultural symbols to make the Bible feel familiar to Muslims—TAZI is to publishing what *naturalness* is to translation. So the English *TAZI New Testament*,<sup>52</sup> is published with page borders around the text, green covers, in a plastic bag, etc., and looks strikingly similar to the English edition of the Qurʾān most commonly available in Nigeria.<sup>53</sup> Such initiatives may sometimes prove provocative to certain Christians (they offend against the Bible translation criterion of *acceptability*<sup>54</sup>), as when the

49 E. van Gerpen. *Ka Koya wa Kanka Ajami* (SIM, n.d.); n.n., *Koya wa Kanka Karatun Ajami* (NNPC Ltd.); © Wusasa: CMS; Printed Kaduna: Baraka Press & Publishers Ltd., 1971); and A. Garba and Abdu-lisa, *Ekkitinol Ajamiya* (Ngaoubela: EELC/JCMA, 1997).

50 Resisting the advance of Islam was a stated policy, even the *raison d'être*, of one of the main missions, SUM (now Action Partners), as articulated by its founder, Karl Kumm, in 1912.

51 Notable exceptions are the several small groups of Yoruba Christian missionaries in northern Nigeria, who are passionately committed to cross-cultural communication, wearing Hausa caps and long beards, and learning Arabic.

52 *The Holy Gospel: Study Edition* (Bangalore: Bible Society of India, 2005); a French edition, adapted for West Africa, is forthcoming.

53 A. Y. Ali, *Roman Transliteration of the Holy Quran: With Full Arabic Text and English Translation* (Kano: Alkali Sharif Bala, n.d.).

54 Accuracy, Clarity, Naturalness and Acceptability are usually cited as the four criteria for quality in Bible translation; as this discussion shows, they may be usefully applied, not only to the wording of a translated text, but also to the publishing process itself. See also A. Warren-Rothlin, “The Texts of the Books” (Paper presented at UBS AFRATCON, Nairobi, Kenya, May 15, 2008), which applies the criterion of *accuracy* to the publishing process.

“northern knot” symbol was used to decorate the 1965 Hausa NT, but ironically, the low price (just \$1) of the *TAZI New Testament* has made it quite popular among *Christians* in some places, such that it is now the Bible itself which is bringing Islamic symbols into Christian contexts!

### Quoting the Qurʾān

In our survey of the history of AS in West Africa, we noted that some of the earliest Bible publications in West Africa were in AS Hausa, Kanuri, Fulfulde, and Bambara, and several of them contained qurʾānic and other Arabic texts. Today, at least 17 Bible translation projects are publishing in AS and some are even publishing Islamic “bridge” material. But the positive spiritual value seen in the Qurʾān by CMS scholar-missionaries at the turn of the nineteenth century contrasts sharply with the deep suspicion of the Qurʾān by many West African Christians and churches today—what might have served as a bridge has become a wall. It is this situation which has necessitated special initiatives such as PROCURA, various national councils for Christian-Muslim relations, JCMWA, and UBS’s *TAZI Task Team*.

### Naming names

Names are often among the most powerful linguistic symbols, and they present special problems for TAZI work.<sup>55</sup>

The *basmala* formula (بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ) “In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate”) is required by many Muslims on the front of any book before they will read it—in some places, even pornographic magazines!<sup>56</sup> And so it is usually printed on the cover of Bible portions too. Whilst “building bridges” to Muslims, we can “build bridges” back to our Christian constituencies by showing them the *biblical* correlate to this expression in Exod 34.6 יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון “Yahweh, Yahweh, a God who is merciful and gracious” (the TAZI-minded Sharif Arabic translation renders this using exactly the same terms as the Qurʾān: أَنَا الْمَوْلَىٰ . (الْمَوْلَىٰ هُوَ اللّٰهُ الرَّحْمٰنُ الرَّحِیْمُ الْعَلِیْمُ).

Reference to the Christians’ Lord as *Isa* or *Jesus* may be a matter of life or death for a new Fulani convert in northern Nigeria, since the Islamic *Isa* is a great prophet (“the prophet *Isa* PBUH<sup>57</sup>”), whilst the Christian *Jesus* is the ultimate مُشْرِكْ *mušrik*, who “made himself equal with God” (John 5.18). As translators, such people may then more likely prefer the more specific and more provocative form *Jesus* (or *Yesu*, etc.). Add to this the influence of popular Christian slogans such as that “there is power in the name of Jesus”<sup>58</sup> and that Jesus is “the name above all names” (a misunderstanding of Phil 2.9), and then the tendency in some Pentecostal circles to consider the name of Jesus in its English or French form as having more effective power than in local language forms such as *Yesu*, and it is hard for a translation consultant to argue for the TAZI-friendly form *Isa*. In the

55 The rendering of names and translation of biblical key terms for Islamic audiences has benefitted from a number of helpful articles by Colin Bearup (Chadian Arabic), Rick Brown (Arabic), Mary Crickmore (Fulfulde), and others; see also K. Thomas, “The Use of Arabic Terminology in Biblical Translation,” *BT* 40.1 (1989): 101-8; in French: *Sycamore* 11 (2002): 8-15.

56 C. E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (London: SPCK, 1961), 96; it is also typically spoken by commentators at the start of a football match.

57 PBUH - “Peace be upon him,” a phrase of respect that follows the naming of a prophet of Islam.

58 A recent Fulani convert once told me that “There is more power in the name *Jesus* than in the name *Isa*, because when I say the former I get stoned by my people.”

digraphic context of Hausa, the team will now most likely use, for this and other personal names in the Bible, the “Christian” forms (e.g., Yesu) in the RS edition and qurʿānic forms (e.g., Isa) in the AS edition.

But there is a further problem for Hausa. The standard form for greeting a superior is *Ranka yā dade* “May your life be long.” This addressed to Isa would presumably be acceptable in an Islamic context, but Christians were offended when confronted with its use in address to Jesus in NT drafts, protesting that one cannot wish a long life to the Eternal One.

The term *Allah* is usually uncontroversial in West Africa for “God,”<sup>59</sup> with the name *YHWH* represented by an indigenous term for God (e.g., Hausa *Ubangiji*), a term for “Lord” (in the Septuagint, Arabic, and English traditions, e.g., Arabic رَبِّ Ar-Rabb), a term for “the Eternal One” (in the French tradition, e.g., Ngambai *Njeshiqenean* “the eternal one”) or a phrase (e.g., Ngambai *Mbaidombaije* “king of kings”). But there is a mismatch here, since most Muslims in fact—despite the term’s apparent derivation from article-noun اَل-اِلَه “the-god”—consider اَللّٰه (*Allah*) a name, as Christians do *YHWH*. Therefore, the Chadian Arabic Bible translation project, following the Sharif Arabic Bible, renders יהוה (*YHWH*) as *Allah*, and אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*) as *Illah*. Meanwhile, the Hausa Common Language project is now using *Yahweh* rather than the traditional *Ubangiji* “Lord” (as in the 1932 and 1979 standars), and this presents special problems for AS conversion. AS Hausa standardly uses ح for *h*, and ة mostly finally only in a few qurʿānic names (most frequently of course in اَللّٰه). But *Yahweh* requires an *h* medially too, and the medial form ه is not known to most AS Hausa readers (and it is relatively rare even in Arabic). It has therefore been agreed to use the final form even in the middle of the word, resulting in the unconventional form يَهْوَه which, though it appears to be two words, has the great advantage of associating, purely by a script choice, the divine name of the Bible يَهْوَه (*Yahweh*), with that of the Qurʿān اَللّٰه (*Allah*).<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusions

The issues considered here have important implications for governments resisting or promoting Islamisation, and for urban churches which already have enough struggles with language policies without bringing in script considerations (they will tend to relegate minority scripts, as they do minority languages, to external use).

Personal motivations are, of course, also present among Bible translation consultants and their agencies—Africans (and African agencies, such as Bible Societies) often being wary of Islamic cultural forms, even in Bible work, because of their political potential, whilst non-Africans (and their agencies, such as SIL branches) are typically *attracted* to AS work for its perceived “exotic” and “romantic” nature, and its *evangelistic* potential.

At the policy level, national Bible Societies (NBSs) typically follow the lead of the churches and the market, while SIL branches and National Bible Translation Organisations prefer missionary-strategic projects (thereby creating churches and

59 Though the Hausa Common Language Bible Translation Project was recently compelled by a few vocal opponents of the use of the term اَللّٰه to organise a day-long seminar to discuss its use; it is hoped that the papers will be published by the Bible Society of Nigeria. See also discussions in K. Thomas, “‘Allah’ in Translations of the Bible,” *BT* 52.3 (2001): 301-6; in French: *Sycomore* 11 (2002): 22-27; J. Massey, “Should Christians use ‘Allah’ in Bible Translation?” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40.3 (2004): 284-5; K. L. Walters, “Is Allah the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?” (unpublished Ms., n.d.).

60 I welcome comments from those who have wrestled with this issue in other languages using AS.

hence markets for Bible products). Thus NBSs which think *solely* in terms of meeting the needs of Christian churches will not want work on TAZI and AS products unless the churches are calling for them (which is currently not common, because they are often led by southerners). Those in close partnerships with missions such as SIL will probably allow their publishing policy to be influenced by their partners' agendas. And certain nBSs may have their own missionary vision beyond that of the churches. In any case, a distinctive feature of TAZI work as a whole is that the customers are not the consumers (Muslims), but missions and churches who require products for their own evangelistic programmes. This has major implications for our research and testing work (which may have to be mediated through others whom we may view as less rigorous) and for our project development, since we may ultimately want to be able to meet the consumer face-to-face. However, we will only be able to do this if we produce excellent-quality Muslim-sensitive products, and our nBSs present themselves in a way that is acceptable to Muslims.

Some years ago, I wrote in a report to my Bible Society's National Translation Committee:

I believe that the right kind of production and distribution at this stage could turn the market such that we may one day be producing high-quality Ajami-script TAZI-focussed Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri Study Bibles with green covers and gold borders to rival the most beautiful editions of the *Qur'ān* [and sold by Muslim traders outside mosques across the region].<sup>61</sup>

This is, I still believe, achievable, but not without careful negotiation of our relationships with both foreign missions and national churches, and a serious concerted commitment to educating national Christians—including our own Bible Society staff—in TAZI values and principles as they apply to the complex politics and sociolinguistics of their respective nations.

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<sup>61</sup> A. L. Warren-Rothlin, *Ajami Script Project Report*, presented to the Bible Society of Nigeria's National Translation Committee (Calabar, Nov 9, 2005).