



## African Sources of Knowledge in Ajami Script: The Case of the Muridiyya

**Wednesday May 16**  
**4:00PM - 5:30PM**  
**Humanities 365**

Although written records are rarely regarded as part of sub-Saharan Africa's intellectual heritage, important bodies of Ajami literature (records of African languages written in Arabic script) have existed in Africa for centuries. In South Africa, Muslim Malay slaves produced the first written record of Afrikaans in Ajami. The neglect of African Ajami traditions is due to a number of factors, including the lack of an Ajami public depository, the limited number of scholars with the linguistic and cultural background necessary to study Ajami manuscripts, and the prevailing assumption that sources of useful knowledge on Africa are either oral or written in European languages. Yet, Ajami traditions of Africa are old and are varied. They include satirical, polemical and protest poetry, as well as biographies, eulogies, genealogies, talismanic resources, medicinal manuals, family journals, business transactions, historical records, speeches, texts on administrative and diplomatic matters, Islamic jurisprudence, behavioral codes, grammar, and even visual arts. In this talk I show how the study of Ajami manuscripts forces revisions of various aspects of our understanding of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Africa.

**Fallou Ngom** is Professor of Anthropology and Director of the African Studies Center at Boston University. His research interests include the interactions between African languages and non-African languages, the adaptations of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, and Ajami literatures—records of African languages written in Arabic script. He seeks to understand the knowledge buried in African Ajami literatures and the historical, social, cultural, and religious heritage that has found expression in this manner. He has held Fulbright, ACLS/SSRC/NEH, and Guggenheim fellowships. His work has appeared in several scholarly journals, including *African Studies Review*, *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, *Language Variation and Change*, and *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. His recent book, *Muslims beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of Ajami and the Muridiyya* (Oxford University Press, 2016), won the 2017 Melville J. Herskovits Prize in African Studies.



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