

Politics, Power and Qur'anic Schooling in Northern Nigeria: Contesting Legitimacies and Contested Knowledges

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In Nigeria, the classical Qur'anic schooling system known as *Almajiranci* is the subject of many negative representational discourses, especially among the so-called western-educated Nigerian elite. These harmful misrepresentations accuse the practice of several things from creating miscreants and thugs for hire, to producing members of the terrorist organisation *Boko Haram*, and being sites of child endangerment because of its practice of sending boys away to live with a teacher. The underlying politics of knowledge means that the *Almajiranci*'s ways and modes of knowing and knowledge transmission are neither seen as valid nor valuable for the Nigerian society. Its pedagogical practices are regarded as retrograde and unfit for the creation of a modern Nigerian citizenry, with little utilitarian purpose found for the schools. Yet the schools appear to thrive among the rural masses with an estimated seven million boys within it, filling a void neither the postcolonial Nigerian state nor the new Muslim elite fully recognise or can fathom.

This paper attempts an exploration of this system of knowledge predominant in northern Nigeria, in its current manifestation. It focuses on the issues of knowledge legitimacy - what counts as valid knowledge and who gets to transmit it; and all other such contestations. The paper is interested in the ways that knowledge encounters power and vice versa, and what this tells us about ourselves as a formerly colonised society, and how we come to know the things we know. Thus, making it a conversation not only about epistemology but also of ontology.

Keywords: *Almajiranci*, Qur'anic Schooling, Power, Knowledge, Politics, Contestations, Nigeria.