

Revisiting Ali Mazrui: The Triple Heritage Theory and Its Implications for Muslim Youth in Africa

Alwy Ahmed Mohamed

Faculty of Islamic Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia, and The AgaKhan High School, Mombasa, Kenya

alwyahmed94@gmail.com

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Abstract

Objective: To investigate the applicability of Ali Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory, which includes Islam, African indigenous culture, and Western influence, in resolving the identity, moral, intellectual, and sociopolitical issues that Muslim youth in Africa are currently facing. **Theoretical framework:** The Triple Heritage Theory of Ali A. Mazrui, which views African identity as a dynamic interplay between Islamic civilization, African cultural traditions, and Western modernity, forms the basis of the study. **Literature review:** In addition to academic studies on African Islam, youth identity formation, postcolonial philosophy, and globalization, the study mainly relies on Mazrui's foundational works, such as *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, *Islam and the Politics of Identity*, and *Cultural Forces in World Politics*. **Methods:** The study uses thematic and interpretive content analysis of Mazrui's primary texts and pertinent secondary literature, utilizing a qualitative and conceptual research design. This method makes it possible to find recurrent themes among African Muslim youth about identity, civilization, power, faith, and cultural negotiation. **Results:** The results show that Mazrui's Triple Heritage offers a potent explanatory framework for comprehending the intricate identity challenges faced by Muslim adolescents in Africa. African culture is seen as a source of community, Islam as a moral and spiritual compass, and Western influence as both a challenge and an opportunity. The study demonstrates that while conscious integration promotes self-assurance, moral stability, and intellectual fortitude, imbalance among these heritages frequently results in identity uncertainty. **Implications:** This study provides educators, legislators, and religious organizations with a crucial foundation for creating youth initiatives that support Muslim youth in Africa's development of balanced identities, cultural self-assurance, and moral leadership. **Novelty:** This study demonstrates the continued

relevance of Ali Mazrui's civilizational discourse for navigating identity, faith, and modernity in postcolonial African contexts by specifically applying his Triple Heritage Theory to the lived realities of Muslim youth in Africa.

Keywords: ali mazrui, triple heritage theory, muslim youth in africa, identity formation, islam and modernity.

INTRODUCTION

African Muslim adolescents now live in a complicated and frequently disputed social environment that is influenced by global modernity, history, religion, and culture. Young Muslims throughout the continent are growing up in settings where Western influences, indigenous African customs, and Islamic beliefs all profoundly and occasionally contradict each other. These interrelated factors have an impact on how young people relate to their communities, understand themselves, practice their faith, and interact with the outside world. As a result, issues of identity, morality, belonging, and purpose have grown more pressing, especially in a time of rapid technological advancement, globalization, cultural uniformity, and socioeconomic insecurity [1].

Long before European colonization began, Islam was an essential component of African culture. It created deeply ingrained spiritual groups and rich intellectual traditions by influencing systems of education, government, ethics, and social organization. Islam has traditionally given African Muslims a feeling of transcendence, a moral compass, and a link to a worldwide ummah that transcends national and racial barriers. Indigenous African cultures, which emphasize virtues like solidarity, respect for elders, group responsibility, and social harmony, have significantly influenced community life alongside Islam. Even in urban and quickly modernizing environments, these cultural values nevertheless have an impact on Muslim youth's upbringing and worldview [2].

However, Western modernity, a potent third force, was brought into African civilizations as a result of the colonial encounter and its aftermath. African social life and value systems were reshaped by Western influence through colonial educational systems, governmental systems, economic models, and media. Globalization, digital technology, and transnational cultural flows have only increased this influence in the postcolonial era. Western modernity has challenged traditional moral frameworks and religious authority, frequently encouraging individuality, atheism, and materialism, even as it has advanced science, formal education, and global connectivity. Navigating these influences can be both inspiring and confusing for Muslim youth in Africa [3].

Ali A. Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory is especially pertinent in this intricate historical and cultural context. According to Mazrui, African identity is a result of three interconnected civilizational influences: Western civilization, indigenous African culture, and Islamic legacy. Mazrui highlighted these forces' dynamic interaction rather than portraying them as isolated or wholly antagonistic, contending that Africa's distinctiveness is found in its ability to synthesize various traditions. His theory offers a sophisticated framework for comprehending how Africans navigate their identities in a world that is impacted by both change and continuity [4].

For young Muslims, the Triple Heritage is a lived reality that appears in everyday situations at home, at school, in mosques, on social media, and in public life rather than an abstract philosophical concept. While attending secular schools with Western-style curricula, young Muslims may get religious instruction based on Islamic precepts. They may see African cultural customs that strengthen ties to the community, but they also come across international media that promotes values and lifestyles that are incompatible with both Islamic and African moral systems. Internal conflicts, identity confusion, and, in certain situations, cultural or religious alienation are frequently the results of this convergence [5].

The experiences of Muslim youth are further complicated by current issues, including unemployment, political unpredictability, Islamophobia, religious extremism, and the disintegration of established authority systems. In many situations, the inability to reconcile the three heritages has resulted in divisive reactions, such as rejecting Western modernity in favor of strict religious interpretations or eschewing cultural and religious foundations in favor of globalized identities. Both extremes run the risk of harming Muslim youth's potential contributions to African societies as well as their overall development [6].

The majority of the literature that is currently available has concentrated on the Triple Heritage at the level of civilization, geopolitics, and cultural history, despite the breadth and impact of Mazrui's research. Its use in comprehending the construction of youth identities, especially among Muslim communities in Africa, has received less attention. By analyzing how Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory can shed light on the moral, intellectual, and cultural problems faced by Muslim youth today, this study aims to close this gap [7].

This study's main contention is that Muslim adolescents can be empowered by engaging with Islam, African culture, and Western civilization in a thoughtful and balanced way. Western modernity adds critical thinking, scientific knowledge, and global involvement; African culture offers communal affiliation and social continuity; and Islam offers ethical foundation and spiritual purpose. When carefully combined, these traditions can produce young Muslims who are strong, self-assured, and socially conscious and who can overcome contemporary obstacles without losing their moral and cultural foundations [8].

In addition to reaffirming the significance of Ali Mazrui's intellectual legacy, this research adds to larger discussions on postcolonial identity, Islamic education, and youth development in Africa by placing Muslim youth at the center of the Triple Heritage discourse. In the end, the study emphasizes the necessity of social, religious, and educational frameworks that assist Muslim youth in balancing faith, culture, and modernity so they can positively influence Africa's future [9].

LITERATURE REVIEW

African studies, political science, Islamic studies, cultural studies, and international relations are all included in the extensive and multidisciplinary literature on Ali A. Mazrui's intellectual achievements. Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory, which views African identity as the result of three significant civilizational influences Islam, indigenous African culture, and Western modernity, is fundamental to this corpus of research. This idea has been extensively studied as a paradigm for comprehending the postcolonial difficulties, cultural hybridity, and historical evolution of Africa [10].

In *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (1986), Ali Mazrui most prominently described the Triple Heritage, arguing that Africa's distinctiveness stems from its exposure to and interactions with several civilizations. Mazrui claims that trade, scholarship, and peaceful dispersion were the main ways that Islam spread throughout Africa, becoming firmly ingrained in African communities and influencing governance, education, and moral standards. Conversely, indigenous African civilizations offered cultural continuity, social cohesiveness, and communal ideals. Modern education, political institutions, and technological advancements were brought by Western influence, which was mostly brought about by colonization. At the same time, traditional structures and value systems were disrupted [11].

Mazrui's theory has been extended by academics, including Adebayo (1998), Mutua (2002), and Falola (2007), who have highlighted its value in elucidating Africa's cultural pluralism and identity negotiation. These studies demonstrate how the Triple Heritage is dynamic and constantly changing due to local contexts, globalization, and historical events. However, some have pointed out that Mazrui's framework may minimize the intrinsic differences within each heritage and overgeneralize African experiences. Despite this, the theory's depth of explanation and flexibility allow it to continue to have an impact [12].

Islam's influence on African identity and social life has been extensively studied. According to researchers like Robinson (2004), Levtzion and Pouwels (2000), and Trimingham (1968), Islam in Africa evolved through contextual adaptation, fusing theological ideas with regional cultural customs. Mazrui's assertion that Islam is an essential part of African civilization rather than anything alien is supported by this historical synthesis [13].

In light of contemporary issues, more recent research focuses on Muslim youth and identity formation. Globalization and mass education, according to authors like Hefner (2011) and Eickelman and Piscatori (2004), have changed how young Muslims interact with Islamic authority and knowledge. Young people are frequently forced to choose between their ancestral customs and modern international standards as a result of these changes. Socioeconomic disparities and postcolonial legacies complicate this discussion much more in Africa [14].

African indigenous culture has been extensively examined as the basis of moral order and communal identity. African ideas of communalism, reciprocity, and social responsibility are highlighted by academics such as Mbiti (1969) and Wiredu (1996). These cultural values frequently coexist with Islamic norms in Muslim communities, strengthening social cohesiveness and communal morality. But when some cultural customs clash with Islamic principles, especially when it comes to gender roles, authority, and ceremonial customs, conflicts can occur. Mazrui's contribution is seen in his belief that African culture should be critically explored rather than glorified or dismissed. This viewpoint has been upheld by later academics, who contend that when African cultural resources are in line with moral and religious values, they can significantly contribute to the development of youth identity [15].



Figure 1. Ali Mazrui's Vision of Triple Heritage: Reclaiming History, Identity, and Agency in Fragmented Africa

One of the most contentious features of the Triple Heritage is still Western influence. Western dominance in forming knowledge systems and cultural norms is criticized in postcolonial studies literature, such as works by Fanon (1963), Said (1978), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986). Mazrui's worries about cultural imperialism and reliance are echoed in these criticisms. Research on African youth and globalization shows that digital media and Western educational systems have a big impact on young people's moral perspectives, lifestyles, and goals. Academics like Appadurai (1996) and Castells (2010) emphasize how international cultural flows both produce identity fragmentation and new avenues for self-expression. Western modernity may both empower Muslim youth through education and marginalize them through Islamophobic tropes and secularism [16].

There is a lot of study on Islam and identity in Africa and Mazrui's Triple Heritage, but not much of it explicitly applies this framework to Muslim adolescents as a separate

analytical category. The lived experiences of young Muslims are understudied because most studies focus on civilizations, governments, or cultural systems at a macro level. Moreover, integrative research that looks at how Muslim adolescents might intentionally balance the three heritages instead of perceiving them as opposing forces is scarce [17].

By applying the Triple Heritage Theory to the current circumstances of Muslim youth in Africa, this study expands upon Mazrui's seminal work. The research provides a more nuanced view of how young Muslims negotiate many civilizational influences by combining literature on Islam, African culture, Western modernity, and youth identity. By doing this, it affirms the lasting significance of Ali Mazrui's intellectual legacy and adds to current scholarly conversations on postcolonial identity, Islamic philosophy, and youth development [18].

Table 1. Summary of Key Literature Related to Ali Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory and Muslim Youth in Africa

Author(s)	Year	Key Work	Theoretical Focus	Core Findings / Arguments	Relevance to the Present Study
Mazrui, A. A.	1986	The Africans: A Triple Heritage	Triple Heritage Theory	African identity is shaped by Islam, indigenous African culture, and Western civilization in a dynamic interaction.	Forms the foundational theoretical framework for analyzing Muslim youth identity.
Mazrui, A. A.	1997	Islam and the Politics of Identity	Islam & Political Identity	Islam functions as both a religious and political force in identity formation.	Highlights Islam as a moral and civilizational anchor for Muslim youth.
Mazrui, A. A.	2001	Cultural Forces in World Politics	Culture & Power	Culture influences global power relations and political behavior.	Helps situate Muslim youth within global cultural power dynamics.
Trimingham, J. S.	1968	Islam in Africa	Islamization in Africa	Islam spread through trade and scholarship, adapting to African contexts.	Supports the view of Islam as indigenous to African societies.
Levtzion, N. & Pouwels, R.	2000	The History of Islam in Africa	African Islamic History	Islam merged with African cultural practices across regions.	Demonstrates cultural synthesis relevant to youth identity.
Robinson, D.	2004	Muslim Societies in African History	Islamic Social History	African Muslims actively shaped Islamic institutions and culture.	Reinforces African agency in Islamic identity formation.
Mbiti, J. S.	1969	African Religions and Philosophy	African Worldview	Emphasizes communalism, spirituality, and moral order.	Explains indigenous cultural values influencing Muslim youth.
Wiredu, K.	1996	Cultural Universals and Particulars	African Philosophy	Advocates for critical engagement with African traditions.	Supports balanced engagement with African culture.

Fanon, F.	1963	The Wretched of the Earth	Postcolonial Theory	Colonialism caused psychological and cultural alienation.	Contextualizes youth identity crises in postcolonial Africa.
Said, E.	1978	Orientalism	Knowledge & Power	Western representations shape domination over the “Other.”	Explains epistemic challenges facing Muslim youth.
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o	1986	Decolonising the Mind	Cultural Decolonization	Language and culture are tools of domination.	Relevant to Westernized education systems affecting youth.
Appadurai, A.	1996	Modernity at Large	Globalization	Global cultural flows reshape identity and imagination.	Explains global media influence on Muslim youth.
Castells, M.	2010	The Power of Identity	Network Society	Identities are reshaped through global networks.	Highlights digital influence on youth identity formation.
Eickelman, D. & Piscatori, J.	2004	Muslim Politics	Religious Authority	Youth renegotiate religious authority and knowledge.	Explains youth agency in Islamic engagement.
Hefner, R.	2011	Islam & Modernity Studies	Islam and Education	Education mediates the Islam–modernity interaction.	Relevant to Muslim youth education challenges.
Mamdani, M.	2004	Good Muslim, Bad Muslim	Islam & Politics	Simplistic narratives distort Muslim identities.	Helps analyze external pressures on Muslim youth identity.
Diouf, M.	2013	African Islam Studies	Youth & Reform	Youth drive religious reform movements.	Shows youth as active agents, not passive recipients.
Falola, T.	2007	African Cultural Studies	Culture & Identity	African cultures are dynamic and adaptive.	Supports integrative identity frameworks.
Alatas, S. F.	2014	Alternative Discourses	Decolonial Thought	Calls for indigenous intellectual frameworks.	Aligns with Mazrui’s anti-hegemonic approach.
Ramadan, T.	2004	Western Muslims and the Future of Islam	Muslim Identity	Advocates contextualized Islamic identity.	Offers comparative insight for African Muslim youth.
UNESCO	2019	Youth & Culture Reports	Youth Development	Cultural identity is key to youth empowerment.	Supports the policy relevance of the study.
Pew Research Center	2015	Religion in Africa	Religion & Demography	Youth form the majority of the African Muslim population.	Justifies focus on Muslim youth as a critical demographic.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the applicability of Ali Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory in comprehending the identity formation and lived experiences of Muslim youth in Africa, this study employs a qualitative and conceptual research design. The study's emphasis on meanings, interpretations, values, and theoretical analysis rather than numerical measurement makes a qualitative method suitable. A deeper knowledge of youth dynamics, identity negotiation, and civilizational interaction within an African Muslim context is made possible by the conceptual design, which permits critical engagement with ideas, theories, and scholarly arguments [19].

Theoretical and Analytical Framework

Ali A. Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory, which views African identity as a synthesis of Islamic civilization, indigenous African culture, and Western modernity, serves as the main source of guidance for the study. When examining concerns of faith, culture, education, and globalization among Muslim youth, this framework acts as the primary analytical lens. Additional perspectives from Islamic philosophy, youth studies, and postcolonial theory are integrated to bolster the study and offer more comprehensive interpretive depth [20].

Sources of Data

The study relies exclusively on secondary data sources, including:

1. Primary texts by Ali Mazrui, such as *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, *Islam and the Politics of Identity*, and *Cultural Forces in World Politics*.
2. Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and edited volumes addressing African Islam, youth identity, postcolonialism, and globalization.
3. Policy and institutional reports from reputable organizations focusing on youth, religion, and culture in Africa.
4. These sources are selected based on their scholarly relevance, credibility, and direct contribution to the study's objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Relevant literature was identified through systematic searches of academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and institutional repositories. Keywords including Ali Mazrui, Triple Heritage, Muslim youth in Africa, Islam and identity, and postcolonial African studies were used to ensure comprehensive coverage. Selected texts were screened for relevance and thematic alignment with the research objectives [14].

Data Analysis Technique

The study employs qualitative thematic and interpretive content analysis. Texts are carefully read and analyzed to identify recurring themes related to:

1. Identity formation
2. Civilizational interaction
3. Moral and spiritual values
4. Cultural negotiation
5. Youth agency and modern challenges

These themes are then interpreted through the lens of the Triple Heritage Theory to assess how Muslim youth engage with, resist, or integrate the three civilizational influences [21].

Validity and Trustworthiness

To enhance analytical rigor and credibility, the study triangulates insights from multiple scholars and disciplines. The use of well-established theoretical frameworks and peer-reviewed sources strengthens the reliability of interpretations. Reflexive analysis is employed to minimize researcher bias and ensure balanced engagement with diverse perspectives.

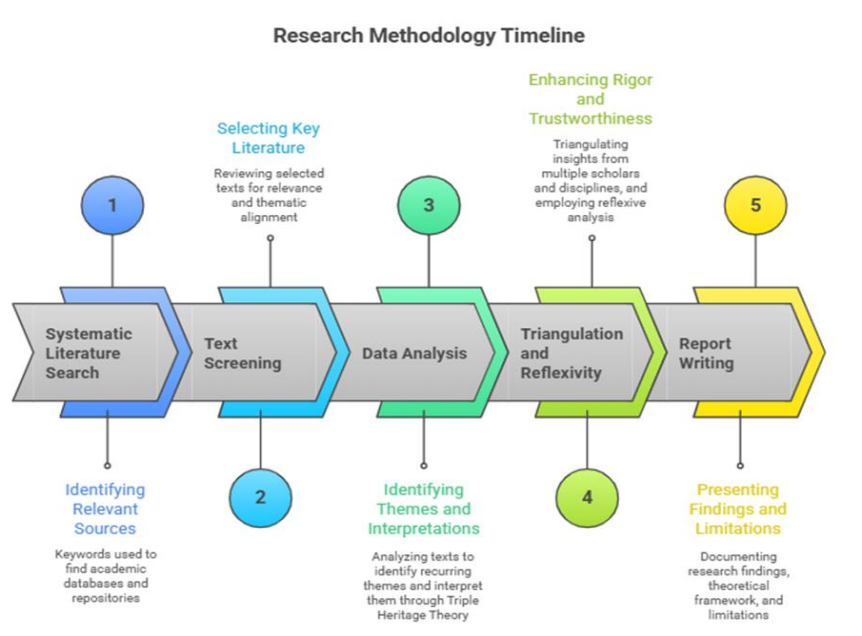


Figure 2. Research Methodology Timeline

Scope and Limitations

The study is limited to a theoretical and literature-based analysis and does not include fieldwork, interviews, or surveys. While this limits empirical generalization, it allows for in-depth conceptual clarity and theoretical refinement. Future research may build on this study by incorporating empirical methods such as interviews or case studies involving Muslim youth across different African regions.

Ethical Considerations

As this research is based solely on publicly available secondary sources, it does not involve human participants. Therefore, no ethical clearance was required. Nevertheless, academic integrity is maintained through proper citation, acknowledgment of sources, and avoidance of plagiarism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the key findings derived from the qualitative and conceptual analysis of Ali Mazrui's works and relevant scholarly literature. The results are organized thematically in accordance with the objectives of the study and interpreted through the lens of Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory to highlight its relevance to Muslim youth in Africa.

Islam as a Moral and Spiritual Anchor for Muslim Youth

According to the analysis, Islam plays a crucial role in the development of Muslim youth's identities in Africa, serving as their main source of social belonging, spiritual meaning, and moral direction. Mazrui has continuously highlighted how Islam has shaped African

Muslims' ethical discipline, literacy, and global consciousness. Islam offers young people a solid moral foundation that helps them deal with the uncertainties brought forth by fast social change and globalization [20].

The results, however, also show that Muslim youngsters frequently encounter conflicts between secularized educational institutions derived from Western models and Islamic beliefs. The marginalization of Islamic teachings in formal education can result in a disjointed religious understanding or moral perplexity. According to Mazrui, reviving Islam's ethical and intellectual aspects rather than restricting it to ritual practice can enable young people to confront contemporary issues with moral clarity and assurance [22].

For Muslim adolescents confronting social discrimination, political unpredictability, and socioeconomic suffering, Islam also provides psychological fortitude and hope. Islamic teachings on patience (ṣabr), faith in God (tawakkul), and social justice offer emotional strength and a feeling of purpose in many African environments where youth are disproportionately affected by unemployment and inequality. Mazrui saw Islam as a moral force that could uplift communities in times of distress, in addition to a set of beliefs. In a world that is becoming more competitive and unpredictable, this spiritual grounding helps young people feel less alone and hopeless [22].

Islam also offers hope and psychological resilience to Muslim teenagers facing economic hardship, political uncertainty, and social discrimination. In many African contexts, where the young are disproportionately impacted by unemployment and injustice, Islamic teachings on patience (ṣabr), confidence in God (tawakkul), and social justice provide emotional strength and a sense of purpose. In addition to being a collection of ideas, Mazrui considered Islam as a moral force capable of uplifting communities during difficult times. This spiritual foundation makes young people feel less alone and forlorn in an increasingly competitive and unpredictable environment [23].

The report also emphasizes how Islam helps Muslim youngsters develop moral leadership and social responsibility. Islamic values like fairness (ʿadl), trust (amānah), and service to humanity (khidmah) inspire young people to see leadership as a moral duty rather than a quest for prestige or power. If younger generations adopted Islam's ethical framework, Mazrui contended, it might play a major role in Africa's moral and political regeneration. Islam may therefore encourage Muslim youth to become change agents by fostering social cohesion, integrity, and compassion in African nations when it is incorporated into education and communal life [24].

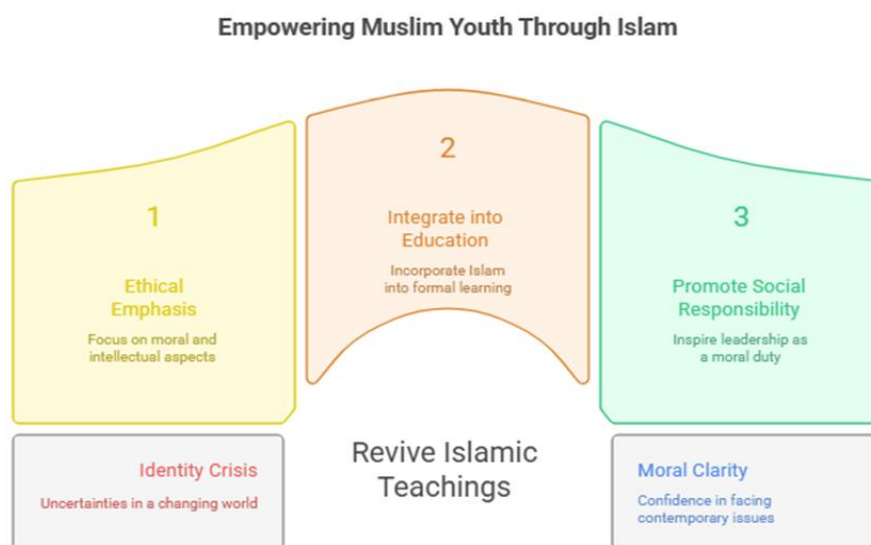


Figure 3. Empowering Muslim Youth Through Islam

Indigenous African Culture and Communal Identity

The findings also demonstrate how the social consciousness of Muslim youth is still shaped by indigenous African culture, particularly in terms of social solidarity, respect for elders, and communal duty. Islamic ethics are often upheld by these cultural standards, particularly in matters of moral behavior, family life, and community support [25].

However, the literature identifies situations in which cultural customs may be at odds with Islamic principles, posing problems for young people trying to strike a balance between cultural identity and religious sincerity. Mazrui's paradigm encourages a selective and moral interaction with African traditions rather than the blind preservation of culture. Muslim youth can preserve their cultural roots while harmonizing their behaviors with Islamic moral values according to this well-rounded approach [26].

Additionally, indigenous African culture gives Muslim adolescents a strong sense of collective identification and belonging, which is crucial in nations where social life still revolves around community relationships. Ubuntu, which emphasizes humanity, interconnectedness, and reciprocal care, resonates strongly with Islamic concepts of social justice and brotherhood (ukhuwwah). Mazrui realized that by providing Muslim adolescents with a social framework that fosters empathy, collaboration, and shared responsibility, this cultural emphasis on community helps counteract the excessive individualism frequently associated with Western modernity [27].

The results also show that traditional cultural transmission has been undermined by modernity and urbanization, resulting in generational divides between young people and elders. Due to Westernized education or digital culture, many young Muslims experience cultural dislocation as a result of being cut off from native traditions. According to Mazrui's theory, identity formation can be strengthened by reintroducing young people to the moral aspects of African culture rather than strict traditionalism. Youth can embrace their cultural history without feeling limited by antiquated or unfair customs thanks to this kind of reconnection [28].

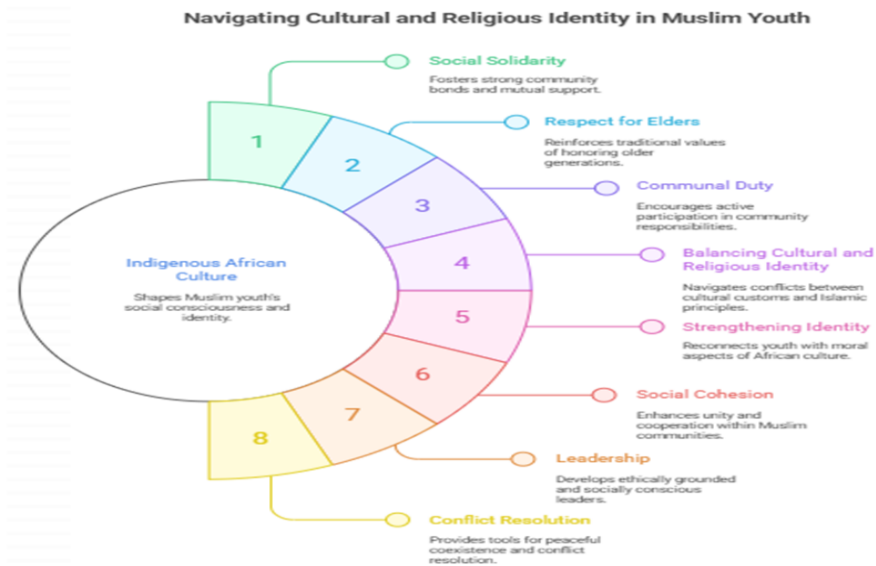


Figure 4. Navigating Cultural and Religious Identity in Muslim Youth

Furthermore, within Muslim communities, indigenous African culture has a significant influence on social cohesion, leadership, and conflict resolution. Islamic concepts of justice and consultation (shūrā) are consistent with traditional methods of discussion, mediation, and consensus-building. These cultural customs can give Muslim youngsters useful tools for peaceful coexistence and community leadership when they are combined with Islamic ethics.

Thus, Mazrui's integrative approach emphasizes how African culture may support Islam in producing Muslim youngsters who are ethically grounded, socially conscious, and self-assured [29].

Western Modernity: Opportunity and Challenge

The most disputed aspect of the Triple Heritage is Western influence. The results demonstrate how Muslim young have been profoundly influenced by Western modernity through formal education, digital media, political beliefs, and economic goals. On the one hand, Western systems facilitate youth mobility and creativity by giving them access to scientific knowledge, critical thinking, and worldwide networks. However, they frequently support consumerism, individualism, and secular worldviews that can be detrimental to communal and religious ideals [30].

The ambivalence of Western influence is highlighted by Mazrui's perspective, which warns against both complete rejection and blind acceptance. The difficulty for Muslim youth is to interact with Western modernity selectively, accepting its technological and intellectual advantages while rejecting its cultural and ethical excesses. The findings show that young people who are not assisted in striking this equilibrium are more susceptible to cultural alienation and identity displacement [31].

The educational goals and professional paths of Muslim youth in Africa have also been altered by Western modernity. Western-style education frequently places more emphasis on economic production, technological proficiency, and competition than it does on moral and spiritual growth. Because of this, a lot of young Muslims feel that the moral precepts of Islam do not align with what they learn in formal schooling. Mazrui cautioned that this imbalance could result in technically proficient people who lack moral guidance. Therefore, fostering well-rounded Muslim adolescents requires incorporating ethical reasoning and spiritual values into contemporary schooling [32].

Additionally, digital media and global popular culture, largely driven by Western narratives, play a powerful role in shaping youth identities. Social media platforms, entertainment industries, and online discourses expose Muslim youth to diverse lifestyles and value systems that may conflict with Islamic and African norms. While these platforms offer opportunities for learning, self-expression, and global engagement, they can also encourage materialism, moral relativism, and cultural imitation. Mazrui's perspective highlights the need for critical media literacy, enabling youth to engage global culture thoughtfully rather than consuming it passively [33].

Furthermore, Western political and ideological frameworks influence how Muslim youth understand concepts such as democracy, human rights, and freedom. While these ideas can promote justice and participation, they are often presented in secular or culturally detached forms. Mazrui argued that Africa, and particularly its Muslim youth, must reinterpret such concepts through indigenous and Islamic ethical lenses. Doing so allows youth to participate in modern political life without abandoning their moral foundations, transforming Western modernity from a source of identity tension into a tool for ethical and constructive engagement with the contemporary world [34].

Table 2. Summary of Findings on the Triple Heritage and Muslim Youth in Africa

Triple Heritage Component	Key Themes Identified	Positive Contributions to Muslim Youth	Challenges Identified	Implications for Identity Formation
Islam (Moral & Spiritual Anchor)	Moral guidance, spiritual resilience, transnational belonging, and ethical leadership	Provides ethical clarity, spiritual stability, psychological resilience, and a sense of global	Marginalization in secular education, ritualization without intellectual depth, and exposure to extremist misinterpretations	Strengthens moral confidence and social responsibility when integrated holistically

		Muslim identity		
Indigenous African Culture (Communal Identity)	Communalism, respect for elders, social solidarity, cultural belonging	Reinforces Islamic ethics; promotes empathy, social cohesion, and collective responsibility	Certain cultural practices may conflict with Islamic teachings, weakening cultural transmission among youth	Supports culturally rooted yet ethically guided identity when critically engaged
Western Modernity (Opportunity & Challenge)	Education, globalization, digital media, and political ideas	Access to scientific knowledge, critical thinking, technology, and global networks	Secularism, individualism, consumerism, identity fragmentation	Enables intellectual growth but risks moral dislocation without ethical grounding
Identity Negotiation (Youth Agency)	Hybrid identities, cultural synthesis, reinterpretation of values	Encourages creativity, adaptability, and leadership potential	Lack of guidance may lead to polarization or confusion	Highlights youth as active agents rather than passive recipients
Education Systems	Knowledge transmission, value formation	Potential platform for integration of faith, culture, and modern knowledge	Overemphasis on Western epistemologies	Calls for integrative and value-based educational models
Global Media Influence	Digital culture, popular narratives	Platforms for expression and learning	Moral relativism and cultural imitation	Necessitates critical media literacy rooted in Islamic ethics
Leadership & Social Responsibility	Ethics, justice, service	Cultivates morally conscious future leaders	Ethical vacuum in modern leadership models	Promotes leadership grounded in Islamic and African values

Identity Negotiation and Youth Agency

The study's main conclusion is that Muslim adolescents in Africa actively negotiate their identities rather than being passive objects of civilizational influences. The literature demonstrates how young people develop context-appropriate hybrid identities by imaginatively reinterpreting Islamic teachings, cultural norms, and contemporary ideals. Mazrui's perspective of Africa as a place of cultural synthesis rather than civilizational conflict is reflected in this process. The findings also show that this bargaining can become chaotic in the absence of appropriate religious and educational frameworks, resulting in polarization between excessive Westernization and extreme traditionalism. Through Mazrui's Triple Heritage, young people can intentionally incorporate a variety of influences, turning identity negotiation into a source of strength rather than uncertainty [35].

Social settings, including schools, mosques, families, and peer networks where conflicting narratives of religion, culture, and modernity are regularly encountered, also influence Muslim youth's identity negotiation. Youth are frequently forced to switch between various identity registers based on context, religious at home or in the mosque, secular in school, and globalized online. When these spheres are out of balance, this continuous mobility can lead to internal conflict, even if it also represents agency and flexibility. According to Mazrui's worldview, these negotiations are a sign of a dynamic and changing identity rather than a sign of weakness [36].

The findings further indicate that Muslim youth employ creative strategies of reinterpretation and selective appropriation to make sense of their realities. Rather than rejecting modernity outright, many youth draw upon Islamic ethical principles to critique and reshape modern values such as freedom, success, and individualism. Similarly, African cultural practices are often reinterpreted in ways that align with both Islamic teachings and contemporary realities. This selective engagement demonstrates youth agency and supports

Mazrui's assertion that Africa's strength lies in its capacity for synthesis rather than imitation [37].

Additionally, the study highlights the role of youth leadership and activism as expressions of identity negotiation. Through student organizations, religious movements, social entrepreneurship, and digital platforms, Muslim youth actively articulate new forms of African Muslim identity that are ethically grounded and socially engaged. Mazrui viewed youth as crucial actors in Africa's civilizational future, capable of transforming inherited tensions into constructive energy. When supported by inclusive educational and religious institutions, identity negotiation becomes a pathway for empowerment, leadership development, and positive social change rather than a source of fragmentation [38].

Table 3. Identity Negotiation and Youth Agency among Muslim Youth in Africa

Dimension	Description	Evidence from Literature	Challenges Identified	Implications for Muslim Youth
Youth Agency	Muslim youth actively interpret and shape their identities rather than passively receiving influences.	Studies show youth reinterpreting Islam, culture, and modernity creatively (Mazrui; Eickelman & Piscatori).	Limited institutional support may restrict the positive expression of agency.	Positions youth as drivers of cultural and religious renewal.
Hybrid Identity Formation	Identities emerge through the synthesis of Islamic values, African culture, and Western modernity.	Mazrui's view of Africa as a space of cultural synthesis.	Risk of identity fragmentation without guidance.	Encourages balanced, context-sensitive identity development.
Contextual Identity Shifts	Youth navigate multiple identity spaces (home, mosque, school, digital platforms).	Literature on globalization and youth identity (Appadurai; Castells).	Internal tension and role conflict.	Highlights the need for integrative identity frameworks.
Selective Appropriation	Youth adopt beneficial aspects of modernity while filtering them through Islamic ethics.	Evidence of ethical reinterpretation of freedom, success, and progress.	Exposure to uncritical Westernization.	Strengthens critical thinking and moral autonomy.
Polarization Risks	Identity negotiation can become extreme in the absence of guidance.	Observed trends of radical traditionalism or excessive secularization.	Ideological extremism and cultural alienation.	Emphasizes the need for balanced religious and cultural education.
Role of Institutions	Schools and religious bodies shape how identity negotiation unfolds.	Education systems often privilege Western epistemologies.	Marginalization of Islamic and indigenous knowledge.	Calls for integrative and values-based education.
Youth Leadership & Activism	Identity negotiation is expressed through activism,	Youth-led movements and online platforms.	Lack of mentorship and ethical guidance.	Identity negotiation becomes a source

	entrepreneurship, and digital engagement.			of empowerment and social change.
Mazrui's Contribution	Provides a structured lens for integrating multiple influences.	Triple Heritage Theory.	Underutilized at the youth level.	Transforms identity negotiation into strength rather than confusion.

Implications for Education and Youth Development

According to the results, educational institutions are essential in mediating the Triple Heritage. Islamic and indigenous knowledge systems are often marginalized in favor of Western epistemologies in many African contexts. Muslim youth's ability to create integrated identities is hampered by this disparity. The paper makes the case for educational methods that balance religious instruction, cultural sensitivity, and contemporary knowledge by drawing on Mazrui's ideas. These integrative methods can produce morally upright, culturally self-assured, and intellectually adept young people who can make valuable contributions to African societies [26].

The report also emphasizes the necessity of rethinking curricula to take into account the diversity of African civilizations. Muslim adolescents might find their identities reflected and appreciated in formal education when Islamic intellectual traditions and indigenous African knowledge are combined with contemporary scientific fields. Mazrui stressed that education should foster historical awareness, moral reasoning, and cultural self-respect in addition to imparting technical skills. Such curriculum integration can foster a sense of ownership over learning and combat feelings of alienation [39].

The findings also underscore the importance of educator training and institutional ethos in shaping youth development. Teachers and religious leaders who are equipped to engage critically with the Triple Heritage can guide youth in navigating identity complexities with balance and confidence. Without such guidance, educational spaces risk reinforcing civilizational hierarchies that privilege Western norms while delegitimizing Islamic and African perspectives. Mazrui's framework encourages educators to act as cultural mediators, fostering dialogue rather than division [31].

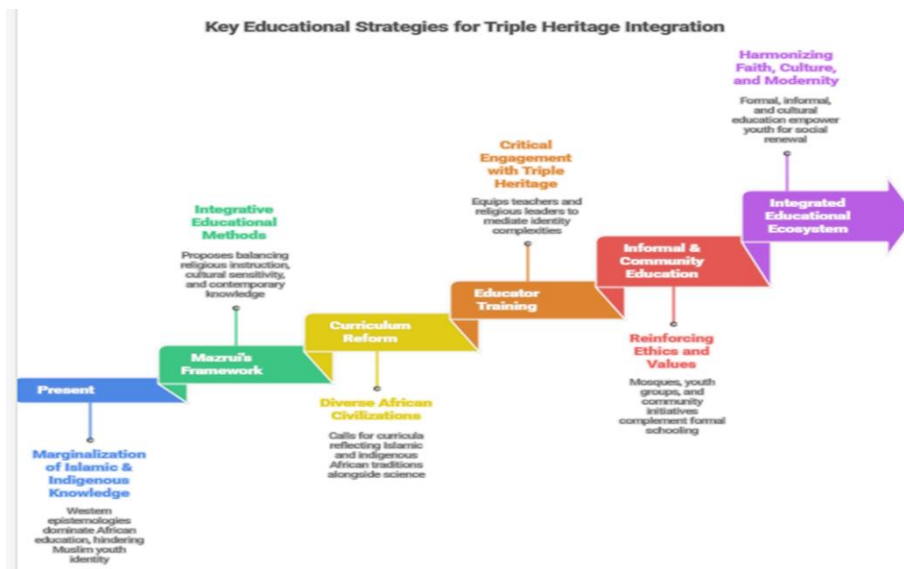


Figure 5. Key Educational Strategies for Triple Heritage Integration

Additionally, the study points to the role of informal and community-based education in complementing formal schooling. Mosques, youth organizations, and community initiatives serve as critical spaces where Islamic ethics and African communal values can be reinforced and contextualized. When aligned with modern educational goals, these spaces can nurture leadership, civic responsibility, and moral accountability among Muslim youth. In line with Mazrui's vision, an integrated educational ecosystem, formal, informal, and cultural, can empower youth to harmonize faith, culture, and modernity in ways that contribute to Africa's social and moral renewal [40].

Discussion

The discussion affirms that Ali Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory remains highly relevant for analyzing the contemporary experiences of Muslim youth in Africa, particularly in a postcolonial and globalized era characterized by overlapping and often competing value systems. The theory provides a holistic and nuanced framework for understanding identity formation beyond simplistic binaries of tradition versus modernity or religion versus secularism. Instead, Mazrui's approach emphasizes synthesis, balance, and ethical discernment, recognizing the African experience as one of continual negotiation among Islamic values, indigenous cultural traditions, and Western modernity [41].

The findings of this study align closely with existing scholarship on Islam in Africa, youth identity, and postcolonial cultural dynamics, while also extending these discussions by centering Muslim youth as a distinct and active social group. Much of the earlier literature has focused on civilizations, political elites, or religious institutions, often overlooking the agency of youth in shaping and redefining identity. By foregrounding youth experiences, this study challenges narratives that portray Muslim youth solely as passive victims of globalization, secularization, or radicalization. Instead, it highlights their role as cultural interpreters, innovators, and future leaders capable of navigating complexity with creativity and resilience [42].

The discussion further reveals that the tensions experienced by Muslim youth do not stem from the coexistence of multiple heritages per se, but from the absence of structured and supportive frameworks to guide their integration. Where educational systems privilege Western epistemologies at the expense of Islamic and African knowledge, youth are more likely to experience identity fragmentation and moral uncertainty. Mazrui's theory offers a corrective by affirming the legitimacy of all three heritages while insisting on ethical evaluation and balance. This perspective reframes identity negotiation as a constructive process rather than a crisis [43].

Moreover, the study demonstrates that Mazrui's emphasis on Islam as a moral and spiritual anchor remains particularly significant in an era of rapid social change. Islam, when engaged intellectually and ethically, provides Muslim youth with moral clarity, spiritual resilience, and a sense of transnational belonging. At the same time, indigenous African culture contributes communal values, social solidarity, and cultural rootedness, countering the isolating tendencies of excessive individualism. Western modernity, though often contested, offers tools of critical inquiry, technological advancement, and global connectivity that are indispensable in the contemporary world. The challenge, as Mazrui argued, lies in selective appropriation rather than wholesale adoption or rejection [44].

The discussion also underscores the importance of education and institutional support in translating the Triple Heritage from theory into lived practice. Educational institutions, religious organizations, and community structures are pivotal in shaping how Muslim youth interpret and prioritize different influences. When these institutions fail to provide integrative guidance, youth are more susceptible to polarizing tendencies, either rigid traditionalism that rejects modern engagement or uncritical Westernization that erodes moral and cultural foundations. Mazrui's framework offers educators and leaders a principled basis for fostering dialogue, critical thinking, and ethical leadership among youth [23].

Table 4. Relevance of Triple Heritage, Youth Agency, and Role of Education

Theme	Key Discussion Insights	Implications
Relevance of Triple Heritage	Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory remains highly relevant for understanding Muslim youth identity in postcolonial and globalized Africa.	Provides a holistic, non-binary framework for identity analysis
Youth Agency	Muslim youth are active agents, not passive victims, in negotiating Islamic, African, and Western influences.	Reframes youth as cultural mediators and future leaders
Source of Identity Tensions	Identity challenges arise from a lack of structured integration, not from the coexistence of multiple heritages.	Calls for supportive educational and social frameworks
Role of Islam	Islam serves as a moral, spiritual, and ethical anchor when engaged beyond ritualism.	Strengthens moral clarity, resilience, and transnational belonging
Indigenous African Culture	Contributes to communal values, social solidarity, and cultural rootedness	Counters excessive individualism and identity alienation
Western Modernity	Offers critical thinking, technology, and global connectivity, but carries ethical risks	Requires selective engagement rather than rejection or imitation
Role of Education	Educational and religious institutions mediate how youth integrate the Triple Heritage.	Integrative education prevents polarization and identity fragmentation.
Risk of Polarization	Absence of guidance leads to rigid traditionalism or excessive Westernization.	Highlights the need for balanced, ethical leadership formation
Decolonization of Knowledge	Mazrui challenges Western epistemic dominance by validating Islamic and African knowledge systems.	Supports epistemological pluralism and cultural confidence
Overall Contribution	Triple Heritage promotes balanced identity, ethical modernity, and cultural self-confidence.	Guides policymakers, educators, and religious leaders in youth development

In addition, the study contributes to broader debates on postcolonial identity and decolonization of knowledge. Mazrui's intellectual legacy challenges epistemic hierarchies that privilege Western modes of knowing while marginalizing Islamic and African intellectual traditions. Applying his theory to Muslim youth underscores the need for epistemological pluralism that validates multiple sources of knowledge and identity. Such pluralism is essential for empowering youth to engage confidently with global discourses without internalizing cultural inferiority [45].

Ultimately, this discussion reinforces the view that the future of Africa's Muslim communities depends significantly on how effectively young people are supported in integrating faith, culture, and modernity. Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory remains a powerful interpretive and normative tool for this task. By offering a vision of balanced identity, ethical modernity, and cultural self-confidence, Mazrui's intellectual legacy provides valuable guidance for educators, policymakers, and religious leaders seeking to nurture a generation of African Muslims who are spiritually grounded, culturally rooted, intellectually critical, and globally engaged [46].

CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms the enduring relevance of Ali Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory as a compelling intellectual framework for understanding the identity formation of Muslim youth in contemporary Africa. By foregrounding the dynamic interaction between Islamic values, indigenous African traditions, and Western modernity, the study demonstrates that Mazrui's

conceptualization remains analytically robust in explaining the layered and often contested identities experienced by young Muslims across the continent. Rather than perceiving these multiple inheritances as inherently contradictory, the findings suggest that they constitute a rich and productive foundation for developing complex, adaptive, and resilient identities. A key insight of this research is that the central challenge does not lie in the plurality of heritages itself, but in the lack of coherent and integrative frameworks—particularly within educational systems—that can meaningfully synthesize these influences. Many formal educational institutions in Africa continue to privilege Western epistemologies, often at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems and Islamic intellectual traditions. This imbalance contributes to a fragmented sense of self among Muslim youth, where cultural dislocation and epistemic marginalization may undermine confidence and belonging. In this context, Mazrui's thought provides not only a diagnostic tool but also a normative direction for reimagining education as a site of integration rather than division. Furthermore, this study highlights that when supported by holistic and context-sensitive educational approaches, Muslim youth are capable of transforming potential identity tensions into sources of strength. Through integrative pedagogies that value turath (heritage), ethical formation, and critical engagement with modernity, young Muslims can cultivate moral integrity, cultural pride, and intellectual openness. In this sense, Mazrui's Triple Heritage is not merely descriptive but deeply transformative, offering a pathway for nurturing individuals who are grounded in their spiritual and cultural identities while remaining actively engaged in global discourses. Importantly, the relevance of Mazrui's framework extends beyond theoretical reflection to practical implications for policymakers, educators, and community leaders. It calls for a reorientation of curricula, teacher training, and institutional priorities toward inclusive and pluralistic models of knowledge production. Such reforms are essential for empowering Muslim youth to navigate globalization without losing their ethical compass or cultural roots. In conclusion, Mazrui's vision provides a vital intellectual resource for addressing the complexities of identity in postcolonial Africa. His Triple Heritage Theory offers a nuanced and forward-looking approach that bridges tradition and modernity, faith and reason, locality and globality. By embracing this framework, African societies can foster a generation of Muslim youth who are not only confident in their identities but also capable of contributing meaningfully to a more just, inclusive, and interconnected world.

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Author Contribution

Alwy Ahmed Mohamed is the sole author of this study and contributed fully to all stages of the research process. He conceptualized the study, developed the theoretical framework, conducted the literature review, and performed data analysis. He also drafted, revised, and finalized the manuscript. The author's academic background in Islamic education informed the integration of Ali Mazrui's Triple Heritage Theory with contemporary issues affecting Muslim youth in Africa.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article entitled *Revisiting Ali Mazrui: The Triple Heritage Theory and Its Implications for Muslim Youth in Africa*. The research was conducted independently

without any financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could be perceived as influencing the objectivity or integrity of the study. All interpretations and conclusions presented are solely those of the author.

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