David Westerlund
Eva Evers Rosander
editors

African Islam and Islam in Africa

**Encounters
between
Sufis and
Islamists**

AFRICAN ISLAM AND ISLAM IN AFRICA

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edited by
EVA EVERS ROSANDER
and
DAVID WESTERLUND

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PREFACE

This interdisciplinary book focuses primarily on Sufism ("African Islam"), Islamism ("Islam in Africa") and, in particular, on the interaction between these different forms of Islam. Previously, much scholarly interest has been concentrated on the critical Islamist views on Western or Western-influenced ideas and patterns of life, while the intra-Muslim relationship between Sufis and Islamists has attracted less attention. Thus we hope that this book will be a valuable addition to earlier studies on Muslims in Africa. Some of the contributions concentrate mainly on Sufism, to which the majority of African Muslims belong; others focus essentially on the increasingly important impact of Islamism; yet others deal more intensively with the encounter between Sufis and Islamists. The regional focus is on areas where Muslims form the majority of the population, mainly in North and West Africa. In some of the essays special attention is paid to gender issues.

Financial support for the production of this book has been provided by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and the Nordic Africa Institute. Two of the chapters have been translated from French into English: the essay by Sossie Andezian was turned into English by Marie De Clerk, while Philippe Moh Ello and Paul Armitage translated the chapter by Lisbet Høltedahl and Mahmoudou Djingui. A language check of the whole manuscript was made by Elaine Almén.

Before the work was completed, one of the contributors, Tomas Gerholm, died. He completed his contribution not long before his death in the spring of 1995, and it was the last scholarly essay he wrote. We remember Tomas not only as a distinguished anthropologist and specialist in Islamic studies but also as a much esteemed colleague.

*Uppsala,
January 1997*

EVA EVERS ROSANDER
DAVID WESTERLUND

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THE CONTRIBUTORS

Sossie Andezian is Senior Research Fellow of Anthropology and Sociology at the research centre SHADYC (Sociologie, Histoire, Anthropologie des Dynamiques Culturelles) of CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) and EHESS (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales) in Marseille. She is a specialist on popular Islam in Algeria and in France. Currently she is preparing a book on popular Sufism in western Algeria.

Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im is Professor of Law at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. He specializes on issues of human rights. His recent publications include *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and International Law* (1990) and *Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (1992).

Eva Evers Rosander is Senior Research Fellow in Social Anthropology at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala. Her main scholarly interests are Islam, gender and development, currently with a focus on Senegal. She has done extensive field work in Morocco and Ceuta and is the author of *Women in a Borderland: Managing Muslim Identity where Morocco Meets Spain* (1991).

Tomas Gerholm (d. 1995) was Associate Professor, Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, and Senior Research Fellow, Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. He specialized in various aspects of Islam and Muslim cultures in Yemen, Egypt and the West. In 1988 he edited, with Yngve Lithman, *The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe*.

Lisbet Holtedahl is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Tromsø. Her major research topics are urbanization, gender, religion, ethnicity and visual anthropology. She has published extensively on Cameroon, Niger and northern Norway, and has produced several documentary films, including *The Sultan's Burden*, with Jon Jerstad.

John Hunwick is Professor of Religion and Professor of African History at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. He formerly taught at the University of Ibadan and the University of Ghana. His recent publications include *Religion and National Integration in Africa: Islam, Christianity and Politics in Sudan and Nigeria*, which he edited in 1992.

George Joffé is Director of Studies at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London. He has specialized on North Africa and issues of Mediterranean security, as well as dealing with the Persian Gulf and security issues in the Levant. His recent publications include *An Annotated Bibliography of Chad*, with Valérie Viaud.

Justo Lacunza-Balda is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Director of Studies at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome. His research interests range from contemporary Islamic movements in East Africa and elsewhere to the way Muslim communities build their identity through language, literary production and interpretations of the Quran. He has published many articles in several languages and is the editor of *Encounter: Documents for Muslim-Christian Understanding*.

Rose Lake, a doctoral candidate in Anthropology, has carried out extensive field work in Senegal and published a number of articles on the Mouridiyya. Currently she is engaged in research on the Senegalese Mouride community in New York.

Roman Loimeier is a Research Fellow at the Department of Islamic Studies, University of Bayreuth. He is a specialist on issues of religion and society in Nigeria and Senegal. In addition to a number of articles he has published the book *Islamische Erneuerung und politischer Wandel in Nordnigeria: Die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen den Sufi-Bruderschaften und ihren Gegnern seit Ende der 50er Jahre* (1993).

Muhammad Mahmoud is currently (1996-7) a visiting scholar at the Centre for International and Comparative Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. He has published numerous works on the problems of reading the Quranic text and the intellectual discourse of modern Islamism. His publications have appeared mainly in Arabic in journals like the London-based quarterly *Mawaqif* and the Cairo-based *Kitabat Sudaniyya*.

Mahmoudou Djingui is trained in social psychology and a doctoral candidate in social anthropology. He is a founder of the journal *Bindi e Jande* and has cooperated with Lisbet Høltedahl in the production of several documentary films on Cameroon. Some of his publications concern questions of gender and marriage.

David Westerlund is Associate Professor at the Department of Comparative Religion, Stockholm University, and Senior Lecturer in the History of Religions at the Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University. His main scholarly interests are indigenous African religions, Islam in Africa, and issues of religion and politics. His recent publications include *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*, which he edited in 1996.

INTRODUCTION

THE ISLAMIZATION OF "TRADITION" AND "MODERNITY"

Eva Evers Rosander

Even if it is accepted that Islam is the most "entity-like" of the world religions, the internal diversity is compelling. To acknowledge this, however, is not to detract from the claim of transcendental unity. Eternal religious truths, like other beliefs, are perceived, understood, and transmitted by persons historically situated in "imagined" communities, who knowingly or inadvertently contribute to the reconfiguration or reinterpretation of these verities, even as their fixed and unchanging natures are affirmed. In fact, when Muslim discourse and practice are considered in the social contexts in which they are produced, the problem of reification is avoided, as is, at the same time, the inadvertent propensity to render representations of Muslim belief and experience parochial. Islam can be seen as the lives of its adherents at the same time as it is divine revelation; and it can be seen as doctrinally complex and evolutionary at the same time that it is seen as a discernibly unique tradition of discourse.¹

What are the characteristics of African Islam today and how does it coexist with or relate to other less popular and more global Islamic tendencies? This is a book about the various forms of Islam found in contemporary Africa and the encounters or clashes between them. The perspective is interdisciplinary, and the theme is elucidated from several different fields and angles. When speaking about "African Islam" we refer to the "contextualized" or "localized" forms which are found particularly in Sufi contexts. African Islam has frequently been depicted as culturally as well as religiously flexible and accommodating. The expression "Islam in Africa", we use to designate Islamist tendencies, which could also be called reformist/activist tendencies. Their aims are to "purify" African Islam from local or indigenous African ideas and practices as well as from Western influences.²

¹ Eickelman and Piscatori 1990: 20.

² Cf. earlier discussions about "localized" or "inculturated" forms of "African socialism"

In part the book deals with *Islamization* as a kind of mediator between “tradition” and “modernity” in Africa, being at the same time an interface and a dividing line between local and global Islam. “Tradition” and “modernity” are put within quotation marks to emphasize the delicate and slightly elusive or deceptive character which these concepts have currently attained. Below, these aspects are further elaborated in relation to the Islamization processes in Africa. These processes not only mediate between tradition and modernity, they also influence and even increase the polarization between oral/vernacular and literate/Arabic in religious practice as well as between traditional and reformist/activist Islam. This book is, also, a volume about Islamization as a creator of religious, political and social discourses with many and varying over- and undertones. One example of an overbridging Islamization discourse is the focus on *umma* as the worldwide Islamic community, open to all Muslims, ideally led by only one leader, a *Khalifa* – in short, the common formula that Islam is “one” – while *de facto* Islam is both *one* and *many*.

Key concepts in this “unifying” and universalistic identity-shaping or confirming discourse are, among others, *sharia* (the Islamic law), *jahiliyya* (ignorance about Islam, heresy), *tahara* (purity) and *baraka* (blessing), concepts which will be discussed in this introduction. Being “Muslim”, a “good/bad Muslim” or “non-Muslim” forms part of this discourse, which refers to basic Islamic cultural values, to be shared by the members of the Muslim community. A discourse which utilizes terms related to these cultural values in its arguments, therefore, is likely to be accepted and appreciated by a Muslim audience. The terms tend to be regarded as universal concepts. However, the meanings attached to them are specific to the cultural setting in which they are used and make sense. Being symbolic, they offer a wide scope for interpretation. The discourse is moral and reveals to us that questions about Islam are questions about the nature of communities and of their relations. It is about people living in at least two moral communities – the face-to-face domain of home and the impersonal world outside. That is why the universal is intrinsically linked to the particular, the global to the local.³ The difficulty for an outsider or researcher is to discern the patterns and fields of application (and manipulation) of the discourse and its universal as well as particular cultural meanings. Those meanings, moreover, vary not only situationally but also over time and space.

There is a tendency in the West to perceive of Islam as something absolute, fixed in form and content, and culturally much more

and the more “orthodox” or Marxist versions of “socialism in Africa”. See, e.g., Aaby 1978.

³ Launey 1992: 1-13.

homogeneous than Christian societies or churches. This idea about Islam as *one*, not many, coincides with the Islamist political discourse, presented to both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. What we deal with are different modes of relationships: personal and impersonal, varying according to how people identify and evaluate themselves and others. *Piety* and the rigour with which one observes the *sharia* could be an important criterion in this context.⁴ The essays in this book deal with both "African Islam" and "Islam in Africa" as well as with the influences from the ongoing Islamization processes on both categories. It goes without saying that no sharp border lines can be drawn between these categories, nor between what is "old" and "new" or "local" and "global". An attempt will be made to analyze the Islamization of tradition and modernity from a centre-periphery and a centre-margin perspective. A distinction in qualitative terms will be made between what constitutes periphery and margin in relation to the centre. A salient point that emerges from the chapters of this book is that what is legitimate African Islam and Islamism depends fully on who has the authority to decide on a definition and to get acceptance for it.

Sufism

There is a spiritual aspect of Islam known as Sufism, or *tasawwuf*, as it is called in Arabic. It has been considered a reaction to the "cold" and formalistic tenets of more scripturalist Islam, which places great emphasis on the absolute gulf between man and God. The Sufi "orders", "brotherhoods" or "paths" (Arab. *tariqa*; pl. *uruq*), have had and still have great importance in Africa politically, as well as in terms of popular religious beliefs and practices. In North Africa they proliferated and flourished most intensely during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gaining considerable political influence during the period of French colonialism in the Maghrib as collaborators on different levels with the French. This was also the case in West Africa, particularly in areas under French dominance. In East Africa, for example in colonial Tanganyika, Qadiri Muslims benefited from colonial rule and defined themselves above all as independent of the Arab and Swahili Muslims of the coastal areas.⁵

Nowadays the Sufi orders in the Maghrib play a minor role in national politics, especially when compared to certain West African countries like Senegal. In that country the Tijaniyya and the Mouridiyya considerably influence politics and the economic strategies of the government.

⁴ Ibid. 1992: 224.

⁵ However, the Qadiriyya was important also for the nationalist movement. Cf Cruise O'Brien 1988: 21 and, e.g., Nimitz 1980.

Elections have even to a considerable extent been directed by the Sufi leaders' commands to their believers and religious authority is similarly used to help the economic and religious élite make deals with the government. Thus the political establishment and the religious leaders are linked in many close but mostly hidden ways.

However, there is a certain difference in the status of the contemporary Sufi orders in West and in North Africa. In the Maghrib there exist orders (for example the Hamadsha and the Issawa) which are considered both by the Maghribi élite and French scholars to be widely popular. They are said to be "corrupted by the base imagination of *le peuple*, by survivals from the ancient religions of the circum-Mediterranean culture area, and by pagan influences from sub-Saharan Africa",⁶ the most dominant traits being ecstatic dancing (*hadra*), spirit possession and expulsion, and visits to "saints" and tombs. Women especially participate in these popular Sufi manifestations, which are particularly widespread in the suburbs of the big cities and in the countryside. Many of the local rural Maghribi religious leaders of these Sufi orders lack political and economic influence. Another important difference, as compared to West African Sufi *turuq*, is the absence of a close relationship between the religious leaders (called marabouts or *shaykhs*) and their disciples. The West African Sufi brotherhoods are firmly based on this very strong link between the disciple and his religious leader, the latter being the intermediary in the disciple's search for *baraka* (blessing) and his striving to enter Paradise after a hard life on earth.

It would be misleading, however, to depict the Sufi orders as not being influenced by the current Islamic tendencies. A good example of this trend is the Senegalese Ibrahim Niass, a reformer of the Tijani order, who has achieved great attention and many followers in Senegal as well as in other countries such as Nigeria.

Islamism

A main characteristic of Islamism is its focus on the Islamic law, *sharia*. Islamists conceive of Islam as an ideology, a total mode of life, and work for the establishment of Islamic societies and, eventually, states based on Islamic law. In this sense Islamism is a reformist and puritanical movement similar to previous ones which have appeared at intervals during earlier centuries, emerging as a reaction against the process of

⁶ Crapanzano 1973: 1.

withdrawal from the Quran and the Sunna, which form the main basis of the *sharia*.

However, the scripturalist versions of Islam that predominate in the current Islamic revival are new to many Muslims. In a sense, the Islamists are not conservative, but champion the idea of *ijtihad*, that is, new and independent interpretations of the Quran and Sunna. It goes without saying that Islamism does not represent the expression of an authentic identity for all Muslims. Some of those practices introduced as Islamic in Islamist circles are essentially novel, contemporary Islamic creations. The Islamic dress worn in Egypt and in other Muslim countries together with various models of veils and scarves for women are examples of this. Thus, what constitutes Islamism is not fixed and is perceived differently by different actors. For "ordinary" people, used to more popular and decentralized forms of Islam, with holy men of their local Sufi brotherhoods to help them in many matters, Islamism is hardly a return to tradition but in fact expresses a rupture in the established social and religious order. The cosmopolitan and modernizing aspect of Islamism has been obscured by the common assumption that it can be best understood only as a rejection of modernity and a reaction against the West. Moreover, when Muslims take on Islamist practices, they are also following a course of action with its own inherent meaning, which Westerners may not be aware of, as it is linked to deeply rooted ideas about Muslim identity and confirmation of identity.⁷

The Islamic discourses presented indirectly in the case studies of this book reflect the current situation in many different parts of Africa: the Maghrib in the northwest, Egypt in the northeast, Senegal and Nigeria in West Africa, Cameroon in Central Africa and the Sudan and Tanzania further east and south. In terms of Islamic issues these countries offer a wide range of differences on the governmental as well as on the local and individual level. While Algeria and Egypt are countries where Islamist movements are strong, creating internal political upheaval, Senegal, although a country with 90 per cent Muslims, has up to now experienced little of that kind of turmoil. In Nigeria, with about 50 per cent Muslims, on the other hand, tensions have arisen both between different groups of Muslims and between Christians and Muslims. In Tanzania, where the Muslims are a substantial minority – probably 35-40 per cent of the population – there are now some signs that the Islamist influence has contributed to increasing tensions between Muslims and Christians as well as between various kinds of Muslims.

⁷ Bernal 1994: 42.

The Islamization of "tradition"

In order to avoid misunderstandings, let me begin by clarifying what is here meant by "tradition". Local history and culture contribute to the religious practices and beliefs of Muslims around the world. These practices and beliefs constitute the religious tradition. "Tradition" is perceived of as an essential part of the local Muslim heritage but *not* necessarily seen as one inseparable or opposite part of a dyad in which "modernity", in the sense of (Western) "civilization" or "progress" constitutes the other part.⁸ Indigenous customs are important for local as well as for religious identity. The line between indigenous custom and Islam is often ambiguous. However, the line of division is becoming increasingly important due to the Islamization process, because the boundary between custom and religion, which once was blurred, if at all recognized by people – and particularly not by rural people – is becoming more clear-cut than before. By juxtaposing "correct" Islam to life as lived by ordinary Muslims, the reformists or Islamists actually help in effecting a break between life and faith. This phenomenon is discussed in an interesting article by Bernal (1993), who has studied the Islamic revival in the Sudan. She emphasizes that the notion of "revival" (here referred to as Islamization) masks the degree to which embracing of "orthodox" Islam constitutes *a break with tradition* for many Muslims.⁹ This is because a great deal of the Muslims around the world have not lived according to strict, text-based practice. Therefore, Bernal contends, Islamization represents not tradition but modernity. The fact that religion tends to become a specialized, compartmentalized aspect of life is thus part of a modernizing process of tradition, brought about by the Islamists.¹⁰

George Joffé, in his chapter about Maghribi Islam, is thinking along similar lines. He wonders if the vitality of Maghribi Islam may ensure that it survives as an essential component of societal definition or whether Islamization will lead to a modernization process which will transfer traditional Islamic observance from the public to the private sphere. If this happens one might wonder if the process of secularization, which should ideally be avoided, at least officially, as it carries the connotation of a Westernized way of life, has not in fact been promoted by Islamization.

In Islamic societies, women are often ascribed by their husbands/fathers/ brothers and sons the role of guardians of tradition, that is, of local, religious and moral practices and beliefs.¹¹ This was especially

⁸ Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xii.

⁹ Bernal 1993: 2.

¹⁰ Ibid. 1993: 11.

¹¹ See Boudhiba 1975: 282 and Bourdieu cited in Vinogradov 1973: 195.

the case during the colonial period and has continued in the postcolonial era when, among other factors, migration to Europe and Western mass media have influenced above all the male society in the Maghrib.

This kind of traditional local knowledge about customs, rituals and religious practices stems from women's oral transfer of knowledge over the generations and their frequent consultation with the village or local *shaykh* or marabout. In African vernaculars, as well as in Arabic, there exist special terms for these local moral and religious applications of law and customs, like *qaida* and *ada* in Moroccan Arabic¹² and *mila* in Swahili.¹³ This tight link between women and tradition, such as it is perceived today in many countries where Islamization has exerted a strong influence primarily among the men, can be seen as both a source of subordination and a source of power for women.¹⁴ It certainly plays a part in marginalizing women as agents of Islamization in contemporary society, reproducing the existing cultural gender gap over time. Thus, in this process male institutions and knowledge often become normative and women's knowledge ignored or disregarded.

The current stress on the *sharia*, in theory and practice, marginalizes women even more than before. The need for scholarly knowledge, based on Islamic studies in Arabic at prestigious schools and universities in the Middle East or elsewhere, is mostly out of reach for rural men and, above all, for women. Islamization of "tradition" in some cases seems to aim at the eradication of traditional female knowledge, or at least as a denigration of it. Women will develop female tactics and strategies to confront these tendencies towards devaluing their cultural knowledge. These endeavours are often combated by men, more or less successfully. Examples of such female strategies are presented by Sossie Andezian in her chapter. As will be elaborated below, however, Islamism also offers some positive and new alternatives for women within the field of education, which may help to compensate for one of the greatest obstacles concerning the achievement of female religious authority and participation: women's illiteracy and subsequent ignorance, not least about Islam. This is underlined in David Westerlund's essay on Islamism in general and is also brought forth in Roman Loimeier's chapter based on Nigerian material.

Many Sufis deliberately play down their *tariqa* activities or the fact that they are Sufi in some public contexts, for instance in local politics and in administrative units outside the traditional socio-religious sphere. This is the case with the Cameroonian judge whom Lisbet Høltedahl and Mohamoudou Djingui present in their chapter. Sufis may keep a

¹² Eickelman 1976: 131; Evers Rosander 1991: 44.

¹³ Larsen 1994: 6.

¹⁴ Bernal 1994: 12.

low profile when they feel that their Sufi activities could be perceived as political efforts to achieve power and influence on the local level, challenging the centralized state bureaucracy. The Islamist discourse, with its universalistic rhetoric, could in this connection be a useful tool for politicians and bureaucrats to attack local Sufis with. The traditional Sufi identity is thus sometimes not openly manifested, and people's *real* religious profile is blurred for the sake of political and personal tranquility outside the intimate group of like-minded, as exemplified by Rose Lake in her chapter.

Within the field of traditional Muslim education, which is generally characterized by its mainly religious content, Islamization plays an important role as an agent of change both in terms of curriculum and in the choice of pupils. The Islamists call for a greater emphasis on language training and subjects like mathematics, geography and history. Separate Islamist schools for girls enable them to study on their own terms without shame and loss of family reputation. In short, schools with a new brand of pupils are created, which despite the inclusion of new non-religious subjects have a clearly religious orientation aiming at the education of the young generation regardless of sex.

In the Islamist discourse some Islamic concepts have been emphasized more than others and appear incessantly, loaded with a partly new ideological content and adapted to current political and ideological demands. This phenomenon could also be regarded as an example of an ongoing Islamization of "tradition". A few particularly conspicuous concepts were mentioned above: *jahiliyya*, *tahara* and *baraka*. In his chapter on Islam and human rights A. An-Na'im points out that under *sharia* non-Muslims do not enjoy equal rights and that animists are denied even the limited rights accorded to Christians and Jews.

Jahiliyya means ignorance, living outside Islam, "in heresy". In the internal discourse between Muslims of different orientations – in which the existence of differences will always be officially denied, as Islam is *one* – *jahiliyya* could be used as a pejorative expression applied to someone deemed to be a less "real" Muslim. With regard to non-Muslims, *jahiliyya* is often referred to by believers as a separating factor with great ideological and political implications. The concept has become charged with moral connotations, which stress the fact that being ignorant of Islam is regarded as something sinful, although this was not originally the case. Today, in plural societies, religious knowledge is an important variable for generating, confirming and maintaining religious identity. This is further underlined by Tomas Gerholm in his chapter on religious identity in Egypt.

Tahara (ritual purity) is another concept which is essential for the characterization of a Muslim as compared to a non-Muslim and a Muslim

man in relation to a Muslim woman. It becomes particularly significant in multiethnic and multireligious societies as another variable for inclusion and exclusion, for indicating sameness and otherness. Also in relation to women and women's religious participation, ritual purity *vis-à-vis* pollution is a key concept which, together with religious ignorance, seems to predestine women to a subordinated position in the religious community. *Tahara* is less referred to in the public or official discourse than in the personal one, which is implicitly shared by Muslim believers. It is a strong and engaging concept, which evokes fear and resistance against possible risks of pollution of mind and body through contacts with non-Muslims or with menstruating Muslim women. One part of the fear has to do with women's capacity to defile sacred spaces like mosques and holy pilgrimage places. It is also sometimes used when arguing against more or less heretical innovations of Islam, which are said to be impure and sinful innovations, categorized as *bida*. In such cases, references to purity may be used for clear political reasons in internal conflicts about power. In his chapter on Nigeria, Loimeier offers us some examples of this.

Baraka (blessing) is less referred to in relation to Muslim identity than is the case with *jahiliyya* and *tahara*. It is, rather, seen as an indicator of legitimate and illegitimate claims of power and authority, mostly related to descent. The Sufi marabouts' authority traditionally rested largely, if not exclusively, on their *baraka*, the proof of which was the miracles they performed. In the centralization process of power during the post-colonial era the various regional religious leaders constituted an obstacle and a threat to some regimes. The monopolization of power in Morocco means, for example, that King Hassan II is the secular as well as the spiritual leader of the country. References to local religious leaders as men of great *baraka* are not openly made today in Morocco. Lake's account of Mahdism in Senegal in this book reveals similar attitudes towards local, popular Sufi men and *baraka* which indicate that only the descendants of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the founder of the Mouridiyya, could claim Mouride religious authority.

The Islamization of "modernity"

"Modernity is profoundly ideological and profoundly historical. Much of the time, in fact, it is difficult to be certain exactly what 'it' is."¹⁵ According to the Comaroffs there are *many* modernities rather than just one. New political cultures, among other things, are born from countless couplings of "local" and "global" worlds, "rerouting, not revers-

¹⁵ Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xi.

ing the march of modernity".¹⁶ Thus, as they are so illusive and exposed to all kinds of casual influences, *modernities* could be said to be *mythical* rather than *factual*.¹⁷ Many of the chapters in this book seem to confirm this statement. However, it is also true that, even if the overlappings are many, and the definitions of "tradition" as well as "modernity" are continuously changing, the chapters do reveal a certain dichotomy existing between Sufism/"tradition" and Islamism/"modernity" in the sense of a new religious orientation, reformist and radical, in African societies of today.

In Africa, modernization can be seen as a process of incorporation and adaption of clan-based family structure into society and further into the nation state. Modernity does not necessarily mean Westernization or secularization. It is a question of participation in social life, organized to a significant extent by people, situations and processes based outside the kin group and the immediate society. Much of the Islamist appeal stems from its association with modernity, urbanity and material success. The influence of Saudi Arabia in many African Muslims' lives is considerable in the sense that they think the good life will reach them through the rich Islamic countries in the East. They see mosques and hospitals being constructed by Saudi money. The Saudi Arabian co-operation channelled through different non-governmental organizations, for example, is associated with religion, change for the better and thus fully in accordance with global, Islamic morality. This change is not to be mistaken for sinful change or innovation, *bida*, which is associated with Western models of modernity. In different ways "Islamic modernity" is given attention by the authors of this book.

The current trend of Islamization largely goes hand in hand with Arabization, the emphasis on the need for learning Arabic properly to be able to read not only religious texts in Arabic. This development is dealt with by several of the authors of this book, Hunwick and Westerlund not the least. Holtedahl and Mahmoudou point out that the modern Arabic schools in Ngaoundéré, northern Cameroon, are disliked by some of the "traditionalists" in the town, because the large schoolrooms with benches and small tables for the pupils remind them of the French-speaking secular schools, introduced by the colonialists. The fact that

¹⁶ Ibid. 1993: xii.

¹⁷ Jean and John Comaroff (ibid.) refer to ideas about modernities as "narratives", giving as examples "the self-sustaining antimony between tradition and modernity" which "underpins a longstanding European myth". They also mention the optimistic models of modernization theory as well as some scholars who criticize those models. The latter point at the underdevelopment by the West and by so doing only too easily resort to Eurocentrism. These and other examples show that modernity "itself an imaginary construction of the present in terms of its mystic past has its own magicalities, its own enchantments" (ibid.: xiv).

after the colonial period came a time of Arabization, nationalism and socialism in countries like Algeria, Libya and Egypt is already well known to most of us. Now one can see how Islamization further promotes not only an Islamized but also an Arabized life style – the one tightly linked to the other. Another important trait of the Islamization of Egyptian modernity is the Islamic economy, according to Tomas Gerholm. He refers to the attempts by Muslim activists to construct viable, Islamic alternatives to already existing institutions.

Interpreting certain styles of dress as an Islamist characteristic is easily done when dealing with modernity and the Islamization of modernity. Much has been written about the veil as a symbol in the Islamization processes.¹⁸ It is often said, that "veiling" represents the most dominant form of resistance to Western cultural and political hegemony.¹⁹ However, the aspect of *fashion* must not be underestimated in the highly politized debate on women's veiling and the use of female and male "Islamic" dress. In this case, as well as other similar ones, it is important to indicate from whose perspective and in whose interest one is actually analyzing a phenomenon like veiling in contemporary Muslim societies. For some people veiling may be a purely political manifestation, while for others it may be a strategic choice, a way of "carving out moral space"²⁰ for oneself, just an impulsive act, or a giving in to social pressure from the surrounding community. Thus, it is difficult to say where wearing clothes as an expression of Muslim identity and life style ends and the force of fashion or social control takes over. Probably it is a mix of both, which also spreads from urban to rural areas of Muslim Africa. As in other places, fashion in Africa is class-related, the Islamist dressing being mainly urban and most easily incorporated into the life style of the middle class.²¹ Veiling may also be seen as an apt example of the vagueness of "modernity" as a concept, in accordance with the Comaroffs' view of "mythical modernities", as contrasting with the stereotype notion of "modernity" as "civilization" or "progress". From a Western perspective veiling is a traditional and conservative Islamic practice, but from an Islamist perspective it is a way of signalling an alternative way of life, a reformistic approach, which is partly new and challenging. Some of these important aspects of "modernity" and "Islamization" are approached by Westerlund in his chapter.

¹⁸ See Mernissi 1991, Rabo 1991: 149ff. and Zuhur 1992: 76.

¹⁹ For a further discussion on veiling as a political act of resistance, see Ahmed 1992 and Moghadam 1993.

²⁰ El Guindi 1981.

²¹ Fuglesang 1994: 144-5.

Attention must also be given to education in relation to the Islamization of "modernity". Not only the curricula of the traditional religious schools are being revised by the Islamic reformers of today. The modern schools are also being scrutinized and sometimes found to be too "secular". The Sufi *shaykhs* feel obliged to send their sons to countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt or Morocco to learn Arabic and to study at prestigious universities so they will not be set to one side by the Islamists' educational goals and methods. A proper Arabic pronunciation has become important and teachers who speak and read Arabic well are highly appreciated. This is especially emphasized in Høltedahl and Mahmoudou's chapter.

Thematic studies

Some of the contributions to this book are general and thematic overviews. Other contributions concentrate more on a specific country or on the description and/or analysis of separate cases, based on extensive field work. All chapters are studies of Muslim plurality, offering the reader a varied picture of how different Islamic orientations have coexisted, interacted or been in casual conflict with each other over time.

In the introduction to their book on Muslim travellers, Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori (1990) take up the concept of *centre* because of its importance in understanding motives and interests – the centre has a given appeal as sacred space and is situated in Mecca, far from the *periphery*, where the Muslim majority dwells.²² John Hunwick's essay in the present volume could also be perceived as dealing with centre-periphery relations, in this case of interactions and relations between the Arabo-Islamic world and the sub-Saharan African Muslim world throughout the centuries. He shows that the links between sub-Saharan Africa and "the wider world of Islam" (mostly Arab countries in the Middle East) have been many and intense. Travels by African scholars from the periphery to the centre to study at universities in Morocco, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been one way of establishing durable contacts. Another has been the flow of visitors in the opposite direction, from the centre to the periphery, with "missionary" aims, whether it be to spread Islam, teach Arabic, provide African people with development aid, or construct mosques, schools and hospitals, etc. The formation of a series of pan-African Islamic organizations and networks as well as African membership in even bigger international Islamic associations has contributed to linking the Muslim part of Africa closer to the Muslim world community. Access to modern media, faxes and other communica-

²² Eickelman and Piscatori 1990: 12.

tion devices has greatly facilitated the promotion and activation of such contacts on a world-wide basis.

Hunwick points out that, in contrast with the United States and most European countries, which have assigned quite a low priority to Africa, Muslim countries, with the Arab states in their vanguard, continue to pay considerable attention to the African continent. Because of this, sub-Saharan Africa is in the process of being more fully integrated into the wider, non-Western part of the world. Having stated this, Hunwick reflects on what cultural effect this closer integration with the Muslim world will have on African Muslims. This is a complicated issue, especially when considering the simultaneous move in the other direction, towards greater contact with the world of secular, technically advanced Europe and the United States. Many residents from sub-Saharan Africa in Western and Arab countries are exposed to influences from both Western and Islamic discourses. Will this erase local or traditional Islam or will African Islam and culture resist the homogenizing tendencies of Western secularization and the Islamization of knowledge and influence from international Islamic agencies?

George Joffé provides a similar historical and contemporary exposé of Islam in the Maghrib. His focus is on the relations between the traditionally different Islamic orientations in North Africa. He emphasizes the "eternal dichotomy" between Sufistic, rural and popular religious practices and the *ulama's* learned, urban and élitistic Islam. However, he is careful to point out that, even if these orientations have always lived side by side, not formally intermingling, they enrich and complement each other and have been part of a dynamic and dialectical social process, which in the long run has been a vitalizing and strengthening ingredient in Maghribi religious culture. Islamism is now entering the picture, constituting something more and stronger than the interface between Sufism and earlier forms of reformist Islam.²³ Islamic radicalism strives to eradicate the mystical and popular forms of Islam, thus disturbing the delicate balance between the different orientations. Joffé draws an illuminating parallel with the situation in the Maghrib during the colonial period, when Islamic reformism aimed at the same destruction of traditional, local forms of Islam.

Continuing to elaborate on the *centre-periphery* metaphor mentioned above, Joffé places the periphery in the rural areas, mainly among women, who are the ones expected not to embrace the new Islamist ideas because of their illiteracy, ignorance of "proper" Islam and culturally ascribed "childishness". The Sufi-coloured expressions of Islam

²³ Sufism can, however, in some cases also have reformist characteristics, at least partially. The history of Islam in West Africa, for instance, shows many examples of reformist tendencies within Sufism. See, e.g., Clarke 1984 and Hiskett 1982.

are hereby thought to be reduced to visits to the shrines (belonging to maraboutic families) and to rituals performed by insignificant, rural *zawiyas* (religious lodges) belonging to the remaining religious brotherhoods. While during the time of colonialism the Sufi orders had an important political role, not least as collaborators with the French and the Spanish, there are only a few urban marabouts politically active today, and their power has been considerably curtailed. Thus, today the centre is *urban* in relation to the rural areas, and *foreign-Arabic* in relation to the Maghribi *ulama* or scholars, who represent a Maghribi tradition of learning. This could all be seen to some extent as effects of Islamization, but also of modernization.

In his concluding remarks, Joffé states that popular and mystical Islam has been discredited and that the scripturalist tradition has been "reworked in a global, radical form". Whether this fact and the continuing modernization of Maghribi society will together generate a progressive secularization and transfer of Islamic observance from the public to the private sphere remains to be seen. As long as Maghribi Islam constitutes an essential component of societal definition, the vitality of religion will remain strong.

Islamic law as an expression of national and African *esprit de loi* in contrast to secular law, with its European and ex-colonial connotations, are hot issues of discussion today in Africa. Abdullahi A. An-Na'im reflects on Islam and human rights in the Sahelian region of Africa. He presents a theoretical framework for analyzing the relationship between the religious/customary norms and practices of Islamic societies in the region and international human rights norms. In doing this, he assumes that some shared conception of Islam constitutes a significant component of those different local cultures. He also emphasizes the need for contextualized analyses and careful comparisons within and between each region of the Islamic world. Taking the present set of human rights as a "prima facie" frame of reference, he stresses the need to be aware both of issues of universality and cultural relativity in relation to human rights. He argues that the cultural diversity of any human society and the different opinions which could be found within each culture should make it possible to mobilize existing cultural resources in order to promote, for example, the legitimation and effectuation of international human rights norms. The current example of the Muslim regime of the Sudan is, however, not consistent with these ideas, as this regime does not acknowledge human rights norms but sees them as Western conventions, not to be applied by an Islamic state and its citizens.

An-Na'im is certainly interested in the Islamic dimension of some cultures in sub-Saharan Africa, although he says he lacks sufficient knowledge to attempt a detailed application here of the proposed theoretic-

cal framework of analysis to specific local cultures of the Sahel. He encourages other scholars to apply his model of research to the region to gain that kind of detailed information about the uniformities and the diversities that one can find only in empirical studies.

The Islamization of the Sahel is a repetitive process. During the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries strong *jihad* movements appeared with which the Islamism of today has similarities. Like previous reformists, contemporary Islamists strive to be guided by the *sharia*. They actively seek to transform society and state, bringing them into conformity with Islamic law. In view of this development, An-Na'im asks some important questions in relation to the application of human rights in Africa: Who represents or identifies with the *sharia*; is it the people themselves or the élite? Are these legal norms in accordance with local traditional culture? What are the dynamics of internal power relations? He stresses an example of Islamic views on human rights which differs from international human rights norms: according to him, the Islamic view of non-Muslims and women as unequal and legally inferior to male Muslims (though exceptional status is conceded to Christians and Jews) is fully accepted today by the Islamists, who are guided by Islamic law.

Among Muslims, translations of the Quran are a controversial issue. Especially in Africa, this is a burning theme of discussion, as the language question is complicated and multifaceted. In Senegal, Mouride women sing religious songs in Wolof, the language of their founder, Cheikh Amadou Bamba, about his mother Mame Diarra Bousso. Arabic-oriented Muslims condemn that kind of religious practice. The Quran, in particular, should not be translated, since God, through the angel Gabriel, conveyed the divine word in Arabic. A translation is of necessity also an interpretation. Therefore, it can be argued that a translated version of the Quran is no longer the proper word of God. In a chapter on the translations of the Quran into Swahili, Justo Lacunza-Balda presents and discusses the reactions of various groups of Muslims in East Africa to Swahili translations of the Quran. Swahili is a lingua franca, the vocabulary of which is much influenced by Arabic. For centuries this "Muslim language" has been spoken by Bantu people in the coastal areas of East Africa. Even Arabs, or people who claim to be Arabs, largely use this language. In this part of Africa, knowledge of Arabic, by contrast, is limited to very few individuals, mainly learned Islamic scholars.

Despite the strong position of Swahili in East Africa, the translations of the Quran into this language have evoked strong criticism. In part, however, the negative reactions have been due to the fact that one of

the three existing translations was made by a Christian and another one by a member of the Ahmadiyya movement, which according to the majority of the Muslims is not part of Islam. Most Muslims hold that the version of the former translator as well as that of the latter seriously distort the message of the Quran. These "heterodox" translations, which because of the East African Muslims' limited knowledge of Arabic have been much used, provoked the great Islamic scholar Abdalla Saleh al-Farsy to provide a more authentic or orthodox translation into Swahili. Even though this version has its detractors too, for instance among Sufi-oriented Muslims, it is the most accepted one. The awareness of the continued need to provide Swahili translations of the Quran, particularly among Islamists, is manifested by the fact that some new translations are now being prepared. One of these is being written by Saidi Musa, currently the most prolific Islamist scholar in East Africa, and another by an Iranian scholar. Lacunza-Balda argues that Muslim translators and interpreters of the Quran are in fact the main protagonists of the Islamic movement in East Africa. In this respect the situation in this part of the continent differs somewhat from the circumstances in West Africa, where the *arabisants* have a stronger position. In Nigeria, the role of Hausa may to some extent be compared to that of Swahili in East Africa. Yet Islamists and other Muslims in Nigeria are more emphatic about the need to teach and use Arabic.

Country studies

Two of the contributions in this book deal with Sufism and Islamism within a country-based framework and concern both historical and contemporary issues. The two chapters deal with Egypt and the Sudan, respectively. In both countries one will find influential Islamist groups and individual religious leaders who play an active role in Africa and the Middle East as propagators for an Islamic state, based on the *sharia*.

Seen from the African Muslims' point of view, Islamism is a religious and political movement, originating in or strongly influenced by the Arabo-Islamic countries of the East. Egypt, as we know, is hardly regarded either by the Egyptians themselves or by the sub-Saharan Africans to be "real" Africa, but as a country which culturally belongs to the Middle Eastern sphere of influence. Still, it is essential to be aware of what is happening in Egypt today in terms of Islamism and what its historical background is, because of its position as a "trend-setter" and politically powerful country.

In his chapter about the Islamization of contemporary Egypt, Tomas Gerholm initially asks whether contemporary Egypt is really becoming a more Islamic country than before. It is easy to get that impression

from the many mosques, the growing beards and proliferating veils one sees in the streets. But is it more a question of frame and idiom than of essence? Gerholm first scrutinizes the three main categories of Egyptian Islam: establishment Islam, personified in the *ulama*, learned scholars who have passed on their knowledge in special schools connected to important mosques, then Sufi Islam and its representatives and, finally, activist Islam or Islamism, represented by the *islamiyyin* or the *asliyyin*, "those seeking for the roots". However, Islam in Egypt is multifaceted. Gerholm stresses that the different categories exist side by side, to a certain extent overlapping each other. A fourth category of Egyptian Muslims he refers to as "the mainstreamers". They constitute the majority of the Egyptian people, without strong and specific Islamic convictions. They are adapting to the current Islamization trend, some more than others, but not necessarily with the great fervour that Westerners are prone to assume when we see the exterior signs like praying men and women hiding under the *hijab*, the head scarf. Gerholm makes an interesting remark about the inherent meaning of these signs of Islamization manifested by the mainstreamers. Although they could be seen as signs of mere conformity, he asserts that formal gestures and roles repeatedly acted out tend to become more authentic as time passes and the performer gradually identifies with his or her role. Thus, Gerholm's introductory reflections as to whether Islamization in Egypt is a matter of frame and idiom or of essence end up in the conclusion that during the course of the Islamization process frame and idiom become essence.

Egyptian Muslims do not live on the periphery of the Muslim world. They are perceived by other Muslim peoples, like the Maghribis, as living if not in the very centre itself at least very close to it. No doubt, Egypt is in an avant-garde position among the Muslim countries in the Middle East. This is manifested spiritually in great religious movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, or materializes in Islamic dress fashion which is quickly followed in other Muslim countries. Hence, in Egypt one finds an Arabo-Islamic culture which is both national and international. In this respect it differs from all other Muslim countries in Africa.

The next study deals with the development of Islam in the Sudan, starting with the rise of the Sufi orders, followed by the Funj period, and later by the Mahdist and the modern periods. Muhammad Mahmoud sees Islam as a constituency that has been politically explored and exploited through the centuries. According to him, the fate of contemporary Sudanese Sufism is uncertain, as the political ascendancy of Islamism and the nature that it has assumed has placed Sufism in a difficult situation. Mahmoud wonders whether the Sufi orders are institutionally strong enough to survive in spite of the current hardships

and if they will be given the possibility to offer an alternative Islam. Considering the importance that the Sudan has in contemporary Africa as a propagator for an Islamic state based on religious law, and considering the radicalization of Islam which Sudanese personalities such as Hasan al-Turabi²⁴ promote, there is a special need to study the historical background of the rise and development of Islam in the Sudan.

Islam was firmly established in the Sudan during the Funj period at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The *shaykhs* or Sufi leaders played an important role in the religious life. They created their own physical space at the heart of which was the *khalwa*, the school of religious sciences. Such institutions enjoyed a considerable degree of independence from the state. A new phase was initiated with the rise in the nineteenth century of Mahdism, which united Sufism and Islamism. The ground was laid for an official Islam that was intermeshed with the state. Muhammad Ahmad (d.1885), the central figure of the Mahdi movement, saw it as a reenactment of the Prophetic time, while he was probably also influenced by the Wahhabiyya movement of Hijaz and the *jihad* movements of West Africa. After the Mahdi's death the political rise of the Khatmiyya and the Ansar, two organizations with a *tariqa* or semi-*tariqa* structure, led to a religio-political polarization, which has been described as *taifiya*, sectarianism. The political dominance of the Khatmiyya and the Ansar stemmed from their broad base, their centralized structure and the economic activity of their leaders. Nevertheless, the main representatives of the Islamization of the country's political life, the Muslim Brothers, were already working to bring about a change in the state of affairs. Once the Muslim Brothers had formed their party, the Islamic Charter Front, they intensified their campaign for an Islamic constitution and the introduction of the *sharia* under the leadership of Hasan al-Turabi. Thus, Mahmoud concludes, the history of post-independence Sudan may be seen on one important level in terms of the movement of Islamism towards the centre. It received a governmental acknowledgement in 1983 with the introduction of the Islamic September laws. Currently, Islamism is the official ideology of Brig. Umar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir's regime. Islamization, enforcement of the *sharia* and a holy war with the South are on his agenda. As mentioned above, this is a serious challenge to Sufism.

²⁴ Hasan al-Turabi was the leader of the Islamic Charter Front and later of the National Islamic Front, both parties sprung from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Field studies

The following chapters consist of four detailed case-studies, which illustrate the delicate balance and the intricate complex of problems characterizing the relations between representatives of African Islam and Islam in Africa. It should be stressed that there are various factions of Islamism and Sufism, embracing people who sometimes collaborate with and sometimes counteract each other. They are situated on a scale whose two extremes are not easy to define, as the poles fluctuate and change according to the political situation and the results of more or less casual and secret negotiations. What is described in the case-studies is more often the ambiguous and complicated relations between the *margins* and their centre than the *periphery*. The periphery marks distance from the centre, without any other ranking indicators in terms of superiority and inferiority than those considered to originate from the remoteness to the centre. "Margins", on the other hand, indicate being morally inferior or "second-rate" in relation to the centre, even if the distance in space or time may be none. The centre constitutes the normative and established setting, seen in relation to the margins, which represent those who are not fully recognized, with an aberrant behaviour or hidden agendas. The margins lack the *legitimacy* of the centre, which dominates the ideological discourse and the interpretation of social practice. Thus, the four case-studies deal to a lesser extent with the centre and its periphery, as was the case in the previous chapters of this book, and to a greater extent with the interaction or even manipulation of the centre by the margins in daily life as well as in the ritual context.

In her case-study Sossie Andezian elucidates the sensitive relations between men and women as reflected in the celebration of a religious feast in Algeria. The women act as marginalized innocent "victims" of men's fear of their polluting presence in the religious rituals. Andezian's main object is to observe a certain group of Algerian women's reactions to the segregation to which they are exposed, particularly in relation to religious participation in a yearly pilgrimage, organized by a popular Sufi order, which she calls the *tariqa* Zidaniyya (the name is fictitious). These Algerian women can be said to be marginal for many reasons, among others in the sense that they are not militant, they do not hold any important public functions or positions in society, they are not consulted by the mass media and are thus never asked to express any opinions publicly.²⁵ In most religious rituals women are also marginal as compared to the men because of their role as passive and distant observers. This is how men define women's participation and this is from a normative perspective how women should behave

²⁵ See Andezian's chapter in this book.

during the pilgrimage. However, Andezian changes the perspective and thereby the conventional focus on men's ideas about women's religious behaviour and practice. Women, who are marginal in relation to men's religious participation mainly due to religious ideas about purity and impurity, are brought forward and placed in the spotlight. Their actual religious practice is described and analyzed from the point of view of the position of the women as *marginalized but active*, the framework being the negotiation of dichotomies such as female and margin/male and centre; ecstatic religion/canonic religion; and female submission/male dominance.

Andezian focuses on derision as a traditional and well integrated component of women's ritual activities, seen in relation to the pilgrimage as a kind of female religious participation. The comic plays performed by the women after the male-dominated pilgrimage rituals are over, in which the irrespectful joking about men and men's ritual activities is an important part of the entertainment, are not to be considered as a non-religious, non-ritual female alternative lacking importance or meaning. This is how the men see them. However, Andezian argues that from the women's perspective, the manifestations of derision are a culturally integrated way of behaviour in which the women take part as fully integrated members of the society. It constitutes an informally established way of female religious participation. Men know about these female practices but they prefer not to see them or pay attention to them. What is thus invisible for the men is highly visible and concrete for the women.

Andezian gives us a description and an analysis of a way of acting that runs parallel with the men's which can be interpreted as female symbolic representations of male religious discourse. However, more important still than exemplifying clashes between Sufi tradition or religious popular practices and "modernity" or Islamic canonic dogma are the clarifications about *from whose angle* the texts are analyzed. One has to situate these texts on a scale from margin to centre, in order to be able to indicate according to whose standards and measures the margins are marginal and the centre remains the centre. In gender relations of the kind we witness here, those who have the greatest power, that is, the men, set the norms and use female ignorance and impurity as a justification for placing them on the margins of religion.

Judging from Rose Lake's case-study of the Senegalese *mahdi* called Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine or, as he is called by his followers, Mohammadou Mahdiou, the boundary between what is publicly and privately permissible in terms of religious practice and tolerable reputation is sometimes very distinct and at other times blurred. A field of interaction can be discerned, where Sufism officially does not mix with the political establishment while, pragmatically, it intermingles or is involved in

power relations both with the Sufi marabouts and the Islamist radicals. It seems to be a tricky game, where the internal competition for power within the brotherhoods and between them is balanced by their relations to the governmental institutions on different levels of the administration. A certain interdependence between the Sufi leaders and the representatives of the "secular" power still exists in Senegal. This explains the delicate balance of the relationship and the strain caused by the Islamists' insistent and moralizing presence. In more general terms it could be said that in relations between African Muslims and foreigners from the Arab (oil) countries, those who have the financial means dictate the Islamic discourse. Although hidden agendas and counter strategies are often developed by African Muslims, this is never done officially or publicly.

Lake initially informs us about the enigmatic silence which surrounds the fate of the *mahdi* from Thies, who belongs to the Mouride brotherhood, without explaining *why*. However, the reader's curiosity is awakened, and what follows is a story about the *mahdi*'s life told by an old disciple. In Lake's interpretations of the oral account, one becomes gradually aware of the challenging religious and political ideas which the story brings forth. The *mahdi* talked of himself as one who has no parents. This is a highly heretical idea, as all human beings are supposed to have parents – only God has not. Thus, what the *mahdi* did was to assume that he had divine origin. Even more challenging is the way he presented the religious texts he wrote in Arabic. Although his books are written in an incomprehensible language, because of his poor knowledge of Arabic grammar, he claimed some of the texts to be revelations from God and, thus, to have the same status as the Quran. This was perceived as the greatest heresy by many people, who did not believe in his status as *mahdi*. They considered him to be a madman and the books were buried with him in his grave. Indeed, he was considered marginal in relation to the great marabouts, who were direct descendants of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the founder of Mouridism.

In their chapter about the Fulbe of northern Cameroon Lisbet Holtedahl and Mohamoudou Djingui focus on some issues of current and vital importance for the understanding of Islam in Africa. They deal with religion and its relations to ethnicity and the national and regional power structure. In the form of a detailed micro study they present the life and views of the judge, Alkaali (*qadi*) Ibrahim Goni Bakari, living in a multi-ethnic town in northern Cameroon. Their presentation of the case study gives breadth and depth to a wider understanding of the current situation in northern Cameroon. Special attention is paid to education as an indicator of religious orientations as well as of the Islamization of modernity and tradition. The empirical data show the way the educational paraphernalia are exposed to a symbolic transfor-

mation and become vehicles of distinct ideological messages. The authors also shed light on the different meanings of knowledge, and of books as almost "magical" sources of it. Furthermore, Holtedahl and Djingui draw attention to the importance of the "correct" pronunciation of Arabic as a means of identification with holiness, the language itself being charged with a certain power. This is an aspect of the learning of Arabic which is easily overlooked by non-Muslim "outsiders" such as Islam-interested social scientists or historians.

Another hot issue is the strained relations between representatives of different groups of Muslims, perceived as "traditional" (Sufi-oriented) or "radicals" (reformists or Islamists). The judge stubbornly refused to talk about contemporary Islam, the subject being too politicized and threatening. The Wahhabi-inspired Muslims looked down on the *moodibbe*, the traditionalists, whom they called "entrance-hut intellectuals". Seen from the Wahhabists' point of view, the traditionalists were old-timers with an inclination towards the use of magic. Traditionalists like the judge in Holtedahl and Mahmoudou's chapter felt threatened by this new radicalism and kept silent. They feared that they would become even more marginalized by the Islamists than by the administrators and state representatives. The latter were interfering in the judge's old domains of power and control and gradually taking over his responsibilities.

Roman Loimeier offers a detailed case-study from Nigeria of the Yan Izala movement. This chapter deals with Islamic reform and political change and focuses on Abubakar Gumi's central role in the rise and development of the movement. It is an illustrative example of the internal tensions created in the spread of Islam. The conflicts can partly be explained as a consequence of movements of reform and rejuvenation (*tajdid*) within Islam. Only when an external threat unifies the conflicting fractions – be they Sufi or Islamist – can calm be achieved. The Christians of Nigeria are seen as such a threat by the Muslims, who live mainly in the northern part of the country.

In the political debates and conflicts in northern Nigeria since the 1950s scholars have used religious arguments in order to fight their opponents. This was intensified by Abubakar Gumi, who in 1978 supported Ismaila Idris' foundation of the anti-Sufi reform movement and organization called Izala. It rapidly spread over the whole of northern Nigeria, much due to its political and modern character. In contrast to the networks of the Sufi brotherhoods, the Yan Izala, the members of the Izala, set up a regular constitution and saw themselves as an organization with members, functionaries and a regular administration. The programme of the Yan Izala especially rejected all initiatives which could be classified as *bida* (evil or sinful innovation) as well as popular religious customs like pilgrimages to the tombs of saints, recitation of

praise songs to the Prophet and other religious rites characteristic of the Sufi brotherhoods. Women were admonished to participate in political life by voting, and special programmes for female education were created. Loimeier proceeds to present a chronological account of the conflicts which arose between the Yan Izala and the Sufi Muslims. Gumi's death in 1992 was a serious blow to the organization. One year before it had split into two groups, and the risk of fragmentation into small networks was imminent. In this complicated situation, what may have contributed to a form of reconciliation between different Sufi orders and Yan Izala was the political threat from the Christians in the North.

This example aptly shows how decisive unity and organizational skills are for the success of a religious movement. A charismatic leadership, like Gumi's, is also an invaluable resource. The battle between Sufis and reformists in this case was largely political, but was fought in religious terms, the Sufis accusing their opponents of being "non-Muslims" and the Yan Izala claiming to be "good Muslims". The Yan Izala's ideological battles are, according to Loimeier, mainly for internal, Nigerian purposes with the aim of taking over political power from Sufi groups. Nonetheless, Izala is spreading into quite a few neighbouring countries.

In religio-political movements of this kind what is belief and what is political ambition remains difficult to find out from an outsider's position. The forms and the symbolic expressions which the battles are what we, as observers, can notice and try to interpret as best we can. Loimeier's case-study reveals the power strategies and realities in African Islamic and Islamist terms. It is a good example of the Islamization of both "tradition" and "modernity".

In the final chapter of the book, David Westerlund focuses on some possible causes for the rise of Islamism. The author tries to sum up and discuss in a broad perspective what Islamism, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, really refers to, how it works and what its most significant regional differences are. Westerlund emphasizes the Islamists' acceptance of the principle of *ijtihad*, that is, new independent interpretations of the Quran and Sunna, as well as their anti-Sufi stance. Among other things, the strong current of Wahhabi influence in West Africa is given attention. The Islamist criticism of Sufism is represented in virtually all Muslim areas, although it is much stronger in North Africa than in sub-Saharan countries. In his chapter, Westerlund first presents an account of what he calls "factors of discontent", that is, some negative reasons for the rise of the Islamist movement in Africa. In addition to the economic and political explanations there is also a more socio-psychological one, which takes into consideration other, non-material forms of alienation. In both cases Islamism is seen as a reaction to the

influence of Western ways of life and ideas about modernity. However, Westerlund stresses the need for paying more attention to the constructive Islamist development efforts and activities. Islamism, he says, brings hope for a better life in both moral and materialistic terms. At a time when the governmental social welfare systems are in disarray, the Islamist construction of schools, hospitals and other social amenities becomes particularly important.

For women, Islamism has in some cases meant a new and morally accepted alternative to their role as guardians of tradition and upholders of local custom. The Islamist movement offers a moral version of modernity, which women can embrace without being criticized for bad behaviour. Education is just one example of the fact that new fields of knowledge are opened up for girls due to Islamist reform ideas. In relation to education, the Islamist promotion of a wider curriculum than just religious education and its stress on language, particularly Arabic, is worth special comment. Westerlund points out the regional differences concerning attitudes to the Islamist Arabization tendencies. Partly for historical reasons – the slave trade and the double colonization by Arabs and Westerners – in the East African countries, the appeal of Arab language training and education is not as great as in West Africa. Moreover, as indicated above, the Swahili language has an established status to an extent not comparable with the West African indigenous languages. Thus, having a “linguistic centre” in one’s own vernacular, yet deeply rooted in Islam, changes the quality of the centre-periphery relations somewhat, at least as compared with the conventional view of the Arabo-Islamic space as something more sacred than the non-Arabic space.

Conclusions

In this book “African Islam and Islam in Africa” – the encounters and the clashes between them – are presented from a multidisciplinary and multifaceted perspective. The authors focus on the position and meaning of Islam as a religious ideology and as a political and social system in Africa. In several chapters, one can discern an emphasis on the idea of a centre, with those who are in it defining a periphery and/or a marginal group or setting relative to it. The intention has been to draw attention to how varied the centres, peripheries and margins may actually be, depending on *from whose perspective* the situation or the issue in question is studied. Moreover, not only do the relations between centre and periphery, or centre and margin, change in accordance with the viewpoint from which they are studied, the content and the meaning of the relations themselves change over time, due to influences from both external and internal political, societal and cultural factors. That

this is so is tacitly admitted by everybody, though publicly or formally religious concepts are frequently used for unifying and identity-confirming purposes. References to the *umma* are, for example, offered to both African Muslims and those who study them as an explanation and a motivation for the Islamization of modernity and tradition. The *umma* is also referred to by African Sufi leaders and their disciples in their conversations about the position of the Sufi orders in contemporary African society.

What is of particular interest in some of the chapters is not so much the study of the marginality *per se*, but more the observation of the processes of construction and generation of margins. In these processes the dominant or established authority defines the margin with reference to its own ideas about what constitutes the norm and consequently the centre. It is tempting to see a certain congruence here in the generation of legitimacy for the construction of centre-margin relations between the Islamists and the Sufis, on the one hand, and the construction of female religious marginality in relation to Muslim men's practice of religious rituals on the other. Sufi representatives can be publicly second-rate, endowed with less formally recognized authority, as their message is not based as strongly as that of the Islamists on the Muslim scripturalist fundamentals of the *sharia*, the Quran and Sunna. Yet the local forms of Sufi Islam coexist with more "universal" and formal forms of Islamism. Nobody in an African Muslim society can deny the great significance of the Sufi orders and of the women's informal religious practices in that society. Visiting one of the numerous religious festivals in an African Muslim country is evidence enough of the great religious engagement that the women manifest. These religious events are often organized by Sufi orders whose male representatives in their turn consider the female participants to be marginal in relation to the men's religious practices. Finally, to make the picture more complete, we have been informed about the Algerian case in Andezian's chapter, where women, when situating themselves in the centre, see men as marginal or even ridiculous beings, whose acts and speech in their absence can evoke only derision and jokes among the women present.

Jahiliyya and *tahara* were chosen as key concepts together with *umma* for the analysis of the creation and confirmation of Muslim identity in the Islamist movements. In their intent to promote religious education of boys and girls the Islamists have given the *jahiliyya* concept a revival. Ideas about purity (*tahara*) separate both Muslims from non-Muslims and Muslim men from Muslim women. Thus, while the concept *umma* stresses the significance of a world-embracing Muslim community without any distinctions in the form of centre-periphery or centre-margins, *jahiliyya* and *tahara* create distance and marginality. *Baraka* (blessing) is interesting as an indicator of religious authority. As seen in

Lake's chapter, not all religious men can claim *baraka*; it is mainly inherited and transferred by the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and, in Sufi Islam, by a few other great religious leaders, who have followed after him.

The Islamization of tradition and modernity could thus be analyzed as a vehicle for the creation of centre-periphery or centre-margin relations. The greater the differentiation between a secular and a religious society, and between an Islamist and a Sufi approach, the greater the marginalization of those who do not control the dominating group's definition of what constitutes the centre and its periphery or margins. Those who have access to the economic and political power, be it formally or informally, openly or secretly, are those who in the long run will set the rules for what may be considered "African Islam" and "Islam in Africa" and how it should be practised.

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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND THE WIDER WORLD OF ISLAM

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES*

John Hunwick

Today we come face to face with perhaps the greatest evil that stalks the modern world – that of nationalism. . . . The path of the *Ummah* and that of the Islamic movement is blocked by nation-states. these nation-states are like huge boulders blown across our path by the ill-wind of recent history. All nation-states that today occupy, enslave and exploit the lands, peoples and resources of the *Ummah* must of necessity be dismantled. . . It is quite clear that one *Ummah* must mean one Islamic movement, leading to one global Islamic State under one Imam/Khalifa.¹

Introduction

In the Muslim world of the late twentieth century, there is a sense of urgency about the need to restate Islamic values in the face of pervasive external influences inimical to them, such as has not, perhaps, been manifested since the late mediaeval period when it was perceived as necessary to batten down the hatches against the subversive influence of the legacy of Greek philosophy and science. That such a sense of urgency, expressed in discussion, debate and often militant action, should come about at a time when Muslim lands have been freed of the direct physical pressure of European colonialism, but are still reeling from its effects, is not surprising. During the “colonial century” (roughly 1860-1960) it was not possible for Muslims to take stock of this situation. The parameters of a relationship with the non-Muslim world of Europe

* The essay mainly deals with “Sudanic Africa” – the broad region lying between Senegal and the Sudan-Ethiopian border. Regrettably, I do not have sufficient information to allow me to extend my coverage through the Horn of Africa and eastern Africa. I am grateful to David Westerlund and Herman Bell for their suggestions, both editorial and substantive, but remain responsible for the essay’s many remaining imperfections. A slightly modified version appeared in the *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26 (3), 1996.

¹ Kalim Siddiqui in Ghayasuddin 1986: 1.

which had been forced on them with great suddenness, and often great violence, were still being negotiated under conditions of subservience. Muslims and non-Muslims under colonial conditions saw their principal goal, both jointly and severally, as the elimination of direct political and economic dominance and the assumption upon independence of the mantle of the colonial powers through the chosen framework of the nation-state.

After political independence was achieved, African Muslims became more clearly aware of what the colonial "interlude" had cost them: notably, the disruption of long-nurtured institutions and the relative isolation of African Muslims from wider Islamic currents, the injection into their intellectual horizons of larger or smaller doses of western secular thought and "methodological atheism", the political realignment of Muslim communities in a way that in many cases inextricably linked their futures with those of non-Muslims, and an economic reorientation towards Europe that entailed in West Africa a reorientation towards the non-Muslim (and eventually extensively Christianized) coastal lands.

Now, as we move towards the end of the twentieth century, it is clear that African Muslims, in common with most Muslims elsewhere, are still seeking to redefine their identity and their relationship to "Western" values and cultural norms and to rethink the political and social frameworks within which they wish to live. Not only is this natural as Muslim peoples recover from the colonial experience and assess its impact upon them, but as other global, regional and local institutions – the United Nations Organization, the Organization of African Unity and the nation-state – often seem unequal to the challenges posed by communal and international strife, gross inequities in the distribution of wealth, environmental catastrophes, severe public health crises, unemployment, violent crime, and in many countries the virtual breakdown of state educational systems, it is natural that Muslims should seek solutions for themselves within the frame of reference of their own culture, which is at once global and local.

African Muslims, no less than Muslims elsewhere, are reaching out on both the intellectual and material planes to their co-religionists through a series of Islamic organizations and networks, both official and unofficial. Through the press, radio and TV, cassette tapes, books, the fax machine and above all the rapid travel facilities in the jet age, ideas are being exchanged between sub-Saharan African Muslims and members of the global Muslim community to an extent and with a rapidity that were unimaginable during the colonial period. Fax machines connect Muslims in Kano or Dakar to others in Cairo or London; radio broadcasts are beamed to sub-Saharan Africa from Tripoli, Cairo, Riyadh or Teheran; cassette tapes of sermons and speeches can be

duplicated in minutes and distributed cheaply; Muslim-run magazines and newspapers published in Paris, London, Beirut, and Cairo are read in African countries, and African authors publish their books and pamphlets in English in London, in French in Paris, and in Arabic in Beirut and Cairo.

Over the past thirty or so years, since the end of the colonial period and the introduction of cheap air transportation, African Muslims have increasingly taken to the air to accomplish the pilgrimage, to study in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Morocco or Libya, and to participate in such international forums of Islam as the Muslim World League, the Islamic Call Organization, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its agencies, and most recently the Popular Arab and Muslim Conference. The existence of such organizations and educational opportunities – and in a large sense the material possibilities for an Islamic awakening – are due in no small part to the fact that in the second half of the twentieth century oil has become the most sought after natural resource, and that a number of Muslim countries – Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Libya and several of the Gulf states – have been major oil producers with a resulting surplus of wealth. All of this is an area of the modern history of Islam in Africa that has as yet been little studied. In the coming pages we shall try to sketch some responses that Muslims have made to these situations.

Historical perspectives

Let us begin with a brief examination of the links of sub-Saharan African Muslims with the wider world of Islam in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. I shall confine myself largely to West Africa, but with some reference also to the Nile Valley. It would be stating the obvious to say that West Africa has always had contacts with the wider world of Islam. Indeed, Islam only reached that region through extensive and well-organized networks of trade leading from Mediterranean Africa and the central Islamic world that were inevitably also conduits for ideas. In the eleventh century the Almoravid movement, which originated in the desert space between North and West Africa, initiated the implantation of that fundamental framework of West African Islam, the Maliki law school (*madhhab*), thus giving the region a shared intellectual-legal frame of reference with the Maghrib (in a wide sense), Spain and (later) the Sudan. Regular contacts with the wider world of Islam were assured through the pilgrimage to Mecca, in which rulers, commoners and members of the religious estate participated. Conditions, both personal and political, were not always conducive to the journey and it is certainly worthy of note that of all the great nineteenth-century West African activist scholars none apart from al-Hajj Umar al-Futi

(d. 1864)² and Muhammad al-Amin of Gundiuru (d. 1887) performed the obligation. However, certain ideas prevalent in Western Arabia (the Hijaz) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were brought back to West Africa by scholars who spent time in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The views of the Hadith school of Medina, which rejected slavish adherence to the views of past legal scholars (*taqlid*) in favour of re-examination of the corpus of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet, find their reflection in similar stances taken late in his life by Shehu Usman dan Fodio (d. 1817), founder of the Sokoto Caliphate (Nigeria) and in the writings of al-Hajj Umar.³ In the nineteenth century, however, West Africa, was not yet influenced by the radical anti-Sufi views of Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), which were dominant in Arabia outside the Hijaz and became a major bone of contention in parts of West Africa from the 1950s onwards.

Usman dan Fodio's early nineteenth century *jihad* against the Hausa rulers of what is now northern Nigeria represented something of a revolution in Islamic thought in as much as it was a call for *jihad* against other Muslims, or at least against others who considered themselves to be Muslims. The normal rule in Sunni Islam is that there is to be no revolt against a ruler unless he quits the faith, and Shehu Usman had to make some complex (and at times casuistic) arguments to demonstrate that the Hausa rulers were, by reason of their oppressive rule, "infidels". The crux of his argumentation on *takfir* (judgment of infidelity) was drawn from rulings given by the late-fifteenth-century Tilimsani scholar Muhammad b. Abd al-Karim al-Maghili in reply to questions from Askiya al-Hajj Muhammad of Songhay, but in retrospect it seems to have a very modern ring about it, for it closely resembles the defence of Khalid al-Islambuli, who claimed that in assassinating President Anwar Sadat of Egypt in 1981 he was only overthrowing a "Pharaoh", an infidel tyrant, and hence such an assassination was a legitimate Islamic act.⁴

A second type of pan-Islamic network which has been (and still is) influential is that created by the Sufi "congregations" (*tariqas*), which stress spiritual rather than intellectual knowledge, a feature that has enabled them to become mass movements – in a sense the "churches" of Islam. The most widespread of these congregations in sub-Saharan Africa have been: (a) in the west, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya, and (b) in the Nile valley and the east, the various *tariqas* deriving from the teaching legacy of the early-nineteenth-century Moroccan mystic

² Born in Futa Toro (Senegal), he established a large Islamic state in what is now Mali.

³ Hunwick 1984: 139-55.

⁴ For an implicit denunciation of Sadat as an infidel, see Abdurrahman 1990.

Ahmad b. Idris – notably the Sanusiyya in Chad, the Khatmiyya in the Sudan/Eritrea and the Salihyya in Somalia. The Qadiriyya originated in Baghdad (in the thirteenth century), where its principal lodge (*zawiya*) is still located, and has an important number of adherents in Senegal (the Mouridiyya (Mourides) who follow the teachings of Ahmadou Bamba, d. 1927), Mali (the Mukhtariyya, stemming from the Kunta *shaykhs* of the nineteenth century)⁵ and Nigeria (the Nasiriyya, led by Nasiru Kabara of Kano). Adherents of the Mouridiyya can now be found doing business in many major American and French cities, and are thus becoming engaged more directly with the “Western” world, a process which is likely to stimulate social change among Mouride communities back in Senegal, and conversely, perhaps, to have an impact on the culture of some Muslims in the United States and France.

The Tijaniyya originated in the Maghrib in the early nineteenth century, but there is a secondary centre of diffusion in Senegal, where more than one branch of it flourishes. The most widely spread branch is the Niassene, propagated by Shaykh Ibrahim Niass (d. 1975), which has hundreds of thousands (perhaps millions) of adherents in Ghana, Nigeria and Chad and a growing community in the Sudan (especially in Dar Fur). There are also overseas Niassene communities in Paris, New York and Chicago and probably elsewhere. No study exists of this particular phenomenon; indeed, no major study of the Tijaniyya has appeared in any European language since the work of Jamil Abun-Nasr more than thirty years ago.⁶

The *tariqas* deriving from the teachings of Ahmad b. Idris have an even wider geographical dispersion. The founding saint was a Moroccan who spent much of his life in western Arabia and the Yemen. His disciples founded orders that took root in Libya/Chad (the Sanusiyya), Egypt/Sudan/Eritrea (the Rashidiyya, Dandarawiyya, Idrisiyya and Khatmiyya) and the Horn of Africa (the Salihyya, led by Muhammad Abd Allah Hasan, d. 1920). Idrisian teachings also took root in Malaysia and Indonesia, partly due to the exertions of a Sudanese adherent, and there are currently large numbers of followers of the tradition in those countries. Here we are luckier, especially as regards the African continent, due largely to work of R.S. O’Fahey and his colleagues in Norway and the Sudan in recent years.⁷

Of a very different character are the Middle Eastern reformist movements that continue to have an impact far beyond their geographical

⁵ See Louis Brenner 1993b: 62-3.

⁶ Abun-Nasr 1965.

⁷ See for example, his *Enigmatic Saint: The Life and Teachings of Ahmad ibn Idris*, London: Hurst, 1990; Einar Thomassen, Bernd Radtke *et al.*, *The Letters of Ahmad ibn Idris*, London: Hurst, 1993; R.S. O’Fahey, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, vol. 1: *The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa to c. 1900*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993.

areas of origin: the Wahhabiyya of Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The Wahhabiyya (inspired by the teachings of Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab) are backward-looking in their eschewal of all "innovation", claiming to return to the pure teachings of the Prophet, but more liberal in their use of "independent reasoning" (*ijtihad*) than many other Islamic schools. A key plank in their programme is the eradication of Sufi influences and the implementation of an Islamic "legal way" (*sharia*). As long ago as the 1940s aspects of their teachings took root in Mali, and more recently, especially during the oil boom period, the Saudi government and various non-governmental organizations (and some that fall in between) have been generous in giving scholarships to African students, in bringing together influential Muslims for conferences and discussions, and in providing money for the building of mosques, schools and the distribution of copies of the Quran and approved Islamic literature.

Inspired to some extent by the puritanical zeal of the Wahhabiyya, though not organically related to it, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928 and developed by numerous disciples, within Egypt and outside it. It has promoted the idea of Islam as a complete "way of life" and a "third way", rejecting both Western capitalism and "Eastern communism" – a notion that has since become something of a slogan among Islamists. It has attracted many intellectuals and a broad following among the middle class (and those aspiring to it) in Egypt. Early on it sent out propagandists to Syria and the Sudan and related groups were founded in both countries. In the Sudan, it is the intellectual ancestor of Dr Hasan al-Turabi's National Islamic Front. In Africa outside of the Sudan its influence has been general rather than specific. While many Nigerian Muslim intellectuals, for example, admire the teachings of Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, just as many also admire what they saw as the powerful defence of Islam and the example of Islamic government established by Ayatullah Khomeini in Iran in the 1980s.

The colonial period

The colonial period, not surprisingly, was a time during which West Africa was perhaps more cut off from the rest of the Muslim world than ever before. Colonial authorities, British and French, were ever watchful for signs of what they perceived as the dangerous phenomenon of pan-Islamism and were able to keep an eye on the movements of Muslim leaders from both ends of the lines of communication – sub-Saharan African and Mediterranean Africa including Egypt. Colonial authorities tried either to co-opt or control Muslim leadership, variously working with such figures as Seydou Nourou Tall (grandson of al-Hajj

Umar) and Malick Sy in Senegal, the Sultan of Sokoto and the emirate structure in Nigeria and Sayyid Abd al-Rahman (the Mahdi's posthumous son) in the Sudan, or exiling suspected opponents such as Ahmadou Bamba (Senegal), Hamallah (Mauritania/Mali) and Said b. Hayatu (Nigeria). While the Mediterranean lands of Islam were under colonial control in one way or another, from the 1920s independent Turkey and Iran, under Kemal Atatürk and Reza Shah and their successors, were undergoing an intense period of secularization and introspection. Down to the 1950s, when the income from oil production began to make a significant impact, Saudi Arabia was a poor country hemmed in for the most part by British protected (and hence controlled) lands – Aden, Oman, the various Gulf emirates, Iraq, Palestine and Jordan – and in no position to have a very profound impact on African Muslims except through the pilgrimage.

In the later colonial period there was some carefully controlled access for West African Muslims to influences from outside the region. In Nigeria, for example, the School for Arabic Studies (and its predecessor the Kano Law School) brought in teachers from the Sudan whose outlook was certainly more international – due to Sudan's proximity to Egypt – than that of the northern Nigerian *ulama* whose practice of Islam Schacht could describe as late as 1957 as the closest thing he knew to the Almoravid Islam of the eleventh century.⁸ Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana were also opened up as early as the 1930s to the influence of the Ahmadiyya sect, which originated in India. With its emphasis on education and use of English the sect may have been seen by British colonial authorities as a liberalizing Islamic influence, but their unorthodox tenets prevented them from operating in northern Nigeria, while their presence in Wa in northern Ghana was a constant source of tension in the Muslim community.⁹

Other international and interregional Islamic influences were at work in post-World War II West Africa at a time when the struggle for freedom from colonial rule was gaining ground. Notable among these was the Union Culturelle Musulmane. Founded in Senegal in 1953 by Cheikh Touré, a graduate of the Ben Badis Institute of Algiers, it rapidly established branches in neighbouring French colonial territories. The Union's importance lay in its anti-colonial slant, and since Touré identified "Sufi Islam" (the Islam of the marabouts) with "colonial Islam" (many Sufi leaders had indeed worked with the French) this

⁸ Schacht 1957: 146.

⁹ After partition in 1947 the two branches of the Ahmadiyya (the Qadianis and Lahoris) were located in Pakistan. Subsequently Pakistani Islamic courts declared the Qadianis non-Muslims because of their belief in the prophethood of their founder, Ghulam Ahmad, and the Saudi Arabian authorities banned them from performing the pilgrimage to Mecca on similar grounds. On the effects of this in Nigeria see Balogun n.d.

expression of the faith was rejected in favour of a strict, literalist adherence to the Sunna.

Rejection of Sufism in favour of a strictly exoteric (*zahiri*) interpretation of Islam has also been the salient characteristic of another movement that has often been labelled "Wahhabi" – the Subbanu. Named after the Egyptian Jamaat shubban al-Muslimun (Society of Muslim Youth, founded in 1927 by Abd al-Hamid Said), the movement was established in Bamako by Guinean and Gambian students returning from training in al-Azhar in the mid-1940s. The rector of al-Azhar Dr Muhammad Shaltut (1893-1958), who was much influenced by the Egyptian reformers Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, was himself involved in the Egyptian Shubban movement and took a personal interest in the African students. The founders of the Subbanu movement also had some contacts with the Jamaat al-ikhwan al-muslimun (Muslim Brotherhood) while they were in Egypt.¹⁰

The period 1945-60 also saw a number of significant political developments in the Middle East and North Africa, notably the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 out of what Muslims saw (despite the existence of a goodly number of Palestinian Christians) as "Muslim soil", and the 1952 revolution in Egypt which soon brought to power Colonel Nasser (Gamal Abd al-Nasir), a man who saw himself as a leader in African liberation. The same period witnessed independence for Libya (1951), Morocco (1956), Tunisia (1956), and a sustained war of independence in Algeria (1954-62). Especially important among these developments was the coming to power of Nasser in 1954 following the dismissal of Gen. Muhammad Neguib. Although Nasser had little time for Islamic militants and took repressive measures against the Muslim Brotherhood, he saw to it that Egypt was a haven for African liberation movements and a source of educational opportunity for African Muslim students. This was part of Egyptian foreign policy in Africa, as was the sending of Egyptian professors (both Azharis and non-Azharis) to teach in African countries, all as part of a strategy of containing and as far as possible undermining Israeli influence on the continent. The Egyptian state broadcasting service in Nasser's day also beamed broadcasts to West Africa in French, English, Arabic, Hausa and Fulfulde, thus keeping West African Muslims in touch with events in the Arab world and the wider Muslim world.

The post-independence period

The 1960s witnessed considerable activity aimed at establishing pan-

¹⁰ On the Subbanu movement see Kaba 1974, especially pp. 73-95. See also Brenner 1993a: 67-71 and the more recent literature cited there.

Islamic organizations. This flurry of activity came at a time when most countries in Africa and Asia where Muslims had a strong presence had become independent. It coincided with a period in which Egypt (or the United Arab Republic as it was known during its union with Syria and the Yemen, 1958-62) under Nasser was spearheading a movement for Arab unity, and Africans were looking optimistically towards greater African unity (in some minds even a United States of Africa), inspired by President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and, after his overthrow in 1966, promoted by other African leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. Both Arabs and Africans already had their international organizations – the Arab League, founded as far back as 1944, and the Organization of African Unity founded in 1963.

This was not the first time such efforts had been made. Following the abolition of the caliphate by Kemal Atatürk in 1924 there had been a series of Muslim congresses designed to provide an overarching structure for common action among members of the Islamic *umma*. In the main they had been distinguished by bickering among the various parties represented, especially since the participants were not official representatives of sovereign countries, but individuals or representatives of organizations. World War II and the exile in Nazi Germany of the Mufti of Jerusalem, al-Amin al-Husayni, a leading figure in the congresses of the 1930s, essentially put an end for the time being to such efforts at Muslim collaboration.¹¹

The early 1960s in retrospect appear as a culminating point in processes that had been going on since the end of World War II. During the 1950s all Arab countries attained independence with the exception of Algeria, which followed in 1962. The major Asian Muslim countries also emerged in this period: Pakistan in 1947, Indonesia in 1950 and the Federation of Malaya in 1957. These were soon followed by a number of African countries with majority or very significant Muslim populations: Sudan in 1956, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Somalia in 1960. By the early 1960s, too, the Palestinian problem had begun to look intractable, but it came to be seen increasingly as a Muslim, rather than a specifically Arab, problem, and Palestinians were happy to tap into this additional support. The Cold War also played its role. As much as Muslim countries might proclaim themselves non-aligned (Egypt and Indonesia, for example, were pioneers in the non-aligned movement), they were under continuous political pressure from both East and West, and they turned in both directions in search of armaments and development aid.

Saudi Arabia became the key player in attempts to set up a pan-

¹¹ On these various congresses, see Kramer 1986.

Islamic organization. Revenues from oil exportation were now considerable and the country had the means with which to patronize such endeavours. In as much as it contained within its national territory the two Holy Places of Islam it was a natural meeting ground for Muslims; the pilgrimage and the lesser pilgrimage afforded natural opportunities for meetings of Muslim leaders, though the most important gatherings often took place at other seasons. Saudi Arabia was also anxious to provide a counterweight to the growing influence of Egypt in the Arab and Muslim worlds and in particular to act as a counterweight to secular Arab nationalism as propounded by Nasser.

The result was the World Muslim League (*Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami*), which was set up in Mecca in 1962, an organization built round prominent Muslim personalities rather than representatives of specific organizations or governments. It created quite an *éclat* at the time as it was one of the first signs of a new Islamic solidarity – an attempt by Muslims to “stand up and be counted” – and was thus a signal of the “coming out of Islam” as a potential political force on the world stage. However, the initiative has now largely passed to other pan-Islamic organizations which will be looked at below.

One African leader in particular who played an important role in the establishment of this first new pan-Islamic body was the *Sardauna* of Sokoto, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello (d. 1966), premier of the Northern Region of Nigeria, a man who became prominent in international Muslim diplomacy in the years following Nigerian independence while actively promoting the cause of Islam within his own region. He undertook numerous tours in the Muslim world to further the idea of greater Muslim unity and to promote the interests of his region, which at times he was inclined to present as if it were an independent country.¹² His constant companion on his visits to Saudi Arabia was Alhaji Abubakar Gumi (d. 1992), Grand Kadi (chief Islamic judge) of Northern Nigeria. He was a speaker of Arabic, which the *Sardauna* was not, and he deputized for him at the inaugural meeting of the League in May 1962, at the second meeting in December 1962 and also at the third in 1963. In the minutes of the first meeting, at which the League was established, and which the *Sardauna* was invited to chair but could not, Ahmadu Bello's name was second in the list of the organization's founders. At the third meeting he was officially nominated Vice-President of the League.¹³

¹² On the *Sardauna*'s international Islamic activities, see Paden 1986: 533-48. The *Sardauna* invited King Saud to visit Northern Nigeria – presumably a diplomatic impossibility since protocol would require the king to be invited and received by another head of state (Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe in Nigeria's case). In a privately printed Cairo edition of the *Sardauna*'s ancestor Muhammad Bello's *Infāq al-maysur* published in 1964, two photographs of him bear captions describing him as “the prime minister of Nigeria”.

¹³ Paden 1986: 539.

With this connection well established, Saudi money began to flow in earnest for religious works. Paden notes a gift of £60,000 to the Sardauna to continue the work of spreading Islam and £40,000 for the construction of the Lagos Central Mosque. These sums, says Paden, were “apart from unofficial donations, probably amounting to millions of pounds”.¹⁴

The Sardauna was not a man schooled in the scholarly intricacies of the Islamic faith and scarcely had a command of Arabic beyond recitation of the Quran. Rather, his education and training had been those of a modern civil servant, English and Hausa. But he was a man of deep personal piety and commitment to the beliefs and ideals of Islam, especially as preached by his ancestor Shehu Usman dan Fodio. Paden has argued convincingly that the promotion of the cause of Islam assumed greater and greater importance in his thinking during the last years of his life. In this task he was aided by Abubakar Gumi, who like the Sardauna was a transitional figure between the fading “mediaeval” Islamic world of the Sokoto Caliphate, and a national and international outlook that understood the ways of modern politics and the power of print and broadcast media. In 1962 Gumi was influential in persuading the Sardauna to establish a pan-Nigerian Islamic organization, the Jamaat Nasril al-Islam (JNI – Association for the Victory of Islam), which was intended to “encourage Islamic literature in Nigerian vernacular languages, build mosques, and encourage Islamic centres of learning.”¹⁵ The Sardauna no doubt also saw this as a useful way of reinforcing his own prestige as a Muslim leader and enhancing his political power in and beyond the Northern Region.

Gumi's importance, however, was as a conduit through which Saudi/Wahhabi ideas could flow and take root in Nigeria. He was of a different mould from the Sardauna. Whereas the Sardauna saw himself as heir to a broad Islamic tradition that embraced Sufism as well as *sharia* – he had prayed at the tombs of both Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani in Baghdad and Ahmad al-Tijani in Fez – Gumi had been trained in a narrower legal tradition and seems to have fallen rapidly under the sway of the austere anti-Sufi interpretation of Islam promoted in Saudi Arabia, becoming a vociferous opponent of the Sufi *tariqas*. The JNI, however, was supposed to represent a broader coalition of Muslim interests, including those of the Sufi and the middle-of-the-road Muslim establishment represented by the Sultan of Sokoto and the emirs. Gumi therefore needed a new channel for his ideas. In 1972 he published his credo under the title *al-Aqidat al-sahiha bi-muwafaqat al-sharia* (Correct

¹⁴ Paden 1986: 543. The Sardauna had conducted conversion campaigns among “pagan” Hausa (Maguzawa) and various Middle Belt groups.

¹⁵ Paden 1986: 549.

Belief in Accordance with the Sharia),¹⁶ and in 1978 this was given concrete expression by the formation of the Izala movement (the Society for the Eradication [*Izala*] of Innovation and the Establishment of the Sunna) under his inspiration.

Nigeria has not only been affected by currents of thought having their origins in Saudi Arabia. The overthrow of the Shah and the installation of an Islamic republic in Iran in 1979 had its repercussions in Nigeria, and in particular among members of the Muslim Students Society (founded in Lagos in 1954), led by Aminudeen Abubakar, a student of Gumi. A split occurred. One wing, which used the name Dawa and was headed by Abubakar and supported by Saudi and Kuwaiti funds, stressed the fight against "innovations" (*bida*); the other, the so-called Umma wing, took a firmer line on the implementation of *sharia* and the establishment of an Islamic state. The Umma wing itself split again into a group called Hodaybiya (recalling the Prophet Muhammad's truce with the Meccans), which favoured an accommodation, at least temporarily, with the secular state, and a group, often referred to as the Yan Shia, which took its inspiration directly from events in Iran and *mujahidin* struggle in Afghanistan and preached a more radical message which brooked no compromise with the ungodly state.¹⁷ Typical of these is the activist Ibrahim al-Zakzaky who has been imprisoned for his activities more than once.

Iran has been active in seeking sympathizers to its cause in Nigeria, largely in an attempt to neutralize the well entrenched influence of its arch-rival Saudi Arabia. Much Iranian Shia literature in English and Arabic has been distributed, and Iran has put forth a magazine in Hausa, *Sakon Islam* (The Message of Islam). Given the anti-Sufi stance of the Saudis and the deep-rooted Sufi tradition of Iran, it was natural for the Iranians to woo the *tariqa* leaders as well, and in 1987 a prominent Tijani leader, Dahiru Bauchi, was invited to Iran for the eighth anniversary of the revolution.¹⁸

A similar polarity is apparent in Burkina Faso, where the "Sunnis" (Wahhabis) are hostile to collaboration with Iran, but are supported with funding and scholarships by Saudi Arabia. In fact, a recent writer

¹⁶ Published by Dar al-Arabiyya, Beirut, with an (unreliable) English translation by M.O.A. Abdul, apparently promoted by Hilal Publishing House, Ankara. There have been replies to the arguments of this book by Nigerian and other West African Sufis, and responses to these replies, thus creating a whole new polemical literature. See Umar 1993: 174-5 and Hunwick 1995, chapter 14.

¹⁷ On these developments, see the excellent summary in Kane 1990, and the more polemical article by Sulaiman 1993. The term "Shi'a" seems to be used loosely in Nigeria, without doctrinal connotations, to stigmatize radical, militant Muslim groups.

¹⁸ See Umar 1993: 172-3.

on this issue sees the Burkinabe Wahhabis essentially as Saudi agents, trained by them and often paid by them on their return to Burkina Faso as teachers and preachers.¹⁹ This story of the playing out of Middle Eastern rivalries and the struggle for political influence through the culture of religion could no doubt be repeated in other West African countries and deserves a detailed study.²⁰

Pan-Islamic organizations and sub-Saharan Africa

Among the more recently established pan-Islamic organizations, designed to bring Muslims together and to propagate the faith which have been active in Africa are the Islamic Call Organization, the Islam in Africa Organization, the African Islamic Centre (Khartoum), the Popular Arab and Muslim Conference and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

The Islamic Call organization. The Islamic Call organization (al-Dawa al-Islamiyya) was founded in Libya in 1972, essentially as a wing of Col. Muammar Qaddafi's foreign policy, which has always been eclectic. Along with promotion of the Third Universal Theory of Qaddafi (an uneasy marriage of socialism, populism and Islamic rhetoric offering solutions to the world's economic and political problems), Libya has sought to promote Arabic language and culture in Africa and to preach the cause of a more mainstream Islam through the "Islamic Call". The aims of this organization are as follows: to spread Arabic, the original language of the Quran, and encourage Muslims to adopt it as an official language; to interpret the Quran in a simple fashion and make it accessible to the masses; to promote the adoption of Islamic law (*sharia*); to publish Islamic encyclopedias and promote Islamic conferences; to train Muslim missionaries (sing. *dai*) and send them abroad to train others. The organization has also handed out college scholarships, financed mosque building and supported infrastructural activities and health service work.²¹

This is not the place to enter into a full discussion of Libya's multifaceted cultural and diplomatic activity in Africa, but it may be noted that Qaddafi has used different tactics in different areas in an attempt to promote his own image, widen his influence and boost Libya's standing.²²

¹⁹ Diallo 1993 (reporting the work of Maimouna Dao).

²⁰ See, e.g., Schultze 1993.

²¹ See Nyang 1988. According to Nyang, in 1988 there were some 4,000 African students studying at Libyan universities.

²² See Mattes 1989.

In countries with Muslim minorities he has sought to support those minorities through the opening of Islamic cultural centres and the sending of Muslim missionaries and teachers of Arabic; in two cases he was successful in converting heads of state to Islam: Albert – later Omar – Bongo of Gabon and Jean Bedel – later Salah al-Din – Bokassa of the Central African Republic, though the latter recanted before he fell from power. Other such states where Libya has established cultural centres include Botswana, Madagascar, Mauritius and Burundi, where a chair of Arabic language was endowed at the country's university.²³

In states where there has been a "revolutionary" or socialist-oriented regime, such as Ghana under Jerry Rawlings or Burkina Faso under Thomas Sankara, the emphasis has rather been on the Third Universal Theory of the "Green Book". In states of Muslim majority in the Sahelian Belt Qaddafi has alternately supported and attacked different regimes. In the Sudan he initially supported the regime of Jafar Nimeiri, but then backed a series of coups against him, only to re-establish ties with the regime of Gen. Umar al-Bashir and in 1990 to form a "union" between Libya and the Sudan. The story of Libyan support for and opposition to regimes in Chad, and its direct military intervention there are well known. Less publicized was Qaddafi's attempt to destabilize Senegal through support for Ahmad Niass, who in 1981 was attempting to overthrow the regime of President Léopold Senghor and establish an Islamic republic (apparently inspired by the Iranian model), but was arrested while on his way from Libya to Senegal.

The Islam in Africa Organization. The recently founded Islam in Africa Organization was set up in the wake of the Islam in Africa Conference, held in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, in November 1989.²⁴ This is essentially a *dawa* organization, aimed at promoting the faith. Its initial steering committee was made up of representatives from Nigeria, Niger, Gambia, Mauritania, Senegal, Tunisia, Libya, Tanzania, Sudan, Tunisia and the Islamic Council of Europe. The Preamble to its charter speaks of the participants at the conference being

.... determined to sustain the momentum of global Islamic resurgence and further encourage cooperation, understanding and the brotherhood of the Ummah; and desirous of forging a common front to unite the Ummah with a view to facing the common enemies – the imperialist and Zionist forces of domination and secularization, illiteracy, poverty and degradation – and to rediscover and reinstate Africa's glorious Islamic past.

²³ See Oded 1987: 287-8.

²⁴ A "hand-out" version of the organization's charter in English, Arabic and French, has the dateline "Abuja 22-24 July 1991" on the cover, but the wording is the same.

Its charter sets it up as “an independent, non-governmental body serving the Muslim Ummah in Africa in particular and the world in general” (article I) and states amongst its objectives:

To support, enhance and co-ordinate Da’wah work in all parts of Africa and propagate the knowledge of Islam throughout the continent; to encourage and support . . . the education and development of the Muslim youth and to ensure that women are accorded their rightful place in society as enshrined in the Sharia; to undertake the translation of Islamic works into various African languages and their dissemination: to promote the learning of Arabic language throughout Africa: to promote respect for human rights and dignity and to support with appropriate means, all causes of justice and freedom throughout the world.²⁵

In addition to its Dawa function, the 1989 conference also had an academic side. A number of distinguished Nigerian Muslim academics and others from countries as distant as Ethiopia, South Africa and the United States presented papers which were subsequently published in book form.²⁶

The African Islamic Centre. The African Islamic Centre (al-Markaz al-Islami al-Ifriqi), was originally established in Omdurman in 1967 to give young Africans from diverse countries training in Arabic and Islamic studies as well as general curriculum subjects, so as to create an Arabophone élite oriented towards an Islamic ideology, especially in the countries of eastern Africa. Part of its role was specifically to “fight against the hatred and rancour towards Arabs and Islam which European colonialism has implanted in the hearts of Africans”.²⁷ This reference to Arabization and the teaching of Islam as a natural antidote to the “brainwashing” of colonialism is a common theme among radical Muslims in Africa and elsewhere, and has been strongly promoted, for example, in Mali, where since 1985 there has been a Centre for the Promotion of the Arabic Language within the Ministry of Education and official encouragement for Islamic education.²⁸

After being shut down by the Nimeiri government in 1969, the African Islamic Centre was reopened in 1977, and large and well-equipped new premises for it were built in a southern suburb of Khartoum. Seventy

²⁵ This is a selection from the thirteen objectives outlined in Article II, chosen for their significance in the writer’s view. See *Islam in Africa Organization: The Charter and Some Working Documents* issued in August 1990 in Kano.

²⁶ Alkali *et al.* 1993.

²⁷ Grandin 1993: 102, quoting an interview with the Centre’s first director Awad Allah Salih published in the Centre’s journal.

²⁸ Brenner 1993b: 177.

per cent of the funding came from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, but this fell off as a result of the Sudanese stance in the Gulf War of 1991. The new centre also aimed at creating a new alternative elite in African countries. It was to be primarily a teaching and research institution providing instruction in general subjects, Arabic language and Islamic religion, but with an important department of missionary activity (*dawa*).²⁹ In so doing it was, consciously or unconsciously, using the model of the Christian seminary that provides education in regular "secular" subjects along with a religious orientation and options for those who wish to train in preaching and conversion – a tactic of imitation that has been increasingly adopted by Islamic organizations, which have hitherto been highly critical of such practices by Christians.³⁰ The Centre publishes a twice-yearly journal, *Dirasat Islamiyya*, which endeavours "to bridge the academic gap that divides Africa from the rest of the Muslim world" and "to break down the quasi-monopoly in African Studies that is held by certain Western scholars who are not always neutral towards Islam and African Muslims."³¹ In 1992 the military government of Gen. Umar al-Bashir suddenly upgraded the Centre into a university, calling it the International University of Africa, the word "Islamic" disappearing from its title. We may presume, however, that this does not signal a change of functions. The present Sudanese regime has tended to take a hard-line Islamist stance and sees itself as the vanguard of Africa's Islamization. It has also undertaken a programme of Arabization and Islamization of all other universities within the country and created a new University of the Quran (Jamiat al-Quran al-Karim) in Omdurman to complement the older Islamic University of Omdurman (formerly al-Mahad al-Ilmi).

The Popular Arab and Muslim Conference. The conference was first convened in 1991 in Khartoum by Dr Hasan Turabi, the *éminence grise* of "Islamism" in the Sudan and, increasingly, on an international plane. In fact, in retrospect it would seem that this conference was organized in order to establish a more central place for Dr Turabi in the international Islamic scene (though admittedly he already had a considerable reputation) and as a major player in that radical Islamism that seeks first the political kingdom. As the organization's name suggests, he wanted to capitalize on both the radical constituency of the Muslim world and that of the Arab world; hence the first conference brought together

²⁹ Grandin 1993: 113-17.

³⁰ A carefully planned missionary strategy was first carried out by the Ahmadiyya Movement which set up missions in Europe from the 1920s, and it has been a staple practice of the Bahais throughout the twentieth century.

³¹ Grandin 1993: 117, quoting the first issue of the journal (April 1985).

such unlikely bedfellows as Rashid al-Ghannushi, the exiled Tunisian Islamist, and Georges Habash, Christian Palestinian leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The second conference was held, again in Khartoum, in December 1993. Four hundred persons were invited, and although "establishment" figures such as the Saudi Religious Affairs minister Abdullah al-Turki, the Secretary-General of the OIC, Hamid al-Gabid, and the Secretary-General of the World Muslim Congress, Raja Zafar-ul-Haque, did not show up, a total of 600 delegates are reported to have attended. Dr al-Turabi was re-elected Secretary-General of the conference and a fifty-member Council of Trustees was created with 30 per cent of the seats going to Africa (five for North Africa, five for West Africa and five for eastern and southern Africa). Since the conference delegates were invited on an individual or organizational, rather than a country, basis this is presumably reflected in the composition of the trustee body.

There were resolutions on self-determination for the Palestinian people and a call for Arab and Muslim governments not to normalize relations with the "Zionist Enemy", one on support for Bosnia (expressing "severe shock at the failure of the United Nations and the European Community *as well as Muslim governments* to put an end to the Bosnian tragedy"), and one on Somalia (denouncing United Nations intervention, appealing to Somalis to sink their differences, and calling on Muslim and Arab countries to help in reconstruction). There were also calls for lifting embargoes on Iraq and Libya, and, not surprisingly given the conference's locale, a resolution that "noted Sudan's current Islamic transformation as embodying the hopes and aspirations of all Muslims" and "declared that it is the duty of all Muslims to support this Islamic transformation in the face of the huge media war waged against it."

More interesting were the resolutions that aimed at showing, as it were, the "acceptable face" of Islamic radicalism. Hence the conference "impressed [*sic*] the observation of Shoora [*shura* – 'consultation in government'] as a prerequisite for eliminating extremism in Muslim society", "stressed the need to observe the rights of women given by Islam and enable them [to] play their role in different aspects of life", and "declared deep interest in the on-going Muslim-Christian dialogue in order to unite the peoples of the faiths against secularism." There was also a long resolution about Muslim minorities with attention especially drawn to the plight of the "Rohingya people in Arakan [Burma]", the people of Tadjikistan (support for the Tadjik *Mujahidin*), the Patani of Kosovo and the Moros of South Philippines – a selection that no doubt reflected representation at the conference.³²

³² A report on the second conference appeared in *Impact International*, January 1994,

It is difficult to say how important or influential this conference and its on-going organizations may be in the future. Dr al-Turabi has hinted at his own possible relocation to Geneva,³³ and one would therefore suppose that he may be thinking of setting up the permanent secretariat of the organization there, where telephones, faxes and electronic mail can more readily keep him in touch with his Islamist colleagues. The weakness of the organization will always be that it works through individual and non-mainstream organizations, but this is the nature of all radical organizations, and, indeed, is also in some sense their strength. It remains to be seen whether it can have an impact at national levels in Muslim countries, but at the very least it is likely to shake the complacency of some more establishment pan-Islamic organizations, unless (or until) it too becomes bureaucratized and "established".

The Organization of the Islamic Conference. The most highly developed and effective international Islamic organization to be established in the post-independence period is the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). However, it is an establishment organization (based on national representation) and highly bureaucratized; hence Dr al-Turabi's Popular Conference, operating so far in a different mode, appears to be a direct challenge to it.

The OIC was established in 1969 in the wake of the defeat of Arab armies in the 1967 "Six Day War" with Israel. Initially King Faisal of Saudi Arabia made a call for pan-Islamic solidarity, but it fell on deaf ears. Two years later, after the arson attack on the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem by a deranged Australian tourist, the former Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husayni, renewed the call for Islamic solidarity to defend Islam and its holy places, and King Faisal repeated his call. The result was a meeting in Rabat in September 1969 which established a permanent organization whose members were sovereign states (rather than prominent Muslim figures as in the World Muslim League) was established, and to this extent it took on something of the air of an Islamic United Nations Organization. Its principles are set out in the Preamble to its Charter:

Strict adherence to Islam and Islamic principles and values as a way of life constitutes the highest protection for Muslims against the dangers which confront them. Islam is the only path which can lead them to strength, dignity and prosperity and a better future.

9-12, and it is from the English text of the conference resolutions published there that the above quotations have been made.

³³ Information from an interview with Dr Turabi by Professor R.S. O'Fahey, January 1994.

It is a pledge and guarantee of the authenticity of the *Ummah* safeguarding it from the tyrannical onrush of materialism. It is the powerful stimulant for both leaders and peoples in their struggle to liberate these holy places [Jerusalem and Palestine] and to regain their natural place in the world so that they may, in concert with other nations, strive for the establishment of equality, peace and prosperity for the whole of mankind.³⁴

This is hardly a revolutionary statement, but the OIC, because it is made up of a disparate collection of Muslim countries – republics, monarchies, democracies, dictatorships – tends to be a consensus-seeking body. As is hinted at in the above declaration, it proposes to work with other world organizations and indeed member states are called upon to “affirm their commitment to the United Nations charter and to fundamental human rights”, though at the same time, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, they resolve “to preserve Islamic spiritual, ethical, social and economic values.”³⁵

There are other contradictions in the expressed principles and aims of the organization and these are elaborated by Abdullah al-Ahsan in the book from which material on this organization is largely drawn. One of the evident contradictions which has created some controversy in Africa is the definition of who can belong to the organization. Article 8 of the Charter simply says that membership is open to “every Muslim state” wishing to join and prepared to adopt the Charter. There is a general problem in defining exactly what a “Muslim state” is and this problem can be acute in Africa. Currently there are eighteen African member states out of a total of forty-six and these include such unlikely candidates as Benin, Gabon and Uganda, in all of which Muslims constitute only a tiny minority.³⁶ A full-blown political crisis arose in Nigeria in 1986 when it was claimed that the country, hitherto only an observer, had been admitted to full member status. Christians, who had a decade earlier fought against the establishment of a Federal Sharia Appeals Court, protested vociferously that this was a further attempt to entrench Islamic legal and social norms within Nigeria as a whole and that the aims of the organization, which were related closely to the promotion of Islamic goals, were inappropriate to a secular state such as Nigeria which did not even have (though this was disputed) a Muslim majority. The government of General Babangida, while not officially admitting that Nigeria had become a full member, tried to deflect criticism by

³⁴ Quoted in Al-Ahsan 1992: 109.

³⁵ Al-Ahsan 1992: 110.

³⁶ The other current sub-Saharan African members are: Senegal, Mauritania, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Somalia and the Comoro Islands.

saying that the OIC was a forum for international cooperation from which Nigeria might gain tangible economic and developmental benefits. The government set up a commission to inquire into Nigeria's membership, but the brouhaha was only quieted when the membership question was shelved *sine die*.³⁷

The OIC has now come of age. It holds periodic Summit Meetings (five between 1969 and 1987) and annual meetings of Foreign Ministers. It has also developed a number of agencies that carry out much of its "non-political" work: the Islamic Development bank, based in Jeddah along with the Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development, the Islamic Solidarity Fund (for the propagation of Islam – *dawa*), the International Islamic News Agency, and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the "Islamic Unesco" based in Rabat (paralleling ALECSO, the "Arab League Unesco" based in Tunis). In addition there is a Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture based in Istanbul.³⁸

Among the agencies ISESCO plays a particularly important role in Africa as it acts as champion of Islamic and Arab culture against its competitors or detractors and works for the acceptance and entrenchment of Islamic cultural values on a continent where Islam is still claiming many new adherents. Not surprisingly, ISESCO literature does not attempt any too precise a definition of "Islamic culture". Among the objectives of the organization as given in its charter are: (1) to make Islamic culture the basis of educational curricula at all levels and stages; and (2) to consolidate *authentic Islamic culture* and to protect the independence of Islamic thought against all forms of invasion and all factors of cultural alienation, distortion and disfigurement [emphasis added].³⁹ Although they did not state it, it is clear that the founders of ISESCO had a vision of what *authentic Islamic culture* is and what would constitute a distortion of it. There is, of course, a symbiotic relationship between Islam and Arab culture and indeed there may even be an almost total identification of the two.

This is well illustrated in the recommendations of a colloquium jointly organized by ISESCO and the Arab Cultural Foundation of Libya on Africa and Arabo-Islamic culture published in 1988.⁴⁰ From the preamble to the recommendations it is clear that the aim of the meeting was, at

³⁷ See further Ohadike 1992: 118-20. A list of member states in al-Gabid 1993: 320 includes Nigeria.

³⁸ For an account of OIC activity relevant to sub-Saharan Africa, see al-Gabid 1993.

³⁹ Taken from the official English version of the Charter, as adopted by the Constitutive Conference (Fez 1402H/1982) and as amended by the General Conference at its special session (Rabat 1407H/1986), published in the tri-lingual ISESCO house journal *al-Islam al-Yawn/Islam aujourd'hui/Islam Today*, 1986.

⁴⁰ *L'Afrique et la culture arabo-islamique*, n.p. [Rabat]: Publications de l'ISESCO, 1988.

least in part, to burnish the image of Arabs and Arab culture and to present them in the most favourable light to non-Muslim Africans:

The colloquium on "Africa and Arabo-Islamic culture" has allowed fruitful exchanges between Arab and African professors and intellectuals, both Muslims and others. It has noted that prejudices and misunderstandings stem from an insufficient or even erroneous acquaintance of the one to the other. The pejorative images that the literature and media of certain western milieux, nostalgic for their past hegemony, spread about ought to be corrected.⁴¹

Among the recommendations on Arabic language and culture were:

- The establishment for the benefit of Africans of training courses in Arabic language in certain Arab countries that have specialized institutions in this field, on the pattern of programmes organized for students and teachers in Europe and America.
- Help in collecting and preserving Arabic manuscripts and in editing and publishing them. Help in this area for independent researchers who have "proved themselves". (In 1982 ISESCO gave a sizable grant to the Ahmad Baba Centre for Documentation and Research in Timbuktu, which is concerned with precisely such matters.)
- Use of the Arabic script for the transcription of African languages in areas where the Arabic language is widely used. It is not clear if this recommendation has had any practical effect. In the 1960s attempts were made to write certain Nilotic languages of the Sudan in Arabic script, but the materials were never made widely available and the project was not a great success.

Other recommendations addressed issues such as dialogue between African Muslims and non-Muslims, stimulating better understanding between Arabs and Muslims on the one hand and "Africans" (presumably Christians from sub-Saharan African countries) on the other, and, conversely, giving "Africans" a direct acquaintance with Arab culture and civilization. There was also an appeal to Islamic (*sic*) countries and minorities on the African continent to promote *authentic* Islamic education so as to halt the foreign (read: "Euro-American") cultural invasion which threatens them everywhere.⁴²

It is perhaps worth noting that while in many sub-Saharan African countries there are university departments and institutes for Arabic lan-

⁴¹ Ibid., 237. My translation from the French, as in the recommendations that follow.

⁴² See, for example, the article in *L'Afrique et la culture arabo-islamique* by Ahmad bin Uthman al-Tuwaijir, "al-Tarbiya al-islamiyya wa-atharuha fi muwajahat al-ghazw al-fikri fi'l-qara al-Ifriqiyya" (Islamic education and its influence in the face of intellectual aggression on the African continent). There are also Muslim voices that see in the trend towards Arabization a sign of Arab cultural imperialism and exploitation. See Brenner 1993b: 182.

guage/culture and Islamic studies, the universities of the Arab world have yet to show any great interest in becoming better acquainted with African cultures – even those that have been deeply affected by Islamic culture. I know of only two where any serious attempt has been made: the University of Cairo, where for many years there has been a low-key Institute of African Studies, and the new Institute of African Studies at the Muhammad V University, Rabat, which in its few years of life has established contact with African scholars in Senegal, Mali, Niger and Nigeria and initiated a productive publication programme.⁴³

As noted above, a Libyan organization collaborated with ISESCO to promote a colloquium on Arab-African relations, and such cross-fertilization between Arabism and Islam, as well as the more particularistic *jamahiriyya* theories of Colonel Qaddafi, have been typical of Libya's diplomatic efforts in Africa over the past twenty years.⁴⁴

In contrast with the United States and most European countries, which have assigned quite a low priority to Africa – not least because of their own economic difficulties and in the case of Europe a number of major political concerns (the end of the Cold War and break-up of the Soviet Union, German reunification, Yugoslavia's disintegration) – Muslim countries, with the Arab states in their vanguard, continue to pay attention to the continent. Although they have been unable to solve any of Africa's major crises – war and famine in the Sudan and the Horn of Africa, AIDS and other public health crises in central and eastern Africa, the disintegration of educational systems, and falling standards of living – they have poured in considerable sums for the support and propagation of Islam and for Islamic and Arabic education, either through grants to local institutions or by setting up facilities such as the Islamic University of Say (Niger),⁴⁵ or through extensive programmes of scholarships for African students to study in Arab countries, as established by Morocco, Libya, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Although a good deal of development aid has also been carried out through Arab and Islamic funds and banks, it is these endeavours on the religious and cultural fronts that are likely

⁴³ Herman Bell reminded me of the excellent research and publication on African studies that has been undertaken by the Institute of African and Asian Studies at the University of Khartoum, situated in a country that bridges the Arab and non-Arab worlds. The continuing purge of non-Islamist intellectuals in the university, however, and dire lack of funding do not augur well for the institute's future.

⁴⁴ There is now an extensive literature on Qaddafi and some specifically relating to his African policies. See, for example, Lemarchand 1988 and Mattes 1989, a summary of his book, *Die innere und äussere islamische Mission Libyens. Historisch-politischer Kontext, innere Struktur, regionale Ausprägung am Beispiel Afrikas*, Mainz, 1986.

⁴⁵ Established on the recommendation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. See Triaud 1988. Another has been set up in Uganda.

to bear most fruit in the long run. Just as Britain, France and the United States, for example, once had an important impact on the youth of Africa through scholarships to study abroad, support of nationals to teach in Africa, lively cultural centres, gifts of books, etc. (all of which have been pared since the high period of the 1960s), it is now the turn of Islamic countries, mainly the Arab ones, to fill that gap, and they continue to do so with vigour.

Sub-Saharan Africa, then, is in the process of being more fully integrated into the wider world of Islam. The new universities in former colonial territories turned out a high calibre of young intellectual in the 1960s and 1970s. A number of these, like the Nigerians Umar Abdullahi and Ibrahim Sulaiman,⁴⁶ seeing in Islam an ideology independent of both communism and capitalism, and one in their view capable of solving seemingly intractable social and economic problems, became protagonists of philosophies of Islamism (Islamic banking, implementation of *sharia*, Islamization of knowledge, etc.). They were able to benefit from the new wealth of some of the Arab Muslim countries and in the case of Nigeria from an oil economy at home, to have freedom to travel and meet other like-minded Muslims, to attend conferences, found magazines and publish books and pamphlets. They have also benefited from improved communications facilities, whether telephone/telex/fax links or, more recently, computers and electronic mail – a number of Muslim and country-specific news and views e-mail nets now exist. Even those who have not been educated partially or wholly in the “Western” mould, such as the leaders of Sufi *tariqas*, share in the benefits of the communications and travel revolution, journeying freely to the Middle East, Europe and the United States and publishing their works in Arabic in Cairo, Beirut and Tripoli, as well as in xeroxed editions for sale in the market place at home. International Islamic organizations see sub-Saharan Africa as a field for missionary endeavour and an area where they may roll back the tide of Christianity. “Secularism” (seldom very rigorously defined) has become the whipping boy of the Islamists,⁴⁷ and since some predominantly Muslim states of the sub-Saharan Africa belt have substantial non-Muslim minorities it will be interesting to see how such debates are eventually played out. One must hope that the painful experience of the Sudan will not be repeated elsewhere. Meantime it will surprise nobody if an area largely abandoned by the Western liberal democracies feels a closer sense of

⁴⁶ Author, *inter alia*, of *A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Usman dan Fodio*, London: Mansell 1986, and *The Islamic State and the Challenge of History: Ideals, Policy and the Operation of the Sokoto Caliphate*, London: Mansell 1987.

⁴⁷ See Brenner 1993b.

identity with the world of its co-religionists and acts in accordance with those feelings.⁴⁸

If this is so, then one may wonder what the cultural effect of closer integration with the Muslim world will be. Already there are considerable cadres of younger West African Muslim men trained in Arabic-speaking countries who constitute an alternative élite. Being Arabophone, they are not surprisingly also Arabophile and, like early Anglophone African Christians who adopted European dress and attitudes along with their religion, these Muslims tend to favour *Arab* dress and social norms, shunning what they see as the *paganism* of local ways.⁴⁹ There has been a considerable increase in the number of Arabic schools in the region, teaching Islamic disciplines through the medium of Arabic. In Nigeria some of the oldest of these, such as Adam al-Ilori's Arabic Teaching Centre in Agege and Kamal al-Din al-Adabi's Azhar Arabic and Islamic Higher Institute (linked to al-Azhar in Cairo) in Ilorin, have sent forth generations of graduates who have in many cases founded their own schools.⁵⁰ In Nigeria also the Izala movement has started schools of its own throughout the country and these propagate an uncompromisingly exoteric, legal, view of Islam which abhors the esoteric Sufi approach and any compromise with local custom. In Mali there are not only the older Islamic colleges (*madrasas*), but a large number of similar new institutions which have grown up since the 1960s, which since 1985 the Malian government has begun to recognize and thus control.⁵¹ Such schools are not only an artifact of West Africa's increased contact with the wider world of Islam – effectively for the region the Arab Middle East – but are also a response to a more general demand for education which national governments cannot satisfy. Some of these receive support from Arab countries, either through grants, gifts of books or secondment

⁴⁸ I am grateful to Mr David Robinson of World Vision for pointing out to me that a number of Islamic charitable organizations operate in West Africa providing welfare services that governments are unable or unwilling to provide. Naturally, they have ideological agendas too, and these may place them at odds even with Muslim majority governments. Reuter reported on 29 November 1994 that Senegal had expelled the foreign heads of two such organizations – the Islamic African Relief Agency (represented by a Sudanese) and Human Appeal International (represented by a Chadian). In Egypt such organizations have been spectacularly successful, to the extent that the Egyptian government has now begun to pour resources into poorer districts of Cairo in an attempt to undercut their popularity.

⁴⁹ They also appear to favour non-indigenous forms of mosque architecture. The new Ilorin mosque, campaigned for by the Arabist Alhaji Kamal al-Din al-Adabi, appears modelled on Ottoman style. The main mosque of the new capital, Abuja, might be at home in Iran.

⁵⁰ On these two educational pioneers, see Reichmuth 1993: 183-7.

⁵¹ Brenner 1993b: 169.

of teachers, funded either through governmental or quasi-governmental channels of the donor countries or private foundations.⁵²

At the same time, there is also a move towards greater contact with the world of secular, technologically advanced Europe and the United States. Large numbers of Muslims from sub-Saharan Africa are resident, either permanently or for extended periods, on both sides of the Atlantic, and are daily exposed to a wide range of discourse, both Islamic and non-Islamic. Whether these are professors and graduate students or cab drivers and street hawkers, there is little doubt that they imbibe, willy-nilly, attitudes, ways of doing things, approaches to debating and a host of other aspects of Euro-American culture which they will eventually take home or pass on to those who do return. These elements will play their role in forging new African Muslim cultures as will the Arabic cultural elements and also, in my view, the older African cultural elements. These latter will not disappear or be expunged, but will survive and be transmuted, and will ultimately be the key variable in a new cultural synthesis. It is this cultural sub-stratum, the product of countless centuries of cultural formation and re-formation before either Islam or Christianity were transplanted into Africa, that allows us to distinguish, for example, West African Islam from Southeast Asian Islam, Nigerian Islam from Senegalese Islam and Hausa Islam from Yoruba Islam. This, I venture to suggest, we shall still be able to do in a hundred years' time, despite the homogenizing tendencies of the global electronic *umma*, the Islamization of knowledge and international Islamic agencies.

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⁵² See Brenner 1993b, who also points to the role of UNESCO (encouragement of Arabic as a vehicle of literacy), ISESCO and the African Islamic Centre in Khartoum. On such schools in southwestern Nigeria, and specifically the two mentioned above, see Reichmuth 1993.

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MAGHRIBI ISLAM AND ISLAM IN THE MAGHRIB

THE ETERNAL DICHOTOMY

George Joffé

The Islamic history of North Africa has been characterized by a dichotomy that ebbs and flows in significance over time and that goes back to the first appearance of Islam there in 647.¹ It is a dichotomy which, in its most prominent phases, contrasts the universalist nature of Islamic doctrine with its localized populist interpretation within the Maghrib. It has been symbolized by the confrontation of Arab with Berber, urban with rural Islam and the scripturalism of the *ulama* (religious scholars) with the mysticism of the Sufi *tariqas* (religious orders). Indeed, for some commentators, this dichotomy has not been a static juxtaposition of two different systems of Islamic institutions in the Maghrib but a dynamic and dialectical social process that has enriched religious and social life.² Ironically, the Islamic reformism of the colonial period and the Islamic radicalism of the contemporary world are both directed towards its destruction.

The earliest confrontation

Despite the often fierce Berber resistance inside North Africa to conquest, conversion to Islam – in essence, the religious ideology of the Arab conquerors – was frequently acceptable to the local Berber population. This was because the administrative and fiscal impositions on converts made by the Arab élites which accompanied Uqba bin Nafi and, after 695, Hassan bin Numan, were less onerous than those of their Byzantine predecessors. However, the administrative structure of the conquest,

¹ The initial introduction of Islam to North Africa parallels the Arab military conquest of the region. This began in 647, against considerable indigenous resistance, and was only completed in 710.

² Gellner 1968: 1-15; Gellner 1981: 1-86.

which was based on the principle of Arab domination,³ eventually provoked a major rebellion in 740.⁴ The cause was the fact that Berber converts in North Africa were only allowed to become *mawalis* (clients) of the tribal Arab ruling élites and were thus excluded from many of the material benefits of the new system.

In a sense, the rebellion, which was primarily about the issue of access to the new administrative system, not its destruction, also provided the first example of the dichotomy in Islamic belief that has marked the region. It made use of the doctrines of Kharijism as its ideological vehicle to question the religious legitimacy of the administrative system created by the Arab élites, both in North Africa and elsewhere in the Muslim world.⁵ These doctrines were contrasted with the Sunni Islamic ones of the Arab-dominated Umayyad caliphate which had originally conquered North Africa, and implicitly called into question the ethnic basis of the caliphate itself. Both strands of Kharijism (Ibadism and Sufriism, the former being the more moderate of the two) appeared in North Africa after 719, with Sufri Kharijis actually organizing the initial rebellion around Tangier.⁶

Although the Sufri rebellion was crushed within two years, after Umayyad rule was almost destroyed at the Battle of the Nobles outside Qayrawan (Kairouan) in Tunisia in 742,⁷ Kharijism has persisted

³ The Umayyads created what Bernard Lewis (1970: 64-80) has called the "Arab Kingdom" in the territories they conquered for Islam. In North Africa, this meant that the Berber populations which converted were excluded from the administration and were obliged to pay both *kharaj* (tax on landed property paid by converts) and *jiziya* (head tax paid by non-converts) – to their intense resentment. The final insult was provided when taxes were increased and an attempt was made to force their payment as tribute made up of slaves.

⁴ Brignon 1967: 45-55.

⁵ Kharijism was the doctrine which emphasized the right of the Muslim community to select the caliph by election, rather than allowing the selection process to operate by heredity. It also allowed the caliph to be deposed by the community if he failed in his obligations to it by not upholding the principles of Islam. It thereby emphasized the inherent egalitarianism of early Islam against the growing hierarchalism and absolutism of the caliphate which increasingly used Islam as its justification (Ayyubi 1991: 203-11). Kharijism also rejected "the doctrine of justification by faith without works" and considered Muslims who sinned as *murtadd* (apostate) (Gibbs and Kramers 1974).

⁶ The Ibadis infiltrated into Tripolitania, which they finally conquered in 757, although the Abbasid caliphate (which had, by then, replaced the Umayyads, except in Muslim Spain) forced them westwards into modern Algeria in 772. There they formed the Rustamid Ibadī state of Tahert (Julien 1931: 333-40). The Abbasid caliphate, based on Baghdad and descended from the Prophet's uncle al-Abbas, had replaced the Umayyad caliphate, based originally on Damascus, in 750. It was based on an egalitarian, ethnically diverse opposition movement, derived from Shia Islam and originating in Khurasan, which rejected the ethnic élitism of the Umayyads.

⁷ Abun-Nasr 1987: 39.

throughout North Africa until the present day. It has also retained its reputation of opposition to the established order, particularly after the Kharijite states that were created there were destroyed by the Fatimids in the tenth century. It has been argued, too, that Ibadi Islam was so successful in Berber North Africa not just because it provided a means of confronting the legitimacy of Arab aristocratic Umayyad rule, but also because its doctrines and *modus operandi* were ideally suited to the type of decentralized society that characterized much of the region.⁸

The importance of Ibadi Islam in the ninth century was not, however, that it represented any notably different principle. What it can be said to have done is to have duplicated the religious authority of the orthodox schoolmen, the *ulama*, and to have revealed the political possibilities in a society lacking the structure of a centralised state. The Ibadi Imamate of Tahart was a theocracy which commanded the nominal allegiance of communities as far away as Tripolitania, grouped around the scattered shaykhs of the sect. It is possible that these reproduced in the countryside an earlier pagan type, already familiar in local society.⁹

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that, by the advent of Kharijism in North Africa, the Berber population there had universally become Muslim. In reality, conversion to Islam tended to be confined to populations within the limits of the old Roman empire, for these were, in essence, the areas occupied by the Umayyads. Even within this region, the coastal Christianized urban populations remained outside the Islamic corpus for many years and it was the rural Berber populations that flocked to Islam – in large part because they thus acquired a collective political identity. When excluded from membership of the ruling Muslim élite, they espoused Kharijism as an assertion of this new-found awareness.¹⁰ Indeed, in south and central Morocco the populations were Muslim only in the most nominal sense or not Muslim at all, whilst to the north, Islam was also worn very lightly. It was, after all, in northern Morocco that the heterodox Muslim sect of the Barghawata, derived from Sufrism, was to appear in the ninth and tenth centuries, with its own Berber divine revelation and its own prophets.¹¹ Only in central and eastern Morocco did the Idrisids remain in control as representatives of orthodox Sunnism, while Ifriqiyya continued to be the real focus of Sunni Islam in North Africa.

⁸ Brett 1973: 5.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Brett 1973: 57ff.

¹¹ Abun-Nasr 1987: 52ff; Brett 1992: 66ff.

The colonization of Islam

Brett has made the point that, after the initial Arab conquests, the Islamization of North Africa did not occur as a result of further conquest but rather through a process of internal colonization, a process which lasted until the eleventh century.¹² Kharijism was one aspect of this process that was to linger on until modern times. Another, which has disappeared completely, was Fatimid Shia Islam. As with Kharijism, Fatimid entry into Maghribi society in 893 occurred as a result of a Berber tribe, the Kutama in eastern Algeria, adopting its doctrines and its leadership as a convenient vehicle to resist attempts by the Sunni Zirids in Ifriqiyya to control them.¹³ Fatimid Shia Islam has, however, left no direct traces within Islam in the Maghrib, largely because its leadership merely used the region as a springboard for its conquest of Egypt in 969.

It did, however, leave very profound indirect traces, for it was the Fatimid caliph in Cairo who ordered the Hillalian invasions of the Maghrib and Libya in 1050. These invasions by two nomadic tribes from Syria which had been transferred to the Nile Delta region "...typified the most serious event of the Middle Ages of the Maghrib."¹⁴ They were a Fatimid response to attempts by the Zirid administration of Ifriqiyya to break away after the centre of Fatimid power moved to Cairo – rejecting Fatimid Shi'ism and accepting instead the Sunni Islam of the Abbasids – and, according to conventional historical interpretation:

It was an onslaught by a horde of nomadic destroyers which, without putting anything in its place, put an end to an emerging Berber system of organization which otherwise would have developed successfully quite normally.¹⁵

In the words of Ibn Khaldun, "Like an army of locusts, they destroyed everything in their path."¹⁶ In fact, the Hillalian invasions seem to have been no more than a catalyst for the collapse of the Zirid state, rather than its cause. The Zirids had already exhausted themselves in trying to subdue the Sunni Banu Hammad in central Algeria and in recovering control of the Jarid region to the south of Ifriqiyya. They had also had to face a major economic crisis the year before the invasions began

¹² Brett 1973: 60.

¹³ Abun-Nasr 1987: 60f.

¹⁴ Julien 1931: 374. "...marqua le plus grave évènement du Moyen-Age maghrébine" (original text).

¹⁵ Julien 1931: 374. "Elle fut la ruée d'un peuple de nomades destructeurs, qui mit fin, sans la remplacer par quoi que ce fut, à une tentative d'organisation berbère, dont rien ne prouve qu'elle n'eût pu normalement se développer et aboutir" (original text).

¹⁶ Cited in Julien, *ibid.*

and, in fact, the initial invasions were relatively peaceful and involved only a few thousand people, not the half million or so usually described.¹⁷ North Africa was already breaking up into a mass of petty principalities as the Hillalian invasions commenced and their widespread effects – for they eventually influenced all of the region – were due to the lack of internal cohesion within the region, rather than to the martial prowess of the tribesmen.

What did eventually result from the Hillalian invasions, however, was the spread of Arabic as the *lingua franca* of North Africa, particularly in the great coastal plains and beyond the urban centres where the use of Arabic as the language of administration, religion and culture had already made it the dominant means of communication.¹⁸ This meant that orthodox Sunni Islam, already strong in urban centres now that Fatimid control had gone, had easier access to the countryside. This was reinforced by the destruction of the great centres of Kharijism – the Ibadi Rustamids at Tahert and the Sufri Banu Midrar at Sijilmassa – by the Fatimids before they moved to Cairo. The collapse of Zirid authority in Ifriqiyya and the creation of a whole range of minor states to the west of what had been the centre of Islamic civilization in the Maghrib set the scene for the next wave of Islamization.

This was the process, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, of the true colonization of Islam throughout the region and the ending of Berberist heterodoxy in the remote depths of the northern Saharan desert edge. The process was carried out by two Berber dynasties, the Almoravids (al-Murabitun) and the Almohades (al-Muwahiddin). Both exemplified the Khaldunian concept of state formation inside North Africa through the circulation of tribal élites, in which the role of *assabiya* (agnatic solidarity)¹⁹ provided the military sinews to back new-found tribal zealotry for the reassertion of orthodox Islam.²⁰ The growth of both dynasties underlined a new dichotomy in Maghribi Islam, for both arose, not from the scriptural orthodoxy of urban Islam in the Maghrib, but from a new ascetic formalism created in the *ribat* (fortress) – the beginning of that characteristic aspect of Maghrib Islam, the “marabout” (*murabit*: “men of the ribat”).

The *murabit* tradition derived from two distinct sources: the tradition of the *qass* (plural: *qussas* – story-teller, preacher) a popular missionary-preacher of Islam who operated outside the confines of the mosque and *madrassa* (school), which goes back to the beginning of

¹⁷ Poncet 1967: 1114.

¹⁸ Brett 1980: 546.

¹⁹ For a sceptical discussion of the universality of Ibn Khaldun's sociological analysis of history, see Al-Azmeh 1981: 159-88, 210-22 and Al-Azmeh 1982: 51-61.

²⁰ Lacoste 1966: 123-57.

Islam,²¹ and the warrior tradition of the *ribat* (fortress or retreat), which was associated with *jihad*. Both represented a zealous commitment to Islam and, after the tenth century, when the warrior tradition began to die out, it was the zealotry of the word that came to typify the *ribat* by subsuming the tradition of *jihad*. It was this feature which was to be manifested in the coming to power of both the Almoravids and the Almohades. In the first case, it was the proselytizing of Abdullah bin Yasin, from the *ribat* established by Wajaj bin Zalwi in the Sus, which created the al-Murabitun movement amongst the Saharan Lamtuna tribe. He preached a rigid, austere and orthodox vision of Islam which rejected the orthodoxies of urban Morocco and ensured the success of the movement in taking power in the mid-tenth century.²² It was a very similar figure, Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Tumart, from the Berber-controlled High Atlas, who inspired the Masmuda and their leader, Abd al-Mumin, in the early eleventh century to move against the Almoravids, by now no longer such austere supporters of orthodox Islam, and to replace them by the Masmuda-based dynasty of the al-Muwahiddin: the Almohades.

Both movements and dynasties, however, by imposing strict Islamic observance on the communities they ruled, completed the Islamization of the Maghrib, particularly of Morocco. It was an internal cultural colonization which was stamped by a Sunni orthodoxy which contrasted with the Kharijite and Fatimid Shia traditions which had preceded it. Indeed, it could be argued that it was only possible because the vehicles of transmission were Berbers, authentic members of the Maghrib, not groups derived from the Middle East and thus linguistically and culturally alien. Furthermore, in both cases, the groups responsible were derived from the authentic social tradition of the region, tribalism, and were able to exploit the populist tradition of the *murabit* and the *ribat* as the mechanism through which power would be achieved.

The evolution of the murabit

The austere orthodox zealotry associated with the *murabit*, however, was to be transformed during the succeeding centuries into a facet of belief and practice which has become typical of Maghribi Islam, particularly in its populist manifestation. At the same time, the concept of the *murabit* formed a bridge between orthodox Islam in the Maghrib

²¹ This tradition first appears in Basra and Kufa in Iraq at the start of the Islamic era, but became a major theme of Islam in the Maghrib up to the present day (Selmane 1993: 170-3.) Their most active period in terms of the propagation of Islam lasted up to the ninth century (Brett 1977a).

²² Abun-Nasr 1989: 79ff.

and Maghribi Islam which was only threatened by the Islamic reformism of the colonial period and, more recently, by the radicalism of political Islam since independence. The key to the transformation and to the bridging process stems from the underlying concept of ritual purity (*tahara*).

This, in turn, derives from the belief in the essential infallibility and sinlessness (*masum*) of the Prophet Muhammad.²³ These qualities were, it came to be believed, inherited by his descendants, the *shurafa* (singular: *sharif*) who, like the Prophet himself, would be able to intercede (*shafaa*) on the Day of Judgement and possessed the property of *baraka* which exemplified their ritual purity. They were also manifest in persons who were Sufis (mystics and members of Sufi orders, the *tariqas*) because, through their mystical awareness of God, they were considered to be the spiritual successors of the Prophet and thus to possess his qualities. Finally, they came in the popular mind to be associated with the person of the *murabit*, who by his style of life and commitment to Islam, demonstrated the quality of ritual purity and, thereby, every other quality associated with it, often including an assumed genealogical descent from the Prophet. In reality, of course, the *murabit* came to be the patrilineal descendent of a person considered as a saint because of his reputation, but who had no genealogical link to the Prophet.

At the same time, the popular perception of the *murabit* underwent a major transformation. From being, before the tenth century, primarily a *mujahid* (fighter in the holy war to defend Islam) – and, in the case of the Almoravids, a person who has made a spiritual commitment to *jihad* against the heretic and the infidel

.... increasingly he is one whose devotions have obtained their reward: from a seeker after God he has become, in popular esteem, one who has found him. He is the possessor of *baraka*, divine grace. Therefore, although he continues to be a voice of conscience, driving the people along the way of God, he is more fundamentally a source of blessing, confirming the people in the way of life they have already learnt to lead. In his original role as pious ascetic he appears as successor to the Christian hermits and monks of late Classical times; now he inherits a more priestlike range of functions in the life of the community. These continue after death when his spiritual powers of course increase. The burial of the body and the building of the tomb help to ensure that the divine favour will, through his saintliness, be drawn down upon the land with its crops and flocks, upon the inhabitants in general, upon the women who come to pray below

²³ Munson 1993: 10-16.

the dome instead of in the mosque, and upon the individuals who may be buried around.²⁴

The *murabit*, as described above, is therefore a symbol of a populist mechanism of integrating the community into the cultural and moral environment of Islam without requiring it to consciously accept and practise the austere orthodoxy of the *ulama* (specialists in Islamic doctrine and interpretation). This concept of integration was allied to that of the Sufi by the fact that the shrine of the former could become the focus of the latter, as the centre-piece of the *zawiya*, the physical structure in which the *tariqa* would operate, which served as mosque, *madrasa* (school) and *ribat*. Many *murabit* shrines also became *zawiyas* and, in the popular mind, *zawiyas* were little different from the traditional *kubbah* (dome; or building over a *murabit's* tomb). Since, as time passed, many of the *ulama* also adhered to *tariqas*, a seamless linkage developed between the orthodox Islam of the urban *ulama* and the populist vision of the rural *murabit*.

There remains a further problem, however. The tradition of the *murabit* as mediator of popular Islam is a very typically Maghribi phenomenon, particularly in Morocco. In the Mashriq, this mediating function tended to be taken over by the *tariqas* directly. It is not immediately evident, however, why the *murabit* should have acquired such a significant role in North Africa. An indication of the reason for this is provided by Abdullah Laroui when he points out that, "maraboutism is not, therefore, a response to urban legalism but a new sentiment of religiosity imposed on everybody by a situation of crisis."²⁵

There seem to have been two stages to this process. Firstly, the Sufi orders established themselves in the Maghrib, mainly in the thirteenth century, and brought with them the Sufi ideologies promulgated by Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (1175-1258) and by Muhammad bin Abd al-Rahman al-Jazuli (d. 1465).²⁶ This provided a degree of penetration into the wider Islamic community in North Africa and offered an alternative to the mosque which was also seen as an integral part of Islamic practice. On the back of this development, maraboutism developed as another acceptable alternative.

The really important development, however, only took place in the fifteenth century. It coincided with three other events, two of them in Morocco. The first was the discovery of the tomb of Mawlay Idris II in Fes in 1437 and Marinid encouragement of a popular revival of the

²⁴ Brett 1977b.

²⁵ Laroui 1974: 49. "Le maraboutisme n'est donc nullement l'antidote d'un légalisme urbain, mais une nouvelle religiosité qu'une situation de crise impose à tous" (original text).

²⁶ El-Mansour 1990: 160-1.

Idrisi sharifian cult as a means of ensuring its own dynastic survival. The second was the proselytising of the Susi Sufi mystic, Shaykh Muhammad al-Jazuli, who popularized the ideas of the twelfth-century Iraqi mystic Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili. Al-Jazuli became the religious patron of the Sadians, the dynasty which replaced the Marinids, and which, in addition to claiming sharifian origins, rendered Sufism publicly respectable in Morocco. The final factor was the growing threat of Christian invasion from Spain and Portugal.²⁷ It was, perhaps, the Christian threat which really stimulated the growth of maraboutism, for – apart from the Battle of Wadi al-Mahkazin,²⁸ which in any case occurred at the end of the period in question and confirmed Sadi dominance in Morocco – the lack of powerful centralizing regimes in North Africa forced local coastal populations back on their own resources.

In this context, the *murabit*, whether as individual or as leader of a *tariqa*, reverted to his original character as a *mujahid* and thus came into his own as a military leader. In the aftermath of the prolonged confrontation, particularly in those coastal regions in which Spanish and Portuguese (and, briefly, British) penetration had become permanent, it was the *murabit* and the *zawiya* which became the centres of administrative authority and power. Once central power re-established itself through the Ottoman occupation of what were to become Tunisia and Algeria and as a result of Sadi (sixteenth century) and Alawite (seventeenth century) control of Morocco – it had to incorporate the *murabit*, *tariqa* and the *zawiya* into the fabric of power, since it could not generally eliminate them.

As a result, all three also acquired a degree of normative social acceptance as mediators of Islamic values and belief to the community at large. It is worth noting that most of the major *tariqas* either date from this period or come into prominence during it.²⁹ On the other hand, as part of the price for this public role, central authority, whether sultan, bey or dey, forced the *zawiyas* and the *murabits* to abandon their military pretensions.³⁰ At the same time, however, a dynamic tension was created within Maghrib society at both the political and religious levels which contrasted central against local power and the religious

²⁷ Brignon 1967: 172.

²⁸ The Battle of Wadi al-Makhazin – or the Battle of the Three Kings, because of the deaths of three monarchs during it – took place on 4 August 1578 in northern Morocco. The crushing Moroccan victory ensured that Portuguese penetration into North Africa was stopped in its tracks (Abun-Nasr 1989: 214-15).

²⁹ El-Mansour 1990: 150-73.

³⁰ Although this discussion is limited to Morocco, the general range of religious orders described – with the exception of the Bekhtashiyya and other orders connected with the Ottoman empire – was also found throughout North Africa.

orthodoxy of the urban *ulama* against the populism of maraboutism. Nonetheless, in religious terms, at least, there was not a confrontation between these two extremes. They were rather, the two ends of a spectrum for, although, "Ideally, no doubt, one excluded the other; in the context of social practice, they were linked by the concepts of purity (*tahara*) and intercession."³¹

Colonialism and reform

By the opening of the colonial period in the Maghrib – in 1830 with the French occupation of Algiers – Maghribi Islam rested on three distinct pillars which ranged from the orthodoxy of urban "scripturalist" Islam to the "mystical" populist Islam of the countryside and the urban poor. They comprised the *ulama*, together with the mosque and the *madrasa* – the embodiment of Islamic orthodoxy in the Maghrib – the *tariqas* and the *zawiyas*, which provided the bridge between orthodox scripturalism and populist mysticism and, at the extreme, the rural, often heterodox, piety associated with the *murabit*, the *kubbah* and those *zawiyas* linked to *murabits*. This was to be exploited by the process of colonial occupation of North Africa – from 1830 to 1871 in Algeria, 1881 to 1883 in Tunisia and 1912 to 1934 in Morocco – for it was premised on a combination of military force and political cooption. The actual process of occupation evolved over time; from the brutality of Bugeaud's campaigns against Amir Abd al-Qadr's forces in western Algeria in the 1840s, or the repression of the Muqrani rebellion in eastern and central Algeria in 1970-1, to Lyautey's development of the technique of "pacification" in Morocco at the start of the twentieth century.

The pillars of Islam in the Maghrib responded differently to the circumstances. In general terms, the urban élite tended to accept colonial control to the extent that traditional Islamic political structures were retained, and to condemn it insofar as they were not, for, "to him who holds power, obedience is due."³² This was particularly the case in Tunisia and Morocco, where the traditional power structures of the Beylik and the Sultanate respectively were maintained. In Algeria, the situation was different, partly because power was broken up between the Deylik of Algiers and the other three Beyliks, and there was, in any case, a distinction between Ottoman Hanbalism and Maghribi Malikism which affected the ability of the *ulama* to influence political decision. There were, of course, some who refused to accept colonial

³¹ Joffé 1993: 121, n. 14.

³² Kedourie 1992: 9.

aggression, for the *ulama* rarely operated as a cohesive group anywhere in the Maghrib, but by and large their role was a passive one.³³

With the major *tariqas*, however, the preponderant response was one of collaboration.³⁴ The main reason for this was the fact that the major *zawiyas* had acquired considerable political and economic autonomy in the period immediately before the advent of colonialism, not least because of European economic penetration into North Africa. They therefore had every interest in discreet collaboration with the colonial powers as a means of protecting these benefits. There were, however, some notable exceptions. The Sanusi order in Libya, for example, which dominated Tripolitania and the Central Sahara to such an extent that the Ottoman authorities in Tripolitania and Benghazi were forced to collaborate with it, and which mirrored the reformism of the Wahhabi movement in the Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century, was to lead the resistance to Italian occupation after 1911.³⁵ The Amir Abd al-Qadr in Algeria was also a leading member of the Qadiriyya order and used it as a means of articulating resistance to the French occupation.

Interestingly enough, it was at the level of the *murabit* – whether he was integrated into normative Islam as a *sharif* or as a *shaykh* in a *tariqa* – that more generalized resistance occurred. It was as if the institution reverted to its pre-tenth century role once again. Of course, this was not a universal phenomenon and many *murabits* actively cooperated with the colonial powers. Nonetheless, there was markedly more resistance from the maraboutic sector of Muslim society in North Africa than from any of the other religious communities. The Ahansalen *zawiya* in central Morocco and the Maayniniyyin in the Western Sahara are two very good examples of this, although it is often difficult to distinguish between *murabit* and *tariqa*. For example, the Maayniniyyin was also a *tariqa* in its own right and had been recognized as such by the Moroccan sultanate in the first decade of the twentieth century. Of course, with the advent of colonial administration, many of the *murabits* and *zawiyas* were coopted by the new administrators. Nonetheless, the popular memory of *murabit* resistance to colonial occupation has generally been more positive than it has of the behaviour of the *ulama*.

This primary resistance³⁶ to colonialism failed, of course, to prevent

³³ Munson 1993: 58.

³⁴ Joffé 1993: 111-23.

³⁵ See Evans-Pritchard 1949.

³⁶ The usage here is based on the distinctions made by Terence Ranger in his studies of Africa. Primary resistance is the initial attempt to oppose the imposition of colonial rule by use of indigenous sources of armed resistance. This fails and is then replaced by more sophisticated techniques of resistance which exploit the mechanisms and systems introduced by colonialism (see Ranger 1968a: 437-53 and Ranger 1968b: 631-41).

its spread. Its last gasp, however, also ushered in a secondary level of resistance; one that was also based on Islam, albeit a new interpretation of it, and one which, in the end and in cooperation with other, secular political trends, was to lead to independence throughout the region. This was the Rif War in Morocco, between 1921 and 1926, when some 20,000 Rifi tribesmen, led by Muhammad bin Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi, fought for independence from Spanish rule and were only finally suppressed by a Franco-Spanish army around 800,000 strong.³⁷ The new facet of Islam that it introduced – Islamic reformism or Salafiyyism – was one that had, albeit in a more elementary form, already appeared in North Africa in the revivalist movements of the Sanusiyya in Libya³⁸ in the early nineteenth century and the Wahhabiyya in Morocco at around the same time.³⁹

Indeed, these developments matched similar developments in the Middle East, particularly in the Ottoman empire, thus beginning the process of reintegration of Maghribi Islam into the general Islamic corpus. They date from the ideas developed by the Young Ottoman movement in Turkey in the 1860s and from the development of Salafiyyism by Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in the 1880s and 1890s. The Salafiyyist movement was, in effect, an attempt at doctrinal renewal in parallel with the attempts at socio-political and economic modernization of the Middle East which began with Muhammad Ali's transformation of Egypt in the 1820s, the Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman empire in the first half of the nineteenth century and the reforms undertaken by Ahmad Bey in Tunisia in the 1840s.⁴⁰

The reform movement sought to exploit Islamic doctrine to provide the ideological underpinning to temporal modernization. In doing this, it effectively sought to replace the European cultural background that accompanied European technical and political efficiency. Islamic reformers argued that the original essential core of Islamic doctrine would sanction precisely the same degree of development of science and philosophy as had occurred in Europe and would provide it with the crucial moral and doctrinal justification which European culture lacked. Thus a return to the pristine, original essence of Islam – the Islam of the *salaf* (ancestors) – was an essential precondition for counter-ing European cultural and ideological penetration.⁴¹ A vital component of this purification was the removal of heterodox accretions and practices

³⁷ Brignon 1967: 390.

³⁸ Martin 1976: 125-42.

³⁹ El-Mansour 1990: 135-43.

⁴⁰ Details of these developments are to be found in Mardin 1962 (the Young Ottomans), Lewis 1961 (the Tanzimat) and Brown 1974 (Ahmad Bey).

⁴¹ Choueiri 1990: 36-48.

that had grown up over the centuries. Thus, by definition, the Islamic reformers manifested considerable hostility towards the *tariqas*, the *zawiyas* and the *murabits*. This was a feature which they shared with their reformist predecessors in the Islamic revivalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴²

The Salafiyyist movement became allied with the various movements of national liberation that began to appear in the wake of the Rif War. In the case of Tunisia, it predated the Rif War, for Islamic reformism formed part of the policy platform of one of precolonial Tunisia's last premiers, Khayr al-Din Basha, who created the first school in Tunisia to have a modern curriculum, the Sadiqiyya College. His example was repeated in 1920 by Shaykh Abd al-Aziz al-Thalaabi who created the Destour Party, calling for the restoration of the 1859 constitution as part of the process of countering the worst effects of French colonialism.⁴³ Al-Thalaabi was a Salafiyyist and implanted many of the movement's ideas into the programme of the Destour. The Destour Party was eventually absorbed into the Neo-Destour movement created by Habib Bourguiba in 1934. In 1926, in the immediate aftermath of the Rif War, Salafiyyists in Morocco under the leadership of Allal al-Fassi founded a similar movement that was eventually to lead to the Istiqlal (Independence) movement in 1944. Finally, in 1931, Abd al-Hamid bin Badis created the Association des Oulémas Algériens in Algeria, a movement which was eventually to be absorbed into the Front de Libération Nationale in the 1950s.

The nationalist movements that did emerge in the 1940s and 1950s, therefore, incorporated the Salafiyyist dislike of populist Islam and their distrust of the *tariqas*. The Salafiyyist movement itself had created a clear and well-defined doctrinal breach between popular, mystical and maraboutic Islam on the one hand and scripturalist Islam on the other. It thereby shattered the inherent social integrity of Islamic practice in the Maghrib, which had persisted up to the colonial period. It should be added that, quite apart from these doctrinal issues, the actual behaviour of representatives of populist Islam, particularly of many of the major *tariqas*,⁴⁴ provided concrete evidence to back up the moral condemnation visited upon them by the Salafiyyist movement. Indeed, as Henry Munson remarks for the case of Morocco:

The conflict between Salafism and Sufism was now widely equated with the distinction between patriotism and treason – despite the fact that many Moroccans attracted to Salafi reformism did not actively

⁴² Choueiri 1990: 23ff.

⁴³ Abun-Nasr 1987: 285, 354.

⁴⁴ Joffé 1993: 111-23.

challenge the colonial order, whereas some Sufis – like Sidi Tuhami al-Wazzani – did.⁴⁵

Nor, it should be said, did maraboutic Islam, as opposed to the Islam of the *tariqas*, fare much better. The Salafiyyist movement objected to the obscurantism and heterodoxy that was prevalent in populist religious practice almost as strongly as it condemned the *tariqas* and for a similar combination of political and religious motives. Indeed, there were real grounds for these politically motivated objections, since French colonial administrators, as well as their Spanish and Italian counterparts, attempted to exploit the maraboutic system as part of their own system of control and administration.

Independence and radicalism

In fact, one of the most important consequences of the colonial period for Islam in the Maghrib was that, through the Salafiyyist movement, it defined, for the first time, a rigid separation between orthodox, scripturalist Islam and the populist, mystical tradition of Maghribi Islam. No longer was there an integrated and graduated spectrum of belief between the two extremes of religious practice, as had been the case in the past. Nor could one extreme be elided into the other as had occurred on other occasions in the precolonial period. Instead they were permanently separated horizontally and vertically: horizontally between town and country and vertically between social class and generation, particularly within the town. There was also a further factor of separation: education and modernization, for, as mass education began to spread through the populations of the Maghrib, so did conformity with scripturalist Islam. And modernization implied movement; migration from the countryside into the town and migration from North Africa into Europe and the Persian Gulf in search of work. As urban drift accentuated, so those affected by it were increasingly divorced from the roots of their rural mysticism and subject to urban conformity.

Nonetheless, populist Maghribi Islam has continued to operate to different degrees in different countries. The *tariqas* still have their clientele, although they no longer have political power and, in Algeria and Tunisia, have lost much of their economic power as well. In Morocco, the major *tariqas* – such as the Wazzaniyya, the Tijaniyya (with their links across the Sahara into Senegal) and the Qadiriyya or Darqawa – have adjusted to the modern world, and their senior members are often key individuals in the new economic and commercial structures that are being created there. The more populist *tariqas*, which often have

⁴⁵ Munson 1993: 106.

heterodox doctrines which involve incorporations from sub-Saharan Africa – such as the Hamadsha, the Guinawa or the Isawa – have retained a significant hold, particularly in the poorer areas of major cities.⁴⁶

Similarly, rural religious observance is still permeated by maraboutism, with the dominant theme of festivities still revolving around the various *mwasim* (festivals) of local *mrabtin*, usually held on the *mawlid* (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad), in addition to the established Islamic canonical feasts. The *baraka* of the *murabit* is invoked as a cure for illness, particularly psychological problems, as a cure for sterility and for talismanic purposes. Similar practices occur with natural objects associated with the *murabit*, such as trees and rocks. Rural religious practice is also marked by a belief in *jinn* (spirits) which are credited with supernatural and often malign powers. Indeed, belief in the presence and power of *jinn* is not confined to the rural world and the characteristics they demonstrate often owe much to cultural borrowings from sub-Saharan Africa – as is demonstrated by one of the most famous and pervasive of them, Aisha Kandisha.

Various apparently pre-Islamic practices still continue within the context of modern Islamic behaviour, particularly in Morocco. The most important of these is the Bou Jaloud or Bilmaun tradition, found mainly in mountain regions. This involves a burlesque performed after the major sacrifice at the *Id al-Adha*, the feast that marks the Muslim New Year, and seems to relate to Hellenic Bacchus rites.⁴⁷ Finally, in what appears to be an atavistic throwback to the classical world of Islam, much folk medical practice seems to bear a distant relationship to the tradition of *tibb al-Nabi* (the medicine of the Prophet, created as a deliberate attempt to counter the popularity of Galenic medicine in medieval Islamic time).

Yet this is not a static world and, as mentioned above, it faces constant threat from two directions both emanating from the urban environment and often brought back to the countryside by educated youth as well as by migrants; the orthodoxy of scripturalist Islam which is rendered accessible to an ever greater audience through urbanization, education and the media – especially television and radio – and, increasingly today, Islamic radicalism. Islamic radicalism in North Africa derives from common roots in the Ikhwan Muslimun (Muslim Brotherhood) movement which was created by Hasan al-Banna in 1928.⁴⁸ Its direct antecedents, however, are more recent, for they derive from the

⁴⁶ An excellent insight into this process is provided by Vincent Crapanzano's study of the Hamadsha (Crapanzano 1973).

⁴⁷ This is not the view of all commentators, although it is the generally accepted explanation. For a contrary approach, see Hammoudi 1988.

⁴⁸ Esposito 1987: 131.

writings of Sayyid Qutb who led the movement after Hasan al-Banna's death until his own execution in 1966, and from the work of Mawlana A.A. Mawdudi, the intellectual force behind the Jamaat-i-Islami movement in Pakistan.⁴⁹

In essence, the ideology of the Islamic revivalist movements seeks to reconstruct Muslim society in political terms in conformity with Islamic precepts. It differs from the reformist tradition in that it is not specifically seeking an indigenous Islamic authentication for the modernizing project introduced into the region by the colonial experience. It is, rather, concerned with monopolizing and legitimizing the political process through a very specific interpretation of Islam which, although revivalist doctrine claims it to be a recovery of Islam's political role, is in reality a radical doctrinal modernization of the social and political implications of Islam.

Its original sources are Kharijism, with its egalitarianism, its absolute commitment to divine sovereignty over temporal affairs and explicit emphasis on redemption by faith (*din*); and the writings of the mediaeval Syrian jurist, Ibn Taymiyya, who emphasized the concept of *tawhid* (the unity of God) and the predominance of divine law (*sharia*) over state (*dawla*) and society (*duniya*). Mawdudi contributed the concept of *jahiliyya* (state of ignorance) as a description of the non-Muslim or corrupt Muslim world which had to be transformed by *jihad* (striving; holy war). It was this aspect that Sayyid Qutb emphasized, putting forward a political programme based on *tawhid*, *jihad* and *takfir* – the concept of migration, in the sense that the true Muslim must avoid and combat the corruption of *jahiliyya* (in the modern context, wilful ignorance) and construct a new moral and social world from within.⁵⁰

Although these objectives are often voiced as an attempt to “return” to the purity of early Islamic society, as experienced under the four *rashidun* (rightly-guided) *khalifas* (caliphs); in reality they represent a new synthesis of Islam in a political mould. The social background is also new in the sense that the dominant social groups actively involved in the Islamist movements tend to come from amongst students, young professionals, workers and migrant groups – all groups which are the result of modernization, rather than from a traditional base of Islamic piety.⁵¹ Since the new revivalist doctrines are universalist and exclusive, they live uncomfortably with the proponents of the scripturalist urban Islam of the *ulama* and totally reject the mystical Islam of the *tariqas*⁵² or the populist Islam of the *murabits*.

⁴⁹ Esposito 1987: 133-51.

⁵⁰ Ayyubi 1991: 125-45.

⁵¹ Ayyubi 1991: 164; Munson 1988: 95-104; Salem 1988: 159-60.

⁵² It must be borne in mind, however, that many of the major *tariqas* do not involve

The revivalist movements in the Maghrib also demonstrate more specific characteristics that arise from national experiences. They therefore need to be discussed in isolation although their representatives would argue that they generally form part of a global movement of Islamic revivalism that extends throughout the Islamic world. Their features reflect both the colonial and post-colonial experience and it is this factor which distinguishes one movement from the other, despite the stated similarity of their objectives.

Tunisia

The Islamic movements in Tunisia date back to 1970, when a group of young scholars at the Zaytuna mosque-university, led by Shaykh Abd al-Fattah Muru, began a discussion circle on the role of Islam in contemporary Tunisia. They were soon joined by a philosopher who had taught in Syria, Rashid al-Ghannushi, and from this small circle an Islamist political movement was created, the *Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami* (the Islamic Tendency Movement). Although the movement, which was formally announced in 1981, seeks to create an Islamic state in Tunisia and, to that extent, forms part of the dominant Sunni revivalist trend described above, it expressly seeks to do this through the ballot box. Splinter groups associated with it have been involved in violence, but have always been denounced by the leadership.

Despite this, it has been rejected by the Tunisian government, which has never allowed it to participate in the political process. With the collapse of the Bourguiba regime in November 1987, the movement sought legal recognition from the new Ben Ali regime by trying to bring its political programme into line with legal requirements by purging it of all formal reference to Islam. It also changed its name to the *Hizb Nahda* (the Renaissance Party). Government hostility towards it has continued, however, and after repression in the early 1990s the leadership has split, with Rashid Ghannushi going into exile while Shaykh Abd al-Fattah Muru has tried to found a new, legal Islamic party.

The *Hizb Nahda* is undoubtedly the dominant Islamic movement in Tunisia. There are, however, two other movements as well. The first is the *Harakat al-Islami* (the Islamic Progressive Movement) which is better known as the 15-21 Movement – the title refers to the fifteenth Islamic century and the twenty-first Christian century – which is the name of its journal. It stems from the same discussion circle at the Zaytuna as the *Hizb Nahda*, but seeks to marry Marxist ideology with Islamist doctrine. It accepts the concept of politically pluralist systems

practices that are heterodox in the sense of being part of *jahiliyya* as far as the revivalists are concerned. They are not, therefore, by definition excluded from the Islamist discourse.

and, to that extent, is quite unlike the majority of Islamist movements operating in the Maghrib. The second is the shadowy Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (the Islamic Liberation Party) which derives from the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East and which seeks the violent overthrow of *jahiliyya* and its replacement by a government based on the *rashidun* caliphate. It has had some success during the 1980s in infiltrating the Tunisian armed forces but now seems to have been eliminated.

Morocco

The revivalist movements in Morocco face difficulties which are specific and unique to Morocco. They are encapsulated in the institution of the monarchy. The Moroccan monarch is not just the possessor of power (*sultah*), he is also *Amir al-Muminin* (Commander of the Faithful) and *khalifa* (caliph) and thus the embodiment of a sacred monarch.⁵³ As a *sharif*, he also enjoys *baraka* and thus controls the politico-religious field. Islamic revivalists in Morocco must, therefore, either accept the institution of the monarchy and seek reform of the temporal realm – in which they may touch upon the royal prerogative – or accept that their ideology is a direct attack on the monarchy itself as part of *jahiliyya* – and thus place themselves beyond the legal pale. In addition, many social strata in Morocco's complex society accept willingly or reluctantly the Royal Place's religious role and thus dramatically reduce the political field of action open to Islamism. Only those groups which are or perceive themselves to be disadvantaged – the urban poor, students and the unemployed – provide a ready support base for Islamist ideals.

As a result, Islamist movements in Morocco are small and fragmented. The major group, al-Adl wa'l-Ahsan (Justice and Charity), is focused around the figure of the veteran Islamist campaigner, Abd al-Salam Yasin, a former schools inspector who came to prominence in 1974 when he wrote an open letter, entitled "Al-Islam aw al-Tufan" (Islam or the deluge), to the king condemning the social and political scene in Morocco. Its doctrinal content corresponded closely with the ideas of the Ikhwan al-Muslimun but also reflects the traditional admonitions of the Moroccan *ulama* towards their sovereign to return to the path of Islam in order to ensure national and personal salvation.⁵⁴ His group of supporters, which is centred around Yasin's place of residence, Salé, continues to be small and to have little contact with other, similar groups.

Recently, the Royal Place has, as a counter-weight to Islamist groups, encouraged the re-emergence of Islamic reformist groups based on

⁵³ Munson 1993: 35-43.

⁵⁴ See Munson 1993.

Salafiyyism. It has even appointed a coordinator for this purpose: Ahmad Khattab. The most important of these groups, which is granted wide access to the media in Morocco, is the Harakat al-Islah wa'l-Tajdid (Movement for Reform and Renewal), which is represented by Abd al-Ilah bin Kiran who, interestingly enough, had been close to Islamic radical extremists in the 1980s. There are also other, local, groups which fit into either the Salafiyyist tradition or into the traditional pattern of religious admonition to the sultanate. Typical of these has been the Sunni movement with which Faqih al-Zamzami of Tangier has been associated and which fits into the broad stream of Islamic piety within Morocco, rather than within the Islamist currents of the region. Bridging the gap between the traditionalist, Salafiyyist and moderate radicalist movements in Morocco are traditional institutions which have sought to adjust to the modern world, such as the Bushishi *tariqa*, which demonstrate the innate flexibility of established Islamic institutions, quite apart from the Islamic revivalist movements, in adjusting to modern circumstances. Indeed, even the political parties, particularly the Hizb Istiqlal – which is the successor to Morocco's national liberation movement – have tried to capitalize on this trend.

There is also a violent and clandestine fringe to Morocco's Islamist movements. This is typified by al-Shabiba al-Islamiyya (Islamic Youth), founded by Abd al-Karim Muti in the 1970s. The founder fled Morocco in 1975 after being implicated in the murder of a prominent Marxist intellectual, Umar bin Jillun, and has since been resident in Europe, although he is also alleged to have taken part in the Grand Mosque attack in Jiddah in 1979. The movement, which has now fragmented, is dedicated to the violent overthrow of the political system in Morocco, particularly of the monarchy. One of the fractions is the Mujahidin, led by Abd al-Allah Naamani, although little is known of its activities and doctrines. This violent fringe has little influence since it has either been effectively repressed or co-opted by the Moroccan government – as the example of Abd al-Ilah bin Kiran demonstrates.

Algeria

The Islamist movements of Algeria are currently the most complex and most important in the Maghrib. Their complexity arises in large measure from the way in which Algeria achieved independence and their significance is due quite simply to their potential role in government. Unlike the movements in Morocco and Tunisia which basically relate directly in doctrinal terms to the wider Islamist movements of the region, the major movements in Algeria are, in some respects, closer to their secular political rivals in Algeria, particularly to the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) which organised the war of independence against France

between 1954 and 1962 and which became the single official political party in Algeria thereafter. They do, however, stem from the tradition of Islamic reformism of the 1930s which was founded by Abd al-Hamid bin Badis.

In the immediate aftermath of independence, the religious leadership in Algeria created an association called al-Qiyam (Values) which sought to continue the Salafiyyist tradition. However, under the Boumedienne regime, this was suppressed, while the state exerted control over national religious matters through the ministry of religious affairs. A clandestine movement, the Ahl al-Dawa (the people of the [Islamic] Call), which was to involve most of the Islamist leaders who appeared later on, developed, despite official disapproval and discrimination. It was only after President Boumedienne's death in 1978 that official controls began to be eased, in conjunction with an extension of the Arabization campaign.⁵⁵ In the wake of the Berberist riots of April 1980, the government also began to manipulate the nascent Islamist movement as a counterweight. At the same time, that movement, which was essentially reformist, although there were links with the Muslim Brotherhood as a result of the large numbers of Egyptian teachers brought in as part of the Arabization of education, began to champion the growing injustices faced by the population at large, particularly in major urban centres.

By the end of the 1980s, there was a significant Islamist movement-in-embryo, based around three figures: two of them – Shaykh Abd al-Latif Sultani and Shaykh Ahmad Sahnun – part of the old Salafiyyist tradition and the third – Dr Abbassi Madani – explicitly seeking an Islamist political solution. He was soon joined by a radical young preacher from the Bab el-Oued district of Algiers, Ali Bel Hadj. Interestingly enough, Abbassi Madani had originally been an active member of the FLN during the war for independence and had turned to Islamic revivalism as he saw the hopes of the Algerian revolution – for social justice and egalitarianism – betrayed. In this respect, he was similar to another figure who took a more radical approach, Mustafa Buyali. In the mid-1980s, Buyali, who had also been an FLN militant, had adopted a view similar to that of the more extreme supporters of Sayyid Qutb

⁵⁵ Even after independence, the French language continued to dominate in administration, commercial and professional life in Algeria. As a result, a campaign began in the later 1970s, becoming more intense in the early 1980s under the Chadli Ben Jedid regime, to Arabize government affairs. One purpose of the campaign was to encourage the Arabization of education and another was to counter the discrimination which those educated in Arabic suffered from. As part of this process, the government also tolerated more explicit expressions of Islamic reformism. Algeria's minority Berber population and significant portions of the Francophone population which spoke the local Arabic dialect but which had no access to modern literary Arabic, many of whose members were also secularists, objected to the process and the 1980s were marked by an intensifying linguistic-cultural confrontation which also had religious overtones.

in Egypt and, with a few supporters, had retreated from *jahiliyya* to wage a guerilla campaign against the Algerian state. He was killed in 1987 and his group scattered, but it was to re-emerge later on.

Although Islamist elements were identified in the 1986 Constantine riots and were certainly active in the latter stages of the country-wide October 1988 riots, it was only after March 1989 that the Islamist movement really sprung into prominence. In that month, in response to the new electoral law, the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS – Islamic Salvation Front) was created by Abbassi Madani and Ali Bel Hadj. The new Islamist party was extraordinary for several reasons. It was explicitly Islamist, seeking to create an Islamic state in Algeria, yet it was controlled by one person who seemed to be more concerned with re-creating the FLN in Islamist guise (Madani), with the more explicit Salafiyyist, Bel Hadj, taking a subordinate role. It explicitly contravened the basic principles of the electoral law which, as in Tunisia, forbade political platforms based expressly on language or religion – and, indeed, seems to have been authorized by the Chadli regime specifically to counter the FLN by competing with it for popular support. And, most strikingly, it lacked any support from the great figures of the Islamist movements in Algeria whose pedigrees stretched right back to Bin Badis and the al-Qiyam movement.

The FIS, moreover, was not really a political party, for it consisted of an amalgam of different groups with very different objectives where individuals could participate in more than one group or move between them over different issues. Moderates, for example, sought an accommodation with the established government and participation in it. The extremists, some of whom had been in the Buyali group, intended to replace it. The Salafiyyists – which included the original leadership – sought reform. In the case of some reformists, such as the Djezaara Group, the objective was a revival, in a purified Islamic form, of the old concept of the Algerian nation which had been the rallying cry of the “historic” FLN before independence, and the concepts of economic sovereignty popularized by the Boumedienne regime. Finally there were the “Afghanistes”, extremists, some of whom had participated with the Mujahidin in Afghanistan and who were the spiritual successors to Mustafa Buyali.

Despite its heterogeneity, the FIS soon came to represent the massive wave of resentment and anger that the mass of Algerians felt over their economic plight – caused both by government mismanagement and by the 1986 Saudi-inspired oil price collapse. Not only did the movement capture control of over 800 municipalities in June 1990 and gain a majority in the first round of the legislative elections in December 1991, but it has maintained its popular appeal despite being banned

and seeing its leadership imprisoned by the new military-backed authorities. At the same time, it has now lost control of what is happening in Algeria, as extremists in the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA – Armed Islamic Group) in the Algérois – which is believed to be heavily infiltrated by the security forces – and Armée Islamique du Salut (AJS – Armed Islamic Movement) – created by former members of the Buyali group within the FIS – in the Constantinois, the Oranais and the Chef Valley, take over, occupying large tracts of the hinterland and denying access to both government and FIS representatives. Nonetheless, once dialogue begins, it will be with the FIS leadership or with their replacements from the ranks of the MIA that the Algerian government will have to deal. The other Islamist movements – Shaykh Abd Allah Djaballah's Harakat al-Nahda al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Renaissance Movement), Shaykh Mafud Nahnah's al-Harakat li-Mujtama al-Islami (Hamas – Movement for an Islamic Society) and the veteran Shaykh Ahmad Sahnoun's Rabitah al-Dawa al-Islamiyya (League of the Islamic Call) – have all been sidelined by the general popularity still accorded to the FIS. It must be said, however, that there is still little evidence of how the real political programme of the FIS would differ from that of the old FLN. Nor is it clear that the movement can go beyond articulating popular anger and discontent.

The future for Islam in the Maghrib

The advent of Islamic reformism and of Islamic revivalism has caused a dislocation in the integrated structure of Islam which had grown up in the Maghrib before the colonial period, separating out the three pillars of Islam there in a rigid and unchangeable pattern. Populist and mystical Islam has been discredited and the scripturalist tradition has been reworked in a global radical form. The exploitation of Islam for populist political purposes that marked the early Islamic centuries in the Maghrib has only partly been recaptured by this process. The integration of Islam into the socio-cultural corpus of the Maghrib, as happened with the Almoravids and the Almohades, has not been repeated. The maraboutic tradition, which used to be an integral element of the Islamic synthesis,⁵⁶ has now been marginalized.

Yet it is precisely because Islam in the Maghrib has been worked into the socio-political fabric over the centuries that Maghribi Islam – that amalgam which stretches from urban scripturalism through the mysticism of the *tariqas* to the popular accessibility of the potentially heterodox *murabit* tradition – continues to display an irrepressible vitality. Although Islamic radicalism provides a ready rallying point for con-

⁵⁶ Munson 1993: 113-14.

fronting the incompetence and repressiveness of government, there seems little readiness to abandon the basic fabric of popular belief. The real question is to what extent the continuing and often painful process of modernization of Maghribi society will generate a progressive secularization and transfer of Islamic observance from the public to the private sphere. Inevitable though that may seem to be, the vitality of Maghribi Islam may, nonetheless, ensure that it survives as an essential component of societal definition.

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ISLAM AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SAHELIAN AFRICA

Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im

As used in this book, the term "African Islam" refers to the "contextualized" or "localized" forms of Islam, usually associated with Sufi orientations. African Islam is often perceived to be culturally and religiously flexible and accommodating. The term "Islam in Africa" refers to so-called fundamentalist or Islamist forms of Islam seeking to "purify" the religion not only from Western influences but also from indigenous African ideas and practices. These forms conceive of Islam as a universal ideology, a total way of life, and work for the establishment of theocracies or Islamic states based on Islamic law.

I accept the underlying premise of this terminology, and will adopt it here, subject to the following clarifications. First, the term "African Islam" should neither be taken to mean that its subject-matter is monolithic or uniform nor to imply a value judgement on the Islamic validity or authenticity of the wide variety of conceptions and practices covered by this term. On the contrary, not only do I take diversity of conceptions and practice as inherent to all religions, including Islam, but I also wish to question the premise and assumptions of "evaluating" the Islamicity of the beliefs and practice of any people.

When examined closely and in detail, any criteria for evaluating the Islamicity of one society will be found to be conditioned by the cultural, political and other factors affecting the norms and practices of the society from whose model those criteria are drawn. It would therefore be extremely difficult not only to envisage purely Islamic criteria of evaluation, but also to apply them meaningfully.

The second clarification is that none of the terms used to describe the highly diverse and complex forms of Islamism underlying "Islam in Africa" is completely satisfactory, whether in European languages or in Arabic.¹ The term "fundamentalism", for example, is often objected to in relation to an Islamic phenomenon because of its foreign (American) origins. I would also add that this term is inappropriate because the connotation of assertion of the fundamentals of the faith is claimed by

¹ Hodgkin 1990: 74.

Muslims who do not accept the interpretations, objectives and methods of the so-called fundamentalist. "Islamism" may also be objectionable in that it implies an Islamic legitimacy which is equally claimed by non-fundamentalist Muslims. Objections can probably be raised to other commonly used terms.

In using the term Islamist (Islamism), I would emphasize that this conception not only identifies Islam with *sharia*,² but also actively seeks to transform the state and society to bring them into conformity with that model. As indicated in the last section of this paper, I would distinguish *sharia* from possible modern conceptions of Islam and reformulations of its normative system in ways which may be significantly different from earlier conceptions and formulations.

As defined here, the basic distinction between African Islam and Islam in Africa is in their perceptions of Islam, and in the ways they seek to implement those different conceptions. For my purposes here, I am assuming that the Sufi orientation of African Islam tends to be self-critical, flexible, inclusive and pragmatic. In contrast, the modern Islamism in Africa is inclined to be self-righteous, rigid, exclusive and doctrinaire. Space does not permit detailed discussion and substantiation of this assumption, but it should be emphasized that these terms are used here to indicate opposite poles of "theoretical types" of Islamic discourse for the purposes of analysis.

In practice, one will find that there is a wide-ranging continuum of opinion and overlap between the various positions, in addition to the usual discrepancy between theory and practice. Sufis may in fact express a view similar to that of Islamists on fundamental principles of *sharia*, if only for fear of confusing or alienating their own constituencies.³ Apparently Islamist individuals, on the other hand, may be sympathetic to Sufi orientations, or at least less antagonistic than one might expect.

In this paper, I propose to present a theoretical framework for analyzing the relationship between religious/customary norms and practices of Islamic societies of the Sahel region (also known as the Sudanic belt) of sub-Saharan Africa, on the one hand, and international human rights norms, on the other. Without suggesting that the cultures of the Sahel societies are Islamic in an exclusive or particular sense, I am assuming that some conception of Islam constitutes a significant component of those cultures. In taking the present set of human rights norms as a *prima facie* frame of reference here, I am sensitive to issues

² Historical formulations of the normative system of Islam, ranging in subject-matter from ethical, confessional aspects and ritualistic practices to legal principles and rules.

³ This is particularly likely in view of the historical Sufi sensitivity to charges of unorthodoxy. See, for example, Qasim 1989.

of universality and cultural relativity of human rights – to be discussed later in this essay.⁴

The theoretical premise and hypothesis of my analysis can be briefly explained as follows. Societies vary in their conception of the nature and implications of challenges facing them at any given point in time, as well as in their capacity to respond and the nature of that response. The timing and nature of response are also affected by a variety of factors, including the dynamics of internal power relations and external influences. For my purposes here, I would emphasize that the cultural diversity of any human society, and availability of different options within each culture, should make it possible to mobilize existing cultural resources in order to promote a particular objective in a given society, such as the legitimation and effectuation of international human rights norms. Appropriate strategies for such a project must be grounded on a clear understanding of the nature, dynamics and prospects of cultural transformation in the particular society.

When applying this analysis to the Islamic context, one should expect to find differences between and within various parts of the Islamic world in the forms of cultural diversity and perceptions of available options as well as in the nature and dynamics of the process of societal change. This is not to say that insights gained through working with this process in one part of the Islamic world cannot be applied to other parts. I am only emphasizing the need for contextualized analysis and careful comparisons within and between each region.

Generally speaking, the presumed flexibility and accommodation of African Islam, as defined in this chapter, appear to offer good prospects for legitimating and effectuating international human rights standards. On the other hand, the local cultures of the region also share, to varying degrees, some of the human rights problems of other Islamic societies. Moreover, African Islam is not immune from the influence of more inflexible and less accommodating perceptions of Islam prevailing in other parts of the Islamic world. As can be seen from the case of the Sudan today, briefly highlighted below, there is no reason for complacency on the assumption that cultures practising African Islam are either fully consistent with human rights norms at present or that the degree of their conformity with those norms is secure against regression in the future.

Thus, my purpose here is not to discuss Islam in Africa or African Islam as such. Rather, I am concerned with the Islamic *dimension* of some cultures of sub-Saharan Africa in so far as that is relevant to the legitimacy and efficacy of international human rights norms. The present or prospective establishment of an “Islamic state” purporting to imple-

⁴ See, generally, An-Na'im and Deng 1990; and An-Na'im 1992.

ment *sharia* as the primary foundation of its legal system would raise, I maintain, a wide range of fundamental human rights issues. But even where that is neither the case at present, nor a likely prospect in the near future, I would still be concerned with the *cultural* implications of an Islamist orientation of society in general as well as human rights issues arising from partial implementation of *sharia*, say in matters of personal law for Muslims.

It should be noted, however, that space constraints and the limitations of my own training as a lawyer would not permit me to attempt a detailed application of the proposed theoretical framework of analysis to specific local cultures of the Sahel. All I hope to achieve in this paper is to explain and illustrate my proposal in ways which might persuade specialized scholars to consider applying it in their work on the region.

Islam and local culture in Sahelian Africa

There is wide diversity in the timing, means and processes of the initial Islamization of various parts of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in the dynamics and consequences of subsequent assimilation and transformation of the societies of the region.⁵ Those initial stages are generally believed to have been characterized by co-existence and mutual accommodation between Islam and Traditional African Religions. The process of conversion and cultural transformation was very gradual, usually working through several generations, in either incorporating or accommodating Islamic institutions. While the customary framework of African societies was initially retained intact, there was a gradual change in psychological attitudes toward social institutions, thereby remoulding life in an Islamic direction from within the cultures of the region. In due course, the dualism and parallelism of Traditional African Religions and Islam ended in the prevalence, to varying degrees, of the latter and the transformation of the cultures of the region.⁶

Nevertheless, it is clear that tensions remained, for example, between the traditional African matrilineal social relations of some societies and the Islamic patrilineal system.⁷ There were also situations where Islamic principles were modified by pre-existing custom. Islamic rules of inheritance were sometimes modified by local custom in order to continue the pre-Islamic practice of denying women shares in the estate of the deceased to which they were entitled under *sharia*. In some cases, the social status and age of the victim were taken into account in determining

⁵ Trimingham 1980, chapters 1 and 2; and Lewis 1980, chapters 1 and 4.

⁶ Trimingham 1980: 43-52.

⁷ Ibid.: 90-1.

the amount of compensation (*diya*) paid for wrongful homicide and bodily harm contrary to *sharia* rules. Gender was also sometimes taken into consideration in assessing compensation in a different way than provided for by *sharia*.⁸ The traditional practice of inheriting the widow of a deceased relative was retained in some communities in a hybrid manner which was neither fully consistent with old forms nor in complete accordance with *sharia* rules of marriage. Slavery was another area where a compromise between pre-existing practice and *sharia* principles was worked out.⁹

Despite the strong Sufi orientation of the region,¹⁰ it seems that the *jihad* movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have succeeded in promoting a new exclusive, legalistic, intolerant and militant Islamic spirit.¹¹ There are subsequent disagreements on the precise nature of the impact and consequences at the time,¹² but it is clear from the ideological orientation of the movements that *jihad* would have sought to "purify" the faith from un-Islamic beliefs and practices. In other words, whatever may have been the exact nature and extent of the actual achievements of those movements at the time, tension and conflict between Islam and Traditional African Religions must have been greatly heightened during that period.

The *jihad* movements are significant for the thesis of this chapter not only as concrete examples of shifting perceptions of Islam in the region, but also as indicating the likely consequences of modern Islamism because of the similarities in the orientation and objectives of the two phenomena. Like the previous *jihad*, modern Islamism is not only committed to an exclusive, legalistic, intolerant and militant conception of Islam as *sharia*, but also actively seeks to transform the state and society to bring them into conformity with that model.

It is also important to note that perceptions of the rationale and achievements of earlier *jihads* will probably be enlisted in support of new political and religious objectives by protagonists on both sides of the issue today and in the near future. That is to say, modern Islamists, on the one hand, would probably recall the religious and "nationalist" objectives of earlier *jihads* in their effort to "purify" society and establish an "Islamic" state. On the other hand, the opponents of modern Islamism in the region would also probably recall the abuses and violence of the *jihad* movements in opposing the new project of the Islamists.

British and French colonialism destroyed the Islamic theocracies of

⁸ Ibid.: 87-8; Lewis 1980: 45-9.

⁹ Trimingham 1980: 92-3.

¹⁰ See, generally, Ibrahim 1989; Cruise O'Brien and Coulon 1988.

¹¹ Trimingham 1980: 15-16.

¹² Smith 1980: 213.

the *jihad* era, as in Northern Nigeria and the Sudan, and stopped overt political manifestations of the movements elsewhere in the region. Nevertheless, and regardless of the real objectives of official policy,¹³ it is clear that the colonial period provided favourable conditions for the numerical expansion of Islam throughout the region.¹⁴ For the purposes of my thesis here, I wish to emphasize that the colonial period merely postponed rather than resolved issues of coexistence and cultural transformation among Islamic and non-Islamic communities in the region. The need for tactical unity in the national struggle for independence seems to have had the effect of further postponement rather than resolution of the issues. It also appears that these issues were either repressed or postponed under various schemes of national secularism during the early post-colonial period.¹⁵

In light of recent developments, I suggest that this long overdue resolution of the issues is about to materialize, and that the form and manner it will take in the various countries of the Sahel are likely to have far-reaching consequences to national politics in general, and to human rights in particular. But why and in what sense should international human rights norms be a frame of reference for the resolution of issues of coexistence and cultural transformation in the region?

Universality of human rights

As indicated earlier, I am not assuming here that traditional African cultures, or their "African Islam", were fully consistent with the normative premise of the present international standards of human rights.¹⁶ In fact, those cultures and their perceptions and practice of Islam clearly had serious human rights problems when *judged by modern standards*, for example, on the question of slavery or the rights of women. In relation to the thesis of this chapter in particular, there is also the risk of regression in popular acceptance of human rights norms through the spread of counter religious or ideological concepts and practices in the region. However, like other cultures and religions, traditional African cultures and their African Islam are changing from within as well as in response to external influence.

In this section, I will briefly clarify the concept and rationale of the

¹³ The impact of the colonial administration, as well as the reactions of Muslims, were neither always predictable nor consistent throughout the period, even within the same area. Ubah 1991: 133-48; Robinson 1991: 149-71.

¹⁴ Lewis 1980: 76-83.

¹⁵ Hunwick 1992.

¹⁶ On issues of the compatibility of traditional African cultures and international human rights, see Howard 1990; Silk 1990.

universality of human rights in general as a frame of reference for exploring the relationship between that concept and its implications, on the one hand, and the two models of "African Islam" and "Islam in Africa", on the other. The thrust of my argument here is that the prospects of these models in the Sahel region will clearly affect the legitimacy and efficacy of human rights in the future.

The universality of human rights means that these rights are due to every human being by virtue of his or her humanity, without distinction on grounds of race, gender, religion, language or national origin. In my view, this concept is fully justified by the principle of reciprocity (the Golden Rule) as the universal moral and political foundation of human behaviour. That is to say, all human beings are morally obliged to concede to others those rights which they claim for themselves. Failure to do so would result in political retaliation by those whose reciprocal human rights are denied. However, the obvious moral validity and political utility of the principle of reciprocity does not seem to have been fully translated into consistent and systematic commitment and action on the full range of international human rights norms.

In addition to all the obvious practical problems of enforcement and implementation, there are certain tensions, for example, between liberal emphasis on individual civil and political rights and Marxist and Third World concern with economic, social and cultural rights and with collective rights. Some would add that there are more profound underlying conceptual difficulties about the notion of universality of human rights: what they mean, who is entitled to them and how?¹⁷ Others would argue, however, that expressing such concerns plays into the hands of authoritarian governments who wish to repudiate the universality of human rights in an attempt to justify their own repressive policies.

While fully committed to the universality of human rights as a matter of principle, I do not believe that its present global acceptance can be taken for granted.¹⁸ However, instead of rejecting all doubts and concerns as pretexts to justify violations, I propose a methodology for realizing universality through the enhancement of the cultural legitimacy of international human rights norms in various cultures. This can be done, I suggest, through the processes of internal discourse and cross-cultural dialogue to broaden and deepen global overlapping consensus on the moral and political foundations of universality in this regard.¹⁹

¹⁷ Howard 1992; McDonald 1992.

¹⁸ Eisenstadt 1992; Gellner 1992. Cf. accompanying comments on these two chapters at 105-12 and 129-34 of Eide and Hagtvet 1992.

¹⁹ An-Na'im 1990a; An-Na'im 1992b; Lindholm 1992. The concept of overlapping consensus is similar to that proposed by John Rawls for social justice, Rawls 1987.

This suggested methodology is premised on the following three propositions:

1. Given the organic relationship between culture and human behaviour, any system of human rights standards is more likely to be observed in practice if its norms are perceived by the people concerned as valid and legitimate in terms of their own culture. That is to say, the more human rights norms are accepted and internalized by a particular population as an integral part of their local culture, the more that population will articulate and implement those norms in daily practice, including action to ensure enforcement in case of violation of those norms.
2. Since human cultures are neither monolithic nor static, choices are constantly being made and changed by the population in question about the meaning and implications of the norms and institutions of their culture. While certain interpretations of culture may prevail at a given point in time, other interpretations do exist and can prevail at other times.
3. This cultural transformation occurs through various processes of adjustment and mediation of competing interests in society, as determined by the dynamics of internal power relations (internal discourse) influenced by external factors and forces (cross-cultural dialogue).

Internal discourse should play the primary role in the process of cultural transformation because, in contesting the validity of prevailing interpretations of the culture in question and presenting an alternative view, it can appeal to the same sources or criteria of legitimacy accepted by the people concerned. Such internal discourse can be supported by cross-cultural dialogue which reflects the experiences of other internal discourses in several ways. For example, the very fact that internal discourse is taking place in one culture will encourage others to engage in similar discourse in their respective cultures. Outsiders who engage in discourse within their own culture can also defend the right of others to engage in discourse within other cultures without being accused of seeking to change those cultures to fit their own since they are critical of their own culture as well. Moreover, cross-cultural dialogue can be used to exchange experiences and strategies of internal discourse between various cultures, or to promote agreement on underlying moral, philosophical and other foundations of universality.

In this way, it should be possible to mobilize cultural resources to promote, through such discourse and dialogue, an overlapping consensus on the universality of human rights.²⁰ The objective of this process should be to broaden and deepen agreement over shared principles

²⁰ For examples of the application of this effort in African settings, see Deng 1990 and Wiredu 1990.

(human rights norms) despite differences about the justification of that commitment. In other words, it should be immaterial that some people justify their commitment in particular religious, secular or humanist terms as long as there is agreement over the same human rights norms.

It is true that differences in justification may initially preclude total agreement on the content of that commitment, but I suggest that the same processes of internal discourse and cross-cultural dialogue can be used to progressively expand and refine the scope of agreement. For example, an Islamic view of the principle of reciprocity as a foundation of human rights may be presented as restricting the obligation of reciprocal treatment to other Muslims rather than to humanity at large. This view, I believe, can and should be contested from an internal Islamic point of view, as informed by external cultural and political influence, to broaden perceptions of the "other" to include all non-Muslims.²¹

The precise issues to be resolved through these processes would, of course, vary from one culture or region to another. In each case, the way issues are presented and mediated is conditioned by internal and external political, sociological and economic factors. But I would emphasize in this regard that the way issues and circumstances are presented should also be seen as itself being part of the process. That is to say, one should not accept the formulation of issues or presentation of circumstances as the only valid way of doing so. As indicated earlier, however, although insights gained from one part of the Muslim world, for example, can be useful in applying the proposed methodology in other parts, each situation should be seen in its own context. Thus, while the presentation of the issues should be seen, *and can be contested*, in the context of each region, insights gained from the process in other Islamic regions can be useful and instructive.

Human rights issues in the Islamic context

In this section, I will briefly highlight the main human rights issues and concerns raised by the complete or partial application of *sharia* in order to discuss two possible modes of response (of African Islam and Islam in Africa) in the context of the Islamic Sahel in general. It is necessary to focus on the human rights implications of *sharia* not only because of the actual or potential consequences of its application (whether partially within an "African Islam" situation or more comprehensively under an "Islam in Africa" programme), but also for its cultural influence throughout the region. Recent experience with the application of *sharia* in the Sudan will be reviewed to illustrate and assess the prospects and

²¹ An-Na'im 1990b: 162-5.

implications of these two models of Islam for human rights in the Sahel region. Nevertheless, as I will argue in the next section, there are possibilities for contesting the modern application of *sharia* principles in favour of greater legitimacy and efficacy for human rights norms.

Sharia is based on the interpretation of the Quran and Sunna (traditions of the Prophet), as supplemented by juridical techniques, such as *ijma* (consensus) and *qiyas* (analogy). The Prophet conveyed the Quran and uttered Sunna between 610 and 632. These sources were no doubt interpreted and applied by Muslims from the beginning, but the development of *sharia* as a systematic body of theology and jurisprudence continued throughout the first three centuries of Islam. Thus *sharia* was essentially formulated more than twelve centuries ago.²²

As was the practice of major legal systems in the region at the time, *sharia* sought to secure certain rights for specific groups of people, as classified by religion and gender, rather than to achieve equality in status and rights for all. Thus, there is the basic distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims, with further differences in status and rights within each group. Although there are some differences between various *sharia* schools of thought, they all agree on the premise and implications of this religion and gender classification. The main constitutional and human rights issues raised by this scheme in the context of the modern nation state include the following:²³

1. Non-Muslims do not enjoy full political participation or equality before the law, and are disqualified from holding any public office which involves exercising authority over Muslims. Those who are accepted as believers by *sharia* criteria (mainly Christians and Jews) are allowed freedom to practise their faith and a degree of communal autonomy in conducting their personal or family affairs. But these limited rights are denied to, for example, the adherents of Traditional African Religions, because they are deemed by *sharia* to be non-believers.
2. Muslim women are allowed partial political participation and partial equality before the law under *sharia* in theory, but their ability to exercise those rights is limited by restrictions on their access to public life. Other forms of discrimination against women under *sharia* include inequality in personal law (marriage, divorce and inheritance) and penal law. For example, women victims are awarded less compensation for wrongful homicide and bodily harm.
3. Muslim men in general enjoy the maximum degree of political participation and equality before the law envisaged by *sharia*, but suffer restrictions on their freedom of conscience. Under the *sharia* capital

²² Ibid.: 12-31.

²³ Ibid.: 75-94, 170-9.

offence of apostasy, a Muslim man can be sentenced to death if his views or beliefs are deemed by an official court to deviate from orthodox Islamic doctrine. As illustrated by a recent case from the Sudan, this violation of freedom of conscience through the enforcement of the death penalty for apostasy is far from theoretical.²⁴

4. Although the prohibition of "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment" is not precisely defined,²⁵ this human rights principle is clearly violated by the imposition of Islamic punishments of amputation and flogging on non-Muslims who do not accept the religious rationale of these punishments. Other aspects of *sharia* penal law also violate human rights prohibition of retroactive punishments.²⁶

Underlying these and other specific constitutional and human rights issues is the whole question of peaceful and equal coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims within each country and beyond. There is a fundamental tension, for example, between *sharia* notions of the Muslim *umma* (the exclusive community of Muslims) and national unity among Muslim and non-Muslim citizens of the modern nation state. At the international level, the *sharia* legitimation of the use of force in *jihād* and direct action in furtherance of "Islamic" objectives can hardly be reconciled with the modern principles of equal sovereignty of non-Muslim states and the rule of law in international relations.²⁷

As illustrated by recent experience in the Sudan, these issues and underlying concerns tend to have their most serious and far-reaching consequences under an "Islam in Africa" model which not only identifies Islam with *sharia*, but also actively seeks to transform the state and society to bring them into conformity with its model. The ascendancy of this model in the Sudan since the early 1980s has had most drastic constitutional and human rights consequences.²⁸ Since the 1989 military coup, which brought the National Islamic Front to power in the Sudan, some of the above-noted problematic aspects of *sharia* have become institutionalized and entrenched.

Even where an "Islam in Africa" model is not in full control of a country, however, constitutional and human rights issues can arise through the application of *sharia* personal law. Thus, the few "secularized" Islamic states which ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women have entered reservations regarding Article 16 (saying that they are not bound by

²⁴ An-Na'im 1986. Apostasy is now punishable by death under section 126 of the Sudan Penal Code of 1991.

²⁵ An-Na'im 1992b: 29-37.

²⁶ An-Na'im 1990b: 107-20.

²⁷ Ibid.: 141-51.

²⁸ Ibid.: 125-33.

it) because its requirement of gender equality in personal law is incompatible with *sharia*.²⁹

More serious, in my view, is the negative psychological and cultural influence of *sharia* on the legitimacy of human rights norms in Islamic communities. It is difficult for these norms, and underlying principles of peaceful equal coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims, to command popular respect and compliance when male and female children are socialized into the inferiority of women to men, and of non-Muslims to Muslims. *Sharia* gender and religious stereotypes are also likely to affect the social and political institutions of Islamic societies. In my view, this is one of the main reasons for the failure to settle the civil war and achieve national unity and stability in the Sudan even before the Islamists came to power in 1989.³⁰

Human rights prospects in Sahelian Africa

I would therefore maintain that the prospects of human rights in the region are inversely related to the dominance of *sharia* values and institutions. The more Islam is identified with *sharia* in popular belief and practice, under an "Islam in Africa" model, the less likely will human rights norms be accepted and implemented by the Muslim population at large. Conversely, the prevalence of values and institutions of "African Islam", as defined in this paper, should mean better prospects for human rights. But as indicated earlier, these two models of Islam are theoretical types of the two poles of a wide, overlapping and shifting continuum of opinion and practice. Not only are there elements of one model in the other, but the characterization of each situation might change over time.

Judging by recent developments in the Sudan, Nigeria and elsewhere, it seems that there is an intense struggle over this issue. For example, mounting Christian-Muslim confrontation in Nigerian politics and the rise of Islamist (Wahhabi) influence in Mali can both be seen as manifestations of the competition between African Islam and Islam in Africa.³¹ As illustrated by the case of the Sudan to date, a well-organized and determined Islamist minority can achieve spectacular political success despite the prevalence of African Islam in the Islamic parts of the country as a whole.

Fortunately, in my view, there is more to Islam than *sharia*, both from a conceptual point of view and in the popular perceptions and practice of peoples of the region. As a historically conditioned inter-

²⁹ Cook 1990: 702-6.

³⁰ Warburg 1990: 163-74; An-Na'im 1993.

³¹ Ibrahim 1991; Niezen 1990.

pretation of Islam, *sharia* is not the only possible version of the normative system of Islam. It is conceptually possible to formulate alternative interpretations of Islam which are fully consistent with modern human rights norms.³² Previous and contemporary experiences of peaceful and equal coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims of the Sahel region can also be mobilized to contest *sharia* formulations. In terms of the analysis of this paper, however, the basic question is whether the possibility of alternative Islamic formulations and conducive experience can now be used to influence the direction or orientation of cultural transformation in favour of greater legitimacy and efficacy for human rights norms.

As indicated earlier, I will not attempt to apply the proposed framework of analysis to concrete situations in the region. But it seems to me that the following practical considerations and questions should be taken into account in empirical applications of my proposal:

What is the actual degree of awareness of the issues, and among which strata of society? Are human rights norms seen as responding to popular concerns, or merely as relevant to political and intellectual élites? Can those norms be presented as consistent with local traditional culture? What are the dynamics of internal power relations and forms and possibilities of external influences in relation to the processes of internal discourse and cross-cultural dialogue?

Various factors and considerations may influence the dynamics of the processes of internal discourse and cross-cultural dialogue. Linguistic factors may either hamper or facilitate certain types of discourse within a local community or the country at large. Knowledge of Arabic or European languages might influence the degree and orientation of cross-cultural dialogue, but not necessarily in expected ways. French can be used to communicate with North African Islamists as well as to facilitate liberal or secular influences. On the other hand, the role of Arabic in conveying a Middle Eastern Islamist message may in fact be diminished by negative perceptions of historical African-Arab relations and images.³³

In conclusion, I would emphasize that in considering these types of questions and factors, one should remain open to possibilities of contestation and alternative responses. For example, it has been suggested that Islam might almost be said to have worked towards the greater secularization of some African societies in that its adoption restricted the overall influence of traditional religions on all aspects of life in those societies.³⁴ From this point of view, it may be argued that some

³² An-Na'im 1990b, especially chapter 3.

³³ Ali 1993.

³⁴ Trimingham 1980: 47. To the extent this was true, it did not impact equally and/or in the same manner on all indigenous African societies, which have always been, and

traditional African cultures were more consistent with a theocratic *sharia* model of the state (where religion is the central organizing principle of society and the state) than with secularized justification of human rights norms. On the other hand, it can be argued that the practical consequences of a *sharia* state are inconsistent with the norms and institutions of traditional African societies. The prevalence of one of these different perspectives at a given point in time should be seen as open to contestation and alternative responses rather than final or conclusive.

Thus, the cause of human rights in the Sahel, or anywhere else in the world, can neither be lost nor secured for ever. In each case, the proponents of human rights need to understand, and operate through, the cultural context of their struggle in the knowledge that the context itself is open to constant contestation and reformulation.

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continue to be, characterized by their own distinctive combinations of diversity and pluralism.

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TRANSLATIONS OF THE QURAN INTO SWAHILI, AND CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN EAST AFRICA

Justo Lacunza-Balda

This chapter is an attempt to examine some aspects of contemporary Islamic revival in the context of East Africa, taking as a starting point the translations of the Quran into Swahili. At the outset, it needs to be underlined that, in my view, the use of the term "fundamentalism" is not appropriate to describe present-day trends in East African Islam. Nevertheless, there will be references to "fundamentalism" below. There are three main reasons which lead me to believe that the use of this word can be misleading and ambiguous, unless, of course, one is able to give a definite meaning to the term and explain intelligibly its mechanism and use.

First of all, there is a general tendency nowadays to use the easy label of "fundamentalism" in the description of Muslim attitudes and approaches, particularly when such an outlook is defined as a modern symptom of Islamic political perceptions. Muslim views on political involvement in terms of either understanding or application are far from being uniform and monolithic. To affirm that there is a political dimension to modern perceptions of Islam does not mean that Muslim leaders and scholars have a unified vision about the role of Islam as an inseparable entity of "religion and state" (*din wa dawla*). Islamic revivalism in East Africa does not necessarily mean the establishment of a religious state or the adoption of an Islamic constitution.

Secondly, there are a variety of aspects of resurgent Islam today, such as the Islamic literary production in African and Asian languages. Although Islam provides the necessary ingredients for adopting positions of rigid interpretation of religious texts, there is a marked underlying tendency in the contemporary revival to search for an "Islamic religious freedom" to interpret Islamic doctrines and Quranic injunctions. In this respect there are a variety of unmistakable voices coming from different parts of the Muslim world. The emergence of plurality in the way

Islam should be understood and practised suggests that, on the one hand, traditional Muslim institutions can no longer monopolize the teachings of Islam and, on the other, the reinterpretation outside the official channels is having long-range implications in the contemporary Islamic resurgence.

Thirdly, the numerous translations of the Quran have opened the door to teachings considered deviationist and contrary to orthodox doctrinal principles. The Quran in Arabic will always be the historical and fundamental reference for Muslims, who believe that Arabic is the language of Quranic revelation. But most of the world's Muslim population has no direct access to the original language of the sacred Muslim scriptures, for they are unable to read or understand Arabic. Some would argue that importance must be placed on the memorization of the text. Such a point of view, nevertheless, will leave the issue of "understanding the Quran in order to apply it" clearly underrated. The Quran in translation, therefore, is the only possible solution for those who want to know the meaning of the original text and how it must be applied. It is in this context that any approach to the understanding of Islam in East Africa will seek to establish the importance and direction given to the translations of the Quran into Swahili. Moreover, Muslims have perceived them differently since the translators did not understand the text in the same way and did not aim at the same public. The sacred texts had often been known only to a privileged class of scholars, writers and teachers, who were more or less familiar with Arabic. The translations helped to take away the cultural and linguistic veil behind which they were hidden for most Muslims.

One of the most significant events in the development and consolidation of Islam in East Africa has been the translation (*tafsiri, tarjumi*) of the Quran and provision of commentary (*tafsiri, maelezo*) in Swahili. Three complete translations have been published (1923, 1953 and 1969) and their authors (G. Dale, M.A. Ahmadi and A.A. al-Farsy) have not only translated the Quranic revelation, but have also written lengthy introductions and explanatory notes to the texts. Such a considerable enterprise was undertaken over a period of many years of scholarly work and was carefully brought to completion.

A Christian translates the Quran: Godfrey Dale

The first complete translation, *Tafsiri ya Kurani ya Kiarabu kwa lugha ya Kiswahili*, was made by Canon Godfrey Dale, a Christian missionary who worked for the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA)

in Zanzibar from 1889 to 1925.¹ "In Zanzibar he had made a special study of Muhammadanism and became the Mission's greatest scholar on the subject. He was a great Swahili scholar."² The chief purpose of his translation was to help missionaries, catechists and local Christian teachers employed by the UMCA to read the Quran in Swahili and be able to understand some of its contents in the language they were familiar with.³ The translation was also intended for Muslims, many of whom could read the Arabic text of the Quran without understanding its meaning. There were at the time professional memorizers of the Quran in East Africa, but this did not necessarily mean that Muslim religious leaders with the status of *imam* had memorized the Quranic verses: "Then that *imam* sent some people to go and call a person who was a memorizer of the Quran."⁴ Dale himself believed that Muslim religious education was mainly focused on the ability "to read the Koran right through, often only in this mechanical parrot-like fashion."⁵ Some years later Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly al-Mazrui (1890-1949), one of the most celebrated Muslim scholars and thinkers of East Africa, expressed similar thoughts when he wrote: "What kind of [religious] ignorance is this for a Muslim to pray without knowing the meaning of what he reads in his prayer, or to recite the Quran like a parrot?"⁶

Dale's translation was meant to be a serious contribution in Swahili to the Christians' apologetics against Islam, which at the time was rather unfortunately called Muhammadanism. The German missionary, traveller and philologist J.L. Krapf (1810-81) gives to the Swahili word *silimu* the meaning "to turn Muhammedan" (to become a Muslim).⁷

¹ The full title of Dale's translation is *Tafsiri ya Kurani ya Kiarabu kwa lugha ya Kiswahili pamoja na Dibaji na Maelezo Machache*. The text is introduced by a long prologue (*dibaji*) (pp. i- xv) and offers the following sections: list of names of the Quran chapters (pp. xvii-xx); list of the parts (*juzu*) of the Quran (p. xxi); lists of the order of revelations (*menzil*) in the Quran (p. xxii); the Swahili translation (*tafsiri*) of the Quran without giving the Arabic text (pp. 1-542); explanatory notes (*maelezo*) to the Quranic verses (pp. 543-682); glossary (*fahirisi*) of names and technical terms (pp. 683-6).

² Blood 1962, vol. III: 203. See also Anderson-Norshead 1909: 358.

³ See *Central Africa* 27, 1909: 85-8 and 40, 1923: 140-1; *Muslim World* 14, 1924: 5-9 and 61, 1971: 102-10; Harries 1954: 50.

⁴ *Raha isiyo Karaha* 1897: 5. The anonymous author of this text is using the technical word in Swahili to memorize the Quran, *hifathi*. This verbal noun is not recorded in the latest Swahili dictionary (S.K. Bakhressa, Nairobi 1992), although the author uses the verbal form *hifadhi* (to preserve, to memorize) in reference to the memorization of the Quran and the Bible.

⁵ Dale 1920: 15.

⁶ Al-Amin bin Aly 1944: 22. See also Blood 1957, vol. II: 167 and 251; *Central Africa* 42, 1924: 217.

⁷ Krapf 1882: 338. He also writes about "the Muhammedan Suahilis" under the term *siku* (ibid.) and defines the *mwalimu* (Muslim religious teacher), as "a Muhammedan priest" under the term *nuiza* (to instruct Muslims on Ramadan fasting) (ibid.: 286).

Dale used these terms almost exclusively whenever he spoke of Muslims or wrote about Islam in the context of East Africa, even to the point that he became "an authority on Muhammadanism".⁸ Muslims themselves certainly did not see themselves as "the followers of Muhammad" in spite of the great poetic tradition in Swahili of praising the Prophet of Islam. "It is wrong to call Muslims Muhammadans, that is people of Muhammad's religion."⁹

There are three ways of translating and writing the word "Muslims" in Swahili: *waislamu*, which is the most widely used by Swahili speakers and writers; *waislam*, which is mostly found in written form¹⁰ and *waisilamu*, which has begun to appear recently in Swahili writings.¹¹ Muslims in East Africa have a long-standing tradition of praising Muhammad, particularly at celebrations popularly known as *maulidi* (birth memorial), with the recitation of the classical poetic compositions often called *utenzi* (poems).¹² M.K. el-Mazrui defines the religious meaning of the *maulidi* as "*ukumbusho wa kizazi chake*" (the memorial of his birth) and its main purpose thus: "The purpose of the Prophet's birth memorial (*maulidi*) is to listen to his good fame and his great dedication to the religion of the exalted Islam, so that we may love him, follow his teachings, and clothe ourselves with his good behaviour."¹³

Dale's translation was published without the Arabic text. This aroused instant suspicions in many Muslims who had serious doubts about the accuracy of his translation, although it was later acknowledged by some

⁸ Wilson 1936: 94. See also Dale 1905 and 1928.

⁹ *Ni makosa makuu kuwaita waislamu Mohamadians au Wamuhamadia yaani watu wa dini ya Mohamed*" (Alawi 1957: 10). S. Hino (1988: 116) uses the term "Muhammadan" speaking about *tasbehi* (rosary beads) in the context of Ujiji (Tanzania). N. Ishige (1969: 98), referring to the Arabs in Ujiji affirms that they "speak Swahili and are certainly Mohammedans."

¹⁰ It is used in the new constitution (*katiba*) of Bakwata (Baraza kuu la Waislamu wa Tanzania – Supreme Council of Muslims in Tanzania), published in Dar es Salaam on 5 September 1991 with the title of *Katiba ya Baraza Kuu la Waislamu wa Tanzania*. See also *An-Nuur* Nov. 1991: 5; *An-Nuur* Sept. 1992: 8; *An-Nuur* July 1993: 13; *An-Nuur* Aug. 1993: 1, 3, 6-7.

¹¹ See *Madai ya Haki za Waisilamu Kauli ya Baraza kuu: Jubu la Waisilamu kwa Barua ya Kichungaji ya Askufu Polycarp Pengo*, Dar es Salaam 1993.

¹² The plural is *tenzi*. The *utendi* has eight syllables in the line and is written in stanzas of four lines each. In the northern dialects of the East African coast it is written *utendi* (sing.) and *tendi* (plur.). "A word which is as nearly as possible equivalent to chansons de gestes" (Werner 1920: 25). See also al-Farsy 1966; Karama and Said 1971; Knappert 1967; Mohammed 1970; Komba 1976; Musa 1982.

¹³ "*Ukumbusho wa kizazi cha Mtume (maulidi) ni kusikiza sifa zake njema na utumishi wake mkubwa juu ya dini ya Islam tukufu ili tumpende, tumfuate mafunzo yake, na tujipambe kwa tabia zake*" (Mazrui n.d.: 12).

of the Muslim leaders in Zanzibar. G. Broomfield, who was also a UMCA missionary in Zanzibar, helped his colleague Dale in the preparation of long notes as a complementary guide to the reader. Some years later, in 1928, Dale, whose knowledge of Arabic and Swahili was evident, wrote a concise work about the doctrinal differences between Islam and Christianity. It was entitled *Khabari za dini ya Kiislamu kwa mukhtasari pamoja na maelezo ya ikhtilafu zilizopo kati ya dini ya Kiislamu na dini ya Kikristo* (Summary remarks about the religion of Islam together with an explanation of the existing differences between the religion of Islam and the religion of Christianity). This was a clear attempt to continue the approach Dale's predecessors had followed in the past: first of all, the plan to provide Swahili translations of Christian texts and, secondly, to print religious tracts, destined more specifically for Muslims with the view of attracting them to Christianity.¹⁴ Al-Amin referred to these publications when he wrote: "Christians have composed many books to show to the peoples of East Africa the wickedness of the Islamic religion and its teachings, and have insulted the apostle Muhammad."¹⁵

The issue of Dale's translation of the Quran has been at the centre of contemporary Muslim-Christian polemics, particularly since 1992. The mutual misunderstanding, which at times has taken the form of vociferous accusations, is focused on the meaning and the use of the term *kashfa* (slander, libel, false statement). In May 1992 Tanzania's prime minister, J.S. Malecela, spoke about "*kashfa za kidini*" (religious slander) made through the channels of public gatherings and cassette recordings. Malecela prohibited religious public meetings, known as *mihadhara*, when he spoke at the end of a parliamentary meeting in Dodoma on 5 May 1993.¹⁶ He had in mind particularly the Society of Muslim Preachers in Tanzania (Jumuiya ya Wahubiri wa Kiislamu Tanzania). The main preacher of Juwakita, as it is commonly known, is Ustadh Magezi Shaabani Maranda, who was chosen as head of the Muslim Preachers' Movement in March 1992.¹⁷ Muslims voiced their

¹⁴ Among the publications printed by the SPCK the following can be cited: *Raha* 1897, printed in Swahili using the Arabic script; *Muhammadi* 1898; Murray 1905.

¹⁵ "*Wametunga Wamasihiya vitabu vingi vya kuwaonyesha watu wa Afrika hii ubaya wa dini ya Isilamu na mafundisho yake, na kumtukana Mtume Muhammad*" (Al-Amin bin Aly 1936: 1). He mentions five titles, among them *Tarjuma ya Kur'an* and *Maisha ya Muhammad*, both written by Dale.

¹⁶ *An-Nuur* Nov. 1991: 5.

¹⁷ *Mizani* April 1992. Sh. Magezi Shaaban lives in Kigoma. The most prominent leaders of the Muslim Preachers' Movement are Kawemba Mh. Ali, Alhaji Punji Msekeni, Sh. Swalah Mbonde, Sh. Ismail Mohammed, Khalifa Hamisi Mohammed, Dk. Khamis Swaleh,

total disagreement with the prime minister's ill-reasoned and absurd decision through Shaykh Kassim bin Jumaa Khamis, religious leader of the Mtoro Mosque in Dar es Salaam: "We would like Malecela to inform those concerned before he forbids public meetings and pronounces what appears to be a slander; he should not frighten us Muslims."¹⁸

Some Muslim leaders seem to have a different idea of what *kashfa* might mean and have spelt out what they understand to be its content: "However, if truly the government intends to stop the mutual accusations, we would be delighted to hear of a government order with the mention of the following Christian books which vilify Islam: (1) Father Dale's translation of the Quran . . ."¹⁹ The author of the unsigned article from which this quotation is taken does not document the passages in Dale's translation or in the other works which he claims are offensive to Muslims or disdainfully explain the text of the Quran. There are three possible reasons for this intellectual viewpoint of East African Muslims regarding Dale's translation.

First of all, Dale broke away from the Islamic tradition that the Quran must always be kept in Arabic by translating the Muslim scriptures into Swahili, an African language closely related to Islam. Muslims saw that their Islamic religious space had been culturally and linguistically invaded by a Christian. He could only have translated the Quran for the wrong aim, to unveil its secrets and prove its falsehood. Furthermore, the fact of "unveiling", "uncovering" and "exposing" is the ultimate meaning of the Swahili term *kashfa*, a loan-word from Arabic which has acquired a specific religious meaning today. The Arabic language veiled and covered, so to speak, the text of the Quran for those without knowledge of Arabic, who were opposed to any uncovering or translation. Now they found that the linguistic and cultural veil had been removed. It is worth recalling here that the most famous poem of Swahili literature is called *al-Inkishafi*, literally "The Unveiling",

Sh. Yusuf Bakari Kabamba and Sh. Mohammed Rafik. Ustadh Ngariba Mussa Fundi, one of the founders of the movement, died in 1989.

¹⁸ "Sisi tungependa Ndugu Malecela Kabla hajafanya mihadhara awatie mikononi wale wote wanaohusika na kile kinachoonekana ni Kashafa, sio kututia hofu na kutoogopesha Waislamu" (Mizani 22 May 1992: 1). These words were pronounced in the context of a Friday sermon at the Mtoro Mosque. In his sermon, Sh. Kassim invited prime minister J.S. Malecela to be more specific about the tapes and cassettes he had in mind.

¹⁹ "Lakini kama kweli Serikali nia yake ni kukataa kukashifiana tungefurahe kusikia amri ya serikali ikivitaja vitabu vya Kikristo vinavyo ukashifu Uislamu vifuatavyo: (1) Tafsiri ya kur'an ya Padre Dale" (Mizani 22 May 1992: 3). There are several other books written by Christian authors mentioned besides that of Dale: *Wana wa Ibrahimu*; *Maalimu*; *Namna ya kuzungumza na Mwislamu*; *Uhuru wa wana wa Mungu*; *Dhiki ya kutawaliwa* and *Ukunu*.

written by Sayyid Abdalla bin Ali bin Nasir (d. 1820).²⁰ The bridge between the act of "translating" the Quran and the purpose of "slandering" Islam had apparently been built by a Christian translation of the Quranic text.

Secondly, the wave of Islamic revival brought about principally by Muslim associations in East Africa such as the Muslim Preachers' Movement (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda), the Ansaar Muslim Youth (Kenya), the Tanzanian Council for Quran Reading, Tabliq Muslim Youth (Uganda), the Youth Muslim Association (Kenya, Tanzania), the Islamic Writers' Workshop (Kenya, Tanzania) and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda) has placed the Quran-Bible controversy in the forefront of religious unrest and mutual confrontation. Outside influences, particularly that of the South African preacher and writer A.H. Deedat, are having a direct impact on contemporary verbal clashes between Muslims and Christians in East Africa. There are no better words than those of Deedat himself to understand his message: "Our armour, sword and shield in this battle of Faiths are in the Qur'an, we have been chanting it for centuries to accumulate *sawab* (spiritual blessings) only; but now we must bring them forth into the battle field."²¹ Following in the footsteps of Deedat, Ustadh Ngariba Mussa Fundi (d. 1993), one of the founders of the Muslim Preachers Movement in East Africa, and Kawemba Mohamed Ali wrote a booklet in English entitled *Islam in the Bible*.²² Both preachers were trained by Mwalimu Songoro Marjani Lweno, a famous Ujiji *shaykh*, who was known for his polemical religious views among the East African Muslim leadership.²³ There is a widespread feeling among Muslims in East Africa that Dale's translation is polluted by the bias of the Christian approach to the Quran. Moreover, they believe that the right and accurate translation of the Quran can only come from Muslim scholars. Therefore, Dale's translation has long fuelled Christian-Muslim antagonism and is surfacing today

²⁰ The poem was written in the Kiamu dialect of Swahili. There are three editions of the text: 1) *Al-Inkishafi: The Soul's Awakening* by W. Hichens (1972); *Al-Inkishafi, Catechism of the Soul* (1977); *Ikisiri ya Inkishafi* by Mh. Wa Mlamali (1980).

²¹ Deedat 1986: 242. See also *An-Nuur* Nov. 1991: 5. A.H. Deedat was born in Tadhkeswar, South India, in 1918 and later moved to South Africa, where he directs the Islamic Propagation Centre International in Durban. He is a prolific writer and an international guest preacher. Among his many works, available also in videotape version and translated into numerous languages, can be counted the following: *Is the Bible God's Word?*; *Crucifixion and Crucifixion*; *Christ in Islam*; *Al-Qur'an, the ultimate miracle*. Two of his works have been translated into Swahili: *Mtume Muhammad katika Biblia* (1965) and *Biblia asema nini juu ya Muhammad* (S.A.W.) (1988).

²² It was published in Zanzibar in 1987. Mh. Kawemba has published two booklets in English together with Othman Matata: *The Message of Jesus and Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) in the Bible* (c. 1990) and *The Sons of Abraham* (c. 1990). See also Smith 1988: 106-11.

²³ Mwalimu Songoro Marjani Lweno, *Mtume Muhammad s.a.w. katika Biblia*, undated.

in the context of an Islamic revival with embittered anti-Christian tendencies. In other words, Muslims in East Africa firmly believe that only they hold the right to translate the Quran into Swahili. However, even if we admit this point of view the problem remains unsolved, as there are evident differences in ritual and understanding of the Quran among East African Muslims. Dale's translation has been greatly disliked and, historically speaking, it might well be that it has accentuated both the Muslim-Christian controversy and the emergence of a collective Muslim front to answer the challenge coming from a non-Muslim. This indirectly underlined the debate about the usefulness of translating the text from Arabic into an African language and drew the line of orthodoxy between the Ahmadiyya and Sunni interpretations of the Quran.

The Ahmadiyya translation: Kurani Tukufu

The second translation of the Quran into Swahili was undertaken by Shaykh Mubarak Ahmad Ahmadi and it had as its title *Kurani Tukufu*.²⁴ He began to translate it at Minazini in Tabora on the first day of the month of Ramadan (15 November) 1936.²⁵ Ahmadi was then the head of the mission (*Raiis-ut-Tabliigh*) and leader (*Amiir*) of the Ahmadiyya community in East Africa. Both titles appear under his name in the translation, but he signs the prologue "*Mubashir wa Islam*" (Missionary of Islam). By the end of 1942 the typescript of the translation was ready and was submitted to the Inter-Territorial Language Committee for approval. The Committee commended the translation and suggested certain amendments in the text. Some of the proposed changes were adopted, whereas others were openly refused, because they related to the Arabic language: "We do not agree because the amendments concern Arabic."²⁶

The commentary on the text was being prepared in 1949 and both the translation and the commentary were finally published in 1953. During all that time Ahmadi had been helped by a number of Africans, whose main task was to read the translation in Swahili and to check especially the language. Among the people whose expert linguistic competence proved to be invaluable were Saidi Kambi, a teacher in the Ahmadiyya Muslim School of Tabora, and Kaluta Amri Abedi, a Tan-

²⁴ *Kurani Tukufu*, East Africa Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission (EAAM), Nairobi 1953. Ten thousand copies were printed. It was reprinted in 1971 (5,000) and in 1981 (10,000). The third edition includes a *faharisi* (glossary) (pp. xxi-xxxviii) prepared by Sheikh Mh. Munawar of Rabwah (Pakistan).

²⁵ *Kurani Tukufu*, xvi.

²⁶ "*Hatuyakubali kwa sababu zinazohusiana na lugha ya Kiarabu*" (*Kurani Tukufu*, xvi).

zanian writer, poet and politician from Ujiji. He was appointed chief Ahmadiyya preacher in 1950 and completed his Islamic missionary training (1954-6) in Rabwah (Pakistan). The Ahmadiyya Muslim School in Tabora, founded in 1937, today continues to prepare students from Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire. One of its prominent teachers in the 1980s was Shaykh Yusuf, who spent three years at the Ahmadiyya theological training centre in Lahore (Pakistan).²⁷ Kaluta Amri Abedi (1924-64) was born in Ujiji, where the older generation still remember his poetic flair, his political commitment (he was a member of the central committee of the Tanganyika African National Union and the first African mayor of Dar es Salaam) and his total commitment to the Ahmadiyya cause. The following verses from his *Diwani* are an example of his commitment to the Ahmadiyya Mission:

Believe in Ahmad, the Messenger of the Glorious.
He was born in Kadian, come on, you recognize him.
If you acknowledge him, why have you
not followed him yet?
It is the commandment of the Glorious,
follow this Prophet.²⁸

The *Kurani Tukufu* takes Dale's work into consideration. In the prologue Ahmadi states clearly the reasons for embarking on such a laborious task as translating the Quran into Swahili:

ARABIC LANGUAGE

"The Glorious Quran is written in Arabic and those who do not understand Arabic cannot know the demands and the meaning of the Quran. Without knowing the words of knowledge and wisdom how will they be able to follow them?"²⁹

The context of this quotation referred to other translations of the Quran into English. The accusation was explicitly made in relation to the translations of G. Sale (1734), J.M. Rodwell and E.I. Palmer (1880),

²⁷ Sh. Yusuf, born in Bukoba, was transferred to the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Dar es Salaam in 1988. While in Tabora he often felt challenged by local Sunni Muslim teachers and by the leaders of the local Muslim Brotherhoods.

²⁸ *Ahmadi muamini, Mjumbe wake Jalia
Kazaliwa Kadiani, haya wewe watambua
Kama wakiri kwa nini, bado hujamfatia
Ni amri ya Jalia, Nabii huyu fateni*
(Amri Abedi 1954: 59).

See also Akilimali Snow-White 1965: 4-14; Mnyampala 1965: 14-18.

²⁹ "*Kurani tukufu iko katika Kiarabu, na wasiofahamu Kiarabu hawajui sawasawa matlabu na maana ya Kurani. Na bila kujua maneno ya maarifa na hekima watawezaje kuyafuata?*" (Kurani Tukufu, xviii).

which "are replete [with] mistakes due to their insufficient knowledge of Arabic and Islamic theology."³⁰

SWAHILI LANGUAGE

"It is now your work, my fellow Muslims, to put in front of them this Holy Book which has been explained in Swahili, your beautiful and pleasant language."³¹

It has always been the policy of the Ahmadiyya mission in East Africa to use the Swahili language as a medium of Muslim religious education. This was in clear opposition to certain Muslim leaders on the coast, who underlined the role of Arabic in the transmission of religious knowledge among Muslims, at a time when the memorization of the Quranic text was the key element in Muslim education. In the Ahmadiyya vision of Islam in East Africa, Muslims needed to understand in their own language what they had memorized or learned in Arabic.³²

Ahmadi's reactions to Dale's translation and to publications about Islam written by Christians are unequivocal. He wished to answer Islamic questions of a controversial nature and present the authentic Muslim perspective, which can only be given by a Muslim writer or scholar:

OPPOSITION FROM NON-MUSLIMS

"The opposition which is brought by those who are not Muslims, especially Christians, in the land of East Africa through their magazines and books about a particular verse of the Quran, about the life of the apostle p.b.u.h. or about the teachings of the Quran."³³

DALE DID NOT KNOW ARABIC

"Father Dale wrote a translation of the Quran. But because he had no knowledge of Arabic he was unable to translate it properly in many places. Often he did not understand an Arabic word and took some of the words from the translation in English."³⁴

³⁰ *Why Islam?* 1954: 31.

³¹ "Sasa ni kazi yenu, enyi ndugu zangu Waislamu, kuweka mbele yao Kitabu hiki kitukufu kilichoelezwa kwa lugha yenu nzuri na tamu ya Kiswahili" (*Kurani Tukufu*, xix).

³² See Ahmadi 1937: 1-3; Soofi 1971: 7-15.

³³ "Upinzani unaoletwa na wasiokuwa Waislamu, hasa Wakristo, katika nchi ya Afrika mashariki katika magazeti yao na vitabu vyao juu ya aya fulani za Kurani na juu ya maisha ya Mtume Muhammad s.a.w. au juu ya mafundisho" (*Kurani Tukufu*, xvii).

³⁴ "Padre Godfrey Dale aliandika tafsiri ya Kurani. Lakini kwa sababu yeye hakuwa na maarifa ya Kiarabu alishindwa mahali pengi kuandika tafsiri iliyo sawa. Mara nyingi hakufahamu neno la Kiarabu, na alichukua toka tafsiri ya Kiingereza baadhi ya maneno" (*Kurani Tukufu*, xvii).

Regarding Dale's knowledge and command of Arabic, it is important to remember that he had "two Arabic professorships at Oxford, two at Cambridge and one in London University".³⁵ Moreover, Dale did not use a single English word in his translation.

DALE'S SLANDER AGAINST ISLAM

"The aim of his translation is to contradict and slander the religion of Islam. Thus Father Dale's translation contains a great deal of destruction because of his lack of knowledge and his hostility without limits."³⁶

The issue of *kukashifu* (to slander, to dishonour, to calumniate) in Ahmadi's opinion begins with the assumption that the translation of the Quran done by a non-Muslim, in this case Dale, is from the start biased and prejudiced. The translation is distorted and contains errors. Therefore, the translator of the Quran has aimed directly at undermining Islam. It is very unfortunate, however, that Ahmadi does not substantiate his allegations and provide the necessary references to prove his claims.

Ahmadi's critical remarks on Dale's translation have opened the door to the Muslim and Christian interpretation of each other's sacred texts, an exercise which is often conducive to public controversies, smearing comments and defamatory accusations. The Tanzanian Episcopal Conference (TEC) wrote an open pastoral letter concerning the question of *kashfa za kidini* (religious slanders) entitled *Tamko Rasmi la Mintarafu Kashfa za Kidini*.³⁷ The document underlines five major aspects of the bitter controversy between Christians and some Muslim groups:

THE FACTS

"Kuna madharau kabisa kwa dini ya Kikristu. Mihadhara ya kashfa, kanda za kashfa na baadhi ya Magazeti yanaendelea kutukana."
(There is a deliberate contempt against Christianity. There are public

³⁵ Anderson-Norshead 1909: 359.

³⁶ "Kusudi lote la tafsiri ni kuipinga na kuikashifu dini ya Kiislamu. Hivyo tafsiri ya Padre Dale ina uharibifu mwingi kutokana kutojua kwake, na kadhalika unaotokana na uadui wake uliopitiliza mpaka" (*Kurani Tukufu*, xvii- xviii). A more radical vision regarding Dale's translation is expressed in the following statement: "Hata Qur'ani iliyofasiriwa Padre Dale kukukashifu na kuusingizia Uislamu. Yote aliyoyasema ni matusi tu" – "Even the Quran which was translated by Father Dale slanders Islam and charges against it. All he said was just insults" (*Mizani* 3 April 1992: 3).

³⁷ It was signed by Bishop J. Lebulu, chairman of TEC, broadcast by RTD and published on 28 February 1993. See also *Uhuru* 2 March 1993; *Kiongozi* 16-17 March. A summary of the text in English appeared in *ANB-BIA* (Brussels), no. 232, 15 March 1993: 18, giving the date of publication as 5 March 1993. In this text *kashfa za kidini* is translated as "religious blasphemies".

gatherings, cassette tapes and some newspapers that continue with their derogatory accusations.)

THE HISTORY

“Kwa zaidi ya miaka 30 wananchi wa Tanzania wamejenga hali ya Amani, Upendo, Utulivu na Uelewano kati ya watu bila kujali tofauti za dini, kabila, rangi na jinsia.” (For over 30 years the citizens of Tanzania have built an atmosphere of peace, love, calmness and understanding among themselves without distinctions of religion, tribe, colour and sex.)

THE DANGER

“Lakini hali hii ya kashfa za kidini na ukimya wa serikali inabomoa jitihada hizo zote. Hivyo badala ya amani hali hiyo inajenga mapambano; badala ya upendo, chuki; badala ya utulivu, vurumai na badala ya uelewano, mafarakano.” (But this situation of defamatory religious accusations and the government's silence undermine all those efforts. Therefore, this situation creates confrontation instead of peace; hatred instead of love; anarchy instead of calmness; division instead of understanding.)

THE APOLOGIES

“Tunapenda kutoa pole kwa waumini wote na watu wenye mapenzi mema, kwa matusi, madharau na kashfa tulizozipata mpaka sasa dhidi yetu sisi na Imani yetu ya Kikristu.” (We would like to say sorry to all believers and to people of good will for the insults, scorn and calumnies that we have received until now, ourselves and our Christian faith.)

THE GOVERNMENT

“Tunasihi Serikali yetu ilinde haki hii ya uhuru na heshima ya kidini ya watanzania bila ubaguzi wa wote ule.” (We beseech our government to protect this right of freedom and respect of religion among Tanzanians without any sort of discrimination.)

This pastoral letter comes after a number of years of strained relations between Christians and Muslims. Religion has been taken out of the traditional space of churches and mosques. Bus stations, markets and town squares have been the scene of religious rallies and mass gatherings, where preachers, often with exuberant zeal and little education, have used a public platform for cultivating an atmosphere of resentment and hatred among Muslims and Christians.³⁸

³⁸ See the following articles: “New leadership brings fresh impetus for Islamic changes”,

The President of Tanzania, A.H. Mwinyi, received Christian leaders on 7 March 1993 and a few days later, on 14 March, Muslim and Christian leaders were summoned to the president's official residence. The Muslim delegation was headed by Sheikh Hemed bin Jumaa bin Hemed, the Chief Qadhi, while Christian leaders were led by Archbishop Polycarp Pengo of Dar es Salaam.³⁹ President Mwinyi addressed the issue of Muslim-Christian relations soon after being chosen president of Tanzania in 1985. A collection of five of his major speeches related to Muslims and Christians was published in 1987 under the title *Uhuru wa Kuabudu* (Freedom of Worship).⁴⁰ He underlined two fundamental points: the disunity among Muslims and the threat to freedom of religion. The principal reason for such disunity within the Muslim communities in East Africa is based fundamentally on the interpretation of the Quran and its application. The different types of Muslim leadership in East Africa stem from this. Some are geared towards a propagation of the Islamic faith even among Christians, presenting Islam as the perfect religion and the Quran as the final and complete revealed scripture. Others are centred on the need for a deeper education in the contents of the Islamic faith. This is seen as part of the modern *jihad* (effort) Muslims must show in acquiring the right knowledge and understanding of their religion. Still others are directed towards a political development of Islam and a more realistic participation of Muslims in state and government affairs. However, a common factor in all the different trends, proposals and solutions for Islamic reform in East Africa is the constant and unfailing reference to the Quran in Muslim publications such as *The Message/Ar-Risala* (Kenya), *al-Islam* (Tanzania), *An-Nuur* (Tanzania), *Mizani* (Tanzania), *Safina* (Tanzania), *Sauti ya Bilal* (Tanzania) and *Sauti ya Umma* (published in Tehran). Shaykh Abdullah Nassir, a well-known Muslim scholar in East Africa, writes:

Arabia December 1984: 40; "Muslims in Kenya", *Risalat al-Jihad* (12) 1985: 84-7; "Kenya: Provoking Muslim Agitation", *Impact International* 27 November-10 December 1987: 5; "PC makes peace call to Muslims", *Kenya Times* 19 May, 1988; "Haji urges Muslims to maintain peace", *Daily Nation* 19 May 1988; "Islamic fundamentalism worries Churches", *African Christian* 31 August 1989: 3; "Religious Controversy in Tanzania", *Africa Events* November 1989: 38-9, 53-4.

³⁹ Members of the Muslim delegation were Sh. Kasim bin Juma, Sh. Mh. A. El-Bukhry, Sh. A. Mwilima, Sh. A. Maalim, Sh. S. Kilemile, Sh. S. Khamis, Sh. Mh. Fasi, Sh. O. Matata, Sh. Kh.H. Mohammed, Sh. M.Sh. Maranda, Sh. S. Roch, Sh. H. Mazinge and Sh. Saleh (*Mizani* 13 August 1993). Members of the Christian delegation included Bishop E. Sendoro (Lutheran Church), Archbishop J. Ramadhani (Anglican Church), Fr. M. Kilaini (Secretary General, TEC) and A. Msomba (Secretary General of the Christian Council of Tanzania) (*Family Mirror* April 1993).

⁴⁰ Mwinyi 1987: 7. The speeches were given in Kibha (29 May 1987), Zanzibar (27 June 1987), Dodoma (2 July 1987) and Moshi (21 September 1987).

"The great purpose of the Quran is to offer guidance for every aspect of human life."⁴¹

There is no doubt that Muslims in East Africa believe that the Quran marks the road for individual and social conduct. Nonetheless, the crucial problem is the interpretation of the text and its concrete application in personal and public life. The translation of the Quran into Swahili began to open the door to individual views on the Quranic text, which until then was hidden for most Muslims on account of their unfamiliarity with Arabic. The *Kurani Tukufu* linked many Muslims in East Africa with a different part of the Islamic world, Pakistan. This contributed to the revival of the political theory of Islam and the belief that the sovereignty of God is the only foundation of the social and moral system in society. Islamic political philosophy was propelled in Pakistan by the work and writings of A.A. Mawdudi (1909-79), the avant-garde defender of the Islamic state and the most outspoken critic of the Ahmadiyya. He was invited to write the prologue to Shaykh A.S. al-Farsy's *Qurani Takatifu*, an extremely intelligent and lucid decision by one of the most persistent and dynamic voices of Muslim identity and Islamic resurgence in the contemporary world.

Shaykh A.S. al-Farsy's translation: Qurani Takatifu

The third complete translation of the Quran in Swahili was the work of Shaykh Abdalla Saleh al-Farsy (1912-82). It was published as a complete edition in 1969 and since then four other new editions have been printed.⁴² He was a great contemporary Muslim scholar, writer and poet, a man of extensive knowledge and considerable literary talent. He was born in Malindi Jongeani (Zanzibar) on 12 February 1912 and died in Muscat (Oman) on 8 November 1982. In the biography written by Shaykh Saidi Musa, one of his students and today's most prolific writer in East Africa, it is mentioned that Bibi Zawadi (Fatma) bint Hamad bin Said (1854-1936) was al-Farsy's first Quranic teacher, and it was under her teaching that he received practical training in Quran memorization: "*Sh. Abdalla alikhithimu Qurani kwake kwa muda mfupi.*"⁴³ Al-Farsy himself was grateful towards the Muslim lady teacher who taught him the first steps of the Arabic language and introduced

⁴¹ "Kazi kubwa ya Qur'an ni kutoa mwongozo katika kila kitu cha sehemu ya maisha ya binadamu" ("Mwislamu na Kurani", *Mizani* 22 May 1992: 7).

⁴² *Qurani Takatifu*, The Islamic Foundation, Nairobi 1969. The number of copies printed was 7,000. Four other editions have been printed: 1974 (25,000), 1980 (15,000), 1984 (36,000) and 1987 (20,000). The prologue, written by A.A. Mawdudi (1903-79), has appeared only in the third and fourth editions.

⁴³ Musa 1986: 30.

him to the study of the Quran: "I have studied the Quran with a Kingazija lady teacher, Fatma, Hamad's daughter."⁴⁴

For a while he also studied under the influential guidance of Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly, one of the most prominent figures and eminent scholars of Islamic revival and Muslim education in East Africa.⁴⁵ Al-Farsy was also a student of Shaykh A. Baril Ajzy, a Muslim scholar from al-Azhar University (Cairo), who had come to Zanzibar in 1907 at the invitation of the government to teach Arabic and Quranic studies on the island. The fact that he had studied under an al-Azhar Muslim erudite was to be used by al-Farsy to authenticate the validity and orthodoxy of his translation of the Quran into Swahili and to legitimize his commentary on the Quranic text. The teaching he received goes back to Muhammad through an uninterrupted chain of transmitters, and this is seen as preserving and safeguarding against any misleading falsification or heretical innovation. Al-Farsy gives a list of thirty-two transmitters as his own plan for the reading and study of the Quran.⁴⁶ He followed the path of Muslim scholarship in Zanzibar, especially under Muslim leaders like Shaykh A.M. Mlomry, Shaykh A. Bakathir and Shaykh A. Mkhzomy, and became director of the Muslim Academy from 1952 to 1954. He was later Chief Qadhi (Islamic judge) of Zanzibar from 1960 to 1967. He became Chief Qadhi of Kenya in 1981 and visiting Qadhi of all the district courts in the Coast Region.

Al-Farsy considered imperative the publication of an authentic and orthodox translation of the Quran in Swahili. In his opinion as a Sunni Muslim scholar the deliberate perverseness of the Ahmadiyya *Kurani Tukufu* needed to be brought out by the undisputed correctness of the Sunni *Qurani Takatifu*. The inalienable role and place ascribed by Sunni Muslims to the Prophet of Islam made the Ahmadiyya prophetic claims sound non-scriptural and fallacious to them. Al-Farsy followed the thought of his master and teacher, al-Amin bin Aly, who had attacked the Ahmadiyya openly and had pitilessly employed three terms against them: *udanganyifu* (imposture), *ukafiri* (unbelief) and *upotevu* (destructiveness).⁴⁷ Shortly after Ahmadi's arrival in Mombasa in 1934 al-Amin bin Aly invited him to establish missions in Mombasa, Zanzibar and Lamu if the Ahmadiyya truly wanted open debate about Islam with

⁴⁴ "Na Qur'an nimesoma kwa mwalimu mwanamke wa Kingazija Fatma bint Hamed" (al-Farsy 1976: 1).

⁴⁵ Al-Farsy 1944: 65-6; Musa 1986: 30; Pouwels 1981: 329-45; Lacunza-Balda 1993a.

⁴⁶ Al-Farsy 1944: 1-2; Musa 1986: 31. S. Musa gives three other chains of Quranic transmission for Sh. A.S. al-Farsy. See also *Qurani Takatifu*, V-VI.

⁴⁷ Al-Amin bin Aly n.d.: 40. Al-Amin bin Aly uses the term *Wamirzai* or the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908), their founder.

the coastal Muslim leadership. Otherwise, he saw two alternatives: to convert the Ha and the Maasai to Islam or to bring back to the true religion the Christians of Uganda and those of Kikuyu and Kavirondoland.⁴⁸

Al-Farsy added another term to define the Ahmadiyya: *upotofu* (perverseness). He explained his total disagreement with the translation of *Kurani Tukufu* in twenty points, citing the appropriate verses of the Quran in Arabic and Swahili.⁴⁹ The central argument of al-Farsy's position is focused on Quran 33-40: "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets; and God has full knowledge of all things."⁵⁰

The controversy between Ahmadi and al-Farsy lies in the translation of the Arabic words *khatama al-Nabiyyin* (the Seal of the Prophets) and the interpretation of those words. For al-Farsy the Ahmadiyya translation *Muhuri wa Manabii* (the Seal of the Prophets) is totally wrong and there is only one way of translating the Arabic words into Swahili: *Mwisho wa Mitume* (the End of the Apostles). The problem really lies in the understanding of those words and in the meaning attributed to them. For Sunni Muslims Muhammad is the last of the messengers of God and with him the divine revelation is completed in the Quran. The Ahmadiyya hold that their founder, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, is the Spiritual Reformer, the Promised Messiah and the Mahdi. Such claims, they believe, are conclusively established by the Quran.⁵¹ Both translators, Ahmadi and al-Farsy, have explained at length the meaning of Quran 33-40, which in *Kurani Tukufu* is given as Quran 33-41.

Al-Farsy's charges against the Ahmadiyya errors and misinterpretations did not go unanswered. Shaykh K. Amri Abedi, a leading Ahmadiyya scholar, took up the challenge and formulated in writing his answers to al-Farsy's accusations in a book entitled *Uongofu wa Tafsiri ya Kurani Tukufu na Husuda ya Sh. Ab. Farsy*.⁵² Sh. K. Amri Abedi not only defended the orthodoxy of the *Kurani Tukufu* translation, but

⁴⁸ Al-Amin bin Aly n.d.: 7.

⁴⁹ Al-Farsy 1954.

⁵⁰ "Muhammad si baba wa yoyote katika wanaume wenu, bali yeye ni Mtume wa Mungu na Mwisho wa Mitume, na Mwenyezi Mungu ni Mjuzi wa Kila kitu." This is the Swahili translation of Sh. A.S. al-Farsy. The English translation is that of A.Y. Ali.

⁵¹ See Ahmad, *the Promised Messiah and Mahdi*, Nairobi 1954. The leader of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Association is Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, who was chosen in 1982 with the title of Khalifatul Masih IV. He established the Bilal Fund in 1986 to support the families of Ahmadi martyrs. The titles of *Mahdi*, *Imam* and *Messiah* have been recently claimed by Haji Ashaari Muhammad, leader of Darul Arqam, Malaysia's biggest Islamic movement (*The Straits Times*, Singapore, 18 June 1994; 24 June 1994 and 25 June 1994; *Sunday Times*, Singapore, 26 June 1994).

⁵² Amri Abedi 1957. See also S.S.A. Rizvi 1978: 16-35 and Musa 1986: 69.

also pointed out the jealousy (*husuda*) shown by al-Farsy in his incorrect answers to the Ahmadiyya. The latter resented the way that Sunni Muslim leaders and writers in East Africa hardly considered them as Muslims. In fact neither al-Farsy nor Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly ever used the term *waislamu* (Muslims) when they wrote about the Ahmadiyya or explained their Islam. They rather favoured the words “*Mirzai*” (followers of Mirza) and “*Makadiani*” (people from Qadian). The Ahmadiyya did not fail in their efforts to translate the Quran into other East African languages, Luganda (*Kurani Entukuvu mu Luganda*, 1984) and Kikuyu (*Kuran Theru*, 1988), in spite of the bitter criticism against their Swahili translation.

In 1950 al-Farsy published some chapters of the Quran. He expressed his personal satisfaction at the fact that his Quranic translations from Arabic into Swahili were printed long before the *Kurani Tukufu* of the “*Makadiani*” and denied imitating them blindly in their initiative. He continued to translate the various parts of the Quran and made sure that the Arabic and Swahili texts were printed together.⁵³

The accusations against the Ahmadiyya were not simply based on grounds of Islamic doctrine regarding the prophethood of Muhammad. The fact that such a translation was made under the leadership of Ahmadi, who was not a Muslim of Arab origin and whose mother tongue was not Swahili, cannot be put aside as underlying motifs for producing a new translation of the Quranic text, written and annotated by a Swahili speaker in his native language: “To translate the Quran into our language of the coast . . . he [Sh. A.S. al-Farsy] unveiled it.”⁵⁴

It was not a question of “just putting” the Quran into Swahili, but rather of scholars whose native language was Swahili translating and explaining it adequately in relation to the tenets of Islam. Its authenticity, validity and accuracy needed to be guaranteed firstly by the scholar’s solid Arabic and Swahili and secondly by fidelity to both the Quran and the Sunna. By taking such linguistic and doctrinal precautions, inaccurate and distorted mistranslations of the Quranic data would be truly corrected and erring interpretations overcome.

Al-Farsy followed closely the literary tradition of Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly, who was in fact the first Swahili Muslim scholar to begin, although rather reluctantly, the translation of the Quran into Swahili. Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly, familiar with and immersed in the modernist thought of Muslim reform, was utterly convinced that knowledge of

⁵³ Al-Farsy 1950: 35ff.; 1952.

⁵⁴ “*Kufasiri Qur’ani Kwa lugha yetu ya Pwani. . . akayaweka wazi*” (al-Farsy 1980: 15). These verses were written by M.K. el-Mazrui.

Arabic was irreplaceable the Islamic education of Muslims. Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly's chief arguments for reviving Islam and Arabic were threefold. Firstly, there was the Arabic legacy of the Quran. Secondly, Arabic was the language of Muhammad's recorded tradition. Thirdly, the Hadith collections of Islamic ordinances and statutes were likewise written down and compiled in Arabic. Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly founded two papers: *Sahifa* (25 November 1930) and *al-Islah* (29 February 1932). The first was published in Swahili and only a hundred copies of each number were printed. It lasted sixteen months. The second was written in Swahili and Arabic, and it was published only for twelve months.⁵⁵ According to Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly there was no alternative to learning Arabic: "It is the duty of every Muslim man or woman to learn Arabic."⁵⁶

This would help Muslims to draw their inspiration from the Arabic sources of Islam. The urgent need for renewal and purification of East African Islam advocated by Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly in his speeches and writings compelled him to warn Muslims against the perils of blindly adopting Western cultural values and European secular education and against the black danger (*khatari nyeusi*) brought by people coming from the hinterland to the coast. Muslim leaders were convinced that outside influences constituted a real threat to the life and culture of the coastal towns, not only because of the arrival of other religions, but also due to the loosening of a Swahili identity deeply rooted in Arabo-Islamic history. The following quotations from *Uwongozi* reveal how important it was for the Muslim leadership at the coast to preserve their own cultural legacy and religious identity:

"*Khatari nyeusi . . . nao ni hawa wa bara*" (p. 31) ("The black danger . . . it is those of the hinterland");

"*Mtaona tofauti kubwa iliyo baina yetu na wao*" (p. 32) ("You will see the great difference there is between them and us");

"*Tofauti baina na sisi na Wazungu na Wahindi hivi leo*" (p. 44) ("The difference between us and Europeans and Indians today");

"*Ukiwa Ustaarabu ni kuvaa nguo za Wataarabu, pasi na Ilmu kama yao wala kazi kama zao, basi wratakuwa Washenzi*" (p. 43) ("If civilization – the Arab way – means to wear the clothes of those who do as the Arabs without their knowledge and their work, then they will be barbarians – uncivilized").

A satisfactory and unique remedy to such a syndrome would be to recognize the paramount role played by Islam in the history and civilization of the coast. Western education and Islam were not necessarily in

⁵⁵ Al-Amin bin Aly (1944) in the *kitangulizi* (prologue). This work contains a collection of 28 *Sahifa* numbers.

⁵⁶ "*Kujifunza Kiarabu ni wajibu wa killa Mwislamu mume na mke*" (Al-Amin bin Aly c. 1944: 22). See also el-Mazrui, n.d.: 41.

contradiction, but it was vital that the latter should not be concealed, disguised or tampered with by modern trends of secular education. In spite of the list of proofs and arguments for defending the primacy of the Arabic language, the reality was that most Muslims were ignorant of Arabic or had only a rudimentary knowledge of it. Al-Farsy belonged to the tradition of Muslim scholars who saw the supreme role of Arabic and acknowledged the invaluable legacy of Islam in its original and primary sources. Furthermore, he wrote in Arabic about Islam and was fully aware of the historical significance the Arabic language had in the growth of East African coastal Islam.⁵⁷ However, he clearly went further than those who, like Shaykh al-Amin bin Aly, had been his teachers. Al-Farsy was preoccupied more with the right Islamic education of Muslims using Swahili than with the arduous pursuit of language preservation. Swahili, and not Arabic, was the vehicle of communication in East Africa and the language in which most Muslims felt at ease. This did not mean an implicit denial of the cultural and religious prestige that Arabic continued to have among Muslim communities. Nevertheless, Al-Farsy believed that no matter how important Arabic might be in the understanding of the Quran and Islam it was not absolutely necessary for Muslims in East Africa: "Islam does not want colonialism of religion . . . Arabic is not necessary."⁵⁸

This is not to be understood as an open betrayal of Arabic or as an unequivocal refusal of its cultural role both in East African Islam and in its relation to Swahili. Rather, it can be looked upon as an intellectual move towards greater freedom in the use of Swahili as a legitimate African language for writing about Islam and translating the Quran. East African Muslims were not to be subjugated to Arabic, a language they considered as foreign and imported from elsewhere.

The *Qurani Takatifu* was not welcomed in Sufi-oriented circles, which were greatly influenced by Arab Sharifian Islam. The campaign against *Qurani Takatifu* was led by a prominent *imam* called A.A. Badawiy (Mwenye Baba). He collected the views and remarks of a number of Muslim teachers at the coast and compiled them under the title *Fimbo ya Musa: Maonyesho ya Tafsiri Mpya ya Sheikh A.S Al-Farsy*. The reason for this document was that al-Farsy had refused to meet with Muslim leaders in Lamu and discuss his translation of the Quran with them. Al-Farsy limited himself to writing a letter stating that the people of the Riyadha Mosque and the Ahmadiyya were the only ones who

⁵⁷ S. Musa (1986: 75) mentions four works of Shaykh A.S. al-Farsy written in Arabic and approved by the scholars from al-Azhar.

⁵⁸ "*Uislamu hautaki Istiimari (Ukoloni) wa dini. . . . Si lazima lugha ya Kiarabu*" (al-Farsy 1976: 4-5). See also el-Mazrui 1943: 1, and Lacunza-Balda 1993b: 226-38.

had refused openly to acknowledge his translation of the Quran.⁵⁹

There are two major reasons why the Muslim leadership in Lamu did not accept any translation of the Quran into Swahili. First of all, Arabic had been the vehicle of transmission of knowledge and education. It had a particular status as the language of Quranic revelation and there was an almost instant spiritual communication when the Quran was read and repeated in its original language. The coastal Muslim leadership tried to maintain the use of Arabic as the only religious language for Muslims in East Africa. Secondly, the Sufi-inspired brotherhoods had underlined the mystical and esoteric dimension of the Quran. Translation into Swahili, or into any other language, took away the mystery attached to the Quranic text. The *shaykh* and *mwaliimu* (teacher) relied greatly on their knowledge of Arabic to teach and guide the Muslim community. The Qadiri and Shadili brotherhoods in East Africa had developed a type of mysticism which looked the preservation of Islam as the Arabs had transmitted it. The development of the *maulidi* celebrations has to be seen as a natural consequence of the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad. He was endowed with divine gifts and blessings, now given to the Muslim community through the public readings of the Quran at *maulidi* gatherings. Moreover, the political power and social position of Muslim leaders on the coast was partly based on the monopoly they exercised in relation to the Quran. Ordinary Muslims were unfamiliar with the text of the Quran and could not possibly have the key to its secrets. The guidance of the *mwaliimu* (teacher) was needed to progress spiritually, although many Muslims had learned parts of the Quran by heart and could repeat them in Arabic.

Al-Farsy was seriously concerned with the right understanding of the Quranic text. He thought that the interpretations of Islam offered by the brotherhoods deviated from the path of the Quran and swerved from the teachings of the Sunna. In his view Muslim authority needed to refer constantly to the sources of Islam, that is to God's revelation and to Muhammad's tradition. Al-Farsy aimed at providing Islamic guidance founded on the Quran and at formulating principles based on the Sunna. This would help Muslims to adhere to orthodox Islam, away from any form of Sharifian Islam based on the charismatic leadership of a particular *shaykh* or *sharif*: "It is not necessary to follow a Sheikh or a Sharif."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ This is the first part of an unpublished document polycopied in Mambrui 1390 H. (1970). I have not seen the second part which, according to the compiler, was to be published later. The founder of the Riyadhha Mosque was Habib Salih ibn Alawi, a Comorian of Sharifian descent who arrived in Lamu in 1886. See also Lienhardt 1959: 228-42.

⁶⁰ "*Si lazima afuate Shehe au Sharifu*" (al-Farsy 1976: 5). The term *Shehe* refers to the local Muslim leader who exercises his authority chiefly through religious teaching. But

Translating the Quran into Swahili, so as to have a *Qurani Sahihi* (a correct Quran), was not enough to overcome the growing malaise and general uneasiness caused by the *Kurani Tukufu*. For Muslims in East Africa, Islam was not just a religion linked to the Book, but also a living religion, way of life with visible and varied implications of a political, economic and social order. As a writer, al-Farsy put a great emphasis on Swahili Islamic literature. It could bridge the gap between an Islamic education founded on the memorization of the Quran in Arabic and an Islamic education based on the understanding of the Quran in translation. Moreover, such Islamic literature began to fill the vacuum created by the evident lack of material available in Swahili about Islam. It came as a complementary aid to the Quranic commentary, the Quran being the essential frame of reference for any structured presentation of Islam. Al-Farsy wrote a great number of works to explain in detail the contents of the Quran and the way Muslims in East Africa should understand them.⁶¹ The Quran remained the pivotal force of al-Farsy's writings. The subsequent development of printed Islamic literature in Swahili has compelled Muslim writers from different tendencies to elaborate on the teachings of Islam. Dissension and controversy between orthodox Islam and secessionist groups have forced writers from the different groups to clarify the particular way in which the Quran is taught and understood.

Contemporary Islamic revival

Shaykh Saidi Musa (b. 1944), the most famous and prolific Muslim writer in East Africa, has his particular vision of the role the Quran must play in Muslim societies. He has not identified himself with any specific Muslim group in East Africa, but his numerous publications have contributed to the revival of the Islamic movement.⁶² He follows

he may combine Islamic religious leadership with medical advice, esoteric knowledge and spirit exorcism without necessarily belonging to a Sufi order. The term *Sharifu* stands in relation to Muhammad's religious and political authority transmitted through Ali's lineage.

⁶¹ A.S. al-Farsy wrote over fifty works in Swahili and some were left unpublished at the time of his death in 1982. Among the most famous not yet cited can be included: *Maisha ya Nabii Muhammad* and *Mambo anayofanyiwa Maiti na Hukumu za Eda; Mafundisho ya Dini* and *Tarehe ya Imam Shafii*. A translation from a manuscript of this work has been published by R.L. Pouwels (1989), *The Shafi'i Ulama of East Africa, ca. 1830-1970: A Hagiographic Account*.

⁶² In an interview with the Islamic publication *Sauti ya Umma (SYU)*, entitled "Waislamu wahakikishe wanaijua siasa", S. Musa says that he has written more than 200 books, but just about 50 of them have been published. The title list of 182 works is given at the end of the interview (SYU 32, 1987: 28-32). Another list of 142 titles can be found in Musa 1981: 50-5.

in the Islamic footsteps of al-Farsy, his teacher and mentor, and upholds his teaching along the path of Sunni Islam. But he has developed a different vision of Islam, which is that of a politico-religious entity. Since 1966, after studying at the Muslim Academy in Zanzibar, he has been fully committed to the work of Islamic propaganda, mainly through his prose and poetry writings. He sees the Islamic Republic of Iran as the most consistent model for the Muslim societies in East Africa: "This Islamic Revolution of Iran and Imam Khomeini's leadership are extremely good. I fully agree with it and wish that the whole world may be governed by the law of Allah and not by that of man which changes time and again."⁶³

Musa believes, however, that the Islamic movement cannot develop unless the Quran becomes the source of all legislation, helping in this way the application of the principles of Islamic Law. He has been working for some years now on a new translation and commentary of the Quran in Swahili, but so far it has not been published. There is little doubt that politics and religion are basically linked in Musa's perception of contemporary Islam and that for him the Quran remains at the heart of the Islamic state: "The Glorious Quran is indeed the constitution which is needed everywhere in the world. Iran has begun, and it is necessary that other nations follow, one after the other, until the whole world is governed by the law of Allah."⁶⁴

The Islamic leadership of the late Ayatullah Khomeini (1904-89) continues to have a direct impact on East African Islam at four different levels. Firstly, there is a growth of new Islamic themes in *utenzi* poetry closely linked to the contemporary history of Islam through the eyes of the Islamic revolution in Iran. There seems to be a desire to revive the old historical links between Iran, formerly Persia, and East Africa through the use of Swahili in its most refined classical form.⁶⁵ Moreover, poetic compositions which echo significantly the Islamic movement in Iran have become a literary means for the spread and development of Islam in East Africa. The revival of Swahili poetry, as a popular form and expression of Muslim thought in East Africa, has taken new roots

⁶³ "Mapinduzi haya ya Kiislamu ya Iran na uongozi wa Imam Khomeini ndio uongozi mzuri mno. Mimi binafsi nauunga mkono na kuupongeza ulmiwengu mzima ni haki utawaliwe na sheria ya Allah siyo ya binadamu anayeibadilisha mara kwa mara" (SYU 32, 1987: 29).

⁶⁴ "Qur'ani Tukufu ndiyo katiba inayotakiwa ifuatwe na nchi nyingine zote, moja baada moja mpaka ulimwengu wote utawaliwe na sheria ya Allah" (SYU 32, 1987: 29).

⁶⁵ There is a section in SYU called "Bustani la Watenzi". The following are examples of some of the new themes: "Khomeini Mkombozi" (SYU 15: 26); "Rabuka uijalie Irani" (SYU 29: 33); "Mapinduzi ya Iran" (SYU 31: 18); "Rambirambi kwa Islamu Iran" (SYU 41: 16); "Harakati za Imam Khomeini" (SYU 42: 24); "Viongozi wa Irani" (SYU 46: 16); "Uhusiano wa kisiasa, kiutamaduni na kibiashara baina Uajemi na Afrika" (SYU 51: 12-14).

and opened fresh horizons. At one time the editor of *Sauti ya Umma* received so many poems about Ayatullah Khomeini that he was forced to ask the readers not to send in any more poetic texts.⁶⁶

Secondly, some of the important works of Muslim religious leaders from Iran have been translated into Swahili. These include a classical text by Hujjatulislam Sayyid Ali Khamenei, the spiritual successor of Ayatullah Khomeini, written originally in Farsi and translated into Swahili with the title *Roho ya Tawhidi: Kutomwabudu Asiyekuwa Allah* (The Spirit of Unity: Not to worship Who is not Allah).⁶⁷ The views and comments of Muslim leaders from Iran are often given in the publication *Sauti ya Umma*. This magazine, published by the Foundation of Islamic Thought (*Taasisi ya Fikra za Kiislamu*), is printed in Tehran. *Sauti ya Umma* can be regarded as the most powerful means in Swahili for Islamic propaganda in East Africa and beyond.

Thirdly, the Quran has acquired the centre stage in the Islamic leadership coming from Iran. Regular explanations of sections of the Quran are offered to readers of *Sauti ya Umma*. Al-Farsy's *Qurani Takatifu* has been regularly used whenever quotations were given. Nevertheless, a new translation with commentary of the Quran in Swahili is being prepared in Tehran by Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Shushtary. It will be published under the auspices of the Foundation for Islamic Thought.⁶⁸ Sections of S.M.M. Shushtary's translation have already been cited in the works translated into Swahili and in *Sauti ya Umma*. Chapter 19 of the Quran (the *Surat Maryam*) has been published in *Sauti ya Umma* (no. 58, 1991, pp. 14-15) with the text of the new translation. The differences in translation compared with Sh. A.S. al-Farsy's *Qurani Takatifu* are substantial in terms of the language and possibly also in the understanding of the text. Unfortunately, the translation in *Sauti ya Umma* is given without any commentary. There is also another translator of the Quran in Swahili with the name of Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi al-Musawi. His translation (*tarjuma*) of Quranic verses is presented in *Sauti ya Umma* together with the commentary (*tafsiri*) written by Ayatullah Nasir Makarim Shirazi. Here again the translation of the Quranic verses and the commentary are different from Sh. A.S. al-Farsy's *Qurani Takatifu*.⁶⁹ Sheikh Abdullah Nassir, a leading Muslim scholar based in

⁶⁶ SYU 42: 28.

⁶⁷ Khamenei 1987: 47. Among other titles can be mentioned: Imam Khomeini, *Baba Mtakatifu na Ukristo* (1983); Sh. M. Mutahhari, *Mjadala Kuhusu Mapinduzi ya Kiislamu* (1983), *Sheria ya Kiislamu katika Dunia ya Siasa* (1984); Sayyid M. Musawi Lari, *Uchunguzi wa Matatizo ya Kimaadili na Kinafsi* (1992).

⁶⁸ This information was given to me by M.A. Shoaie, Director of the Centre for International Cultural Studies in Tehran (24 November, 1992). The translation has not yet been published.

⁶⁹ *Tafsiri Safi* (10), SYU 35: 24-25; *Tafsiri Safi* (13), SYU 43: 26-28; *Tafsiri Safi* (16), SYU 51: 32-33.

Mombasa, has published a series of commentaries to selected verses from the Quran in the newspaper *Mizani* under the title "Muislamu na Kurani". Generally speaking he has followed Sh. A.S. al-Farsy's translation, but writes his own commentary on the Quran and underlines its importance in individual and social life.⁷⁰

One of the most prominent Muslim organizations in East Africa for the spread of the Quran has been Balukta (Tanzania's Council for Promoting the Quran). Competitions of Quran recitation and memorization are organized annually in East Africa, the Iranian Cultural Centres being one of the main official sponsors.⁷¹ Balukta suffered a setback in April 1993 when a group of its supporters destroyed three shops in Dar es Salaam which sold pork.⁷² It was banned on 28 April 1993 after its leader Sheikh Yahya Hussein had been arrested and brought to court on 16 April. He had acknowledged that the people who went on the rampage against the selling of pork were his followers.⁷³ The Imam of the Mtoro Mosque in Dar es Salaam, Sheikh Kassim bin Jumaa Khamis, a zealous advocate of public gatherings (*mihadhara*), was also brought before the court. He admitted two charges before the judge: incitement to confrontation and causing enmity between Christians and Muslims.⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, a deeply ingrained belief had settled into the minds of Balukta and their numerous supporters all over East Africa that the Quran must be the dominant power and the driving force in society.

Fourthly, the tide of Islamic reform coming from the Islamic Republic of Iran has also touched the political arena of East Africa. Kighoma Ali Malima, the controversial former minister of education in Tanzania, visited Iran from 6-14 March 1988 as the head of an official delegation. Visiting the holy city of Mashad, where Shia Muslims go on pilgrimage

⁷⁰ *Mizani* 22 May 1992; *Mizani* 3 April 1992; *Mizani* 9 October 1992.

⁷¹ Ahmad Amir was the winner of the Quran recitation and memorization competition held at the Iran Cultural Centre in Nairobi in March 1994 (*Kenya Times* 19 March 1994).

⁷² See *Uhuru* 10 April 1993; *Sunday News* 11 April 1993; *Mzalendo* 11 April 1993; *Mwananchi*, 12 April 1993. The eating of pork is forbidden for Muslims in the Quran: *Qurani Takatifu* 2: 173; 5: 3; 6: 145; 16: 115 and *Kurani Tukufu* 2: 174; 5: 4; 6: 146; 16: 116. A.S. al-Farsy and M.A. Ahmadi explain at length the meaning of the Quranic verses, but neither of them says that it is forbidden to sell or buy pork. See also *Msanii Africa* 17-23 April 1995.

⁷³ The ban on Balukta was announced by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Augustine L. Mrema, meeting Christian and Muslim leaders at the Diamond Jubilee Hall in Dar es Salaam. He said that the government would not register any Muslim or Christian group unless the demand had previously been accepted by its respective affiliation: Bakwata (Muslims), TEC (Catholics) and CCT (Christians) (*Uhuru* 10 April 1993).

⁷⁴ *Uhuru* 24 April 1993. Sh. Kassim bin Jumaa Khamis had trouble with the government in May 1992 when it forbade a protest march he had organized to the Prime Minister's office (*Mizani* 22 May 1992).

to venerate the tomb of Imam Ali Ridha (d. AH 203 – AD 818), he said: "The firm stand of Iranians in welcoming the Islamic Revolution in war conditions is an excellent example for Tanzanians."⁷⁵

Iranian officials did not miss the opportunity to suggest to K.A. Malima that the ministry of education in Tanzania should introduce the teaching of the Quran to its school programme and follow the educational programme of Iran. The invitation came from Ayatullah Muntadhari, a leading *mullah* in Qum.⁷⁶ Malima continued to favour the improvement of relations and the establishment of closer links with Muslims from other countries. His appointment as minister of state in the president's office in Tanzania in May 1989 gave rise to much concern, particularly among non-Muslims, because of his leaning towards a greater participation of Muslims in education and politics. He told Muslim participants at a seminar on *Maadili ya Kiislam* (Islamic Righteous Conduct) on 27 February 1993: "Politicians say: 'don't mourn, organize', in other words do not carry on with self-regret and blame, rather show determination and resolve without any more delay."⁷⁷

The first of the topics discussed at that seminar was *Qur'an na Mwislamu* (the Quran and the Muslim), which was treated by Shaykh Abdullahi Nassir. Only a few months later the centrality of the Quran in political life received official approval at the hands of President Mwinyi. At the stand of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Book Show President Mwinyi was shown a copy of *Juzuu Amma* (section 30 of the Quran) and he commented that the various parts of the Quran should be distributed and used for children's primary education.⁷⁸ One of the dominant figures in the promotion of the Quran in East Africa has been the Iranian ambassador to Tanzania, Sayyid Muhammad Ali Lavasani, who left the country in 1991 after seven years of service as Iran's top representative, and gave his farewell address at the Mtoro Mosque.⁷⁹

The three-day visit to Iran of the Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni from 4-7 March 1991 gave a new impulse to the propagation of the Quran, especially through the Tabliq movement in Uganda led by Sheikh

⁷⁵ "Msimamo wa Wairani katika kuunga mkono Mapinduzi ya Kiislamu katika hali ya vita umetoa mfano mzuri kwa Watanzania" (SYU 46: 14).

⁷⁶ SYU 46: 15.

⁷⁷ "Wanasiasa wanasema: 'don't mourn, organize', yaani msiendelee kujisikitikia na kujilaumu, bali shika maneno na jiimarisheni, bila kuchelewa zaidi" (Mizani 1-15 March 1991). These words were pronounced in the opening address, which had three references to the Quran and one to the Sunna.

⁷⁸ Mizani 27 September 1991.

⁷⁹ Mizani 1-15 March 1994. In his speech Sayyid Lavasani referred to those who began the Crusades. They continue doing the same today, he said. Muslims, therefore, must be united, even if there are many branches (*matawi*) of Islam.

Sulaiman Kakeeto. The new *mufti* of the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC), Sheikh Ahmed Mukasa, was elected in July 1993 to replace Sheikh Saad Luwemba. He held a Quran in his right hand as he was sworn in in the presence of Tabliq leaders who had given him their support.⁸⁰ The Tabliq movement, which has taken deep roots among the youth, suffered a setback when police arrested some forty of its members in December 1993. Within a few days the rector of the Islamic University in Uganda at Mbale, Syed Sufderul Haq, was expelled from the country.⁸¹

In a feature article entitled "Is it possible to establish an Islamic University in Kenya?" A.H. Ahmed proposes, as part of the general programme, the area of Quranic studies and Quranic exegesis.⁸² The National Union of Kenya Muslims (Nukem) has sought financial aid from Saudi Arabia for the establishment of an Islamic University on the coast. The suggestion was made to Sh. Yusuf L. al-Saloum, ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Kenya, on the occasion of *Id al-Hajj* celebrations in Mombasa. The Saudi diplomat, who was the guest of honour, offered several hundred copies of the Quran to Nukem.⁸³ Meanwhile, Rashid Mzee, a Kenyan member of parliament and vice-chairman of Ford-Kenya, said that the Iranian government had promised an Islamic University would be created in Kenya. The news came after his return from Iran, where he had attended the memorial anniversary services of Ayatullah Khomeini at the beginning of June. His claim was denied by Hamid Moayyer, ambassador to Kenya of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as baseless and unfounded.⁸⁴

The translations of the meaning of the Quran in Swahili are intrinsically related to the issue of "Islamic fundamentalism". There is no single word in Swahili which can express such a concept. However, Muslim and non-Muslim writers use several terms to indicate new forms of religious confrontation, both in the perception of Islam and its interpretation. Terms such as *imani kali* (ardent faith), *msimamo mkali* (aggressive, obstinate attitude), *msimamo mkali wa kidini* (obstinate

⁸⁰ *The New Vision* 25 September 1993. The new *mufti* was elected to head a two-year interim administration to unite all Ugandan Muslims. New general elections for the Islamic leadership were to be held in 1996. Shaykh Zaidi K. Mugenyiasooka, the oldest Muslim leader in Uganda, died on 31 May 1994 (*The New Vision* 8 June 1994). For an overall view of Islam in Uganda, see Kiyimba 1990: 84-120.

⁸¹ *The New Vision* 18, 29 and 30 December 1993. Some fifty Tabliq members were evicted from William Street Mosque in Kampala. Tabliq leader Shaykh S. Kakeeto believed that it was a deliberate act of persecution against Muslims masterminded by the government.

⁸² *The Message/Ar-Risala* 51, 1954.

⁸³ *Coastweek* 3-9 June 1994.

⁸⁴ *The Standard* 19 and 20 June 1994. The Iranian ambassador addressed a press conference and described M. Mzee's words as "rubbish" (*The Standard* 22 June 1994).

religious attitude), *majambazi* (bandits), *siasa kali* (hot-headed politics) and *waliochanganyikiwa* (those who have been confused) point to the different directions of contemporary Islam.⁸⁵ Two recent documents have seen this question of "Islamic fundamentalism" from different angles. The first is entitled *Kwenye vijilia ya Sinodi Ya Maakofu kwa ajili ya bara la Africa*. It was written by P. Pengo, Catholic Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, for the meeting of the African Synod of Catholic Bishops in Rome in April-May 1994⁸⁶. A distinction is made in the document between "*Mwislamu muungwana na Mwislamu mwenye msimamo mkali*" ("a true Muslim and an obstinate Muslim") (p. 7). The word *wungwana* has often acquired cultural undertones, and it is reminiscent of a historical past linked to the slave trade. The second document, *Madai ya Haki za Waislamu kauli ya Baraza Kuu*, was written by the Supreme Council of Islamic Organizations in Tanzania as an answer to Pengo's *Barua ya Kichungaji* (Pastoral Letter). The Muslim answer to the Archbishop's Christian position, totally refusing the notion of Muslim stubbornness and aggressivity, is given with the support of the Quran. It can be summarized in the Quranic verse (Quran 28-5), printed only in Arabic, on the back cover: "And we desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth and to make them examples and to make them the inheritors" (Quran 28-5 – M. Pickthall's translation)⁸⁷

The terminology mentioned above, which continues to grow, is already part of popular vocabulary. It would be wrong to believe that the content is exclusively religious. There is a general feeling among Muslims in East Africa that Christians have for years monopolized the political scene, leaving Muslims marginalized. Moreover, many are of the opinion that East African governments have sided with the churches and have favoured Christians, much to the detriment of Muslim communities.⁸⁸ The Islamic revival in East Africa has acquired a social and political dimension alongside the religious one in education and learning. Islamic movements such as Warsha wa Waandishi wa Kiislam (Muslim Writers'

⁸⁵ See *An-Nuur* July 1993; August 1993; *Heko* 6-12 October 1994; 13-19 October 1994; *Kiongozi* 17-31 March 1993; 1-15 January 1994; 1-15 July 1994; 16-31 August 1994; 16-30 September 1994; October 1994; 1-15 November 1994; 16-30 November 1994; *Mzalendo* 11 April 1993; *Mwananchi* 14-16 October 1994; *Rai* 13-19 October 1994; *Uhuru* 12 April 1993; 15 April 1993; 17 April 1993; 19 April 1993; 24 April 1993; 26 April 1993 and 29 April; *Tazama* 1-8 March 1994.

⁸⁶ Pengo 1993: 24.

⁸⁷ Baraza Kuu 1993.

⁸⁸ Muslims in East Africa, and more specifically in Tanzania, refer to J.V. Sivalon's *Kanisa Katoliki na Siasa ya Tanzania Bara 1953-1985*, Peramiho 1992. See also Westerlund 1980: 198. Two articles with the title of "Uislamu na Mageuzi" have dealt with the same theme of government favouritism regarding the Church: *An-Nuur*, August 1992 and November 1992.

Organisation) and Umoja wa Wahubiri wa Kiislamu wa Mlingano wa Dini (The Union of Muslim Comparative Religion) have underlined government support to the churches and the cultural favouritism enjoyed by Christians. On the other hand such Islamic movements have pressed for a more effective participation of Muslims in East Africa. Mohamed Said, a prominent member of the Warsha movement, said in 1989 at the Conference on Daawa in East Africa that "national salvation lies in justice being done to all".⁸⁹ The most recent important work used by the Warsha movement, *Mafundisho ya Qur'an: Uislamu Njia Sahihi ya Maisha*, brings into perspective the Quran as the core of God's religion which is Islam.⁹⁰ The translation of the Quran used in that work is basically that of the *Qurani Takatifu*, but with some substantial differences in the commentary. One example which shows how the Quran is the departure point of Islamic revival is the translation of Quran 3-19 ("The Religion before God is Islam (submission to His Will)", A.Y. Ali's translation):

Qurani Takatifu: "Bila shaka dini (ya haki) mbele ya Mwenyezi Mungu ni Uislamu."

Warsha: "Bila shaka dini (Njia ya Maisha) ya haki mbele ya Mwenyezi Mungu ni Uislamu."

The difference lies in the fact that, according to the Warsha translation, religion (*dini*), is understood as *Njia ya Maisha* (the Way of Life). In al-Farsy's view there is certainly no indication to suggest that the term "religion" might mean "way of life". The Warsha believe that Muslims have reduced Islam to a set of religious duties and therefore the word "Islam" has lost its profound meaning and value as the path of human life: "The Quran is the text-book of all things. We have changed Islam into a Religion of Worship, Fasting and Pilgrimage only and others have added on their own account other forms of *dhikri* practice, which have not been taught by the Apostle, PBUH."⁹¹

Religion (*dini*) in Islam has a wider meaning and covers three inseparable concepts: *al-Islam* or the five religious duties of a Muslim (witness, worship, fasting, alms-giving and pilgrimage); *al-Iman* or the Muslim creed (Allah, the prophets, the books, the angels, the day of

⁸⁹ Unpublished conference paper given by M. Said with the title "Islam and Politics in Tanzania", 1989. See also M. Said, "In Praise of our Ancestors", *Africa Events*, March/April 1988: 37-42.

⁹⁰ *Mafundisho ya Qur'an: Uislamu njia sahihi ya Maisha*, undated. See also Sayyid A.A. Maududi, *Katika Kuufahamu Uislamu*, 1988; A.N. Chande, "Muslims and Modern Education in Tanzania", *Journal: Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 14 (1-2) 1-16.

⁹¹ *Mafundisho ya Qur'an: Uislamu njia sahihi ya Maisha*, n.d., III. This is a reference to the leaders of the Muslim brotherhoods in East Africa, who interpret Islam and the Tradition of the Prophet in a different way. See also Nimtz 1980 and Constantin 1988.

the resurrection and predestination); *al-Ihsan* or the right conduct in life. The Warsha proposal for an Islamic revival in East Africa comes from the desire to use a more precise label for what is understood by "Islam" and thus define the proper meaning of its content. In their view, the Quran provides the signpost, clearly indicating to Muslims which direction to follow and which road to take in today's world.

The translation and interpretation of the Quran have opened new avenues both in the reading of the sacred Muslim text and in its modern applications in East Africa. Muslim translators and interpreters of the Quran are the principal protagonists of the Islamic movement in East Africa. It is inevitable that some inconsistencies will arise from the different translations. The challenge of translating and interpreting the Quran cannot be placed at the level of Muslims and non-Muslims only. It is also an Islamic process of self-identification, whose constant dynamism influences Muslims' political, religious and social culture in East Africa.

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THE ISLAMIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY EGYPT*

Tomas Gerholm

Islam in Egypt today is a phenomenon that is both overwhelming and elusive. It is overwhelming because of the new mosques and their insistent loudspeakers, because of the many invocations of Allah on road signs and house walls, because of the growing beards and the proliferating veils. At the same time, it is elusive because it is not quite clear what these signs mean. Is Egypt *really* becoming a more Islamic country than it was before? Or are the Islamic signs – which are undoubtedly increasing – more a question of a frame and an idiom than of an authentic essence? Or is it, perhaps, too simple to view frame and idiom, on the one hand, and essence, on the other, as exclusive alternatives? Answering those questions is no easy task. Perhaps it will be facilitated, if we start by rehearsing some basic facts about Egypt.

The most important of those circumstances is the demographic explosion that at least until recently characterized Egypt. A recent estimate claimed that the Egyptians already number 60 million, and all sources agree that the population is still growing by more than 1 million annually. The rate of population growth may have started to decline, reaching a mere 2.3 per cent compared to 2.7 per cent a decade ago. However, in absolute numbers the growth is still immense and, furthermore, it takes a long time before the effects of a reduced rate become noticeable. Medical and health institutions dealing with new-borns are affected immediately, primary schools have to wait six years before the effect is felt, and it takes twenty to twenty-five years before the pressure on labour and housing markets begins to ease. The demand for employment will continue to grow by about 50 per cent during the coming three decades. At the same time, expectations in the field of education, for example, continue to rise, which postpones even further

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the date when we can say that the consequences of the demographic explosion are under control. Urbanization is a related issue. The rural exodus may have reached a climax in the 1960s and 1970s,¹ but cities like Cairo and Alexandria still have enormous areas lacking elementary urban infrastructure. These facts are important to remember, because from them follow, more or less logically, many features of the Egyptian situation.

It should also be remembered that Egypt is one of the most important countries in the Muslim world. It is not the biggest: Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan have more Muslims than Egypt, but Egypt is the most populous of the Arab countries. Through its dominance in the field of Arabic media, it has a deep influence on the rest of the Arab world. And apart from the pilgrimage centre in Mecca, the Azhar mosque with its university is probably the most important institution in the world of Sunni Islam. Finally, twentieth-century Islam has received some of its main impulses from Egypt: Muhammad Abduh, Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb. Is Egypt, then, an example of "Islam in Africa" or of "African Islam"? It is tempting, but of course too simple, to claim that there can be only one answer. One could have ventured the reply: If Egypt really is part of Africa – Hosni Mubarak may be the current President of the Organization of African Unity, but one rarely meets an Egyptian who considers his or her country as *belonging* to Africa, without modifying this admission in one way or another – it is there as a representative of the Great Tradition of Islam. But, as we shall see, this answer does not tell the whole story.

A glance at the recent history of the country should also be included in this introduction. Modernization of the Arab world started in 1798 with the arrival at Alexandria of Napoleon Bonaparte and his invading army. The ultimate aim of this expedition may have been to establish a base for future attempts at attacking India, the jewel of the British imperial crown. But the most immediate effect of his landing at Alexandria was the beginning of a long process of Egyptian efforts to somehow bridge the gap between the East and the West, taking the best from the West while still standing firmly on deep Islamic roots. Muhammad Ali, an Albanian soldier in the Ottoman army, managed to make himself the ruler of Egypt in 1805. While his country remained, officially speaking, a province of the Ottoman Empire, the Sublime Porte became ever more remote. To safeguard Egyptian independence Muhammad Ali launched an ambitious programme of importing relevant knowledge from Europe. He wanted to make Egypt into a modern country which would be technically and militarily on a par with European

¹ Fargues 1994: 6

powers while still remaining part of the Muslim world. The political independence was won, however, at the price of an economic dependence on Europe which, during the reign of his successors, was finally transformed also into a political dependence. For a quarter of a century, beginning in 1883, Lord Cromer was formally only the British Consul-General in Egypt. In reality he ruled the country.

This special relation to Great Britain remained long after Egypt had achieved its formal independence in 1922. It was only broken by the revolution of 1952, which gave the country its first *Egyptian* leadership since the Persian invasion in 525 BC. Gamal Abdel Nasser cut the British bonds and tried to steer away from Western dependence in general. This could only be done by accepting aid and influence from the Soviet Union. The result was Arab socialism, Nasser's own version of the Soviet system. Anwar Sadat, his successor, changed the economic and political course of the country by breaking with the Soviet Union and opening Egypt to the market forces of the Western economy. After the Islamist murder of Sadat in 1981, President Hosni Mubarak tried to curtail the extremes of his two predecessors and to achieve some kind of synthesis of Arab socialism and Arab capitalism.

Any economic system would be put to a difficult test by Egypt's exploding population, which at present demands great efforts just to prevent the 20 per cent unemployment rate from further escalation. This situation has made the country very dependent on the willingness of Western countries and the World Bank to deal leniently with Egypt's snowballing external debt. President Mubarak's tireless activities as a peacemaker in this unruly corner of the world can only be fully understood if one takes Egypt's precarious economy into account. Peace in the Middle East is needed by many. Some are prepared to pay dearly in order to increase its chances. This is a new example of an old pattern. Some sort of brokerage has been a typically Egyptian activity ever since Muhammad Ali's days. Egyptians have been trying to modernize their country without having to give up too much of their Islamic heritage. But what is "too much"? Most deals in this sensitive field have been criticized by brokers who would have dealt with it differently. When trying to understand Islam in Egypt one comes repeatedly back to this tension. The character of Islam in Egypt is continuously under negotiation.

Having sketched this background I shall now try to be more specific, turning to a description of the main Islamic actors on the Egyptian scene during the latter half of the twentieth century.² The first one to

² In principle I have followed the tripartite division in Ibrahim 1988. I have also borrowed his labels.

appear will be the Islamic establishment, symbolized by al-Azhar, the prestigious house of Islamic learning which twenty years ago celebrated its first millennium. After that we shall look at popular Islam, an Islam filled with Saints and Sufis. Let us then turn to the radical Islamists who more than any other Muslims have captured the attention of Western media because of their often violent means to try and establish the Islamic state. Finally, I want to introduce Islamic actors who should not be identified with any of these already mentioned and who lack a platform of their own, but who are still very much part of the Islamic renaissance we are now witnessing. I shall call them, tentatively and with no abuse intended, the mainstreamers.

Establishment Islam

In its Sunni form, Islam has no real priesthood, no elaborated clerical hierarchy. There is no God but God and no human is supposed to get closer to Him than anyone else. If the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned as an exception, it is not because he was anything but human, but because his life exemplified the way God wants us all to act.³ Muslims have not been able, however, to follow this lofty principle rigorously. One important reason is that Allah's law was never specified in such detail that it could be easily applied, especially not in other times and other places than in Muhammad's own Mecca and Medina. The Scripture often had to be interpreted in order to be applied. This work of interpretation gave rise to a whole series of Islamic sciences with their respective experts. These learned men, the *ulama* (sing. *alim*), passed on their knowledge in special schools connected to important mosques. Among other things, al-Azhar is such a school. For a long time it has been considered by *ulama* throughout the Sunni Islamic world as the most important of them all.

As experts on things Islamic, the *ulama* have also had other functions than to train the next generation. For instance, they have been the persons most qualified to advise the ruler and make sure that he is acting in accordance with the divine law, *sharia*, and admonish him if he is not. Consequently, they have had the power to legitimate the ruler in the eyes of his community. In theory, they have also had the power to withdraw this legitimation. But this is something that has rarely occurred, since the *ulama* have feared that the consequences – strife and perhaps fragmentation of the *umma*, the community of believers – would be worse than letting a bad ruler continue in office. Furthermore,

³ Schimmel 1985: 4, 8, 16.

the *ulama* have provided the common people with many services in the mosque, the court and the schools. Through these activities they have been in close contact with ordinary members of the *umma*. This has made it possible for them to serve as links between the subjects and their ruler.

In other words, Sunni Islamic societies may not have priests in the Christian sense, but they do have (or have had) a category of religious experts who can influence and legitimate the ruler. Ideally, al-Azhar is the home of such *ulama* in Egypt. But a closer look at the learned of al-Azhar leads to another picture. An important prerequisite for the role of the *ulama*, as Islamic supervisors of the ruler, is their independence of him. Since Muhammad Ali, however, the Egyptian government has tried to diminish this independence in order to facilitate the use of *ulama* for the legitimation of various policies. The final steps of this process were taken during Nasser's presidency.

The Free Officers who took power through a *coup d'état* in July 1952 were not equipped with a real ideological programme. They were not ardent Muslims, nor were they convinced secularists. Some of them, including Sadat and Nasser, had had contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood, which in the beginning supported their take-over. This organization – about which much more will be said later – was the only mass organization in mid-century Egypt. In that sense it was a potentially dangerous rival to the officers. An attempt on Nasser's life in 1954, viewed as a result of a Brotherhood plot, served as a pretext for crushing the organization and eliminating some of its leaders. When Nasser felt more secure on that frontier, he turned his attention to the religious establishment, which he hoped would play an important role in the revolution of Egyptian society that he was now planning.

In order to transform the *ulama* into a revolutionary tool in the hands of the government, Nasser did not rely on persuasion alone. He sought to undermine whatever was left of the *ulama*'s economic independence. Traditionally, this independence was based on the *ulama*'s control of *awqaf* (sing. *waqf*), the religious endowments:

A source of both individual and corporate *ulama* wealth was the donation by individuals of inalienable property (*waqf*) for either charitable or religious purposes or to benefit the descendants of the donor. The former type of *waqf* brought direct income to institutions run by the *ulama*, such as mosques, schools, or hospitals; even in the latter type of personal or family *waqf*, members of the *ulama* class generally administered the *waqf* and received a fee for doing so.⁴

⁴ Keddie 1972: 2.

As early as in 1952, the family endowments had been abolished. The attack on the *awqaf* continued in 1957, when the public endowments (for mosques, schools etc.) were nationalized. In the previous year, the *ulama* had been dealt another blow through the abolition of the religious courts and their replacement by a national system of secular, or at least secularly oriented, courts. This reform affected of course also the Copts, but its main goal was the Muslim *sharia* courts run by the *ulama*. In this way, Nasser's Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) managed to undermine "the economic basis of the Islamic establishment, . . . hence curtailing its influence even further."⁵ Only the last *ulama* bastion, al-Azhar, still remained more or less intact.

In 1961, however, a law was passed which placed al-Azhar under the Ministry of Religious Endowments and thus made it part of the government. This move had been carefully planned for many years. The RCC had both opponents and supporters within al-Azhar itself and the struggle between various factions continued for many years, even after al-Azhar had formally lost its independence. Many high-ranking *ulama* resigned in protest and others resorted to passive resistance.⁶ In fact, it took several years after the passing of the law before it was implemented. When it finally took effect, the results were far-reaching. The following are the words of a seemingly enthusiastic observer who tried to summarize the impact of the reform four years after its proclamation:

The reform of al-Azhar is a complete reorganization of the system. A new balance of power has been struck within the system in the form of a reduced role for Shaykh al-Azhar [the rector of the university and the most highly ranked of al-Azhar's *ulama*] and greater authority for government agencies. New personnel of a higher calibre [including military officers] have been brought in to occupy important Azhar posts and the type of instruction and subject matter taught in the entire Azhar system has been injected with new vigor. The new law totally integrates the religious system of education with the government system. In a word, al-Azhar has been "nationalized".⁷

The nationalization of al-Azhar made it possible to use the "most important institution of the Sunni world"⁸ for political purposes. Nasser needed an Islamic legitimization for many reforms of Egyptian society, from birth control to Arab socialism. The *ulama* of al-Azhar were the scholars who could provide it.

⁵ Warburg 1982: 135.

⁶ Crecelius 1966: 36.

⁷ Ibid.: 44.

⁸ Eccel 1984: 498.

Firstly, they were expected to grant the "Free Officers" the backing they required in their internal quest for legitimacy; and secondly, the *ulama* of al-Azhar, by making use of their prestige throughout the Muslim world, were called upon to bless Nasser's Arabism in the name of Islam, thus helping the new creed to gain respectability and acceptability in other Muslim, and especially Arab, states.⁹

They were expected to perform these functions, and so they did. In doing that, they demonstrated – in the long run – that they were no longer acting as traditional *ulama* who, ideally at least, remained independent enough of the government to be able to keep a critical eye on its policies. But the increased, if not "total", state control of this paramount religious institution was not without its positive effects for the *ulama* themselves. Chris Eccel, author of the most detailed Western study of al-Azhar, is anxious not to let us forget this other side:

Autonomy has not been impaired without a trade-off however. In the classrooms the *alim* may teach thousands of students, with the Azhar press he may publish, in the mosques he may preach, and on payday he is able to pay his bills, within reason.¹⁰

Teaching, publishing and preaching under somewhat better conditions than before were the benefits. They all deserve some further comments. Al-Azhar is a university which, since 1961, has expanded to include other faculties besides those of the Islamic sciences and the Arabic language. This horizontal expansion of al-Azhar learning has been complemented by an increase, already started before the reform, of the number of Azhar satellite universities in the country. Al-Azhar has also expanded in the vertical dimension, in order to take care of prospective students at an early age and to give others a minimum of Azhar-inspired education. Its share of the Egyptians in school, however, remains minute. At the beginning of the 1980s one estimate lay in the range of 1 or 2 per cent.¹¹

In 1982, al-Azhar had 48,500 students at the Cairo establishment, whereas the satellite universities in seven places outside of Cairo were much smaller. If mentioned according to decreasing size, the list would look like this: Asyut, Tanta, Mansura, Zagazig, Menufiyya, Alexandria, Sohag. With its 6,300 students the Asyut Azhar was almost twice as big as the second, in Tanta, and ten times as big as the seventh, in Sohag. Moving down the academic scale from the universities to the religious institutes, the figures become more impressive. In 1982 there were 550 institutes on the primary school level with 112,000 students;

⁹ Warburg 1982: 135.

¹⁰ Eccel 1984: 501.

¹¹ Ibid.: 506.

385 institutes on the preparatory school level with 59,200 students; 245 institutes on the secondary school level with 110,300 students; 17 Teacher's Colleges with 6,000 students; and 17 institutes for Quran reciting with 4,200 students.¹²

This expansion does not necessarily demonstrate that al-Azhar is capturing a greater share of the pupils and students in Egypt. In a country where 40 per cent of the population is below the age of sixteen, one has to expand rapidly just in order to maintain the status quo. Yet, it is likely that Azharite education has become a more reasonable alternative in later years. At the Azhar institutes, one finds the same basic curriculum as in the ordinary schools. On top of that come specific religious subjects. A similar system prevails at the university level. At least in Cairo, many non-religious subjects can be studied in addition to the religious subjects that are compulsory, whatever the major field of study may be. Choosing the Azhar way does not mean that one is opting for a narrow specialization at an early age.

In the publishing field, there has been a notable increase of religious literature. All of this does not derive from al-Azhar, of course, but is more an indication of a general trend. The Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, created in 1960 as a special organization within the Ministry of Religious Endowments and staffed with many Azhar *ulama*, has carried out an ambitious programme of keeping classical religious works in print, as well as supplying simple manuals to the general public. Already during its first decade, the Council managed to publish more than 8 million copies of these texts, pamphlets and journals.¹³

The growing presence of al-Azhar is unmistakable in the modern audiovisual media. There is now a radio station broadcasting religious programmes twelve hours a day, and the religious share of Egyptian TV time has increased dramatically. Between 1970 and 1985 the number of hours devoted to religious issues in these two media grew by 400 per cent.¹⁴ There are no figures available for the following decade, but the explosive growth may well have continued. In the beginning of this development, "religion" in the modern media was equivalent to al-Azhar, but during the Mubarak years a certain opening towards other Islamic tendencies has taken place. There have been debates on TV, for instance, between Azharites and representatives of other Islamic inclinations. At least the moderate Islamic opposition has not been totally eclipsed in the government-run media.

Al-Azhar is present in the media also in another, more oblique way. In addition to the government censorship of political matters, there is

¹² Jomier 1983: 301-2.

¹³ Jomier 1977: 52.

¹⁴ Ibrahim 1988: 637.

the Azhar censorship concerned with moral and religious issues. The 1990s have witnessed several "affairs" of this kind and the censors have shown a clear tendency towards a less permissive attitude. But censorship can be flexible. At the Cairo book fair in 1994, for example, books that previously had been put on the blacklist by one authority or the other were graciously pardoned by president Mubarak himself and allowed to be displayed.¹⁵

The Islamic message is, of course, mainly delivered through the most traditional of Egypt's media: the country's myriad of mosques. Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Religious Endowments take an important part in this. Ideally, the *imam* who delivers the *khutba*, the Friday sermon, should be an Azhar *alim*. But in reality this is rarely the case. The mosques in Egypt are divided into two main categories, *hukumi* (governmental) and *ahli* (popular or private) mosques. The former may have been built by funds controlled by the Ministry of Religious Endowments, and their *imams* are mostly Azhar graduates on the pay-roll of the Ministry. The latter, on the other hand, may have been built by private individuals or benevolent societies (of which there are now plenty in Egypt). The government has unwittingly stimulated the building of private mosques by granting tax privileges to the entrepreneur who includes a mosque in the building he is erecting for other purposes, be they residential or industrial. And so the unprecedented proliferation of mosques has become an almost automatic effect of the soaring Egyptian building industry. The *imam* in these private mosques may be a pious local man without any formal qualifications who preaches for free or for a symbolic remuneration.

This would be all right if there were a consensus about the message to be announced in the mosques. But since there is a deep conflict between the views of Establishment Islam and those of Activist Islam, the *khutba* has become politically sensitive. Ever since the revolution in 1952, the government has tried to take over the private mosques. A couple of laws making this move legal have been proclaimed. Implementing the laws, however, has proved to be more costly than the government realized. It is not only a question of paying the *imam* and maintaining the mosque, but also of making sure that there are enough qualified Azhar *imams* around. Neither the money nor the human resources available have been sufficient for carrying out the parliamentary decisions.

In 1962, 83 per cent of Egypt's mosques were *ahli*.¹⁶ The government tried to improve the relative figures both by taking over private mosques

¹⁵ Censorship during the presidencies of Nasser and Sadat has been dealt with in great detail by Stagh (1993).

¹⁶ Berger 1970: 18.

and by building new ones, but the private initiative in this field remained vigorous. In 1980, the total number of mosques in Egypt was about 28,000. Of these, 75 per cent remained in private hands.¹⁷ After the murder of Anwar Sadat in 1981, the efforts to turn all mosques into government mosques were increased. The present figures are very uncertain. One estimate sets the number of private mosques at 40,000 and the government ones at 30,000.¹⁸ Another would settle for the same ratio but at a slightly lower level.¹⁹ In other words, 57 per cent of the mosques would still be in private hands. Whatever the precise figures may be, it seems reasonable to assume that the total number of mosques in Egypt has almost doubled since 1980. If that is the case, the mosques increase faster than the population.

Establishment Islam may be under attack from various quarters, but it is not a declining form of Islam. On the contrary.

Sufi Islam

The Sufi brotherhoods of Egypt have millions of members. One estimate dating from 1982 claims that the adherents at that time numbered some 6 million which, according to the same source, would then have represented more than a third of the male population.²⁰ Other estimates have been more modest but, even so, it is quite clear that Sufism constitutes a massive presence in Egypt. In fact, "today there is no other country in the Middle East in which the Sufi brotherhoods are so predominant, so numerous and so extensive as in Egypt."²¹ But then what is Sufism?

A common answer to that question would begin by stating the history of this Islamic phenomenon. While warning the reader against assuming too much similarity between the various Sufi brotherhoods, Nikki Keddie, for instance, presents its origins like this:

In the early centuries of Islam the word Sufi, from the Arabic *suf* (wool) – referring to their coarse woolen garment – was applied to ascetic mystics, men who rejected both the worldly ways of many of the ulama and the distant transcendental God of the orthodox, and who believed that they could attain direct knowledge of God,

¹⁷ Ibrahim 1988: 643.

¹⁸ Hazem Hassan Hanafi, personal communication.

¹⁹ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, personal communication.

²⁰ Baldick 1992: 159. The author refers to the Dutch expert on Egyptian Sufism F. de Jong without mentioning the relevant text. A likely candidate would be de Jong 1986. A semi-official estimate reported in *Tasawwuf Islami*, no. 34 (January 1982): 9, may be the ultimate source. See Luizard 1990: 51.

²¹ Luizard 1990: 51.

or even union with Him, by a variety of practices similar to those of mystics in every land. Although mystics too bold in proclaiming their achievement of identity with God were sometimes persecuted or even executed, mystical practices grew in popularity and provided a much shorter and easier path to knowledge of divinity than the lengthy and possibly expensive scholastic study of the ulama.²²

A characterization of the Sufi way of Islam before the rise of the big Sufi brotherhoods in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries can rely both on a comparison with things European and on a detailed account of the phenomenon in itself:

Sufism is a mystical tradition which, when compared to Christian and European institutions, could be put somewhere between monasticism and Freemasonry. It has many of the characteristics of monasticism, but does not usually preach celibacy. It does enjoin mortification of the flesh, and exalts the ideal of poverty, but it includes ordinary members of society in its ranks, with no distinction of clerical versus lay. It emphasizes the love of God, and teaches that God and the Sufis have a special relationship which goes back to a primordial Covenant: the Sufis are God's friends, perpetually engaged in remembrance (*dhikr*) of him.²³

This characterization does not hold, however, for the vast multitudes of men who later on filled the orders.²⁴ The claim that, two hundred

²² Keddie 1972: 4.

²³ Baldick 1992: 3.

²⁴ I am here using "order", "brotherhood" and *tariqa* as synonyms to avoid repetition, but I am aware that the term "order" may be misleading. The Sufi orders were not like organized monastic orders in the Christian world. They were much looser structures. Like the concept of "saint", the concept of "order" tends to smuggle Christian connotations into a discourse on Islamic phenomena. Here is Julian Baldick's (1992: 72-5) explanation of the specificity of the Sufi brotherhoods: "To understand the significance of this [the founding of the first international brotherhoods] it is necessary to examine the Sufi institution of the *tariqa*, or brotherhood, and the mistranslation of this term as 'order'. A *tariqa*, in the new sense which the word acquired from the thirteenth century (as opposed to the general meaning of 'the Sufi Path'), may be defined as a brotherhood of Sufis who have a common pedigree of spiritual masters, and in which elders initiate disciples and grant them formal permission to continue a common school of thought and practice. This brotherhood sometimes does and sometimes does not have an organization. An international administrative structure has usually proved impossible to achieve, but there is organized activity at a local level. Now this is very different from a Christian monastic order. Islam, in theory, at least, has no monasticism, nor does it have the institution of a church, which is indispensable for the government of the Christian monastic orders. The latter are necessarily constituted as fixed organizations within an ecclesiastical framework. . . . The emergence of the brotherhoods in reality meant the emergence of 'elders' with specific programmes of instruction, linked to a founder who is believed to have instituted their method. . . . We know that at the beginning of the thirteenth century

years ago, virtually every urban adult male in the Ottoman Empire was a member of one brotherhood or another should not be read as a claim that a major category of the population actually consisted of fully-fledged mystics.²⁵ The religious brotherhoods which now make up Sufism fulfil a number of functions, among which it is not at all sure that one will find the idea of unification with God. A realistic description would linger among functions such as “social, ‘entertainment’, charitable, intellectual, psychological, and sometimes political” ones, before even mentioning the purely religious or mystical functions.²⁶

Egypt is a country with strong centralizing tendencies and a relentlessly growing bureaucracy. Together with ex-Yugoslavia Egypt is – to the best of my knowledge – the only country where the Sufi brotherhoods, the *turuq* (sing. *tariqa*), have been brought together in a central organization to facilitate supervision and control by the state. It is only membership of this Supreme Sufi Council which can make a brotherhood legal. Registration began in the early nineteenth century. In 1848 there were twenty legal orders, in 1990 the number had risen to seventy-three. The growth was especially rapid during the Nasser years. Criticism from orthodox or “fundamentalist” Muslims – who consider Sufism a dubious offshoot of Islam – slowed down the process of registering new brotherhoods. Instead, they were recommended to affiliate themselves to already recognized orders. In addition to the seventy-three official brotherhoods of 1990, there were at least fifty unofficial ones, some of them loosely associated with a legal *tariqa*, others not.²⁷ Most of these brotherhoods of all sizes are categorized as belonging to one of the following six main brotherhoods: the Ahmadiyya, the Burhamiyya, the Khalwatiyya, the Qadiriyya, the Rifaiyya and the Shadhiliyya.²⁸

The Ahmadiyya was founded by a Moroccan, Ahmad al-Badawi (1200-76), usually considered Egypt’s most venerated “saint”²⁹ and

a founder of a brotherhood . . . would formally designate people as ‘deputies’ (*khulafa*). But there is no evidence that these ‘deputies’ were intended to operate together in any kind of organization. In the event, the degree of mutual co-operation would depend on them, and they might simply go their own ways.”

²⁵ Keddie 1972: 4.

²⁶ Ibid.: 5.

²⁷ These figures have been culled from Luizard 1990: 58-9.

²⁸ The information about these orders relies on Luizard 1990: 36-8.

²⁹ Whether this Christian concept can be used about Muslims is a debatable issue. Baldick (1992: 7-8) finds it totally misleading, but I use the concept in the sense indicated by Nicolaas Biegan (1990: 73): “The phenomenon of the ‘holy man’ who has intimate knowledge of a special kind about God and who can act – even, and especially, after his death – as an intermediary between man and God, is shared by a number of religions.” In Islam this notion has taken a special form: “A saint radiates *baraka*, or blessing – a beneficial power, which can be transferred to his descendants, followers and visitors. Apart from the rather diffuse benefits of *baraka*, visitors can invoke the saint’s intercession

buried in the big Delta city of Tanta. To the mosque built over his grave come pilgrims from all over Egypt, especially at the time of his *mawlid*, the feast held in commemoration of his birth. On that occasion the population of Tanta increases by about a million people, many of them – but far from all – members of the order.

The Burhamiyya is a brotherhood linked to Ibrahim al-Desuqi (1246-88), the only native Egyptian to found a major Sufi *tariqa*. He was buried in the town of Desuq, not far from Tanta, and this place hosts another *mawlid*, about a week after the one in Tanta and almost as big. Like the Ahmadiyya, the Burhamiyya originated in the Delta but later underwent a spectacular development and is nowadays to be found practically everywhere in Egypt.

The Khalwatiyya was founded in Persia by Umar al-Khalwati (d. 1397), but it was inspired by the Persian Sufi Umar Suhrawardi. When it arrived in Egypt towards the end of the fifteenth century, it took root in the towns and particularly the cities. Gradually it became one of the most influential of the Egyptian brotherhoods. In 1812 the authority over all the recognized orders was conferred by Muhammad Ali on a Khalwati *shaykh* of the Bakri family.

With few interruptions this authoritative position remained within that family until well into the twentieth century. Historically, the Tijaniyya order in northwest Africa is an offshoot from the Khalwatiyya: it was founded in the late eighteenth century by a Khalwati disciple.

The Qadiriyya, the oldest and most extensive of all the *turuq* in the Muslim world, was founded by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166) in Baghdad, where his tomb is also to be found. The Qadiriyya is reputed to be the most “humanist” of all the brotherhoods and an enemy of the spectacular excesses of the more popular orders. At the end of the nineteenth century, a Qadiriyya adherent, Amadou Bamba, founded in Senegal what has been described as a “typically African” brotherhood, the Mouridiyya, which is formally regarded as a branch of the Qadiriyya.

The Rifaiyya was founded in Basra by a contemporary of al-Qadir, Ahmad al-Rifai (d. 1176). In mediaeval times it spread widely in Egypt, especially among the lower classes. It has developed extravagant forms of *dhikr* which the Qadiriyya, for instance, would never accept.

The Shadhiliyya has its name from Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d.

with God or the Prophet: instead of praying directly to the Almighty, one asks the saint to lend his good offices to obtain something, or to avoid or ward off something else. As Sheikh Ahmed Radwan put it: “The saints can get anything they want from their Lord, so it is all right to ask for their assistance in front of God to receive a benefit or to ward off evil; asking for their help is useful as long as God has not yet irrevocably carried out his decision in another sense; because then, the saint [wali] will be silent.” (ibid.: 75).

1258), regarded as the founder of the brotherhood although he seems to have left no particular instructions about the founding of a *tariqa* or its ritual. The actual establishment was carried out by an Alexandrian *shaykh*, Ibn Atallah (d. 1309), a determined opponent of Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) who has been a source of inspiration to many radical Islamists of today. This well-organized order with several subdivisions has branches far outside of Egypt.³⁰

To be recognized as a legal *tariqa* a brotherhood must have a clearly specified internal structure. The head of the order is the *Shaykh al-Saggada*, that is, the "Shaykh of the Prayer-Rug", the prayer-rug being a symbol of this authority and also a concrete rug which he has inherited from his predecessor. The *shaykh* is supposed to act as the national representative of the brotherhood and as such he may also be chosen to join the Supreme Sufi Council as one of the ten *tariqa shaykhs* (the other five members being representatives of the Ministry of Religious Endowments, the Mufti's (that is, the chief judge of the *sharia* court system) office and al-Azhar. The *shaykh* is assisted by deputies (a *naib* or *wakil*) and on the district and province levels he has local substitutes, *khulafa* (sing. *khalifa*). These offices, including that of the *Shaykh mashayikh*, the president, are usually inherited and not recruited from the rank and file of the members. Some decisions by the local representatives have to be confirmed by the Shaykh of the Prayer-Rug, but most of the work has another character:

The khalifa looks after the spiritual and social welfare of his followers. He is present at their hadras [defined below], he solves problems within their families, and resolves controversies between them: none of the brethren will take a member of his own group to court. "The *turuq* are a state within the state", Sheikh Zahir says. "It is order without politics".³¹

But the *tariqa* is also affected *by means* of politics. At the meetings of the Supreme Sufi Council efforts are made to limit the heterodox excesses of many *mawlid* celebrations. The president of the council recommends the other *shaykhs* to make sure that certain things do not occur: "no songs, no music, no percussion, no dancing during the *dhikr* sessions, no mixing of the sexes during the meetings, no fire-eating, no swallowing of insects, no eating of glowing charcoal, broken glass or living snakes. . . . and no hitting of oneself with swords!"³²

³⁰ The Shadhiliyya has attracted much attention among scholars, both Egyptian and foreign. For an important study of a Shadhiliyya branch that has been the source of much discussion, see Gilsenan 1973.

³¹ This quotation as well as the information on the internal structure of a *tariqa* comes from Biegan 1990: 123.

³² Luizard 1990: 58.

These prohibitions stimulate one's curiosity: what are those *hadras* and *mawlid*s really like? *Hadra* (from the classical Arabic word for "presence", in this case referring to God's presence) is one of several names for the seance during which Sufis by various means strive to achieve unity with God. Another name found in other parts of Africa is *imara*, while the classical concept is *dhikr*, "remembrance", "invocation", in which the central feature is the repeated mentioning of God's name. The following description indicates some of the Islamic understanding of what really happens in the *dhikr*:

Special forms of *dhikr* exist which include a form of dancing on a fixed spot, introduced by the chanting of religious poetry accompanied by drums, and sometimes by flutes, to create a state of devotional tension. In this dance known as *dhikr as-sadr*, the Divine Name Allah is chanted; then the Name is reduced to its last syllable *Hu* (of the nominative form *Allahu*) which corresponds to the shortened form of *Huwa*, "He", a Divine Name of the Essence. Finally, this Name and the act of invocation are reduced simply to breathing, which is, as actualized by the sacred context of the dance, both the Divine Name in its purest form, which is that of breath or of life itself, and, because of the nature of breath, also the cosmological process of creation and its opposite, the re-absorption of creation into God. . . This *dhikr as-sadr*, or "invocation through the breast", symbolizes a return of essences escaping from the existential illusion of manifestation back into the Creator, a return of creatures out of the cosmos, even as the Divine Name loses its form and becomes pure breath.³³

Normally each local Sufi group meets for a *hadra* once or twice a week, but it can also be done daily. In addition, the ritual is often performed on special occasions, such as the circumcision of a member's son or the return of a member from the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca.³⁴

Another special occasion is the *mawlid*, theoretically defined as the day of the birth of a holy man, a "saint". But in practice a saint may have more than one such day devoted to him, with more or less the same activities taking place each time. Therefore, the *mawlid* celebrations are not really birthday celebrations but more general days of commemoration. Michael Gilsenan prefers to translate the term *mawlid* by "saint's day".³⁵ The *hadra* may be an important part of the saint's day (which usually goes on for several days, often a week, sometimes two), but the *mawlid* contains much more. It could be compared to a saint's

³³ Glassé 1989: 97.

³⁴ Reeves 1990: 60-1.

³⁵ Gilsenan 1973: 47.

fair in medieval Europe, where religious and non-religious activities took place side by side: "visits to the shrine, processions, trade, amusement, eating, drinking and begging".³⁶ The main actors at these festivals are the Sufis who turn up to celebrate their own saint – perhaps the founder of the *tariqa* – but also attend other *mawlid*s. But the Sufis are usually greatly outnumbered by other participants:

Apart from the sufis or dervishes, the moulids [*mawlid*s] are frequented by sympathizers or *muhibbin*, who also can take part in a *zikr* [*dhikr*]; pilgrims looking for the saint's *baraka* – *baraka* is the beneficent force or blessing inherent, for example, in saints and holy places – and his intercession with God or the Prophet; many people simply looking for a good time; and also professionals who make money at the moulids selling nuts and sweets, clothes, toys and kitchenware, or manning swings, merry-go-rounds, shows and circuses. There are often one or more specialists in circumcision (*mutahirs*), who can be either travelling craftsmen or local barbers. Those who make their living going from moulid to moulid are called the "moulid-people", or *mawalidiya*. . . . At many moulids there is some hashish, at some there is beer, but no one gets drunk and there is a great difference between the friendly and good-natured crowds in Egypt and the much more boisterous and aggressive public at carnivals in Europe.³⁷

The crowds grow and grow as the days pass until the culmination is reached during the Great Night (*al-layla al-kabira*), when the *dhikr* continues all through the night. After this climax, the saint's day is over. Sufis, pilgrims and professionals depart, the latter with their donkeys, carts or cars loaded with the paraphernalia needed for the next *mawlid*. In the Delta there is a special season beginning in late October when one celebration is immediately followed by the next.

The *mawlid*s are without any doubt the most spectacular manifestations of Sufism in Egypt. They are also the main Sufi events in which women participate, even though – as we saw above – the Supreme Sufi Council tries to prevent any mixing of the sexes. It should perhaps be noted at this point that female participation in Sufi activities is not as widespread in Egypt as in many other African countries.

There are, of course, also other and less exuberant forms of Sufism. As William Adams observes, "Sufism, so-called, embraces everything from the lofty mystical poetry of al-Ghazali (Abu Hamid al-Ghazali 1058-1111) to the most crudely mechanistic village *dhikr*."³⁸ It is not

³⁶ Biegman 1990: 13.

³⁷ Ibid.: 14.

³⁸ Adams 1990: ix.

surprising that this is true also of Sufism in Egypt, a country that since the time of the Pharaohs has been characterized by a chasm in the cultural and religious field between the élite and the masses.³⁹ As early as in eighteenth-century Egypt one can notice a clear difference between orthodox orders devoting themselves to "contemplative and ascetic mysticism", on the one hand, and popular orders "associated mainly with shrine-cult and ecstatic practices", on the other.⁴⁰ A similar distinction can be made today. Egyptian Sufism is generally considered to be a form of popular religion, but it does have its *high* forms as well. In the view of one observer, the difference between the élite and the popular forms of Sufism has grown during the current revival of Islam:

On the one hand are the mass of the followers in the orders, who have little formal education, work at menial jobs, obey their shaikhs unquestioningly, and participate fully in the overt and ceremonial aspects of the orders' activities. On the other hand, I met many well-educated Egyptians who have adopted or resumed an interest in sufi ideas; some spent several years in Western countries as students or government officials. Their interest is in doctrine and meditation ... and in social welfare in the orders – i.e., a deeper form of religious devotion and brotherhood than they can experience elsewhere.⁴¹

At this "higher" end of the Sufi spectrum one also finds many examples of *shaykhs* who have an Azhar education and important positions in Egyptian society. Shaykh Abu-l-Wafa al-Taftazani, for example, became the Shaykh of the Prayer-Rug for the brotherhood Ghunaymiyya Khalwatiyya in 1947. Five years later he entered the Supreme Sufi Council of which he became the president in 1983 and also the editor of the review *Tasawwuf Islami*. He is an academic who has been the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Fayyum. Later on he was promoted to Vice-President of Cairo University where he is Professor of Philosophy. His academic work deals with Sufi masters of the past and he has lectured in a large number of Western and Middle Eastern countries. There are many similar cases which may emerge from a look at the Supreme Council of 1990. The Sufis in it consisted of four Khalwatiyya *shaykhs* (including Taftazani) and four Ahmadiyya *shaykhs*, while the Burhamiyya, the Rifaiyya and the Shadhiliyya had one *shaykh* each. In this group one finds four *ulama* from al-Azhar, two lawyers, two civil servants, one journalist and one business man.⁴²

Sufism is well entrenched in Egyptian society. It is spread all over

³⁹ Biegman 1990: 21.

⁴⁰ Moriah 1963: 387, quoted by Berger 1970: 77.

⁴¹ Berger 1970: 76-7.

⁴² Luizard 1990: 60.

the country and one finds members in all social classes, although the variety of Sufism espoused may vary in sociologically predictable ways. But is the Sufi presence growing or declining?

In the 1960s and early 1970s there seemed to be an overwhelming consensus among researchers that Egyptian Sufism was in decline. Whereas Sufism had been well adapted to a basically agricultural society with small industry often localized in town quarters where labour was organized in guilds, it was said that Sufism had not been able to adapt to the structural changes of modern Egypt.⁴³ Ten years later, however, there is almost the same consensus that – far from declining – Sufism is actually growing. Some point to the steadily growing number of registered *turuq*, others to estimations of *tariqa* membership made by *shaykhs* in the Supreme Sufi Council, or to the many hours it now takes to complete the procession of Sufi orders in Old Cairo, on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday. Whatever the method used, there seems to be no doubt that Sufism is on the rise.⁴⁴

How this unexpected development should be explained is difficult to say. First of all, one should remember demography. The rise in absolute numbers could be a simple effect of the demographic explosion: if the Sufi share of the "religious market" remains the same, the numbers of Sufis will increase at the same rate as the population. But other types of growth will demand other types of explanation. One attempt rests on the view that the *turuq* do adapt to modern times but to aspects of it and in ways that have not occurred to previous analysts.⁴⁵ Another explanation is based on the "broad notion that social stress and a strong authoritarian trend have sent people searching for relief in those few corners of social life where self-direction, trust and intimacy are still possible."⁴⁶ This general idea could be developed in a series of hypotheses:

1. The revolution of 1952 has not brought the social and economic progress promised and Nasser's Egypt has been severely defeated in wars with Israel. There has been a general repression of dissent and some critics have been silenced by forceful methods. "In such conditions of rapid political change, stress, unachieved goals and denial of free expression it seems natural that a religious people should turn to that form of solidarity still permitted to it."⁴⁷

⁴³ This argument is very well developed by Michael Gilsenan (1973, especially pp. 188-207). His main critic is F. De Jong (1974).

⁴⁴ Researchers arguing for the expansion of Sufism include de Jong (1974, 1986), Ibrahim (1988) and Luizard (1990, 1991).

⁴⁵ Luizard 1990, 1991.

⁴⁶ Berger 1970: 76. Berger is an exception to the early view of the inevitable decline of Sufism.

⁴⁷ Ibid.: 75.

2. "... long-range changes in the direction of modern industry and urbanization may have weakened the kinship structure and induced men to seek solidarity by returning to traditional religious brotherhoods but out of different impulses from those that may have been dominant in earlier eras."⁴⁸
3. The traditional Sufi reaction against the religious establishment may have become stronger as an effect of the declining prestige of al-Azhar which has too often been reduced to a powerless yes-sayer to the government.⁴⁹
4. There may also have been a reaction against government efforts "to supply secular opportunities for spontaneity and autonomy, such as television and other entertainment media, trade unions, a mass political party with no rivals, and rigidly-controlled cultural clubs." Instead people have turned to "genuinely autonomous associations that have deep roots and that are not proscribed (even if not encouraged)."⁵⁰

The last hypothesis may have seemed reasonable during Nasser's time, less so during the "Believer-President" Sadat's era. And the reaction against al-Azhar has not been particularly strong: the *turuq* seem to have been satisfied with the more benevolent attitude taken by al-Azhar after its nationalization. The brotherhoods may be officially apolitical, but circumstances have forced them into politics. It has not been al-Azhar but the radical Islamists who have provided sharp criticism of Sufi practices. This has triggered a Sufi reaction against the Islamists which has made the government, in its turn, interested in supporting Sufism. Instead of the old ambivalence in the attitude of the religious establishment and the government towards the *turuq*, they are now viewed as allies:

Even though participation in political party activity is anathema to the spirit of sufism, the existence of a large bloc of Muslims impermeable to fundamentalist propaganda is very precious to a government whose main preoccupation is internal stability.⁵¹

Finally, one should remember that, apart from purely political considerations, there is a deep-seated reason for the relatively tolerant attitude of Establishment Islam towards Sufi Islam. This reason is the important role played by Sufi brotherhoods in spreading Islam to unbelievers in Africa and Asia, "a role that has continued in Africa into the twentieth century."⁵² Their success as missionaries has probably rested on their

⁴⁸ Ibid.: 75-6.

⁴⁹ Ibid.: 76.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Biegman 1990: 124.

⁵² Keddie 1972: 5.

personal example and "their nonscholastic and popular approach to religion [which] has enabled them to win the allegiance of those to whom scholastic Islam might seem formidable."⁵³

It is now time to turn to the third kind of Islam in Egypt today, embraced by the disturbers of internal stability.

Activist Islam

Analysts convinced of a decline of the Sufi *turuq* do not usually take the further step of claiming that religiosity in general is in decline. Michael Gilsenan, for instance, suggests that the Sufi brotherhoods have lost their members to other Islamic organizations better adjusted to the changing conditions of modern Egypt.⁵⁴ These groups are usually labelled "fundamentalists", a Christian term that may be misleading if not qualified and that could be avoided by the use of terms like *islamiyyin*, "Islamists", or *asliyyin*, "those searching for the roots", in other words radical Muslims. What is characteristic of them all is the effort to "return to the purest sources of the religion . . . and to cleanse Islam from all the impurities, heresies, and revisionisms which may have influenced its body-intellect as well as its body-practice."⁵⁵ But since they are obviously searching for the fundamentals of the faith, it is not improper to call the whole tendency *al-usuliyya al-Islamiyya*, "Islamic fundamentalism".⁵⁶ It should be kept in mind, however, that these fundamentalists are not trying to lead their lives in the seventh century. They are inspired by the society created by the Prophet and believe that the principles guiding that society can be applied today, in a society that in other respects is fully modern.

Any attempt to present Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt must start with the Muslim Brotherhood (al Ikhwan al-Muslimun) founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna (1906-49). From the middle of the 1930s it was a very active religious and political organization; from the 1940s onwards one could say – perhaps with a slight exaggeration – that the existence of the Brothers has put its stamp on everything taking place in Egypt.⁵⁷ At any rate, for over sixty years the Muslim Brotherhood has been a massive presence, whether legal or not, in Egyptian society. Like other revolutionary movements it has also produced various splinter groups inspired by the general ideas of the Brotherhood but critical of the means used and favouring other solutions.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Gilsenan 1973: 203-5.

⁵⁵ Ibrahim 1988: 633.

⁵⁶ Dekmejian 1985: 4-5.

⁵⁷ Carré 1984: 8.

Hasan al-Banna, the founder, has been described as the very incarnation of Sunni revivalism in this century:

He was the unique embodiment of the Sufi spiritualist, Islamic scholar, and activist leader who possessed a rare ability to evoke mass support by translating doctrinal complexities into social action. While Banna's movement lacked the philosophical depth of the Salafiyyah [the Islamic reform movement of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-97), Muḥammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Rida (1865-35), it succeeded in galvanizing and organizing a mass following as no other Islamic movement had done in recent centuries. Banna was singularly unconcerned with ideological intricacies since he was committed to revival of the Islamic community without regard to its internal, sectarian, or other divisions. In promulgating the Brotherhood's ideology, Banna relied on the Quran, and the six canonical treatises of *hadith* [the traditions concerning what the Prophet did and said on various occasions during his life].⁵⁸

A direct look at a classical passage in his writings may give an indication of his message:

My Brothers: you are not a benevolent society, nor a political party, nor a local organization having limited purposes. Rather, you are a new soul in the heart of this nation to give it life by means of the Qur'an; you are a new light which shines to destroy the darkness of materialism through knowing God; and you are the strong voice which raises the recall of the message of the Prophet. . . . You should feel yourselves the bearers of the burden which all others have refused. When asked what it is for which you call, reply that it is Islam, the message of Muhammad, the religion which contains within it government, and has as one of its obligations freedom. If you are told that you are political, answer that Islam admits no such distinction. If you are accused of being revolutionaries, say "We are voices for right and for peace in which we dearly believe, and of which we are proud. If you rise against us or stand in the path of our message, then we are permitted by God to defend ourselves against your injustice. . . . If they insist on pursuing their oppression, say to them, "Peace be upon you, we will ignore the ignorant."⁵⁹

In a more concise definition of the movement, the Brotherhood is described as "a Salafite movement (that is, derived from the Salafiyya), an orthodox way, a Sufi reality, a political body, an athletic group, a

⁵⁸ Dekmejian 1985: 80.

⁵⁹ Mitchell 1993: 30. The text is from al-Banna's *Bayn al-ams wa al-yawm* (Between yesterday and today), pp. 28-31.

scientific and cultural society, an economic company and a social idea.”⁶⁰ As this quotation indicates, there was no direct opposition between Sufism and what al-Banna wanted the Brotherhood to be, Sufism was just too narrow. His movement grew rapidly, mainly in the cities where the social strain was strongest. It seemed to have the ambition to found a new society, an Islamic *umma* within the Egyptian nation. The Brotherhood had schools, health clinics, a press of its own, legal experts, as well as a special scout-like youth movement. When the Second World War broke out, there were already 500 branches spread all over the country. At the end of the war, it had a membership of around 1 million.⁶¹ These numbers continued to grow through most of the 1940s. The Brotherhood also trained a secret army which participated in the struggle against Israel, not for Palestinian nationalist reasons but for Islamic ones. In late 1948 the Muslim Brothers were regarded as the most dangerous threat to the monarchy.⁶²

Hasan al-Banna was murdered in February 1949, probably by members of the political police and probably also with the tacit consent of the prime minister.⁶³ The movement elected a new Supreme Guide in 1951, the judge Hasan al-Hudaybi. Good relations existed with single members – Sadat and even Nasser – of the group that would soon form the “Free Officers”. But although the Brotherhood’s secret army fought the British in the Suez Canal Zone and attacked Western-owned establishments in Cairo, the Brothers did not take any part in the *coup d’état* on July 23 1952. In the following years the cordial relations deteriorated considerably and the alleged attempt by the Brotherhood to kill Nasser in 1954 led to the outlawing of the organization, the imprisonment of 4,000 members and the execution of six of its leaders. Al-Hudaybi was sentenced to life imprisonment.

One of the 4,000 prisoners was Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), the man who would soon be the main theoretician not only of the Muslim Brotherhood but also of many of its offshoots. Qutb came from a family of modest village notables in the province of Asyut which has produced more Islamic radicals than any other part of the country. He began his career as a man of letters and associated a great deal with Mahmud Abbas al-Aqqad, one of the leading writers and intellectuals of the interwar years. During the Second World War, Qutb gradually turned away from his literary pursuits and started to devote himself to the social and political problems of the country. In 1948 the Ministry of

⁶⁰ Gilsenan 1973: 203. The text is from *Min Khutab Hasan al-Banna* (From Hasan al-Banna’s preachings), first series, Damascus, 1938, pp. 14-5.

⁶¹ Dekmejian 1985: 82.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Mitchell 1993: 71.

Education sent him to the United States in order to study the educational system there. When Qutb returned in the summer of 1951, he did so as a Muslim who had rediscovered his religion. He joined the Muslim Brotherhood soon after his arrival and was later to declare: "I was born in 1951."⁶⁴ The following year he was already a member of the council leading the organization and the director of the propaganda section. During the whole year of 1952 he had fairly close relations with Nasser and was asked to work on the statutes and programme of the Liberation Rally, Nasser's first mass organization launched in January 1953. Qutb refused and sided with his own organization when the conflict with the rulers deepened. When he was arrested in 1954, this was the beginning of an imprisonment that would last for the rest of his life, with the exception of eight months of liberty in 1964-5.

In August 1965 Nasser claimed that a plot to overthrow the government had been discovered and that Sayyid Qutb was the leader. His book *Maalim fi al-tariq* (Signposts on the road), was held against him. It was first published in January 1965. Half a year later it had been reprinted five times. After a rapid trial he was sentenced to death and hanged on August 29 1966, together with two other men. Like al-Banna, Qutb had then advanced to the status of martyr and his writings were being widely read, both within and outside the Brotherhood.

Maalim was mainly a series of excerpts from Sayyid Qutb's monumental commentary on the Quran, *Fi Zilal al-Quran* (In the shade of the Quran), which was written in prison and distributed in portions both by his fellow prisoners and by sympathizers outside the concentration camp.⁶⁵ A key concept in "Signposts" is that of *jahiliyya*, "ignorance". In the Islamic tradition this is the depiction of the conditions in Arabia (and the world at large) prevailing before the Quran was recited to Muhammad and he had begun to construct an Islamic society in Medina and Mecca. Arabia, like the world in general, was ignorant: ungodly, barbaric. This concept was severed from its historical root and has also been used in internal Islamic polemics. The Hungarian orientalist Ignaz Goldziher has pointed out that within the Islamic tradition *jahiliyya* functions like "barbary" does in our own. "Socialism or barbary?" were the alternatives as seen by some European intellectuals in the 1950s. "Islamism or barbary?" would be the alternatives posed by Sayyid Qutb.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Kepel 1984: 43. Most of the information on Sayyid Qutb's life has been taken from Kepel's book, especially Chapter 2, "Signes de piste".

⁶⁵ Kepel insists on using this concept all through his book, without ever discussing the similarities and dissimilarities with the Nazi concentration camps. That torture was used in Nasser's prisons is beyond doubt. Many later reports, for instance by Amnesty and Middle East Watch, indicate that this has remained a feature of Egyptian prisons with political prisoners.

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 47.

His use of the concept is radical. To other Muslim Brothers it was (and is) natural to regard the non-Islamic world as characterized by *jahiliyya*. To him, however, contemporary Egyptian society was also a case of *jahiliyya*, even though the constitution proudly proclaims that Egypt is an Islamic state. But if Sayyid Qutb is right, then the Islamic avant-garde finds itself in the same situation as the Prophet himself and his very first followers. While they remained a small minority in Mecca, they were in a phase of weakness. Hence the migration to Medina where they were able to become the majority and create an Islamic state which then, finally, conquered Mecca. This insight has important consequences for Sayyid Qutb's Quran commentary. He singles out for special scrutiny the suras which he regards as having been revealed in Mecca: it is these suras that may help him and his followers in their struggle, for they are also, like Muhammad at that time, in a phase of weakness.

This is an original conception. Hasan al-Banna would never have regarded Egyptian society as similar to pre-Islamic *jahiliyya*. But Sayyid Qutb views Egypt from the perspective of a concentration camp where he and his friends are tortured:

It is the totalitarian state that provides the model of *jahiliyya*. Qutb's *jahiliyya* is a society ruled by a perverse Prince who lets himself be adored, instead of God, and who governs according to his own whims, instead of following the principles inspired by the Book and the Prophet's sayings.⁶⁷

This analysis of Nasser's totalitarian state delivered original concepts to the radical Muslims which made it possible for them to understand it in a new way. It also pointed to the future by asking the Leninist question: What is to be done?

Sayyid Qutb's answer was, on the one hand, *jihad*, the "holy war", which should be waged against the barbaric society in which the true Muslims lived and, on the other, an exhortation to analyses of the current situation in terms of weak and strong phases. What is the situation now? What would the Prophet have done? Sayyid Qutb's readers would differ in their replies.

The Muslim Brotherhood split into various factions, but the mainstream under the leadership of al-Hudaybi tried to refute Sayyid Qutb's analysis of contemporary Egypt as a society of *jahiliyya*. In their view it *was* a Muslim society, although with many faults, the main one being the lack of a strict *sharia* jurisdiction. They believed in the possibility of bringing the masses back to Islam by preaching and setting good examples.

⁶⁷ Ibid.: 49.

Another reading was made by Shukri Mustafa (1942-78), one of the Muslim Brothers arrested in 1965. Like many others in this new generation he had a modern education. His own specialty was the field of agriculture. When he emerged from prison some time after Nasser's death, he was disillusioned with the Brotherhood and the internal struggle for power. Therefore, he founded an organization of his own, originally called the Association of Muslims (Jamaat al-Muslimin) but soon to be known by the public as al-Takfir wa al-Hijra, (Excommunication and Holy Flight). This was actually a fitting name, invented by a journalist, for it summarized the main ideas of Mustafa's organization. There was a basic agreement with Sayyid Qutb's analysis of Egypt as a *jahili* society: therefore one was prepared to excommunicate all Egyptians who were only formally believers. But the Society of Muslims was a small group, a small island of believers in the vast sea of unbelief. The situation was like that of the Prophet in Mecca before the *hijra*. In this phase of weakness it was inconceivable to wage war against the state. That kind of *jihad* would have to wait until the local cells of the organization had grown strong enough to pose a real threat to the state apparatus. In the meantime Shukri Mustafa's disciples tried to lead an authentic Islamic life in *hijras* that could be peripheral settlements in the Nile valley or crowded apartments in the cities. Internal splits tempted Mustafa to excommunicate some of his former followers: they were apostates and should therefore, in the proper Islamic tradition, be executed. But the attempt to do so attracted the attention of the police, and the Society of Muslims was dragged into a military conflict with the *jahili* state for which it was far from ready. Shukri Mustafa and four of his associates were executed in March 1978.

Other readers of Qutb disagreed with his identification of the Islamic avant-garde of today and the small Islamic minority in Mecca before the Holy Flight. Such an idea could only arise if one refused to take *jihad* seriously. This argument was developed in a booklet with the title *Al-Farida al-ghaiba* (The hidden obligation), written by Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj (1952-82), an electrical engineer working in the administration of Cairo University, and circulated among the members of al-Jihad, (The Holy Struggle), founded in 1979. The Holy Struggle was the Hidden Obligation, the obligation that most Muslims had preferred to forget.

Among those forgetful Muslims were most of the other Islamic activists. Faraj's text contains a detailed survey of the Islamist movements and critical remarks singling out their main shortcomings. He criticizes the benevolent associations (*jamaat khayriyya*) for letting themselves be controlled by the state. Whatever good they may achieve, it will not lead towards the establishment of an Islamic state. And those who want to launch an Islamic party will in effect contribute to the main-

tenance of the state. This goes also for those who believe they can reform the ungodly system from within by becoming "Muslim doctors", "Muslim engineers" etc.: it is a pure fantasy that these dispersed individuals could make the *jahili* system fall. Others think that preaching will do the job by leading to massive recruitment and an outnumbering of the unbelievers. But this will not do as long as the barbaric state controls all the media and can turn them against the Islamists.⁶⁸

These are just a few examples of the Islamist strategies that Faraj discusses. I shall soon come back to them, for they represent perhaps the strongest tendencies in the current Islamization of contemporary Egypt. But for Faraj they all suffer from one and the same fundamental weakness: they have evaded the problem of power. They have made no analysis of how to really wrest power from the wicked Pharaoh.

For Abd al-Salam Faraj this fundamental problem could only be solved through *jihad* in its most violent interpretation. Pharaoh had to be killed and his state apparatus dismantled. Preparing for this action Faraj sought closer cooperation with a branch of the organization based in Middle Egypt, in the provinces of al-Minya, Asyut and Sohag. An initial problem was the question of the Copts. According to the southern branch of al-Jihad there was, in fact, a more immediate enemy who should be crushed before one turned against the state, namely the Copts. In Middle Egypt the Copts are a strong minority of perhaps 20 per cent of the population – instead of the usual 5-10 per cent – and they were looked upon as serious threat to the Muslims. Shaykh Umar Abd al-Rahman,⁶⁹ a radical Azharite often approached by Islamist students at the University of Asyut, accepted in the spring of 1981 to be the *mufti* (the *sharia* advisor) of the Jihad group. In that capacity he issued a *fatwa* (legal advice) legitimating the killing of Coptic jewellers and the looting of their shops in order to finance the activities of al-Jihad. Attacks on the Copts were also regarded as attacks on the state, since according to an Islamist perspective the state had made use of the Copts in its battle against the Islamist organizations.⁷⁰

Finally, however, an agreement was reached between the northern and the southern branches of al-Jihad. When the North killed Sadat, the South would take control of Asyut in order to initiate the crushing of the state. On his own initiative a young officer, Khalid al-Islambuli, carried out the actual murder of Sadat on October 6 1981, the very day when the Egyptian state, led by Sadat, celebrated the victorious

⁶⁸ This description builds on Gilles Kepel's detailed summary of *Al-Farida al-ghaiba* in *ibid.*: 191ff.

⁶⁹ Later internationally well known for his alleged involvement in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on February 26, 1993.

⁷⁰ Kepel 1984: 158.

crossing of the Suez Canal eight years earlier. Two days later, Asyut was occupied and held for a few days. But the ungodly state was never shaken. The vice-president took over and Hosni Mubarak's long regime had begun.

This was not to be the end of violent attempts to establish the Islamic state, only a rehearsal for the drawn-out period of violence marking the first years of the 1990s.⁷¹ In 1993 and 1994, the newspapers were

⁷¹ This first phase of attempts at the Islamization of Egypt by violent means led to the imprisonment of many militants. Some researchers have attempted to look into the social background of the activists. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, for instance, conducted research among imprisoned members of two of these groups, one of them being al-Takfir wa al-Hijra. The results were reported in an article (Ibrahim 1980) which attracted worldwide attention after the murder of Sadat in October 1981. In a later summary Ibrahim (1988: 652) describes these militants as "educated, motivated youngsters of rural or small-town and lower middle-class backgrounds; but who are often living in large cities and away from their families at the time of their recruitment." Contrary to common stereotypes that these radical groups generally attract a disproportionate number of "misfits", "alienated", "marginals", or otherwise "abnormal" individuals, the fieldwork showed Egypt's Islamic militants to be almost "model young Egyptians".

Some of these results are confirmed by Gilles Kepel (1984) in his analysis which is based on Ibrahim's data combined with data on members of al-Jihad imprisoned after the murder of Sadat. Kepel dwells on the effects of the extremely rapid urbanization as one explanatory factor: the militants are "marginals", at least in the sense that they have left their families in small towns and villages without having been integrated in a functioning urban system. The majority of them lived in overpopulated areas in Cairo without a proper infrastructure. They may have been "model young Egyptians" in one particular sense, but not the – positive – one that Ibrahim intended. This emerges from Kepel's (1984: 211-12) own portrait of the militants: "*Le milieu qui est le plus gros pourvoyeur de militants islamistes est la tranche d'âge des 20-25 ans qui réside dans les quartiers désordonnés situés à la périphérie des grandes villes. Ce sont des marginaux dans tous les sens du terme [emphasis added]: par leur inscription sur la carte, tout d'abord, dans un entre-deux qui n'est plus la campagne qu'ils ont quittée, mais pas encore la ville dont ils ne pénètrent pas le coeur. Par leur hiatus culturel ensuite: pour eux, les structures traditionnelles du village ne fonctionnent plus, elles ne peuvent plus leur assurer des moyens d'existence et une insertion sociale. Ils sont les enfants de l'exode rurale et arrivent dans les banlieues avec des coutumes dépassées. Et, contrairement à leur attente, la scolarisation, fut-ce dans l'enseignement supérieur, ne leur donne pas les clés de la modernité. Ce sont les gros bataillons du mouvement islamiste, les symboles vivants, à une échelle de masse, de l'échec des projets modernisateurs de l'Etat indépendant*" [emphasis added]. According to Kepel, the militants are both "marginals" in all possible senses and "model young Egyptians" in the sense that they are the typical victims of the failing modernization projects of independent Egypt. And one could add that these failures are, at least partially, caused by the demographic explosion and its correlate, the feverish urbanization of the country.

But Ibrahim's and Kepel's efforts to find "external" causes of Islamic militancy in Egypt have not been unanimously accepted. Some find the investigated sample too small, others point out that whatever the situation may have been ten years ago (Kepel) or fifteen years ago (Ibrahim), Activist Islam is now a more complex and, above all, much more widely spread phenomenon. Alain Roussillon (1990: 49-50), for example, wonders if it is not time to "renoncer à voir dans l'islamisme un ensemble cohérent d'attitudes et de valeurs qui seraient le fait d'acteurs socialement identifiables en termes de catégories

full of details on the latest events in the bloody struggle between the security forces and al-Jamaat al-Islamiyya, "the Islamic Groups", which were presented as the main Islamist organization still striving to overthrow the government by violent means. But the name does not reveal the actual organizational structure: one tightly knit organization spread over the country or a loosely knit network of small groups? According to Shaykh Umar, the latter alternative is the correct one.⁷²

When the name first appeared, it referred to Islamist university organizations which were supported by Sadat in the wake of the triumph of 1973 in order to break the dominance of the Nasserist left and the Communist groups among the students. Four years later, the left-wingers had been forced underground. At the same time, however, the Islamic associations broke up the honeymoon with Sadat because of his peace policy towards Israel.⁷³

These student organizations became very important at all the ordinary state universities, whereas the Azhar ones were exempted. Students were attracted to the Islamic associations primarily because they tackled difficult problems of university life. Female students, for instance, suffered from the crowded buses to and from the universities where some (minor) sexual abuse was common. They had similar problems in the overfilled lecture halls where they were forced to sit much closer to their male classmates than Egyptian etiquette allows. And both men and women had to pay their way through university, although officially this should be free of charge. Because their underpaid teachers had to supplement their meagre income by giving expensive private lessons and selling photocopied material without which a test could not be passed, a university education could not be completed without paying. The Islamic associations solved these problems in concrete and ingenious ways. They rented minibuses for the young women; they insisted on segregated education; they bought their own photocopy machines. The ideology came later.⁷⁴

In September 1981, just a month before his death, Sadat decided

socio-professionnelles." Roussillon also refers to a similar hypothesis concerning Islamism in al-Maghrib, i.e. Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, put forward by François Burgat (1988: 117, here quoted after Roussillon 1990: 50): "le phénomène islamiste est sans doute de moins en moins territorialisé socialement. Ou que sa géographie sociale est en mutation suffisamment pour ne plus être limitée aux seules victimes économiques de la modernisation." This is likely to be the case also in Egypt, according to Roussillon. One should remember, however, that Ibrahim and Kepel have focused on groups dedicated to violent *jihad*, whereas Burgat and Roussillon are dealing also with the general phenomenon of Activist Islam.

⁷² Weaver 1993: 86.

⁷³ Kepel 1984: 126.

⁷⁴ The recruitment activities of the Islamic Associations have been well described by Kepel (1984: 132-42).

that his erstwhile allies at the university had become too strong and too difficult. The associations were dissolved and their leaders imprisoned, but the name al-Jamaat al Islamiyya lived on and the members gradually found other ways of continuing their work. Some joined other organizations; some founded new ones; some pursued their Islamist way of life on a more individual basis, taking part in the proceeding Islamization of Egyptian life.

Some of them no doubt became members of the Muslim Brotherhood, an alternative that young activists hardly would have considered a decade earlier when the Brothers were looked upon as cautious reformists coopted by the government. Having eliminated his leftist opponents, Sadat now supported the more moderate tendencies among the Islamist opposition. That meant, above all, the mainstream of the Muslim Brotherhood, which had refuted Sayyid Qutb's ideas and settled for a gradualist Islamization of Egyptian society. When the old Supreme Guide of the movement, Hasan al-Hudaybi, died in 1973, the leadership was taken over by Umar al-Tilmassani who had just been let out of prison by Sadat. He was not the only one to be released. Sensing a change of political climate, Muslim Brothers who had fled the country now returned. In the mid-1970s, the leadership of the moderate wing of the Brotherhood was reassembled.

Sadat did not legalize the organization and, in general, opposed the forming of political parties on religious lines, but he raised no obstacles to other forms of Brotherhood activity. They could hold meetings, they could publish magazines, they could found benevolent societies. And they could establish financial institutions like the so-called Islamic banks and investment houses. All this pulled the Brotherhood back into the limelight, so that in Mubarak's Egypt the Brothers would emerge as the most solid and realistic tendency within the general Islamist movement. Their new members came not only from the lower but also from the upper middle class: business men, civil servants, doctors, engineers, journalists, lawyers etc. Through these new member categories the Brotherhood entered the professional organizations and was soon dominating several important syndicates.⁷⁵ In a recent analysis of the

⁷⁵ The information on the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s and 80s is based mainly on Esposito 1992b: 131-3. More details on the Brotherhood's long march through the syndicates can be found in Roussillon 1990: 29-30: "... c'est surtout à partir de 1984-85 que s'amorce l'irrésistible expansion du courant islamique dans les associations professionnelles, notamment les plus 'sensibles'. Syndicat des médecins, où les militants islamiques obtiennent dès 1984, 7 sièges sur 25, avec 35% des voix, au niveau des instances nationales, tout en s'assurant le contrôle d'importantes unions locales – Alexandrie, Le Caire, Assiout – ; en 1988, la liste islamique emportera plus de la moitié des sièges avec 63% des voix. Syndicat des ingénieurs, où le courant islamique enlève 54 sièges sur 61 aux élections générales de 1987. Syndicat des pharmaciens – alors même que près de 60% de la profession est copte –, où le courant islamique profite de la

Syndicate of Egyptian Engineers, the Islamist leadership is presented in a very favorable light: democratic, reformist, efficient, and perhaps an indication of what a future Islamic leadership of the whole country could be like.⁷⁶

Under al-Tilmassani the Muslim Brotherhood came close to being a political party, although it was not legalized as such. But its political and religious stand revealed that it had accepted the given system and decided to work for changes within its framework:

It clearly opted for socio-political change through a policy of moderation and gradualism which accepted political pluralism and parliamentary democracy, entering into political alliances with secular political parties and organizations as well as acknowledging the rights of Coptic Christians.⁷⁷

In the 1984 election, the Brotherhood joined forces with the old nationalist party, al-Wafd. This coalition was the main threat to Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) and served as the major opposition in parliament until 1987. The Brotherhood then switched partners and forged an "Islamic Alliance" with the Socialist Labour Party and the Liberal Party. The Alliance came second and of its sixty seats thirty-eight went to the Brotherhood. Next time, however, the Brothers decided to boycott the election. It could not, they claimed, be carried out under impartial conditions because of the state of emergency in force ever since the murder of Sadat.⁷⁸ They are, therefore, not represented in the present People's Assembly. And despite their being the main opposition to the NDP government, they were not invited to participate in the "national dialogue" which Mubarak called for in order to find "national" solutions to the grave problems facing the country.

The presence of the Muslim Brotherhood and their sympathizers is felt in many other ways, however. One of them is the emerging "Islamic" sector of the economy.⁷⁹ The inverted commas in the preceding sentence are meant to indicate that the Islamic character of the Islamic economy

faible mobilisation de ses membres et des dissensions au sein de son conseil pour faire triompher ses candidats." The "Islamic list" did not consist exclusively of Muslim Brothers, but also of other moderate Islamists.

⁷⁶ This argument is developed in a postscript, entitled "The Islamization of Modernity", to Moore 1994.

⁷⁷ Esposito 1992b: 132.

⁷⁸ In late 1994, this is still the case. The state of emergency gives the government greater legal facilities to deal efficiently with the Islamist opposition. In the Brotherhood's view these facilities have a negative effect on all kinds of opposition.

⁷⁹ The following description is based on Roussillon 1990, especially pp. 34-46. I have no detailed information on the development in this field during the last few years, but except for the fate of the investment houses (see below) no fundamental change seems to have occurred.

may be questioned. The first cases of economic institutions in Egypt claiming to apply *sharia* principles in their work go back to the beginning of the 1970s, but it was not until a decade later that the phenomenon emerged on a large scale. Then the Islamization of the economy was presented as a third way between Nasser's socialism and Sadat's capitalism. Along this third way one could find three types of economic institutions: banks, investment houses and small firms. They all announced that they operated without being part of the interest-infested and therefore *jahili* economy.

This announcement proved to be of strategic importance in the competition over the large sums of money remitted by Egyptian migrant labourers in the Gulf states and elsewhere. The Islamic institutions managed to capture a significant part of that money, especially when it turned out that the "dividends" – the term "interest" was of course taboo – were greater than what normal banks could provide. How this outmanoeuvring of the banks was possible remained a riddle until it emerged that most of the money remitted was used in commercial operations linked to currency speculations. After a few years, the government had to allow normal banks to open "Islamic branches" in order to recover what had been lost to the Islamic innovators. The result was a gradual decrease of "dividends" for the whole field.

The main actors in the "Islamic" sector, however, have been the investment houses which in the 1980s managed to attract as big a share of the small savers' money as the banks.⁸⁰ Their "dividends" could be about three times as high as what the banks gave, so the ideological arguments were nicely supplemented by purely economic reasoning. This impressive economic performance was made possible by the use of several economic strategies. One was to construct vertical monopolies in certain sectors, that is, controlling all stages in a production process. Another one was to use "importation as substitute for industrialization"⁸¹ by forging close links to foreign firms producing, for instance, refrigerators and other electric household machines as well as air-conditioners. By being able to guarantee a special market, the investment houses managed to sign profitable contracts with Piaggio, Zanussi and Sanyo among others. Some have also entered the international ungodly market using their money creatively. In the end these activities triggered action from the government, which by passing new laws tried to regulate the functions of the investment houses. During the first years of the

⁸⁰ At the end of the period Alain Roussillon is describing, there were more than a hundred such investment houses. The biggest ones were al-Sharif, al-Rayyan, al-Sa'd, Huda Misr, Badr and al-Hilal. Their importance is illustrated by the attempt of Huda Misr to compete with the state-run Egypt Air in the field of tourism by buying two jumbo jets.

⁸¹ Roussillon 1990: 40.

1990s one house after the other came tumbling down with, the director sometimes fleeing the country or ending up in prison, since the small investors had not been – and never could be – reimbursed.

The small “Islamic” firms do not seem to be quite as compromised by hidden involvement in the very economy to which they present themselves as alternatives. To some extent they have managed to define their economic relations as very special, not governed only by the laws of the market. They also serve as a haven for Islamists who refuse to seek employment in the public sector or elsewhere in the *jahili* economy.

These examples of Muslim activists constructing concrete Islamic alternatives to the already existing institutions gradually take one outside of the well-known organizations and into another field: that of the mainstreamers.

The mainstreamers

The three major forms of organized Islam – Establishment, Sufism and Activist – mobilize large groups of the Egyptian people. Still, it is probably a safe assumption that the majority of the population is not directly engaged by any one of them. But since Islam is the “cultural system” of Egypt or, at least, a “cultural focus”, this majority seems to be easily affected by what goes on within the organized forms of Islam.⁸² Some are easily swayed in one direction or another, others are at least aware of the efforts of various Islamic actors to set the agenda and define the situation. For the majority without strong and specific convictions going against Islam, there will occur a stronger or weaker – perhaps imperceptible – adjustment to the (re-)Islamization of contemporary Egypt furthered by the Establishment, the Sufis and Activists. The men may start taking the five prayer times more seriously; the women may hide hair under the *hijab*, the head scarf; and everyone may pick up the Quran more frequently.⁸³

These could, of course, be looked upon as signs of mere conformity. But formal gestures and roles repeatedly acted out tend to become more authentic as time passes and the actor gradually identifies with his role. And those who began as mere onlookers will eventually be reminded that Egypt is a Muslim society and realize that they have to take this circumstance into consideration. The alternatives mentioned initially – that is, whether the Islamization of Egypt is a matter of frame

⁸² The notion that Islam constitutes the cultural system of Egypt was put forward by Fouad Ajami (1983: 30), quoted by Tibi (1991: 136). The suggestion that Islam is a cultural focus in Egypt was made by William Adams (1990: x).

⁸³ In 1993-4 there were several announcements in the press that one female TV announcer after the other had decided not to appear unveiled on the screen any more (which probably meant that they would not appear at all).

and idiom or of essence – do not really exclude each other. Given some time, they tend to merge. Frame and idiom become essence.

This subtle process of Islamization which proceeds by a constantly renewed definition of the situation as Islamic is immeasurably strengthened and complemented by the plethora of concrete actions engaged in by the Establishment, the Sufis, and the Activists as well as by the mainstreamers. In the words of a close observer of the Egyptian scene:

The most important characteristic of Islamic revivalism in Egypt in the 1980s . . . is the extent to which revivalism has become part of moderate, mainstream life and society rather than merely a marginal phenomenon. It is no longer simply a lower- or lower middle-class phenomenon. Renewed awareness and concern about leading a more Islamically informed way of life can be found among the middle and upper class, educated and uneducated, peasants and professionals, young and old, women and men. They are active in Quran study groups (run by both women and men), Sufi gatherings, mosques, and private associations. As a result, Islamic identity is expressed not only in formal religious practices but also in the social services offered by psychiatric and drug rehabilitation centers, dental clinics, day-care centers, legal aid societies as well as organizations that provide subsidized housing and food distribution or run banks and investment houses.⁸⁴

Finally, it is time to address the question implicitly raised by the title of this book: what kind of Islam do we find in Egypt? Is it an example of Islam in Africa or a case of African Islam? Rephrasing the question in terms of Robert Redfield's classical distinction between Great Traditions and Little Traditions,⁸⁵ it is easier to find the answer. Establishment Islam as well as its main critic, Activist Islam, belongs to the Great Tradition of Islam. Sufi Islam, on the other hand, is mostly a popular phenomenon and as such rather far removed from the vigorous dogma of orthodox Islam. It is a Little Tradition of Islam. In this way, it resembles Islam in other parts of Africa. And remembering that Islam was brought to many African peoples by Sufi missionaries who managed to handle indigenous beliefs without pronouncing a harsh verdict on

⁸⁴ Esposito 1992a: 171.

⁸⁵ Originally these concepts were used by Robert Redfield (1956) in order to contrast the formal literate tradition of an urban élite with the oral and informal tradition of the peasant community. They are two aspects of the same civilization and there is a mutual flow between the two traditions. What is taken up from the Little Tradition and incorporated into the Great Tradition undergoes reinterpretation and refinement, whereas whatever sinks down from the Great Tradition into the Little Tradition is similarly adjusted to fit in.

them, it seems reasonable to view Egyptian Sufism as a northeastern case of African Islam. So, reverting to the original question, Islam in Egypt is not either Islam in Africa or African Islam. It is *both*.

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SUFISM AND ISLAMISM IN THE SUDAN

Muhammad Mahmoud

This paper deals with Sufism and Islamism in the context of Sudanese Islam. In addressing the subject, stress has been laid on the context within which Sudanese Islam and its institutions have developed. The paper is divided into three parts covering the Funj, the Mahdist and the modern periods. As a detailed treatment dealing with the complex web of the interaction of Sudanese Islam and its institutions with Sudanese society, culture and politics is beyond the scope of this paper, I have set out to give a skeletal outline that aims at highlighting some significant aspects pertaining to the significance of Sufism and Islamism while giving the reader a sense of the continuities and discontinuities involved.

Islam under the Funj

Islam came into Sudan after the first wave of Islamic conquest had petered out. It came thus as a secondary wave directed towards what was viewed as a peripheral zone. The initial encounter between the Muslims who had conquered Egypt and the Nubians of northern Sudan took place round the middle of the seventh century. In 651-2 the Muslims, under Abd Allah b. Sad b. Abi Sarh, drove into Nubia and reached Dongola, whose cathedral they destroyed. Both sides eventually reached an agreement which contained a non-aggression pact allowing the Muslims and the Nubians to travel and trade freely in Nubia and Egypt without taking up permanent residence.

The treaty set in motion a slow process whereby Nubia came under two powerful agents that were to erode it and lead to its eventual collapse – trade and a relentless migration of Arab tribes looking for pastures. Of the two agents, the latter was the more significant. Though these tribes were not driven by any missionary ardour, they played a decisive role in the Islamization and Arabization of the country. The two processes of Arabization and Islamization were interconnected and intermarriage with the indigenous population played a crucial role.¹

¹ Hasan 1973: 177.

This process was consolidated after the emergence of the Funj kingdom around the beginning of the sixteenth century. The origins of the Funj are controversial and the beginnings of this kingdom are still shrouded in obscurity. What concerns us here, however, is the significance of the establishment of the Funj kingdom (early sixteenth century to 1820) as far as the aforementioned process is concerned. The Funj kingdom provided this process with a stable framework within which the dissemination of Islam and the Arabic language was given a vigorous impetus.

It is important to note here the slow nature of the process. Two and a half centuries after the emergence of the Funj kingdom, the Scottish traveller James Bruce expressed the following remarks about the Islam of the kingdom's inhabitants:

The Pagans . . . of Sennar, and all the little states to the westward, Dar Fowr, Dar Sele, Bagrima, Bornu, and Tombucto, and all that country upon the Niger, called Sudan, trouble themselves very little with the detail of the Mahometan religion [prayers, ablutions, alms, circumcision, etc.] which they embraced merely for the sake of personal freedom and advantage in trade; but they are pagans in their hearts and in their practices, Mahometan in their conversation only. As for the sons of these, they are Pagans like their fathers, unless some Fakir, or Arab saint, takes pains to instruct and teach them to read; otherwise the whole of their religion consists in the confession of faith . . . "There is but one God, and Mahomet is his prophet."²

Bruce made a significant observation concerning the consumption of pig meat in Sennar: "Hog's flesh is not sold in the market; but all the people of Sennar eat it publicly; men in office, who pretend to be Mahometans, eat theirs in secret."³ A person who was of particular attraction to Bruce was *sid al-qawm*, "the great master", whom he described in the following terms: "He was little attracted to, or convinced of the truth of, the Mahometan religion, and as little zealous or instructed in his own . . . He was constantly attended by Nuban priests, powerful conjurers and sorcerers, if you believe him."⁴ *Sid al-qawm* might have been a licensed regicide and it has been argued that he was biologically related to the ruler and might have been the king's maternal uncle.⁵ Bruce's comments about *sid al-qawm* are particularly significant in the light of the fact that he was seemingly an important person in the

² Bruce 1804 (vol. VI): 389-90.

³ Ibid.: 388.

⁴ Ibid.: 373.

⁵ See Spaulding 1985: 34-6.

kingdom's court and thus reflected to a reasonable extent the degree of the courtiers' and the ruling élite's attachment to Islam.

Though Bruce was not impressed by Sudanese Islam, his observations provide us with two significant clues about the degree of change in social attitudes already brought about by the process of Islamization: pork was not sold in the market and men who exercised power consumed pork secretly. These were clear indications that Islam was gradually claiming part of the "public space".⁶

The rise of Sufi orders

During this phase there was another agent that played a decisive role in the spread of Islam to which Bruce refers only in passing, namely the religious and spiritual masters or *shaykhs*. To understand Sudanese Islam we must understand the role of these men. The Funj period was crucial to the history of Islam in the Sudan as it witnessed its supplanting of Christianity, its relentless expansion and its consolidation. This was a process initiated and sustained by *shaykhs* and the institutions they set up.

Our main source on the religious life under the Funj kingdom is the *Kitab al-Tabaqat* (henceforth, *al-Tabaqat*), which was written by Muhammad al-Nur Ibn Dayf Allah (d. 1809), a jurist who belonged to a religious family. The author finished his book in 1753 but he apparently kept going back to it and adding to his material till his final years.⁷ *Al-Tabaqat* is a biographical dictionary containing entries on around 300 holy and religious men. Though a few references to holy women are made, the author does not credit them with separate entries. The physical world of *al-Tabaqat* is the central part of the Sudan, which constituted the heartland of the Funj kingdom, and the author relied mainly on oral traditions in depicting his period. The book is a remarkably rich document that reflects the religious, intellectual and cultural life of the central and northern Sudan in the period from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was the period during which the roots taken by Islam started to germinate and produce a distinctively Sudanese Islam.

⁶ It is on the basis of this "mixed" nature of Islam under the Funj that Sid Ahmad does not accept the description of the Funj as an "Islamic sultanate or kingdom" (1991: 60).

⁷ In his introduction to his abridged translation of *al-Tabaqat*, H.A. MacMichael maintained that the book was written in 1805, as may be gathered from a reference to that year in one of the biographical notices (MacMichael 1922, vol. 2: 217). Holt and Daly maintain that the work was produced by several hands (1988: 26). In his introduction to his edition of the book, Hasan maintained that the author started compiling his material at an earlier date and kept adding and revising till the final years of his life (1985: 18). Judging from the internal evidence of the material, I find Hasan's suggestion most plausible.

The evidence of *al-Tabaqat* suggests that the coming of the *tariqas* into the Sudan was preceded by an earlier phase which was dominated by individual holy men who instructed the people on the affairs of their religion and combated what they deemed as non-Islamic practices. Two such early men Ibn Dayf Allah mentions were jurists who studied in Egypt: Mahmud al-Araki and Ibrahim al-Bulad, who taught *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Al-Araki called for a strict observance of Islamic family laws in connection with the period of probation after divorce, an area in which the people were reportedly lax. Al-Bulad is credited with popularizing two Maliki *fiqh* books, namely the *Risala* of Abu Zayd al-Qayrawani (d. 996) and the compendium of Khalil b. Ishaq (d. 1365). They were followed by Muhammad al-Masri, an Egyptian Malikite who lived in northern Sudan and taught Malikite standard books, besides *tawhid* (God's unity) and grammar. This activity apparently gained momentum to the extent that the author of *al-Tabaqat* tells us that the sciences of *tawhid* and *tajwid* (Quranic recitation) soon became widespread in Gezira, the country's heartland.⁸ The hegemony of the Malikite rite was challenged by proponents of other rites.⁹

These jurists were, however, soon to be eclipsed by Sufi *shaykhs* or masters. One of the earliest *tariqas* which entered the Sudan was the Qadiriyya, thanks to the intense activity of a certain Taj al-Din al-Bahari who came from Baghdad in the mid-sixteenth century. He stayed in the Sudan for several years and travelled to win recruits. Soon the Qadiriyya came to dominate the Sufi scene in the country. Another early order which competed with the Qadiriyya was the Shadhiliyya whose beginnings are traced to the mid-fifteenth century. It reached its peak in the eighteenth century at the hands of Khawjali b. Abd al-Rahman (d. 1743), who started his career as an adherent of the Qadiriyya. Another prominent *shaykh* influenced by this *tariqa* was Hamad b. Muhammad al-Majdhub (d. 1776) whose *tariqa* came eventually to be known as the Majdhubiyya.

The shaykhs' physical and spiritual spaces

The Sufi *shaykhs* created their own physical and spiritual space. The physical space was the *shaykh's* independent centre at the heart of which stood the *khalwa* or school of religious sciences. The *khalwa* provided a centre for attraction of disciples and a powerful dissemination agent as these disciples graduated and were given permission to start their own centres. Some of these *khalwas* were large centres with numerous students. Ibn Dayf Allah tells us that some of them catered

⁸ Ibn Dayf Allah 1985: 40-1.

⁹ Ibid.: 42.

for as many as a thousand students.¹⁰ They drew students from all parts of the northern, central and eastern Funj land and from the west. The curricula of these *khalwas* comprised standard Maliki *fiqh* books besides Quranic exegesis and *hadith* (Prophetic traditions). The material of *al-Tabaqat* indicates that students took part in the work on the lands owned by the *shaykhs*. Some centres were founded by *shaykhs* or flourished after *shaykhs* had moved to them. A case in point was al-Aylafun, southeast of Khartoum, which sprang up around Idris b. al-Arbab (d. 1650). Idris was granted land by the kings of the Funj and his centre was a point of great attraction for people who came from areas as far apart as the Red Sea and the White Nile. A factor that greatly enhanced Idris' status was the mediator role he played between subject and ruler.

What the *shaykhs* succeeded in establishing was an institution with religious and socio-political power that enjoyed a considerable degree of independence from the state. This is clearly illustrated by the career of Abd Allah b. Daf' Allah al-Araki (fl. 1570) who started as a judge at the Funj court. With the rise of the Qadiriyya and the power and prestige it acquired, he travelled all the way to Mecca to be initiated into the *tariqa*. As a judge he was dependent upon the state, whereas as a *shaykh* he could establish his relatively independent power base. The state forged close links with the *shaykhs*' centres, granting them land and offering them gifts. Some of the *shaykhs*, like Hasan b. Hasuna (d. 1664), were virtual feudal lords. Moreover, some *shaykhs* could receive the *zakat* (alms tax) and according to *al-Tabaqat* could dispose freely of it. The relative independence of the *shaykhs*' power base gave them so much confidence that some of them did not conceal their contempt for the state.¹¹

So much for the *shaykhs*' physical space; let us turn now to their spiritual space. This space was created on one important level in contradistinction to that of the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) representatives. The historical roots of this lie in the conflict between mystics and *fiqh* scholars in Islam. The material of *al-Tabaqat* reflects this antagonism. A dramatic incident in this connection is what *al-Tabaqat* recounts about the bitter and hostile confrontation between Dushayn, a Shafi'ite judge, and Muhammad al-Hamim, a Sufi *shaykh* who was initiated by al-Bahari:

Dushayn . . . was called the Judge of Justice because he declared shaykh Muhammad al-Hamim's marriage null and void. The shaykh, in a state of Divine ecstasy, had married more than permitted by *sharia* which is four and had married two sisters at the same time

¹⁰ Ibid.: 73, 80, 89, 100, 109.

¹¹ Ibid.: 208.

. . . When shaykh al-Hamim came to the Friday service in Arbaji, justice Dushayn declared his opposition to this. On the shaykh's way out, Justice Dushayn held his horse's bridle tight and said, "You have married five and six and seven. All this has not been enough for you. And now you marry two sisters at the same time." The shaykh said, "What do you intend to do?" The Judge said, "I intend to dissolve your marriage because you have defied God's Book and the Way of the Messenger of Allah, Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him." The shaykh said, "The Messenger of Allah has given me his permission . . ." ¹²

According to the account of *al-Tabaqat*, the judge's interference earned him divine punishment as he was afflicted by a severe skin disease. This negative view of the judge reveals the clear bias of the popular mind in favour of the Sufi institution and its *shaykhs*.

In the biographical notice of Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd we come across his dim view of *fiqh* practitioners, "whose hearts are concealed from God." ¹³ The experiences of some *shaykhs* underline the Sufi conviction that *fiqh* was a blind alley. This is reflected most dramatically by an aspirant who, after having studied *fiqh*, was so discontented and desperate that he went to join the small boys of the school of a *shaykh* in the hope of being initiated into the Sufi way. ¹⁴ A similar resentment and revolt against *fiqh* is encountered in the case of Hamad al-Turabi (d. 1704). ¹⁵ One of the *shaykhs* did reportedly even go to the extent of acting in clear violation of *sharia* by revoking definite divorces (*al-talaq bi al-thalatha*). ¹⁶

The material of *al-Tabaqat* does, however, give examples of a reverse movement. Hence, we are told about *shaykhs* who start off as promising Sufis but then revert to *fiqh*. A prominent proponent of stern *fiqh* views was Hamad b. Muhammad b. Ali who entered into conflict with his master on account of what he saw as laxity on his *shaykh's* part. What should be stressed, however, is that the position and temperament of a man like Hamad b. Muhammad b. Ali remained unrepresentative and it was rather the more open and tolerant outlook of his *shaykh* that characterized the general attitude of the Sufi institution.

In return, the popular mind held these *shaykhs* in great reverence and projected upon them superhuman qualities. This was done by investing the *shaykhs* with *baraka* (blessing) and the special powers of performing *karamas* (miracles) which demonstrated their holiness and

¹² Ibid.: 90.

¹³ Ibid.: 71.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 83.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 161.

¹⁶ Ibid.: 237.

their closeness to God. The concept of *baraka* was part of the *shaykh's* charismatic power and it was a concept that was inextricably linked with the idea of Divine Favour. In acquiring *baraka*, human effort was inconsequential, but then *baraka* could be bequeathed to the *shaykh's* offspring.¹⁷

Karamas were a vital element in the relationship with the *shaykhs* and *al-Tabaqat* abounds in them. These *karamas* served a double need: the *shaykhs* needed them to enhance their image and promote their authority and the people needed them to sustain their belief-system. On another level, the *karamas* may also be seen in the narrower context of the rivalry among the *shaykhs* as the followers of each one sought to champion the special status of their master. Most of the *karamas* of *al-Tabaqat* were modelled on those of the Quran but a good number of them came from other sources. To some *shaykhs* were attributed *karamas* of celestial journeys similar to the one attributed to the Prophet. There was a set of *karamas* which echoed the miracles attributed to Jesus such as the raising of people from the dead. Some *shaykhs* were credited with the power of flying, others with that of communicating with the dead or communicating with animals. In another set of *karamas*, the concept of a miracle fused with the *shaykhs'* alleged curative powers. An important and widely accepted role of the *shaykh* was the treatment of mental disorders and infertility. The period did, however, witness a resistance to the *karama* cult and a counter emphasis was advanced to the effect that authentic *karama* consisted in *istiqama* (religious righteousness). There is evidence in *al-Tabaqat* to suggest that this was part of the Shadhiliyya's reaction against the Qadiriyya. Yet this tendency did not seem to have had an appreciable impact on the popular mind as it seemed to be steeped in a *karama*-infused world.

A noteworthy aspect that should be pointed out is that in fulfilling their several roles, the *shaykhs* always invoked the authority of their *silsila* (spiritual chain). The authority of the living *shaykhs* was seen as being firmly rooted in a living tradition that went back to former *shaykhs* and ultimately to the Prophet. It is important to note in this connection that the tradition treated the former *shaykhs* and the Prophet as living agents who took an active part in guiding the community. We are hence told that Khawjali b. Abd al-Rahman used to see the Prophet in person twenty-four times a day.¹⁸ Another figure who was glorified by the tradition was al-Khadir, a legendary saint. The material

¹⁷ The inheritability of *baraka* was also seen in terms of a *shaykh's* *sharifi* origin, i.e. his descent from the Prophet. Some *shaykhs* made such claims and were thus seen by their followers as carriers of *baraka* from the most exalted source. See Holt 1973: 121-2.

¹⁸ Ibn Dayf Allah 1985: 191.

of *al-Tabaqat* presents this figure as a living and active force who met *shaykhs* and intervened in settling disputes.¹⁹

From Ibn Dayf Allah's material it is evident that the traditional education of some *shaykhs* was poor. Some studied little of the Quran and the recitation by some of the holy text was flawed.²⁰ There were, however, others who were noted for their great learning and other solid grounding in traditional sciences and were credited with works that they had authored.²¹ The interests of some *shaykhs* even covered controversial aspects of *kalam* (scholastic theology).²² What should be noted is that whether *shaykhs* were ignorant, learned or even mentally disturbed, they still retained their distinctive quality as carriers of *baraka* and performers of *karamas*. So much so that even when *shaykhs* flagrantly breached *sharia*, they were still revered and their conduct was viewed as a deliberate act to conceal their saintliness.²³

In the world of *al-Tabaqat*, the death of a *shaykh* meant that only his physical presence came to an end. His *baraka* could still be sought through an undiminished spiritual presence. This spiritual presence was materially embodied in the *shaykhs*' tombs and graves. These tombs and graves became places of considerable attraction for pilgrims from far and near, giving rise to what has been described as "saint worship", an important aspect of Sudanese Islam to date.

Sudanese Islam gained some of its lasting features during the Funj period. At the centre of this Islam stood the Sufi *shaykhs* as archetypal figures who provided the community with its spiritual sustenance. Besides, these *shaykhs* were at the centre of a complex socio-economic and political context and as such they owned property and exercised a degree of political influence. The *shaykhs* built their independent centre of power *vis-à-vis* the state and other *shaykhs*. This bestowed a great deal of prestige on the Sufi institution; so much so that when the Sudanese eventually wanted to realize their salvation, it was only a *shaykh* produced by this institution who could unite them and lead them into a revolution that promised global salvation.

The context of the Mahdist revolution

The Funj kingdom was brought down by Muhammad Ali Pasha (1769-1849), the governor of Egypt, who was lured by the prospect of finding

¹⁹ See *ibid.*: 161, 222, 74, and 236 respectively.

²⁰ *Ibid.*: 140.

²¹ See e.g. *ibid.*: 102, 103, 297, 359, 362.

²² See e.g. *ibid.*: 267, 373.

²³ Muhammad al-Hamim and Muhammad b. al-Naqar were such *shaykhs*. The author tells us that they belonged to the *malamtiyya* (blameworthy) class of mystics.

precious metals and of setting up a slave army. The expedition was accompanied by three *ulama* who belonged to different rites. These *ulama* were under strict orders to urge the Sudanese to submit to the invading forces on the grounds that they were Muslim and that submission to the Ottoman Caliph and "Prince of Believers" was a religious obligation.²⁴

With the coming of these *ulama* and the further training of more *ulama* at the Azhar University,²⁵ the Turco-Egyptian administration provided the required manpower for the running of the *sharia* (Islamic law) courts it set up and which "had never before been known to most Sudanese."²⁶ Alongside the popular, *tariqa*-based Islam of the Sudanese, the ground was laid for an official Islam that was intermeshed with the state. However, the Turco-Egyptian administration soon realized that the roots of this brand of Islam were too deep and so it took the pragmatic step of cooperating with the *tariqas*. The government bestowed privileges upon Sufi *shaykhs* and provided their brotherhoods with grants.

With the rise and intensification of the disillusionment with and opposition to the Turco-Egyptian regime, some men of religion were willing to come to the fore and express their disaffection. The Austrian trader and traveller Ignaz Pallme wrote about a certain Shaykh Badawi who said to the Turco-Egyptians, "You call yourself Muslims . . . God alone knows the truth, but to me you are only the oppressors of my country."²⁷ It was eventually a man produced by the establishment of popular Islam who could articulate the discontent of the oppressed and lead them through a most stormy and turbulent phase to what seemed to them like the beginning of a new millennium.

The proclamation of Muhammad Ahmad b. Abd Allah (1844-84) of his Mahdism led to the most dramatic revolution in Sudanese history. The events that led to the Mahdist revolution, its subsequent success and the establishment of its state do not concern us here as the present focus will be confined to the significance of the Mahdist event to Sudanese Islam. To understand Sudanese Mahdism we must take into account its broader Islamic context. Though Muhammad Ahmad projected his movement as a re-enactment of the Prophetic time, it may be possible to trace its thought to an indirect impact of the Wahhabist movement of Hijaz and a possible impact of the *jihād* movements of West Africa.

²⁴ Shoucair 1903, vol. 3: 3-4.

²⁵ On the ideological basis for the acceptance by the Sudanese *ulama* of Turco-Egyptian rule see al-Gaddal 1985: 51.

²⁶ Khalid 1990: 30.

²⁷ Quoted in Trimingham 1949: 103.

The Wahhabist movement was an extreme reaction against what was seen by its founder, Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792) as serious deviation from the true path of Islam as expounded by the Quran and the Sunna (the Prophet's way). Ibn Abd al-Wahhab showed particular disapproval of saint worship and some other prevalent practices which he deemed as "paganistic". The early phase of his career was characterized by his travel in search of religious learning. During his stay in the Iraqi city of Basra he came into active contact with several teachers and it was likely that he came to know at close quarters adherents of Sufism and Shi'ism.²⁸ Having a temperament of a more austere nature, he was attracted by the neo-Hanbalism of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and the focal point in his reform became his attack on *bida* (innovation). This position was in fact rooted in his staunch Sunnism, which led to his condemnation of sects and schisms. As an action-bound reform movement, Wahhabism succeeded eventually in setting up its theocratic state. Though its extremism hindered its spread in the rest of the Sunnite world, it nevertheless had its distinctive impact.

One such impact was on Sufism, which was at the receiving end of Wahhabism's violent vituperation. A fresh response that came to be known as neo-Sufism formed among the Sufis. This response was characterized by its conciliatory attitude towards mainstream Sunnite Islam. In formulating the basis of its rapprochement with Sunnism, neo-Sufism affirmed the central place of the Prophet in its belief-system, emphasizing the link with the Prophet and deliberately playing down the ecstatic link with God.²⁹ Neo-Sufism continued, however, to see the Prophet as a living agent who took an active part in shaping the *umma*'s history.

In turning to the western flank of the Sudan, we find that the leaders of the West African *jihad* movements firmly rooted themselves in the idea of *tajdid* (renewal). Shaykh (Shehu) Usman dan Fodio, Shaykh Ahmad Lobbo (Seku Ahmadu) and al-Hajj Umar presented themselves as *mujaddidun* (renewers of the Faith) who set out to eradicate what they saw as a "syncretic" Islam that permeated the religious life of their people, that is, an Islam that coexisted with and was influenced by traditional African beliefs.

These leaders were steeped in Sunnite Islam and a Sufi tradition dominated by the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya. Though they were distinguished scholars who enjoyed a great deal of prestige, their calls for *jihad* had to be grounded on an ultimately unchallengeable authority. This they achieved by recourse to visions in which the Prophet appeared and invested them with the required authority. Usman dan Fodio

²⁸ Laoust 1968: 678.

²⁹ O'Fahey 1990: 1-9.

described such a vision on reaching the age of forty. According to his account, he was drawn into a *hadra* (colloquy) of the Prophet, and the congregation was attended by the Prophet's Companions, other prophets, and all the saints. He was made to sit at the group's heart and then Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani appeared, dressed him with a robe and a turban and girded him with the *saif al-haqq* (the Sword of Truth or of God) which he was to unsheathe against God's enemies.³⁰ Al-Hajj Umar had similar visions in which the Prophet and Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani appeared and instructed him to declare the *jihad*.³¹ This Sufi dimension was coloured with a Wahhabist-like hostility against *bida* and hence the programmes of these reformers stressed the necessity of implementing *sharia*. In studying the character of Muhammad Ahmad we note a temperament that had much in common with Ibn al-Wahhab and the leaders of the West African *jihads*.

The calling of a revolutionary shaykh

Muhammad Ahmad's education followed the traditional curriculum and path offered at the time by the religious schools and the *tariqas*. After mastering the traditional religious sciences under two *shaykhs*, he went on to sit at the feet of Muhammad Sharif Nur al-Daim (d. 1908), a descendant of Ahmad al-Tayyib al-Bashir, and a great *shaykh* of the Sammaniyya order. Muhammad Ahmad scrupulously followed a Sufi regime of extreme self-denial and an austere and rigorous asceticism, earning the immense prestige and his master's authorization to represent him. Thanks to this position, he could travel widely and thus gauge the revolutionary ferment that was seething against the colonial Turco-Egyptian administration.

Though Muhammad Ahmad eventually rose to be a major *shaykh* of a Sammaniyya branch, this was apparently not sufficient in his view as a vehicle for carrying out his mission. As a *shaykh*, however exalted and influential he might be, he would after all be one among many and part of a vast and intricate web of rivalries and animosities. It was the appropriation of the position of the Mahdi that would at one stroke place him above the entire religious establishment and bestow upon him the required authority to exercise his role. The development of Muhammad Ahmad's consciousness may hence be seen in terms of a conjunction between his religious consciousness and a socio-political consciousness stressing the necessity of setting up the Mahdist ideal of a "just society" on earth. It is, however, not clear whether the idea of Mahdism was self-envisaged by Muhammad Ahmad or whether he

³⁰ Hiskett 1973: 66.

³¹ Quoted in Batran 1989: 540.

was promoted into it by Abd Allah b. Muhammad (1846-99), his close disciple who later became the commander of his forces and the ruler of the Mahdist state.

Abd Allah b. Muhammad belonged to the Taaysha branch of the Baqqara of western Sudan. According to al-Zubayr Rahama (d. 1913), Abd Allah's great-grandfather came as a pilgrim from West Africa and then settled among the Taaysha and married into them. Having been spared by al-Zubayr after falling captive in his hands, Abd Allah wrote to him telling him about a vision in which he had seen that al-Zubayr was *al-Mahdi al-muntazar* (the Expected Mahdi).³² Al-Zubayr rebuffed Abd Allah's suggestion but this did not apparently drive the latter into despair. When Abd Allah later met Muhammad Ahmad, he immediately declared at their first meeting that he had seen in him the signs of the Expected Mahdi.³³ These accounts might not be true but they reflect a prevalent mood of expectation that imbued the country. Someone who reported this mood was Yusuf Mikhail, the son of a Coptic clerk, in his memoirs. According to him, the people of al-Ubayyid complained bitterly about their grievances and waited for their deliverance at the hands of a Mahdi. Even the children of the city played "Mahdists and Turks".³⁴

The atmosphere of expectation might explain partially why Mahdism caught up with a vast number of Sudanese and proved to be a highly potent concept in mobilizing and directing their energies against the government on the one hand and in the direction of constructing a salvation history on the other. The idea, though inert within the context of Sunnite Islam, was not foreign or unappealing. In the *Tabaqat*, we come across an earlier claim to Mahdism made by Hamad al-Turabi but the impact of his claim did not go beyond his disciples' circle. So, the idea of Mahdism, being an essential part of Islamic salvation history, only went into a state of hibernation. It was in August 1881 that the idea was to erupt on the Sudanese scene in the form of a cataclysmic upheaval that swept the "old order" before it and replaced it with its own "Mahdist order". For this to succeed in the manner and the speed it did, the forceful appeal of the Mahdist image had to combine with the right social conditions.

The fact that the revolution's leader came from within the ranks of Sufi orders is consonant with the characteristic role of these orders as supra-"tribal"³⁵ and supra-"social" bodies, whose *shaykhs* could attract

³² Shoucair 1903, vol. 3: 71-2.

³³ Ibid.: 120 and Holt 1958: 43.

³⁴ Mikhail n.d.: 15.

³⁵ The term "tribe" is not used here in a genealogical sense but rather in that of a large social group whose members follow a similar style of life, are economically interdependent

followers from all parts of the country and from all social backgrounds. But, for the special claim of Mahdism, one needed more than the traditional veneration accorded to a leading *shaykh*. For this unique position one needed no less than "election".

On one crucial level, this "election" was predestined in a "biological" sense as Muhammad Ahmad made the claim that he was a descendant of the Prophet.³⁶ Making use of the procedure of *naskh* (abrogation) in the Quran and the Prophetic traditions, he dismantled the entire traditional edifice of the received doctrine of Mahdism and offered his own version based on his claim of Prophetic visions. In resorting to these he was in fact treading a familiar Sufi path. The popular figure of al-Khadir was also brought into Muhammad Ahmad's Mahdist construct, alongside the illustrious figures of the Prophet's four successors, Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and other great and lesser Sufi *shaykhs*. In a letter to one of his disciples, he referred to a waking vision of the Prophet (a state to be attained only at an advanced stage of spiritual evolution) in which a dialogue between the Prophet and a close disciple of Muhammad Ahmad's took place. In this vision, the Prophet solemnly proclaimed that whoever disbelieved in Muhammad Ahmad's Mahdism was an unbeliever in God and his Apostle.³⁷ In another vision, the Prophet seated Muhammad Ahmad in his seat repeatedly and girded him with his sword.³⁸ In the light of the striking similarity between the images of Muhammad Ahmad's visions and those of his predecessor Usman dan Fodio it is hard to discount a degree of exposure on his part to West African influences.

Extravagant as they sounded, these visionary claims did play their role in investing Muhammad Ahmad with his ultimate authority and in transforming his status from that of a *shaykh* to that of an *imam* (leader). There was a clear nexus between his visions and his role as a religious and political leader: the visions underpinned his religious and secular authority and his subsequent military and political successes lent credence to his visions.

The *ulama* and some *shaykhs* expressed their stiff opposition to Muhammad Ahmad's claims. Among the noteworthy rebuttals of his claims were those of Shakir al-Ghazzi, the *mufti* (supreme judge) of the Sudanese Appeals Council, Ahmad al-Azhari, an eminent religious

and share a sense of affinity based on a common language, history and cultural heritage. In the process of their history, tribes tend to develop sets of genealogies which give the tribe a sense of a distinct identity that it has retained over long periods of time. As a result of Islamization and Arabization, northern Sudanese tribes tend to produce genealogies that link them to Arab origins.

³⁶ Abu Salim 1969: 26.

³⁷ Abu Salim 1990: 76.

³⁸ Ibid.: 97.

figure in western Sudan, al-Amin al-Darir, a notable man of religion and literature, and a poem by Muhammad Sharif, Muhammad Ahmad's former *shaykh*.³⁹ The rebuttals of the *ulama* enumerated in detail the prerequisites of Mahdism as spelled out in Mahdist traditions and set out to demonstrate that Muhammad Ahmad did not satisfy them. The *ulama* class was, however, seen as an ally of the discredited and "infidel" Turco-Egyptian government and hence their pronouncements fell on deaf ears. Muhammad Ahmad's Mahdism was an all-powerful and unstoppable tide that did eventually bring into line some of his most hostile and grudging opponents such as Muhammad Sharif.⁴⁰ Mahdism succeeded in placing its own vision and order of knowledge at the centre, to the exclusion of any other order of knowledge.

It is probably the *baya* (oath of allegiance) to Muhammad Ahmad that provides us with the best summing up of the Mahdist ideology. This was a fixed formula that would-be followers (or *Ansar*, helpers, like the Prophet's *Ansar*) solemnly uttered, transforming hence their status to that of full-fledged followers:

... we pledge our allegiance to God, His Apostle and to you that we would [keep a firm] hold [of] the Unity of God and would not set up associates to Him. We would neither steal nor commit adultery nor make slanderous allegations nor disobey [your command] to do what is good and honourable. We pledge our allegiance to you to renounce and forsake the [pleasure of the] world, to be contented with what is with God and the Hereafter and not to flee *jihad*.⁴¹

Modelling his Mahdist state and society on that of the Prophet, the heart of Muhammad Ahmad's programme was the imposition of *sharia* as the ultimate remedy for all social ills. This was to stress continuity, but on another level his movement was about discontinuity. Muhammad Ahmad's claim of having direct access to the Prophet was soon to harden into a distinct attitude of rejecting the variant expressions of Islam in favour of a unified Mahdist Islam. He abolished all the orthodox rites of *fiqh* and all the Sufi *tariqas*. All books on Prophetic traditions, Quranic exegesis and other religious subjects were banned and burnt. The Mahdist prescribed texts were the Quran, Muhammad Ahmad's *ratib* (prayer book) and his *manshurat* (proclamations).⁴²

³⁹ Shoucair 1903, vol. 3: 374.

⁴⁰ Shoucair tells us that only three religious notables could stand their ground against Muhammad Ahmad and express their opposition to him without being subjected to the familiar Mahdist persecution. See *ibid.*: 373-4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 139.

⁴² *Ibid.*: 364.

The promise of Mahdism

Muhammad Ahmad's position was to all intents and purposes his solution for the dichotomy that had existed within Islam. He saw his Mahdism as a high point which harmonized *haqiqa* (Sufi "Truth") and *sharia*, the *batin* (Sufi esotericism) and the *zahir* (Sunni exotericism). As he could meet the Prophet, he had thus direct access to Prophetic knowledge and ultimately to Divine knowledge. As *khalifat rasul Allah* (the successor of the Messenger of God) his decrees held comparable authority with those of the Prophet's.⁴³ Rejecting Muhammad Ahmad's Mahdism was, hence, an act of *kufr* (unbelief) that was punishable by death.

The success of Sudanese Mahdism in setting up its state meant, according to its ideology, the onset of a "Mahdist space" that delegitimized what preceded it and what existed outside it. It was this wholesale delegitimization that bestowed upon Muhammad Ahmad's Mahdism one of its characteristic qualities: its *jihad*-ist nature. So much so, that Muhammad Ahmad issued a ban on pilgrimage to Mecca (one of the five pillars of Islam), substituting it with *jihad* which, he maintained, constituted a more immediate imperative.⁴⁴ This *jihad*-ist nature gave birth to a militarized society pervaded by a militant and intolerant ideology. Hence, Muhammad Ahmad's interpretation and practice of *sharia* were typified by an intransigent rigorism. This was particularly clear in the way women were treated. He declared that women who uncovered their heads in public or spoke at the top of their voices were to be flogged.⁴⁵ Furthermore, women were banned at some point from leaving their homes and if they ventured into public spaces they were to be flogged.⁴⁶ It marked a clear break with the traditions of his Sufi past when Muhammad Ahmad banned visits to the tombs of *shaykhs*

⁴³ In discussing Sudanese Mahdism, Nels Johnson (1978) argues that Muhammad Ahmad's career could be subjected to a religious paradigm of a "Faki-Reformer", "Mahdi", and "Prophet-Surrogate". I find his paradigm convincing with the exception of the first element. Within the institutions of Sudanese Islam, the "faki" is either a healer or a Quranic school teacher, as Johnson is well aware. Though the word is a Sudanese variant of *faqih* (jurisconsult), a scholar of *fiqh* is never called *faki*, and the word is kept thus to denote the indicated junior functions. Furthermore, the word is never used in connection with prophets. Johnson misreads a reference in one of Muhammad Ahmad's visions to a certain Faki Isa as reference to Jesus. I believe that a more likely paradigm that reflects Muhammad Ahmad's career is one of: "*faqir*", (disciple of a Sufi *shaykh*), "*shaykh*", "Mahdi", and "Prophet-Surrogate". Needless to say, these phases are inextricably linked and it would have not been possible for Muhammad Ahmad to assume a higher function without going through its preceding phase.

⁴⁴ Shoucair 1903, vol. 3: 365.

⁴⁵ Abu Salim 1969: 186.

⁴⁶ Ibid: 299.

and cordoned them off with heavy fences.⁴⁷

But why did the Sudanese follow a "Mahdi" rather than a non-religious leader? In examining the causes which led to the revolution it is clear that the vast majority of the Sudanese resented the heavy taxes imposed by the colonial administration and the ill-treatment to which they were subjected.⁴⁸ Yet sharing common grievances, however intense and deep-rooted they may be, is not enough to ignite a revolution. Muhammad Ahmad's effective exploitation of the organized structure of his immediate *tariqa* milieu and the aura of the mission he claimed were crucial factors in the remarkable and quick success of his revolution. In nineteenth-century Sudan, the two most important organizational structures were the "tribe" and the "*tariqa*". Each structure had its distinct context that was shaped by its specific social functions and what Muhammad Ahmad succeeded in doing was to mediate between the two and fuse their energies into a unified religio-political movement. On one level this gave the Sudanese a sense of a "unified entity" *vis-à-vis* the colonial government, and on another a sense of "Messianic role" that went beyond the Sudan which they were destined to play through their active participation in the moulding of a salvation history. This "Messianic role", which was a vital element in the way Muhammad Ahmad's movement projected itself as Mahdism, is "universalist" by its nature. Sudanese Mahdism, hence, saw in its programme and vision the salvation of the whole Islamic World (and of course, ultimately, that of the entire world).

The Mahdist assertion that unbelief in Muhammad Ahmad's mission would render a Muslim an infidel and the *jihad*-ist nature of its programme and state placed the Sufi brotherhoods under unprecedented pressure and threat. One of the largest and most successful brotherhoods, the Mirghaniyya or Khatmiyya, did not recognize Muhammad Ahmad as the Expected Mahdi despite their recognition of the Mahdist idea. As this *tariqa* had a large following, particularly in the east and the north, and as it had close links with the Turco-Egyptian regime, the challenge and threat it faced were of an extreme nature. On the level of its followers, the Khatmiyya showed conspicuous cracks, as many of them joined the Mahdist cause. The leadership, however, remained on the whole steadfastly anti-Mahdist. Muhammad Sirr al-Khatim II was a major opponent of Mahdism, which he denounced as a *fitna* (sedition), and what was interesting in his case was that he based his position on his claim to explicit authorization from the Prophet.⁴⁹ In

⁴⁷ Shoucair 1903, vol. 3: 365.

⁴⁸ For the factors which led to the revolution see Shoucair 1903, vol. 3: 109-12 and Holt 1958: 24-7.

⁴⁹ Karrar 1992: 101.

the eastern region, the rivalry between the Khatmiyya and the Majdhubiyya polarized their respective positions as the latter sided wholeheartedly with Muhammad Ahmad.⁵⁰

With Muhammad Ahmad's death in June 1885 it was clear that the millenarian promise kindled by Mahdism was over. As part of the eschatology of his Mahdism, Muhammad Ahmad had made claims that were never realized. He claimed that he would pray in Egypt, Damascus, Constantinople and Mecca, and that after the conquest of Mecca the world would enter a Mahdist era of complete justice and peaceful harmony, that wolves would play with sheep and children would play with scorpions.⁵¹ It was left for his successor, Khalifa Abd Allah, to insist on the authenticity of Muhammad Ahmad's claims and press ahead with his programme. People undoubtedly took Abd Allah's claims to visions of Muhammad Ahmad seriously, but under his autocracy Muhammad Ahmad's Mahdism was the heart of the regime's ideology. The failures of the Mahdist regime and its eventual removal at the hands of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium forces in 1899 did not, however, put an end to the aura and influence of Muhammad Ahmad's Mahdism. The legacy of that revolution still remains and plays an active role in present-day Sudan in the form of the Ansar, a religio-political organization of significant presence and weight.

The political rise of the Khatmiyya and the Ansar

After 1899, the energetic dynamism of Ali al-Mirghani and his close relationship with the Condominium government guaranteed a speedy recovery in the status of the Khatmiyya. This unassailable position was, however, seriously challenged between 1914 and 1924 with the rise of what came to be known as neo-Mahdism, owing to the indefatigable efforts of Abd al-Rahman, a posthumous son of Muhammad Ahmad. In reviving the Ansar, Abd al-Rahman was careful to stress their religious nature and play down any political designs. He could count on the Ansar's loyalty in creating a significant wealth based on agricultural ventures.⁵² With the rise of the power of the Ansar and its recognition by the authorities, a new bi-polar mould represented by the Khatmiyya and the Ansar was introduced into the country's political and religious life.

Muhammad Ahmad's *ratib* became the centre of the Ansar's spiritual life. The irony of their situation was that they re-created the very thing

⁵⁰ For a good account of the Khatmiyya under Mahdism see Karrar 1992: 93-102.

⁵¹ Shoucair 1903, vol. 3: 394.

⁵² For the rise of Abd al-Rahman and neo-Mahdism see Warburg 1978: 21-66, Woodward 1985: 39-51 and al-Karsani 1987: 385-404.

that their master set out to abolish: a *tariqa* in the strict sense of the word. By its nature a *tariqa* is open to a future promise whereas in the case of the Ansar the promise, that is Mahdism, has already been realized in the past. The Ansar's eschatology does not allow for a Second Coming in which Muhammad Ahmad will re-manifest himself as in the case of the Shiite Mahdi. Following the victory of the Condominium forces, there were several resistance movements against the new order. These movements came to be known as *Nabi Isa* movements as they were inspired by the Mahdist belief that his reign would be succeeded by the *dajjal* (the anti-Christ) who would be defeated at the hands of Jesus (*Nabi Isa*). A succession of revolts broke out. These were led by religious men who were imbued by the Mahdist ideal but were soon put down by the colonial administration.⁵³ It should, however, be stressed that these movements did not express neo-Mahdism and that the latter was a product of different dynamics.

The Khatmiyya-Ansar religio-political polarization introduced into the country's life what has been described as *taifiya* (sectarianism). The term is heavily coloured by the implication of economic exploitation of the rural adherents of the two major communities. It was through their political visibility that the economic involvement of the leaders of the Khatmiyya and the Ansar came under greater scrutiny, but the pattern became widespread and consistent under Condominium rule, and after, as far as other religious groups were concerned. Al-Sharif Yusuf al-Hindi, the leader of the Hindiyya order (a branch of the Sammaniyya) was given land in the Gezira. Prominent families belonging to the Qadiriyya, the Sammaniyya, the Majdhubiyya and the Ismailiyya were increasingly acquiring land and consolidating their economic position.⁵⁴ The Condominium regime encouraged this development, "in the hope that by enabling such leaders to emerge as prominent businessmen they could defuse the political threat posed by tightly organised movements capable of fanaticism."⁵⁵

The political dominance of the Khatmiyya and the Ansar stemmed from their broad base, their centralized structure and the economic activity of their leaders. By the time independence was achieved in January 1956, both communities were established at the heart of the country's political life, with Ali al-Mirghani patronizing the national unionist parties and Abd al-Rahman patronizing the Umma (Nation) Party.⁵⁶ By contrast, the other Sufi orders withdrew on the whole to the background and confined themselves to their religious role. What

⁵³ See Niblock 1987: 162.

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*: 52.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 51.

⁵⁶ See al-Shahi 1986: 29.

may however be noted about this period is that though the two religious leaders were prime players on the political scene, the dominant political discourse was essentially secular. Nevertheless, the representatives of the Islamization of the country's political discourse and life, the Muslim Brothers, were already setting up the early foundations of their organization and working to bring about a change in the state of affairs. Though at the time a tiny group that could only act through pressure channels, the Muslim Brothers' agitation for an "Islamic constitution" did partially pay off in April 1958, with the drafting of constitution which stated that the republic was duty-bound to bring the country's laws into conformity with the injunctions of the Quran and the Prophetic Sunna.⁵⁷ Such a position meant, among other things, a virtual exclusion of Southerners from the process of shaping the country's future. The civil war had broken out in the South five months before independence. The roots of the conflict may be traced to factors of uneven development, race, religion and culture.⁵⁸ What concerns us here is the religious factor as far as Islam is concerned. Islam has long been seen by large sections of the Northern population as a most effective means of producing a measure of homogeneity that would enable the country to be kept intact. This was once spelled out openly by Sadiq al-Mahdi, a great-grandson of Muhammad Ahmad and a prominent politician, who said: "The failure of Islam in southern Sudan would be the failure of the Sudanese Muslims to the international Islamic cause. Islam has a holy mission in Africa, and southern Sudan is the beginning of that mission."⁵⁹ A ferocious phase of forced Islamization, coupled to intense repression, was unleashed by the government of Ibrahim Abbud in the 1960s.⁶⁰

The search for a constitution

An important feature during the second democratic era (1964-9) was the rise of Islamism and the steady diffusion of its discourse among Northern political parties. The Muslim Brothers set up their party, the Islamic Charter Front (ICF), and they relentlessly campaigned for an Islamic constitution and the introduction of *sharia* under the dynamic

⁵⁷ Khalid 1990: 144.

⁵⁸ For a general survey of the conflict see Mohammed Omer Bashir, *The Southern Sudan: Background to Conflict*, London: Hurst, 1968. For an exposition of the Southern point of view see William Deng and Joseph Oduho, *The Problem of Southern Sudan*, Oxford: Institute of Race Relations, 1962. See also Dunstan M. Wai, *The Southern Sudan: A Problem of National Integration*, London: Frank Cass, 1973. For Northern and Southern prejudices that aggravated the situation see Malwal 1981: 31-8.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Malwal 1981: 41.

⁶⁰ For more details on this see Khalid 1990: 188-91.

leadership of Hasan al-Turabi. The fact that they were a single-issue party did not isolate them but rather gave them a higher profile. The Islamism of the Muslim Brothers was based on an anti-sectarianism and anti-Sufism ideology that had a closer affinity with Wahhabism. As such it was difficult for the Muslim Brothers to command the allegiance of a wide popular base. However, the movement could wield a disproportionate degree of influence by virtue of the effectiveness of instrumentalizing Islam in politics and its dynamic and urban nature. This period also witnessed the rise of Sadiq al-Mahdi to prominence. His advantage over al-Turabi was that he had immediate access to the Ansar as a large popular base. But he was at the same time an Islamist of a type similar to that of the Muslim Brothers and hence his ascendancy as a leader and political ideologue of the Umma Party stamped it with an Islamist outlook that did not differ substantially from that of the Muslim Brothers. A significant outcome of the close co-operation between the Umma Party and the ICF was the banning in 1965 of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP), the chief force of the left and a leading platform for secularism.⁶¹ This move came as a hard blow to Sudanese constitutionalism,⁶² and constituted a significant gain for the Islamists. The basis for banning the SCP was its atheism, which meant that Islam had now become the new basis of political legitimization, and hence the way lay open for the sacralization of politics and the desecularization of society.

A similar attempt aimed against the Republican Party of Mahmud Muhammad Taha was also engineered during this period. Taha propagated a position which might be described as neo-Islamist.⁶³ His conceptual framework rested on a fusion of Sufi principles and the notions of political freedoms, economic justice and social equality. He argued that Islam realized itself historically through two distinct phases: a Meccan phase, spanning the Prophet's career from its inception to his forced *hijra* (emigration or flight) in 622, and a Medinan phase, covering the Prophet's period in Medina and the remainder of his career up to his death in 632. According to Taha, Meccan Islam stressed the values of freedom and equality but these values were unworkable in the historical context of seventh-century Arabia. Consequently, this level of Islam was withdrawn

⁶¹ For an account of the events that led to the dissolution of the SCP see Warburg 1978: 113-20. On the rise of the SCP as the major force of the left see Beshir 1974: 186ff.

⁶² For a discussion of this point see An-Na'im 1988: 104.

⁶³ By neo-Islamism I mean a subscription to the basic concept of a return to the sources of Islam, "the fundamentals", while opening Islam up to modern concepts such as political freedom and economic and social equality. Taha developed a perspective which insisted on doing away with discriminations based on class or gender and embraced liberal democracy. For an exposition of his views see Taha 1987.

or subjected to *naskh* (abrogation) to be replaced by another that could be put into effect and that was in keeping with the social realities of the time. Medinan Islam was hence characterized by its recognition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, sex and social status or origin as in the case of slaves. What Taha called for was a return to the Meccan level which, he insisted, was the "authentic" message of Islam. Taha argued that the time was ripe for this "second message of Islam" to be presented and that the Sudan was destined to spearhead its implementation.⁶⁴

Another controversial aspect of Taha's thought was his theory about *salat* (Islamic prayer). He maintained that the five obligatory prayers of Islam are in essence an emulation (*taqlid*) of the Prophet and that this is meant to lead the believer to a stage where he no longer need imitate the Prophet. This is a state of mystical union with God where the *salik* (follower of the spiritual path) realizes his/her absolute individual freedom and *asala* (authenticity).⁶⁵ Taha's perspective was bitterly disputed by the religious establishment and the Muslim Brothers in the Sudan and the rest of the Sunnite world. In 1968, a *sharia* court convicted him of apostasy *in absentia*. Public feelings were whipped up against his views in orchestrated campaigns, but the wave was not powerful enough to incriminate Taha or outlaw his party.

During this period, the efforts to set down a permanent constitution continued. The state of affairs favoured the Islamists, who pressed for an Islamic constitution and the proclamation of the Sudan as an Islamic republic. A national constitution committee recommended that the constitution be derived from the principles and spirit of Islam and that the *sharia* be the basis of all legislation. This was strongly opposed by the representatives of the South and the Nuba Mountains.⁶⁶

The *coup d'état* of May 1969 that brought Jafar Nimeiri to power showed all the hallmarks of a complete rupture with the Islamist programme and orientation. The May regime manifested a decidedly

⁶⁴ For a full exposition of Taha's views see Taha 1987. For more details about Taha's thought and the history of the movement he had set up see Hayder Badawi Sadig, "The Republican Brothers: A religio-political movement in the Sudan" (M.Sc. diss., University of Khartoum, 1988), Jürgen Rogalski, "Die Republikanischen Brüder im Sudan: Ein Beitrag zur Ideologiegeschichte des Islam in der Gegenwart" (M.A. diss., Free University of Berlin, 1990). See also Mustapha Khayati, "Introduction à la pensée de Mahmud Muhammad Taha, réformiste et martyr" in Hervé Bleuchot, Christian Delmet and Derek Hopwood (eds), *Sudan: History, Identity, Ideology*, Reading (UK): Ithaca Press, 1991, 287-98 and Haydar Ibrahim Ali, *Al-Ustadh Mahmud Muhammad Taha: Ra'id al-tajdid al-dini fi al-Sudan* (Ustadh Mahmud Muhammad Taha: A Pioneer of religious reform in the Sudan), Casablanca: Sudanese Studies Centre, 1992.

⁶⁵ For Taha's theory on prayer see his *Risalat al-Salat* (A tract on prayer), Khartoum, 1979.

⁶⁶ Khalid 1990: 218-19.

secularist orientation coupled with the adoption of left-wing policies in the economic and social domains. It should, however, be pointed out that in the context of Sudanese politics secularism has never come to mean an active hostility to Islam, nor an opposition to the implementation of *sharia* laws in the domains of family law and wills, or to the state's support of religious institutions. As has been noted, even the SCP "had long recognized and practised Islamic observance."⁶⁷ The most important achievement of the regime was its conclusion of the Addis Ababa Accord in 1972 with the South Sudan Liberation Movement which brought the civil war to an end. This new-found harmony with the South was confirmed in the regime's 1973 constitution, in which the references to Islam as the religion of the state in the 1968 constitutional document were removed and indigenous religions and Christianity were recognized, guaranteeing their followers religious equality.⁶⁸ The great irony was that this profound and enlightened recognition of the country's religious plurality took place under a regime that did not recognize political plurality in the first place and that had no constitutional legitimacy. Therefore the gain was short-lived.

The imposition of sharia

With the setting in of what was called the National Reconciliation in 1977, a fresh realignment in favour of the traditional political forces of the North emerged. The most significant development in the new context was the rise of the Muslim Brothers, not just as a political but also as an economic force. They championed the formula of Islamic banking and with the help of vast funds from oil countries they succeeded in building up a formidable economic base within the space of a few years.⁶⁹ This decidedly changed the social nature of the Muslim Brothers from a hitherto student and intellectual-based movement to one of an urban bourgeoisie. In sharp contrast to the emphasis of the tradition of Sudanese Sufism on the values of asceticism, frugality and plain living,⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Woodward 1985: 181.

⁶⁸ Khalid 1990: 277.

⁶⁹ For the rise of Islamic banking during this period and its significance and impact see Elfatih Shaaeldin and Richard Brown, "Towards an Understanding of Islamic Banking in Sudan: The Case of the Faisal Islamic Bank" in Tony Barnett and Abbas Abdelkarim (eds), *Sudan: State, Capital and Transformation*, London: Croom Helm 1988, 121-40.

⁷⁰ A Sufi whose conduct personified these values to the extreme was Hamad al-Turabi. According to *al-Tabaqat*, he entered into a retreat for twenty-two months, during which he lived on very little food. After a break, he went back into another retreat for a period of thirty months and on coming out he was so thin and emaciated that his bones could be seen. See Ibn Dayf Allah 1985: 161-3.

the Muslim Brothers were stressing now a bourgeois ethos of appropriation and consumerism.

Internal and external dynamics pushed the Nimeiri regime towards Islamization.⁷¹ The state initiated a policy of active encouragement of the small religious orders in a bid to create a counterweight against the Khatmiyya and the Ansar. Nimeiri began to pay the *shaykhs* of these orders regular visits and they received government grants and were officially represented in the Sudanese Socialist Union, the country's only political party.⁷² In September 1983, after he entered into a showdown with the judiciary, Nimeiri took the nation by surprise when he announced an immediate adoption of the *sharia* penal code. Relying on the enthusiasm and close cooperation of the Muslim Brothers, the entire country was driven into a *sharia* frenzy.⁷³ Between August 1984 and March 1985, 106 citizens lost their limbs, including seventeen cross-amputations (i.e. amputations of the right hand and the left foot).⁷⁴ In addition, countless citizens were subjected to the degrading and brutal punishment of flogging (a standard *sharia* punishment for the drinking of alcohol). Though there are no statistics reflecting opinion polls at the time, it would be reasonable, in my judgement, to say that most Sudanese were traumatized by the regime's savagery and saw its "judicial revolution" as a last-resort measure of intimidation and control. Probably, the Republican Brothers reflected a majority feeling when they brought out a leaflet in December 1984 attacking the laws and dismissing their Islamic credentials.⁷⁵ Taha was immediately arrested, hurriedly tried, convicted of apostasy and executed in January 1985. The breath-taking speed with which Taha was pushed towards the gallows reflected Nimeiri's keenness to petrify any potential opponents and the Muslim Brothers' over-eagerness to get rid of their arch-enemy.

In March-April 1985, the people of the Three Towns (Khartoum, Omdurman and Khartoum North) took to the streets to overthrow the regime. The army's command decided to side with the people and toppled Nimeiri. After a transitional period of one year, a new government, headed by Sadiq al-Mahdi, was elected. Sadiq al-Mahdi's period from 1986 to 1989 was dominated by two interrelated developments: the intensification of the civil war in the South between the Sudan

⁷¹ On some of the external dynamics that pushed the regime towards Islamization see Warburg 1991: 91-92. For a discussion of Nimeiri's Islamization shift from an Islamist perspective see Zein 1989: 60-108.

⁷² El-Hassan 1993: 84-6.

⁷³ For the conduct of the Muslim Brothers during this period see Prunier 1989: 368-72.

⁷⁴ Khalid 1990: 310.

⁷⁵ For a translation of this leaflet see An-Na'im's introduction in Taha 1987: 10-12.

People's Liberation Army (SPLA)⁷⁶ and the government forces and the entrenchment of the Islamists in the North. The Muslim Brothers, under the name of the National Islamic Front (NIF), emerged as the third parliamentary force⁷⁷ and were close allies of Sadiq al-Mahdi. Though Sadiq al-Mahdi had attacked the September 1983 laws in the course of his election campaign, he did not abolish them.⁷⁸

The NIF followed its agenda doggedly and produced the two most important documents of Islamism during the period: the Sudan Charter of 1987 and the draft Penal Code of 1988. The former was highly significant because it outlined, though in generalized terms, the bases on which the Muslim Brothers sought to project themselves to the Sudanese and the rest of the world. Moreover, it reflected the development of the Muslim Brothers' thinking in the light of their rich political experience since the mid-1960s. The following features may be noted about the document: the NIF offered its alternative vision within the framework of the country's liberal democracy which provided for a multi-party system; the country's religious and cultural diversity was recognized; a decentralized, federal system was advocated; other laws, besides *sharia*, were recognized and were even accepted on a territorial level in areas where non-Muslims were a majority; and the widely discussed proposal of convening a constitutional conference involving all the country's political forces to reach a national consensus was accepted. Compared with the position of the ICF in the 1960s this showed an unmistakable moderation of the Muslim Brothers' views on several issues.

However, the essential feature of the Sudan Charter lay in its insistence on the Islamization of the country's politics, legal system and economic and social life. The charter started off from a simple division of the Sudanese into a "Muslim majority" and a "non-Muslim minority". Sudanese Muslims were cast in the following seemingly unchanging mould: "The Muslims are unitarian in their approach to life. As a matter of faith they do not espouse secularism. Neither do they accept it politically."⁷⁹ In arguing the necessity of carrying out Islamization and implementing *sharia*, the charter does not marshal the traditional argument of the Muslim Brothers that insists on "Divine injunction", but rather puts forth a secular argument based on liberal democratic reasoning: "The Muslims, therefore, have a legitimate right by virtue of their

⁷⁶ For the views of the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement see Mansour Khalid (ed.), *John Garang Speaks*, London: KPI, 1987.

⁷⁷ On the significance of the NIF's electoral gains and some aspects of its thinking see Niblock 1991: 261-2.

⁷⁸ For the government's problems *vis-à-vis sharia* under Sadiq al-Mahdi's government see Salih 1990: 212-14.

⁷⁹ Ahmed and Sorbo 1989: 134.

religious choice, of their democratic weight and of natural justice, to practise the values and rules of their religion to their full range – in personal, familial, social or political affairs.”⁸⁰ The authors of the charter were fully aware that conflicts of law could arise and in envisaging such eventualities they threw their weight behind *sharia*: “The state shall establish a legal system in full consideration of the will of the Muslim majority as well as the will of the non-Muslims . . . In common matters where it is not feasible to enforce but one option or system, the majority option shall be determinative . . .”⁸¹ Furthermore, the charter endorsed a situation where discrimination on the basis of religion in appointments for public offices could have arisen: “None shall be legally barred from any public office only because of his adherence to any religious affiliation. *But religiousness in general may be taken into consideration as a factor of the candidate’s integrity.*” (Emphasis added.)⁸²

The other document for which the NIF, in the person of its secretary-general Hasan al-Turabi, was responsible was the draft Penal Code, which was submitted in July 1988 to the cabinet. This code was noisily trumpeted by the government and the Muslim Brothers as a more acceptable Islamic alternative to the September 1983 laws. But, as its critics noted, the proposed code was more divisive as far as the country’s unity was concerned and more restrictive as far as the freedoms of thought and expression were concerned.⁸³ Along the lines of the Sudan Charter, the code proposed the exclusion of the South from the jurisdiction of *sharia*, an arrangement which would create two legal systems which were not compatible in many respects. The other alarming aspect was the inclusion of apostasy as a capital crime.

Though Sadiq al-Mahdi stood on the same Islamist platform as the Muslim Brothers and displayed an equally intense aversion to secularism,⁸⁴ the NIF decided to commit itself to its own course of action and impose its own pace. In June 1989, an NIF-inspired junta toppled Sadiq al-Mahdi’s government.

1989 and after

It is interesting to note that the junta which seized power under Brig. Umar Hasan al-Bashir did not advance any Islamist arguments (such as opposition to the freezing of the *sharia* penal code under the democratic

⁸⁰ Ibid.: 134.

⁸¹ Ibid.: 135.

⁸² Id.

⁸³ Khalid 1990: 370.

⁸⁴ See e.g. his “Al-tahaddi al-’almani: al-judhur wa al-ab’ad” (“The Secular Challenge: Genesis and Prospects”), Khartoum: n.d.

government) in its initial phase. To justify their act, they argued that their intervention was necessary in the light of what they described as the government's failure to resolve the civil war in the South and its incompetence. The regime started off as what seemed to be an alliance between Islamists and other minor forces opposed to multi-party democracy and received an initial vigorous boost from the Egyptian government. However, it soon became evident that the Islamists were not only the regime's backbone, but were intent on monopolizing power and marginalizing the other forces, whether religious or secular.

The NIF's social basis remained the same as before the coup, but taking power enabled it to channel the state's resources in two directions: undermining its political opponents with the view of crushing them or at least neutralizing their influence and engaging in a sweeping privatization programme with the view of realizing a full control of the country's economy. The Khatmiyya and the Ansar came under the regime's immediate attack, particularly the former. The NIF's high degree of organization, discipline and determination have contributed significantly in helping it secure its grip on power over the past six years, though opposition to the regime has been gradually growing and consolidating itself.

The policy line adopted by the regime, which has been informed by the NIF's social constitution and its ideology, has entrenched and exacerbated certain cleavages within the national fabric. There has been a decisive shift in favour of the North and the Centre and its Arabo-Islamic ethos; there is a clear rejection of and counting out of the black African component of the country's cultural and religious constitution; economic policies have favoured the rich and the gap between them and the poor has widened.

The regime bases its legitimacy on a twin claim: it maintains that the democratic regime had failed the people of the Sudan and that the Islamic orientation is their natural choice and their only way to address their problems. All aspects of life should be strictly subjected to the rules of Islam, and legitimacy (whether political or otherwise) should be derived from a prior and final commitment to Islam. As Islam is a historical entity that displays multiplicity and internal contradictions, it is thus defined and upheld in accordance with the choices made by the NIF's ideologues. What is excluded by them becomes a "non-Islam" or at least a "corrupt Islam" and the state's resources are mobilized to counter it with the view of uprooting it. This exclusive ideological position has stamped the regime from the outset with a *jihad*-ist nature.

The regime has so far relied heavily on two institutions to influence the Sudanese: schools and the Popular Defence Forces (PDF). School curricula have been infused with a substantial Islamist component as the authorities are keen to mould the thinking of the younger generations.

Furthermore, the regime imposed military training on tens of thousands of citizens within the framework of the PDF. The PDF's antecedents were the NIF's paramilitary groups but the seizure of power brought a qualitative change and a radical boost to the Islamists' plans. The state's resources were appropriated to subject the PDF's recruits (most of whom were forced to join) to an intensive programme of Islamist re-education.⁸⁵ A vital function of the PDF was their use to fuel the civil war against the South and to extend it to other parts of the country and in particular the Nuba Mountains region in the west.⁸⁶ While pursuing a vigorous militaristic policy inside the country, the regime has engaged in long-drawn-out talks with the SPLM and neighbouring country and insists that it is seeking a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

An important aspect of the regime's policy that has received international attention is the human rights situation, which is strongly criticized by human rights organizations.⁸⁷ The number of Southern and Northern citizens who have been killed as a result of the escalation of the war runs into tens of thousands and the number of Southern citizens who have been either internally displaced or had to leave the country and take refuge in neighbouring countries is estimated at 3 million. Citizens suspected of being government opponents are likely to lose their jobs and those arrested are reportedly tortured and ill-treated in secret detention centres. As part of its ideological position, the regime has argued in favour of what it describes as an "Islamic" concept of human rights and does not accept being judged by the standards of human rights instruments and conventions which are informed by Western secular thinking. However, the regime has so far failed to come up with a code which it can follow.

A harsher version of the September 1983 Penal Code was revived. A new addition was an article which provided for *rida* (apostasy), and as such freedom of religion and thought have been largely swept away. It is hard for Muslims in the Sudan to argue against *sharia*'s penal code but it is likely that the vast majority of them do not accept it (as attested by the great masses of people who took to the streets and toppled Nimeiri's regime in 1985) and would like to practise their

⁸⁵ For a statement by the regime's president outlining the PDF's tasks see *Sudan Update*, vol. 6, no. 5, April 3, 1995, p. 4.

⁸⁶ See *Africa Watch* report, "Sudan: Eradicating the Nuba", September 9, 1992.

⁸⁷ See Amnesty International report, "Sudan: The Ravages of War, Political Killings and Humanitarian Disaster", September 1993; Sudan Human Rights Organisation, "Human Rights Violations in the Sudan", report prepared for the fiftieth session of the Commission on Human Rights in January 1994 in Geneva; Human Rights Watch/Africa, "Sudan, 'In the Name of God': Repression Continues in Northern Sudan", 6: 9 (November 1994) and Amnesty International, *The Tears of Orphans: No Future without Human Rights*, London: Amnesty International Publications, 1995.

Islam without reference to it. In as much as many Sudanese see that several Quranic injunctions (such as, for instance, those to do with slaves) are irrelevant and out of place in the context of modern life, they sense that *sharia*'s penal code can no longer address their problems. So much so that even the regime cannot show any ostentatiousness similar to that shown by Nimeiri in implementing Islamic law.⁸⁸

Under the current regime, the NIF has almost exclusively relied on the army, the security apparatus, the PDF, its membership and financiers. Alongside the Khatmiyya and the Ansar, the other Sufi brotherhoods have been excluded. This is likely to remain the case owing to the regime's commitment to an ideological position that disapproves of Sufism as an Islamic expression. As in the case of Mahdism, the *jiḥād*-ist nature of the current regime and the nature of the ideology to which it subscribes have so far underlined its discontinuity with popular Islam. The regime is working hard on moulding the national character in its image, but there is still a great deal of resistance on the part of other expressions of Islam and on the part of non-Muslims and secularists.

In the Sudan, Islam has always been available as a constituency to be politically explored and exploited. The quietist nature of Sudanese Sufism went through a dramatic rupture during the Mahdist revolution. Mahdism united Sufism and Islamism, bringing to the fore Islam as a political ideology that sought power and the remoulding of society through it. Muhammad Ahmad's personal history, prestige and successful career made such a fusion of Sufism and Islamism possible and was accepted by a vast number of Sudanese who followed him and laid down their lives for his cause. His successor, Abd al-Allah, could not, however, live up to this image and under his regime it was his brand of Islamism that dominated and was imposed as an official ideology.

The Condominium regime gave the Sudan a stabilization of its borders as the present-day nation-state and provided the state with its machinery, laying the foundations of modern Sudan. The regime's educational system gave the country its élite, which wavered between its Islamic and Islamist legacy and the ideals of secularism and liberal democracy. However, the dynamics generated by the Condominium led also to the establishment of the Khatmiyya-Ansar sectarian mould within the context

⁸⁸ The regime is increasingly finding its commitment to the implementation of *sharia*, more and more problematic in the current international human rights atmosphere. A clear example demonstrating its dilemma is the case of a Muslim scholar who converted to Christianity in the early 1990s and against whom the regime could not bring a death sentence. For a detailed account of Sylvador Ali Ahmed's story see *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, "Converted Imam Released after Six Months in Prison", March 1994, p. 10.

of which traditional Islamic allegiances and politics were brought into active interplay. The prominence of these two groups led to the political marginalization of other Sufi orders.

The history of post-independence Sudan may be seen on one important level in terms of the movement of Islamism towards the centre. This movement had gathered consistent and gradual momentum under civilian and military governments but it received its most vigorous boost under Nimeiri in 1983 with the introduction of the Islamic penal code. A sequel of this was that during the period 1985-9, the political force of Islamism could effectively paralyze the political will of the North. Though the enforcement of the September 1983 laws was frozen during this period, they were still in force and their retention was one of the chief factors that contributed to the deteriorating of the relationship between the South and the North.

Since the coming of Brig. Umar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir to power, his regime has espoused Islamism as its official ideology. The regime is committed to a programme of wholesale Islamization, the enforcement of *sharia* and the settling of the conflict in the South through a *jihad* war. The political ascendancy of Islamism and the nature it has assumed has placed Sufism before an extremely difficult challenge. The Khatmiyya and the Ansar aside, the small Sufi orders have tended on the whole to be politically less active. The future of Sufism seems to depend largely on its ability to sustain its institutions on the one hand and to be an active expression of an alternative Islam on the other. Whether this will ever take place and whether it will be within the context of the existing orders or that of reformed or new orders is a matter for the future to settle.

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THE ROLE OF SUFI WOMEN IN AN ALGERIAN PILGRIMAGE RITUAL*

Sossie Andezian

Ever since they appeared on the Algerian political scene, the Islamists have tried to reduce the presence of women in public life by means ranging from verbal intimidation to physical attack. This segregation of women, which is required in schools, in the work place, on public transport and on the streets, is symbolized by the *hijab*, the so-called Islamic garment, already worn by many women out of conviction, fear or mimetism. The "reform of society" undertaken by Islamists, which is supposed to touch all sectors of political and social life, concentrates on the management of relations between the sexual categories in public, and more precisely on the management of the place of women in a universe which is considered as being foremost that of men.

One might retort that this is one of the old debates of Arab-Muslim societies or that sexual inequality is a universal principle, which remains, if not always present in daily life in Western societies, at least widespread at the level of representation. But why underline the topicality of this problem in Algeria, where the social relations of gender (to use the terminology of feminist anthropology¹) have always been codified, and where marriage has been commonly considered the only institution authorizing sexual intercourse and reproduction, at least for women? The reason is clear. It is because the regulation of a domain as fundamental as the reproduction of society by an authority claiming to act in the name of divine law would transfer into the field of universal law something the social categories had previously admitted, more or less, as an internal principle. Such legislation would congeal society within a rigid system which would prevent any attempt at responding to real transformations in society and changing the relations between men and women. What seems to be at stake in the approach of the Islamists is

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¹ For a general inventory of the discipline, see Moore 1988.

the control of changes that have become inescapable. And everything happens as if the evolution of this society was limited by the fear of disorder that women behaving "freely" would introduce. This is, in a way, an archaic fear, "pollution" by women² disguised in so-called religious principles to justify their segregation. This segregation was at work in Algerian society before the emergence of politico-religious movements, being more or less effective in certain geographic areas, socio-cultural spheres and times. But that situation was often disputed and analyzed as one of the effects of the rapid urbanization of the young independent state, while, more significantly, women themselves constantly kept their segregation at a distance through games, derision and laughter.

It is this relation between women and the segregation they are subject to that I intend to analyze from observations of followers of a popular Sufi order, the *tariqa* Zidaniyya.³ These women could be considered as marginal in the sense that, not being militant, not holding any important post in society, and devoid of interest for the media, they are not induced to express themselves publicly. I started working with these women by chance and then chose to penetrate deeper into the study of women's representations of the social relation of gender in that recently urbanized rural environment, where women, most of whom are not engaged in active outside employment, have a very low academic standard. I did not choose these women on the basis of populism, but since they do not belong to any ideological religious or non-religious movement, they are more in a position to have a view of their society that is based on their own life experience and system of categorization. Through examination of a parodical ritual presented by women followers of the Zidaniyya in western Algeria during the annual pilgrimage of the brotherhood and through their reactions to repression of ecstatic practices by the Islamists in 1990, I would like to show the ambivalence of their representation of the authority of men in general, and of religious men

² Douglas 1981.

³ Zidaniyya is not the real name of the order referred to here. I chose to give it a fictitious name for reasons of discretion. The Zidaniyya are renowned for their practice of falling into a trance during ceremonies involving prayers, and perilous physical exercises based on the principle of annihilation of corporal sensations (*laab*, lit. game). In the region of Rimal (fictitious name), the members of the Zidani order are gathered under the authority of a *shaykh* who claims to be a descendant of the founder of this order which was created in Morocco during the sixteenth century. The members constitute a brotherhood. It is in fact a spiritual lineage: the *shaykh* belongs to a family originating from a Moroccan tribe affiliated to the *tariqa* which settled in the tribe of the Midam (also a fictitious name) around 1770. The *zawiya* is composed of two mausoleums sheltering the tombs of the founder ancestors, a mosque, a cemetery and the residences of the descendants. The *zawiya* is the regional seat of the Zidaniyya brotherhood. That is the place where the pilgrimage takes place.

in particular. By this I do not intend to emphasize the contradictions between their speech and their official and unofficial behaviours but to try to bring to the fore the duality of their view of the world as it expresses itself in these contexts. My main objective is to destroy one of the most common stereotypes concerning the image of women in Muslim societies: that of their passive and mechanical submission to the rules decreed for them by men. Going beyond the point of view of women in Algerian society, I seek to illustrate the representation of (political and religious) power by social categories dominated in the social and symbolic fields and to stress their use of derision in the expression of their relations to authority, a derision which conveys a great mastery of the organization and operation of a system from which they are a priori excluded.

The pilgrimage

Called the *rekeb* or *wada*,⁴ the pilgrimage of the Zidani order of the Rimal region to the tombs of their founder ancestors used to take place during the last week of May, during the sowing period. For the last few years, however, the pilgrimage has been taking place in July during the school holiday to allow a maximum of followers to join it. Among the pilgrims are members of all the *forqas*⁵ of the brotherhood and of ones invited from the central and eastern areas of the country, from Tunisia and Morocco and even from the *forqa* of women who have immigrated to France. There are also many followers who have come as private individuals as well as many bystanders. The *rekeb* is the most important moment of the ritual life of the brotherhood and, for many followers, it is the only time they take part in the activities of the organization. There are many reasons that induce more than a million people to spend one or several days at one of the holy places of their order: a request for *baraka*,⁶ a visit to the tombs of the founder ancestors,

⁴ Several terms are used to designate the described event. The most common are *rekeb*, which means a ride and refers to the horse, used as means of transport in the past, and *wada* or vow and by extension the collective sacrificial meal offered in honour of a patron saint.

⁵ *Forqas*, lit. part of a group. Groups of followers gathered under the authority of a leader elected by the group but legitimated by the *shaykh* who confers upon him the title of *muqaddam* (female *muqadma*) and invests him with functions of administering the group, of recruitment and training of the new members.

⁶ *Baraka*: in conventional belief, a beneficial force of divine origin that provides excesses in all fields of life. It is supposed to be especially concentrated in the person of the Prophet and of the saints, who can communicate it to all those who ask for it. The leaders of Sufi orders, considered as holy men, are also invested with that supernatural force, which is at the origin of all prodigious events. Each ritual ceremony of the Zidaniyya is chiefly aimed at acquiring the *baraka* of the order's founder.

a spectacle of extraordinary events and gestures, a meeting with the *shaykh*, a reunion with "brothers" (*khwan*) and "sisters" (*khwatat*) who share the same beliefs, experiencing moments of intense community life and so on.

The main ceremonies last one and a half days on the Friday and Saturday but followers come and go during the whole week. I have accompanied a *forqa* whose activities I have been following since 1982 twice to the event. Like all the *forqas*, this one goes to the *zawiya* in procession. Men and women are divided into separate vehicles. This separation of the sexes, which also affects married couples, will be strictly observed from the beginning to the end of the ceremonies.

Seen from outside, the pilgrimage seems to be men's business. The official events, *hadra*,⁷ sacrifice, invocation prayers, rogations and dispensation of *baraka*, are in the charge of male followers; the women are in the position of spectators, in quest of *baraka* which is supposed to be dispensed to them by the officiants. Even the *muqadmas*, who are appointed by the *shaykh* to be responsible for the women's *forqas*, merge into the masses at the place reserved for the female audience and children. Penetration into the *halqa*,⁸ or circle of officiants, is strictly forbidden to them and at each of their attempts to get closer to the circle they are roughly pushed away by a guard or *shawish*.

Tension is very high among the women during the first morning. They are watched over, especially by men from their family town and *forqa*. These men fear that their women might have contacts not only with "foreigners", that is with men not belonging to the named groups, but also with persons in charge of the ceremonies who have to remove from the *halqa* any disruptive elements that might discredit the *zawiya* in full view of the numerous "guests" and cause an accident during the perilous exercises. Women are the favourite target of these "watches": they are said to be undisciplined like children, and their state of physical and spiritual purity⁹ is questioned, factors that are "capable of irritating the *jnun*"¹⁰ and compromising the process of gaining and spreading the *baraka*. The *baraka* must be concentrated in the *halqa* where the *forqas* follow one another to gain it by reciting the *dhikr*,¹¹ by singing,

⁷ *Hadra*: divine presence according to the Sufi terminology. It is the name given by the popular orders to their ritual ceremony of invocation prayers, psalmodes, sacred songs and dances.

⁸ *Halqa*: ceremonial space regarded as sacred which is reserved for the officiants supposed to be in a state of ritual purity.

⁹ Physical purity is gained by ritual ablutions. Spiritual purity is *niyya*, pure intention, sincere faith.

¹⁰ Extract from an interview. *Jnun*, sing. *jinn*, beneficial or baleful spirits.

¹¹ *Dhikr*, lit. memory. Sufi rite *par excellence* which consists of meditative prayers or of the repetition of Quranic formulas, more particularly the repetition of divine names.

dancing and performing extraordinary exercises which provoke states of trance, the expression *par excellence* of the descent of the order founder's *baraka*. It will then be communicated to the pilgrims in different ways: *zyara*, or pious visit, to the tombs of the ancestors, *zyara* to the *shaykh* and the important members of the brotherhood, consumption of the couscous prepared with meat of a sacrificed animal or consumption of *herrif* (bread smeared with butter and honey distributed the following day at the end of the ceremony). It must be said that the whole space of the *zawiya* is thought to bear the imprint of *baraka*: it can be acquired at any moment, by contact (with materials: fabrics covering the catafalques of the founder ancestors, clothes of the officiants, stones from the graves or earth taken from the space of the *halqa*), by ingestion (ingestion of the *shaykh*'s saliva added to *henna*- and clay-based preparations, ingestion of water and food) or by acquiring objects (purchase of plastic kitchen utensils or of wickerwork sold by the stallholders installed in the *zawiya* for this occasion). Every entreaty for *baraka* is paid for in prayers, in vows, and most often in cash.

Women appear as passive beings, dependent on men's goodwill to obtain *baraka*. They sometimes make themselves heard with their ululations when they show their admiration for the wonders worked in the *halqa*, but these cries are soon repressed. Sometimes, "pushed by an irrepressible need to go into a trance" as they put it, a woman breaks away from the group and goes running towards the officiants. The *shawish* immediately intervenes and tries to immobilize her. The women then put pressure on him and remind him of the danger represented by the stopping of uncontrollable behaviour that has been ordered by occult powers. The *shawish* resigns himself to this and demands that the dancer takes off her shoes and puts on a hooded tunic. He covers the dancer's face with the hood before letting her go into her trance. He keeps her, however, in an intermediate space between the *halqa* and the audience. Other women try to approach the ritual space to lightly touch the officiants' clothes, to touch the blood-covered heads of those who slash their skulls, to ask wielders of sharp instruments to use the blades on a suffering body, or to snatch a piece of snake that one of the *Ulad al-Shaykh*¹² is devouring. Women explain: "God's love is making me do all this", "I am wild with love", "I cannot wait any longer". Even if "God's desire cannot wait", it seems that, to comply with it, women are subjected to men's authorization; men control their slightest movements.

In the evening, some pilgrims set out on their return journey. There

¹² *Ulad al-Shaykh*: lit. the children of the *shaykh*. Refers to the spiritual descendants of the founder of the *tariqa*, that is the present *shaykh*'s own children and nephews.

are many women among those who spend the night at the *zawiya*. They will take part in the women's *hadras* of the night but will be allowed to go and listen at a distance to the men praying and playing music.

On the morning of the second day, the official closing ceremony of the pilgrimage takes place: *hadra*, short speeches by the *shaykh*, by the *imam*, by the most influential *muqaddam*, general invocation prayers and also, at the request of some persons and in exchange for cash donations, distribution of the *herrif*. During the *hadra*, many women go into a trance among the men. They talk with the religious leaders and with other followers and jokes prevail in their talk. The number of participants is smaller than the day before and people know each other better. At the end of the morning, the crowd scatters and the pilgrims start to go home. The pilgrimage is officially closed.

The above is a description of the public image of women in the official ceremonies. A visit to the houses making up the *zawiya* reveals a very different aspect of women's participation in the pilgrimage: the role of the *zawiya*'s women and the *muqadmas* in the organization and enactment of the ceremonies is revealed as being as important as that of the men. In the same way, their talk about the exercise of authority by men (husbands, fathers, brothers, religious leaders) is surprising when one has seen how they are subjected to that authority. What do these outward discrepancies reveal? Where are the women between the sequences of the pilgrimage's official events, what do they do, and what do they say?

The place assigned to the women is in principle "inside", that is in the houses of the *zawiya*, in particular in the house of one of the deceased brothers of the *shaykh*, which is "a house without men" (although that brother has several sons, today all married). The women who deserve more respect, like the *muqadma* of the *forqa* from France, the wife of some *imam*, myself as a "foreign guest", will be accommodated in the *shaykh*'s house, left in the care of the first wife, who the followers call *Mrabta* and who is considered by them as the only lawful spouse. The remarried *shaykh* is living with his second wife in a new apartment built in the enclosure of the *zawiya* by one of the *forqas*. The women are in charge of preparing the food for the pilgrims for the whole week. They bustle about in the kitchens preparing the couscous that will first be distributed to the men; women always eat after the men. It is less a question of a real meal than the consumption of fragments of *baraka* which that traditional and highly symbolical meal contains. Most of the pilgrims take along a "snack" or buy something to eat on the spot.

Between the official ceremonies for mixed groups, the *muqadmas* lead *hadra* performances (*dhikr*, litanies, songs, dances) with the help of female musicians in an atmosphere which is particularly propitious for inducing a trance. Not all the women take part all the time. Some of them take care of their children, take a nap or chat. Others go out where the atmosphere is less tense, do a *zyara* in the mausoleums and in the cemetery of the *zawiya*, consult the *shaykh*, watch the male *hadras* and *forqas*, and buy "souvenirs" at the fair. Thus they move around among the men, of course wearing a veil and discreetly watched by those who consider themselves responsible for their security, as the presence of many "foreigners" is supposed to constitute a real danger. Young girls, and especially girls from immigrant families around whom boys hang about, are even more closely watched.

After the closing of the pilgrimage, not all the women leave. About twenty members of the *forqa* of Halat (a fictitious village name), who are well acquainted with the place, stay with their *muqadma* to spend a second night at the *zawiya*, to repeat the pilgrimage in their own way, where expressions of fun predominate. From that moment on, "the pilgrimage in the women's way" begins. Two series of activities characterize that second phase of the pilgrimage: the *khalwa* (lit. remote place, retreat), a procession that will lead to the heights of the *zawiya*, and a parody of marriage ritual and scenes from the pilgrimage.

Accompanied by two young musicians, the women, singing religious songs, climb to the *khalwa* situated on the heights of the *zawiya*. They stop by each mausoleum to salute their ancestors, praying, wailing and falling into a trance. At the *khalwa*, there is a long session of *hadra* where the women let themselves go freely into trances, interrupted by moments of discussions and jokes. Back at their accommodation, the members of the Halat village *forqa* start to prepare the evening entertainment, which will take place in the inner yard of the house.

After supper, the women of the *zawiya* and their children join the group that organizes the entertainment. They seat themselves on carpets laid on the floor. Even the first spouse of the *shaykh* is present. It is the first time I have seen her in a women's assembly since the beginning of the pilgrimage. Until now, her place has been in her house to welcome visitors who wish to meet her husband, to listen to them, to comfort them, and to prepare amulets for them. The *shaykh* often came to consult her about problems concerning the progress of the ceremonies. In other words, she assisted him discreetly even if she had been dethroned as a spouse since the second marriage of the *shaykh* after she had had a hemiplegia attack. Moreover, for the followers as a whole, she remains the *Mrabta*, the one who has the *baraka* after the *shaykh*, the *baraka*

which her eldest son will probably inherit. Her personal qualities are largely responsible for the esteem the followers feel towards her.

The entertainment is announced. Four women aged about fifty walk in. They are dressed up, one as a wife-to-be (she will also play the role of dancer) and the three others as men, in the roles of musicians (a *berrah*, or public announcer, and his assistant) and the best man (dressed as a hunter-rider). They will request some of the men present in the house to intervene: the young musicians taken to the *khalwa* during the afternoon, a man, considered the village idiot, in service of the *zawiya*, the *Ulad al-Shaykh*, also called *Mrabtin*, and single or recently wedded men. The entertainment consists of sketches, songs, dances and dialogues with the audience, which takes an active part: laughter, comments, remarks, *yoyous*, clapping, applause. Some women accompany the songs on musical instruments: drums of different sizes and tambourines.

All the scenes played focus on the theme of marriage: the proposal, announcement of marriage, ceremonies before the marriage in the respective families of the fiancé and fiancée, a procession accompanying the bride to the nuptial house, gifts to the bride, festivities, later domestic quarrels, bigamy and conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The scenes are not very precise and the whole thing has little structure. It is inspired by the daily life and rituals of the women who are present as well as by some sequences of the pilgrimage. In other words, there is no account or story strictly speaking, but a series of comic scenes. The comic aspect comes from the inversion of attitudes, behaviour and roles in performances where improvisation plays a great part. When the *berrah*, the compère, pauses for a while, he is immediately shouted at by the audience, who ask him to go on.

To my neighbours (the two married daughters of the *shaykh*, his youngest daughter who is single, his daughter-in-law and the wives of his nephews), everything seems comic. They shake with laughter at the actresses, closely examining every word, every event, every gesture of those taking part in the performance, recalling the trivial events and the peculiarities observed during the pilgrimage. Moreover, when they invited me to attend the entertainment, they introduced it to me as an "evening gathering of women where you laugh a lot". Intense moments where the excitement of the gathering reaches a peak punctuate the evening "made for laughter": the entrance of the disguised actresses, the dance of the men taken by the women, the dance of the gun, the imitation by the *berrah* of the religious leader who blesses the followers making offerings, an improvised song for the *Mrabta* on the proposal of marriage to her daughters. In short, they are all situations which show "the hidden sides of things".

The appearance of the disguised characters gives rise to general hilarity. The principle of disguise seems already comic in itself. The one playing the *berrah*, with a goatee and a moustache drawn in charcoal, a Bedouin scarf on her head, is wearing a shirt, a jacket and trousers borrowed from a man of the *zawiya*. Part of her shirt can be seen through the unbuttoned flies of her trousers. She sporadically plays on her *darbuka*, which is slung across her shoulder. Her "assistant" is wearing her *blusa*¹³ – only the Bedouin scarf covering her hair points to the fancy dress. From time to time, she pretends to play the flute on a stick. It is mainly her obesity that provokes laughter. The "bride/dancer" is wearing a white printed *blusa*. The golden veil, which is tied up behind her head and which hides her face and her neck, shows that she is a bride. She takes it off when she plays the role of dancer. In each hand she holds a dish towel by way of handkerchieves that she waves alternately while dancing. The "hunter-rider", who dances with a gun pointed at the floor in her hand, is wearing a white *djellaba* and a cartridge belt. A charcoal moustache and a white turban complete her disguise.

The men provoke laughter by their mere presence, which is unusual in a women's celebration. They are obviously the object of mockery. The *Ulad al-Shaykh* are ridiculed because they allow themselves to be made fools of by letting women who were only this morning at their feet "begging" for fragments of *baraka* lead them into the dancing. Their wives, sisters, sisters-in-law and cousins are the most savage. The men even get sung *Jibuha ya-l-Ulad*, the song composed to cheer on the Algerian football team in the 1982 World Cup, exhorting the "boys" to win. The women imitate the *Mrabt* performing the pilgrimage rituals in a state of trance: they are elated, in tears, they try to tear off pieces of snake that they swallow, they play with sabres or with fire with great commitment, they drive out the women from the *halqa* but do not refuse proffered bank notes. The *Mrabta* is called out by the *berrah*'s song, which alludes to the existence of her *shrika* (co-wife). It is now her turn to make fun of her husband, the *shaykh*, and she tells how he presented his second marriage, with a woman recruited to work at the *zawiya* while she herself was hospitalized for several months: "He said he would marry again, only to ensure the work of the *zawiya* and not for any other reason." Laughter. Her daughters add that they were really embarrassed when their father was taken to the *zawiya* "as a young bridegroom". The women snigger and increase

¹³ *Blusa*: traditional female dress for celebrations, but also indoor clothing: a long dress with short sleeves made of embroidered and/or lamé fabric, gathered at the waist and worn over a petticoat.

their comments on the real motivations of the *shaykh*: "He meant that he could not sleep anymore without a woman." The grasping *muqaddam* is another object of parody. Every time a member of the audience holds out a coin, the *berrah* draws the attention of the audience to it (every gift is first made ostentatiously), by banging on her *darbuka*. She thanks her and wishes her a long life and prosperity, announcing that the gift will be devoted to the "community of the *shaykh*" while she enumerates the names of the *Ulad al-Shaykh* and then pockets the money, which gives rise to laughter and comments on those *muqaddams* who appropriate the offerings of the pilgrims in return for good wishes. The principle of invocation itself is ridiculed. To a woman who asks who I am, the youngest daughter of the *shaykh* explains, imitating the intonation of the voice of a *muqaddam*, that I am the foreigner, "the one for whom *muqaddam* X said special prayers this morning. Welcome to the foreigner who is again among us this year, *meskina*! [the poor one]. Her country is still at war, may God protect her and bring peace back to her country. I hope she will come back to us next year." – "Amin!" (So be it), the audience answers in chorus.

But laughter is equally provoked by the women's evocation of their own daily lives. In the song addressed to the *Mrabta*, called by her first name, she is ridiculed as much as her husband. She laughs it off with her daughters, who point out that their fate as wives or daughters of the *shaykh* is not different from the fate of other women. This critical regard is also used on rival or hostile women. One of the daughters of the *shaykh* makes an insidious remark on the fact that her father's second wife is not present at the evening gathering. Some sketches present quarrels between women: a mother-in-law beats her daughter-in-law, neighbours pull out each others' hair because of quarrels between their children. Not even I will escape their sarcastic remarks. As she notices I am photographing and recording, one of the daughters of the *shaykh* says about me in the middle of laughter: "All this evening is in her honour, so that she takes away with her a pleasant memory of the *zawiya* and that she says 'look what they gave me there.'" To an older woman who asks not to be photographed with the others she answers mischievously: "It is an advertisement for television." The determination with which I record and photograph talking and remarks that have nothing aesthetic about them (neither beautiful songs nor well-dressed women) amuses them a lot. They evoke all the scenes of the pilgrimage where they have seen me running from one place to another to get the best picture or asking the men to record the music and songs for me.

The evening gathering ends late at night. The women of the *zawiya*

return to their houses, the others sleep there and will go back to their homes in the morning.

The women's rekeb: a marginal ritual?

How is this women's experience of the *rekeb* marginal? How does it constitute a heuristic object within the framework of an analysis of the sexual division of the space and symbolic work in Algerian society? Does it throw light on the processes of imposition, control and interiorization of the norms relating to the social relations of gender?

The events described above are marginal both from the point of view of the religion instituted by the Algerian state and that of the hierarchy of the brotherhood in question. By adopting the reformists' Islam at independence, the state excluded from the area of religion the various Sufi orders and condemned their practices, including the pilgrimages. However, in order to justify their occurrence in society, which is more frequent than is willingly admitted, these practices were transferred to the women's universe and attributed to their ignorance of religious matters. They were tolerated if the brotherhoods or the *zawiyas* which organized them did not represent any political danger. These events are thus marginal in the eyes of the established religion because they belong to a marginalized religious system subtended by structures that are excluded from the public domain. The *zawiya* referred to here is, as many other structures, considered to be the private property of the brotherhood's leaders.

In the eyes of the brotherhood's hierarchy, the women's evening gathering is not included in the pilgrimage's ceremonies and, in the same way, all the women's practices are marginalized. The evening gathering is held in the house of the *zawiya* known as "the women's house". It takes place after the official closing of the pilgrimage. The *shaykh* knows perfectly well that the event is taking place and what is done and said during it, but he could not repress it openly and take the risk of losing an active female clientele. He reduces it to "women's business", and thus makes it a matter of no importance or impact on the public image of the brotherhood. Overshadowed by the men, the women naturally include their own experience of the *rekeb* as an integral part of the entire ritual and their religious life of canonical practices, ecstatic practices and domestic or local customs. Furthermore, their parody of formal social behaviour is not very special. It can be observed in every women's gathering, religious as well as secular, spontaneous or organized, that is intended to celebrate a happy or a sorrowful event. In other words, parody goes beyond the bounds of the pilgrimage and is given a meaning only in the context of women's social life. The women can play that kind of game around a cup of tea with neighbours,

at the *hammam*, during the evenings of Ramadan, at weddings and also at funerals. If the women's events of the pilgrimage are marginalized, it is in the final analysis because these events are not codified nor legitimated by the brotherhood's hierarchy and because they take place outside the public sphere.

Instead of considering the women's events of the pilgrimage as alternative ceremonies with a set of subversive reactions to the rules of the brotherhood, I suggest that they should be analyzed as one of the pilgrimage's components (furthermore, they are considered as such by the women). In this way they become a complex, multidimensional, polysemic phenomenon where the women take their place as full social actors. The analysis of this sequence is relevant, first and foremost, because it brings to light the duality of aspects of every form of cultural production in a society based on sexual segregation. It reveals above all the non-official meaning given to society by the women. My purpose is not so much to underline the specificity of the women's expressions of religiosity as to try to show their articulation with established religious practices. This can help to deepen the knowledge given by social science on the religious universe of Muslim societies, which is often presented as an austere, male universe excluding emotional expressions of religiosity. At a second level, the analysis of this sequence is relevant because it dismantles the social mechanisms of construction of the sexual categories and of production of the women's segregation. As Corin (1986) suggests in his collection of articles on "margin dynamics", what is relevant in such a context is less the study of the state of marginality than that of the construction process of the margin. That is why I would like to question here the relation between margin and centre, that is the relation between the women's experience of the pilgrimage and the official pilgrimage, between the Zidaniyya women and the organization of the brotherhood. The study of the women's experience of the *rekeb* has not only the aim of reporting on women's religious life but also tries to reveal the outlook of these women on their social situation. This study should contribute to proposing a model of analysis for the relations between marginalized social categories and global society.

Marginal facts and scientific legitimacy

The theoretical tools for the analysis of facts considered as marginal have yet to be elaborated. In the particular case of the data presented here, there are two possible approaches: on the one hand the approach of feminist anthropology, and on the other the approach of the anthropology of ritual inversion, with certain reservations.

Feminist anthropology has conferred a theoretical status of "social

relations" on the male-female relations referred to today by the expression "social relations of gender", making social categories out of sexual (biological) categories. It deserves credit for having underlined the importance of the study of the social relations of gender in all aspects of life. It starts from data which are taken from women's daily lives and not from theoretical presuppositions and it aims at understanding the articulation between women's facts and the whole sphere of social facts. The debate on sexual inequality or on sexual asymmetry was central in the discipline's early stages in the 1970s. It has not completely disappeared now but has given way to two other questions that have emerged from the acknowledgement of the non-universality of men's domination or at least of the great variety of situations in the world: what is the real distribution of power among men and women in a given society, and is the category of gender not culturally specific? Feminist anthropology has, moreover, restored some dichotomic analytical categories such as the category "private/public", which has often been rejected because of the complexity of each of these contrasting terms and because of the dialectic relationship between them. But by turning sexual hierarchy into a political problem, feminist anthropology sees its impact limited to social categories of women who claim to be political actors in society. While Algerian women have appeared as such in the past and still do so today – if only for their fight against the Family Code within associations – the women in question here immediately assume a position outside the political arena. It is more than probable that their criticism of the running of society potentially contains the germs of political protest but, as researcher, that is all I can say about it. It would be pure speculation to interpret it as a deliberate political act.

Many years ago anthropological works on the social relations of gender in the Maghrib and in other countries of Muslim culture gave prominence to the relativity of men's supremacy and the importance of women's role in the running of society.¹⁴ In the same way, they revealed the existence, everywhere, of women's societies having their own social activities and their own vision of the world. But there is still a difficulty in the analysis of the articulation between the male and female universe: it is linked to the illegitimacy of the social status of the discourse and practices in women's societies, which is taken by many researchers as a basic postulate for their reflections. Every attempt at looking more towards the centre, which means taking the women's experience of the world as the anchorage point, leads to considering this experience as a by-product, as a reinterpretation, as a negotiated form of the "men's culture". Even Messick, for instance, who in his

¹⁴ See in particular the collection of articles edited by Beck and Keddie 1979.

analysis of Moroccan women's discussions about domestic weaving¹⁵ tries to avoid this pitfall by taking the specificity of the women's world experience and their ways of expressing it – which is more characterized by action than by words, by the unspoken and by silence. But even he is marginalizing this discourse by presenting it as something different and dissociated from that of women in public.

The ritual inversion approach is no more favourable. Structuralists and functionalists (e.g. Turner and Gluckman) turn these expressions into marginal sequences in comparison with official rituals, even if they underline their importance in the organization of social groups. That inversion is a structural fact, and not an accidental or specific fact, has been sufficiently demonstrated in historical literature (Bakhtine, Davis, to name only two authors). In religious ceremonies, comic cults and myths have from time immemorial accompanied serious cults and myths. The imitation of ritual actions and parodies relating to the official religious and social life of a given group are phenomena of an almost general nature.¹⁶ The works on the symbolic life in the Maghrib are teeming with that type of phenomenon, which is already mentioned by Leo Africanus. Every religious celebration, every ritual ceremony (e.g. marriage), every official demonstration has its parodical version which is played both by women and by men: the *bujlud* of the Islamic feasts, the burlesque *khutba* of the *tulbas*, the parodies of life at the royal court, the "scenes of debauchery" of the brotherhoods' pilgrimages, the parodical marriage rituals and so on. All these facts are described in the colonial literature. They are analyzed as rites prior to Islam, survivals from the pre-Islamic religions and therefore peripheral and subversive.¹⁷ We had to wait for Hammoudi's work before we had a view of the *bujlud* or *bilmaun* as study objects.¹⁸ This is a ritual series (masquerade, processions, theatre) that follows upon the ritual of sacrifice of the *Id al-kabir*, the Great Islamic Feast, observed among the Ait Mizane, a Berber group of Marrakesh. Hammoudi engages in a systematic criticism both of the anthropological works on the rituals of inversion and of the colonial literature on the *bujlud*. His approach is interesting on several accounts: understanding of the sacrifice and masquerade as the two components of one whole, split by previous authors into Islamic celebration on the one hand and pagan rites on the other; analysis of the ritual sequence as a reading of society by itself, with no other aim than to depict and to evaluate itself; perception of the coexistence of

¹⁵ Messick 1987.

¹⁶ Leiris 1980.

¹⁷ Cf. Dermenghem, Doutté, Gaudry, Westermarck and also Jamous.

¹⁸ Hammoudi 1988.

the norm and its transgression. However, Hammoudi's weakness is the inadequacy of data on the daily life of the drama's protagonists. This is certainly due to the chosen angle of observation (the ritual event). On the other hand, Geertz's perspective on the inversion as a comment on the existing nature of things is incomplete from the point of view of the anthropologist, even though it proves to be relevant from the point of view of the actors. For anthropologists, in fact, the reading of their experience of the world by the actors themselves constitutes not only an aesthetic phenomenon but also an object of study in itself.

Even if these approaches do not seem entirely satisfactory within the framework of the analysis of the ritual presented above, they nonetheless constitute useful starting points for the construction of a reading-grid for the facts described. Having observed the parodical ritual in 1983, I first understood its importance only in relation to the organization and the ritual life of the brotherhood. It was only with the accumulation of field data that the idea of the relation between that ritual and the women's social reality asserted itself. It is therefore as important to give an account of these women's relation to the religious, to men and to society as a whole, as to relate, on the one hand, their representation of the religious, men and society, and on the other, their position in the religious and social fields. The point is not to analyze that parodical ritual as a compensatory reaction of a marginalized social category (women) but as a performance of the logic of its marginalization, the inversion phenomena having no other role than to serve as the means of expression.

Symbolic inversion or the other side of the picture

I have borrowed the notion of "symbolic inversion" from Babcock (1978) in order to characterize the pilgrimage's ritual of parody. The author uses these terms to describe every expressive behaviour which reverses, contradicts, abrogates or in some way offers an alternative to commonly accepted cultural codes, values and norms, regardless of whether they are linguistic, literary, artistic, religious, social or political. Indeed, all these elements seem to be collected together in the ritual:

inversion of sexual categories and roles: women appropriate male attributes in disguising themselves and perform ritual roles reserved for the men;

violating the prohibitions concerning the relationships between the sexes: the presence of men in a women's assembly, dances between men and women and led by the latter;

reversal of the attitudes of the women before the men, which are usually attitudes of modesty and of respect, characterized by avoidance

(of eye contact, of body contact) and silence: criticism of the men and of the religious leaders.

Despite all this, is it a question of contesting, corruption or subversion of the established order? Apparently it is, but it remains obvious to everybody, women as well as men, that it is a "game" with, on the one hand, actresses, on the other, active spectators. The women attend to "enjoy themselves", to "joke", to "laugh", to "amuse themselves". One would be tempted to put forward a functionalist explanation in evoking Gluckman's notion of "catharsis".¹⁹ But this turns out to be inadequate. Beyond the feeling of relaxation, pleasure and liberty that the game seems to produce, that is, beyond its effects, social science is interested in what the women say. They do not only talk about the men, they also talk about themselves; and they do not only inform us about their representation of male roles, they also inform us about the representation of their own roles.

This might be compared with Geertz's analysis of Balinese cockfights as an interpretation of the Balinese experience by the Balinese. The women's ritual of the pilgrimage presents itself as a reading of their experience of Algerian society by these Zidaniyya women, a reading of their experience of the rules that govern social relations between the categories of different persons and groups: between the sexual categories, between the religious agents and their clients, between the representatives of authority and those who are subjected to it. But it is a critical reading, although presented with a great deal of humour. The importance of everything is relativized, only their capacity for making us laugh still gives a meaning to the words and to the gestures. The behaviours of men and women are brought to the theatre, their characteristic features are underlined and exaggerated (disguise, imitation) to become comic. Weaknesses and failings are plain for all to see. Abuses of authority by religious agents, husbands and mothers-in-law are denounced and the subordination of women to those holders of power is presented as merely conventional behaviour. If men are the special target of the jokes about social codes, so too are the women who respect them too rigidly. The imposition of a social order seems to be necessary since it is not questioned in the least, but the order itself seems to be arbitrary since it is seen reversed, infringed, abolished. Social hierarchies are abolished, prohibitions are suppressed, and fear for the power of humans is destroyed.

In the group studied, the common representations of man and woman place them in contrasting categories, separated by a border and hierarchized. The man is in the "top" category and the woman is in the "bottom" category. Male and female roles are clearly defined: the woman

¹⁹ Gluckman 1965.

has to take care of the management of the domestic space and the man has to work outside. The practice of an occupation by the woman does not throw into question this division of functions, even if in practice the man shares the domestic tasks. The man has the authority over the women in his house and over his children, an authority which is shared, if need be, with the other male elements of the family and with the old women. But it is not unusual to hear in women's assemblies that "today, the (young) women are in command."

These representations are embodied in the formal, official behaviours of family and social life. This is particularly true in the framework of the ritual practices where male space is clearly separated from women's space. The Zidaniyya brotherhood in western Algeria is composed of male *forqas* and of female *forqas*, which are under the respective authorities of a *muqaddam* and of a *muqadma* and have their own activities. The men have a weekly ritual *hadra* on Thursday evening, they conduct spiritual evening gatherings at different persons' homes, and they have public *hadras* during religious feasts and also during national or local festivities. The women gather on Friday afternoon and the days after religious feasts to have family celebrations. The women's gathering, called *jama*, is never public: it takes place inside a *zawiya* if one is available, otherwise in a home. It is open to women, followers or not, of the *tariqa*. Only small boys are allowed to accompany them. The weekly meeting of the men, which is focused on the *dhikr*, is exclusively male. The presence of women can only be observed when they give a public performance. After the *dhikr*, the women attend the *laab* (literally "game") which consists of the performance of spectacular rites, such as the piercing of the body with sharp instruments, the game with fire and the ingurgitation of crushed glass and of snakes. The ritual practised by the men is more complex. Only the *dhikr* is common to the two categories of followers along with the dance (*zuhd*),²⁰ which remains, however, the women's practice *par excellence* of the Zidani ritual. The *baraka* "collected" during a men's *hadra* can be directly dispensed to the women. But the *baraka* of a women's *hadra*, being less important because of the absence of extraordinary rites (the success of these rites is the sign of the presence of the *baraka* of the *tariqa*'s founder), can only be indirectly transmitted to the men through the women.

The activities of the Zidaniyya women appear as less legitimate than the activities of the men. The women who possess the *baraka* are not recognized as such outside by the official members of the order: their *baraka* is not sought in public as is the case for men. Should we conclude

²⁰ *Zuhd*: lit. asceticism. The Zidaniyya use this term to refer not only to the dance but to all the expressions of trance.

that women are excluded from the management of the symbolic life? Are they only in a position of client in relation to the men dispensing the *baraka*? Do they practise rites without understanding the meaning of them? The women's experience of the pilgrimage does not allow us to answer these questions in the affirmative. We have seen these women organizing their own religious activities and taking on responsibilities in the organization and the development of the pilgrimage in its entirety. We have seen them enact the functioning system of their group. This system is made up of rules and codes defining a certain number of social behaviours: the relations between male and female followers in public and in private, the relations between religious leaders and participants in the official ceremonies and informal situations, the relations between instituted religion and experienced religion. This is not only evidence of the coexistence of the norm and its transgression but of the demonstration of the duality of religious actions where reality and the symbolic are united. The way women speak about the religious men when they ridicule them is proportionate to the respect they show towards them in public. This is less a question of the individual who is the object of respect than what he represents: authority, perpetuation of a tradition, charisma. Colonna noted that the notion of *baraka* reduces saintliness to something that has an undefined origin (even when it is inherited), something that possesses the subject rather than being an essential quality of an individual. In her analysis of the religious culture of Aurès, the status of religious leader proves to be basically ambiguous: "chosen by God but in many cases affected in his physical or psychical integrity, loved – in the most humane way – and honoured but in many cases led or misled." The remarks of the daughter of the *shaykh* who underlines the derisory side of the status of "*mrabta*" are along the same lines.

Islamist reactions

The use of derision by women may become subversive in extreme cases when their fundamental freedoms are threatened. A reaction of this kind was observed in October 1990, some months after the victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in the municipal elections, on the occasion of the celebration of the Birth of the Prophet (*Mawlid al-Nabawi*). The city of Rimal was then the scene of a conflict between the keeper of the patron saint of the city's shrine and some Islamist militants. The keeper was accused of encouraging the worship of the dead and was beaten by the Islamists. The shrine was closed for about ten days. The women, who have been awake the whole night in the *zawiyas* and in the mosques, reciting the *dhikr* while waiting for the assumed time of the Prophet's Birth, usually go to the sanctuary in

procession. The patron saint is a symbolic figure in the mysticism of the Maghrib, representing a convergence of different forms of religious and cultural expressions: classical Islam and mysticism, Sufism and ecstasism, male worship of the saints and female worship of the saints, local identities and Islamic identity. The incident at his sanctuary revealed his importance in times of identity crisis. Most of the inhabitants of the city of Rimal and its surroundings disapproved of what they considered a strategy of the Islamists to deprive them of one of their most ancient and meaningful traditions. The defenders of the city's historical patrimony rose up against their attempts to appropriate a place which is also a tourist site. The followers of saint worship saw in it a pretext to prevent the women from gathering in the sanctuary during the night of the *Mawlid*. One thing was clear for the advocates of the reopening of the *qubba*: what had happened threatened local identity. The sanctuary not only contains the religious memory of the region, it is also a symbol of liberty. It is a place where love for God and for the saints is expressed with words, songs and ecstatic dancing; it is a gathering place, a place which the women are usually given permission to go to freely. That is why the closing of the *qubba* at the time of such an important feast as the Prophet's Birth was given a meaning of physical as well as moral repression. "They also forbid us to visit the saints now? But what will be left in his country?" cried out a young girl who had rushed to the sanctuary, like many other women, as soon as its reopening had been announced. As they were waiting for the *muqaddam*, two men came out of the mosque and reprimanded them as if they were disobedient children. "What are you doing here? Do you come to see a man who died centuries ago? Give up these ignorant practices and go home!" Forced to withdraw under the pressure of these inquisitors, who they call "pseudo-Muslims", the women left the place, humming one of the old religious poems that sing the praises of the patron saint.

The incident has been repeatedly commented on in the *Zidaniyya* women's assemblies. They allow some modifications in the ecstatic rituals but defend their lawfulness, relying on two criteria: the rituals' respect of the dogma of God's unity and their anchoring in local traditions. As during the pilgrimage, women make fun of those men who want to impose on them their own vision of religion. Their laughter is all the more savage because this new authority with its disputed legitimacy is not accepted. Moreover, this time, even the women's religious leaders are on their side in ridiculing "the ones who say what we have to do in the matter of Islam." The joke which is retold below was recounted in the *zawiya* by a woman member of the *forqa* that performed the parodical ritual. The *forqa* is carrying out the *zyara* of the third day of the *Mawlid* to pay homage to the founder-ancestors of the brotherhood and to its present leader. After the *hadra*, the women take some refresh-

ment in the yard and tell jokes. As usual, men are the favourite target of their jokes. On that day, the representatives of the FIS got a proper dressing-down, to the great delight of the few men of the *zawiya* who had joined the women's assembly. Amid the laughter, a woman relates:

Abbassi Madani is seated at a table in a restaurant in Bab al-Oued. He is wearing a suit and a tie and he is getting ready to eat, with a knife and fork, the steak and chips he has just ordered. A turbaned farmer arrives and seats himself on the floor and orders a dish of chickpeas.

— Brother! (says Abassi Madani) why do you sit on the floor so close to the devil who might steal your meal?

— No, honourable *shaykh* (answers the farmer), the devil is not that stupid! He will not fall on a poor dish of chickpeas! He prefers a steak and chips, like you!

The men of the *zawiya* then relate how they managed to throw out local councillors of the FIS at the last pilgrimage of the brotherhood:

They asked us to be allowed to take part in the ceremonies. We welcomed them warmly like we do with all our guests and the ones who love us. They recommended that we did not practise the *laab* any more [cf. note 3]. We did not answer. We recited the *dhikr* together for approximately two hours. They were happy. After a break, during which they were served some food, the musicians started to play the tunes of the *laab*. At that point the FIS men got up and went without a word. The FIS will not be able to prevent us from existing. Some members of the brotherhood side with the FIS through fear or through interest and refuse to practise the *laab*. They are manipulated by the bearded men who probably promised them something, they are thick-headed, a woman adds.

If, for the Zidaniyya women, canonical observance implies submission to the divine law and takes on a compulsory character, ecstatic religion symbolizes the freedom to satisfy a profound desire, the desire for God, their only Master. All the other masters are mere mortals who are momentarily assigned authority. That is the reason why these women are very hostile to the Islamists, who do not only prevent them from practising ecstatic religion but set themselves as absolute masters in the image of God.

These women show a great command of their symbolic universe, the mechanics of which they dismantle to control them better. To do this, they resort to means of expression like derision of the human condition, laughter, the rituals of inversion, which are means that have

been used since the earliest antiquity to reduce existential anguish through depicting life as a game. In enacting the social organization of their group, the relations between the sexes, the relations between the secular and the sacred, they contribute to giving a meaning to behaviour that might lose its meaning by being repeated in a codified way. In the pilgrimage's paradoxical ritual, everything happens as if the women were revealing the logic of application of the rules, which oscillate between conformity and transgression, perhaps even inversion in private. It may be concluded that in the women's representations, sexual segregation is not a natural principle but a cultural and social one. Through the game, the women underline the relativity of the opposition between the social categories of gender as well as their lower position in the hierarchy. Through the disguise, they transcend not only their own category but also that of others. Through the appropriation of the space of the *zawiya* and of some religious leaders, they go beyond the antonyms that form the values of the symbolic order to which they belong in order to achieve greater freedom – by running to the holy mountain like Bacchantes to give full expression to their desires – they are continuously reminding us of the law of their social group concerning the presence of women in public space. One may say that if they accept social codes that seem segregationist to them, it is because they know that these codes are necessary to manage collective life but that they are not life. However, those codes are contested and rejected every time they are imposed on them as rigid and immutable principles.

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THE MAKING OF A MOURIDE MAHDI¹

SERIGNE ABDOULAYE YAKHINE DIOP OF THIES

Rose Lake

At dawn, each morning in Thies, you will find five or six disciples circling inside Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's mausoleum. Their heads are covered with *kaalas*, head scarves, in the style of Cheikh Amadou Bamba,² the founder of the Senegalese Mouridiyya, presenting an ominous, solemn and barefoot vision. They are reciting the *dhikr* ("remembrance", Sufi worship) of the lineage, singing and circling. Should you ask them what these morning rituals mean, they might explain that these visits to the tomb of Serigne Abdoulaye give them power, and provide them with the benefits of the Shaykh's closeness to God. Like most Sufis, these early morning pilgrims are searching for their link to that essential ingredient which propels them past the boundaries of the mundane into a superior world.

Disciples, *talibés*, say that the Shaykh speaks to them. Literally, they call on him and he responds; they hold conversations. *Talibés* claim that Mohammadou Mahdiou knows their secrets and what exists within their hearts. Should they need assistance at any moment, the Shaykh comes to them. Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine has *talibés* as far away as Gabon and Cameroon, but distance has no meaning. The Shaykh is simultaneously in front, behind and on both sides of each of his disciples. Yet each devotee must be worthy of such a relationship. Mohammadou Mahdiou asks each adept to devote himself or herself to the difficult and dangerous path of spiritual training. He warns against pretenders and pseudo-mystics and commands his disciples to be self-reliant and always to remain focused on God, since it is only then that the spirit will finally seek answers of its own.

Pilgrims said that, during his lifetime, there was nothing more pleasing

¹ "Mahdi" as used throughout this essay refers to the Islamic equivalent of "the chosen one", "guide", "messiah".

² In the style of the popular orthography in Senegal, I have retained the French spelling of "Cheikh" in the cases Cheikh Amadou Bamba, Cheikh Ibra Fall and Cheikh Anta Mbacké throughout this essay. When referring to Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, I have sometimes simply called him "the Shaykh" (using capitalization for the "s"). This expression is frequently used among *talibés* whenever referring to their *shaykh*.

to the Shaykh than *dhikr*. In accordance with Sufi doctrine, disciples daily tune into a non-rational *dhikr* rhythm, leaving the realm of reason and the language of linear logic behind. The Shaykh's desire (from inside his tomb) turns into divine command guiding these disciples' every action. *Talibés* are all too eager to comply to what they perceive is the way to his heart and, ultimately, to God. According to one disciple, this is a mutual relationship between the Shaykh and his followers that restores and revives them. The comfort of their voices deflects the harshness of the world outside the mausoleum, and as they put their hands to their ears to tune themselves – the Shaykh's teachings remind them – the resonance and the voice they hear is their own.

Who is "Mohammadou Mahdiou"?

The religious history of Senegal has long been associated with charismatic leaders of the various Islamic brotherhood lineages.³ All are well represented in photographs and fill the pages of their disciples' picture books. The leaders are looked upon as saints because of their inheritance of *baraka* (the blending and fusing of spiritual grace which may include the ability to redeem souls). Mourides (followers of one of the dominant Sufi orders in Senegal) have a reputation for revering their *shaykh* (religious leader) as if he were God himself. Cheikh Amadou Bamba wrote in one of his numerous devotional handbooks: "The truth is in the love for your shaykh."⁴ Disciples have carried this well-known maxim to the extreme. Virtually every *shaykh* from each lineage is well represented in photographs. It is possible to obtain a photo of even the youngest members of the brotherhood's élite. One will never, however, find a photo of the *shaykh* known as "Mohammadou Mahdiou". No matter which name one uses – Abdoulaye Niakhep or Niahite; or Abdoulaye Yakhine, or Lyakhine; or the Mahdi of Thies⁵ – he never appears in any of the collections of the roving photo salesmen, nor is he among the millions of photographs that fill the pages of Mouride photo albums. Historically, we are reminded that the Prophet Muhammad cursed the maker of images (particularly of men and animals), and consequently, they are held to be unlawful.⁶ Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine followed this restriction and extended it to include photographs. His

³ Cruise O'Brien 1971: 44.

⁴ This is the ultimate Mouride principle. Dumont 1975: 90.

⁵ All names for Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine Diop, the Mahdi of Thies. "Mohammadou Mahdiou" is a Wolofization of "Muhammad the Mahdi", the name Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine calls himself in the numerous writings.

⁶ Hughes 1965: 458.

daughter and *khalifa*, Sokhna Magatte, acting today as the supreme head of his lineage, also respects this ethic.

In this chapter I will attempt to unravel the religious history of this very particular Wolof holy man of the Mouride order, a twentieth-century Mahdi, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine Diop (1881?-1945). Proceeding from a question posed to his most verbal spokesman, "Who is Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine?", a translated oral account informs us that Abdoulaye was not born into the religious élite but, rather, appeared in the Kajoor region of Senegal under miraculous circumstances. He became a disciple of the newly formed Mouride brotherhood, founded on the principles of work and total devotion of a disciple to his *shaykh*. In 1930, he declared himself Mahdi. Throughout his life, he wrote numerous religious texts, the most controversial being his own version of the Quran. Like most Islamic leaders of his time, Abdoulaye had his share of problems with the colonial government. Perhaps most interesting to modern scholars is the fact that even though he had twelve sons (from several wives), none survived him, and he appointed a daughter as *khalifa* of his lineage.⁷

Why is so little known about the Mahdi of Thies? With the exception of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, Senegal is flooded with Mouride hagiology. Information about this great leader, considered by some to have been the third pillar of Mouridism (following Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibra Fall, the founder's most famous disciple), is entirely lacking. An outsider can only speculate as to the reason for this; inside the Mouridiyya, mentioning the Mahdi of Thies draws responses ranging from blank stares to nervous chuckles.

Clearly, only those knew the Shaykh during his lifetime can comment upon this mysterious brotherhood-wide loss of memory about Mohammadou Mahdiou. In 1992, at the time of this research, four old men (Serigne Abdoulaye's only remaining disciples), some neighbours, and a few family members were the only ones who could authenticate the suppositions that were being offered.

The following hagiographic presentation lends itself frequently to pairing and it is tempting to tackle the subject through the *shaykh/talibé*, Mahdi/community, narrator/narrative, then/now dichotomies. In contrast to most studies, I have tried to rely wherever possible on the informants themselves for guidance and direction. This chapter seemed a particularly appropriate forum for those least heard. After fifty years of silence

⁷ Serigne Abdoulaye first became known to me as the father of Sokhna Magatte Diop, the only recognized woman *khalifa*, perhaps ever, in the history of Sufi Islam to lead a lineage of Sufi disciples. Sokhna Magatte inherited this position at her father's death in 1945, and as such she has become an important subject for current research on the history of women in Islam. My first contact with Sokhna Magatte was in 1984.

Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's family, disciples and supporters finally have a chance to speak for themselves.

Two personalities dominate this chapter on Mahdism: the subject, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine Diop, and the speaker/disciple, Assane Thiam. Careful consideration of subject and speaker, their roles within early twentieth-century brotherhood Islam, and the nexus between them is essential to an understanding of this unique phenomenon. Statements throughout this chapter unanimously support the opinion that "human purposes seem to represent God's purposes."⁸ Hence, when investigating religious matters, I will focus on what is sociologically (rather than theologically) inspired, and my basic concern throughout is always for the human factor.

Symbols and markers

There are two major pitfalls which may beset any Western interpreter of Mouride Mahdi culture: the dual nature of hagiographic language and the dual nature of the exploits which the hagiography relates. The narrative both conceals and conveys deeper meaning: the tale itself may offer materialistic "proof" of "holiness" designed to be understood as something more profound than a literal reading might indicate. It becomes essential to operate from within the Durkheimian premise that "religion is ultimately personal", whereby "each individual is able to appropriate the sacred in his or her own fashion, with the mark of one's own distinctive stamp."⁹ Just as there is no empirically right or wrong Islam, each expression of religion must be viewed in its own terms.¹⁰

Wolof discourse is meant to function as both narrative and symbology. Typically, the narration serves largely to underscore the narrator's love for his *shaykh*, a premise to which actual historical and factual content takes second place. The symbolic language, appearing first in the colourful guise of idiomatic Wolof, transforms into esoteric Sufi mysticism upon closer perusal.

The worldly exploits of West African Islamic holy men are easily misperceived. The Western concept of "holy" is monastic, while in West Africa the saintliness of an individual can be measured by his

⁸ Waldman 1985: 93.

⁹ Durkheim 1976: 416.

¹⁰ Marilyn Waldman, relying on Geertz's definition of religion, suggests that religious symbol-sets become a guide and a "model" for living in the world: "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." Waldman 1985: 95.

physical presence and material success within society. The fact that mystical elements are buried deep beneath a veneer of materiality should not be cause to ignore them or to suggest that an Islamic asceticism does not exist. Senegal's religious personages fit Lamine Sanneh's characterization: "They aspire to a social presence . . . there should be no underestimating the company of persons and family. Outwardly, the West African saint is associated with material accumulation. He is a man of the world, who strives for moral and spiritual perfection."¹¹

Shaykh and talibé: The heart of the Mouridiyya

The *shaykh/talibé* relationship is, as stated above, at the very heart of Mouride piety, by extension making manifest the desire for (and expectation of) a messiah. Senegal's history lends itself to the supposition that religious leaders replaced traditional rulers in response to the colonial dismantling of Wolof society. With an intensification of certain problematic social conditions, a religious figure can easily assume the role of Mahdi/messiah, replacing the traditional Wolof ruler as a focal point for mass dependency.

With this society-wide emphasis on deference and political conditions which supported the arrival of a strong and charismatic personality, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's proclamation of Mahdihood seems not to be so extraordinary, after all. Endemic Islamic and Mouride longing for the reign of a Mahdi is certainly nothing new. In fact, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine was merely the latest in a long succession of regional Mahdis/messiahs dating from as far back as the sixteenth century. Since there are no specific Mouride references to a messiah prior to Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's appearance, it seems that the Mahdist philosophy manifested simultaneously with the person, at a time of supreme crisis precipitated by the deaths of Mouridism's founder, Cheikh Amadou Bamba (in 1927), and of Cheikh Ibra Fall (in 1930). Cheikh Amadou Bamba's role in the religious history of Senegal could be compared to that of a Mahdi; however, he was never identified as such. It was perhaps the vocabulary of Mahdism and Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's use of and identification with the title "Mahdiou" that separated Serigne Abdoulaye from other mainstream Mouride leaders, eventually resulting in his virtual disappearance from the annals of history.

There is an interesting explanation as to why, in the face of the prevalence of the *concept* "Mahdi", in Senegalese theology, there would

¹¹ Sanneh explains the materialistic nature of West African Sufi religious life and practice. Sanneh 1987: 127.

remain such prejudice against using the word "Mahdi", almost to the point of phobia. Perhaps it stems from French censorship of Mahdism in general, associated in the colonial imagination with smolderings of treason and, inevitably, *jihad* (holy war). Did Cheikh Amadou Bamba, in his mystical quietude, manipulate this fear, somehow threatening the French to the extent that they found it necessary to send him into exile? This being the case, what would have prompted Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's eagerness to adopt the very dangerous cloak of self-declared "Mahdism"?

Few studies on Mouridism have delved into the more obscure elements of religious practice and almost no attention has been directed to Mouride religious expression from the perspective of its devotees. Mouride history in the Thies region is extremely rich and complex, due in part to the sociology of the Wolof, who comprise the dominant ethnic group in the Kajoor region. Some observers have suggested that there is a Kajoorian personality – termed in Wolof, *Ajoor Ajoor*. Their defining mythology is that of the desperado, extremely tenacious, difficult to sway, lacking entirely in gullibility or frivolity.¹² While no one would suggest that the environment made the leader, references to the city of Thies never fail to mention its importance in the colonial resistance movement. It is only fitting that Mahdism would evolve in a region like Kajoor, with its long history of cantankerous local rulers and persistent resistance leaders.

Unacknowledged Mahdist tendencies within the Mouridiyya

In 1886, the final defeat of Lat Dior in the Kajoor region of Senegal made the colonial conquest complete. In the bitter aftermath, Wolof society regrouped, nominating Cheikh Amadou Bamba to be its saviour. This archetypal holy man, unimpressed by such worldly acclaim, remained steadfast and focused himself instead upon more profound issues of Islamic spirituality.

In an attempt to ward off an "Islamic uprising",¹³ the French colonial government forced the exile of the Mouride founder to Gabon (1895-1902) and, later, Mauritania (1903-7). Again and again, throughout the periods of disunion, messianic prophecy permeated the air, kept alive with enduring devotion and the fervent belief that Cheikh Amadou Bamba would one day return from exile. When that day finally arrived, his minions could barely contain themselves and, upon seeing their leader, were compelled to shout, "*Yalla ñów-na!*" ("God has arrived!").¹⁴

¹² From a personal interview with Moussa Samb.

¹³ The threat of *jihad* existed in the minds of the colonials, based on events and history elsewhere in the region.

¹⁴ Mohammed Maktar Mbacké's interpretation of this important quote differs somewhat

The flames of dissent were fueled by imperialist attempts to destroy this Senegalese leader, in flagrant disregard of Wolof psychology. More than ever, the population was convinced that salvation lay in attachment to the newly established brotherhood. Consciously or unconsciously, the Mouridiyya's religious leaders fulfilled the specific popular expectations of a saviour king, an age-old pattern.

Serigne Abdoulaye's personality had similar popular appeal in the important Kajoor region. Like Cheikh Amadou Bamba, he was a teacher and spiritual guide, the great number of devotees he attracted offering proof of his veracity. However, Abdoulaye was intensely involved with the here and now; he had an understanding of politics in the mundane world as well as a penchant for supernatural power. As a devoted community leader, he knew the local and national culture and understood that it was in continual flux but, more importantly, he knew the needs of his disciples. Some claim he was popular because of his accessibility, while others find he was intensely forceful as a result of his self-appointed Mahdism. In one of the few published sources, Amar Samb, a Senegalese Arabist, writes: "Thus was born another brotherhood under the auspices of the Messiah, Abdoulaye Niakhite, a Senegalese prophet! For some he was a well-known and brilliant Mahdi."¹⁵

Circumstances rapidly paved the way for Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's ascension to the role of Mahdi. When Cheikh Amadou Bamba passed away in 1927, he left behind some 100,000 followers so bereft that historians have made comparison between this time and that of Prophet Muhammad's taking leave from corporeal existence, Amadou Bamba's bond with the Prophet being the *sine qua non* of *shaykh/talibé* relations. Cheikh Amadou Bamba's passing nearly caused mass hysteria, quelled finally by two factors: the acceptance by his people of the temporariness of this life and the fact that Cheikh Amadou Bamba purportedly talked about his "move" ahead of time, in order to give his disciples a chance to prepare themselves. Nevertheless, when the moment arrived, those closest to the founder were in a state of denial, while the masses of disciples were in shock.

Although no formal proclamation of Mahdihood had yet been made, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's prominence within the Mouride community now began to parallel that of the newly deceased Mouride founder. Christian Coulon claimed that family members and disciples consider Abdoulaye Yakhine the third pillar of Mouridism after Cheikh Amadou

from Cruise O'Brien's account. The emphasis here is "Allah has *arrived!*", whereby God has taken over the former human form of Cheikh Amadou Bamba. From a personal interview, 22 February 1993.

¹⁵ Samb 1971: n. 421.

Bamba and Cheikh Ibra Fall, and informants say with a certain modesty and reserve that the Shaykh was *boroom jamano* (master of his time),¹⁶ an elusive honorific incapable of causing offense. There is an abhorrence, to be sure, among conservative *talibés* as well as among some family members, of admitting to Abdoulaye Yakhine's eminent presence at the brotherhood's helm. How Muslim leaders defined themselves and how colonial officials defined religious leaders has often affected the course of West African history. Coulon said that Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's family denied Mahdist claims, but that Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine called himself Mohammadou Mahdiou in his prolific writings.

Some of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's detractors and less congenial voices from within and outside the Mouride brotherhood have used the pithy Wolof expression "*dafa diis*" ("it's heavy") to describe the tenacity of Mohammadou Mahdiou. Others call him "a mad heretic" and have gone so far as to suggest that "anyone hoping to understand Islam should stay away from Kër Yakhine" (see below). Still others claim ignorance of the very name. "Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine is not for everyone", members of his *zawiya*¹⁷ warned. The Mouride élite in Touba said, "There [Abdoulaye Yakhine's] you will find only *daanukat*-ism."¹⁸

Remembering Kër Yakhine

Kër Yakhine was the physical home of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine (Kër: house in Wolof). It has also been the spiritual home of his teachings both during his lifetime and today. Similarly, it is the house of his designated heir and present-day followers. Kër Yakhine is also the name of the neighbourhood that surrounds Serigne Abdoulaye's mausoleum in Central Thies; it covers several city blocks and is referred to as a *quartier*. By definition, Kër Yakhine proper consists of Sokhna Magatte's house, the *zawiya*, which was Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's personal residence during his lifetime, the school that is several blocks down the road, the homes of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's relatives and disciples and the above-mentioned mausoleum of Mouridism's only mahdi.

¹⁶ In Arabic, *qutb al-zaman* (master of his time), which carries explicit overtones equated with the Mahdi elsewhere in Islamic Africa. Coulon 1988: 127.

¹⁷ I prefer Cruise O'Brien's description of the "untranslatable" *zawiya*: a flexible, multifunctional institution – monastery, school, inn, market and more. Cruise O'Brien 1981: 162.

¹⁸ A *daanukat* in the Mouride milieu is an extremely emotional disciple, who exhibits hysteria and performs extraordinary acts, sometimes even self-flagellation.

Visitors will find that the Director of the Museum in Thies, Abdoulaye Mbaye, is the first to admit he is not particularly well informed about the history of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine in Thies. The same will be the case with the Mouride Imam there. Qadiri¹⁹ notables (there are several Aidara families, descendants of Cheikh Saad Bouh,²⁰ in the area) are in a better position than many Mourides to speak about Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine because of their long and loyal relations with Kër Yakhine. One Qadiri elder interviewed spoke succinctly about Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine saying, "He is the one that holds the keys to his *talibés*' lives. He is their intercessor on *bésu pénc* (Judgement Day). He is part human, but maybe not. He is like the angel Djbril."

In my efforts to collect information about this enigmatic personality, it soon became apparent that finding willing informants was only the first hurdle. Equally perplexing was the puzzle presented by the subtle interplay between what was said and what was inferred – all utterances seemed to have deeper implications. Also troublesome is any attempt to clearly delineate the qualities of the man from the idiosyncrasies of his spiritual teachings. Time and time again, interviewees repeated the warning, "It's not for everyone." One naturally had to wonder whether, indeed, those interviewed could be candid when asked about such private and potentially off-limits topics as saintliness, Mahdihood and the more esoteric mysteries of their religion. After a short time, my qualms were put to rest. Once confident of my intentions, Mourides interviewed from Serigne Abdoulaye's community enthusiastically shared stories about their leader, and story-telling sessions drew larger and larger gatherings. Retelling this oral history is a pious act, they explained, which brings succour to those present and ensures charitable returns in the afterlife. Another disciple explained, "It is my duty as a believer in Mohammadou Mahdiou to speak about my leader to whosoever asks. And whosoever asks will receive the Shaykh's blessing. That person will become a true follower." In his lifetime, the Shaykh apparently said this, and the fact that someone was asking meant, for this disciple, that the prophecy had come true.

The mausoleum (called *habru*) is the quintessence of Kër Yakhine. It sits in the middle of the main thoroughfare that passes through the centre of Thies, forcing the heavy traffic to circle around this small domed robin's-egg-blue building. It is most apparent that no one walks

¹⁹ The Qadiri are the oldest of the four major Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal today. The movement was founded by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (1088-1166) and introduced in Baghdad as a religious order by the fourteenth century. Schimmel 1975: 247.

²⁰ Cheikh Saad Bouh (1850-1917), a grandson of the founder of the Mauritania-based Fadeliyya order, known for his mystical practices. He and his present-day descendants still have many disciples throughout Senegal.

with shoes on the manicured sandy grounds that surround the *habru*. Even those in a hurry kick off their sandals and carry them as they pass over this sacred turf. Others use the smooth sand and shady areas as an afternoon resting place and find themselves captivated by the extraordinary chanting voices accompanied by drums emanating from the large building that faces the mausoleum. Many *Thiessois*, i.e., people living in or coming from Thies, who generally dismiss all expressions of religiosity, may find the caretakers at the *habru* extraordinarily friendly and congenial when responding to mundane questions like "Who is inside the mausoleum?" and "Why is the mausoleum so close to the street?" Spokespeople at Kër Yakhine explain all of this as the *bayre* (the magnetism, and in this case, the spiritual attraction) that is believed to exude from the soul of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine whose remains are inside this simple structure. Visitors say they find solace in the peaceful atmosphere. On one occasion, a middle-aged man stopped to chat with the elders; he said he found the discussion so moving, that right then and there he made the decision to become a disciple of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's lineage. These on-the-spot conversions are not that uncommon I was told.

In response to my question "Did he look like a Mahdi?" an old woman in Thies, Falé Mbow, who grew up in Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's compound, described him as having "a light complexion, very tall and very handsome", and said "he had the *sàkkare Yàlla* [mark of God].²¹ His presence was noble, his heart open and he was generous in the extreme." Another woman, overhearing the conversation with Falé Mbow, started arguing. "Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine was medium-tall with very, very dark skin", she said. "He was strong", she agreed, "but, his skin was the colour of hers – blue-black." ("*Dafa ñuul kukk!*")

In the early 1920s, the compound was huge and the household was never lacking – there was always "lots of money and gold in the cupboard". There were regularly fifty to 100 children living at Kër Yakhine. The land holdings were significant and stretched from Pout to Mboro on the Atlantic and south to Joal, spanning three regions. This property, which used to be farmland, has been divided and given to *talibés*. Sokhna Tabara Cissé, the favourite wife of the Mahdi of Thies, was a noble and a *shaykha* (an Egyptian word for female *shaykh*) who ruled over the Thies household. Her family, Gambian Mandinka clerics, often stayed at the Thies compound. Covered with gold and a necklace of *peme* (a popular carnelian-like stone with esoteric qualities) five times the length of the longest *kurus* (prayer beads), Sokhna Tabara purportedly

²¹ In Wolof society, *sàkkare Yàlla*, a gap between teeth, especially the two front teeth, is very alluring. Customarily those who have it are thought to be beautiful and very sensual.

looked like a queen. Family members confirmed that Serigne Abdoulaye adored Sokhna Tabara. Residents today still talk about this great woman's beauty, about the gold in her hair and the *peme* and *téere* (leather-covered amulets) adorning her neck, slyly adding that "she had too many clothes". Yet, for all her material wealth, she was happiest when giving her possessions away. Sokhna Tabara also had "special gifts" given to her by God and was responsible for many of the *karamat* (miracles) still remembered and often recited at Kër Yakhine.

The first thing I noticed at Kër Yakhine also left the most lasting impression: disciples here beam with a striking self-confidence which stems from their still-unshakable security in their identity as Mohamadou Mahdiou's *talibés*. Today's residents are absolutely sure they are the followers of God's chosen leader.

Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's writing

"Commenting upon the Koran, the Lord said: Verify if men and jinn agree to produce the like of this Koran, they will not produce the like of it though one to the other were backer" (Quran 17: 90).²²

Outside the security of the Thies compound, merely mentioning the Quran written by Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine will start an all-out verbal attack. "It is blasphemy to mention such an impossibility." When Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's disciples are asked about his Quran they emphatically explain, "*Téere bu mag* [the large book] was revealed to Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine in much the same way the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad", and often they add (without providing details), "Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's life is very similar to Muhammad's."

Amar Samb refers to "Abdoulaye Niakhite" as one of the three poets/writers in the "Thies School" of Arabic literature in Senegal along with Dun-Nun Ly and his younger brother Ibn Arabi Ly, but places Abdoulaye in a category of his own: "He does not have the genius of Dun-Nun."²³ Likewise, it is interesting that Samb did not include any examples of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's writing, but rather very briefly described one of his many books entitled *Furqan* (Distinguisher), which,

²² Von Grunebaum 1951: 7.

²³ Samb 1972: 202-3. This IFAN publication, *Essai sur la contribution du Sénégal à la littérature d'expression arabe*, by Amar Samb, proves to be one of the only modern printed references to Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, and it is interesting to note that Samb's approach, relying on the words of a disciple, was similar to mine twenty-three years later. What is implied in Samb's description of the Mahdi of Thies is that he wrote volumes upon volumes, but the books are unavailable.

interestingly, is another title for the Quran.²⁴ The book was started when Cheikh Amadou Bamba died in 1927, and not finished when Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine died in 1943. Describing *Furqan*, Samb calls it "50 kilos covered with fancy, perfumed covers, an imitation Quran kept in the Abdoulaye Niakhite's temple next to the three gigantic *tabalas* [drums]."²⁵ With its eccentric style, partly as a result of grammatical problems, Samb tells us that *Furqan* claims to be sincere. The first page is: "Surat of the Ulemas, 572 verses revealed in Medina to the Mahdi." When talking about the coming of the Mahdi, "Oh, men. Muhammad el-Mahdi says to you: 'I am here.' " Samb says *Furqan* is almost untranslatable, but thinks "in spite of its fantastic character, and misuse of all grammatical rules, it is a book to be taken seriously."

Another interpretation of the grammatical elements of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's writings is recalled during a personal interview with Yaga Diop, a Bay Fall *talibé* and intellectual. Speaking about Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's numerous books, Yaga Diop explains that once his books were completed he gave them to Mohammadou Dem, the official grammar editor of Arabic at the time. Dem was from a great Tijani family of Quranic scholars, but he converted to Mouridism. After reviewing the books, Dem remarked he could not understand the language because of the grammar. On the other hand, Dem did not reject the books: "It was the voice of God who wrote the books, and the voice and language of God doesn't necessarily have to conform to the rules of a man-made grammar." Ultimately, Dem did not ever repudiate Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's writings; rather, he acknowledged that they came from God.²⁶ In spite of all his critics, the narrative of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's life and the lineage he leaves behind endure.

A Talibé speaks

A Mouride can tell the hagiography of his *shaykh* in more detail than the one recited by the griot.²⁷

Eighty-seven-year-old Assane Thiam, the oldest living disciple of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, attracts people wherever he goes. He wears a colourful combination of at least five layers of *boubous* (caftans) and *kaalas*, various shades of *asamaan* (sky blue) damask. Around his waist is an

²⁴ Hughes 1965: 484.

²⁵ Samb 1972: 202-3.

²⁶ Another informant, Mame More Diop, confirms the importance of Mohammadou Dem's role in Mouride history. He was very learned and many of the most important Mbacké family members sent their sons to study at Dem's Quranic school. (Personal interview, New York, 12 March 1994.)

²⁷ Samb 1972: 421.

elaborate string belt with hundreds of small recycled bottles and sundry miniature funnels, all knotted to one another and mysteriously attached. No two bottles are alike. However, it is not this artful presentation that attracts people – it is his voice.

By profession, Assane Thiam sells perfume in Sandaga Market in central Dakar. He prefers to situate himself in the courtyard of one of Sandaga's seven mosques. Should Assane Thiam be within earshot, people, whether they know him or not, drop what they are doing and gather around him. The frenzy of the market subsides when Assane Thiam appears and is about to speak. His voice is hoarse but lively, and his discourses have an instructive air. He may talk of brotherhood Islam, his *shaykh*, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, or tell anecdotes about the founder and early history of Mouridism.

Assane Thiam has more than the gift of speech; he has a profound knowledge of language, and communicates with an air of confidence and authority. He knows how to mesmerize his audience, utilizing a well-structured narrative style, subtle nuances and a sophisticated mix of inflections. He speaks about the deeper meaning of life from the Sufi point of view, in an uncorrupted Wolof. Assane Thiam is highly credible. You can feel his sincerity. His age is an advantage in this society, which equates it with authority. "Old men are full of light and wisdom learned the hard way from their real-life experiences, expressed in well-phrased maxims and numerous proverbs. They are at the same time, patriarch, sage, philosopher and sacred oracle."²⁸

People do not mind listening to Assane Thiam telling the same story over again. For some, the content of the story alone persuades people to listen. For others, it is participating in an event that evokes sacred thoughts that causes them to succumb to his discourse. According to *talibés*, these saint stories are believed to be an instructive link to the more profound elements hidden within the religion, capable of bringing the listener closer to God. Assane Thiam is not preaching *sharia* (the law that governs Islam), but he is giving real examples of the verities of brotherhood traditions. Hearing about the virtues of great men like Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine in an everyday situation encourages listeners to identify – if only for a moment – with the hero of the narrative. The listeners internalize virtues and morality and share the sense of *umma* (Islamic community), one of the central features of Muslim identity.

Sokhna Magatte, her family members, and disciples recommended Assane Thiam to me because he had been especially close to Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine. Their suggestion was excellent – Assane Thiam proved an ideal source. He was the most senior of the four remaining

²⁸ Samb 1972: 23.

talibés who had spent significant time with Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine. As a young boy he had been on one of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's *daras* (the Mouride farm and school) near the outskirts of Thies. Assane Thiam knows all of the main characters in and around the Thies *zawiya*. He also has in his possession one of the "small books" written by Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine and referred to in the narrative.

Here follows Assane Thiam's conversation depicting his *shaykh*, the Mahdi of Thies.²⁹ First, he replies to the question "Who is Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine Diop?"³⁰

Bismillahi. [In the name of God – according to Islamic tradition, Allah should be summoned to any important event.] He came when the sun sets.

At Mecca, there is a *Kaba* [square box] and if that square box had been an egg, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine would have been the chick inside. [Abdoulaye's genesis is non-human and he is coming into the world from Islam's holiest shrine.]³¹ If God wants one of his own to come back into the world he will just put his hand on the sand and God will call him to come back. [God is in utter control of the Universe.]

When Abdoulaye got to *Penku* [a Wolof expression meaning the East] he finally received his revelation. [Revelations come from God and *Penku* is God's territory, since "the East" refers to the direction of the Kaba and the direction that all Muslims orient their prayers.]

When a *Mahdi* [chosen one, Messiah] is coming he will never walk on cow dung. People must sacrifice many cows for him. All over the land people will be putting their feet on the necks of cows and killing them. [The chosen one will be revered and will not be a part of the world.] When all the cows were dying, a time of great drought – that was when he arrived in this country.³² [Drought is literal and metaphoric.

²⁹ The narrative was recorded twice. The first session's tape appeared to be blank after the recording so it was decided to re-record the same material. As it turned out, the first session's tape was audible, and the one I have chosen to present, while the second session's tape was virtually identical. I found this repetition to be a sign of the strength of the narrative and the narrator's familiarity with his subject. During my eleven months in Senegal, Assane Thiam repeated portions of the same narrative time and time again. All versions were remarkably similar even though his audience had changed.

³⁰ Notes in brackets are annotated explanations to guide the reader through the translated oration. At times the text appears to be in riddle – there is the apparent meaning and then there is the deeper Sufi meaning.

³¹ The *Kaba* is *Bayt Allah* meaning "House of God". Al-Ghazali 1983: 94.

³² John Hunwick has commented that this might suggest he came from cattle-keeping people in southern Mauritania whose herds were decimated in the rinderpest epizootic that hit eastern Africa in 1887-9 and evidently came to West Africa soon afterwards. Such calamities are generally considered to be signs of the end of the world and the coming of the Mahdi.

The times were difficult and there was a spiritual drought. The world needed a leader. God sends down rain as well as a Mahdi.]

God told him to go in the direction of the setting sun, meaning the West, to a town where every tree gives abundant shade, as in Paradise. But Abdoulaye didn't know where he was being sent. [He is foretelling his arrival in the town of Thies which has so many trees it resembles Paradise.] When he came to Pir Sanoxoor [a village in northern Kajoor famous for Islamic education]³³ he saw the bright aura of Cheikh Ibra Fall and Cheikh Amadou Bamba, and it covered the world. He squatted down and said to God, "This place that you have sent me, I know these people are important. How shall I speak to them?" [Abdoulaye arrives in Senegal and sees the prophetic light of Mouridism. He asks God to give him a voice within this new brotherhood.] And God told him, "The person I want you to meet and you will live in his house; he doesn't pray and he doesn't fast, and he doesn't give *zakat* [a part of his earnings]. Whosoever dares to question his legitimacy, I will take that person to hell." [God is proclaiming that Abdoulaye will become Cheikh Ibra Fall's disciple. God has honoured and legitimized the sacred covenant with the founder of Mouridism, relieving the Bay Fall of certain of Islam's prescribed duties.] At that time, Abdoulaye didn't know the whereabouts of Cheikh Ibra Fall. Abdoulaye was walking in the bush, and as he walked he met Yaga Mbaye, a disciple of Cheikh Saad Bouh.³⁴ Yaga offered Abdoulaye lodging in exchange for herding sheep. Yaga Mbaye asked Abdoulaye his name. [Abdoulaye, following God's orders, was searching for Cheikh Ibra Fall. Having no family ties, he spent most of his time wandering in the countryside until he met Yaga Mbaye, the founder of the village Kër Yaga Mbaye, about 60 km northwest of Thies.]

"What is your name?"

"*Bil-la-hi*" [By God], Abdoulaye answered.

Yaga Mbaye said, "That's my name. *Billahi* belongs to me. I have been with God."

Then God told Abdoulaye, "We will call you Dee Samba, because he who is alive and is speaking, when he says the word *dee*, meaning 'to die', he will think about God." [God instructs us to never stop thinking about Him, and that while "being alive" we should never forget God's power. If we remember one of Abdoulaye's names, "Dee", we will surely remember God.] Even *Yonent bi* [the Prophet] was once

³³ Certain people have speculated that Abdoulaye studied the Quran at Pir Sanoxoor, but he was so advanced that his teacher told him to search for a real master.

³⁴ Cheikh Saad Bouh (1850-1917) was from Khroufa, Mauritania, and was a Traza chief of the Qadiri Fadeliiyya order, famous for their extreme mystical practices. Cheikh Saad Bouh had numerous disciples throughout Senegal. Behrman 1968: 111-12.

a shepherd.³⁵ [This implies that herding was not a bad job. Abdoulaye has accepted Yaga Mbaye's offer and, like the Prophet, Abdoulaye found that herding agreed with his contemplative nature.]

Cheikh Saad Bouh came from Gannaar [Mauritania] and told Yaga Mbaye, "There was a light from your house and I found it on my bed in Ganaar,³⁶ so I want you to call everyone, bring even the babies that were born last night." Cheikh Saad Bouh gave his order, and it's normal that as the chief of his village, Yaga Mbaye brought his own children before anyone else's. All the children were called except for Abdoulaye – he was considered an outsider. Cheikh Saad Bouh gazed at all of them carefully and he told Yaga Mbaye that the enlightened one was not among them and he asked, "Is there anyone left?"

Yaga Mbaye said, "There is just one left, but I told him to go tend the animals in the bush."

Cheikh Saad Bouh said, "Tell someone to get him." When Abdoulaye came, Cheikh Saad Bouh asked Yaga Mbaye, "Where did you find this young boy?"

Yaga Mbaye replied, "He is my son."

Cheikh Saad Bouh said, "From Adam and Eve to this generation there does not exist a person who can be Abdoulaye's parent, and the person who says that he is Abdoulaye's parent will burn in the fires of hell. I will ask the question again, where did you get this boy?" [Cheikh Saad Bouh has confirmed that Abdoulaye is not from this world.]

Yaga Mbaye says, "He is my domestic worker."

Cheikh Saad Bouh replies, "He who dares to take Abdoulaye as an inferior, will go to hell."

Yaga Mbaye responds, "I am afraid of hell."

Abdoulaye says, "*Baay* [father], I erased your name from the list God keeps of those to be sent to hell before God was able to do anything."³⁷ [Because of Abdoulaye's special relation with God he can intercede on another's behalf, and he is using his power to help.]

Yaga Mbaye asks Abdoulaye, "What's the name of the horse I gave

³⁵ Haykal (1976: 58-9) embroiders upon the tradition that Muhammad was a shepherd during his youth: "The shepherd, who was intelligent of heart, found opportunity for reflection and meditation in the wide open spaces of the open during the day, in the twinkling of the stars when night had fallen. . . . In the various phenomena of nature he sought an explanation for this existence and its creation; and he saw . . . his soul as an integral part of this existence."

³⁶ Just as the angel Djbril declares "he has come because he was attracted to the brilliant concentration of light on the earth that could be seen all the way to the heavens", Cheikh Saad Bouh has come because of the prophetic light radiating from Abdoulaye that could be seen all the way to Mauritania. Schubel 1993: 19.

³⁷ According to al-Ghazali, *Kiram Katibun* are the angels who record whatever man says or does. Al-Ghazali 1983: 96.

you?" [Yaga Mbaye is attempting to make an offering of a horse and humbles himself in front of Abdoulaye's greatness.]

Abdoulaye replies, "*Weddi gis bokku ci.*"³⁸ [A Wolof proverb, meaning "seeing is believing". Now that Yaga has "seen" the real Abdoulaye, he "believes" that he is from God. It is *ayat* (a sign from God).]

Yaga Mbaye told Abdoulaye, "That horse, it is yours from today and the room where I was sleeping, my room, take it and sleep there. I will go to your room where you were sleeping, and my oldest daughter, I give her to you as a wife." [In addition to Yaga Mbaye's generosity, it is also very auspicious to sleep where God's friend has slept.]

Abdoulaye told him, "*Baay*, I want to go live where it pleases me." But in fact, Abdoulaye knew he had to continue his search to meet Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibra Fall. It's because of this, that he went to Niakhep [located about 40 km. southwest of Yaga Mbaye's village. Cheikh Ibra Fall's disciples were scattered throughout this region]. When he arrived at Niakhep, he lived near the edge of the village in the trunk of a "*lëm*" [local tree].³⁹ He was doing extraordinary things. Villagers would find him there, and converse with him. People from Cheikh Ibra Fall's house would see him in his tree and remark about his mysterious powers. Finally, they advised him, "Find a spiritual master." [Mysterious powers are evidence of Abdoulaye's ability to understand the hidden qualities of mundane things. People were urging him to use his power for the benefit of the community.] He answered, "I would not be the devotee of someone merely because he has many disciples. The person God wants me to see will leave his house and come to me here." [Abdoulaye distinguishes himself from the virtueless charlatans that were joining brotherhoods in order to seek refuge or find worldly success.]

Then Cheikh Ibra Fall left Njaarém [Diourbel] and came to Niakhep. Before leaving he told everyone: "I enjoin all persons to whom I gave the *wird* [special litany]; to keep the *wird* alive until *bés u pénc* [Judgment Day, or the end of the world]." [Cheikh Ibra Fall was well known and was dispensing the *wird* and initiating disciples.] When Cheikh Ibra Fall arrived, Abdoulaye got up to greet him. Cheikh Ibra Fall said to Abdoulaye, "I prostrate myself before you. Peace be unto you, in the name of God." Cheikh Ibra Fall then remarked to the people of Niakhep, "You have a very important person living here in your village." [Cheikh Ibra Fall recognized Abdoulaye's stature. He was no ordinary neophyte.] Cheikh Ibra Fall then asked Abdoulaye his name. Abdoulaye

³⁸ Sidi Gueye, an informant in Thies, explains it was common to give animals Wolof proverbs as names in order that these "truths" were often repeated.

³⁹ "*Lëm gwi*", or "Ask a Lébu", was the advice my Wolof informants gave me. There are stories attached to these local trees: Kuus is a *jinn*, he is short with a calabash on his head, and if you beat him with a *balee* (a handmade broom), the calabash will fall off.

answered, "*Billahi*". [By always proclaiming his name "*Billahi*" he was relentless in telling people he was from God.] Cheikh Ibra Fall asks, "Why did you come to our land?" Abdoulaye says, "I seek a master. I didn't come for wealth, I didn't come for fame. God placed two messengers on the earth [implying Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibra Fall] and I want to join them in their mission. I am ready to follow you." [Abdoulaye is making his position clear by stating that he has no worldly intentions.]

Cheikh Ibra Fall, accepting Abdoulaye's *jébbalu* [submission] said, "Meet me in Ndande." [Ndande was Cheikh Ibra Fall's village about 50 km northwest of Niakhep on the road to Ndar (Saint Louis). Abdoulaye makes the transition from individual power to a longer chain of saintly power and community.] Abdoulaye arrived at Ndande. People remember him pushing three huge barrels of water with ease because God sent two *malaaka* [angels] from *Mahrabin* [the town in the sky]. They were rolling the earth under the barrels to make them go faster. [In saintly stories, *malaaka* are always present. They often appear as miraculous materializations supplying pious individuals with superhuman resources.]

"*Liggéey dafa baax.*" ["Work is good."] Abdoulaye explains why. "You are brought to life for a reason and that reason is to work. And if you work, God will never fail you. If you continue to work and you still have nothing, people will pray that God will one day give you something. But if you do not work, whatever you have will amaze people and they will say 'I don't know where he got what he has.' And then people will be suspicious, and you thus make people sin. [The evil eye and jealousy.] Therefore let's work." [The Bay Fall have coined a phrase "*Ku ñag jariñu*" ("Sweat for your wealth"). Abdoulaye is repeating the Bay Fall doctrine whereby work is an expression of Mouride disciples' love for their shaykh.]

After three years, Abdoulaye completed his apprenticeship to Cheikh Ibra Fall. [Sufi doctrine commonly says that it takes three years to be admitted to the Path. "The first year is devoted to service of the people, the second year to service of God, and the third year to watching over his own heart."]⁴⁰ Cheikh Amadou Bamba requested his followers to raise money for the construction of the Touba Mosque. When Abdoulaye brought his contributions to Cheikh Ibra Fall to be presented to Cheikh Amadou Bamba, he and his followers went behind the house. Someone told Cheikh Ibra Fall, "Abdoulaye is here. He is behind the house." And Cheikh Ibra Fall said, "Step aside and let the owner of the house pass through whichever door he wants."

[A possible interpretation could be that Cheikh Ibra Fall has recog-

⁴⁰ Al-Hujwiri 1982: 34.

nized Abdoulaye's prominence. The doors represent "Human Doors to God", which is a development of Muslim thought that regards spiritual leaders as "doors to God". Abdoulaye is the way for others to reach God.]⁴¹

When Abdoulaye went inside, many people were following him, and he said to them, "He who didn't come carrying a load on his head must walk behind the others." [Bay Fall (well known for carrying things on their heads), have a saying that they will proceed to Paradise ahead of all other Mourides since their superior work habits are the most pleasing to Cheikh Amadou Bamba. They have given everything, therefore they go first.] Cheikh Ibra Fall told Abdoulaye, "You are surprising me again, where have you been keeping these fine horses of *Badr*?" [These horses, used in Muhammad's Battle of Badr, are probably a reference to Arabian horses imported from North Africa.] Abdoulaye replied, "That's my secret. That is what God has given me: possibilities and potential." [Abdoulaye is keeping some of his abilities hidden.⁴² The possibilities God gives humans are defined precisely in their indefinability.]

Cheikh Ibra Fall told his closest disciples, "Take Abdoulaye to Cheikh Amadou Bamba." [This would be his first contact with the founder.] When they arrived, Abdou Khar and Ndiaye Rokhaya [two disciples of Cheikh Ibra Fall] dropped to their hands and knees while Abdoulaye prostrated himself. Cheikh Amadou Bamba then placed his hand on his mouth and ritually made the three muffled exclamations of wonder in the presence of a personage of high honour. Then he asked, "What is the name of this disciple?" Abdou Khar and Ndiaye Rokhaya said, "Abdoulaye of Niakhep." But of course that name has no meaning, it's just a nickname describing where Abdoulaye is from. Cheikh Amadou Bamba gently waved his hand three times in Abdoulaye's direction, another expression of awe in the presence of an honourable guest. Cheikh Amadou Bamba asked Abdoulaye, "What is your name?"

Abdoulaye slowly said his own name, "Ab-dou-la-hi."

Cheikh Amadou Bamba says, three times: "*Akasa!* [The truth be told!] *Abdou Mubarakun!* [There is sanctity in your presence!]." Then Cheikh Amadou Bamba asked, "Abdoulaye, where are you from?" Abdoulaye did not answer. Again Cheikh Amadou Bamba asked, "Abdou,

⁴¹ Without this link there would be nothing linked. For the *shaykh* is the door to God, and there is no access to God save through this door. Sidi Mustafa I-Bahri said: "Haunt the door of the Master and thou shalt be through this a chosen friend." Padwick 1961: 214.

⁴² Citing Michael Gilsenan, Schubel writes: "This ability to keep hidden the events of a person's life is one proof of the power of a saint. Such knowledge of what is hidden in a social sense is a metaphor for knowledge of what is hidden in a religious sense." Schubel 1993: 23-4. Cf. Gilsenan 1982: 116.

from where do you come?" Still he did not answer. And again, "Abdoulaye, where are you from?" Abdoulaye answered, "From you, from inside of you." [Certain men of power can see you without your seeing them. If you are searching for the path to God, they pick you, and move you to their house. Abdoulaye's coming from "inside" of Cheikh Amadou Bamba can be seen as the ultimate relationship between a Sufi *shaykh* and his disciple "in which the self of the disciple is annihilated in the self of the master."] ⁴³

Cheikh Amadou Bamba looked at him and said, "Well Abdoulaye, then you are here." It was as though Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Abdoulaye had seen each other in a previous life. Only Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Abdoulaye knew why Cheikh Amadou Bamba said, "Well, then you are here." [This is similar to the hadith that speaks about the metaphysics of Ali's and Muhammad's relationship, where the Prophet declares that he and Ali shared a pre-existence before the creation of the universe.] ⁴⁴ And Cheikh Amadou Bamba repeated, "Abdoulaye you're here! Say 'yes, I am here.'" Abdoulaye rose to his knees and said, "Ah, Cheikh Amadou Bamba, I'm afraid to say I am here, for perhaps I may not be here tomorrow." [The role Abdoulaye is playing is fluid. He has been sent by God on a mission to lead people, and he is continuously adapting to changing circumstances. God may call him back at any moment.] Cheikh Amadou Bamba told him, "You are called Yakhine, and you come from the site of God." Then, Cheikh Amadou Bamba said, "Yakhine you are here! Yakhine you are here! Yakhine you are here!" [Yakhine is a non-worldly name that is only defined at the end of this narrative. Like the Quranic reference "naming the name", to know the name of something is to have power over it.] ⁴⁵ Abdoulaye agreed finally, "Yes I'm here." The two of them got up and went inside to talk and when they came back Cheikh Amadou Bamba called Yaram Mbaye and told him, "When you return, tell Cheikh Ibra Fall to introduce Abdoulaye to everyone because he is not from here, it's God who sent him."

On the road back, Yaram said to Abdoulaye, "Abdoulaye, tell the people who you are, because Cheikh Amadou Bamba ordered it. [Abdoulaye has been given *ndigal* (orders) to speak. *Ndigal* is the ultimate command for the Bay Fall disciple. In Bay Fall parlance, no other word has relevance, and no action should be taken unless it is prefaced with "*ndigal*", and that word must come from the *shaykh*'s mouth.]

⁴³ Schubel 1993: 27-8.

⁴⁴ Schubel 1993: 18-19.

⁴⁵ Schimmel 1975: 188.

Yakhine who is in Thies is not destroying Bambaism. Abdoulaye Diop in Thies, you are the essence of Bambaism. The whole town will certainly agree." [This becomes a Wolof praise formula, with metre, rhythm and rhyme, using different variations of names for the brotherhood and defining Abdoulaye's role therein. The family name "Diop" was very common in this region. According to relatives, it was a worldly name Abdoulaye assumed early on since he had no family name himself.]

When they returned, Cheikh Ibra Fall got up suddenly as if he were surprised, and asked, "What did Cheikh Amadou Bamba say?" Yaram answered, "Cheikh Amadou Bamba said that we must treat Abdoulaye very well, and let people know him because he is not a part of us. God sent him." [How does one know who is a saint and who is not? Al-Hujwiri declares that a saint is only known to a saint.]⁴⁶ And Cheikh Ibra Fall replied, "I knew it." And then went on, "What is in you, Abdoulaye, if I had it, I would put it on my eldest son Fallu, or Moustapha, or Abdoulaye Khar. Abdou, I give thanks. I am the son of God through Cheikh Amadou Bamba and you are the son of God through me." [What Abdoulaye has within him, his saintly power, is coveted even by Cheikh Ibra Fall. Then Ibra Fall explains "linking into a lineage", whereby he describes the line of descent of the three most powerful figures within the Mouride brotherhood.]

Cheikh Ibra Fall continued, "By saying 'I am here' you display the confidence you received from Cheikh Amadou Bamba. Abdoulaye, thanks. Now go speak to the people. You will attract many disciples from East to West. Be a leader! The Mohammadou Mahdiou who has been on the lips of the people for so long is none other than you. It is God's work. God gives you that title. You are other than the one we suspected to be the Mahdiou. Cheikh Amadou Bamba carried out unprecedented works for God, which is why God placed you in his hands." [Cheikh Ibra Fall is assuring Abdoulaye of his success throughout the countryside as a *shaykh* and leader, and naming him Mohammadou Mahdiou. The Mahdiou was expected; however, this may have been a reference to Abdoulaye's mysterious background, and the fact that he was not born into a well-known Senegalese noble family.]

Abdoulaye said, "Submit to God, and all will have peace. [*Tubleen, bépp di jàmm!*] We are all slaves of God and anyone who doesn't like me because I am close to God, I accept it. I forgive him. I trust God and God is sufficient for me because he doesn't trust in anything except the act of *jébbalu*, that is, complete submission to Islam. [As the appointed Mahdi, Abdoulaye is promoting the most basic tenet of Islam, asking people to submit. He is renewing the faith, but in a non-radical sense. Cheikh Amadou Bamba would be in agreement with this.] So I will

⁴⁶ Denny 1988: 85.

give you a very strict way to follow, the way of peace and *jébbalu* that leads to paradise, a way of certainty beyond a doubt. So I want you all to work for God because one day we will rise from the grave and that day God will do whatever he wants, what pleases him." Abdoulaye said this and wrote it, and later he wanted to give everything he wrote to Cheikh Ibra Fall, but Cheikh Ibra Fall refused, saying "Abdoulaye, keep it. I am without doubt – Cheikh Amadou Bamba doesn't doubt." Abdoulaye said, "I am happy you do not doubt because on Judgement Day, everyone who doubted will see his error." Then Abdoulaye dug the soil and put the papers he wrote upon in the soil.⁴⁷ [Like Rumi, who "held that every thought that becomes embedded in the heart will turn into a form visible to everybody at the Day of Judgement, and death will meet man like an ugly mirror, which shows either a beautiful face or an ugly face according to his good or evil deeds."]⁴⁸

Cheikh Amadou Bamba worked three more years. His mission was completed. He said to Abdoulaye, "Spread the faith." [Cheikh Amadou Bamba had "finished work", meaning to pass away – but we must never imply death in the language of saints.]⁴⁹ Cheikh Amadou Bamba doesn't like, nor will he help, those who won't do anything for God. Those who do good deeds in life will die facing God. Those who don't will not. For only he who is on the side of God will die facing him.

Abdoulaye says, "What God maintains between the earth and sun is for the sake of humankind. But God created three kinds of people: most people don't know God – most people don't thank God – most people don't follow God." [Here he is listing the three negative aspects of the human nature with relation to God.]

Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine has two kinds of books: the large one and the small ones, but he only consents to show the small ones. The big one is in Mecca, he will not show it. [This is the secrecy of the contents of the books. Mecca is in Thies].⁵⁰ The big book is Abdoulaye's Quran.] Assane Thiam says, "I am afraid. I believe that Abdoulaye Yakhine existed before there was life. He knows man and many things about life." Abdoulaye Yakhine said, "Most of my followers will die

⁴⁷ Some people have a gift from God. They can write something very powerfully, yet very simply. Someone seeing this may try to copy it, but no two people have the same *marhaban*. Who is writing is more important than what is written. Therefore, among those mystically inclined, we see digging and burying in the soil written documents that could fall into the wrong hands.

⁴⁸ Schimmel 1975: 107.

⁴⁹ Recalling Hallaj's spirit, Schimmel tells us "the spirit of the saint is able to participate actively in the affairs of the world, often appearing in dreams and guiding the wayfarer on his Path for 'the friends of God do not die.'" Schimmel 1975: 105.

⁵⁰ If "Touba est La Mekke des Mourides, Tiwaouane celle des Tijanes, Camberene celle des Layennes, . . ." then it follows that Thies is the Mecca for the disciples of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine. Samb 1972: 33.

before I do." He also said, "All of my sons will die." When he spoke these words two of his twelve sons were still alive. While he was dying he called all the *tariqas* [Sufi brotherhoods], and when all of them came, he showed them the small books.

Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine wrote a letter to Mame Thierno Mbacké [Cheikh Amadou Bamba's brother, and an important Mouride leader] and sent another copy to Dame Abdourahmane Lo [another prominent figure in Mouride history]. Whenever Abdoulaye sent a letter to someone, he would always send a copy to someone else. These letters concerned the *allaxira* [afterlife]. The idea is that you can bring your letter with you to the afterlife. He wrote to all of the *khalifas* [supreme heads of lineages]. [Abdoulaye was a friend of all the brotherhoods.]

Cheikh Amadou Bamba called an old man who was over 100 years old and asked him, "Were you here when the earth was moving?" The person answered, "Yes." Cheikh Amadou Bamba asked, "How was it?" "It was as though the noise was coming from the East." Cheikh Amadou Bamba said, "That wasn't a noise, and the earth wasn't moving; it was Muhammad moving his *habru* to come live with me in Touba." Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine told Assane Thiam many things about Serigne Touba.

At that time there was someone named Faye who lived in Ouakam⁵¹ in Dakar. Faye's job was to take people to Mecca. One day Faye heard that the Prophet was in Thies, and thereupon he went to Thies, wanting to see Him, but people chased him away. So Faye left. The next time that Faye went to Mecca, he sat near the *Kaba* and turning up the palms of his hands, he said to God, "Oh God if you have two trunks [Kaba here is referred to as a trunk] I want to see what is in each of them – in this one and in the one in the West, when I return to the West." That's what he asked God. Faye thought God took the Prophet from Medina and brought him to Senegal. When Faye left Mecca to return to Senegal he took all his luggage to Ouakam. When he reached home, he didn't even wait for people to greet him; he simply took a car and set out again for Thies. He found Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine lying on a hammock with people swinging him as he said prayers from the Quran. Faye fell down and rolled in the sand in front of him with his Hajj clothes on. These clothes are very important. He said to Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, "I swear you are what is in the first trunk, the leader I seek. God brought you here. I came here once before but I couldn't see you. I am coming from Mecca and I asked God to see you when I came back here."

Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine asked, "How many times did you go to Mecca?" Faye answered, "Twenty-three times". [Hagiographers say

⁵¹ A quarter in Dakar, not far from the airport at Yoff.

some Muslims went on Hajj seventy times.]⁵² Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine said, "Ah, so you went to that box that has nothing inside. If it were an egg I would be the chick inside." [Abdoulaye is saying that the *Kaba* in Mecca, the most sacred symbol for all Muslims, has nothing inside. Therefore, it has no meaning and a pilgrimage to Mecca is insignificant, since the sacred ingredient of the *Kaba* can now be found in Thies. This is also the very image that opened the narrative and Abdoulaye repeats it again.] Faye forgot all about his pilgrimage and said, "I agree. Now you are here." [Schimmel reminds us that People of the Path knew that the divine spirit was not in the *Kaba* (the one made of stone): "When you seek God, seek him in your Heart – He is not in Jerusalem, nor in Mecca, nor in the Hajj."]⁵³

Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine told Assane Thiam that this is the *baat* [expression] he will use to wave goodbye to the people from this life. It came from God and will go back. "There is no king except God and I want you all to trust *Rasululahi* [God's messenger]." It was just like this. [Following Islam, Abdoulaye is suggesting a kind of Muhammadan mysticism: when you trust Muhammad, the faithful will know the king, the holy, is God.]

Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine said, "Oh, people in this world, don't try to look for me in the Quran, you'll never see my person in the Quran. Don't look for me among relatives, because you will never know my relatives. Don't look for me in the *Lawh Mafuz* [Tablets of Mafuz];⁵⁴ God put there the names of all persons in life, you won't see my name there. Therefore, I am not a simple person. If you want to know something about me, you must know where God is, *awu Yakhine* [the location of God], only there will you find me. Follow what I say, and one day you may understand what I have been talking about". [Abdoulaye explains the secret of his name "Yakhine", perhaps the most significant phrase of the narrative. Abdoulaye suggests "looking in on yourself", which is similar to an alleged *hadith* not found in

⁵² Schimmel 1975: 106.

⁵³ Ibid., quoting Yunus Emre.

⁵⁴ With Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows it but He. He knows whatever is in the land and in the sea; not a leaf falls but He knows it; nor is there a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green or dry, but is [recorded] in a clear Book, i.e. the 'Preserved Tablet' (*Lawh Mahfuz*). "The 'Preserved Tablet' is commonly understood to be in heaven. It contains the originals of all revealed Books, including the Quran itself (Quran 13: 39). Everything which God has decreed to bring into being from the beginning of creation to Doomsday is recorded in it (Quran 22: 52). It is referred to sometimes as the Tablet, sometimes as a clear Book, and sometimes as a clear Imam." Al-Ghazali 1983: 96.

standard works but often quoted: "He who knows his own soul (or himself) knows his Lord.]"⁵⁵

Regarding the Translation

What is evident on first perusal of the translation of the narrative is the particularity and specificity of the geography, the central actors and their roles in the earliest formation of the brotherhood. Names are mentioned with little explanation, and accurate translation requires a specialist from the same age group, membership within the Mouride brotherhood, and knowledge of the relevant characters then and now.

Assane Thiam speaks "real" Wolof, heard only in villages; his vocabulary is laden with Mouride and Sufi terms understandable only to those few familiar with Mouride phenomenology. Like the Wolof in the narrative, it is not mixed with French (unlike most Wolof spoken in Dakar). Three older Mourides and a Senegalese Wolof teacher painstakingly transcribed the recording, using the national standardized Wolof that has Roman, not Arabic, characters.⁵⁶ A word-for-word translation would not have been comprehensible to a non-specialist reader and was replaced with a more fluid approach that seemed truer to the nature of the texts and ultimately more intelligible.

The actual recitation was spiked with stretches of unintelligibility, reminiscent of the esoteric quality of brotherhood Wolof (specifically Mouride Wolof, the language spoken in Touba, famous for its softness, slurs, and Sufi imagery and vocabulary). The goal of this form of delivery is to inspire deference while demanding the most attentive listeners. Ultimately this discourse is spoken and understood by a small and diminishing group of Mouride élites and elders.⁵⁷

Commenting on the More Obscure Elements of the Text

God says in the Quran: "We shall lay upon you a heavy message." [73.5 (5)]⁵⁸

Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, was born inside the holiest shrine of Islam, and like Ali, our character emerges

⁵⁵ Murato 1992: 26.

⁵⁶ Three old Mourides in Thies: Mamadu Niane, Talla Diop and Abdou Fall. Sidi Gueye is a Wolof instructor at the Peace Corps Training Centre in Thies.

⁵⁷ The purpose of a Touba dialect is to keep the utterances out of the mainstream while increasing the secrecy and non-public aspects of this ephemeral linguistic tradition. "It has more elements than can be taken in at once, the more you know, the more you can take in." Tonkin 1989: 46.

⁵⁸ Ibn Khaldun 1967: 185.

from the Kaba, or more specifically, hatches from an egg. ("If that square box had been an egg, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine would have been the chick inside.") The Wolof concept of "*tostan*" is literally translated as an egg breaking and a chick being hatched, and connotes spiritual rebirth. It is an act that brings personal independence and change. Here Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine emerges as the prophet of renewal.

Thiam uses his voice to dramatize the epic qualities of the very uncommon arrival of the Mahdi. Images of the setting (not rising) sun, the Kaba, an egg and a chick, delivered with hypnotically rising and falling intonation, speak of another kind of birth, not human. Islam's own birthplace provides the setting, not the western region of Senegal. Here, elements of the narrative cause discomfort for more mainstream Muslims. The distinctive feature that separates this narrative from others is not so much the appearance of a Mahdi in Senegal (since we are told that every year a new one would appear),⁵⁹ but rather that this one claimed to have been without parents. Even Muhammad had parents and Isa (Jesus) was born from Mariama (Mary). Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibra Fall had parents, too, the former's mother, Mame Diarra Bousso, being widely known and highly venerated among Mourides. The narration says that Abdoulaye was "placed" on the Earth and is followed by the statement by the venerable Qadiri mystic, Cheikh Saad Bouh, that "since the beginning of the world no one was worthy to be the parents of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, and anyone who makes such a claim will go to hell."

Though there is no mention of Mahdism in Mouridism, Assane Thiam uses the term very early within the narrative, warning us that everyone must honor the Mahdi, purify his surroundings, and sacrifice cows for him. The narrator points out that our saviour was sent by God to a geographic site that carries another linguistic tradition. The first identifiable village in the narrative is Pir Sanoxoor⁶⁰ in northern Kajoor, defined as the region's first Islamic university, famous for Islamic learning since the seventeenth century.

Later on, we are told about a prophetic light emanating from the Mouride principals (Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibra Fall). Their light was covering the mortal world. God is explaining that although Cheikh Ibra Fall's brand of Mouridism has some unusual features: anyone who dares question the sanctity of his disciples, who do not pray, fast, or give *zakat* (alms), will find themselves in the fires of hell.⁶¹ The

⁵⁹ Behrman 1970: 42.

⁶⁰ Colvin 1974: 592, n. 11.

⁶¹ This was the point in the narration where there was significant response from the listeners, many moved to shout "*Eskey!*" (Praise God!). Everyone was enthusiastic.

opening images seem to come from a literary source that is very specific and rich,⁶² while other portions of the narrative reflect an oral tradition.

While wandering in the countryside, Serigne Abdoulaye came upon Yaga Mbaye, a disciple of Cheikh Saad Bouh. Yaga Mbaye, chief of the village, offered Abdoulaye a room in exchange for watching over the sheep. In this initial conversation, both Yaga Mbaye and Abdoulaye have been touched by God, have spoken to God, and are identified with him. The narration returns to the emotive and again includes esoteric aspects of Sufi doctrine and philosophy.

It is interesting that God has rescued Abdoulaye from an argument over who owns the name "Billahi". Our narrator gives us the logic behind one of the Abdoulaye's names, "Dee Samba". Nowhere again textually is the name Dee Samba repeated, and family members only rarely use it, each time explaining, "It is a name from God, revealed through a conversation between Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine and God." Next, Abdoulaye's acceptance of Yaga Mbaye's offer to tend the village sheep links him to the Prophet Muhammad's earliest vocation, a noble profession suited to his contemplative nature. This reinforces Assane Thiam's earlier point that Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's life parallels the life of the Messenger of God.

When, in the text, Cheikh Amadou Bamba insisted that Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine say who he was, he was slow to answer. Abdoulaye showed no self-adulation. But why? Assane Thiam explains, "We cannot assimilate this other realm, our universe is limited to the ordinary." In the narrative, Cheikh Ibra Fall explained to Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine that since Cheikh Amadou Bamba allotted him confidence and ordered him to speak out and announce, "I am here", he was at the same time ordering him to seek his worldly rewards. Not only would Abdoulaye "attract disciples from East to West", but Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine was empowered with the title of "Mohammadou Mahdiou". It was Cheikh Ibra Fall who confirmed, "God gives you that title. The Mohammadou Mahdiou who has been on the lips of the people for so long is none other than you." Central to all orality is the proverb, and this narrative is no exception. The proverb "*weddi gis bokku ci*" ("seeing is believing") is used here as both the name of the horse mentioned in the narrative and in order to elucidate a cultural truism – in this case, a powerful allegory underlying the entire narrative.⁶³

The word of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine as presented by Assane

⁶² My conjecture is that the epic-like opening of the narrative may have come from a written source, i.e. Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's book, the one that Assane Thiam has in his possession.

⁶³ Informants explain that the use of proverbs as names for people and animals is common in pure Wolof and they are an effective mnemonic device for children. Regarding the use of proverbs, see Yankah 1989: 325-46.

Thiam, far from being a shapeless tangle of words that perverted the wisdom of Islam and turned Mouridism into a lore-ridden folk religion, was, on the contrary, a philosophy of the elect. Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's followers squeezed out a deeper Sufi spirituality that for them was absent in mainstream Mouride teachings. Serigne Abdoulaye's philosophy, not easily understood, is in fact comprehensible to only a few of his closest family members and followers.

In hindsight, it is probable that Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's sudden mysterious arrival on earth was a necessary explication. He was not part of any lineage. He was not aligned to the Mouridiyya through relatives. He was establishing his own power base and displaying his *baraka*; and he was defining himself. By disassociating himself from all the lineages, he could easily remake himself, without limitation. Not acknowledging familial connections, he appeared ephemeral; his charisma was bequeathed directly from God. Other non-Mbacké saints became prominent leaders in the Mouride establishment, but all had deeper roots and connections to other great Senegalese families.⁶⁴

The *zawiya* of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine was an attempt to recreate, on a higher spiritual plane, the lost ideals and splendour of the philosophy expounded by Cheikh Amadou Bamba. Its role models are the first and earliest disciples. Its rituals are directly inspired by the first *ndigal*⁶⁵ of Cheikh Amadou Bamba and the supremacy which the founder accorded Muhammad the Prophet. It is still to this inspired Mahdi (and his current *khalifa*) that all Kër Yakhine disciples turn for ideological sanction for each ambition in this life and the next. To a lesser degree, these disciples are in turn influenced by Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibra Fall. But it is Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's Mahdihood that is kept very much alive in Thies today, through Assane Thiam's remembrance of, and Kër Yakhine's nostalgia for, Mohammadou Mahdiou.

"Official" vs. "Popular" Devotion

Within each religion a powerful body of tradition emphasizes not codes but stories, not precepts but personalities, not lectures but lives.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Issa Diene was one such person. His legacy is well known and even today, disciples greet his descendants using the same praise phrase as when greeting the Mbacké élite. "*Diene, Diene Balla Issa*" mimics the Mbacké family's "*Mbacké, Mbacké Balla Issa*."

⁶⁵ Popular tradition suggests that the first and most important *ndigal* (order) from the Mouride founder was "Go and Work!" The disciples at Kër Yakhine appear to be very motivated and constantly active. They say they are "working for Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine and Sokhna Magatte."

⁶⁶ Hawley 1987: xi.

Assane Thiam loves to remember and recite the story of his *shaykh*. He is a self-appointed orator for Mohammadou Mahdiou. When asked about his ability to speak endlessly about his *shaykh*, he replies that he is fulfilling his religious duties. When he remembers Mohammadou Mahdiou, he remembers God, he says. Distinctive to Sufism, this "remembrance" is sanctioned in a Quranic order: "Recollect God often, . . . any time and any place. . . . The heart of the faithful must be perfumed with the recollection of God."⁶⁷ For Assane Thiam, "any place" could mean in the market, on public transport, among friends or among strangers.

As in many hagiographic accounts, "the most memorable point in this narrative is when one saint meets another."⁶⁸ In the above narrative this happens twice. The first time is when Cheikh Ibra Fall goes to Niakhep to meet Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, just as Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine had stated was a condition for his *jébbalu*.⁶⁹ The second time is when Serigne Abdoulaye travels to meet Cheikh Amadou Bamba, at the suggestion of Cheikh Ibra Fall.⁷⁰

Hagiography aside, modern Mourides publicly do not recognize any Mahdis among them: they simply reject the notion. They shy away from repeating the very word "Mahdi" in hopes of maintaining their conservative veneer. Mohammed Mbodj suggests that the Mouridiyya's strict bloodline hierarchy is a possible reason for the brotherhood élite to be so adamant about rejecting this non-Mbacké Mahdi phenomenon. Mahdihood, and its accompanying claim of spontaneous earthly appearance (in this instance, without benefit of human parental derivation), appears especially challenging to the ultimate "blood" authority of the brotherhood.⁷¹ Mouride notables continue to "pooh-pooh" the thought of any appearance (ever) of a Mouride Mahdi.

Around most Mbacké family members, particularly those closest to the founder, there is a certain pretentiousness; they envision themselves as "sharia-minded" and fancy being called serious, conservative Muslims. Their discussions almost never venture into the deeper territory of *batin*

⁶⁷ Schimmel 1975: 168.

⁶⁸ Hawley 1987: xix.

⁶⁹ This act, which has been recorded frequently and has received much scholarly discussion, called *jebblu* in Wolof (coming from the Arabic *bayah*, *talqin*), means personal and physical surrender.

⁷⁰ John Hawley appropriately describes the "desire to create an extended sacred family. . . . It generates a network of familiar spirits . . . who communicate a sense of continuity, variety and amplitude of the community of faith, and who as erstwhile denizens of this world span the gap between the known and the unknown." Hawley 1987: xix.

⁷¹ In a personal conversation with Professor Mohammed Mbodj, 21 December 1994 in New York.

(esoteric Sufism) for fear that they may be misinterpreted and labelled as irrational. Publicly, they seem embarrassed by the extreme behaviour of the majority of their retinue, the uneducated disciples who express their feelings sincerely with a demeanour that is still redolent of subservience, a mode of behaviour which Cruise O'Brien calls "reminiscent of Wolof slaves". For these ultra-devoted disciples, their *shaykh* IS God, and in the language of *talibés*, "God" ("Yàlla") is replaced with the name of their *shaykh*.⁷² This is not extremist; it is the local idiom.

To suggest the existence of a "public code of conduct" inside the brotherhood is unthinkable. Polite and official Mouridiyya does not legislate pious behaviour, and devotional behaviour is not taught by the example of the *shaykh*, but by other *talibés*. In Touba, there is an unofficial public relations group close to the Mouride Khalifa General (supreme head) that would like to temper the *mêlées* which often erupt spontaneously in front of television and video cameras during massive gatherings. This team would like to believe that public behaviour can be regulated, but the extreme veneration of a disciple for his or her *shaykh* often manifests itself in hysteria and, very simply, there really is no way of controlling it. Certain *shaykhs*, particularly Bay Fall *shaykhs*, have their own standards and styles regarding appropriate relations between a *shaykh* and disciple in these situations. Naturally, the more Quranic education promoted by the Mbacké family, the more moderated the devotional displays. But among *talibés*, there is an unspoken invitation to challenge one another (paradoxically) in the performance of extreme gestures of humility.

In 1927, while the Mourides were having difficulties reaching consensus in selecting the future Khalifa General of the brotherhood, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine reportedly travelled to Touba and offered himself as the legitimate leader who would guide Mourides through this tumultuous period. The response from a member of the Mouride élite, according to one informant, was to tell Serigne Abdoulaye to return to Thies, since Cheikh Ibra Fall had designated him the leader of Thies. Had there been an admission publicly of problems of leadership in the post-Cheikh Amadou Bamba era, it would have suggested that the Mourides had faltered (and implied weakness). As other scholars have pointed out, the Mbacké lineage was filled with individuals well-placed to assume the position of Khalifa General.

In addition, the French wielded their influence and let their preferences be known when it came to succession decisions – clearly some candidates

⁷² For example, when speaking of events in the future, disciples replace "*bu neexe Yàlla*" (if it pleases God) with the phrase "*bu neexe Serigne Djilé Mbacké*" and likewise, "*Insha Cheikh Ndigal Fall*" replaces the common Arabic phrase "*inshallah*" (God willing).

warmed to their long-range goals for the country while others did not – or, rather, some candidates could easily be manipulated while others could not. Only the foolhardy could have imagined that the colonials might support a leader outside the Mbacké family such as Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine. Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine was problematic and resisted the French on many levels; most aggressively against their attempt to contain his growing sphere of influence and stop the mounting influx of rural Yakhine disciples pouring into the Thies *zawiya*.

Touba ultimately forgave Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine for his Mahdist proclamations and likewise, Sokhna Magatte, who still carries on the Mahdi's lineage, was always whole-heartedly accepted as a part of the Mouride mainstream. Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine may have defied and tested the resiliency of the Touba élite, but Sokhna Magatte's multiple connections to the highest echelons of the brotherhood tie her eternally to the Mouridiyya: first through her marriage to Cheikh Ibra Fall; later in her marriage to the youngest brother of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, Serigne Massamba Mbacké; and finally to her last husband, Cheikh Atta Mbacké, the *khalifa* of Mame Mor Diarra, Cheikh Amadou Bamba's older full brother. Mouridism is ultimately very flexible and responsive to the needs of society. It accommodates all kinds of practices: sibling and other family rivalry, regardless of age and status; power struggles from within and without the Mouride structure; and lastly, a woman *khalifa*. Ultimately, Mohammadou Mahdiou was never outside the official Mouride brotherhood.

The miraculous

By using the term "Mahdi" to describe Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine in popular terms, one necessarily implies miraculous events. How his disciples are affected and how this power is reflected today have to do with his *baraka* and saintliness. In brotherhood Islam, miracles are frequently performed. The *baraka* of the saint lives, his *baraka* does not die. To be sure, in the language of Sufism, saints can only sleep or rest; they never die. Old men sitting outside Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's *habru* in Thies say, "The Shaykh is a miracle-worker with powerful medicine for the human soul. You can call the name 'Yakhine' and receive his help."

Sufism promotes the sacred person as opposed to the law. The *karamat* of the saints is a deviation from the usual, and with each great *shaykh*, you will often hear recited a list of his miraculous feats. Saintly praise poetry is an oral résumé describing how this or that *shaykh* is different from all others. It is the *karamat* that separates one *shaykh* from another. Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's repertoire of miracles is easily recounted by disciples who claim he was closer to God than was Cheikh Amadou

Bamba. He healed snakebites, battled sorcerers and was able to cause houses to combust at a distance.⁷³

A granddaughter tells how people used to collect the sand where he had walked because it cured diseases. Others say he could make the moon fall. He knew the curative powers of trees and the wells he located still have not run dry. He spoke to cats who could tell him who was sick and who was going to die.⁷⁴ He also knew of his eventual resting place and it caused a terrible buzzing in his head, not unlike the traffic circling around his *habru* today, according to his *talibés*.

Yaga Diop says that Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine did what all the important *waliyus* (friends of God) have done. To understand him, you have to be conversant with the deepest aspects of Sufism. People say that he was strange, and they compare him to the father of the late Serigne Mor Mbaye Cissé, the well-known Quranic teacher whose sons still maintain a large school in Diourbel, and to Serigne Mbaye Sarr, also of Diourbel.

Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine and the elder Serigne Cissé were contemporaries. Serigne Cissé was a prolific and impeccable writer; nonetheless, he is more commonly remembered for dancing in circles in the crowded market, shirtless! Meanwhile, Serigne Mbaye Sarr, his neighbour with millenarian tendencies, was renowned for his mystical practices and for his insistence that Cheikh Amadou Bamba was Yàlla.

Overt and over-exuberant veneration is frequently interpreted as deviant in Islamic society, or as *majdhub*: "ones supposedly under the shock of mystical vision and bereft of their senses." However, there is also the feeling that since they are considered insane, they are freed from God's orders and prohibitions. They are set free by God and live in perfect union with Him."⁷⁵

Other Islamic forces in contemporary Senegal

The Wahhabi movement is feared by moderate Muslims throughout Senegal and elsewhere. Formed as an eighteenth-century Central Arabian reform movement that attempted to rid Islam of its saint worship and other innovations associated with "heretical" practices of Sufi brotherhoods, the Wahhabiyya appeared in the region among Malian Dioula traders returning from Hajj in the 1940s. It does not have a significant presence in Senegal today and it seems more accurate to suggest that students returning from the Middle East have established associations

⁷³ Coulon 1988: 127.

⁷⁴ Kër Yakhine is still filled with cats.

⁷⁵ Schimmel 1975: 19.

adopting reformist ideals, and therefore are confused with Wahhabis in Senegal.⁷⁶ Still, traditional Saudi-style pressures are present in modern Senegal and can be traced to any of the brotherhood *shaykhs* who send their sons to Morocco, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia to study. These returnees often wind up espousing a much more austere devotional style.

There is also a similar element of opposition to popular Mouride expression in the extraordinarily popular DEM (Dahira Etudiant Mouride), with its various branches in Dakar, Paris, and New York. Instead of following the Mouride norm of making contributions through their local *dahira* (urban association), they prefer to move as a group and make their pledges to the Khalifa General directly. DEM members meet frequently, spending much of their time rehearsing and preparing presentations for large Mouride events like the *Magal* (the annual pilgrimage to the Mourides' holiest city, Touba). They do not recognize any particular *shaykh* other than the Khalifa General as Cheikh Amadou Bamba's representative. DEM is a modern, well-funded, well-organized, exclusivist organization and is known for its community participation or outreach. Its members call themselves the "real" Mourides. DEM philosophy accords with traditional Muslim beliefs holding that anyone acting or pretending to act as an intercessor is standing in the way of God. This is in direct opposition to the fundamental principles of brotherhood Islam, and contrary to the expressive Sufi phrase repeated often by Cheikh Amadou Bamba and others: "Without a *shaykh*, *Seytaane* [Satan] is your *shaykh*." Traditionally, disciples' identities are intertwined with that of their *shaykh* and this has been the root cause of the *shaykhs*' success in attracting and converting disciples in the first place.

The media have a tremendous influence on reformist ideas. In Senegal, Tijani forces are very prominent on the weekly Islamic television shows, presenting discussions of law and social discourse from the mainstream Tijani representatives of the Taal, Sy, and Medina Gounass families, with an occasional Niassian representative. From time to time, there is a representative of the Tijani-affiliated Layenne, but it is usually in a very limited capacity. (The Layenne in Senegal are the least traditional of the Tijani groups.) It is interesting to note that the Qadiriyya are almost never on television – Qadiri *shaykhs* proclaim they do not seek or like "publicity".⁷⁷ Still, the Qadiris have the oldest roots and potentially the most powerful rights to a worldwide pan-Islamic solidarity.⁷⁸ Mouride *shaykhs* appear less frequently as talk show participants and are more

⁷⁶ Behrman 1970: 158.

⁷⁷ From a personal interview with Shaykh al-Islam, an important Qadiri *shaykh*, in Thies, 2 October 1992.

⁷⁸ Cruise O'Brien 1981: 159.

often represented as leaders of the excited crowds at any of the spectacular public Mouride events.

Take, for example, the weekly question-and-answer show hosted by the Imam of the Central Mosque of Dakar, who responds to questions submitted by Dakar residents. This type of religious programming deals only with safe and innocuous questions, for example, details of ritual, questions of *sharia*, and the rules that guide female (almost never male) behaviour.⁷⁹ Anyone viewing this show might think that Senegal was on the verge of an Islamic revolution. In early 1992, the Mouride Khalifa General made an announcement on the radio requesting all disciples to follow the Quran, and particularly asked that Touba residents (both women and men) behave in a dignified manner. Women were commanded to stop using skin-lightening products and were forbidden to wear their hand-cut, see-through, ultra sheer *pagnes* (fabric that is tied around the waist and worn as a skirt) in public, and were requested to stop braiding their hair with extensions of "fake" hair. Men were prohibited from playing soccer (the national sport and pastime) within the city limits of Touba.

Most women in Touba found a way to discount the Khalifa General's announcement, suggesting that Serigne Saliou Mbacké (the current Mouride Khalifa General) did not even know about women's habits, since he himself had no young wives. Women, and particularly the Mouride élite, assumed that he was paying lip service to some other non-Mouride directive. And for Senegalese men to stop playing soccer was simply unthinkable. Like so many other attempts at reform, "It is one *wadi*, life is in another."⁸⁰

However, stating that there have been no reforms or signs of change within the brotherhood would be inaccurate. The Bay Fall are now writing about themselves and have stated in their latest foundation document that *dhikr* (recollection and repetition of divine names and religious formulae) is more important than work. Such a change in doctrine would have been inconceivable during Cheikh Ibra Fall's lifetime. In the case of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, it is difficult to gauge change. His philosophy, upon closer inspection, seems less and less radical and in many ways his teachings seem almost mainstream. In his final message, the Shaykh asked only that his followers trust in God and follow Muhammad. Yet there is still a veil of secrecy covering Kër Yakhine.

⁷⁹ Sivan 1985: 13.

⁸⁰ Ibid.: 13.

Conclusions and some further thoughts

As pointed out earlier, information concerning the biography and manner of life of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine remains hidden away and buried beneath a veneer of silent trepidation. A possible explanation could be that talking about Abdoulaye Yakhine necessarily reminds one of Mahdism and talking about Mahdism is the same (for some) as accepting Mahdism. In today's Senegal, accepting Mahdism could be dangerous, since followers of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine are sometimes regarded as heretics and madmen by other Muslims.

It is important not to generalize about the community of believers or their beliefs. Using the *shaykh* and *talibé* as a model, there is mutability and a multiplicity of relations. In a particularly Senegalese fashion, the narrative tapestry is not averse to leaving many threads loose, and yet the whole forms one entirety.

In the case of Assane Thiam, the *shaykh/talibé* relationship is based upon a kind of divine love. His existence is indistinguishably intertwined with that of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine, whom he perceives as the embodiment of Mahdiou manifested on earth. This *talibé's* reverence is based on a life-long respect for Mohammadou Mahdiou that culminates in an intensely personal and ever-deepening spiritual bond. So powerful is Thiam's love and devotion that when he takes a breath, it is absolutely the breath of his *shaykh*, Abdoulaye Yakhine.

It is always difficult to extricate religion from the lives of its believers; in the case of Islam, it is nearly impossible. In fact, religion at Kër Yakhine has so permeated the lives of the community that Muslim practice is nearly indistinguishable from the very business of living. Believers have pushed a formalized and static Islam to its limits in order to derive a religion more responsive to their day-to-day lives. This is proof of the ultimate flexibility (as well as durability) of Sufism, and, in particular, Mouridism. An examination of the irregularities intrinsic to popular expressions of brotherhood Islam indicates utmost prudence in the seeking of solutions. Only by leaving some questions unanswered will the seeker be able to find any resolution at all. Such equanimity becomes of paramount importance when delving into the religious mysteries of Kër Yakhine. Unquestionably, there is a distinct reluctance among Yakhine's believers to speak about or disclose what is sacred. To pass on these secrets⁸¹ to the uninitiated is to present those least likely to understand with the opportunity to corrupt these subtle mysteries and the likelihood of misinterpreting their esoteric intent. To be sure, few Muslims are prepared to accept Serigne Abdoulaye

⁸¹ Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine seems to have imparted numerous secrets to each of his disciples, relative to the amount that each could support. Sokhna Magatte continues this tradition.

Yakhine's own Quran. To get at the depth and richness of the experience, the Yakhine disciple (and supporter) must move past simple human reasoning to a supra-logical comprehension of the very essence of Sufi belief. These *talibés* exhibit what could be termed "unconditional commitment" to a very special knowledge bestowed upon them by Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine and his *khalifa*, Sokhna Magatte.

Outside commentators are of no help. Paradoxically, those that claim to know don't and those who know don't say. Therefore, any verbal explanation is superfluous and bound to confuse the intimacy of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's "way of knowing". This is also part of the reasoning behind the statement that "Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine is not for everyone." The legacy and writings of Mohammadou Mahdiou remain unknown because the inheritors of Yakhine's lineage have preferred to remain invisible, rather than to be subjected to public scrutiny and distortion. In the presence of Senegal's anti-Sufi forces, anonymity is preferential to attacks from outsiders. Those in residence today at the Thies *zawiya* confided in me that the perceived quietude at Kër Yakhine delineates the sacred and somehow makes it more sacred, more profound.

There is a broadening of religiosity at Kër Yakhine, rather than a negligence of Islamic precepts. From the outside, the apparent materiality and here-and-now mentality of Yakhine's disciples (as is the case with the larger Mouridiyya), is often confused with irreligiosity or even sacrilege. But, on second appraisal, the materiality of religious life extends only to its exterior. Rather than suggest that there is a hypocritical duality of appearance versus purported beliefs and practices, it is necessary to ponder the everyday realities of life in West Africa. This will lead us to look at how the contradictions of existence are reconciled. After reviewing the standard Mouride hagiography and history, one feels that many of the brotherhood's leaders resembled one another. Few stand out. In the case of Mohammadou Mahdiou, he is the seal of a triple transmission of God's grace: Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine and his submission to Cheikh Ibra Fall and Cheikh Amadou Bamba and, individually, his own submission to God. This is a robust mix of saintly authority. Kër Yakhine teaches a practical approach, since no one is preaching or recruiting disciples there. A seeker should always see for himself, but must not be discouraged – not everyone can be among those favored by Mohammadou Mahdiou's grace.

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THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE

THE LIFE OF ALHAJI IBRAHIM GONI, ISLAMIC JUDGE IN NGAOUNDÉRE, NORTHERN CAMEROON

*Lisbet Holtedahl and Mahmoudou Djingui*¹

In this chapter² we hope to achieve an understanding of some aspects of the transition in Fulbe³ society from an egalitarian, atheistic system⁴ to one in which the Fulbe are obliged to submit themselves to an omnipotent God.⁵ We will try to get to grips with the cultural and social transformation of a sub-Saharan African community brought about by the Fulbe's conversion to Islam as it can be observed in Northern Cameroon today.⁶ Our intention is not to chronicle the Fulbe's history since their conversion to Islam for the purpose of revealing which aspects

¹ This chapter is the result of a collaboration between Lisbet Holtedahl, professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Tromsø (Norway) and Mahmoudou Djingui, social psychologist and Ph.D. student in social anthropology at the same university.

² Since 1982 Alhaji Ibrahim Goni Bakari, the main figure discussed, has been one of Lisbet Holtedahl's close friends and informants in Ngaoundéré. In order to write this article, we have not only made use of material gathered during recent conversations with Alhaji Ibrahim, but we have also been able to resort to information accumulated over several years of research in Ngaoundéré, and to the viewpoints of other informants and of Alhaji Ibrahim's wives. We would like to thank them all and extend our gratitude to Abbo Hamidou, to the late Oumarou Nduudi and to Mobas Baba Soudi for the help they have given us during our investigations.

³ *Fulbe* is what the Fulani people call themselves in their own language, and we will mostly use this term in our article. In the text, terms which are transcribed from *Fulfulde*, the language of the Fulbe, appear in italics. In French the Fulbe are called *Peul*, a name probably derived from *Pullo*. The essay deals with Fulbe who are resident in the town of Ngaoundéré and not the nomadic Fulbe outside the town. This is simply to point out that due to inter-ethnic marriage and a high degree of assimilation of other ethnic groups, especially the Mbum, a resident Pullo is not necessarily an original Pullo, i.e. a person whose ancestors are nomadic Fulbe. He may have a Pullo father or mother or parents who have adopted the behavioural and moral characteristics and therefore consider themselves Fulbe (Burnham 1991).

⁴ See Stenning 1966; Dupire 1970 and 1981; Riesman 1988; Azarya 1978; Burnham 1991.

⁵ See Froelich 1954; Briesen 1994; Hino 1993; Dognin 1981; Njeumia 1978; Ahmadu Bello 1962; Gowers 1921; Hogben 1930; Smith 1966; Trimmingham 1962; Waldman 1966; Schultz 1980; Vereecke 1989.

⁶ Shimada 1993: 88.

of their culture, outlook and personality led to this. Nor shall we consider Islam insofar as it offers a solution to the spiritual needs of the Fulbe. What interests us is the relationship between the Fulbe and other groups, and what we can learn about the relationship today by looking essentially at one aspect of their identity: their possession and management of Islamic knowledge. Whatever the Fulbe's objectives might have been, their *jihads* ("holy wars") always had consequences for local social organization and for the relationship between social groups. One such consequence was the transfer of power. The Islamic religion structures community practices and has therefore an essentially political character.⁷ As a result, the adoption of Islam by a community, or the imposition of Islam on that community, has been accompanied by the seizure of political power by those who possessed Islamic knowledge: the Islamic leaders. The Fulbe always took power in regions they had conquered during *jihads*.

We shall focus our attention on the Fulbe's experience of Islam at a specific place and time in their history: the town of Ngaoundéré in the 1980s. The information we have gathered since 1982 has led us to believe that the practice of Islam covers many aspects of culture and society, such as spirituality and ethnicity, which together influence the believer's devotion to the religion. In this analysis, however, we wish to illuminate one aspect only, and that is the connection between Islamic knowledge on the one hand, and its potential as a means of power, influence and social control on the other. Our hypothesis proposes that the Fulbe have turned to Islam and Islamic symbols in order to safeguard their identity and their social, political and religious leadership in light of the menacing possibility of other ethnic groups acquiring social influence. We also propose that this kind of safeguarding is becoming increasingly difficult, because today the new generations of Fulbe have their own ways of exploiting Islam and turn to different symbols.⁸

Ngaoundéré has witnessed numerous shifts of power since Islam was implanted in the town in the nineteenth century.⁹ Once part of the extensive Islamic territory of Adamawa,¹⁰ Ngaoundéré was subsequently integrated into the State of Cameroon by colonialists. After Cameroon won her independence, Ngaoundéré came under the new, secular Cameroonian administration. At the local level, the administration was run by Cameroonians, while the president was a Muslim Fulani from the north of the country, Ahmadou Ahidjo. Since 1982, the country

⁷ Weber 1963: 263; Gellner 1981: 70.

⁸ Rowlands 1993.

⁹ Mohamadou 1978.

¹⁰ Adamawa, whose capital was Yola, encompasses today's Gongola State in Nigeria, as well as the provinces of Adamaoua and part of the northernmost province in Cameroon.

has been led by a Christian president from the south, Paul Biya. With these shifts of power, there also emerged a new class of wealthy men and intellectuals educated in the West. This new class rapidly acquired social and political influence, not just locally but nationwide.¹¹

The arrival of these new factors has contributed to a fall in the Fulbe's political and religious influence. Nevertheless, Islam continues to be one of the main criteria in the definition of Fulbe identity. The terms *Pullo* (sing. of Fulbe) and *juuldo* (Muslim) have become synonymous – their meanings have coalesced and are considered one and the same in the mind of the Fulbe.¹² The fascination with Mecca and the prestige attached to both the pilgrim and to the title of *alhaji* (*al-hajji*, *Hajji*)¹³ are still very much alive. Many Fulbe would willingly spend all their savings to make the pilgrimage to the hallowed city of Mecca. Every public event is an opportunity for them to show their total devotion to their faith (worshipping in a mosque, giving alms, fasting and so forth). In their speech, their behaviour, their dress and in their attitude, we will always find the embodiment of an Islam which aspires to be pure. "For the Fulbe", said Lacroix, "religious faith is deep and sincere."¹⁴ Indeed, despite their pride,¹⁵ their concern to publicly display their independence and their free spirit beyond all weakness, they always show that the image of God is in their soul, and their way of life is marked by a resignation caused by the fear of God and by the acceptance of His will.¹⁶ The expression *Allah hoddiri dum* (God willed it so) is a common phrase in their language. Enthusiasm for Islam among the Fulbe, far from being on the wane, appears to be gaining strength.¹⁷

The hypothesis we have put forward to explain this enthusiasm incorporates the Fulbe's concern to uphold a power which they feel is

¹¹ See Miaffo and Warnier 1993; Rowlands 1993; Holtedahl 1993.

¹² One of our Fulani informants told us that the Fulbe's attitude towards Islam is such that their children could never imagine their ancestors were non-Muslims.

¹³ All Arabic words loaned by the Fulbe have been modified and adapted to the Fulfulde language. In this article we use the terms as the Fulbe themselves use them. Some of the equivalent Arabic terms will be given alongside in brackets.

¹⁴ Lacroix 1966: 402.

¹⁵ We use the word "pride" to characterize the image the local people have of the Fulbe as well as the image the Fulbe have of themselves. *Pulaaku*, which literally means "the Fulani way of life", is typified by behavioural rules concerning honour. The notions of honour strictly impose a type of behaviour which lends great importance to "pride". See Bocquené 1986; Vereecke 1989 and 1989; Riesman 1988; Schultz 1980.

¹⁶ Riesman 1977: 129.

¹⁷ Here we are alluding to public behaviour, body language and other vehicles for the communication of meaning. We are not referring to the Fulbe's inner beliefs. There will be a discussion of this aspect of them as part of personal identity later in the chapter, in connection with our dialogue with Alhaji Ibrahim Goni.

under threat. We shall clarify the hypothesis on the basis of Islam as it has been experienced by the Fulbe of Ngaoundéré throughout the life and career of one of their most influential religious figures: Alhaji Ibrahim Goni Bakari,¹⁸ *Alkaali* (*qadi*), or Islamic judge, of Ngaoundéré.

Our plan is comprised firstly of a presentation of Islam in Ngaoundéré: among other things, its place in the life of Muslims, the distribution of functional roles and how Islamic knowledge is acquired. Secondly, we shall present the central figure in our chapter, Alhaji Ibrahim Goni. We shall examine his daily life, his relationship with the townspeople and with the Cameroonian administration (through its representatives and institutions), and the role and status he has ascribed to Islam during his life in Ngaoundéré. We will then analyze our own conversations with him in order to specify how Islam relates to his life and how it might affect his relations to other people. In this way we hope to reveal that Islamic knowledge is one vital part of the current identity of the Fulbe *vis-à-vis* other populations in Ngaoundéré. To do this we shall analyze material from our field work in Alhaji Ibrahim's milieu and information we have gathered about him from his wives and various informants. We shall also exploit our own film material in which he plays a major role.¹⁹

A coexistence of several religions

Like all towns and villages in Cameroon, Ngaoundéré is secular. Several religions exist side by side in the town, the most prominent being Islam, Christianity and African religions. The religion of Christ is represented by the Catholic Church and what is known as the "Mission norvégienne", comprising the Lutheran Evangelical Church and the Norwegian Protestant Mission. The Lutheran Evangelical and Catholic denominations are practised by several local populations, especially the Gbaya, the Dii or Duru, and a few Mbum communities. The Norwegian Mission is very active in the health and education sectors. One of the largest hospitals in Ngaoundéré, known as *L'hôpital Ameerika* (American Hospi-

¹⁸ The biographical material we have is fragmented. It consists of his own reports (in different contexts) of his life history. Over the years, we have also collected material from field work, which has enabled us to construct a model of his life and career from a more analytical point of view. See Rudie 1994; Holtedahl 1993 and 1997; Okeley and Callaway 1992; Bertaux 1981.

¹⁹ In 1992 we produced an anthropological documentary entitled *The Sultan's burden*. The film follows Lamiido Issa Maigari's difficulties during the period leading up to the first "democratic" national elections. Alhaji Ibrahim Goni plays a key role in the film. He mediates between the Lamiido and the *imam* of Ngaoundéré (leader of prayer). He also explains to the audience what is special about Muslim law, gives advice to the Lamiido on local political conflicts and explains the right Muslim strategy for countering insurrections involving non-Muslims and fundamentalists.

tal), is run by representatives of the Lutheran Church. Mazenod College, established by the Catholic Mission, has produced several of the great figures from Ngaoundéré and the north of the country.

In Ngaoundéré, Islam is primarily represented by all the Fulbe and by the Hausa, Kanuri and the majority of the Mbum. The religion was introduced to the town after the *jihad* that the Fulbe waged under the direction of Moodibbo Aadama.²⁰ He gave his name to today's Province of Adamaoua, of which Ngaoundéré became the administrative capital. During the *jihad*, the Fulbe were allied with the Hausa, whom they had accompanied from Nigeria. Since political power has fallen into the hands of the Fulbe, Ngaoundéré is considered a Muslim town. The way Muslim dress has been adopted by all local people gives Ngaoundéré the appearance of a homogeneous town entirely under the spell of Islam.

As far as African religious practices are concerned, it is hard to trace their presence in the town. There is no visible site of worship and no conspicuous ceremony of any kind. Islam and Christianity seem to have succeeded in edging out the former African religious practices. Nevertheless, nearly everybody still adheres to an African faith, albeit discreetly, and several monotheist individuals even practise African religions. All in all, a kind of syncretism exists.²¹ Those who uphold traditional African religions continue their practices in secluded corners of their homes, usually in their bedrooms.

Islam and its institutions

In Ngaoundéré there is an abundance of mosques. The main mosque stands near the *lamiido*'s (Sultan's) palace and dominates the town centre. Every town district has one or more mosques, often located just a stone's throw from each other.²² Annexed to most of the new private luxury mansions are mosques of admirable architectural quality, many of which seem to have a monumental function. A full mosque is a sign of prestige for its builder, so the wealthy owners offer more alms in order to attract greater masses to fill their houses of prayer. The five daily prayers are performed within a period of time prescribed by the Quran. Every mosque, for instance, must schedule its afternoon

²⁰ The title *moodibbo* is perhaps best translated as "scholar".

²¹ We are aware that the word "syncretism" may be regarded as a pejorative term. We use the word in the sense of the synthesis of various traditions or beliefs. See Stewart and Shaw 1994.

²² A former governor of Adamaoua Province has explained to us that permission must be sought to build a new mosque. Permission may be granted on the condition that the mosque be constructed a certain distance from existing mosques. This distance is reckoned as just out of earshot of the prayer-call of one *ladan* (*muadhdhin*) from one mosque.

prayer sometime between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. In this way, prayers do not interrupt business or any other activities – in Mecca or Jeddah, by comparison, everything stops for prayer.

Ngaoundéré has a large number of Quran schools in which various teaching methods are practised.²³ In each district there are improvised schools, ranging from the teacher's private entrance-hut²⁴ to street corners. There are usually no benches, desks or blackboards. Students sit on the floor holding reading tablets inscribed with verses of the Quran. The more senior students constitute two groups which are distinguished by gender. The students one sees divided by gender in the Quran schools can be seen mingling in the Western-style schools with no sign of sexual segregation. In the Quran schools students read aloud in unison, and this is likely to give an impression of utter chaos. However, the *mallum* (teacher),²⁵ sitting quietly in his corner, keeps a close eye on each and every student and corrects any reading errors. In some schools, the students comprise several more or less separate groups, and each group is headed by a more senior student.

Young Muslims will begin by learning the Arabic alphabet, then go on to recognize letters and repeat them in speech, learn by heart some of the last suras (chapters) of the Quran, and conclude their studies by reciting the entire Quran without necessarily knowing its meaning. Throughout this period of study, they will learn all they need to know in order to say their prayers correctly. Having successfully recited the Quran, a young man may be called a *mallum* and may, if he so wishes, establish a school for beginners.

There is another type of Quran school attended only by adults and elderly people sitting reverently on mats or goatskins in front of a much older man. These people are either *mallum'en* or fairly learned people who are seeking to broaden their knowledge under the instruction of a *moodibbo*. This is where they learn to translate and comment upon the Quran and the *hadiise* (*hadith*)²⁶ as well as the philosophy of Islam, and it is also here that people establish their adherence to one of the religious denominations. It is important to note that the way the Arabic

²³ See Al-Naquib Al-Attas 1979; Santerre 1982; Unesco 1984; Kane 1961; Botte 1990.

²⁴ In a typical compound consisting of several huts, one hut is the entrance-hut that gives access to all the other huts.

²⁵ The term *mallum* (plur. *mallum'en*) means a primary school teacher. It may also be used as a sign of respect – for instance, someone called Abbo may be called *Mal* Abbo (*Mal* is the diminutive of *mallum*). If the person's name is unknown, he may simply be called *mallum*. This is the equivalent of "sir" in English. Cf. the Arabic term *alim* (plur. *ulama*), religious scholar or leader.

²⁶ The tradition originating with the Prophet Muhammad, namely his interpretation of the Quranic verses. *Hadiise* means all the Prophet's propositions and conversations.

language is pronounced by pupils, *mallum'en* and *moodibbe* (plural of *moodibbo*) differs very much from Arabic proper.

As for recruitment of the Quran schools, a school which is run by a Hausa, for example, is usually mainly attended by young Hausa. Far from being a matter of discrimination, this can be explained by ethnic grouping. Those who belong to the same ethnic group tend to gather in the same district. At an advanced level involving translation and commentary, the choice of both a *moodibbo* and a student teacher is made according to their academic competence. Some *moodibbe* only give courses at a very high level. Apart from this, there is no formal distinction in people's access to the various Islamic institutions. All Muslims have an equal right to practise, study and thereby fully understand their religion. Religious learning is available to everybody, and the sole limitation is the individual's intellectual capacity. No organized body coordinates the activities of Quran schools. All Muslims who feel they can teach are free to start their own schools. The position of a *mallum* is available to women, and many women carry out this role effectively. The establishment of a Quran school is not founded on ethnic adherence. Each school independently sets its syllabus and timetable according to the wishes of the presiding *mallum* or *moodibbo*. Lessons are very often given on a one-to-one basis. There is no streaming of classes into different levels of study. Thus, each student is assured individual treatment, whatever his or her level of ability.

The *mallum'en* and *moodibbe* do not have a regular income. "It is impossible to pay money for the work and effort made by those who teach God's word. Only God can honour the efforts of the Muslim teachers", says a Hausa *mallum*. However, there is a system that guarantees the welfare of the Muslim teachers. The students' parents present gifts to the *mallum'en* who teach their children. In addition, when pupils start learning particular suras at certain stages of their education, they must present gifts to their *mallum* and give alms to local people.²⁷ The student is also expected to work in the teacher's household and field.

In addition to the district schools there is a Franco-Arabian school run by the country's Ministry of Education, and a school called the *madarasa*,²⁸ established by a native of the region who was educated in Saudi Arabia.²⁹ These two schools bear all the features of a Western

²⁷ They give *cobbal*, a dough made of rice or millet, and other kinds of food.

²⁸ *Madarasa* (*madrasa*) means school.

²⁹ In the 1960s, Cameroon had an agreement with the Arab countries, especially with Saudi Arabia, concerning a number of scholarships which were given to Muslim students. The scholarships enabled a certain number of young Muslim men from Ngaoundéré to fulfil their Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia. In general, these young men had been educated by the traditional *moodibbe* because their fathers did not allow them to attend the modern school. Therefore their education was directed towards Islam and the Arab countries.

school: classrooms, benches, blackboards, fixed timetables, breaks between classes, leave and holidays, and so forth. In the Franco-Arabian school, classes are taught in French and Arabic, and the standard of general education is equivalent to that of primary school. Completion of studies here is acknowledged by the award of the *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires Elémentaires* (Certificate of Primary Education). Although no religious courses are provided by the official programme, teachers of Arabic do give basic instruction in some aspects of Islam. The *madarasa* has firmly opted for religious instruction. Here the pupils learn to read, write and speak Arabic. This means that the pupils at this school can understand the Quran when they read it, whereas the pupils in the traditional school cannot. The Holy Book and the *hadiise* are translated into Fulfulde. The students of the *madarasa* are adults, and for those who are to be converted to Islam this school offers the opportunity to quickly acquire a sound knowledge of their new religion without having to mix with children in the town district schools. Equally, the school allows Muslims who are already competent in religious matters to improve their knowledge. Certain students (not representative of the majority) wear a turban on their heads, have grown their beards, and wear trousers that tail off a couple of inches above their ankles. These people try to model their existence on the life of the prophet Muhammad. Indeed the *madarasa*, founded by Muslims with an Arabian education, has established a religious branch called Wahhabism in Ngaoundéré and in other towns. Wahhabism extols the purification of Islam. However, most Muslims in Ngaoundéré belong to the *maaliki* (Maliki) school of Islamic jurisprudence.

Islamic associations are hard to find in Ngaoundéré, but there are two Islamic movements whose aim is to kindle the spiritual life of Muslims: l'Amicale de la Communauté Islamique du Cameroun (Association of the Islamic Community of Cameroon) and l'Union Islamique du Cameroun (Islamic Union of Cameroon). Observant visitors might also spot several other organizations, such as the Tijaniyya and other Sufi orders.³⁰ These religious communities are very closed, and members of each community share a common sense of purpose.

The delegation of functional roles: from equality to partiality

In spite of equal rights in terms of access to learning, positions of responsibility within the Muslim system are allocated disproportionately. In Cameroon, though, Islam has no official framework which governs

³⁰ During the reign of the late president Ahmadou Ahidjo, the Tijaniyya movement was forbidden because its followers practised *wirdi* (*wird*) and refused to accept any other authority but God.

the life of Muslims, so it is unrealistic to talk of the allocation of positions of responsibility. Every Muslim can choose to become a disciple of any *moodibbo*. Nonetheless, the *lamiido* is regarded as the supreme leader of Islam in his *lamidat* (sultanate). He is seconded by two *moodibbe* of his choice, and these may either be locals or natives from elsewhere in the land. He will appoint one of them *imam* (prayer leader) of the central mosque, and the other he will nominate *alkaali* (judge). In Ngaoundéré the *imam* and the *alkaali* are both Fulbe. The same system of appointment applies to the helmsmen of the two branches of Islam which predominate in the town (the old *moodibbe* branch, and the *madarasa* or Wahhabist *moodibbe* branch). The two large Islamic associations of Cameroon mentioned earlier are represented in Ngaoundéré by two Fulbe. Finally, although every Muslim is free to establish his own school, the Fulbe hold more than half of religious positions with an educational function.³¹ Despite the freedom of access to learning in the country, the fact is that in Ngaoundéré the Fulbe occupy the most influential posts in Islam.

Alkaali Alhaji Ibrahim Goni Bakari: origins, education and career

In the preceding sections we outlined the background, with all its distinctions, from which Alkaali Alhaji Ibrahim Goni Bakari emerges. Born in Madumsi, a village near Ngaoundéré, Alhaji Ibrahim is a Pullo from a branch of the Yillaga.³² His parents are natives of the *lamidat* of Ray Bouba. His mother is a sixth-generation descendant of Lamiido Buuba Jurum,³³ and this makes him a distant *wajiiri*³⁴ of Ray. On his father's side, Alhaji Ibrahim is born of a literate and ardently pious Muslim family. His father and grandfather were both *goni*.³⁵

Alhaji Ibrahim is father to thirty children, whom he has produced with nine wives. At present he lives with four wives and many of his children. He is highly esteemed and feared within his family and is

³¹ See A. Gondolo's doctoral thesis 1978.

³² The Yillaga are great warriors who established well-known *lamidats* such as Ray, Bibémi and Midif in Cameroon, as well as Bindir in Chad.

³³ This is Alhaji Ibrahim's maternal genealogy as he himself told us: Buuba Jurum, Asta Relli, Asto Bano, Asta Waabi, Asta Jam Diddi, Diija Bebbe, Asta Jumba Adda, Alhaji Ibrahim. He guards the list closely. Note that the branch from Buuba Jurum, the ancestor, to Alhaji Ibrahim consists only of women.

³⁴ *Wajiiri* is the title given to the son of a princess. However, there is also a function called *wajiiri* in the *lamiido's* *faada* (court). The holder of this post is considered the King's confidant.

³⁵ Literate people capable of faithfully reciting and flawlessly writing the Quran from memory.

addressed only in the third person plural. In strictest fashion, Alhaji Ibrahim upholds in his family a total respect for the principles of Islam: he keeps a close eye on the movements of his wives and daughters, he marries off his daughters at an early age without their consent,³⁶ and all his children are sent to Quran school. Yet he has not always succeeded in commanding complete respect from his family. Some of his daughters, for example, have refused to marry a man who is not of their own choosing. He has reacted by refusing to talk to them for a very long time. One daughter chose a husband who Alhaji Ibrahim could not accept, and she was told to stay in her own home for three years and not to visit the family during that time.

In his home, he has four bedrooms where he takes turns to sleep with each of his wives. Each bedroom contains a well-stocked bookshelf with literature of every kind: theology, history (histories of the Fulbe and the life of the prophet Muhammad), philosophical narratives from the Arab world, to mention only a few. He bought most of these books while he was a student in Yola in Nigeria. The entrance hall of his home serves both as a room where he receives guests and as a schoolroom.

Being a *moodibbo*, Alhaji Ibrahim has a far higher standard of education than his parents, who were unable to correctly translate the Quran into their own language and comment upon it. He is convinced that he owes his learning to his illustrious ancestors – he explained: “To be a *moodibbo* one has to be brought up among literate people.” In fact he had begun his training as a young boy with his father who knew well the contents of the Quran. Having completed primary school, his father helped him translate Islamic scriptures.

Later he travelled to Yola where he studied for thirteen years. At that time, Yola was renowned as a town of scholars of Islamic issues. Alhaji Ibrahim has distressing memories of hard times during this long stay, but he often repeated: “He who seeks in perseverance shall find”, implying that his hardship was not in vain. Not only did he find himself a companion in Yola, Hapsatou, with whom he first set up house and had two children, but he also acquired so much religious knowledge that he had to leave the town for fear of being nominated *alkaali* there. He wanted instead to devote himself to his studies and to teaching. Besides, he disliked the role of *alkaali*, for he was convinced that it corrupted the individual spirit. On his return to Madumsi, he took up the work of his dreams: to study and to instruct future *moodibbe*, but unfortunately this was a short-lived chapter of his career. He was called upon by Lamiido Mohamadou Abbo, who suggested he take up the position of *alkaali* in Ngaoundéré. He simply had to accept under the

³⁶ In fact the father *must* ask his daughter’s opinion, but silence is taken to be acceptance.

pressure of insistence from his family and from the *lamiido*, who was determined not to abrogate his decision. Even though Alhaji Ibrahim took up the new post, he continued to study and teach, and at the time of writing he had been judge for thirty-four years.

Alhaji Ibrahim in the town of Ngaoundéré

Alhaji Ibrahim is one of the most influential people in the traditional society of Ngaoundéré. As *alkaali*, he represents traditional justice. He mediates in all social problems, personal conflicts, difficulties with inheritance and many other predicaments where the parties concerned wish to find an amicable solution to the conflict, in keeping with the doctrine of Islam and the traditional spirit. As an eminent figure, Alhaji Ibrahim is a member of the royal court and, moreover, one of the most consulted and heeded advisors to Lamiido Issa Maigari. He spends more time with Lamiido Issa Maigari than any other member of the court. We have often met them sitting alone discussing the serious issues affecting the town. In addition to his official post as judge, Alhaji Ibrahim has the unofficial role (together with Imam Hamaoude) of guardian of the town. In this role, he spends most of his nights holding oracular meetings to foretell the future of Ngaoundéré. Afterwards he reports his prophecies to the *lamiido*. Being a public figure highly regarded by the town's inhabitants, Alhaji Ibrahim is a role model and his decisions are obeyed. Thus, when he recently decided to take part in a Quran reading course organized at the mosque by Muslims with an Arabian education, many reluctant traditionalists did likewise.

The value of knowledge

Alhaji Ibrahim is a truly passionate reader. At home he does nothing but read. Every time we pay him a visit, usually at night, we find him sitting on a mat engrossed in a book. The mat lies beside the bookshelf so that an outstretched arm is enough to reach any book. Before him lies his prayer mat, facing east. Again, with a small effort he can be on the mat and ready to pray. With his arrangement, he can even say his prayers close to his books. He considers his books to be the reason for his pride and his superiority over others, because he is convinced that genuine, irrefutable knowledge is to be found in books. He accused us of having been in contact with a Hausa *mallum* from whom, he believed, we had tried to learn something about Islam. "Knowledge", he said, "is in books – you can learn nothing from someone who has no books." Alhaji Ibrahim has books, so it is through him and him alone that we can learn anything worthwhile. When speaking of Islam, he always refers to his literature. We have had difficulty trying to elicit

his own views on Islam the way it is practised in Ngaoundéré. He says that what we need is true knowledge, which we can only find in his books.

One day, while he was telling us the story of Kano, written in Arabic by a scholar from that town, a *moodibbo* came to visit. Alhaji Ibrahim went out to greet him, and on his return he said to us: "The man who has come is a *moodibbo* known and respected by everybody, but even in his home you won't find this kind of book." Alhaji Ibrahim will not deny that this *moodibbo* is respected, but he does not have the same access to learning through the literature, and this is the mark of Alhaji Ibrahim's superiority. However, the superior knowledge that he possesses cannot be widely appreciated by people. He explains that "to give a sermon in public, one must get permission from the *lamiido*", but to Lamiido Issa Maigari, Alhaji Ibrahim is the *alkaali* – a judge – and cannot give sermons as well.

Alhaji Ibrahim is not worried by the fact that people cannot appreciate his superior learning in comparison with other *moodibbe*. He sees two categories of people who seek knowledge: those who seek knowledge for the sheer pleasure of learning, and those who do so for a means of attaining higher status. He considers himself among the first of these. Remember that this was the very reason he left Yola in order not to be appointed *alkaali* there. For Alhaji Ibrahim, knowledge has an inherent value, and it is the value that interests him.

Access to knowledge

For Alkaali Alhaji Ibrahim, not everybody can gain access to knowledge, and one's eligibility depends upon several conditions. We have already heard the *alkaali*'s view that, in order to become a *moodibbo*, you must always have remained close to the *moodibbe*. On one occasion when he spoke about the conditions, he referred to Sayiidina Aliiyum,³⁷ who listed six in a song which the *alkaali* sang for us:

Keep an open mind
Be thirsty for knowledge.
Be patient.
Be relatively wealthy.
Have a good teacher who hides nothing from you.
Have a long life.

On another occasion, he told us that everything depends upon God's

³⁷ Sayiidina (Sayd) Aliiyum (Ali) was the first convert to the message of Islam, and son-in-law of the Prophet.

will. If He decides that a man should grow wise, He sees to it that the man possesses enough courage and patience to search for wisdom.

An encounter between two different kinds of knowledge

Since our first encounter with Alhaji Ibrahim, he has considered our meetings with him to be representative of two opposing kinds of knowledge. On the one hand there is Islamic learning inlaid with Arabian and Fulbe culture, which he symbolizes, and on the other hand there is Western knowledge, which he considers us to represent. The essence of the opposition is spirituality against materialism. In our presence, Alhaji Ibrahim did not seem to have the same self-confidence as he did when he was with his *moodibbe* colleagues. He believed he was ignorant of our knowledge, and he thought that his literature, which forms the very basis of his superiority, would be useless when he was faced with us. The impression he had of Western knowledge is that it is a figment of the colonial and post-colonial periods. We shall later see that this impression might have arisen out of Alhaji Ibrahim's anxiety: the fear that we would not recognize his knowledge, and that he would thereby lose his position as a wise man.

Thus, at an early stage in our contact we found ourselves on one side of a confrontation between the two kinds of learning. For us, this was the beginning of a long period of observation and difficult conversations, or even negotiations, with Alhaji Ibrahim. He wanted to assure himself of our intentions before opening his mind to us. Eventually, he simply accepted one of us (Lisbet) and one of our close friends, the late Nduudi Oumarou. He had presumed that Lisbet wanted to learn about Islam, and that Nduudi, being a Mborobo, did not pose any danger to him because Nduudi's Islamic learning was supposedly insubstantial. With Mahmoudou present, observation took a very long time. Alhaji Ibrahim believed that Mahmoudou, having a Western-style education, belonged to the generation which questions traditional learning. It was only in 1993 that Mahmoudou was genuinely accepted and thenceforth enjoyed a friendly relationship with Alhaji Ibrahim.

In fact, our patience and desire to work with him had the effect of justifying his self-image, namely that of a learned man. He interpreted the interest we showed for him as a kind of acknowledgment of his worth. This led him to adopt a completely different attitude towards us: he let us know when he was available, allowed us to come and see him when we pleased, kept us longer than he himself had time for, and even became irritated if a visit was overdue or if we were unable to keep an appointment. His attitude was virtually that of a solemn professor, and he felt a genuine desire to illustrate his learning. He determined the topic of our conversations and often insisted that we

write notes on things he considered important to us. Sometimes, in a roundabout way, he even asked questions about our past discussions, as if to check that we had been paying attention. At time, he went off to see one of his friends, a bookseller, to borrow a publication which he thought necessary for our information. We often had to implement a cunning ploy in order to swing the conversation towards the topic of our own choice.

His attitude, his conversation and his way of telling us what we should know all indicate that Alhaji Ibrahim had assured himself of his superiority during our various meetings, and he sometimes expressed this superiority when we were in his presence. Indeed, on a number of occasions he tried to pit his knowledge against ours. One day he told us the story of the origin of the Fulbe, in which he provided many details about Ukhba, their legendary Arab forefather. Until then, the books we had consulted on Fulbe history only mentioned the name Ukhba, with no specific reference to his surname.³⁸ Alhaji Ibrahim, thanks to his literature, has three versions of the origins of Ukhba. The first version, as told by Ceehu Usman bii Fooduye (Shehu Usman dan Fodio),³⁹ claims that a certain Ukhba Nafii'i was the ancestor of the Fulbe. The second version, told by Ahmadu Bello, son of Ceehu Usman bii Fooduye, names three Ukhbas: Ukhba Yassir, Ukhba Amiiru and Ukhba Nafii'i. The *sahaabo*⁴⁰ who converted black Africans to Islam gave one of the three Ukhbas the job of educating the locals. The third version cites twenty-seven Ukhbas and gives detailed accounts of their origins and their respective places of birth. Alhaji Ibrahim gave us all these details by consulting his books. Having told us this story, he said: "Only those who have knowledge [*jawmu anndal*] can know this."

Feeling more self-assured, there came a day when he did not hesitate to openly confront our Western learning. He spoke about the low level of knowledge in the local population and told us what a woman must know in order to be considered a *moodibbo rewbe* – a female *moodibbo* – and what a man must know to become a *moodibbo*. He also said:

³⁸ See Eldridge 1978.

³⁹ In Africa a *ceehu* or *shehu* (*shaykh*) is considered to be chosen by God. He is obliged to promulgate the purification of Islam, and he must be a Muslim. On the other hand, a *walo* (*wali*) is also chosen by God but not necessarily a Muslim. It is worthy of mention, however, that in certain regions of Africa, such as the Borno region of northern Nigeria, the local sultan is called *shehu*. Alhaji Ibrahim says that Ceehu Usman dan Fodio was appointed *walo* when he was thirty years old. He was given the *walo'en*'s most magnificent gown, *alkibaare*.

⁴⁰ *Sahaabo*: Alhaji Ibrahim explains that the *sahaabo'en* are all those who converted when they met the prophet Mohammad and who contributed to the spread of Islam. When the prophet died, there were 120,000 *sahaabo'en*.

[European geographers] claim that the earth revolves around the sun, but the *moodibbe sunna*⁴¹ say otherwise. They argue that the sun has three doors. On the day of the last judgement, the sun will set and never rise again. As the last judgement draws near, one night will last as long as three nights. Wise men will then know that the end of the world is nigh.

We interpret this as a way of substantiating the superiority of Islamic learning over Western learning, which he believes us to represent.

However, we were under the impression that he often felt the need to justify or legitimize his learning for us, even to the extent of bringing between himself and us a certain connivance that is typical of the relationship between learned men. With Mahmoudou he brought down the age barrier – which would normally separate them in this kind of society – in order to be on friendly terms with him. While telling a story, he shook Mahmoudou's hand at every pause as a form of greeting that two intimate friends would use in conversation. If we happened to be dining with him in his bedroom, he would insist on serving us himself. The only thing his wife would do was to bring the food into the room. Knowledge brings down barriers between people and distinguishes them from those who lack it. Thus, Alhaji Ibrahim does not express any envy of Western intellectuals. He believes that in some fields, he has just as much knowledge as them, and in other fields he has more (for example the long list of Ukhbas). However, both he and Western intellectuals are all superior to less knowledgeable people.

Islam and Arabs

For Alkaali Alhaji Ibrahim, Islam is the absolute Truth. In this regard, everything that comes close to Islam is right and should serve as an example. He believes God gave the Arabs of Saudi Arabia many privileges. Islam came into being in their country. The man most loved by God and for whom he created the world, the prophet Muhammad, is a son of Saudi Arabia. The Quran is written in Arabic, the language in which every Muslim says his prayers. At the end of the world, Arabic will be the only language spoken in heaven. The great defenders and propagators of Islam were originally the Arabs of Saudi Arabia. Alhaji Ibrahim believes that all this makes a fine example of the Arabs, and that their example should be followed (even though in some instances it is difficult to emulate them). He considers their customs, their way

⁴¹ These are *moodibbe* who, as far as possible, emulate the lifestyle of the prophet Muhammad.

of life, their view of the world and the way they practise Islam to conform fully with Islamic principles.

On one occasion he had sadly told us that the people of Ngaoundéré do not know how to respect the Muslim intellectuals among themselves like the Arabs do. Relationships between Arabs are entirely different. "On meeting his equal, an Arab will kiss his hands. On meeting a scholar, he will kiss either his hands or his feet, and he will kiss his wife on the lips." Concerning the last of these, he passionately described how the kiss is given. No doubt he wanted to have us understand that kissing between husband and wife, a custom recently adopted in his milieu by young adults under Western influence, is a phenomenon he has always been aware of thanks to his books.

The Arabs are like you, Lisbet. They wash seven times a day and their mouths smell nice. There is nothing repulsive about them . . . This behaviour belongs to the most educated among us, and to everyone with an Arabian education. If the local wise men who know of this [kissing between husband and wife] do not practise it, it is because the Fulbe and Hausa here know nothing at all about washing and such like.

The good life, he says, can be attained through knowledge, particularly knowledge found in literature. This means a learned man is among the most cultured of men.

During his pilgrimage in Mecca, he had seen girls attending school and women working in the public services. Once back in Ngaoundéré, he astounded everyone by allowing his daughter to attend a Western-style school, something which he emphatically opposed before his pilgrimage.⁴² At that time in Fulbe society, the education of women was firmly based on housekeeping, and he was one of the first men to send his daughter to a Western-style school. This upset the most purist traditionalists because Alhaji Ibrahim was, as we have often said, among the most influential Islamic figures in Ngaoundéré.

As we have seen, Alhaji Ibrahim participated in a Quran reading course to improve his pronunciation of Arabic words. This shows that his mind is very open towards Arabian civilization, the reason being that he looks upon it as the ideal model. He explores Arabian civilization in philosophical narratives in his books, and this enables him to feel close to the Arabian way of life, though he lacks the opportunity to practise it. Feeling close to the Arabs is the same as feeling above all those who are ignorant of the Arabian way of life.

⁴² This was told us by his own daughter.

The practice of Islam

According to Alhaji Ibrahim, Islam in Ngaoundéré has several different guises depending on individual sensibility or ethnic group. Where individual sensibility is concerned, he has an expression which illustrates his view of individual practice:

Every believer is not necessarily an intellectual [in the religious sense of the word], every intellectual is not necessarily a believer, and all intellectuals who are also believers do not necessarily possess wisdom.

In fact, the *alkaali* pictures three categories of believers. The first consists of those who have religious faith but no knowledge of their religion. In this category are those he calls Muslims by *cahada* (*shahada*),⁴³ in other words those who became Muslims by allegiance to the faith. This group contains the majority of the local population and is led by the *mallum'en* who, for Alhaji Ibrahim, are more like "fetishists" than good believers.⁴⁴ He refused to say any more about this group's practice but, if we insisted, he would answer by telling us the conditions which must be fulfilled in order to be considered as having faith. The conditions are as follows:

— Believe in the Oneness of God. God is One. He is not begotten and cannot beget. He has no form and resembles nobody. The idols are the deeds of mankind and are created by those who are themselves created by God.

— Accept the Quran as the manifestation of the words of God and use the Sunna⁴⁵ as a daily guide.

— Believe in all the prophets and accept that Muhammad is the last of them. Each prophet has had his time and the appropriate means to accomplish his mission. Believe in all the Holy Scriptures and that the Quran is the total of all these Scriptures.

— Know the five pillars of Islam together with their "commandments", whether obligatory, expected, or simply recommended.

— Read books about Islamic principles. Do not hesitate to find out from learned people what you do not know.

Alhaji Ibrahim said: "Here, as soon as someone has managed to decipher

⁴³ Confession or profession of faith: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger."

⁴⁴ Alhaji Ibrahim differentiates two types of *mallum'en*: those who genuinely believe in God and respect His teachings, and those comprising the majority who only see Islam as an opportunity to get rich. The latter type practise occultism and are feared by the people.

⁴⁵ Normative practice or exemplary behaviour of Muhammad.

the alphabet on the reading tablet, he thinks he has completed his reading of the Quran [*yottini*].”

The second category of believers consists of those who, although having a good knowledge of Islam, are not necessarily good believers. This is called the category of *faasiki'en* (hypocrites). He was not alluding directly to any particular ethnic group, but if we consider the ongoing debate between the two branches of Islam, we would soon discover that he was referring to the *moodibbe* educated in Arab countries. Alhaji Ibrahim is aware of his role as *alkaali* of Ngaoundéré and therefore bluntly refuses to take a stand in this debate. One of his wives told us that he was a member of the Tijaniyya order, but that he refuses to talk about it. He is on good terms with all members of all Muslim organizations and speaks to them indiscriminately. Another young man from the Wahhabist branch told us: “Alkaali Ibrahim has not clearly stated his position, but we all know that he stands on the side of the *moodibbe* from the traditionalist, conservative school. And because Lamiido Issa listens to him, we know that he conciliates Lamiido Issa in order to support the *moodibbe*.” Into the category of hypocrites Alhaji Ibrahim also places those who seek knowledge as a means of climbing the social ladder. These people are intellectuals from the Islamic or the Western-style schools. The third category is that of learned believers who have no wisdom, and this covers those who do not possess books from which they can learn about the philosophy of the Arab world.

Furthermore, there is a fourth category which Alhaji Ibrahim does not describe explicitly, but which seems to derive from the three other categories. Wise and learned believers comprise the fourth category, into which Alhaji Ibrahim places all the Arabs because they worship God the way He wishes them to, they practise Islam the way it should be practised, and because they live in the spiritual world. Members of this category may also be found in Ngaoundéré, but they are men of books – in other words, they seek knowledge for its own sake. He considers such people to be close to the Arabs.

The distinction between believers lies in their ethnic bonds, and the *alkaali* sees on the one hand those who were converted to Islam centuries ago, and on the other those who were more recently.⁴⁶ The former have a deep knowledge of Islam, while knowledge among the latter is superficial. Among those who were converted centuries ago are the Fulbe, the Hausa and the Kanuri. The Hausa practise a mystical Islam. Their religious learning is insubstantial⁴⁷ and in their midst are many

⁴⁶ See Botte 1990.

⁴⁷ As for Islam among the Hausa, an informant told us that they were good believers. “When it’s time for them to pray, they pray”, he said. “However, their practice is limited to what is strictly necessary. When the *imam* is a Hausa, prayers are said quickly. This *imam* only uses short verses.” In Ngaoundéré, mosques where this happens are called

mallum'en who practise occultism. However, Alhaji Ibrahim stresses that the great *moodibbe* Hausa are to be found in Nigeria and the greatest number of *goni* are among the Kanuri, but he remarked: "Among ten *goni*, you will only find one who really knows Islam." The Mbum are haughtily proud, he says. They refuse to submit to the difficult conditions for learning the Quran, and this refusal is the reason for their shallow knowledge of Islam. Finally, Alhaji Ibrahim considers the Fulbe to be the learned ones. When he told us the story of the Fulbe's arrival in today's Nigeria, he specifically mentioned that they had a greater learning than the natives. In Kano, for example, the Fulbe arrived during the reign of King Yaakuuma (a Hausa). In this town, the Muslims' knowledge was limited to the Quran, the *hadiise*, the *fur'a*⁴⁸ and the *fiqh*.⁴⁹ The Fulbe knew, in addition to these, the *tawhid*⁵⁰ and the *lunnga*.⁵¹ Alhaji Ibrahim does realize that some Fulbe practise witchcraft, but he says that "there are pure Fulbe and there are mixed Fulbe, and between these two there are differences in behaviour." He infers by this statement that the pure Fulbe do not practise witchcraft, *anndal baleewal*.

One of our Fulbe informants had told us, however, that the Fulbe also practise occultism, "They mostly do it to defend and protect themselves. Now if somebody points a finger at you, then he'll see . . ." This is called *ronga*.⁵² The informant had also told us about the existence of a book called *Buubel*, written in Fulfulde, containing prayers which are sinful and dangerous to exploit. One day we also found Alhaji Ibrahim reading a book written in Fulfulde about self-protection against enemies. The book contained lyrics. He read some of the book to us and told us that the book was rare and that it came into his possession in Yola. "I would not give away this book for a million francs", he said, "I would only give it to someone I cherish."

juulurde innaa aadhaynaa — this refers to the beginning of the *al-kawsar* sura, one of the shortest in the Quran. Another nickname for such mosques is *juulurde appolo*, alluding to the speed of the American Apollo spacecraft, or *juulurde six-five*, an allusion to the game of ludo, where five and six are the highest numbers and lead to a quick victory. The informant also told us that most young Hausa attend the *madarasa*, and they no longer pray the way they used to.

⁴⁸ *Fur'a* is a study of religious practices, such as how to perform the ablutions, the prayers and so on. This study is usually taught by a *mallum* and is followed by the reading of the Quran.

⁴⁹ *Fiqh*: Islamic jurisprudence.

⁵⁰ *Tawhid*: acknowledgement of the oneness of God, of His power, and that everything which exists or happens in the world is His doing.

⁵¹ *Lunnga* is a type of learning accessible only to people imbued with deeper Islamic knowledge. The meaning of *fur'a*, *fiqhu*, *tawhiid* and *lunnga* were explained to us by Mal Dayyu Abdoulaye.

⁵² *Ronga* involves the use of certain verses of the Quran or of certain plants called *ceemmbal* or *gaadal* as a kind of "armour" to protect oneself against adversity.

Conflicts between Muslims

As we have said earlier, we had to be extremely patient to persuade Alhaji Ibrahim to speak about Islam in Ngaoundéré. He bluntly refused to speak about today's experience of Islam among the young Wahhabists or about the persistent intervention of the Cameroonian administration. Our information about this therefore stems from other informants.

Islam in Ngaoundéré is presently undergoing an important transformation. The number of disciples of traditionally-educated *moodibbe* is falling appreciably, while there is a corresponding rise in the Wahhabist branch. In general, young people from neighbouring villages tend to join the Wahhabists. They belong to ethnic communities recently converted to Islam and do not necessarily originate from the province of Adamaoua. Others who join the branch are retailers who have gone bankrupt and are trying to reinstate themselves in the local hierarchy.

There is a struggle between the two branches (Wahhabists versus old *moodibbe*). For the locals, this conflict seems to represent a simple opposition within Islam between the modern and traditional methods of teaching. The Wahhabists have classrooms, benches and desks, exercise books, chalk, blackboards and so on, and their teaching methods remind the local population of Western education. For this reason, the Wahhabists are suspected of attempting to establish a modern Western-style school. Young Wahhabist beginners learn the Quran and the Arabic language at the same time, which after a few months enables them to translate some of the last suras of the Holy Book into Fulfulde, and to give a sermon about the basic principles of Islam. Formerly, a *moodibbo* would need several years to bring his students up to this standard. Eventually, the Wahhabist students will learn to articulate words like native Arabs, and the public see this as the crux of the problem. A young Wahhabist told us:

With the current method, we are not only taught to read – and to read well – but we are also taught the meaning of what we read . . . We read better than those who began before us. Even our pronunciation is better . . . You see, Imam Hamaoude is respected and everybody recognizes his knowledge in religious matters. But today a young boy who begins to read will discover that Imam Hamaoude does not read well. He then tells himself that Imam Hamaoude and all the others don't know anything.

Although Imam Hamaoude is respected in religious issues, he is condemned for his bad pronunciation of Arabic. This is what makes some traditional teachers believe they can solve the problem by adopting both systems (the modern and the traditional). We know a teacher who has done just this. He uses a blackboard and chalk and teaches like the Arabs do. He also teaches the old way with compulsory housework

for the *mallum'en*, and discipline is severe (students are tied with chains, for example).

By approaching both sides of the conflict, one discovers that it is far more bitter than it first seems. The Wahhabists have imported new practices from Arab countries which the traditional *moodibbe* consider to be non-Muslim. "These people go there and learn things which can derail your mind and jeopardize the Islamic religion", a young Wahhabist told us in reference to the accusation which had been directed at the Wahhabists by the traditional school. In fact, the traditional *moodibbe* see the Wahhabists as nonconformists and devil's advocates. As for the Wahhabists themselves, with the help of the Quran and the *hadiise*, their self-proclaimed mission is to purify Islam in Ngaoundéré and rid it of all superfluous practices. They tell us that the main accusations they make against the traditionalists are their lack of genuine knowledge of Islam due to the language barrier,⁵³ and the incorporation of local customs and witchcraft into the religion. The most moderate Wahhabists say of the *moodibbe*:

A *moodibbo* is supposed to know the basic principles of Islam, and when he reads the Quran he should be able to understand what he reads at least superficially, even though he can't interpret it . . . They know the principles of the practice of Islam, but they don't know the fundamentals or the philosophy behind this religion.

The outspoken hardliners say that "the *moodibbe* don't know Islam. All they do is read and make mistakes."

For our purposes, the interest lies in the exploitation of Islamic knowledge in the conflict. We had seen that as far as Alhaji Ibrahim is concerned, Islamic knowledge is what distinguishes an individual, and whoever has his learning from Arabic books is superior to the *moodibbe*, who have no access to books. In this ongoing tussle between the traditionalists and the Wahhabists, learning is exploited by each party in an attempt to prove that they are on the side of the Truth. The Wahhabists base their actions on four principles:

The possession of Islamic knowledge.
Sensible application of this knowledge.
Encouraging people to share this knowledge.
Patience.

The Wahhabist intellectuals, with their theological education from Arab countries, have a much broader and deeper religious knowledge and use literature to which the traditionalists have no access. In their exploits, the Wahhabists try to highlight this distinction. A new nickname

⁵³ The Quran is written in Arabic, while the language of the Fulbe is Fulfulde.

has been given to the traditional *moodibbe*: they are called *moodibbe jawleeji* (entrance-hut intellectuals), even though the *moodibbe* call themselves *moodibbe sunna* (intellectuals conforming to the prophet Muhammad's way of life). Slogans such as "We bring a new Islam . . . It's revolution", are often heard. The emphasis is thus laid on two types of Islamic knowledge, where one difference lies in the way the two groups pray. During prayers or recitals, the Wahhabists speak loudly and articulately so that everyone can understand. They pray at a relaxed pace and look very concentrated with their hands on their chests. Anyone who watches a television programme about Mecca will see that this is the way prayers are said there. In everyday life they abide by the Sunna. The strictest of them grow their beards, wear trousers which tail off above their ankles, refuse to shake hands with women, and so on. The more moderate will distinguish themselves by saying greetings with their Arabic pronunciation. The majority of them call each other *ustaaaj* (professor), and they try to warrant this title in their discussions by quoting verses of the Quran or texts from the *hadiise*, by handling out question sheets in the *moodibbe*'s entrance-hut,⁵⁴ and by their sermons in the mosques, whether in the town or in the most remote villages. Sometimes they choose a young man from the local district and ask him to preach. A young man who had been through this experience happily told us:

After the *esaa'i* prayer, when sermon was due, people were amazed at seeing me stand there and recite it. There were old people and friends of mine there. After the sermon, they no doubt wondered "this young lad, who has just started school, already knows the Quran!"

This happened in 1988.

Alhaji Ibrahim is aware of the exploitation of Islamic learning in the religious conflict. On one occasion when we talked to him about a young Wahhabist's rejection of the practice of *do'a*,⁵⁵ he justified the existence of this ceremony by harking back to Khalif Oumar (Umar).⁵⁶ This was the first time he talked to us about religion without referring

⁵⁴ In handing out question sheets, the Wahhabists know perfectly well that they will not receive any answers. The objective is simply to show the *moodibbe* that there is much they do not know about Islam. Here we see how Islam is used as a means of intimidation.

⁵⁵ A ceremony organized in honour of a young person who has completed his reading of the Quran. This young Wahhabist, by insisting on the non-Muslim origin of the *do'a*, expresses his fear that people believe the *do'a* was prescribed by the Quran or the Prophet Muhammad (in which case it would be compulsory). He is anxious about the fact that some people even believe they will go mad if they fail to perform the *do'a*.

⁵⁶ Khalif Oumar is the second person to have represented the prophet as leader of the Muslims.

to his books. In fact it was from this day that he began to tell us about Islam in Ngaoundéré. It seemed that he had found an opening to show his superiority and that this opportunity gave him the self-confidence to relax his attitude towards us and tell us what we had long been wanting to hear.

Islam and the modern state

Although the Cameroonian administration is essentially secular, it has an undeniable control over Islam. The *lamiido*, who is traditionally the spiritual leader, has become a civil servant. He is nominated by the government after consultation with local leaders. He may also be dismissed by the government and thereby lose his position as spiritual leader of Muslims. In Ngaoundéré, which is the centre of the country of La Vina, the *lamiido* answers directly to the prefect. This accountability creates a conflict in the exercise of religious authority. As a civil servant, the *lamiido* answers to his hierarchic superiors, but as a religious leader he answers only to himself. The difference between his two types of authority is not always clear, and the government representatives tend to take advantage of this lack of delineation. Thus, a Muslim minister from the north becomes a religious leader *de facto* because of his position in the hierarchy. He represents the national administration in all religious affairs and represents the Muslims at all official events. At the local level, during Friday prayers or religious ceremonies such as *juulde suumaye* (*Id al-Fitr*, the feast at the end of Ramadan) or *juulde layha* (*Id al-Adha*, "the festival of sacrifice" on the last day of the pilgrimage to Mecca),⁵⁷ the highest ranking Muslim official receives as much attention as the *lamiido* and prayers will only begin after his arrival.

The *lamiido* has no decision-making power in national issues such as Ramadan. Traditionally, the *lamiido* announces the first and the last day of the fast after consulting the *moodibbe* present at the occasion. The announcement is made when the moon is first seen by a selected person. The nominee must be a fully responsible person, be considered of good faith and have a good Islamic knowledge. The announcement can also be made if at least two God-fearing adults have seen the moon. The announcement is only valid in the *lamiido*'s own *lamidat*, such that two neighbouring *lamidats* could begin and end the fast on different days. The beginning and end of the fast are now officially decided by the authorities and broadcast on national television, and apply to the whole country. The broadcast is made when the moon is first seen anywhere in the country. The *lamiido* is obliged to confirm this announcement even though the moon has not been sighted in his

⁵⁷ A sheep is sacrificed in honour of God.

lamidat. The Muslim population are very sceptical of this⁵⁸ and tend to see the *lamiibe* (plural of *lamiido*) as puppets on strings pulled by the government. Their role as spiritual leaders is debatable. For example, many people will still refuse to fast unless they see the moon with their own eyes or receive confirmation of its sighting from a *moodibbo* whom they trust. An odd situation arose in Ngaoundéré in 1993 when the first official day of Ramadan was set for Thursday, while others understood that Friday or Saturday was to be the first day. The same confusion also occurred on the last day of Ramadan, which is marked by a huge celebration (the Feast of Ramadan) that should only take place on one specific day declared by the *lamiido*. Some of the traditional *moodibbe* began fasting after the official starting day because they questioned this official date. Consequently, some *moodibbe*, loyal to the *lamiido*, celebrated the Feast of Ramadan in the middle of their fast on an empty stomach. Some *lamiibe* were accused of behaving likewise and of going to the mosque before their own fast came to an end. Also in 1993 Lamiido Issa Maigari of Ngaoundéré tried to reach a compromise with the traditional *moodibbe*, but when he gauged the extent of discord, he used his power to declare that whoever disrespected the official dates would be expelled from Ngaoundéré.

In the words of Alhaji Ibrahim, the chaotic state of affairs is the result of ignorance: "The regional leaders, administrative or traditional, have no Islamic learning. They only care about their power . . . Unfortunately, those who have both Islamic and Western learning are not given any responsibilities." When we asked him why the *moodibbe* would not meet to discuss the religious problems confronting the town, he replied that he would never attend such a meeting because there would be people present whose only function was to relay what was said at the meeting to the administrative officials, and who would only lie about what had been said.

Alhaji Ibrahim and the national judicial system

At the moment, Alhaji Ibrahim is going through a rocky stage in his relations with the administration in matters of justice. Being a traditional judge, he finds himself faced with judges of Western-style training over an inheritance case, where he himself is implicated as one of two parties competing for a house. In this confrontation he feels powerless. He cannot understand the type of justice in which there is no direct dialogue between the judge and the plaintiff due to the language barrier.

⁵⁸ The *moodibbe* say that, in Islam, ignorance can be tolerated but doubt is unacceptable. When in doubt, one should seek information. Thus, to doubt fasting but to fast nonetheless would invalidate the act of fasting.

Nor does he understand a system of justice in which you require a lawyer to defend yourself. He showed us a pile of documents from the law court which were completely unintelligible to him. Remember that this is the man whose learning forced him to leave Yola for fear of being appointed judge, but because of his learning he was then given the post of judge in Ngaoundéré against his will. Now he is in a situation where he has to call upon someone else to defend him. Disillusioned, he said to us: "If I don't come out on top in this struggle, I will leave the country with my children." Meanwhile, his conflict with the administration is proving expensive, and he is gradually losing his cattle.

For Alhaji Ibrahim, all these changes have brought about a deplorable situation. There is absolute turmoil in the community, and especially within Islam. Once after listening to him portray the sorry state of Islam, we asked what could be done to solve the problem. He replied: "To reinforce Islam, we must use whips and chains, but this is not possible any more. Today only he who is blessed by God can live according to His principles." In short, God should take charge of religion once again, since the *moodibbe* cannot cope with the challenge.

Change and continuity

While talking about his life and about Islam in Ngaoundéré, Alhaji Ibrahim does not limit himself to a description of current events. He also conveys a picture of Ngaoundéré where symbols of power (religious, economic and political) are arranged in a hierarchy. He ascribes a predominant role to religion in this hierarchy, though it is the knowledge associated with religion that is the decisive factor. We have seen time and time again that Alhaji Ibrahim always uses his religious knowledge to secure his premier position in society. If we were to sum up his thoughts, then we would see that Islamic knowledge is a means of distinguishing individual people – the more knowledge you have, the closer to God you are and the more respect you deserve.⁵⁹

However, access to religious knowledge is controlled in various ways. Alhaji Ibrahim does not state explicitly that the title of *moodibbo* is hereditary, but he implies that it does depend on one's social background. Further still, the title of *moodibbo* is bestowed by God, so nobody can become wise simply by wishing it, and Alhaji Ibrahim implies that only the Fulbe have received this blessing from God.

From what Alhaji Ibrahim has taught us, we have gathered that

⁵⁹ Here the term "respect" should be understood in the African sense, where it is associated with influence. Once somebody is respected, his words will not be doubted and he must be heeded. This is what gives such a person a controlling influence over those who respect him.

when individuals believe in the same God, they develop a common language and knowledge which transcend their different ethnic backgrounds. The religion unites them and brings them under the same set of norms. Those who have religious knowledge are heeded by the others. For Alhaji Ibrahim, religion should also be concerned with the practical side of daily life. When he complains that the region's leaders do not have the knowledge they require for their responsibilities, he does not imply that they are ignorant, but rather that they do not possess religious knowledge.

Alhaji Ibrahim makes a clear distinction among those who have wisdom: there are those who have true knowledge and those with false knowledge. By "true knowledge" he means Islamic knowledge, which he considers the absolute Truth. However, he makes no distinction between true and false knowledge as means of acquiring respect. A wise man, no matter what kind of knowledge he has (Islamic or Western), deserves consideration and respect.

Alhaji Ibrahim has acquired his knowledge from his books and from local teachers. Therefore this Islamic knowledge has a very local character. It is only put to use locally. With the coming of modernization, the trend has turned. A new knowledge has been introduced from outside and has created a fresh local perception of Islam. In order to grasp the process that has led to this change, we have to understand the situation facing young people in Ngaoundéré who have been educated in Arab countries.⁶⁰

For students finishing the Franco-Arabian schools, there is nothing to do but wander the streets with an education they cannot find recognition for. They can neither work in the administrative sector nor for the traditional *moodibbe*, who have different teaching methods than those they are accustomed to. For those who return from studying in Arab countries, the opportunities are just as sparse. To those who went to France to perfect their French, a few translating jobs are available in Arabian embassies in Cameroon and Cameroonian embassies in Arab countries. Some may work as teachers of Arabic in colleges (only one teacher per college, and no more than ten colleges have Arabic courses). Some end up as teachers in the few Franco-Arabian primary schools. Although their education carries as much weight as that of their compatriots who studied in Europe, the Cameroonians who studied in Arab countries find themselves on the street because there is nothing to suit them on the job market, which in Cameroon has a Western structure. When they return to the traditional Muslim society, they face a well-established, hierarchic system into which they cannot fit. Being well educated, their place ought to be among the *moodibbe*, but here they

⁶⁰ See Kane 1961.

are left out because they are young and have a different educational background. The way these young people see it, they are barred from modern society and have no defined place in traditional Muslim society, and so they can only enter the latter by challenging the *moodibbe*.

The young scholars, rejected both from the job market and from their traditional Muslim communities, are now fighting for recognition. Their Wahhabist movement is based on several principles. First, they have targeted the traditional *moodibbe*, from whom they adopted and slightly transformed the ideas that enabled the *moodibbe* to maintain their predominance. In short, they have taken over the *moodibbe*'s literary knowledge, as Alhaji Ibrahim would define it. The peculiar thing is that the Wahhabists do not associate this knowledge with the possession of books, but rather with the ability to pronounce Arabic. The better one can articulate Arabic, the more knowledgeable one is said to be, and this naturally stands the Wahhabists in good stead. The stress put on this aspect of knowledge serves them. The idea that knowledge is indicated by good pronunciation of Arabic is so well embedded in the popular mind that even Alhaji Ibrahim and Imam Hamaoude had to take Arabic classes and Quran reading sessions arranged by young Wahhabists. A Wahhabist leader, talking about these two very influential personalities, said: "They are keen students, but even though they try as best they can, they cannot pronounce very well because of their age." Thus, the new definition of knowledge, expressed by pronunciation of Arabic, cannot apply to the elderly. This unfortunate situation in which Alhaji Ibrahim and Imam Hamaoude are embroiled is advantageous to the Wahhabists, as it confirms their newly-attained position in society. The same Wahhabist leader also told us that "many people followed in the footsteps of Alhaji Ibrahim and Imam Hamaoude and came to these classes. This is very significant – even Imam Hamaoude, despite his age, came to these classes to learn to read the Quran." The attempt by the *alkaali* and the *imam* who wanted to brush up their pronunciation of Arabic has lent legitimacy to the young Wahhabist movement. We should bear in mind that the Wahhabist leader in Ngaoundéré belongs to the Fulbe, which makes the whole process seem more like a transfer of power from the old Fulbe to the younger ones. In a situation where locally-inherited Islamic knowledge no longer represents as important an asset as before, new forms of Islamic knowledge might appear attractive. These new forms, which the Wahhabists claim to be universal, constitute a formidable resource when confronted with the Western school system and the access it gives to new sources of income.

This understanding of the new situation comprises the basis of the second principle of the Wahhabist's strategy, which is to make Islam accessible to other people. In order to achieve this, the Wahhabists try to abolish the idea of a Fulbe monopoly. The Wahhabists now claim

that "there are worshippers of Allah, but there are no Fulbe of Allah." Islam is coming closer to everybody, and by removing the ethnic foundations, the Wahhabists expect to spread their influence and recruit more followers from other ethnic groups.

The Wahhabists are trying to come out of the ideological isolation in which the traditional Muslims were confined. At the national level, several associations run by young Wahhabists educated in Arab countries are flourishing. The global notion of refining Islam is encountered in every Islamic country and has been absorbed by the Wahhabists, allowing them to take part in the incipient Islamic fundamentalist movement. It is important to stress that the idea of purifying Islam in Ngaoundéré always takes local realities into account. The young Wahhabists must tame some of the ideas of Islamic purity and limit their practice to what is tolerable in a secular state such as Cameroon. One practice they must avoid is the strict application of Islamic law as laid down in the Quran.

The change in dynamics of Islamic knowledge has the same effect as the proceeding secularization of the Cameroonian state. In the transformed Muslim society, Alhaji Ibrahim seems to be marginalized because his knowledge is used at the local level only.

In this article we have dealt with the transformation of relations between social groups in a sub-Saharan urban society. In studying the character of the social relations, we have tried to take into account the creative efforts that have been made to design a strategy for the management of identity as expressed by one person, Alkaali Alhaji Ibrahim, belonging to one group, the Fulbe. Further, we have focused on the aspect of identity associated with Islamic knowledge.

In so doing we have tried to throw some light on the role played by specific forms of Islamic knowledge in the dynamics of change in social relations. The hypothesis we have proposed is that the Fulbe have used Islamic knowledge as a means of self-furtherance and of safeguarding their leadership, and that such safeguarding is becoming more difficult than before. To test our hypothesis, we have observed the life of a member of this group in Ngaoundéré. It has not been our intention to reduce the complexity of the mechanisms of a group's self-promotion to the life of a single person. However, some important mechanisms for the reproduction of power and influence can be revealed by the manner in which a single person behaves, expresses himself, and interacts with other people. Our goal has been to make the reader aware of the opinions of this person, his perception of social relations, and the role he ascribes to Islamic learning in these relations.

Our investigations have revealed that, as far as Alhaji Ibrahim is concerned, Islamic knowledge is firmly linked to respect, power and social status. From his own views and from what we have surmised

in our conversations with him, the link is made firstly by ethnicity (the Fulbe identity). If you belong to the Fulbe, then you are certainly a *juuldo*, and only a *juuldo* can become a *moodibbo* by the blessing of God. Moreover, a *moodibbo* must be respected. Secondly, the link is secured by his position as *alkaali*. Finally, the possession of books guarantees a superior standing in relation to other *moodibbe*. The relation can be illustrated metonymically: the Arabs are close to God, so everything the Arabs do is God's will; God himself is knowledge *par excellence*, and knowledge can only be found in books. For Alhaji Ibrahim, owning books means superiority, and in all his words and deeds he strives to perpetuate this idea, this link between knowledge and power.

However, his efforts to hold his power are greatly threatened by external events, represented by the globalization and modernization of the local urban society. Alhaji Ibrahim feels this threat, for instance, when his daughters or wives do not behave in strict conformity with the rules he sets. It seems that no single person can hope to keep a firm hold on his knowledge in order to defend his status. In the case of Alhaji Ibrahim, the threat came from the development of the colonial and post-colonial administrations, and the modernization and democratization of the country. There is also an internal threat from the Muslims themselves, a threat which seems to be the result of a more global interaction of Muslim people. Alhaji Ibrahim's Islamic knowledge has lost its predominant role in the running of public life. Young Muslims are increasingly susceptible to the more global Muslim interaction and challenge him with their superior articulation of Arabic. The *alkaali* is thus forced into a position where he has to compromise as well as to be more creative and devise more ingenious ways of maintaining his position.

Although the social transformation in Ngaoundéré has weakened the status of ancient learning, this community is still characterized by a continuity which ensures that political and religious power remain in the hands of the Fulbe. However, the ongoing religious battle, in which old Fulbe are at odds with the young Fulbe educated in Arab countries, indicates that the Fulbe are losing their monopoly on Islam. As we have understood it, their loss is expressed by the phrase: "There are worshippers of Allah, but there are no Fulbe of Allah." Islam is everybody's business and not only the concern of the Fulbe, despite the fact that their religious domination continues.

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ISLAMIC REFORM AND POLITICAL CHANGE*

THE EXAMPLE OF ABUBAKAR GUMI AND THE YAN IZALA MOVEMENT IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Roman Loimeier

The spread of Islam and the development of Islamic societies have always been characterized by internal religious tensions, which reflected the political and social process of change of the time and place. In this Northern Nigeria is no exception. Since the 1950s, however, the quarrels among the Muslims have intensified. These can be explained, at least partly, as a consequence of movements of reform and rejuvenation (*tajdid*) within Islam, which were often reacting against the socio-political *status quo* which was usually seen by the reformers as "un-Islamic".

Islamic reform has a long tradition in Northern Nigeria. Abd al-Karim al-Maghili (d. 1503), regarded today as having been one of the first reformers in Hausaland, became famous for his treatise on the art of government according to the rules of Islam for the ruler of Kano, Muhammad Rumfa (1463-99). The reform of the existing social situation in Hausaland was also one of the most important objectives of the *jihād* led by Usman dan Fodio (1754-1817) which was to transform Hausaland in the early nineteenth century into the Islamic Sokoto empire. The religious scholars (*ulama*; Hausa: *mallams*) who initiated reform movements within the two great Sufi brotherhoods in Northern Nigeria, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya, again referred to the *jihād* and to Usman dan Fodio. The legacy of the latter was also adopted by the most recent movement of reform in the North, the Jamaat Izalat al-Bida wa Iqamat al-Sunna (Society for the eradication of evil innovation and the establishment of the Sunna; Hausa: Yan Izala), whose leader Abubakar Gumi (d. 1992), former Grand Kadi (Paramount Islamic Judge) of the North, even claimed (in an interview with this author in September 1987) that his own efforts of *tajdid* would have been useless without the achievements of Usman dan Fodio.

* This article is based on research work carried out in Nigeria between 1986 and 1988 for a Ph.D. thesis. After completing that work in 1990, I continued to evaluate information and data on Nigeria until 31 December 1992.

The question as to why the *jihad* of 1804 and the legacy of Usman dan Fodio are held in such high esteem can be answered only by looking back at Nigeria's history in the twentieth century. The British conquered the Sokoto empire as well as adjacent Bornu in 1902-3 and integrated the whole region into their colonial empire as the "Protectorate of Northern Nigeria". But whereas they intervened directly in the development of the South, the British decided to share power in the North with the local rulers, the emirs – for financial reasons and because of the difficulty of finding enough qualified European personnel to staff the administration. In the colonial period the North was thus a relatively united block compared to the South. The Prime Minister of the North, Ahmadu Bello, who governed from 1954 to 1966, tried to maintain the region's political unity and the predominance of the Muslims within the Federation. However, this political unity was also to be strengthened on the religious level. Thus he initiated a new religious movement in the 1960s named Usmaniyya, which was supposed to assimilate the competing Sufi brotherhoods of the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya. In addition, he attempted to unite the *malams* by institutional means; thus the Kaduna Council of Mallamai was founded in 1963. At the same time the Jamaat Nasril al-Islam (Society for the Support of Islam, JNI) was established as the religious and political mouthpiece of the Muslims.

The assassination of Ahmadu Bello in January 1966 created a new situation. The tensions between the different Muslim fractions broke out into the open and blocked the development of Islamic institutions like the JNI. The new military government under General Gowon dissolved the existing regions and subdivided them into a number of smaller federal states,¹ so that with the fragmentation of the North the politicians who tried to continue Ahmadu Bello's strategy slowly lost their dominant position in the Federation. Not only the Christian heads of state (Gowon 1966-75 and Obasanjo 1976-9) but also their Muslim counterparts (Shagari 1979-83, Buhari 1984-5 and Babangida 1985-93) were increasingly influenced, particularly in the eyes of many Muslims in the North, by non-Muslim interest-groups from the Middle Belt or the South. The political fragmentation, the ongoing conflict between the two Sufi brotherhoods, and the Yan Izala and their leader Abubakar Gumi have thus decisively influenced the development of Islam since 1966. A bitter struggle has developed over the interpretation of every possible symbol of Islam. Politically active Muslims stress the importance of "correct" school uniforms for Muslim children; they demand the acceptance of the Islamic festivals as national holidays; and demand the incorporation of the *sharia* into the national system of jurisdiction as

¹ By 1991 the number of federal states in Nigeria had grown to thirty in addition to the Federal Capital Territory Abuja.

well as into the constitution. Some of them are even prepared to fight for these symbols of an Islamic society. Many of the politically active Muslims saw Abubakar Gumi as their leader in the struggle for the reform of Islam and the maintenance of the political predominance of Muslims in Nigeria since the 1960s. From the late 1970s this situation of conflict was aggravated by the fact that Nigeria increasingly felt the effects of a severe economic crisis, accompanied by a number of socio-religious upheavals like the Maitatsine riots. Only a series of conflicts with Christian interest groups such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which had been established in 1976 by the Catholic, Protestant and indigenous churches to serve as a counterweight to the JNl, in combination with the process of return to civilian rule initiated by General Babangida in the late 1980s, convinced the different Muslim fractions to unite and maintain a certain formal external unity. Since 1986-7 the need for political unity among the Muslims has been stressed more than internal, seemingly religiously motivated struggles for power.

Abubakar Gumi and his religio-political career

Abubakar Gumi was a child of two worlds. He was born on 7 November 1924 in the small village of Gummi (Sokoto province).² After studying the Quran with his father, the Alkali (Islamic judge) of Gummi, and Malam Musa of Ambursa, he was sent to the Dogondaji elementary school in 1934 and thus came into contact with the new colonial education system. His superior Islamic knowledge caused him to be appointed Hakimin Salla (religious prefect) in Dogondaji, a position he also maintained at the Sokoto middle school where he studied 1936-42. After successful final examinations he was accepted into the famous Katsina College, which was designed to take in and form the Northern élite. However, he declined to join the school and instead decided to study law at the Kano Law School. After completing his time there in 1946, he started to work as a scribe for Chief Alkali Attahiru in Sokoto in early 1947. However, this first public office soon became problematic since Gumi criticised certain malpractices in the administration of the Chief Alkali.³ In 1948 he thus returned to the Kano Law School as a teacher and was finally transferred to the newly-created Teachers' Training Institute in the small town of Maru (Sokoto province) in 1949.

It was here that he gained his first credentials as a religious scholar

² For his autobiography see Shanono 1976, Tsiga 1992 and Loimeier 1993. Gumi's correct date of birth is 7 November 1922. The earlier date is due to a manipulation arranged by the then Director of the School of Arabic Studies in Kano, Mervyn Hiskett, who wanted to help Gumi to get a job in the administration in the late 1950s by predating his year of birth (Tsiga 1992: 74).

³ Tsiga 1992: 37.

as a result of a dispute with the Imam of the Friday Mosque of Maru concerning the question of *tayammum*, the ritual ablution before prayer with sand instead of water. *Tayammum* was practised in Maru regularly although enough water was available for the ablutions, and Gumi therefore attacked the Imam of Maru on the grounds that *tayammum* was permissible only when no water was available. He thus appealed to the students of the institute to boycott Friday prayers until the Imam stopped the practice.⁴ This might have remained without consequences had the Sultan of Sokoto not taken up the case. In a letter to the daily newspaper *Gaskiya ta fi kwabo* Gumi had attacked the Sultan's speech on the occasion of the last *salla*-festival, which he had begun with the usual Islamic greetings before adding a reference to the British colonial administration and the King "under whose flag we live in peace and justice."⁵ Gumi's criticism of this passage was taken as an insult to the Sultan, who used the *tayammum* debate in Maru as a pretext to bring the case before the Emirate Council. The latter made three major complaints against Gumi: reciting the *Id*-prayer (the prayer celebrating the end of the fasting period of *Ramadan*) in the court of the school instead of taking part in the communal prayer in the town of Maru itself; inciting the students of the school to boycott prayer in the town of Maru; and claiming before a public assembly to be the Mahdi.⁶

In the ensuing inquiry led by the British district officer called Spicer, Gumi, purely on the basis of theological argumentation, proved to have the stronger arguments for his position. The commission of inquiry thus acquitted him and ordered the Imam of Maru to stop the malpractice of *tayammum*; it also asked the Sultan as leader of the faithful (*amir al-muminin*) to go to Maru in person to stop it.⁷ As the Sultan of Sokoto declined to follow this advice, the case was finally brought before the Northern Nigerian Council of Chiefs, where Gumi's position was supported by the Emir of Kano, Abdullahi Bayero, who thus contributed to his final victory and acquittal by the British.⁸ On the basis of this dispute with the Sultan of Sokoto, Gumi acquired an image as a religious scholar of renown and was even able to reverse the roles: he wrote a *fatwa* (legal opinion) against the acceptance of titles such as "Knight of the Order of the British Empire" by the Sultan of Sokoto and argued that such acts also had to be regarded as un-Islamic. Gumi's campaign against the Sultan was stopped only when the British forbade

⁴ Loimeier 1993: 123-4.

⁵ Tsiga 1992: 49.

⁶ Ibid.: 51.

⁷ Ibid.: 56.

⁸ Ibid.: 59.

public preaching in the district of Maru in 1949.⁹ The Maru dispute demonstrated the importance of religious discourse for settling questions of power and politics. Mastery of religious argumentation was clearly a precondition for successful participation in the political power play of Northern Nigeria. Abubakar Gumi had shown at Maru that he was fitted for this struggle.

After his dispute with the Sultan of Sokoto Gumi continued his education at the School of Arabic Studies (SAS) in Kano and taught there until 1954. In that year he applied for a scholarship to study at the famous Azhar university in Cairo. However, for political reasons he was sent to the Bakht ar-Ruda College of Education in Khartoum, then British Sudan, together with five other students from Nigeria. From there he went on the *hajj* to Mecca where he met the Prime Minister of Northern Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello. Because of his excellent knowledge of Arabic, Bello chose Gumi to act as interpreter in his dealings with the Saudis. This connection with Bello had far-reaching effects on Gumi's career. In 1957 Bello appointed him first Nigerian Pilgrims' Officer, his first representative religious function. As such he lived for several months in the Hijaz and wrote an official report on the conditions of the *hajj* for the Nigerian pilgrims.¹⁰ In the following years he became a permanent companion to Bello during his visits to Arab countries; he also became Bello's adviser on religious affairs, and on 29 July 1960 was appointed Deputy Grand Kadi of Northern Nigeria. In this function he worked on the reform of the Islamic legal system there and was finally appointed Grand Kadi of the North in 1962.¹¹

After Bello was assassinated Gumi lost his political protection. On the other hand he was now free of Bello's moderate influence and thus able to start his own campaign for the *tajdid* of Islam. Foremost in his endeavour was the realization of political unity among Muslims. The most important precondition for achieving this was the elimination of the Sufi brotherhoods. Their "sectarianism",¹² he maintained, posed a threat to Muslim unity. The open conflict between him and the brotherhoods started in 1967 when he began to do his annual *tafsir* (interpretation of the Quran) in the month of Ramadan. This was broadcast in a special programme by Radio Kaduna, thereby giving him the opportunity to reach a much wider public than ever before. In late 1970 he also started writing articles for the Hausa newspaper *Gaskiya ta fi kwabo*.¹³ These mass media campaigns by Gumi provoked angry counteractions from

⁹ Umar 1988: 239.

¹⁰ Loimeier 1988: 212.

¹¹ Tsiga 1992: 81.

¹² Gumi 1976: 78.

¹³ Tsiga 1992: 131-7.

the Sufi brotherhoods, which blocked any further development of the JNI as neither camp could agree on common political or religious positions. In 1969 a last effort to come to an agreement between Gumi and the brotherhood leaders failed, whereupon the JNI dissolved into a number of competing regional fractions.

At the level of religious argumentation Gumi began the fight against the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya in 1972 with the publication of his major programmatic work entitled *al-Aqida as-sahiha bi-muwafaqat ash-sharia* (The correct faith is based on the *sharia*). As this treatise was conceived in Arabic it was at first confined to a limited circle of religious scholars,¹⁴ but in 1978 he wrote a booklet entitled *Musulunci da abinda ke rushe shi* (Islam and the things which destroy it), a popularized and abridged version of *al-Aqida* in Hausa. From the time of its publication in Zaria in 1981, the dispute between Gumi and the leaders of the Sufi brotherhoods ceased to be a conflict among religious scholars and evolved into a violent confrontation in the villages, towns and mosques of Northern Nigeria.

Gumi's sharp criticism of the corruption of the Gowon regime during the 1970s gave him the image of an incorruptible religious scholar. He had begun his attacks on the military government in 1971 when Gowon dismissed the former military governor of the North and confidant of Gumi, Major-General Hassan Katsina, as Army Chief of Staff, and replaced him by David Ejor from Bendel. In the following years Gowon continued to fill important posts in the administration with candidates enjoying his confidence, thereby ousting the representatives of the so-called "Kaduna Mafia", the group of Kaduna-based politicians, army officers and entrepreneurs whose aim was to conserve the legacy of Ahmadu Bello. Gumi attacked Gowon for his corrupt internal and economic policies and nicknamed him "the Christian missionary's boy from Pankshin".¹⁵ In his criticisms of Gowon he could rely not only on the support of the "Kaduna Mafia", but increasingly won the sympathy of the radical young Muslims in the North who were organized in the Muslim Students' Society (MSS) and also rejected Gowon's government as un-Islamic.¹⁶

However, in the second half of the 1970s Gumi was forced to realize that he could not hope to continue his career in the national system of jurisdiction. He had been appointed Grand Mufti (Supreme Islamic Judge) of Nigeria by the new Muslim head of state, General Murtala Muhammad from Kano. This took place in the context of a planned

¹⁴ For an analysis see Loimeier 1993: 147-55.

¹⁵ Usman 1987: 83.

¹⁶ Interview with Ibrahim Sulaiman, lecturer at the Centre of Islamic Legal Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and former National President of the MSS, 9.9.1987.

creation of a Federal Shariah Court of Appeal in 1975 after the overthrow of Gowon.¹⁷ After the assassination of Murtala Muhammad on 13 February 1976 and the take-over by General Obasanjo, a Christian from Abeokuta, the proposal to establish such a supreme Islamic court of law and to integrate it into the new constitution was blocked by Christian interest groups.¹⁸ Thus Gumi's appointment as Grand Mufti remained without institutional consequences, although he drew the salary of the office.¹⁹ When the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) again discussed this problem during the Buhari regime in May 1985, Dahiru Bauchi, an influential Tijani leader and opponent of Gumi, persuaded the NSCIA to refuse to acknowledge Gumi as Grand Mufti of Nigeria.²⁰

With his hopes for further career advancement thus blocked, Gumi changed his strategy, which till the late 1970s had been based on the patronage of influential politicians such as Ahmadu Bello and the "Kaduna Mafia". His new religio-political strategy was now to gain support from an organization of his own and was aimed at increasing the mobilization of Muslims. The foundation of the Jamaat Izalat al-Bida wa Iqamat al-Sunna on 8 February 1978 has to be seen in this new political context. It had become necessary for Gumi to establish such an organization since he had increasingly lost the institutional means of pursuing his policies. In addition, his debates with the religious scholars of the Sufi brotherhoods in the form of pamphlets and learned treatises had no visible effect on the majority of the Muslim population. Furthermore he had not been able to make use of the JNII for his own purposes and his external financial support from the Saudi-based World Muslim League and other Saudi supporters was in itself not sufficient to sustain his struggle against the brotherhoods.

In the political and religious debates and conflicts in Northern Nigeria since the 1950s the religious scholars have used religious arguments to fight their opponents. The use of religious arguments was intensified by Abubakar Gumi in the 1970s and 1980s with a clear political motivation, which became very obvious in the preparations for the presidential elections in 1983. The election of 1979 had been won by the Muslim candidate of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Shehu Shagari, by only a small margin of 700,000 votes to his closest opponent, Chief Awolowo (Unity Party of Nigeria, UPN). To prevent a similar result in 1983, a number of Muslim politicians began to campaign for greater

¹⁷ Umar 1988: 240.

¹⁸ Doi 1989: 46-7.

¹⁹ Gumi was finally retired as Grand Mufti and Consulting Grand Kadi of the former northern states on 1 April 1985 (Tsigas 1992: 209).

²⁰ Umar 1988: 242.

participation by Muslim women in Northern politics. Gumi justified this campaign with religious and political arguments, thus particularly stressing the problem of *ikhtilat*, the mixing of men and women in public. In an interview with *Gaskiya ta fi kwabo* in 1982 he appealed to Muslim men to allow their women to register for the elections as voters and to go out to vote. He legitimized his point by using the formula *siyasa tafi muhimmanci da salla* (Politics is more important than prayer). As this sentence was attacked by a number of his opponents as a heresy, it is appropriate to quote Gumi's opinion in its context:

Gaskiya: What about the legality of men and women mixing together, especially as the time of elections draws nearer?

Gumi: Well, it is said that if the Muslims rest, the unbelievers will make war on them. So it is a duty for men and women to take up arms . . . Well [by analogy to this], it is [a duty] to cast a vote. Now since this will be beneficial to oneself and moreover beneficial to the Muslim community, it is Satan who prevents them from going out . . . *As long as a man's wife covers her body properly, well there is no problem.* If you hear somebody say that this is a gathering of men and women, we don't want it, this is Satan who urges the unbelievers, men and women, to oppress the Muslims. I personally will go out with my wives, with our children following. If this is not done, even to the point of letting unbelievers predominate, then what is our position? . . . This religion, if you do not protect it, it will not protect you. This is what makes me say that *politics is more important than prayer* . . . With politics one stands for prayer and worship together, whereas prayer is only part of this . . . It is a necessity that every man takes his women and children above the age of eighteen to register *so that we can predominate over the Non-Muslims.*²¹

In the year of the elections Gumi also appealed to the Muslims to abstain from the pilgrimage that year as the *hajj* would take place at the same time as the presidential elections. He justified this appeal again by arguing that the elections were more important than the *hajj*. He was thereupon again attacked by a number of religious scholars such as Ibrahim Salih from Maiduguri and accused of abandoning one of the pillars of Islam.²² Despite these criticisms Shehu Shagari, due to the mobilization of Muslim women in Northern Nigeria, won a decisive victory in 1983.

Gumi's arguments favouring the mobilization of Muslim women for the elections was repeated by his followers in almost identical formula-

²¹ Author's emphasis, translation from Hausa by Christelow (1987: 232).

²² Salih 1986: 439.

tions in the context of the registration of the voters for the local government elections of 2 December 1987. Thus Shaykh Lawal Abubakar, one of the leaders of the Yan Izala in Kaduna, mentioned in an interview with Radio Kaduna that Muslim women could leave their houses without any problems as long as they dressed properly. Their husbands should accompany them to the centres of registration; those who prevented their wives from registering under the pretext of *ikhtilat* would feel sorry in the future "when the wrong people are voted to [sic] power".²³ The subsequent political mobilization of Muslim women can be interpreted as a recent form of modernization within Northern Nigeria society. This social change was influenced and accompanied by the religious conflict between Gumi and the Sufi brotherhoods. However, as Gumi and his followers, the Yan Izala, not only appealed to the public with religious arguments but actively worked for the establishment of a modern Islamic system of education and furthered the enlightenment of Muslim women, the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya were forced to adopt similar strategies in order not to lose their influence on the Muslims to Gumi and the Yan Izala. Thus a considerable increase of activity related to the expansion of a modern Islamic school system and increased social and political integration of Muslim women occurred in Northern Nigeria after the late 1970s. The conflict between the Yan Izala and the Sufi brotherhoods resulted in a further politicization and modernization of society; these changes were defended like earlier movements of reform by Muslim politicians and religious scholars as a *tajdid* of Islam and legitimized at the religious level by referring to the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet.

The Yan Izala and the conflict with the Sufi brotherhoods

The proper work of establishing the new organization of the Yan Izala was taken over by an old protégé of Gumi, Malam Ismaila Idris (b. 1937), son of a religious scholar from Goskorom (Bauchi).²⁴ After a traditional religious education he was appointed teacher of religious knowledge at the Tulu Provincial School in 1959. However, in 1963 he abandoned his career and went to Kano to study at the SAS, where he met Abubakar Gumi, who had a teaching post there at the time. In 1968 he completed his education, joined the JNI and was appointed teacher at the Sultan Bello Islamiyya primary school in Kaduna where once again he was in close contact with Gumi. In the 1970s he had a short and turbulent career as an *imam* in the Nigerian army, where his polemical style of preaching repeatedly brought him into conflict with

²³ *The Reporter*, 16.10.1987.

²⁴ For Ismaila Idris' biography see Umar 1983: 3ff.

his superiors and led to his being dismissed from the army in April 1978 because of his leading role in establishing the Yan Izala.

After being formally established in February 1978, the Yan Izala at first had a great influx of adherents – which can be explained by the ban on political parties which still existed at that time. Many politically active Muslims sought alternative ways to engage themselves politically in 1978-9 and were thus active in religious movements. As a consequence the Yan Izala rapidly spread over the whole of Northern Nigeria in 1978 through the network of followers which Abubakar Gumi had established in earlier years; it usually took place in the context of organized preaching tours. During such tours new local groups of the Yan Izala were founded, their leaders often being former disciples of Gumi. In some regions like Kaduna or Plateau, the Yan Izala could even count on the support of the local JN groups. However, its expansion did not take place without resistance from the Sufi brotherhoods. Thus between 1978 and 1980 Northern Nigeria experienced an escalation of violence, mostly resulting from the Yan Izala's preaching activities and often connected with their efforts to disturb the religious activities of the Sufi brotherhoods and gain control over the Friday mosques. As the Tijaniyya was more strongly represented than the Qadiriyya in most areas of the North, especially in the rural regions, the skirmishes were above all between followers of the Tijaniyya and the Yan Izala.²⁵ The Yan Izala's aggression thus particularly affected the Tijaniyya. Many Tijanis from Plateau and Kaduna discontinued their affiliation with the Tijaniyya in fear of attacks by the Yan Izala, or at least abandoned too active participation in the brotherhood's ceremonies.²⁶ A number of Tijanis also joined the Yan Izala and some, like Bala Sirajo, a co-founder of the movement,²⁷ or Dahiru Maigari, a lecturer at Bayero University, Kano, and former Shaykh of the Tijaniyya,²⁸ became militant adherents. However, the expansion and dynamic of the Yan Izala suffered a severe blow when the so-called Maitatsine riots broke out in Kano in December 1980 and the leaders of the Sufi brotherhoods used this opportunity to connect the Yan Izala with this sect in their polemics.²⁹

In contrast to the networks of the Sufi brotherhoods, the Yan Izala have set up a regular constitution and regard themselves as an organization with fixed structures, members, functionaries and a regular administration. Programmatic or ideological differences to the religious

²⁵ Loimeier 1992: 66.

²⁶ Quadri 1981: 402.

²⁷ Tsiga 1992: 155.

²⁸ Loimeier 1993: 174-5.

²⁹ Ibid.: 213-14.

or political positions of Abubakar Gumi did not exist.³⁰ No objection to his leading role and the power of his advice could be made. The programme of the Yan Izala was relatively simple and stressed the rejection of all *bida* (evil innovations), such as *tawassul* (intercession) at the tombs of the dead, pilgrimages to the tombs of the saints, the religious rites of the brotherhoods or the recital of praise-songs to the Prophet. In contrast it emphasized the importance of the Quran and the Sunna as foundations of the faith, and the necessity of reopening the "door of *ijtihad*".³¹ However, it was not explained how the intended process of *tajdid* was to be developed in detail.³²

In the social sphere the Yan Izala stood for better education of Muslim women and they condemned as un-Islamic a number of customs and traditions in Northern Nigeria, such as high expenditures on brideprice, naming ceremonies and *Id* celebrations. The Yan Izala's religiously legitimized criticism of these costly social obligations was welcomed particularly by the socially disadvantaged and the poor. In addition, the Yan Izala condemned the submission of the faithful to the authority of the Sufi *shaykhs* and the obligation to give them donations (*sadaqa*). Thus the Yan Izala were in a position to provide a religious motivation for the dissociation of many adherents of the Sufi brotherhoods from their *shaykhs*. Patterns of expansion of the Yan Izala between 1978 and 1988 show that it gained most of its followers in Northern Nigeria among the young who were no longer willing to be subject to the authority of the old Sufi *shaykhs*; among women who increasingly strove for better education and more participation in public life; and among the poor who would no longer sacrifice their meagre resources for costly social or religious ceremonies. However, as the Yan Izala not only destroyed an existing system of authority and values but also offered a new system of orientation and legitimation, as well as a complete network of modern schools, it could offer the Muslim population a real alternative and even give them the impression that their fight against the Sufi *shaykhs* was a positive action in the sense of a struggle against *bida*.³³

The religious and social protest of the Yan Izala led to a revolution in the established system of religious and social values in Northern Nigeria after 1978. This social development was uncompromising. The new adherents of the Yan Izala absorbed nothing of the old, "un-Islamic" system of values, but categorically rejected it and instead accepted a

³⁰ Interview with Ismaila Idris, 7.10.1987.

³¹ *Ijtihad* is the effort to develop new legal solutions by independent reasoning on the basis of the Quran and Sunna.

³² Loimeier 1993: 176-8.

³³ Interview with J.H. Yola, lecturer at Bayero University, Kano, 21 Dec. 1986.

new system of explanation. The radical dissociation from former social and religious values explains the aggressiveness and militancy of the Yan Izala's actions towards representatives or symbols of the old system. On the other side, it also explains the violent reaction of the Sufi brotherhoods to the Yan Izala's criticisms.³⁴ The conflict between them has led to a deep split within many communities and families in Northern Nigeria, deeper than those between the different networks of the brotherhoods in the 1940s and 1950s; this is because it was not only a comparatively superficial religio-political conflict but a manifestation of a thorough reorientation throughout the society. In this process of reorientation the young rebelled against the old, the marginalized against the establishment and women against their husbands.

The serious conflicts between the Yan Izala and the Sufi brotherhoods in 1978-80 and in particular the continuous mutual accusations of unbelief (*takfir*) forced Muslim politicians and the military government to mediate. The Northern Muslim politicians who felt obliged to uphold the legacy of Ahmadu Bello were especially unwilling to see their chances of being elected in the parliamentary elections of 1979 endangered by disputes among the Muslims. Thus on the instigation of the strong man of the Obasanjo government, Brigadier Shehu Musa Yar'adua, the conflicting parties, as well as a number of representatives of the regime and neutral mediators, met in Lagos and in Sokoto in late 1978 to discuss a solution to the conflict. Finally, on 5 February 1979 what has since become known as the "*kufr*-agreement" was reached. Among a number of other issues the religious scholars agreed that all religious scholars should confine themselves to their respective areas of specialization; co-operation among the Muslims should be strengthened; it was against the law to fight one injustice if that would lead to another, greater injustice; and any person who labelled another person an "infidel" (*kafir*) was a *kafir* himself.³⁵

With this agreement the Sufi brotherhoods managed to put Gumi and the Yan Izala under political pressure. The number of clashes between the Sufi brotherhoods and the Yan Izala decreased in 1979, but resumed immediately after the elections in late 1979 in scenes of unmitigated violence until the Maitatsine riots of December 1980 put an end to the aggression of the Yan Izala. In the context of the Maitatsine riots in Kano (1980), Maiduguri and Kaduna (1982), Yola (1984) and Gombe (1985),³⁶ the Yan Izala were forced to moderate their attacks on the Sufi brotherhoods in order to prevent their being thrown into one pot with the Maitatsine movement by the leaders of the brotherhoods. Since

³⁴ Interview with M.S. Umar, lecturer at the University of Jos, 21 Aug. 1987.

³⁵ Original text in Quadri 1981: 493-5.

³⁶ Loimeier 1992: 67-9.

then the Sufi brotherhoods have urged a counter-offensive against the Yan Izala.³⁷

The reaction of the Sufi brotherhoods to the attacks of the Yan Izala

The publication of Gumi's work *al-Aqida as-sahiha* in 1972 and the attacks on the Sufi brotherhoods by his followers had the effect of persuading the numerous competing networks of the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya gradually to shelve their internal disputes in the 1970s. They concentrated their efforts instead on their struggle against Gumi and the Yan Izala. The conflict between Gumi and the brotherhoods escalated further during the so-called Shariah debate. Gumi aroused fierce emotions in the dispute when he declared in a public sermon in Kaduna on 11 April 1977 that anyone who recited the *salat al-fatih*, one of the central prayers of the Tijanis, should be regarded as an unbeliever and could therefore be legally killed. As a consequence, marriage with such a person would also be illegal, and remarriage possible only after renouncing one's affiliation with the Tijaniyya and paying a second brideprice.³⁸ In an immediate reaction to the sermon seventy scholars of both Sufi brotherhoods published a manifesto entitled *Hakika nasiha ita ce addini* (Correct advice on religion) listing a number of critical arguments against Gumi. Among other things they accused him of practising *tafsir*, the interpretation of the Quran according to his own opinion; giving *zakat* (alms-tax) to the wrong persons; destroying the peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims; and inciting children against their parents. Further accusations included encouraging women to disobey their husbands, ridiculing the emirs, falsifying *hadiths* (accounts of actions or sayings of the Prophet) and monopolizing the media with evil intentions.³⁹ The religious scholars asked Gumi to join in a public debate and published a list of forty-two points for discussion. But for his own security Gumi refused to appear personally and sent two of his closest followers, Ismaila Idris and Ahmad Muhammad Sanusi Gumbi, who also preferred not to participate in the heated atmosphere in Kaduna.⁴⁰

The mutual interests of the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya developed into a real bond of alliance after the first attacks by the Yan Izala. In this context the Fityan al-Islam (Heroes/youth of Islam), an organization

³⁷ Ibid.: 202.

³⁸ Quadri 1985: 102.

³⁹ Umar 1988: 192.

⁴⁰ Ibid.: 197-8.

founded originally in 1962 by a Tijani scholar, developed into an organization of both Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya. Most of its activities were carried out by the preaching group of the Fityan al-Islam, which was again led by Shaykh Dahiru Bauchi.⁴¹ Since the late 1970s this *shaykh* of the Tijaniyya was thus able to establish a reputation as a major leader of the Sufi brotherhoods and in particular the Tijaniyya in their confrontation with the "Wahhabis".

Another religious scholar of the Tijaniyya who came to be acknowledged as a leading figure in the struggle against the Yan Izala was Shaykh Ibrahim Salih from Maiduguri, who acquired his reputation by publishing two major works in defence of the Tijaniyya's often problematical dogmatic foundations. In *at-Takfir akhtar bida tuhaddid as-salam* (The accusation of unbelief is the most dangerous innovation which threatens peace) he pointed to the danger which *takfir* represented for the unity of the Muslims in Nigeria. With his condemnation of *takfir* Ibrahim Salih was temporarily able to divert attention from Tijaniyya doctrine to the strategy of the Yan Izala which was based on *takfir*. In *al-Mughir* (The aggressor) Ibrahim Salih extended his argumentation and sharpened his attacks on the Yan Izala: anybody accusing another Muslim of being a *kafir* had to be regarded as a *kafir* himself.⁴² At the centre of Ibrahim Salih's endeavours to overcome the argumentative weaknesses of the Tijaniyya stood his effort to dismantle the foundations for the attacks on it. These attacks were generally based on the major work of the Tijaniyya, *Jawahir al-maani* (The gems of meaning), recording the deeds and sayings of the founder of the brotherhood, Ahmad al-Tijani.⁴³ Ibrahim Salih argues that this work, originally written by Ali Harazim, a disciple of the founder, had been spread in a number of non-authorized, false versions, which included those presently in use in Nigeria. The criticism of the Yan Izala would therefore be based on false propositions.⁴⁴ However, with the rejection of these "non-authorized" versions of the *Jawahir al-maani* Ibrahim Salih raised a serious problem for the Tijaniyya, namely to find an authorized, "true" version of the book, purified of all problematical points. By stating that none of the current versions of the *Jawahir al-maani* were authentic, Ibrahim Salih was able to develop a new strategy in the dispute with the Yan Izala, which it could not easily refute; the Yan Izala would have to wait until a new "authentic" version of the book had been published. The question remains how far Ibrahim Salih and his followers

⁴¹ Quadri 1981: 408.

⁴² Salih 1986: 18.

⁴³ For a presentation of the Tijani teachings see Abun-Nasr 1965: 27ff.

⁴⁴ Interview with I. Salih, 27 Mar. 1988.

are prepared to renounce the central dogmatic arguments of the Tijaniyya under pressure from their critics.

The strategy of Ibrahim Salih in the last years led to another split within the Tijaniyya because the hardline followers of Shaykh Dahiru Bauchi and others regarded his argumentation as a capitulation to the enemies of the brotherhood. But while Ibrahim Salih's new strategy was rejected by the older generation of the Tijaniyya, he has won many followers among Western-educated younger adherents, especially at universities and high schools.⁴⁵ Ibrahim Salih has also found support among non-affiliated Muslims of the younger generation, particularly because of his rejection of *takfir*. These young, often radical Muslims stress the necessity of Muslim unity and regard him as one of the few religious scholars in Nigeria above the feuding networks and groups.⁴⁶ His popularity among the Muslim intellectuals may seem surprising in view of his close relationship with President Babangida. He was regarded as Babangida's personal *mallam* and for a number of years held the official *tafsir* in the month of Ramadan in the State House in Lagos.⁴⁷ This position of influence enabled Ibrahim Salih to follow his own strategies in the disputes among the religious scholars. For instance, he has repeatedly taken up a position against Shaykh Dahiru Bauchi whom he did not acknowledge as an overall leader of the Tijaniyya in Nigeria. Thus the religious condemnation of Gumi demanded by Dahiru Bauchi during a meeting of a council of scholars in Yankari (Bauchi) in the spring of 1983 failed because Ibrahim Salih refused to support it.⁴⁸ The conflict between Dahiru Bauchi and Ibrahim Salih in the 1980s showed that even the confrontation between the Tijaniyya and the Yan Izala was insufficient to overcome the internal tensions within the Tijaniyya.

After 1978 the attacks of the Yan Izala were primarily directed against the Tijaniyya, and this was successful in the face of the internal contradictions of the brotherhood. The Qadiriyya was rarely touched by the criticism of Gumi's followers. This phenomenon can be explained in a number of ways: first, the Qadiriyya had fewer members than the Tijaniyya in almost every part of Northern Nigeria, and thus for purely demographic reasons offered less room for attacks. Secondly, the Qadiriyya under the leadership of Nasiru Kabara was relatively homogeneous and united whereas the Tijaniyya had numerous feuding networks. Thirdly, identification with the leaders of the Sokoto *jihad* was much easier for the Qadiriyya than for the Tijaniyya since Usman

⁴⁵ Interview with T. al-Miskin, lecturer at the University of Maiduguri, 18 Mar. 1988.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Interview with M.S. Umar, 5 Apr. 1988.

⁴⁸ Anwar 1989: 305.

dan Fodio and his followers had all been members of the Qadiriyya. An attack on the Qadiriyya was thus always risky for Gumi and his supporters. For instance, Gumi exposed himself to ridicule when he said that Usman dan Fodio had left the Qadiriyya before he died, an allegation he could not prove.⁴⁹ Lastly the Qadiriyya, in contrast to the Tijaniyya, did not have so many problematic dogmatic features, and thus attacks on it were less rewarding.

A first direct attack on the Qadiriyya took place only in February 1987. The Yan Izala denounced a booklet attributed to the brotherhood's founder, Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, which claimed that Abd al-Qadir had "seen" God. According to the Yan Izala, this implied that he had God-like attributes which would violate the basic principle of Islam, namely *tawhid*, the uniqueness of God. For this reason all supporters of the Qadiriyya had to be regarded as *kafirun*. Nasiru Kabara answered this attack personally in a sermon in his mosque in Kano on 20 February 1987. His major argument was that all Sufis including Abd al-Qadir, used metaphoric language and special terminology which could not be understood literally. This special language would be intelligible only to *ruhanai*, spirits. How therefore could "a dirty and wicked he-goat" claim that he would understand the language of the Sufis?⁵⁰

In contrast to the Tijaniyya, the internal cohesion of the Qadiriyya became stronger in face of the Yan Izala attacks, and it maintained its rituals such as the communal *dhikr* (Sufi meditation) and the celebrations of the birthday of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani despite criticism. Only a few Qadiris renounced their affiliation with their brotherhood, whereas numerous followers of the Tijaniyya in some regions such as Plateau or Kaduna left that movement. Communal activities of the Tijaniyya almost stopped in other areas, and many of the mosques were given up or taken over by the Yan Izala. The conflict between the Yan Izala and the Sufi brotherhoods, however, increasingly troubled the non-affiliated Muslims who feared for the unity of the Muslim community and its political chances in the Federation of Nigeria while it was split into feuding fractions. The efforts of the non-affiliated Muslims to bring the parties of conflict into some kind of agreement have dominated the religio-political development of the Muslims in Northern Nigeria during the 1980s.

The Council of Ulama and the reconciliation of 1988

The development of Nigeria since 1967 has been increasingly influenced

⁴⁹ Loimeier 1993: 142.

⁵⁰ Speech by Nasiru Kabara, Kano, 20 Feb. 1987, recorded by the author, translated from Hausa by J.H. Yola.

by non-Muslim and southern-oriented power groups. To many Muslims in the North this has appeared not only to endanger the achievements of the Sokoto *jihad* and the policy of Ahmadu Bello, but also to diminish the chances of their religious and political demands such as the acknowledgement of the *sharia* as part of national jurisdiction. In the face of this many Muslim politicians and intellectuals as well as religious scholars have started to stress the need for political and religious unity among Muslims in order to conserve or win back their former dominance in the Federation. The JNII had been blocked as a platform for all Muslims since the 1960s because of the internal conflicts between the Sufi brotherhoods and the Yan Izala, and a meeting of Muslim intellectuals and other eminent personalities was held in Zaria in November 1986 to seek a way out of this dilemma. During the meeting a so-called Council of Ulama was formed and asked to develop a common policy, acceptable for all Muslims, under the guidance of its newly appointed Secretary General, Dr. Umar Bello, Director of the Centre of Islamic Studies in Sokoto.⁵¹

The motivating factor behind the founding of the Council of Ulama was an external threat to the whole Muslim community. Faced with the catastrophic financial situation of the Federation, the Babangida administration decided in 1986 to join the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which would give Nigeria access to the interest-free loans and credits of the Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah. Christian interest groups, in particular the northern-based Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), attacked the government's plans and spoke of a sell-out of the country to the Muslim states of the Near East. The violent attacks of the Christians finally forced the different Muslim fractions to overcome their antagonisms. The necessity to develop a common counter-strategy led to the foundation of the Council of Ulama. On 25 January 1987 the Council met a second time in Kano, and the participants agreed on a common political platform. Among the Council's demands the most important were: the entry of Nigeria into the OIC with full membership status; official acknowledgement of the Islamic festivals as national holidays; revision of the pro-Western foreign policy of the Secretary of State, Akinyemi; acknowledgement of Friday as a holiday; and the garrisoning of the security forces in their respective regions of origin: no Christian security forces should be in Muslim areas.⁵²

The new political unity of the Muslims would probably have been short lived despite the pressure of the OIC debate, if the serious riots

⁵¹ Loimeier 1993: 221.

⁵² *The Triumph*, 22 Feb. 1987.

in Kafanchan between Christian and Muslim students at the local Advanced Teachers' College, and the ensuing disturbances in several northern towns in March 1987, had not reunited Muslims.⁵³ In this atmosphere of religious conflict the Council of Ulama became a mouthpiece for all Muslims and was thus able to force the emirs and other representatives of the conservative establishment to support its resolutions. It was increasing pressure by the Muslims which led to the Secretary of State Akinyemi's dismissal in 1987. The Christian editor of the most important northern daily newspaper, the *New Nigerian*, Innocent Oparadike, a friend and confidant of General Babangida, was replaced by Bilkisu Yusuf, the first woman in the North to hold such a position.⁵⁴

However, a much more decisive factor in the success of the Council of Ulama was the result of the local government elections of 12 December 1987, the first free elections since the military take-over in 1983 and thus regarded by many as a test for the development of future political parties. Despite the renewed mobilization of Muslim women undertaken by the leaders of the Yan Izala, the election results were a shock to Muslim politicians and intellectuals in the North. Many areas of the Middle Belt were won by Christian candidates fielded by the CAN, which also ensured that only single Christian candidates were put up for election in marginal constituencies. The Muslims by contrast had the choice between two or more Muslim candidates in most constituencies. This led to a division of the Muslim vote, with the result that areas with a nominal Muslim majority were won by Christian candidates with a simple majority. The division of the Muslim vote not only had political reasons but was influenced by the conflict between the Sufi brotherhoods and the Yan Izala. In particular a speech made by Dahiru Bauchi had serious effects on Muslims electoral behaviour.

Thus as far as what he [Gumi] has said, namely, that one should vote only for a good Muslim, not for a Christian, it has to be said that according to his [Gumi's] opinion a good Muslim is a follower of the Yan Izala group. According to our own opinion and in the faith of all Muslims in this country we should, when we come together [to vote], not vote for one of Gumi's men because he would be a member of the Yan Izala group. If in one place there are three candidates, one Muslim, one Christian and one Izala, then one can make one's choice among all three of them, but one should not vote for the candidate of the Izala.⁵⁵

⁵³ For a presentation of the Kafanchan riots see Loimeier 1992: 221-3.

⁵⁴ *Newswatch*, 14 Mar. 1987.

⁵⁵ Translation from Hausa by Asma'u Garba Saeed, original text in *Amana*, 15 Jan. 1987.

What was remarkable in this declaration was not only that Dahiru Bauchi made a clear distinction between Christians, Muslims and Yan Izala, with an implicit categorization of the latter as non-Muslims, but that he also referred to a declaration by Abubakar Gumi who had appealed to the voters to vote only for Muslim candidates. As the followers of the Sufi brotherhoods were not regarded by the Yan Izala as Muslims, this declaration was equivalent to an appeal to vote for Yan Izala candidates only. This situation led to the phenomenon that followers of both the parties in conflict preferred to vote for a Christian candidate or to abstain in order to deny victory to a candidate of the other party if their own candidates did not seem to have a chance of winning in the election. Thus Kaduna local government, a constituency with a slight Muslim majority, was won by Reverend John Aboki, the CAN candidate, because the supporters of the relatively weak local Tijaniyya preferred to abstain or to vote for John Aboki rather than Gumi's candidate, Malam Sule Bako.⁵⁶

The effect of such results was that great regions of the Middle Belt, which had been regarded as a domain of the conservative Muslim establishment since Ahmadu Bello's time, fell to Christian candidates. Because up till 1983 the NPC and NPN on the national level could only gain election victories with support from the Middle Belt voters, this outcome of the local government elections signified that for the first time a non-Muslim candidate was able to win a democratic election in Nigeria and become President of the Federation. The December 1987 results and the perspectives that followed from this election seriously troubled the Muslim politicians in the North. In its aftermath they started to exert pressure on the Sufi brotherhoods and the Yan Izala to overcome their internal disputes. Under the mediation of Ibrahim Dasuki, Secretary General of the JN1 and leading member of the Council of Ulama, a mass rally was organized in Kaduna on 2 January 1988 with the aim of establishing a support fund for the victims of the Kafanchan riots. Before the eyes of about 1,500,000 participants in the rally, the old rivals Abubakar Gumi and Dahiru Bauchi embraced and thus publicly demonstrated the reconciliation between both camps. This was strengthened during a further meeting of religious scholars in Kaduna on 16 January 1988 in the presence of Abubakar Gumi, Nasiru Kabara, Ibrahim Salih, Dahiru Bauchi and others. The formula of compromise was that "no one person could claim to know everything in Islam and [Muslim scholars] should therefore restrict themselves to the areas of their specialization."⁵⁷ The public reconciliation in Kaduna was complemented by a personal one between Abubakar Gumi and his old

⁵⁶ *New Nigerian*, 8 Jan. 1988.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 Jan. 1988.

teacher and adversary Nasiru Kabara, who made a surprise visit to Gumi at his house in Kaduna on 6 May 1990, thus ending a long conflict between them. This event incited Bature Idris Gana, reporter of the Kano daily newspaper, *The Triumph*, to comment, "*Dare daya Allah kanyi Bature*" – "God can make one become a white man overnight".⁵⁸ In the following weeks Nasiru Kabara continued his tour of reconciliation, visiting, among others, the leaders of the Tijaniyya, Dahiru Bauchi and Ibrahim Salih.⁵⁹

However, the development of religious movements in Northern Nigeria and of the Yan Izala in particular suffered a serious blow in 1991 when Ismaila Idris, the formal leader of the Yan Izala, was accused by other members of having embezzled funds. As a consequence he was excluded from the organization, which he refused to acknowledge, continuing to maintain his claim to be its leader. Since then the Yan Izala have split into two groups.⁶⁰ A further blow was Abubakar Gumi's death on 11 September 1992, which has left the reformist movement of Muslims in Northern Nigeria without a charismatic and renowned leader. It is thus quite possible that the fragmentation of the religious groups in Nigeria will continue. This process will affect the Yan Izala in particular, and probably the internal tensions within it will develop into a full-scale national conflict over power and authority.

With the formal reconciliation of the old conflicting parties in Kaduna, the political necessity for unity among the Muslims had proved, for the first time since Ahmadu Bello's reign, more important than the existing religious contradictions in Northern Nigeria. Under these new conditions the Council of Ulama could proclaim unity between the Muslims as the most important issue in Muslim politics and portray the conflict between the Yan Izala and the Sufi brotherhoods as a dangerous split. However, the formal unity accomplished since 1988 was intrinsically bound to the assumption of an external threat to the Muslims. If this external threat no longer exerted pressure on the diverse politico-religious networks and fractions, old tensions could erupt again. For as long as the ideal of Muslim unity is valued more than internal religious conflicts and dogmatic disputes, the Yan Izala as well as the Sufi brotherhoods will be forced to exercise moderation. Both sides have to understand that they are likely to be stigmatized as forces destructive to Muslim unity if they attack their adversaries again.

⁵⁸ *The Triumph*, 27 May 1990.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 June 1990.

⁶⁰ Interview with Ousmane Kane, grandson of Ibrahim Niass and lecturer at the University of St Louis (Senegal), who has done extensive research on the development of the Yan Izala in Kano, 1.4.1993.

REACTION AND ACTION

ACCOUNTING FOR THE RISE OF ISLAMISM

David Westerlund

This chapter focuses on the political and socio-economic role of Islamism in Africa, particularly south of the Sahara. Examples are provided from several countries, notably Senegal and Nigeria in the west and Tanzania in the east. The purpose is to study some possible reasons for the recent rise of Islamism and how it challenges Sufi forms of Islam. Arguably, a complex phenomenon such as Islamism calls for a multi-dimensional analysis of possible causes. The main approach here is genetic. Hence subsequent circumstances or results are interpreted in the light of preceding conditions. Since Islamism is a modern phenomenon which has developed basically since the 1970s, such a study is admittedly somewhat premature and has of necessity a tentative and exploratory character. The discussion is eclectic rather than geared to the testing of any specific theory. With the present short time-perspective several factors remain obscure. We do not know the "final result" of the strivings of contemporary Islamist groups. Yet the increased significance of such groups indicates that even preliminary analyses of causal factors may have significance.

It should be emphasized that it is very difficult or impossible to indicate in numerical terms to what extent the influence of Islamist groups has grown in Africa. Statistics on religious affiliation and changes are a notoriously sensitive issue. In recent decades, however, Islamist organizations have been formed in virtually all parts of Africa and their impact is felt in the religious as well as in the socio-economic and political fields. In the early 1990s the strength of the Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front) was tested in Algerian elections. As a rule, however, religiously affiliated political parties have been and are still outlawed in Africa. With the exception of Sudan, where the Muslim Brotherhood obtained a leading role after the 1989 coup, Islamism is a force of opposition and resistance in Africa as in most other parts of the Muslim world.

Before discussing possible causes of the Islamist appeal, the following introductory section will sort out some basic characteristics of Islamist groups, particularly their anti-Sufi position, thus establishing the proper-

ties of this "genus". Then follows an account of "factors of discontent" or of Islamism as a *reaction* to serious problems in society. In the next sections there is a discussion of Islamism as *action*, that is, of some more positive or constructive reasons – "factors of content" – for the spread of this form of Islam. Finally, there are some remarks about the problems or obstacles encountered by the Islamist movement, particularly in Africa south of the Sahara.

Islamist characteristics

For want of a better term, Islamism is here used as a generic concept with reference to Muslim individuals, movements and organizations conceiving Islam as an ideology and comprehensive way of life.¹ The Islamist goal is to establish Islamic law, *sharia*, as the basis of Muslim societies and Islamic states. Since God is the legislator and ruler on earth as in heaven, human beings are not supposed to legislate. The secular idea of human legislation is regarded as *shirk* (polytheism), putting humans on a par with God, which is seen as the most serious sin. However, Islamists are modernizers who make good use of modern scientific and technological knowledge. As reformers they champion the principle of *ijtihad*, i.e., new independent interpretations of the Quran and Sunna. In all respects – religious, political, economic, social, moral and cultural – they aim at a renewal and work out Islamic programmes for changing existing conditions.

Certainly, historical examples may well be important sources of inspiration, but Islamists do not attempt to recreate old forms of Islam.² The strong attachment to the *sharia* as a fruition of a spiritual and moral renewal implies criticism of both Sufis and secularist-oriented ruling élites. The great scholarly interest in the political aspects of Islamism easily overshadows religious, moral, social, economic, cultural and other aspects of the Islamist growth. However, the Islamic state based on the *sharia* is not an end in itself.³ Such a state must be

¹ After the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the term fundamentalism became popular in the West as a designation for certain radical Muslim groups with articulate political goals. Applied to Islamic and other non-Christian contexts, however, fundamentalism is an imprecise and misleading concept. Moreover, it is pejorative or accusatory rather than descriptive. One of the advantages of the term Islamism is that, at least in some cases, it is a self-designation of Islamic groups. Besides which, it is a useful concept for denoting the use of Islam as an ideology or "-ism" comparable to, for instance, liberalism or socialism. See further, e.g., Hallencreutz and Westerlund 1996: 4-8.

² This point has been strongly made by, among others, the influential Sudanese Islamist leader Hasan al-Turabi: "Nous ne voulons pas répéter les formes historiques du passé de l'islam. Je regarde le passé juste pour m'en inspirer, pour y prendre une certaine expérience, non pour y trouver un modèle formel" (Duteil 1992: 121).

³ For instance, Hasan al-Turabi (1987: 3) stresses that the primary institution in Islam

prepared by the creation of what is conceived of as proper Islamic societies. The Islamist orientation is markedly this-worldly, and ideology tends to be more important than theology.

Although the dividing line between Islamism and Sufism need not be sharp, an anti-Sufi stance is often an outstanding characteristic of Islamist groups. In Senegal, for instance, anti-maraboutic publications appeared as early as the late 1920s. The important reformist society Union Culturelle Musulmane was formed there in 1953 by people with a clearly anti-Sufi orientation.⁴ Cheikh Touré, a leading early representative of this association, has written about Sufism as an innovation without support in the Quran or Sunna. He has criticized the "magic" ideas and practices of marabouts and their disciples as well as their habit of praying at tombs of saints.⁵ In Nigeria, the well-known Islamist scholar Abubakar Gumi (d. 1992) relentlessly fought against Sufism. He criticized its subjectivism and stressed that Sufi orders did not exist at the time of Muhammad. In his view, the Prophet did not conceal any part of the revelation during his life-time to be delivered to those who came after him. Further, Gumi condemned charms or amulets as well as the use of drums in mosques.⁶

Even though Sufism has become increasingly questioned by Islamist and other Muslim forces, which in many cases has weakened its position, probably an overwhelming majority of sub-Saharan Muslims are still Sufis. In some countries, such as Senegal and Somalia, the predominant role of Sufism is most conspicuous, whereas in other countries, like Niger, Nigeria and Kenya, its position is clearly weaker. The strength of Sufism in sub-Saharan Africa increased remarkably during the colonial period, partly because of cooperation with colonial regimes. Certainly, there were examples of Sufi resistance to colonialism. Yet Donal Cruise O'Brien concludes that "most Sufi orders came to collaborate willingly, even enthusiastically, with European rulers." He refers to the Qadiriyya of northern Nigeria as the outstanding example, where emirates originating from movements of *jihad* (effort, "holy war") were fully incorporated into the British colonial administration.⁷ The French colonial authorities much preferred "African Islam" to "reformist Islam" because of the former's alleged passivity in the face of colonial

is the *umma* ("congregation", the world-wide Islamic community). States come and go, but Islamic societies have existed for centuries without the structures of a state.

⁴ Coulon 1983: 121ff.

⁵ E.g., Touré 1986a: 12ff.; Touré 1986b: 8ff. For a recent study of Cheikh Touré, based largely on an interview with him, see Loimeier 1994a.

⁶ Umar 1988: 223-8; Loimeier 1993: 147-55. See also Umar 1993.

⁷ Cruise O'Brien 1981a: 162; Cruise O'Brien 1981b: 20ff.

domination.⁸ Some orders, like the Mouridiyya in Senegal, took advantage of the introduction of commercial agricultural production.⁹

In the post-colonial time, cooperation between governments and Sufi orders often continued. Sufi leaders collected tributes from their subjects or disciples and received subsidies from secular rulers. Like colonial regimes, newly independent governments kept a wary eye on reformist or Islamist-oriented groups. Outright rejections of secularism and pan-Islamic ideas were regarded as serious threats to the precarious attempts at nation-building in multi-religious states.¹⁰ Sufi cooperation with secular rulers in colonial and post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa is one of the reasons for the often vehement Islamist attacks against Sufi Muslims. Another reason is the strong influence of the markedly anti-Sufi orientation of Wahhabi Islam.

This renewal type of Islam, which was established in the eighteenth century by Muhammad Ibn al-Wahhab, is a call or mission (*dawa*) for the true implementation of Islam.¹¹ According to Peter Clarke and Ian Linden, "there can be no doubt that for the past two centuries Nigeria, and West Africa, have been remarkably receptive" to such influence.¹² Wahhabi ideas have passed into West Africa largely as a result of the pilgrimage to Mecca and through student contacts with Saudi Arabia. Much literature has been brought back and circulated by West Africans returning from this country. In Nigeria, the introduction of Wahhabi classics, such as the *Kitab al-Tawhid* (the Book about the Oneness of God) by Muhammad Ibn al-Wahhab and a number of Ahmad Ibn

⁸ Brenner 1993b: 66.

⁹ In colonial Tanganyika, Qadiri Muslims benefited from colonial rule and defined themselves above all as independent of the Arab and Swahili Muslims of the coastal areas. Cruise O'Brien 1988: 21.

¹⁰ A pan-Islamic orientation is not absent from Sufism either. For instance, it is a characteristic of the reformed Tijaniyya founded by the Senegalese marabout or *shaykh* Ibrahim Niass. By and large, however, Sufi orders are more locally oriented than Islamist groups.

¹¹ The Wahhabi call can be seen as a continuation of the strict Sunni tradition of the Hanbali school of law. In the thinking of Ibn al-Wahhab there was a more vigorous criticism of Sufism than is found generally among Hanbali scholars. The Wahhabi movement, like contemporary Islamist groups, began with a call for changes in society. The exercise of *ijtihad* provides justification for changes that fall within Islamic limits. In the early days the opposition to polytheism (*shirk*) and ignorance (*jahiliyya*) focused on concrete issues like saint worship or veneration and the ignoring of explicit Quranic commands. In the present century these concepts have been expanded and include secular ideologies such as communism. Originally the Age of Ignorance was the period before the time of Muhammad, but the concept of *jahiliyya* has now been broadened to include willfully ignoring the guidance of the Quran and the Sunna. See further, e.g., Voll 1987. For more information about the influence of the Wahhabi movement in Africa, see Moreau 1982: 258ff.

¹² Clarke and Linden 1984: 99.

Taymiyya's works,¹³ became particularly widespread during the 1980s.¹⁴ Mali is another West African country where Muslims have been substantially influenced by Wahhabism.¹⁵ Louis Brenner concludes that much of the appeal of the Wahhabi doctrine lies in its international and universalist conception of an Islam that transcends local limitations and identifies with the wider Muslim world.¹⁶ In Senegal, Al-Fallah (or Harakat al-Fallah, the Salvation Movement), is an example of a recently formed society whose members are inspired by Wahhabi thought.¹⁷ Yet the great strength of Sufi Muslims in this promised land of Sufism has largely mitigated the effects of Wahhabi and other Islamist influences. Likewise, the Wahhabi call has not influenced very many Muslims in East Africa and southern Africa, although its presence is certainly felt there too.¹⁸

Although Islamist groups are now found in virtually all Muslim areas of Africa, their position in sub-Saharan Africa is much weaker than in the more homogeneously Muslim North Africa, where Islam also has deeper historical roots. In northern Nigeria and Sudan, both of which are regions where Islamic or theocratic rule once prevailed, the presence of Islamist groups has been strongly felt too. As a rule, though, such groups are small minorities in sub-Saharan Africa. In the far south, where Islam is the faith of tiny minorities only, Islamist organizations like the South African Qiblah and Muslim Youth Movement may be radical, but their following is extremely limited. Division into various and partly competing organizations is, furthermore, a characteristic of the Islamist movement. Islamist organizations are primarily based in urban areas and they tend to attract followers of a younger

¹³ The works of the Hanbali scholar Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who became well known for his opposition to devotional innovations and popular religious customs not specified in the Quran and Sunna, have exerted a great influence on Wahhabi ideas. Interestingly, Ibn Taymiyya was not only a scholar and jurist but also a Qadiri Sufi, although he condemned as heretical many of the Sufi practices of his day. Among other things, he was not prepared to accept travels to the tombs of prophets and saints, which many believed were places of special holiness. The core of his teaching was the oneness of God (*tawhid*), and he rejected the Sufi claims that the law and the mystical path were somehow separate. Moreover, he emphasized that *ijtihad* by scholars was possible, if subject to clear rules. A scholar who uses *ijtihad* is not required to accept the earlier conclusions of the great mediaeval scholars. For a brief introduction to Ibn Taymiyya see, e.g., Makdisi 1987.

¹⁴ Umar 1993: 175.

¹⁵ Brenner 1993b: 60ff.

¹⁶ Ibid.: 61.

¹⁷ Evers Rosander and Westerlund 1994: 96ff.

¹⁸ For instance, when the birthday of Muhammad was celebrated in the Tanzanian town of Tabora in 1982, a local group influenced by Wahhabi doctrines was so disruptive that strong security had to be implemented. Sicard 1991: 8.

rather than an older generation. The prevalence of students and professional middle-class people with a modern education is well documented, although some societies like the Nigerian Izala may recruit members from all social strata.¹⁹ In certain countries, such as Algeria and Egypt, Islamist leaders have been able to attract the support of a large following among poorer strata of the population.

The rise of Islamism is manifested, for instance, in the enormous growth of mosque-building. It should be remarked that mosques are often centres which provide not only special places for prayer and sermons but also educational, health and recreational services. For spreading their ideas, Islamist groups make good use of modern means like cassettes, magazines and radio programmes. Sometimes open-air meetings, a form partly inspired by Christian revivalist churches, are organized and often attract huge crowds of people. Another manifestation of the Islamist rise are the new Islamic schools, clinics, pharmacies, banks, insurance companies and other modern social and economic amenities. Many universities, such as those in Zaria, Kano, Sokoto and other Nigerian towns, have been much affected by the resurgence of Islam. For instance, there has been a conspicuous increase in terms of research into Islamic themes by scholars as well as by students. In northern Nigeria the caliphate of Usman dan Fodio has been the subject of a great amount of, mainly unpublished, scholarly work. When the University of Sokoto was renamed Usman dan Fodio University, it was interpreted by Islamists as a symbolic victory for the Islamic revival.²⁰

Factors of discontent

Many preliminary analyses of the rise of the Islamist movement have focussed primarily or exclusively on the hard and deteriorating economic and political conditions. Thus it has largely been interpreted as a movement of discontent, the adherents of which have reacted against failures of secular regimes, particularly those that have championed the cause of idealistic socialism, be it Islamic in North Africa or African in the sub-Saharan part of the continent. The problems of economic, political and psycho-social discontent have been highlighted, for example, in a study by Susan Waltz on the Islamist appeal in Tunisia. It appears, however, that many of the points she raises are applicable to other parts of Africa – as well as the wider world of Islam – too.

¹⁹ Umar 1993: 168. The full name of the Izala is Jamaat Izalat al-Bida wa Iqamat al-Sunna, "The Society for the Rejection of Innovation and for the Retention of the Sunna".

²⁰ For a valuable overview and introduction to the study of Islamism in Africa, which also includes a comprehensive bibliography, see Hodgkin 1990.

Waltz argues that the economic explanation appears to account quite well for the Islamist attraction for the dispossessed, particularly those who by the standards of an earlier generation would easily have been able to climb the ladder of success. How well, though, does it explain the attraction of students and practitioners of science and technology? It is well known that many Islamists belong to these categories of people. If it were only, or even primarily, economic fears or discontent that attract young people to groups like the Tunisian *Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique* – later renamed *Hizb Nahda* (the Renaissance Party), then one would expect other categories of students than those in the sciences to form the core of such groups. According to Waltz, the economic thesis fares no better in explaining the Islamist appeal for women. One of the most notable characteristics of the Islamist movement in Tunisia, she remarks, is that it is especially attractive to women in the sense that they are highly visible and engaged there in a way that they have not been engaged in other political groups. In Tunisia, as elsewhere, Islamist groups generally play down the economic importance of women, arguing that they belong in the home, raising children and safeguarding the family. Hence it does not seem that personal economic interest is a primary reason for drawing women into the Islamist movement.²¹

The political thesis points to another form of deprivation. When access to political fora is seriously curtailed, the mosque becomes an alternative for political expression. Waltz argues, however, that if the growth of the Islamist movement is a function of an increasingly closed political system, an indication of political alienation ought to be disproportionately manifest among those attracted to this movement. Rather, the Islamist movement in Tunisia, as well as in many other countries, is built on a class of politically favoured young technicians. Like the economic thesis, moreover, the political one does not seem to account well for the Islamist appeal to women since, at least indirectly, Tunisian Islamists tend to advocate a restriction of women's political life.²²

Yet it should be remarked that not all Islamists are very keen on confining women to the home. Hasan al-Turabi, among others, holds that women should not be excluded from public life. Through the Islamist movement, he claims, the women of Sudan are liberated.²³ Women played a considerable role in public life during the life of the Prophet, and contributed to the election of the third caliph. Only afterwards were women denied their rightful place in public life, but this was history departing from the ideal, just like the development of classes

²¹ Waltz 1986: 661ff.

²² *Ibid.*: 663ff.

²³ Duteil 1992: 119ff.

based on property, knowledge (*ilm*), or other status. In principle, all believers, rich and poor, noble or humble, learned or ignorant, men or women, are equal before God, and they are His viceregents on earth and the holders of His trust.²⁴ Within the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Sudan, men and women may mix freely. Whereas in the 1950s Sudanese Muslim Brothers opposed giving the vote to women, in the 1980s Muslim Sisters like Suad al-Fatih became vocal members of parliament. Many women may in fact live a freer life than they did before joining an Islamist group.²⁵

With regard to sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, it is important to compare the ideals and roles of women in Islamist circles not only to the gender policies of Western-influenced secular élites, such as those in Tunisia, but also the female circumstances in Sufi contexts. It must not be overlooked that the programmes and legislation of ruling élites in practice tend to concern small urban groups rather than the majority of people. In comparison to the real situation for women, especially in the countryside, Islamist feminine ideals may well be interpreted by Muslim women as a step in the right direction. For instance, many women have been attracted to the Nigerian Islamist movement Yan Izala because they view its ideas and practices as a move forward in comparison to the situation within the Sufi orders.²⁶ In Senegal, reformist or Islamist leaders like Cheikh Touré have criticized what they regard as a degradation of women in Sufi orders. Touré objects, for example, to leading marabouts' disrespect for the Islamic limit of four wives and their religious legitimation of polygyny, based on the idea that the more wives they marry, the more descendants will receive their inheritable *baraka* ("blessing", special spiritual power). He stresses instead the equality of men and women, championing the ideal of monogamy. Piety, he concludes, is more important than gender and "secular" achievements.²⁷

In her discussion based on the Tunisian case, Susan Waltz argues that an explanation for the Islamist appeal that puts primary emphasis on psycho-social alienation is more compelling than the economic and political theses. The psycho-social thesis, she maintains, fares better than the latter alternatives as an explanation both for the primary significance of science and technology students and for the great interest shown by women. Students in the scientific fields receive the highest doses of Western culture. In these fields the West is most unrelievedly held up as a model to be emulated.²⁸ According to Waltz, the dominant

²⁴ Al-Turabi 1987: 4.

²⁵ Hodgkin 1990: 66.

²⁶ On this issue, see further Roman Loimeier's chapter in this book.

²⁷ Touré 1981: 9ff.; Touré 1980: 12ff.; Evers Rosander and Westerlund 1994: 99.

²⁸ It may be remarked, though, that people trained in the sciences are well represented

Western model of modernity undermines with its rationality the existing moral order. Problems of morality, loneliness and psychological dissonance caused by the clash of two worlds are particularly acute for young people of modest backgrounds. Islamism offers an alternative, non-Western vision of a good society, and in turning to Islam, Islamists explicitly downgrade the cultural importance of the West.²⁹ The fully integrated and indigenous world view of Islam and its detailed moral rules may provide a safe haven for those who risk being caught in the snares of their own changing society. Waltz argues that "the appeal of Islamism for many young women, in a world where social and sexual behavior has become unpredictable, is as basic as it can be and easily masks any costs in terms of personal economic or political prosperity."³⁰

In comparison to the ideologies of Islamic and African socialism, which became highly important in many Muslim areas of Africa after the attainment of political independence around 1960, Islamism represents a deepened reaction against and criticism of Western domination. Rashid al-Ghannushi, the Tunisian Islamist leader, says that Islamists there have felt like strangers in their own country. Though educated as Muslims and Arabs, they saw their country "totally moulded in the French cultural identity".³¹ The Egyptian scholar Hasan Hanafi emphasizes that Islam is a source of power that helps Islamists to overcome the inferiority complex caused by Western domination.³² In part, Islamism is an expression of a cultural revival and the search for a strengthened indigenous identity. The threat of cultural disruption from the West and the fear of Western imperialism play their part in sustaining the wave of Islamic revivalism.³³ This is one of the characteristics that Islamist groups share with "fundamentalist" or anti-secularist groups in other religions or cultures that have been exposed to Western domination.³⁴ Sufi Muslims with deep roots in indigenous cultures may feel alienated from Islamists as well as from more Westernized élites. Being Muslims, however, their own ideas and practices may seem to be closer to the views and behaviour of Islamists than to those of more Western- and secular-oriented people. Despite the common anti-Sufi rhetoric, some Islamist leaders, for their part, regard the Sufis as a possible

among American Protestant fundamentalists too. These are certainly not anti-Western but associate the evils of American society with the secular orientation of American policies.

²⁹ Waltz 1986: 665ff.

³⁰ Ibid.: 669.

³¹ Interview 1985: 18.

³² Hanafi 1985: 99.

³³ See further, e.g., Tibi 1980; Clarke and Linden 1994: 93; Mazrui 1988: 516.

³⁴ Cf. Abun-Nasr 1985: 73; Juergensmeyer 1993: 5.

alliance in the struggle for power and Islamic change. In particular, more pragmatic leaders like al-Turabi may see a need to strive for the inclusion of non-Islamist Muslims, and sometimes even Christians, in a common struggle against foreign, non-religious ideologies.³⁵

Economic difficulties, the disintegration of state welfare systems, autocratic political tendencies and the failures of the Western-oriented secular ideologies of ruling élites are obvious reasons for dissatisfaction. Yet Waltz has convincingly argued that these factors of discontent do not provide a satisfactory answer to the question why an increasing number of people have chosen to support an *Islamist* opposition. In the Algerian elections, for instance, there were several non-Islamist political opposition alternatives to the successful Islamic Salvation Front. Unlike the economic and political factors, the psycho-social and cultural aspects contribute to the answering of the question "Why Islamism?" However, the concentration on negative factors of discontent, which characterizes the analysis of Waltz and several other scholars, needs to be supplemented by a consideration of positive or constructive factors – factors of content. Apart from the religious and cultural satisfaction that Islamists may offer, their modern associations and conscious socio-economic efforts have attracted many people. In the following sections the significance of issues of organization and development, particularly in the educational field, will be considered.

Organization

One factor that has contributed substantially to the growth of Islamism is its organizational strength. Through modern organizations Islamists can act, for instance, as lobby groups. Sufism being the main exception, Islam has not traditionally been grouped into religious organizations or denominations. From the very beginning of the history of Islam, religion and politics, or religion and state, were not separate entities. Hence no institutions comparable to Christian churches developed. During the modern period of Western colonialism, however, the idea of separation of religion and state began to have a deep impact on Muslim parts of the world. In colonial and post-colonial times new "religious" organizations started mushrooming in the Muslim world. Several of these new associations challenged the established Sufi organizations or *turuq* (sing. *tariqa*), which were particularly strong outside the Arab world. Moreover, they became an Islamic counterpoise to the activities and conversion attempts of the well-organized Christian mission societies. To some extent, however, they were also influenced by the modern organizational patterns of the latter.

³⁵ Al-Turabi 1982: 11.

Islamist organizations are mainly a phenomenon of the post-colonial period of time, although some societies like the Muslim Brotherhood were formed earlier. The great spread of such organizations started in the 1970s and continued in the '80s and '90s. At this time their actions were directed not only against Sufi Muslim and Christian institutions but also against national Islamic umbrella organizations representing a form of establishment Islam.³⁶ In order to control and elicit support from Muslim as well as Christian leaders and other followers of these religions, the new post-colonial regimes formed or supported the formation of both Muslim and Christian national organizations. Official Islam, and Christianity, could provide a religious legitimation for secular rulers. Among other things, national religious umbrella organizations were supposed to assist or co-operate with governments and to promote inter-religious dialogue and harmony.³⁷

In Nigeria, for instance, governments have formed several organizations such as the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, which was set up by the Obasanjo regime in 1977 under the chairmanship of the Sultan of Sokoto, with a view to creating channels for discussion and dialogue with representatives of the Muslim community but also in the hope that Muslims would listen to and follow "wise" counsel.³⁸ About a decade later, in connection with the controversy over Nigeria's admission as a member state into the international Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Babangida regime established an Advisory Committee of Religious Affairs with both Muslim and Christian members chosen by the president. This organization was called upon to promote consultation and understanding as well as to present resolutions of issues that tended to cause suspicion, mistrust and antagonism.³⁹ In eastern Africa, governments have also supported and strongly influenced national religious organizations such as the Baraza Kuu la Waislam wa Tanzania (the Supreme Council of Muslims in Tanzania), the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, the Association des musulmans au Rwanda and the Muslim Association of Malawi.⁴⁰

³⁶ In a study of "Egypt's Islamic Activism in the 1980s", Saad Eddin Ibrahim uses the term "establishment Islam" when referring to Islamic institutions that have formed "the religious arm of the state" (Ibrahim 1988: 636).

³⁷ In some markedly multi-religious countries like Nigeria and Tanzania unofficial forms of what has been called civil religion have developed. These are based on common elements of Christianity and Islam, in particular, and aim at the attainment or improvement of national integration. On "civil religions" in Nigeria and Tanzania see, e.g., Hackett and Olupona 1991 and Westerlund 1980: 63-76, respectively.

³⁸ Clarke 1988: 534.

³⁹ Westerlund 1992: 88.

⁴⁰ See further, e.g., Westerlund 1980: 103ff.; Kasule 1982: 137; Kiyimba 1990: 101ff.; Constantin 1993: 48ff.; Sicard 1994: 165.

As expected, the official national Islamic organizations have tended to further the interests of those who have held power. Islamist organizations, by contrast, have resisted such established institutions supporting the political status quo.⁴¹ Whereas Sufi Muslims have often been well represented on the boards of official Islamic associations, few if any Islamists have been members of such boards. Rather, they have been more or less vehemently opposed to the attitudes and actions of people supporting such institutions. As a rule, African governments do not accept the formation of political parties on religious grounds. The Front Islamique du Salut in Algeria and the National Islamic Front, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan, have been exceptions. For instance, in 1979 the Senegalese "ayatollah of Kaolack", Ahmad Khalifa Niass, formed a party of God, Hizboulahi. This party was quickly outlawed and Niass himself was arrested.⁴²

It is less difficult for Islamist organizations to become registered as religious organizations, although it may not be easy. In Tanzania, for instance, there are now several associations which are not registered by the authorities. For a long time after the demise of the East African Muslim Welfare Society in 1968, the official and strongly government-supported Baraza Kuu la Waislam wa Tanzania (Bakwata) was the only registered Muslim organization. It was not until the 1980s that new associations began to emerge. In 1982 the Warsha ya Waandishi wa Kiislam (Islamic Writers' Workshop), which started in 1975 as a branch of Bakwata with the purpose of dealing with educational issues and which became increasingly critical of Bakwata's uncritical role, was forced to leave its mother organization. However, at their simple headquarters by the Quba mosque in Dar es Salaam they continued their partly anti-government activities, arranging courses and publishing Islamic literature. Later on, several other anti-Bakwata and Islamist-oriented societies such as Baraza la Uendelezaji Koran Tanzania (the Tanzanian Council for Quran Reading) and the Dar es Salaam University Muslim Trusteeship started.⁴³

The organizational structure of Islamist groups owes much to Western administrative models. The organization of the Izala in Nigeria may be taken as an example. Its national leadership structure consists of a president, two vice presidents, a general secretary with a deputy as well as members of a National Executive Council. The headquarters of the national leadership cadre is in Jos in the Middle Belt. In addition

⁴¹ For an interesting theoretical discussion on "religions of the status quo", "religions of resistance" and "religions of revolution", see Lincoln 1985.

⁴² In East Africa, the Islamic Party of Kenya and the Pemba-based Bismillahi, which has worked for a political separation of Zanzibar from mainland Tanzania and called for a referendum on that issue, have faced problems because of their religious orientation.

⁴³ Lodhi and Westerlund 1994: 148f.; Ludwig 1996: 226ff.

to the national organizational set-up there are also regional branches in most of the Nigerian states. Until his death in 1992, Abubakar Gumi served informally as a kind of national patron. For instance, international Muslim financial aid was channelled through Gumi, who also made good use of his personal contacts with Nigerian heads of state. Roman Loimeier concludes that the Izala differs from the networks of the Sufi orders in that it has a formal organization with a proper constitution.⁴⁴ When the Izala was formally founded in 1978 it attracted many people. At this time political parties were outlawed. The year after, however, many Izala supporters became absorbed in politics.⁴⁵

Although international Islamic connections are very important to Islamist organizations, their organizational strength has been on local and national rather than on international levels. In terms of organized international co-operation Islamists clearly lag behind representatives of politically more established forms of Islam, who have strong organizations like the Muslim World League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). In this respect, however, the recently formed Popular Arab and Muslim Conference, initiated by al-Turabi, may represent an important change.⁴⁶

Development issues

Another important reason for the increased support of the Islamist movement is the great interest in development and socio-economic questions. Islamists are certainly much influenced by Western forms of development. Hasan al-Turabi, among others, argues that Muslims can incorporate any experience whatsoever as long as it is not contrary to their ideals.⁴⁷ Yet their aim is to "Islamize" modernity, that is, to mould the process of socio-economic development in an Islamic form. Due to serious financial and political problems, the state welfare systems of African countries have become increasingly weak. With the failure of development policies and the current disintegration of the state in Africa, non-governmental organizations like Islamist ones have become increasingly important. For a long time the socio-economic activities of Christian mission organizations have contributed to attracting new members to Christian churches, and a considerable amount of research has been focused on their development efforts. Now it is clear that the socio-economic activities of Islamist organizations, likewise, contribute

⁴⁴ Loimeier 1993: 171-6.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 167ff.

⁴⁶ This and some other international organizations are studied in the chapter by John Hunwick in this volume.

⁴⁷ Al-Turabi 1987: 10.

to the growth of these bodies, although much less research has been carried out on the development ideas and efforts of these non-governmental organizations.

It has been argued that, due to the manageable structure of religious and other non-governmental organizations and their nearness to the grass-roots level, these tend to be more effective than the heavy and largely corrupt bureaucracies of governments. Two advantages of the former are that they are often closer to the poor sections of society and that they function economically because of their small size. Other advantages are the use of volunteers and a more decentralized decision-making process.⁴⁸ In Mali, for instance, Wahhabi-inspired local communities and individuals have initiated many successful examples of grass-roots development. Most of these are locally controlled and effectively addressed to popular social needs.⁴⁹ There is now a range of Islamist institutions including mosques, modern schools, clinics, pharmacies and cultural centres. This infrastructure, mostly constructed within the past twenty years, is impressive, especially in a country where parallel public institutions have during recent decades shown increasing signs of inefficiency and collapse.⁵⁰

Concerning Somalia, it has been reported that, while Western-financed development projects have failed, some Islamist development settlements in the countryside, where members have started raising new crops and using new cultivation techniques, have been more successful. Some people have joined these settlements for "religious reasons", or dissatisfaction with the secular world outside; but because of their prosperity they have also attracted people from adjacent areas and, in particular, poor landless families or people who for ecological reasons have become refugees. In the town Luuq near the river Jubba in south-western Somalia, for example, there is an Islamist settlement which has recently been praised in reports because of the relative peace and prosperity the members have succeeded in establishing in the midst of the civil war.⁵¹

In many rural parts of Africa the Sufi fraternities are still the only communities that can provide a form of social security system. Among other things, in the case of illness Sufi *shaykhs* may provide healing with traditional methods. Religious etiologies and treatment form an important part of these methods. A common way of treating patients in Sufi circles is to provide water which in one way or another has

⁴⁸ See further, e.g., Hyden 1983 and 1986.

⁴⁹ Brenner 1993b: 70, 77.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 67.

⁵¹ Helander 1986; Helander 1994: 129.

been mixed with portions of Quranic text. It is believed that by drinking the dissolved words of the Quran the patient may recover. The use of various amulets is another common method of prevention and treatment. In his attempts to rationalize or demystify beliefs in the field of health care, Abubakar Gumi fought hard against such practices.⁵² Among Wahhabi-inspired Muslims in Mali, for instance, the Sufi *shaykh* or marabout is regarded as an ignorant, superstitious and exploitative "charlatan".⁵³ By establishing modern hospitals, clinics and pharmacies, Islamists challenge the more traditional-oriented healing activities of Sufi *shaykhs* and other Muslims. These institutions, moreover, challenge or supplement, and sometimes replace, state institutions which can no longer afford medicine and other equipment.⁵⁴

While Islamists show much interest in socio-economic and political reforms, they are usually not very concerned with eschatological issues.⁵⁵ As indicated in the introductory part of this essay, the aim is to transform society here and now. To some extent Islamist groups may function as a separate society within the wider society of the secular state.⁵⁶ Islamists assist each other not only through the provision of modern social and economic amenities, including Islamic banks and insurance companies, but also on a more personal level by seeking or providing employment for the unemployed, assisting those in distress, arranging marriages and so forth. This kind of everyday assistance can be extremely useful in difficult times, as can be the emphasis by some on the need to adopt a more modest and economical style of living. In a comment on the activities of Islamic activists in Egypt, Hasan Hanafi holds that "their readiness for sacrifice and their zeal make them a model of behaviour in the eyes of the Muslim masses."⁵⁷ Sometimes the Islamist opposition to ostentation and call to lead a modest life conflicts with the more exhibitionist life style of Sufi leaders. Many Mouridiyya marabouts in Senegal, for instance, live in the lap of luxury. It appears that their disciples want them to be wealthy and flourishing, which increases their authority, status and prestige.⁵⁸ In Nigeria, the Izala

⁵² Loimeier 1993: 151.

⁵³ Brenner 1993b: 75.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Hodgkin 1990: 91; Kleiner-Bosaller 1993: 104.

⁵⁵ Millennial and other eschatological expectations tend to be strong primarily among groups with a marginal socio-economic position. For an interesting example, see Al-Karsani's study of messianic and Islamist forms of Islam in Sudan (Al-Karsani 1993).

⁵⁶ Cf. Coulon's discussion about Muslim communities as a *contre-société* or *contre-culture* (Coulon 1983: 52ff., *passim*).

⁵⁷ Hanafi 1985: 102.

⁵⁸ Evers Rosander and Westerlund 1994: 87.

movement condemns, among other things, the elaborate Sufi forms of feasting and the escalation of costs for various festivities.⁵⁹

Knowledge and education

A particularly important aspect of development is the establishment of modern educational facilities. The growth of new Islamist organizations is often connected to the founding of modern Muslim schools,⁶⁰ and the striving to raise the level of knowledge of Muslims is a typical feature of the Islamist movement. The conscious and intensive attempt to modernize Islamic education, which characterizes many Islamist associations, is another important reason for their ability to attract support. In traditional Quran schools, often run by Sufi *shaykhs*, there is little more than religious instruction, which to a large extent consists of memorizing portions from the Quran and learning elementary ritual obligations. Children in these schools may till the soil of the teacher and train to be obedient and respectful. In schools started by Islamists, modern skills are taught in addition to the religious instruction, and there is often a strong emphasis not only on memorizing but also on learning Arabic as a key to independent studies of the Quran and Sunna. Moreover, free Arabic schools have also been established in several countries. In Senegal, for example, the Mouvement de l'Enseignement Arabe has initiated many such schools.⁶¹ The standard of the teaching of and in Arabic is uneven, however, and it is often difficult for people with an Arabic- and Islamic-oriented education to find employment in countries where the official languages are those of the former European colonizers. Nevertheless, the increase of such education is an important change. Knowledge of Arabic is no longer the monopoly of a few leading Sufi *shaykhs* and *ulama* (religious scholars).⁶²

Islamist educational efforts may range from elementary teaching of male and female adults at home and in open places, as practised, for example, in the Sudanese countryside by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, to the establishment of educational institutions on all levels from primary schools to universities.⁶³ Even in eastern Africa, where Muslims

⁵⁹ Ibrahim 1991: 126. On the issue of holy and wealthy men in northern Nigeria, particularly Kano, see Loimeier 1993: 77-91.

⁶⁰ Coulon 1983: 111; Brenner 1993a: 8.

⁶¹ Coulon 1983: 115ff.

⁶² Cf. Cruise O'Brien 1981b: 166.

⁶³ In a report of the executive secretary of the Nigerian Izala to its National Symposium in 1986, it was argued that the great achievement of the organization had been its teaching in modern schools. It was claimed that the Izala had reached the stage whereby in every corner of the country adult classes, primary evening schools as well as schools for married women, had been established (Umar 1993: 167).

as a rule constitute small minorities and Islamist organizations are much weaker than in North and West Africa, there is a substantial demand for the development of Muslim educational facilities; and many new schools, including an Islamic university in Mbali in Uganda, have been established. In Tanzania, for instance, issues of learning are a top priority for new associations like Warsha and the Dar es Salaam University Muslim Trusteeship. As in many other countries, some new Muslim schools have been financially supported by Arab states and organizations. Warsha has initiated the formation of some externally assisted schools in Dar es Salaam and Morogoro, in which religious and secular education are combined.⁶⁴ Mohamed Said, a leading representative of Warsha, admits, however, that the Islamic schools are poorly equipped and complains that the state authorities have discouraged the opening of such schools as well as the assistance from Muslims abroad. In comparison to West Africa, there is a less pronounced emphasis on the need for learning Arabic among Islamists in East Africa. Here the "indigenous Muslim" language Swahili has a continuously strong position.

Intellectuals who have received a modern rather than a traditional Islamic education are a most important group within the Islamist movement. As noted by Elisabeth Hodgkin, local university departments of Arabic and Islamic studies have played a certain role, but Islamist leaders are just as likely to have been educated outside such departments.⁶⁵ Departments of Arabic and Islamic studies are of particular importance in universities of northern Nigeria. Christian Coulon speaks about the *nouveaux ulama* educated in this country who form a Muslim élite that competes with alumni with a more secular educational background.⁶⁶ In the Izala, for instance, intellectuals from universities and colleges of northern Nigeria constitute an important leading body.⁶⁷ With the origins of the Islamist movement so deeply connected with universities and student struggles and so many of the Islamist leaders having a university background or still working in universities, it is not surprising that these institutions themselves have been "profoundly affected by the resurgence of Islam".⁶⁸ One effect of the revival in the universities, inspired by internationally renowned Muslim scholars like Ismail al-Faruqi, is the attempt at "Islamization of knowledge".⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Yusuf 1990: 209-15; Sicard 1991: 8; Lodhi and Westerlund 1994: 148f. See also, e.g., Kiyimba 1990: 117; Fuglesang 1994: 56ff. With regard to Rwanda, Kasule (1982: 139ff.) reports that the Ecole Islamique de Nyamirambo "has played a notable role in the Islamic awakening."

⁶⁵ Hodgkin 1990: 93.

⁶⁶ Coulon 1987.

⁶⁷ Loimeier 1993: 174. Cf. Ibrahim 1991: 121.

⁶⁸ Hodgkin 1990: 95.

⁶⁹ Coulon 1987: 36; Hodgkin 1990: 94ff., 98ff.

In the light of the current situation, al-Turabi interestingly widens the meaning of the term *ulama* (religious scholars). According to him, an *alim* can be anybody “who knows anything well enough to relate it to Allah.” Since all knowledge is divine, chemists, engineers, economists and jurists are all *ulama*. The role of the *ulama* in this broad sense, whether they are social or natural scientists, public opinion leaders or philosophers, is to enlighten society.⁷⁰ Considering their modern and high education, it is not surprising that many Islamist leaders are very critical of more traditional religious leaders, *ulama* as well as Sufi *shaykhs*, and their conservatism. In the case of the latter it is not only the problem of a narrow conception of *ilm* (knowledge) – and it should not be forgotten that such knowledge may be an important part of the leadership legitimation of Sufi *shaykhs* too – but also the idea of a mystical or esoteric knowledge associated with the special “blessing” (*baraka*) of such leaders. The highest levels of this hierarchical type of knowledge are open only to a limited number of prime Sufi leaders. The Islamist conception of knowledge, by contrast, is exoteric and rationalistic. In principle, all human beings have the same access to knowledge, the final revealed knowledge of the Quran and Sunna as well as that based on principles of logic and observation. In many places this challenges the dominance of hereditary, family holiness which provides a crucial legitimation for the power of Sufi leaders.

The high intellectual level of Islamists is one reason for the rapid increase of, among other things, Islamist publications, cassettes, videos, radio and TV programmes. Islamist publications may range from home-produced cyclostyled sheets to well-produced high-quality magazines, journals and books. Increasingly, even non-Islamic magazines and newspapers have, for example, a Friday Islamic column such as that of the influential Nigerian Islamist leader Ibrahim Sulaiman in the *New Nigerian*. In Senegal, Cheikh Touré initiated radio programmes in Arabic, and in Nigeria, Abubakar Gumi’s access to radio and TV was one of the reasons for the success of his campaigns against the Sufi orders. In areas such as northern Nigeria, where many people’s ability to read is still quite limited, radio programmes and taped cassettes may be of particular importance. In their struggle to recruit new followers, young Nigerian Islamists also use badges, T-shirts and stickers for houses or cars. In East Africa, where Muslims in general have been more reluctant to embrace the technology of modern mass communications than have West African Muslims, the ability of Islamists to use modern means of spreading their message is increasingly striking. For instance, the

⁷⁰ Al-Turabi 1987: 5. It may be remarked that al-Turabi himself took a Ph.D. in law at the Sorbonne.

Tanzanian newspaper *Mizani* and the Iran-supported magazine *Sauti ya Umma* are now important voices of Islamism in this region.⁷¹

Some other factors

In 1990, the editor of *Mizani*, Khalifa Khamis Mohammed, argued in an interview that the Islamic revolution in Iran is an example "which Muslims around the world should cherish to follow."⁷² Saidi Musa, who now appears to be the most prolific Muslim writer in East Africa and to whom religion and politics are the same thing, is also much influenced by the religio-political orientation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁷³ Certain Islamist organizations, such as Qiblah in South Africa and the Muslim Students Society in Nigeria, are clearly inspired by the Iranian example.⁷⁴ Some aspects of the influence of Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia have already been touched upon. Another important source of international inspiration and support is the Muslim Brotherhood and the writings of its leading theorists like Sayyid Qutb and al-Turabi.⁷⁵

The significance of financial support from Iran, Saudi Arabia and other foreign Muslim powers for Islamist groups and activities has often been emphasized by Western observers. Certainly, the oil boom and its financial and psychological consequences has been an important factor. Yet it seems that the significance of petro-dollars from various foreign lenders and donors has frequently been exaggerated. Conversely, the importance of the often hard, disciplined and devoted work of the Islamists themselves, and their technical and scientific know-how as well as involvement in finance-based capital, has been underrated. It should be noted, furthermore, that the influence of foreign powers may also have a divisive and weakening effect on the Islamist movement. In Nigeria, for instance, there have been some tensions between the Iran-supported Muslim Students Society and the more Saudi-oriented Izala. As far as the Islamic Republic of Iran is concerned, its Shia basis is a complicating factor in the overwhelmingly Sunni-dominated continent of Africa. With regard to Saudi Arabia, Islamist attitudes are paradoxical too. While this country is rich and markedly Islamic, its political and social conservatism, large-scale capitalism and its depend-

⁷¹ See further, e.g., Coulon 1983: 130; Hodgkin 1990: 83ff.; Kiyimba 1990: 113; Constantin 1993: 57; Lacunza-Balda 1993: 226-31; Loimeier 1993: 173; Fuglesang 1994: 52.

⁷² Interview 1990: 12.

⁷³ Lacunza-Balda 1993: 236.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., Esack 1988: 485; Westerlund 1992: 80ff.

⁷⁵ Concerning the significance of such influence in Nigeria, for instance, see Clarke and Linden 1984: 100ff.

ence on the United States, the "great Satan", and other Western powers, are causes of strong Islamist criticism.

In terms of economic policies, Islamist views are in some respects similar to those of Islamic or Arab and African socialists, and the call for socio-economic justice is an important aspect of the Islamist movement.⁷⁶ Though inspired by different "holy" texts, there are similarities between the leftists of previous decades and contemporary Islamists. Hence it is hardly surprising that many leftist intellectuals have become Islamists. To the former, the shift from socialism to Islam is frequently interpreted as a "fulfilment" rather than as a "conversion". Islam adds a spiritual and more genuinely indigenous dimension to their striving for social justice, and its language is understood by the masses of Muslims. The comprehensive Islamist view of religion also tallies with most indigenous African traditions. In an Islamist idiom, religion becomes the tool and weapon rather than the opium of the people. If the Islamist movement should be compared to some religious entity in the West, it would be less misleading to compare it to Catholic liberation theology than to Protestant fundamentalism. Islamists and proponents of liberation theology agree that religion should be concerned not only with spiritual but also with political, economic and social issues. Both groups are, moreover, critical of more conservative interpretations of religious establishments and voice in their sermons and publications a demand for social justice or equality as well as international solidarity.

In Africa, as elsewhere, the ongoing internationalization of Islam competes with the global spread of Western cultural values. Although the creation of Islamic societies and states within the boundaries of existing nation states is a primary Islamist goal, there is an important vision of the *umma* not only as a religious but also as a political unity, a "United States of Islam". Now international awareness is stronger in cities and towns than in the countryside, and it is precisely in the urban areas where we find the strongholds of Islamism. Hence the mass drift of people to urban centres tends to favour the spread of this form of Islam and, conversely, to disfavour Sufism. Due to rapid urbanization more and more people come within earshot of Islamist preaching, and uprooted Muslims find new communities that offer assistance, fellowship and protection in a competitive and individualistic environment. In Tanzania, the process of villagization, which started in the mid-1970s, may, similarly, have contributed to the rise of Islamist as well as of Christian revivalist groups.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See, e.g., Westerlund 1982: 46ff.; Hodgkin 1990: 89.

⁷⁷ Ludwig 1996: 231ff. Concerning Senegal and Nigeria see, e.g., Fall 1985: 42; Magassouba 1985: 203f.; Umar 1993: 176ff. See also Cruise O'Brien 1988: 29.

Final remarks

It is not surprising that it has been easier for Islamist groups to gain widespread popular support in the more homogeneously Muslim North Africa than in the multi-religious Africa south of the Sahara, where Islam and, in particular, reformist forms of Islam are less deeply rooted. While the internationalism of Islamism is in one sense a strength, it does pose some problems too, especially in the markedly multi-religious regions. Here secular regimes fear and try to counteract the divisive effects of Islamism as well as of fundamentalist and other Christian revivalist and anti-Muslim groups. The mounting tensions between Muslims and Christians in several parts of the continent are a cause for serious concern. In their opposition to Islamism, secular regimes expect support from Western regimes, which also fear the spread of this often strongly anti-Western form of Islam. In some cases, it appears that secular regimes have consciously contributed to the inflammatory use of the term fundamentalism. In order to gain support from the West and to soften the critique of their own repressive and autocratic measures, such regimes may be tempted to brand political opponents "fundamentalists" and depict them as serious threats to national stability.

One example of the attempts to counteract the rise of Islamist ideals and international co-operation is to substantially limit the number of pilgrims to Mecca.⁷⁸ Officially, there are economic and other non-political reasons for such limitations, but they are no doubt also caused by a fear of the Islamic contagion.⁷⁹ Particularly in areas where the memories of Arab imperialism and slave trade are still fresh in people's memories, the Islamists' Arab contacts and great interest in Arabic may be turned against them. In East Africa, where there was a double colonial domination, the rise of Sufi orders was an indigenous reaction to Arab dominance as well as a response to the Western colonial transformation.⁸⁰ Here African Sufi leaders contributed to the spread of Islam among indigenous peoples and slaves in a way never contemplated by the ruling Arab Muslims of the coastal areas, "whose monopoly over the Arab-Islamic culture was a cornerstone of their position of quasi-hegemony."⁸¹ In general, the Africanization of Islam through Sufism counteracted Arab

⁷⁸ For some other examples see, e.g., Coulon 1983: 133ff. In a discussion on the Senegalese situation, Coulon (*ibid.*: 123, 131) argues that Islamists or reformists are easy to control because of the weak social and financial basis for their authority. Should they become more self-sufficient, they will also become a more serious threat to the secular regime. Since the Senegalese Sufi orders are much more capable of self-sufficiency, their support is a more vital concern than the support of the minority of Islamists.

⁷⁹ For the case of Nigeria, see Westerlund 1992: 88ff.

⁸⁰ Coulon 1987: 112.

⁸¹ Constantin 1988: 68, 72.

dominance and racialism.⁸² Louis Brenner maintains that the impact in Africa of the Islamic revolution in Iran demonstrates the weakness of "Arabism" on this continent. He argues that the appeal of the Iranian development in Africa rests, in part, on the fact that it is not "Arabo-Islamic".⁸³ It is interesting to note, as previously exemplified, that there is a strong Iranian influence on Islamists in Tanzania, where the history of Arab dominance is a particularly thorny problem.

Facing the challenge of Islamism, many Sufi Muslims feel a need for change. In their confrontation with new Islamist organizations, they have suffered from divisions. However, some attempts to create new and unifying organizational patterns have been made. In Nigeria in the 1960s, for example, the prime minister of Northern Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello, formed the Usmaniyya with the purpose of uniting the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya. After his death in 1966, though, the divisions and conflicts between these predominant orders again came to the fore. Fitiyan al-Islam, a Nigerian Sufi youth organization which started in the 1960s, recruited members from more than one order too, although the majority belonged to the Tijaniyya.⁸⁴ In Senegal a defence association was formed within the Tijaniyya to deal with the attacks of the new Muslims.⁸⁵ Challenged by Islamist and other modern schools, Senegalese and other Sufi Muslims have, furthermore, started modern schools of their own. Sometimes, however, they depend on assistance from more Islamist-oriented and well educated teachers.⁸⁶

In Senegal, Mouridiyya leaders at an early stage saw the need to extend their organizational networks in the urban centres, and this activity has expanded in recent years. Thus, in addition to the *daaras* in the countryside, the agricultural institutions where young men work for their marabouts, there are now many urban *dahiras*. The members of these more modern associations are recruited from disciples who have the same profession, live in the same neighbourhood or have something else in common, and they elect presidents who communicate with the marabouts.⁸⁷ In the new organizations, as in the older *daaras*, religious and economic interests are closely intertwined. The economic diversification strengthens the political position of the Mouridiyya *shaykhs*, and they have increasingly stressed their independence of the state

⁸² Cruise O'Brien 1988: 8ff.

⁸³ Brenner 1993a: 15.

⁸⁴ Quadri 1984: 27.

⁸⁵ Coulon 1983: 125.

⁸⁶ Ibid.: 140; Evers Rosander and Westerlund 1994: 97ff. Other Sufi orders expand their activities in the urban areas too (Fall 1985: 43).

⁸⁷ Loimeier 1994b; Evers Rosander and Westerlund 1994: 92ff.

bureaucracy.⁸⁸ Hence it becomes more difficult for Islamists to accuse them of guilt by association with the ruling élite.⁸⁹

In discussions of possible reasons for the rise of Islamism, it is important to focus not only on how Islamists have related to urban-based administrative élites and their policies of change but also on their attitudes to the masses of people who represent Sufism. With such a wider perspective, Islamism more clearly stands out as a modernizing rather than a conservative force. The main argument of this essay is that, in addition to the study of this form of Islam as a phenomenon of reaction to economic and political problems, the significance of the modern Islamist organizations and the effects of their active engagement in terms of alternative but modern development ventures should be studied in more detail. It is argued that local initiatives and responsibility for the establishment of Islamist clinics, schools and other amenities are more important than the support of foreign Muslim states and organizations. The striving for development is an important aspect of the Islamist call for social justice. In some final remarks it is argued, however, that the Islamists encounter special problems in Africa south of the Sahara. In multi-religious countries, the pan-Islamic orientation of Islamism is strongly counteracted by national leaders who see the separation of religion and state as the only viable policy of religion, and who in some cases may also fear a new Arab dominance. Moreover, by modernizing their own activities and by expanding their presence in urban centres, where the Islamists have their strongholds, Sufi Muslims have in many cases responded effectively to the challenge of Islamism. Despite the continued growth of Islamist groups, Sufism is still the strongest force of Islam in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

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⁸⁸ Coulon 1981: 272; Loimeier 1994b: 106.

⁸⁹ For more information on the renewal of Sufism in Senegal see, e.g., Magassouba 1985: 169ff.

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This interdisciplinary book focuses primarily on Sufism ("African Islam"), Islamism ("Islam in Africa") and, in particular, on the interaction between these different forms of Islam. Previously, much interest has been concentrated on the critical Islamist views of Western or Western-influenced ideas and patterns of life, while the intra-Muslim relationship between Sufis and Islamists has attracted less attention.

Some of the contributions concentrate mainly on Sufism, to which the majority of African Muslims belong; others focus essentially on the increasingly important impact of Islamism; yet others deal more intensively with the encounter between Sufis and Islamists. The regional focus is on areas where Muslims form the majority of the population, mainly in North and West Africa. In some of the essays special attention is paid to gender issues. The book will be a valuable addition to earlier studies of Muslims in Africa.

Conflicts between adherents of locally contextualised forms of Sufi Islam and more universally-oriented reformist Muslims are not new. However intra-Muslim tensions in North and West Africa have increased in recent decades, largely because of the rise of radical Islamist movements in countries such as Egypt, Algeria and the Sudan. Modernising Islamists are critical of 'African Islam' and aim to 'purify' it of pre-Islamic African beliefs and practices. However, there is a revival within Sufism too, and a concomitant tendency among Sufi Muslims to adhere more closely to Islamic law. This intriguing example of intra-Islamic debate is the principal theme addressed in the book.

THE EDITORS *Eva Evers Rosander* is Senior Research Fellow in Social Anthropology at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden. *David Westerlund* is Associate Professor at the Department of Comparative Religion, Stockholm University, and Senior Lecturer in the History of Religions at the Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University.

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