

# *BAYREUTH*

## **Trends, Discourses and Representations in Religions in Africa**



**Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers No. 9**



INSTITUT  
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## Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers

The "Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers" report on ongoing projects, the results of current research and matters related to the focus on African Studies at the University of Bayreuth. There are no specific requirements as to the language of publication and the length of the articles.

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## **Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS)**

Since the year 2007, BIGSAS is part of the competitive 'Excellence Initiative' by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR). The basic aims of BIGSAS are to bring together excellent young African and non-African scholars to work jointly in the field of African Studies and to offer a centre of creative and innovative PhD training and research. On 15<sup>th</sup> June 2012, BIGSAS was one of the successful DGF funded 'Centers of Excellence' which were granted support for the next 5 years. BIGSAS has more than 100 junior fellows from 25 African, American, Asian and European countries. BIGSAS builds on this experience and offers a multi- and interdisciplinary research environment based upon three clearly defined general Research Areas which are:

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The Research Areas allow for challenging theoretical studies sensitive to emerging basic problems; they also take into account practical questions and problems of the African continent. Thus, the BIGSAS Research Areas encompass basic, strategic and applied research. BIGSAS also contributes to the creation of an African universities' network. It brings together African and European networks and fosters partnership not only between the University of Bayreuth and universities in Africa but also between the universities in Africa themselves. Six African Partner Universities, namely the University of Abomey-Calavi, Cotonou (Benin), Moi-University, Eldoret (Kenya), Université Mohammed V-Agdal, Rabat (Morocco), Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo (Mozambique), the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban (South Africa), and Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia) cooperate closely with BIGSAS in recruitment, selection, training and mentoring of doctoral students. Other partners

are the Universities of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies, AEGIS.

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Over the past 20 years Bayreuth has amassed considerable experience in co-ordinated research programmes, integrating various disciplines into a stimulating research in the field of African Studies. The Institute of African Studies (IAS) promotes 63 researchers and coordinates African studies at the University of Bayreuth in 12 subject groups distributed over four of the six faculties of the university.

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## **BIGSAS*works!***

BIGSAS*works!* aims at offering Junior Fellows at the Graduate School of African Studies a platform for publishing research-related articles. This new online-journal provides an excellent platform for representing and promoting the idea of BIGSAS. It opens a space for showcasing ongoing research, creating transparency of the work carried out by Junior Fellows and providing a space for trying out articles and working jointly on them towards further publication. Each issue focuses on a certain thematic field or theoretical concept and Junior Fellows from any discipline are invited to submit papers, enabling common interests beyond the predetermined BIGSAS research areas to flourish. At the same time BIGSAS*works!* offers its work group participants deeper insights into and practical experience of what it means to be an editor. Last but not least BIGSAS*works!* makes BIGSAS and its research(ers), visible before their theses are published.

Bayreuth, August 2012

Meron Zeleke, Halkano Abdi Wario

## Editors of this volume

Meron Zeleke is a Social Anthropologist who completed her PhD study in BIGSAS in June 2012. The title of her dissertation is 'Faith at the Crossroads: Religious Syncretism and Dispute Settlement in Northern Ethiopia'. She obtained her MA degree in Social Anthropology from Addis Ababa University and BA degree in history from the same university. Her areas of expertise are Gender, Traditional Institutions of conflict resolution, Religion and peace. Meron has worked for three years as coordinator of the work group of Religion in Contemporary Africa in BIGSAS together with Halkano Abdi and have co-organized two international workshops on Religion in Africa.

Halkano Abdi Wario is in the field of Islamic Studies and finished his studies in April 2012. His research project was titled 'Networking the Nomads: A Study of Tablīghī Jamā'at among the Borana of Northern Kenya'. He did Bachelor and MPhil degrees at Moi University in Kenya. His research interests include transnational Islamic movements, religion and spatiality, religious reformism among pastoralist communities of the Horn of Africa, Muslim personal law courts and religion and media. Halkano has also been a co-coordinator of the work group of Religion in Contemporary Africa.

## Foreword by Professor Ulrich Berner

### Prof. Dr. Ulrich Berner

The first issue on religion in this journal deserves special attention and appreciation. It comprises contributions from BIGSAS students and alumni, representing different disciplines: Anthropology, Islamic Studies, Religious Studies, Literature, and Economics. This collection of articles mirrors the interdisciplinary composition of the BIGSAS religion-workgroup, and such an interdisciplinary workgroup is a very conducive, indeed ideal context for doing Religious Studies. As an academic discipline, Religious Studies (or History of Religions which would still be preferable as an equivalent for Religionswissenschaft) should be done not in isolation but in collaboration, since its object – religion – is not an entity of its own alongside literature, music, and so on, but an aspect of human activities crossing the boundaries of these various sections of culture. Therefore, the discipline of Religious Studies has to be contextualized in the framework of cultural studies.

In the past, Religious Studies has often dealt with its object in such a way as isolating it from its historical context, in order to focus on and take care of the specific “religious” character of the phenomena. In more recent times, Religious studies scholars, as, for instance, Bruce Lincoln, have rightly criticized this “decontextualizing” approach to the study of religion. Taking into consideration the full context of religious phenomena, means, according to this new critical approach, focussing on conflicts and taking into account causes for conflict that lie outside the religious field. This requirement for Religious Studies, the contextualization of religious phenomena, is perfectly met by the collection of articles in this issue of the BIGSAS works online journal.

The focus on conflict, however, must not lead to neglecting or even ignoring cases of peaceful coexistence or even cooperation among adherents of different religious traditions, as it is described in the first

contribution, based on fieldwork in Ethiopia. Thus the collection of articles clearly shows the ambivalence of religion as having the potential for intensifying conflict as well as strengthening peace or, more precisely said: the divergent interpretations and appropriations of a given religious tradition by its adherents.

The interdisciplinary composition of the religion-workgroup in BIGSAS, corresponds well to the study and research program of the department of Religious Studies (Lehrstuhl für Religionswissenschaft I) at the University of Bayreuth, based on collaboration of experts in different fields of Religious Studies: History (Ulrich Berner), Anthropology with a focus on Ritual Studies (Magnus Echtler) and Sociology with a focus on Media Studies (Asonzeh Ukah). Joint seminars, for instance, on “Bourdieu in Africa”, or on “Witchcraft in Africa and Europe”, have brought together students from a great variety of disciplines. It should be mentioned that a junior fellow of BIGSAS is integrated into a research project on “The Economy of Sacred Space in Durban, South Africa”, covering classical African Initiated Churches (M. Echtler), new African migrant churches (A. Ukah), various Muslim communities (F. Kogelmann), and various Hindu communities (Z. Kopecka).

It is part of the program of this department to invite Religious Studies scholars representing the various strands of this discipline – historical, phenomenological, and sociological approaches to the study of religion. To name but a few colleagues: Prof. James Cox (University of Edinburgh), Prof. Richard Kieckhefer (Northwestern University), and Prof. Bruce Lincoln (University of Chicago) followed the invitation to give lectures and offer private consultation to junior fellows of BIGSAS. Just this intention to present, in a balanced way, the various approaches to the study of religion, is perfectly mirrored in this collection of essays. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Afe Adogame, Senior Lecturer in World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh, who attended several workshops of the BIGSAS religion workgroup, holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the University of Bayreuth.

## Ulrich Berner

Chair: Religious Studies (Lehrstuhl Religionswissenschaft I), Faculty of Cultural Studies (Kulturwissenschaftliche Fakultät), University of Bayreuth

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## Introduction

### Meron Zeleke Eresso and Halkano Abdi Wario

Religion in Africa has for long been a woven cultural fabric of life, a great moving force that guided people's behavior, interaction and action since time immemorial. A decade after the United States experience of the 9/11, the unfortunate event has set the landmark for a geopolitics in contemporary Africa that securitizes religious movements and that identify them with the so-called global war on terror, a phenomenon within which most African nations play a significant regional role. The current wave of developments related to religion in the continent became fossilized through religious manipulation and politicization in the post-colonial era

One of the most dramatic news event in recent past was destruction of some century old Sufi shrines and tombs in Timbuktu by *Ansar Dine*, an insurgent militant group that agitate for establishment of strict Islamic law in the restive region of northern Mali that aspire to form an independent Tuareg majority state. The group views the UNESCO cultural heritage sites as idolatry and sacrilege to the true faith as based on their interpretation of the fundamental of faith. Similarly a ragtag militant group called *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) popularly known as *Boko Haram* has waged attacks against the Nigerian state institutions and a wide range of Muslim and non-Muslim targets in order to achieve its ultimate goals that ranged from avoidance of western education, separation from and annihilation of non-members, to institution of 'proper' Islamic law in northern Nigerian Muslim majority states. Similar small scale protests have also been reported in other Sub-Saharan countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia. The last two years have also witnessed emergence of popular protests fueled by long standing political disenchantment dubbed the Arab Spring that led to the fall of northern Africa's long serving leaders from Mouammar

Gadhafi to Hosni Mubarak. All these events though appearing disconnected often depict entanglement of religious and socio-political discourses in everyday struggles and the embedded nature of religious faith as fundamental for mobilization of groups, formation of identities, agitation for recognition and negotiation for state resources and opportunities.

In everyday circumstances, the evangelical pastors or popular *imams* on a popular religious broadcast in Africa yield immense power and influence over their constituencies, as do political leaders. From state governments' involvement in global war against terror to mundane issues such as drawing up national constitutions, religious groups and individuals constitute pivotal stakeholders in everyday life in Africa. The question then moves from the motivation behind such resilience to how such groups pervasively imprint their influence in society. To better understand the impact of religious groups and ideas, we need to move beyond the search for the reasons behind the resurgence of religion and examine the manifestation of interconnected phenomena that intricately display increased presence of religion in daily life.

Therefore three thematic concepts have been identified, i.e., religious trends, cultural discourses and representation, in order to capture some of the most contemporary issues of concern to Muslim, Christian and indigenous religious communities in Africa. The call for abstracts and papers for this issue of BIGSAS *Works!* hence targeted current doctoral researches from a wide range of disciplines and successfully integrated a cross-disciplinary approach to appreciate the complexity of faith matters in the continent, Africa, which is a focal point of the graduate school, BIGSAS.

The issue is a culmination of workshops, informal discussions, guest lectures and seminar presentations organized by a BIGSAS work-group, Religion in Contemporary Africa (RiCA), initiated by the editors of this issue. The work-group brings together junior fellows in BIGSAS interested in the theme of religion as part of their research concerns. As can be seen in the profiles of the authors, the authors' thematic interest cuts across such diverse religious denominations as Christianity, Islam and African traditional religions within a multidisciplinary environment that includes anthropology, sociology, religious studies, geography, and media studies. Apart from serving

as a platform for junior fellows to exchange field experiences and their preliminary understanding of research findings, the work-group also availed forum for interactions with invited guests and senior fellows. In June-July 2011, a lecture series titled 'Missionization, Revivalism and Creation of Transnational Communities' brought together invited guest scholars, senior and junior fellows and other interested students to discuss topics such as transnationalization of African Christianity in diasporic communities, changing gender roles in transnational Islamic movements, rapid rise and challenges of Islamic banking sector in East Africa, media and missionization, and emerging issues in informal dispute settlement in Sufi communities in the north of Africa. In June 2012, the work-group brought together senior researchers and junior fellows in a oneday workshop titled 'Dynamics of Religions Reform Movements in Africa'. The forum gave junior scholars an opportunity to share their preliminary findings and benefit from discussions and criticism from the work-group attendees/participants.

The first issue of BIGSAS Works titled "Women's Life World 'in-between' " raised, through insightful articles, critical gender questions concerning women in Africa. How, for example, do African women perceive themselves since their understanding of gender roles differs from that of Western feminism? How and to what extent do African women change their life worlds when they feel disadvantaged or discontented? To what extent are African women expanding their involvement in the social, political or economic realm? Does this change result in a re-definition of gender roles? How do women in Africa deal with gendered hierarchies and authority? Are there conflicts or 'in-betweens' among 'traditional roles' and the behaviour of women? What do we learn from the empirical data and experiences gained within our various research projects? 'In-between-ness' is hence seen as referring to a situation when the life worlds of women transform, resulting from social, political, economic or environmental changes or uncertainties. In such a situation women negotiate between conflicting or contradictory assumed norms, roles, social practices or orders. Opportunities for women may change, expand or become limited (BIGSAS Works, 1).

The articles in the second issue though dealing with different religious traditions and from varying disciplinary backgrounds are closely interconnected. As mentioned earlier, the three main themes,

namely religious trends, cultural discourses and representation, are more all less represented in all the papers.. The papers 'Stocktacking in a Transnational Islamic Movement: Accounting for Growth of Tablīghī Jamā'at in Kenya' by Halkano Abdi Wario; 'The Fragmented Entity: Conflict and the Emerging Faces of Jos' by Timothy O. Baiyewu; and 'Politics of Islamic Banking: A Hindrance on the National Unity of Sudan?' by Ahmed Elhassab Omer, concern localization of transnational Islamic movements, embeddedness of religious and ethnic conflicts, and recent developments in Islamic economics, respectively, and fall under the theme of religious trends. Meron Zeleke's article titled 'Unity in Diversity: Local Accounts on Pilgrimage and Religious Boundary Crossing at Islamic Sufi Shrines in north-central Ethiopia' and Serawit Bekele's paper 'Traditional Religious Practices in Axum Town, a Sacred Christian Center: Ethiopia' expound on the theme of cultural discourses by exploring the multiplicity of religious practices that compete, complement and contrast as religious groups and individuals appropriate different traditions to renew their faith. These articles also demonstrate how issues of representation come to the forefront in matters pertaining to debates of religious orthodoxy, hence interlinking two of the three central themes of this issue (representation and cultural discourses). Under the theme of representation, the paper, 'Moulding and Shaping Space: Editorial Cartoons, Terrorism and Islamic Space in Kenya', by Dan Omanga, insightfully analyses how editorial cartoons in Kenyan newspapers depict the terrorism and various actors engaged in and targeted by the global 'war on terror' while Magdaline Wafula's 'Faith versus Reason: The Place of Religion in the Socialization Process as Depicted in Two Kiswahili Novels: Kufa Kuzikana & Unaitwa Nani?' expounds the portrayal of religious beliefs, behaviours and socialization in two Kiswahili novels.

As a way of linking to the first issue of BIGSAS works on gender, the themes raised in some of the articles in this issue touch on gender related themes. The paper Unity in Diversity by Meron Zeleke shows how gender comes to the forefront in the discursive gendering strategy of the Sufis' counter-narrative. Halkano Abdi's work on the Tablīghī Jamā'at in its discussion of the profile of the members shows the different duties assigned along gender lines. Serawit Bekele's work on the traditional beliefs and rituals in Axum shows how some religious congregations are defined along gender lines.

The discussions of the respective contributions included in this volume raise a variety of issues that are ripe for further investigation. As the discussions suggest, the dynamic elements related to religion in contemporary Africa are an intriguing development that should be explored in further research.

Editors

Meron Zeleke Eresso and Halkano Abdi Wario

# Moulding and Shaping Space: Editorial Cartoons, Terrorism and Islamic Space in Kenya

**Duncan Omanga**

**Abstract:**

Following the terror attacks in Nairobi on 7th August 1998, the 9/11 Attacks in New York and the Kikambala hotel bombings in November 2002, editorial cartoons in the Kenyan press have come under close scrutiny for their ability to capture the dominant discourses on 'the war on terror.' As expected, Islam, already seeking to assert itself across the country, has found itself at the core of a (spatial) discourse on terrorism. Using Lefebvre's concept of the production of space (complemented by elements of semiotics) this paper interrogates the relationship between (social) space in Kenya on one hand and Islam, the media and terrorism on the other.

**Key Words:** Islam, Space, Kenya, Editorial Cartoons

## Introduction

On 7<sup>th</sup> August 1998, terrorism made its entry into Kenya.<sup>1</sup> Two men allegedly acting on behalf of terror master mind Osama bin Laden packed a 2000 pound bomb behind a truck, following an all night assembling of the bomb at a posh Nairobi estate. The consignment was to be driven to the basement of the United States embassy, then located at the centre of Nairobi and detonated. After driving through the treacherous Nairobi traffic, the two men were forced to stop at the embassies gate for routine security checks. Claiming they had an important appointment with embassy officials, the two got into a

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<sup>1</sup> As I will show later, this was not the first terror incident, but perhaps the most conspicuous. This study defines 'terrorism' as an ideologically inspired form of acquiring or seeking to change or affect policy and political space through violence.

fierce altercation with the security officials.<sup>2</sup> Panicking, and his patience wearing thin, one of the terrorists who had already disembarked from the truck pulled out a pistol and shouting allahu akbar (Arabic for God is great), fired shots at the security man before hurling a hand grenade inside the basement. His equally agitated colleague hurriedly stepped on the gas, ramming through the gates and detonating the massive bomb just several meters from the intended spot. The neighbouring Ufundi Cooperative, an eight storied building was reduced to a pile of rubble. The US embassy itself was badly damaged and later demolished. One of the terrorists survived the suicide mission and was later arrested. The men, of Arabic descent and “purporting to be acting on God’s behalf” were all Muslims. For the first time, Kenyans came face to face with what has become known as international terrorism.

Although not the first terror attack in Kenya, and also not the last, the attack on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August was the most horrific in the country’s history. Much earlier, in the late 70s, Palestinians took hostage a jetliner carrying mainly Israeli passengers and demanded the release of Palestinian prisoners. Having already found favour with the then Ugandan dictator Idi Amin Dada, the hostage takers landed the plane in Entebbe, Uganda. Shortly after, with the logistical help of the Kenyan government, Israeli commandos staged a covert raid and rescued all hostages. This act of perceived complicity between the Kenyan and the Israeli government inspired a terror attack in the heart of Nairobi, this time targeting the Israeli owned Norfolk Hotel a few years later. About sixteen people lost their lives in the first ‘international terror’ attack on Kenyan soil.

In 2002, as President Moi’s term was coming to an end and the country deeply immersed in the presidential campaign, terrorism asserted its presence in the region again. In coordinated attacks, two men drove a truck loaded with explosives into the reception area of Paradise Hotel; a popular Israeli owned hotel, while a second pair

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<sup>2</sup> Author Samuel Katz (2002) records how guard Benson Okuku Bwaku engaged in an altercation with the truck driver, Azzam and his colleague Mohamed Daoud Al-Owhali shortly before the blast. Al Owhali survived what was supposed to be a suicide mission. He was arrested when he sought treatment for injuries sustained from falling debris. Okuku survived too, and still works as a security guard. His version of the events that day is recorded at the bomb blast Mausoleum in Nairobi.

with shoulder guided missiles, attempted to down an Israeli jetliner taking off from Mombasa International Airport and carrying over 250 passengers. While the later attack missed the intended target by a whisker, the former claimed about 14 lives and injured several more. Again, terrorists espousing Islamic inspiration claimed responsibility.<sup>3</sup> Not surprising, when terrorists attacked New York on 11<sup>th</sup> September 200, those suspected to have masterminded the attacks were linked to the Nairobi attacks. Shortly after, Kenya with the help from the U.S. government, stepped up its own local efforts in the “war against terror”, a government policy that included measures ranging from legislative, logistical and political support for the fight against international terrorism.

Shortly after, Islam became the inevitable focus of news stories, editorials and even editorial cartoons both locally and internationally. Years earlier, between the 10th and the 9th century, Islamic traders from the Persian Gulf settled along the coast and intermarried with the local Bantu people, resulting in the Swahili people. Most of them converted to Islam. Swahili, structurally a Bantu Language with large borrowings from Arabic, was born; it is currently the most widely spoken language in East and Central Africa. Muslim traders introduced Islam to the western region between 1870 and 1885<sup>4</sup>. The chief Mumia of Nabongo accorded the Swahili traders a warm welcome. During an inter-tribal war, the Muslims assisted Chief Mumia to overcome his enemies. In return, one Idd day, Chief Mumia, his family and officials of his court converted to Islam. Henceforth, Islam spread to the surrounding areas of Kakamega, Kisumu, Kisii and Bungoma<sup>5</sup>. Today, Islam is the faith of approximately ten percent of Kenyans<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> This attack was allegedly carried out by Al Qaeda operatives who had recruited local Kenyan men for the mission. However, the little known Army of Palestine, based in Lebanon claimed responsibility saying the attack was to accentuate ‘the voice of the refugee’. The attack was meant to coincide with the 1947 November 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the partitioning of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state.

<sup>4</sup> For details See Kim, Caleb Chul-soo (2004): *Islam among the Swahili in East Africa*. Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> See Mwakimako, Hassan (2007): *Mosques in Kenya*. Berlin: Schwarz. Oded, Arye (2000): *Islam and politics in Kenya*. Boulder [u.a.: Rienner.

<sup>6</sup> See 2009 census report  
at <http://www.knbs.or.ke/Census%20Results/KNBS%20Brochure.pdf>

Islam, in its symbols and presence is now almost ubiquitous in both public and social spaces. Islamic schools dot the country especially at the coast and the northern part of the country. A vibrant media comprised of several FM stations such as Iqra FM, Radio Rahma, and Frontier FM as well as several print media now narrowcast to Muslim faithful in Kenya. Besides, plenty of Islamic banking institutions and charities have opened shop in Nairobi and Mombasa targeting this growing niche. The Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), an Islamic organization meant to safeguard the interests of Muslims at a national level, forms the link between the faith and the government of Kenya. It is comprised of mostly professionals in its leadership and is perceived to be liberal and genial, as opposed to the more conservative Council of Imams and the Muslim rights organization, Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI).

Broadly, this article examines how social space in Kenya, with specific reference to aspects of Islam, has changed since the onset of religious terrorism in the country. Using Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, which holds that social space is not static but produced through practice and representational space, the paper reveals how Islam's social space has been produced and redefined through representational moments. In doing so, I specifically focus on editorial cartoons in Kenya's two leading newspapers, The Daily Nation and the East African Standard. With this introductory part, the next part of the paper looks closely at Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, and how this relates to how editorial cartoons represent a particular space. Specifically, comments will be made on the extent to which the space occupied by Islam in Kenya is represented in editorial cartoons in an epoch of terror related attacks linked to Islamist groups.

### **The production of Space**

In *The Production of Space* (originally published in 1974), Lefebvre starts from the observation that 'so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it' (Lefebvre, 1991 p.15). Contrary to that, Lefebvre argues that social space does not exist on its own but is part of everyday social interactions, and works as a network between many spaces, and the subjects who inhabit such spaces. To perceive space on its own would be to ignore

all the complexities which go into the history of producing space. It is a social product which holds historical significance. Furthermore, Lefebvre's theory asserts that, "space is not only produced materially, but also through imagination" where the material world is shaped. The imagination lends itself through among several ways, the deployment of symbols, which in modern times can be seen through the media.

For Lefebvre, space is socially constructed and society constructs space. Lefebvre argues that space in society is produced through a relationship between spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces. Through spatial practice, Lefebvre explains that space is given meaning to by the daily, everyday activities which play out within that space. In other words, the way space is used socially defines how it is perceived and interpreted by those who live in this space.

Representations of space refer to how space is constructed by urban planners and other dominant figures in society. "It is representations of space that act as the material producers – mapping, planning and then constructing material space." (Lefebvre, p.38) Representations of space can also be interpreted as the extension of the state's hegemony into the spatial sphere. The way a space is conceived and labelled by the state reflects power dynamics.

The third moment in which space is produced is through representational spaces or the direct lived space of everyday experience as it is represented through images (or editorial cartoons). This form of representation is done through the imagination and expressed through vernacular language, symbols and images. Eugene McCann (1999) gives the example of editorial cartoons as one form of representational spaces. McCann goes on to argue that images of representational spaces do not have to be accurate. Their accuracy or inaccuracy does not diminish the power of the image as a representational space. In this study, editorial cartoons were seen to have played a dominant role in the production of space in relation to Islam and terrorism in Kenya.

While Lefebvre's theory on space and its production attempts to explain the genesis of socially phenomena spatially, it becomes inadequate on its own to explain the signs and symbols inherent in editorial cartoons, themselves representational spaces. Thus, the study incorporates aspects of semiotic thought in the analysis of how

the editorial cartoons acted as representational spaces of a perceived Islamic social space at a time of increased terrorism.

### **Representational Spaces (Editorial Cartoons), Islam and Terrorism**

One of the key issues that emerged from the terror attacks in Kenya and the United States was the role and effects of mass media coverage on terrorism. Specifically, a series of cartoons appearing in the local dailies appeared to 'elicit' varying passions among readers. At one point, the Muslim community swarmed Nairobi Streets claiming that some of the cartoons had 'tried and condemned' Islam of terrorism. Here, one begins to appreciate the genre of editorial cartoons as a powerful form of communication and the immortalization of key events, just as any effective communication does.

Danjoux, (2005) argues that editorial cartoons are effective in their ability to reduce complex events into an intelligible clash of opposites. By reducing events to a clash of opposites, cartoons provide a unique insight into the actors involved. Also, the satirical nature of cartoons makes them effective conveyers of the group paranoia and revealers of deep-seated suspicion and public mood that underpin conflict. It is therefore not surprising that the fears, aspirations and prejudices of a people are clearly revealed in the content of their Editorial cartoons. Also, cartoons portray a rare ability to sum up the public's impression and opinion of a conflictual situation by a simple reductionism of 'good' or 'evil'. Not only is the visual metaphor and caricature effective in explaining complicated political situations, but are effective in exposing deceit and offering criticism of key actors in events. Editorial cartoons have for a long time questioned and supported policies, legitimized values and illegitimized other oppositional 'values', and more significantly 'naturalized' ideology. As satire, cartoons can also excuse opinions too offensive, socially unacceptable or politically dangerous to be voiced in conventional discourse, or printed in prose. Further, its strength appears to surpass that of the written editorial for the simple reason that it is a picture. In the Kenyan scene, the identity of the actors was represented using cultural stereotypes. As

representational spaces, the editorial cartoons rely heavily on an audience's social and cultural memory and the native understanding of symbols to successfully deliver both humour and meaning. In other words he or she appropriates and recreates spatial practice as understood by his or her audience. Years after the August 8 bombings and the September 11 attacks, editorial cartoons have become effective in the production of space in relation to Islam in Kenya. Chronologically, the following selected editorial cartoons show how the media, through cartoons, acted as representational spaces.



Figure 1: The Standard, Aug. 11, 1998. Reprinted with permission

The Editorial cartoon above was drawn by John Khamirwa<sup>7</sup> and published in The Standard on 11th August 1998. The cartoon attempts to show the forces and actors behind the August attacks in Nairobi. From the onset, the bold inscription “in the name of god...indeed!” gives us hints of a religious motivation to the attacks. The hooded, perhaps skeletal figure, armed with a scythe, draws on the image of the grim reaper, a powerful symbol of evil and death from the middle ages of the religious space in Europe. This symbol was appropriated in Kenya in more forceful form at the high noon of

<sup>7</sup> John Khamirwa is The Standard's editorial cartoonist. The paper is the second best selling newspaper in Kenya. The Daily Nation is the first.

HIVAIDS campaigns. It is possible that part of the huge stigma that accompanied the disease in the 80s and early 90s might have had something to do with this image. Not surprising, the sign later vanished from AIDS campaigns only to emerge as a fitting metaphor of terrorism in the late 90s and early 2000. Behind the grim reaper stands the supposedly masterminds of the attacks, curiously watching the mediated (binoculars) events at a safe distance while hiding behind religiously hinged ideologies. At this point the artist questions the identity of the god behind these motivations, drawing a religious binarism in the interpretation of these events. Given the context in which the editorial cartoon is produced, it is instructive to note that a subtle comparison between Islam and other faiths, most probably Christianity is implied. The syntagm of religion (implied by the words) and terrorism (by the images) are all spatially motivated, and likewise reproduce a cultural and social space that feed particular myths and stereotypes. The next day on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1998, this construction was developed further.

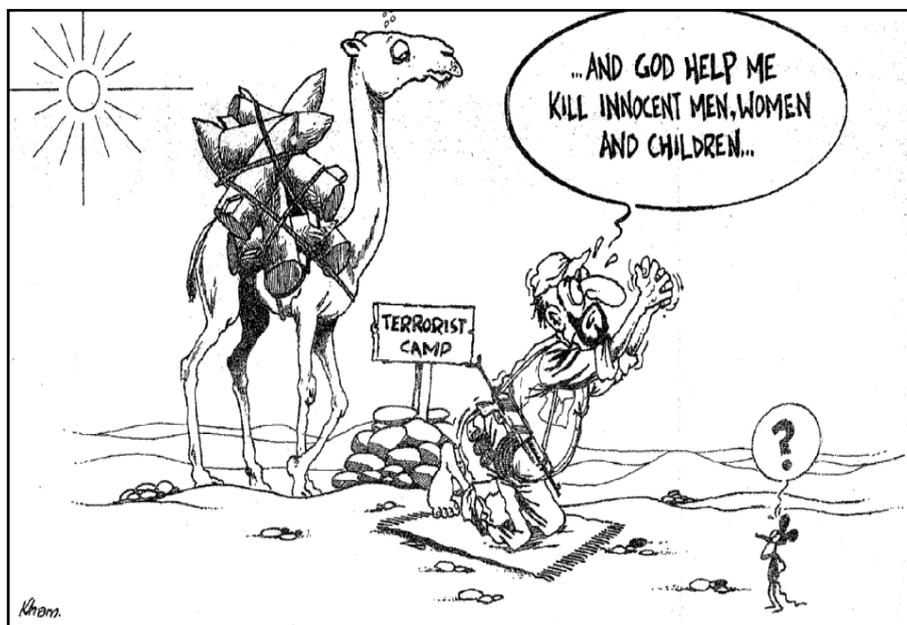


Figure 2: The Standard, Aug., 12, 1998. Reprinted with permission

The cartoon shows a camel laden with explosives under a scorching sun while nonchalantly standing next to a man of "Arabic extraction", who appears deeply engrossed in petitioning "god" for help in killing and maiming (the innocent). The epithet of terror etched in the words terrorist camp and a bemused mouse completes the picture. The

camel is an indexical symbol of the desert life. A man kneeling is indexical of supplication and prayer. However, when all the signs are taken corporately in a single syntagm, a man on a Persian mat praying, a camel beside him, and oriental looks, it becomes obvious to the reader that this is a Muslim engaged in supplication. The geographical space implied correlates strongly with the one currently occupied by Kenyan Muslims in the northern part of the country, and where the mode of transport is predominantly the camel. Although the denotative message appears to ridicule those who kill in God's name, the connotative message is equally clear: Islam is to blame for the senseless (denoted by the idea of killing innocent women and children) attacks in Nairobi. The use of 'women and children' is pivotal in revealing the absurdity and heinousness of this particular terror attack, and also the character of terrorism, directed at innocent and vulnerable non-combatants. While many may have seen a correlation between fundamental Islam and the attacks, few journalists had the audacity to give it the treatment Khamirwa gave. The cartoon not only ridicules terrorists, but also explicitly demarcates the 'other' as the enemy, in this case the Muslim. The cartoon elicited sharp reactions from Muslims in Kenya. Sheikh Ali Shee, the then head of Islamic preachers in Kenya, had this to say about the cartoon: "The media have already tried and found Islam as the cause of the car bomb blast ... without taking into consideration the implications of such insinuations" (Ngunjiri, 1998) The spokesman of the Supreme council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM), added:

Even before the identities of the terrorist and their motives have been determined by local and international investigators now working on the case, there have been concerted efforts by some sections of the mass media to make it look as if Islam was to blame for the unfortunate event (Ngunjiri, 1998).

In the same article cited above, Muslims were reportedly enraged following then President Daniel arap Moi's televised remark shortly after that the perpetrators of the bomb would not have done the deed if they were Christians. The editorial cartoon, it appears, merely captured in a symbolic form the dominant discourses at the time and the unuttered thoughts among sections of Kenyans; by acting as representational space. This discourse was to gain momentum following the attacks in New York on September 11th 2001. The lack

of sufficient closure following the Nairobi Embassy bombings in 1998 in which most Kenyans anticipated the arrest and eventual conviction of Bin Laden, meant the 8/7 narrative played out in the 9/11 understanding of events, especially in the Kenyan media. Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, the media, perhaps picking on dominant international discourse on terrorism, began constructing two binary forces, one evil and one good. The same played out in editorial cartoons appearing at the time. Below, entitled 'The War Today', one of these cartoons provides a fitting invitation for the reader to identify with one of the sides.

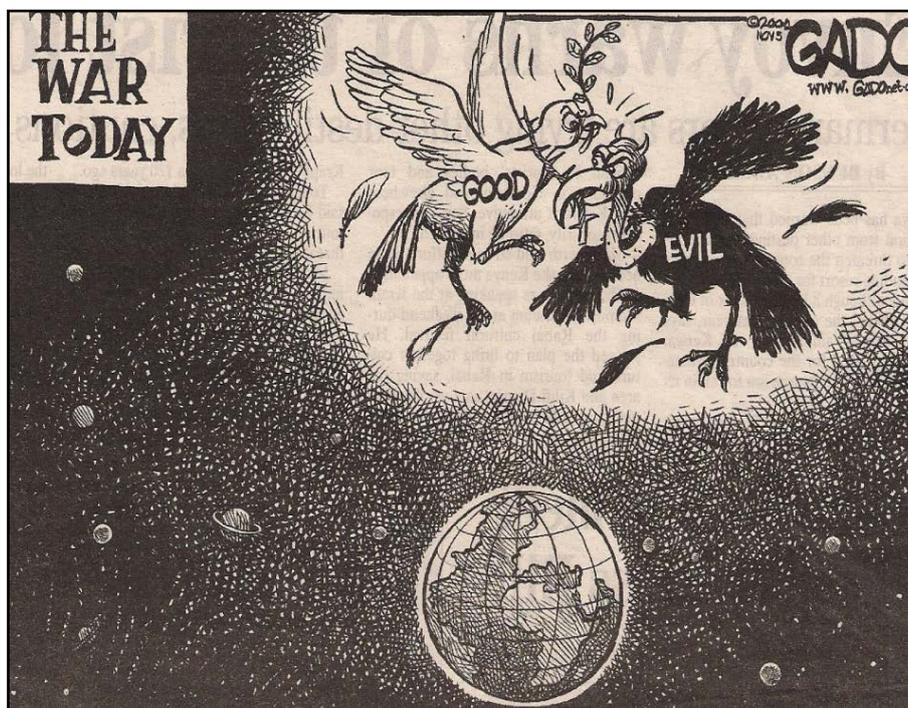


Figure 3: The Daily Nation, Oct. 23, 2001. Reprinted with permission

The piece above drawn by Gado<sup>8</sup> constructs an evaluative theme that privileges a particular interpretation. Symmetrically balanced on the top right corner of the pictorial frame, the two dominant aspects in the cartoon are the feuding birds and the planets cast in outer space. Planet earth is fore grounded, perhaps symbolizing its interlocked fate with the outcome of this cosmic war. A transcendental

<sup>8</sup> Gado, whose real name is Godfrey Mwampekwa is the editorial cartoonist for The Daily Nation, East and Central Africa's leading newspaper in terms of circulation.

interpretation is churned as the stretched heavens witness the fight of good versus evil. While the 9/11 terrorists claimed to be fighting on god's behalf, likewise the fight against terror appears to tap on the inspiration of a transcendental force. The casting of this war in outer space also adds an apocalyptic dimension to it. The cartoon draws on a Judeo Christian interpretation, where the dove symbolizes the essence of godliness and God's presence-the very gentleness of the Holy Spirit and the olive branch on its beak, drawn from an episode in The Biblical epic of the flood, is a now a staid symbol of peace and comeliness.

The vulture, a sign mostly linked with widely held notions of scavenge and opportunism is a common cultural symbol of evil in most of Africa. To a vast majority of Kenyans, the symbolism resonates well as the vulture is feared as an indexical sign of death and bad omen while the dove was appreciated and domesticated as a 'friend of man'. The horned head of the vulture is an obvious exaggeration that accentuates visual monstrosity designed to foreground an oppositional Manichean reduction of 9/11 as a conflict between good and evil. The thorny twig, deliberately hurled at the dove's neck, apportions the blame on the vulture, which is seen as the unprovoked aggressor. It is not lost to the keen observer that black, often a sign symbolising evil is contrasted to white, a sign embodied by the 'good' dove. The resulting syntagm reveals a binarism paired along oppositional structural categories of both evil and good (a mostly religious interpretation) or alternatively the aggressor and peacemaker (a political-military interpretation). The paradigmatic interpretation suggests that variously the terrorists were seen to be the aggressors, acting with malevolent intent and hence the villains.

While the pairing of good versus evil in the media is common in virtually all political, social and human interest stories, such binarism at the onset legitimized the war against terror as it cast the war against terrorism as a God sanctioned operation. However tenuous the connotation, at the receiving end must have stood Islam in its varied expressions, (especially when the previous editorial cartoons are considered) and the consequences, whether directly or indirectly, profoundly affected the social space occupied by Islam in Kenya. Mahmood Mamdani (2004: 257) in his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* argues that the binarism of good and evil, which was

extensively used during the Bush administration, closes the door for any kind of negotiation and contains ideological language which justifies the use of power and impunity. He argues,

The consequence of bringing home-whenever home may be-the language of the war on terror should be clear: it will create a license to demonize adversaries as terrorists, clearing the ground for a fight to finish, for with terrorists there can be no compromise. The result will be to displace attention from issues to loyalties, to criminalize dissent, and to invite domestic ruin. Worse still, if the struggle against (political) enemies is defined as a struggle against evil, it will turn into a holy war. And in holy war, there can be no compromise. Evil cannot be converted; it must be eliminated (Mamdani, p.254).

In launching the 'war on terror'<sup>9</sup> shortly after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush frequently employed rhetoric that constructed a binarism of 'us' and 'them'; cautioning the international community of being either 'with us or against us' and terming the US response as 'crusades.' In journalism however, such binarism is almost always hard to resist in practice. This is because conflict of whatever nature is newsworthy, whether in sports, politics or war it is the essence of news. And more so when the feuding pair brings out a 'David and Goliath' confrontation where a strong actor comes against a weak foe, or the privileged versus the deprived, and of course, the good versus the bad.

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<sup>9</sup> 'War on Terror' becomes a problematic term, since terror is not an entity but a tactic. War is waged on a country or a defined group, and not on a method of engagement.



Figure 4: The Daily Nation, Oct. 25, 2001. Reprinted with permission

Following the onset of the 'war on terror' after the invasion of Afghanistan by coalition troops, Osama Bin Laden, now the epitome of evil was targeted for capture and a price of hundreds of millions of dollars was placed on his head. However, as the search dragged and hopes of his capture began dimming, the despair found expression in editorial cartoons. Above, a mean faced CIA agent is perplexed at the many 'Osama look alike' in his search for the enemy. The 'Lilliputian' makes a long distance call to his superiors mumbling something about the mounting difficulty in the search. The difficulty is blamed on the facial, cultural and social similarity among men of Middle Eastern origin, While this is denotatively true, the underneath ideology excuses the lumping of all men of such looks together and further legitimizes widespread suspicion of men professing an Islamic persuasion, having long beards and those leading similar lifestyles.

While such depiction can be rightly considered to stereotype men of Islamic faith, the following cartoon does the same to women of the same faith. Published on the 30th of November in The Daily Nation, the cartoon mainly dwells on the now fruitless search for Osama. Still hot on his heels, a CIA agent (indexical of the US, also a metonymy of the West) informs his bosses that no sign of Osama is forthcoming. Meanwhile a man dressed as an Islamic woman intermingles with other women dressed in similar fashion, while

shooting a curious glance at the black suit clad CIA agent. All the while, his long beard partly showing underneath and his clumsy mien attract suspicious glances from the women. In a backdrop of dramatic irony, the 'Lilliputians' joke that having run out of options, Osama can still suicide bomb himself. While pouring scorn on the fruitless search, the cartoon also loops in women, symbolized by the burqa clad women as objects of our collective suspicion. In most parts of Kenya, the burqa, known by its Swahili term 'buihui' often has connotations of mystic, secrecy and malevolent intent especially among the non Islamic populations. For the average Kenyan growing up in the non Islamic parts of the country, mythologies of men gone mad or completely disappearing without trace after rendezvous with buihui<sup>10</sup> clad women still abound. The metaphor taps into an easily identifiable cultural notion.

Although according to media reports the search for Osama was in the mountainous terrain between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the cartoon below, using Arabic architecture (providing connotations of Islam) as its background situates the search in an urban space. As a representational space, the dominant impression secreted appears more to highlight the social space than the physical space portrayed.

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<sup>10</sup> Swahili word for the dress worn by Muslim women meant to cover one from head to toe with only a slight opening for the eyes.



Figure 5: The Daily Nation, Nov. 30, 2001. Reprinted with permission

Shortly after the US launched the war on terror with the invasion of Afghanistan and later Iraq, Kenya was 'coerced' into supporting the war against terror. Much earlier, in 1998, then President Moi had led a street demonstration in Nairobi against terrorism, a first in the history of the country by a head of state. In 2001, when New York was hit, Kenya's foreign policy began to take a more proactive role in the so called war against terror. As a geographical space considered as harbouring active terror cells, and equally on the receiving end of numerous terror attacks, Kenya began to fight terror locally. In close cooperation with Western Powers, for instance the U.S., - the establishment of the National Security Intelligence Service, the Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) Program, the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) in 1998, a Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) and the National Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC) in 2003 were realised. The ATPU was provided with broad powers, and was exempt from the standard use of due process in the event they suspected an individual of terror links. They were allowed to make arbitrary arrests and hold suspects incommunicado for up to two weeks. And so, to give it the legal platform to work from, the government was again coerced to pass the 'suppression of terrorism' bill. Apart from its provisions, the bill was vague and broad in its definition of "terrorism" or a "terrorist" act or action. Also, its provisions gave extensive powers to the police and customs officers to stop search and seize, detain and arrest;

making detention the rule and bail the exception. (Amnesty International, 2004). The lack of safeguards and due process in decisions to extradite equally raised a furore among civil society groups in the country. However, this did not stop the harassment, arbitrary arrests and prosecution of hundreds of Kenyan Muslims especially in the Coast, North eastern and parts of Nairobi.

The following cartoon (see Figure 6) appeared in The Daily Nation on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2001, a few months after 9/11. As a representational space, the cartoon captures spatial practice of an ordinary Muslim in Kenya following the country's resolve to contain terror locally. Two policemen on a routine patrol possessing a picture of a wanted 'terrorist' stop a potential suspect. After assaulting and thoroughly pounding him to pulp they realize he is not the man they wanted. Their gut instincts and reliance on generalizations had failed them. One 'Lilliputian' suggests suing them, and another retorts 'where?' a veiled attack on the ineffective judicial system in Kenya and ridicule on the broad powers vested on the terrorist police. While this is an accurate picture of police conduct, the representational and spatial practices as elements of the production of space are seen to show interdependence in the eventual secreted space. Here, one can understand how the 'war against terror' (or more accurately the apprehension of terror suspects) is partly executed locally; haphazard, stereotyped and brutal on those at its receiving end. The denotative message is one of a mistaken identity in what may perhaps be an honest pursuit of terror suspects. However, the connotative message reveals that in the wake of the so called 'war on terror', perhaps more harm has been meted on the imagined than on the real enemy.



Figure 6: The Daily Nation, Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Reprinted with permission

The day before Christmas, as is the norm in Kenya's print media, Christmas symbolism is heavily appropriated to capture the prevailing yet dominant social and political discourses in the country through the use of editorial cartoons.

Almost like a sequel to the cartoon above, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2001 the editorial cartoon in the next page was published in The Daily Nation. It carries on the framing of the 'war on terror' from a local perspective, satirizing its methodology that is largely based on blunt stereotyping and generalizations. While the narrative of the proverbial wise men who visited the baby Jesus draws inspiration from the Christian text, the apparel, mien and physical looks of the 'wise men', when placed in the contemporary Kenyan context, tell more about Muslims than what is denotatively implied. Although the terrorism bill was not made into law in the state that it was originally, it paved the way for the justified profiling based on religion in actual social space.



Figure 7: The Daily Nation, Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Reprinted with permission

It is worth noting that the controversial suppression of the terrorism bill also made references to dress as one way in which suspected terrorists or their associates could be identified. For instance, a particular clause made it an offence for people to dress in such a way 'as to arouse reasonable suspicion that he is a member of a declared terrorist organization', (Republic of Kenya, 2003). Needless to say, this clause caused particular concern amongst Muslim communities, who have their own distinct way of dressing. The bill also granted the minister responsible for national security the power to make exclusion orders but only against individuals with dual citizenship. According to Howell & Lind (2010) this was perceived as directly targeting Muslims, many of whom descend from immigrants from Somalia, the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia. The editorial cartoon above appears to capture the discourse of the possible execution and abuse of this piece of this legislation should it become law<sup>11</sup>. In response to the bill, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, the governmental human rights watchdog, stated '[l]aws or policies must not target or appear selective by community or group' (KNCHR, 2003: 8).

<sup>11</sup> The suppression of terrorism bill was eventually passed into law in August 2012 after extensive consultations with stakeholders key among them Muslim rights groups.

## Conclusion

Incidences of police profiling and arrests on suspicion of being a terrorist were widely reported in Mombasa and other coastal cities. The same was reported in North Eastern province and the Somali enclave of Eastleigh, Nairobi. In November 2001 over 50 businessmen in Mombasa were rounded up for alleged links with Al Qaeda. Most were however released without charges being preferred. Just recently, over 300 youths were arrested in Eastleigh in January 2010 and charged with being in the country illegally. It is not a coincidence that these spaces are mostly wholly or mostly occupied by Muslims. However, while police action appears targeting the cultural and material space occupied by Muslims; spatial practice, which Lefebvre argues can be empirically determined through history and practice, has equally helped in producing the resultant lived space. According to the Kenyan authorities, materials used for the construction of the 800kg bomb that shook Nairobi was smuggled into East Africa disguised as relief aid with the help of some Islamic relief agencies (Achieng 1998). Further, with regard to the political and social space, of all the countries in the Horn of Africa, Kenya boasts the most stable, most effective, and most democratic government. As a result, terrorists take the advantage and continue to move in and out the country freely, establishing businesses in Mombasa, the Islamic dominated places of Nairobi, Lamu and parts of North Eastern province like Garissa. Indeed most operate Islamic charities, find local brides, rent light aircraft to come and go from Somalia, hold meetings, communicate with terror financiers outside the country, transfer money, stockpile weapons and engage in undetected reconnoitring of possible targets.

Based on the foregoing spatial practice, the nett effect is a growing perception of Islam's complicity with terror. Also, comments by a few Islamic leaders appearing to sympathize with terror masterminds have not helped matters. Still, Islamic leaders have consistently come out to denounce the terrorists as criminals especially when Kenyans and targets on Kenyan soil are involved. Despite counter claims, Whitaker (2008) argues that there is little evidence that

Islamic radicalism has gained much support among Kenyan Muslims (Haynes 2005; Rosenau 2005). She comments that the recent mobilization of the Muslim community in Kenya is motivated primarily by local concerns (mostly political inclusion, economic development, etc.), and not by global issues (Seesemann 2005). Further Muslim activism should not automatically be interpreted as radicalism. This is not to deny that a small number of Kenyans have been involved in extremist groups, a fact that Kenyan officials are reluctant to admit. On the whole, however, Kenyan Muslims have largely rejected militant methods and extremist ideology.

As for the media, being purveyors of news, these ambiguities are never fully expressed in the time bound news bulletin, or the space bound column or news report. The dominant and easily churned frame from the media has been largely replete with generalizations and reductionism that has subtly reproduced in the Kenya's social space, an image of Islam as a purveyor and accomplice of terror. And as this study illustrates, the editorial cartoons have been sharp, if not brutal, in capturing the rapidly changing space, as representational spaces.

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## Politics of Islamic Banking: A Hindrance on the National Unity of Sudan?

**Ahmed Elhassab Omer**

**Abstract:**

Islamic banking in Sudan which has become dominant in the banking sector since 1990s, might pose a direct threat to the unity of the country by the end of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) interim period in 2011. The anxiety expressed in this paper is based on the feeling that the issue of Islamizing the economy is not an unintended policy as thought by the masses. It rather, goes hand and foot with the development of the identity crisis, which divides the country along the Arabism-Islamized and Africanism-Christian dichotomy. The way by which politicians tackled the issue of identity, over the last 54 years, has left too many issues still swept under the rug of this dichotomy, one of which is the Islamization of the banking sector. These two mutually exclusive views have been at the heart of the socioeconomic and political turmoil, which underlies the current problems facing the Sudanese state.

**Key words:** Islamic banking, national identity, Arabism, Africanism

### Introduction

The period around the 1970s saw Muslim communities in the Middle East witnessing the appearance and rapid expansion of interest-free banks, later known as Islamic banks. Such developments were later on initiated in countries outside the Islamic world with sizable presence of Muslims. Since then, Islamic banks have become an essential component of everyday Muslim business life, and a cornerstone of Islamization of economic policies. It would be reasonable, before heading on, to explain what we mean by Islamizing the economy? Generally speaking, the term 'Islamization' refers to 'the

process of restructuring the prevailing socioeconomic set-up in the Muslim societies according to Islamic injunctions' (Iqbal, M., 2002, p. 68). The banking system as the beating heart of the modern economy has been the focal point on which the pioneers of Islamic banking theory drew their thoughts about what they envisaged as Islamic economy. They perceived Islamic banks as institutions that provide investment and financing facilities for Muslims who are keen in implementing the Islamic law in their business transactions. They believe that goals of Islamizing the banking sector, are not of materialistic side only, but are based also on the concepts of improving the well-being of humans and the overall achievement of a good life. Hence, Islamic banking theory tends to emphasize Islamic values, socioeconomic justice and a balance between the material and spiritual needs of its followers (Khan, M. and Bhatti, M., 2008, pp. 7-10)

Islamization of the banking system therefore, indicates a situation whereby all the existing banks, nation-wide, should, by law, operate under and subscribe to the principles of Islamic law in their business transactions. This argument entails four essential points that should be observed: 1) prohibition of charging (taking or receiving) interest being glossed as *Ribā* (usury)<sup>12</sup>. Financial transactions should be free from interest, and should also be linked directly or indirectly, to a real economic deal. Interest, as a price of capital in conventional banks, should then be replaced by the arrangement of profit/loss sharing in Islamic banks. Profit/loss sharing demonstrates a case in which the investor and the bank will share in the risks and profits generated from the deal, an asset or a project<sup>13</sup> 2) not undertaking

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<sup>12</sup> *Ribā* literally, means increase or addition or growth. Technically, it refers to the 'premium' that must be paid by the borrower to the lender along with the principal amount as a condition for the loan or an extension in its maturity. Interest as commonly known today is regarded by a consensus of the majority of *fuqahā* (Islamic jurists) to be equivalent to *Ribā*. (Iqbal, Munawar and Molyneux, 2005, pp. 7-11. Also, Khan, M., and Bhatti, M., 2008, pp. 20-25).

<sup>13</sup> As stated by the Islamic principles of financing, any positive, fixed or predetermined rate of return related to the maturity or amount of principal is prohibited. Instead, the principle of profit/loss sharing should be in action. Basically, on profit/loss sharing modes of financing, borrowers and lenders should share the rewards of the deal as much as the loss incurred out of the deal, if any. The main idea is that borrowing households will pay back the principal of their loans along with the portion of their profit to the bank. The principle therefore, means that, no person is ever allowed to invest his property, in a way that generates profit without exposing him to the risk of loss. Rather,

transactions that are considered to be unlawful (*harām*) by *Sharī'a*. Financial transactions should not be directed toward economic sectors considered unlawful such as investment in business dealing with tobacco, gambling activities, drugs, alcoholic beverages, pork process and sale industry, and any activity that might be deemed harmful to the community or, being not congruent to the Islamic values. 3) Prohibition of carrying out operations with unknown outcomes because of the risks they might involve. Examples of such transactions include, among others, lottery, speculation, and gambling associated activities. 4) Finally, Islamic banks are required to pay *zakāt* (a religious tax) as an obligatory duty. The objective of paying *zakāt* is to enhance brotherhood among members of the Muslim community and to achieve social development goals<sup>14</sup>

In addition, Islamic banks have one distinct feature, namely, the existence of the so-called *Sharī'a* Supervisory Board. A *Sharī'a* Supervisory Board is assigned, in any Islamic bank, the task of monitoring work of the bank to ensure that every new transaction that seems questionable or doubtful from a *Sharī'a* standpoint is disallowed or made to comply with the dictates of the Muslim law. Membership of the board is drawn from among the *ulamā* (Muslim scholars). The opinions of the board are expressed in forms of rulings and verdicts over different banking issues, and they are considered binding to the banks, as well as to the clients. The rationale underlying the existence of such a board is to act as an independent audit unit to assure the shareholders that the bank fully complies in its business transactions with the principles of *Sharī'a*.

However, the implementation of a financing system based on the religious affiliation of the majority of the population who subscribe to Islam might not seem reasonable, in a country like Sudan, where the non-Muslims, especially in the south of the country and who

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it exposes both parties to the outcome of their deal, be a profit or loss. (Igbal, Munawar and Molyneux, 2005, pp. 20-23. Also, Khan, M., and Bhatti, M., 2008, pp. 45-54).

<sup>14</sup> *Zakāt* is an obligatory financial religious levy on all non-working capital, surplus wealth and agricultural income of the Muslims. It is charged at varying rates and can be collected by the state and is determined annually (normally based on lunar year). The rate of *zakāt* on commercial merchandise is 2.5%. The assets subject to *zakāt* must meet specific conditions. In particular they should be owned for at least one lunar year. According to the majority of Islamic scholars, only tradable assets are subject to *zakāt*: fixed assets are not subject to *zakāt*. These tradable assets should be valued at their cash equivalent. (AAOIFI, 1999, p. 308)

constitute a considerable size of the population, may harbour feelings of discrimination and suppression of their fundamental rights as Sudanese citizens. More seriously, is whether the anticipated system of Islamic banking is flexible enough to accommodate the financial interests of the non-Muslim citizens, or is, well immunized not to violate their rights to access the banking services on the same footing with their Muslims counterparts?. For instance, will non-Muslims be compelled to pay *zakāt* when banking with Islamic banks?

This paper attempts critique the Islamic banking system in Sudan using an economic approach as an essential instrument in addressing the identity crisis between the Muslim-Arab in the north and Christian-African in the south. The paper will try reading the politics of Islamic banks not as resultant of two different socio-political views, rather including also, a new dimension from economic perspective. The paper argues that politics of Islamic banking, might share responsibility, besides other factors, if the country falls apart by the end of the CPA six-year interim period in 2011<sup>15</sup>.

### **Emergence and Development of Islamic Banks in Sudan**

Emergence of the Islamic banks in Sudan cannot be read in isolation from controversy over the contested identity of the country. Since the dawn of independence, the question of identity has been sharply, and in the most cases, violently, debated. This question has presented an outstanding challenge that, unfortunately, has not yet wisely been handled by various Sudanese governments and other regional and global players.

The author agrees that Sudan suffers from what Mazrui (1985) called multiple marginality and that the country is seen as *Africa's* 'sick

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<sup>15</sup> Southern Sudan became an independent state on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011, in the end of the six-year interim period of the CPA. Unfortunately, the split of the country into two separate parts had been the concern of this paper. It became clear to many observers from the onset that the divisive nature of the CPA, combined with the deep mistrust between the two signers factions, would only lead to an out-right loss of the national unity of Sudan. However, even though, it might not seem easily manageable dissolving the two monetary systems over night; many difficulties will be encountered; and this is out scope of this paper.

man'. Because of that judgment, the author advocates the idea that the problem of Sudanese identity has been mismanaged between the two hostile factions – northerner and southern elite in a tragic manner. Assal (2009) agrees with Mazrui, pointing out that 'the multiple marginality of the Sudan is brutally reflected in the internal politics of the Sudan, where its dominant northern elite desires it to be Muslim and Arab and its southern elite desires it to be African and de-Arabized.' (Ibid, p. 3) These two contradictory, even mutually exclusive visions have been at the very heart of the violent political conflict that colored the post independence Sudanese State. Harir (1994), maintains that "In the continuous and relentless pursuit of making Sudan an appendage to 'something' Arab, African or Islam, both parties have failed to build 'something' Sudanese as its uniqueness expressed in being Arab and African at the same time, required" (Harir 1994, p. 11). However, the political dimension might not be the purpose of this article, rather as Assal envisages, the way, by which the question of identity was tackled by politicians left many issues that were/are still swept under the rug of Muslim-Arabs and Christian-Africans dichotomy. The economic arena in general, and the banking sector in particular, is taken in this paper as one of the areas that require urgent address and fixing if Sudan is to remain united.

The first Islamic bank in Sudan emerged in 1975, as a direct result of the cooperation between the Arab World and the Islamic Movement Faction, the most radical political group, which later, succeeded in taking-over power in June 1989. The Islamization of the banking sector may be a pointer on Sudan's earnest quest of championing the course of Islam. Sudan is the sole country in the continent, where a government sponsored full-flagged Islamic banking system has been in action for more than two decades.

The slogan of Islamizing all aspects of Sudanese life had been the corner-stone by which Arabian countries were invited to penetrate the national economy under the guise of Islamic banking. Historically, many reasons worked together to give rise to the emergence of Islamic banks in Sudan in the second half of 1970s. Although political and economical factors played a role, it had been the religious factor which played a key-role in fueling the aspirations of the pioneers who were fascinated by idea of the Islamic banks (Abdeen, Yasin Al-Hajj. Field Interview, Khartoum, 2007). Politics and religion had been the

two factors, which played crucial role to the inception of Islamic banks in Sudan. Whereas politics had been used as fuel, religion was the vehicle by which idea of Islamic banking transmitted and entrenched into the Sudanese financial environment. Having seized the opportunity of political reconciliation with the then president Nimeri, the Islamic Movement succeeded to move with their Islamic slogans and agendas to unprecedented levels

The inception of an Islamic oriented bank – Faisal Islamic Bank of Sudan in 1976 – was the political price that Nimeri's regime had to offer for reconciliation with the Islamic movement, the most active faction against his rule before 1975. The success and viability of Faisal Islamic bank paved the way for the establishment of several other Islamic banks, notably, Tadamon Islamic Bank of Sudan established in November 1981, and the Sudanese Islamic Bank in 1982. By the year 1985, Al-Baraka Group, the rapidly expanding Islamic banking system established a branch in Khartoum. Three others followed soon after; the Islamic Bank for the Western Sudan, the Islamic Cooperative Bank for Development and Al-Shamal Islamic Bank in 1990 (J. Millard Burr and Robert O, Collins, 2006, pp.106-107). In less than five years course of operation, Islamic banks in Sudan not only proved to be effective, but also took a large share of the banking market. Their total 'paid-up' capital increased to 168 million Sudanese pounds compared to 158 million for the fifteen non-Islamic banks (Anwar Mohamed, 1987, p.13). It was observable that, the rapid expansion of Islamic banks in Sudan was achieved at the cost of the conventional banking existence.

Islamization process of the banking system in Sudan had passed through four stages, before it reached the apex in 1990:

**Stage One: 1982/1983:** The Islamic banking system was conceived as an idea that firstly fostered by the declaration of the famous September Laws, which were adopted by ex-president Nimeri, as Islamic *Sharī'a* law in 1983. Many observers considered that step of applying *Sharī'a* law was not taken for the sake of Islam, but to rescue the swaying regime of president Nimeri from the definite collapse. Among the many aspects of life, directly be affected by September law, was the banking sector. Soon afterward, the application of the law, a presidential decree was issued declaring intention of the regime to adopt a complete interest-free financial

system. Accordingly, all operating banks, by then, were oriented to assist in the transition from interest-bearing to interest-free banking (World Street Journal, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1984, p.39). Usually, upon such big economic turning-point, preparatory measures are supposed to be done, before the transition is applied. Surprisingly, that had not been the case; because the orientation did not consider any transitional measures. Nor did it care about other non-Muslims stakeholders who were not necessarily, concerned with Islam anyhow, or even Muslims citizens, those who were not in favor of that Islamization policies. Another problem associated with that presidential decree, was pertaining to the non-availability of the well-trained cadres, who were supposed to carry out the new policies efficiently. As a result, a wave of turmoil in the banking sector was observed. Many banks were not able to satisfy the new requirements, with their funding abilities being seriously reduced.

**Stage Two: 1983/1985:** that period was marked by the declaration of the so-called September Islamic Law of 1983. In December 1984, the government of Sudan under president Nimeri 'ordered all banks in the country to stop paying or charging interest'<sup>16</sup>. A presidential degree was issued to make interest payments unenforceable in Sudanese Law Courts. That decision affected 27 banks, including nine foreign banks<sup>17</sup>. The Agricultural Banks of Sudan had been the first bank to adjust itself shortly after. As a result, many Islamic modes of financing were designed to replace the usurious rates. *Murābaha* sale replaced the medium term finance for the bank's owned commodities and trucks. In addition, the bank started accepting deposits (demand deposits, saving deposits, and investment deposits) according to the newly Islamic modes of financing. Short-run loans were replaced by agricultural contracts under the so-called cost-service<sup>18</sup>.

**Stage Three: 1985/1990:** during this period, the Sudan was being ruled by a democratically elected government, which happened not to be in conformity with the National Islamic Front and its Islamization slogans. Because of that a clear fluctuation of Islamic banking policies was observed. This included the dissolvability of *Shari'a*

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<sup>16</sup> Wall Street Journal, op. cit., p.13

<sup>17</sup> Anwar, Mohammad, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Gism Al-seed, Hago, op. cit

Supervisory Board and postponement of its functions. Due to the conflicting views of the Sudanese political parties during that period on the issue of *Sharī'a* law, a partial implementation of Islamic banking principles was made, while the whole issue of Islamizing the banking sector was made open for further debate. In September 1995, the Minister of Finance and the National Economy, introduced what came to be known the 'Law of Compensatory Rate' under which the banks were allowed to deal in compensatory rates, and of determining the a rate of compensation for credits balances, debts balances, saving accounts and loans. The compensatory rate was considered by the National Islamic Front a real interest rate concealed in a new terminology.<sup>19</sup>

**Stage Four:** 1990/2005: this period of time represents the biggest leap of Islamic banking development in Sudan ever happened, when a comprehensive Islamization of the economy was set up. That was in early 1990s, one year later, after the National Islamic Front attained power through a military coup. A series of decisions concerning Islamic banking were taken to make it in conformity with *Sharī'a*, following the declaration by the new government leaders to make *Sharī'a* the sole source of law and legislation in the country. Based on the ministerial decision No. 69/1990, related to the abolition of usurious deals in the state circles, a Higher *Sharī'a* Supervisory Board for Banking and Financial Institutions (HSSBBFI) was formed from a number of *Sharī'a* specialist scholars (Gism Al-saed Hajoo, Field interview Khartoum, 2007)<sup>20</sup>. To officiate the new modes of finance, the *Sharī'a* board, was assigned tasked by the Central Bank of Sudan (CBOS), the duty offor drafting verdicts, '*fatwās*', advising banks, and replying questions from the public, on

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<sup>19</sup> Elhassan, Sabir Mohammad: The Management of Monetary Policy within the Experience of the Sudanese Islamic Banking, p. 12

<sup>20</sup> *Sharī'a* Supervisory Boards (SSBs) are "in-house religious advisers and they issue a report to the users of financial statements, which certifies that the bank has adhered to Islamic principles" (Karim, 1990, p.34). In addition, they undertake other duties like providing advices and give fatwas (verdicts) to the banks in non-Islamic clear transactions. In Sudan, the central bank has formed what is called: higher *Sharī'a* Supervisory Board for Banks and Financial Institutions (HSSBBFI)

the legal difficulties associated with workability of these new modes of Islamic financing (Ibid). You have not exhausted the 4 stages, only 2!

### **Sudanese Islamic banks and non-Muslims**

Islamic banks are those banks, which follow Islamic *Sharī'a* in their business transactions. Abolishing interest from their dealings is the fundamental principle on which Islamic banks are based. Islam's strict ban on dealing with interest seems to have social roots. Mirza and Baydoun (2000, p. 36) argue that the use of *Ribā* (usury) violates the principle of social justice, which is very important in Islam, because it leads to rewarding people without them making an effort. Those who lend money on interest do not make an effort, nor do they participate in the risks of the project financed, and such behavior is rejected by the teaching of Islam. Talip and Phay (1998, p. 65) suggest that the most apparent reason for the ban of *Ribā* is to 'enforce the spirit of brotherhood between Muslims'.

If such argument of social justice, and the enhancement of brotherhood, were the theoretical and moral basis of Islamic banking industry, then why did non-Muslims Sudanese citizens resist and oppose it? The answer to this question may be related to the question of identity and the way it has been reflected in the economic field. The totally biased socio-economic policies carried out by Ingāz government, during the first days in power, under the radical slogan '*al-mashro al-hadāri*' (Civilizational Project) had left no options for non-Muslims Sudanese citizens. The Civilizational Project was the socio-economic engineering program designed by the Islamic Movement, for to restructuring the Sudanese community, as to bring it back to the pristine era of the Islamic state. of the Prophet Mohammad. Under that project, the entire aspects of life were subdued to radical changes, in favor of the Arab-Islamic identity, which deliberately intended, to excluding exclude other cultural components of the Sudanese social fabrics.

The divisive identity politics launched by the regime in the early 1990s; in all aspects of life, and the holy war as perceived by the regime (*jihād*) as perceived by the regime (it is imperative to give the

full meaning of jihad in footnote and how it is used in a narrow sense for 'holy' war if at all there is anything holy in the Sudan political calculations by the state) against the southerner rebel movement and the Christian Sudanese citizens in the north, had coloured their relation and feelings of national belongingness, with a thick fog of suspicion<sup>21</sup>. Southerners elite and other Christians in the north looked at the Islamic banks with suspicious eyes, and perceived them with much doubt. It was an aspect of the identity game politics, which the regime, as they saw guess it, was striving to impose on them by virtue of force and coercion. So it was nothing, but an Arab-Muslim device, used by the regime to crowd them out economically after they had been crowded out culturally and politically. In one of his weekly broadcasting speech John Grang, the leader of the rebel movement in the South SPLM/SPLA, said:

The junta in Khartoum has decided to impose an Islamic identity over the whole country! The state is an object that can neither be Muslim, nor be Christian, and that is why, we in SPLM/LA refuse giving the state a religious identity! The state is a human created object that has no religion! Have you ever seen a state going to the mosque on Friday or to the church on Sunday? Has someone of you ever heard about a state gone to *Mekka* for pilgrimage? It is human beings who do that, not the state! Let us differentiate between the personal religiosity and the state, because it is the only way by which we can keep up our country united.

Therefore, all political and financial institutions that resulted out from the Civilizational Project, in all aspects of life, and particularly, the banking sector, were considered as devices, designed to favor an

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<sup>21</sup> *Jihād* literally is an Arabic derivative of the word "*jahd*" which basically means strive struggle, and endeavor. In Islam, such struggle is of two types; one is internal and the other is external. However, both of them have the same purpose that is to change a situation, which seems as not in conformity with God will, or not in conformity with nature as such; and thus, may cause unrest or disturbance for the Muslims nation. (Encyclopedia of Islam: ). In the context of this paper, the term *jihād* has a political and religious connotation of the "holy war" in the Sudanese government circles. A war that is based on, and fueled by religious manipulation agenda. It has been used by the 1989 government of Sudan to demonstrate an allegation of taking up arms in defense of Islam and Sudanese nation against the secular-oriented rebel movement 'Sudanese People Liberation Movement/Army' (SPLM/SPLA), during the period 1989-2005.

Arab-Islamic identity at the cost of other Sudanese components. The resultant output of that sentiment, was a real doubt that rights of Christians and other non-Muslims are conserved within the new banking system. Such a doubt, towards Islamic banks was not felt out of nothing; many aspects of Islamic banks could make Christians and other non-Muslim clients feel doubtful. Their suspicion was confounded when they recognized that the new banking system, might not position them in the same footing with Muslim citizens, with whom they are sharing the same space. Below is an account on some of the aspects that made the non-Muslim citizens to reject Islamic banks.

### **1. Prohibition of charging interest**

While the prohibition of Ribā is binding on Muslims, the same cannot be said of non-Muslims, who are allowed to deal with interest-based institutions. Thus, imposing interest-free banking means depriving all non-Muslims from revenue gains they could, otherwise, be generating. Moreover, in the Sudan, the non-Muslims are not allowed to access funds from any interest-based institution while the national banks are by law, not allowed to serve their demands. In essence the economic fate of the non-Muslims had been sealed by Islamic banks. In addition, while interest-based banks provide people with consumption loans as well as overdraft facilities, Islamic banks do not recognize such loans, or facilities. Provisions of consumption loans and overdraft facilities, in any form in an Islamic banking set-up, for those who may need it are outlawed. Moreover, no bank is/was permitted to work on an interest-based system in the northern part or even in the south before the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of January 2005. In this way, during the entire period extended between 1989 and 2005, a considerable size of the population was deprived from enjoying an important civil right of rational choice. In fact, it was a clear constitutional violation, since citizenship is the only constitutional criteria by which rights and duties are determined. However, according to that course of action taken by the Sudanese state, constitutionality of citizenship was nothing more than a nominal written clause, that could easily, be dropped a side, whenever it goes against the Arab-Muslim identity. Because of that many Christians southern citizens were feeling economically marginalized, which boosted up their political and cultural grievance to unprecedented levels. It should be pointed out that, whereas the

regulations of the CBOS forbid conventional banks to operate in the North, it nevertheless, allowed Islamic banks to operate in the South. Available statistics reveals that, eight Islamic banks with 18 branches were operating in the South; before the Government of Southern Sudan required them to turn their operations interest-based or otherwise stop their operations in the region (Annual Report 2007, Central Bank of Sudan, p. 50)<sup>22</sup> These banks, however, refused to comply and had to close their businessshop in the region. The action was in fact a clear signal that the two banking system arranged under the CPA, was undergoing serious intricacies.

## 2. Religious-based shareholding

According to the recognized nature of Sudan as a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual country, it has been confirmed that religion shall not be used as a divisive factor<sup>23</sup>. Based on this, eligibility for public office, public service, including the presidency and the enjoyment of all rights and duties shall be based on citizenship and not on religion, belief or customs<sup>24</sup>. In spite of the clear emphasis by the CPA that religion should not be taken as a basis for political, cultural and economical entitlement, however, Faisal Islamic Bank of Sudan limits, by law, the rights of share-holding's ownership and exchange to Muslim citizens only. It has been stated by the principal law of the bank that 'all shares of the bank are nominal; owned and exchanged by Muslims.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> It deserved mentioning that in 2007, the Ivory Bank's branch in the south has opened an Islamic window, alongside the conventional system (Annual Report 2007, the Central Bank of Sudan, p. 50). It is a paradox, that such a rational view is not at all, possible in the north.

<sup>23</sup> Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2005, Chapter 1, Part B, article 6.1

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 6.2

Accordingly, non-Muslim citizens are not entitled to hold a share in the bank as a public limited company.

### 3. Prohibition of unlawful transactions

Islamic banks are by *Sharī'a* law, not permitted getting into any transaction that violates Islamic principles. The umbrella of such transactions covers a wide array of business, which is forbidden according to Islamic context. All business that are deemed unlawful and the related activities, like manufacture, transportation and sale of all sort of alcohol beverage, tobacco, night clubs and all activities of unknown outcome; like lottery businesses all of them are not eligible for getting Islamic financing opportunities. (Awad, Mohammed Hashim, an interview, in Khartoum, 2007)<sup>26</sup>. If all these businesses were permissible to non-Muslim citizens before the introduction of Islamic banking system, so the kind of resentment generated with the *Sharī'a* based banks was rather somewhat expected. Before signing the CPA it was not permissible in the southern region for one to undertake any investment on such taboo businesses.

### 4. Payment of *zakāt*

Conceptually, *zakāt* is supposed to be a major instrument for providing social security, eradicating poverty, curbing excessive economic disparities, and stimulating economic activity by transferring substantial purchasing power from the haves to the have-nots. Although *zakāt* is obligatory for all Muslims, there is controversy in the Islamic literature as to whether Islamic businesses are obliged to pay this tax, or whether it is obligatory only for individuals. Gambling (is this a name of an author?) and Karim (1991, p. 103) have argued that *zakāt* levied on individuals who are Muslims individuals and that entities are not liable to it. The Islamic

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<sup>25</sup> Documentation of Sudan Experience in the Field of Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions, Part 2 (Laws associated with the experience), Central Bank of Sudan, Khartoum, 2006, p. 70

<sup>26</sup> He was the Prof. Chair of Economics, Faculty of Economics, U of K, a permanent member of the (HSSBBFI), since it has been initiated in 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 1992.

*Fiqh* Academy, in its first *zakāt* conference held in Kuwait in 1984, reached the conclusion that businesses are not required to pay *zakāt*, unless such a requirement is imposed by law or agreed on by their shareholders (Shihaddeh, 1987, p. 32). In Sudan, all the banks operating in the country before the CPA were required, by law, to pay *zakāt*. The computation of *zakāt* is however, inclusive for all clients regardless of their religious affiliation. Hence, many Christian clients who deal with Islamic banks and pay *zakāt* feel that they are obliged by force of law, to pay a religious tax, which they are not entitled to by Islam itself. In addition, the way by which *zakāt* funds are channeled to the designated recipients is somehow ambiguous and segregative. Many Christians are not eligible to receive *zakāt* funding except when they are recently converted to Islam under the name (*Al-Muā`lafatu qulūbahum*) – those hearts have been (recently) reconciled to the truth of Islam. Only then they deserve being given *zakāt* to make them feeling the brotherhood and solidarity of the Muslim community. So while Christians are forced to pay *zakāt*, they are not allowed to enjoy one cent out of it. Some observers believe that many of those funds did not find its way even to the targeted groups of the Muslims community. The regime was accused by using the fund of *zakāt* to fuel the holy war (*jihād*) against Christian southern citizens during their revolt against the government in Khartoum (J. Millard Burr and Robert, O. Collins, 2006, pp. 106-107). However, such allegation may need more investigation. The concluding remark of this point is that, non-Muslims became victims twice, namely they are forced to pay *zakāt*, and that their money may be used to fight against them.

##### **5. *Sharī'a* Supervisory Board Membership**

All banks that were operating in Sudan, before the signing of the CPA, were required by law to have a *Sharī'a* Supervisory Board. The board has the duty of examining the bank's transactions to ascertain if there is any breach of *Sharī'a* rules. It assures the investors about congruence of Islamic banks performance with Islamic laws and principles. In addition to that, the board advises the banks, on some transactions those seem to be of ambiguous nature, (Haniffa, R. 2005, p. 15). Membership to Higher *Sharī'a* Supervisory Board of the CBOS has been confined to *Sharī'a* specialists and to professionals who are knowledgeable on the field of Islamic law and banking business. It is composed of 10-persons; none of them was/is a

Christian. Every individual bank has been required to establish its own three to four member *Shari'a* boards, whom are usually nominated by the bank's board of directors. It should be noted that within the 26 banks operating in the country in 2008, none of their *Shari'a* Board posts, was filled by a Christian citizen. The Christians are still being excluded by definition of law to satisfy conditions of such task. The investigation I did, on the membership of *Shari'a* Supervisory boards in 24 banks out of 26 banks operating in Sudan in 2008, gave astonishing results. Out of 100 people who represent the population size of all the boards, none of them is a southerner or a Christian. The membership is totally confined to the knowledgeable *Shari'a* scholars.

### **The Issue of Banking System at the Heart of the CPA**

It was not surprising then, the economic identity, so to say, was a conflicting point, while negotiating the CPA in 2005. Discussions on wealth sharing agreement, reflects, the parties conflicts over the contested identity (Emerik Rogier, 2006, p. 38). The hard line followed by the rebels, reflects their anxiety over the best way to promote unity on an equal and fair economic footing. Accordingly, the rebels movement (SPLM/A) claims that it is now, necessary, to correct past historical mistakes, of which the banking sector was the utmost priority. Therefore, the restructuring of the banking system was at the heart of the wealth sharing agreement for its imperative function and its key role in supporting the political stability and the national unity of the country. However, instead of reaching one unitary banking system, the two parties agreed to establish two different banking systems. It was clear that the insistence of the National Congress Party (NCP) to keep up the Islamic identity of the banking system drove SPLAM/A negotiators to counteract it, and clamoured for a secular or conventional banking system. The pragmatic negotiation tactics of the two hostile factions resulted in a sharp divisive identity politics upon which the option of the two different banking systems has been integrated in the CPA.

## Two-Headed Banking System

The two factions— NCP and SPLM/A – agreed to establish dual banking systems, albeit not ones that are fully separated as SPLM/A had hoped (Ibid, p. 40). It has been agreed that conventional banking facilities are urgently needed in Southern Sudan. Therefore, the view was to establish, during the -interim period, the Bank of Southern Sudan (Dau, Stephen Dhieu, 2006, pp. 2-3). Demonstrating more suspicion, SPLM/A, insist restructuring; during the interim period, the CBOS inasmuch to reflect the duality of the banking system in the country. CBOS shall therefore, use and develop two sets of banking instruments, one is Islamic and the other is conventional, to regulate and supervise the implementation of a single monetary policy through: 1) an Islamic window in Northern part of the country under a deputy Governor of CBOS using Islamic financing instrument to implement the national monetary policy in Northern Sudan, and 2) the Bank of Southern Sudan headed by a deputy governor of CBOS to manage the conventional window using conventional instruments in implementing the national monetary policy in Southern Sudan<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, four years after signing the CPA and now approaching the deadline of the interim period, it has been clearly proved that theories are always failed by practical realities. The noble objective upon which the dual banking system had been proposed – to promote the fragile national unity – has been aborted. Instead of, at least having a peaceful co-existence, and harmonious co-operation, the opposite scenario has been encountered. The gap between the two systems has widened, with no spark of hope, in the corridor of the national unity. Each of the parties started developing an exclusive and independent economical identity. The decision taken by the Government of Southern Sudan to chase out the branches of the Islamic banks that were operating in the South for their failure to convert to conventional system, left no doubts that two independent economic identities were taking shape in the country. It has been the anxiety of the author that, the huge technical difficulties associated with such kind of hybrid financial system will finally lead to the appearance of two different banking systems.

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<sup>27</sup> Agreement on Wealth Sharing, Naivasha, Kenya: Wednesday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

In the end, what has been hoped by the CPA to be the way out of such divisive economical identity appeared the most fragile part of the CPA. The two headed banking system, instead of serving as a lubricant to promote the national unity, turned out to become a divisive factor, which will tear-up the already withering national unity. As the paper shows, the arrangement of a dual separated system is not relevant to enhance the missing ring of the national unity; it will rather accelerate it to fall apart. It will in fact, serve as a dividing instrument, if much concern is not given to re-correct it.

### **The way forward**

The debate over identity question represents an outstanding challenge for all Sudanese intellectual elite, those who are seeking a safe harbor to the issue of national unity. One may opine that economic identity is one aspect of the macro identity crisis that has come very late, yet, contributed a lot to the chronic nature of the crisis. The approach suggested in this paper looks to the identity politics by adding a new dimension based on economic perspective. The economic aspect has not been given much care in the identity debate. It is time to consider this aspect if we seriously seek an inclusive solution to the problem of identity. The CPA was the first endeavor ever tried to include the economic aspect of identity to readdress it, but the outcome has not been promising so far. This could mainly be attributed to the paradox of Arabism-Islamized and Africanism-secularized dichotomy in which the CPA has been trapped. Even though, it might not be fair to rule out that the dual banking system was the wrong option, I believe, it is one step in the right direction, if applied properly. Therefore, for the system to be more meaningful in resolving the identity crisis, this paper proposes that the dual banking system must be allowed to function simultaneously all through the country. The banking system should be a unified system, with two different windows (conventional and Islamic) both of them operate simultaneously to satisfy the needs of all citizens regardless of religious affiliation.

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## Faith versus Reason: The Place of Religion in the Socialization Process as Depicted in two Kiswahili Novels: *Kufa Kuzikana* and *Unaitwa Nani?*

**Magdaline Wafula**

**Abstract:**

This paper focuses on the role of Christian religion in the socialization of the youth in East African communities as represented in two Kiswahili novels; *Kufa Kuzikana* (True Friendship) and *Unaitwa Nani?* (What is Your Name?). From a Postmodern perspective, one can argue that in the present era where reflectivity is of paramount importance, the younger generation is more inclined towards a logical as opposed to a theological approach in tackling socio-political and economic challenges. Reflexivity, a tendency to positively question reality, is opposed to passive acceptance of socio-cultural establishments as the absolute norm. Drawing on critical review of the two novels, this paper examines how young people shift away their gaze from the theological approach in tackling socio-political and economic challenges to advocating logical discourse in their dealings on daily basis. In this sense, the hegemonic control of Christianity is challenged as new options become the norm especially by the younger generation in the contemporary society.

**Key terms:** Missocializing agent, postmodernism, reflexivity, implied author, focalization and narrative voice

### Introduction

Colonialism in Africa took not only the form of political dominance over the colonized people but also exerted considerable influence over their cultural and religious beliefs (Ngugi, 1986; Mlacha, 1988:45-46). Ngugi wa Thiong'o observes that it was not easy to

differentiate between the missionary and the British administrator. This is because the missionaries were charged with the conversion of Africans to Christianity as well as being responsible for their basic education to equip them for the service of their colonial master. It is at mission schools that Africans were encouraged to embrace the white man's culture. They had to denounce their African 'traditional' values such as rites of passage, traditional forms of medication, naming systems among many others. They were encouraged to drop their African names but instead to take pride in the 'Christian' names acquired after conversion. African names remained as family names; for instance, people began calling themselves, John Kamau, James Onyango, Mary Wafula, etc. This trend has continued to date, albeit with some critical reassessment by some leading African personalities such as Jomo Kenyatta, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wangari Maathai, Raila Odinga, Koigi wa Wamwere (in Kenya), Kwame Nkrumah and Kofi Anan (in Ghana), Namdi Azikiwe, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe (in Nigeria).

However, today some African Christians prefer to retain their indigenous or tribal names even after baptism. They argue that their African names are loaded with meaning and reflect their African identity. This in itself is a pointer to a generational shift in the attitude to the Christian faith. Christian doctrine is seen as a camouflage of Western culture. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has championed this drift by abandoning the name 'James' preferring to use only his African name 'Ngugi wa Thiong'o' (Theodore Pelton, 1993; Shelton, 1978:12-13). He contends that although colonial establishment and administration were important in the change of social groups in Africa, they mainly strived to effect social and cultural changes in the individual. Alterations in the African's personality, the Europeans naively felt, could easily be made through missionary activity and education. Christian activity was often less "Christian" than European and thus, unlike Islam, tended to bring widespread overt change to Africa.

Consequently, Western formal education and Christianity became the basic means of socializing young people in most of the colonized African countries. Even to date when African states have achieved political independence, the trend still lingers on. For instance, most national and provincial (now county) schools in Kenya are associated with certain Christian denominations. This is because different missionary groups tended to concentrate their activities in specific

geographical regions. For example, in Nyanza region we have Maseno School (Anglican Church); Central Kenya is associated with Alliance High School (Presbyterians), while Western region has St Peters Mumias (Roman Catholics) and Friends School Kamusinga (Friends Church). Although the government oversees the running of these schools by supplying them with teachers and other subsidies, the respective denominations still have an influence on the spiritual matters. For example, they insist on having a representative of the church in the Board of Governors or even have a chaplaincy in the school.

Consistent with critical postmodern perspective, it is argued that the dominant culture tries to remain dominant by imposing and universalizing its own culture through indoctrination and ideological manipulation. It does this most effectively through ideological hegemonic control of educational institutions, the mass media, and through religion and other cultural agents - a subtle process of incorporating persons into particular patterns of belief and behaviour (Nicol, 2008:4-5). These realities are well captured in the Kiswahili novel especially from the 1970s to the present (Mlacha, 1988).

African writers use literature as a means of addressing social ills (Mazrui & Syambo (1992). Elena Bertoncini (2009:2) affirms that Kiswahili literature has tended to develop in parallel with the changes in the East African society. Therefore, Kiswahili novelists have always used their works as a platform to engage with socio-political and economic issues in their society. For instance, the influence of religion as a socializing agent in East Africa was and still is so great that many Kiswahili literary works have featured it as a theme in its own right. Alamin Mazrui (2007: 37-38) observes that most of the earlier Kiswahili literary writings pitted Christianity against Indigenous African religions, as in Samuel Sehoza's *Mwaka Katika Minyororo* (A Year in Chains, 1921).

Religion as a theme is not just prevalent in the earlier Kiswahili literary works. A quick survey of some of the contemporary Kiswahili novels reveals that Christianity is portrayed as one of the catalysts of social conflicts in post-colonial Africa. This is well captured in Kezilahabi's *Rosa Mistika* (1979), John Habwe's *Paradiso* (Paradise, 2005) as well as of Wamitila's *Nguvu ya Sala* (Power of Prayer, 1999). In all these works, Christianity is portrayed as a

“missocializing” agent especially when the youth are unable to cope with challenges outside the home environment where Christian values are upheld. Could this scenario be an indication of the waning power of missionary religions as socializing agents in the postmodern era?

I argue that the younger generation is tending towards a logical approach in tackling social issues as opposed to faith. Examples to support my argument will be drawn from two Kiswahili novels; *Kufa Kuzikana* (Walibora, 2003) and *Unaitwa Nani?* (Wamitila, 2008). These novels vividly capture how the older and younger generations are coping with socio-political and economic challenges prevalent in the present society. *Kufa Kuzikana* is authored by Ken Walibora while Kenneth Wadi Wamitila is the writer of *Unaitwa Nani?*

Kennedy Walibora and Kenneth Wamitila are among the upcoming Kiswahili novelists only marched by their predecessors like Said Khamis, Kezilahabi and Shafi Adam Shafi who belong to the older generation (Bertoncini, 2009). Ernest Waititu (2005) describes Walibora as one of the best Kiswahili writers and broadcasters in Kenya. *Wamitila's Nguvu ya Sala* (The Power of Prayer) (2001) and *Musaleo* (2005) have won the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature. In 2006, Wamitila was also awarded by the Institute of Kiswahili Research (TUKI) (now TATAKI) as the best East African Kiswahili literature scholar (Wamitila, 2006). Walibora's *Ndoto ya Amerika* (The American Dream) won the 2003 Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature (in the children category).

### A Summary of the Novels

The story in *Kufa Kuzikana* takes place in a fictional country, *Kiwachema*, where two antagonist ethnic groups, the *Wakorosho* and the *Wakanju* live next to each other in Korosho district. Two young characters (Akida a *Mkanju* and Tom a *Mkorosho*) are faced with the challenge of negative ethnicity<sup>28</sup> that almost breaks their friendship but they withstand it. The story is mainly narrated by a homodiegetic

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<sup>28</sup> Negative ethnicity here refers to the tendency to discriminate an individual on racial or ethnic grounds. This is what is commonly referred to as tribalism in Kenya.

narrative voice (Akida) who is also a character in the story. He relates how he travels by bus from his village to Tandika the capital city of Kiwachema. He is to be rewarded by the Minister for Education as one of the three best primary school leavers of the country. While in the city, he hopes to stay at Tim's place for a short time. However, when an ethnic clash suddenly breaks out in Baraki his village, he is unable return home.

The government chooses not to give any news about the massacres in the media, pretending that all is well. Neither of the two friends has any news of his family until Tim's sister Tamari, after a narrow escape from death, manages to reach her brother's place. After looking in vain for their relatives in the mortuary and in hospital, they decide to ask for help from Tom, a young and influential man from their village. They call at his luxurious residence when he has just learnt that his father has been killed in the ethnic clashes. In spite of the risk, Tom decides to bury his father in accordance with his customs. Akida volunteers to join him and his four bodyguards in this dangerous journey. Akida takes this chance to go to his home only to find that it has been burnt down. When he returns to the others, he finds Tom's body lying in the mud. He was stabbed by *Korosho* policemen. Tom's colleagues and his bodyguards did not lift a finger to protect him. Akida does not want to return to town before burying Tom's body although the others urge him to leave at once. He remains with his friend only to discover that he is not dead after all. With great difficulties he carries him to the hospital and stays with him until Tom slowly recovers. In the meantime, Tim has lost his job because his uncle accuses him for siding with the *Wakanju*.

Akida finds Tim living with Tamari in a slum in utmost poverty and is invited to settle with them, living on casual labours like Tim. One day, Akida strikes a *Korosho* man who boasts of having killed hundreds of *Wakanju*. Convinced that he had killed the man, Akida flees to another region where a local farmer hires him as his servant. Nevertheless, three years later he returns to the capital city and gives himself up to the police for the murder he thinks he committed. After the trial he is released because the man did not die, he was only injured. Tim reveals to Akida that his own father (Mzee Zablon) indeed killed Akida's father. Akida weeps bitterly but he comes to terms with it and is ready to stay with Tim. However, the relatives of the man he injured try to take their revenge and Akida has a narrow

escape disguised as a woman. In the end, Tom, who has moved to Canada, arranges for Akida to join him there.

*Unaitwa Nani?* has an interesting plot in the sense that it is subdivided in two sections on gender basis. Both sections begin with the question ‘*Unaitwa Nani?*’ We are then presented with unconscious nameless characters in a hospital. When they come to their senses, they can only recall their gender. What follows thereafter is a chronology of episodes that are entertaining, saddening and thought provoking since they involve the two characters’ efforts to understand themselves as well as their society.

The first section features stories about a woman who in a way represents various female characters who suffer under patriarchal systems. Different episodes are narrated from the point of view of this female character. On regaining consciousness, the woman is shocked to see several men gazing and making fun of her naked body. She is disgusted but in spite of her efforts to respond to them she is unable to utter a single word. When she is asked to mention her name, all she says is ‘*mwanamke*’ (woman). They insist that she should give a name that reveals her real identity for example as Mr X’s daughter or wife. The section ends with several episodes featuring female characters that are oppressed on account of their gender. Notably, the younger female characters are determined to combat social structures that are oppressive to the female folk. Acquisition of Western form of education becomes the key to their freedom.

The second section is narrated from the perspective of a male character who also speaks for various male voices. Male characters are equally victims of the female characters who have found leverage in the institutions of marriage and religion. However, like their female counterparts, young characters break loose of the oppressive establishments in their society. Kaminda (a pastor’s son), is tricked into marriage by Sasi. Apparently, Sasi is out to revenge on pastor’s children after Katiwa (another pastor’s son) abandoned her after impregnating her. Seemingly, Kaminda is unable to handle marriage issues due to poor socialization by his Christian father.<sup>29</sup> There is

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<sup>29</sup> *Unaitwa Nani?* pp.161-176

also the story of Wamae, a young man who fakes lameness in a 'Christian' crusade in order to obtain money to start a business<sup>30</sup>. In both novels, the authors are engaged with social-cultural, political and economic challenges facing the present Kenyan society. Some of the themes that cut across the two novels include: hypocrisy on the part of the religious leaders, corruption, demerits of the free market economy and oppressive cultural practices such as wife inheritance and forced early marriages for girls.

In this paper I foreground religion as a socializing agent as depicted in the novels. In both novels, the Christian faith is predominant. For instance. In *Unaitwa Nani?* only one episode (*Vuta n'kuvute*)<sup>31</sup> refers to a Muslim teacher who abuses his pupil. However, several episodes as we shall see later refer to Christian pastors who misuse their position. They are unable to serve as role models to the younger generation. The older members of society who are entrusted with the duty of socializing the youth fall way below the expected moral standards. As a result, the youth turn to education and their talents as the way out of their social challenges. Seen against the postmodern era in which the depicted communities live, it can be argued that religion as a socializing agent may be losing power or need a revision if it is to be relevant in the contemporary society.

## Postmodernism

As a basis of my discussion, I shall highlight some fundamental viewpoints about the postmodern ideas which in my opinion attempt to explain the tendency to drift from religion to reason or rationality in the contemporary society. Simon Malpas observes that the term 'postmodernism' tends to be used in critical writing in two key ways: either as 'postmodernism' or 'Postmodernity' (Malpas (2005:9). Generally, postmodernism has tended to focus on questions of style and artistic representation, and Postmodernity has been employed to designate a specific cultural context or historical epoch. However, as

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<sup>30</sup> *Unaitwa Nani?* p.183

<sup>31</sup> *Unaitwa Nani?* P.82

Simon has rightly noted, a clear cut distinction between postmodernism as a style and postmodernity as a period is impossible. The social context in which a literary work is produced and read has a bearing on the literary devices that the author deploys.

According to Anthony Giddens (2001:680) for instance, asserts that postmodernism describes a historical era marked with major changes affecting the global society due to a set of economic, social, and political forces that circulate across continents and national boundaries. It is an ideology that challenges the idealistic and universalistic tendencies of its predecessor, modernism, which are dissolving with the changing world. Bran Nicol (2008:2) also affirms that postmodernism is characterised by fluidity in social concepts, reflexivity of social members and a diversity and plurality of systems that give human beings a chance to choose the most suitable one. Nicol (2008:4-5) further points out that postmodernism is an attitude that underscores our culture and refers to a heightened degree of self-consciousness, indicating that our experience of reality has changed. Reality is no longer something that we take for granted, but is something that we suspect is continually organised and constructed for us by the apparatus of the mass media and the global capitalist economy.

Subsequently, the suspicion of the 'created reality' is what propels the postmodern men and women to actively engage in its recreation. People (especially the youth) in the twenty-first century no longer accept the present establishments as the ideal but rather as provisional structures that need continuous reassessment in the ever changing society. This is the kind of society that is depicted in *Kufa Kuzikana* and *Unaitwa Nani?*

In the two novels, the authors depict intergenerational conflicts involving the older and younger members of society emanating from their varied outlook on various social issues. For instance, while the older generation appears to be passive and conservative towards on the established social structures, the younger generation is reflexive; it is inclined towards self reflection and self referral (Steve, 1988). It actively re-evaluates the cultural heritage handed down to it by the parent generation. Various cultural practices, Christian religion included, have come under strong criticism by the younger generation which is more inclined to reason as opposed to faith.

David Kinnaman observes that for the younger generation, the lines between right and wrong, between truth and error, between Christian influences and cultural accommodation is increasingly blurred (Kinnaman, 2011:12). In the present internet era, the youth can readily access information thus making them more informed and more critical of their social environment. As Erdmute Alber (2008:3) informs us, the youth in contemporary societies are no longer passive in their societies. They are actively involved in the social structures that affect their daily life. It is on this premise that we see some young characters challenging Christianity as a valid socializing institution as represented in the two novels.

### **Christianity in *Kufa Kuzikana* and *Unaitwa Nani*?**

For the white missionaries, Christian religion was seen as a means of enlightenment and moral uprightness to the Africans who were considered to be uncivilized. It was part of modernization and consequently, an ideal form of life (Shelton, 1978:13). However, in the postmodern era the “authenticity” of the Christian faith is increasingly being challenged. This is especially so when those who are entrusted with its propagation fall short of the moral standards that they purport to advance. In *Kufa Kuzikana* and *Unaitwa Nani*? Christian leaders are represented as hypocrites who manipulate their congregation for their own interests. Mere profession of the Christian faith is therefore not a surety of morality in the contemporary society.

In *Kufa Kuzikana* (Walibora, 2003), Christianity is less appealing to the youth as a moralizing agent. This can be inferred from the behaviour of characters like Akida, Jerumani and Tim, Jerumani, a young man who had won a scholarship to pursue a Bachelor’s degree in engineering in Germany scoffs at Akida’s suggestion that religion is a plausible means of revolutionizing their society. He accuses Christian leaders like John Njalala for fuelling ethnic clashes by inciting their congregations to attack each other and even supplying weapons used in the clashes in Baraki (*Kufa Kuzikana*, 156, 160). Moreover, the same pastor pleads guilty in a court where he is accused of sexually abusing young girls (*Kufa Kuzikana*, 189). Akida is shocked that the pastor could be accused of such an offence. However, Jerumani is not surprised and he cites the

Rwandan genocide which to him clearly reveals how Christian leaders were partisan in the ethnic clashes (Kufa Kuzikana<sup>156</sup>). This scenario is similar to what happened in Kenya where during the Post-Election Violence in 2008, the Church was silent about the contested presidential results and burning of members of an ethnic group in a church in Eldoret town.

When we consider that literary works are cultural artefacts of a given community, it is no surprise that the author draws his themes from his own experiences. Elena Bertoncini (1989: 2) notes that Kiswahili literature has tended to develop in parallel with the socio-political and economic changes in East Africa. *Kufa Kuzikana* vividly captures the political mood that characterized the Kenyan society in the early 1990s during the onset of multiparty politics. The novel was published in 2003 meaning that it could have been written between 1992 and 2002. At this point in time, multiparty system was taking root in Kenya and the single party system was declining in power. The ruling party known as Kenya African Union (KANU) had become very unpopular after being in power since Kenya's independence in 1963. This appeared to suggest that all those who had benefited from the KANU regime feared losing their economic and political grips in the country. Therefore, to safeguard their interests, they resorted to ethnic manipulation by exploiting the existing latent social and economic cleavages between citizens from different ethnic groups. In 1992 and 2002 respectively, Kenya experienced major ethnic clashes following the country's general elections. Therefore, in view of the historical context of the novel, it can be understood why ethnicity features as a major theme in the novel.

The fictional country of Kiwachema can easily be associated with Kenya; the birth place of the author. Some of the places mentioned in the novel have a bearing with actual features and roads in the country. A case in point is River Kibisi which is located in the western part of Kenya while Lumumba, Mandela and Nkrumah are names given to some of the roads in Nairobi; the capital city of Kenya. These names also depict great African luminaries whose political ideals were to form the basis of African renaissance.

Therefore, a reader who is conversant with the geography and history of Kenya can easily figure out that the fictional city of Tandika represents Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya (KK.31). During this

period in the Kenyan history, Christian principles were put on the scale. Communities from varied ethnic backgrounds who lived together were faced with the challenge of either submitting to ethnic loyalty or religious allegiance. As captured in the novel, some Christian leaders reclined to ethnic prejudice and attacked fellow Christians. Furthermore, the failure by a section of the Church to marshal support against the new constitution during the 2010 referendum may also be indicative of the declining fortunes of the Church in postmodern era. Could we say that these are indicators that Christianity (the predominant faith of the majority of Kenyans) is losing the moral ground to guide the masses given that grand corruption are abound perpetuated by leaders who bear Christian names?

Within the framework of narrative theory, *narrative voice* and *focalization* are the key narrative strategies that reveal the ideology of the *implied author* in a literary text. *Narrative voice* designates the agent that tells the story and *focalization* refers to the angle from which the story is related (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002:88). These two strategies are usually lodged in the narrator who may or may not be part of the narrated story in the form of character(s). In most cases the main character is the one that reveals the *implied author's* ideology in a narrative text. However, sometimes minor or incidental characters may communicate this ideology (Uspensky, 1973:8-9).

The *implied author* is a textual entity that is an 'implied version' of the real author who establishes the norms of the narrative (Booth 1961:67-71). For Jacob Lothe (2000:19), the implied author is practically a synonym for the ideological value system that a text, indirectly and by combining all its resources, presents and represents. In *Kufa Kuzikana*, Akida the protagonist, Jerumani and Tim are characters in which the implied author's stance on Christianity is lodged. These young characters are opposed to the idea that religion can enhance moral standards in their society. They have lost confidence in their 'Christian' elders whom they regard to be corrupt and immoral. Through Jerumani, the author suggests that Kiwachemans need a change of heart and traditions to realize true social revolution. This view finds expression in the following excerpt:

Hii nchi yetu inahitaji mapinduzi," (Jerumani)alisema... "Sio mapinduzi ya serikali. Hata kidogo. Tunachohitaji ni mapinduzi ya mioyo.

Mapinduzi ya ada na mila. Mapinduzi ya mitazamo, misimamo na mikabala.” (154)<sup>32</sup>

Tim too acknowledges that mere profession of the Christianity faith may not be the solution to the socio-political and economic problems in their society. This is indeed in line with the teachings of Jesus. Those who merely call Him Lord shall not inherit the Kingdom of God (Matthew 7:21). Like Akida, Tim is disappointed that Pastor Njalala does not live what he preaches in his sermons. This is well captured in the following conversation:

Na Kasisi John, mtu wa Mungu alifanya makosa anayodaiwa kufanya kweli?”“Hii dunia ina maajabu.Umdhaniaye siye kumbe ndiye ...Sitaki kuizungumzia mada hiyo (dini) kwa sasa...nimeacha dini hadi niwapate watu wanaoishi kulingana na wanavyohubiri...”(199-201)<sup>33</sup>

Evidently, Christianity no longer appeals to the younger generation especially because some of the ‘Christian’ leaders are not moral models. The same scenario is depicted in *Unaitwa Nani* (UN hereafter)? In this novel, several episodes featuring hypocritical “Christian” leaders out to manipulate believers for selfish gains abound. Through characters such as Kaminda’s father (UN.165), the implied author shows that Christianity is no longer valued. Kaminda’s father is portrayed as a hypocritical pastor. Pastoring is to him a source of income rather than a calling. Moreover, Kaminda, his only child who appears to embrace his Christian doctrine is poorly socialized to cope with the challenges outside the home environment (UN.161). He is easily tricked into marriage by Sasi. Sasi is out to revenge on pastor’s children since Katiwa (another pastor’s son) abandoned her after impregnating her (UN.165, 175). The same pastor is reported to be intimately involved with a member of the church choir (UN.151-3).

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<sup>32</sup> Kiwachema people need a revolution. Not a revolution in the government but in their attitude. They need to change their customs and traditions as well their worldviews, perspectives and positions on issues.

<sup>33</sup> Is it true that Pastor John Njalala, a man of God, is guilty of what he is accused of? This world is full of wonders. He whom you least expect turns out to be the guilty one...I have resolved to abandon religion until I come across people who live out what they preach.

The impression that one gets from these episodes is that some of the Christian leaders are wanting morally. One therefore wonders if they can be relied on to inculcate good morals in the younger generation. Such observations confirm Erving Goffman's (1990)<sup>34</sup> assertion that in society people act within an overall frame of reference. This frame of reference works like a theatrical play in which everyone has taken a part within the scene. In this perspective, the scene works only when people keep faith with their part and avoid acting in ways which may contradict what has been accepted as one's part. Thus in the perspective of the young people as depicted in the novels, the Christian leadership messes up their role-playing – a situation which is unacceptable especially to the youth of the twenty-first century because it breaks up the scene.

To some extent this reveals the weaknesses of Christianity as propagated by the white missionaries. They presented the clergy as a 'holier than thou' category; a concept that was foreign to the African belief system. In the African religious beliefs, the obligation to uphold good deeds fell on each individual and reward and punishment, though may have effects on subsequent offspring, is often meted in real time here on earth on the offenders (Mbiti, 1989). This is illustrated in the episode of *Mizimu ya Marehemu*.<sup>35</sup> In the story, Nyalgondho, a male character miraculously becomes rich after marrying a mysterious woman from the lake. However, when he mistreats the woman later on, she vanishes with all the accumulated wealth leaving him impoverished. Here we witness recompense for the offender in the here and now.

It can also be argued that the money economy and the struggle to make a living characteristic of the contemporary society could account for these dissonances between telling people to uphold high moral standards and being moral. This is implied in the episode of the unfaithful pastor captured in *Siasa ya Soko Huria*.<sup>36</sup> Christianity is portrayed as a money making business for making money. It is no

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<sup>34</sup> Erving Goffman, *The presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. 1990, Anchor Books, New York.

<sup>35</sup> The Spirits of the Dead. *Unaitwa Nani?*, p.72.

<sup>36</sup> The Politics of the Free Market. *Unaitwa Nani?* p.145.

surprise that the pastor resorts to threats of hell fire for those who do not buy his religion (UN.162). However, with time, the 'hell fire' tactics lose power as people realize that the Christian religion offers no practical solution to their day to day challenges. See the following excerpt:

Akawatishia kuwa huo moto usemwao si wa kuyapasha moto maungo yao... Wakamwambia kuwa shida za maisha yao ni moto wa kutosha. Kuna moto mwingine mkali kuliko tanuri la maisha ambako wametumbukia? Mhubiri akawa analemewa (UN.162).<sup>37</sup>

Here the implied author insinuates that while Biblical teachings pacify the deprived with a false hope in the future, the poor also see that there is such a huge dissonance between what the clergy say and what they actually do. Hence one wonders if hell fire is losing power to scare or is hell demystified?

The efficacy of Christian doctrines in bringing about morality in highly unequal societies like the one portrayed in *Unaitwa Nani?* is highly challenged. We see characters who have amassed resources with no fear of retribution while those without them would do anything to better their lives. What is the place of Biblical teachings that discourage covetousness and seeking first the kingdom of God?<sup>38</sup>

In the episode entitled *Utamlaumu?*<sup>39</sup>, some Christian leaders are portrayed as liars who use Biblical narratives to manipulate people for material gains. Benny Hinn; a famous television evangelist is cited as one of the religious leaders who conduct crusades in which people receive miraculous healing. However, when a character by the name Wamae fakes healing, doubt is cast on the authenticity of some of the Biblical narratives. The *implied author* seems to justify Wamae as an innovative young man. He ceases the opportunity to overcome the economic challenges brought about by the politics of a liberal market in the present society.

In such circumstances one is bound to question the validity of Western religion in the first place. Is Christianity a kind of trade that

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<sup>37</sup> He threatened them with hell fire if they do not repent. But they told him that the problems they were facing were already hell for them.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew 6:33

<sup>39</sup> Literally translated as "Will You Blame Him"? *Unaitwa Nani?*p.177

was and is still used by its crusaders to impoverish those who blindly buy into it? They see the need to convince the poor who suffer from myriad social and health problems and their desire to get quick solutions as a fertile ground for their gimmicks. Consequently, stage-managed miracles are organized to hoodwink the poor and deprive them of even the little resource they may have. The begging question is why do people buy into such gimmicks? Are they fulfilling the prophecy that those who have will be given more while those who lack will lose even the little that they have?<sup>40</sup>

As a matter of fact, the hollowness of some of the works of Church leaders resonates with actual events in East Africa and elsewhere. For example, the Kanungu massacre in Uganda, the failure by some pastors to resurrect their colleagues who had died in a road accident (2011) and the end of the world prophecy that did not materialize by a USA based Church leader in 2011. When events do not happen as predicted, what will stop the congregation from feeling cheated, disillusioned and to lose hope in their religious leaders?

In the postmodern era, the younger generation in particular is reverting to the use of reason and exploiting their talents to tackle socio-economic problems. Young (female) characters in *Unaitwa Nani?* (Mwanamka or Pandora (UN.62), Nyakor (UN.72) and Kamene (UN.89) strive to overcome cultural inhibitions based on gender. They are opposed to the traditional practices such as forced marriages and wife inheritance. Instead, they have embraced modern culture like the Western form of education as an avenue for their emancipation.

Young men like Pipo use their talents to acquire capital and venture into the world of business as illustrated in the story; *Kichwa cha Lori*<sup>41</sup>. Subsequently, in the twenty-first century characterized with globalization in all spheres of life, religious crusaders may have to devise better ways to persuade especially the youth into buying into their religion. As Kinnaman (2011:91) points out, the impulses toward creativity and cultural engagement are some of the defining characteristics of the young generation today. They want to re-

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<sup>40</sup> For to everyone who has, *more* shall be given, and he will have abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away ( Matthew 25:29)

<sup>41</sup> The Head of a Lorry. *Unaitwa Nani?* p.194

imagine, re-create, rethink, and be entrepreneurs, innovators and starters.

Kinnaman thus suggests that the Church needs new architects to design interconnected approaches to faith transference. To rethink its assumptions and come up with new forms of catechism and confirmations that will utilize the potentials of the young generation. This is the only way to produce young people of deep abiding faith (Kinnaman 2011: 12-13). Hence for Christianity to stand the test of time, the younger generation should be given a chance to participate in the establishment of Church structures to enhance the transference of faith from generation to generation. Moreover, the elders should walk the talk and not the other way round.

## **Conclusion**

From the examples cited in the two novels, one notices an intergenerational conflict between the younger generation and the older one on their outlook on religion as a feasible means of solving social problems. The younger generation is inclined to a more pragmatic approach based on logic rather than relying on divine intervention. They differ from the older generation which seems to take the Christian doctrine passively. Indeed the youth in both the novels question the efficacy of some cultural practices and traditions including Christianity in tackling real life challenges in the contemporary society.

Probably it is high time Africans went back to their roots to reflexively and reflectively consider their traditional systems to cope with their daily challenges. While globalization inevitably brings in myriad alternatives, one has no choice but to appreciate the past. We need to look to our past, sieve out what is noble and synthesize it with the decent from other cultures and weave out homemade structures that are more adapted to our own environment. This is the only way faith and reason will emancipate Africans from global dominance and exploitation by the global giants. Religion does not necessarily negate reason as demonstrated by young characters like Tim and Jerumani. The unknown, as much as it could be in the hands of the divine creator, it is equally in the hands of the created. Human beings

are made in the creator's image and likeness to be a co-creators in making the world a better place (Genesis, 1:26).

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# Stock taking in a Transnational Islamic movement: Accounting for growth of Tablīghī Jamā'at in Kenya

**Halkano Abdi Wario**

**Abstract:**

Tablīghī Jamā'at, a transnational apolitical lay missionary movement is undoubtedly one of the most widespread Muslim groups in the contemporary world (Masud 2000; Sikand 2002, 2006). Conservative estimates put the number of active members of this movement in millions and note of its presence in almost all countries of the world (Marloes 2005; Moosa 2000; Tozy 2000; Marc 2000). The rapid growth of the movement has been attributed to its apolitical stand, its focus on individual and collective re-spiritualization, its ability to mobilize ordinary Muslims as active preachers and its strategies to build its growth on religious mobility and border crossing that guarantees its germination in fertile Muslim areas. This paper focuses on one of the least observed feature of the transnational movement: self-appraisals and reviews. It explores the theme of growth from the perspective of the Tablīghīs themselves. Hence, it asks, how do the Tablīghīs evaluate their growth? What mechanism do they put in place to sustain exponential rise in membership? What institutional and individual structures bolster their competitiveness, relevance and resilience in highly diverse Muslim societies? Is the stock taking done collectively, individually or regionally? How often do they meet to evaluate past activities and plan for the future one? It is only by exploring these themes can one state with certainty and account for growth of the globalizing but highly reclusive Muslim movement. The paper is based on extensive ethnographic field research done between April 2009 to January 2012 among the Tablīghīs in Kenya, a country that has over the years emerged as the nexus of the lay movement in East and Central Africa.

**Key words:** Tablīghī Jamā'at, Kenya, ahwāl, evaluation

### **Tablīghī Jamā'at: A historical background**

The fall of the Mughal Empire and the establishment of the British colonialism in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had unprecedented impact on reform movements in the Indian subcontinent (Haq 1973). The loss of political dominance by the minority Muslims triggers a wave of religious revivalism that manifested itself in Islamic revivalism and extensive investment in *madrassa* education. Chief among the emerging centres of Islamic learning and revivalism was Darul Uloom Deoband in the town of Deoband in north India (Sikand 2002). Here, led by prominent scholars of the time such as Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi, Muhammad Yaqub Nanautawi, Shah Rafi al-Din, Sayyid Muhammad Abid, Zulfiqar Ali, Fadhl al-Rahman 'Usmani and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, Deobandi *madrassas* trained a number of Muslims scholars that were to impact on revivalism in the later years. Tablīghī Jamā'at grew out of such an environment of religious reform. It was founded by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, a Deoband educated Muslim scholar in 1927 in Mewat, near New Delhi. Mewatis or Meos, were by then, characterized by religious illiteracy and non-observance of Islamically ordained duties such as prayers, fasting and *zakat*. The movement was also established as a counter to Hindu reform movements such as *Arya Samaj* that targeted to 'revert' the nominal Meos back to Hindu religion. (Haq 1972) Ilyas mobilize ordinary Meos in small groups to travel within their own regions and major centres of Islamic learning as lay missionaries. The essence of such travels, as envisioned by the founders, was not primarily to preach but to inculcate religious observance and discipline among the lay missionaries. In the heightened days of socio-political activism in the British India that ignite religious and ethnic rivalries, the Tablīghī Jamā'at, unlike movements such as the Jamā'at -e-Islami, stayed clear of political discourses and agitations. This strategy allowed the movement to focus on individual and collective re-spiritualization of everyday life, to build consensus and return to the fundamentals of the faith in spite of political and sectarian divisions and mitigated backlash from state actors bent on proscribing politically influential movements. This strategy, would in the later expansion of the movement, allow for its establishment and growth in East Africa, Arabian Peninsula, South East Asia and the United Kingdom.

Central to the ideology of the Jamaat is the role of travel as the most effective tool of personal reform. (Masud 2000) The main teachings

of the movement are summarized under six principles: One, article of faith (*shahada*); two, five daily ritual prayers (*salat*); three, knowledge (*ilm*) and remembrance of God (*dhikr*); four, respect for every Muslim (*ikram-l Muslim*); five, emendation of intention and sincerity (*ikhlas-i niyat*) and six, spare time (*tafriq-i waqt*). (Sikand 2002) The last principle is the hallmark of the movement. It is also known as *khuruj fi sabillillah* (going out for the sake of God) and involves volunteers sparing time and resources to travel away from home for different durations such as 3 days, 10 days, 40 days, 4 months and even a year. Members are expected to set aside at least 3 days every month, 40 days every year and 4 months in a lifetime for the sole purpose of missionary journeys.<sup>42</sup>

### Notes on Data collection

The data used in the paper are sourced primarily from field work done Kenya in April, 2009, August-October 2009, April-August 2010 and December 2011- February 2012. Ethnographic data were collected through attendance of transnational Tablighī gatherings in Nairobi, Isiolo and Moyale, formal and informal interviews with members of the movement and religious leaders and followers drawn from mainstream Salafi and Sufi traditions. Observations and field notes from travel experiences with Tablighīs enriched the research.<sup>43</sup>

### Tablighī Topography in Kenya

Tablighī Jamā'at came into Kenya in 1956, largely through contacts with Kenya's Asian Muslim communities from Indian Subcontinent.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Personal interviews with Mohammed Aero (2009), Abdi Rashid (2010), Mzee Sule (2011) in Moyale.

<sup>43</sup> In total 35 face to face interviews were conducted in the period stated above of which about 7 were focus group interviews. The respondents included novices, active leaders Tablighīs and members and local and national non- Tablighī religious leaders. The author also attended eight national gatherings of Tablighīs in different parts of Kenya as well as 10 day travel with the missionary group. Most interviews were conducted in Swahili and Borana.

<sup>44</sup> Naushad, a sermon at Bait ul Maal, Nairobi, 18.04.2009. Mercantile Indian Ocean trade brought traders of various origins to the coast of East Africa. Among early settlers included Indians of various religious persuasions (Salvadori 1984, 2000). British Colonial administration also brought large Indians of diverse religious

(Hasani 1967) It has immense presence in most parts of Kenya especially in Northern Kenya, the Coast, Nairobi and major towns in Central and Western Kenya. The North is home to Cushitic speakers of Borana, Gabbra, Burji, Garre and Somali. Among the Borana community of Isiolo and Moyale, the Jamā‘at has a history of about 15 years.<sup>45</sup> Of Kenya’s 40 million people, slightly more than 11% are Muslims (Population and Housing Census Report 2009). Kenyan Muslims are a diverse group with varying doctrinal and sectarian affiliations. Large sections ascribed to moderate Sunni traditions with strong affiliation to *Shafi’i* School of jurisprudence. Members of Tablighī Jamā‘at constitute a minority missionary group but with high visibility in Muslim public spaces due to frequent itinerary and upsurge in membership.

Distinctive and pragmatic ‘faith bureaucracy’ accounts for the success of self-organization and growth of the Tablighī Jamā‘at in most parts of the world. Kenya is not an exception. Deitrich Reetz (2008) observes that despite the fact that Tablighīs forcefully assert that the movement has no specialized organization or administration and that it is purely lay and voluntary, its internal administration is strong and robust and highly hierarchical. Reetz describes many features that resemble functioning of a bureaucracy with clear in- and out-group distinction. While the movement knows no formal membership it is marked by a distinct internal culture, which influences all members and their mutual relations.

The country’s national administrative council referred to as Kenya *Shūrā* divided the country into three major zones called *halqas*, namely: Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa *halqas*. The *halqas* are named after the central and most populous town in the zone. Kenya *Shūrā* is composed of about a dozen senior Tablighīs largely drawn from Kenyan Muslims of Asian origin but also selected committed

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persuasions as indentured railway labourers to construct Kenya-Uganda Railway from Mombasa to the shores of Lake Victoria at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> Century. A number of the labourers went back home while others made Kenya their home. Subsequent migration increased the population of this diasporic and heterogeneous community. The Kenyans of Asian origin are relatively wealthy due to trade. Various Muslim communities are represented within them including Ismailis, Ithna Asharis, Memmons, and Ahmadis among others. It is among the Sunni groups from the Kenyan Asian community that the Tablighi Jamaat found a viable connection.

<sup>45</sup> Hussein Dima, personal interview Isiolo, 14.04.2009

members of the movement from other communities. Each *ḥalqa* is further subdivided into sub-*ḥalqa*. All the three major *ḥalqas* have about 10 sub-*ḥalqas*.<sup>46</sup> Three or four *qarias* constitute a sub-*ḥalqa*. A *qaria* is composed of four to five mosque jurisdictions. Tablīghīs who frequent a specific local mosque organized themselves into a mosque-based unit that regularly meet, preach, recruit members, receive foreign and local lay preachers and consult on matters of faith. These mosque-based units also called *maqamis* are the cornerstone of the re-territorialization strategy, occupation of sacred spaces and resilience of the movement in the country. At the lowest level of the Tablīghī bureaucracy is the household unit where the ethos of the movement are re-enacted and inculcated through regularly text reading and consultative meetings. In essence, an adherent is expected to bring the movement home and revive the adherence to the faith by his family members.

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<sup>46</sup> Isiolo and Waso sub-*ḥalqas* fall under the Nairobi *ḥalqa* which is also the largest and most active *ḥalqa* in Kenya. Moyale and Marsabit sub-*ḥalqas* fall under Garissa *ḥalqa*.

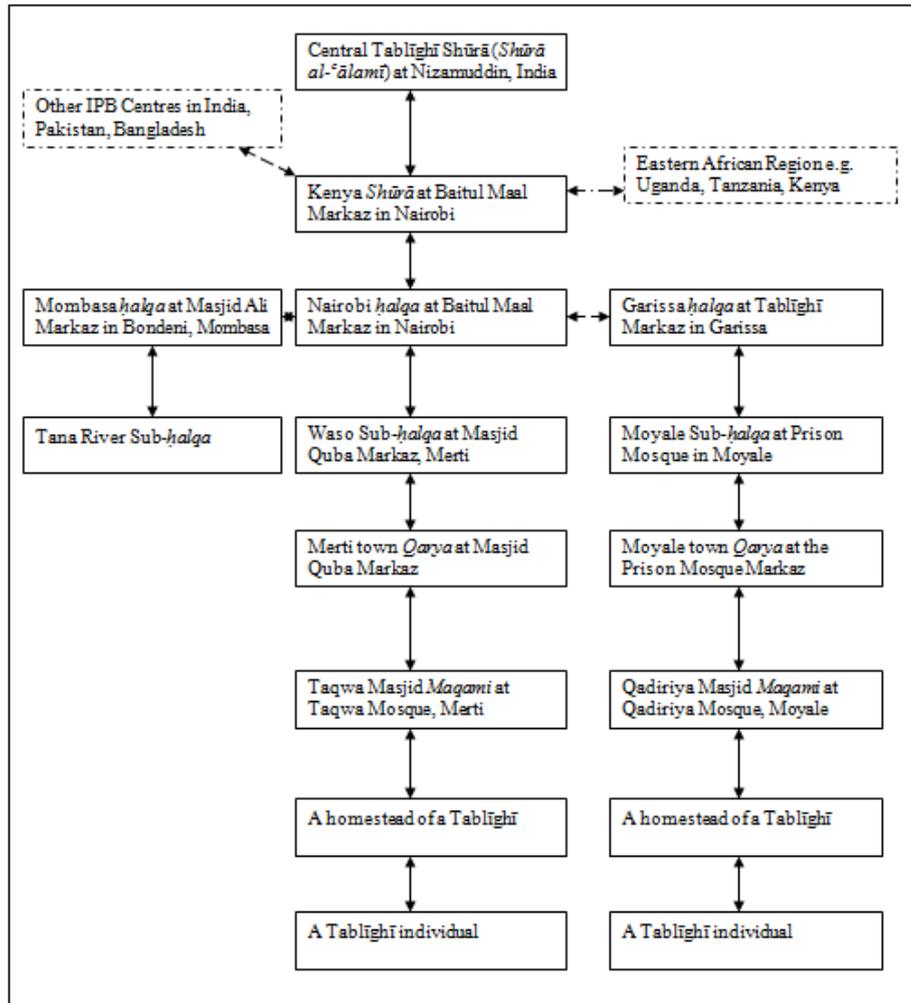


Figure 8: Tablighī territorial and administrative structure



Map 1: A map of Kenya showing the three Tablighī zones of operation

At each level an *amir* (leader) heads a unit on rotational base. The *amir* is selected from among the regular Tablighīs in an area. The level of commitment and organizational skills are some of the requirements that boost one's rise in the leadership structure of the movement. A man is considered as the *amir* of his household. A travelling group also has an *amir* as the head. He is often selected by a regional or local consultative council to lead based on his vast travels and knowledge of Tablighī practices.

In each *halqa* and sub-*halqa* the Tablighīs have designated mosques that serves as coordination centre for movement's events and regular

activities. Such a centre is called *markaz*. Baitul Maal is the Nairobi *ḥalqa markaz* and the national headquarters of the movement. Masjid Ali is Mombasa *ḥalqa markaz* while Masjid Quba is Garissa *ḥalqa*'s administrative seat. In areas where the Tablīghīs do not possess their own sacred space, a 'Tablighi-friendly' mosque is identified and utilized as an operational base. Mosques not only serve as venues to preach and recruit new members but also act as seat for consultative meetings (*shūrā*), spaces for congregational gatherings (*ijtimā'ī* and *jor*), places for reception and accommodation of visiting fellow lay preachers and classes to teach and learn about various Tablīghī practices in customized educational programmes (*ta'lim*).

### Evaluating Tabligh: *Ahwāl* Giving as Progress Review

The highly structured 'faith bureaucracy' described above accounts for smooth flow of directives and a clear chain of command among these lay preachers in Kenya. However it reveals little if any concrete data as to how the movement grew and continuously strategizes to evaluate the past events and activities, coordinate present programmes and plan future undertaking. A glimpse into the movement self-appraisal mechanism undoubtedly shed a clear picture on this under-researched theme of the transnational movement. The questions worth asking are: how do the Tablīghīs appraise their activities? Are such evaluative measures oral or written? Are they done on individual or collective basis? Does each level of Tablīghī bureaucracy evaluate activities within its jurisdiction? What are the variables that are used in the evaluation process? How do such evaluative measures impact on the commitment of individual Tablīghī to the various mobility related practices that has bearing on their finance? The case studies below and the subsequent analysis shall be used to explore the theme of growth and self-evaluation of the movement.

Tablīghī practices can roughly be divided into individual (*amal ifradī*) and collective (*amal ijtimā'ī*) deeds. Individuals are expected to carry out the following daily practices without supervision, namely, recite at least a *juzu* (1/30<sup>th</sup> part of the Quran), recite at least 300 *adhkar* (sing. *dhikr*) (supplication for remembrance of God), greet a certain

number of individuals with proper Islamic pleasantries, visit a few fellow Tablighīs, do supplementary recommended prayers aside from obligatory prayers and read some texts from Tablighī prescribed books such as *Faza'il-e-A'amaal* and *Muntakhab Ahadith* for guidance. In sum, a committed Tablighī is expected to set aside 2 ½ to 8 hours daily for uninterrupted *amal ifradi*. Aside from that, a Tablighī who is also often an integral member of mosque-based *maqami* unit is expected to attend on daily basis a consultative forum (*shūrā fil masjid*). He is also expected to accompany fellow Tablighīs from his mosque in a weekly neighbourhood missionary patrol called *jowla* between *Asr* (late afternoon prayer) and *Maghrib* (early evening prayer). The excursion often gathers local Muslims to attend evening prayers at the mosque. After *jowla*, the local *maqami* team motivates the mosque attendants to volunteer to be part of a preaching team to be sent to other areas. A Tablighī also participates in a collective weekly practice called *fikrudīn*, an evaluative session that brings *maqami* units from a number of mosques in an area to a central mosque so as to gauge the success of the previous week's activities, plan the present activities and set target for the coming week. Collectively a *maqami* team is expected to inculcate the culture of text readings in the local mosque. The reading and discussions are called *ta'lim fil masjid*. As a collectivity, the members of a *maqami* team conducts visits (*ziarat*) to religious elites (*ūlama*), fellow inactive Tablighīs and pay courtesy calls to barber shops, meat shops, markets, schools and hospitals. They are also expected to organize *panch amal* monthly 3 day excursions (*khuruj shahri*) for local missionary purpose. On quarterly, semi-annual and annual basis, they are expected to organize teams to attend local, regional, zonal and national three days congregational gatherings called *jors* and *ijtimā's*. At home, each Tablighī is expected to initiate daily consultative forum (*shūrā fil bayt*) and text reading (*ta'lim fil bayt*).

The *maqami* team, the most fundamental unit of Tablighī Jamā'at at the grassroot level, is expected to contest for sacred space use and own it by conducting corpus of practices called *panch amal*. Implementation of (five practices) is believed to make the local mosque gain the noble characteristics of the sacred spaces of the pristine Islam. These practices, some already mentioned, include *mashwera* (consultative meetings), *ta'lim* (text reading and religious instructions), *jowla* (neighbourhood missionary patrol), *fikrudīn*

(deliberations on faith matters) and *khuruj shahri* (3 days monthly missionary excursions).

The question is, with all these expectations and obligations, how does such lay missionary movement take stock of its progress and challenges? The obligations required of an individual Tablighī tasks him in various capacities, namely, as individual, as a family man, as a member of a mosque-based maqami team, and a member of local, regional and national Tablighī Jamā'at. To facilitate detailed evaluation at various levels, Tablighī Jamā'at in Kenya has immensely invested in culture of individual and collective appraisal and report mechanism called *ahwāl* giving. *Ahwāl* can be given formally in *maqami*, *qaria*, sub-*halqa*, *halqa* and national *halqa* levels or informally between individual Tablighīs.

A *maqami* team is expected to hand in written or oral report of its activities every week in the weekly gatherings (*fikrudīn*) that bring a number of *maqami* teams from a number of local mosques. The team also picks the set targets for coming week. A *maqami* team, in sense, attempts to give an 'accurate' report of how many people attend its daily *shūrā*, bi-weekly *ta'lim*, weekly *jowla*, how many volunteered for various travel durations, how many members conduct home-based family consultative meetings and text reading and even how many members set aside 2 ½ hours on daily basis. The sum of the *maqami* reports in a sub-*halqa* is discussed in monthly sub-*halqa shūrā* sent to the *markaz shūrā* of the *halqa* in Nairobi, Mombasa or Garissa. Quarterly or semi-annually, the *markaz shūrā* consults with various sub-*halqas* and identify a mosque in which to conduct zonal congregational gathering of *jor*. *Jor* is held on rotational basis in all areas of the *halqa*. For three days, the Tablighīs and non-Tablighīs, attend preaching and learning sessions that ends with recruitment drive to constitute as many travel teams as possible. Months before *jors* and *ijtimā's*, each sub-*halqa* is given targets to mobilize and bring to the gatherings in terms of 40 days and 4 months teams from their area. Often the *jor* does not end without a specific time set aside to discuss the *ahwāl* of each sub-*halqa*. Figure 1 is a summary of such session at Isiolo *jor* in 2009. Annually, a few days before national *ijtimā's* are held, representatives of each *halqa* and sub-*halqa* attend a consultative *shūrā* for *qudamah* (senior regulars) and they submit the details cumulative progress of their *halqas* orally in

front of others and national Kenya *shūrā* members.<sup>47</sup> This is done from a standard form distributed among the *amirs*. A sample of these reports, also called *karguzari*.<sup>48</sup> *Karguzari* plays an important role of informing, educating and updating each other on current challenges and development. The reports from the three *ḥalqas* are summarized and a representative of the Kenya chapter of Tablīghī Jamā'at presents it in an annual gathering of country representatives at the auspicious headquarters of the movement in Nizamuddin, New Delhi, India.

*Ahwāl* giving session, especially the formal congregational type, is a tense environment. Barbara Metcalf notes that at the conclusion of a tour, participants report back, orally or in writing, their experiences to the mosque-based group (local, regional, or national) from which they set out. *Ahwāl* giving' in *ijtimā'* and *ḥalqas* is a sort of peer review session in which the representatives of *masjids*, sub-*ḥalqas* and *ḥalqas* participating in the event attempt to give a true account of *da'wa* activities in areas under their jurisdiction. Members of unit giving *ahwāl* at any moment are expected not only to be truthful but also avail extra information about how they conduct certain recommended deeds and practices. The sessions are often chaired by invited members of national consultative council, the Kenya *Shūrā*. These evaluators are thorough in their interrogation of the local and regional *amirs* appointed to orally submit the reports. The sessions depending on nature of the congregational gathering may be attended by fifty to three thousand Tablīghīs and non-Tablīghīs. New directives are often given. The members are encouraged to do better. Past efforts though not belittled are often summed up as not enough. The members are motivated to believe that they have greater potential to do much better and to take the revivalism of the faith to greater heights. In the following section, two case studies have been chosen to highlight the practice of *karguzari*. In the first progress report was submitted by a representative of Waso sub-*halqa* in a joint Isiolo-Meru-Waso sub-*halqa* *ḥalqa*. The second report

<sup>47</sup> In April 2010, I attended the national *qudamah shūrā*. Approximately 300 persons gathered at Baitul Maal for the meeting. Representatives from various sub-*ḥalqas* such as Waso, Isiolo, Moyale, Marsabit, Wajir, Garissa, Tana River, Kisumu, Nakuru, Kajiado, Mombasa, Malindi, Kwale, and Nairobi are among the congregation. Few representatives from Tanzania and Uganda presented *karguzari* of their country *ḥalqas*. The two day meeting coming days before the national *ijtimais* discussed logistics and other necessary preparations.

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Metcalf 'Travellers' Tales in Tablighi Jamā'at

was a cumulative summary of the national progress report indicating how each of the three *halqas* of Mombasa, Nairobi and Garissa performed.

### **Case Study I: Ahwāl Giving at Isiolo Jor**

From 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> April 2009, I attended 3 days Isiolo *jor*. The total number of attendants was approximately 500 hundred. There were Sudanese, Indian, Swahili speaking group from the Coast, Somali speaking group from North Eastern, groups from Merti, Kinna, Garba Tulla, Sericho, Meru, Nairobi and Isiolo (the host). The congregation was held at Isiolo Jamia Mosque. Adjacent to the mosque is the prominent educational institution called Al Falah Islamic Educational Complex. It has a modern Islamic school and a health unit. Missing from the gathering were the prominent sheikhs of the mosque and the *ūlama* from Al Falah. Presumably the sheikhs do not necessarily share the zeal and methods used by the movement as appropriate *da'wa* techniques. The visiting Tablīghīs were accommodated at the Centre. They cooked, ate and slept at the Centre and attended the *jor* programme at the mosque. The classrooms were utilized for this purpose. The accommodation was arranged on basis of the places of the origin of the group, for instance, Merti, Kinna, Meru, India, Sudan, Coast, North Eastern and so on. Each group contributed towards the *khidma* (catering) and *harasa* (security) and other collective duties. Each group had its own *amir*. About 5 leading Kenya *shūrā* members were in attendance. For three days, after the five daily prayers, sermons (*bayans*) were delivered given by the visiting Sudanese, Indian, Swahili and Somali travelling groups. Translations were done rotationally by a group of local Tablīghīs into Borana. Every morning session had language-based learning circles for *ta'lim*. In the *ta'lim*, apart from preaching on the need to volunteering for *da'wa*, the congregants listened to selected *hadith* and Quranic verses from *Faza'il-e-A'amaal* and *Muntakhab Ahadith*, taught the six fundamentals of the movement and made to spontaneously group themselves in bands of 2 to 3 persons to recite short verses of the Quran. The session ended with a recruitment drive to form travelling groups.

The *ahwāl* giving session was held on the afternoon of 11<sup>th</sup> April 2009. This was done shortly after the *Asr* prayers. Representatives of Waso, Isiolo, and Meru sub-*ḥalqa* that falls under Nairobi *ḥalqa* submitted their *karguzari* reports from a standardized form. The representatives were taken to task why certain practices were not performed, for instance, house-hold *ta'lim* in Isiolo. Meru representative was particularly asked why very few people volunteered to travel for Tablīghī missionary tours. Waso representative was asked to account for falling number of Tablīghī volunteers in the area. The *karguzari* report covered the period from October 2007 to May 2009. The form contains set of parameters to gauge success or failure of each unit and give approximate picture of the organizational strength, weaknesses and potentialities. In a sense, with periodical reviews of their practices, the adherents in an area make a personal effort to reach targets, own the process and commit themselves to the objective of reforming the self and the others to a different level. The categories for review can be roughly classified into six namely: *Ulama*; Brothers (active Tablīghīs); Ladies (women); Mosques; Household: and Jamā'at (a travelling group). The first three are about human beings while the last three are of institutional nature. The form is roughly subdivided into two sections. The upper sections deals with details of commitment to the recommended travel regimes such as 1 year, 4 months, 40 days, 10 days by *ūlama*, brothers and women and also the statistical details on number of mosques (*masajid* and *musala*) in the area. The second part has 19 entries and each of the entry is subjected to review on basis of its previous status (past), present situation and intentional expectations (future). Below is a replica of the Waso sub-*ḥalqa karguzari* report.

State/Area: Waso Sub- <i>ḥalqa</i>			
Date: Since October 2007-May 2009			
<i>Ulama</i> who have spent 1 year	- -	No. of Active	--
<i>Ulama</i> who have spent 4 months and 40 days	1 0	No. of Active	6
No. of 4 month brothers	1 2 9	No. of Active	4 8

	No. of 40 days brothers only	5 1 9	No. of Active	2 0 7	
	No. of ladies who have spent 40 days	- -	No. of ladies who have spent 40 days with <i>Tartib</i>	--	
	Ladies who have spent 10 days	- -	Ladies who have spent 3 days	--	
	No. of ladies spending 3 days with Tarteeb	- -	No. of places for Ladies weekly <i>ta'lim</i>	--	
	No. of <i>Masajid</i> + <i>Musala</i>	76			
	ITEMS		Prev ious	Pres ent	Inten tion
1.	<i>Masajid</i> with 5 <i>A'maal</i>		26	29	37
2.	<i>Masajid</i> with some <i>A'maal</i>		19	15	43
3.	No. of <i>Masajid</i> doing daily <i>Abadi</i> of the <i>Masjid</i>		3	--	7
4.	3 days <i>Jamā'at</i> per month		11	8	30
5.	Brothers spending 2 ½ Hrs Daily		47	23	63
6.	No. of Houses doing daily <i>ta'lim</i> with <i>muzakra</i> of six <i>siffat</i>		33	16	77
7.	No. of brothers spending 4 months yearly		14	6	40
8.	Brothers spending 10 days monthly		--	--	3
9.	Brothers spending 8 hours daily		--	--	3
10.	No. of 4 months <i>Jamā'at</i> s		5	6	11
11.	No. of 4 months <i>Jamā'at</i> s on foot		5	6	13

12.	No. of 40 days Jamā'at s	34	24	37
13.	No. of 40 days Jamā'at s on foot	29	21	34
14.	Jamā'at s sent to other countries	2	5	7
15.	40 days Jamā'at s with ladies	--	--	1
16.	10 days Jamā'at s with ladies	--	--	1
17.	3 days Jamā'at s with ladies	--	--	1
18.	Brothers who have spent two months in Bangle Wali Masjid (Nizamuddin)	--	--	3
19.	No. of remote locations and <i>karguzari</i> of the efforts in these locations	--	--	1

Table 1: Waso area karguzari report

## Analysis

Though the movement recruits ordinary Muslims for preaching tours, the participation of the religious scholars is highly appreciated even if minimal. It was one of the first categories under review in the report. The number of women (denoted as ladies in the form) who spent 10 days and 3 days masturat tours are also noted. Mosques form central sacred space for enactment of reform agenda as envisioned in the Tablighī ethos and hence the importance of its exact number, location and nature of its custodians for its future and present success. The Tablighis are among the few Islamic groups who have a consistently accurate number of all the mosques in Kenya. In each local mosque they attend, members are asked to formulate *maqami* units to carry out some recommended communal practices.

The Tablighī Jamā'at envisages that all mosques adopted what they call *panch amaal* (five practices). These practices strengthen the

bond of network between the Tablīghīs and also build their religious capital. Hence the first three items on the second section of the report were on in how many mosques that all the five practices are carried out, how many uphold some practices and how many exercise the daily *da'wa* effort within such as *da'wa*, *ta'lim* and *istiqbāl*. Commitments of ordinary Tablīghīs were also gauged as an indicator of the performance of the movement in the area. The regulars are expected to set aside time for individualized activities such as few hours for *dhikr* and Quran reading and communal practices approved by the movement like spending 40 days and 4 months on missionary tours within and outside the country.

The core target of *Tablīghī* self reform is household unit and hence its review. It is believed that the practices learnt by a Tablīghī man at the local mosque and on travel can have a lasting impact once the household-based practices such as text readings on the core teachings of the movement are firmly established. The evaluation places emphasis on the means of transport used by the Tablīghīs on missionary journeys, for instance bus or other motorized means or on foot. Missionary travel on foot (*paidal Jamā'at*) is especially revered as it involves not only greater sacrifice and risks but also closer in experience to the idea of travel for faith as done during the pristine period of Islam. Tablīghīs in Kenya are increasingly encouraged to visit the Bangle Wali Masjid in Nizamuddin, India for advanced training on ways of the movement.

### **Case Study II: *Purana Saathi Jor*, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2011-1<sup>st</sup> January 2012**

The Tablīghīs in Kenya have two national gatherings. One is held in early May and the other in late December. The former is open to all Tablīghīs and non-Tablīghīs from Kenya and neighbouring countries and the latter is open mainly to the active members of the movement from all parts of Kenya. The former attracts up to 15,000 people while the latter is attended by about 3000-4000 persons. The former is called *ijtimā' al-aam* (general congregational gathering) while the latter is called *purana saathi jor/majma jor/qudamah jor* (specialized gatherings for active Tablīghīs).

I arrived on the 29<sup>th</sup> December shortly before the *Maghrib* prayers. Each attendee was required to report to the *istiqbāl* (reception) tent to register. Details about name, place of origin, mosque of origin, the highest number of travel days or months volunteered in the past, expected number of days or months to be volunteered at the end of the gathering and remarks were entered into a big black register book. I was number 807 on the register. The atmosphere was more cordial and animated. Most of the congregants are regular acquaintance due to missionary travels and such conventions. The *bayan* and *ta'lim*, just like in the general *ijtimā'*, took into consideration linguistic diversity and had translation circles for the Borana, the Somali, the Amharic, the Swahili, the Arabic and the Baganda Tablīghīs.

The evaluation session was held on the 31<sup>st</sup> December, first by Mombasa *ḥalqa* started then Garissa *ḥalqa* and finally Nairobi *ḥalqa*. It is important to note that prior to giving of *ahwāl*, an invited scholar give motivational talk in Urdu about the need for accuracy and importance of such reports in the consolidation of faith revivalism. The speeches were translated into Swahili by one of the local Muslim of Asian descent. The invited speakers play down any tendency of inter-*ḥalqa* rivalry and emphasized that such reports are not for record keeping but a basis for setting better targets for tangible progress.

Each of the *ḥalqa* representatives gave cumulative summary of Tablīghī activities and achievements for the period between May-December 2012. Apart from general summary, the *ḥalqa* representative was asked to invite a representative from one of the mosque within his jurisdiction to give more detailed grassroot *ahwāl* report. Both the general and grassroot reports from each *ḥalqa* were subjected to rigorous interrogations by a band of invited 'elders' of the movement from the Indian subcontinent. The speakers were at times asked to clarify how they go about some of the Tablīghī practices and advices and new directives were given on the best way to go about it. It is important to note that a number of congregants took notes of the statistical data and new directives for their own record keeping and implementation upon return. Finally, the reports from the three *ḥalqas* are summarized into one form by the members of the national consultative council as indicated below. The table below is a replica of the original. It was slightly modified for better

analysis. While all the rows are as in the original, the column on totals is my analytical addition.

#### Purana Saathi Jor

	Karguzari Halqa:-Kenya Purana Saathi Jor Date:- Dec. 2011	Items			
		Nairobi <i>halqa</i>	Mombasa <i>halqa</i>	Garissa <i>halqa</i>	Total
1.	No. of 4 months brothers	550	324	546	1420
2	No. of 4 months active brothers	280	151	290	721
3	No. of (only) 40 days brothers	1710	841	1321	3872
4	No. of 40 days active brothers	740	331	435	1506
5	No. of <i>Ulama</i> having spent 1 year	8	5	2	15
6	No. of active 1 year spent <i>Ulama</i>	6	5	2	13
7	No. of <i>Ulama</i> having spent 4 months /40days	60	27	39	126
8	No. of active 4months/40days spent <i>Ulama</i>	35	12	22	69
9	No. of <i>Shab guzari</i> place(weekly programme)	3	2	5	10
10	No. of places having <i>Hayatus sahaba ta'lim</i>	3	2	5	10
11	No. of ladies having spent 40 days	20	14	02	36
12	No. of ladies having spent 10 days	84	70	39	193
13	No. of places having ladies weekly <i>ta'lim</i>	7	25	18	50
14	No. of ladies spending 40 days with <i>Tartib</i>	-	-	2	2
15	No. of ladies spending 3 days with <i>Tartib</i>	11	-	18	29
16	No. of dwellings (villages, towns etc.)	-	-	-	-
17	No. of zones (collection of about 20 dwellings)	-	-	-	-
18	No. of <i>Masajid</i>	1071	1400	1200	3671
19	No. of <i>Masjids</i> with 5 <i>A'maals</i>	80	57	129	226

20	No. of <i>Masjids</i> with some <i>A'maals</i>	145	159	135	439	
21	No. of average 3 days <i>Jamā'at s</i> per month	130	56	71	257	
22	No. of brothers participating in 2 ½ hrs efforts daily	350	174	170	694	
23	No. of <i>masajid</i> doing daily efforts with <i>abadi (dwt,istq,tlm)</i>	3	-	-	3	
24	No. of houses doing daily <i>ta'lim</i>	360	202	215	777	
25	No. of houses doing daily <i>ta'lim</i> and six <i>siffat</i>	120	-	146	266	
26	No. of brothers spending 4 months yearly	52	24	107	183	
27	No. of brothers spending 10 days monthly	5	2	12	19	
28	No. of brothers spending 8 hrs daily	1	2	11	14	
29	No. of 4 months <i>Jamā'at s</i>	13	10	46	69	
30	No. of 4 months <i>Jamā'at s</i> on foot	5	9	38	52	
31	No of 40 days <i>Jamā'at s</i>	46	40	77	163	
32	No of 40 days <i>Jamā'at s</i> on foot	20	38	56	114	
33	No. of <i>Masjids</i> who sent complete <i>Jamā'at</i> in the country	4M-40D10	4M-40D-	4M-40D-	4M-40D10	
34	No. of <i>Masjids</i> who sent complete <i>Jamā'at</i> to abroad	4M-40D-	4M-40D-	4M-40D-	4M40D-	
35	No. of <i>Jamā'at s</i> sent to foreign	10	3	9	22	
36	No. of 10 days <i>Jamā'at s</i> with ladies	-	3	2	5	
37	No. of 40 days <i>Jamā'at s</i> with ladies	-	-	-	-	
38	No. of 10 days <i>Jamā'at s</i> with ladies to foreign	-	-	-	-	
39	No. of 3 days <i>Jamā'at s</i> with ladies	5	10	9	24	
40	No. of brothers who gave 2 months at Nizamuddin	1	1	-	2	
41	No. of localities where work started		-	9	12	21

Table 2: Kenya country Karguzari report

## Analysis

Participation of *ūlama*, religious scholars, though encouraged is so far insignificant. Tablīghīs take great care not to mobilize Ulama for their *da'wa* travels as they do with ordinary people.<sup>49</sup> Because the *ūlama* are in charge of management of mosques and religious schools, they are respected as custodians of knowledge. The *ūlama* are to be acknowledged and their support sought. However when they opt to take part in the travels with them, they are highly appreciated and honoured as men of knowledge. Their travels with ordinary Tablīghīs guarantee the movement legitimacy and a sense of religious orthodoxy in the public sphere. Tablīghīs hence take great pride and interests to document and evaluate the participation of these scholars in the regular appraisal sessions. As with other evaluative measures, they divide the participation of the *ūlama* into stipulated categories of travel periods and their regularity in these travels, namely, how many have spent 1 year, 4 months and 40 days and how many are active participants in these travels. In total 141 religious scholars partook in Tablīghī travels with Garissa, Mombasa and Nairobi *ḥalqas* contributing 29 %, 23%, and 48% respectively.

5292 Kenyan Tablīghīs participated in 40 days and 4 months travels during the evaluation period. Of this, 2227 are active Tablīghīs. Of the three *ḥalqas* in Kenya, Mombasa has the smallest number of Tablīghīs volunteering for 40 days and 4 months travels. 694 Tablīghīs and 14 Tablīghīs spend 2 ½ hours and 8 hours daily on movement's individualized practices. There are 183 and 19 active Tablīghīs spending 4 months yearly and 10 days monthly on preaching tours. Only two Tablīghīs, one from Mombasa and Nairobi *ḥalqa* respectively, spent 2 months at Nizamuddin centre during the evaluation period under focus. However at the end of the *jour*, I met at least five Tablīghīs from Moyale and Waso sub-*ḥalqas* who were about to leave for 2-4 months stay at the Nizamuddin global headquarters. 229 women have so far spent 10 and 40 days on Tablīghī travels. Garissa had the lowest entry with 41. There are about 50 places in Kenya where weekly *ta'lim* for women are held.

<sup>49</sup> No *tashkeel* only *ziarat*

While no women travel team has been sent to foreign countries for *da'wa*, 24 teams were sent locally for 3 days missionary tours. The report depicts a gradual growth in popularity of women Jamā'at s in Nairobi and Garissa *ḥalqas*.

According to the report, out of 3671 mosques in Kenya, 226 have mosque-based *maqami* units that carry out all the *panch amal* such as *ta'lim*, *jowla*, *fikrudīn*, *khuruj shahri*, and *shūrā*. Mombasa *ḥalqa* has the lowest number of Tablighi-affiliated mosques despite the large number of mosques in the zone. 439 mosques have Tablighī teams that execute partial *panch amal*. There 777 household that conduct *ta'lim* session on daily basis, of which 306 are from Nairobi *ḥalqa*. 226 households have *ta'lim* combined with teaching on the six fundamentals of the movement. No household in the Mombasa *ḥalqa* carry out the latter.

During the period under evaluation, 121 groups were dispatched for 4 months missionary tours. If each group is, on average, composed of 12 individuals, then 1452 persons undertook this kind of travel. 227 groups were dispatched for 40 days preaching tours. This means approximately 3324 persons volunteered for the stipulated tours within the country. While there were no new areas of growth in Nairobi *ḥalqa*, Mombasa and Garissa *ḥalqas* registered 9 and 12 places respectively.

This statistical data helps the national and regional Tablighī units to plan on how to boost dwindling numbers of active members and consolidate gains made over time. The national *shūrā* subjects the cumulative data to detailed analysis, compare with previous records and set targets for each of the three *ḥalqas* in the coming period. The practice of allocating quotas for each zone is called *takaza*. The leaders from each *ḥalqa* redistribute targets for the next six to one year to respective constituent sub-*ḥalqas*, *qarias* and mosque-based *maqami* unit. This loose flow of information, directives and targets in combination with thorough peer-to-peer collective evaluation accounts for the phenomenal growth of the movement in Kenya.

## Conclusion

Every human organization is interested in its growth and expansion. Because organizations are interested in growth, they are also interested in evaluation of their programmes. Organizations appraise their past activities, execute present plan and set targets to be achieved in the future. Some reviews of past activities and future plans may be done formally or informally and may be public or open only to core members. Religious movements are not an exception. Scholars who study transnational social and religious movements are fascinated by not only the bureaucratic structures that these organizations construct but also the means through which establishment and consolidation is gained in increasing globalizing world. However unless due attention is given to the way the members of the organizations and movements evaluate their past, present and future activities, most studies about their growth remain shallow. Tablīghī Jamā'at, one of the fastest growing lay Muslim missionary movement in the world, has invested immensely not only in religious bureaucracy ran by bands of committed members but also an elaborate oral and written mechanism for review of its activities. However, its phenomenal growth in East and Central Africa has gone unnoticed due its avoidance of publicity, doctrinal debates and socio-political activism, its focus on spiritual matters and its popularity among the ordinary Muslims rather than religious scholars. Tablīghīs look to the past, precisely to the world of pristine Islam for guidance and revivalism but they also pragmatically appropriate modern evaluative measures for the success of its programme and consolidation of its growth.

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### **Halkano Abdi Wario**

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# Pilgrimage at Islamic Sufi Shrines in North Eastern Ethiopia

**Meron Zeleke**

**Abstract:**

According to the dominant academic discourse in post 1991 Ethiopia, the shift of the political structure at the macro level is believed to have had a trickling down effect on the nature of social relationships between members of the different ethnic and religious groups in the country. The effect is described mostly as a type of relationship characterized by growing tensions and conflicts represented either as inter-ethnic and/or inter-religious conflict (Abbink 1998; Afewerik 2009). Religious identification and religious practices at the region under discussion as to be presented in this paper are starkly different from the dominant discourse on the escalation of interfaith tension often described as one of the major characteristic features of post 1991 Ethiopia (Medhane 2003). This paper presents a case of pilgrimage at an Islamic shrine in Northern Ethiopia a case, which contradicts with the main discourse of tightening of Ethno-religious boundaries in post 1991 Ethiopia. It addresses the factors that facilitate this act of crossing a religious boundary.

**Key words:** Pilgrimage, Sufi, Religious boundary, Saint Veneration

## Introduction

At the very first glance the contemporary religious practices commonly practiced at the Islamic Sufi shrines in North Eastern Ethiopia gives for an outsider an impression of blurred and thinned out religious boundaries. The presence of Christians, Muslims, spirit possession cult adepts and adherents of Oromo traditional belief as pilgrims in the biannual pilgrimages to the Islamic Sufi shrine – which otherwise is defined as an Islamic shrine– poses to one the question of how the adherents and leaders of the shrine make meanings and account for this act of crossing the seemingly dense religious boundary? Growing up in the political environment of post-1991 Ethiopia where the multiculturalism that is generated by ethnic federalism has made ethnicity the main organizing principle in

forming, framing, and contesting different identity and resource claims in the country (Vaughan 2003; Turton 2006), the author's experience during the biannual pilgrimages at the shrine of Teru Sina during the PhD research field work (between November 2008 and March 2010) was a 'category crashing' one<sup>50</sup>.

The first encounters during the biannual pilgrimages to the shrine, corroborated by the findings of the study afterward, challenge the dominant thesis of the social bordering process in two ways. First, it challenges the definition of the social situation of the country by the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) primarily as 'ethnic', which starkly contrasts with local realities such as in Teru Sina. Many of the people coming to attend the different religious rituals at the shrine, apparently an Islamic institution located in the Oromo nationality zone of the Amhara national regional state, are mostly Christian Amharas coming from the districts of Ephrata-Gidim and Ansokiya-Gemza both situated in the northern Shewa zone. This double boundary-crossing at the shrine - ethnic and religious - thus poses a formidable empirical challenge to the representation of the Ethiopian social landscape primarily as ethnic. Secondly, the continued vitality of integrative social institutions such as the Sufi shrines in post 1991 Ethiopia also challenges the detractors of ethnic federalism who accent the hardening of ethnic and religious boundaries and escalation of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tension throughout the country. The article explores and explains how pilgrims from different religious background come together to an Islamic shrine and how the different actors at the shrine (the pilgrims and religious leaders) define crossing the religious boundary and hence challenges this dominant thesis of the social boundary forming process drawing on the field encounters and drawing on fieldwork data.

Academic works on pilgrimage have argued that pilgrimage needs to be understood as a double boundary-crossing phenomenon whereby pilgrims tend to not only cross religious but also ethnic boundaries (Levine 1974, Pankhurst 1994; Gibbs 1997). Such works draw on the widely received Turnerian paradigm of 'communitas' which

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<sup>50</sup> In his book *Amhara traditions of Knowledge: spirit mediums and their clients*, the Norwegian anthropologist Harold Aspen used the expression of category crashing experience to describe the "odd" and dramatic field experiences that challenge our "normal" expectations.

emphasizes the argument that pilgrimages blur the diverse religious and ethnic boundaries of adherents and create a sense of communality among the pilgrims (Turner 1995). This paper aims to contend this analysis by emphasizing the need to seriously engage with the agency of local actors not only in terms of emphasizing “crossing” religious boundary but also in relation to the questions of how they conceive these boundaries in the first place and how they account for the act which appears, at least from the outside, as crossing a boundary. As such, this article calls for a phenomenological approach that moves beyond the mere description of the social interaction as a ‘mechanical mixing’ between Christians, possession cult adherents, and Muslims or as a ‘thinning out’ (loosening) of religious boundaries. It analyzes the cultural worlds of interlocutors who insist on emphasizing the salience of the religious boundary despite the pervasive crossing of it. It also seeks to discuss, on the basis of emic accounts, the factors which account for the participation of pilgrims of diverse religious backgrounds. While addressing this, the paper identifies factors which facilitate the attraction of pilgrims from different religious backgrounds despite the dominant bordering processes generated by the new political order in Ethiopia, i.e., institutionalization of identity in the form of ethnic federalism. Before moving to the main arguments, brief background information on Sufism in the region and cursory information about the shrine will be presented to readers.

### **The *Sufi Shrine of Teru Sina* and the Biannual Pilgrimages**

The name *Ye shaykoch madad* (place of the *shaykhs*) in north eastern and north central Ethiopia refers to a number of Sufi shrines established between the eighteenth and the twentieth century on the region. North central Ethiopia, especially the area around Wallo, is well known for the presence of numerous Islamic shrines that have central place in the history of the emergence and dissemination of Islam in the region and in Ethiopia. The shrines in fact played a crucial role in serving as first centers of Islamic learning that attracted students from different parts of Ethiopia and other neighboring countries such as Djibouti, Somalia and today’s Eritrea. Scholars have debated the origin and nature of Sufism in Ethiopia. Sufism was first introduced to Ethiopia from Yemen in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; the oldest

and the most widespread Sufi order in Ethiopia being the *Qadiriyya*. The *Qadiriyya* order was first introduced to Harar and then spread throughout the country. Other Sufi orders in Ethiopia include the *Tijaniyya*, the *Shadhiliyya*, the *Sammaniyya* and the *Mirghaniyya* (Muhammad 1994). Trimmingham (1952) has mentioned the type of Sufism in Northeast Africa was “vulgarized” to suit into local realities. He has explained this phenomenon as,

Thaumaturgy is exulted at the expense of theosophy; mystical exercises degenerated into orgiastic dances; no real apprenticeship is required before initiation; initiation is simplified to the taking of a solemn oath of allegiance to the *shaykhs*; less rigorous discipline from the neophytes; *dhikr* song and dance are exercised immodestly to produce psycho-social effects, and the local *shaykhs* of the order are venerated to a degree little short of deification. (Trimingham 1952:233-234),

Yet Hussein Ahmed, the foremost scholar on regional histories of Ethiopian Islam, has painted Sufism in Ethiopia in a more positive light, even though he too recognized the ‘bizarre’ form it has taken in some areas and among some followers (Hussein 2001: 70). According to him,

Under the repressive political structure of Christian hegemony, Islam in Ethiopia was indebted to Sufi centers for its very survival: it was the expansion of the Sufi orders, the various centers of local pilgrimage which recruited converts to Islam, and laid the basis for the emergence of viable and prosperous Muslim communities in the countryside and towns of Ethiopian interior. (Hussein 2001:71).

Sufi centers of learning in different parts of the country such as the one of *shaykh* Muhammad Shafi in Wallo (Jamma Negus); *shaykh* Abadir of Harar, and *shaykh* Hussein of Bale have played an important role as centers of Islamic learning (Østebo 2011). As such, the shrines of these famous *shaykhs* serve as nodes in a local network, creating congregating points for Islamic education and for other spiritual rituals.

The shrine of Teru Sina is one of these *ye shaykoch madads* founded by *shaykh* Siraj Muhammad Awel who belonged to the *Qadiriyya* order, the dominant Sufi order around Wallo and Shewa located in north eastern part of Ethiopia. *Shaykh* Siraj Muhammad Awel was

born around 1875 at Dana, a place well known in the history of Sufism in Ethiopia. Siraj studied in famous Islamic schools in Wallo and Shewa and established his own Islamic learning center (*zawiya*) of Teru Sina around 1949 to provide Islamic education for students coming from the countries of the Horn of Africa, such as Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea, as well as for those *darsas* (students) from different parts of Ethiopia.

Before the establishment of the shrine at Teru Sina, the area was a hot spot for ethnic conflict and land disputes between the two neighbouring ethnic groups; the Oromo and the Amhara. Governors in the area have tried at different times to end the conflicts using various measures ranging from harsh penalties to co-opting local religious leaders as a way of convincing the local community to come to terms. In a pragmatic move towards succeeding in ending the deadly conflicts of early 1930s and mid-1940s, local government officials approached Siraj who had earned a reputation for his extraordinary spiritual power of performing miracles and healing<sup>51</sup> and used him as a mediator between two conflicting groups. He collaborated with government officials in the attempts to end the protracted inter-ethnic conflicts of the 1930s in Mekdessa, and later on in Teru Sina in the 1950s. *Shaykh* Siraj's settlement at the hot spot of the deadly conflict and the amicable relations that he established with the local government officials had opened up a new horizon to his relationship with the Ethiopian state. *Shaykh* Siraj had managed to forge ties with the imperial family as much by his own efforts as it was a reflection of the political weakness of the imperial regime in the immediate post-liberation period throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Haile Selassie became emperor in 1930 after a protracted power struggle; not least a formidable challenge from the Mammadoch dynasty of Wallo to which *Lij* Iyasu, the grandson of Emperor Menelik II, belonged. Emperor Haile Selassie was barely five years in power when he was ousted by the Italians in 1936. The military support that he got from the British during the Second World War enabled him to regain his throne. But this came with a British political baggage. The British sought to reduce Ethiopia to a protectorate after liberation from the Italians in 1941 until the end of

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<sup>51</sup> After his initiation as a Sufi *shaykh* in 1924 informants account narrates his religious piety, his life as a Sufi mystic, his large scale proselytization missions and that he has performed number of miracles.

the Second World War in 1945 (Erich 2010). A politically insecure imperial regime thus had every incentive to work with and through traditional authorities to re-establish its own legitimacy, more so in regions such as Wallo where memories of political resistance against his rule were still fresh.

The alliance between the Christian Emperor Haile Selassie and a Muslim *shaykh* by the time sounds anomalous, given the former's orthodox background and the underlying Christian authenticity discourse. The imperial regime of Haile Selassie claims a descent from Solomonic dynasty and it was a regime where by the church and state were closely intertwined (Erich 2010). Emperor Haile Selassie had similar strong ties with some Sufi *shaykhs* in different parts of Ethiopia (Østebo 2011). In this favorable political context *shaykh* Siraj had sought to expand his base. The network that *shaykh* Siraj built with the Ethiopian state and his reputation as a religious leader had enabled him to be rewarded in different forms as; in land grants, sponsorship of his pilgrimage to Mecca, sponsorship of his construction of number of mosques, etc.

*Shaykh* Siraj died in 1972. In recognition of the closer political ties he made with the imperial family and local government officials, *shaykh* Siraj was given a state funeral. A *dori* (sanctuary) was built within the compound of the *zawiya* (local Islamic learning center) where his body still lies. Many of his adherents present that upon his death, his soul ascended to heaven while his spirit remained in Teru Sina where he has continued to be the guardian of the local community. Hence, informants mention that by going to this tomb, they visit *shaykh* Siraj in person. After his death thousands of pilgrims started flocking to his *dory* at the shrine of Teru, as a visit to his shrine is believed to reward one with a *baraka* (locally often defined as grace).

The tradition of making pilgrimages to visit a living or dead Sufi is a widely spread practices among the Sufis around the world such as in Asia (Werbner 2003) and in Africa (Gellner 1983; Lewis 1999). In Ethiopia, pilgrimage to holy places in general is so extensive that Levine called it one of the 'pan-Ethiopian traits' (Levine 1974:50). Like the Sufi shrines in different parts of the world, pilgrimage is one of the religious rituals associated with Sufi shrines in Ethiopia such as shrines in eastern Ethiopia (Gibb 1998; Desplat 2005); western Ethiopia (Ishihara 2009); northern Ethiopia (Kelkilachew 1997), and

in southern Ethiopia (Braukämper 2004). Pilgrimage to the shrine of Sufi *shaykhs*, on the other hand, is unanimously condemned as *bida'h* by Islamic reform movements around the globe (Werbner 2003). Notwithstanding the controversy surrounding the orthodoxy of the pilgrimage to the shrines of Sufi *shaykhs* as a legitimate Islamic religious practice, it is continued to be widely practiced at Sufi centers throughout Ethiopia.

There are biannual pilgrimages to the shrine of Teru Sina held on August 15<sup>th</sup> and October 15<sup>th</sup> every year. Pilgrims of diverse socio economic profile attend the biannual pilgrimage to the shrine of Teru Sina.



Picture 1: Pilgrims singing on their way to the Shrine (Photo: Meron Zeleke)

Despite the location of the shrine of Teru Sina in Oromo Nationality Zone, the majority of the pilgrims, over seventy percent, were Amhara. Similarly, regarding the religious profile of the pilgrim's, sixty five percent of them were Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and the rest were Muslims and traditional believers. The record on the ethno religious profile of the pilgrims at the contemporary shrine of Teru Sina contradicts with the main discourse of the narrowing down of the religious and ethnic boundary in post 1991 Ethiopia mentioned in the introductory note above. The majority of adherents of this Islamic

shrine are mostly Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Close to two thousand pilgrims came to the shrine on the night of October 14, 2009. These were from different parts of Ethiopia and few were from the diaspora mainly from Jeddah and Qatar. The ethnic and religious composition of the pilgrims was quiet diverse. The following table presents the socio- economic profile of two hundred pilgrims randomly picked on October 14, 2009

Ethnicity		Religious profile of Pilgrims		Age		Professional Background		Place of Origin
Amhara	67	EOC	68	< 20	8	Farmers	46	Kara Kore
Oromo	24	Muslims	20	20-30	27	Business Men	29	Majate
Argobba	7	Traditional	12	30-45	25	Unemployed	19	Teru Sina
Gurage	2			> 45	40	Diaspora	9	Addis Ababa
						College Student	3	Ataye
						Doctor (neurologist)	1	KSA
						Lawyers	2	Dana
						Agricultural officer	1	Desse
								Welidya
								Adama
								Kara Kore

Table 3: Profile of Male Pilgrims (Source: Author's field Note)

Ethnic background		Religious background		Age		Profession		Place of Origin
Amhara	72	Orthodox	62	< 20	9	Housewives	42	Kara Kore
Oromo	19	Muslims	28	20 - 30	29	Spirit Mediums	18	Majate
Argobba	9	Traditional	20	30-45	30	Traders	17	Addis Abeba
				Above 45	32	Diaspora	7	Teru Sina
						High school Student	6	Ataye
						College Student	4	KSA
						Teachers	4	Desse
						Health officer	1	Weldiya
						Secretary	1	

Table 4: Profile of Female Pilgrims (Source, field Note)

In addition to the biannual pilgrimages, religious rituals regularly taking place at the shrine such as the weekly *zar hadra* (*zar* spirit appeasement sessions), the weekly *wadaja* (group prayer) ritual, the annual ritual of *Telema* (annual thanks giving ritual for harvest season) and the annual *Atete* rituals are all attended by people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. This creates a sense of confusion for external observers and forces one to raise a legitimate question on what accounts for such element of attraction between adherents of different religious traditions. The following section presents the emic account on the factors that are described as facilitating such boundary crossing religious practices.

### Conceptual Compatibility as a pull factor to the Islamic shrines

In the context of ever hardening of religious and ethnic boundaries in contemporary Ethiopia, extensive religious syncretism and profound local socio-cultural integration appears anomalous. In the following sections based on the emic accounts the factors that explain this 'anomaly', i.e., conceptual compatibility will be discussed.

During the informal talks and interviews conducted with most Christian and spirit possession cult adherents of *shaykh* Siraj, a common pattern of justification for their presence at an Islamic shrine has been observed. Emic accounts contest the very idea of crossing

a religious boundary, for in their perspective there is a fundamental similarity at the conceptual level – the notion of sainthood and the intercessory role of saints between humans and *Igziabiher/God/Allah*. The recurrent theme and that which is shared among Orthodox Christians; the leaders of the shrine, adherents of the spirit possession cult, and Sufi Muslims is the concept of holy men. They often tend to over emphasize the points of similarity or some crosscutting concepts in the different religious traditions. According to Rogers (1983), the foremost authority in popularizing compatibility as a factor in diffusion of innovation, compatibility is described as one of the characteristic features of innovation. In his theory of diffusion of innovation, Rogers (1983) has stated five characteristic features of innovation that are said to greatly shape the overall degree of acceptability or rejection of a certain innovation in a given society. These are relative advantage; compatibility; complexity; tribaility, and observability.

Compatibility according to Rogers (1983:223) is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters. An idea that is more compatible is less uncertain to the potential adopter. An innovation can be compatible or incompatible with socio cultural values and beliefs; with previously introduced ideas, or with client needs of innovations. According to Rogers, the greater the compatibility the faster its adoption becomes. I draw on Rogers's idea of compatibility and expand it further while applying it in the field of religious syncretism. The notion of compatibility that I refer to in making sense of religious syncretism at the shrine of Teru Sina also relates to the major works in the study of syncretism such as the notion of 'tolerable variation'(Stewart 2004: 265); commonality (Droogers 2008:49), or the finding of one's own in the other (Schenk 1989). Leopold and Jensen (2004: 93) emphasize the point that 'compatibility between foreign beliefs is just as good a starting point for syncretism'. Following the lead of these authors, I argue that conceptual compatibility across religious boundaries is one of the major factors that have shaped the process of religious syncretism at the shrine of Teru Sina in general and participation in different rituals as the biannual pilgrimage in particular.

Concepts such as saint veneration, saint intercession, belief in the extraordinary spiritual power of saints and their power in performing

miracles are cross cutting notions that exist in the different religious traditions in Teru Sina. Veneration of saints is a common religious practice among the Sufi Muslims in various parts of the world (Baldock 2004). This is one of the major contentious issues between Sufis and members of Islamic reform movements that question the orthodoxy of this religious practice, for whom it is an aspect of, *shirk* (polytheism). Veneration of saints is a common religious practice among Orthodox Christians, (Anderson 2007). Saint veneration is in fact one of the major contentions between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the various Protestant denominations in the country (Tibebe 2009). Many Christian interlocutors who come to the shrine of Teru Sina at different occasions during the biannual pilgrimage, for the weekly *wadaja* (group prayer), healing and other rituals put emphasis on the 'compatible concepts 'existing both at the EOC and Sufi Islam. The strong tradition of venerating saints in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church goes to the extent of dedicating each day of the month to different saints venerated at the churches.

This cross cutting concept of saint veneration comes over and over again in the various narratives provided by Christian interlocutors. In the following sections, two examples will be provided to show the centrality of saint veneration among Sufi Muslims and Orthodox Christians. One of the key interlocutors, Mebratu Baye, is a deacon at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church of Majate Medihanialem. He described his participation in religious rituals at the Islamic shrine of Teru Sina despite his Christian background in the following manner:

There is nothing wrong in coming to Teru Sina for the weekly group prayer or to attend the biannual pilgrimage. I am a Christian. I am even a deacon [At this stage Mebratu proudly pointed at his identification card which states that he works at the Church]. The Muslims at Teru Sina also have their own *qidusan* (saints) like us the Orthodox Christians. They call them *wali* which in Amharic means *qidusan*. *Wali* is an Arabic term. Arabic is the holy language of the Muslims just like Geez is for us, Orthodox Christians. Thus, to come to the place of the *qidusan* is not wrong at all. What will be wrong is going to the *pentés*' (Protestants") churches. Unlike the *pentés*, the Muslims here at Teru Sina know and revere the *qidusan*. On the other hand, the *pentés*, who claim to be Christians, do not know anything about the *qidusan*. But

today we also have new Christians (*pentēs*<sup>52</sup>) and new Muslims (the *wahhabiyas* or *pentēs* of the Muslim) respectively<sup>53</sup>. The old Muslims know the *qidusan*. So they are like us the Orthodox Christians. (Mebratu Baye. September 17, 2009; Teru Sina).

In Mebratu's parlance, the conceptual link is maintained without collapsing the religious boundary between the 'old Christianity' and the 'old Islam'. Mebratu's negative reference to the Protestants (*pentēs*), on the other hand, suggests the greater salience of an intra-religious boundary, i.e., between Orthodox Christians and Protestants, than between Orthodox Christians and Sufi Muslims. Mebratu also referred to the intra-Muslim religious boundary and he likened the '*Wahhabiyas*' (*Salafis*) with the *Pente* (Protestants). Interestingly, this is not considered by the reformers as something derogatory. In an interview conducted with Dr Jeylan Geleta, the defacto leader of the *Salafiyya* movement in Ethiopia, he also referred to the same distinction between *pentēs* and the Orthodox Church while explaining the boundary between Sufi and *Salafi* versions of Islam. He even felt more comfortable with the comparison with the *pentēs* than the derogatory term *Wahhabiyas*, 'we are like the *pentēs*', was how he explained to me about the reformist missions of the *Salafis* in general.

Another Muslim pilgrim shares the Christian interlocutor Mebratu's account presented above. He also mentioned the similarity regarding the practice of venerating saints between Sufis and Orthodox Christians as follows:

The Orthodox and we, the *suffaya*, venerate saints. We are cultured people who pay due respect to those who have dedicated their lives to their respective religion. We are obliged to do so for Allah himself has

<sup>52</sup> *Pente* is a word locally used interchangeably with "Pentecostal". It is used as a derogatory term by Orthodox Christians as a gloss to the various denominations of the Protestant Churches. The three major Protestant denominations in Ethiopia are *Mekane Yesus* (Lutheran); *Qale Hiwot* (established by the Sudan Interior Mission, international, interdenominational Christian mission organization), and *Mulu Wengel* (Full Gospel), an independent Pentecostal Church (Tibebeu 2009).

<sup>53</sup> In the study area and in most parts of Ethiopia, there is a great tendency of referring to all the different Islamic reformist movements as *Wahhabiyas* that rather has a derogatory connotation of hinting at extremism. It does not as such reflect on the doctrinal differences between *wahhabism* and the *Salafiyya* Islamic reformist movements founded in Saudi Arabia and Egypt respectively.

privileged those people who served him with his *baraka*. They have been granted *baraka* to perform *karama* (miracle) to heal the sick, to bless others, to preach, to live their whole life as pious individuals. These are qualities that only few measure up to. As such, they need to be revered and respected. The *Wahhabiyas* and the Christian *petnes* are *sirat yalelachew* (undisciplined) people who treat everyone the same as if they were equal. The *wahabiyas* are uncultured as the *pentes* of the Christians who do not pay respect to their saints and holy figures (Bakri Arba. September 13, 2009; Teru Sina).

Bakris understanding of monotheism echoes Orthodox Christians' notion, which, despite the critic by the reformers – *Pentes* and *Salafis* – is not deviation from Orthodoxy but is recognition and affirmation of the sacredness of God/Allah; access to which is not as 'easy' as the reformers would put it.

To sum up, the cult of Saint Mary and a myriad of saints by the followers of the Orthodox Church have softened the apparent religious boundary between Islam and Christianity at the Islamic shrine of Teru Sina and in the wider region of Wallo/North Shewa. While participating in the Sufi shrine rituals the Orthodox Christians do not feel crossing a religious boundary for this entails only a switch of personal references for instance, from Saint Mary to *shaykh* Siraj. The pilgrimage to the shrine is described by many Christians as part of venerating saints. In doing so, they selectively draw on a repertoire of the Orthodox Church tradition which recognizes saints and saint veneration. On the other hand, crossing an intra-religious boundary – such as reformers visiting the shrine – is rather considered as an act of crossing the religious boundary because of the strong emphasis they put on monotheism by the reformer, which is conceptually incompatible with saint veneration, less with saint intercession. Although both Muslims and Christians draw on the compatible concept of saint veneration and intercession in sense-making of the religious participation across the religious boundary none of them mentioned even a single time that it is an act of crossing a religious boundary.

## Conclusion

As the discussion in this paper clearly shows there is inconsistency between the dominant discourse on the tightening of religious and ethnic boundary in post 1991 Ethiopia and the lived reality at grassroots level which rather shows the fuzziness of religious boundaries in northeastern Ethiopia.

Academic discourses surrounding pilgrimage and how pilgrimages enhance senses of communitas among pilgrims mainly limits their arguments to the functionalist explanation without engaging much with the local accounts of maintaining differences a gap this paper has anticipated to contribute to. However, in discussing the multifaceted elements related to pilgrimage as issues of boundary crossing the local account needs to be equally represented in order to get a clear and holistic perspective of what crossing the religious boundary in a given context entails. As it has been stated in the introductory remarks of the paper, studies dealing with pilgrimage should go beyond giving a descriptive account of the ritual. The context and the local meanings attached to the practices vary tremendously and such variation can be understood only if due attention is given to emic accounts. This allows us to simultaneously engage with boundary - crossing and boundary maintenance in local terms. The discussion in this paper has clearly shown how conceptual compatibility is emphasized by pilgrims as being a factor facilitating the participation at the biannual pilgrimage at the Islamic shrine and other religious rituals hosted at the shrine.

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### **Meron Zeleke**

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# The Fragmented Entity: Conflict and the Emerging Faces of Jos

**Timothy O. Baiyewu**

**Abstract:**

The spate of bombing in Jos is quite worrisome to average Nigerian residents in Jos and its environs. The seeming unending cycle of explosions that destroy human lives mostly in worship centers, market place, and relaxation centres have consequential effects. The reasons for this ugly situation in a metropolitan city that was for decades an epitome of beauty, hospitality, commerce, peace and tourism have attracted divergent analyses. This paper argues that the conflict in Jos is ethno-religious. The Hausa/Fulani extractions who contest ownership of Jos, particularly Jos North, with the indigenous tribes of Afizere, Anaguta and Berom are predominantly Muslims while the later tribes are largely Christians. The seeming inseparability of the ethnic identity struggle and the religious leanings of the two opposing actors have consequentially played out in the relocation of many victims of the lingering conflict. The unending cycle of conflict in Jos and its emerging dimensions greatly influence the changing pattern of human settlement as residents relocate to safe havens where residents practice the same religion. The paper posits that the emergent settlement pattern in Jos has a wide range of implications on the future trend of conflict in the entire Plateau State. By extension, the conflict is consequential on the political, economic and social development of the state and increases human agony that impedes the wellbeing of victims and the general public.

**Key words:** ethno-religious conflicts, Jos, indigenes, settlers

## Introduction

The bomb blasts which occurred on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 2010 at three strategic places around Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Gada Biu and Angwan Rukuba areas remain a worrying indicator of the

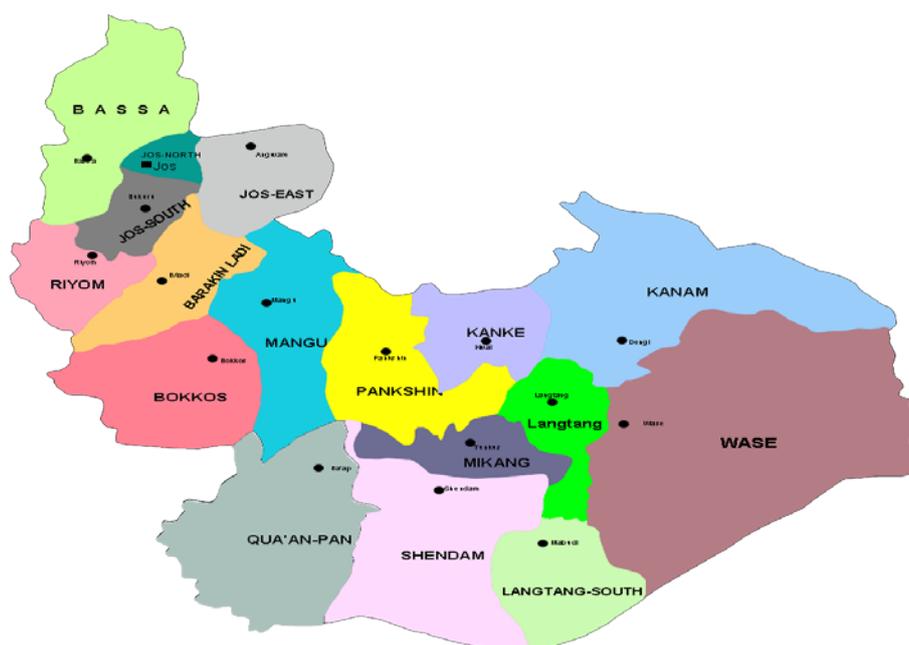
new dimensions ethno-religious conflicts have attained in Jos, Nigeria (Shobayo 2010). The blasts, in fact demonstrated a seeming affinity with the mode of operations by Muslim extremists in the Arab world of Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, often operating under the banner of fundamentalist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Al-Shabaab. Initiated by suicide bombers, the blasts marked yet another level of ethno-religious violence in Jos in particular and Nigeria in general. One quite easily tends to compare the blasts in Jos with the anti-Christian terrorist attack by an Al-Qaeda group on worshippers in Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church, Baghdad, Iraq which killed 58 people on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, 2010, and the murderous terrorist attack of 31<sup>st</sup> December of the same year that was carried out on worshippers in a Coptic Orthodox Church, All Saints Church in Alexandria, Egypt. While the above examples of suicide bombing do not explain conflict engendered by indigen-settler sour relationship, the Jos conflict presents a situation where owners of the land and migrants once lived next to each others' doors, exchanged gifts and ideas but were later fragmented by ethnic and religious boundaries that exist among them. Most residents of Jos live along ethno-religious grouping. Yet some live along religious grouping. Some Yoruba Muslims, for example, feel safer to live in Hausa-Fulani dominated areas of Jos, but many of them (the Yoruba Muslims) live among the owners of the land who are predominantly Christians.

The conflict in Jos over the years has remained visibly ethno-religious. It has often been mainly between the Christian dominated ethnic groups- Berom, Afizere, and Anaguta, and the predominantly Muslim Hausa and Fulani groups. Although Aapengnuo (2010) and Kwaja (2011) see the conflict in Jos as ethnic identity problem that is often used to open up structural deficiencies in governance, it is difficult to separate Islam from the Hausa and Fulani groups who are predominantly Muslims; neither can Christianity be separated from the Berom, Afizere, and Anaguta indigenous groups that are predominantly Christians. More so, the destruction of churches and Mosques, and the relocation of people within Jos along ethnic and religious cleavages are evident. The actors are polarized along ethnic and religious differences. Other tribes include the Yoruba, Igbo, Urhobo, Hausa-Fulani and other migrant communities. Mohammed (2011) in his x-ray of the frosty relationship between the Hausa and Fulani groups, and the Berom, Anaguta, and the Afizere

acknowledges the presence of the latter in the caves and on the hills, and their initial failure to take part in the mining business in their environment. This seeming pre-existence of the Berom, Afizere, and Anaguta in the mining environment called Jos before the business adventure and later settlement of the Hausa and Fulani groups in same area has often been used to determine the ownership status of the predominantly Christian tribes in Jos. In agreement with Slocum-Bradley (2008:1) that people naturally form some perceptions of themselves and others' and also express "the construction of a certain perception of one's own group and that of the 'other'" helps our understanding of the creation of a 'indigene' - 'non-indigene' demarcation between the 'people of the caves and the hills' and the Tin mining traders of Hausa and Fulani extractions. Such age long distinction which Abimbola and Alao (2009:153) describe as "fixed and unchanging notions of ethnic identity or indigeneity" has been deepened by the indigeneity policies of the Nigerian government (Human Rights Watch, April 25, 2006; January 27, 2011). Of all the tribes that met the earliest occupiers-Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere of the mining area, the Hausa's and Fulani's more seeming resilience in the quest for identity in their new found abode of living and survival seems to be echoed by their incessant conflicts with the other three tribes who seem to have more access to the instruments of governance and who are more favoured by other tribes in the State. Conflicts between the former and the latter are usually understood along ethno-religious line due to the overlapping between the ethnic and religious identities of the groups in question.

Ethno-religious conflicts remain a marked feature of Nigeria, a country where ethnic, religious, political, economic and ideological cleavages have constantly shaped policy formulation, decision making, access to political and economic opportunities, and interpersonal relationships. Conflicts usually arise from differences in needs, aspirations and ideas that abound among individuals and groups. Ethnicity and religion are examples. If properly managed, conflicts can influence some positive change. Gunther Schlee (2008:4) argues that ethnicity is a recurrent factor that stirs up conflict through cultural differences. Conflict is necessary for growth and social change. Research has shown that violent conflict, in spite of its destructive and painful outcome can lead to some form of adjustment mechanism on the parts of the actors in terms of policy and decision making (Lewis Coser, 1957). The emerging faces of incessant ethno-

religious conflict in Jos present a city that is fragmented along ethnic, religious and economic structures. If conflict truly can bring about social change, its perceived benefits are yet to be in sight in the case of Jos. The main concern of this paper is to bring to the fore the emerging cleavage settlement pattern of Jos and the implications it is likely to bring on the people, the city, the State, and the unity of the Nigerian state.



Map 2: Map of Jos showing different administrative divisions

### Jos in Retrospect

As a heterogeneous settlement, the ethno-religious conflict in Jos has placed the city among the most deadly trouble spots on the Nigerian map. Recent happenings have shown that some form of harsh argument that may ensue in public between people of opposing faiths could lead to stabbing, shooting and burning of properties, catching innocent people, traders and workers from different backgrounds unawares. This perhaps stems from accumulated agonies of previous violent conflicts and tendency for vengeance. As a 'melting pot' where people of different origin, colour or race have found solace in commerce and peaceful settlement, the city has remained a test case for the 'one Nigeria' question. Mining

and other trading activities that attracted a lot of people from various parts of Nigeria have turned out to be a blessing in disguise for a city that was known as 'home of peace and tourism'. The work of Leonard Plotnicov (1967), Shadrach Best (2007), Sen Luka Zangabadt (1983), Billy Dudley (1968), Samuel Nwabara (1963), Sati Fwatshak (2010) and the Plateau State website capture much about the historical antecedents, geographical location and features, ethno-religious composition, and commerce and political development of Jos, which between its inception in about 1920 and 2001 had metamorphosed from one of the most healthiest and safest places in Africa to a cosmopolitan city that is recently threatened by political intrigues and ethno-religious violence. Most historical accounts on Jos are written by insiders, but Manu Isah's (2010), an outsider seems contentious. Isah avers history supports that all the tribes on the Jos Plateau are emigrants from various geographical locations, but he lacks historical document to substantiate this claim.

The seeming cordial relationship between the 'natives' and the 'settlers' got affected at the wake of violence of September 7, 2001 (Ezekiel Gomos, 2011). As a resident of Jos for over two decades, oral evidence gathered from some of the children and grand children of some key actors indicate that there was some form of cordiality through exchange for desired property between the 'natives' and the 'settlers'. The willingness and the good spirit with which farmlands were sold by the former to the latter underscore the hospitality of the former. B. W. Hodder's (1959) work on tin mining in Jos reveals that mining activities might have begun in Jos then known as Bauchi Plateau earlier than 1884 when European travelers and traders found that straws of tin were being used by the Hausa in their brass work and that there was smelting and trading of tin around Kano extending to the Nile, Tripoli and Ashanti. Hodder (1959) further reveals that the mineral survey of Northern Nigeria by the colonial government from 1904 to 1909 confirmed tin mining activities and also proved the large deposit of tin over a wide area of the Plateau. By 1943 Tin mining had reached its peak of production which was put at 15,842 tons but which dropped to 1,264 tons by 1984 (Michael Alexander 1990). Natasha Cooper (n.d.) seemingly attributes this decline to the substitution of tin for rubber and other products that do not corrode in the international market. The decline forced the locals to go back to their farms while the migrants decided to settle on the Jos Plateau and took up other commercial activities. Most of the migrant traders

occupied great part of what is today known as Jos North. They settled along ethnic cleavages. The Igbos are predominant in Apata and West of Mines areas, the Yoruba occupy vast area of Nasarawa Gwong, Eto Baba and part of Dilimi areas, while the majority of Hausa settlers are found along Bauchi road, Dilimi, Gangare, and Rikos areas of the city.

As a civil servant resident in Jos, observations reveal that the Hausa-Fulani have to a great extent enjoyed freedom of religious worship, association, economic and social activities. The establishment of Jama'atu Izalatul Bidi'ah Wa Iqamatu Sunnah (JIBWIS), an Islamic sect by Sheikh Isma'ila Idris in Jos in 1978 has made Islam more socially visible in the city. They have created for themselves some market niches that have made them more formidable in the economic sphere of Jos. They trade on textile materials, foodstuff, jewelries, wrist watches to name a few. The Yoruba trade on textiles and plastic material. They are also in to commercial transport business, furniture works, auto repairs to mention a few, while auto spare parts, electronics and drug sales have remained largely the preserve of the Igbos. The indigenes are predominantly government civil servants. They also engage in mason and other lucrative businesses. It is important at this juncture to examine how the above socio-economic and religious freedom and interaction among various people in Jos has developed into aggressive struggle for identity and violent conflicts.

### **Ethno-Religious Identity Struggle and the Peculiarity of Jos**

Ethnic identity struggle is a common phenomenon in most developed and developing pluralistic societies. Some countries outside Africa that readily come to mind are Albania, Bulgaria, Afghanistan and China, Serbia and other countries in the Balkans. In Africa, Burundi, Rwanda, the Congos, Mauritania, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire have continued to have their share of the negative effects of ethnic identity struggles. In Nigeria, the phenomenon is widespread and is often associated with religion; 'indigene' and 'outsider', which in Hausa language means '*dan gida*' da '*dan ci rani*'; in Yoruba language, the indigent-settler concept is referred to as '*omo'le*' ati '*at'ohunrinwa*'. In fact, a person's ethnic identity has great influence on the safety of his

or her life and property, upward mobility in the work place, access to political, social and economic opportunities. Viewed from physical evidence and group conceptions, ethnicity is the idea of common place of origin, kinship, distinctiveness or uniqueness of cultural traits. John and Jean Comaroff (2009) observe that this tendency has refused to recede even with globalization and transmigration of people, objects and ideas, and that it has assumed a commodity with its copy rights law in such a way that a culture and its cultural products are highly protected by its people by enactment of law and other human strategies. One may be right to assume here that ethnicity is a social identity formation which when protected or commodified by a group in disfavour of another may trigger up conflict of latent or violent nature.

Every human society, homogeneous or heterogeneous, consists of individuals or groups with varying degree of identity, and unequal natural elements. Conflict emanating from their interaction is unavoidable especially when there is discordance in interest and ideas. Similarly such interaction over time, especially when it involves host and migrant, will enable the groups to be more conscious of their differences which can considerably fuel conflicts (Karin Norman 2004). Norman avers that the dynamics of identity can generate group distinctions such as 'exclusion' versus 'inclusion', 'us' versus 'them', 'original inhabitants' versus 'sojourners'. While we cannot rule out the relative size and abundant opportunities of a group against others as a great indicator for conflicts, distance that exists among various groups, or the 'us' versus 'them' can further polarize groups and deepen conflicts. Although the largest group is more likely to demonstrate more opportunities and strength over others in resources and size as is the case in Jos, colonialism in Africa, apartheid in South Africa, and Tutsi minority in Rwanda have proved otherwise. Such social construction and the interaction of various constructed communities is captured by Benedict Anderson (1983) who sees a nation or community as a social construction resulting from the mental mind of people but holds that an imagined community differs from an actual community because members of such imagined community tend to retain the mental image of their similarity in their minds as against other communities in the nationhood. Anderson asserts that such construction is a product of modernity which has its political, social, and economic advantages. However, the conflict in Jos presents a vivid picture of the weakness

of such an imagined structure. Although latent conflict over hegemony persists among the Afizere, Anaguta and Berom as well, the trio has latently and confrontationally aligned themselves against the resilience of the predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani for identity recognition. This has constantly diminished the peace that the city is known for.

The peculiarity of Jos ethno-religious identity struggle is the resilience of the predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani migrants' quest for recognition and right of indigeneship of Jos. Jude Onwuamanam (2010) captures the resilience of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim migrants in Jos as he avers 'the desire of the largely Hausa/Fulani settler community to be accorded full rights as indigenes of Plateau State'. The natives of Jos likened this situation to a friend who is invited to table but holds up the hand of the host in order to eat to his satisfaction before the host could eat. The Nigerian constitution in sec 23(3) (a) and 135(3) seems to support the indigenous status of an individual or group, thereby promoting discrimination against non members of an indigenous community. While the natives of Jos seem to draw strength from the position of the constitution, the Hausa/Fulani migrants also feel empowered by 27(1) of 1960 constitution which is incorporated in sec 42 of 1999 constitution. The complicity of the 1999 constitution can be seen in 42(3) which reinstates discrimination on the grounds of place of origin and ethnic strain. This legal ambiguity is, to a large extent, exploited by stakeholders in various tiers of government in Nigeria to systematically preserve privileges and opportunities for indigent sons and daughters. Basically in Nigeria, every state, local government, ward and ethnic community determines who its indigenes are. This is done in a sense, to systematically edge out the 'outsiders' from job opportunities and other welfare facilities that are either inadequate or not readily available but which are regarded as exclusive preserves of the sons and daughters of the community. This scenario can make one to ask where the spirit of Nigerian nationalism of the 1940s and 1950s has gone to. The spate of ethnic conflicts and demands in Nigeria, particularly the case of Jos are examples of where, in the words of Yasemin Soya (1994:13) 'cultural identity of citizens', and its recognition and protection seem to have overwhelming claims above nationalism. In this case, the identity and rights of the 'indigenes' of Jos seem to be entrenched and protected against probable influence of the 'settlers' in the spheres of life.

Femi Omotoso (2000) and Samuel Oguiche (2008) independently express their opinions over the entrenchment of distinctions on the grounds of ethnic affiliation and place of origin in the Nigerian constitution. They also bear their minds on its inadequacies in taking care of the anxiety, rights and privileges of Nigerians outside their respective home of origin, and non implementation of some sections and clauses that promote peace and integration of citizens. The inadequacies in the constitution seem to trigger off ethno-religious conflicts and mayhem. Similarly, Olusegun Osoba and Yusuf Bala Usman (1976) express concern that no matter the length of time you spend as a resident in a town or village or state which is not your place of origin, you cannot enjoy the right of full participation in the political, social and other spheres of that geographical space. While identity protection remains a marked feature of interaction and citizenship in almost every community in Nigeria, the abuse of the hospitality of the 'natives' of Jos by the Hausa-Fulani 'settlers' should not be overlooked.

The Hausa-Fulani seeming political intrigues to wrest Jos from the hands of the Berom, Afizere and Anaguta, started first with the creation of Jos North Local Government during Ibrahim Babangida Military regime in 1991, and then through the appointment of a Muslim Military administrator for the state who in turn appointed a Muslim Care-taker chairman for the newly created local government council. Jos East Local Government was later carved out of Jos South, while Jos North is largely populated by the Migrant Hausa/Fulani. Second, the absence of local elections in the local government since 2002 has shut the Hausa/Fulani migrants from taking control of its administration which can be achieved through elections. The migrant community often assures governorship aspirants of various political parties of their electoral votes. This is often done with a long list of demands by the migrant Hausa-Fulani which the governorship aspirants are expected to meet. This includes identity recognition, local elections to be conducted in Jos North local government, and the creation of an Emirate council. There seemed to be indications that the crises that have made a lot of Christian Landlords to sell up their houses located in the Migrant Hausa-Fulani dominated areas was one of the master-strategies employed to expand the Hausa-Fulani frontier in Jos North Local Government. Although there are no demographic data to substantiate the claim

that the destitute children popularly called *Almajiri* in Nigeria are used for infiltrating Jos to increase migrant Hausa-Fulani population, the increasing number of Hausa-Fulani youths used as instruments for attacking Christians is glaring. It is very glaring that the Hausa-Fulani community employs various intrigues because the constitution does not adequately address the “indigene-settler” question. The expressions of some Nigerians over the indigeneity concept in the constitution have laid bare their irrelevance to current realities being faced by many Nigerians including the Hausa-Fulani migrants outside their respective towns of origin. If Awolowo’s (1947) description of the Nigerian state as a mere geographical expression or what Anderson (2006:7) calls ‘imagined community’ is to be understood in the light of the identity question, indigeneity remains a biological concept which only assumes socio-political meaning. It then implies that the original inhabitants of a geographical entity shall ever remain indigenes or native sons and daughters of that place while the settlers remain non indigenes. How do the Hausa-Fulani settlers respond to this unending struggle for identity?

Basically, people of different civilizations have different worldviews which seem to be more fundamental than some form of acquired socio-political thoughts or construction. The Hausa-Fulani migrants’ somewhat worldview about human relationship with God; migration, integration and neighborliness seem to play out in their approach to their unending struggle for indigenship of Jos. In this regard, Moses Ochonu (2008:5) examines the Islamisation of the Hausa-Fulani and concludes that the post-Jihad identity of the Hausa-Fulani ‘became synonymous with assimilation into an Islamic consciousness that was packaged, consecrated, and policed by the Jihad leaders and the inheritors of their authority’. The term *sabon gari* aptly captures the Hausa-Fulani conception of human migration and integration. *Sabon Gari* is a new settlement predominantly occupied by settlers in cities and towns. In the southern and eastern parts of Nigeria, it is predominantly occupied by Hausa-Fulani settlers and this considerably alienates their integration into their host community. They are also associated with *Almajiri* phenomenon. Emanating from the Arabic al-muhajirin (the emigrant), it depicts Prophet Mohammed’s migration from Mecca to Medina. Originally in Hausa land, the almajiri are male children of ages seven to eighteen who are being taught the Quran by wrote by Quranic teachers but who are allowed to stray along the streets begging for food, money and

cloth. In Nigeria, it has become a syndrome synonymous with destitute, street beggars regardless of age or gender, aggressive and violent jobless males who easily succumb to political thuggery and religious violence. There are insinuations that their *sabon gari* settlement often serves as a conduit pipe through which the *almajiri* breed and infiltrate the streets of their host community for arms begin. Marriage of their daughters to their Christian neighbours is restricted on religious ground. Such culture has not really helped to dissolve some form of primordial difference that abound between the Hausa-Fulani and their host community. By this dispensation, one may be right to suggest a slogan: Jos the home of crisis, where the 'indigens' and the 'settlers' make life unbearable for themselves. This unending struggle for identity requires us to examine its effect on the settlement pattern of residents of Jos. How have the people fared within the dynamic nature of the crisis ridden city of Jos?

### **The Changing Faces**

Contrary to what Jos used to be before the outbreak of the violence of September 7, 2001, when the relationship between the 'indigens' and the 'settlers' was relatively peaceful and friendly, and when the city had comparatively low violent cases, the cosmopolitan city has assumed a worrying situation. Before now, the positive attributes of simplicity, hospitality and relatively violent-free and tourist sites which nature has bestowed on the city probably earned it 'the home of peace and tourism' but these have been lost to ethno-religious conflicts and mayhem. Debra Fieguth says Jos has turned to a city that had been known for its peaceful atmosphere, but where trust has been replaced by anger and fear on both sides. The identity difference which seems to polarise the people of Jos probably drew the attention of Olusegun Obasanjo and Akin Mabogunje (1992) who emphasise the inability of the Nigerian constitutional provisions to cement or modify ethnic, regional preferences and geographical dichotomies that the colonial government constructed as what is today called Nigeria.

The victory of Samaila Mohammed, a Hausa-Fulani at the chairmanship election in Jos North local government council in 1991 and the appointment in 1994 of Aminu Mato of Hausa-Fulani

extraction seemed to have brewed the subsequent violent conflicts in Jos (Ostein 2009, Gwamna 2010). Between 1994 and 2011, Jos has witnessed numerous major crises. The crises have led to the death of at least ten thousand people and about eight hundred thousand internally displaced (Global IDP Project 2005). The state witnesses an alarming upsurge in the level of violence and displacement. In Global IDP 2005 report, the total number of people displaced by the 2004 Jos crisis was put at a range between 40,000 to 258,000. While some traced back their ancestral roots in various parts of Nigeria and have failed or refused to integrate back into local communities in Plateau state, others did come back but reintegrated along ethno-religious line.

Today, human settlement pattern in Jos is pocket-like, largely on ethnic and religious affiliations. The dangerous trend in the crises in Jos which gave rise to speculation that the Yoruba migrant Muslims have become one of the targets of the Hausa-Fulani migrants have made the former to find peaceful settlement among their Christian brothers and sisters. Most residents of Jos live in segregation. Persons or groups with particular traits are spatially located in close proximity to others who share similar traits and are separated from others who do not share those traits. The ethno-religious conflict and residential segregation in Jos remind us of similar conflict and settlement pattern in Northern Ireland. While the Jos case presents an inter-ethno-religious segregation, that of the Northern Ireland presents an intra-religious segregation. The works of Singleton (1981, 1985), Wilson (1989), and Coulter (1994) amplify cases of ethno-religious residential segregation in Northern Ireland made possible by ethno-religiously motivated terrorism.

The 2010 Christmas Eve bomb blasts, which resulted into a bloody crisis, had its negative impact on the pattern of settlement in Jos city. There are strong indications that the attack on the Igbo traders on Dilimi Street during the crisis forced the Igbo merchants to relocate their businesses to satellite markets in the predominantly Christian settlements in Gada Biu, West of Mines, Apata, and Gyel-Bukuru. The Igbo community in Jos claimed it lost forty members to Saturday, January 8, 2011 mayhem while several others were missing (Taye Obateru and Chris Ochayi 2011). Similarly, the crisis had forced the Christian traders in Bukuru market to relocate to Gyel-Bukuru market that is in a predominantly Christian area (Yiro Abari). Besides the

pattern of business relocation, Christian primary and secondary school teachers who are posted to schools sited in the Hausa-Fulani dominated areas have always expressed fear of losing their lives in the course of carrying out their primary assignment. Similarly, most parents have relocated their children to schools sited in environments mostly populated by people of the same faith (Onoja Audu 2010).

Mahmud Lalo (2010) and I. Shobayo and I. Samuel (2010) report that there are public claims that the December 2010 multiple bomb blast and crisis might have been masterminded by unidentified Muslim fundamentalists, however it marked a new phase in the metamorphosis of Jos. This new phase refreshes one's memory of the metamorphosis of the Niger Delta crisis which went from protest writing to mass street protest in the days of Ken Saro Wiwa to kidnapping of expatriate oil workers, then to bomb-blasting of oil pipe lines and other installations. In this regard, Michael Watts (2004) argues that the ecological degradation, insecurity, deplorable conditions, and the spate of kidnapping of oil workers and the bombing of oil installations have been largely due to insensitivity of the stake holders to the cause of the oil producing communities and the need to nip the problem from its bud. The current development places one on a platform to predict the spate of suicide bombing in few years to come. It is probably going to be 'a no-go entity' existing within a larger entity. The areas of Jos dominated by Hausa-Fulani Muslims that have currently become 'no-go areas' for non Muslims may witness a gradual underdevelopment in terms of good road network and other basic social amenities which are exclusive responsibility of the state government that the 'natives' seem to largely control its machinery.

### **Implications**

The conflict in Jos and its changing faces demonstrate the difficulty involved in deconstructing the barriers that exist among the people of Jos. Identity formation and protection seem to be on the increase among members of the various tribes in Jos. The heterogeneity of Jos which has been made possible by identity differentiation seems to engender 'friend' and 'enemy' slogan. Such construction of slogan tends to widen the natural dichotomies that abound between the

'natives' and the 'settlers'. The 'natives' feel challenged by the struggles put up by the 'settlers'. By this development, the former employ all available intrigues, strategies to protect its identity and rights associated with it; edge out the 'settlers' from the mainstream of governance and other opportunities. By extension, the claim by the migrant Hausa/Fulani Muslims of their ownership of Jos, and their demand for other rights and privileges have spurred the dominant indigents-Afizere, Anaguta and Berom into constant designing and redesigning their master-strategies in order to maintain their hegemonic control of Jos.

More importantly, the Jos crises tend to lend credence to what (Thomas Eriksen 2001) rightly points out that ethnicity is a biological concept that has assumed social and political expression and that ethnic, religion and culture are critical to integration of various levels of the society. By extension it supports the wide opinion that Nigeria is a mere geographical expression of faultily 'integrated' entities whose people and their respective ethnic loyalty and marked natural boundaries influence their vision and mission as they partake in societal development.

The emerging new pattern of settlement in Jos affects a market economy in a cosmopolitan city operating along ethno-religious line. It also implies a lopsided infrastructural development. In order to protect and sustain their hegemonic control over their land, the indigent groups are likely to neglect or systematically edge out the Hausa-Fulani migrants from the mainstream socio-political development of Jos. A case that readily comes to mind is the relocation of the local government Secretariat from the migrants dominated area of Dogo Agogo to Jos Township, a settlement that is densely populated by the indigenous tribes and migrants from the southern part of Nigeria. An empirical study carried out by Marta Reynal-Querol and Jose Montalvo (2000) though on the continent of Africa, points to the dynamic implications of ethno-religious crisis on the growth of human society. Reynal-Querol and Montalvo argue that the ethnicity and other differences, and the inability of constitutional provisions of respective African countries to dissolve these dichotomies are responsible for Africa's growth tragedy. Significantly, the incessant mayhem in Jos has gradual but steady negative implications for its growth in the area of uncertainty and dwindling investment rate. Although there are no available concrete data to

support this claim, the resultant human displacement and its publicity in the media remains a worrying indicator. The loss of human capital through killings of able-bodied men and women from all sectors of the economy and the use of public expenditure by the government as a mitigation device, especially for the provision of security, significantly slows down the economic growth of Jos. Another dimension of the negative implications of the Jos crises on its human capital has been researched on by Rose Obilom and Tom Thacher (2008) who in their study on stress disorder arising from ethno-religious conflict in Jos, reveal a great deal of effects of traumatic stress arising from personal attacks, loss of possessions, death of close and distant persons and displacement, on the psychological health of victims. One can as well imagine the number of Jos residents, visitors and passerby who have either directly or indirectly had contact with death and stress of various kinds. The above incidents require responsiveness of and interventions by the government, individuals, nongovernmental organizations, ethnic leaders, cleric and other stake-holders.

### **The Way Forward**

Basically, conflict is inevitable in human society. More so, conflict may not necessarily be violent. Some latent conflicts may develop into violence. Conflict and change are synonymous. Hence it is necessary for social change and development of the society. Growth and positive social change are possible when conflicts are properly directed and managed. The ethno-religious conflict in Jos has become endemic. The extreme positions which the conflicting groups take have not helped to transform the conflicts into peaceful and positive social change and growth.

It requires that the government of Plateau State takes a deep understanding of the dynamics of the factors responsible for the conflicts in Jos; should be flexible enough to accept some innovative suggestions from stake-holders, and should be willing to compare and share ideas with the Hausa-Fulani community. Through this approach, a common mutual ground may be reached without the 'natives' losing out their hegemony and without the migrant Hausa-Fulani group losing out completely.

Through dialogue, renegotiation for the lost mutual social relationships that existed between the indigent tribes and the migrant Hausa-Fulani may be achieved. This will offer a golden opportunity for the warring parties to recognize their pains and loses, and apologize to one another. This can go a long way in healing their relationship.

The Federal government on its part should set up a machinery of Constitutional law experts that will critically examine the ethnicity, indigeneity, and citizenship questions, bearing in mind the disparate access of Nigerians to scarce resources, and people's age-long loyalty and protection of their respective ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. This is not to foreclose the current effort of the nation's national assembly where amendments to the Nigeria's 1999 constitution are being made. The understanding of most Nigerians that indigeneity or ethnicity has a biological meaning rather than social and political expression should be well articulated in order to address the identity question in the constitution. The protection, rights and privileges of a 'migrant' or a 'settler' should be clear and not ambiguously duplicated in other sections of the constitution. The ambiguity of a law opens it to conflicting interpretations.

Adequate number of security men should be deployed to every flash point of crisis. Security reports should be looked into and prompt actions should be taken accordingly. This will go a long way in nipping any security problem from its bud.

## **Conclusion**

The catalogue of ethnic and religious conflicts, which are a hallmark in Nigeria's history, begs for proactive approaches. While conflict can be seen as a descriptive and prescriptive tool for a better human life, it requires unflinching determination to implement recommendations. Conflict itself describes, reveals the fundamental reasons for its manifestation. Its self-description serves as a good frame for prescription of appropriate measure. Hence, it is an instrument of change that is inevitable in human society. The distance between the

indigenes and Hausa-Fulani settlers rendered the conflict uncontrollable, leading to negative change.

The Jos ethno-religious conflict, between 1994 when it started with a peaceful protest and December 2011, has assumed different faces. The current level of its dynamism is a worrying indicator of future spates of suicide bombing in Jos. In order to guide against future catastrophe where Jos becomes a haven of bomb blasts, rampant cases of kidnappings and spontaneous mayhem, it is high time that stake-holders take bold proactive measures to restore lasting peace and stable growth of Jos and its environs.

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### **Timothy Baiyewu**

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## Traditional Religious Practices in Axum Town, a Sacred Christian Center: Ethiopia

**Serawit Bekele**

**Abstract:**

This article describes and analyses some aspects of traditional religious practices in Axum town, an ancient city accorded with a status of sacredness. The main focus is on the analysis of a ritual that is held on the first day of every month in the town with particular reference to what is practiced on *Ginbot Lideta* (May 9). In doing so, an attempt to show the multiplicity of religious practices within the dominant orthodox Christian frame work is made. The official narrative of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church posits the town as a 'sacred' Christian center where the history of Ethiopian orthodox Christianity starts. 'Sacred',<sup>54</sup> according to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Christian institution, describes a condition of holiness separateness and cleanness as opposed to 'impure' which results from a mixing of different religious practices with an orthodox religious practice. By drawing on the ethnographic accounts obtained from informants,<sup>55</sup> the paper describes and analyses the ritual. The main objective of this paper is then to show and analyze another dimension of religiosity which is downplayed by the official narratives of 'sacredness'. The argument is that the empirical condition of Axum and the rhetoric of its 'purity' should be re-read in context of local lived realities in order to be able to understand the conditions of religious practice at the local level against the back ground of the taken for granted narration of 'sacredness' by the institution.

**Key words:** Appropriation, Tradition, *Ginbot Lideta*, Religion, Prosaic

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<sup>54</sup> The Ge'ez (local language used for church service) version of Sacred is *Qidus* which translates as holy, sacred, pure.

<sup>55</sup> In addition to the conversations held with informants, personal observations also constitute the data used here to describe and analyze the ritual.

## Introduction

The history of the introduction of Christianity in to the Axumite kingdom is one of the contested subjects in the study of religious dynamics in Ethiopian history. This is mainly due to the fact that the church scholars and scholars on Ethiopian history present two distinct assumptions. Sources coming from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church trace the introduction back to the first century AD while scholars of Ethiopian history trace it to the fourth century AD. Below, I will give an over view of each of the account as it lies the foundation for the discussion about the construction of Axum as a sacred center of the Ethiopian orthodox Christian religious institution. According to the narrative of the church, Christianity was brought to the kingdom in the first century AD (Sergew and Tadesse 1970; Church History 2000EC).<sup>56</sup> During the time when Christianity was expanding in the Middle East, the religion was brought to the Axumite kingdom by an Ethiopian Eunuch. According to Sergew,

Although Christianity became the official religion of the Aksumite kingdom in the fourth century, the religion had been known in Ethiopia since a much earlier time. In the Acts of the Apostles, VIII: 26-40, we are told of a certain Eunuch, the treasurer of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, who went to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. There he met Philip the Deacon and was baptized by him. Ethiopian tradition asserts that he returned home and evangelized the people. In his Homily on Pentecost, St. John Chrysostom mentions that the Ethiopians were present in the Holy City on the day of Pentecost. Later, when the Apostles went out to preach the Gospel, Matthew was allotted the task of carrying the good news to Ethiopia.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the fact that the religion was introduced to the kingdom much earlier, Christianity began to have a strong hold in the kingdom since c.336 AD after its endorsement as an official state religion. Thus, this account asserts that Christianity was in Ethiopia long before its endorsement as an official state religion. What makes the year 336 AD unique is not that the religion was introduced for the first time but the fact that it assumed the status as an official state religion

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<sup>56</sup> EC means Ethiopian Calendar, which is eight years behind the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/prechristian.html>

following the king's conversion (Church history 2000 EC). On the other hand, scholars of Ethiopian history argue that Christianity was introduced to the kingdom in 336 AD when the two Syrian monks came to Ethiopia and converted the then king called Ezana and it expanded further down to the south of the kingdom with the coming of the nine saints in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. They are indifferent to the claims made by the scholars from the church and assert that the religion was introduced in the year 336 AD (cf. Taddese 1972; Levine 1974; Tekletsadik 1981; Teshale 1995; Mesay 1999).

The main interest of this paper is not however the debate on the introduction of Christianity to the kingdom but rather the developments that followed orthodox Christianity's declaration as the official religion i.e, the declaration of Axum as sacred Christian center and the banning of previous beliefs and practices because they were regarded as 'pagan' practices. The local religious practices were sidelined as a result of the newly introduced religion to the kingdom centered in Axum. Although these local practices were sidelined, they were not abandoned and even in contemporary Axum they are practiced with more elements and justifications added from the church's teachings. According to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Axum's status as a holy and chosen religious center goes back to the first Millennium BC when it was decided that the Ark of the Covenant should be placed in Axum after the legendary King Menelik I brought it from Israel. The church's legend informs us that the king went to see his father, King Solomon of Israel, and managed to bring the Ark of the Covenant with him. Axum, the then capital city of the kingdom, was chosen as the abode for the ark and thus proclaimed a sacred city. Its acclaimed sacredness continued after the kingdom accepted Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and the city has remained the center for Ethiopian Christianity even to date (*Kibra Nagast* 1995; Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church; 2000 EC). According to the *Kibra Nagast*<sup>58</sup> (glory of kings) not only Axum was nominated as sacred but the people of the kingdom were also chosen as holy. The following statement from the book explains this: 'These things we have declared unto you in order that ye may keep and perform the Law of God so that ye may be blessed in this country, which God hath given unto you because of the heavenly Zion, the Tabernacle of the law of

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<sup>58</sup> *Kibra Nagast* (glory of kings) is a book written in Ge'ez in which stories about the Queen of Sheba, Christianity, Ethiopian emperors and all related accounts are found.

God...it is because of Zion that they have been chosen and our fathers rejected' (Kibra Nagast, 1995:123).

The contemporary Axum is a town in the Tigray national regional state of the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia. It was the center of the ancient Axumite kingdom. It is a town in which about 44647 people live. More than 88 percent of the number of population living in the city is practicing orthodox Christian while about 11 percent are Muslims. The rest is composed of followers of Protestant (locally called *pente*) religion according to the local statistics office. Ethnically, it is mainly resided by Tigrigna speaking people except a handful of Amharas and Gurages who are involved in trade activities. Being the center of ancient Ethiopian civilization and Christianity, it is a very busy tourist center. It is also center of pilgrimage for many followers of Ethiopian orthodox Christianity from all over the country and the Diaspora. November 28 is an annual celebration where by followers of Ethiopian orthodox Christianity flock from all over the country and even from the Diaspora. The fact that it is believed that the Ark of the Covenant is stored in Axum St. Mary church of Zion adds to Axum's sacredness and also attraction to tourists.

### **The Literature on Christianity and Local Religions**

Talking about the adaptation or syncretization of the Ethiopian orthodox Christianity after its introduction in the 4<sup>th</sup> AD up until the time when it reached most of the inhabitants of the Christian empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have shown that the Ethiopian orthodox church is characterized by syncretic traits which came as a result of its contact with local practices (Mesay 1999; Teshale 1995; Tadesse 1972; Trimmingham 1952; Levin 1974; Daniel 1984). According to Mesay (1999:2), 'Judaism and Christianity exist in a form no longer current in their country of origin' but rather they are 'naturalized.' Teshale (1995) also maintains the same stance and asserts that Orthodox Christianity has adopted elements from the then religious practices and Judaism up on its introduction to Ethiopia. Trimmingham (1952) asserts that the Ethiopian Christianity is not authentic enough since it has been intertwined with indigenous belief systems and practices. Tadesse (1972) stresses on the same issue by discussing

the mixing up of Ethiopian orthodox Christianity with indigenous beliefs especially when it was expanding to the center and south.

Concerning specific works which have been done so far about Christianity and local practices among different groups of people, a lot of studies can be found on spirits possession cults and their intermingling with orthodox Christianity in different parts of Ethiopia. For instance, in the southern part of Ethiopia, Braukämper, (1992), Shack (1969), among the Oromo (Knutson; Lewis 1989; Lewis 1983; Bartles 1983; Serawit 2009; Negaso and Crummy 1972) among the Amhara Yoftahie (1958) Aspen (2001), Setargew (2000). The works by these scholars describe and analyze interactions of Christianity with the indigenous belief systems and their syncretic features. They state that the introduction of Christianity has transformed the practices and has also been transformed in the process.

However, less or no attention has been given to the Tigray region in general and to Axum in particular to study the belief systems that are practiced side by side with Christianity by the people in their everyday lives. Moreover, the above works deal basically with possessing spirits which are different from the spirits appeased during the time of the *Lideta* ritual. Yoftahe's work which describes and analyses the guardian spirits celebrated on the birth day of St. Marry among the Amhara of Begemidr is an exception in this regard. The main contribution of this article is therefore the description and analysis of a ritual as it is practiced in the acclaimed sacred town of Axum. It also contributes to the literature concerning *Lideta* ritual in which the guardian spirits are appeased.

In order to analyze the ritual, I take two main concepts. The first is the concept of prosaic religion as defined by Grieve. Although I take the definition and the concepts of prosaic religion from Greive (2006), I opt to use 'everyday religion' instead of prosaic for, according to the online Oxford dictionary quoted in Iltis (2008), prosaic means 'dull or common place, mundane, consisting of written in prose, unpoetic unromantic unexting, flat' and it is reductionist to name the creative and exiting as well as colorful religious ritual as such. Everyday religion 'Indicates a strategy that is not confined to scripture but that consists of a 'pragmatic ritual repertoire'. That is, it exists as a form of flexible, innovative, body-focused, hybrid praxis. [It] includes ceremonies, rites of passage, and religious processions to name a

few of the most important practices' (Grieve 2006:3). Secondly I employ Meyer's (1994) concept of appropriation in which she expounds how African Christians are active agents in historical process and how they translate Christianity in their own terms. Appropriation according to Meyer is 'the process of making Christianity one's own' (ibid: 44).

The church claims that people used to practice 'pure' worship of God since the endorsement of Christianity and all religions which were hitherto practiced by the society are abandoned in favor of Christianity (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church 2000 EC; Sergew 2003). However, as opposed to the church's dogma and teachings about the kind of worship Ethiopians practice, empirical experiences suggest otherwise. Even in the sacred city of Axum, whose sacredness goes as far as the belief that the community living in Axum is also holy by default, there are practices which are not in line with the teachings and the dogma of the church. This is attributable to the history of the kind of religion practiced before the introduction of Christianity and people's determination not to abandon it since it is as meaningful and important as orthodox Christianity. Sergew has the following to say on the belief systems that existed before the coming of Christianity,

The Sabaeen migrants who crossed the Red Sea in the first millennium B.C and settled in Ethiopia brought with them their own religion. They were polytheists, and worshipped different gods of heaven, the earth and the sea. Almouqah (Elmouqah), for example, was the principal god of the south Arabian pantheon, and was retained as such in Ethiopia. Other Sabaeen gods, like Astar (Astarte), corresponding to Aphrodite and Venus of the Greek and Roman world, sin the moon god shams the sun god, were widely worshipped in Ethiopia. Later, with the introduction of Greek culture into Ethiopia, worship of the Greek pantheon became widespread.<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, the pre Christian religious dynamics of the Axumite kingdom, as explained by Sergew, is that there were polytheistic religious practices even by the royal family until Christianity was introduced and adopted by the kingdom in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD. This line of argument which draws on works of scholars in the field of

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/prechristian.html>

Ethiopian history informs us of dynamic traditional religious practices before the making of Christianity as a state religion. Scholars agree that the introduction of Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD did not come to fill a religious vacuum. Rather, it came in a context of polytheistic religious practices (Kobishanov, 1981) and Jewish practices (Teshale, 1995). As a result of its early contact with the polytheistic as well as Judaic religions, Christianity had mingled and the people have not given up their previous practices even after conversion. Levine (1974) and Messay (1999) assert that Christianity has significantly changed after it was introduced due to the fact that it adapted itself to the indigenous and Judaic religious practices and in as much as Christianity has undergone some changes, so has been the case with practices before Christianity. According to Levin (1974), Ethiopians reception of foreign religious elements is creative as a result of which they take the new elements and 'incorporate them in such a way that the resulting belief systems strongly reflect on indigenous traditions' (ibid: 67). Thus, it can be argued that since the very introduction of Christianity in the kingdom of Axum it was mixed with other practices which were there before the coming of Christianity to the kingdom. This would then challenge the church's claim of the abandonment of the old practices and shift to purity after conversion.

### **Local Realities of Religious Practice in Contemporary Axum**

#### **Town: The Ritual on the Day of *Ginbot Lideta***

According to the Ethiopian calendar, which derives its origin from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, a month has thirty days and each day is devoted to the commemoration of specific religious figures. And once or twice a year, an annual feast is held to remember the religious figure. Accordingly, the first day of every month is celebrated in remembrance of St. Mary's birthday. The day is called *Lideta lemaryam* which literally translates to birthday for st. Mary. The annual celebration is held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of *Ginbot* according to the Ethiopian calendar (9<sup>th</sup> of May) every year. The day is celebrated as st. Mary's birthday and the church teaches that this day is exactly when she was born even though every first day of each month is devoted to memorize her birthday. During this day, the institution instructs followers to come to church for service and spend some

time in the compound engaging in activities of honoring the saint in whose name the annual feast is held (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church 2000 EC). For those who can afford to travel where there is a church in the name of st. Mary, it is believed that they get more blessings. Moreover, the celebration is more colorful if it is held in the church of st. Mary. On the day of the annual celebration, the ark is brought outside to the public from its bode for procession inside the church compound. A large number of people also gather around to share the blessing and honor the saint<sup>60</sup>. After the church service ends, people go back to their homes and the celebration continues. During the celebration at home, more rituals are added to give the holiday more symbolic meaning and more color. The extended celebration and the rituals that accompany the celebration are not part of what the church instructs as to how a religious holiday should be celebrated. It is rather something the church strongly opposes for it is mixing the religious with superstitions. On the other hand, the community members who participate in the extended ritual explain why they practice the ritual based on stories they claim to have learned from their forefathers about God, how the evil and good spirits are created, how they should be tamed and appeased and although the main frame is thest. Mary's birthday. The main interest of this paper is therefore to show the celebration of the in the name of st. Mary. It starts by describing the ritual below.

The main ingredients required for the day are; freshly cut grass, coffee, perfume, incense, peas or beans, wheat, pop corn, goat or sheep, locally prepared beer known as *tella*<sup>61</sup> bread, *kitta* (a thin flat pan cake made from wheat flour). Some of these items like bread and *tella*, are prepared ahead of time as their preparation takes longer than the others. The celebration starts early in the morning around 6:00 AM as people go to the church of st. Mary of Zion which is situated in the heart of the old part of the city of Axum. In the church, there is mass and chanting accompanied by church dance. This takes about two to three hours. Then the priest in charge of the celebration teaches some words from the Bible and says a farewell blessing to the attendants. On their way back they buy some of the necessary items mentioned above to make the celebration as colorful

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<sup>60</sup> "Feast days of Ethiopian Orthodox Church" an article accessed from <http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/calendar.html>

<sup>61</sup> *Tella* is not a must requirement, some families prepare it some do not. It also depends on the status of a family. Usually the poor do not prepare *tella* as it is more expensive.

as it should be. From the gate of the church they buy freshly cut grass and incense. From the near buy kiosk, they buy the coffee beans, popcorn and the grains.

The ceremony starts around mid day with what is called *nifro kikela* which literally translates as boiling of grains. First, the woman in charge of the family looks for an appropriate place where to prepare a temporary stove for the grain boiling and the following activities. It should be an area which is convenient for people to sit around. Once the right place is chosen, a big pot is prepared for the grain and the fire is now set. Depending on the order of boiling she puts first the bean or peas then after a while the wheat is added so that they are cooked properly. While the *nifro kekela* is taking place, the family members are engaged in different activities. Tidying the place for the ritual, preparing the coffee ceremony, baking the *kitta* and inviting neighbors are the main activities. The first task is left for the men while the rest are of the mother and children. The mother takes care of the coffee ceremony and the *kitta* baking while children are sent out to tell the neighbors that they are invited.<sup>62</sup>

The mother is observed running here and there trying to follow up the boiling of the grain and preparing the coffee ceremony. Once she made sure the grain is well cooked, then it is possible to start the next step. The food items prepared for the day are taken outside, the coffee ceremony is ready to start family members and invited guests are present, then it is time to start the ritual. Everything is arranged in order. The coffee tray is put on the freshly cut grass which is spread on the floor. In front of the coffee tray, the *kitta*, the boiled grain, the bread, the popcorn, the gadget for burning incense are put. No one is allowed to eat anything until they are told to start. The temporary stove on which the grain was boiled should have fire on it because there is one more frying it is needed for. So, before everything starts, the sheep or goat<sup>63</sup> prepared for the day will be slaughtered by the head of the family, in this case the man. Then the meat is chopped by

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<sup>62</sup> Invitation depends on the size of the family, usually if it is a big family, they do not invite neighbors. Moreover, if the time of the celebration by the other neighbor also coincides there is no need to come around as they are busy with their own celebration. If the family preparing the feast is wealthy, it is a moral obligation to invite those who don't have the capacity to do so.

<sup>63</sup> Sheep or goat is not obligatory, but if a family can afford it is done. Black colour is usually preferred.

the mother and girls. And a big metal plate will be put on the temporary stove and the meat is fried. Once the fried meat, locally called *tibis*, is ready everybody sits making circles by the side of the coffee. Now it is time to start the celebration of st. Mary's birthday, *Ginbot Lideta*. It all starts by first taking a small amount of each of the food item and the drink and throwing it in all directions spelling some words of prayer. This is done by the oldest man in the family. The prayers read as follows,

*Our father's and mother's Wuqabi*<sup>64</sup> *we are grateful for you have protected us through the year. Amen!*

*We are thankful for you have kept your eyes on our country, on us, on our children, our cattle, on everything we have. Amen!*

*We hope and pray for your protection for the years to come. Amen!*

*We beg you to give us peace, love, health, productivity, fertility to our mothers, success to our children. Amen!*

*We ask for your apologies if we have been out of the right way and we ask you to help us in the future. Amen!*

*We ask you accept our offering, to test and bless the food we have prepared and also be with us tonight. Amen!*

*God of Abraham and Sarah we give you honor and thanks for making us see this day. Amen!*

*Mother of God [st. Mary] we give you honor for being with us all the year and for enabling us celebrate your birthday. Amen!*<sup>65</sup>

It is not allowed to take anything from the food and drink before it is thrown to the spirits (*Wuqabis*) and the explanation for this is, since the items are mainly prepared to appease the spirits, they should be the ones who first test it or otherwise it will have a drastic consequence on the person who ate or drunk anything before its thrown for them. It might cause the person a serious affliction as the disappointed sprits may take revenge on who did an act of transgressing their authority. Thus, it is only after all participants said amen to the prayers and thanks giving, can start participants eat and drink what is served.. Finally the celebration gets to a closing session when all say blessings and prayers asking for their well being once again and asking for more blessings and protection until next year. At

<sup>64</sup> *Wuqabi* "is a guardian sprit of an individual or a family" (Yoftahie 1958:78). It is not a possessing sprit like the *zar*.

<sup>65</sup> Prayer made by Gebremedihn Tadesse on May 9, 2010.

the end, no leftovers will be taken back to the house. Everything except the containers will be thrown in different directions as it was done at the very beginning of the ritual for the spirits themselves.

According to one of my informants on the issue, the idea of celebrating st. Mary's birthday in this manner has its origin from the very time she was born and there is nothing superstitious about it since what they are doing now is what st. Mary's parents have done up on child birth. Leaving the leftovers out there for the spirits, throwing some amount for the spirits, appeasing them are also nothing unchristian or superstitious but rather have their roots in the bible and church stories they have been taught by the priests. He says,

We are thought in the church that on this day Hana, mother of our lady and Eyaqem her father did the things we are doing here now except that they did not have coffee and that they did not slaughter a sheep or a goat. We are taught in the church that few days before Hana gave birth to st. Mary, she and her husband climbed a small hill in search of a nice place where she can rest and deliver the baby. On the top of the hill they settled at, they were staying in a small hut and they did not have a proper house. So when people in the surrounding area heard the news of a child born on top of the hill, they all went to see them. They also took food stuffs with them according to the tradition of the day. So as they reached and saw Hana with her newborn baby girl, they greeted her and congratulated her. They set fire outside and put a small pot on the fire to boil the grains they brought with them. They celebrated the coming of the long awaited St. Mary with it. They ate and they did not take the leftovers with them, as you can see, that is what we are doing now. We fed ourselves and we have to also feed the spirits who guard as because they don't have any means to feed themselves unless we do. If we do not do, they attack us. They eat us because they will be starved. So that is the reason.<sup>66</sup>

Bantalem's (2010) assumption about the celebration of the day agrees with what the informant told me except that Bantalem argues differently about the leftovers. He says, the leftovers left by the visitors of Hana were not intended to feed the spirits since that is not in line with the teachings of the Orthodox church but rather, it was

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<sup>66</sup> Conversations with Gebremedihn Tadesse

meant to feed the birds. Yoftahie on the other hand, has another perspective about the boiling of grains and leftovers which connects it to what Jesus has done to save human kind. Accordingly, he says

The popular belief for boiling *nifro* is that, before Christ was born to die on the cross and save mankind from Hell, sinners were thrown into boiling water and fire. But st. Mary was born; she gave birth to Christ and He, through His death and Resurrection, took all those sinners out of the unbearable boiling water and fire. Thus the boiling of *nifro* is in remembrance of that suffering and to show how the birth of St. Mary contributed to the redemption of our souls Yoftahie (1958 :78).

He also adds that why leftovers are not taken back to the house is because it is believed that since the sufferings are symbolized by the boiled grain, taking them back to the house would mean calling the suffering once again to the house (ibid. 1958). However, both Bantalem and Yoftahie agree that the animal slaughter and coffee are not supported by the church. Bantalem and Yoftahie go in line with the church's teachings and do not accept the assertion that the leftovers should be left for the spirits. Rather, says Yoftahie (1958:78), the religious significance of the celebration of St. Mary's birthday has 'decreased in importance and the practice has become modified in its performance *to include other elements apart from what is recognized by the church*' (italics mine). He thus believes that the ritual is extended to include some elements which are not from the church's teachings but rather brought in from the previous practices. It can be argued that these extended practices are continuations of the old practices which were performed by the people before they were converted to Christianity but at this time they are mingled to make more meaning and be expressive of the love for st. Mary, and their relationship with the guardian spirits. In addition, both Bantalem and Yoftahie do not give any explanations about throwing the food items to the spirits before anyone eats and drinks although priests with whom I have discussed the issue say it is superstition and that is it strongly opposed by the church.

A priest informant from the church explains the inclusion of appeasing the spirits while celebrating st. Mary's birthday as a total superstition which is against the teachings of the church and he even believes that it is embarrassing to see this practice in Axum among other places given its long history of Christian tradition and while it is

a sacred city chosen by God as an abode of the Ark of the covenant.<sup>67</sup> He says that after all this long established tradition of Christianity the old traditions of this superstition should have been abandoned, but it is rather surprising how they found their way to be celebrated together with the birthday of our Mother, st. Mary. What he calls superstition is the inclusion of the killing and the coffee together with throwing food items for the spirits.

However, an old woman who has been doing this for many years says that she cannot be without this practice since it is one of the bases of her well being in the day to day activities. She believes that if she stops it anytime that the sprits will take out right revenge either on herself or her family or her property. She says 'the church men themselves tell us that we have guardian spirits. Like the guardian spirits, there are also evil spirits which we need to handle carefully if we don't want any troubles to befall us.'<sup>68</sup>

Talking about the guardian spirits, my pries informants quoted a verse from the Psalms 91:1-16 and admitted that there are both bad and good spirits. However, he says, 'there is no place in the Bible that says they should be handled the way these people are treating them. They do not need any appeasement and offering by people because their creator God himself takes care of the sprits and his people too. The people are just making this up to justify their bad practices which are impurifying our long lived Christian tradition.'<sup>69</sup> This is an interesting point where we can see how creative and innovative people are to interpreted and appropriate their knowledge from the church about the good and bad spirits and devised their own way of dealing with them.

Meyer's concept of appropriation captures the whole scenario here very well. According to Meyer, discourses on syncretism in Africa, although they are being challenged recently, down play the role of actors in the process and strip their agency off and also not gives attention to Africans understanding of Christianity. By using the term appropriation she argues, an 'understanding of African Christians as active agents in a historical process' (Meyer 1994) can be achieved.

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<sup>67</sup> Conversation with Gebru Gebrehawaria.

<sup>68</sup> Conversation with Ade Atsede Tesfaye.

<sup>69</sup> Conversaition with Zegebreyesus Lemma.

Appropriation is one of the ways through which the people under discussion make use of Christianity to explain their relationship to the spirits. It is stated above that informants go back to the church's teachings itself to show that what they are doing derives its roots from the bible and what the church teaches its followers. This way, they make Christianity their own as Meyer (1994) says and synthesize it with their old practice before the introduction of Christianity. It has been shown above in the introduction that the people long before were practitioners of local belief systems and that they were polytheists. They did not need to abandon their old belief for the new one for it has always served them a purpose to be in good terms with the spirits. However, they have to also negotiate some elements with the church. So instead of abandoning the whole thing, they borrowed some stories from the church to justify their practice of appeasing the spirits. Moreover, the concept of multidimensionality also must be taken in to account. Local practices which were and are believed by the practitioners, to be important, tend to find ways to deal with the hegemonic institution by being rather flexible and creative. What they do is not standing against it or resisting it, rather, appropriating it and as we saw from the above ritual borrowing some elements and bring some Christian elements in it.

Reading in to the prayer above, it is not difficult to infer that this practice is more concerned with the pragmatic issues such kind of a practice is believed to deal with. It is a practice which is in John Cort's (2001: 187-200) quoted in Greive's (2006) expression concerned with 'the realm of well-being, health, wealth and mental peace emotional contentment, and satisfaction in one's worldly endeavors.' It is not much about the transcendental or the life after death but the well being of life while living on this earth. It is part and parcel of the effort of bringing well being and stability to the socially constructed everyday life of practitioners (Greive 2006). As such, the practice does not contradict with the teachings of the church in the eyes of the practitioners but rather compliments one another. They celebrate st. Mary's birthday and in the same event they appease the spirits. While the former is in line with responding to their transcendental life the later replies to their pragmatic everyday life and this way they are seen complimenting each other (Greive 2006). In doing so, they appropriate Christianity in a meaningful manner and also deal with the spirits which are responsible for their everyday life.

This is more explained by Greive (2006:3) as follows. 'The transcendental and the prosaic complexes do not collide or compete, nor are they in mere accidental association. Rather, each is a response to specific needs. They complement each other as they are utilized in what are essentially distinct and complementary contexts of application'.

Historically, before the introduction of Christianity, it has been said above that the people in the Axumite kingdom were practicing polytheistic religions and they were also used to giving sacrifices to the spirits they adhered to. The introduction of Christianity however came with teachings which ban the practice of offering sacrifices and worshipping the spirits at all. This did not get much weight in the eyes of the society and it was not also something they could afford to stop for they have been connected with the practice for a long time and they have found it legitimate so far. But they were also faced with the influential institution which was attempting to impose the new teachings. At this point, they had to devise ways of negotiating the two, the former practice and the teachings by the new religion. Thus, they had to translate Christianity into ways which were understandable and applicable to their situation which is what makes it appropriation. And as Meyer (1994) argues, the church's role to control the followers ways of practicing the religion in as much as it wanted is very much limited among the Christians in Axum for they have appropriated some elements from Christianity that are meaningful and related to their practices and relations with the spirits.

### **Concluding remark**

If, according to Mary Douglas (2002), purity never gets along with ambiguities and compromises, the very time the religion was introduced to the Axumite kingdom purity could never be the case due to its interaction with Judaism and local practices which must have led to the ambiguity or conditions of 'impurity'. The practitioners in this ritual have become actively innovative to the extent that they appropriate the Christian religious myths for negotiating their conditions in relation to the spirits and their institutional base which is the 'pure' Orthodox tewahdo Christian institution.

According to Nurnberger 'in the current spiritual situation, you find a diverse spectrum of combinations, interactions, inter-penetrations, adjustments, new developments, deconstructions and simple decay. Local and detailed analyses would be necessary to know exactly what happens at grass roots level in specific communities' (Nurnberger 2007: 20-21). Hence, there should be ways to go beyond idealized purity discourses in order to see the lived realities which are very much expressed by dynamic and creative practices. To this end, I analyzed a ritualized Christian religious practice which is appropriated by adherents to appeal to the non-Christian spirits as celebrated once in a year on the 9th of May which is *Ginbot 1* according to Ethiopian calendar. This day is the actual day when st. Mary was born and it is a day of big celebration although the Christian people actually continue to commemorate every first day of the twelve months.

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## **Final Word: The Religious Situation in Contemporary Africa**

**Kupakwashe Mtata**

### **Introduction**

Religion, as witnessed in such an extended geographical region as Africa, expectedly exhibits much diversity. Both inter-religious and intra-religious diversity are evident on the African religious landscape. Intra-religious diversity arises from the fact that '[religion] is not just a matter of belief, of internal commitment to the notion of existence of some transcendent power' (Firth 1996:168). Rather, whether it has any 'purely religious' origin or not, religion as it is lived out has other stimuli than transcendental or metaphysical ones. Human interests, economics, social organization, historical developments, politics, charismatic personalities, psychological conditions and many other historical (as opposed to transcendental) realities shape religious beliefs and practices. The multiplicity of these motivations and factors unavoidably gives rise to diversity in the shades in which religions appear.

In the same vein, common influences may give rise to noticeable parallels in the religious practices of different communities. Common historical conditions in much of Africa result in comparable forms of religious practices. In addition, comparability of religious manifestations across the different religious situations presented in this issue may partly be accounted for by reference to the similarity in the characters or types of religions.

This essay will adumbrate the contours of a typology that will illuminate some aspects of the cases presented in this issue which are significant for comparison's sake. A seemingly superficial meta-

level observation is that all the cases examined are instances of religious grouping. What is more insightful and to be considered here is the nature of solidarities and boundaries that characterise the groupings. That is, what are the bases upon which groups of people cooperate or differ in, or even fight over matters of a religious nature? Religious groups are influenced by both by the religious contents of their religions and the non-religious aspects of their environment. What are those religious and non-religious elements that have an effect on the complexion of religious solidarity or divergence in the cases under investigation? And what complexions of religious solidarity and divergence can be observed?

### Typology of religions

Religions have certain qualities which generally define how their adherents are mobilised. A number of proposals have been made regarding how to categorise religions.<sup>70</sup> Reference is made here first and foremost, to the typology proffered by Jan Assman (2010). Assmann's is not precisely a typology of religions in general. It is rather particularly a classification of monotheisms into exclusive and non-exclusive religious discourses. Assmann perceives in Egyptian history two paths to monotheism which lead to two types of monotheism:

One, the evolutionary path, leads to an inclusive monotheism, a monotheism that is nothing other than a mature stage of polytheism. The other, the revolutionary path, leads to an exclusive monotheism, a monotheism that cannot be arrived at through any developmental process but only through a revolutionary break with all that went before it. The distinction between true and false religion pertains solely to this exclusive monotheism. (2010:36)

Assmann borrows from Karl Jaspers the notion that the Axial Period, a period encompassing c. 800 – 200 BCE, saw the rise of novelties of a religious and non-religious nature. For Jaspers, the Axial Period,

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<sup>70</sup> Since religion, like all other cultural phenomena, is in an on-going process of reproduction it should be expected that new variations continue to arise which do not necessarily fall neatly within any suggested categories. However, broad categories organise data into manageable sets before complexity may be introduced.

a period of acute cultural transformation in global history, was the time in which humanity became conscious of consciousness, started to strive for redemption, attempted to convince each other through communication of thoughts, reasoned discussions and essayed arguments, a development which led to the formation of parties and the rise of religious conflicts. In religion, ethics attained priority over myth. The former period, what Jaspers regards as the mythical age, an age of tranquil unconscious acceptance of ideas and customs, gave way to an age of the conscious rational examination and demolition of what hitherto had been accepted without question. Additionally, in its relation to the world, humanity adopted a new disposition, namely spiritualisation. That is, asceticism, philosophy, and speculative mysticism gained currency. (Jaspers 1953:1-8)

For Assmann therefore, it is in the Axial Period that religions with exclusive monotheistic theology, which he also labels counterreligion or secondary religions, came into existence. The emergence of these self-conscious and exclusive religions whose gods are unique and cannot be translated to those of other cultures happened in the same period as the rise of other cultural and intellectual aspects, viz: the judgement of the dead, personal piety, separation of state and religion, writing and literacy, the canonization of scriptures, violent self-exclusion, violent exclusion of others, martyrdom, and conversion. (Assmann 2010:8-30, 2008)

The main feature of exclusive monotheism as is seen in the Torah is the demand for exclusive contractual loyalty to a god. To worship any other gods attracts jealousy and retribution from the god. Inclusive monotheism on the other hand is an idea of a god who is manifest or concealed in multiple images which complement, offset and illuminate one another. Inclusive monotheistic religions affirm the world as a divine world, and their divinities participate in worldly affairs of politics, economics, and health. Rulers are identified with divinities and intercede with the divinities to ensure the health and wellbeing of the territory under their jurisdiction. They are the representatives of the gods to their people. On the contrary, the exclusive monotheistic god is a transcendent individual who is removed from the world and negates it. The god and the world are

set apart; his kingdom is not of this world.<sup>71</sup> Redemption from this world is a major feature of exclusive monotheism. Religions with a theology of exclusive monotheism also usually require personal piety which involves a temporary detachment from the world in order to commune with the god (Assmann 2010:31-56).

Another important feature of exclusive monotheism is an emphasis on law, morality and justice as integral aspects of religion. Moral stipulations that require care for the poor and the powerless, as well as following other given moral behaviours or prohibitions, are an important element of exclusive monotheistic religions. In societies with inclusive monotheism, such moral stipulations are usually not aspects of religion but of the profane wisdom of rulers in their duty as patrons and protectors. The gods of inclusive monotheism generally do not give laws of an ethical nature. Exclusive monotheistic religions therefore tend to attribute lawlessness and indecency to non-adherents. (ibid.)

The turn from inclusive monotheism to exclusive monotheism correlates with the turn from ritual to text or from orality to scripturality. In inclusive monotheistic religions, ritual is believed to be necessary to keep the world going, while in exclusive monotheism it is not ritual performance but the will and action of a transcendent god which ensures world continuity. The priest type is the key religious specialist in those religions in which ritual is the main medium, whereas the scholar, exegete or preacher is prominent in book religions. While what is required in the former is ritual performance involving the proper handling of sacred objects and appropriate behaviour in sacred spaces, in the latter reading, reciting and exegesis take precedence. When emphasis is on ritual performance the observance of purity rules that govern the ritual is critical, and when the text is what is fundamental remembering and obeying scriptural guidelines and ethical rules assume most significance. The transcendent god of exclusive monotheism reveals his will through scriptures, and the gods of inclusive monotheism manifest in nature and other worldly media. (ibid.)

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<sup>71</sup> This is not to say that there have not been many times when exclusive monotheistic religions have colluded with politics.

The typology of religions as primary and secondary is borrowed by Assmann from Theo Sundermeier. This typological classification of religions is widespread. In a lecture delivered at the University of Bayreuth on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Michael Pye, spoke of primal religion, critical religion and civil religion. He characterized primal religion as that religion not formally recognised as religion by its adherents. It is taken for granted as the customary practice of the natural community. Primal religion, therefore, has no formal name. The great majority of participants in primal religions are not reflectively aware of participating in a religion. Critical religions, on the other hand, are reflective, self-critical, and critical of society or culture. Their teachings are disseminated by teachers or preachers, but their survival and growth ultimately depend on people's decision to accept or reject them. Pye defines critical religion as 'a voluntary system of symbolic concepts and ritual behaviour which enables individuals to determine meaning independently of a natural community', and civil religion as 'a complex of symbols, concepts, and values accompanied by ritual activities and calling forth feelings such as historical nostalgia, national loyalty, and commitment to a common future' (Pye 2011).

Along the same lines as Sundermeier, Assmann, and Pye, Raymond Firth makes reference, on the one hand, to small scale particularistic religious systems, and, on the other, to religious systems that make claim to universality. The former can be said to have the following characteristics: emphasis on honourable conduct and proper ritual performance rather than adherence to a clearly articulated set of beliefs; no need for proselytizing; rarity of sceptics, who in any case have doubt limited only to specific rites, priests or divinities. There is no need to mention the characteristics of the universalistic religious systems as they are just the reverse side of those of small scale particularistic religious systems. (1996:157-158)

Of importance at this point is to note that once spiritual consciousness or self-reflectivity enters into the history of a people, religion among those people can assume many different forms depending on how elements from different religions are associated and blended, and on how other historical factors impinge on religion. Different emphases lead to different designs of religion. The arrival of critical religions did not lead to a perfect retreat of non-reflective forms of religion. Rather, in some case the old forms gained

consciousness and became defensive. The gaining of consciousness was already an adoption of a characteristic of critical forms of religion. Likewise, the new critical religions more often than not adopted elements of the primal forms of religion, and had to do so if they were to survive.

The unreflective-reflective dichotomy dominant in all the typologies above is only a broad typology which ignores intermediate or different forms which are so rife in reality. Only Pye refers to one such instance, namely civil religion. Different emphases may lead us to more types with different or more refined nuances, such as popular religion in contrast to official or elite.

### **Types of religion in Africa**

In Africa the two most proselytizing religions, Christianity and Islam, are distributed in such a way that the north is largely Muslim while the south is largely Christian. Nigeria is one of the religious borderlands of this demarcation. These self-reflective and missionizing religions collide at the frontier, but the nature of the collision depends on other extenuating circumstances. In the particular case of Jos, as presented by Baiyewu in this issue, religious conflict merely provides a superstructure to conflict that is already simmering on socio-economic grounds. Difference in religious affiliation coincides with ethnic and economic disputes thereby heightening the conflict. Is it not possible though that the perceptions of global conflict between the Christian and the Muslim world, especially as dramatized since 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, have similarly contributed to accentuating imaginations of violent conflict on the basis of religion? In any case, religious affiliation in exclusive monotheistic religions has the effect of creating religion-based group identities, or, where other identity markers were already in existence, of intensifying exclusive identities.

Like Nigeria, Sudan before 9th July 2011 was one of Africa's Christian-Muslim borderlands. The case presented by Omer in this issue is one in which a dominant exclusive monotheistic religion unjustly imposes its ethical rules of just wealth-creation and distribution on minority groups. Non-Muslims are required to pay

*zakāt* and thereby contribute to the social welfare pool, but they are not entitled to benefit from it. Non-Muslims are required to follow the Islamic rules of banking. Again in Sudan, like in Jos, Nigeria, the religious difference coincided with ethnic identity and economic issues. Where it has its way exclusive monotheism is likely to crush difference and to disregard the rights of minorities.

The same can be noticed in the media representations in Kenya whose wholesale demonization of Muslims in the face of terrorist attacks in Kenya and beyond is due to a Christian majority taking advantage of its dominancy of the social and cultural space. The binary opposition of good and peaceful Christianity versus evil and violent Islam is the exaggerated and stereotypical belief that already existed in embryonic form in the antagonistic attitude between self-conscious, competing, and aggressively self-propagating religions.

The type of monotheistic religion emerging in the Axial Period is well illustrated by the case of the *Tablīghī Jamāʿat*, an apolitical, fast-growing, lay missionary movement in Kenya. Wario tells us that *Tablīghī Jamāʿat*'s principal method is the missionary journey upon which members are expected to embark frequently, a strategy calculated to swell membership through sending out a great number of preachers. The preacher and the teacher are therefore the principal actors. To be noted is the emphasis on reading of the *Qurʿan* and other texts. Texts and sermons, typical of exclusive monotheism, and not the ritual of primal religions, are prominent in this case. The preoccupation of Wario in this issue is to draw the reader's attention to the bureaucratic support system behind *Tablīghī Jamāʿat*'s core activities. This movement demonstrates a high sense of self-reflectivity through its evaluation and planning sessions. However, from Omanga's essay, it seems that the Kenyan mass media landscape is more attuned to an atypical violent Islam in Kenya, and oblivious to the positive, successful, peaceful and more authentically Kenyan Islamic movement, the *Tablīghī Jamāʿat*. A general latent hostility between competing faiths predisposes even newspaper editors' representation of the religions.

In the essay by Wafula we get another verdict on religion in Kenya. Wafula argues that Christianity in Kenya is losing grip of young generations because of pastors and priests' failure to consistently demonstrate the ethical standards they preach to their

congregations. Christianity is one of the religions arising from the Axial Period with a set of moral imperatives to be followed. However, in practice religious communities have never managed to fully uphold the moral injunctions they teach. If the youth in Kenya are beginning to be conscious of the disparity between what is taught and what real happens in practice then what is to be investigated is how the new critical consciousness came about. Even the white missionaries were not consistent in their ethical behaviour. For instance, according to Wafula, the white missionaries worked in cohorts with the coloniser.

In Ethiopia, the terms 'Christianity' and 'Islam' may hide more than they reveal the forms of religion there. There are varieties of Christianity and Islam which may have more affinity with each other than with other kinds of Christianity and Islam respectively. The indigenisation of Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia gives these exclusive monotheistic religions an inclusive character. The argument given by Mebratu Baye, a deacon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, in Zeleke's essay above, demonstrates how inclusive monotheistic types of Islam and Christianity can harmoniously live together and even cooperate while they feel far removed from and cannot collaborate with the exclusivist varieties of their respective religious denominations.

The essays by Bekele and Zeleke give evidence to the fact that the evolution of religions is not unilinear. Former secondary religions may assume a primary nature so that the relevance of the terms 'primary' and 'secondary' is put into question. In the case of both the *Ginbot Lideta* and the Sufi shrine of Teru Sina, as presented by Bekele and Zeleke respectively, the ordinary people put emphasis not on the one true god or on correct belief or conformity to scriptures but instead on ritual observance and devotion to intermediary divinities. In light of the theoretical outline in this essay it is no surprise that the Islamic reform movements complain that the ritual practice of paying tribute at the shrine of Teru Sina is *shirk* (polytheism). From the Islamic reform movements' perspective, given that there is no God but Allah and his prophet is Mohammed, veneration of saints is *shirk* and therefore erroneous.

When we categorize *Sufis*, Orthodox, *Salafis* and Protestants under the inclusivist-exclusivist dichotomy it becomes clear that at the shrine of Teru Sina there is hardly any boundary to cross. Rather this

is a case of inclusive monotheistic religious forms translating their gods with concordance. Even though they part when it comes to eating, they remain one joint community that venerates *shaykh* Siraj Muhammad Awel together. It is notable that they did not set apart different days for Christians and Muslims for the veneration. They come together at the same time and, apart from eating, they do everything together. Inclusive monotheism is more inclined to demolish borders rather than erect them, except in reaction to the violence of exclusive monotheism.

## Conclusion

The typology reviewed in this essay is a heuristic device by which to understand the state of affairs of religion in Africa today. Religious behaviour tends towards inclusive monotheism or exclusive monotheism. In some contexts even typically exclusivist religions may don an inclusive monotheistic nature. Exclusivist religions tend to accentuate exclusivist identities and to erect boundaries. They compete with and attract competition from other exclusivist religions.

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