

# Challenges to the Study of Islamic Education in African Universities

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## Abstract

This article examines the challenges to the study of Islamic education in African colleges and universities. I claim that such a study, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, is not a priority even though Muslims accounted for 44 percent of the continent's population in 2009 and 22 of its nations have a Muslim population of 50 percent or more. I present four main factors responsible for this phenomenon: European colonization; the relatively small number of Arabic speakers in most African nations; the negative implications of connecting Islamic fundamentalism/al-Qaeda to Arabs and Islam; and the humiliation, abuse, and severe punishment experienced by Black Africans in Arab-majority societies.

## Introduction

The primary theme of this special issue, whether Africa's colleges and universities prioritize the study of Islamic education, is very important. If a significant proportion of a society's inhabitants practice a particular religion, then it is quite rational to study it in that society's academic institutions. This is even more so the case with Islam in Africa, which goes back to "the beginning of the seventh month of the lunar calendar in the year 626 C.E.,"<sup>1</sup> because its practice is normally part of its adherents' everyday activities.<sup>2</sup>

One very important observation of the 1.2 billion people of Black African descent worldwide<sup>3</sup> is that the overwhelming majority of them are open to practicing and joining other religions, especially Islam. However, research shows that the study of Islam or Islamic education receives rather less attention in all African institutions of higher learning, as well as in other countries with a rel-

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atively high proportion of Muslims or even a Muslim majority. Instead, more focus is placed on western secular or Christian education.<sup>4</sup>

Like Muslims in the Arab countries, Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa differ in their beliefs and attitudes towards the state and Western education. Many in the category labelled “modernists” ... tend to have Western education. They support the maintenance of the Western type of schools but at the same time the establishment of more developed Islamic schools. They aim to purify Islam from African elements and to detach it from power structures. The ulama (learned Muslim scholars) in northern Nigeria, for instance, want to introduce technological innovations without destroying traditional moral values .... “Reformists”, on the other hand, advocate a return to religious orthodoxy .... They struggle for a type of Islamic education that can transmit Islamic religion and philosophy more efficiently. In both categories there are Muslims who aim to conquer the secular state and the education system and use them for religious purposes. In Nigeria, for instance, influential Muslims argue for a complete Islamisation of the country and for replacing the secular law with the sharia (Islamic law).<sup>5</sup>

Thurston writes of Mali, a Black West African country that table 2 shows as having a 90 percent Muslim population, that “[c]ommentators sometimes describe Mali as a ‘secular society.’ ... The constitution Mali adopted at independence in 1960 and the constitution promulgated during the transition to democracy in 1992 both declared Mali a ‘secular’ republic. Independent Mali inherited the notion of secularism, or *laïcité*, from France, its former colonial ruler. The ‘Law Concerning the Separation of the Churches and the State,’ promulgated in France in 1905, established the secular character of the French state, banning state funding for religious activities and removing religious symbols from public buildings.”<sup>6</sup>

Cook points out that in Egypt, “the religious curriculum is mandatory only at the primary, preparatory, and secondary levels. No such requirement exists at the national universities.”<sup>7</sup> Survey results of 381 Egyptian undergraduate and graduate students show that 73% support, 9.7% do not support, and 17.3% support limited religious education in the national curriculum. Of the 380 students [this number is one student short of the 381 above] surveyed, 67.1% support religious education at the university level.<sup>8</sup> Rupp states: “Higher education, like so many institutions in the Middle East, was significantly shaped by European colonialism. The colonial powers sought to build educational systems that largely served French and British interests rather than the indigenous interests of the region.”<sup>9</sup> According to Cook,

As Islamic countries gradually emerged from their colonial experiences, political leaders sought to modernize their countries along the lines of Western

development paradigms. Government bureaucrats and officials were usually modern educated elites who had grown comfortable and affluent with Western material culture. Most educational policy was based on perpetuating the secularized systems of which they themselves were a product so as to maintain their economic and socio-political advantage. What the early educational modernizers did not fully realize was the extent to which secularized education fundamentally conflicted with Islamic thought and traditional lifestyle. . . . Religious education was to remain a separate and personal responsibility, having no place in public education.<sup>10</sup>

This article examines the factors responsible for the low level or even lack of priority placed on the study of Islam or Islamic education, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. It first presents the numbers and percentages to demonstrate that not only do Muslims account for the highest proportion among all religions on the continent, but that by 2009 they also accounted for half or the majority of people in quite a few countries. The second section discusses the conceptualization of Islamic education, and the third one analyzes the factors that attempt to explain why this is so.

## Numbers and Percentages

Proportionally or in absolute numbers, more Africans are drawn to Islam than to any other religion. For example, of the 823.4 million Africans in July 2001, 371.4 million (45.1%) were Muslim, 304.31 million (36.9%) were Christian, 137.84 million (16.7%) practiced traditional religions, and 9.8 million (1.2%) belonged to other religions. By 2009, of the continent's 997 million people, 434.74 million (43.6%) were Muslim, 411.13 million (41.2%) were Christian, 117.73 million (11.8%) practiced traditional religions, and 19.4 million (1.9%) belonged to other religions (tables 1A and 1B). As of July 2009, Africa's 434.74 million Muslims represented 31% of the global Muslim population of 1.41 billion in 2007. In both 2001 and 2009, Africa was the only continent where Muslims outnumbered the adherents of all other religions.<sup>11</sup>

Duan points out that “[t]he percentage of Christians is highest in south and east Africa and in the coastal areas. The proportion of Muslims varies from nearly 100% in Mauritania and Somalia to a few percent in Botswana, Gabon, South Africa and Zaire. During the colonial period, Protestants were more active in the British colonies and they used vernacular languages in education more than Catholics did in the French colonies.”<sup>12</sup> Within Africa's five geographic regions, of the 316.1 million people in Eastern Africa (see appendix 1 for countries categorized in each region) in 2009, 181.9 million (57.5%) were Christian, 74 million (23.4%) were Muslim, 51.4 million (16.3%) prac-

ticed indigenous African religions, 7.7 million (2.5%) practiced other religions, and 1.1 million (0.3%) practiced no religion.

Within Middle Africa, of the 121.5 million people in 2009, 79.2 million (65.2%) were Christian, 17.6 million (14.7%) practiced indigenous religions, 17 million (14%) were Muslim, 7.2 million (5.9%) practiced other religions, and 361,465 (0.3%) practiced no religion. Within Northern Africa, of the 210.4 million people in 2009, 188.6 million (90%) were Muslim, 10.9 million (5%) were Christian, 10.3 million (4.9%) practiced indigenous African religions, and 705,677 (0.3%) practiced other religions.

Within Southern Africa, of the 56.4 million people in 2009, 44.8 million (79.5%) were Christian, 7.8 million (13.9%) practiced no religion, 2.2 million (3.9%) practiced other religions, 848,178 (1.5%) were Muslim, and 672,137 (1.2%) practiced indigenous religions. Finally, within Western Africa, of the 292.6 million people in 2009, 154.4 million (53%) were Muslim, 94.4 million (32.2%) were Christian, 37.6 million (12.8%) practiced indigenous religions, 4.75 million (1.6%) practiced no religion, and 1.54 million (0.5%) practiced other religions (tables 1A and 1B).

Tables 1A and 1B: Religious Breakdowns of the Five Regions of Africa, July 2001 and July 2009 (N=57 Nations/Territories)

<b>Table 1A 2001</b>	<b>Indigenous</b>	<b>Muslim</b>	<b>Christian</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>No Rel.</b>	
<b>Regions</b>	<b>Religions</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Religions</b>	<b>Pop.</b>	<b>Total</b>
Eastern Africa	52,114,073	59,091,873	135,194,880	6,058,251	0	252,459,077
Middle Africa	21,001,056	13,528,373	61,821,241	437,688	0	96,788,358
Northern Africa	9,020,093	167,131,245	6,410,368	632,920	0	183,194,626
Southern Africa	14,089,672	871,722	34,202,095	1,087,807	0	50,251,296
Western Africa	41,617,613	130,835,929	66,685,296	1,601,876	0	240,740,714
<b>Total</b>	<b>137,842,507</b>	<b>371,459,142</b>	<b>304,313,880</b>	<b>9,818,542</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>823,434,071</b>
<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>45.1</b>	<b>36.9</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>99.9</b>

**Table 1B 2009**  
**Regions**

Eastern Africa	51,367,087	73,995,889	181,876,937	7,768,746	1,088,589	316,097,247
Middle Africa	17,852,344	16,959,205	79,182,314	7,160,733	361,465	121,516,061
Northern Africa	10,271,956	188,581,600	10,850,994	705,677	0	210,410,227
Southern Africa	672,137	848,178	44,839,062	2,230,338	7,817,046	56,406,761
Western Africa	37,562,542	154,359,098	94,381,359	1,544,867	4,752,513	292,600,379
<b>Total</b>	<b>117,726,066</b>	<b>434,743,970</b>	<b>411,130,666</b>	<b>19,410,361</b>	<b>14,019,613</b>	<b>997,030,675</b>
<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>43.6</b>	<b>41.2</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>99.9</b>

Source: Amadu Jacky Kaba, "The Numerical Distribution of Muslims in Africa," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 26, no. 3 (July 2009): 12.

Table 2 shows that 39 African nations/territories had Muslim populations of 10% or higher in 2009; 22 had 50% or higher; and 15 had 90% or higher,

including 9 in sub-Saharan Africa and 6 in North Africa. The 9 sub-Saharan African nations are Mauritania (100%), Somalia (100%), Comoros (98%), Mayotte (97%), Senegal (94.2%), Djibouti (94%), Niger (91%), Gambia (90%), and Mali (90%). The 6 North African nations/territories are Western Sahara (100%), Algeria (99%), Morocco (99%), Tunisia (98%), Libya (97%), and Egypt (90%). Muslims in Guinea represent 85.5%; 70% in Sudan; 61% in Sierra Leone; 53% in Chad; and 50% each in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Nigeria. Muslims in Eritrea represent 45%; 39% in Cote d'Ivoire; 37% in Tanzania; 33% in Ethiopia; 24.5% in Benin; 20% each in Cameroon, Liberia, Mozambique, and Togo; 17% in Mauritius; 16% in Ghana; 15% in the Central African Republic; 13% in Malawi; 12% in Uganda; and 10% each in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, and Swaziland (table 2).

Table 2: African Nations/Territories with Muslim Populations of 10% or Higher, 2009 (n=39)

Country	Population	Percent Muslim	Country	Population	Percent Muslim
1. Mauritania	3,129,486	100	21. Guinea-Bissau	1,533,964	50
2. Somalia	9,832,017	100	22. Nigeria	149,229,090	50
3. Western Sahara	405,210	100	23. Eritrea	5,647,168	45
4. Algeria	34,178,188	99	24. Cote d'Ivoire	20,472,748	39
5. Morocco	34,859,364	99	25. Tanzania	41,048,530	37
6. Comoros	752,438	98	26. Ethiopia	85,237,336	33
7. Tunisia	10,486,338	98	27. Benin	8,791,832	24.5
8. Libya	6,310,434	97	28. Cameroon	18,879,300	20
9. Mayotte	223,765	97	29. Liberia	3,441,790	20
10. Senegal	13,711,597	94.2	30. Mozambique	21,669,278	20
11. Djibouti	516,055	94	31. Togo	6,019,876	20
12. Niger	15,306,251	91	32. Mauritius	1,284,264	17
13. Egypt	83,082,869	90	33. Ghana	23,832,494	16
14. Gambia	1,782,893	90	34. Cent. African Republic	4,511,488	15
15. Mali	12,666,987	90	35. Malawi	14,268,711	13
16. Guinea	10,057,975	85.5	36. Uganda	32,369,557	12
17. Sudan	41,087,824	70	37. DR Congo	68,692,541	10
18. Sierra Leone	6,440,053	61	38. Kenya	39,002,771	10
19. Chad	10,329,207	53	39. Swaziland	1,123,913	10
20. Burkina Faso	15,746,232	50			

Source: Amadu Jacky Kaba, "The Numerical Distribution of Muslims in Africa," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 26, no. 3 (July 2009): 13-16.

These statistics illustrate that since Muslims comprise Africa's largest population, the study of Islamic education in its colleges and universities, especially south of the Sahara, is a rational undertaking.

## Conceptualizing Islamic Education

Careful and substantial research has revealed a significant number of scholarly publications that attempt to conceptualize, explain, or define Islamic education from several viewpoints: that of tradition, especially as opposed to the western secular/modern or European form of education; that of Allah's oneness and knowledge (with the Qur'an as a guide) and how they cannot be separated; and that of emphasizing ethics and morality so that the person will be complete, obedient, and well mannered.<sup>13</sup>

According to Kamali, "[t]he singular leitmotif pervading the Islamic educational agenda is ... the Oneness and Unity of God. This permeates the whole of Islamic epistemology which posits God as the ultimate source and goal of knowledge. Man's knowledge is possible only because God has given him the necessary faculties of knowing and his intellect is illuminated by the Divine Intellect."<sup>14</sup> Akdere et al. write that "the Islamic educational system can be viewed in terms of '(a) aiding individual development, (b) increasing understanding of society and its social and moral rules, and (c) transmitting knowledge' ... The purpose of Islamic education is to teach students both worldly and heavenly knowledge and help them develop as good members of their family, society, and humanity. It also aims to lead the individual beyond the stage of knowing to the stage of being.... Thus, it is a comprehensive process involving physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth of the human personality..."<sup>15</sup> Cook notes that

From the beginning, Islamic education was – in essence – Qur'anic education and had the unequivocal goal of instilling correct knowledge of God and righteous conduct. ... Islamic education was not uniformly organized or centrally managed as are modern school systems, nor was it the charge of central government. It was locally organized and privately endowed. The centrality of religion in the educational process contoured the content and epistemology of education throughout Islamic history. This fact served at times to precipitate educational proliferation and at other times as a catalyst for intellectual stagnation. The corpus of knowledge emanating from the study of the religious sciences was considered, especially after the 13th century, as absolute and immutable Truth, and the rational sciences were consigned to ancillary status.<sup>16</sup>

Yaakub states that "Islam is a religion of knowledge. ... As knowledge in Islam is intimately related to belief, knowledge, therefore, is part of faith."<sup>17</sup> Cook claims that "[a]ccording to many Muslim thinkers, the philosophical shortcoming of most modern systems of education in the Islamic world is that they do not reflect the fundamental aims and objectives of Islamic education.

Contemporary policy makers are simply products of the Western social and cultural milieu, adopting Western modes of curriculum development administrative structures and pedagogical tools.”<sup>18</sup> According to Khan, “[i]n the Quranic view, the knowledge is divine. The overall repository of knowledge [is] Allah, who is Omniscient (*alimun, samiun, basirun*) and none possesses any knowledge except whatever He wishes (*illa bima sha’a*).”<sup>19</sup> Robinson<sup>20</sup> quotes Loimeir<sup>21</sup> as saying: “The teaching of ‘Islam’ which used to be conceived of as an ‘ocean of learning’ has ... been transformed in the 20th century into a discipline called ‘Islamic Religious Instruction’ (IRI).” In an article discussing Islamic religious education and modernity, Hazri conceptualizes religious education as traditional education and goes on to present “three main features” to explain the differences between the two forms of education.

Firstly, traditional education assumes the form of a master-disciple relationship while the modern prizes independence of judgment amidst a plurality of opinions. Secondly, the intellectual outlook of traditional education is often inter-disciplinary while that of the modern values specialisation. Thirdly, there are substantial differences between what traditional education views as the most “basic” or “elementary” knowledge and the modern understanding of it. ... At first sight, the traditional education system of which Islamic religious education is a fine example may seem anachronistic by modern standards. Yet Islam is certainly not alone in this respect. The classical system in which a master-disciple relationship is dominant is found even in other civilisations – one may think of Aristotle’s relationship to Plato or Plato’s loyalty to Socrates in the Greek tradition. ... The second component of traditional education has to do with its inter-disciplinary nature, i.e. a single scholar may master simultaneously the different branches of learning, remaining faithful to one intellectual strand that reflects his intellectual affiliation. The third feature that we wish to discuss is different conceptions of what is “basic” or “elementary” knowledge between the two educational systems ... the “conflict” between religion and modernity as a clash between two knowledge-systems – the one firmly metaphysical while the other anti-metaphysical. Religious education then accords immense importance to metaphysical knowledge as the basis and foundation of other knowledge. Within the specifically Islamic context, this means that the sole source for such knowledge – Revelation – is made to be the prelude to the other sciences.<sup>22</sup>

Hassan et al. claim that “[t]he main objective of education is to develop the potency of human’s intellect, physical, emotion and spiritual towards the level of perfection. Within this process, the implementation of values has being focused by the Islamic Philosophy of Education, which the aspect of ethic and moral cannot be separated from education and the thought of Islam. ... Within the axiology of Islam itself, the knowledgeable person should be the moralistic

and well-behaved person... education in Islam is to reinforce the self potential of an individual. From the aspect of intellectual, each human has already been provided with the ability to empower the knowledge and truth. From the aspect of physical, human has the ability to develop the strength and resistance. Thus, with education, human will gain the sense of perfection in their life and also able to strengthen their civilization.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Factors Responsible for the Low Priority**

Several mostly interrelated factors contribute to the low priority placed on the study of Islamic education in Africa’s colleges and universities, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. This section focuses on (1) European colonization, (2) the relatively small number of Arabic-speakers in the vast majority of African nations, (3) the negative implications of connecting Islamic fundamentalism/al-Qaeda to Arabs and Islam, and (4) the humiliation, abuse, and severe punishment experienced by Black Africans in Arab-majority societies.

#### *European Colonization*

Even though Islam was brought to Africa from Arabia 1,400 years ago and had spread continent-wide by the beginning of European colonization in the mid-1880s, the latter development had a serious impact at all levels of education. European governments established western/secular educational institutions, even in Arab/Muslim-majority countries, many of which are still trying to emulate the West’s higher education systems.<sup>24</sup> In addition, although Ethiopia was one of the world’s first Christian lands, it was European governments and missionaries who spread Christianity far and wide via formal colonization. According to Kaba, Ethiopia was the only African land not formally partly or fully colonized: 20 were colonized by France, 19 by the United Kingdom, 5 by Portugal, and 3 by Belgium. Italy colonized Libya, Equatorial Guinea by Spain, and Namibia by Germany. Liberia was indirectly colonized by a European-majority nation: the United States.<sup>25</sup> This is why, as table 1B shows, Christians accounted for 411.13 million (41.2%) of the 997 million Africans in 2009.

The strong influence of European/western secular education makes it very hard for African colleges and universities to prioritize the study of Islamic education. Almost all of them have Euro-American academic curriculums and tend to structure their academic calendars like their western counterparts. Even when an African nation changes its educational system, it just exchanges one western nation’s model for another. For example, in the late 1980s Kenya replaced the British model with the American model. Kaba points out that “on January 12, 2001, the East African Standard published a list of 14 private colleges and universities in Kenya that were under different categories of accred-

itation. Of those 14 private colleges and universities, 13 (93%) were Christian based, with most of them affiliated with Christian institutions in the United States. The one university that was not Christian based, was still an American institution, the United States International University (USIU).<sup>26</sup> This makes it easier for African students to further their education in the West. In the 2012-13 academic year, 30,585 sub-Saharan African students and 5,879 northern African students were enrolled in American colleges and universities.<sup>27</sup> Duan's study, which focuses on primary education in sub-Saharan Africa, finds that

Private schools, most often run by Christian associations, were frequent in Africa when most countries became independent around 1960. In 1965, 38% of all primary school pupils were enrolled in private schools in the 24 sub-Saharan countries for which longitudinal data on this enrolment are available. The percentage was largest in the countries with the highest income and countries with the largest percentage of Christians. ... Countries that have maintained a comparatively large percentage of pupils in private education belong to the high income category and are strongly Christianised and growth-oriented. They have one third enrolled in private schools. The percentages have been maintained in countries with a large portion of Christians, growth-oriented states and high economic level.<sup>28</sup>

Mazrui writes of the openness of Christian mission schools to teaching secular academic subjects.

Christian mission schools in the African continent have been among the major carriers of secularism in the total African experience across generations. All Christian schools were simultaneously carriers of Western secular skills and values. The missionary schools taught mathematics as well as religious studies; sometimes philosophy as well as the catechism; social studies in the here and now as well as theology about the hereafter ... This means that Christian missionary schools were ambivalent, while Muslim schools were single-minded. Christian schools split allegiance between Western Christianity and Western secularism, whereas Muslim schools concentrated allegiance to Islam.<sup>29</sup>

### *The Relatively Small Number of Arabic Speakers*

Another factor is the relatively small number of sub-Saharan African speakers of Arabic and that not all North Africans speak Arabic. While many Africans might be interested in or willing to learn Arabic, they lack the resources to do so. Others with the resources may not be interested in this field. Even Africans who memorize the Qur'an or recite its verses may not understand what they mean. This becomes a challenge for African students who want to study Islamic education in African colleges and universities.<sup>30</sup>

It is noted that “Arabic is the official language of some fifteen countries, and over 200,000,000 people are estimated to speak some dialect of Arabic. The geographical center of the language can be said to encompass the ... [northernmost] part of Africa from Mauritania to Egypt, the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, and Iraq. In addition to the Arab countries, in which Arabic speakers are concentrated, large numbers of Arabic speakers live in Iran and France (600,000 speakers each), while a substantial number of speakers live in the... [Comoros], Tanzania, and other parts of Africa.”<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, African nations account for up to half of the League of Arab States members and Africa contains a large number of Arabs. According to Burke, III, “two-thirds of all Arabs live in northern Africa.”<sup>32</sup> As of 2009, Africa had the four most populous Arab nations: Egypt (83.1 million), Sudan (41.1 million), Morocco (34.9 million), and Algeria (34.2 million). Other Arab nations with 20 million or more people as of July 2009 are Iraq (28.9 million), Saudi Arabia (28.7 million), Yemen (23.8 million), and Syria (20.2 million). Ten (45.4%) of the league’s twenty-two member countries are in Africa: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia. As of July 2009, member countries had a total population of 224.2 million, 63.6% of whom resided in Africa.<sup>33</sup>

The Arabic language, like English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, has been influential in African nations and used by Africans to communicate with each other; some of these words have even entered their native languages. Ngom writes of “[t]he social status of Arabic, French, and English in the Senegalese speech community” and claims that “the early Islamization of the country (especially in the northern part) accounts for the strong linguistic influence of classical Arabic found in Wolof today.”<sup>34</sup> Mohamed writes of teaching Arabic in South Africa.<sup>35</sup> According to Thurston, in 1979 the government of Mali “... established a Center for the Promotion of the Arabic Language, housed within the Ministry of National Education.”<sup>36</sup>

Kaba suggests that in order to unify the continent, English-speaking Africans should learn French and French-speaking Africans should learn English. “As of July 2008, there were 239 million people in the former or current French colonies in Africa. If one adds the populations of the former Belgian colonies in Africa where French is an official language: Democratic Republic of Congo (66.5 million), Rwanda (10.2 million) and Burundi (8.7 million) to the 239 million, the sum will be 324.4 million. As of July 2008, there were 511 million people in the former or current British colonies in Africa. ... The strategic goal of a federal African Union is to teach both French and English in its national university so that Africans in those two parts of the continent would be able to communicate with each other, especially as civil servants

spread across the entire continent.”<sup>37</sup> One could then suggest that Muslims living as large minorities or even as majorities in Africa should learn Arabic. In an article on the Nigerian Armed Forces, Iman points out that

Understanding an international language like Arabic by the three major branches of the Nigerian Armed Forces (Army, Air Force and Navy) is quite important. Arabic is particularly of a very high value because the language will assist the military on peace keeping in various countries especially those countries where they exist. Study of this language while on operations, especially in terms of signals and intercepting communication will be of a great importance. For instance, it was reported in a BBC broadcast in August, 1992 on a special program that some officers from Nigerian Armed Forces lost their lives in Somalia due to their ignorance of the language spoken by the enemies in the area of operation. Even though the then commander could hear the communication between the rebels but he could not understand and interpret the contents and thereby led his company into enemy’s fire and about ten of them were killed.<sup>38</sup>

Pertaining to Arabic as the medium of instruction for Islamic education, Benkharafa claims that “Arabic is the vehicle of Islamic tradition and culture and this is the reason why it is impossible to dissociate it from the Islamic religion. ... any community which adopts Islam ought to learn the Arabic language in order for individuals to be able to recite Kuranic verses in prayers and other rituals.”<sup>39</sup>

According to Ngom, in Senegal “[i]ts [viz., Arabic] use was and is still primarily restricted to religious spheres. For this reason, classical Arabic is respected and is granted a holy status, as it is the language of the Koran, the Islamic holy book of over 90% of the Senegalese population.”<sup>40</sup> Mazrui writes:

Simply from the issue of the language of worship, Islam has been less compromising than Christianity. It is as if the God of Islam understood only one language, Arabic. Formal prayer and ritual in Muslim Africa, as well as in the bulk of the rest of the Muslim world, is conducted almost entirely in the Arabic language. Most Muslim children have to learn the art of reading and reciting the Qur’an even if they do not understand what the words really mean. That is why many Muslim schools in Africa are referred to as Qur’anic schools, emphasizing the verbal mastery of the Holy Book. Most of the hymns in the mosques in Africa are in the Arabic language, and are memorized and recited, not necessarily with a command of their meaning. It is in this sense that Islam in Africa is linguistically uncompromising, demanding due conformity with the language in which God communicated with humankind... The official language of Islam is Arabic: the language in which the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. The fact that

the Holy Book of Islam is actually available and read in its original language has much to do with the possessiveness with which Muslims treat Arabic.<sup>41</sup>

Ngom claims that in Senegal “the Arabic language has never been used as a medium of communication in the daily life of the Senegalese people.”<sup>42</sup> In Sudan, according to Siddiek, a 1956 census showed “that Arabic was spoken at home by 51% of the population.”<sup>43</sup> Mogeckwu writes that in Algeria, “one of the sources of conflict derives from the attempt by the dominant group to impose Arabic as the language for all official transactions; Berber speakers oppose this vehemently.”<sup>44</sup>

### *Negative Implications of Connecting Islamic Fundamentalism/ al-Qaeda to Arabs/Islam*

Arabs and Black Africans have a long history, for Arabs not only brought Islam to the continent but also colonized parts of it and settled down there. Under European colonialism, both Arabs and Black Africans worked together to free themselves. Following World War II, they assisted each other as best they could. However, since Arabs have been among the leaders (e.g., Osama Bin Laden) in using terrorism against the West and those African nations (e.g., Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Uganda) that have good relations with it to take revenge for their suffering under colonialism and humiliation, Black African leaders and people of Black African descent in general have come to reject such terrorist acts. Although only a very tiny number of Arabs are involved in terrorism, Arabs in general tend to be viewed negatively and as associated with al-Qaeda or Islamic fundamentalism. In the case of people of Black African descent, this seems to have caused a rift or a confrontation with Arabs, because the latter’s terrorism seriously impacts the former. In addition, most Black African Muslims (most of whom practice Sufi Islam) tend to reject the Saudi brand of Islam (Salafist fundamentalism) as incompatible with African traditions. This is especially the case because it influences Black Africans negatively by transforming them into radical militants. This could encourage Black African nations in particular, and even Arab North African nations (including governments), not to support a robust study of Islamic education in their institutions of higher learning.<sup>45</sup>

Writing about Arab-African solidarity in the early post-World War II period, Ayari states that there was “a growing awareness among Arab and African countries of their shared goals. This is particularly evidenced by the common Arab and African positions regarding the problems of decolonization and the struggle against racism in Africa, Palestine and elsewhere. ... Together the Arab and African countries never cease to struggle for justice and liberty

through the UN, the Arab League, and OAU.<sup>46</sup> Bentahar quoted Gamal Abdul Nasser (d. 1970) as saying that “I may say without exaggeration that we cannot, under any circumstance, however much we might desire it, remain aloof from the terrible and sanguinary conflict going on [sub-Saharan Africa] between five million whites and 200 million Africans. We cannot do so for an important and obvious reason: we are in Africa.”<sup>47</sup> According to Nyang, one reason for Arab aid to Africa and other developing countries was “their commitment to South-South solidarity.”<sup>48</sup>

However, terrorism has engendered a growing lack of unity among Black Africans and Arabs. According to de Montclos, “Islam in the Sahel is now perceived by many Africans as a tool of repression when compared to Christianity, which was the oppressor’s religion during European colonization. Thus in Southern Sudan today, conversion to Christianity is both the result of forced Islamization, dissatisfaction with the old religions, and attraction to churches because of the role they play in education and providing humanitarian aid.”<sup>49</sup> In his discussion of the Shari’ah’s impact on northern Nigeria, Last claims that “[a]lthough the shari’a sentences of stoning, amputation and execution have attracted worldwide publicity, they have very rarely been carried out”<sup>50</sup> and “[o]nly three domains are seriously affected: women in public (their dress, their proximity to unrelated men – in conversation, for example, or in public transport); alcohol and non-military music and singing.”<sup>51</sup> When the United States and the United Kingdom led a group of European and Arab countries to overthrow Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi during March 2011, many world and African leaders attempted to find a peaceful solution. Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni is quoted as having said:

Sometimes Gaddafi and other Middle Eastern radicals do not distance themselves sufficiently from terrorism even when they are fighting for a just cause. Terrorism is the use of indiscriminate violence – not distinguishing between military and non-military targets. The Middle Eastern radicals, quite different from the revolutionaries of Black Africa, seem to say that any means is acceptable as long as you are fighting the enemy. That is why they hijack planes, use assassinations, plant bombs in bars, etc. Why bomb bars? People who go to bars are normally merry-makers, not politically minded people. We were together with the Arabs in the anti-colonial struggle. The Black African liberation movements, however, developed differently from the Arab ones. Where we used arms, we fought soldiers or sabotaged infrastructure but never targeted non-combatants. These indiscriminate methods tend to isolate the struggles of the Middle East and the Arab world. It would be good if the radicals in these areas could streamline their work methods in this area of using violence indiscriminately.<sup>52</sup>

As Mazrui notes: “In order to kill 12 Americans, Middle Eastern terrorists killed about 200 Kenyans in the streets of Nairobi a few years ago. This was the attack on the US Embassy in Nairobi in August 1998. There were also Tanzanian casualties when the US Embassy in Dar es Salaam was targeted at the same time.”<sup>53</sup> Menkhaus also discusses the phenomenon of Black African resistance to terrorism or racial revenge.

The link between sub-Saharan Africa’s diaspora and terrorist activities defies conventional wisdom. The continent has produced a large and growing diaspora concentrated in Europe, North America and the Gulf States. African diaspora members in Europe and North America are mixed in their socio-economic status – some are educated and middle class, but many others are poor, unemployed, illegal, marginalized, easily abused, concentrated in immigrant ghettos and frequently the targets of racism and discrimination in their daily lives. For this latter category, life in their newly adopted host countries is often far harder than they imagined. A significant portion of the African diaspora members in Europe and North America are Muslim. The vast majority of African Muslims in the diaspora were brought up in the Sufi tradition, encountering radical, Salafist preaching for the first time only when arriving in the Gulf states or the West. This combination of alienation, marginalization, exposure to radical new interpretations of Islam and the promise of belonging that al Qaeda cells offer to recruits is a potentially lethal cocktail. Collectively, the Muslim portion of the African diaspora in the West fits the general profile of a community at risk of recruitment into Jihadist cells. Yet sub-Saharan Africa’s large Muslim diaspora has to date produced few terrorist recruits, neither as leaders, nor as foot-soldiers. African diaspora involvement in al Qaeda is nowhere near the level generated by the diaspora originating from North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. ... African diaspora involvement in Jihadist terrorist activities in Europe and North America is quite low. Sub-Saharan African Muslims do not figure prominently in leadership levels in the al Qaeda network, or in known al Qaeda cells in the West.<sup>54</sup>

Thurston discusses the Islamists’ attempted takeover of northern Mali in 2012 in the following terms.

During 2012, Islamist attempts to impose Sharia and enforce conformity with Salafitheology caused an international outcry, and West African governments readied a military intervention while attempting to negotiate peace. When Islamist fighters pushed south into the Mopti region in early January 2013 – possibly hoping to hinder the West African intervention – France deployed forces to re-conquer northern Mali. By January 30, French and Malian soldiers recaptured Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal. At the time of writing, West African forces are deploying to replace the French and help Mali’s interim government re-establish its rule in the north.<sup>55</sup>

Kaba points out that

[b]y the beginning of the second decade of the 21st Century, almost all previously conquered nations or countries by Europeans in Asia and Africa have fought and successfully won their independence. However, there is deep resentment emerging from these once conquered peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas and some of these formerly conquered peoples have been attempting to take revenge against Europeans: Suicide bombings specifically targeting people of European descent before and after September 11, 2001 in South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Indonesia, Central Asia, Europe, the United States, etcetera; kidnapping of people of European descent in Central Asia, Middle East, North Africa, Latin America and South Asia; and academic and intellectual confrontations from Asians, Africans and people of Native American descent against people of European descent all over the planet Earth, are all examples of the urge to revenge the humiliation and negative economic implications suffered as a result of European conquests. One very important development (a phenomenon), however... they [Black people] appear to resist racial revenge (especially through their leaders), such as suicide bombings or military attacks against people of European descent or even people of Arab descent (who too conquered, colonized and dominated Black Africans), even though the whole world is aware of the fact that they suffered the most brutal conquest from the Europeans, leading to enslavement of tens of millions or more of them in Europe and the New World for centuries.<sup>56</sup>

Mazrui writes of Black Africans' ability to resist revenging themselves against other racial groups.

Cultures differ in hate retention. Armenians have been hating the Turks since the Armenian massacres in 1915-17. Africa has a short memory of hate. Nelson Mandela lost 27 years of the best years of his life in Prison. When he came out, he was prepared to have tea with the unrepentant widow of Hendrick Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, begged white terrorists to stop their fasting unto death and thus laid the foundations of Black-White reconciliation. Before Mandela, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya was denounced by the British as – leader unto darkness and earth –, but emerged from jail an Anglophile eager to consolidate good relations with the former imperial power. Ian Smith unleashed a civil war on Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. He lived to sit in a Black dominated Parliament and to openly criticize the new Black government of the day.<sup>57</sup>

During his post-imprisonment speeches, Nelson Mandela (d. 2013) asserted that “no man or woman who has abandon apartheid will be excluded from our movement toward a nonracial, united and democratic South Africa.”<sup>58</sup>

When a White South African assassinated Chris Hani, an African National Congress (ANC) leader, Mandela called for peace and respect for the law.

Tonight I am reaching out to every single South African, black and white, from the very depths of my being. A white man, full of prejudice and hate, came to our country and committed a deed so foul that our whole nation now teeters on the brink of disaster. A white woman, of Afrikaner origin, risked her life so that we may know, and bring to justice this assassin. .... Now is the time for all South Africans to stand together against those who, from any quarter, wish to destroy what Chris Hani gave his life for – the freedom of all of us.<sup>59</sup>

In a review of David Robinson's *Muslim Societies in African History*,<sup>60</sup> Hanretta notes that he identified three themes.

First, he identifies an ongoing “dialogic” interplay between the Africanization of Islam and the Islamization of Africa. ... Second, he posits a recurrent opposition between a tendency towards radicalism and militancy in African Islam and a countervailing “Suwarian” tradition of tolerance and inclusion. Finally, and most innovatively, he emphasizes the ways African Muslims attempted to situate themselves within Islamic space and time by orchestrating or imagining ruptures with their surroundings, sometimes subtly through distinctive dress or abode, sometimes dramatically through emigration (hijra) or violent conflict. ... Robinson makes it clear that the growth of Muslim societies in Africa was not only a matter of individuals slowly transforming the culture and politics of their communities by adopting Islamic symbols or institutions, but also a process of transforming Islam to fit local needs.<sup>61</sup>

These explanations show that Arabs and Black Africans recognized their similar or shared experiences and assisted one another to free themselves from European colonization. However, the campaign of terrorism led by al-Qaeda has resulted in visible misunderstanding between them.

### *Humiliation, Abuse, and Severe Punishment*

Another possible contributing factor is the constant media reports and academic publications on how Arabs humiliate, abuse, severely punish, and even murder Black Africans. These acts have resulted in a negative view of Arabs, 90% or more who are Muslim, and can lead to Black Africans rejecting any educational influence of Arab origin. This is especially the case as more Black Africans and Black people in general attain formal education and learn that Arabs also enslaved them and occupied their lands for centuries.<sup>62</sup>

According to Cook Jr., “slavery in Morocco was not only pervasive but was – as in the West – strongly colored by race. Most slaves originated in west-

ern Africa, extracted through war, raiding, trading or kidnap[ping], or were of African descent.”<sup>63</sup> Kaba points out that from 1400 to 1900:

... there are 6 African nations that lost ten thousand or more of their members during the Indian Ocean Slave trade: Tanzania (523,992), Mozambique (243,484), Madagascar (88,927), Malawi (37,370), Zambia (21,406), and Kenya (12,306). ... there were 10 African nations that lost tens of thousands or more of their members during the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: Ethiopia (813,899), Nigeria (555,796), Mali (509,950), Chad (409,368), Sudan (408,261), Mauritania (164,017), Senegal (98,731), Kenya (60,351), and Somalia (26,194). ... there were six African nations that lost ten thousand or more of their members during the Red Sea Slave Trade: Ethiopia (633,357), Sudan (454,913), Chad (118,673), Nigeria (59,337), Niger (19,779), and Kenya (13,490).<sup>64</sup>

He also notes “that a substantial proportion of Arabs both in Africa and countries in the Middle East such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen are Black people who are Arabized – Arab as culture.”<sup>65</sup> Dupree writes, “[t]he population of Libya, according to the 1954 census, is 1,091,830, of which about 961,830 are Arabs. The other 130,000 are primarily Berbers, Negroes, Qulaughli and Italians.”<sup>66</sup> By 2011, reportedly “one-third of the population of Libya ... is black.”<sup>67</sup> Zeleza claims that “[i]n 2005 Saudi Arabia reportedly had the second largest African-born population in the world after France, estimated at 1.5 million.”<sup>68</sup>

Writing about Arab-African tensions throughout history, Buo claims that

[w]hile both sides would not openly or readily admit it, the truth is that since the ugly days of the barbaric Arab slave raids into Black Africa, long before the more publicized European slave traders come on the African scene, the Arabs and the Africans have barely managed to co-exist in their vast and rough continent of mutual distrust. Up to this day, in countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and other Arab or Arab-dominated countries, people with Black skin are kept at the bottom of the social ladder with little hope of upward mobility. Discrimination against Black people in Arab countries is strong and visible...<sup>69</sup>

In a review of an “Islam in Africa” conference held in Malaysia in 2011, Abushouk cites Chouki El-Hamel, whose presentation, “The Othering of Black Africans in Islamic Traditions?” examined the Islamic state’s evolution under a profoundly Arabo-centric theocracy that took a different path from Prophet Muhammad’s ideals. He hypothesized “that the Prophet (SAW) rejected any racial prejudice with respect to the social order that was created and adhered to the Qur’an. However, after his death, the ideal of an egalitarian Islamic ummah was more illusory than real.”<sup>70</sup> Burke, III explains the tensions between

Black scholars and non-Black scholars in identifying Africa and Africans: “For Africans (and Africanists), North Africans were slavers and proto-imperialists, whose historical experiences diverged from those of sub-Saharan Africa. As constituted in the U.S., African studies has tended to see its terrain as Africa south of the Sahara, ‘black Africa’ as opposed to ‘white Africa’ (thereby mindlessly replicating colonial racisms). While Africa specialists are fully aware of the historical links between the two, such as the trans-Saharan gold trade, Islam and Arabic culture, the field often proceeds as if the North were another world.”<sup>71</sup> Bentahar points out that the “distinction between North and sub-Saharan Africa increased after the period of decolonization, reflecting the shifting political drives of pan-Arabism and pan-Africanism. It is noteworthy that periods of detachment between North and sub-Saharan Africa coincide with moments of rapprochements within the Arab World.”<sup>72</sup> Bentahar quotes Mazrui<sup>73</sup> as saying that “in general from 1957 to 1970 the deep ambivalence of black Africa towards the Arabs ... remained.”<sup>74</sup>

Al Khair reports that a “video filmed in Saudi Arabia has thrown the authorities’ treatment of migrant workers back into the spotlight. The footage shows an official in the coastal city of Jeddah chasing Africans out of a passport office and beating one of them with a belt, shouting: ‘Out!’”<sup>75</sup> Beydoun writes that

I witnessed the range of human rights abuses endured by Ethiopian maids – from both the perspective of a Lebanese insider and a human rights attorney. ... An unsavoury blend of Lebanese ethnocentrism, racial animus toward Africans, human trafficking and the debt bondage of maids upon arrival from Ethiopia, make up a recipe for contemporary enslavement. While the images of silent and submissive African maids trapped inside cosmopolitan Beirut apartments, condos and villas seemed juxtaposed at first, the modern portrait of Middle Eastern slavery – I gradually discovered through on-the-ground research, interviewing nearly 50 maids, and an examination of Lebanese labour laws and observance of human rights – was a common picture and practice.<sup>76</sup>

Genet reports that

[a]fter the November 4th deadline [of an immigration amnesty], Ethiopian migrant workers in Riyadh [Saudi Arabia] attempted to protest the police tactics in the round up and became the target of angry vigilante mobs that beat and killed at least 3 Ethiopian workers, and injured many more. ... Abuse and mistreatment of migrant workers in the Middle East is well understood in the African Diaspora. It has been a year and a half since the tragic death of Ethiopian domestic worker Alem Dechasa-Desisa in Beirut, who committed suicide after being publicly beaten and threatened with deportation. Outrage

followed that incident, but change has been slow or non-existent in Lebanon and the region since then.<sup>77</sup>

According to UN Watch, “Libya must end its practices of racial discrimination against black Africans, particularly its racial persecution of two million black African migrant workers. There is substantial evidence of Libya’s pattern and practice of racial discrimination against migrant workers. In 1998, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed concern about Libya’s alleged ‘acts of discrimination against migrant workers on the basis of their national or ethnic origin.’”<sup>78</sup>

Ghosh reports that “[t]he African Union (AU) will not recognize the Transitional National Council (TNC) of Libya as the legitimate government of that country because they charge that rebels in Libya have been indiscriminately killing black Africans... the Chairperson of the Commission of the AU Jean Ping believes this is jeopardizing the lives of tens of thousands of black Africans who have migrated to Libya in recent years to find work. ‘We need clarification because the TNC seems to confuse black people with mercenaries .... They are killing normal workers...’”<sup>79</sup> Sinco asserts the following about the condition of Black Africans in a Benghazi prison facility: “In a scene out of the movies about the dreaded penal colonies of French Guyana, some 50 Libyan and African men sat quietly against the high walls of a sun-drenched concrete prison yard. High above, the enclosure was ringed with coils of barbed wire. The prisoners looked sullen and downcast, many barefoot, their hands clasped together across their laps.”<sup>80</sup>

Onyango-Obbo writes

It is a dangerous time to be dark-skinned in Tripoli,” Human Rights Watch reported recently. Since the revolutionaries defeated, and then killed, Muammar Gaddafi, “dark-skinned” Africans from outside traditional North Africa have seen hell. Libya, even under Gaddafi, was always racist, but critics say it has grown worse under the Transitional National Council. According to rights groups, most of these “dark-skinned” African brothers are immigrant workers. They have been beaten, murdered, ran out of their homes, imprisoned, and a few murdered wantonly. ... The issue has become so hot, the American civil rights activists... Jesse Jackson has joined the fray. Writing in various American publications, Jackson said: “Reports abound that black Libyans are being subjected to beatings, torture, rape, killings – and, in several instances, horrific public lynching.”<sup>81</sup>

These examples make any sort of continued mutual trust between Arabs and Black Africans or people of Black African descent rather difficult. As a result, sub-Saharan Africa’s colleges and universities in particular may avoid academic policies or programs focusing on the study of Islamic education.

## Conclusion

I began by explaining that if a society has a substantial number or a majority of people who practice a particular religion, then it makes sense for its colleges and universities to study that religion in a serious manner. In Africa, Muslims account for 44 out of every 100 people on the continent, and 22 nations have a 50% or larger Muslim population. Therefore it is logical for the study of Islamic education to be prioritized in those nations' colleges and universities. However, as the article asserts, this field is not a priority. I then conceptualized Islamic education.

I posit that four main factors are responsible for this situation, especially in sub-Saharan Africa: European colonization; the relatively small number of Arabic speakers; the negative implications of connecting Islamic fundamentalism/al-Qaeda to Arabs and Islam; and the humiliation, abuse, and severe punishment experienced by Black Africans in Arab-majority societies.

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## Appendix 1

Classification of Regions of Africa (as of 2009) (N=57)

**Eastern Africa** (n=19): Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Reunion, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mayotte.

**Middle/Central Africa** (n=9): Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tome & Principe.

**Northern Africa** (n=7): Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Western Sahara.

**Southern Africa** (n=5): Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland.

**Western Africa** (n=17): Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Saint Helena.

Source: Country/regional classifications by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved on April, 10, 2009, from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>.