The Historical and Political Backdrop to Islamic Studies in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper argues that the lack of serious attempts to incorporate Islamic studies in Kenya's academic culture can best be understood by looking at the colonial and postcolonial policies toward university education there. The early missionary influence that shaped the nature of the indigenous educational system had a far-reaching impact upon creating a culture of resistance among Muslims toward western education. In the postcolonial period, the new governments tried to create a level playing field for all of their citizens, regardless of religious orientation. But the colonial imapct had already left its mark on Muslims in terms of their visibility at the university level. The Kenyan government did not interfere in what academic programs should be prioritized at this level. But because Christians outnumbered Muslims in academia, their influence created a dearth of indigenous university-generated information and knowledge on Muslim institutions and society. This gap was left to foreign researchers to fill. As a result, Kenya has no indigenous Islamic intellectual culture. If this status quo does not change, Kenyan Muslims will remain vulnerable to foreign Islamist influences.

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Historical Islam in Afrıca and Its Neighborhood

Islam has been an important part of the African landscape since the seventh century, when it began to replace Christianity. Today, a little over half of all Africans are Muslim, with the largest concentrations residing in North and Northwest Africa, the Horn, and large swathes of West Africa and the East African seaboard.[1] Not only did it gradually overcome Christianity in the north, but it was also at that liminal point that Islam found a beachhead to Spain, where it remained until it was displaced by the Reconquista.[2] The Islamization processs did not completely displace Christianity or native forms of worship. They remained, although tension was sometimes very high due to the emergence of less tolerant forms of Islam akin to contemporary Salafist trends. The precursors of African Salafists were the Almohods (Al-Muwahhidun), puritanical groups that dominated predominantly Berber/Tuareg North Africa. Some Andalusian emirates were actually established by groups of Berber descent. It is no coincidence that both North Africa and al-Andalus, not to mention virtually the whole of West Africa, were Maliki.[3]

West African societies gradually became Muslim through contact with North Africa via the Saharan trade routes.[4] There is a vast body of historical and religious literature on these areas. Archaeological evidence, for example, points to ninth-century contacts between Islam and East African societies that led to the conversion of the coastal city-states on the Banadir Coast and the rest of the East African seaboard. This process was just the beginning of a profound transformation.[5] Hitherto matrilineal societies became patrilineal, in line with Islamic jurisprudence, and the adoption of Islam engendered a social and intellectual transformation. The previously largely oral societies embraced a culture of literacy with gusto, which helped modernize them by transforming pre-literate societies into literate societies by committing local languages to writing. This advance enabled the emergence of new literary traditions that were parallel with the primordial culture of orality.

The African civilizations that developed at the dawn of the Christian millenium were mostly centered around converted Muslim communities. The Tuareg, Hausa, Swahili, Maninka, Wolof, and Somali peoples, among many others, were acculturated as Muslims and developed highly literate and intellectual cultures.[6] They adopted and then adapted the Arabic script to meet the exigencies of their native languages' phonological systems. African intellectuals gradually emerged as part of the international Islamic medieval and post-medieval culture. Even in societies that did not immediately adopt the Arabic script, like the Somalis, there was always an intellectual and literary elite who adopted it as their default language of intellectual engagement.

For almost two millennia, Africa was the shared spiritual home of indigenous traditional religions, Christianity, and Islam; Christianity was dominant in Ethiopia and pre-Islamic Egypt. The decline of the Roman Empire affected Christianity's fortunes in its African provinces to such an extent that it was largely eclipsed until European imperialism, fired by the Industrial Revolution, began its first feeble efforts to spread the religion there once again. However, European imperialism's true interest was not to win souls for Christ – this appears almost as an afterthought – if the "Scramble for Africa" is anything to go by. The missionaries came in full force only during the mid-nineteenth century, when a window of opportunity offered itself. Reverend J. Spencer Trimingham undertook the first systematic study of Islam's spread in Africa only during the 1950s.[7] The missionaries followed in the wake of their governments' imperialism. Ever since Napoleon marched into Egypt with a vast troop of artists, Arabists, archaeologists, and Orientalists in 1798-1801, other empires sent advance forces in the form of missionaries who sometimes doubled as explorers (e.g., David Livingstone).[8] Parallel with these activities was the emergence of Muslim-led resistance movements in Libya, Sudan, and West Africa that came to be known as "Mahdism" or "Islamic millenerianism."

The nineteenth century was a period of waning Islamic intellectual culture, but also a time of rising colonial scholarly activities in the form of the systematic study and learning of African languages accompanied by a curiosity about the continent's pre-colonial indigenous written literatures, the compilation of bilingual dictionaries and, most importantly, the translation of portions of the Bible into major African languages. Ironically, Christian missionaries employed the religious registers developed over centuries by Muslim ulama in Swahili, Hausa, and Wolof to translate their theological and eschatological lexicons.[9] And Muslims, in turn, used the new infrastructure of roads and railways to push into isolated communities to gain converts. In short, this was a win-win situation for both groups.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, Africa had firmly established what Ali A. Mazrui calls "Africa's Triple Heritage."[10] Muslim cultures were by definition hybrid. In Spain Muslim men married Christian women, and in Africa immigrant Muslims married into local dynasties and great houses. Missionaries, given the supremacist ideologies then prevalent and inspired by the new Darwinian ideas of evolutionary hierarchies applied by race men (perhaps an earlier form of ethnic profiling), limited miscegenation to the absolute minimum out of fear that this practice would offend racial sensibilites back home. Europe therefore lost its golden chance to integrate itself into the African world when its adventurers, merchants, missionaries, and colonial administrators re-

jected intermarriage. That this decision was more a function of race than personal choice or religion can be seen in several African societies. For example, hybrid or biracial communities exist in such disparate places as East and West Africa (e.g., Senegal, Liberia, and Sierra Leone), where Christian and Muslim Arabs of Lebanese stock intermarried and integrated with the locals, as did the Yemeni and Omani Arabs in East Africa. Indeed, the Yemenis left a genetic imprint in both Indonesia and Malaysia, which accounts for some of the remarkable similarities between these Muslim cultures and those of East Africa.

African Islam in Academia

East African Islam can only be understood within the context of the Indian Ocean diaspora.[11] Indeed, many Muslims are not as famaliar with this diaspora, which is far older and also the area where the earliest phase of globalization was forged, as they are with the Trans-Atlantic one. The Indian Ocean diaspora is only beginning to be understood through the pioneering studies of both local scholars who have lived in the area and therefore have an insider view, and of international scholars interested in the area. The rising body of interdisciplinary knowledge lacks the stigma of a condescending and essentializing orientalism, for it has rejected the expedient of policy considerations and seeks to understand.

A younger generation of scholars is studying Islam, among them Ulrike Freitag,[12] Roman Loimeier,[13] Rüdiger Seesemann, and Clarissa Vierke (German)[14]; Scott Reese (American and British); Hassan Mwakimako, Hassan K. Ndzovu, and Newton Kahumbi (African); and Engseng Ho (Asian). They continue the venerable tradition of Charles Sacleaux, Carl Meinhof, Malcolm Guthrie, Berndt Heine, Mohamed Hassan Abdulaziz, Wilhelm J. G. Möhlig, and Gudrun Miehe, as well as of local historians like Abdul Shariff,[15] Ahmed Idha Salim,[16] and John Middleton,[17] among others. Virtually all of these scholars have adopted an interdisciplinary approach by immersing themselves in other areas and crossing boundaries. Part of their success is predicated upon their mastery of the local languages and cultures. In fact, it is ofteen difficult to separate the Islamic from the non-Islamic dimensions. Due to the centuries of Islamic presence, the religious lurks very close to the surface in many of these studies.

There is, however, a vast literature on the historical aspects of Islam in Africa and only a very small amount on contemporary issues affecting Muslim societies. Existing research on aspects of African Muslim societies tends to be generated in the West and Asia (e.g., Singapore and Malaysia). This had

something to do with applying the current dominant theories to Muslim cultures and societies, mainly in the humanities and, to a certain extent, in the social sciences. Modernization theory was a kind of straight-jacket that sought to explain every facet of the developing world (e.g., that as societies modernized, consumerism would gradually replace religion).[18] This "orthodox" view became so entrenched that policy advisors were suprised by religion's reemergence in the form of assertive radical forms.[19] The reason behind this was the institutionalization of area studies with the associated cult of recognized authorities in some key areas. For example, France's reference point for any aspect of political Islam revolves around Roy Olivier and Gilles Kepel, both of whom are reminiscent of the colonial era's omniscient Orientalists. For a long time, Orientalists like Bernard Lewis dispensed advice based on historical research conducted some fifty years earlier.[20] Since Lewis wrote on Muslim societies, he was called upon to "explain" any issue related to Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon because he had visited them several decades ago. This assumption is predicated on the belief, again articulated by the same scholars, that Muslim societies are eternally stuck in the past and thus their institutions and worldviews are immune to change. The literature generated by area specialists was recycled and absorbed in the newer universities set up in the colonies. Even after independence, the existing knowledge about Islam and Muslim societies was only critiqued after Edward Said's 1979 epistemological critique of orientalism.[21]

The African universities established by the colonial powers replicated the curricula of the metropolitan universities upon which they were modelled. The one-way center-to-periphery staff exchange institutionalized the western academic traditions, which affected the curricula content and the courses offered. Since until relatively recently no full-fledged departments of Islamic studies existed even in the West, there were none in African universities either, even in those located in Muslim-majority countries. Most likely, they would have departments of religious studies with a strong component of Christian theology and reduce other religious traditions to the single semester option of "comparative religion."

The situation became more dire in the French colonies, for the French system of education was strictly secular and the study of religion was confined to the center of Oriental studies at the Sorbonne. True departments of Islamic studies, except for places like Nigeria's Ibadan University, were unheard of elsewhere in Africa. Those colonial students who were religiously inclined were expected to embrace laicism, an extreme form of secularism that, in the French context, has always been a Trojan horse for atheism. It was no coinci-

dence that literary works tackling the theme of the loss of spirituality almost inevitably came from francophone Africa's strongly French-influenced cultures. Here I have in mind the Senegalese Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (2012), the Guinean Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1983), the Egyptian Taha Hussein's *Al-Ayyam* (1933), and the Turkish Racaizade's *Araba Sevdasi* (1896). France's flirtation with Islam was confined to anthropology departments and the Institute Langues Oriental to serve its colonial project rather than the interests of its Muslim subjects.

Religion and Politics in African Universities

African leaders like Julius Nyerere (d. 1999), with their postcolonial projects of social amelioration based on the latter's concept of *ujamaa*, excluded religion and philosophy as academic university subjects. In their place, they offerred a heavy dose of ideological education that made *ujamaa* the focal point of educational policies. This concept, an African socialist utopia inspired by a mixture of Marxism, Maoism, Christian compassion, and humanism in general, was seen as incompatible with socialism and thus paved the way for a complete ban on establishing a university-level department of religious studies or philosophy. This state of affairs was quite ironical, inspired as it was by the most famous exponent of African political thought and given that Tanzania had a large Muslim majority. Although a devout Catholic himself, Nyerere wanted to preempt any potential opposition from the Muslim and Christian clerics who could use their captive audiences to challenge him with an alternative spiritually based political ideology. Thus religious studies had no place in the nascent University College, Dar es Salaam, when it was established.

President Jomo Kenyatta (d. 1978) had the opposite idea. A known nonbeliever in organized religion or any religion for that matter, he did not seek to influence what was taught in the universities. Educated during his formative years at the Church of Scotland Mission's Thogoto School, he understood the missionary mindset and saw its sanctimoniousness and condescension at close quarters.[22] At the London School of Economics and Political Science (University of London), he did his thesis for the diploma in anthroplogy. Under Branislaw Malinowski's supervision, he defended the Gikuyu way of life, its religious beliefs, and its cosmology. In 1938, it was published as *Facing Mount Kenya*. Kenyatta famously said that "when the White Man came to Africa he came with the Bible. He then asked us to close our eyes and pray. When we opened our eyes, he had our land and we had the Bible."[23] This cryptic witticism summed up what he considered to be the colonial invader's paternalism.

The autonomous University of Nairobi was inaugurated during July 1970, and a department of religious studies soon followed. Prior to the breakup of the University of East Africa, each constituent college specialized in a key academic area to avoid duplication. The Department of Religious Studies was then at Makerere. In 1972 it was moved to Nairobi and headed by Bishop Stephen Neil,[24] a prominent British theologian who, according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's latest installment of his memoir, *In the House of the Interpreter* (2012), was invited to Alliance High School, Kikuyu, to preach in its chapel on one Sunday during the 1950s. His emotional sermon managed to put the stern but compassionate headteacher, Carrey Francis, in a rare lacrimonious mood. Set up by an alliance of Protestant missions from which it derived its name, the school was meant to be a training ground for those who would spread the light of Christ throughout Kenya. Bishop Neil maintained his connections with Kenya for a long time, and when the opportunity presented itself to do some good for the country, he returned to set up the Department of Religious Studies.

As the Makerere department was also headed by another bishop, Father Welbourne, there were suspicions that both units were no more than departments of Christianity or Christian theology, rather than conventional departments of comparative religion. But then, they were just carbon copies of their British or American counterparts. Yet with time and after independence, African departments of religious studies began to adjust so they could reflect the multi-religious nature of the continent's newly independent societies. Token lectures were given, often by part-timers, on Hinduism, Islam, and other religions. Sometimes a token representative of one of these important religions could be found on the faculty. The staff also reflected this Christian bias, for many of the lecturers were past seminarians, priests, or men of the cloth. However, the period also saw the rise of indigenous forms of Christianity or assertive African traditional beliefs, as epitomized in Dini ya Misambwa among Kenya's Abaluhya, led by the controversial Elijah Masinde. This phenomenon attracted the interest of Christian theologians and African historians, as well as anthropologists. The former wanted to understand these new forms of Christianity, whereas the latter were interested in the nature, structure, and motivations of these distinct spiritual phenomena.

At Makerere, Father Webourne and historian Allan Ogot co-authored a study of these new forms of religiosity: *A Place to Feel at Home* (1966). The University of Wales-trained Gideon Were, a Muluhya himself and one of the younger crop of indigenous historians, directed his attention to African milleniarism as reflected in the Dini ya Misambwa and the worship of one's an-

cestors through their departed spirits. This latter practice was really a form of religious syncretism: Christianity mixed with a very strong dose of ancestor worship. Such movements were opposed by the established churches and some elements in government, for most of the leading politicians and bureaucrats were graduates of the European Christian misssionary institutions set up during the early twentieth century: Alliance, Maseno, and Mangu high schools in Kenya, along with Achimota College (Ghana) and King's College (Uganda). Almost without exception, sub-Saharan Africa's new power elite was drawn from such institutions and thus shared the same biases and suspicion of these forms of worship as did the missionaries who had influenced them.[25]

The departments of religious studies appeared to be uninterested in other religions and, if anything, were too protective of their newly established African Christian legacy. Thus they saw no need to understand non-Christian religious institutions. For example, curiosity about Islam's impact on East Africa became the domain of historians and archaeologists, and other traditions became part of the antiquarians' curiosity – remnants of a dying tradition soon to be replaced by the dynamism of Christianity, as opposed to vibrant living traditions having an obvious continuity with the past. This approach was not far removed from the Orientalistism that Edward Said railed so much against in his classic study *Orientalism* (1978). These departments found it traumatic to sever themselves from the colonial mentality of distance from the unfamiliar.

The postcolonial departments of religious studies were carrying on business as usual, just as the departments of English were. For example, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and his colleagues were questioning why departments of English literature were even necessary. Ngugi, Okot p'Bitek, and Henry Owuor Anyumba penned the famous "Nairobi Declaration," which called for replacing the University of Nairobi's Department of English with a more inclusive Department of Literature in order to expose Kenyans to other literary traditions.[26] This became a reality when the Faculty of Arts voted unanimously to change the department's name and content to reflect the new postcolonial realities. The study of African literatures became the core around which other traditions were given critical attention. Both African oral literature and literatures in African languages and non-Latin scripts became respectable subjects of study overnight. This was also the first time that African languages established a toehold in African academia. Ngugi had a counterpart in Okot p'Bitek, who also waged a struggle in defence of African religions around the same time.

While a student at Oxford, poet Okot p'Bitek witnessed first hand the mistreatment of African religions in western academia. He forced an aware-

ness of African religions into the public consciousness through his study of Lwo religious beliefs and cosmology, which have adherents among the Nilotic populations of South Sudan, northern Uganda, and western Kenya. These are the same religious beliefs held by the Dinka, Shilluk, Nuer, and Alur (South Sudan); the Lang'o, Acholi, and Lugbara (Uganda), and the Luo (Kenya). He wrote biting critiques of western views on African religions.[27]

In the meantime, postcolonial East Africa was undergoing a rapid transformation. The new indigenous leadership rapidly swept away the unjust colonial order that had divided people into races, ethnic groups, and religions. It tried to close these potentially exsplosive fault lines by devising more egalitarian and inclusive national constitutions that outlawed all forms of discrimination based on race or creed. At the same time, society was gradually becoming secularized. The region became a de facto and de jure multiracial, multiethnic, and multireligious society. The various groups' legal, social, and educational institutions were left intact and integrated within the new political dispensation. African customary law, Islamic personal law, Hindu law, and English common law continued to find space in which they could function, as long as they did not go against the spirit of the new constitutions.

The sixty years of British colonial rule increasingly Christianized Kenya via its westernizing school system. Muslims were westernized as well, without their conscious recognition and acceptance of this fact. Given the government's increased involvement in education, Muslims felt more comfortable with availing themselves of the new educational opportunities than they did when education was largely in missionary hands. No longer was becoming educated associated with the stigma of conversion to Christianity; rather, it was seen as a social good and an aid to social, economic, and political mobility within the new Kenya. Indeed, at the dawn of British colonialism Muslims had the highest literacy rate. In fact, more Muslims could read and write through the medium of the Arabic script than any other group.

Muslims in Kenya: A Dynamic Integrated Minority

Muslims, who constitute about 35 percent of the Kenyan population, are drawn from a variety of social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.[28] The overwhelming majority are African, and virtually every tribal group is represented. Some, like the Maasai and the nomadic groups from northwest Kenya (except for the Somali), are relatively recent converts. Others like the Digo, a subgroup of the 2 million strong Mijikenda ethnic group, are among the oldest adherents of Islam and have produced some of the best-educated ulama. There are significant numbers of South Asian Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'ah,

whose associaton with Kenya predates colonialism. The largest stream consisted of indentured laborers recruited by the British to build the Kenya-Uganda railway during the early part of the twentieth century. These Muslims, especially the Punjabis, have married local African and Arab Muslims to such an extent that it is sometimes difficult to notice that some of these groups have Indian and Pakistani blood. The Punjabis have particularly intermarried with the Kikuyu and the Meru of the Central Province and, to a certain extent, the Kalenjin. South Asian culture has had a deep influence on Kenya's cuisine, language, and urban architecture.

South Asian Muslims are divided along sectarian lines and usually have their own religious institutions, schools, hospitals, and clinics that serve a cross section of the Kenyan population. Many of them evolved as racial or sectarian institutions due to colonial-era policies that racialized Kenyan society. However, in general this community, including Hindus, resented this ghettoization and displayed its resentment by joining the African nationalists to confront and challenge the colonial state. They used some of their institutions to advance the anti-colonial cause and opened their print media to support the African struggle for human dignity and freedom.

Alibhai M. Jeevanjee, a Muslim South Asian enterpreneur, started *The African Standard*, Kenya's oldest English-language daily. This community's role in contributing to the country's national consciousness and the formation of a collective identity has been underestimated because of the persistant stereotype of its members as fence-sitters, exploiters, and opportunists. The well-known Kenyan- Canadian novelist V. G. Vassanji deconstructs this image of the duplicitous "Indian" in his fiction, especially in his *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* alluded to above. Given that Hinduism is an ethnic rather than a conversion religion, South Asians have been generally perceived as racial purists. This may be true of Hindus, but is certainly inaccurate about South Asians of Muslim backgrounds. Except for the Hare Krishna movement, Hindus have not gone out of their way to proselytize.

The country's South Asian Muslims have been assimilated and integrated through the homogenizing instrument of education. Many Kenyan professionals – doctors, engineers, business executives, architects, teachers, and academics – whether living at home or abroad, were educated at the University of Nairobi. In fact His Highness the Agha Khan, head of the Shia Imami Ismaili community, encouraged his East Africa followers to integrate until Uganda's General Idi Amin Dada (r. 1971-79) launched his campaign of political and economic persecution. Although a Muslim himself, he was an equal opportunity racist who did not spare his South Asian coreligionists.

Most East Africans and non-South Asian Muslims know little about South Asians of any religion beyond their demonized collective stereotype. African Kenyans know even less about their Asian compatriots. The paradox of Kenya is that it is a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual society characterized by most communities living within the confines of their sectarian, ethnic, and cultural boundaries; they do, however, interact in public because they cannot avoid doing so. If the Department of Religious Studies had originally been outward looking and open to embracing other faith traditions, then Kenyans educated in local universities would have had a better insight into the country's various cultures and traditions through intellectual engagement. Kenyans in general are deeply religious, and religion has therefore shaped their cultures and influenced their worldviews.

Religious studies, in their broadest sense, would have helped all of them become familiar with the "other." But in reality, communities insulated themselves from others both in interreligious and intra-religious terms (e.g., Catholics and Protestants, as well as Sunni and Shi'ah). Yet attempts were made to bridge these setarian differences by creating umbrella organizations that affiliated various groups to larger groupings, such as the World Christian Council of Churches or the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims. The Kenyatta government sought to co-opt and control religion by bureaucratizing it through a policy of laissez faire. Religious communities set up and ran their own social, religious, educational, and medical institutions with minimal government interference. Some of them established universities with rather restrictive syllabi centered upon prodiving a theological education. Needless to say, many became unwitting victims of external influences and the more acute problem of not producing indigenous scholarship on any aspect of these religions.

It is telling that fifty years after becoming independent, Kenya has produced no homegrown graduates with doctorates in Islamic studies. The current holders of doctorates teaching Islam invariably earned their degrees abroad, mainly from the universities of Cape Town and Kwa Zulu Natal, the University of the Western Cape, and Khartoum's International Africa University. Except for those who earned their doctorates in South Africa, Nigeria, Malaysia, those who graduated elsewhere do not have a sufficiently good command of English to function effectively within the Kenyan university system. This smaill group of scholars circulate within the newly established private Universities as part-time lecturers. Few of them are trained in the social sciences and are therefore handicaped as regards social and political research methods. This perhaps accounts for the dearth of serious research on the social, political,

and economic aspects of Muslim society in Kenya as well as, for the most part, in neighboring Tanzania and Uganda. Students are also reluctant to enroll in Islamic religious studies, which has drastically lowered the number of students attending local universities.

From Traditional Sunnism to Militant Salafism

The past thirty years have seen a rapid transformation of Sunni groups from traditionalists to "reformists" due to (1) the emigration of Sheikh Abdallah Saleh Farsy (d. 1982), a key Muslim figure, from his native Zanzibar to Mombasa, Kenya and (2) the sudden Saudi financial windfall after the 1973 oil embargo. Although there might not appear to be any connection between these two phenomena, there was a causal relationship among Sheikh Farsy's emergence as the public face of Salafism, the wave of Kenyan students trooping off to Madinah to pursue Islamic studies, and the Islamic Foundation's support for his translation of the Qur'an. These connections are underexplored, especially because the Islamic Foundation in Nairobi was an extension of the Leicester-based Islamic Foundation in Britain, itself the western outpost of Pakistan's Jamaat al-Islam. This institution, which received most of its funding from Saudi sources, underwrote his authoratative Swahili translation.

Saudi Arabia also embarked on a vast educational project of recruiting large numbers of students to enroll in its universities. There was nothing wrong with this, for during the 1960s large numbers of Kenyan students were "airlifted" to the United States through the philanthropic acts of individual Americans, an altruistic action that was breathtaking in both its suddeness and scale, given how the troubled the 1960s were. Those sent to the United States specialized in all manner of disciplines, unlike the recipients of Saudi largesse, who were trained at the Islamic University of Madinah in theology and jurisprudence for their sole role: *dā'ī*s (missionaries) who would spread the puritanical, often intolerant and self-righteous Saudi brand of Islam to support that nation's strategy of securing its future politcal influence via the World Muslim League (RABITA).

These graduates came back angry, finger-pointing, and hell-bent on the gradual Salafization of East African Islam, which had its own venerable tradition of local scholarship and intellectual culture that inclined more toward the unthreatening, accomodating, and inclusive spiritual religiosity associated with Sufism. Traditional and orthodox Muslims had organized themselves through such structures as the Shadhili and Qadiri brotherhoods. This collective brand of Islam has been in East Africa from the earliest times, inspired

through Muslim migrants primarily from Hadhramawt (southern Yemen). The critical stage of Islam's consolidation in East Africa occured during the eighteenth century with the wave of migrating Sayyids from Tarim and Seun, the strongholds of Hadhrami mysticism,[29] who brought with them their intellectual tradition that shaped the East African ulama until the 1970s.

The tide of Madinah-bound students was from East Africa and the Somali Republic; thousands of them returned home with Salafi leanings. Just as with the former, the returning Somalis became overzealous missionaries and eventually drove a wedge between those who adhered to traditional Sufi-based forms of Somali Islam and the new Salafi converts. The Saudi scholarships were generous, relative to most of the students' economic status, most of whom were graduates of poorly run local madrassahs that lacked a rigorous curriculum with a structured course of study. The Saudis later encouraged their protegés and point men on the ground to implement the Saudi religious curriculum, but only those portions that had a clearly religious content. Only recently, due to the maddrassah's association with the Taliban, have scholars started to take an interest in this ancient Muslim institution (e.g., Hefner and Zaman, 2007).

The recruits, at least those from Kenya, were mostly drawn from identifiable geographical areas ruled by abject poverty, dismal rates of academic achievement, and no tradition of schooling or literacy of any type: the Bajuni villages on Pate island and in the Lamu archipaelago on the Somali/Kenyan border. Young people from these neglected areas were the most enthusiastic about Saudi religious education because it was seen as a way out of the vicious cycle of poverty. In addition to being neglected during the colonial period, this was also the place where Mau Mau prisoners were sent during the Emergency period (1952-60). The other areas were Kwale District and the North Eastern Province bordering Somalia, where poverty was almost medieval in its severity.

The irredentist Shifta movement had alienated Somalis from the rest of the country, and Nairobi's bureaucrats and politicians completely ignored the developmental needs of the Somali and Borana populations on the pretext of insecurity. Kenya's Somalis were issued special identity cards, which created a climate of fear, resentment, and mutual suspicion between them and all other Kenyans. Feeling themelves to be strangers in their own country, Saudi scholarships were very attractive and the Somali clan network enabled them to access Saudi scholarships in ever greater numbers.[30] The ensuing flood of Somali and Kenyan students provided the nucleus of al-Shabaab, whose members later formed the so-called Council of Islamic Courts in Somalia, and the Shabaab sympathizers in neighboring Kenya and Tanzania.

The new Somali Saudi-trained "ulama" brought home not only their Salafi learning, but also the obscurantist, intolerant, and misogynist Saudi cultural mindset. Gradually Somali culture began to assume Saudi Salafist contours in matters of clothing, deportment, and general outlook.[31] These "new ulama" not only pushed Somali society to new frontiers of conservative and intellectual isolation, but also exacerbated the rift between the traditionalists and the new extreme conseravatives. Somali refugees in Kenya, now numbering over 1 million, brought this neo-Wahhabism to Nairobi, Mombasa, and other cities.[32] Some parts of Nairobi, among them South C and Eastleigh, now resemble Jeddah in such external elements of forms and modes of clothing (both male and female), beards, and hennah. There is the lugubriousness of piety, a lack of joy in daily life because all forms of entertainment from music to the cinema or art to literature have been proscribed. The construction of a new Somali Islam is largely the work of Saudi-trained or inspired preachers who use the bully pulpit to keep the flock in line. Madinah graduates also staffed the new madrassahs that began to fall under the sway of Saudi influence and money. Sheikh Farsy, then Kenya's chief *kadhi*, lent legitimacy to Saudi education by encouraging young people to study in Saudi Arabia.[33]

The postcolonial governments were completely blind to these emerging trends because no institution was paying attention to the Muslims' social transformation. Moreover, no attempt was being made to nurture or encourage the growth of a contemporary local intellectual tradition by systematically producing future ulama in local universities. This benign neglect and indifference prevented the rise of home-grown scholarship on aspects of Kenya's Muslim society. This is largely true of all sub-Saharan Africa. In much of francophone North Africa, for example, the secularization pursued under the French colonial system created a deep chasm between the traditional ulama and the French-trained intellectuals. Througout Africa, the former group had no new ideas on how to solve the countless new problems confronting their societies, whereas the latter group offerred nothing but contempt for the self-referential traditional scholarship forever rooted in medieval texts that could hardly resolve current problems.

These irreconcilable differences derived from the fact that these two streams of scholarship rarely find common areas of convergence because each side hardly knows the terrain covered by the other. Ironically, this has not always been the case. In Egypt, for example, jurisconsults like Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri,[34] who holds a doctorate in law from the Sorbonne and a professorship at the University of Alexandria, did much to codify Islamic law in his native land. Using his background and familiarity with Islamic and French

law to reconcile various aspects of the two traditions, he sought to find a place for them within the Egyptian legal system. His training in Islamic law at al-Azhar, as well as his training in French and western law, enabled him to make substantial contributions to the new Egyptian civil code. Although based on French law, this new civil code incorporated certain aspects of Islamic law that he found necessary for a modernizing society that wanted to keep its Islamic essence. This was possible only because Egypt was able to produce its own ulama. Its civil code was cobbled together after the Second World War, a time of rapid modernization veering toward globalization.

Modernizing South African Islam

The only sub-Saharan African country that has successfully produced homegrown ulama is South Africa. The University of Cape Town, under the leadership of Abdulkader Tayob, has trained world-class Muslim intellectuals because post-apartheid South Africa has not neglected Islamic studies. Tayob, a *ḥāfiẓ* who graduated with a First Class degree in mathematics, opted to pursue his doctoral studies in Islamic studies in the United States at Temple University. Upon graduation, he returned to Cape Town to lay the foundation for the next generation of Muslim scholars. Among his distinguished students were Farid Esack and Ebrahim Moosa.

The university's Department of Religious Studies, which has managed to create its own discourse about Islam in South Africa and the rest of the world, innovatively decided to accept students from a local madrassah that, with the assistance of academics, had designed a carriculum that would prepare its students to enroll in the department as second-year students in its BA program. Students who enter a madrassah in Cape Town are expected to have completed their high school education, as is every South African child, so they can acquire the necessary language skills to fit within South African society. In contrast, East African and Somali students join a madrassah when they are just five or six years old. Nuruddin Farah's 1998 Neustadt Prize acceptance speech poignantly describes the dilemmas of an underdeveloped educational system.[35] The University of Cape Town, almost unique for African universities, has created a center for the study of contemporary Islam outside the study of "orthodox" Islam and its venerable tradition.[36]

Over the last two decades, Kenya has seen a proliferation of universities, most of which are really theological colleges with a sprinkling of information technology and business courses. But Muslims have been slow to establish universities, which has encouraged foreign Muslims to fill the vacuum.

Kuwait's Africa Muslim Agency, a humanitarian organization that runs feeding, medical, and educational programs in many African countries, recently set up the Umma University in Nairobi's periurban areas: Thika and Narok. Its faculty of Islamic studies was initially affiliated with Khartoum's International Africa University, which taught its carriculum. Interestingly, it now has seventy students enrolled in Islamic studies, more than in all of the state universities combined.[37]

Both institutions have modelled their syllabi on what is taught in Saudi universities, since they are strongly Salafist in orientation. It appears that the faculties' main purposes are to produce clerics and imams to staff mosques and local madrassahs, as well as to secure Arabic's adoption as the language of instruction in the Department of Islamic Studies. It also has a separate department of Arabic. No attempts are being made to create modern departments of Islamic studies in which theological concerns can be integrated with the social, economic, and political issues affecting Muslim communites. Interestingly, Islamic studies and Shari'ah law as presented as separate degree programs.[38] The other function is to provide manpower for Islamic financial institutions, which are becoming increasingly popular with Muslims and non-Muslims. Both Middle Eastern and locally incorporated banks require Shari'ah-compliant banking for their burgeoning Islamic clientel. These degree programs are pragmatic projects that see Islam as a lived experience, rather than as an abstract system of dogmas only remotely connected to the lives of ordinary Muslims.

Islamic studies are a priority in any country whether or not Muslims live there. This field is considered a priority in African countries, especially where Muslims constitute a significant minority or the majority population. Apart from the fact that Islam and Muslims are now center stage in international affairs, one needs to understand how trends affecting Muslims may produce local and even national or global consequences. But such knowledge has to be generated locally before it can be compared to knowledge generated elswhere. Given that African countries are accustomed to being consumers rather than producers of knowledge, it is very easy for them to embrace the views, perceptions, and prejudices of outsiders in looking at their compatriots and thus create unnecessary – and avoidable – enmity. If African countries are to avoid these sectarian fault lines, they must seriously consider institutionalizing Islamic studies within their university structures. But the shortage of qualified academics tends to affect student intake, for they are aware of the lack of qualified academics who can teach and research effectively. For example, the University of Nairobi has merged religious studies and philos-

ophy, as if these are not autonomous areas of scholarship. Of its thirty-two faculty members, only two are Muslim. Further, some priest-faculty members teach courses on Islam even if they have neither specialized in Islamic studies nor conducted research in this area.[39]

A country does not need to be pervaded by religiosity or be overtly religious in order to prioritize university-level religious studies. Turkey is a case in point. Over 98 percent of its population either professes Islam or consider themselves to be cultural Muslims, meaning that they hardly live as practicing Muslims but do avoid pork and assiduosly celebrate Islamic holidays. They are encouraged to celebrate *bayram*, which marks the end of Ramadan, and celebrate the festive hajj season, because Muslim religious holidays are the longest ones on the national calender. Turkey does not celebrate Christmas, although New Year's Day is a recognized national holiday. After the Ottoman Empire fell and the republic was established during the 1920s, the new government of the centuries-long symbolic head of the caliphate had to declare Turkey a secular republic because Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938) could not assume the mantle of "leader of the faithful." The logical next step was to abolish the caliphate and adopt the "new" values associated with secularism.

Paradoxically, sultans Abdulmajid (r. 1839-61) and Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909) started the whole project of westernization first with the army, architecture, and clothing and then, gradually, with other state institutions. This period of radical transformation became known as the Tanzimat period. French culture and intellectual tradition provided the model, and a nucleus of francophiles, former students who had returned from France with many new ideas in culture, literature, and education, was ready to pursue it. These zealous graduates, the core of future westernizers, were following the same process that Muhammad Ali (r. 1805-48) had pursued in Egypt.[40] But six centuries of Ottoman culture could not be erased overnight. Although the Arabic script was replaced with the Latin alphabet, Turkey's deep Islamic legacy remained.

Despite almost ninety years of secularization, in many respects Turkey remains a culture driven by Islamic values. In fact, it produces the largest number of BA, MA, and PhD graduates in Islamic studies anywhere in the world from its more than ninety Islamic studies departments in both state and private universities. Just this week that bastion of Turkish secularism, the army, will soon have students who chose to study the Qur'an as a high school elective subject in the military and naval high schools from which they will have graduated.[41] Such facts do not make Turkey any less secular than it has always been; however, the counry seems to follow the more rational form of secular-

ism found in the United States and Britain, rather than the racist, hidebound, and proselytizing variety found in France.

Importantly, the military junta that grabbed power and established the republic in 1923 tolerated the remnants of the old order, among them the educational establishment that was rooted in Islamic education. In 1929, it closed the theology department at Istanbul University; it reopened twenty years later as the Faculty of Divinity due to public outrage over the acute dearth of qualified imams to lead prayers and oversee funeral and other religious rituals. This new department was opened in Ankara, within sight of the military rulers. This was only possible, however, because teaching Islam had gone underground, especially in Anatolia. People obstinately kept up their intellectual and ritual religious traditions in safe places beyond the prying eyes of the secularist establishment. No other example vindicates the dictum that it is better to concede to the legitimate spiritual needs of groups than to drive them underground, for the latter approach only strengthens the groups' will to resist.[42]

Some Turkish universities, such as Istanbul's Fatih University, have broken with the long-established tradition of isolating divinity faculties by allowing students specializing in Islamic studies to take a double major in another social science/humanities subject in order to broaden their perspective. Before this development, these graduates were strictly confined to professions that required their kind of narrow specialization: imams and bureaucrats in the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments. All such glass ceilings have now disappeared.

The contemporary cliché that "the world is changing" signifies globalization and openness. What is deemed "global" culture is ultimately western culture, and there is no gainsaying that the underpinning of that culture is Christianity and its ethos. The King James Bible, together with pagan Greek philosophy and mythology, are the founding texts of much of the West's intellectual work. Indeed all of its literature, from the medieval period to well into the early twentieth century, is incomprehensible to one who is unfamiliar with the Bible or what Melvyn Bragg called "the Book of books."

> You may be a Christian. You may be anti-Christian, or of another religion, or none. You may be an atheist fundamentalist and think the Bible is monstrous, a book to be dismissed or derided. But whoever you are in the English speaking world, I hope to persuade you to consider that the King James Bible has driven the making of the world over the last 400 years, often in the most unanticipated ways.[43]

In order to understand the West's numerous views about Islam, one has to understand how the western intellectual tradition perceives non-western religions and how these views percolate down to the global public through the popular (and the not-so-popular) media. For example, Charles Hirschkind put his finger on this problem when he lamented that:

> To speak of Islam today, one necessarily encounters a terrain shaped by deeply entrenched presumptions and anxieties. As Edward Said pointed out some time ago, these dispositions towards Islam, sedimented in the Western psyche, have their genesis in a long-standing tradition of scholarly and popular discourse on the inferiority of Muslim practices and doctrines. To dislodge these entrenched attitudes and judgements and to clear a space for a more open-minded inquiry into Islamic societies will require more than a merely intellectual exercise in that narrow sense. The different registers of thought and feeling that give force to these judgements will also require work. The challenge, in other words, is a moral one, especially in light of the current danger of a world increasingly polarized along religious lines.[44]

It is these borrowed prejudices that can impede a fuller understanding of sociopolitical phenomena. This is especially true in the case of religious fundamentalism and terrrorism, both of which have their genesis in, and can only be understood according to, specific historical and contemporary contexts. If African countries are to avoid these sectarian fault lines, they have no choice but to seriously consider institutionalizing Islamic studies programs within their university structures. Materialist philosophies that valorize the study of science and technology have dominated Africa's attempt to catch up with the rest of the world. However, the study of the humanities and social sciences are integral to erecting a vision of a future society that is cultured, civilized, and humane. And Islamic studies should take pride of place in that envsaged future for economic, political, and strategic stability. African universities, through their governments, should invest in that future.

Conclusion

The current international trend of reducing government support for universities has made state universities more accountable financially than they have ever been. They are now expected to generate their own finances by supporting financially rewarding research that can produce income-generating patents, to raise tuition fees to fill their coffers, and to find similar new revenue streams. This is also true of African universities. Unless Muslims begin endowing chairs in Islamic research or setting up research institutions to address issues

confronting Muslims in particular and the country in general, they will have no one to blame for the ongoing status quo but themselves. At least in Kenya, Muslims seem to have done pretty well for themselves in other areas of national endeavor. But in terms of academic excellence in Islamic studies or attempts to create centers of excellence in Islamic studies, they have generally faired pretty poorly despite, based on per capita income, being relatively well off in terms of the national average and their numbers. Yet they remain at the level of producing local imams for mosques and teachers for local madrassahs, instead of working assiduosly to create a serious intellectual class that can participate in the national discourse. Many of these teachers and imams remain strangers in their own country because they have not acquired a good command of the official language, English, or of written Kiswahili. Instead, they have spent decades alienating themselves in madrassahs or Arabic-medium institutes.

In addition, local non-Muslim academics still view Islam and Muslims as mysteries that should be left to foreign academics to decipher. It is ironic in that although Arabic is a sub-department in some of the local universities, no attempt has been made to collect manuscripts in the Arabic script, as has been done in Nigeria. Islam thus is viewed as an alien implant with little connection to Kenya's mainstream culture or history. This is obviously a legacy of colonail missionary indocrination, which created a cordon sanitaire around Islam to protect the new captive audience of Christians from being contaminated. As result, in the words of anthropologist Robert Launay, Islam became "an invisible religion." He noted that this was a contrived and deliberate policy to exclude the serious study of Islam as a legitimate part of African reality.

> Arguably, there existed a tacit partition of African realities among academics, with anthropologists appropriating the study of "authentic" Africans with genuinely "traditional" religions while the study of African Muslims, those whose pristine authenticity had apparently been violated, was left to historians if not to "Orientalists."
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> Paradoxically, the earliest French anthropologists were not nearly so reluctant to acknowledge the existence and importance of Muslims and Islam. The first self-consciously ethnographic studies of African cultures, as distinct from descriptive passages in explorers' narratives, were conducted by a cadre of scholar-administrators during the early twentieth century. As administrators, they were concerned with acquiring first-hand practical knowledge about their new colonial subjects. These scholars' disciplinary boundaries were relatively fluid, and so their contributions bridged linguistics, history, geography, and ethnography.[45]

The best recent research on aspects of Islam in East and West Africa has largely been done by German Africanist scholars, and the best among these undertakings were those conducted by scholars who were competent in both Arabic and Islamic studies. Among these outstanding and insightful publications, those produced by Roman Loimeire and Rüdiger Sesseman stand out due to their unrivalled command of Arabic, Islamic studies, and research methodologies. Their work is devoid of ideological posturing or subtle Islam-bashing. This is the type of examplary scholarship that local scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, would be well advised to emulate. In fact, their work respresents scholarship for its own sake.

Endnotes

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