ISLĀM IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA: RE-READING HISTORY, CONTEMPLATING CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This paper is hinged on the following propositions: that any inquiry into the problematic of Islām in contemporary Africa must engage, not only with how the past has shaped the present, but equally with how the latter would likely shape and, in turn, be shaped by possibilities in the future; that contemporary challenges facing Islām in Africa nests, in the main, in the disconnect between Islām in the text and the fissures in the contexts of Muslim realities all over the world. In exploring these assumptions, this paper casts a fresh look at the history and the unassailable patrimonies of Islām in the continent. It proceeds from there to explore some of the challenges facing the religion in the continent. While projecting into the future, the paper sources its discussion from critical perspectives that have been offered by, among others, Ali Mazrui, Sayyid Hussein Nasr and Talal Asad among others.

"Islām needs some first class minds who can interpret the old in terms of the new as regards substance, and turn the new into the service of the old as regards ideals".
-Fazlur Rahman

Introduction

Hardly is there a religion in the contemporary period which has continuously occupied the front burners of international and academic discourse other than Islām. However, each time it does, each time Islām and its adherents are mentioned in the media, it is usually for negative reasons. Unwholesome actions of a group of Muslims have been interpreted to mirror fundamental injunctions of the religion they profess. Aside from other unpropitious after-effects of this trend including the construction of Islām as primeval and antidiluvian and the portrayal of Muslims as

flagitious and malevolent, the contributions of the religion of Islām to human civilizations is particularly at great risk of being lost.

In other words, aside from other locales of crises across the world where Muslims have become anti-heroes, the violent activities of elements which claim allegiance to Islām appears to find graphic illustrations in Africa. In the latter, which is the main concern of this paper, extremist violence, intra-Muslim conflicts and poverty among others have of recent become rampant. Thus critics no longer talk about the contributions of Islām to human civilization in Africa but how the continent can be extricated and liberated from the stranglehold of Muslim groups such as the Boko Haram[1] and al-Shabaab[2] in Western and Eastern parts of the continent who are desirous of taking Africa on to the road of abyss and destruction. It is along this axis that this paper sources its justification and arguments. It sets out not to explore the arguments and claims of these groups, however specious and sophistic they may be. Rather, the paper seeks to re-insert the contributions of the religion of Islām to the fortune of the continent in the contemporary period, inquire into challenges confronting it and ultimately attempts some projections into the future.

Islām in Africa: Re-Reading History

The religion of Islām has an originary link with the continent of Africa (Akintola, 2008,10). In fact long before the religion staged its emergence in Iran, Syria, Malaysia, or even Madīnah, it already had followers on the African continent. Africa emerged in the geography of Islām, or better still, Islām emerged on the map of Africa as a refugee fleeing the social apostasy of Arabia. The first group of Arabs to practise Islām in Africa were rebels in search of a refuge; the first contact between Africa and the Muslims was one in which the continent, represented by King Negus of Abysinia,[3] played the role of a friend. But while Islām in certain parts of Africa

has marked its millennia, Islām in South Africa has only recently marked its three hundredth year of existence having been brought to the area not by the Arabs but by the Malay migrants (Tayob, 1999, 111-124). In fact, to talk about Islām in Africa without inscribing the Asiatic connections into the discourse would amount to celebrating the role of the rain in the phenomena to the utter neglect of the sun. While it is true that Islām in Africa is, going by the Arab connections, over a thousand years old, the "other" story is equally engaging: that Christianity had been on the African soil for over 2000 years before it was appropriated by or painted as a European legacy (Lamin, 2008). In other words, there had been churches in Africa long before the Vatican was established.

Further, Islām and Africa have been 'conceived' in the womb of time to be 'partners' - the first provides spiritual strength, the other affords geographical or spatial opportunity. While Islām impinges Africa on to the cultural map of the world, the latter, in turn, provides the former with the human and material resources for it to flourish. Islām forged the disparate communities of pre-modern Africa together in order to hew out of them empires and suzerainties including the Ghana, the Mali and the Songhay, whose fame reached far into the Asiatic world (Lertzon, 1973). Historians would always recollect how Mansa Kankan Mūsā's journey to Makkah occasioned an unprecedented inflation in the economy of the then medieval period (Naval, 1972, 221-234). Cultural cartographers of the religion of Islām in the continent of Africa would marvel at a religion which, at its onset in the continent, produced intellectuals who, in turn, produced scholars. No religion other than Islām in the continent of Africa has produced icons and scholars like Ibn Khaldūn, Jalāl-dīn al-Asyūtī, Al-Maghīlī, al-Jabartī, and 'Uthmān b. Fūdī. It is the call of Islām which Aḥmad Bābā al-Timbuktū, Shaykh Muhammad Bello and 'Abdullah b. Fūdī and others answered that made heroes out of them. It is highly arguable to say that African cities such

as Cairo, Sokoto, Dār Salām, Senegal and Morocco would not have been known today were it not for the privilege they enjoyed as centres of Islamic learning and civilization.

But how did Islām achieve the above in Africa? It did through the sheer strength of its message. At its emergence in the continent, Islām appealed to the ordinary African because of, I would argue, the simplicity of its creed and the universal appeal of its message. Islām equally gained ground in Africa courtesy of the unity forged by Arabic language (Quadghiri, 2003) among the disparate identities in the continent. Thus while serving the cause of Islām, Arabic also served the cause of Africa; while Africa provided a space for Islām to flourish, Islām gave Africa much of its identity. Arabic equally served as the store-house for the preservation of the history of the continent particularly during the colonial period when it was argued that were it not for Western modernity Africa would have been lost to history.

The service rendered by Arabic, the language of Islām, to Africa is equally evident in indigenous languages of Africa. For example, the Hausa and Yoruba speakers in the north and south of Nigeria, the Swahili speaker in Kenya and Tanzania and the Bantu speaker in South Africa depend on Arabic in the construction of their individual *diglossia*. In other words, when the Yoruba says "Alafia fun yin" (Abubakr, 1985, 46-54) and the Hausa says "laafia kalau" (Greenberg, 1947, p. 85-97); when we hear the Tanzanian say "ahsanti" (Sutton, 2006, p. 61-89) and the non-Muslim African historian in West Africa talks about *Tārīkh*[4], all of them derive essence for their linguistic experience from Arabic language.

The Islāmic heritage in Africa is equally circumscribed by the spiritual, by the Sūfī movements in the continent. In this instance, mention may be made of, in the main, the Qādiriyah and the Tījāniyyah in West Africa (Oladosu, 2008, 67-93), the Shādihiliyah (Martins, 1976) in East

Africa, the Khalwatiyyah, Naqshbandiyyah and A'Alawiyyah in South Africa (Doi, 2000). All these spiritual orders have always had one goal behind their establishment: the exploration of ways and means by which Africans could be brought into contacts with their Creator through the conquest of terrestrial principalities whose vocation is the enthronement of a state of anomie and corruption in the continent. Through the instrumentality of Islām's spiritual powers, the sacrifice of Kings and beautiful ladies to the gods in certain parts of Africa came to an end (Doi, 1969). In certain parts of pre-colonial Africa, Kings in traditional societies would not venture to go to war unless and until such is sanctioned by one of the Malams (Abdulrahman, 1986, p.46).

A review of the Islāmic heritage in the continent of Africa would be incomplete, however, if mention is not made of how it energized the anti-colonial fervor in all parts of the continent. Recourse to Islāmic cultural patrimony validated the emergence of the Mahdī of Sūdān (Abdel Rahim, 1966, 45) and the "Mad Mullah" of Somaliland (Oladosu, 2006, p. 133-148). Islām invigorated the war between King Attahiru in *bilād al-Sūdān* against the colonial intruders in the North of Nigeria(Maishanu, 1993, p. 59-80). Muslims in West and East Africa opted to forsake the educational plans of the British and the French because of the explicit threat the former posed to their identities and fortunes as Muslims. The Senegalese Sūfi leader and Islāmic scholar, al-Hajj ʿAbdulah Ibrāhīm Niass (d. 1922) persuasively captured this when he re-entered Senegal after participating in the late nineteenth-century jihad and subsequently went on exile into Gambia to escape French intrigues (Tijani, 1992). The colonial authorities inquired from him whether or not he would start trouble with the French again. Al-Hajj ʿAbdulah replied:

> "I am not fighting the French, for there is nothing they possess that I want, and I am not interested in their positions and their money. But what I want is that they do not take my children to the French schools. My children must learn what I know, and when I am gone, they must be able to continue teaching Islām" (ibid p.35).

ISLĀM IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA: MAKING SENSE OF THE PRESENT

In contemplating Islām in contemporary Africa, I suggest we begin with the approbatory, the complimentary. In the contemporary period, Islām is reputed to be the fasted growing religion in Africa and, indeed, in the world (Akinade, 2007). This has occurred based on, among others, two mutually exclusive reasons: the biological and the rational/practical. In the first, Muslims communities across Africa hold the record of having the highest birth rates. The Prophetic tradition which says "Marry and procreate for I would be proud of you among nations on the day of resurrection" (Abu Dawood, Hadith 2050) is usually given practical manifestation by Muslims in the continent. Thus in traditional Muslim societies in East and West Africa, a Muslim who is unable to father children is deemed an invalid. A Muslim woman without a child in traditional Sudanese society is like a beautiful tree without fruits (Oladosu, 2004, 113-139).

In the second, the religion of Islām continues to attract the Other in the continent mainly because of, as has been noted above, the rationality of its precepts and the simplicity of its creed. Thus in large parts of Africa, heathenism, fetishism, and idol worship continue to yield space for Islām. Against the cult of the *Ogbonis* in West Africa has arisen the Mosque and the *Mimbar*. In lieu of sacrifice to the gods, Africans now dedicate their rituals to Almighty Allah. An ordinary Igbo man in the Eastern parts of Nigeria would accept Islām partly because the religion offers a simple but rational passage for his father whose burial ceremony would otherwise have cost him thousands of dollars in the region (Doi, 1974, 31-44).

Islām in contemporary Africa has also functioned in the establishment of mutual feelings of brotherhood among African Muslims in Muslim majority and minority countries For example, when the Arab uprising broke out in 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, special prayers were

offered by Muslims across the continent for succor and peaceful resolution of the crises, the same way they offered prayers when Muslim minorities were tagged terrorists in Kenya and Tanzania during the US led war on terror (Kheir, 2006, p. 151-168) after September 11, 2001. The Islāmic brotherhood in Africa, therefore, transcends the slippery barriers of tribes and race. To be Muslim in the continent is to share the burden and blessing of *Pax Islāmica*.

Further, Islām in contemporary Africa has produced scholars of repute whose contributions to Africa's and, indeed world's intellectual heritage remain invaluable. Islām in West Africa has produced, for example, Shaykh Muhammad al-Shinqītī (d. 1973) Ādam 'Abdullah al-Ilūrī (d. 1992). In South Africa, Islām Africana has nurtured and produced Ahmed Deedat (d. 2005) and Farid Esack. In East Africa, it has produced Shaykh Sirājudīn Raḥmān of Kenya (d. 2009) 'Alī Mazrui (d.2014) of Tanzania and Mahmood Mamdani of Uganda. How might we begin to talk of Islām in Africa in the absence of Yūsuf Qarḍāwī (b. 1926), Muhammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī (d. 2010) and 'AbdulḤamīd Kishk (d. 1996) all of Egypt. The literary-intellectual lights which emerged during the 20th century from Muslim societies of North Africa are just too numerous to mention. These include Taha Hussein (d. 1973), Najīb Mahfūz (d.2006) and Tayyib Ṣālih (d.2007) to mention just a few.

But an attempt to give an account of Islām in Africa in the contemporary period would be incomplete once we fail to highlight the contributions of, in the words of Fatimah Mernissi (d.2015), the "forgotten Queens of Islam" (Mernissi, 1993). This is particularly true of the intellectually challenging works and, at least to the patriarchal authorities, the highly discomforting perspectives of the latter and that of Nawāl Sa'adāwī (b. 1931) to gender relations all around the Muslim world. How can we talk about the contributions of Islām to the development of human capital in Africa without mentioning the efforts of Lilia Labidi of Tunisia

(b. 1949), Aisha Lemu of Nigeria (b. 1940), Zainab al-Ghazālī (d. 2005) and Su'ād Ṣalāh of Egypt who once headed the Islāmic law department of al-Azhar's Women's College. The fortune of Islām in Africa in the contemporary period has largely been circumscribed by the progress Muslim women have made in overcoming cultural barriers that have always impeded their destinies over time.

Faces of Islām in contemporary Africa are equally evident in the architectural design of some public monuments and buildings even in non-Muslim majority milieu. Reminiscent of the pre-modern era, Islāmic images and calligraphic designs and the Muslim spatial imagination has influenced the construction of public monuments in Abuja, Kampala and Dār Salām.

Picture showing the National Assembly in Abuja

Thus the more the Islāmic vision is inscribed into public monuments, the stronger the notion that when mention is made of Islām in Africa we are actually talking about Islām of Africa.

However, Islām in Africa in the contemporary period has been seen by some scholars as a product of a multiplicity of historical processes including colonialism. The latter, they argue, has

led to eclectic categories of Islāms in the continent. These include rational Islām (Brenner, 2001), egalitarian Islām (Kane, 2003) secular Islām (Mahmood, 2005) and progressive Islām (Gasper, 2001, 85). The Muslim critic would no doubt be hard-pressed to make sense of these Islāms since, as far as the Qur'an and the Sunnah are concerned, there cannot be more than one Islām notwithstanding the contrarieties and contradictions in Muslim realities all around the world. But to scholars in anthropology of religion such as Talal Asad, these categories are useful because they play into the conception of Islām "as a collection of often locally specific socio-cultural manifestations which have, over time and across centuries, been given Islamic coloration" (ibid p. 54). He says:

> "There cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because definition itself is the historical product of discursive process" (Asad, 1993, 54)

Talal Asad's reading of Islām may however be germane to this inquiry not so much for the claims he makes but because his argument calls attention to the aporetic in Islāmic heritage in the continent in the 21st century.

Islam in Contemporary Africa: Contemplating Challenges

In other words, an objective consideration of the Islāmic heritage in contemporary Africa, as it is all around the world, compels the conclusion that it is circumscribed, to a large extent, by *aporia*. The aporetic for Islām could be seen in the assumption that as at today in the continent, the religion remains known to some and unknown to many others; it is attractive to some and scary to others. In large parts of the continent of Africa, Islām is familiar to some even as it could be described as the familiar-stranger in other parts of the continent. Those who read Islām using authentic texts on the religion would find the religion highly enticing and attractive; those who

read Islām using the fissures and fractures in the contexts of Muslims' existential realities as tool would wonder whether Islām is indeed not responsible for the contradictions in Muslims' life. Put differently, the non-Muslim critic who observes the unwholesome circumstance of Muslims in Maiduguri or Somalia would conclude, though erroneously, that the reason Muslims are under socio-cultural and economic siege is the religion they profess. But this is just a perspective.

In other words, one of the greatest challenges confronting the religion of Islam in Africa today is probably the inability of Muslims to correctly interpret and apply normative rulings of the religion to their daily life. This is evident in failed governance structures in predominant Muslim states in the continent and the consequent prevalence of poverty and under-development. The Arab uprising[5] of 2011 and 2012 would probably not have occurred were it not for the lack of good governance in parts of Arab-Muslim world. Failed governance in Muslim states and wrong interpretation of Islamic texts have produced at least four typologies of Islām in Africa in the contemporary period for us to work with. These include Islāmic revivalism, "Islāmic" reformism, "Islāmic" reductionism, and "Islāmic" anarchism. Islāmic reformism could be referred to as the storm within the Islāmicate communities all around the world. Contrary to Michel Foucault's notion that reform within Islām belongs to "young men who are dislodged from local, social and religious contexts (Almond, 2004, 150), Islāmic reform is being championed by the young and the old. It is being discussed inside al-Azhar (Ayubi, 1991); it is being talked about in Saudi-Arabia (Al-Shamsi, 2010). Ordinarily, Islāmic reformation is said to concern itself with women's rights in Islām, the status of the minority in Muslim majority countries, Muslim participation in democracy and the desirability or otherwise of violence as a means of engaging the Other.

But a closer contemplation of the whole idea of Islamic reformation compels the suggestion that critics should rather do rather do a paradigm shift and begin to talk about Muslim reformation. While it is true that reference to Islām in Islamic reformation is often linked to the tradition of the Prophet in which he is reported to have said: "At the beginning of every century, God will send to this community someone who will renew its religion" (Sunan Abu Dawood, Book 37: Number 4278). But it does not appear that the Prophet intended a conflation of Islām with the Muslims. Rather it appears that the focus of the reformation he hinted would be Muslims not the religion; the reformation he desired is probably inside-in, not the one to be dictated by non-Muslim critics of Islām. Not to privilege this type of reading is to imply the existence of a deficiency within the normative precepts of the religion of Islam which are therefore in dire need of intervention by modern day scholars.

The whole idea of Islāmic reformation could be contested from another perspective. In other words, if it is true that one of the goals of the campaign for Islāmic reformation is the perceived need to give voice and agency to the voiceless sections of Muslim societies either in Kano or Cairo, then one wonders why such a campaign should be labeled Islāmic reform or reformation instead of Muslim reformation? Why should the campaign for political equality and a more equitable distribution of resources across the Muslim world be labeled Islāmic given the fact that it is the Muslims who have failed to follow the dictates of the Quran and therefore in need of reformation?

But there exists another perspective to the whole campaign for reformation of Islām. Here the campaign seeks the dissolution and the destruction of the fundamental spirits of the religion. According to Salman Rushdie "the starting point for Islāmic reformation begins with an acceptance of the concept that all ideas, even sacred ones, must adapt to altered realities" (S.

Rushdie, 2005) . In other words, the moment our reality becomes altered, once what is in the Qur'an is interpreted in such a way as to confer validity on the new reality of life dictated by modernity, then Islām would become one of those religions with unstable and slippery norms and values. But that exactly is the goal of reformation envisioned by critics like Salmon Rushdie. They desire to enthrone a postmodern hegemony in which all values would become impermanent and one in which, in line with Muhammad Arkoun (M. Arkoun, 2006), the unthinkable would become not only thinkable but indeed a necessity.

Unlike Islamic reformation, Islāmic revivalism has remained an endemic feature of Islām in Africa since the pre-modern to the contemporary period. It is that trend in Islāmic practice that the Prophet hinted at in the tradition quoted above when he says that at the beginning of every century, Allah will send to the Muslim Ummah someone who will renew its religion. Two variants of this trend may be proposed here: State-sponsored Islāmic revivalism (SSIR) and Non-State Islāmic Revivalism (NSIR). SSIR has been an endemic feature of Islām in Africa since the pre-modern period. It occurred in 1890 when Muhammad Ahmad 'Abdullah (M. AbdelRahim, 1985) emerged in Sūdān; Islāmic revivalism informed the emergence and the sustenance of the Sokoto Caliphate under 'Uthmān b. Fūdī (J. A Amoloye, 1993). SSIR was evident in the initial posture of Mu'amar Qadhafī (T. George, 1993) when he emerged in Libya 1965; historians often read Islamism to the hegemony established by Ja'afar Nimeiry (D. Hevesi, 2009) before his overthrow in Sūdān in 1985.

The 21st century has equally witnessed the emergence of SSIR. This occurred in the most populous Muslim country in Africa, Nigeria where, in 1999, the Shari'ah law was introduced by Governors of States in the northern parts of the country (R. Peters, 2001). The event in Nigeria was particularly instructive - it invalidated the assumption by Christians in the country that by

the 21st century Christianity was going to achieve complete dominion in the country. It also called attention to the notion that with reference to Africa, Islām is permanently arriving, never completely departing.

Non-State sponsored Islāmic revivalism (NSIR) in Africa has largely been domiciled in the public-private sphere. Here mention could be made of the activities of Sayyid Qutb and Shaykh Ḥasan al-Banā (A. B. Sooge, 2008). In the contemporary period, NSIR is evidenced in the emergence of new Sūfī trends in Africa like the NASFAT (Oladosu, 2008b) and Muslim women organizations such as like FOMWAN (H. Oladosu-Uthman, 2011). The reason these new movements were launched range from the secular to the spiritual. They all strive to bring Muslims back to Islām; to fill the gap between Islām in the text and the context of Muslim's existential realities all across Africa.

However, unlike Islāmic revivalism, however, "Islāmic" reductionism, or rather Muslim reductionism, in contemporary Africa would refer to that trend among African Muslims which considers it expedient for Muslims to reduce aspects of Islāmic practices to one or two activities. Muslim reductionism appears to undergird the activities of the *Tablīgh Jamā'ah* (Oladosu 2008, p.82) across Africa - a religious movement which emphasizes *Khurūj* (the act of embarking on trips for the sake of inviting people to Islam) as a very important aspect of Islām to the exclusion, and indeed to the detriment of other features of Islām. Muslim reductionism is evident in the activities of another group which recently broke out of the *Tabligh Jamā'at* in Nigeria. The group, known as the *Karikasa*, holds that "the *Qiblah* is not the East but a point between the East and the West; it holds that Muslim males should wear the turban as a cardinal principle of Islām; that they should go about their daily activities in company of their staff" (D. O. Qasim, 2008,

p.10). To the *Karikasa* in Nigeria, the use of the camel, the donkey and the horse are the recommended means of transportation for the Muslims. Any attempt to use either cars or airplane is deemed a deviation from the "Sunnah" of the Prophet; an infraction on the Islamic devotional-spiritual praxis!

Muslim reductionism is equally evident in the activities of the *Boko Haram* in Northern Nigeria. Pleading history and contemporary facetious politics between Islām and the West, the group disapproves of what they have termed "Western" education and violently prevent Muslims from attending government-established schools. As at 2015, the activities of the group in the West African sub-region has led to the death of close to fifteen thousand people and the loss of properties worth million of dollars (A. E. Olojo, 2014, p.3). What is evident from these reductionist trends across the Muslim world is that whenever Muslims fail to identify and hold on to the very core of the message of Islām, and whenever, in line with Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, they fail to relate to Islām as a "comprehensive system of life, a pragmatic and a way made easy" (Y. al-Qardawi, 2006), a descent into anarchism becomes a categorical imperative.

In other words, Muslim anarchism, as is axiomatic in the above, refers to a state of anomie where life is viewed ahistorically and one in which upholders of this belief usually occupy adversarial postures against all elements, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, who reject their interpretation and application of Islāmic tenets and creeds. Put differently, Muslim anarchists usually begin by wearing the garb of ascetism though they neither share the Sufi worldview nor its method. They often consider the state, particularly when such is established on structures which do not conform to their own understanding of Islām, as undesirable. An anarchist within the Islāmicate spheres of Africa would claim total commitment to the *tawhīd –lā ilāha illa Allah-* no god but Allah; like the *Khawārij* (M. M Sharif, 1966) he would be willing to kill and plunder in defense of his

philosophy. Their actions call attention to the category of the modern man who Hussein Nasr says has lost touch with "the rim and the axis" (H. Nasr, 2000, p. 8) of life. They are incapable of apprehending the wisdom behind the existence of opposites in creation. Such elements exist in Baghdad and Kabul; they are presently on the prowl in different parts of the Western and Eastern Africa. The anarchist trend in the Muslim world exemplifies some of the challenges facing Islām today.

CHALLENGES CONFRONTING ISLĀM IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

Perhaps the greatest challenge confronting Islām in Africa is historical-intellectual not anarchism. Just as Islām is the only religion whose origin has been recorded historically and is, therefore, grounded not in legend but in facts, the religion is ironically confronted by other facts of history which nests in the argument that while it has forged a spiritual empire out of the disparate communities of Africa, it has been unable to weave a political empire out them. Put differently, if indeed it is true that all great nations achieve greatness by solidifying polities and empires around a spiritual or political entity we must therefore ponder why Islām not succeeded in producing new empires since the demise of the medieval ones like the Mali, Ghana, and Songhai empires? Two responses may be pleaded here: the apologetic and the pragmatic. An apologia for the inability of Islām in contemporary Africa to re-enact the medieval styles might be to say the religion does not glory in establishing earthly empires. Whenever Islām is seen to have aided the establishment of either a state or an empire such is viewed as a means towards an end. In other words, as far as Islām is concerned, the establishment of states and empires by its adherents is a journey, not the destination.

But the pragmatic approach is to say that Islām, like other forces in history, is innocent of the failure or inability of its adherents to deploy it to their advantage. The religion, like a sharp knife, attains its maximum effect in the hands of a willing and capable agent, a Muslim subject who is capable of availing himself of the opportunities Allah has placed in the physical world. Thus it can be suggested that the reason those empires flourished during the medieval period was because Muslims at the time connected with the religion; the reason Islām has not been able to catalyze the birth of political hegemonies today is the disconnect between Islām and the Muslims and the inability of the latter to rise up to the challenges of the contemporary period.

Let us side-step the above in order to consider the challenge posed to Islām in the contemporary period by two groups of Muslims: the *du'āts* (callers to Islām) and the intellectuals. All around the Muslim world, it appears its intellectuals are not *du'ats* (missionaries); it seems its *du'ats* are not intellectuals. An ordinary *dā'ī* (missionary) in contemporary Africa would likely be a product of al-Azhar University, or a graduate of University of Madīnah, or a local, pauperized Mallam, who is treated with scorn by the Muslim congregation for living off their wages. Some of the *du'āts* believe that Islām is ahistorical, or a mortified system of belief which is incapable of reinventing itself and as such cannot stimulate action or respond to currents from within and outside its shores. For example, some of the traditional *d'awah* workers hold tenaciously to the literal meanings of the injunctions on giving of *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* with grains even in societies where such has become of no value. Thus they are utterly incapable or unwilling of bringing about a reconciliation between *al- Naql wa al-'Aql* (Revelation and Reason). The knowledge tradition which produced the likes of al-Ghazālī, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Wāṣil b. Aʿaṭā in which speculation and critical inquiry are central appears forever lost. Our duʿāts still carry on with *d'awah* as if Islām, like the era in which Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Ghazālī lived, is *the* civilization, not one of

the civilizations; they bask in their knowledge of Islām; they rejoice in their ignorance of *jāhiliyah*. Umar ibn Khaṭāb, the second Caliph once said:

> He will detract from Islām, he who knows only Islām, and is utterly ignorant of *jāhiliyyah* (ways of life of non-Muslims) (A. A. Nadwī, 2007, p.33).

Muslim intellectuals in the contemporary world represent the other narrative. They can be referred to as occupiers of what al-Ghazālī has described as the *dhliz*[8] – the space in-between the world of unbelief and that of Islām. Though their scholarly orientation is forged at that intersection where the East meets the West, they disseminate knowledge and engage in scholarly endeavours not with the purpose of promoting Islām. Rather knowledge for some of them is an end in itself. Their rank has produced those who may be referred to as liberal Muslims: Muslims who hold the credo of western secularity in higher regards than Islāmic spirituality. Such Muslim intellectuals have the notion that their vocation is delimited to the dispersal of Islāmically free knowledge. They operate with the assumption that in order for them to be known, which is one of the shores of knowledge, the 'Islām' in them must consciously be elided.

One reason the intellectuals in Muslim societies across the world find themselves in this dilemma is probably the constant challenge which modernity poses to humanity. Hardly is there a society in Africa which does not yearn to be "modern". Modernity, Shabbir Akhtar contends, is "the circumstance of being 'modern'. It is, in a central sense, inescapable. It is the necessary context for every tolerably well-informed life-journey undertaken in the contemporary world (S. Akhtar, 1990, p.104). But the question which constantly confronts the Muslim world is how do we become modern without becoming Western? Thus the confusing conflation of modernity and 'Westernity' has fed into existing cultural conflicts between Islām and the West. Apart from betraying an intellectual gap in our conception of the problematic of modernity, such a reading

functions in picturing Islām as anti-modern, retrogressive and unsuitable for the contemporary period.

A reading of the challenges confronting Islām all around the world particularly in Africa would be incomplete in the absence of Islāmophobia. Like every other phobia, Islāmophobia is an intense and persistent fear of certain situations, activities, things and people with links to Islām[9]. But exactly what fuels Islāmophobism? Two possible responses could be proposed here: the Eastern and the Western. The "Eastern" origin of Islāmophobia is Muslims who maintain two conflicting identities in relation to Islam; Muslims whose actions call to question the normative ideals of the religion of Islam. It therefore becomes inescapable that non-Muslim observers of the former would develop a phobia for the latter. They hate and abhor Islam in response to the ills in Muslims' conduct.

The Western argument for Islāmophobia is, however, eclectic. Central to the argument of the Islāmophobic is the notion that Westerners are superior and that the "Easterner" (this loosely refers to Muslim countries outside the West) is not only inferior to the Westerner but equally an irritant – a burden to and on the "paradise" the Westerner seeks to build on earth. It is the latter who Western intellectuals, colonialists and imperialists used to refer to as the Oriental; it is this interest in non-Western life and society that led to the field of study known as orientalism (E. Said, 1978). In other words, when the non-Muslim sees himself as inferior to none but himself, it becomes easy for him to read the inferiority in the condition of the Other as a manifestation of his spiritual orientation and consequently and evidence for his own superiority.

But of what effect is Islāmophobia on Islām and the Muslims in the contemporary world? Islāmophobia positions Islām in a binary; it situates the religion as the abnormal, the aberrant,

the noxious, the toxic. The Islāmophobic sees Islām as a fossil, a dead organism, utterly incapable of reinvention and revivication in contradistinction to the other religion. The Islāmophobic rarefies Islām and views it as separatist, exclusive, never inclusive. The Islāmophobic sees Islām as the enemy, the Muslims as a threat, the Mosque as an anathema. This was evident in the recent ban of the hijab in France, the protest against the construction of minaret in Switzerland and the anti-Islāmic strains in Netherlands. Muslims citizens of these countries live their lives in constant anxiety. To attack a Muslim unjustly in the countries where Islāmophobia has become a measure of treasure is to defend the nation against the enemy within (F. Githens-Mazer and R. Lambert MBE, 2010).

But there is another "phobia" in the Muslim world. This is may be referred to as "Westophobia". Literally, and like Islāmophobia, "Westophobia" refers to the negative image of the West in Muslim societies. It is a condition of the mind in which the Muslim anathemizes everything and all things Western. Like Islāmophobia, extreme Westophobia operates at the borders of psychosis; a state of complete paranoia and one in which the West is seen as an incurable disease. To be Westopobic is to essentialize the West, to view the West as an eternal enemy of Islām, to consider the West as the nemesis of the Muslims. But unlike Islāmophobia, Westophobia has an antithesis in the Muslim world. Let us call this strain "Westomania".

Westomania refers to an unequivocal love for the West and the quest, on the side of the non-West, to be Westernized. In contemporary Muslim world, Westomania is evident in the uncritical adoption of western ways of life by Muslim societies. The argument is no more whether the East would go the way of the West. Rather it is the extent to which the non-West would be

westernized. Today, the West appears to be synonymous with the air we breathe; the West, like China, is a "necessity".

CONCLUSION

Let us begin to close by asking a simple question: What might be the possible futures of Islām in Africa? A suggestion might be that the future would witness the Africanization of Islām the same way Europeans Europeanized Christianity or the way the Chinese converted Indian Buddha into a Chinese cultural treasure. The future of Islām in Africa and indeed in the world may still feature a scenario where Muslim demographics would continue to rise in line with the current trend. A report already says that Muslims are projected to make up 55.6 percent of the population in West Africa in 2030, up from 52.2 per cent in 2010 (PEW FORUM on Religion and Public Life, 2015).

Islām in Africa in the future would equally likely be enriched by what I would refer to as 'Islāmomania', a counterfoil for 'Westomania' which is eating deep into the fabrics of Muslim societies across the world. In other words, while the rich among the Muslim elites are likely to continue to "migrate to the West", ordinary Muslims in Africa, Asia and the Middle East would most likely continue to identify with Islām in the future and forge their identities on its timeless values. This is in line with timeless lesson taught by history- that insofar as human societies continue to be circumscribed by class struggles, each segment of the latter would always tread different pathways in their attempt to realize their earthly desires.

Further, the future of Islām in Africa would likely be circumscribed by continued struggles, by Muslims in sub-Sahara Africa, with Pentecostalism (Tomas Sundnes, 2013). The latter, in my opinion, is a variant of fundamentalist Christianity which seeks to establish kingdoms the like of

which Jesus Christ never dreamt his followers would create on earth. In the area of gender, it is inevitable that in the future Muslim women all around the world would continue to seek more spaces for themselves and demand greater access to existing opportunities which patriarchy, not Islām, has denied unto them since time immemorial.

Inside Islām, we are likely to continue to witness conflicts among the "modernists" and the so-called "Salafis" (R. Gauvain, 2013, p.40) over the correct interpretations of the Qur'ān and Islāmic precepts. New revivalist movements, new strains of Muslim anarchists and reductionists are equally likely to emerge. This is true of Islāmic heritage in Africa and all around the world in the past; it is likely going to be true of its heritage in the future. Ibn Khaldūn says: "the past resembles the future just like water resembles water" (C. Issawi,1969, p.31).

Notes

1. There exists a huge bibliography on the subject of Islām in Africa. See for example: I. Akintola: "Islam in Africa" in *Political Islam and the State in Africa* (ed) H. Solomon, A. Fadare and F. Butler (Pretoria: CIPS, 2008) p.15-55

2. For more on the trajectories of Islam in South Africa see: M. Amra: Islam in Southern Africa: A Historical Perspective" in *Islamic Civilization in Eastern Africa* ed. A. B. K Kasozi (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2006) p. 99-119;

3. The Tor Tiv is the royal title of Kings of the city. The city, which is located in the middle belt of Nigeria, represents one of the last signposts of the Jihād embarked upon by 'Uthmān b. Fūdī in 1804. On its contemporary history, see E. Isichei: *Introduction in Studies in the History of Plateau State, Nigeria* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

4. On King Negus see: H. M Haykal: *The Life of Muhammad* (Islamic Book ServicesAcademy, 2005)

5. The word *Tārīkh* was given by African historians to the first journal on African history in sub-Sahara Africa. The journal was founded in and located in University of Ibadan. It was established in 1965.

6. The Arab Uprising began in February 2011 in Tunisia following the killing of an unemployed youth. The protests which followed eventually engulfed the whole of the Middle East and North

Africa. It led to the overthrow of the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents and strong internal upheavals in Syria, Bahrayn, Jordan, Yemen, Algeria and Morocco.

7. This is often referred to as Islamic millenarianism. For the discussion of this ḥadīth, see: Abu Dāwud's *Sunan* under number 4270 in Al Ḥākim's *Mustadrak*, in *Al-Fitan* (4: 522), in Al Bayhaqī's *Ma'rifat Al Sunan wa Āthār* p. 52; in Al Khaṭīb's *Tārīkh Baghdādī* 2: 61.

8. The *dihliz* in the Ghazalian philosophy is an intermediate space or the threshold space with intersecting boundaries and heterogeneous notions of practices and time". For more see: E. Moosa: *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) p. 27

9. This is taken from an important study of Islamophobia in London. For more see: J. Githens-Mazer and R. Lambert MBE: *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: A London Case Study* (London: European Muslim Research Centre, 2010)

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