

**EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION:
MUSLIMS IN AFRICA AND AFRICAN MUSLIMS IN THE DIASPORA**

Africa must be considered as being essentially multicultural, pluri-ethnic and pluri-religious continent. This means that people on the continent hail from diverse cultures, ethnicities, and more importantly from different religions. First, it ought to be said that in Africa there is what some people refer to as African traditional religions (ATR) shunned by most monotheists ranging from Judeo-Christian confessions to the Islam faith. In other words, in general Africans had, and still do, in many places throughout the continent, religions from the ancestors to mediate with God. Conversely, African Christianity and Islam are also part of African people's overall identity.

Many social scientists have commented upon Islam's status as a fast growing religion after Christianity in the world. Additionally, according to available statistics, more than 50 % of Africa's inhabitants claim Islam as their religion.¹ Admittedly, there is a great number of Africans practicing Islam in Africa and in the Diaspora. It ought to be underlined that this is a sheer expression of diversity. This means also that not all these African Muslims practice Islam the same way. Though the dogma as the canonical practices are the same everywhere cultural specificities of practitioners color the practice of the faith. Of course, so much there is a distinctively Asian way of being Muslim, despite claims to the contrary, so too there is such a thing as a distinctively African way of practicing Islam. Thus, some Western scholars of French extraction did not bother to speak of "islam noir" (African Islam). More importantly, this legitimates the very existence of an idiom like "Africains musulmans"²; i.e., African Muslims to be posited against/along any other kind of Muslim as well as diversity in the faith. Needless to say that Islam and African identities and some non-antagonizing African cultural ways have lived in good intelligence. Yet, for some decades now, upon the return of some African students from the Arabian Peninsula, the way Islam has been practiced by our forefathers in the 11th century, is under constant assault. The paramount of example of this is the destruction of mausoleums in Northern Mali by extremist groups claiming that local practice of Islam is tainted with fallacy and innovation. There is a tendency to destroy the stable and accommodating version of Islam in West Africa.

Conflicts in Northern Mali gushed back on Burkina Faso³, and later in Cote d'Ivoire's Grand-Bassam in 2016 during the summer. Thus, Dawit Giorgis, a former Ethiopian government official could not be more accurate when he submitted that "[...] the perversion of Islam in Africa in the form of Salafi-jihadism is an affront to an entire way of life that has been practiced even before Islam was adopted in many parts of what we now call the Arab world, and before the

¹ According to Hussein D. Hasan in an article prepared for the US Congress, "[...] experts believe that there are approximately 300 million African Muslims in the world, which comprises roughly one-third of the African continent's population." (Hassan 3).

² This is a phrase borrowed from René Luc Moreau, a French Dominican who worked for interfaith dialogue among Muslims and Christians. Moreau's book is titled *Africains musulmans: des communautés en mouvement* published in 1982.

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Wahhabi school of thought was founded in Saudi Arabia. The injection of this brand of Islam threatens an African identity that has thrived by blending of both Islamic and local traditions.”⁴ In other words, Islam is not new on the continent. What is subsumed under the facile formulation of “traditional Islam” is actually the version of Islam in practice in much of West Africa and it stands out very characteristically through its tolerant nature vis-à-vis non-Muslim communities. Besides, one particularity of (West) Africa’s Islam is spiritualist. In West Africa brotherhoods originally from west North Africa (Morocco and Algeria) have been adopted and highly marked with African specificities worth underlying. Sufi orders played a very important role in the social order of African societies and much of the propagation of Islam in the Western part of the continent is largely to be credited to Sufism. This spiritualism is in no way synonymous with frictions and conflicts bred by the new brand of Islam that invaded the continent.

Conversely, anti-Western, anti-imperialistic, revivalist, violent, extremist and highly ideology-driven groups (Salafi and Wahhabi strongly antagonizing the so-called “traditional Islam”) are gaining ground in urban area through *da’awa* and proselytizing will be better serving Africa if they are under scrutiny by the Muslim community itself first and by the State. They have to be called to order. Behind these groups lurk some political agenda aiming at disrupting national cohesion of the African continent in the name of a brotherhood that cannot still thwart cleavages based on skin complexion. Yes, outside the continent some Africans are continually ostracized and prejudiced against in the Muslim community they long to be part of.

Objectively, no serious scientific analysis of Islam’s diversity will be conclusive if it is not inclusive of the characteristic features and cultural specificities of the communities under study. Silence in this context is highly criminal. It is therefore high time Muslims in general and those in Africa in particular regain their agency by way of giving account their own sides of stories told about and for them by others. To analyze Islam in Africa, it is imperative to first and foremost seek to comprehend the different values, norms and cultures in the variegated African communities and see how these have impacted or shaped African people’s interactions with Islam and other Muslims the world over.

Nowadays, our (post-)modern era is riddled with high commotion. There is a great deal of chaos and every day has its loads of violence, horror and devastation. There is a great deal of instances indicating that the world in general, and particularly the Islamic/Arab world, is under pressure and duress. These instances include the events of September 2001 in the United States as well as the appropriation of the acts perpetrated by some radical movements, the American occupation of Iraq and the shift in the political order originally in the hands of the Sunni, and the deliquescence of authority and power in Afghanistan and eventually Al-Baghdadi’s Islamic State in the Middle East. Visibly, there is a movement both exogenous and endogenous to the Islamic world that seeks to reinvent the world order. Some use violence and/or terror to make their point both at home and abroad, while some instigate revolution in the Muslim world for political and economic gains. All in all, it is clear that Samuel Huntington’s prediction or agenda has come to pass. In fact, the man once said:

World politics is entering a new phase, and intellectuals have not hesitated to proliferate visions of what it will be [...] Yet they all miss a crucial, indeed a

⁴ See Dawit Giorgis’s contribution titled “Radicalization of African Islam” in the *National Interest*.

central, aspect of what global politics is likely to be in the coming years. [...] The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. (Huntington, 22)

One may fault Huntington with pursuing an agenda seeking to undermine the Islamic world on behalf of mostly Christian Western nations. The reality remains that from the time he authored his piece to this date, the divide between the West and the Muslim/Islamic world has become a gaping hole, thereby prompting interfaith dialogues.

A decade back, most people could not imagine the possibility of jihadist presence in modern Africa though in the past such figure as El-Hajj Omar Tall and others used the religious rhetoric to wage war against neighbor not sharing their faith, Islam. As the saying goes in (West) Africa, when the neighbor's house is burning down, one should hasten to find water and put out the fire because failure to do so might end up in one's own house ablaze. Modern-day religious violence in our part of the Islamic world used to be only a far-off phenomenon because seen only through TV in places like Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine, among others. Today, in West Africa radical and autonomist movements like MNLA and MUJAO⁵ in North Mali, Ansar Deen, and the politicized religious group dubbed AQMI⁶ by the French have shown their capacity to do what once was distant from the continent. Though countries like Kenya had fallen victim to terror, Africa was not so much affected as it has been in recent years. One can notice that few West African nations fell prey to the same kind of violence affecting some Muslim countries in Asia, and especially in the Middle East. For instance, some movements related to North Mali very likely struck Burkina Faso twice. Some of those who attacked Grand-Bassam in southern and coastal Côte d'Ivoire have been arrested in Mali and have connections with the radical groups in that country. The questions in the face of all this are the following: Was Islam such as taught by Islamic scholars in centers like Timbuktu, Fez, Jenne, Kong, to name but a few, so radicalized and politicized as to generate social and political frictions as we know it today? What has been the stand of African Muslim/Islamic scholars? What are they doing as part of their social responsibility to analyze and propose solutions to decision-makers in African nation-states difficultly in becoming?

Issues worthy of academic analysis also include the advent of Islam in Africa, the development of Islamic brotherhoods, the interactions between Islam and African cultural specificities and the possible reforms initiated by Muslims in Africa, among others. Of course, although some of these issues have been addressed sometimes by Africans and at other times by

⁵ The initials stand for Le Mouvement pour l'unicité et le djihad en Afrique de l'Ouest meaning The Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa. This movement came about following the abduction of three Westerners on October 23, 2011 in a Polisario-controlled camp in Algeria's Tindouf region by the leader of the group called Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou.

⁶ The French called the Islamist movement in the Magreb, and in reality all the way down into Mali passing by Mauritania, AQMI or Al-Qaeda au Maghreb islamique) The movement played a great role in the radicalization of the Touareg fighting for years for self-determination in North Mali.

non-African specialists, a great deal of them still lie in wait of extensive treatments and mostly by African scholarship.

The mission behind *Acta Islamica: Revue d'études islamiques/Islamic Studies Review*'s statement is to bring to the forth the African part of Islam. It is also our hope that we may be able to help the world beyond the continent hear and understand what African scholar think about African scholarship of past, and what (s)takes they have in/on contemporary Islamic issues in the Muslim world in general, and in Africa particularly. In other words, the African part is also inclusive of pronouncements on issues Islamic in general and as they unfold in Africa in particular. Here, we attempt to give voice and the opportunity to African scholars and students of African Islamic history to take part in the discussions about not only issues like terrorism, revival of the Islamic faith, but also about Africa's contributions in global Islamic cultures and civilization. Visibly, most contributions on Islamic issues are authored by the supposed centers of Islamic knowledge and cultures, the Oriental space. This is speaking cum writing from the margins. The unheard voices suppressed for historical reasons want to be empowered now.

Though our journal must address the question of modern Islam and its characteristics viewed from Africa and this inaugural issue of *Acta Islamica: Revue d'études islamiques/Islamic Studies Review* aims to understand the socio-historical and current processes of Islam's establishment as a religious tradition on and beyond Africa's continent. It essentially hopes to assess the consequences thereof. Most contributions here pave the way for more frontal engagement with ideological, political, exegetical, historiographical and hermeneutical essence of some issues confronting Africa in the continent's relationship with the Islamic faith.

Dr. Binaté Youssouf is author of the first contribution of this inaugural issue. The article is titled "Kéлиндjan : monographie d'un centre religieux au nord de la Côte d'Ivoire," and it reviews the life and contributions of Cheikh Matié Boiké Samassi in the city of Kéлиндjan in Northern Côte d'Ivoire. This contribution is a historical survey of the founding of Kéлиндjan and the internal organization of the said city. The paper also examines the particulars of the city in the context of socio-religious mutations through the coming of age of religious movements known as brotherhoods in West Africa. What makes this contribution so exceptional is that it is one of the first in its kind to focus on Ivoirian Islamic leadership and scholarship from an endogenous perspective. In fact, most writings on Islam in Côte d'Ivoire have been and still are in majority authored by non-Ivoirian and non-Muslim scholars.

Dr. Paré Moussa has authored the second article. This contribution is titled "Stéréotype et image de l'autre: l'Espagne musulmane à travers *La chanson de Roland*." (Stereotyping and Representations of the Other: Muslim Spain in *The Song of Roland*). Moussa Paré's work is an exercise into debunking the stereotypes and false images developed in post-Islamic Spain by those who sought to de-Islamicize Spain after it fell into the turf of Islam. According to Paré's reading of the French tale, *La chanson de Roland*, the description of Muslim Spain in *The Song of Roland* is suggestive of many stereotypes developed out of ignorance of the physical and human environment of the Iberian Peninsula. The country and its people are portrayed stressing geographical details and with profound lack of knowledge of the subject and object of the description. Such caricatured representations of Spain serve the propagandistic goal of bestowing supremacy on Christian civilization and Charlemagne, its leader at the time, over and against Islam. The conquest of Spain is thus to be construed as Christian propaganda.

The next contribution is article by Yacouba Ouédraogo. It is called “Courant musulman francophone: Emergence d’une critique en islam au Burkina Faso” (Francophone Muslim Trend: The Emergence of a Politicized Critique in Islam). This is a study using archives, secular press as well as non-secular press, to provide an account of emerging political trend in Islam in Burkina Faso. In his contribution, Dr. Ouédraogo seeks to put in a historical perspective the relationship between Islam and politics starting from colonial days in Burkina Faso up to this date. He also provides a genealogical survey of the Francophone Islamic trend as well as gives an idea as to how this critique-based trend is articulated and expressed in Islam.

Here, the last contribution is a review essay titled “The Muslim World’s ‘Peculiar Institution’ and Africa: Notes on Chebel, Malek’s *L’Esclavage en Terre d’Islam : Un tabou bien gardé*”. This is a piece proposed by Konaté A. Siendou on *L’Esclavage en Terre d’Islam: Un tabou bien gardé* by Malek Chebel, Franco-Algerian specialist of Islam and anthropologist who took the bull by the horn by tackling the thorny question of slavery in the land of Islam (among Muslims and Arabs around the world, in other words. The review essay concerns itself with the enslavement of black people alone since slavery in the Land of Islam was variegated and diverse. The point is to stress the necessity of engaging a fruitful discussion on this taboo still rife among North Africans.

This inaugural issue is a long-awaited exercise into setting the pace for further discussions on issues touching upon Muslims of any color and region. We only hope that from now on with this platform, we, Africa-based scholars and scholars of African extraction, intend to and will in actuality take part in the debates involving their faith the world over in order to facilitate the coming of age of a global society taking Muslims once again as a point of reference intellectually, spiritually and otherwise. Hoping to provide in the future with more issues on African scholars and their works on Islam in Africa and around the world, on answers to some critics seeking to monopolize speaking on Islam, we can only invite our readers to enjoy reading this inaugural issue.

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