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Nation Building and the Politics of Islamic Internationalism in Guinea: Toward an Understanding of Muslims' Experience of Globalization in Africa

Abstract

This article discusses the historical role of Islam in the political evolution of Guinea in the broader context of Muslims' experience of nation/state building and globalization in Africa. This role is examined on the premise that Islam is one of the major globalizing forces (more in the body of the paper on this idea of Islam as a globalizing force) responsible for the formation of what experts have conceptualized as Africa's "triple heritage" or the juncture of African traditional values, Islamic influence, and the legacy of Western colonialism.

The article examines Islam's role in the creation of cultural identities, territorial polities, and complex regional and trans-continental networks of trade and scholarship in pre-colonial West Africa; the formation of fronts of resistance to European colonial conquest and occupation; and the mobilization of new nationalist forces which sparked the national liberation struggle of the 1940s and 50s in the region.

The discussion of key concepts such as nationalism, nation/state building, internationalism, and globalization exposes the limited applicability of existing theories to the African experience by highlighting the complexity of post-colonial cultural reconstruction and nation building on the continent.

From this perspective, the article focuses upon the political and ideological contradictions having marked the relations of the regime of the Parti Démocratique de Guinée (PDG) under President Ahmed Sékou Touré and conservative Guinean Muslim circles in the early years of independence, due in part to Touré's Marxist and socialist leanings of the time.

Also comprehensively discussed is this regime's subsequent ideological incorporation and diplomatic use of Islam in an effort to curb anti-PDG opposition at home and abroad and to free itself from isolation by the West. Hence, President Touré's successful policy of "offensive diplomatique" geared primarily toward Arab and Muslim nations and organizations but also, though somewhat indirectly, toward Western powers, serves as an example of the dynamics of Islamic internationalism in Cold War global affairs.

Past experiences of party-centered and state-controlled regimentation of religious organizations under Touré's state-party regime is compared to the current trend of self-decentralization and self-internationalization of Islamic forces in light of the challenges of religious radicalism and post-Cold War politics in Africa.

Introduction

This article examines the role of Islam in Guinea's experience of nation building and international alliance building from the perspective of Africa's "triple heritage" (Mazrui 1986) (i.e. the juncture of African traditions, Islamic influence, and the legacy of western colonialism) and in the context of the Cold War world order under which post-colonial Africa struggled to find a fitting place. Additionally, the article extends the examination to the post-Cold War experience of globalization increasingly characterized by a shift from the

hegemony of the nation-state apparatus to the deepening of the porosity of national boundaries under the aggressive offensive of transnational forces.

The discussion evolves from a threefold premise. First, Africa is a place where forces of globalization have been clashing with one another for over a millennium inducing, in the course of history, far-reaching disturbance in the continent's indigenous systems. Second, as one of those forces of globalization, Islam penetrated Africa in a wide variety of ways, in many cases resulting in a relatively balanced symbiosis between endogenous and Islamic values. Third, the role of Islam in Africa's struggle for sovereignty and nation building makes Muslim Africa a particularly informative case in the debate on Muslims' experience of globalization.

As a working concept, "nation building" is, in this study, equated with "statecraft" based on the fact that in post-colonial Africa, nation building has, in many regards, meant the development of a sense of legitimacy measurable by the degree of political loyalty that the state elicits from those under its institutional rule, thus making members of a highly cosmopolitan society citizens of an entity called the nation-state.

Because "contemporary state formation in Africa has been mediated through the intrusive erection of the colonial state by European occupants," as Young and Turner put it (Young 1985: 7), and because many existing theories place African nation building in the general framework of European perception of nationalism, one can argue that the theories apply only partially to the political-cultural experience of Africans. Some of them apply more narrowly to the immediate post-World War II national liberation struggle which has lost much of its significance to ethnic conflicts and civil wars over the decades.

Thus, the extent to which William Pfaff's theory that "Nationalism is connected with the absence as well as the existence of nations" (Pfaff 1993: 41) applies to the African

experience depends upon how one interprets the argument that nationalism in Africa has been connected with the absence of nations while in modern Western Europe it has been essentially connected with the existence of nations.

The same conceptual ambivalence goes for Gellner's argument that nationalism constitutes a theory of political legitimacy in which the coincidence of the territorial state and ethnic boundaries is necessary and that a homogeneous superior culture is indispensable for the birthing of integrative citizenship (Cottam 2001: 8-10). Rupert Emerson's definition of the nation as "a community of people who feel they belong together in the double sense that they share deeply significant elements of a common heritage and that they have a common destiny in the future" (quoted in Cottam 2001: 2) may be one of the examples of a serious conceptualization strategy of nationalism and nationhood, as some see it. Yet, in many respects, it, too, fits only obliquely African nation building.

Finally, if nothing else, the theory that "A state is a nation state when people identify with the territorial unit organized as a political entity, that is, a nation, more strongly than with any other politically relevant identity group (racial, ethnic, etc.), and they give the nation primary loyalty" (Cottam 2001: 2) may help to explain the fragility of the African nation-state. This fragility is chiefly imputable to the fact that most post-colonial African polities are a legacy of the colonial partition of the continent making the transfer of loyalty from the natural comfort zone of kinship to an artificial national state often occasional and uncertain.

In the final analysis, the historical particularities of the colonization and de-colonization of Africa and the strong ethnic self-consciousness of African societies represent serious intervening variables largely responsible for the pervasive ambivalence with which the African nation-state emerged, and due to which many view it as a myth that can show a semblance of reality only when considered from the perspective of contemporary statecraft,

itself a pervasive legacy of European colonialism.

This is perhaps what Edem Kodjo means when he indicates that the post-colonial African state lives by and for the outside world: “it is from the outside world that it receives its concepts and ideas...Whereas the truly independent and sovereign state bases its power on endogenous factors, the African state extenuates itself to derive its essence from exogenous factors” (Kodjo 1987: 119-120). Basil Davidson shares Kodjo’s pessimism when he argues that the African anti-colonial forces and their leaders remain the nationalists without nations they were prior to independence (Davidson 1978: 304). Davidson insists that the magnitude of these little-anticipated challenges soon made many honest hardworking leaders aware of a built-in failure of proto-colonial institutions.

With the emergence of new doctrines of world order at the end of the Cold War, the debate on nation building and globalization has raised complex questions not the least of which is whether the two are compatible. The viability of the African nation-states in particular, whose emergence on the ruins of colonial empires was once considered a revolutionary step towards peaceful coexistence, is being challenged by a new trend of globalization conceived as “both an active process of corporate expansion across borders and a structure of cross-border facilities and economic linkages” (Herman 1999).

To truly understand nation building and globalization in post-colonial Africa, whether separately or conjointly, one must take into account Africa’s longstanding active involvement in world affairs, for as Michael O. Anda puts it, it is incorrect to view Africa only as a victim of history, a passive recipient of influences and a bystander in global affairs (Anda 2000: 2). In West Africa, this active involvement has resulted in Islam playing a key role in the shaping of the region’s societies in the last eight hundred years or so, both as a globalizing force and as a factor of nation building.

The history of Islam in West Africa has been examined from various angles and the present study analyzes a particular aspect of this history along the lines of the works of experts such as Nehemia Levtzion (Levtzion 2000), Ivor Wilks (Wilks 2000), David Robinson (Robinson 2000), Stefan Reichmuth (Reichmuth 2000), Knut S. Vikor (Vikor 2000), and Lamin Sanneh (Sanneh 2000) who discuss in depth the role of Islam in the construction of Afro-Muslim identities, between the eleventh and the nineteenth centuries, in the western portion of the *bilad es-Sudan* through trade, scholarship, and diplomacy with North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and the Middle East. Claude Rivière (Rivière 1971), Lansiné Kaba (Kaba 1974), Jean-Louis Triaud (Triaud 2000), and Ira M. Lapidus (Lapidus 2000) complete the discussion by examining the political and cultural history of Islam in West Africa under French colonial rule.

What made Islam an integral part of Guinea's nationalist and global aspirations? How did the regime of the *Parti Démocratique de Guinée* (PDG) deal with local religious forces (Muslim and Christian alike) opposing its original Marxist-socialist pronouncement? What was Islam's contribution to the regime's political survival and alliance building in the face of its isolation by the West since independence? How has the Islamic dimension of the PDG political philosophy and diplomatic action influenced post-PDG Guinea's national "reconstruction" and international relations?

Islam and the Challenge of Nation Building in Guinean History

With the introduction of Islam in the late eleventh century, a succession of events contributed to the opening of Western Africa to the wider Muslim world, including the Islamization of rulers of the Mande Empire one of whom, Mansa Musa (r. 1307-1332), was given the ceremonial title of Caliph of Islam in the western *bilad es-Sudan* during his legendary pilgrimage to Mecca. From this point onward, as J. C. Froelich points out, the convergence

of scholarship, commerce, and politics enabled Berber, Moor, Marka and Arab proselytizers to gather fellowship among the rulers and the populace of Western Sudan (Froelich 1962).

In the seventeenth century, Islamization in the Mande region was closely tied to the matrimonial alliances among Mande Mori families, as well as their religious alliance with prominent Mauritanian clerics. Further west, the Futa Jallon became, in the late seventeenth-early eighteenth centuries, another theater of zealous Islamization by ethnic Fulani nomads and semi-nomads spreading from Futa Maasina and, in the late-eighteenth century, by ethnic Torobhe led by the charismatic Cheikh Omar Tall of Futa Toro.

As a result, theocratic states emerged in the Mande and the Futa Jallon where holy men and venerated families established religious sanctuaries, including Kankan (the Islamic metropolis of Upper Guinea), Tuba (founded by the Jakanke cleric El Hajj Salimou Touré), Kula Mawnde and Sagale in the Labé (Futa Jallon), and Dinguiraye from which founder Cheikh Omar Tall expanded the Tijjaniya Sufi order which, according to Claude Rivière (Rivière 1971: 289-295), succeeded fairly easily in supplanting its Qadriyya counterpart in most of the Futa Jallon. These Islamic centers established close ties with Sufi circles in Mauritania, North Africa and Egypt, thus consolidating Islam's global network in this part of the world.

However, as Ira M. Lapidus indicates, "At the very end of the [nineteenth] century European invaders defeated, subordinated, and broke up existing states and imposed their own regimes. Muslim state formation was checked and Muslim peoples became subjects to new European-generated political and economic pressures" (Lapidus 2000: 732). As a matter of general assessment, the clash of these forces of globalization, viewed by some as two opposing systems of imperialism, plunged African societies in general and Muslim Africans in particular into an era of greater political, cultural, economic, and spiritual turmoil. The

ensuing decades of colonial occupation would affect Muslims' experience of national sovereignty and globalization in a number of ways.

Like elsewhere on the continent, the curving out of French Guinea valued neither the ethno-cultural identities of the natives nor their pre-existing religious and political allegiance. Instead, the interests of the colonial powers involved determined exclusively the outcome of what was to be a zigzagging partition of West Africa among the French, British and Portuguese. Hence, the area named the *Rivières du Sud*, which had been attributed to France in June 1882, by a French-British treaty, was declared a colony on October 12 of the same year, and divided into three territories, including French Guinea whose definitive borders, however, would take more time to establish. In July 1887, a French-Portuguese treaty defined the border between French Guinea and Portuguese Guinea; in January 1895, the Guinea-Sierra Leone border was agreed upon by the French and the British; in January 1911, the French administration and the Liberian government ratified an accord defining the Guinea-Liberia border (Rivière 1971: 27; De Benoist 1979: 15-25). In the meantime, in October 1899, a French decree had transferred from French Sudan (modern-day Republic of Mali) the *cercles* of Dinguiraye, Siguiri, Kouroussa, Kankan, Kissidougou and Beyla, roughly a third of the territory of the modern-day Republic of Guinea (Rivière 1971: 27).

Fifty-nine years of administrative juxtaposition failed to prepare the ethnic Mande of these *cercles* to adjust to their uprooting from the traditional *Mandeba* (Greater Mande), or to ease religious tensions between the numerous segments of Guinea's population. So, by the time of independence, the country's ethno-religious entities were far from being culturally integrated. These entities consist of the Muslim Mande of Upper Guinea; the Fulani, Jakanke and Jallonke (Muslim), Basari, Bajaranke, and Koniagui (mainly animist and Christian) of Middle Guinea; the Kisi, Toma, Guerze, Kono, Mano, Lele, Konia (mainly animist and

Christian) and Tomamaniya (largely Muslim) of Forest Guinea; the Soso, Mende, Nalu, Baga, and Mikhifore (Muslim, Christian and animist) of Lower Guinea. Historically, the relations among some of these ethnic entities had been strained by decades or centuries of cultural frictions, religious prejudice and political tensions.

Claude Rivière explains that after having “pacified” them, French colonialism induced more subversive division and hostility among these ethno-cultural entities forcibly aggregated in the territory of French Guinea. Thus, by transforming traditional chiefs into agents of colonial canton chieftaincy (colonial municipality) and by granting self-serving privileges to displaced groups over larger autochthonous communities, the French administration reinforced ethnic frictions between Nalu and Landuma chiefs, between Fulani feudal lords and Jallonke serfs, between Temne *koroba* (warriors) and Baga of Kalum, and between *métis* of European descent and indigenous Guineans (Rivière 1971: 41).

This colonial policy of “divide-and-rule” weakened Islamic brotherhood causing Muslim leaders of the anti-colonial movement to face internal scissions in their following and betrayal from jealous neighbors. As a result of this cultural trauma, post-colonial nation building has been a struggle for sovereignty under new identities within the arbitrary colonial boundaries. The struggle has been carried on with a variety of means ranging from political mythology to deep-rooted cultural and spiritual values, such as Islam.

The Guinea in which the new political elite endeavored to build a modern nation emerged from this background of very limited cultural congruence. Also, the building of a national platform in Guinea by the regime of the PDG was further complicated by the little-anticipated consequences of the dramatic circumstances under which the same party had led the country to independence as well as by some of the policies that the new regime adopted afterward in an effort to curb the challenges of independence in the midst of political

adversity.

Upon achieving the de-colonization of the country in 1958, the leadership of the PDG, which had become the de facto and de jure leadership of the new state, was challenged on two fronts. First, the former colonial master belabored to isolate the new regime from the remainder of Francophone Africa and the West. Second, despite the apparently voluntary merger of former opposition parties into the PDG, just weeks before independence, the regime encountered serious difficulties in its attempts to legitimize its single-party system of government. The difficulties emerged from a clash over Touré's pursuit of a Maoist brand of party preeminence over the state, a pronouncement strongly opposed by right-wingers and vigorously supported by left-wingers in Touré's government.

Caught in this position, Sékou Touré turned to the Eastern Bloc for economic aid while resorting to Marxist interpretations of history. As a labor unionist, Touré had previously encountered Marxism in the *Cercles d'Etudes Marxistes* (CEM) which French leftists had organized in the 1940s to train "revolutionary elites" throughout the French Empire. Also, from 1946 to 1951, the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (RDA), the all-French African political movement as a territorial branch of which the PDG was formed in 1947, had virtually operated under the shadow of the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF).

However, as head of state, Touré first hesitated to commit the Guinean regime to socialism preferring the ambiguous ideology of "non-capitalist development." Most important perhaps, even after the adoption of socialism, he categorically rejected communism, basing his view of the socialist path on the "communal" nature of African societies in which family, village, and clan are the primordial parameters for any meaningful expression and understanding of individuality. Yet, as Lapido Adamolekun has observed, Touré's belief "that the traditional communal living in Africa would make the peasants

accept the establishment of agricultural cooperatives, which would gradually develop into collective farms” failed to materialize as “he found that Guinean peasants were unprepared to transfer their loyalties to ‘family,’ ‘village’ and ‘clan’ to an artificial group such as agricultural cooperatives. The cooperative system which was established collapsed, and most Guinean farmers continued their subsistence farming” (Adamolekun 1979: 63).

Despite Touré’s rejection of communism, the espousal of “Afro-Marxism” brought his regime into collision course with the Catholic Clergy and with local Islamic circles. As far as the Clergy is concerned, accounts of this collision course are found in the work of Raymond-Marie Tchidimbo, first African bishop of Conakry (1962-1970) and former political detainee (1970-1979). Downplaying the collaboration between the Catholic Church and the colonial administration in Guinea, Tchidimbo condemns the Defferre Law which granted semi-autonomy to France’s colonies in Africa and, consequently, democratically brought the PDG to power in 1957, with Sékou Touré as vice-president of the Semi-Autonomous Government Council. Tchidimbo’s contempt to this legislation is based, in part at least, upon the allegation that once in power Touré suspended sine die all subventions to Catholic schools throughout the country (Tchidimbo 1987: 86). Tchidimbo goes on to praise, “by intellectual honesty,” the colonial system for having understood, “—despite numerous errors in the exercise of power—that the sphere of personal freedom remained and shall always remain beyond the hold of society and government,” before depicting the PDG’s nation building effort as a deliberate “socialist-communist” adventure which, “in twenty-six years of reign, demolished what had been patiently built in sixty years of colonization” (Tchidimbo 1987: 124). One can understand why this clergyman could not get along with Touré the nationalist politician.

Against Tchidimbo’s characterization of the PDG regime as “primitive

communism,” which is arguably a reaction to Touré’s decision to expel, in August 1961, French Roman Catholic bishop Larb de Mileville who had publicly opposed the government’s proposed nationalization of Church schools, it is useful to also recall that Soviet Ambassador Daniel Semyonovich Solod was expelled in December 1961, following Touré’s denunciation of a Communist plot to destabilize Guinea for its declared non-alignment.

Even though Sikhé Camara argued that despite the contradictions having marked the Guinean government’s relations with individual members of the Catholic clergy Guinea maintained decent working relations with The Vatican (Interview, October 1992), it is no secret that the PDG regime’s honeymoon was much shorter with the Guinean Catholic Church than with most other spheres of power outside the party-state. But the causes of the divorce were more political than ideological and, arguably, go back to the general perception which predominantly Muslim societies had developed during the colonial period toward Christianity perceived as an agent of European imperialism. This perception grew particularly stronger in French Africa where the colonial administration, most often, adopted hostile attitudes vis-à-vis Islam. Due to its historical antecedence in these areas and its greater adaptability to African traditions, Islam had been accepted as “an African religion” and utilized in the resistance to European occupation. Put in the context of the history of globalization, this phenomenon epitomizes the clash of agents of globalization responsible for the forging of Africa’s so-called “triple heritage.”

As for the alleged conflict between Marxism and Islam in Guinea’s nation building history, it, too, is not free from controversy. Mamdou Béla Doumbouya, a founding member of the PDG and long-time unionist and spiritual leader, downplayed the allegation and suggested that even though some traditional chiefs co-opted in the colonial structures

stridently accused the PDG of being communist and godless, the party was able to demonstrate to the masses that compared to those chiefs it was more faithful to Islam's precepts of freedom, equality, justice and brotherly solidarity (Interview, January 1993). According to this interviewee, the fallen aristocracies and formerly privileged canton chieftains used the RDA's initial affiliations with the French Communist Party to misrepresent the PDG-RDA as a "godless party." The PDG-RDA countered by providing legal and political support, in high-profile litigation cases, to individual victims of power abuse in the hands of canton chieftains, including orphans and widows whose inheritance powerful chieftains had confiscated in flagrant violation of Islamic law.

Ibrahima Sory Fadiga, former secretary general of Guinea's National Islamic League, concurs and adds that the PDG never attacked Islam. Instead, it denounced individual clerics whose teachings and behavior were not only un-Islamic, but they were also contrary to the party's anti-colonialist program. In Fadiga's opinion, there was nothing special in this state of affairs: "It simply reflected the normal course of conflict of authority and conflict of interests in societies in profound transformation whereby decadent forces always fight to the last minute, sometimes using the most absurd arguments" (Interview, August 1992).

Chérif Nabaniou, former minister of Islamic Affairs and former secretary general of the National Islamic Council, perceived the matter differently when he argued that even though the PDG was never anti-Islamic its policies did nonetheless contradict Islamic precepts in key areas of national policy. One such area was the adoption of socialism. "Islam advocates neither socialism nor capitalism, and yet the PDG imposed socialism's institutionalized collectivization of property in agriculture and commerce" (Interview, September-October 1992).

One is inclined to infer from the preceding that the attitude of the PDG toward both

religion and Marxism was aimed at establishing the party's political predominance over the different forces competing for power in Guinea in the waning years of the colonial era, including the French administration, the old traditional chieftaincies which the same administration had turned into proto-colonial structures, and para-political forces whose power rested on the manipulation of religion.

In fact, under the Socialist Cultural Revolution (SCR) proclaimed in 1968, this policy was expanded to include “demystification,” a campaign aimed at neutralizing the *marabouts* (clerics) and at abolishing secret societies of animist initiation and fetishist divination. As I have discussed elsewhere (Camara 2005), the principal objective of the SCR was the standardization of all aspects of Guinean culture, including but not limited to religion and education, according to norms determined in the political program and ideological doctrine of the single-party regime in place since independence.

Diplomatic Offensive and the Politics of Islamic Internationalism

The politics of Islamic internationalism under Sékou Touré can be better grasped when analyzed from the systemic standpoint of the PDG regime's theory and practice of foreign policy as articulated in President Sékou Touré's writings from which one notes that Guinea's foreign policy was primarily focused on Pan-Africanism and anti-imperialism. In 1964, the Guinean leader wrote, “But our international policy is not conducted exclusively in view of Guinea's interests. We subordinate it to Africa's overriding interest” (Touré 1964: 297).

To subordinate Guinea's national interests to “Africa's overriding interest” and conduct a foreign policy accordingly was, in Touré's view, to hold a dual outlook whose justification is twofold. First, “A vertical development in Guinea would indeed inevitably result in cutting us off from the African context; hence, irrespective of its quality, it would be

extremely frail, since, in making for our isolation, it would weaken us” (Touré 1964: 297). Second, “If our development was an isolated phenomenon, if it was to make us retire within ourselves, it would not be very dangerous for imperialism and colonialism... Imperialism and colonialism desire as a lesser evil the isolation of Guinea, her walling in, which would limit the effects of her struggle against their privileges and powers of domination in Africa and in the world” (Touré 1964: 198). In the conditions of the Cold War, the PDG regime added to this framework that of non-alignment because, in Touré’s view, “To attempt to interpret Africa’s behaviour in terms of capitalism or Communism is to ignore the fundamental fact that Africa’s present conditions correspond neither to the essentials of capitalism nor to those for building up Communism, as generally admitted” (Touré 1964: 120).

In retrospect, therefore, it is from the triple perspective of the defense of national sovereignty, African unity, and non-alignment that Guinea’s official internationalist philosophy and politics under the PDG ought to be considered. Hence, the role of Islam ought to be examined as one of many venues in Guinea’s international policy geared toward upholding the principles of this triple perspective.

Even though the mid-1970s is generally considered to be a turning point in the political and ideological attitude of the PDG regime toward Islam, it is useful to know that as early as the first years of Guinea’s independence, Touré had established close personal and political relations with African Muslim leaders such as King Mohamed V of Morocco and Presidents Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria, Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. But in terms of ideological globalization through Islam, an attentive analysis of President Touré’s policy of *Offensive Diplomatique* officially launched through the International Ideological Colloquium of Conakry and the subsequent PDG Eleventh

National Congress of 1978 will help to understand the trend.

In 1978, Touré's regime was gradually emerging from a decade of relative isolation, including political tensions with neighboring Senegal and Côte-d'Ivoire (which Guinea had accused of harboring anti-PDG Guinean exiles) and an extremely challenging Western embargo due, allegedly, to Guinea's close ties to the Communist bloc and questionable human rights record. Indeed, in 1975, diplomatic relations were normalized with France. As a result, reconciliation was reached with the two Francophone neighbors in February 1978, and, in December of the same year, French President Valéry Giscard D'Estaing was scheduled for a state visit to Guinea (the first of its kind). In the heat of this "détente," the PDG leadership undertook the highly publicized task of hosting a forum on the role of ideology in African politics and international relations under the theme "Africa on the Move."

Judging by its unusually inclusive nature, one can argue that the forum was chiefly designed to sell to international public opinion the regime's new open-door policy without compromising its commitment to third world revolutionary ideology. Indeed, of the eighty-three foreign delegations representing states, political parties, labor unions, national liberation movements, and international organizations, fifteen were representatives of Muslim nations including Algeria, Egypt, Gambia, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen whose pronouncements were particularly well received by the Guinean National Islamic Council and Ministry of Islamic Affairs created two years earlier to further integrate Islam into the PDG political apparatus and further integrate Guinea into the international Islamic community.

Thus, international panels endeavored to tie Islam to revolutionary socialist ideology as a uniting factor among political parties and states sharing this religion and this ideology.

This transpired from the allocutions of a number of delegates from Muslim socialist states. Malek Bachour of the Iraqi Arab Socialist Baath Party indicated, “The meeting of revolutionary ideological forces which the Democratic Party of Guinea has organized constitutes, from our point of view, a serious and effective opportunity to share our experiences, to expose and overcome the challenges posed to the national liberation movements and to the socialist Revolution in the third world by the imperialist forces and their agents” (Machour 1979: 3). On the same tone, the secretary general of the central committee of the Yemenite Socialist Party, Abdoul Fattahi Ismaël, stated, “The active political solidarity linking our parties and our peoples in their common struggle against imperialism and for the triumph of liberty, democracy, peace and socialism shall remain strong” (Ismaël 1979: 3).

Still from the Islamic standpoint, the International Ideological Colloquium of Conakry was once and at the same time an occasion to ascertain anew the political unity of the world Muslim community against the enemies of Islam and Muslims everywhere. Dr. Mohamed Moatassine of the Moroccan Parliament expressed this when he stated, “Allow me, Mister President, from the height of this revolutionary tribune, to reiterate to our Palestinian brothers our total and constant support for their heroic and legitimate struggle against Zionism, agent of imperialism” (Moatassine 1979: 4). The Moroccan delegate also saluted President Touré for his contribution to the success of Islam:

As a Muslim [Mister President], you have liberated our sacred Religion [sic] from charlatanism, fanaticism and the prejudices it has endured for centuries. In short, through a just and honest view of the Islamic principles, you are restoring our Religion’s authentic revolutionary dynamics and freeing it from the hold of exploiters and from those who oppress a fundamental pillar of our society, namely women. Did the Prophet Saidina Muhammad not say, ‘The way to Paradise is paved by the steps of mothers?’ (Moatassine 1979: 4-5).

Following the colloquium and the National Congress, President Touré embarked, in

1979, on an unprecedented diplomatic shuttle which led him to Morocco, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait notably. Throughout these diplomatic missions, the Guinean leader emphasized his country's longstanding "privileged relations" with the Arab world and unwavering support for the Palestinian people because of which his government was among the first in Africa to break diplomatic relations with Israel in the 1960s.

As a result of the government's heightened political and diplomatic engagement, oil-rich nations such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Iraq, Iran and Libya provided much needed financial aid to Guinea. In addition, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Libya offered a number of scholarships, thus enabling Guinean students to pursue higher and vocational education in North Africa and the Middle East. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia established the Dar al-Mal al-Islamiyya Bank in Conakry, while Libyan, Tunisian, Iraqi, Iranian, and Moroccan businesses opened in Conakry.

Guinea's policy of Islamic internationalization also materialized through President Touré's increasingly active participation in Muslim organizations and programs in his cumulative capacities of first vice president of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, president of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Iran-Iraq War, and president of the Al-Quds Committee.

Quite interestingly, Guinea's increasing political respectability and diplomatic prestige among Muslim nation-states helped advance the Touré regime's quest for warmer relations with the West so by the end of the regime Guinea was, for the first time since the 1960s, enjoying meaningful bilateral relations with France, the United States and West Germany. Had President Touré's untimely death not cancelled the twentieth Summit of the OAU scheduled for May 1984 in Conakry (which would have made him the executive

president of the OAU for the following annum), the Guinean leadership could have perfected its political, diplomatic, and economic rapports both on the African and global levels.

Neo-Salafian Activism and Social Contradictions

From the fall of the PDG regime in 1984, to the present, the role of Islam in Guinea's experience in nation building and globalization has changed dramatically. For one thing, the long suppressed social-political contradictions having marked the twenty-six years of the PDG era surfaced among the country's different ethnic, regional and religious components. With the disappearance of the national political party, which had somehow succeeded in maintaining a semblance of national unity, different and often opposing forces converged from within and abroad with conflicting agendas for what is termed "the reconstruction of post-Sékou Touré Guinea."

During the 1984-1991 period of absolute military rule of General Lansana Conté's *Comité Militaire de Redressement National* (CMRN), this soul-searching society underwent a confusing period of transition, and religion quickly became a potent force of mass mobilization and political protest. This shifted the status of Islam from a party-controlled and state-centered instrument of political power to a self-decentralizing energy henceforth set to galvanize grassroots popular forces. Thus, the so-called "traditional" or *alsilamaaku* Sufi-oriented establishment soon faced new forces advocating spiritual reform as a solution to Guinea's growing political and economic problems. The revivalist movement of these "modern" forces also referred to as Wahhabi, which can be more accurately described as neo-Salafian activism relatively widespread in West Africa, was originally spearheaded by former students returning from North Africa and the Middle East and activists returning from neighboring West African countries such as Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, and Côte-

d'Ivoire where, unlike in Guinea, congregational Islam had flourished.

It is not all clear whether this latest revivalist trend constitutes in any substantial way a continuation of the earlier neo-Salafian movement which was eventually forced into retreat by the PDG anti-sectarian policy and whose reformist campaign and anti-colonial activities in French West Africa are examined in Lansiné Kaba's classic book (Kaba 1974). In fact, observers find an elusive contrast between the two reformist movements in that despite its relative radicalism the earlier movement gave some credit to "traditional" Islamic creeds in West Africa while the later one discredits proponents of these creeds as spiritually corrupt.

Observers also conceptualize the socio-religious frictions that the new trend of reformism has generated among Muslim Guineans as a contradiction between "traditionalists" and "modernists." The problem with this approach is that it is based on the flimsy assumption that there exists somewhere something that qualifies as "pure Islam" compared to which anything else is at best "stained Islam." Even though Islam has foundational precepts universally accepted by Muslims, the universality of the faith rests in large part upon the consciously acknowledged and celebrated diversity of the Ummah. "Diversity exists on various levels, including the exegetical, legal, theological, social, and political," Seyyed Hossein Nasr points out before recalling this saying of the Prophet: "The difference of view among the scholars of my community is a blessing from God" (quoted in Sharma 1993: 431).

What then qualifies the neo-Salafian reformists as "modernists?" What do proponents of this theory mean by "traditionalists" and "modernists?" What is the theological basis for such contradistinction? These problematic terms are applied differently to a variety of social-cultural and spiritual realities throughout the Muslim world, from Morocco to Indonesia. Nonetheless, Islamologists argue that because the *Qur'an* is known

and accepted as Allah's unchanging revelation and the ultimate reference for settling any legitimate argument on faith, life, and the afterlife, Islam, the religion based upon this revelation, does not lend itself to any theological distinction between "traditional Islam" and "modern Islam."

Furthermore, if by modernism it is meant innovation, the simple fact that the so-called Wahhabis oppose the incorporation of Sufism and indigenous African traditions does not necessarily make them innovators. On the contrary, insofar as their reformism is aimed at restoring what they hold as the integrity of Islam as preached and practiced by and under the Prophet Muhammad, thus following the puritanical example of Muhammad ibn Wahhab, they are conservative in essence. Indeed, "innovation" in the sense of *bid'a*, which is prohibited in Islam, is incompatible with the puritanical tenets of Wahhabiyya.

However, examined from the standpoint of the social-political history of Guinean society, the frictions between Wahhabiyya and *Alsilamaku* are based less on theology than on practical societal issues such as the Wahhabis' strong opposition to the existence of what they perceive as an oppressive hierarchy of *karamokos* (clerics) in parts of Guinea where there has long been a morbid attachment to social discrimination against relatively newly Islamized communities by descendants of earlier proselytizers. The reformists are also opposed to beliefs and practices ranging from levirate diktat (the tradition of remarrying a widow to the brother of her deceased husband) to *maraboutism* (talismán making, soothsaying, and spell casting).

These contradictions have on occasions resulted in violent confrontations in recent years. Beyond its varied local manifestations, however, the pattern reveals a significant new facet of Guinea's experience of Islamic globalization whereby the widespread availability of the *Qur'an* in languages other than Arabic (including French in this case) and the rapid

development of global transportation and communication technologies allow grassroots society to challenge traditional scholarship's monopoly over religious knowledge. Since the mid-1980s, private Islamic bookstores and cultural clubs have proliferated throughout Conakry and other large cities. In addition, unlike the state-sponsored quotas of the PDG era, more and more Guineans have the opportunity to make the *hajj* (great pilgrimage) and *umrah* (lesser pilgrimage) to Mecca and to interact with Muslims of diverse cultural backgrounds and political leanings.

Furthermore, beginning in the early 1990s, Guinea has been experiencing an increasingly aggressive campaign of evangelization by various Christian denominations from the United States and other Western nations targeting areas where the influence of Islam remains minimal. Some evangelical missionaries use material and financial rewards to attract followers from among indigent individuals while some (Neo-Apostolic missionaries notably) go as far as to profess toleration of polygamy and open mixture of animism and Christianity. Likewise, and perhaps in an effort to counter evangelization and secularism, unidentified Muslim organizations are pursuing an equally aggressive trend of recruitment of Wahhabi fellowship particularly among women of precarious conditions.

Two main characteristics distinguish this trend of "Wahhabization." First, judging by the dramatic change in the lifestyle of neophytes (former prostitutes and hitherto destitute women from broken families have suddenly shown signs of prosperity concomitant to their adoption of the Wahhabi public dress code and behavior), it is clear that whoever is behind it seems able and willing to invest abundantly in the endeavor. Second, the neophytes seem to be sworn to total secrecy as to the origin of their newfound wealth and puritanical piousness. Why are women in difficulty the primary target of this ongoing "Wahhabization?" Why so much secrecy among neophytes? Why are non-Wahhabi husbands of these

neophytes quick to resign to their so-called fate?

Even though I have no evidence to substantiate widespread rumors among non-Wahhabi locals suggesting that some of these new revivalists could be involved in drug trafficking, I would point out that in recent years a number of Guinean citizens have been arrested for drug trafficking abroad. Another rumor insinuates a possible tie between local revivalists and wealthy global terrorist organizations. On the other hand, there are those who speculate that in its aggressive “war on terror” the CIA could be playing one Wahhabi wing against another by financing the recruitment of needy and vulnerable Muslims for the purpose of injecting them into sleeper cells in this and other parts of the world. Proponents of this version indicate that observers have in fact wondered whether some of the activists are not connected to “jihadists” with whom they are known to have had contacts in nations such as Algeria, Egypt, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan (long-bearded Pakistani nationals appeared from time to time in mosques with local “*ustaths*,” teachers in the Arabic language, that is, in Conakry).

Whatever the case, Guinean activists do not seem to mind being portrayed as supporters of the ideals of movements fighting for the “redemption of Islam.” Also, while many found “Operation Desert Storm” justified by Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait, most consider “Operation Iraqi Freedom” to be a calculated invasion of a Muslim nation by a non-Muslim force. This invasion, the sufferings of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, and America’s current harsh rhetoric toward other Muslim nations have lately prompted some of these activists, hitherto less vocal on such matters, to openly express admiration for Usama bin Laden’s challenge to America, referring to the Al-Qaeda leader as “*Waare nden*” (“The Beard” in Fulani), an expression generally reserved for heroes. The ongoing destabilization of occupied Iraq, the recent Israeli-Hesbullah war, and President Bush’s

utterance of the term “Islamic fascism” only add more fuel to this burning fire. However, there is no evidence linking these reformists to any terrorist network.

What is evident is that Guinea has come a long way from the arch-disciplinarian PDG regime under whose watch the present twists and turns were practically unthinkable. Of course, one must also be mindful of the fact that the history of the world has been tremendously accelerated lately and that this acceleration has advantages and disadvantages for the whole world while arguably being more challenging for developing societies. Though reflective of the political, economic, and social-cultural transformation of Guinean society since independence, in that the current religious fervor swiping the nation is in large part a response to the mounting crisis addressed earlier, the new experience of Islamic globalization in Guinea is not simply a local prototype. It is also a part and parcel of a phenomenon of self-ascertainment growing among African Muslim communities across national boundaries. With contemporary Western theories and practices of globalization being widely criticized in Africa as yet another wave of neo-colonial policies and with Muslim Africans resenting what many consider to be an anti-Islamic new world order flooding the already marginalized continent, “traditionalists” and “modernists” seem to espouse the same vague ideal of a global Islamic revival, if not revolution, to restore the dignity and strength of the spiritual heritage of Muslims around the world. Both maintain that Islam is the only true response to the ongoing humiliation and exploitation of Muslim societies. In Usman Muhamad Bugaje’s words,

The salvation of the African economy, from all that can be seen, cannot lie in the bloody and cruel hands of those who have sought to conquer, exploit and dominate Africa for the last five centuries or so. The meetings of the G-8 seem to be only distinguishable from the Berlin conference of 1884 in its sophistication, subtlety and efficacy. Nor can the future of Africa lie in the feeble and soiled hands of mercenary regimes, whose primary concern has never been the interest of their people, but the elusive game of self-perpetuation

which is pursued vigorously and recklessly until expiry of either the leader or the state that he heads...Africa's only hope seem [sic] to lie with an inward looking, independent, confident, committed and courageous leadership, which so far only the Islamic movements seem capable of providing (Bugaje 1999).

Conclusion

With an estimate 85 to 87 % Muslims ranking Guinea among the most Islamized nation-states of West Africa, I would argue that no study of this country's past and present can be fully comprehensive without giving Islam its due consideration. Whether considered from the standpoint of early Mande and Fulani proselytism or the spiritual and political role of Islam in Guinean anti-colonial nationalism, or from that of the PDG ideological diplomacy or post-PDG self-decentralizing activism, Islam has played a central part in the delicate balance of statecraft/nation building and globalization.

One can put Guinea's case of Muslims' experience of globalization in a more comprehensive historical perspective by pointing out with John O. Voll that although Islamic activist movements emerge from a particular set of circumstances, they are more often than not characterized by an intricate combination of territoriality and universality in that they do not occur in isolation from the rest of the world (Voll 1982: 3). Therefore, it matters little whether activism occurs in what is considered the core of the Muslim world or in what is considered its peripheries (West Africa, in this particular case). Nor does it matter much whether it is viewed as a local, regional, or global phenomenon. What matters the most are the motives, the agenda, and the methods which activists advocate under a given set of circumstances, and the consequential marks of their actions on their immediate and distant political and socio-spiritual environments. From this perspective, both the PDG state-centered Islamic internationalization and the present neo-Salafian revivalist/reformist movement can be envisioned as Islamic activism.

The politicization of Islam by the secular regime of the PDG through the merger of the country's diverse Muslim forces under the National Islamic Council served this double purpose of nation building and globalization. While it is unclear in which direction of the dual endeavor the regime made its most lasting mark, one is inclined to suggest that this ideological single-party regime was able to effectively utilize Islam as a steppingstone toward ending its political and diplomatic isolation from the West. With the secretary general of the National Islamic Council also being the Minister of Islamic Affairs and head imam of the Great Faisal Mosque of Conakry (an infrastructure symbolizing the PDG institutionalized Islamic globalization built by Moroccans and financed by Saudi Arabia with \$28 million), the state immersed the Islamic faith in a sea of ideology, thus utilizing its most effective asset to efficaciously connect with the Muslim world at large and benefit substantially from the global auspices of Islam.

The current global crisis involving Islam as a prime target in the name of international security, as many Muslims see it, could not have come at a worse time for Guinea. The culture of rampant political corruption, poverty and revolving failure of governance having plagued General Lansana Conté's regime has also transformed the country slowly but surely into a breeding ground for all forms of extremism. The causes of this dire state of affairs reside in a variety of factors not least of which is the Bretton Woods Institutions' infamous Structural Adjustment Program, the shortsighted implementation of which suddenly produced an unprecedented volume of unemployment itself increasing exponentially as thousands of college graduates join each year this mass of left outs. These factors coupled with an anarchical opening of Guinea to the rest of the world have ultimately resulted in a rapid decline of hope and morality, lending a growing number of Guineans to questionable behavior.

I would, therefore, argue that neo-Salafian/Wahhabi activism is primarily aimed at Guinea's political and economic crisis and secondarily at what is widely perceived as Western neo-colonial new world order and plundering of African resources while supposedly promoting democracy and free trade. It must be noted though that like Muridiyya in Senegal and Ahmadiyya in Sierra Leone, for instance, Wahhabiyya in Guinea is not intrinsically anti-Western (though it is not exactly pro-Western either). In fact, some of this movement's most vocal leaders are reported to have repeatedly uttered: "we are 'anti-' no one. We are anti-anti-Islam and want only the welfare of our brothers and sisters in Islam here and around the world. Only those opposed to that welfare consider us to be anti-themselves." Arguably, this in itself makes Wahhabi activism in this West African nation-state a local manifestation of contemporary global Islamic revivalism whose underlying aim is the restoration of what it views as Islam's rightful authority over, and guidance for Muslims everywhere. This is perhaps what Voll means when he writes that Islamic activist movements do not occur in isolation and that they operate in the broader interactions of their time.

On the other hand, however, just as nineteenth- and twentieth-century secularist anarchists shook Europe the way they did, twenty-first-century religious organizations with political agendas outside mainstream Islam, or whatever world religion for that matter, are predisposed to shake or even reshape the world. Such organizations have demonstrated their extraordinary ability to transmute from moderate to extremist national forces and, ultimately, to international underground movements willing to resort to violence, unless adequate measures are taken. Such measures must include objective acknowledgement of the real problems that religious activists seek to solve and rational distinction between terrorism and legitimate reformism. This means, for instance, that when the state is the problem, as is mainly the case in Guinea, proper recognition of the fact must be followed by concrete and

reasonable action of positive change.

Viewed from the analytical perspective of Joel S. Migdal's "strong society and weak state" paradigm, the history of religious activism, political change, and social contradictions in Guinea is once and at the same time an issue of "deterioration of old social control" and "transformation of social organizations into state institution" (Migdal 1988: 86-96). It is so in that it has repeatedly challenged and often weakened existing mechanisms of state control, thereby forcing the state to reengineer social organizations—religious movements in this particular case—which it more or less successfully transforms into state institutions or, at least, as new mechanisms of social control. Whether with French colonialism, West African "theocratic" aristocracies, Sékou Touré's civilian autocracy or Lansana Conté's military junta, Islamic activism has, from time to time, cornered the state in a position of crisis and reconsideration leading to what Migdal terms triangular accommodation for political survival. Such political acrobatics rarely produced positive social results and are more likely to generate far-reaching crises in correlation with the current international situation.

International organizations and states, big and small, ought to face this historical fact realistically if lasting peace and security are to be restored. The emerging tendency to dismiss the historical relevance of the state in the name of globalization is at best a hypocritical argument and at worst an imperialistic doctrine. It is hypocritical because the dismissal applies mostly to the weaker states of the third world while at the same time the state in the developed world is undergoing an unprecedented consolidation in the name of security. It is imperialistic because the forced permeability of third world national borders to foreign interests whereby multinationals spearhead the mainly one-way economic traffic on the global highways differs from colonialism in form but not in substance. And yet, the same developed world is quick to "strongly urge" the states deemed obsolete to promote

democracy, protect human rights and, most of all, cooperate with powers under assault in their “war on terror” because, as President George W. Bush enunciated it, “either you are with us or with the terrorists.”

The fact is that only when the responsibility is assumed in a way which favors the formation of a truly international community (in lieu and place of the current bodies of superpower-manipulated venues reminiscent of post-World War II international clientelism) will national leaderships be able to responsibly address the real causes of religious extremism. Only then could the world enjoy healthy international relations and only then could it reverse the current freefall from the wasteful Cold War maneuvers to a dreadful Cold Peace game whereby, as an American analyst put it, intimacy necessarily breeds contempt.

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Interviews

Dr. Sikhé Camara, Sorbonne graduate, WWII veteran, former judge, former minister of Justice, former minister of Education, former ambassador, former member of the PDG central committee and Politburo, former political detainee under the Conté regime, lawyer and magistrate, interviewed in October 1992.

El Hadj Mamadou Béla Doumbouya, founding member of the PDG, former union leader, former governor, former ambassador, former member of the PDG central committee and government, former member of the National Islamic League, interviewed in January 1993.

El Hadj Ibrahima Sory Fadiga, theologian, former member of the National Islamic Council, former advisor to President Ahmed Sékou Touré for Islamic affairs, founding member and former secretary general of the Union of Guinean Ulema for the Development of Islamic Culture, former secretary general of the National Islamic League and former head imam of the Great Faisal Mosque of Conakry, interviewed in August 1992.

El Hadj Chérif Nabaniou, theologian, former representative of the *Union pour la Culture Islamique* in West Africa, former ambassador, former minister of Islamic Affairs, former secretary general of the National Islamic Council, former head imam of the Great Faisal Mosque of Conakry, former adviser to President Ahmed Sékou Touré for Islamic Affairs, and former political detainee under the Touré regime, interviewed in September-October 1992.