GLOBALIZATION AND THE MUSLIM WORLD:

Sub-Saharan Africa in a Comparative Contxt

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INTRODUCTION

Many different reasons have been advanced for the rise of Islamic revivalism in Africa and elsewhere in the world – from the effects of drought in the Sahel region of the continent to Islam's presumed innate propensity for violence and fanaticism. What I propose to focus on in this essay is the possibility that the many forms of Islamic revivalism that we see today are themselves, at least in part, a consequence of globalization. How, then, has globalization, sometimes acting in concert with other forces, contributed to the resurgence of Islamic revivalism, in its many African faces, in the last couple of decades?

Globalization can be seen as the process by which regions of the world become linked, at various levels of society, through an expanding network of exchanges (of peoples, goods, services, ideas, traditions etc.) across vast distances. The process itself goes back to the heyday of mercantilism, voyages of "discovery" and empire building, but it did not reach its pinnacle until the late twentieth century. Since the end of the Cold War globalization has increasingly assumed an American face: In many instances, in fact, it has come to mean Americanization. As Bill Readings has put it, "Americanization in its current form is a synonym for globalization, a synonym that recognizes that globalization is not a neutral process in which Washington and Dakar participate equally" (1996: 2)

It is possible to distinguish between economic globalization, political globalization and cultural globalization. Though interdependent, these three articulations of globalization have triggered various manifestations of Islamic identities of the revivalist type in Africa and, of course, elsewhere in the world. And it is to the interplay between these forms of globalization and faces of Islamic revivalism that we must now turn.

ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION AND THE SOUL OF SOUL-LESS CONDITIONS

A prominent feature of economic globalization has been the sustained use of economic power by stronger states to penetrate the economies of weaker nations in the ultimate interests of the stronger. This unequal relationship is manifested by a wide array of established structures – ranging from the omnipresence of western multinational corporations to the pervasiness of the "almighty" US dollar in international economic relations. The financial advantages unfairly pursued in this manner have included access to markets, opportunities for private investment, availability of raw materials, and access to cheap labor.

On the whole, economic globalization has deepened the marginalization of Africa. It has often led to the virtual collapse of local economies and thrown basic social services (education, health care etc) into a state of severe crisis. It has increased the suffering of large sections of African populations – spreading poverty, misery and hardship. Under these circumstances many Muslims have turned to some Islamic moral code to find a sense of direction and draw sustenance against the agonies of deprivation.

In the process of this spiritual and identitarian quest in Islam, Muslims have sometimes organized themselves in new ways to address their needs of basic survival. Community-based groups, some of men, some of women, and some of both sexes, have sprung up in parts of Muslim sub-Saharan Africa, becoming platforms of organizational work to improve the quality of life for individuals and the community at large. In the aftermath of the civil war in Somalia, specifically, such Islamicist networks have virtually come to funtion as an alternative government. It is significant that these grassroots efforts often go hand in hand with a renewed quest for Islamic learning among community members. Community reconstruction and religious renewal are seen as intertwined phenomena.

In some cases, Muslims have gone beyond the local community to form non-governmental organizations with a wider constituency in mind. While drawing from local resources, many of these NGO's also solicit support from Muslim agencies and countries abroad and may even have Muslim foreign nationals amongst their staff. Though their mission may be focused on a specific nation, therefore, a number of these NGOs are pan-Islamic in their material, logistical and human resources.

Though stimulated by global economics, these Muslim NGOs have sometimes also been victims of global politics in their national expression. Following the August 1998 bombing of the USA embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, for example, President Daniel Arap Moi quickly banned a number of Muslim NGOs operating in the country, seemingly at the behest of the American FBI. Though this decision was later rescinded after much legal jostling, Moi's action had served as yet another source of Muslim grievance against his leadership and an added catalyst for the politicization of Islam in Kenya.

Muslims organizing themselves in new ways to alleviate suffering in their communities and create conditions for community development has certainly been one of the more positive outcomes of the ravages caused by economic globalization. To this extent, Muslims have complemented the efforts of other developmental initiatives and have even collaborated with Christian-led NGOs for the benefit of all.

On the other side of the picture, however, the competition for dwindling resources has sometimes been so stiff that it has generated severe religious tensions in some African societies. In Cote d'Ivoire, for example, Houphouet Boigny, the first president of the country known for his steadfast Roman Catholicism, was able to maintain the allegiance of his Christian, Muslim and other religious subjects well into the late 1980s when the country was supposedly experiencing an economic boom of a sort.

Increasingly, however, the situation deteriorated and the economic bubble eventually burst. Among the hardest hit were people of Muslim origin who were concentrated in the trade profession. Once supporters of Houphouet, they now became his opponents, increasingly seeing him as being more responsive to his Christian constituents than to other Ivoirians. And the monumental basilica, the Notre Dame de la Paix, that he had constructed in the country now came be seen as a symbol of disproportionate Catholic dominance, real or imagined, in the affairs of the state (Kaba, 2000: 198-199). The co-existence between Muslims and Christians that had once defined Cote d'Ivoire was now in jeopardy as Christian-Muslim tensions began to build up.

In the Sudan, mounting pressures of economic decline also led to a growing momentum of popular revivalist Islam. This development eventually forced the then Ja'far Numeiry, in a remarkable chameleon act, to transform himself virtually over-night into a die-hard Islamicist of a sort. In a 1983 mental coup against the self he changed the

Sudan into a quasi-Islamic state, promulgating a series of rather notorious *Sharia* laws, fore-grounding religion as a factor in the North-South conflict than it had previously been. A religious maneuver thus devised to mask the regime's own incapacity to deal with the economic crisis, ended up fuelling new religious tensions in the long-standing civil war in the country.

POLITICAL GLOBALIZATION AND THE IMPERATIVE OF PLURALISM

Since the 1990s Africa has been experiencing the collapse of one autocratic regime after another. Local and international pressures have forced even the most uncompromising autocrats of Africa to open the doors to political pluralism. Except in a few countries – like Uganda, which is still experimenting with a no-party arrangement -- the multiparty system, in particular, has come to be widely embraced almost throughout the continent even as people continue to struggle for the realization of other dimensions of liberal democracy.

This opening up of the political space, however, has also allowed constituencies that had hitherto felt marginalized or subjected to internal colonialism to rise up, affirm their presence and demand their rights. This has been true of ethnic groups as much as of religious communities, of race as well as of gender. All this is part of the centrifugal face of globalization. Repressed Muslim minorities or newly threatened Muslim communities have thus taken advantage of the political space to express a new sense of identity in relation to the nation-state as part and parcel of a democratic struggle to inscribe themselves in a reconfigured national space.

A good illustration of this phenomenon is again that of Cote d'Ivoire. The Muslim-Christian tensions that were generated by the economic recession in the country eventually spilt over into the post-Houphouet and newly instituted multiparty dispensation. Upon his death in December 1993, Houphouet was succeeded by a fellow Roman Catholic, Henri Konan Bedie who is said to have been particularly repressive against Muslims. Special citizenship criteria were introduced through a bill whose overall effect was to subject Muslims, occupying mostly the northern region of the country, to undue screening and harassment.

Implicitly, the legislation created a dual system of citizenship favorable to the Christian southerners – deemed "pure Ivoirians." The northerners, recognizable by their clothes and surnames, were now liable to be confused with alien residents: identification cards were checked at random by the police, even near the mosques. The security forces in frequent roundups in the poor sections of Abidjan and other southern cities often humiliated the northerners and tore their identity cards. (Kaba, 2000: 200)

This trend of events led to the formation of a radical Muslim organization, the National Islamic Council (CNI), led predominantly by graduates from Islamic universities in Africa and elsewhere, committed to struggle against Muslim oppression. "By 1994, Islam had become a powerful vehicle of political opposition in the Cote d'Ivoire" (Kaba, 2000: 201).

The situation in Cote d'Ivoire can be compared to some degree with that of Kenya. Muslims in Kenya have long felt like second class citizens. There is currently a court battle in Kenya over a government regulation requiring Kenyans with Islamic names to produce additional documentary evidence to prove their citizenship status than is usually required of other Kenyans. There have also been claims of unfair treatment in other domains of society, including employment and education. Some have gone as far as to describe the condition of Muslims in Kenya, in general, and at the Coast – where they are presumed to be in the majority – in particular, as one of "internal colonialism." And it is partly in response to these conditions that the yet unregistered Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) came to be born in the early 1990s and whose political spirit continues to be alive, to one degree or another, to this day (Oded, 2000; Chande, 2000: 351-353). IPK thus became one manifestation of a local Muslim identity turned radically political in the context of new expressive spaces wrought, in part, by forces of globalization.

But there has also been the formation of non-partisan Muslim organizations like the Muslim Consultative Council and Muslim Civic Education Trust which have sought to advocate for greater inclusion of Muslim and Muslim concerns in the political process. And even long established Muslim organizations, like the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, that had hitherto chosen to remain "apolitical" have now been forced by their constituents to play a more active political role in the quest for change, to intervene in

favor of a more democratic and just Kenya, just as Christian organizations like the NCCK and the Catholic Church have been doing for a long while.

Significant about this particular political expression of Muslim identity, however, has been the absence of a spiritual quest. Mosques have indeed served as important venues of discussion about the plight of Muslims in the country: But even here the general flow of politically oriented sermons has been towards political mobilization rather than spiritual renewal. What we see here, in other words, is the exercise of Islam not as a religion but as a source of collective identity. And more or less the same phenomenon has been observed in Tanzania and Uganda (Chande, 2000: 355-365), the political peculiarities of the individual countries notwithstanding.

Yet another manifestation of revivalism triggered by the democratic momentum is that of Shariacracy in Nigeria. Here Muslims are not an oppressed minority; on the contrary, they had long been a formidable force politically. But, democratization in Nigeria led to certain insecurities among sections of northern Muslim bourgeoisie that they would lose the political edge they had been enjoying in the country to the already economically dominant south. And precisely because democracy as pursued in Africa today has a western face, the Northern Muslim bourgeoisie has reacted to it with a quasi-Islamic assertion (Ali Mazrui, 2001). To this extent, the "Sharia question" is inspired less by religion than by the politics of power in a highly sectarian national space. The question has thus been forced on Nigeria's political agenda as to whether, in a federal democracy, different states can have different laws to govern their citizens – just as some states in the USA maintain the death penalty and others do not.

CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL ISLAM

The economic and political systems fostered by globalization, of course, have come with their own accompanying values and beliefs. These can be considered one aspect of cultural globalization. The neoliberalist value of "profit over people," for example, -- leading to America's adamant refusal to be a signatory to international environmental protection agreements in spite of its notoriety as the leading culprit of environmental degradation -- has earned the country mounting wrath of the global civil

society. Similarly, Machiavellian values in America's foreign policy continue to provoke the moral indignation of many throughout the world.

The USA's position on democratic transitions in the "Third World" is a case in point. America advocates liberal democracy for all. Yet, as in the case of Algeria, it is quick to use its influence to discourage the election of Islamic parties through a popular democratic process.

Or consider the plight of the Kurds. When the USA was ostensibly keeping the government of Iraq out of its northern part in order to protect Kurds, Turkey launched a cross-border offensive of some 30,000 troops into Iraq in hot pursuit of its own Kurds. Since 1995 Turkey's planes have crossed Iraq's borders from time to time to bomb Kurds. In other words, the US no-fly zone has prevented Iraq from reaching the Kurds but has allowed Turkey to kill as many Kurds as it chooses.

One can mention other instances of America's failure to act with honor in the Middle Eastern region – from the promiscuous sale of arms to those who turn them against innocent civilians to its total disregard for the lives of thousands of Iraqi children silently killed by US-backed sanctions. These and numerous other incidents of American hypocrisy and double standards are examples of one political cultural value that continues to shape the country's relations with other nations of the world and which it seeks to inscribe and validate in global politics. And all these developments are not unrelated to the web of fundamentalism that has produced the extremist elements responsible for plunging America into the tragic terror of September 11, 2001.

As for Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, it may be America's role in Palestine and Saudi Arabia that has had the most significant impact on their global consciousness. The Palestinian question, of course, is widely known. The story extrends from the creation of the Zionist state of Israel, to the 1982 orgy of murder in the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatilla and the subsequent invasion of Lebanon – resulting in over 20,000 deaths of civilians -- to the more recent bombardment of Palestinian homes by US-made missiles and rockets. The Palestinians have not been oblivious to the American contribution to their own plight.

In Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, there has been the established presence of American troops in the country since the beginning of the so-called Gulf War in 1990.

More recently, American and other foreign businesses have been given "the right to own land, sponsor their own employees and benefit from concessionary loans previously available only to Saudi companies" (Bahgat, 2001: 6). In this move, the Saudi royal family may be trying to solidify its alliance with the USA in response to the growing opposition from an emergent capitalist formation within its own class. By so doing, however, it may also have intensified the insurrectional element from within, seemingly operating under the garb of Islam. The marriage between the self-interests of the Saudi family for survival and the global, neoliberalist interests of America are now generating new explosive conditions in that cradle of Islam.

The implications of American adventures in the Middle East have, of course, been experienced by other parts of the world as well. Kenya, for example, has paid the price more than once. In December 1980, the Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi was bombed as a direct consequence of tensions in the Middle East. On August 7, 1998, over two hundred Kenyans were killed when the US Embassy in Nairobi was bombed. And now, the country too has become a victim of the wave of bioterrorism that has hit the USA in October 2001. According to an editorial of a Kenyan daily, on October 18 – precisely the day that the culprits of the US Embassy bombings in East Africa were sentenced to life imprisonment in the USA – "Kenya became the first country in the world outside the US where incidents of the anthrax germ being received in the mail were positively confirmed" (*Daily Nation*, October 19, 2001). The face of terror has become international just as its causes have become increasingly globalized through American (and Western) economic, political and military pursuits.

For Muslims throughout the world, however, it may be the religio-cultural dimension of American penetration that has provoked their greatest anger. Islam's three holiest cities – Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem -- are seen to be under siege, with America leading the pack. If there is danger of a global Muslim insurrection against the West, this seeming violation of the three most sacred sites of Islam is likely to be one of the most powerful triggers.

Yet another dimension of cultural globalization has been the seeming "pollution" of the values, mores, traditions and sense of identity of "other" societies either by the hegemonic assimilation into a proselytizing culture or as a side effect of other forms of

domination such as economic, military or political. In effect, cultural globalization has come to mean cultural westernization.

As we have seen in the examples discussed above, Sub-Saharan African Muslim responses to the effects of economic and political globalization have tended to be nation-bound and defined by intra-national dynamics. Muslim responses to cultural globalization, on the other hand, have tended to be inter-national and even global in demographic scale, even when those responses are articulated within national spaces. The stream of Islamic consciousness triggered by cultural globalization, in other words, is indeed transnational.

Modern technology in transport and communication has promoted an unprecedented degree of interaction between Muslims across the world, especially those belonging to the middle and upper classes, forging new links in scholarship, trade, commerce and welfare programs. This network of relationships has naturally given fresh impetus to the **trans-national nationalism** of the Muslim *umma*, with a leadership drawn mainly from the ranks of the middle class. Its energies are targeted against western cultural imperialism, seeking to purge seemingly decadent values of the capitalist west from the global Muslim organism. But like all nationalisms, this pan-Muslim nationalism too has had its own tensions and contradictions.

One of the major contradictions, in fact, has to do with the status of women women. As in all religions, of course, the perspective of Islamic doctrinal positions in the Muslim world has been decidedly patriarchal. But it is the absolutist brand of Islamic fundamentalism that has, in fact, been the most repressive of women. While prepared to go to any extent to "liberate" the Muslim world from western imperialism, it has been busy consolidating structures of "enslavement" of the Muslim woman – all in the name of "true Islam." The nation-wide oppression of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban is, tragically, being mirrored in the domestic spaces of some revivalist Muslims in parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

Throughout the Cold War era, the West and the Muslim world sometimes became allies against a common enemy called Communism. The West regarded Communism as a politico-economic threat to its capitalist system and market ideology. The Muslim world regarded Communism – especially in its atheistic articulations -- as a cultural threat to its religious ethos and its unitarian ideology of one supreme God. Now they came together

as strange bed fellows to root out this "evil" in their midst. We now know that Usama bin Laden and his Al-Qa'ida organization as well as the Talibans are, in fact, a creation of America in the process of supporting the *mujahideen* against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Once the Cold War was over, however, it is the Muslim world that increasingly became demonized partly because it seemed the most resistant to western cultural infusions so necessary for the complete triumph of neo-liberalism. In the words of John E. Woods, a professor of Middle Eastern history at the University of Chicago, "Almost immediately after the collapse of Communism, Islam emerged as the new evil force" (*New York Times*, August 28, 1995). And so Islam and the West parted ways, sowing the seeds of a new anti-western Islamic revivalism. And it is from within this particular brand of Islamic revivalism that we have witnessed fringe tendencies of the extremist and suicidal type. The terror and fundamentalism of capital had now provoked the terror and fundamentalism of blind faith.

Expectedly, the primary target of this Islamic fundamentalist revivalism has been the West, its governments, its institutions, its people and its symbols. Its network is said to be world-wide and includes several countries in Africa. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, in particular, have now been identified as part of the world-wide "Bin Laden Belt." According to one newspaper report, "The US Federal Bureau of Investigation in tracking down a large number of suspects across East Africa believed to have links with Saudi fugitive Osama bin Laden" following the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC (*The East African,* September 24, 2000). It is yet unclear whether these suspects include East African nationals or whether they are exclusively foreign nationals who are operating in an ideologically sympathetic milieu.

By extension, this face of religion has also manifested itself in other ways. Where Muslims have felt numerically strong, for example, there have been organizational plans to assassinate leaders (as in the case of Anwar el-Saadat) or even to take over the government altogether, as happened in the Sudan in 1989. This is in situations where the regimes themselves, often run by fellow Muslims, are regarded to be morally corrupt and its leaders to be political "stooges" of the West.

It is not always remembered, however, that the victims of this Islamicist absolutism in the age of globalization have included Islamic reformers. The realities and challenges of the modern world have led some Muslim thinkers to seek a reinterpretation of the message of Islam. They have argued for a basic duality of the Islamic message – one totally historically relative and the other universal. They have asserted that the relativist message of Islam was intended only for seventh century Arabs and included many of the harsh punishments.

The other message of Islam was intended to be universal and for all time. The challenge of the entire scholarship about Islam was to distinguish the relativistic from the universal in Islamic doctrines through the exercise of *ijtihad*. And what is universal, it is argued, can only be completely revealed in the fullness of historical time. Some of these reformers, for example, have taken the unorthodox position that capital punishment today is no longer Islamic, holding that history has revealed enough of the causes of criminality and violence that society is no longer entitled to play God and forfeit the life of a human being. They have also tried to provide new readings of Islamic doctrines that challenge the more orthodox and patriarchal interpretations that continue to hold the Muslim woman in bondage.

One of the Muslim thinkers in sub-Saharan Africa who flirted with this kind of divine historical relativism and paid the ultimate price for it was Mahmoud Muhammad Taha, the Sudanese theologian and jurist. In his old age he was charged with apostasy and executed by the dictatorial regime of Jaafar Numeiry in Sudan in 1985 -- This, as we indicated earlier, is when Numeiry had opportunistically undergone an Islamicist conversion for his own survival as a president in a country where economic effects of globalization had turned Islam (in the words of Marx) into "a sigh of the oppressed creature". Of course, Hassan al-Turabi was later to disagree with the execution of Taha, stating that "To be punishable [as a capital offence] apostasy has to be more than just intellectual apostasy. It would have to translate into not only sedition but actually insurrection against society" (Lowrie: 1993: 44). But even within this interpretation, the Taha-type of intellectual exercise is considered a punishable religious offence – if not by death then by other means. Taha's followers too, often called "The Republicans, were hounded and persecuted in various ways. The Islamic absolutists thus triumphed over reformists who were experimenting between relativism and universalism in Islam.

In some other instances, adherents of fundamentalist Islamic revivalism are known to have completely withdrawn from local politics and from ongoing struggles for new national constitutions and more democratic orders. They are persuaded that it is utterly un-Islamic to participate in these political exercises, believing that the only valid constitution for Muslims is the Qur'an and the only valid political system is the one based on the principles of *Tawheed* (Unity of God), *Risalat* (Prophethood) and *Khilafah* (Vicegerency of man). And democracy is seen as affirming the traditions of *shurah* (consultation), *ijma* (concensus) and *ijtihad* (independent interpretive judgement). On a single day, it has become usual for me to receive as many as a dozen e-mails from East Africa sent by such revivalists – exposing Western hypocricy or effects of Western domination, urging Muslims to disengage from local politics of the nation-state and strive for unity of the Muslim *umma* towards the final installation of a *Khilafah* system.

TECHNOLOGY AND ISLAMIC REVIVALISM

There is, in fact, something of a paradox between globalization and Islamic revivalism. One of the greatest engines of globalization in the new millennium has indeed been the same technology that Muslim revivalists have used to widen their network of relationships. In an attempt to turn the world into a global village this technology, especially the communication and information technology of the World Wide Web and the Internet, have had two inter-related effects:

1. Shrinking of national sovereignty, and

2. Shrinking of distance.

In both these regards, Islam and globalization are fundamental allies.

Muslim identity, at least in the doctrinal sense, is deeply rooted in the idea of a common *umma* that defies national, racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries. The printed word may have been playing a major role in the construction of nationhood and in reinforcing national consciousness. The new communication technology, on the other hand, is contributing to the breakdown of nationhood and may be playing a role in the construction of other trans-ethnic communities. Like globalization and the new technology accompanying it, Islam is hostile to the insularity of nationalism of the state

and is oriented towards breaking down the barriers of competing national sovereignty. Modern technology is providing Islam with a fresh opportunity to realize its mission of a universal community of believers in a new way. One of the most recurrent pictures of Usama bin Laden that appears on American television, in fact, is of the man isolated in the rocky wilderness of what is supposed to be a section of Afghanistan with a cellular phone in hand, an apt symbol of the interplay between communication technology and pan-Islamicist connections.

The shrinkage of distance is also deeply embedded in Muslim consciousness. This orientation has three sources in Islam. Islam is a religion which has always wanted to celebrate both movement and direction. The Islamic era or calendar does not begin when the Prophet Muhammad was born in 570CE. It does not begin when he became a prophet forty years later. It does not begin when the prophet died in June 632 CE. The Islamic era or calendar begins when the Prophet Muhammad **moved** in 622 CE. The *Hijra* is, in a sense, a celebration of purposeful movement. The Prophet not only changed and synthesized religious paradigms, from pre-Islamic to Islamic. The Prophet also physically changed cities from Mecca to Medina. Islamic time began with physical movement.

Islam is a religion which has three holiest cities each of which signifies different levels of the death of distance. I have already mentioned Medina as the destination of Prophet Muhammad's decision to turn nascent Islam initially into a tale of two cities – from intolerant Mecca to receptive Medina.

Islam has also sought to shrink distance through faith. Mecca signified other aspects of the primordial death of distance. Five times each day millions of Muslims turn to Mecca, communicating with God through a city thousands of miles away. Mecca is a constant point of religious convergence for those in communication with the ultimate. Distance is threatened by faith. And, in the earlier centuries, Islam enlisted scientific and technological know-how in this very quest to overcome the barriers of distance.

But Mecca is also the city of the annual pilgrimage, receiving millions every decade from diverse corners of the world. They came by jet and camel, on foot and by boat. No barrier was challenging enough to stop the Muslim faithful from conquering the distance to Mecca.

The third most sacred city for Islam is, of course, Jerusalem over which Israelis and Palestinians are today in a stalemate. Especially sacred to Muslims is Al-Quds, focussed on the Dome of the Rock. Muslims believe that on the night of *Mi'raj*, distance was truly shrunk at three different levels: The prophet moved from Mecca to Jerusalem in a single night in the age of the camel; and he moved from earth to Heavens during the same night, ascending from Jerusalem; and while in Heavens the present age communicated with the ages of the past, for the Prophet was able to talk to Jesus, Moses and all the way back to Adam during the same night. The Prophet was back in Mecca before morning – breaking at least three sound barriers of cosmic experience: the distance between Mecca and Jerusalem; the distance between the earth and the Heavens; and the distance between the past and the present. And it is in this sense that Islam prepared believers for the age of the end of distance and the age of globalized digital simultaneity. But is the technology now falling into the "wrong" Muslim hands, so to speak?

The same factors of consciousness that have drawn some Muslim fundamentalists to the new information and communication technology may prompt a momentous movement of Islamic Reformation. In the twentieth century westerners have debated whether the Protestant Reformation was the mother of capitalism in Europe or whether the Christian Reformation was itself a child of earlier phases of the capitalist revolution. Max Weber's book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, puts forward a powerful case for the Reformation as the mother of capitalism rather than a child of economic change. On the other hand, other thinkers have identified pre-Reformation technological inventions as part of the preparation for both Protestantism and capitalism. In Francis Robinson's opinion, for example, "Print lay at the heart of that great challenge to religious authority, the Protestant Reformation" (1993: 229).

The question which has now arisen is whether what printing and the first Industrial Revolution did to Christianity, the Internet and Cyberspace and the third industrial revolution (of information technology) will do to Islam. (The second revolution was in global exploration and imperial trade). The printing press shook the foundations of Christian tradition. Will the Internet and World Wide Web shake the foundations of Islamic tradition? Will the new technology force open the doors of *ijtihad* afresh?

There are now multiple quasi-reformist initiatives in the Muslim world that seek to Islamize scientific knowledge as part of a bigger project, the Islamization of modernity

itself, even as Islam struggles to transform from within. The Islamization of computer technology is seen as a core component of this quest. As Butt explains:

> As information technologies are becoming the basic tools of manipulation and control, access to them will become the decisive factor between control and power or manipulation and subservience. In this powerful dilemma, the way forward, surely, is to modify the technology at the point of use to meet the needs and requirements – the goals – of the Muslim society. (1991: 62)

The realization here is that the power of skill has become vital. The question is whether Muslims are making progress in narrowing the digital divide between the West and the Muslim world in Africa and globally (Mazrui and Mazrui, 2001: 52-55).

As indicated earlier, in spite of the digital divide, Muslim revivalists in Africa have been making extensive use of the Internet and World Wide Web for purposes of advocacy and networking. But it is also true on the whole that African Islam has been remarkably tolerant of difference: Could Africa be the center of an Islamic Reformation? Lansine Kaba has observed that in many West African Muslim communities, and especially among the Mandinka, there is a new ethic of religious disagreement that has emerged in which Islamic radicalism has come to denote, not violent sectarianism, but a struggle fought first against the self and then within one's community (2000: 202-204). Combined with the possible catalytic effects of the new technology, will the emergent ethos propel Africa into a pioneer of an Islamic Reformation?

CONCLUSION

This essay has tried to provide an overview of some of the varied Islamicist responses to certain aspects of globalization – economic, political and cultural -- since the late twentieth century. While the larger part of the picture I have drawn has tended to focus on oppositional identities, there has been, in every case, pro-establishment Muslim groups and organizations – irrespective of whether the establishment is Muslim-controlled or otherwise. In the heated environment of the politics of pluralism, such bodies have often been described as auxiliaries of and even puppets of existing regimes – sentiments which, in some cases, are not altogether unfounded. But between these Muslim constituencies operating on the right of the mainstream and the politically radical

ones on the left, there is a whole range of Islamicist manifestations, organized or otherwise, which, taken together, provide a more realistic image of the woven tapestry of African Muslim identities in the new millennium.

But it is easy to overlook and fail to appreciate the entire spectrum of African Islam under the media spell (with its images of gun toting Islamicists and clandestine terrorists) and political pressures of the West, in general, and the USA, in particular. There is the danger that African leaders will take the West's problem with Islam and the Muslim world and make it their own – ignoring the fact African countries are in fact merely victims of a war between capital fundamentalists and religious fundamentalists. This attitude is well demonstrated by the situation in Kenya. President Daniel Arap Moi considered it perfectly appropriate to organize and lead a demonstration to condemn terrorism <u>not</u> when Kenyans were killed in the August 1998 bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi, but when Americans became the victims in the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington DC. In the same instance, the Kenyan president found it objectionable that Muslims in Mombasa "had the audacity" to organize a demonstration against the American bombing of Afhanistan (*Daily Nation*, October 20, 2001). There is also increasing concern that the US Federal Bureau of Investigation has seriously abused the free license and logistical support provided by the Kenya government to seek out "terrorists" in predominantly Muslim areas of the country following the September 11 attacks in the USA. At the same time, the state's xenophobia has escalated, leading to the active search, arrest and deportation of hundreds of "illegal immigrants," especially those of Muslim background (*Daily Nation*, October 18, 2001). Such further disregard of the rights of Muslims in the name of fighting terrorism may end up radicalizing even the more moderate groups in the society.

Also under the sway of the USA, there is the further danger that some African governments will use the specter of Usama bin Laden to explain away periodic protests of its Muslim minorities. This is probably what happened in Tanzania when Muslim youths sympathetic to the opposition Civic United Front rioted on August 24, 2001, demanding the release of an Islamic cleric jailed for 18 months in Morogoro allegedly for claiming that according to Islam "Jesus was not God." But, according to some unidentified Tanzanian police sources, the youth protest and the ensuing violence was masterminded and funded by Bin Laden's Al-Qa'ida (*The East African*, September 3,

2001). The truth of this matter may never be known. Yet, according to some reports, there is enough reason to believe that the Tanzanian government has been

> … using the threat of Islamic fundamentalism for its own benefit. The only electoral challenges to the ruling party of President Benjamin Mkapa comes from mostly Muslim Zanzibar, where the authorities regularly invoke the threat of Islamic fundamentalism at polling time. After the general elections last October, dozens were killed in Zanzibar by the security forces and hundreds fled to nearby Kenya. (*The Economist*, September 22-28, 2000: 42)

What must not be forgotten, then, is that Muslims in a number of African countries have genuine grievances that need to be addressed as part and parcel of the quest for a new order that is cognizant of and receptive to multiple voices within their borders. Looking for scapegoats elsewhere in the world for Muslim dissatisfactions internally can only aggravate an already grave situation.

The politics of globalized terrorism (by groups and states) have recently played themselves out in the divided West African nation of Nigeria with tragic consequences. Spurred by George Bush's declaration of a "crusade" against terrorism and Bin Laden's declared "jihad" against "infidels," Nigerians in the northern city of Kano turned violent against each other, sibling against sibling, Muslims reportedly on the march against their Christian brothers and sisters. By the end of that tragic October 2001 weekend, numerous people had been killed and dozens of buildings, including houses of worship, had been torched to the ground. Clearly, Africa is permitting its sympathy for American victims of the September 11 attack, on the one hand, and for Afghani victims of American bombs, on the other hand, to become a source of conflict among its own people.

African governments certainly do need to be mindful of any local connections in the wave of terrorism targeted especially against the West as part of an international effort against terrorism. After all, Africans are not unsusceptible to religious extremism of one kind or another. Khalfan Khamis Mohamed, one of the four people who planted the US Embassy bombs in Kenya and Tanzania, was himself a Tanzanian national. On October 19, some riotous young men are said to have broken away from a Muslim-led anti-war demonstration in Mombasa, Kenya, reportedly chanting pro-Usama and pro-Taliban slogans. Any responsible government will have to take these signals seriously concerning the possible use of their territories for the recruitment of potential "terrorists."

At the same time, however, African governments must not overlook the fact that, except in a few cases, Islam's record in Africa has been one of peaceful co-existence with other religious communities. They need to appreciate the presence of Muslim activist individuals, groups and organizations that are engaged genuinely in seeking solutions to the myriad problems confronting our communities. These bodies are part of "a quiet revolution," functioning constructively in civil society. Within their ranks may lie the seeds of an Islamic Reformation. We cannot afford to threaten their survival: On the contrary, they need to be provided with the space and conditions for growth and consolidation. For, in the final analysis, a self-assured and a self-confident Islam is a better partner for peace and for the struggle against terrorism than a threatened Islam.

In the meantime, however, Muslims in Africa and elsewhere need to overcome their own sense of insecurity and confront the enemy within, openly and honestly. They must speak out boldly and take a clear stand against oppression that is being perpetrated by Muslims often in the name of Islam. They must embrace the Islamic fundamental to "Wish for the other what one wishes for oneself." If Muslims wish to be free from domination, both external and internal, they must struggle to end the "enslavement" of others even within their midst – whether the others are non-Muslims, women or children. Only then can Muslim demands for their rights gain greater credibility world-wide. And only then can the doors of *ijtihad* open sufficiently towards an Islamic Reformation.

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