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Islam and Traditions in Africa: Friends or Foes?

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay of Islam and traditional African ideas, institutions and cultural practices. It reviews some cultural aspects of Islam and African traditions aiming to find-out how African cultural, i.e. religious, political, social and even linguistic values have either been accommodated by or have accommodated Islam. The framework involves the theories of inculturation, acculturation and enculturation. The method used was a critical analysis of some values of Africans and Muslims. Islam has accommodated and has been accommodated by some African traditions. Although, the two traditions have had some frictions such as the Muslim jihad which took away political power from some of the indigenous people, yet, they have generally coexisted peacefully as some African chiefs either became Muslims or African Muslims have become chiefs and sometimes even made Islam a state religion. The paper, therefore, concludes that Islam and African traditions have been friends and not foes.

Key words and phrases: Islam, Africa, traditions, inculturation, polygamy, divination, female circumcision

Introduction

Islam, both as religion and culture, has had profound impact on many African societies. Like Christianity and Western education, Islam has shaped and, in fact, will continue shaping even the future of such African societies. African historians have tasked themselves to revisiting the impact of Islam, Christianity, and secular or Western education on the African continent.¹¹⁶ Some of these scholars argue that Islam has tolerated African traditions more than Christianity.¹¹⁷ However, a critical look at the Islamic tradition shows some, if not most, of its norms being in conflict with African practices. One, therefore, wonders about what really informs this view among some African writers. Using the constructs of inculturation,¹¹⁸ acculturation¹¹⁹ and enculturation,¹²⁰ this paper, through the method of

¹¹⁶ "Religion in Africa", <http://eabaka.tripod.com/islam.htm>, retrieved on 18/11/12.

¹¹⁷ J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in West Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976). See also: M. Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (New York and London: Longman, 1984), pp.1-23, passim.

¹¹⁸ This is the process of adapting particular cultural values to another cultural background.

¹¹⁹ This is the process of assimilating or absorbing the cultural values of a different group.

critical analysis, scrutinizes and attempts to understand the interplay between Islam, on the one hand, and indigenous African ideas, institutions and cultural practices on the other. It samples and teases-out some of the cultural aspects of Islam and some African traditions to find out how African cultural, i.e. religious, political, social and even linguistic values have either been accommodated by or have accommodated Islam. Islam is perceived to have coexisted with some African cultures or traditions for ages. While, in some continents, the Islamic presence has caused some discomfort and even 'clash of civilizations', the Islamic presence in Africa, especially, in its encounter with some African traditions and cultures, has been relatively calm. Have those African traditions found a friend or a foe in Islam? What has been the nature of relationship between Islam and the traditions of the African? In finding answers to these questions, this paper reviews the cultural romance between Islam and some African traditions. How did Africa come into contact with Islam?

Islam, Its Beginning, and the African Factor

Islam started after the religious experience of Muhammad with the Ultimate Reality, Allah, the experience Rudolph Otto would describe as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*,¹²¹ in his encounter with Angel Jibril in the cave of Hira.¹²² This is reported to have happened in one of the odd nights of the last ten days of the month of Ramadhan in 610 CE. After this, Muhammad (hereafter, the Prophet) was commissioned as the universal prophet of humankind.¹²³ After narrating his experience back home in the house of his beloved wife, Khadijah, his initial converts were his household.¹²⁴ Later on, his friend, Abu Bakr joined him. As it often happens in history, no prophet is initially accepted in his own hometown. Therefore, when Muhammad started his prophetic preaching, his constant criticisms of the existing cultural, political, social, and economic order created what Leon Fetsinger would call "cognitive dissonance"¹²⁵ for the traditional Arabs of Makkah. This resulted in the painful persecution of his followers.

¹²⁰ It is the process in which one gradually accepts the practices or values of another person's culture.

¹²¹ R. Otto, "On Numinous Experience as *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans*", in L. Teugels and R. Ulmer, *Experience of the sacred: Readings in the phenomenology of religion* (Hanover, NH: New England University Press, 1992), pp. 77-85.

¹²² J. Subhani, *The Message* (Tehran: Foreign Department of Be'that Foundation, 1984), p. 176.

¹²³ Qur'an 21:107, 7:158, and 34:28.

¹²⁴ Subhani, *The Message*, pp. 176 and 190.

¹²⁵ L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 9. Cognitive dissonance, according to Fetsinger, is an "antecedent condition which leads to activity oriented [behaviour] toward

This led to the first migration of the Muslims to Abyssinia in Ethiopia in 615 C.E.¹²⁶ for protection from the Negus (King of Abyssinia). It is reported that the king risked the chances of international diplomatic friction with the Makkan overlords, the Quraysh, and the possibility of foreign attack and welcomed the Muslim fugitives to his land.¹²⁷ It is also reported that when Negus died, *Janazah* (an Islamic funeral prayer) was organized by the Prophet in Madinah in absentia for him.¹²⁸ This presupposes that Negus converted to Islam. If this is correct, then it is possible that he gathered a following "that more than likely" propagated Islam in Eritrea and north-western Somalia.¹²⁹ This then makes Africa the first continent and, undoubtedly, the first land to have received Islam and Muslims without misgivings, although, as a matter of fact, this event was a flight for self-protection from religious persecution. According to Miran,

Following their persecution by the Meccan Qurayyshi [conventionally spelt 'Qurayshi'] nobility, the Prophet Muhammad's *sahaba* (companions) crossed the Red Sea, landed on the Eritrean coast, and sought refuge in al-Habasha (Abyssinia) in 615 A.D.¹³⁰

However, in 639 C.E, during the reign of the second Caliph,¹³¹ a Muslim army invaded Egypt and two generations later, Islam spread across North Africa and the Maghreb.¹³² Below the Sahelian belt, Islam was introduced between the 12th and the 15th centuries. During the 18th and the 19th centuries, the establishment of trade networks by Muslims connected by

dissonance reduction" (p.3). This happens when feelings and facts are in conflict so that people find ways to reconcile them. This could result in an attack on the source of the conflict or dissonance. See also R.D. Graham, "Theory of Cognitive Dissonance as It Pertains to Morality", *Journal of Scientific Psychology* (2007), p. 20.

¹²⁶ W.M. Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (London: O.U.P., 1969), p. 66.

¹²⁷ M.H. Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad* (USA: American Trust Pubs., 1976); Subhani, *The Message*, pp. 176 and 190; Watt, *Ibid*; P.K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, 10th Ed. (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan), p. 106.

¹²⁸ Z. Awaleh, "The History of Islam in Africa: A Historical Overview" (2005), http://www.islamawareness.net/Africa/afri_article001.html, retrieved on 20/11/2012.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*.

¹³⁰ J. Miran, "A Historical Overview of Islam in Eritrea", *Die Welt des Islam*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2005), p. 180.

¹³¹ Umar b. Al-Khattab.

¹³² H.D. Hasan, "Islam in Africa", CRS (Congressional Research Service) Report for Congress, Library of Congress (2008), p. 2.

lineage, trade, and Sufi brotherhoods had reached West Africa making Muslims wield a high political influence. In Central Africa, Islam had been introduced by the 15th century. In East Africa, Islam had entered the hinterland by the 19th century. The spread of Islam led to the establishment of new societies and a reconfiguration of existing communities and empires based on Islamic values.¹³³ The introduction of Islam to the various parts of Africa is demonstrated in the figure below.

Spread of Islam Into Africa: 7th-19th C.

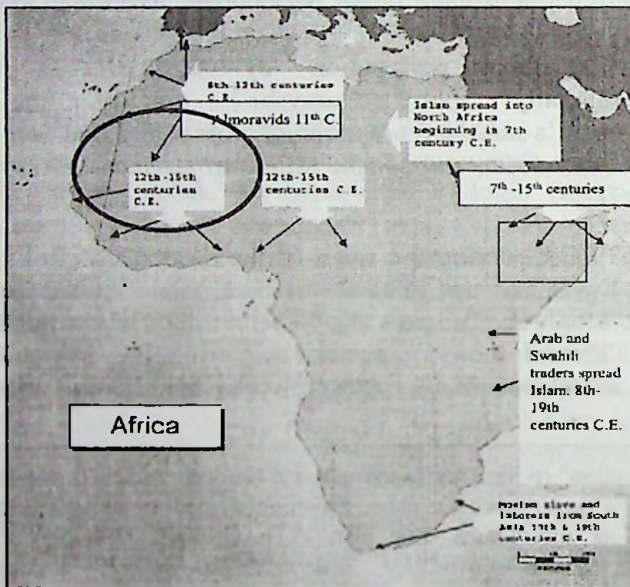


Figure 1: The direction of the spread of Islam in Africa.

Source: Adapted from a document: "Islamization of Africa", http://www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/amcdouga/Hist347/autumn%202012/lectures/spt_26_rev.pdf, retrieved on 21/01/12.

Many scholars opine that the spread of Islam in Africa was basically through trade and not organized military warfare. In 641 C.E, it is reported that about three hundred clerics were dispatched into the heart of Africa, Eritrea, under the command of one Al-Kuma b. Mujazzar to engage in a

¹³³ *Ibid.*

missionary work in central Africa; although, the influence of Islam in this place was probably felt after 661 C.E when the Umayyad occupied the Dahlak islands off the Masawwa coast.¹³⁴

Hence, Africa was one of the lands to which peaceful attempt was made to introduce Islam through, perhaps, formal *da'wah*.¹³⁵ Again, it was one of the lands that accepted Islam without misgivings. Hence, it is a no mean fact that Africa stands tall as the only continent with a majority Muslim population.¹³⁶ As at 2011, the percentage of Muslims in Africa was 52.39%, that of Asia, the continental home of Islam, was 32%, North and South America was 1.06%, Europe was 7.6% while Oceania (including Australia) was 1.5%.¹³⁷ Even more remarkable and fascinating is the fact that Africa produced Islam's first caller to prayers (*muazzin*), Bilal ibn Rabah,¹³⁸ a freed Abyssinian or Ethiopian slave of Umayyah Ibn Khalf.¹³⁹ All the more so intriguing is the fact that Africa was the birthplace of the greatest historian of Islam's memory, Ibn Khaldun (a Tunisian), and also the birthplace of Islam's most known traveler, Ibn Batuta (a Moroccan).¹⁴⁰ Africa was the home of the Almoravids (*Al-murabitun*), one of Islam's few mass movements in the world. It, again, supplied the human resource for injecting Muslim political and military power into southwestern Europe.¹⁴¹ Also

It bankrolled the Muslim world with treasures of gold in its historic struggles with the Crusaders and the Mongols and enriched Europe and Asia alike with its human energy and its rich heritage of music, art, culture and history.¹⁴²

What relationship existed between Africa and south-western Asia, the geographical birthplace of Islam? What is the geographical limit of the Africa referred to in this paper?

¹³⁴ Miran, "A Historical Overview of Islam in Eritrea".

¹³⁵ Islamic Religious Propagation or 'Evangelism'.

¹³⁶ N. Ahmed, "Islam in Africa", in *History of Islam: An Encyclopedia of Islamic History*, <http://historyofislam.com/contents/the-classical-period/islam-in-africa/>, retrieved on 24/11/12.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ P.B. Clarke, *West Africa and Islam: A Study of Religious Development from the 8th to the 20th Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), p. 40; Hitti, *History of the Arab*, pp.106 and 259.

¹³⁹ N. Ibrahim, A. 'Abdul Maajid and E. Darbaalah, trans. by A. Ibrahim and A. Ben Razzaq, *In pursuit of Allah's Pleasure* (London: Al-Firdous, 1997), p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Ahmed, "Islam in Africa".

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

Conceptualizing Africa

The origin of the word *Africa* is controversial. At least seven origins have been suggested.¹⁴³ One hypothesis opines that the word is a Roman name for what the Greeks referred to as "Libya" (which is itself probably a Latin name for the Berber tribe known as Aourigha (possibly intoned as "Afarika"). Another says, it is derived from a Phoenician root, *pharika* that either refers to a land of corn or of fruit like it. The third hypothesis traces it from a Phoenician root, *faraqa*, which refers to "separation" or "diaspora"; a similar root is apparently found in some African languages including Bambara. Another root is deciphered from a Latin adjective, *aprica* (sunny) and the Greek, *aprike* (free from cold), while the Sanskrit and Hindi root, *Apara* is argued to connote what, in geographical terms, comes "after", to the west, in which case, Africa is judged as a western continent. A sixth hypothesis attributes it to the name of a Yamani king, Africus, who invaded what is North Africa today in the second millennium B.C.E. and founded a town called Afrikiyah. A less convincing one also traces the name to Afer, a grandson of Abraham and a companion of Hercules.¹⁴⁴

It is obvious that while a few of the hypotheses appear convincing, there is very little or, perhaps, no agreement on the original meaning of the word *Africa*. Its earliest geographical limit is even fraught with more complexities. However, it appears the term *Africa* was used widely from Roman times to refer initially to North Africa, originally called by the Greek or Egyptian word *Libya*, before it was extended to the whole continent from the end of the first century of the Common Era.¹⁴⁵ Hence,

The Arabic term *Ifriqiya* most probably represents a transliteration [corruption] of the word *Africa*. In this sense, then, Africa was a European construct – as much as Europe itself was a construct inflicted by the idea of Africa (and Asia) – whose cartographic application was both gradual and contradictory in that as the name embraced the rest of the continent it increasingly came to be divorced from its original North African coding and became increasingly confined to the regions referred to in Eurocentric and sometimes Afrocentric conceptual mapping as 'sub-Saharan Africa,' seen as the pristine locus of the 'real' Africa or what the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) called 'Africa proper.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ "Idea of Africa – Origins of the Name Africa", <http://science.jrank.org/pages/8198/Africa-Idea-Origins-Name-Africa.html>, retrieved on 15/01/13.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

According to Hiskett, *Ifriqiya* was the Arab name for part of what is now Tunisia.¹⁴⁷ However, what is now Sahel (an Arabic word meaning “fringe” or a “shore” of desert) was used by the Arabs for the narrow semi-arid land stretching about 5000 km across northern Africa from the Atlantic Ocean slightly eastward to the Red Sea Coast. It includes much of present-day Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Chad, the Sudan and the northern fringes of Nigeria and Burkina Faso.¹⁴⁸ Today, Africa consists of more than fifty countries with a population of more than 600, 000,000 and close to 800 languages. Two main races inhabited early Africa. They were the Berbers of the Mediterranean coastlands and the Negroes of equatorial Africa. The Berbers were of Hamitic stock while the Negroes included the small statured pigmies whose descendants now inhabit the forests of Central Africa. A small number of a third race, the Bushmen, survived and they now inhabit the Kalahari Desert in the south. A mixture of the Berbers and the Negroes inhabited the Sahara, the fertile grassland lying between equatorial Africa and the northern coastlands.¹⁴⁹ The setting or landsite of a continent is the position of the natural environment that becomes the background for human activity and, therefore, it has more than simply scientific significance but as well even religious and political or cultural significance. How does religion manifest itself in African societies?

Religion and the African Society

Africans are very religious people. The dominant religions include the Traditional African Religion,¹⁵⁰ Christianity and Islam.

¹⁴⁷ Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ S.E. Nicholson, “Sahel, West Africa”, *Encyclopaedia of Environmental Biology*, Vol. 3, Academy Press, p. 261, <http://dweb.met.fsu.edu/people/nicholsonpapers/sahel95.pdf>, 01/02/2013, retrieved on 01/02/13.

¹⁴⁹ “A Short History of Africa”, http://aero-comlab.stanford.edu/jameson/world_history/A_Short_History_of_Africa.pdf, p. 3, retrieved on 21/01/13.

¹⁵⁰ This is the indigenous religion of the African which is perceived to have no known founder. It involves pacification of departed ancestors or heroes, and other supernatural entities.

| | Indigenous | Muslim | Christian | Other | Total |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Eastern Africa | 52,114,073 | 59,091,873 | 135,194,880 | 6,058,251 | 252,459,077 |
| Middle Africa | 21,001,056 | 13,528,373 | 61,821,241 | 437,688 | 96,788,358 |
| Northern Africa | 9,020,093 | 167,131,245 | 6,410,368 | 632,920 | 183,194,626 |
| Southern Africa | 14,089,672 | 871,722 | 34,202,095 | 1,087,807 | 50,251,296 |
| Western Africa | 41,617,613 | 130,835,929 | 66,685,296 | 1,601,876 | 240,740,714 |
| Total | 137,842,507 | 371,459,142 | 304,313,880 | 9,818,542 | 823,434,071 |
| Percentage | 16.7% | 45.1% | 36.9% | 1.2% | 99.9% |

Figure 2. Religious statistics of Africa.

Source: Adapted from A.J. Kaba, "Spread of Christianity and Islam in Africa: A Survey and Analysis of the Numbers and Percentages of Christians, Muslims, and Those Who Practice Indigenous Religions", *Western Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 561.

Mbiti and Parrinder were, therefore, aptly right when they concurred that Africans are "incurably and notoriously religious."¹⁵¹ The significance of this is seen in the way some Africans readily embraced Islam. There was a fervent religious consciousness and hence, to some, Islam was a welcome addition to what they already had. In some African countries, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, both Christians and Muslims express some support for democracy and advocate religious freedom. In spite of this, however, both religious traditions would strongly back a government based on the Bible or *Shari'ah*.¹⁵² Indeed, the craving for the operation of *Shari'ah* in Nigeria has caused many interreligious fracasces between the popularly Muslim north and the popularly Christian south. The President of Malawi once referred to his country as a 'Christian Country' and many Ghanaians have gone close to

¹⁵¹ J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1989), p. 1; E.G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Clowes & Sons, 1962), p. 9.

¹⁵² M.E. Iheanyi, *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* (Ibadan: IRFA, 1995), p. 13; F.N. Mvumbi, "Preaching with Islam in Mind, Thomas Aquinas: A model", *Peaching in Contemporary Nigeria*, No. 1 (2003), pp. 145-154.

referring to Ghana in a similar manner, while Joseph Kone of Uganda is still fighting to install a government premised on the Bible.

Islam's Relationship with Africa

Muslims have established diverse communities in Africa where they were welcome by rulers who were appreciative of their multiculturalism and pluralistic religious ideologies, trading expertise and Arabic literacy. A mention could be made of the Ancient Sudanese empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. Many of the 14th to 16th century empires in the Western Sudan, including Mali and Songhai, had Muslim rulers who made pilgrimage to Makkah and came back to promote the religious and cultural influence of Islam in their respective empires.

Islam is perceived to cohabit well with some African traditional lifestyles and beliefs. Indeed, in some instances there has even been such a deep mix that one at times finds it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the Islamic religious prerogative and what is traditional to the people of Africa. In some African societies, Islam has little-by-little substituted itself for the culture of the people, with little or no disagreements. In spite of this, it must be noted that Islam was not massively adopted by all societies it found itself in on the African soil. In the ancient empires of Mali, Songhai and Ghana, for example, Islam continued to be a religion professed mostly by the ruling classes and urban dwellers.¹⁵³ In sub-Saharan Africa, Islam became popular among itinerant traders. Many people who converted in the outskirts still engaged in their indigenous practices. Where it became a dominant religion, it was preceded in some cases by a period of peaceful co-existence between Islam and the indigenous culture. This made it possible for the inter-mingling of the two cultures with virtually no difficulty.

A major factor responsible for the tolerance between some African traditions and the people, on one hand, and Islam was the attempt by Muslims to adapt some Islamic values or norms to environmental circumstances in some African communities and not necessarily because the practices of those Africans and Islam were similar, although, one could strongly argue for both being 'equal' factors, because for some black Africans, there was very little difference. Informed by the statements of Mbiti and Parrinder, one could argue that the religious consciousness in the Africans made some of them see Islam as a welcome presence. Further, the Islamic principle of '*Urf* (custom or tradition) made it easy for Muslims to see a lot of good in some African Customs. Hence, those Africans did not see themselves as committing 'a religious suicide' as compared to their initial views on Christianity. Islam, therefore, could be said to have tolerated

¹⁵³ Clarke, *West Africa and Islam*.

some African traditions more than Christianity. Therefore, although, Islam and such African traditions were not the same, in actual fact, some of the practices of the African and Islam were comparable, therefore, in many cases adaptation or indigenization of some Islamic cultural values did not pose much problem.

Inculturation: An Assessment of the Case of Islam and the Indigenous Africans

According to Pruitt, a number of concepts including indigenization, contextualization, and inculturation have been used to expound the process of movement of religious teachings across cultures.¹⁵⁴ Others include acculturation and enculturation. However, in his opinion, indigenization and contextualization are the methodological aspects of the adaptation of Christianity to new cultures but “inculturation, more adequately describes the ongoing interaction, or synthesis, between that faith and culture”,¹⁵⁵ “Inculturation” as a term actually originated from the Catholic Church. According to Gerald Arbuckle, catholic theologians were disgruntled about the prevailing term, “contextualization”, which denoted the attempt to relate the gospel to culture. The feeling was that “contextualization emphasized external connection between the gospel and the local culture. This is termed “acculturation” by Aylward Shorter.¹⁵⁶ However, acculturation is a necessary condition for inculturation because it defines an encounter between one culture and another, yet, it does not describe “the ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them.”¹⁵⁷ In other words, inculturation can be a good theory for explaining the two-fold process of Islam influencing some indigenous cultures while it also undergoes a certain indigenous transformation. Starkloff drew attention to this two-way process of inculturation.¹⁵⁸

However, according to Andrew Byrne, the term inculturation first appeared in print after 1962 in the writings of Roest Crollius and J.S Masson

¹⁵⁴ R.A. Pruitt, “The Inculturation of the Christian Gospel: Theory and Theology with Special Reference to the Igbo of Southern Nigeria”, An M.A. thesis presented to the Graduate School, University of Missouri-Columbia (2007), p. 19.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁶ A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pubs, 1999), pp. 6–7.

¹⁵⁷ G. Arbuckle, “Inculturation and Evangelization: Realism Romanticism”, *Missionaries Anthropologists and Cultural Change* (Williamsburgh, VA: College of William and Mary, 1984), pp. 171–214.

¹⁵⁸ C.F. Starkloff, “Inculturation and Cultural Systems (Part 1)”, *Theological Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (1994), pp. 66–69.

and that, after 1977, different concepts like acculturation and enculturation began to jostle for space.¹⁵⁹ Enculturation is

The process where the culture that is currently established teaches an individual the accepted norms and values of the culture or society in which the individual lives Enculturation helps mould a person into an acceptable member of society.¹⁶⁰

In the opinion of Washburn, enculturation modifies “cognitive associations” and some of these “modifications” take place outside individual thoughtful notice.¹⁶¹ Some African Muslim families comprise units with numerous migration histories. In some African communities, some Muslim families were formed out of migration, including migrants whose ancestors entered Africa from Arabia after the 7th century. In northern Ghana, the people of Dagbon and Larabanga traditionally trace their ancestry to Arabs.¹⁶² Similar is said of the Yoruba (Ya-Arab) of Nigeria, with others in Sudan, Mali, Cameroun, Libya and many others. There are many other families whose ancestors were converted by the activities of Muslim clerics and traders. It is an established fact that while professing Islam, many African Muslims still retain their African identity, culture and tradition. Hiskett puts it more succinctly in his observation about the Gonja people of northern Ghana:

Gonja society then developed into the following classes. First, were the *gbanya*, They had become Muslims through their association with the Dyula Muslims They still continued to take part in the traditional Earth cult and consulted Earth priests as well as their advisors. ... The subjects of the *gbanya* were the *nyamase*, the commoners. They remained largely untouched by Islam, except that they took part in certain festivals that mixed Islam with the customs of the Earth cult. ... Islam in Gonja was, and still is, characterized by extensive mixing. A typical example is the *Damba*, a traditional festival that now takes place each year at the time of the *Maulud*, the Prophet’s birthday. So much of the old Earth cult survives in it that it bears little semblance to the *Maulud* as this is celebrated in Sunni

¹⁵⁹ A. Byrne, “Some ins and outs of inculturation”, *Annals Theologici*, Vol. 4 (1990), p. 113.

¹⁶⁰ C.P. Kottak, *Window on Humanity: A Concise Introduction to Anthropology* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2007), as quoted by D. Washburn, “Enculturation and the Degenerative Principle”, *Contemporary Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2008), p. 50.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, pp. 120–121, passim.

Islamic communities. Mixing also shows itself in the use of Islamic objects, especially those bearing Arabic writing, as medicine shrines. Chiefs habitually refer both to shrine priests and Muslim *imams*, requiring the traditional ritual from the former and Muslim prayers from the latter. These practices have always been regarded with tolerance by the *sakpare* and the *dogtes*.¹⁶³

Contrary to this, however, in Hausaland, there had often been much zeal to reform Islam, and the entire *Jihad* of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio of the Sokoto *Khilafah* was for the purpose of restoring Islam to its puritan state.¹⁶⁴ The fact is that the Africa Muslim culture constitutes a wide range of diversity to the extent of their acculturation into the customs of the dominant Islamic culture while, in some cases, retaining the norms of the African culture and tradition.¹⁶⁵ To understand this system of diversity among Islam and some African traditions or the extent of coexistence, the theories of acculturation, inculturation or enculturation will be used.

Acculturation as a term or theory was first defined by Redfield et-al as "... phenomena which result when groups of individuals sharing different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in original culture patterns of either or both groups."¹⁶⁶ In 1967, Graves used the term "psychological acculturation" to describe the effects of acculturation at the individual level.¹⁶⁷ According to Kim and Abreu, this process involves the transformation that individuals go through in terms of their attitudes, values and identity subsequent to their contact with other

¹⁶³ Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, pp. 120–121. The *Sakpare* were a category of literate Muslims who primarily served as *Imams* and advisers to Gonja kings. They were a subdivision of the scholarly class known as *Karamos* who occupied a position between the *Gbanya*, the ruling class and the *Nyamase*, the subjects. The *sakpare* were believed to be the off-spring of Muhammad al-Abyad, the celebrated Muslim advisor of the Gonja war-hero, Jakpa (p. 120). The *Dogtes*, on the other hand were said to have come from the lineage of the invaders, the followers of Sumaila Ndwura Jakpa. They also sometimes acted as *Imams* (p. 121).

¹⁶⁴ Clarke, *West Africa and Islam*, pp. 113–114. See the Manifesto of the Jihad.

¹⁶⁵ F.N. Mvumbi, "Islam in Africa Today", A seminar paper delivered at 6th meeting of African-German Catholic Bishops, Volta Hotel, Akosombo October 10-16, 2004.

¹⁶⁶ R. Redfield, R. Linton, & M.J. Herskovits, "Memorandum on the Study of Acculturation", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 56 (1936), p. 149; see also page 156 of B.S.K. Kim & J.M. Abreu, "Acculturation and Enculturation", in F.T.L. Leong, et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Asian American Psychology*, 2nd Ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), pp. 141–158.

¹⁶⁷ T.D. Graves, "Psychological Acculturation in a Tri-ethnic Community", *Southwestern J. Anthropology*, Vol. 23 (1967), as cited by Kim & Abreu, "Acculturation and Enculturation".

cultures.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, Hersokovits defined “enculturation” as “... the process of socialization into the maintenance of the norms of one’s indigenous culture, including its salient ideas, concepts, and values.”¹⁶⁹ Kim and Abreu indicate that this process of “cultural maintenance” referred to in the definition can be better represented with enculturation.¹⁷⁰ This characterization of cultural maintenance accurately describes the cultural experiences of Africans who were socialized in their indigenous cultural norms or customs before conversion to Islam. However, some Africans born as Muslims nonetheless may not necessarily have been brought up in an ‘Islamic Culture’ as such but ‘African Traditional Society’, and the influence of the latter cannot be underestimated, therefore, the construct of enculturation is more accurate for this group because they may not have had any cultural assimilation in the true African context.¹⁷¹

Sometimes, there is a fusion between certain aspects of indigenous and Muslim cultural life in Africa. For instance, in northern Ghana, some traditional festivals are celebrated alongside Islamic ones while others that go separately are celebrated by both. They include the following:

Id-ul-fitr: This festival is celebrated by all Muslims worldwide on the 1st of *Sha’wwal* every lunar year to mark the end of the Ramadhan fast. It is celebrated by the Muslims in virtually all traditional areas in northern Ghana. Both the Muslims and the indigenous believers celebrate it together. However, the traditional people of northern Ghana mark it as the 1st day of the lunar month of *Konyurichugu*.¹⁷²

Id-ul-adha: This festival commemorates the unsuccessful attempt by prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ismail. It is also marked worldwide by all Muslims on the 10th of *Dhul Hijjah* of the Arabic lunar year. Both Muslims and traditional people of the Northern region celebrate it. In northern Ghana, the traditional people mark it as the 10th of *Chimsi*, a traditional lunar month.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Kim & Abreu, “Acculturation and Enculturation”, p. 146.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141–158.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁷¹ B.S.K. Kim, A.J. Ahn, and N.A. Lam, “Theories and Research on Acculturation and Enculturation Experiences among Asian American Families”, In N.H. Trinh et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Mental Health Acculturation in Asian American Families, Current Clinical Psychiatry* (New York: Humana Press, 2009).

¹⁷² This corresponds to March each year. The ethnic groups include the Dagbani, the Gonja, the Mamprusi and the Nanumba, etc.

¹⁷³ See: M.E.K. Dakubu, “Personal Names of the Dagomba”, *Research Review (New Series)*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2000), p. 57.

Damba: This festival coincides with the birth of Prophet Mohammed. It is celebrated by some Muslims and is known as *maulud-un-nabi*. In Wa, for example, this festival has assumed a traditional significance and is characterized by a ritual in which the Wa Na (the paramount chief of Wa) prolongs his life by successfully jumping over a cow. It is a two-day festival that is full of pageantry, showmanship and horse riding. Muslims and the traditional people in Tamale/Yendi, the towns of Dagbon, Gonja, Mamprusi and the Nanumba celebrate it together every year.

Paare Gbiele: This is a festival celebrated by the people of Tumu in the Upper West region of Ghana. It is associated with the first nine days immediately following the holy month of Ramadhan every year. It is done to celebrate a bumper harvest and both Muslims and the indigenous traditional people partake in its celebration.

Bugum: This is also held by many ethnic groups in Northern Ghana. Most Muslims and Non-Muslims take part in its celebration. It was observed by the Muslims to mark the landing of Prophet Noah's (Nuhu) Ark after the flood but it has assumed traditional significance. Now, it is a fire (*Bugum*) festival and it is celebrated at night with bundles of grass used as torches. Another practice that both African traditions and Islam find friends in each other is polygamy.¹⁷⁴

Polygamy:

Some African traditional people and Muslims do not only practice polygamy, but also both cultures frown on polyandry.¹⁷⁵ However, Muslims are restricted in terms of number which is a maximum of four.¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, even though, Africans are not restricted in terms of the number of women they can take as wives, men marrying two wives are more common in many African polygamous marriages.¹⁷⁷ In this case, therefore, if an African polygamous man became a Muslim he could still keep his wives without any religious inhibitions (provided they are not more than four which is uncommon). The competing Christian alternative would demand an unconditional adherence to monogamy, which more often than not, was inconvenient to some Africans. According to Fenske, in the cluster of countries stretching from Senegal to Tanzania which he refers to as the

¹⁷⁴ However, there is an exception here; polygamy refers to the plurality of husbands (polyandry) or wives (polygyny), but in the case of Muslims and most African 'traditional' people, it refers strictly to multiple-wife marriage.

¹⁷⁵ This is multiple husband marriage.

¹⁷⁶ Qur'an 4:3.

¹⁷⁷ J.E. Brown, "Polygyny in and Family Planning in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 12, No. 8 and 9 (1981), pp. 322-326.

“polygamy belt”, more than a third of women are contending with polygamy.¹⁷⁸ Tertilt asserts that several countries in Africa have more than 10% of women being in polygamous homes.¹⁷⁹ In this case, such Africans would see Islam as a friend to their tradition. Islam, therefore, became an alternative for some Africans in some cases.

In addition, the functional Islamic female experience is similar to that of the African people. Men dominate the African socio-economic and political machinery and organizations and are regarded as natural leaders, who are superior and born to rule over women. Muslims have a similar belief. In the Qur’an, Allah says:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have let them guard.¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, early marriage is also approved by both traditions. This early marriage has created some misconceptions due to the problem of application. In some African societies and Islam, girls are deemed to mature earlier for sexual intercourse than boys. The dominant cultural view is that since, realistically, girls are more vulnerable in their sexual manoeuvrings, to avoid the possibility of men taking advantage of them, they must marry as soon as they mature for sexual intercourse. This thought was favoured in the pre-secular education period of these societies. Today, secular education, “enlightenment”, and the problem of women’s socio-economic security have affected female sexual orientations. Sadly, however, this orientation has not blocked women’s vulnerability in sexual matters in the African society.

The Islamic view, therefore, is that men and women should marry early when they have the craving for sexual intercourse, otherwise, they should fast. This is because fornication/adultery (*Zina*) has undesirable consequences for the individual, his family, and the society as a whole. In the Qur’an Allah says:

¹⁷⁸ J. Fenske, “African Polygamy: Past and Present”, Centre for the Study of African Economies (CSAE) Working Paper, WPS/2012-20 (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2012), p. 1. Also citing H. Jacoby, “The Economics of Polygyny in Sub-Saharan Africa: Female Productivity and the Demand for Wives in Cote d’Ivoire”, *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 103, No. 5 (1995), pp. 938–971.

¹⁷⁹ M. Tertilt, “Polygyny, Fertility, and Savings”, *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 113, No. 6 (2005), pp. 1341–1375.

¹⁸⁰ Qur’an 4:34.

Nor come nigh adultery [*wa laa taqrabu-z-zina*¹⁸¹]: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils).¹⁸² The adulterer cannot have sexual relations [i.e. marry] with any but an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress, none can have sexual relations [marry] with her but an adulterer or idolater; to the believers such a thing is forbidden.¹⁸³

Since women are more prone to early sexual exploitations than men, it is quite logical that women would marry earlier than men. For this reason, the Prophet emphasized that women should be married while they are virgins. This demand is not different for the men. However, some Muslim parents, in an attempt to dodge the responsibility of caring for their female children, marry them off under the pretence of fulfilling a religious obligation. This situation is no different among some indigenous Africans. Nonetheless, motivations may be different. Although, for the traditional African also, morality is a core issue, many parents are concerned with seeing their grandchildren early. Hence, sometimes the motivation is not merely to avoid the responsibility of caring for them.

Evil Spirits and Witchcraft

Another important belief among both Muslims and some of the African indigenous people is the belief in evil machinations from envious clan members and demons or the *jinn*. When the traditional African falls sick it is sometimes attributed to the nocturnal activities of envious clans men and women. There is also a category of living creatures of beastly nature known as demons or *jinn*. The Akan people of Ghana call these spirits, *Abosom* (Yoruba: *Alujonnu* and Swahili: *Majini*, etc). These dwell in the invisible world. Both the African indigenous people and Muslims believe in the existence of these spirits. Again, both Muslims and the African indigenous adherents believe that some of these spirits are kind while others are evil or unkind. The African world view is that the insufficiency of humanity is such that humankind needs protection from all corners. For this reason, some traditional Africans constantly establish a good relationship with these spirits to avert their evil machinations. Below is the result of a survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre (a worldwide public-opinion surveys and reports centre) on Religion and Public Life in some African countries.

¹⁸¹ The word *Zina* is used in the Qur'an to refer to both adultery and fornication. Although conceptually, it refers to an unlawful act of sexual intercourse, if it involves a married person, it is known as 'adultery' but if it involves an unmarried person, then it is known as 'fornication.'

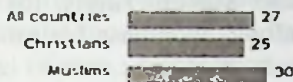
¹⁸² Qur'an 17:32.

¹⁸³ Qur'an 24: 3.

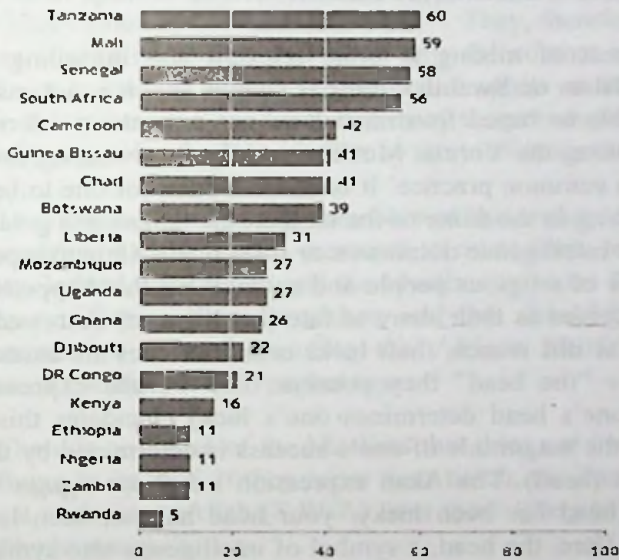
Belief in the Protective Power of Sacrifices to Spirits or Ancestors

% who believe sacrifices to spirits or ancestors can protect them from bad things happening

Median results:



Among general population in...



Q51. Which, if any, of the following do you believe in? That sacrifices to spirits or ancestors can protect you from bad things happening.

Figure 3. A Survey of Muslims and Christians who believe in the protective power of sacrifice to spirits.

Source: Adapted from a document by the Pew Research Centre, <http://www.pewforum.org/executive-summary-islam-and-christianity-in-sub-saharan-africa.aspx>, retrieved on 10/02/13.

Many Muslims and Christians in Africa incorporate African traditional religious or cultural elements into their daily lives. In the above table, more than half of the people in the survey involving South Africa, Senegal, Mali, and Tanzania believe that sacrifice to ancestors and spirits

could protect them from harm. This is confirmed among the Swahili Muslims in Mombasa:

The religious life of the Swahili Muslims was blended with Islam.... For example, veneration of ancestors continued and also added Islamic saints. Swahili Muslims pay homage to their immediate ancestors, their leaders and also Muslim saints, for instance, the Sheikh at Mackinnon Road along Mombasa-Nairobi highway in Kenya. Paying homage to Islamic saints was seen to bring blessings (Baraka), the barren women are able to conceive and also mysterious ailments are cured....¹⁸⁴

Such an extent of mixing is quite relevant and intriguing because the influence of Islam on Swahili culture is so high that it is not easy or perhaps it is impossible to "trace Swahili culture per se without referring to Islam today."¹⁸⁵ Among the Yoruba Muslims in Nigeria, swearing in the name of ancestors is a common practice. It is also common for one to hear a Yoruba Muslim pleading in the name of the mother, the father, or a great ancestor.¹⁸⁶ Indeed, one's intelligence dominates or rules one's life and represents one's fate in the life of religious people and so anything that happens to religious people is perceived as their share of fate (intelligence) bestowed on them by the creator. For this reason, their lucks or misfortunes are assessed in terms of wisdom or "the head" they possess. The Yoruba expression: *ori eni lawure eni* (one's head determines one's luck) elucidates this point.¹⁸⁷ In other words, the magnitude of one's success is determined by the quality of one's thought (head). The Akan expression *wo ti aye ngugo/ wo ti annye ngugo* (your head has been lucky/ your head has not been lucky) further clarifies this. Here, the head, a symbol of intelligence also symbolizes one's destiny.

The above concept closely relates to the Islamic concept of predestination (*Qadar*: divine decree). This is symbolized by the head. Thus, to say one's head as chosen for an individual is to say that is one's *Qadar* (i.e. one's share of nature). However, *Qadar* originates from the creator but the acculturated Yoruba Muslim worldview lacks this quality.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ E. Faki, E.M. Kasiera & M.J. Nandi, "The Belief and Practice among the Swahili Muslims in Mombasa District, Kenya", *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (2010), p. 216.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ A.O. Omotosho, "Islam, Custom, Culture and Tradition: The Dilemma of the Nigerian Muslim", <http://unilorin.edu.ng/publications/omotoshoao/Omitosho%20ISLAM--Edited%20with%20title%20page%5B1%5DA7.pdf>, retrieved on 17/01/13

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Hence, in spite of the predominance of Islam in Yoruba land, Nigeria, no success has been achieved in eliminating this from the thought of the non-literate Yoruba Muslims.¹⁸⁹ It is, however, worthy to emphasize that the veneration of saints is not peculiar to African Muslims. In Iraq, Abdul Qadir Jilani, the founder of the Qadiriyyah Muslim brotherhood, has for a long time running, been regarded by the Kurds as their guardian saint. The African traditional people, however, believe that nature is enlivened by spirits, either in the pantheistic form of an Omnipresent Being (God, *Mawu*, *Oldumare*, *Olorun*, *Nyankopon*, *Nyame*, *Chineke*, *Ebube Dike*, *Mulungu*, etc.) or in a polytheistic pro forma with a pantheon of spirits believed to originate from specific objects of nature e.g. trees, stones, mountains, and water.¹⁹⁰ This feature is known as *animism*.¹⁹¹ They, therefore, believe in the sacredness of specific objects that merit only the contact of specific people held to be possessed by either the mentioned spirits or those of venerated ancestors: sometimes in a good way (whereby the possessed person exercises special powers), or in a bad way (whereby the victim is exorcised to return to normalcy).

They believe that certain members of the society could implore the unseen services of these hidden creatures to cause harm to the members of the society. Indeed, the Qur'an and the Muslim traditions fully acknowledge the existence of these living creatures, and this should be borne in mind when we attempt to understanding the African Muslim worldview on divination. A tradition of the Prophet says:

There is no house of the Muslims that does not have a Muslim jinn living in its roof. If they serve their lunch, the jinn come down and eat with them. Allah (S.W.T.) uses them (the jinn) to protect them (the humans).¹⁹²

Although, this tradition is inconsistent with Qur'an 13:11 and, therefore, may not pass the test of credibility, many Muslims also believe that some of the

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 8–19.

¹⁹¹ G. George, "Animism in Theory and Practice: E.B. Tylor's Unpublished 'Notes on "Spiritualism"', *Man, New Series*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1971), pp. 289–307; J.S. Stuart-Glennie, "Queries as to Dr. Tylor's Views on Animism", *Folklore*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1992), pp. 289–307; N. David, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 40 (1999), pp. 567–591.

¹⁹² W.A. Bali, trans. by H. Kreidly., *Wiqayat al-'Insan min Al-Jinn wal-Schaytan (Man's Protection against Jinn and Satan)*, 3rd Ed. (Lebanon: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 2009), p. 13.

jinn can be harmful to human beings.¹⁹³ Faki, et-al make the following observation about the *jinn* among the Swahili Muslims of East Africa: "The Jinn can either be friendly or a nuisance to people. They can be captured through magic and used for different goals;¹⁹⁴ The dangerous and harm-perpetrating ones dwell at unclean and filthy sites like bathrooms and toilet places.¹⁹⁵ Others dwell in cracks and burrows. This offers the theological ground to understand the traditional African belief that the *jinn* even live in water bodies whether deep or shallow, including the sea and big trees with strange holes as well as burrowed mountains. In the Qur'an, Allah says,

I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve me.¹⁹⁶ And the Jinn race, We had created before, from the fire of a scorching wind."¹⁹⁷

This means that the *jinn* or the *abosom* actually exist. However, the orthodox Islamic worldview is that these spirits were created for the same purpose as humans, *ibadah*. From the Muslim literature, also, there are categories of the *jinn*. Muslims also believe that some of the *jinn* are just or kind while others are unkind and inimical to human beings. The Qur'an quotes the following from the *jinn*:

There are among us some that are righteous, and some the contrary: we follow divergent paths. Among us are some that submit their wills (to Allah), and some that swerve from justice¹⁹⁸

Al-Shibli identifies five categories of the *jinn*.

1. The types that live in houses with humans are known as *Aamir* (plural *Ummaar*: dwellers).
2. There is the group that interacts with children, and are known as *Arwaah* (spirits).
3. Those that perpetrate wickedness are known as *Shayaateen* (devils).
4. The type that is worse in perpetrating wickedness is known as *maarid* (demon).
5. The most dangerous of the company of the *jinn* is known as *Ifreet*.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Faki, Kasiera & Nandi, "The Belief and Practice", p. 217.

¹⁹⁵ Bali, *Wiqayat al- 'Insan min Al-Jinn wal-Schaytan*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁶ Qur'an 51:56.

¹⁹⁷ Qur'an 15:27.

¹⁹⁸ Qur'an 72:11 and 14.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Shibli, *Aakaam Al-Marjaan*, p.21, as cited by A.K.I. Ameen, *The Jinn and Human Sickness* (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 2005).

The Qur'an and the Islamic religious tradition also affirm the belief in the existence of some category of human beings whose activities are as inimical to their fellow human beings as some of the *jinn*. These are known as the 'blowers of the knot.'²⁰⁰ Allah's recognition of the ability of the evil ones among both the *jinn* and mankind led to the revelation of the twin chapters known as *Al-muawwidhatayn* (the two chapters from which refuge is sought: the Chapters of the "Dawn" and "Mankind"). They read as follows:

Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the Dawn, from the mischief of created things; from the mischief of Darkness as it overspreads; from the mischief of those who practice Secret Arts [Blowers of the knot]: and from the mischief of the envious one as he practices envy (*hasad*).²⁰¹

Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of Mankind, the King of Mankind, the God of Mankind, from the mischief of the Whisperer (of Evil), who withdraws (after his whisper), (the same) who whispers into the hearts of Mankind, among Jinns and among Men.²⁰²

With this common belief, therefore, some of the African traditional people and some non-literate Muslims tie objects containing such verses of the Qur'an that could possibly ward-off the evil attacks of the unkind creatures among the *jinn* and mankind round their waists. This is perhaps the origin of the association of Muslim clerics with talismans, amulets, and charms, although, in actual fact, Muslims were not the originators of these objects.²⁰³ Many people think that amulets for warding off evil spirits always contain Arabic inscriptions or verses of the Qur'an. However, the following extract points to the contrary:

... the *jinn* are afraid of wolves, and they cannot appear in wolf form. Many people believe that wolves have power over the *jinn* when they appear in physical form, and are able to attack and devour them. They also believe that the *jinn* flee from the scent of the wolves. Hence some of those in ... remote mountain villages

²⁰⁰ Qur'an 113:4.

²⁰¹ Qur'an 113.

²⁰² Qur'an 114.

²⁰³ S.I. Mustapha, *Prohibitions that are taken too Lightly: Based on the Works of Shaikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjib* (Sydney: Islam Publication International, 2001), pp. 34-35.

like to wear an amulet containing something from the wolf, be it hair, a tooth, a bone or a piece of skin.²⁰⁴

From the above it is possible that charms, amulets, and talismans that are often attributed in some traditional African communities to Muslim clerics may be a misconception, although, more often than not, it is designed by herbalists or medicine men some of whom might combine as Muslims clerics. The reason is that in many African communities, Islam spread through scholars who were trained in Sufism or the esoteric sciences (*ilmul asrar*). As a result they offered spiritual assistance to non-Muslim aristocrats and leaders. This association of Islamic ritual specialists with esoteric wisdom made practices like divination and amulets manufacturing (through which most of such services were rendered) connected with Islam and indeed as an attestation of Islam's mystical powers.²⁰⁵

Hence, Islam itself played a role in rationalizing divination when it recognized that there are forces in the world of the unseen that could be inimical to mortals, although, it offered a remedy in its own way. By enculturating themselves into the traditions of their people, therefore, some African Muslims think that divination is the only way to know the events of the invisible world, and hence, the use of even Qur'anic verses in this spiritual adventure. Truly, this granted them harmony in the state they lived in. Many rulers in West Africa either surrounded themselves with Muslim clerics who manufactured these objects for them or they trooped to the Muslim clerics for divination and spiritual protection. The instances of this among the Asante kings of Ghana, ancient Ghana, Mali, and Songhai are well recorded in history. It is also amply reflected in Leo Africanus' observation in Timbuktu that "... here are great stores of doctors, judges, priests, and other learned men, that are bountifully maintained at the king's cost and charges."²⁰⁶ This situation gave birth to a breed of scholars in Africa whose activities were occasioned by the situations of their times,²⁰⁷ i.e. demand for protective objects. Hiskett relates a strange story of a mysterious staff planted by one Muslim cleric, Muhammad al-Abyad, during a warfare involving a Gonja king and his enemies which resulted in the sudden retreat of the said enemies.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Mustapha, *Prohibitions that are taken too Lightly*, pp. 34–35.

²⁰⁵ K. Graw, "Culture of Hope in West Africa", *ISIM Review*, Vol. 16 (2005), p. 28.

²⁰⁶ C. Goucher, C. LeGuin & L. Walton, *In the Balance: Themes in Global History* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), see chapter 13.

²⁰⁷ Mvumbi, "Islam in Africa Today", p. 2.

²⁰⁸ Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, p. 120.

Divination:

In African societies, orthodox health care delivery is more complicated than simply offering organic substances for medical treatment. According to Twumasi, "the diagnosis of illness is largely viewed as a diagnosis of a social offence and the curing of illness requires the establishment of normal social relationships."²⁰⁹ For this reason, the non-material causes of ill-health are as relevant in the African traditional medical diagnosis as the biological or material causes. In traditional African medical systems, the medicine men determine the exact causes of illnesses and their remedies through the application of a mechanical law of nature called divination. The word 'divination' means different thing to different people as it means different things to different scholars.²¹⁰ In the worldview of the indigenous Africans, the door to a person's choices in life is not closed by fate, and perhaps the facility of divination could make it possible to alter the course of one's fate. According to Dime, African understanding of divination is somewhat different from a European notion.²¹¹ For him, the European notion of divination is simply identifying the wishes of a deity and acting on it to bring about equilibrium in life. However, if that is the case, then it is not that Europeans have a different understanding of divination, but rather, that there are different types of divination. In any case, he defines divination as "...the communication to a consultant of his [one's] prenatal choices by a divinity through the instrumentality of ... [a] (diviner)."²¹² In the view of Gehman, "Today, despite scientific knowledge, there is still a revival of witchcraft, spiritism and the occult in the West and a persistence of belief in mystical powers worldwide."²¹³ This means that divination still stands as a traditional medical activity that scientific advancement has not been able to eradicate, and this is because of its role in discovering the unknown.²¹⁴ It is a process by which one obtains the knowledge about the

²⁰⁹ P.A. Twumasi, *Medical Systems in Ghana: A Study in Medical Sociology* (Accra: Assembly Press, 1975), p. 64.

²¹⁰ W.A. Lessa and Z.W. Evon, *Reader in Comparative Religion: Anthropological Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); N. Fodor, "Divination", *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science* (USA: University Books, 1966), pp. 1-20; P.M. Peek, *African Divination Systems: Ways of Knowing* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1991), p. 2; W.R. Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969); V. Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu ritual Ithaca* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 1-10.

²¹¹ C.A. Dime, "Divination: The Penumbra of African Traditional Religion", *Orita: Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1982), p. 93.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Gehman (1998), p. 98, as cited by Faki, Kasiera and Nandi, "The Belief and Practice", p. 213.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

cause of one's misfortunes, be it past, present, or future and it gives one the chance to revoke this cause to better one's fortunes.²¹⁵

It must be emphasized, however, that divination is forbidden in orthodox Islam. In Qur'an 5: 90, Allah says:

Oh you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, sacrificing to stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination, of Satan's handiwork: eschew such (abominations), that you may prosper.

The Islamic view of divination is that it ascribes Allah's attribute of Knowing the past, present and the future to the diviner. Divination sows the seed of hatred between family relations and is therefore described as *amal-ish-shaytan* (Satan's handiwork). According to a tradition of the prophet, whoever consults a diviner and believes in what is divulged to him or her will have his or her prayers rejected for forty days. However, it must be emphasized that Islam is a religion and culture that has been acculturated to social, economic and political milieus over the years depending on what set up any group of Muslims finds itself in. As it was indicated earlier, the perceived spiritual challenges of the African, both Muslim and non-Muslim, occasioned the upsurge of a certain breed of Muslim scholars and medicine men influenced by the demands of their times. Islam has its own rules and regulations but, at the same time, it exists as a religion when people practice it. Both Qur'an and hadith talk about witchcraft and sorcery as real and call on humanity to seek protection against them. This means that one needs the knowledge of their existence at any particular moment to merit looking for protection. Since human beings do not have the power of the knowledge of the unknown, one needs another facility to access this knowledge, and hence rationalizing the use of divination as the path to the unknown and to dealing with this reality recognized by both the Qur'an and the traditions. Hence, as already indicated earlier, Islam itself played a role in rationalizing divination when it recognized the existence of forces of invisibility that have powers to cause harm to humans.

Consulting diviners is a popular practice among the Swahili Muslims of Mombasa in Kenya. This, according to Faki et-al, is seen by the Swahili Muslims not as contradiction to Islamic norms "... but a perfect blend of Islam with their culture."²¹⁶ However, divination by Muslim cleric among the Swahili of Mombasa appears to be a borrowed practice. This is because,

..., most of the advanced in the Arabic language among the Swahili Muslims were the Islamic priests and teachers. They were poorly

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

paid for their services and some took to divination and other healing practices to supplement their income.²¹⁷

This involvement of the Swahili Muslim clergy now justifies the thought of the ordinary Muslims that it is allowed. Most of these clerics were known as *Sherifs* (clerics who were believed to have descended from the family of the Prophet).²¹⁸ In South Africa, many herbalists prefer geomantic or sand divination.²¹⁹ The overall friendship and the extent of acculturation between African traditions and Islam is well demonstrated in the following extract:

Although there is – as we shall see-an overwhelming scholarly consensus that the latter – day *Ifa* and ‘*Sixteen Cowries*’ in West Africa derive directly and demonstrably from the Islamic prototypes, an early, original North West African input into the overall geomantic system is suggested by the early circulation of Berber names for the sixteen basic geomantic configurations, and by the performance of proto-geomantic cultural forms in the latter-day North West African material.²²⁰

In Senegal and Gambia, according to Graw, “...rather than being practised at the margins of Islamic orthodoxy, Senegambian divination is embedded in and integrating other forms of Islamic ritual.”²²¹ In northern Ghana, by adapting to traditional methods of divination, Muslims are gradually introducing a future perspective and expanding the possibilities of preventive action. By so doing, it is bringing about a religio-epistemological transformation that is, among other things, helping people to understand and make better use of Western bio-medicine and primary health care programs. Hence, the traditional medicine will only lose its grip on the indigenous African only when Western medicine incorporates divination in its practice.

Female Circumcision

This is known to many as female genital mutilation (FGM) and it is also known as female circumcision. The former, however, seems to pass a value judgment on the practice and so the latter is preferred. Some cultures

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ W.V. Binsbergen, “Islam as a Constitutive Factor in African ‘Traditional’ Religion: Evidence from Geomantic Divination”, in A. Breedveld, J. van Santen and W.M.J. van Binsbergen, eds., *Islam and Transformation in Africa*, http://www.shikanda.net/african_religion/islampaper_def_2003_RTF.pdf, retrieved on 27/11/12.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²²¹ Graw, “Culture of Hope in West Africa”, p. 28.

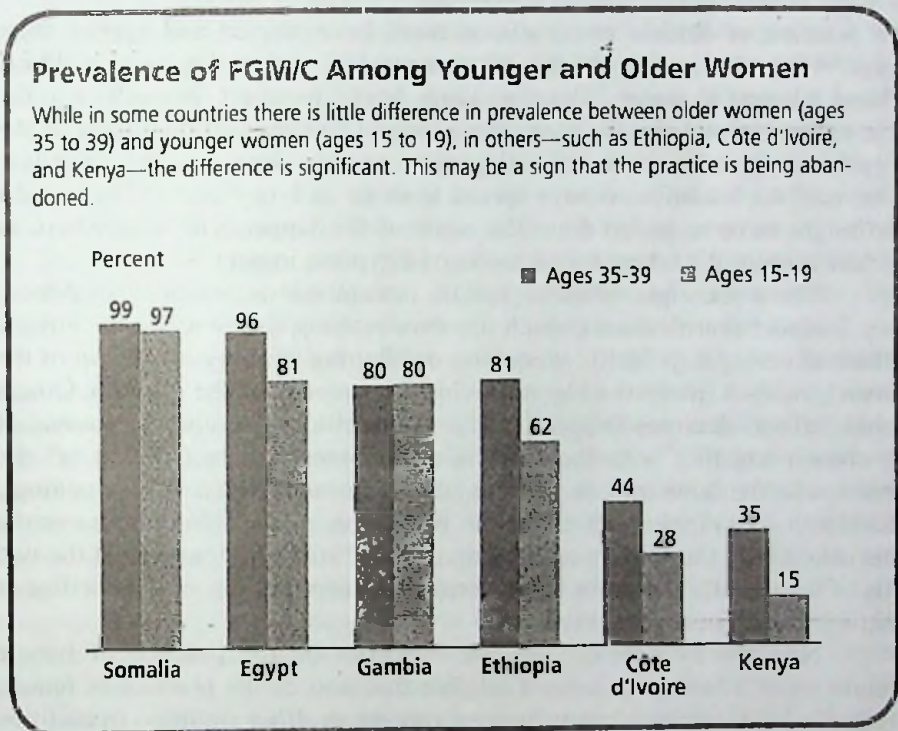
have insisted, in one way or the other, on circumcision, whether male or female. This is the removal of the foreskin from the grand penis. In females, this process entails the partial or total removal of the vulva. The most widespread places include Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, and Sudan.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Data and Trends

| | Data Source | | Prevalence by Age (%) | | |
|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| | | | 15-49 | 15-19 | 35-39 |
| Benin | DHS | 2006 | 12.9 | 7.9 | 16.3 |
| Burkina Faso | MICS | 2006 | 72.5 | 59.7 | 79.8 |
| Cameroon | DHS | 2004 | 1.4 | 0.4 | 1.2 |
| Central African Rep. | MICS | 2008 | 25.7 | 18.7 | 29.8 |
| Chad | DHS | 2004 | 44.9 | 43.4 | 46.2 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | MICS | 2006 | 36.4 | 28.0 | 43.8 |
| Djibouti | MICS | 2006 | 93.1 | — | — |
| Egypt | DHS | 2008 | 91.1 | 80.7 | 96.4 |
| Eritrea | DHS | 2002 | 88.7 | 78.3 | 92.6 |
| Ethiopia | DHS | 2005 | 74.3 | 62.1 | 81.2 |
| Gambia | MICS | 2005/06 | 78.3 | 79.9 | 79.5 |
| Ghana | MICS | 2006 | 3.8 | 1.4 | 5.7 |
| Guinea | DHS | 2005 | 95.6 | 89.3 | 98.6 |
| Guinea-Bissau | MICS | 2006 | 44.5 | 43.5 | 48.6 |
| Kenya | DHS | 2008-09 ^a | 27.1 | 14.6 | 35.1 |
| Liberia | DHS | 2007 | 58.2 | 35.9 | 66.7 |
| Mali | DHS | 2006 | 85.2 | 84.7 | 84.9 |
| Mauritania | MICS | 2007 | 72.2 | 68.0 | 75.4 |
| Niger | DHS | 2006 | 2.2 | 1.9 | 2.9 |
| Nigeria | DHS | 2008 ^d | 29.6 | 21.7 | 33.9 |
| Senegal | DHS | 2005 | 28.2 | 24.8 | 30.5 |
| Sierra Leone | MICS | 2006 | 94.0 | 81.1 | 97.5 |
| Somalia | MICS | 2006 | 97.9 | 96.7 | 98.9 |
| Tanzania | DHS | 2004/05 | 14.6 | 9.1 | 16.0 |
| Togo | MICS | 2006 | 5.8 | 1.3 | 9.4 |
| Uganda | DHS | 2006 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.8 |
| Yemen | PAPFAM | 2003 | 38.2 | — | — |

Figure 4. Statistics on female circumcision in Africa.

Source: Adapted from a document: Female genital mutilation/cutting: Data and trends. A statistical update of the Population Reference Bureau, 2010. See Definition and Notes, p. 9, <http://www.prb.org/pdf10/fgm-wallchart2010.pdf>, retrieved on 27/11/12.



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Figure 5. Statistics on female circumcision in Africa.

Source: Adapted from a document: Female genital mutilation/cutting: Data and trends. A statistical update of the Population Reference Bureau, 2010. See Definition and Notes, p. 9, <http://www.prb.org/pdf10/fgm-wallchart2010.pdf>, retrieved on 27/11/12.

Circumcision operations could be grouped into three categories.

- a. Male circumcision for purification or hygiene purposes. This is non-religious and medical.

- b. Male circumcision after birth. This is a religious or cultural rite and it is also for purification purposes. This is practiced among some religious traditions including Islam.
- c. Male circumcision and clitori-dectomy: this sometimes marks a transition from childhood to adulthood.²²²

The practice of female circumcision must have started and spread from Egypt.²²³ By the middle of the 8th century B.C. when Egyptian political influence began to wane, Ethiopian kings began to assert themselves in the ruins of the Egyptian civilization after almost 1800 years of dominion by the Egyptians. By this time, the Egyptian social ideas which ultimately influenced the Sudan must have spread to as far as Ivory Coast. The Yoruba who might have migrated from the coast of the Upper Nile somewhere in the first century A.D. bear tribal marks of Egyptian impact.²²⁴

There are eight types of female circumcisions practiced in Africa. They include: scarification (which involves making four cuts on the clitoris without severing any flesh), wrenching or Nipping (ripping off the tip of the clitoris), *summah* (performed by removing the prepuce of the clitoris). Others include: clitori-dectomy (ripping off the entire clitoris); excision (removal of the clitoris together with the labia minora); intermediate (ripping off the clitoris with the labia minora and the labia majora leaving a vulva opening); infibulations (scrapping off either the two edges of the labia majora or the clitoris and both the minora and the majora and stitching together of the two ends of the vulva), and introcision (scrapping deep into the vaginal orifice or splitting the perineum lengthwise).²²⁵

Now let us state the Islamic blueprint on the practice of female circumcision. There is no known reliable tradition on the practice of female circumcision. However, Imam Bukhari reports an *Athar* tradition (a tradition that traces its origin not to the Prophet but to the companions) which refers to what is known in Arabic as *Khafad*. The word *Khafad* means to "diminish" or "suppress." It was a process used to suppress the growth of the clitoris. This process cannot be translated as female circumcision. This is because the Arabic word for circumcision involving the cutting of a flesh is

²²² B.D. Rachewiltz, *Black Eros: The Sexual Customs of Africa from Pre-historic Times to the Present Day* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), pp. 162–163.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

²²⁵ E.J. Dingwall, *Male Infibulations* (London: J. Beale & Sons, 1925), p. 35; E.J. Dingwall, *Woman: An Historical, Gynaecological and Anthropological Compendium*, Vol. 1 (London: Heinemann, 1935), pp. 359, 342, 352, 358, and 351; C. O. Knudson, *The Falling Dawadawa Tree* (Denmark: Intervention Press, 1994), pp. 31–37.

Khitan. This is used only for male circumcision.²²⁶ However, the patrons of female circumcision translate *Khitan*, which appears in many religious texts, to refer to both female and male circumcisions,²²⁷ but this is incorrect. This is because the only sound report that refers to a circumcision operation on the female genitalia in a tradition mentions *Khafad*.²²⁸ *Khafad* does not involve cutting-off any flesh but it was only a portion of the clitoral hood or prepuce that was stitched to suppress the over-growth of that organ as it was popular among especially Southern Arabians who may have inherited it from the Ethiopian emigrants from Abyssinia and Yemen. Whenever female circumcision is mentioned in respect of Islam, it stands for this practice.²²⁹ In spite of this, there was no report to suggest that it was even applied by the Prophet or whether it was applied to all women. Some Muslims have enculturated or accustomed themselves to the prevalent practice of cutting the clitoris or even other part of the genitalia as a compelling necessity for all Muslim girls. The traditional African practice of circumcision has, therefore, found a friend in enculturated African Muslims in this regard.

Really, as a religion whose principles apply to all environments, time and space, Islam has confronted indigenous cultural tradition whose solutions to problems of explanation, social structure, and fertility have often appeared more effective to the local community.²³⁰ The relevance and immediacy of masked cults and the figurative art of shrines which, at least in theory, Islam rejects, have clearly not diminished under the impact of Muslim practice in Africa. In effect, that means that these traditions were integral or very essential to the existence of the people and their worldview. Indigenous traditions, embedded in particular social formations and economic activities, have therefore rarely been eliminated from the African whether Muslim or traditional in his contact with Islam. As a matter of fact, the entire African Islamization process was fraught with creative inculturation of some Islamic and African traditional norms and an attempt to find an Islamic meaning to these ideas in brilliant African perspectives.

Of course, Islam did not reject as false all the beliefs and practices of the indigenous African people. It concurred 100% with the African notion of the spirit world and sanctioned the belief in mystical powers. In

²²⁶ L.I. Asmani and M.S. Abdi, "De-linking Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting from Islam", <http://unfa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2011/De-linking%20FGM%20fromIslam%final%20report.pdf>, retrieved on 14/02/13.

²²⁷ *Ibid*.

²²⁸ *Ibid*.

²²⁹ A.A.M.I. Al-Bukhari, trans. by R. A. Rehman, *Al-adab al-mufrad (Manners in Islam)* (Pakistan: Darul Ishaat, n.d.), p. 761.

²³⁰ "Islam and African Traditional Religion in Nigeria", <http://www.africaworld.net/afrel/islam-atr-nigeria.htm>, retrieved on 14/02/13.

consequence, therefore, it has accommodated itself with the numerous notions of spirit forces within the primordial religious philosophy of the African people. Sadly, however, it appears the complexity of this course of action and the various dimensions of individuals applying a certain degree of religious pluralism or diversity is unpopular in Muslim discourse which tends towards normative assertions. For this reason, in the past, some Muslim clerics insisted on the duty of conscientious Muslims to declare *Jihad* on "pagans" and convert "polytheists" and Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio's declaration of *Jihad* on the Hausa rulers could be understood in this context. The question, however, lingers as to who the "polytheists" really are to merit the declaration of a *Jihad* and who has the moral right to execute that job. Indeed, the history of Islam in Africa with special emphasis on the sub-continent West of the Sahara, could be understood in three stages: containment (kings checking Muslim influence by isolating them in *zongos* (Hausa word for ethnic quarters)); mixing (kings blending Islam with local traditions); and reform (whereby conscientious scholars moved for reforms in order to free their society of unIslamic practices and pave the way for implementing *Shari'ah*).²³¹

The above tripartite framework facilitates the understanding of the development of Islam and its relationship with the medieval empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, the 19th century *Jihad* that led to the establishment of the Sokoto *Khilafah* in Hausaland and the Usonian state in the Senegambia. Some African Muslim clerics and leaders who went on pilgrimage to Makkah did not only absorb the ideas of *Jihad* and conversion to Islam. They also cleverly took advantage of this to transform socio-political unrests into Islamic reform movements and the *Jihad* in Senegambia that finally established the Bundu state in the 1690s²³² as well as the factors that resulted in the formation of the Al-Moravid Movement among the Berbers in 1076 are clear cases in point. In spite of this *petit larceny*, and other societal dissonances fuelled by aggressive orthodox scholars, Islam is still deemed as cohabiting well with African traditions and some African chiefs either became Muslims or African Muslims have become chiefs and sometimes even made Islam a state religion; hence the two are friends not foes.

Conclusion

This paper examined the relationship between African traditions and Islam to find-out whether the two traditions find friends in each other. The constructs of inculturation, acculturation and enculturation were used as the scientific principles to explain this phenomenon. It was found that Islam has

²³¹ Goucher, LeGuin and Walton, *In the Balance*.

²³² *Ibid*.

tolerated and has been tolerated by African traditions. Islam tolerated traditional values such as polygamy which, for some, made conversion to Islam easier than perhaps conversion to Christianity. The early African Muslims creatively combined Islamic and indigenous beliefs to give rise to African Muslim traditions of incorporation, toleration, and mutual respect. Of course, at a certain period of its existence, African Islam had a turbulent history with reform movements and dynasties replacing some indigenous leadership or even crushing and succeeding themselves. Nonetheless, they provided a breed of Islam that gave a certain sense of cultural security to the indigenous Africans. The real proximity of Islam to African traditions is more than simply both of them having religious underscoring but as well in the substance of dealing with both the relationship of humanity to the transcendental metaphysical and socio-cultural aspects. The history of Islam in Africa has examples of a wide range of interaction or inculturation with African traditions and practices. At certain times, particularly when Muslims constitute a minority, a pluralist response to other cultures and traditions has occurred. Muslims took the view that different forms of primal religion could exist side by side with them in the same society. This combined with the recognition that the social and political structure of the wider society could be accommodated, individual Muslims, and sometimes Muslim communities, in some parts of Africa have incorporated into Islam different aspects of traditional life to varied degrees without any significant disagreements, hence to a very large extent, Islam and traditions in Africa are friends and not foes.