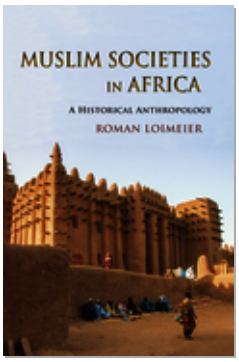
Muslim Societies in Africa

Roman Loimeier



Published by Indiana University Press

Roman Loimeier.
Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.
Project MUSE. Web. 3 Mar. 2015. http://muse.jhu.edu/.

1 Is There an "African" Islam?

The Diversity of Islam in Africa

Sometimes, old patterns of thought die hard. Even in the most recent literature on Muslim societies in Africa, such as Coulon and Cruise O'Brien (1988), Evers-Rosander and Westerlund (1997), or Quinn and Quinn (2003), it is possible to find the concept of an "African" Islam or, in French, *Islam "Noir."* This African Islam is presented as peaceful and syncretistic, accommodating, and less orthodox than "militant Arab Islam." The discussion of Muslim societies and Islam in Africa has to take into account, however, that there is no uniform and singularly "orthodox" form of Islam, either in Africa or in the Islamic world as a whole. The continent is not only much too vast to harbor just one continental expression of Islam, but African historical experiences with Islam have also been much too diverse to support the notion of a single, African Islam. When visualizing the expansion of Muslim societies in Africa in geographical terms and their multiple entanglements, the force of this argument becomes immediately clear.

Traveling counter-clockwise through Africa from the north to the south, we encounter at first Egypt (Miṣr), which has always had, due to her central position in the Islamic world, an important role as a broker for many Muslim societies. Egypt has consequently been in contact with many interpretations of Islam. The famous al-Azhar University in Cairo was established in 988 by the Fāṭimid Caliph ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz as a center of Ismāʿīlī learning, yet became a center of Sunni teaching after 1171. Since the thirteenth century, al-Azhar has been home to dozens of student convents, arwiqa (sing. riwāq), and among these were three arwiqa housing students from sub-Saharan Africa, namely Bornu, Ethiopia, and Funj. Apart from her importance for the Muslim world, Egypt has also always been a major center of Orthodox Christianity, forming, from the sixth to the sixteenth century, a belt of Orthodox churches stretching from Armenia via Lesser Armenia, Palestine, Egypt, and the Nile Sudan to Ethiopia.

This strong Christian influence was largely absent in the Islamic west, the bilād al-maghrib. Yet the bilād al-maghrib were influenced by numerous Jewish communities of considerable size that settled as far south as the oasis of Tuwāt in the central Sahara. After the demise of the great Berber empires of the Almoravids and Almohads that dominated the bilād al-maghrib and large parts of the Sahara as well as al-Andalus (Spain) from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, the bilād al-maghrib disintegrated into essentially two zones of political organization: the lands administered by a central government (the bilād al-makhzan) and the lands beyond government control (the bilād al-sība). These political frame conditions favored the emergence of religious

brokers and thus specific forms of saint veneration and Sufism that later spread, through trans-Saharan trade, to sub-Saharan West Africa. The development of Muslim societies in the bilād al-maghrib as well as the oasis of the Sahara and sub-Saharan West Africa has to be understood as being connected through the trans-Saharan trade. Saharan as well as sub-Saharan Islamic scholarship were consequently interwoven with the important centers of Islamic learning in the bilād al-maghrib, such as the Zaytūna in Tunisia, the Qarawiyyīn in Fes, and other schools in Tilimsān (Tlemçen) and Marrākish.

The most important transmission belt for the spread of Islam south of the Sahara into sub-Saharan West Africa was, as has been mentioned above, trans-Saharan trade. It would be easy to pass over this sea of sand and to move on to the next region of Islam, yet such a move would underestimate the importance of the Sahara as a major space for the development of independent centers of Islamic learning, such as the western "Mauritanian" Ādrār, the central "Malian" Ādrār, the oasis of Tuwāt, Ghāt, Ghadāmis, the Aïr mountains and Agadez, Kufra, and numerous other Saharan centers of settlement that were of paramount importance for the maintenance of the trans-Saharan trade for more than one thousand years. Muslim states and empires both north and south of the Sahara have tried to gain control over these Saharan centers of trade and scholarship, yet more often these islands in the desert were able to maintain their autonomy, often in alliance with the populations of the Sahara that also fought for the control of the trade routes. Due to its mediating role in long-distance trade, the Sahara (as well as the East African coast) has been called a "gateway" (Robinson 2004: 32ff., Levtzion/Pouwels 2000: 1). This term suggests a one-sided direction of agency into some other place, however, and does not explicitly address the mutuality of exchanges between the northern and the southern shores of the Sahara (or the different shores of the Indian Ocean). It would be more appropriate to stress the role of the Sahara as a connective space, linking both shores, the bilād al-maghrib in the north and sub-Saharan West Africa in the south, in interfacing and mutual ways.

Probably from the eighth century, and possibly earlier, networks of trade, scholarship, and pilgrimage connected sub-Saharan West Africa, the "lands of the blacks" (arab.: bilād al-sūdān) across the Sahara with the bilād al-maghrib. As a consequence, Islam was presented to the countries of sub-Saharan West Africa primarily as a religion of traders. Muslims were highly esteemed at the courts of the Sudanese kings as representatives of the most advanced civilization of the time. The rulers of the kingdoms of the bilād al-sūdān such as Takrūr, Ghāna, Mālī, Gao-Songhay, or Kānim-Bornu converted to Islam in order to become part of this civilization and supported the development of Islamic teaching. At the courts of the Sudanic kings, Muslim scholars were appreciated as experts in administrative, legal, and financial matters, as scribes and interpreters. New centers of Islamic learning such as Jenné, Timbuktu, Gao, Kano, or Katsina developed, and in the late sixteenth century Aḥmad Bābā, a scholar from Timbuktu, could remark that Islamic learning in the bilād al-sūdān had not only reached

the same quality as in the famous schools of the bilād al-maghrib but surpassed these schools, in particular in the sphere of jurisprudence (Arab. fiqh). Yet, although the new religion found quick acceptance among sub-Saharan rulers and traders, Islam did not become, until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the religion of the vast majority of the population. Peasant farmers and artisan groups, in particular, remained attached to communal religions, and local cults continued to coexist with Islam at the courts of the Sudanese rulers, even if most people in the bilād al-sūdān, including non-Muslims, recognized Islam as a powerful source of blessing.

The paradigm of the peaceful spread of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa by traders was equally valid for the areas of tropical West Africa south of the Sudanic belt. Here, Muslim traders did not come from the bilād al-maghrib anymore, but from the trading centers of the bilād al-sūdān: since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Hausa and Mande traders started to establish Muslim trading entrepôts in the forest regions. And although these traders gained considerable influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at the courts of the states in the tropical forest regions, such as Asante or Yoruba, Islam has remained until today a religion of a minority in contemporary Ghana, Togo, or Benin. At the same time, Muslim societies in tropical West Africa have acquired multiple experiences of interaction with Christian missions and churches of different orientations as well as an array of African religions.

Whereas Islam reached sub-Saharan West Africa by way of the trans-Saharan trade routes, the lands of the Nile came into contact with Islam through Arab tribes migrating south from Upper Egypt along the axis of the Nile. Again, Islam was to develop in a different way in these regions of sub-Saharan Africa: Nile Sudan was dominated until the thirteenth century by Nubian kingdoms, such as Dongola and ʿAlwa, that, like Egypt, Ethiopia, and Armenia, formed part of a string of Christian orthodox churches. Until the fourteenth century, Greek was, in fact, the language of the church in Nubia, and last vestiges of Christianity continued to exist in Nubia until the late fifteenth century. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Nubian kingdoms started to disintegrate, however, and were replaced by Muslim Arab-Nubian principalities that fought for regional predominance until the early sixteenth century. Their constant rivalry enabled the rise of another power, the Funj-federation. Since 1505, the lands of the Nile Sudan were ruled by the Funj-empire of Sinnār, and although the rulers of Sinnār were nominal Muslims, the court of Sinnār as well as the majority of the sedentary population continued to practice pre-Islamic communal cults. The process of Islamization gained impact in the eighteenth century only and was connected with the establishment of Muslim traders and local saints who came to form new local centers of power and blessing.

Islam was again expressed in different terms in the highlands of Ethiopia. Here, Muslims had first appeared as refugees from heathen Mecca, in 615, seven years before the hijra of the Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Medina. Their short stay at the court of Axum, Ethiopia's ancient capital city, did not have any consequences, however,

> I rather prefer the term indigenous or communal (or even communitarian) when talking about African religions which have often been labeled as African traditional religions (ATR) or even as ethnic, tribal, or primal religions, to denote their lack of "motivation to broaden their appeal outside their own community" (ter Haar 2000: 3). It is also important to stress here that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have, of course, become African religions in the course of time, yet neither Islam nor Christianity nor Judaism is indigenous to Africa. Established umbrella terms for African religions such as those mentioned above are quite misleading, as there are major differences among African religions, such as the religion of the San of the Kalahari and the religion of the Yoruba. "Yoruba" religion or philosophy in fact seems to be about to turn into a world religion by transcending the communal context, not only due to a growing Yoruba diaspora, particularly in the Americas, but also due to an intensifying movement of conversion from outside the Yoruba ethnic context. At the same time, Yoruba priests have started to translate Yoruba religious texts into vernacular languages, in particular Spanish and English, and are engaging in disputes over the interpretation of religious tenets of Yoruba religion. These disputes over the interpretation of Yoruba religion are set in the context of a movement of reform within Yoruba religion, which is informed by debates within the Yoruba Diaspora in the Americas (communication, Claudia Rauhut, Leipzig, 5 January 2007).

and Ethiopia remained an orthodox Christian empire. Ethiopian Muslim communities that started to form in the ninth century traced their ancestry to these early migrants, however, and Ethiopia was often seen, in Muslim historical traditions, as a "dār al-ḥiyād," a neutral land, a sanctuary even, that according to a prophetic tradition (Arab. ḥadīth) was exempt from jihād. After a long history of ups and downs between the seventh and thirteenth centuries, Ethiopia's Christian emperors were able to conquer vast territories in the central, western, and southern highlands. Ethiopia's efforts to gain control over the eastern highlands as well as to gain access to the rich markets of the south led to a series of wars with the Muslim trading principalities of the eastern highlands that had developed in these regions since the ninth century. In the early sixteenth century, Imām Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ghāzī united these Muslim emirates and subsequently inflicted a number of defeats on the Ethiopian armies. Between 1528 and 1542, Muslim armies conquered almost all of Ethiopia and were defeated only in 1542, when Imām Aḥmad was killed in a battle with the reorganized Ethiopian army. The century-old struggle between Muslim and Christian Ethiopia continues to inform

Ethiopia's historiography until today: while Ethiopia's Christian elites portray Ethiopia as being "surrounded by a sea of Islam," Ethiopia's Muslims point out their marginal role in Ethiopia.

While Ethiopian history came to be marked by the influence of the Christian orthodox church as well as a history of rivalry between Christian and Muslim states and principalities, the arid lowlands of the Horn of Africa could be seen, like the Sahara, as a region marked by stateless societies, mostly Somaal nomads. In the port cities of Berbera, Mogadishu, Marka, and Brawa, traditions of Islamic learning developed since at least the early fourteenth century, as attested by the famous traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, who visited Mogadishu in this period of time.

Whereas a sea of sand connected the northern and southern coast (Arab. sāḥil) of the Sahara, the Indian Ocean and the monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean connected the East African coast with the coasts of India and Arabia. This regional orientation toward India as well as Southern Arabia and even Persia also characterized the specific development of East Africa's Muslim societies since probably the eighth or ninth centuries. Thus, the Shāfiʿī school of law came to predominate in East Africa, whereas the Nile Sudan as well as sub-Saharan Western Africa, the Sahara, and the bilād al-maghrib joined the Mālikī school of law. In contrast to North and West Africa, Islam in East Africa also remained confined to the littoral zones. Muslim traders started to penetrate into the East African interior only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At this point in time, an old Islamic culture had come into existence on the coast, characterized by a common language (Kiswahili) and a culture of seafaring and long-distance trade. In contrast to the bilād al-sūdān, however, the trading centers of the East African coast never formed empires until they were united in the nineteenth century by the Sulṭānate of Oman. Thus the history of the East African coast has to be viewed as a history of competing trading centers that were rather oriented toward the sea than toward the bush (Swa. nyika). In fact, it is possible to differentiate between a long history of the Muslim societies on the coast and a short history of Islam in the East African interior. The East African upcountry regions are informed today by a multitude of interfaces between Islam, Christianity, and African religions.

Another historical tradition, again different from other contextualizations of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, may be found in South Africa. In 1658, only six years after the establishment of a Dutch colony in Cape Town, first Muslims from India and the East Indies arrived in Cape Town on board of Dutch ships. These Cape Muslims started to form a community that developed, due to the rigid policies of the "Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk," as an underground community. Constant growth connected with the ongoing settlement of political prisoners from India as well as the East Indies, but also conversion of black slaves, allowed the Cape Muslim community to grow to considerable strength in the nineteenth century. In 1850, about 40 percent of Cape Town's population was Muslim, among them a considerable number of

marginalized European immigrants. Under British rule, the Cape Muslim population gained religious freedom and the number of mosques increased. The growing size of the Cape Muslim community triggered, however, a number of communal disputes that were often connected with the question as to who would be entitled to lead a specific mosque community. As a result, the Cape Muslim community was never able to achieve the kind of political unity that would have been necessary to influence Cape Town's political development in decisive ways in the late nineteenth century.

Unity within Diversity

Muslim communities and societies in Africa thus can be viewed as characterized by variegated historical experiences, their integration into different geographic settings as well as varying modes of interaction with Christianity, Judaism, and a multitude of African religions and communal cults. These trans-religious interfaces have influenced the development of local traditions of Islam and are reflected in the way in which Muslim traditions are integrated (or not) into respective Christian, Jewish, or African religious traditions or, vice versa, the way in which Muslims have integrated non-Muslim social and religious customs into their own religious and social traditions. In some regions such as the bilād al-maghrib, Egypt, or Ethiopia, Muslims share the cult of Jewish or Christian saints (and vice versa) and have adopted, in varying ways and degrees, aspects of Christian, Jewish, or African cosmologies. Such influences are particularly clear in the development of the disciplines and sciences of astrology, astronomy, numerology, and/or divination, often subsumed under the term ʿilm al-falak, where references to Jewish traditions (Kabbalah) have been important.

However, the differences among the Muslim communities in Africa are to be explained not only by these historical, regional, geographical, or cultural forces or their respective modes of interaction with other religious traditions. Their diversity is also connected with the fact that the acceptance of "Islam" as a religion is and has always been a selective process. In this process of selective and situational adoption and enculturation of Islam, specific elements of the faith have been taken over completely in some regions but were stressed less in others. Thus, the Imasighen tribes of the western Sahara accepted the norms of Islamic law as a program of reform under the influence of the Almoravid movement in the eleventh century, whereas they have found less or only marginal acceptance in other parts of Africa. Local (pre-)Islamic customs have also been incorporated, in the context of processes of conversion, into local practices of Islam as customary law and practice (Arab. ʿurf or ʿādat) in particular, when these customs did not contradict the prescriptions of the sharīʿa. Numerous local practices thus came to form part of Islamic ʿurf. This explains the formation of multiple ways of living "Islam" in Africa and Asia, which came to be challenged, from time to time, by Muslim reformers who questioned the normativity of local customs, attacking them as "un-Islamic innovations" (Arab. bidaʿ, sg. bidʿa). As often, local scholars have risen to defend local practices. Cyclical debates about the Islamic or un-Islamic

The Wahhābiyya was a movement of reform in Arabia established by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792). Wahhābis stress the central doctrine of the unicity of God (tawḥīd) and consequently call themselves al-muwaḥḥidūn (unitarians). Wahhābis are Sunni Muslims and follow the Ḥanbalī school of law. They reject all forms of saint veneration and other un-Islamic innovations (bidaʿ), such as the visiting of tombs or veneration of the Prophet, and propagate a literalistic reading of the Qurʾān. In an alliance with the Āl Saʿūd family of central Najd (Darʿiyya) in Arabia, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb defeated all opponents to the movement in central Arabia by 1773, when the Wahhābī movement conquered Riyādh. In the following years, the movement took control of the al-Ḥasā region on the Gulf, finally conquering Medina (1804/1805) and Mecca (1806), and taking control of the Islamic pilgrimage and the holy cities of Islam. In 1811 the Ottoman sulṭān authorized the ruler of Egypt, Muḥammad ʿAlī, to invade Arabia and to recover Mecca and Medina. By 1818 Egyptian troops had conquered most of the Arabian Peninsula, including Darʿiyya, and terminated the first empire of the Wahhābiyya.

character of local ʿurf practices are thus part of an ongoing history of disputes which has characterized the development of Muslim societies since the time of the Prophet.

Yet, even when the norms of the sharīʿa (the principles of Islamic law) were adopted by Muslims as legal foundations of their societies, unusual interpretations of the sharīʿa could occur. After a successful jihād against the "pagan" Bambara state of Segu in sub-Saharan West Africa that led to the establishment of the imāmate of Masina in 1818, the sharīʿa became the exclusive legal foundation of this Muslim empire. Masina society was characterized, however, by a comparatively strong position of Halpulaaren women. As a consequence, the Muslim scholars of Masina did not dare to fully implement the legal norms of the sharīʿa, particularly with respect to the so-called ḥadd (pl. ḥudūd) regulations, punishments commanded by the Qurʾān. When a woman was found guilty of a crime punishable according to ḥudūd regulations, it was not the woman who was punished, but, according to the rules of legal procedure as practiced in Masina, an item in her possession. According to Amadou Hampaté Bā, the prescribed flogging was enforced "on the roof of her house or on an object belonging to her that was dear to her heart. This public replacement-punishment was as humiliating for the culprit as if the punishment would have been enforced on her in person" (Bā 1955: 49, my translation).

The process of Islamization has to be characterized thus, on the one side, as a process of gradual and selective adoption and in-culturation of the greater framework

of Islam by communities of Muslims. This process was accompanied by processes of contestation and reconfiguration of an established consensus and consequently never came to an end. A major element of the discourse of Wahhābī scholars in Arabia in the eighteenth century, for instance, was that the Bedouins of the Arabian peninsula had allegedly fallen back, as far as their faith was concerned, into the times of pre-Islamic "jāhiliyya" (ignorance, heathendom), an argument taken up by Sayyid Quṭb, the twentieth-century Egyptian thinker of radical Islam in his analysis of contemporary Muslim society. Both Wahhābīs and Quṭb accordingly advocated a movement of "iṣlāḥ" (purification of the faith). On the other side, the process of Islamization has to be understood as one of localization, in which elements of the faith and religious practice were incorporated into a multitude of local contexts and thus came to form local traditions of Islam. It is not possible, therefore, to talk about an Africanization (or Asianization) of Islam, as Africa (likewise Asia) cannot be seen as homogenous geographical, cultural, or historical entities which would be informed by one single, essential "Africanité." Rather, Africa should be seen, as mentioned above, as a huge continent that forms a geographical and cultural continuum with Mediterranean Europe as well as Western Asia and the Indian Ocean. Islam could thus acquire, perhaps, a distinct Moroccan, Senegalese, or Somaal notion, but not an African (or Asian) character. Items and practices that are presented as typically African, such as amulets (Arab. ḥijāb), practices of numerology, or "ecstatic Sufi rituals" (Robinson 2004: 27–58) can in fact be found in virtually every part of the Islamic world in one form or the other. The best market for amulets from both Northern Nigeria and Senegal is Saudi Arabia, and the annual pilgrimage has become an important market for the trade in these items. Equally, spiritual healers (Swa. waganga) from the East African coast have become highly sought practitioners of "kusoma Kurani" (healing by Qurʾānic recitation) ceremonies in Saudi Arabia, although their very residence in Saudi Arabia is regarded as being illegal.

Islam as a Discursive Tradition

Despite their differences in regional, historical, and cultural terms, Muslim communities and societies in Africa (as well as in Asia) are still viewed as "Islamic," and Islam indeed constitutes a frame of reference common to all Muslims. In order to explain this paradoxical notion of unity within diversity we should visualize Islam as a great pool or corpus of texts, of prescriptions concerning the faith and/or everyday life, of shared rituals and festivals, of norms and values, as well as teaching traditions that were based on a number of key texts such as the Qurʾān, the compilations of the sunna of the Prophet, as well as a large number of legal and theological texts. In addition, all Muslim societies share one single concept of "Prophetic" time that unites Muslims across continents as well as through times. This canon has always been interpreted and reinterpreted, however. Due to its immensity it has been adopted only partially and selectively, and even religious scholars were usually familiar with only parts of the

corpus of Islamic teachings. They specialized on specific aspects such as jurisprudence (fiqh) and granted "ijāzāt" (authorizations) of teaching to their students for a specific text only. Beyond the scholars' circles, knowledge about specific theological positions or aspects of the law, of Islamic history or philosophy, was even smaller. In addition, not all aspects or components of the canon were stressed equally in Muslim societies at all times: in one scholarly tradition, Sufism (Arab. taṣawwuf) could be particularly stressed, while another tradition would focus on fiqh. This could change, of course, in the course of time. In Zanzibar, the syllabus of Islamic education has moved from a stress on jurisprudence in the late nineteenth century to a stress on ʿaqīda-literature (catechisms) and ḥadīth in the late twentieth century. At the same time, the corpus of texts taught in madāris in Zanzibar has decreased from about 235 texts in the different disciplines of Islamic learning until the 1950s to about 85 texts since the 1970s and 1980s. Also, many texts, including the Qurʾān, have been translated into Kiswahili and are taught in Kiswahili.

The partial, situational, and selective realization of the canon of Islam does not imply, however, that Islam was perceived and discussed, in a specific society and a

Islam has often been characterized as an orthopraxy due to its insistence on correct ritual. This idea fails to appreciate the fact that each orthopraxy is based on an orthodoxy. Orthodoxies are not given, but formed by processes of negotiation that have led to a temporary consensus on matters of religion in a specific community. In Islam, as in Christianity and Judaism, such processes of negotiation refer to key texts. In the case of Islam, these key texts are the Qurʾān and the collections of traditions (ḥadīth) of what the Prophet Muḥammad has done and said, as well as a series of exegetical texts in religious disciplines such as tafsīr (exegesis of the Qurʾān) or tawḥīd (dogmatic theology). This canon of texts is consulted and interpreted in matters of ritual, as, for instance, in disputes over the rules for prayer (ṣalāt): each physical component of the act of prayer is defined, in fact, by a set of rules that have to be followed in order to make a prayer considered valid. Deviation from the accepted norm can be interpreted, if need arises, as a conscious break with the established tradition, both in terms of the orthopraxy of a specific community and its consensus regarding the interpretation of the canon of core texts. Changes in ritual practice can signal opposition to established authorities and can consequently be branded as unbelief (kufr). Due to the tremendous importance of the proper ritual, ritual procedure has often been at the center of disputes in Muslim communities that often touch on questions of authority.

specific period of time, in small, disconnected, or even distorted bits and pieces. Each Muslim society should rather be seen, as Talal Asad has pointed out, as a distinctive and coherent set of "discursive traditions," even if these traditions were not the same in all Muslim societies. All of them, however, referred to a corpus of "Islamic general knowledge," a pool of widely accepted and known core "sites" such as Mecca, Medina, or al-Quds/Jerusalem; core icons and symbols such as the hand of Fāṭima; core festivals such as the ʿīd al-fiṭr at the end of the month of fasting, Ramaḍān, or the ʿīd al-aḍḥā (also ʿīd al-ḥajj, ʿīd al-kabīr) on tenth Dhū l-ḥijja, the month of the pilgrimage; but also the calligraphic representation of the name of the Prophet Muḥammad, of the "shahāda" or of the "takbīr" on walls, flags, or calendars; the iconic representation of saints like Aḥmad Bamba or ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī; as well as amulets and visualizations of the holy mosque of Mecca on carpets and prayer mats; and last but not least, core events and discourses that were and are familiar to most Muslims until today and that form, as such, a frame of reference that we may call, with Robert Redfield, a "greater tradition." Due to the fact that Muslims are still able to refer to and to quote from this canon, brokers such as religious scholars, writers, or politicians are able to conduct meaningful discourses on questions of everyday life or politics and to sanctify these discourses by establishing references to religion. The basic corpus of symbols, icons, and discourses may consequently be activated in political conflicts, when Muslim politicians or religious scholars point out, for instance, the trans-temporal importance of historical events related to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, such as the battles of Badr (a small group of Muslims wins a surprising but decisive victory in a war against infidels) or Uḥud (Muslims suffer a serious defeat against an enemy as a form of punishment for previous disobedience but recover from the defeat). Trans-temporal references to the canon of basic texts, "lieux de mémoire" (places of memory), symbols or icons of Muslim history, may thus be cultivated for the legitimization of claims of religious superiority of one tradition over another or for the legitimization of a jihād against both non-Muslims and Muslims.

The greater tradition of Islam thus does not exist as an autonomous and never-ever changing social or religious entity. Rather, local actors, often religious scholars, who are familiar with the discursive traditions of Islam as well as locally established concepts of the ritual and Islamic teaching, seize the initiative and refer to the greater tradition of Islam in order to call for changes in the local context. In the course of these scholarly discourses, established local practices are criticized or even condemned as un-Islamic innovations, bidaʿ, with reference to the reformers' own and peculiar interpretation of the greater tradition of Islam. Interaction between the greater tradition of Islam and local communities is thus realized only when "hard" references are established by, for instance, local scholars: otherwise, the greater tradition of Islam would remain a residual category, activated, quoted, and interpreted only selectively and with respect to a specific context at a specific point of time. The Qurʾān and other texts and

The debate on the anthropology of Islam has been informed to a large extent by Robert Redfield's work (1956) and the reactions to his argumentation (see Resources for Further Study). In contrast to Redfield, I think that a great(er) tradition (of Islam) is not confined to elites of the "reflective (urban) few" but is shared by the "un-reflective (rural) many" as mediated by a multitude of brokers. In addition, I would argue that communal/local or little traditions are scriptural in the sense of accepting the authority of texts, even if approaches to texts may differ: while Sufis stress the esoteric dimension of texts, Wahhābī-oriented scholars tend to reject the esoteric dimension of texts and stress, in contrast, a different episteme characterized by a literalist interpretation of the texts (see Brenner 2001). I do share, however, Redfield's idea of processes of universalization and parochialization that link greater traditions with little (local, communal) traditions in multiple forms of negotiation.

parts of the canon are not self-explanatory, therefore, or "inherently central" (Eickelman and Piscatori 1990: 14) for any Muslim society or time, even if they are indispensable points of reference in theological disputes. If not activated or quoted, and translated into ever changing contexts, they would remain dormant. Specific aspects of the greater tradition, in particular, those that are less quotidian than, for instance, daily prayers, acquire meaning and relevance for a specific society only through a process of negotiation as mediated by a multitude of brokers, scholars, students, traders, and pilgrims, or, today, the virtual travelers of the Worldwide Web. In this process of negotiation, specific aspects and interpretations of the canon have to be linked with the respective realities of a Muslim society to acquire social, political, and religious relevance. As contexts and frame conditions change, however, the interpretation of the texts changes as well, and texts and their interpretation have to be situated anew: The "contested nature of interpretation is a constitutive part of any Islamic tradition" (Asad 1986: 14). The basic interpretability of traditions and texts, and thus the "disponabilité" of the canon of Islam also disproves essentialist reductions of one static Islam and timeless Muslim societies. This logic extends to radical and activist (Islamist) Muslims who have tried to essentialize traditions and texts and have advocated a selective reading and interpretation of these traditions and texts in order to instrumentalize such readings for their own purposes. Yet instrumentalizations of traditions and texts are again embedded in specific political contexts. As soon as contexts change, essentializations have to be revised and adapted to new situations: even essentialistic readings of Islam do not escape the dynamics of negotiation and change.

Agents and Institutions of Brokerage

The question now arises as to how different local contextualizations of Islam are actually connected with the greater tradition of Islam beyond the obvious reference to the generally accepted canon and corpus of texts. Despite their differences, Muslim thinkers and societies are not only interwoven across time and space due to their ongoing dialogue with the texts of the canon, even though these texts are interpreted and enacted in different and often conflicting ways. They are also linked by a number of trans-local institutions and groups that act as brokers between the different local traditions in Africa (as well as in the other parts of the Islamic ecumene) and thus connect Muslim societies over space and time. The most prominent of these institutions or groups, namely scholars and schools, traders and trade, as well as pilgrims and the pilgrimage, are presented below. Yet this list is not exhaustive: regional shrine pilgrimages (Arab. ziyāra), festivals, the ritual itself, as well as the networks of the Sufi-orders and their institutions such as the zāwiya, also create community and interconnect Muslim communities.

Scholars and their institutions: In all Islamic societies in Africa (as well as in Asia), numerous local traditions of learning have developed in the course of time that have produced highly developed cultures of scholarship, schools (Arab. madāris), and mosque-colleges: Cairo, Qayrawān, Fes, Tilimsān, Marrākish, Shinqīṭ, Timbuktu, Jenné, Kano, Mombasa, Lamu, or Mogadishu, to name just a few. These traditions of learning were not isolated in their respective regions but connected through traveling scholars and their students. Through the practice of ṭalab al-ʿilm, the "journey in search of knowledge," not only the Qurʾān but all kinds of scholarly writings were spread in the Islamic oikumene. Thus, we find a major theological treatise written by the Maghribinian scholar Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 1486), *ʿaqīdat ahl al-tawḥīd al-ṣughra* (also called *al-sanūsiyya* or *umm al-barāhin,* "mother of proofs"), not only in the bilād al-maghrib or the bilād al-sūdān, but also on the East African coast, in Indonesia, and in Kasan in central Russia, where this treatise still constitutes an essential feature of Islamic education.

Trade and traders: Apart from scholarly traditions and journeys as well as Islamic schools, trade and the institutions of trade such as the caravanserai-khans (Arab. funduq) were a major feature of Muslim societies that connected the different regions of the Islamic world. Centers of trade in the bilād al-sūdān have been trading with the bilād al-maghrib as well as Egypt and the regions beyond for a long period of time. It would even be possible to characterize the history of the north Saharan as well as the sub-Saharan states between the ninth and the nineteenth century as a history of their efforts to gain control over as large as possible a section of the trans-Saharan trade. At the same time, the East African coast has been connected across the Indian Ocean with the trading centers of India, Arabia, and the countries of the Gulf and the important trading regions beyond. As a consequence, archaeologists have found

fifteenth-century Chinese porcelain at the court of the Mwene Motapa in Zimbabwe and gold of West African origin in northern Scandinavia.

The pilgrimage (ḥajj): The ḥajj constituted another important element of connection between the different regions of the Islamic world. In Mecca, pilgrims from Java met pilgrims from Egypt, Senegal, or central Asia and were able, by means of the common language of scholarship, Arabic, to discuss the news of the world or to dispute theological treatises. Information spread in fact quite fast among pilgrims, scholars, and traders and Muslim rulers were, as a consequence, often better informed about specific events in the world than European travelers who were cut off from all sources of information after weeks and months in the African interior. The British traveler Clapperton thus recorded, in 1824, "that he was regarded as a spy in Sokoto and that it was the common talk of the town that Europeans intended to take Hausaland as they had taken India" (Adeleye 1977: 120). Apart from the ḥajj to the holy places of Islam, a journey that was often linked with the visit of other "lieux de mémoire" (and trade) such as Cairo or Baghdad, shrine visits to local sacred places such as the graves of saints should also be mentioned here. Shrine visits not only tended to be more feasible for a majority of Muslim populations in historical times, but they were also important for the regional (religious, spiritual, economic, social) integration of Muslim societies. The experience of the ḥajj (and, to a lesser degree, of shrine visits) was not always an easy one, however. Often, the ḥajj was a long and dangerous journey that led pilgrims not only to Mecca but to other important places of Islamic learning such as Medina, Jerusalem, Cairo, or Damascus. These travel experiences were often recorded in travel accounts and books, a kind of literature that formed one of the oldest features of both non-religious and pious literature in Muslim societies. The experience of the ḥajj also became, from time to time, an issue in local disputes, as pilgrims returning from the holy cities of Islam started to criticize local customs that in their eyes were not in accordance with the norms of Islam as experienced in Mecca.

Questions of Authority

The trans-local experiences of scholars and students, travelers, traders, and pilgrims stimulated processes of reform, dissidence, protest, and dispute. Often, these conflicts were of a rather quotidian nature but sometimes they could acquire major social significance, as in the "qabḍ-sadl" disputes in the bilād as-sūdān in the early twentieth century over the question of the proper position of the arms during ritual prayers, either "sadl" (arms outstretched), as recommended by the Mālikī school of law, or "qabḍ" (arms folded over the chest), as accepted by the three other Sunni schools of law. The qabḍ-sadl disputes of the 1930s through the 1970s in sub-Saharan West Africa were informed by conflicts between a reformist movement of the Tijāniyya Sufi order as led by Ibrāhīm Niass, who insisted on qabḍ, and other branches of the Tijāniyya, as well as the Qādiriyya, who insisted on sadl. While this dispute could still be

interpreted as a conflict set within the Mālikī school of law, new Muslim movements of reform affiliated with both the Saudi-oriented Wahhābiyya and the Indo-Pakistani-Tablīghi Jamāʿat have recently added new aspects to this dispute. In contrast to the ʿTijānī'-qabḍ of the 1930s through the 1970s, which was identical with the qabḍ of the Shāfiʿī, Ḥanafī, and Ḥanbalī schools of law, the qabḍ of both Wahhābis and Tablīghis was characterized by the fact that hands were folded much higher on the chest. These dynamics of religious conflict point to the symbolic importance of seemingly quotidian features of the ritual, namely, to provide movements of reform with a marker of religious and/or social identity.

Reformers indeed often tried to discredit existing local traditions by attacking them as being un-Islamic innovations (Arab. bidaʿ makrūha) that had nothing to do with their own interpretation of Islam, perceived to be much more authentic than a local interpretation of Islam. The local scholarly establishment rejected this kind of argument by accusing the reformers of trying to introduce bidaʿ themselves and to represent a less authentic interpretation of the faith. Established scholars could also rely in their counter-argument on their own interpretation of the canon. The ultimate success or failure of a movement of reform was consequently much less connected with a convincing theological argumentation, although such an argumentation was still important for the development of the theological legitimization of respective religious and/or political positions, but with the capability of the rebels (or the representatives of the establishment) to respond to existing social, economic, or political grievances and to win, for their program of reform, acceptance as leaders of the marginalized, the poor, and the oppressed.

Thus, a whole series of religiously legitimated rebellions, often directed against slave trading, arbitrary rule, and widespread exploitation of traders as well as farming populations, have occurred in the bilād al-sūdān in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Islamic revolutions brought about the foundation of new states, led by scholarly elites that sought to legitimize their newly acquired power within the framework of Islam. Islam thus became, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the only source of legitimate rule in the bilād al-sūdān. This instrumentalization of Islam for the legitimization of political power by the victorious scholarly elite, as, for instance, in the imāmate of Masina, in the Sokoto caliphate, in the empire of al-Ḥājj ʿUmar Taal al-Fūtī (all in sub-Saharan West Africa), in the empire of the Mahdī in the Sudan, or in the realm of Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAbdille Ḥasan in Somalia, however, also led to a new dialectic of rule and oppression that triggered resistance, rebellion, and a renewed struggle for power and domination. At the same time, the religiously legitimized rebellions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not subject to an automatism of jihād, as shown by the history of the jihād in Hausaland. In the ancient Muslim kingdom of Gobir, considerable unrest and protest had formed against high taxation, the slave raids of the aristocracy, and acts of arbitrariness against both peasant farmers and herdsmen. In the late eighteenth century,

a Muslim scholar, Usman dan Fodio (1754–1817), started to criticize these policies and to condemn the practices of the government of local rulers as "un-Islamic." In 1787, the escalation of the conflict between rulers and the Islamic opposition came to a halt, however, when the Sarkin Gobir (Hau. ruler, king of Gobir) accepted a number of demands of the religious opposition. Usman dan Fodio even rose to become a councilor at the court of Gobir. Sarkin Gobir's successor, Yakuba (1790–94), continued this policy of de-escalation. Only when Sarkin Gobir Nafata came to power in 1794/95, rejected this policy, and issued a number of "anti-Islamic" decrees did dialectics of escalation start, which led from the "takfīr" (expiation) of the "un-Islamic" ruler to the theological legitimation of jihād to jihād. In a war of four years, almost all Hausa kingdoms were conquered and the Sokoto caliphate, the largest Muslim empire in nineteenth-century Sudanic West Africa, was established.

The Islamic revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were also linked, however, with processes of social, religious, and political change, and these processes of change continued in the twentieth century. From the 1890s to the 1960s, Islam became an ideology of resistance against mostly French and British, sometimes German and Italian, colonial rule. As David Robinson (2000) has shown, Muslim scholars at the same time developed paths of accommodation, modes of cooperation with the colonial powers that could strengthen the social and political role of Islam. However, the Muslim populations of sub-Saharan Africa also experienced a serious social crisis as the processes of colonial modernization had a strong secularizing character and were represented by non-Muslims, often Christian elites that stressed their orientation toward Europe. In many sub-Saharan African colonies and, later, independent states, formerly dominant Muslim populations and elites, as in Northern Nigeria, lost their privileged social and political position or were reduced, as in Kenya or Tanzania, to marginalized minorities in new nation-states dominated by mission-educated Christians: In the course of these developments, new forms and dynamics of interaction between Muslims and Christians have emerged, in particular, when looking at the interfaces between contemporary Muslim "missionary" movements such as the "Muslim Bible Preachers" of Tanzania and Pentecostal churches and their respective ways of approaching audiences.

In the context of these processes of modernization, a new series of Islamic reform movements developed in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa since the 1930s. In their endeavors of reform, Muslim reformers established reference to the sources of inspiration of the time, in particular the texts and teachings of the Salafiyya movement of reform, as represented by Muḥammad ʿAbdūh and Rashīd Riḍā, the movement of the Ikhwān al-Muslimīn, the Wahhābiyya of Arabia, or, more recently, the writings of Abū Āʿlā Maudūdī and Sayyid Quṭb. In the context of these renewed efforts of reform, the greater tradition of Islam was activated again and reinterpreted in order to discredit established paradigms of explanation as well as existing claims to irshād (correct guidance) with respect to the question, for instance, as to who would provide the most

acceptable interpretation of the canon, who would be entitled to speak for Muslims. In their efforts of reform, recent movements of Islamic renewal were particularly successful among disgruntled urban youth as well as women. In fact, many Islamic reform movements in sub-Saharan Africa (but not only there) can be seen as an effort of the young and the women to fight against existing social and cultural limitations and to achieve some sort of religiously legitimated emancipation. These movements of reform stimulated the reemergence of other, often conservative and status-quo oriented social and political movements that rejected the reformist and sometimes modernist interpretations of Islam. Many leading representatives of recent Islamic reform movements have not acquired qualifications as religious scholars (Arab. ʿulamāʾ), however, but were trained as doctors or computer experts and consequently regarded themselves as Muslim thinkers (Arab. mufakkirūn muslimūn) or professors (Arab. asātidha, sg. ustādh). The argumentation of these reformers has acquired a decisively political connotation that has been criticized by their opponents as a distortion of the spiritual message of Islam. At the same time, established religious scholars felt threatened by their claims to hegemonic interpretation of the faith.

When looking at the history of Muslim societies in Africa (and beyond) and the impact of Muslim movements of reform that have attacked local interpretations of Islam over centuries as seemingly un-Islamic bidaʿ, the question arises again as to why we still encounter differences among Muslims, in particular when considering the importance of the unifying forces of Islam—such as pilgrimage, the canon of texts such as the Qurʾān, or contemporary means of communication, especially the internet—that seem to enhance processes of unification. The differences between Muslim societies in Africa (and beyond) may be explained by diverging geographical settings, different historical experiences, and modes of interaction with other religious cultures and traditions. At the same time, the greater tradition of Islam has been accepted and interpreted selectively in different societies, contexts, and times. Local contexts have remained important defining frameworks and spaces of reference for the realization of the greater tradition of Islam. Equally, established and seemingly obsolete social and religious practices may show astonishing persistence, despite the onslaught of generations of reformers. Muslims have shown remarkable resilience, for instance, with respect to the reformist critique of the celebration of the mawlid, the birthday of the Prophet, which has remained a popular festival despite centuries of scholarly critique.

The multiple character of Muslim societies and the persistence of local traditions of learning may thus be explained, at least to some extent, by the very vitality of local traditions of learning. The interaction between the local context and the greater tradition of Islam must not necessarily lead to greater uniformity in expression and interpretation, precisely due to the fact that the reference to the canon usually comes from the local context and is linked with its particularities. The interaction between the local and the canon can even stimulate the further accentuation of the local and lead to a further expansion of the interpretative framework of the canon. After all, even

the most trans-local religious scholar is still rooted in a local context and the success of each movement of reform is equally linked with its capability to translate a program of reform into multiple local settings and their respective realities. Despite the undisputed importance of the "unifying forces" of Islam, differences in interpretation thus persist. As a consequence, we are not confronted with a single (African) Islam nor an archipelago of seemingly autonomous Muslim communities and societies but with both: the unifying framework of Islam as well as the diversifying and seemingly fragmentizing forces of change as experienced by Muslim communities and societies in their quest to negotiate and to define ever again their "Islamicité," their "Islamic identity," their ways of "being" Muslim. This dialectic has continued into times of globalization. Contemporary movements of reform have not generated more unity in Muslim societies but rather stimulated differentiation and accentuation of multiple expressions and interpretations of Islam. This process was enhanced by the fact that no church has blocked or channeled theological discussions and disputes and that many traditions of learning and traditions of reform continue to compete over questions of authority and interpretation. The spectrum of interpretation of Islam in Africa as well as in the Muslim world as such has thus grown considerably in the twentieth century and provides departments of religion, history, anthropology, and Islamics with an ever-growing array of research themes.

Theories of Conversion and the Evolution of Muslim Societies

A final core issue still has to be addressed here, namely, the question as to how and why African populations converted to Islam. This question has produced a large body of literature in the past and continues to do so until today. Europeans, often missionaries, particularly wanted to explain why major parts of Africa which had come under European control by the early twentieth century had turned Muslim only recently or were about to convert to Islam under European control, while other regions had been Muslim for hundreds of years. Missionaries and colonial officers tried to rationalize Islam in an evolutionary concept of social development and claimed that Islam was closer to supposedly simple African religious traditions than "sophisticated" Christianity. By accepting polygamous marriage and pre-Islamic ritual—in particular, spirit possession cults—conversion to Islam was allegedly easier than conversion to Christianity, which condemned these practices. In this worldview, Islam was often seen as a necessary evolutionary step from heathendom to Christianity. Based on Arabic accounts as well as the experiences of missionaries and colonial officers, colonial historians started to formulate theories on African conversion to Islam. The first influential paradigm was developed by a British missionary and historian, John Spencer Trimingham, since the late 1940s. His assumption was that Islam developed in sub-Saharan Africa in three major stages: in a first stage, Islam was introduced as a religion of North African traders and became prominent in trading centers as well as at courts: Muslim traders from North Africa were regarded as carriers of "cultural prestige,"

representing the "civilized world of the Mediterranean," and had, as scholars, superior knowledge of many things such as medicine, astronomy, or writing. Still, Islam was adopted slowly and selectively only and remained confined to trading centers and courts, coexisting with pagan cults. Trimingham then identified a second stage in the development of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, an "interregnum of eclipse in the fortunes of Islam": after the collapse of the large trading empires in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Islam lost its institutional backing, non-Islamic states replaced the Islamic empires, local cults reemerged, and Muslim minorities compromised and mixed originally pure and orthodox Islam with African religions. This was a period of stagnation. A third stage was characterized by the recrudescence of Islam and movements of jihād as a reaction against accommodationist rulers and the mixing of orthodox Islam with African indigenous religions and communal cults.

Although Trimingham's model of development in stages sounded quite convincing at the time, it suffered from three major problems: First, the assumption that North African traders represented pure and orthodox Islam is misleading when looking at the rather variegated development of Muslim societies in the bilād al-maghrib since the eighth century. Second, the focus on the courts, important as it may have been, ignores the fact that Islam was also represented by traders, including an increasing number of local traders, outside the courts and that local traditions of Islamic learning developed beyond the control of courts. Third, the collapse of Islam and the "mixing" of Islam with African communal cults fails to explain the emergence of Muslim reformist movements in the bilād al-sūdān in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: where did these scholars come from? Movements of reform did in fact originate in interaction between a multitude of small rural centers of Islamic learning as well as the urban centers and the courts. Islam had survived the collapse of the imperial courts.

In the early 1970s, a British anthropologist, Robin Horton, proposed a new approach to conversion which was structured differently and took a theological stance. Horton in particular pointed out the existence, in African indigenous religions and communal cults, of a two-tier concept of religion: "In the first tier we find the lesser spirits which are in the main concerned with the affairs of the local community and its environment. . . . In the second we find a supreme being concerned with the world as a whole" (Horton 1971: 101). Lesser spirits dominated local cults to a large extent: they were linked with mountains, wells, sacred groves, trees, and springs, and they granted order, stability, well-being, rain, and good harvests in a specific environment and area. The ancestors formed the link between these spirits and the living, in particular the priests of the different cults which required ritual and sacrifice. In times of crisis (such as natural disasters, war, and colonization) local microcosms could face destabilization and collapse. People would search for new answers in a new macrocosm, and Islam (or Christianity) would get a chance. Also, when trans-local (trans-Saharan) trade developed and traders started to move out of purely local contexts, local cults and their "lesser spirits" not only lost their function but also their meaning.

Soon after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in 632, Muslims started to quarrel over a number of religious and political issues such as the question of the succession to the Prophet, the Caliphate (Arab. khilāfa). In these disputes three major religious orientations emerged: the Shīʿat ʿAlī, those who stressed the claim of the Prophet's nephew and son-in-law ʿAlī to the caliphate on account of his closeness (qarāba) to the Prophet; those who opposed the idea that the caliphate should become a family dynasty and supported, in 632, 634, and 644, the succession of Abūbakar (d. 634), ʿUmar (d. 644), and ʿUthmān (d. 656) on grounds of their merits and priority (sābiqa) as companions (ṣaḥāba) of the Prophet; and finally, those "people of uprightness" (ahl al-istiqāma) who supported ʿAlī's claims to the caliphate in 656, yet abandoned his camp in 657 when he started to negotiate the caliphate with his major Umayyad opponent Muʿwiya. The ahl al-istiqāma (or dissenters, Khārijites) split into three competing fractions, the Ibāḍites, Ṣufrites, and Azraqites, of which only one group, the Ibāḍites, survive to this day in Oman and small communities in Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. The Shīʿat ʿAlī, in contrast, started to turn into a major religious orientation in 680 when Umayyad troops massacred ʿAlī's son al-Ḥusayn and his entourage near Karbalāʾ in ʿIrāq in order to stop Shīʿite claims to the caliphate. Although the Shīʿat ʿAlī had lost its leader (imām), Shīʿites continued to challenge the Umayyad (and later, the ʿAbbāsid) caliphate. A majority of Muslims rejected Shīʿite claims to the caliphate, however, and stressed the paramount role of the tradition (sunna) of the Prophet as a model for the social, religious, and political life of the community (jamāʿa) of Muslims. In the decades to come each group developed its own tradition of legal reasoning. Among the ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamāʿa, four Sunni legal traditions have survived until today, the Mālikī, Ḥanafī, Shāfiʿī, and Ḥanbalī schools of law.

As a consequence, traders looked for a more powerful "general" spirit and found this supreme deity in Allāh. On the local level, Islam and communal cults could continue to coexist, however, for a long period of time.

A British historian, Humphrey Fisher, responded to Horton's crisis theory and Trimingham's stages model and proposed, in the 1970s and early 1980s, a third approach to conversion which reactivated Trimingham's three-stage model: in a first, quarantine stage, Islam was introduced by outsiders in an orthodox mode, Muslims did not mingle, Islam was not mixed, and Muslims remained a minority. Mixing occurred in a second stage, when original Muslim enclaves dissolved: "As local people

converted in increasing numbers, a stage of mixing followed, in which people combined the profession of Islam . . . with many pagan survivals. Finally, often after a lapse of centuries, the candle of reform, kept alight by the written word, and perhaps also by the devotion of some clerics who succeeded in maintaining an element of quarantine against the mixing all around them, burst into a conflagration and established the rule of the saint" (Fisher 1973: 31). Fisher's model obviously had similar problems as Trimingham's. Besides the fact that stage models suffer from the fact that they are too ahistorical and rely on the assumption of rather rigid dialectics of evolution, Fisher's model ignored the emergence of a multitude of local centers of Islamic learning, where the "written word" was actually studied and applied to local contexts. In addition, centers of Islamic learning never existed in total isolation or quarantine, but were in constant exchange amongst each other as well as with the centers of Islamic learning in the Sahara, in Egypt, and in the bilād al-maghrib. The assumption that Islam came to sub-Saharan West Africa in an orthodox form again belies realities of historical development in the bilād al-maghrib, where we find a long history of sectarian development. Before the establishment of the Mālikī school of law in major parts of the bilād al-maghrib in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, both Shīʿī and two different Khārijī orientations, the Ibāḍiyya and the Ṣufriyya, had been quite vibrant, and the establishment of something like orthodox Islam among the Imasighen populations in the Sahara took probably still longer. The "orthodox Islam from outside" perspective reflected, in fact, a colonial perspective on Muslim societies, when Arab Islam was presented as orthodox, pure, clean, undiluted, militant, and dogmatic as well as anti-European, whereas African Islam was presented as unorthodox, mixed, tolerant, and pro-European.

These models of conversion have been modified since by other historians of African history, such as John Hunwick, Robert Launay, Nehemia Levtzion, and David Robinson, who developed, since the 1970s, more sophisticated approaches to conversion to Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. Levtzion (1979) thus distinguished between "communal" and "individual" conversion. In the history of Islam, whole communities such as the Bedouin tribal groups of the Arabian peninsula or the Imasighen populations of the bilād al-maghrib converted to Islam as a group while maintaining their cultural identity as bedouin Arabs or as Imasighen: "There was hardly a break with past traditions and pre-Islamic customs and beliefs survived. In this process more and more people came under the influence of Islam, but they took longer to cover the distance from their former religion to Islam, viewed as a continuum from nominal acceptance of Islam to greater conformity and commitment" (Levtzion 1979: 19). Communal conversion, often linked with defeat and/or (voluntary) submission as sealed by an "oath" (Arab. bayʿa) of allegiance and loyalty, only started a long process of Islamization. In many regions, such as the bilād al-maghrib and the bilād al-sūdān, "initial demands on Muslims were minimal. Only after Islam had gained a foothold in a society did the exclusive nature of the Prophetic religion gradually become more manifest" (Levtzion

1979: 21). The gradual move of a community toward greater conformity and orthodoxy was marked by crises and subsequent movements of reform against allegedly lenient Muslims. Still, pre-Islamic heritage survived and was incorporated into local Islamic traditions as ʿurf. In some regions such as Egypt and Syria, conversion to Islam was not even encouraged by Muslim rulers, in particular in the early times of Islam, as ruling elites wanted to keep privileges confined to a small (Arab) Muslim elite while consolidating tax-income from "protected" (Arab. dhimmī) Christian and Jewish populations. On the other side, there has been individual conversion driven by a cocktail of motivations, both external and internal. Individual conversion was "more meaningful, a reorientation of the soul" (Levtzion 1979: 19), and implied a radical break with the past and unqualified commitment to Islam, often linked with efforts to not only internalize the ritual obligations but to also study the texts.

According to Levtzion and Hunwick, the establishment of Islam in the bilād al-sūdān can be imagined historically as the "dispersion" of Muslims (as traders), since a period of initial contact in the seventh and eighth centuries, and the emergence of small "islands" of Islam in a "sea of paganism" (Hunwick 1996: 181). Muslims were living in separate quarters, and such situations could last decades or even centuries. From the tenth and eleventh centuries, conversion to Islam became increasingly frequent. Islam was seen, in particular, in the centers of trans-Saharan trade, as being a supreme "source of blessing" (Arab. baraka), as expressed, for instance, in the story of the conversion of the king of Malal to Islam. At the courts and in trading centers, Muslims were esteemed as translators in many respects: they knew how to write, they became clerks and archivists but also experts in many trades, they were a knowledgeable elite and, with time, local centers of Islamic learning developed, often supported by the rulers in the bilād al-sūdān who wanted to profit from Muslim scholars and traders. Due to first "royal pilgrimages" as well as trade, knowledge in the bilād al-sūdān about the lands of the Muslims in the north increased, and the Muslim empires of the north and their metropolitan cities, in particular Cairo, became poles of attraction. At the same time, the islands of Islam started to expand and to form archipelagos of Islam in a shrinking sea of paganism. The increasing importance of Islam in the bilād al-sūdān created a dilemma for the rulers as they still had to respect local cults while recognizing the increasing strength of Islam: "The adoption of Islam as the official religion of the court, in Mali for example, was intended to supplement rather than to replace other principles on which the rulers based their legitimacy" (Launay 1992: 17). Coexistence of both Islam and local cults thus characterized most of the period between the tenth/eleventh and the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries, even after the demise of the great trading empires, due to the fact that the majority of rulers in the smaller kingdoms and principalities of the bilād al-sūdān, which emerged after the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were still involved in the trans-Saharan trade and thus linked with the Muslim emirates and empires in the north. Also, Islam continued to constitute a supreme source of legitimization of political rule in all empires and states

of sub-Saharan West Africa, as rulers had to address a large array of different local communities and societies: Islam was an important common denominator, a platform uniting diverse populations with different communal cults.

Rulers, both of empires as well as smaller kingdoms, thus pampered Muslim scholars, granted privileges, donated to centers of learning, gave protection, exempted Muslim scholars from taxation or custom fees, and gave them land or cattle. This led, since the eleventh/twelfth century, to the development of two major categories of Muslim scholars in the bilād al-sūdān: those who worked at the courts and those who had their own schools and trades beyond the immediate control of the rulers. The emergence of a large number of principalities and kingdoms in the bilād al-sūdān after the collapse of the great trading empires in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, however, started a period of crisis, warfare, disruption, anarchy, and constant competition for resources for the maintenance of courts and the defense of local and regional fiefs. As a consequence, rulers and warlords in the bilād al-sūdān started to raid each other's territories in order to gain control over trade and resources. They started to sell captive enemies, but even more often farmers and pastoralists into slavery in increasing numbers. Since the sixteenth century we can observe the development of predatorial states in the bilād al-sūdān (as well as on the Nile and in Ethiopia) which were increasingly linked with the trans-Saharan and transoceanic (Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and Red Sea) slave trades. In this situation, Muslim scholars, often those in rural communities, started to speak up against unjust rulers (an old theme in Islamic theology), to defend the oppressed and marginalized, and condemned the slave trade of Muslims in particular. As a result, movements of opposition against the "predatorial lords" of the bilād al-sūdān started in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which eventually led, in most parts of the bilād al-sūdān, to the establishment of Muslim states led

> According to the Arab geographer al-Bakrī (d. 1094 in Cordoba) (*Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik,* chapter 1464, p. 875/876), the king of Malal was called al-musulmānī. His country had been plagued by a drought for years. Finally, the king asked a guest, a Muslim, who read the Qur'ān, what could be done. The Muslim asked the king to convert to Islam and to have faith in Allah, and in that case he would pray for rain on the king's behalf. The king followed his advice, his guest taught him the religious and ritual obligations of Islam, asked him to perform the prescribed ablutions, and gave him a simple cotton dress, then the Muslim climbed a hill nearby and they both prayed, on the next Friday, for rain, during most of the day and the night. In the morning, abundant rain came. Thereupon the king commanded all statues of local deities to be destroyed and both he and his successors remained Muslim.

by religious scholars. In these states, Islam became, in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the one and only source of power and legitimization, and a sea of paganism was turned into a sea of Islam which harbored some heathen islands. Some of these islands of heathendom, such as the Maguzawa and Azna communities of northern Nigeria and southern Niger or the Boni of the northern Kenyan coast, continue to exist today and practice rituals such as the bori-spirit possession cult in Hausaland, the zār-cult in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt, or varieties of the East African pepo-cult, although most pre-Islamic cult sites have disappeared and been replaced by mosques. Some religious beliefs, such as the concept of the spirits (Hau. iskoki), have been incorporated into local traditions of Islam, however, and have found acceptance as Muslim jinns (demons).

In recent years, scholars have emphasized the need to look at the many specific ways in which Africans have "made Islam their own" (Robinson 2004: 42) and incorporated "Islam" into local traditions. Their considerations have been supported by a number of field studies on processes of conversion, such as Searing (2006) on the Sereer of Siin-Saalum (Senegal) in the early 1900s, Faulkner (2006) for the Boni in the hinterlands of Lamu (Kenya) in the postcolonial period, Becker (2008) for the hinterlands of Kilwa, Mtwara, and Lindi (Tanzania) in the 1920s and 1930s, or Bunger (1979) for the Pokomo (Kenya) in the 1940s and 1950s. These studies as well as other historical research (Glassman 1995) have identified a cocktail of motivations for conversion to Islam which applies to different local contexts in different periods of time. This allows us to assume that processes of conversion to Islam may have followed similar patterns and similar motivations in earlier times, even if the cocktail of motivations for conversion may have been different in each case and varied in each local context. Such motivations for conversion can be seen to fall into two major categories: external and internal. External factors which stimulated or triggered conversion could have been experiences of war, coercion, disaster, colonization, Christian missionary pressure, or disruptive modernization. War, in particular, has to be seen as being a rather ambiguous driving force for conversion, in particular when Muslims themselves came to be seen, as in the case of the Sereer in Siin (Senegal) in the late nineteenth century or the populations of the Jos plateau (contemporary Northern Nigeria) in the nineteenth century, as the enemies who brought instability and enslavement. Among the internal factors for conversion were dissatisfaction with existing traditions which were seen as being increasingly obsolete in contexts of social change; protest against existing political elites; rebellion against an older generation or the elders as such; and the effort to establish new religious authority. Sub-Saharan African populations characterized by traditions of matrilineal inheritance and descent (ancient Nubia, for instance, but also the Sereer in Senegal, and a number of societies in East Africa) viewed conversion to Islam as a way to secure inheritance and thus control over the means of production in the patrilineage. Recent case studies (Becker 2008, Faulkner 2006, Searing 2006) show that converts were often young men who married Muslim women and wanted

to make sure that their children would inherit from them, not their maternal uncle. In addition, conversion could be seen as a way to achieve social emancipation and to gain privileges confined to Muslims, a share of the booty in war, a way out of slavery, a gate toward integration into a powerful, prosperous, successful, and prestigious (civilized) community (as on the East African coast), and thus a strategy to acquire a new identity and recognition, to rise in status and to escape oppressive and obsolete local customs. In her study of conversion among the Mawri in Niger, Adeline Masquelier was for instance told by one of her local interlocutors that "people had turned to Islam because, once (colonial) peace was established, they just wanted to get on with their lives and take advantage of new opportunities" (Masquelier 2001: 60). Processes of conversion were also often characterized by a critique of existing traditions as with respect to (costly) burial rites, initiation, and marriage ceremonies. These motivations can be observed not only for processes of conversion to Islam, but also for processes of re-affiliation within Islam, as in the context of movements of reform.

Processes of conversion have thus always been situational and selective, and specific aspects of Islam were incorporated more easily than others. Equally, local traditions were not discarded completely in processes of conversion: they could be incorporated as non-objectable ʿurf (and come under attack only later in a movement of reform) and they could continue to coexist with Islam (even if recognized as non-Islamic). This process of incorporation (or enculturation) should be seen as representing a cocktail of variations in different contexts. At the same time, individual conversion could take different forms: it could come as an abrupt and complete shift to Islam, a radical reorientation which has been described in recent times as "born again Islam" (Diouf and Leichtman 2008: 8f.). Or it could evolve slowly by adopting ritual aspects of Islam, in particular prayer and fasting, in multiple steps. After some time of becoming acquainted with Muslims and their variegated practices of Islam, perhaps even after generations, local traditions of learning could emerge, a process which would lead to a more reflexive view of Islam, as well as pre-Islamic religious traditions, by studying the books. This process has been described by Humphrey Fisher as a "second conversion" to Islam (Fisher 1985: 166). Recent models of conversion are thus not characterized by a concept of development in historical stages so much as by a focus on local dynamics of conversion and variegated speeds of development, different from region to region, as well as a focus on the agency of the converts and those who did not convert.