

Religion and globalization:

Sub-Saharan Islam in the Conquest of new territories

Made by : M'hamed Achraf El ofir

## INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of religious flows in globalization is a fact that no serious analyst would consider denying today. Whether we emphasize the "globalization of religions", the increasing transnationalization of religious networks or, more specifically, the transition from Islam to the West, what is now visible is an international game subverted by private actors, especially religious ones, whose proliferation represents a radical break with the Westphalian model based on the primacy of state sovereignty. The State is now only one actor among others in the international system and its decline would signal the growing and paradoxical hold in the light of the homogenizing dynamics of globalization of cultural particularisms.

If the international visibility of religious actors is now undisputed, it is nevertheless worth recalling two obvious facts that are sometimes forgotten. The first concerns transnationalization, which has always been consubstantial with international relations. The second concerns religious flows, which can be argued to have always transcended territorial logic, especially with regard to monotheistic, universalist religions by nature. If we are now rediscovering the influence of religion on the international scene, sometimes to overestimate its importance or to apprehend it in an anhistorical way, it is because it has been permanently obscured by the ephemeral triumph of modernization policies according to which the secularization of the political order seemed inevitable. What is therefore unprecedented is the acceleration of the globalization process that actually began in the nineteenth century with the advent of imperial states, and perhaps even before that, due, among other things, to the massive diffusion of the electronic media, the densification of movements of populations and the development of trade, including the scale and recurrence erode the omnipotence of the nation-state, while in As long as the completed expression of modernization was expected, it was expected to be levelled. Symbolic differentiations and the confinement of religion in private space.

Sub-Saharan Africa is not on the margins of globalization, even if its share in international trade is very small. Various mechanisms, both legal (cooperation agreements, structural adjustment plans, etc.) and illegal (trafficking in arms, drugs, medicines, etc.), support its integration into the international system. This is also true, and perhaps above all, of religious networks which, through their proselytism and their capacity to mobilize, have established themselves as one of the privileged vectors of this integration. This phenomenon is well studied in the case of Christian, Catholic or Protestant churches, whose analysts like to highlight the extraordinary dynamism brought about by the combination of interindividual relations and inter-organizational relations. With regard to Islam, if its transnationalization also attracts attention, it is often, it must be recognized, from a security perspective maintained by the deterritorialization of radical Islamism, so that the very use of the term "network", heavily connoted, to refer to the actors of this transnationalization is now problematic.

And yet, the Islamic articulation of the local and the global does not only pass, far from it, through the troubled interplay of Islamist networks, if only because the globalization of Islam has accompanied its expansion throughout the twentieth century, and because the Ummah, the community of believers, is by definition supranational. The transnationalisation of Islam, limited here to the Islam of sub-Saharan Africa, actually follows a plurality of paths and combines individual and collective strategies; it is not only a matter of institutions, political and commercial networks or material civilisation, but also of culture and symbols because globalisation is being built and deconstructed also in the imagination.

### **THE RELIGION IN THE SERVICE OF DIPLOMACY:**

One cannot speak of the transnationalization of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa without mentioning, even briefly, Afro-Arab relations: on the one hand, because Islam is a major structuring element of these relations, and on the other hand, because the contemporary expansion of Islam south of the Sahara is frequently perceived as the result of the political-religious activism of the Arab States, even Iran or Pakistan. There would be a lot to say about this vision of things that seems to us to be refuted for at least three reasons: the first is that it grossly underestimates the differences internal to Arab and Islamic States. These can be found punctually around some diplomatic objectives south of the Sahara, while opposing over the long term, as did Nasserian Egypt and Saudi Arabia in their time in the name of a radically opposed conception of Islam.

The second is that it overestimates the capacity of Arab and Muslim countries to intervene in sub-Saharan Africa, which are often unable to implement a genuine African policy. In fact, only a handful of them are or were able to do so: Libya, which has long aspired to impose its leadership there and which, back on the international scene after resolving its disputes with the United States, the United Kingdom and France, aspires to do so again, is now struggling with its internal problems, Saudi Arabia, which can mobilize its financial power and its status as guardian of the holy places of Islam to promote its fundamentalist reading of the Koran, Sudan, finally, a time pointed out for its supposed links with Islamist terrorism and which has regained its virginity by joining the axis of the Good after September 11, 2001. To be completely complete, we would have to mention the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has recycled the diplomatic network set up in sub-Saharan Africa by the imperial regime in the early 1970s to benefit from its new ideological orientations.

The third and final reason is that this vision gives an over-determining weight to external dynamics, to the detriment of the internal dynamics of African societies (state crisis, failure of development, often unfinished democratic transitions, uncontrolled urbanization, uncontrolled education, pandemics, etc.) in the first place explaining the use of the sacred. This in no way means that Arab-Muslim political and religious

activism has nothing to do with the Islamization of sub-Saharan Africa, but that it represents one variable among others, whose explanatory scope should not obscure that of sociological variables. Once these prerequisites have been quickly established, the analysis of Afro-Arab relations seems likely to be divided into two points: the crisis of Afro-Arab cooperation, on the one hand, and political-diplomatic recompositions, on the other hand.

### *Cooperation under the seal of Islam :*

The rapprochement between the Arab world and sub-Saharan Africa, which began in the late 1960s, essentially refers to two closely linked sets of political and economic factors. At the political level, the convergences between the two groups began to emerge in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, one of the consequences of which was the occupation of Sinai. Notwithstanding the good relations that many of them, such as the highly Islamized Chad and Nigeria or the progressive Ghana of Kwame Nkrumah, had maintained with the Jewish State for several years, the sub-Saharan States believed they had an obligation to show solidarity with the Arab countries, and particularly Egypt as an African country facing the occupation of part of its territory. But it was not until 1971 that sub-Saharan Africa turned massively to the Arab side, following the failure of an attempt by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to mediate in the conflict. One after the other, most African states will then break off their diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, thereby aligning themselves with the positions of the Arabs and constituting with them, within international institutions, the automatic majority by which the latter will be able to achieve their objective of Israel's diplomatic isolation.

The strategy of the Arabs is all the more easily implemented as it is part of an economic situation that is very favourable to them, marked by the continuous increase in their oil revenues since the early 1970s. However, it was not until 1973 that the real reversal occurred, with the first oil shock following the October Arab-Israeli war. For the first time, oil is used as a weapon and, faced with the spectacular increase in the price of crude oil, Western countries, which are facing serious economic difficulties, are forced to drastically reduce their official development assistance. Faced with the rise of national egoisms in the West, Arab countries appear to Africans, who are also affected by the rise in crude oil prices, as alternative partners, all the more attractive because they now have a very large financial margin. All the conditions are therefore in place to give institutional content to the rapprochement between the two parties. This will be done in March 1977 with the holding of a summit in Cairo of Arab and African heads of state and government, during which the foundations are laid for cooperation and a solemn declaration of political solidarity.

What is interesting in this process, with regard to the question that concerns us here, is that it is presented, at least by Arabs, as the actualisation of plurisecular links that would have united Arabs and Africans and for which Islam would have been the cement, before being temporarily obscured by European colonization.

The argument is all the more functional because it is a legitimate principle: for the Arab States, which, in rivalry for the spread of the da'wa (the call to Islam), use it in the service of their national strategies, for the sub-Saharan States, for whom the appropriation of Islamic rhetoric provides privileged access to Arab help, which can increase their capacities redistributive.

### *Islamic solidarity in the challenge of realpolitik:*

But the Afro-Arab agreement will not stand the test of time and economic and political constraints for long. Sub-Saharan states quickly declared themselves disappointed with Arab help, deploring its modesty and ideological nature, which led to its concentration on Islamicized African countries (particularly those in the Saharan belt such as Mali, Niger, Chad and Senegal) to the detriment of others. Justified or not, the argument is all the more relevant because the relative importance of this help contrasts sharply with that of Arab investments in the West, the preferred destination for petro-dollars to be recycled; and because the volume of Arab financial assistance will contract in the early 1980s due to tensions on the international oil market.

While, Arab help has been scaled up and remains useful for African States facing serious economic difficulties, it is now seen as a mere complement to the massive intervention of the Bretton Woods institutions.

Finally, the disintegration of the Afro-Arab group from above is all the more irrepressible as two parameters will accelerate the process. This is, on the one hand, the Camp David Agreement which seals peace between Israel and Egypt and, on the other hand, the Libyan factor, which will gradually encourage several sub-Saharan regimes to develop their security cooperation with the Hebrew State to protect themselves against Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi's activism. Indeed, the end of the state of belligerence between Anwar Sadat's Egypt and Israel is perceived by Africans as a signal to free themselves from their commitment to the Palestinian cause, especially since the Arab world itself was facing the Egyptian peace initiative in a very divided way. In addition, there are growing fears about Tripoli's African policy, which has been accused of destabilizing its neighbours, nurturing hegemonic ambitions or spreading Gaddafi's militant Islam. In this context, countries that consider themselves threatened by Libya, such as Zaire de feu Marshal Joseph Désiré Mobutu, Cameroon, Togo, Kenya of former President Daniel arap Moi, and even Nigeria, are attempting to restore their diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv more or less discreetly, entrusting Israeli specialists with the supervision of their security forces and the close security of the Head of State.

## **FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: ISLAM AT THE TIME OF THE WORLD**

The analysts have long drawn attention to the increasing transnationalisation of trade between Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa and Muslims in the Arab world or Asia, as well as the extension of Islamic flows to Europe and North America. It has even been possible to describe as Islamic modes of diplomatic action these informal, infra-state, parallel

dynamics, straddling the legal and illegal, as well as the internal and external, which bypass official diplomacy and give the state apparatus a spin. Playing with borders, colonizing the interstices of a fragmented international system, the Islamic dynamics of transnationalization create a complex web where religion and economics, politics and charity are in constant interaction and participate in the globalized production of difference.

### *The brotherhoods, agents of the internationalization of Islam :*

Religious brotherhoods (in arabic *turuq*) are probably the most important, if not the oldest, vector of the transnationalization of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. Comparable to the religious orders that organize Catholicism, they have accompanied the expansion of Islam when they have not been its privileged agent, promoting through their universalism the regulation of the ethnic and sociological diversities that expansion has multiplied. Massively established south of the Sahara, they are the most effective management structures in the region, combining organizational rigour and operational flexibility. The strength of the The brotherhood system and the density of its geographical network should also lead the colonizer to try to use it to optimize the administration of often very large territories. Thus, brotherly leaders were sometimes used as relays of colonial power to local populations. However, this pragmatic attitude didn't exclude a certain mistrust of a religion perceived as hostile to the European order. However, in despite administrative obstacles and control mechanisms, the colonial period, synonymous with a certain modernization, stimulates the expansion of Islam. Prompt to adapt to the change induced by colonization, the brotherhoods will take advantage of it to accentuate their de-territorialization, spreading their lodges (*zawaya*) and their networks throughout Muslim Africa, transcending happily colonial borders, and sometimes even ethnic particularities. They are will thus contribute to the spread of Islam, articulated around a double movement of movement of people and goods of salvation. They will also appear as the cultural and political negation of the colonial order, or that they embody resistance to white domination, or that they be seen as a counter-society. It is by the way in these terms of exit option that must be interpreted in Sheikh Amadou's gesture Bamba and Sheikh Hamallah, respectively founders of the Mouride brotherhoods and hamallist, whose anti-colonial mobilization takes the form of a *hijra* (exile) to escape European control.

Far from signifying its decline, decolonization, on the contrary, gives new vigour to the brotherhoods, even if it is reflected everywhere in a process of nationalization and territorialization of Islam, and even if the influence of the brotherhoods is challenged since the 1950s by the emergence of modernist currents that draw their inspiration from Salafist reform and, like the Wahhabi movement that is beginning to develop in sub-Saharan Africa, display violent anti-confrontational feelings. Zelators of an Islam free of its maraboutic and Sufi practices, these reformist currents, often plural, capture the allegiances of certain social categories that no longer find in brotherly Islam the

answers to the upheavals brought about by modernization. Thus, the success of Wahhabism among immigrants from northern Côte d'Ivoire in Abidjan can be explained by the "situation of generalized insecurity" that they would feel and by the ability of Wahhabism to offer them a socially liberating vision, in contrast to the traditional Islam of their home countries. This is also the case for certain urban strata, such as traders, who see it as an instrument for opening up to the world, particularly in terms of adapted to the constraints of their profession, or of the Arabized counter-elite, including it serves the quest for legitimacy.

Notwithstanding the criticism to which they are subjected, however, the brotherhoods have managed to institutionalize themselves and assert themselves as political and economic powers. The case of the Senegalese Mourides is exemplary in this respect. Founded at the end of the 19th century, the brotherhood of A. Bamba successfully moved from anti-colonial protest to the status of privileged partner of the postcolonial state on the basis of a pact guaranteeing the latter the support of the brotherhood and its cohorts of peasant groundnut farmers, long a main source of income for the Senegalese state, in exchange for the latter's autonomy.

Reflecting a growing trend towards the individualisation of electoral preferences and the empowerment of populations with regard to maraboutic power, the silence of the Mouride marabouts cannot, however, be interpreted as a sign of the decline of the brotherhood. Although the latter is suffering in rural areas from the disaffection of peasants with regard to groundnut cultivation, which is less remunerative than in the past, it has, in return, invested the city where its organization works wonders in terms of social framework and the grid system of the urban territory. But this process of urbanization of the Mourides is only one element of a global strategy of internationalization of the brotherhood through the development of its commercial networks and its hierarchical organization in the rest of Africa but also in Europe and North America, which has become a land of choice for Senegalese emigrants who know they can count on the active solidarity of their compatriots already settled there.

Long rightly considered purely Senegalese, the mouridiyya is thus gradually acquiring a transnational character, all the more so as its followers have virtuously appropriated modern technologies of Information and communication to spread the Koranic message and export sacred symbols and socio-commercial practices. Driven by this dynamism, the brotherhood is building new spaces of mobilization totally deterritorialized and invested by private actors whose action combines religious and commercial repertoires, allowing it to project itself outside the Senegalese borders where it was born. The same reasoning also applies to another brotherhood present in Senegal, the Tijaniyya Niassène (named after its founder, Ibrahima Niassé, 1900-1975), whose transnationalization process is even more advanced. Extending its networks throughout West Africa for several decades, Tijaniyya draws its dynamism from the influence of its two historic strongholds, Kaolack in Senegal and Kano in Nigeria, two cities with a prestigious commercial past. Like the mouridiyya, it has also begun to Americanize, attracting many African-Americans in need of roots. But, less marked than it is by its Senegalese and Wolof identity (the ethnic group that forms the main part of the

recruitment of the mouridiyya), Tijaniyya Niassène is part of a more assertive pan-Islamic perspective.

### *The interpenetration of religion, politics and humanitarian issues:*

The capacity of the brotherhoods to subvert stato-national logics is all the more certainly expressed as their mobilization is part of a general movement for the development of Muslim humanitarian work. Humanitarian action, however, has long been secular from Catholic missionary work and refers to a doctrinal corpus that began to develop in the 19th century and was codified with the Second Vatican Council and then the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967). The emergence of a humanitarian Islamic is later. It began in the 1970s and, very significantly, sub-Saharan Africa, along with Afghanistan in the struggle against Soviet occupation, was from the outset one of the main fields of action of Islamic relief organizations, the first of which, Al-ighatha al-islamiyya, was established in Khartoum.

Why Africa? Because it represents a source of conversions of prime importance for Islam and Christianity, which cannot expect such substantial gains on any other continent. Faced with the dynamism that internationalized Catholic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Pax Christi, OXFAM or the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), joined in recent years by their Protestant counterparts, have long demonstrated, the creation of a network of Islamic NGOs therefore consecrates sub-Saharan Africa as a central issue in this race for evangelization.

Closely linking humanitarian action and religious proselytism, Islamic relief organizations will extend their activities south of the Sahara, with the stated objective of competing with Western NGOs, sometimes suspected of using humanitarian help for religious purposes in the same way. From the outset, these organizations affirm their transnational character, as do the most important of them, the International Islamic Relief Organization, which, based in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), boasts more than 90 offices around the world. Present throughout the southern Sahara, they operate there protean in relation to local Muslim organisations, including brotherhoods, providing them with technical assistance and financial assistance for the construction of (mosques or schools) or providing them with du'at (preachers) trained in the best religious universities in the Arab-Muslim world. There are at least three reasons for their rapid proliferation. It is largely the result of the rivalry between the Arab and Muslim states for the spread of the da'wa, a rivalry that will lead, for example, to the petro-monarchies of the Gulf, which are being conducted by Saudi Arabia, to create their network of organisations so as not to leave the field open to Libya, which is very active in this field. It is also the consequence of the democratic transitions that began south of the Sahara in the early 1990s: giving birth to a legal-political environment favourable to associative activities, democratization sharpens the dynamism of Muslim transnational entrepreneurs, who take advantage of it to invest in humanitarian aid by connecting to



these transnational networks and thus benefit from easier access to Islamic sources of financing. Finally, it is stimulated by the gradual disengagement of a number of functions, which leaves the field open for the private actors, especially religious ones, quick to appropriate the social spaces left behind in disinheritance by the withdrawal of public power, when they are not invited to replace them in the name of participatory development and design idealized by civil society. Such sensitive areas as health and education, or even security, are gradually being handed over to religious institutions, thanks to their organization and the efficiency of their territorial network.

While they are inspired by the organizational and working methods of Western NGOs to the point of being comparable in terms of professionalization, Islamic relief organizations differ from them in that they use an authentically Muslim conception of charitable action, which has been established as an alternative model of Western-Christian humanitarian work. As a bearer of specific norms and values, it is part of a process of communalization of the religious bond, i. e. of crystallization a subjective feeling of belonging to the same community, which tends to weaken national allegiances in favour of a supranational, pan-Islamic allegiance in this case. These identity recompositions are all the more problematic for sub-Saharan states that they also stage a new category of African Muslim intellectuals, the Arabisers.

Arabisers refer to the growing mass of young sub-Saharan Muslims who are socialized in the medersa system, the Islamic schools that provide their courses in Arabic and sometimes, partially, in French. Distinct from the traditional Koranic school, limited, as its name suggests, to the teaching of the Koran and rudiments of Arabic, the medersa embody the modernization of Islamic education based on the rationalized learning of Islamic sciences combined with that of profane subjects. Their success is now such in Islamic sub-Saharan countries that they now compete with public and private schools, i. e. missionary schools, most often. This is particularly the case in the Sudano-Sahelian region (Senegal, Mali, Niger, Burkina, Nord-Nigeria, etc.) where the scale of the phenomenon is such that, in order to be effective, the State has had to resolve to deal with the Arabized education system, either by integrating it into its own system or by granting it a margin of more or less autonomy. The reasons for this craze are complex and include religious, political and economic reasons. They also hold It should be noted that a lot of it is due to the bankruptcy of public policies in education implemented since independence, as well as the disengagement of the State of the education sector following the introduction of structural adjustment of the most sub-Saharan African economies over the past two decades. In any case, the success of the medersa dramatically underscores the inability of the postcolonial state to control the religious field and, more generally, to socialize, i.e. to disseminate the values and norms around which articulate the emergence of a sense of national identification. Because it brings the universality of the Ummah into communion with the mastery of Arabic, the language of the Koran, Arabization moves the lines of the territorial order, but does not completely abolish them. It introduces to a collective imagination that no longer has territorial support concrete but which takes shape in speeches, practices, habits and ways of saying and doing. In this sense, it is not illegitimate to argue that Arabized

education is one of the sites where the deconstruction of the Western order is played out and the construction of an African Muslim identity.

### *GLOBALIZATION OF ISLAM, RESISTANCE OF TERRITORIES :*

The fluidity of these informal flows and their density thus tend to structure a relational continuum between sub-Saharan Muslims and their diasporas, between Black African Islam and the Arab and Muslim world. Official and unofficial diplomacy are deployed in close coordination, mobilizing political and sacred resources that pass through, for example, the international branches of the Saudi World Islamic League, whose action aims both at the propagation of Islam and the enhancement of the Wahhabi monarchy, of which it appears to be a propaganda instrument, or through the zeal of missionary organizations like the Jama'at at-tabligh, increasingly present south of the Sahara, whose pietism and The fact that they are in stark contrast to the fact that they are in stark contrast to the the ethos of Saudi princely munificence. The increasing transnationalisation of these relations have the effect of maintaining the demand for Islam south of the Sahara, a demand amplified by Arab aid to local Muslim communities, including the mobilization has consequences for sub-Saharan states.

## CONCLUSION

It is therefore at another level, that of the imagination, that the transnational mobilization of sub-Saharan Islam must be thought of. By instrumentalizing the border rather than abolishing it, this mobilization invents new deterritorialized spaces such as so many places of production of meaning, solidarity and identification. The transnational thus tends to favour the formation of religious communities of the imagination whose coherence is not based on the existence of a geographically circumscribed territory but on that of a stock of shared representations and meanings. This reinforces the symbolic character of the Ummah, especially since the transnationalization of Islam is accompanied by a profound reformulation of the links between the individual and his or her home group, whether religious or ethnic. Islam, like other religions, is therefore subject to the corrosive effect of individuation and subjectification practices, which tend to multiply. Religion, in this context, is increasingly becoming an individual affair, it being understood that the emotional communities that religious movements are appear, at the same time, as places of recomunautarization and the invention of new solidarities for individuals in need of identity reference points. Sub-Saharan Islam is not immune to these recompositions, further blurring the image of a Africa is a prisoner of tradition and its community allegiances.

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