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Islamic NGOs in Africa: The Promise and Peril of Islamic Voluntarism

by

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Abstract

Islamic NGOs provide relief and humanitarian assistance to poor communities during emergencies, natural disasters (prolonged drought and floods), famine and epidemics. Others are engaged in long-term development activities, including community development, agriculture, water, health and education in the least-developed Muslim countries. Some Islamic NGOs are involved in *Da'wa* (i.e. Islamic call, an equivalent to Christian evangelism), conversion to Islam as well as in publishing, broadcasting and disseminating Islamic teaching and values. However, Islamic NGOs distinguish themselves from other NGOs by the fact that voluntarism is a religious duty in Islam, and those NGOs which profess an Islamic identity claim also to be advancing a Muslim way of life and expanding the Islamic *umma* (community) world-wide. As there is no distinction between ethics and law in Islam, there is also no distinction between social, economic, political and religious functions of NGOs beyond the activities in which they are engaged.

This paper examines the varieties of ways in which Islamic NGOs have left their imprints on the African continent, arguing that some of these NGOs have been used as a vehicle for spreading political Islam at an accelerated rate combining faith and material rewards among the disfranchised Muslim poor. In common with western-style NGOs, Islamic NGOs have gained a considerable outreach and become part of the global NGO movement, with all its promises and setbacks. On the one hand, Islamic NGOs comprise a modernizing force operating in the field of development, on the other, they agitate for an exclusive Muslim community (*umma*), hence embodying two contradictory discourses: one reinforces global or universal values, and the other usurps the specificity of Islam. Muslim NGOs seek to solve this contradiction by being cronies to militant Muslim groups, including an emergent tide of indigenous African Islamic fundamentalist movements.

Islamic voluntarism

A simple definition of Islamic NGOs is that they are voluntary (national, regional or transnational, as well as community-based) organisations for which Islam is an important inspiration to do good and an identity marker that distinguishes them from NGOs with similar orientations and objectives. Islamic NGOs comprise communities of interest with diverse motives and objectives, including social, political and economic interests. The resource base of voluntary activities in Islam includes the following: 1) *zakat* (Islamic alms), 2) *kharaj* (land tax), 3) *sadaqat id al-fitr* (an equivalent to poll tax, which every Muslim must pay, except the absolutely poor, given on the conclusion of the fasting month of *Ramadan*), 4) *waqf* (charitable endowments), 5) gifts and donations, 6) voluntary services (education, defence etc.) and 7) obligatory family support. A Muslim is therefore obliged by religious duty to do good, which is considered an act of faith, an issue with some far-reaching implications for what I call the promise and peril of Islamic voluntarism.

Because there is no separation between ethics and law in Islam, there is also no separation between economic and humanitarian principles since both derive legitimacy from the Islamic sources of law, i.e. *sharia*. These sources of law are of two types:

The primary sources are:
  a. The Quran
  b. *sunna* (prophet Muhammed's pronouncements and acts)

Secondary sources include:
  a. *ijma*
  b. *qias*
  c. *ijtihad*
  d. *masalaha*

According to Islamic primary sources, humanitarianism is an integrated part of Islamic alms or *zakat* (the third of the five pillars of Islam). As part of an elaborate welfare system, *zakat* is by most Muslims considered the cardinal Islamic principle of humanitarianism and solidarity. Surely, because of the integration of economic and social life in Islam, distinctions between Islamic ethics, law, humanitarianism, and altruism do not exist.

In Islam*, zakat* is an assertion of the Muslim social welfare and the duty of Muslims to care for the poor and the needy. Seen from the perspective of the designs of political Islam, the state is the only rightful recipient of *zakat.* It is deposited in *bait al mal* (Islamic treasury) and used to address specific social problems (cf. Edge 1996). If social security and solidarity are catered for by *zakat, zakat* becomes an important political tool both in secular as well as religious ideology. Al-Qardawi (1981:72) made the point that "the declaration of the poor due along with prayers in the Holy Quran

and in the *sunnah*, is an enough testimony for the deep and strong relation that exists between the two". Although *zakat* resembles, but is not equivalent to the Western concept of taxation, it can by no means support the multitude of obligations, varied activities and responsibilities expected of a modern state. Therefore, most modern Muslim states introduced *zakat* as an obligatory source of income to address, among other things, the question of poverty alleviation and to augment solidarity among its supporters, as the case studies would illustrate.

Al-Qardawi (op.cit.:79-80) outlines three major factors on which the Muslim *ulama* based their consensus (ibid.). These are as follows:

1. The payment of poor-due is obligatory so that the poor and the needy could be helped adequately and be enabled to devote themselves to the worship of God.

2. The payment of poor-due cleanses Muslims from their sins and dirt. It creates in them righteousness and piety, kindness and mercy by eradicating his spirit of greed and lust. Wealth-selfish heart turns into a generous one. It meets the rights of others squarely and sincerely. This has been contained in the Command of God: "Take alms of their wealth, wherewith though mayst purify them and mayst make them grow, and pray for them. Lo I thy prayer is an assuagement of them. Allah is Healer", Knower (9:130).

3. God has showered a blessing on the rich by granting them wealth, and has elevated their status with surplus wealth. As they lead a happy life, it behoves genuine that they should pay the poor-due and be grateful to God for granting them such bounty.

Although *zakat* is supposed to be the main source of the Islamic state revenue, it is obvious that *zakat* alone cannot alleviate poverty, or cater for the magnitude of needs created by the nature and structure of the modern state, nor the high costs of an elaborate social welfare programme. Taxation, rather than *zakat,* has become the main source of revenue. Because of the political implications of instituting *zakat* as a source of state revenue, many states, including those with Muslim minorities, have used *zakat* as a supplementary source to the revenue generated through taxes. However, once a state pronounces itself Muslim or opts for the introduction of Islamic *sharia* law*, zakat* becomes a focus of social, religious, economic and political interest, without actually being the mainstay of the economy.

In the absence of an Islamic state, Islamic NGOs and voluntary groups undertake the role of the state by claiming *zakat* and by distributing among the poor, albeit in a modern NGO setting. In many states with a majority population of Muslims *zakat* has been distributed through an elaborate voluntary system, rather than having been accumulated in *bait al mal* (Islamic state treasury). The totality of Islamic ethics, law, politics and economics come together in a completely modern form of caring for disfranchised Muslim communities. There is a real possibility that Islamic NGOs can be utilized as a valuable political resource in the modern world.

However, we should bear in mind that Islamic NGOs are diverse and range from the politically militant to the truly benevolent. On the one hand, Islamic NGOs have acquired the organisational capacity and structure of modern secular NGOs, on the other hand, they claim a religious role inspired by the intimate association between religion, politics and economic welfare in puritan Islam. Yet, the assertion that Islam is a holistic way of life in which there is no separation between religion and politics makes it difficult for Islamic NGOs to deny their unwitting political role as active contributors to one of political Islam's, many versions.

Evolution of Islamic NGOs within the African NGO movement

The emergence of Islamic NGOs, in the strict modern definition of the concept, is recent. It dates back to the colonial period, and to a large extent it is a reaction against Christian missionary activities and their capacity to combine religious and educational, as well as health and social activities. Although the colonial authorities tolerated *sufi* orders and treated them as communities of unpolitical believers, their attitude towards associations organised by educated members of the elite under Islamic banner was not encouraged, to say the least. Moreover, secular professional and ethnic urban associations were encouraged, and they were largely used by educated Africans to lobby for the improvement of social conditions in their home areas (cf. Hanna & Hanna 1971). At a latter stage these associations became nuclei for most of Africa's modern political parties that lead African agitation for independence.

In post-independent Africa, NGOs have developed through four phases (cf. Mhamed Salih 1999):

First, the 1960s-1970s were characterised by the transformation of community-based organisations and urban associations into "modern" urban charity and local voluntary development organisations. The establishment of these associations was an extension to some of the urban associations established during the colonial period. In fact, there has been a great deal of continuity between modern and traditional grassroots' community-based organisations, although the latter are larger in number and more widespread than modern NGOs. In this respect Schneider was right in arguing that, "Once dialogue with outside parties and foreign NGO partners become necessary - within a given aid or development project for example - such groups tend to assume the appearance, name and behaviour of NGOs" (Schneider 1988:85). Not all African states have tolerated the emergence of independent voluntary associations, operating outside the state-sanctioned domains, particularly in development, which was seen as the monopoly of the state. In severely divided African societies, the state perceived the emergence of NGOs as a negation of the state-centered development hailed as the foundation stone of nation-building projects. Religious voluntary associations were particularly targeted because of the state's recent memory of mosque and church agitation for independence, potentially a frustration of an effort bent on a nation-state premised on one religion, one language, one supra-state in a state of diverse nations. Furthermore, with memories of Islamic *jihad* against colonial rule and the potential role of religion as a destabilizing factor, most African states were actually intolerant towards decent. Some African states feared that such voluntary associations

might develop into organised political opposition, and they therefore resisted the formation of NGOs with an iron fist. Some states had denounced NGOs and their leaders as traitors, parochial watchdogs for foreign powers and a threat to national security.

Second, by the 1970s-1980s African NGOs began to expand rapidly under the influence of foreign NGOs, and to a large extent as a result of recurrent droughts and civil wars, in Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sudan, Somalia and Uganda. The 1980s were dubbed the decade of the African crisis. This phase was characterised by at least three features: 1) an increase in foreign NGO activities, particularly in relief and rehabilitation in war-torn countries, 2) an increase in the acceptance of foreign, including Islamic, NGOs by some African states which began to value their contributions to public services (relief, health and education) which alleviated pressure on a heavily curtailed national expenditure. 3) The Afro-Arab dialogue, which began during this period, was augmented by the newly founded power of the Islamic World, particularly the oil-rich Arab countries' influence through the petro-dollars (cf. Kunibert & Mohamed Salih 1992). The first amongst the Islamic NGOs which began to penetrate the African scene included the African Islamic Relief Organisation and a myriad of Islamic banks supportive of Islamic co-operatives and private or collateral investment (see the section on Islamic transnational NGOs).

Third, the late 1980s-1990s were characterised by a) the formation and emergence of African NGOs independent of the state, b) the proliferation of national, sub-regional and regional African NGOs, with organisational structures similar to foreign NGOs and c) an increasing co-operation and dialogue among and within foreign and African NGOs. Foreign NGOs had by then realised that they could no longer ignore the significant role of local grassroots and intermediary organisations in development.[1] This was also a period of great political transformation exemplified by popular struggle for democracy and the rule of law following the collapse of one-party states, military regimes and military socialist regimes in most African countries. The creation of a people's space for political and economic participation meant that NGOs, both secular and religious, foresaw a positive development exemplified by the opening of new opportunities not only for development work but also for engaging the state. As this paper will show, Islamic NGOs are not an exception.

Fourth, the 1990s were dominated by consolidation and refinement of the operational capacity of African NGOs, including the development of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, with an increasing call for accountability and transparency. The late 1990s were a period characterised by transnational, inter- and intra-regional cooperation, as well as partnership between diverse NGOs, both religious and secular. All these developments have occurred with the main objective of rethinking the mission, mode of operation and future development of the NGOs. As a result of almost two decades of existence and development interventions, there is now: a) an increasing awareness of the role of NGOs in society, b) an increasing variety and multiplicity of the activities of

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[1] See Mohamed Salih (1999) *Environmental Politics and Liberation in Contemporary Africa*, chapter 8 on "NGOs and Liberation in Africa: The Global- Local Nexus".

NGOs and c) more active and engaged NGO communities at all levels: the local, the national, the regional and the transnational.

Therefore, the rise of Muslim, Christian and secular NGOs in Africa is driven by at least three major crises:

1. the African crisis, which refers mainly to the economic crisis and its social ramifications;

2. the livelihood crisis emanating from civil wars, drought and famine aggravated by the economic crisis, and

3. the governance crisis, including economic mismanagement, corruption, abuse of power, disrespect for human and civic rights by military and one-party authoritarian states.

However, it is impossible to disentangle these crises which are mutually reinforcing and impact each other in many ways.

The range of activities in which Islamic NGOs are engaged illustrates that they are either responding to the African crisis or taking advantage of it. The politics and economics of Islamic voluntarism inspire the specificity of Islamic NGOs in their response to the Africa crisis. This particular aspect of Islamic humanitarianism gives Islamic NGOs a peculiar role relative to their secular counterparts. For example, in 1990, the National Islamic Front government in the Sudan initiated two new policy directives aimed at supporting the work of national Islamic NGOs. These are first, *Al-Tamkin* (empowerment of Muslim minorities in regions that are dominantly Christian or animist such as South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains). The second is *Al-Takaful* (social solidarity fund) whereby part of *zakat* is distributed amongst Islamic NGOs which in turn redistribute alms amongst the Muslim poor.[2] Similarly, the revenue generated from state-controlled *waqf* (privately donated property, corpus, endowed for a charitable purpose in perpetuity) is distributed among Muslim NGOs, which in turn distribute it among poor Muslims or those who would potentially become Muslims.[3]

The emergence of Islamic NGOs in Africa cannot be isolated from the factors contributing to the emergence of secular NGOs in general, i.e. the economic, governance and livelihood crises. However, Muslim NGOs have stretched their concern with these crises further, by superimposing on the Africa crisis the need for replacing the failure of Western development model(s) with an Islamic civilising project. Since most governments in the Muslim world have adopted a western-style political

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[2] For more details on this see de Waal (2000).

[3] In the Sudan, rich Muslims have endowed the state with 286 shops, 39 houses, 2 clinics, 182 offices, 18 restaurants, 12 flourmills, 156 stores and other moveable and immovable property. The income generated from these endowments is distributed to Islamic NGOs to augment their operations amongst the Muslim poor.

system, it is natural that such concerns would grow outside the state sector, a sector considered by the Islamic movement as part of Western decadence. Little wonder that Islamic NGOs have co-operated with regimes that declared themselves Islamic (Sudan, Mauritania, Libya etc.) and operated in countries with a minority Muslim population (Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, Sierra Leone etc.).

The magnitude of the presence of Islamic NGOs in Africa is shown in Table 1 below, which illustrates an impressive expansion relative to the pre-1970's situation. Generally, this observation is consistent with the evolution of the African NGO movement. It is also true because most Islamic NGOs operating at the national level are often supported by transnational NGOs, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Some national Muslim NGOs have engaged in collaborative projects with a wide range of bilateral and multilateral agencies (see section on Islamic NGOs and Multilateralism).

The table also reveals that the total number of NGOs operating in Africa has increased from 1854 in 1980 to 5896 in 2000. In other words, NGOs in Africa have had a three-fold growth (about 310%). In 1980, Islamic NGOs represented about 7.4% of NGOs operating in Africa. In 2000 they represented 15.1% of the total number of NGOs. Islamic NGOs, both African and non-African, operating in Africa have grown from 138 in 1980 to 891 in 2000. In other words, African Islamic NGOs have grown more than six times between 1980 and 2000, i.e. twice as fast as secular and religious NGOs put together.

Because the growth of Africa's NGO sector had occurred at the onset of the democratisation process during the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is safe to argue that their expansion is the result of the emergence of a reformed post-colonial state. The newly acquired freedom of organisation has granted greater possibilities for the emergence of different interest associations, including Islamic NGOs.

Furthermore, the proliferation of Islamic NGOs could be viewed as part of the Muslim world's search for alternative development approaches embedded in the Islamic movement's negation of westernisation.[4] It can therefore be argued that the core values ushered in by the emergence of Islamic NGOs are inseparable from the factors that contributed to what is known as the Islamic resurgence, succinctly depicted by Esposito (1998:165) as follows:

1. Islam is a total and comprehensive way of life. Religion is integral to politics, law, and society;

2. The failure of Muslim societies is due to their departure from the straight path of Islam and their following a western secular path, with its secular, materialistic ideologies and values;

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[4] Cf. Roff 1987, Watt 1988, Choueiri 1990, Marty & Scott 1994, Marty & Scott 1995, Jansen 1997, Esposito 1998, among others.

3. The renewal of society requires a return to Islam, an Islamic religio-political and social reformation or revolution that draws its inspiration from the Quran and from the first great Islamic movement led by Prophet Muhammad;

4. To restore God's rule and inaugurate a true Islamic social order, civil codes modelled on western principles must be replaced by Islamic law, which is the only acceptable blueprint for Muslim society;

5. Although the westernisation of society is condemned, modernisation as such is not. Science and technology are accepted, but they are subordinated to Islamic belief and values in order to guard against the westernisation and secularisation of Muslim society.

The process of Islamisation, or more accurately, re-Islamisation, requires organisations or associations of dedicated and trained Muslims, who by their example and activities are willing to struggle (*jihad*) against corruption and social justice.

Not all Islamic NGOs adhere to such a blueprint, but those established to spread Islamic values and teaching as well as to encourage the conversion of non-Muslims into Islam (see the case of the World Islamic Call Society below) are by and large motivated by such objectives. Others use Islam as a reminder of the failure of western style development, while still others abuse Islam and use the lure of religion to access the financial resources. They aim particularly at the financial resources made available by trans-Islamic organisations and financial institutions such as the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank among others.

Tawhid Islamic Association (Uganda) is a case in point. Tawhid Islamic Association was registered on 26 February 1988 under Ugandan laws, and is located in Kinsenyi, a sub-county of Kampala. The main objectives of the association are as follows:

1. To undertake the responsibility of preaching, propagating and spreading the Islamic call *Da'wa*.

Table 1: Growth of African Islamic NGOs 1980-2000

Country	1980			2000		
	No. Of NGOs	No. of Islamic NGOs	%	No . of NGOs	No . of Islamic NGOs	%
Benin	23	3	13.04	144	31	21.52
Burkina Faso	56	9	16.07	171	29	16.95
Cameroon	42	9	21.40	89	17	19.10
Central African Republic	12	0	-	57	9	15.78
Chad	29	5	17.24	68	23	33.82
Ethiopia	23	0	13.20	150	13	8.66

Gambia	17	2	11.76	81	17	20.98
Kenya	57	8	14.03	268	23	8.58
Mozambique	14	2	14.28	154	19	12.33
Mali	33	5	15.15	74	21	28.37
Niger	13	3	23.07	69	29	42.02
Nigeria	1,350	54	4.14	4,028	523	12.98
Senegal	50	19	38.0	112	35	31.25
Sierra Leone	65	3	0.40	80	9	11.25
Sudan	19	5	26.31	71	29	40.84
Tanzania	17	3	17.64	147	27	18.36
Uganda	34	8	23.52	133	37	27.81
Total	1854	138	---	5896	891	---

Sources:
1) NGOs and Voluntary Organisations' Registry of the countries cited.
2) ECA (1996) Source Book of African People's Organisations. 2 Volumes. Public Administration, Human Resources and Social Development Division. Addis Ababa: Economic Commission for Africa. (ECA)

1. To construct and develop mosques, schools, orphanage centers, and clinics for the purpose of establishing strong Islamic institutions.

2. To improve, promote and develop the religious, social and economic welfare of the Islamic community in East Africa.

Since its inception, the association has implemented projects, including Tawhid Islamic Centre, which consists of a mosque with the capacity of two thousand persons at a time and nine Islamic primary schools. The association also constructed twenty mosques, sunk seven bore holes and sponsored over eighty orphanages in different parts of Uganda.

Since 1999, Tawhid Islamic Association has expanded its education activities and built new schools to meet its objective of providing educational opportunities for Muslim children in general and especially the less fortunate ones. In view of this, the association prioritized the following steps as its immediate plan:

1. Expansion of the primary schools.
2. Building new secondary schools so that Muslim children should not enrol in Christian missionary secondary schools.
3. Income-generating activities in order to cover some of its running costs.[5]

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5 The incoming-generating activities include the purchase of tipper trucks and renting them out to meet the demands of the booming construction development in Kampala, the capital of Uganda.

There are two other Tawhid associations: in the Sudan and in Tanzania. However, my research is not conclusive in determining whether these three Tawhid Islamic Associations and their business interests are part of Tawhid Uganda. Nevertheless, the three associations are engaged in similar activities, and one of Tawhid's objectives is "to improve, promote and develop the religious, social and economic welfare of the Islamic community in East Africa". Still, Tawhid could be seen as a moderate business-minded association, and it makes sense of its funds by investing the income generated from its business activities in targeted charitable activities.

In short, I chose the case of Tawhid Islamic Association because it represents the dominant trend and type of activities in which Islamic NGOs operating at the national level are engaged. Some of the areas in which other Islamic NGOs are engaged, such as relief, depend largely on the political environment and the receptivity of the government in place. For instance, in Sudan, Kenya, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda Islamic NGOs have built on the existing Muslim base and popular Islam (religious sects, orders) to advance their activities. In other situations, the African states are too overwhelmed by the economic crisis and the social problems that this crisis has generated for them to resist the material support offered by the Islamic NGOs.

In short, African Islamic NGOs are also active in conventional NGO fields of operation such as development, education, women, child care, community health, environment, water, sanitation, shelter, legal assistance, advocacy, networking, relief, famine and food distribution in emergency operations. As I will explain later in relation to transnational Islamic NGOs, Islamic NGOs have also acquired skills in conversion to Islam and Islamic evangelism. Islamic brotherhoods have gone a long way in tapping this resourceful phenomenon.

Muslim brotherhoods and Islamic NGOs

In the introductory section of this paper I mentioned gifts, donations and the provision of education as religious obligations in which capable Muslims are expected to contribute in each of the respective domains. Educating young Muslims in their religion is one of the oldest voluntary activities in which Muslim *ulama*, religious sects and concerned Muslims have been engaged. By and large, Islam was initially spread through the combined effort of *jihad* followed by Muslim *ulama* and religious sects, which spread Islam voluntarily. It is only during the closing decade of the colonial rule that Islam became part of the national curricula, and this continued after independence. Even after independence Quranic schools continued to expand, at times not welcomed by the mostly secular state-sponsored educational establishment. However, when education is treated as a legitimate and encouraged domain of Islamic voluntarism, Quranic schools become important institutional frameworks for integrating gifts and donations, which are equally import parts of obligatory voluntarism.

The first case I introduce here is concerned with the relationship between some militant Islamic sects, brotherhoods and NGOs and the spread of religious violence in Northern Nigeria. The main

objective of these groups is to convert the states where they have emerged into Muslim states: short of that, their aim is to install Islamic *sharia* law, at least in the northern states of the Nigerian federation. Most important among Islamic brotherhoods in Northern Nigeria are: *Jamaatu Nasril Islam*, the *Zak Zaky* Shiite Muslim fundamentalist movement, the *Ansarul Din*, the *Ahmadiyya*, and the *Jamatul Muslemeen* Council. These Muslim brotherhoods and sects build their creed on the determination to advance Islam and ensure the application of *sharia* as a Muslim way of life. All the incidents of religious violence have involved one or more of these militant Islamic groups. These movements receive generous support from Egyptian brotherhood organisations, Saudi Arabia- and Europe-based Islamic NGOs, with various connections, particularly to American Muslims. Nigerian Islamic brotherhoods have developed a sophisticated network for fund-raising activities, with frequent visits to Saudi Arabia, USA and Europe where they maintain contacts with transnational Islamic NGO foundation organisations (see Table 2 on transnational Islamic NGOs).

Islamic religious personalities such as the Sarduna of Sokoto and the Emir of Kanu still hold political sway, with thousands of chiefs and millions of followers behind them. One of the most renowned and militant Muslim activists and scholars was the late Shaikh Abubakar Gummi of Kaduna. He used *Jamaat Izalat al bidi' wa Iqamat al sunna*, a militant anti-sufi movement dedicated to the eradication of innovations. It perceived *sufi* orders as heretical and un-Islamic by using the Federal Radio Corporation of Northern Nigeria (FRCN Kaduna), two newspapers (*New Nigerian* and *gaskiya ta fi kwabo*) and recorded cassettes of his teachings. Kukah observed that, by 1978, "some of his pupils had penetrated the main political institutions like the army, the media, the universities and the business world in the county, bolstering his base within and outside Nigeria" (Kukah 1993:218). With his contacts in high places, including President Shagari, Shaikh Gummi had developed an aura of influence around himself which gave *Jamaat Izalat al bidi' wa Iqamat al sunna* legitimacy and acceptance. However, Shaikh Gummi found himself under immense pressure from Nigeria's traditional Muslim establishment such as *jamma' atu nasril Islam* (JNI) and its supporters in the leadership of political parties in Northern Nigeria (Kukah & Falola 1996). The ferocity with which the religious-political alliance of the northern establishment had attacked Shaikh Gummi caused scepticism among many Nigerians who understood that his teachings might go beyond religion to the advocacy of an alternative political order. No matter what Shaikh Gummi's political religious teaching and political manoeuvring might have entailed, it reveals that the Muslim movement in Northern Nigeria is far from unified. It is divided and beset by ideological as well as material differences. Needless to mention that Shaikh Gummi was supported by the Saudi Islamic establishment and voluntary organisations. In Umar's view, the rapport that the Sarduna established with the Saudis yielded donations for the promotion of Islam in Nigeria. He had little problem persuading the Saudis that donations to the cause of Islam in Nigeria would not be used for promoting *sufism*, given the Saudi antagonism to the Islamic *sufi* orders' venomous abhorrence of the idea that a Muslim country could be ruled by a king (Umar 1993:162).

Much has been written about brotherhoods and NGOs in Egypt, and I shall not use this paper to review this long-drawn case. What I would like to emphasise, however, is Sullivan's commentary

(1994:215) that private Islamic associations in Egypt are evident up and down the Nile, in villages, larger towns and cities. They range from small organizations of five people or so, operating out of satellite villages, to large societies (even corporations) employing scores of health care professionals, educators and clerical staff in the middleclass suburbs of Cairo. In general, these Islamic Private Voluntary Organisations (PVOs) are part and parcel of the *Jamiyyad Khayyria*, or charitable associations, which are registered by the Ministry of Social Affairs (Sullivan 2000; Rahman 2001).[6]

Islamic voluntarism has not always been put to good use and has in some circumstances been used to the detriments of devout disciples. The case of the Ansar and the Khatmiyya sects in the Sudan is instructive. During the 1940s, Sayyid Abdel Rahman (the leader of the Ansar) and Sayyid Ali Al Mirghani the leader of the Khatmiyya) were able to make considerable investments in the agricultural and industrial sector (Abdel Rahim 1969). Sayyid Abdel Rahman relied on his father's 19th century ideological creed: the *ratib* (book of prayers) and *manshurat* (proclamations). *Shabab Al Ansar* (the Ansar Youth), armed with the *ratib* and the *manshurat,* constituted a paramilitary organisation in the tradition of Islamic *jihad* (holy war) (Warburg 1978:21-4). Sayyid Abdel Rahman reconstructed *gezira* (island) *Aba*, where his father had begun his rebellion against Turco-Egyptian rule in 1881. Together with the Mahdi Tomb in Omdurman, Aba Island became a destination of *muhajirin,* holy pilgrimage. Shabah Al Ansar provided labour and a contingent of political support (op.cit.:41). Likewise, The Khatmiyya sect, under the leadership of Sayyid Ali Al Mirghani created *Shabab Al Khatmiyya* and encouraged pilgrims to visit his father's tomb in Kasslal town in Eastern Sudan, provided labour as well as investing in the industrial sector, particularly in perfumes (known as *bit Al Sudan* or Sudan Girl).

Unfortunately, these religious sects are parasitic, and they never invested in religious education, let alone secular education. Their disciples remain committed to the mystique of the leadership rather than voluntarism to improve their own lot. However, the twin expansion of African Islamic NGOs, sects and brotherhoods is not a coincidence. It reveals that Muslim brotherhood organisations are capable of exploiting modern institutional and organisational frameworks and adapt them to their needs. The evidence available suggests that, far from being backward-looking and exclusive, Islamic brotherhoods and sects selectively integrate their activities within the wider global NGO movement, thus expanding their following and outreach at a global scale.

The following section continues this argument by illustrating how Islamic voluntary associations and NGOs have been able to expand their activities from Quranic schools to Islamic universities, again showing their capacity to reinvent Islamic structures. By adaptation Western education models are put to the service of their grand objectives of a) establishing a universal *umma* and b) responding to the African crisis in the realm of ethics and values.

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[6] For more details on Islamic NGOs in Egypt see Sullivan 2000a, 2000b and Abdel Rahman 2001.

From Quranic schools to Islamic Universities

The presence of a large benevolent sector operating outside or within the state structure is not new to the Islamized parts of Africa. In most of pre-colonial Africa, Muslim *ulama* of various religious denominations, sects and *sufi* orders created around them disciples often attached to the tomb of the order's founder. In most cases *ulama* maintained a certain degree of aloofness from the state and depended on local communities that generously provided the necessities of life (Trimingham 1959). The *Ulama*, religious sects and *sufi* orders have depended on voluntary work carried out by the disciples, or the seekers of healing and *baraka* (blessing). In some cases, they have accumulated sufficient funds to care for the poor in the host community, while in others they have invested the surplus in the modern sectors (agriculture, transport, trade etc.).

Most Quranic schools (*madaris*, sing. *madrasa*) were established by *ulama* with the prime interest of preserving and expanding the teachings of the founders of the *sufi* order or sects to which they belong. Such Quranic schools were spread throughout Muslim Africa, with varying degrees of density and social significance. These schools were single teacher institutions found both in rural and urban areas, where children are taught to recite the Quran, and prophet Muhammad's teachings (*hadith),* grammar *(nahu)* and ethics *(akhlaq).* Through community, private or government support they have developed gradually into Islamic schools. These include schools such as those in existence today in Swahili-speaking East Africa, also in Sudan, Eritrea, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria, among others. Some Quranic schools are established by disciples of sufi orders or close to the tomb of a founder of a religious sect. Others have been established as part of the Mosques' duty to the surrounding Muslim community and are often supported by an *imam* (religious leader) or a religious teacher.

Barkindo (1993:102-3) reports on Nigeria that since the 1970s, a considerable number of *Islamiyya* (Islamic) schools have been established in metropolitan Kanu by businessmen, *ulama*, Islamic organizations and the Government. The Kanu Foundation, Shaikh Isa Waziri, Shaikh Aminu Deen, Malam Hassan Sufi and Shaikh Nasir Kabara had begun a frenzy of Islamic school building. This mode of operation continued until today, therefore giving impetus to the emergence of a large number of Islamic schools and trends.

In Nigeria, Reichmuth (1993:186-7) also reported that in 1943, Kamalu d-Din (student of the Muslim clerk Shaikh Muhammad al-Labib Taju l-Adab) founded *Adabiyya* Muslim Society among the Yoruba with a primary school in Ilorin integrating Islamic and western Education. The school operated within the wider rubric of *ansar* (disciples) *Al-Islam Society,* the new name for *Adabiyya* Muslim Society. Many of the teachers and the graduates of *ansar* Al-Islam society schools found their way to Egypt and other Muslim countries for further education, many more held high positions as civil servants, and in the administration of the education establishment in northern Nigeria. The influence of the graduates of these Islamic schools on the political development of Nigeria should not be underestimated (Mohamed Salih 2001).

For instance, the work of Louis Brenner on Muslim schools in Mali is instructive (Brenner 2000). Brenner laments the case of Mali where, in 1982, Mali Council of Ministers decided that the Ministry of Education should assume responsibility for the *madaris*. It was recommended that the *madaris* conform to the new regulations concerning their operation. The religious orientation of the schools would be respected, although they would also be required to teach the full secular curriculum of the state primary schools. Although Mali has not yet established an Islamic University, it is well known that reminiscences of Timbukto, the first Islamic university in Sub-Saharan Africa, still echoes strong emotional outbursts. In my view, with state recognition of Islamic schools, it will not be long before a call for reviving the past glory of Timbukto Islamic University will be heard.

In Eastern Africa, according to Sperling, writing on the Madrasa of the Southern Kenyan Coast (1993), the founders of the Shamsiya Kibarani *madaris* on the Kenya and Tanzania coast, a network of 40 Islamic schools, have been conscious of the role such schools could play in the future of Eastern Africa's development and polity. It is worthwhile to remind the reader that in 1973, Shaikh Muhammad Ali Mwanboga established a network of Quranic schools in East Africa in order to spread education among Muslim communities of the Swahili-speaking coast. Shaikh Muhammad Ali Mwanboga had never hidden his interest in contributing to the establishment of a Muslim state. The aim of that state was envisaged to foster Islamic education and teaching to produce moral citizens in order to replace the corrupt secular government officials of the day. The network is also seen as a counter against the Christian crusade, and it is intended to halt what its founders commonly perceive as the state wanting to ensure the dominance of decadent western values.

In sum, Islamic schools are common, albeit with different structures, funding sources, modalities and organisational principles. One of the major changes that struck such Islamic schools, according to Sperling, is the increasing influence of foreign Islamic NGOs, operating at Africa-wide or national levels. Donor support includes upgrading of school structures and materials, import of Islamic teachers from other parts of the same country or abroad, payment of subsidies and provision of food. In addition to their contribution to religious education, most foreign-supported Islamic schools have some ties to activists politically leaning to Islamic political parties and organisations.

The Young Muslim Association (YMA) of Kenya provides an excellent illustration of the new Islamic schools and their role in influencing society by repacking the old-style Quranic schools. The YMA is a Kenyan registered Muslim Charity. Started in post-independence Kenya in 1964, its aims were to look after the well-being of the Muslim community in Kenya. By 1968 the YMA had started one of its major projects - the Garissa Muslim Children's Home (GMCH), catering for Muslim orphans from all over Kenya. In 1969, the GMCH was established with two main objectives in mind:

1. to provide relief to the Muslims inhabiting Northern Kenya, and

2. to counter-act the activities of the Catholic Church, which was established much earlier and had founded "Garissa Boys' Town".

According to the YMA, while the apparent motive of the Catholic intervention appeared to be relief and charity work, the subtle, yet real motive was to convert Somali Muslims to Christianity. A fact-finding mission sent to Garissa in 1969, recommended that a child-care facility be established to care for Muslim children.

The second range of activities in which YMA is involved is education (the Young Muslim Primary School (Garissa), with 800 students, both boys and girls). While the infrastructure (building, teaching materials etc.) is provided by YMA, the Government of Kenya provides the teachers and obliges the school to teach the Kenya primary school curricula. However, in addition to the national curriculum, the school provides an Islamic environment, including the observance of Islamic values, prayers, fasting and extra-curricular Islamic lessons. YMA pays the salaries of Islamic education teachers in support of Islamic *madrasa* or Quranic education in Garissa Young Muslim Nursery School, Nakuru and Nyahururu Islamic Centers, and grants a limited number of bursaries to bright Muslim students from poor families to attend university and college education in Kenya. The Islamic call (*dawa*) branch of YMA is the most controversial, particularly its role in conversion (known to YMA leadership as reversion, i.e. to revert Christian Somali to Islam). "Revertees" are taught the basics of Islam at various centres in order to equip them with the foundations of Islamic faith.

Africa's governance crisis, which I described earlier, has, in a sense, delivered the believers to the domain of religious moral and ethical values as an anti-thesis to a corrupt state. Opting out of the state institutions did not stop at primary and secondary education, whose graduates cannot influence the highly educated state operators. Islamic University education became an obvious option. Islamic business, banks, engineering, import/export and benevolent organisations felt comfortable with the graduates of these universities. On their part, the universities devoted their curriculum to instil in their students a strong orientation towards the study and application of Islamic ethics and moral standards.

The University of Holy Quran and Islamic Sciences, Omdurman, Sudan, was founded in 1990, a year after the military coup of 1989 which brought the National Islamic Front to power in alliance with the military government known at the time as the National Salvation Revolution. The University comprises two already existing institutions: the Holy Quran College, established in 1981, and the Omdurman Higher Institute established in 1983. The new institution's mission is to contribute to the intellectual, scientific, economic, social and cultural development, with particular reference to the following:

1. Affirming and authenticating the identity of the nation.

2. Teaching all sciences of the Holy Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah as well as Arabic language and all Islamic and social sciences.

3. Studying the Islamic heritage and enriching the life of Sudanese society by the Arab and Islamic civilization.

4. Carrying out scientific research on issues of the society through the medium of the Islamic intellectual concepts, which correspond to the current issues of the world and interact with the environment.

5. Cooperating with universities and institutions of higher education in the country and other countries in the world.

6. Contributing effectively in qualifying the various sectors of the society to assume their role in discharging the tasks and duties of the Islamic state.

7. Educating students and awarding them academic degrees.

In order to achieve its objective, the University of Holy Quran and Islamic Sciences established four faculties and a female students' center. These are as follows: Faculty of the Holy Quran, Faculty of Sharia, Faculty of Arabic language, Faculty of Da'wa and Information, Graduates College and Female Students' Centre. The extra-mural activities of the university include:

1. Holy Quran Institute, considered the University's window to society, organizes activities through open courses, recital diplomas in the Holy Quran and Islamic studies, model Quranic schools and specialized training courses in the various domains of knowledge.

2. National Institute for Qualifying Holy Quran Memorizers,

3. Research and Preachers' Training Institute,

4. Arabic Language Teaching Institute,

5. Holy Quran Research Centre,

6. Institute of Quranic methodology,

7. Al-Nilien Da'wa Centre.

Unlike other universities, the University of the Holy Quran and Islamic Sciences encourages independent learning and self-study through a network of 10 regional University Centers and

libraries located throughout the country. It also has its own printing facility devoted largely to the printing and free distribution of copies of the Quran. In fact there is little difference between the University of Holy Quran and Islamic Sciences in spreading Islam through *Da'wa* and Muslim NGOs such as Tawhid Islamic Association (already discussed above) or International Islamic Call Society (to be discussed in the following section).

The second case I present here is Mbale Islamic University, Uganda, which in a sense differs from the state-sponsored University of Holy Quran and Islamic Sciences. The education philosophy and objectives are not different from those of the University of Holy Quran and Islamic Sciences, Sudan. However, the main difference is that the Mbale Islamic University is not politically charged as its Sudanese sister. Certainly, Sudan's Holy Quran University was established during a period of heightened Islamic fundamentalism overtures engineered by the National Islamic Front. In fact it was established in 1990. It consists of four faculties, Arts, Business Studies and Public Administration, Education, Islamic Studies and Arabic Language. The University became member of the League of Islamic Universities and became candidate for funding from the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in its 8th session held in Tehran, Iran 9-11 December 1997. This is not an isolated incidence as the University was officially recommended for endorsement and funding by Islamic Commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs (ISCECSA) which works very closely with it. Most of the funding came from Saudi Arabia, which also established two Mosques through the establishment of a Waqf for the University. It is noteworthy that Saudi Arabia shoulders the bulk of the finances of the Islamic University of Omdurman, Sudan. Other donors for Mbale Islamic University, included the Islamic Solidarity Fund, the International Islamic Da'wa Society (Libya), the Islamic Committee of the International Crescent, among others. The ISCECSA is represented on the governing board of Mbale Islamic University in Uganda.

Transnational Islamic organisations: multilateralism and its discontent

In addition to NGOs operating at the national and regional levels, there are also seven major transnational Islamic foundations and societies operating throughout the world, with significant financial and human resources. These transnational Muslim NGOs are engaged in diverse activities ranging from activism, conversion, evangelism and development activities throughout the Muslim world. Instead of going through all of these organisations, I shall take up the cases of International Islamic Relief Organisation, the World Islamic Call Society and the Aga Khan.

Table 2 below shows a sample of transnational NGOs and their countries of operation in Africa. I must admit that the table is not exhaustive and has excluded some smaller NGOs. The table shows that Islamic NGOs originated outside Africa, notably in the UK, USA and Arab Muslim countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya and Egypt). They mostly concentrate in countries with large Muslim populations (Sudan, Nigeria, Kenya, Morocco, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda and Senegal among others), while others are more interested in minority Muslim populations in countries where

Christianity is dominant (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry, Malawi, Mozambique).

Some transnational Islamic NGOs have joined global NGO networks and created a partnership with the UN system and other secular as well as religious transnational NGOs. The variety of networks and partnership arrangements in which they are involved offers them the opportunity to connect with global NGO trends, problems, evaluation and monitoring methodologies, lobbying and advocacy. The following case studies will illustrate this.

First, I take up the case of the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) concerned with three major development areas: health, education and relief. After introducing IIRO, I will offer a rare glimpse of its African and other development activities. I then contrast what I perceive as the secular orientation of IIRO with the proactive role of the Islamic Call Society in the spread of, and conversion of non-Muslims to, Islam.

According to its publications, IIRO seeks to serve the victims of natural disasters and wars: orphans, refugees and displaced people all over the world. Relief work is conducted on purely humanitarian grounds, without any distinction on the basis of ethnic, linguistic or religious considerations. IIRO has, however, discovered that more than 80% of the refugees and victims of wars and disasters are Muslims. Some of IIRO relief programs are therefore directed towards the provision of medical, educational and social support of those in desperate need of them. IIRO also encourages entrepreneurs. It sponsors viable economic projects and small businesses that can help the victims to find employment, earn a living and thereby lead a productive and fruitful life again. To fulfil these objectives, the IIRO has established a wide network of national and international contacts with various Islamic and non-Islamic relief organisations, institutions and individuals.

In addition, IIRO has established a wide network of international contacts with various international humanitarian organisations. It has developed an excellent working relationship with organisations such as the United Nations' High Com-missioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (ICRCS), International Organisation of Migration (IOM), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Federation of African Voluntary Development Organisations (FAVDO), OXFAM, Refugee Study Program at Oxford, Save the Children, International NGO Working Group on Women Refugees, and many others.

Recently, IIRO has joined the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and become a member of its executive committee. It has joined the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) in a consultative role, and the Conference of Non-Government Organisations (CONGO). IIRO is chairing the General Committee for Relief (GCR), which comprises more than 50 international Arab and Muslim relief organisations.

Since 1989, IIRO has been engaged in emergency relief operations in Afghanistan, for Royeingya refugees in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Indonesia, Egypt, Morocco, and Kergisistan, through provision of tents and relief items. It has also assisted the victims of armed conflicts in Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi through provision of tents, clothes, food items and other relief items, including educational and medical services. IIRO is also active among the Tuareq refugees in Mali, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, where it provided food, medical supplies, sanitary services, education, vocational training and orphanage care.

Table 2: Major Transnational Islamic NGOs and countries of operation

Transnational Islamic NGOs	
Islamic African Relief Agency (ISRA) (Denmark)	Chad, Kenya, Mali, Senegal, Sudan and South Africa
The Islamic American Relief Agency (IARA), (USA)	Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Somaliland, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda
Muslim World League (Saudi Arabia)*	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Moroni Comores, Mozambique, Nigeria, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda
World Islamic Call Society (Libya)*	Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Guinea Konakry, Libya, Malawi, Morocco, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda
World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) (Saudi Arabia)*	Africa is served through the Sudan office
League of Islamic Universities (Saudi Arabia)*	Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda
Organisation of Islamic Conference (Iran)*	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Moroni Comores, Mozambique, Nigeria, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda
International Islamic Council for Da'wa and Relief (Egypt)*	Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Guinea Conakry, Libya, Malawi, Morocco, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda
International Muslim Relief Network (USA)	Somalia, Sudan
International Islamic Charitable Foundation (Kuwait)*	Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Somalia, Somaliland, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda
International Islamic Relief Organisation (Saudi Arabia)*	Burkina Faso, Egypt, Gambia, Mauritania, Malawi, Morocco, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda
Ibrahim Bin Abdul Aziz al Ibrahim Foundation (Saudi Arabia)	Kenya, Somalia, Sudan
Human Concern International (Canada)	Benin, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan
Mercy International (USA)	Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan
Horn of Africa Relief Agency (HARA), (Kenya)	Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti
Islamic Relief Worldwide (USA)	Egypt, Ghana, Sudan
Al Haramin Islamic Foundation (Saudi Arabia)	Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, Tanzania ,Uganda.
Islamic Relied Worldwide	Mali, Sudan
Al Tawhid Foundation (Uganda)	Uganda, Sudan, Tanzania
World Ahlubait Islamic League (UK)	Tanzania (with strong business interests in the UK, USA, Canada, Finland, Sweden, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates, India and Pakistan)

The Department of Urgent Relief and Refugees (DURR) has established good relationships with many NGOs and international organisations that are working in the emergency fields, for the purpose of generating the required resources for their mutual operations. Together with other humanitarian and international organisations it co-ordinates humanitarian projects for the benefit of the victims of disasters. IIRO co-operated with UNHCR in acting as an implementing agency of UNCHR in Tanzania among the Rwandan and Burundian refugees.

IIRO seems to put its network and membership of international organisations to work. For instance, it co-operated with MSF Holland in the field of medical services, with the World Food Programme (WFP) to distribute food to the poor and the refugees in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone, with UNICEF to install drinking water projects in Iraqi Kurdistan. It worked jointly with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), which supports some of its programmes to assist Muslims in desperate need. In Sierra Leone, it co-operated with the National Committee for Rehabilitation (NARECOM) and co-ordinated the efforts of the NGOs and the Government to help the displaced people who had fled from civil war.

It is clear that IIRO's activities, structure, mode of operation and development programmes are not different from that of secular transnational NGOs. However, there are three major differences:

1. An emphasis on working in Muslim countries and among poor Muslims, particularly in the least developed Muslim countries.

2. A Muslim staff committed to its objectives, and

3. Support of education, particularly within the formal education curriculum, sponsoring teachers and students as well as publishing.

However, it should be noted that some transnational NGOs emphasize education, although with less emphasis on sponsoring students and teachers.

In contrast to the IIRO, the World Islamic Call Society (WICS) has developed three main areas of intervention:

1. Society *Da'wa* and Islamic Centers

2. Conferences, institutional support and relief

3. Research, information and publication

A synopsis of some of the activities of the WICS is given below. By its very nature, WICS is a religious organisation committed to the spread of Islam and has the creation of a universal Islamic *umma* as its ultimate goal. One of the main objectives of Islamic *Da'wa* centres is to introduce Islam and disseminate Islamic culture and conversion. It is also active in printing translations of the Quran as well as of translating other religious and cultural books into local languages. In Africa, WICS has been carrying out such activities in Zambia, the Comoros, Chad and Sri Lanka.

The newly converted Muslims are often supplied with all care and assistance by WICS. They are provided with Islamic publications in their own language to assist them in learning more about the faith. Educational and professional courses to teach them skills and to help them integrate into their new societies were organised for the new Muslims in Thailand, Chad, Southern Sudan, Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Benin and the Gambia. Another objective is to counter-act the spread of Christianity in Africa. An example of this is a project called "Countering the Christianization Efforts", with a seminar held on Christianization (February 1997) in the Sudan in co-operation with Africa International University. The seminar was entitled "Christianization and Colonialist Penetration", with the main aim of exposing the methods used by Christian Evangelists, to subvert their efforts to weaken Islam and destroy the Muslim character.

The WICS activities include Quran printing, recording and translations. Special WICS editions of the French and English translations of the Quran were also published, with 10.000 copies produced and distributed in each language.

Globally, WICS has co-operated with UNESCO to develop a number of projects. Most prominent among these projects is "Individual and Society in Islam", a compiler published in English. Equally important is the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia financed and supervised by WICS, also in co-operation with UNESCO, under the title "Diverse Aspects of Islamic Culture". The volume was previously published in French and has recently been published in Arabic. WICS also co-operates with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) in the field of spreading Arabic language and Islamic culture. This also includes co-operation in the fields of education, culture and science jointly implemented in the Sahara belt countries.

Since 1998, the Islamic Call Society has vowed to combine the Call activities with food and medical convoys sent to poor Islamic countries (Republic of Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Chad, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Conakry). Each convoy included a number of physicians and nurses in support of this effort.

Not all transnational Islamic voluntary organisations are supported by inter-governmental organisations, as indicated in Table 2. Some rich Muslims from oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have established their own transnational NGOs, which are engaged in activities

similar to those of inter-governmental organisations. However, Table 2 reveals that the majority of Muslim transnational voluntary organisations are private, while a few are connected with specific Muslim sects or orders (Shia, Bahai, Ismaili, Ahmadiyya, Gadriyya etc.). Some transnational Islamic NGOs such as Aga Khan began as Islamic sect-specific orders, but at a later stage declared themselves non-denominational organisations. The Aga Khan Foundation is one such organisation that was originally closely tied to the Ismaili Muslim community, but gradually developed into a global Foundation, with projects throughout the world, including Africa. I elaborate on this below.

The Aga Khan Foundation is one of the most prominent religious foundations in the African continent despite the fact that it portrays itself as non-denominational organisation. It has its roots in the Fatimid caliphate, the first major Shia state in North Africa (Tunisia) during the 9th century. As a result of migratory movements and mission activities in its history, the Ismaili community has come to settle in a wide- spread number of countries across the globe. Its traditions fall within four broad geographic and ethnographic groups: Central Asian, Persian, Arab and South Asian, all of them united by their allegiance to their present, 49th hereditary Imam, Prince Karim Aga Khan. Ismaili settlements in Africa primarily comprise Ismailis of Indian sub-continent origins, while recent settlements in the West comprise Ismailis from all the above nationalities and traditions.

In 1905 Aga Khan ordained the first Ismaili Constitution for the social governance of the community in East Africa. The new administration for the Community's affairs was organised into a hierarchy of councils at the local, national, and regional levels. The constitution also set out rules in such matters as marriage, divorce and inheritance, guidelines for mutual co-operation and support among Ismailis, and their interface with other communities.

1948 marked the beginning of modern Ismaili history when the 46th Imam, Aga Hasan Ali Shah, emigrated to India and settled in Bombay, where he established his headquarters, and became known as Aga Khan I, followed by Aga Khan II who lived only for four years after holding the Imamate. At the time of his accession, Imam Sultan Mohamed Shah, Aga Khan III, was under eight years old. At the age of nine, Queen Victoria bestowed upon Aga Khan III, the title of His Highness.

Following the Second World War and the difficulties East Africa, among other developing regions, had to face, the Aga Khan Foundation's main objective was to secure the social welfare and economic well-being of the Ismaili community. In 1945, the Aga Khan Ismaili Community created the East African Muslim Welfare Society (EAMWS). By the 1950s EAMWS was already engaged in an effort to train businessmen, agriculturalists, and professionals. This process has continued, albeit with new emphasis on developing modern institutions for social and economic development in the Indian sub-continent East Africa. The Aga Khan Foundation is the arm of the Ismaili school of jurisprudence and although dubbed as a foundation concerned with Indian and Pakistani Muslim affairs, a number of indigenous East African Muslims have benefited from the foundation's charitable work and activities.

In 1983, the Aga Khan Foundation established the 300 million US$-worth inter-national Aga Khan University, with its Faculty of Health Sciences and teaching hospital based in Karachi, expanded its programmes for schools for girls and medical centres in the Hunza region, one of the remotest parts of Northern Pakistan bordering on China and Afghanistan, established the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Gujarat, India, and extended the existing urban hospitals and primary health care centers in Tanzania and Kenya. In 1986, it promulgated a constitution that, for the first time, brought the social governance of the world-wide Ismaili community into a single structure with built-in flexibility to account for diverse circumstances of different regions. Served by volunteers appointed by and accountable to the Imam, the Constitution functions as an enabler to harness the best in individual creativity in an ethos of group responsibility, to promote the common well-being of the communities the Foundation serves.

Today, the Aga Khan Foundation defines itself as a non-denominational, international development agency established by His Highness the Aga Khan in 1967. Its mission is to develop and promote creative solutions to problems that impede social development, primarily in Asia and East Africa. Created as a private, non-profit foundation under Swiss law, it has branches and independent affiliates in 12 countries. It is a modern vehicle for traditional philanthropy in the Ismaili Muslim community under the leadership of the Aga Khan.

Although the Aga Khan Foundation denies any political role in East Africa, the Ismaili community is well represented on individual basis by politicians who have a religious leaning towards the Ismaili order. However, rumours of sympathy with the leader of the Islamic Party of Kenya, Sheikh Khalid Balala, could not be confirmed. Sheikh Khalid Balala is a radical Islamist who was exiled to Germany following the 1995 riots by Muslims in Mombassa. The expulsion was blamed on his fiery speeches and call for the installation of a Muslim government in Kenya.

Islamic NGO solidarity

One of the incidents which draws my attention to a closer look into the transnational political role of Islamic NGOs was the 7 August 1997 bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania where more than 250 people were killed and 5,000 others injured. The incidents were blamed on Islamic terrorists linked to the dissident Saudi millionaire, Osama Bin Laden, believed to be living in Afghanistan. Five Islamic NGOs were banned and a team of Kenyan police and US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) agents raided the offices of one of them, Mercy Relief International, a few days latter. The other four - the Al-Haramain Foundation, Help African People, the Islamic Relief Organisation (reinvented itself as International Islamic Relief Organisation) and Ibrahim Bin Abdul Aziz Al Ibrahim Foundation - have not been raided by the law enforcement officers. According to the NGO Co-ordinating Board's Director, John Etemesi, the organisations had been found to be working against the interests of Kenyans in terms of security.

Muslim NGOs throughout the world protested against the banning of the five Muslim NGOs in Kenya. Likewise, the bombing was condemned by the three East African Supreme National Islamic Councils of Tanzania (BAKAWATA), Uganda (NAAM) and Kenya (SUPKEM). Known for the varying degrees to which they promote Muslim interests at the national level, the leaders of the Supreme Islamic Councils were quick to defend the non-violent nature of Islam (for more on the historical antecedence of these Muslim councils, cf. Constantin 1995). It was reported that while addressing the mourners in Nairobi at the bombsite, Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi said those behind the bombing "could not have been Christians". These remarks were widely publicized and as such drew criticism from Muslim leaders who claimed their religion was being wrongly associated with violence. Sheikh Ahmad Khalif, head of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM), commented that "Islam like any other religion does not support the killing of innocent people for whatever reason".

The reaction from West African Muslim NGOs was swift. West Africa, too, was concerned. Baraham Diop, President of the Senegal Federation of *Ulama* stressed that Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance and dialogue. Islam is against any violence and any form of terrorism, whatever its objective. Sani Aladji, the Chair of the Yaounde Chapter of Cameroon's opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) notes that "generally Islam advocates negotiation and compromise", while in Lome, Islamic groups threatened to retaliate against the raids on Sudan and Afghanistan by targeting U.S. installations. Kodjo Nulugbe of Lawyers Without Borders, a non-governmental organisation, requested that the United Nations should ask the entire international community and not just one country to agree on anti-terrorist measures.

The reaction of Islamic NGOs to the bombing of the East African embassies and the US retaliation centers on at least four points:

1. It confirms our assertion that the majority of these NGOs operate within the parameters of Islamic voluntarism. This voluntarism treats Islam as an all-embracing faith in which there is no distinction between the provision of social welfare, economics and politics. However, Islamic NGOs are diverse and some of them are much closer to this fundamental position than others.

2. Transnational Islamic NGOs could be used as political instruments to further the interests of particular Islamic groups. Because their operations are not purely voluntary, some of them have massive economic power, and they have therefore developed economic interests that could only be served through a global network of support.

3. Seemingly non-political groups such as schools and sufi orders have been increasingly lured by the expansion of Islamic NGO activities and the financial resources they command. It is therefore natural that their reaction to the bombing of the East African embassies was based on defending a religious faith rather than judging the facts behind the bombing.

4. The global solidarity among Islamic NGOs is derived from the specificity of the contribution Muslim NGOs make towards a universal Muslim *umma*.

Conclusions

In Islam, therefore, the problem arises not from what sources of Islamic law take prominence in usurping humanitarianism as a religious and social duty, but from the negotiability or non-negotiability of the primary sources (i.e. Quran and *sunna*). Since some schools of Muslim thought consider the primary sources of Islamic law divine scripts, any attempt to deviate from their original interpretations could be perceived grave disobedience by orthodox Muslims and blasphemous by more fundamentalist Muslims. Here again, the problem does not lie wholly with the principles embedded in humanitarianism cloaked in Islamic sources of law and ethics, but with how they have been interpreted, used and abused by a body politic hostile to diversity and pluralism.

The future of Islamic NGOs may point in a stark direction, including a role in the proliferation of violence, stifling the democratic process or monopolising aspects of economic operations. These NGOs may even be capable of undermining the secularist African economy in favour of Islamic business interests similar to those I have described in relation to some Islamic NGOs. There are already shady relations between Islamic NGOs and some militant groups that are increasing at an accelerating rate. In my view, here lie the perils and not the promises of Islamic NGOs and probably the dangers that they pose to African societies. There is the fear that some Islamic NGOs may contribute to the emergence of a militant society hostile to polycentricity and all that is African, including the quest for pluralism, and diversity of faith beyond the Islamic *umma* or community.

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