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**VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES AND INSTITUTIONS  
IN AFRICA AND THEIR IMPACT  
ON DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESSES**

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# VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES AND INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA AND THEIR IMPACT ON DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESSES

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Three major religions prevail on the African continent today: African Traditional Religion(s) Islam, and Christianity. Rather than looking at these religions as homogeneous, exclusive, and self-contained systems and worldviews, this paper focuses on the heterogeneity and pluralism contained within these religions (Brenner, 2000, 144) and their potential for promoting or inhibiting the development of a democratic culture in Africa. It also looks at the evolution of political and religious institutions and ideational frameworks from the colonial period up to the end of the twentieth century.

## **Religious Heterogeneity, Pluralism, and Democracy**

Each of the three main religions practiced in Sub-Saharan Africa have certain core beliefs which distinguish them from each other. Although acknowledging a single god as the Creator of the universe. African Traditional Religions assert a strong belief in the existence and intervention of intermediary Gods and spirits in human affairs. Islam affirms the existence of a single God without intermediaries, the Koran as the word of God, and Mohammed as God's messenger. Christianity declares Jesus Christ to be the incarnation of God and the source of salvation and the Bible as the word of God. These core beliefs in themselves are politically neutral in the sense that they don't necessarily provide support for democratic, aristocratic, or autocratic political systems. Once we get beyond these core beliefs, we see that these religions are heterogeneous and contain a wide variety of different principles and practices that can and have supported different kinds of political systems and cultures. Specific religious orders, institutions, denominations, churches, organizations, associations, communities, and individuals have adopted different dogmas, cosmologies, guiding moral principles, governance structures, modes of organization, objectives, and identities over time. Our task in this paper is to identify those dimensions of religion supporting democratic cultures and political systems.

Unlike African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam have historically embraced doctrines of salvation that exclude non-believers, affirm the inferiority of other religions, and refer to sacred texts as the word of God and the source of religious authority. This has historically led to a strong emphasis on the need to convert others to the true religion through missionary activities and intolerance towards non-believers or co-religionists who violate the rules laid down by religious authorities.

At the same time, Islam and Christianity also contain principles that affirm the innate equality and dignity of all human beings, social justice, and some form of the Golden Rule. These principles can provide the foundation for democratic cultures (Gruchy, 1995; Esposito and Voll, 1998). Since the 1960s, The Roman Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant Churches have adopted a more respectful position towards other religions and have supported democratic institutions. Although extremist Islamist ideologies get a

disproportionate amount of attention in the West, one also finds currents within the Islamic world supporting inter-faith dialogue and democratic institutions.

Political analyses of colonial and post-colonial African societies have often described these societies as pluralistic multi-racial or multi-ethnic entities with the emphasis on divisions based on race, tribe, and ethnicity. This paper shifts the focus from racial and ethnic to religious pluralism as another way of looking at the political order and its relationships with society in Africa.

In Africa, religious pluralism is more striking in countries like Tanzania where Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions each claim roughly one-third of the population or in Nigeria which has roughly equal Muslim and Christian populations and a sizable number of adherents of African traditional religions. Tanzania has had Christian and Muslim political leaders and is known for its religious tolerance (Ludwig, 1999).

Although African Traditional Religions are now minority religions in nearly all African countries, traditional African beliefs, practices, and rituals survive and remain part of the life of individuals who now identify themselves as Muslims or Christians. Thus, as one commentary has it, Senegal is now 94% Muslim, 5 % Christian and 100 % Animist.

Some degree of religious pluralism can be found in all societies, even seemingly religiously homogenous societies. For example, although Muslims comprise more than 98% of the population in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, these countries contain a wide range of Islamic beliefs, political organizations, and different approaches towards democracy, church-state relationships, and relationships with secular forces and non-believers (Entelis, 1997). Differences in the configuration of Islamic institutions, Sufi organizations, popular religious practices, and relationships between rulers and ruled also underscore the high degree of heterogeneity and pluralism within Muslim North African societies.<sup>1</sup>

Religious pluralism can also be found in countries like Zambia which are overwhelmingly Christian and have almost no Muslim population (Gifford, 1997:181-245). Members of Zambia's Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Evangelical, Pentecostal, African Independent Churches and the nearly quarter of the population still adhering to African traditional religions have adopted different religious dogmas, beliefs, modes of organization, priorities, and stances toward government.<sup>2</sup>

Two broad approaches to defining democracy prevail.<sup>3</sup> The first one, now predominant in Europe and North American social science circles stresses a minimal and procedural definition of democracy emphasizing free, fair and open national elections as the essence of modern democracy. From this perspective, Democracy is a system which gives the people the right to choose and change its leaders through periodic multiparty elections. The second approach provides a broader definition of democracy whose components and principles also include freedom, equality, participation in public affairs, government accountability, protection of human and minority rights, and a culture of tolerance. This approach defines democracy as a way of life as well as a system for choosing leaders.

## **Components of Religion with the Potential to Support Democratic Cultures in Africa**

What elements can we find in different dimensions of African Traditional Religions, Islam, and Christianity that support or hinder the development of a new democratic culture and society in Africa?

### *African Traditional Religions: Religious Tolerance, Pluralism, and Local Autonomy*

Unlike Islam and Christianity which aspire to be universal religions, African Traditional Religions are essentially local and adhered to by specific kinship-based societies. John Mbiti (1969), a prominent African theologian, maintains that each African people had its own religion with different gods, cosmogonies, myths of origin, specific rituals and sacred places. African Traditional Religions often took the name of the people who adhere to them. Thus, one speaks of the Yoruba religion as the religion of the Yoruba people who trace their origins back to a common ancestor and have a common set of myths, gods, secret societies, and religious practices.

In societies in which African Traditional Religions prevailed, boundaries between temporal and secular authority were blurred. Chiefs and rulers embodied the vital force of their societies and officiated over religious rites designed to please the gods and ancestors and thereby insure the fertility of the land and the people, prosperity, and success in war. The office of chief and ruler was usually hereditary. Chiefs came from the descendants of the founding family of the village. Rulers of empires and large political entities were descendants of those setting up these larger political systems usually through military conquest.

The larger political systems were often autocratic and built on the concept of sacred kingship and aristocratic principles of *inequality* based on status at birth. Aristocratic systems supported slavery, excluded large categories of people from access to political office and required commoners and lower caste people to show great deference towards rulers and aristocrats. These aspects did not support the evolution of a democratic culture.

African traditional religions and large-scale political systems also exhibited a high degree of syncretism and *religious tolerance* that accommodated a wide range of religious beliefs and provided local communities with a high degree of political and religious *autonomy* (Diagne, 1967). For example, the rulers of the Ghana Empire in West Africa had no qualms about converting to Islam and establishing Islam as the official court religion while at the same time insisting upon continuing to fulfill their religious obligations under the old religion (Levtzion, 1973). The Mandinka rulers of the Mali Empire who adopted Islam permitted the vassal states and local communities within the empire to practice their own religions without any coercion. The result was a high degree of religious *pluralism*. Conversely, rulers who did not convert to Islam had no problem accepting Muslims as part of their court and often provided them with land and other favors in exchange for their religious support in the forms of prayers and amulets.

Traditions of religious tolerance and inclusiveness enabled Africans to convert to Islam and later to Christianity while retaining many elements of their traditional religions and incorporating these into their new religions or to adopt Islamic practices into their own lives.<sup>4</sup> In a remarkable interview for a Yoruba magazine, Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Prize laureate in literature and a staunch advocate of democracy, refers to the mutual celebration of traditional Yoruba, Christian, and Muslim holidays among the Yoruba as evidence of the acceptance of the equality of all religions and the openness of ATRs in absorbing and adopting new ideas and practices from other religions that resonate with traditional religious myths and experiences (Soyinka, 1997). In that same interview, Soyinka also argued that Christianity and Islam were conservative forces that actually retarded Nigeria's ability to cope with the modern world, whereas traditional religions—Yoruba religion at least- was something much more open, liberating, and capable of adaptation.

*Islam: Equality, Popular Sovereignty, Participation, Consensus, Social Justice, and Human Rights*

Unlike African Traditional Religions, Islam professes to be a universal religion with principles that apply to all and a system of law (*sharia*) and obligations that all believers must follow. In looking at the potential for Islam to support or inhibit democracy, it is helpful to make distinctions between historic Islam- i.e. how Islamic societies and polities actually functioned over time and Islamic doctrines which contain the basic concepts, principles and rules governing Islam.

Historically, Sunnis have constituted the overwhelming majority of Muslims in Africa.<sup>5</sup> Outside of Egypt and North Africa, which were integrated politically, culturally, and religiously into the Islamic world of the Middle East and adopted similar political institutions, Islam throughout Sub-Saharan Africa has had a very different kind of political history

*Minority and Majority Models and Traditions: Tolerance and Intolerance*

Patrick Ryan has made a useful distinction between Islamic Minority and Majority Models (Ryan 1987). The minority model dates back to the time of the Prophet when Mohammed and his religious followers attempted peaceful coexistence with the majority in Mecca and promised to respect the religious views of others as long as they did not attack Islam. In the Minority Model, Muslims constitute a minority in a non-Islamic environment, attempt to spread Islam by persuasion rather than coercion, develop friendly relationships with different religious groups and accommodate to religious practices not sanctioned by formal Islam.

Where Muslims are the majority and/or constitute the ruling elite, Muslims have the option to install the Majority Model by establishing an Islamic state. In the most extreme form of the Majority Model, Islam is the official state religion, the *sharia* is the law of the land, and state power is used to suppress all other religions. Saudi Arabia provides an

example of a more extreme form of the Majority Model. Sudan has been closer to the extreme Majority Model since 1985 but has moved away from this model following the peace agreements ending the hostilities with the non-Muslim South in 2005.

While acknowledging the dominance of Islamic norms, states adopting liberal Majority Models allow freedom of religion and recognize Non-Muslims as citizens having the same political and social status as Muslims.<sup>6</sup> Morocco and Tunisia are examples of more liberal forms of the Majority Model. Morocco is the only African Muslim nation-state where the ruler is a hereditary monarch claiming descent from the Prophet and holding on to the title of Commander of the Faithful. Although declaring Islam as the dominant religion, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt all have secular rulers.<sup>7</sup>

In West Africa where the Minority model prevailed, Islam was spread by traders and clerics whose exemplary behavior attracted converts. Ryan notes that most of the countries in post-independence West Africa like Senegal, Gambia, Mali, and Niger, which now have large Muslim majorities have not established Islamic Republics and constitutions based on the Majority Model. Rather than attributing this primarily to the essentially secular nature of the Muslim political elite in power, he argues that the failure to do so has more to do with the political history of Islam in that region and traditions of Muslim and non-Muslim co-existence. In the predominantly Muslim states in Northern Nigeria containing Christians and adherents of ATRs, movement towards adopting an extreme Majority Model imposing *sharia* law on all citizens has been a major source of growing of inter-religious conflicts.<sup>8</sup>

#### *The Umma (Community of Believers): Equality, Popular Sovereignty, Consensus, and Human Rights*

Islam proclaims the innate equality of all humanity. Affirmation of equality is a key component of democratic cultures and societies (Tocqueville, 1988). Equality has historically been invoked to fight against racial, ethnic, caste and, more recently, gender discrimination and provides the foundations for the concept of popular sovereignty and human rights. Traditional Islamic rules of law pertaining to war, for example, support the notion of human rights by protecting the rights of non-combatants, women, children, and the elderly.

Although Islam is a universal religion, certain precepts of equality did not apply to Non-Muslims. Islamic law historically precluded the enslavement of Muslims, but not non-Muslims. Muslim rulers and clerics throughout Africa engaged in the slave trade and held large numbers of slaves. Some Muslim rulers engaged in wars which led to the enslavement of fellow Muslims. In West Africa, Muslim clerics denounced Muslim rulers who engaged in such practices while condoning the holding of non-Muslim slaves (Sanneh, 1989).

Another precept of equality that did not apply to non-Muslims was equal treatment before the law for religious minorities—e.g. Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and pagans—who had to pay special taxes if they preferred to practice their religion rather than convert to

Islam. Although Christians and Jews, as People of the Book, enjoyed the protection of the Islamic state, they nevertheless suffered from religious discrimination. Historically, one can cite examples where religious minorities were harshly treated (Ye'or, 2002) as well as examples of peaceful coexistence, intellectual and religious dialogue, and minorities holding public office (Menocal, 2002). The Koran contains verses providing justification for harsh treatment of non-believers and other verses calling for respectful treatment of non-believers and religious tolerance.

One of the main focal points of Islam is the *Umma*. Under Islam, Muslims are “citizens” of a universal religious community (*umma*) that transcends state and national boundaries. All members of the *umma* are equal before the law and before God.

Historically, the precept of the equality of all Muslims has not always been applied within the Islamic world. For example, Arab Muslims have often regarded themselves as racially, ethnically and religiously superior to the Berber tribes of North Africa and the peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa who converted to Islam. The Moors of Mauritania, for example, have historically regarded Black Africans living along the Senegal River as racially inferior while similar views have been held by Arab Muslims regarding black African Muslim populations in Sudan and in part explains the degree of cruelty taking place in Darfur.

Islam teaches that Muslim rulers must provide social justice and work for the well-being of the *umma* within their realm. Islamic doctrine contains concepts that rulers and the class of clerics and scholars (*ulema*) charged with interpreting and applying *sharia* law should not arbitrarily impose applications of the law that go against the consensus (*ijma*) of the *ulema* class or the community concerning basic beliefs and practices. This principle can be used to prevent rulers from imposing minority religious beliefs and practices on the people and provide some measure of protection for religious pluralism and minority religious rights within Islam in order to insure harmony.

Islamic law is also designed to promote social justice and to provide sustenance and protection for the weakest elements of society while punishing violators of the law who are considered to be evildoers. As the interpreters of the *sharia*, the *ulema* historically enjoyed a good deal of autonomy vis-à-vis the rulers and held them accountable for following and applying the law. In the Islamic world, rulers often had to arbitrate among opposing schools of thought in applying the law and to intercede when Islamic reformers were perceived as going too far in attacking Sufi brotherhoods and beliefs<sup>9</sup>

### *Sufi Brotherhoods and Popular Islam: Tolerance*

Since the eighteenth century, the Sufi Brotherhoods have emerged as the most important Islamic institution in Africa and demonstrated their capacity to draw large numbers of followers.<sup>10</sup> Although Sufism has been part of mainstream Islamic since the twelfth century, the Sufi Brotherhoods have increasingly come under attack from Islamic reformers denouncing the principle and practice of *marabouts* acting as intermediaries

between believers and God. Certain Sufi beliefs and practices make Sufism more compatible with democratic cultures than Islamic doctrines demanding the establishment of Islamic states and the rigid application of *sharia* law.

Following the colonial conquest, Sufi brotherhoods throughout North, West, and East Africa, for the most part, made their peace with the colonial ruler. Sufis entered into various modes of accommodation with the colonial regime. Although some Sufi leaders distanced themselves from the colonial state, most accepted to be loyal subjects of the ruler and counseled their followers to respect the secular law established by the colonial ruler when it did not conflict with Islamic law.<sup>11</sup> Sufi religious leaders placed greater stress on the spiritual life and how to get closer to God than on following the law. They were also more inclined to recognize non-Islamic paths to God as equally valid rather than to assert that Islam was the only road to salvation, and to be more tolerant towards other religions.

### *Christianity: A European Religion*

Unlike Islam which had roots in Sub-Saharan Africa as early as the eighth century in Sudan and the Horn of Africa and in West Africa since the tenth century, Christianity was relatively new to Sub-Saharan Africa outside of Ethiopia where the Coptic Church had been implanted.<sup>12</sup> Orthodox Christianity, one of the three main branches of Christianity, was not a factor in the expansion of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa because Africa was colonized by Western European nations where Catholicism and Protestantism dominated.

Like Islam, Christianity also affirms human equality. Tocqueville has argued that this principle embodied in Christianity implied that all human beings had the capacity for self-government regardless of their social status at birth and thus contributed to the transformation of aristocratic societies into democratic societies (Tocqueville, 1988).

During the nineteenth century, Catholicism and Protestantism diverged in several doctrinal areas.<sup>13</sup> Catholic doctrine affirmed the infallibility of the Pope in matters of dogma, the Catholic Church as the ultimate religious authority and center of Christianity, and the special role of priests and saints as intermediaries between God and the people. Historically, it was hostile to secular liberal democratic principles and supported the aristocratic order during and after the French Revolution. Like Islam, Catholicism placed more emphasis on religious communities than Protestantism which emphasized the individual and had a tendency to fragment into independent churches following doctrinal disputes

Protestantism placed greater emphasis on the Bible rather than the Church as the main source of religious authority and the right of individuals to interpret the Bible according to their own lights. Protestants also regarded the clergy as servants and functionaries of the Church rather than as intermediaries between man and God, and rejected the cult of saints as idolatrous.

West European Protestants generally supported separation of church and state, religious freedom and pluralism, and looked to the state as the ultimate political authority. Conversely, they rejected the divine right of kings to rule and the subordination of Catholic or Protestant rulers to their respective churches. Moreover, Protestants accepted the growing privatization of religion accompanying secularization and regarded religion and salvation as primarily a personal matter.

Although the Catholic Church was a centralized and hierarchical institution, it supported a wide range of opinions within the Church. Like Islam, Catholicism aspired to be a universal religion encompassing all Christians. While retaining their loyalty to the Church, Catholic clergy and congregants, over time, came to adopt new identities as citizens of nation-states.

Unlike Islam, Christianity had no fixed set of laws which regulated all aspects of daily life. Catholics and Protestants alike shared a belief in the superiority of Christianity and the need to propagate the faith through missionary activity to insure salvation for all humanity. Although believing in the equality of humanity before God, most European and American Christians, even those opposing slavery and the slave trade, still believed that Africans were racially and culturally inferior to Europeans. During the colonial era, European and North American Christians continued to hold these views and to support colonialism as a vehicle for civilizing and evangelizing primitive African societies.

While many European Christian clergymen supported some form of political democracy at home, most believed that Africans were not ready for this until the last years of colonial rule.

### **The Impact of Colonial Rule: Religious Pluralism and the Decline of African Traditional Religions**

In 1900 at least three-quarters of Sub-Saharan Africa's populations could be classified as adherents of African Traditional Religions. Islam claimed more than 20% of the continent's population with Muslims concentrated in North Africa, Egypt, the Sudan and Horn of Africa, the savannah areas of West Africa and coastal enclaves in East Africa while Christians comprised only 2% of Africa's total populations and concentrated in Ethiopia, South Africa, European coastal settlements, and tiny pockets of Christian missionary activity.<sup>14</sup>

One of the most striking byproducts of colonial rule was the explosive development of Christianity in non-Muslim territories, the rapid and steady expansion of Islam in territories adjacent to areas with large Muslim populations in sub-Saharan Africa, and the sharp decline of African Traditional Religions.

*Varieties of Christian Colonial States, European Churches, and Multi-Religious Colonial Societies*

The colonial political order can be seen as a pluralistic multi-religious empire run by a very tiny foreign European Christian minority (Gellar, 2006a). In the colonial social and cultural hierarchy, Christians were at the top. European colonial rulers regarded Islam, though inferior to Christianity, as more advanced than traditional African religions. Muslim societies had more in common with Christian societies because they were monotheistic and valued literacy. Most European Christians regarded traditional African religions as primitive, heathen, and even satanic.

The 1884-1885 Berlin Congress prepared and legitimized the division and occupation of Africa by a small number of West European nations (Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and, later Italy) and the setting of the territorial boundaries of today's African nation-states. Political scientists have paid less attention to the fact that the Berlin Congress also provided the ground rules for carving up Africa into competing Christian spheres of religious influence. This was accomplished through a provision insuring freedom of religion which gave all Christian denominations the right to evangelize. This meant that a predominantly Catholic nation like Belgium or Portugal had to admit Protestant missionaries while a predominantly Protestant nation like Great Britain had to admit Catholic missionaries.

Before the Scramble for Africa, German missionaries had not been very active in Africa. However, when Germany took control over South West Africa (Namibia) Cameroon, Togo, and German East Africa (Tanganika, Rwanda, Burundi), it insisted on sending German Protestant and Catholic missionaries to its colonies. After Germany lost its African colonies, following its defeat in World War I, German missionary activity rapidly declined when its colonies fell under British, French, and Belgian control as protectorates.

Although King Leopold had set up the Congo Free State as his private domain he had to turn control over to the Belgian government in 1908 following pressures from world public opinion outraged at the disclosure of Belgian atrocities in the Congo. Belgium signed a concordat with Rome in 1906 which provided the basis for strong support to Catholic missions in Belgium's African colonies and insured that the Catholic missions would be run primarily by Belgian priests and nuns. Despite the Concordat establishing Catholicism as the preferred religion in the Congo, Belgium was obliged to accept Protestant missionaries--e.g., Baptists, Presbyterians, and Swedish Lutherans -- partly out of respect of the freedom of religion clause deriving from the Berlin Congress and partly because Belgium lacked enough nationals to engage in extensive missionary activities to cover the vast areas under its control. After Germany's defeat in World War I, Belgium also took control over Rwanda and Burundi. The Catholic Church became a pillar of the colonial regime in all of these countries.

Of all the European colonial powers, Portugal had the longest historical ties with Sub-Saharan Africa. In 1493, a papal bull had given Portugal civil and ecclesiastic authority

over the new territories “discovered” in Africa and encouraged the Portuguese to evangelize. At that time, Portugal was a major West European power. The Portuguese established trading centers and tiny Catholic communities on enclaves along the coasts of West, South, and East Africa which eventually provided the basis for their claims over the Cape Verde islands, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique.

Portugal had close ties with Rome and was the official state religion of Portugal throughout much of its history. As the smallest, poorest, and weakest of the colonial powers, Portugal had little capacity to develop its colonial territories or to provide much financial support to Catholic missionaries and mission education. Despite preferences shown to Catholic missionaries, Portugal also permitted Baptist, Methodist and Congregationalist missionaries to operate in Portuguese Africa. During the Salazar regime, Portugal regarded Protestant missions as training grounds for African nationalists hostile to Portuguese colonialism.

Italy was the last European power to obtain colonies in Africa when it seized control over Libya, Eritrea, and Italian Somalia before World War I. Under Fascist rule, Italy consolidated its hold over all of what is now modern Libya and conquered Ethiopia in 1935, sending Emperor Haile Selassie into exile.

While the major European colonial powers had predominantly Christian populations, their governments were ruled by secular leaders who adhered to different varieties of secular ideologies and based their foreign policies on perceived national interests. During the inter-war period in Europe, Fascist regimes in Italy and Portugal suppressed democracy and signed Concordats with Rome which gave the Catholic Church special status at home and in the colonies. France pursued anti-clerical policies and did little to promote the spread of Christianity in its African colonial Empire. Great Britain did the most to spread Christianity in Africa by its pro and even-handed missionary policies which permitted Catholics and Protestant missionaries to compete on an equal basis while Belgium favored Catholic missionaries and relied on the Catholic Church to provide the bulk of educational and health services in their colonies.

Christian churches in Africa were, to a large extent, overseas extensions of metropolitan church structures. The Anglican (Church of England) and Presbyterian (Church of Scotland) churches set up in the British colonies, for example, were under the supervision of their church hierarchies at home. For their part, Catholic missions and churches remained under the direct supervision of Rome.

During the autocratic phases of colonial rule (1885-1945), European Christian churches in Africa closely aligned themselves with the colonial political order and rarely took critical stances vis-à-vis the political authorities. Nor did they advocate the granting of citizenship rights to African subjects whom they regarded as not ready for participation in democratic political institutions and better off under the benevolent tutelage of the colonial state.

The French began their rule over predominantly Muslim populations in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, Muslim majorities in Mauritania and Senegal and sizeable Muslim minorities in Guinea, Niger, Chad, Mali, Upper Volta, Chad, and French Cameroon. In these colonies, the French discouraged the establishment of mission schools and proselytizing among the Muslim populations. Because of the Muslim-led resistance to the colonial conquest during the second half of the nineteenth century in West Africa, French colonial officials kept a close watch over Muslim religious leaders whom they feared would stir up trouble. However, during the first decade of the twentieth century, the French adopted a policy of accommodation with Islam which contributed greatly to the peaceful spread of Islam.

The situation was quite different in the British colonies where Britain allowed more religious freedom than the other colonial powers, had a wider range of religious denominations operating in their territories, and supported mission schools. In the British colonies, the colonial state and the mainline Protestant churches were integral parts of the power structure. Before it became independent, South Africa was one of the few territories where a European church, the Dutch Reform Church of the Afrikaner people, opposed the colonial ruler. Although Protestants usually constituted the majority of Christians, the Catholic Church had a strong presence in many British colonies like Uganda, Tanganyika and Western Nigeria.

One major indication of the alliance between the colonial state and the Christian Churches was the domination of the western education system by mission schools. As late as 1945, mission schools accounted for 95 percent of primary schools in British Africa (Hastings: 1979: 542). Because of the anti-clerical stance of the French Third Republic, secular public schools provided most of the opportunities for western education for Africans, especially in the heavily Muslim territories. Even in colonies with small Muslim minorities, Catholic missionaries received little support from the French colonial administration.

The main instrument for converting Africans was through schooling. Outside the French colonies, most western education took place in mission schools which, in addition to teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, attempted to inculcate Christian values. The Protestants placed a great deal of emphasis on translating the Bible into African languages and the importance of studying and understanding scripture. Students who went to mission schools adopted Christian names, European dress, and Christian life styles. They were expected to give up old ways—polygamy, fetishes, recourse to witchdoctors, veneration of ancestors, and animal sacrifices. If they went to Protestant schools run by Evangelical missionaries, they were also expected to give up smoking, drinking and dancing. Bush schools accounted for an estimated 90% of conversions and provided opportunities for literate Africans to move up the colonial social scale.

Although often collaborating with the colonial regime, Sufi brotherhoods generally resisted westernization and discouraged their rural followers from attending western schools. In the French colonies, however, Muslims in the towns often attended French secular schools after finishing Koranic school. This gave them opportunities to enter the

colonial administration on a par with Christians who had also been to French public schools. The educational gap between ordinary Muslims and Christians was greater in British colonies because most schools there were Christian mission schools which Muslims were reluctant to attend.

Sufi religious institutions had several advantages over Christianity in drawing more followers from traditional African religions. Sufi Islamic religious institutions were headed by Africans, permitted polygamy, and were relatively tolerant towards traditional African religions having coexisted with them for many centuries. This was particularly true of West Africa. Many Africans saw Islam as a preferable alternative to westernization. Not being dependent upon external sources of authority and financing, Islamic religious institutions were relatively free to shape their own governance structures in taking into account the cultural norms of the societies in which they operated. The Sufi brotherhoods and other Islamic institutions in colonial Africa provided an alternative educational system to that offered by the colonizer and provided Africans with some literacy skills, knowledge of the Koran, and religious obligations.

Christian churches differed markedly from Islamic religious institutions in leadership, governance structures, and norms. The social and cultural gap between clergy and laity was much greater in the Christian churches. European clergymen had been brought up in entirely different cultural settings, were highly educated, and unwilling to make compromises with the local African cultures. Throughout the colonial area, the Christian Churches regarded the expansion of Christianity in Africa primarily as a missionary enterprise under the guidance of European clergymen whose primary goal was to save souls by bringing the Gospel to Africa. Christianity seemed to do best in the countryside, in areas where Islam had not established a foothold, and in Animist societies which had not fiercely resisted the colonial conquest.

African Independent Churches (AICs) emerged during the colonial period which rejected domination of the Church by European missionaries and asserted the right of Africans to develop indigenous forms of Christianity (Hastings, 1994:493-539). AICs were nearly all break away churches from Protestant denominations.

Most African Independent Churches began as responses to the failure of European churches to treat Africans as equals in violation of the basic teachings of Christianity contained in the Old and New Testaments and the acquiescence of the European Churches concerning the oppressive policies of the European colonial states. African Independent Churches were often critical of forced labor, corporal punishment, and the imposition of head taxes on their people. Some even preached rebellion against colonial rule.

The AICs took different forms. South Africa had 2000 independent Zionist churches that had broken away from the Dutch Reform and Anglican churches. These churches emphasized faith-healing, baptism, and speaking in tongues and referred to the need to reinvent Zion/ Jerusalem in their own land on their own terms. Other AICs, like the Aladura Church in Western Nigeria, rejected all practices associated with African

Traditional Religions. In the Belgian Congo, Simon Kimbangu emerged as a prophet and founded the Kimbanguist Church which led to the mass conversion of the Bakongo to Christianity in the early 1920s. Although the Kimbanguist Church was non-violent, the Belgians put its founder in jail where he languished until he died in 1942. In Nyasaland (Malawi), Joseph Chilembwe, who had been educated in a black Baptist college in America, started an African Independent Church and launched a movement which eventually evolved into a full-scale revolt against the colonial system.

Until World War II, European-dominated churches rarely criticized the colonial political order in which they operated. The Catholic Church at that time was not very committed to modern democratic systems and concerned about the advance of communism. The mainline Protestant churches accepted the “civilizing mission” rationale that legitimized colonial rule, colonial tutelage, and the notion that Africans would not be ready for self-governance for many generations to come. The evangelical churches had little interest in politics and were primarily interested in saving souls through conversion to Christianity. The job of the Church was not to prepare Africans for democracy but to form good Christians and loyal subjects.

During the brief post-war period leading to independence, Africa witnessed a dramatic acceleration of democratization processes in the territories under French and British rule. Although Christians and Muslims took the leading role in independence movements and political parties, they functioned primarily as secular political leaders who challenged the colonial authorities in the name of equality to apply the same democratic principles and institutions found in the *métropole* to their overseas subjects. This meant giving Africans voting rights, greater representation in territorial political assemblies, and greater freedom of association.

This period was also marked by the rapid Africanization of Church structures (Baur, 1994: 266-268). In 1920, the Catholic Church had only 50 African priests. By 1960, that number had jumped to 2000 with half of this number ordained in the 1950s. However, Europeans still controlled the Church hierarchy with only one African archbishop and 25 African bishops for Africa’s 325 dioceses. Protestant churches had less difficulty in Africanizing the clergy because educational standards for becoming a Catholic priest were much higher than those required to become an ordained Protestant pastor. Protestant churches, especially the evangelical ones, were less centralized and hierarchical in organization and gave their overseas missions more leeway to recruit and train pastors. Independent African Churches also expanded rapidly during the post-war period because of the lowering of barriers on freedom of association

By 1950, there were at least twenty-three million Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa (Hastings, 1979:43-50). Roughly eleven million were Roman Catholics, ten million Protestants, and two millions members of AIC. Catholics were most intensively concentrated in the Belgian territories which had 3.5 million. Catholics were also strong in Uganda which had 1 million Catholics and Tanganyika with 700,000. About five million of the ten million Protestants were in the Union of South Africa which had two million white Protestants and three million black Protestants. Despite Belgium’s favoring

of the Catholic Church, Protestant Christianity was surprisingly strong in the Belgian Congo with 1.5 million adherents, thanks to missionary activities. Protestants were predominant throughout in most of Britain's sub-Saharan territories and small minorities in Portuguese and French West Africa. At this time, the movement towards self-government and independence was accelerating in France's and Great Britain's colonial empires while Belgium and Portugal did not see independence as an option.

During this period, Sufi Brotherhoods in Sub-Saharan Africa came under attack from Islamic reformers influenced by Wahabi doctrines preaching a return to a pure form of Islam requiring strict adherence to the Sharia and rejecting the concept of religious holy men as intermediaries between man and God. The African reformers also supported political movements demanding independence (Kaba, 1975).

With the expansion of Western and Islamic education, traditional African religions lost ground. By 1960, less than a quarter of Africans openly declared themselves members of traditional African religions even though many Africans retained traditional religious practices. Animist religions remained strong in the tropical rain forest zones and in East and Southern Africa.

### **Post-Colonial Nation-States, Religious Pluralism, and Democracy**

Christianity and Islam continued to advance after independence. By 1990 the number of Africans on the continent claiming to still belong to traditional African religions had dwindled to 14% while Christianity claimed 44% and Islam 42% of the continent's approximately 600 million people (Baur, 1994: 526-527).<sup>15</sup>

During the first two or three decades of independence, western social scientists paid relatively little attention to religion's impact on political and public life. Instead they focused primarily on the secular nation-state as the main instrument for achieving political and economic development and national integration and secular political ideologies and political parties and state bureaucracies as the central institutions of political life. This led to an abundance of writing on one-party states, African Socialism, and development planning. Since these institutions and ideologies had little roots in African society, there was a large gap between the secular political elites and the people.

#### *Secular Ideologies, Theologies, and Church-State Relationships*

The secular political elites who came to power in Africa at independence embraced a wide range of ideologies and combination of ideologies that included:

- Nationalism. This ideology placed a heavy emphasis on nation-building and national integration even though the idea of belonging to a nation with artificial boundaries created by the colonizer made little sense to most Africans, especially in countries like Zaire, Mauritania, Chad, and the Sudan

- Marxism. This ideology stressed class analysis, the struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism, and state control over the economy. Nearly all of the liberation movements in Sub-Saharan Africa embraced some variety of Marxist ideology. Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau established overtly Marxist regimes while military coups brought Afro-Marxist regimes to power in Benin, Madagascar, and Ethiopia. Nkrumah in Ghana, Sékou Touré in Guinea, and Modibo Keita in Mali also adopted Marxist ideologies. As imported ideologies from Europe held only by a tiny minority of western educated elites, the doctrines and modes of thinking they contained were quite alien to most Africans. Marxism, as an ideology based on historical materialism, of course, adopted a hostile stance towards religion in general.
- Hyphenated Socialisms. These ideologies took different names and forms— e.g., Arab Socialism in Egypt, African Socialism in Senegal, Ujaama in Tanzania. They all stressed that Socialism, an idea imported from Europe, would be built on and integrate traditional Arab or African values. They all asserted that the concept of class struggle was not applicable to Africa and denied that religion was the opium of the people thus leaving room for accommodating religion. In Senegal, Senghor also promoted the concept of *Négritude* in tandem with African Socialism. In Tanzania, Julius Nyerere's vision of *Ujamaa* was also inspired by liberal Catholic social doctrines (Duggan and Cville, 1976).
- Authenticity. This ideology was the brainstorm of Mobutu in Zaire. It incorporated a mixture of nationalism and traditionalism. This ideology built a personality cult around Mobutu who assumed the powers and life-style of a divinely ordained monarch.
- Democracy and Democratic Socialism. Secular political leaders began paying greater attention to democracy as the dominant political ideology in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

African regimes promoting radical Nationalism, Marxism, and Authenticity within the framework of a military/ personal dictatorship or one-party state often clashed with Christians, Muslim, and African traditional religious authorities and institutions and failed to win the long term support of the people. These ideologies have faded in importance because of their links with unpopular autocratic regimes and lack of relevance and meaning to most Africans.

Democracy as an ideology has been more or less accepted as compatible with religion by most Christians, Muslims, and adherents of African traditional religions because of its protection of religious freedom for minorities and the possibility of religious majorities to come to power through the ballot box. The decline of secular-based ideologies in Africa was accompanied by a sharp rise in the articulation of new theologies and religious doctrines:

- African Christian Theologies. Since independence and over the years, African Christian clergymen and intellectuals have been working on developing distinctively African forms of Christian theology (Baur, 1994:290-306). South African theologians have worked on articulating a non-racialist, non-violent Black Theology which contains many components of Christian Liberation Theology (Walshe, 1995). Francophone African Catholic theologians are also articulating African Liberation theologies as well as theologies that pay tribute to and integrate traditional African cosmologies and religious practices (Afan, 2001) Anglophone African Protestants are making similar efforts (Njoya, 2003; Olapido, 2006). These theologies, which are being elaborated primarily by Catholic and mainstream Protestant clergymen all support democratic institutions.
- Protestant Prosperity Theologies. Evangelical/Pentecostal Churches are experiencing rapid growth and introducing an added component to traditional theologies stressing personal salvation and preparing for the Second Coming. Prosperity Gospel theologies stressing that faith in Jesus and sharing the wealth with one's spiritual leaders will bring prosperity to the faithful are gaining ground throughout Anglophone Africa. Proponents of these ideologies generally do not have as strong a commitment to democracy or criticizing government abuses as the African Christian Theologies described above because of their major emphasis on faith, salvation, and material prosperity rather than social justice and human rights. North American Protestant evangelical missionaries have been instrumental in introducing prosperity theologies to Africa and have often supported autocratic regimes (Gifford, 1998; Gifford, 2004).
- Political Islam. Since the 1970s, varieties of ideologies often labeled as Political Islam, Islamist, and *Intégriste* have emerged that have sparked Islamic political movements challenging the authority of secular governments and seeking to win power in order to establish an Islamic state. There is a broad continuum of ideologies and doctrines underlying Political Islam<sup>16</sup>. Some are moderate and non-violent, seek power through the ballot box, and campaign against government corruption and failure to respect Islamic values.<sup>17</sup> The most extreme forms of Political Islam use radical rhetoric stressing divisions between Christendom and Dar al Islam, seek to impose their radical vision of Islam on the world, and support terrorist activities against the West. They also seek to overthrow corrupt Muslim and non-Muslim governments, attack Muslim leaders not sharing their views, and drive non-Muslims out of their countries.<sup>18</sup> In 1979, the Islamic Revolution in Iran also stimulated the introduction of Shia doctrines concerning concepts of fusion of state and religious institutions.
- Reformist and Revivalist Theologies. Conservative revivalist ideologies postulate a return to the purity of Islam as supposedly practiced in Mohammed's day, restoration of the authority of the *ulema* class, strict enforcement of *sharia* law and attacks on the Sufi Brotherhoods.<sup>19</sup> These theologies reflect Wahabi and Salafist visions of Islam. One also finds what might be called "Protestant" Islamic ideologies that rejects both the *ulema* class and marabouts as the main sources of

religious authority and asserts the ability of the individual believer to interpret the Koran according to his own lights.<sup>20</sup>

- Sufi Theologies. Sufi Brotherhoods also elaborated a variety of religious doctrines.<sup>21</sup> Some, like the Niassene branch of the Tijaniyya brotherhood, adopted some of the reforms suggested by Islamic reformers and placed greater emphasis on promoting Arabic as the holy language. Others, like the Mourides in Senegal, sought to spread the doctrines of Ahmadou Bamba who preached the virtues of the work ethic. Mourides also rejected Arab Muslim claims to religious superiority.
- Liberal Islamic Theologies. New liberal, progressive and modernizing Islamic theologies have emerged in Sub-Saharan Africa since the 1970s which challenge and/or seek to update some of the core doctrines contained in the more orthodox schools of thinking (Gellar, 2006). Mahmud Taha, who was martyred by the Sudanese government in 1985 for circulating a petition criticizing the imposition of *sharia* law, argued that *sharia* law was a concession made to the Arabian society of Mohammed's time. Taha argued that Muslims had to reject fundamentalism and update the teachings of Mohammed and the Koran whose principles implied political, economic, and social equality, decision-making by the people, and respect for minority rights (Taha, 1987). In South Africa, Farid Esack formulated an Islamic Liberation Theology based on his understanding of the Koran and his experiences in the anti-Apartheid struggle in working with an inter-faith coalition of Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the pursuit of social justice (Esack, 1997; Esack 1999). In Tunisia, Mohammed Talbi, a distinguished historian of medieval Islam and democracy advocate, exhorted Muslims to return to Islamic traditions of religious tolerance, attributed the decline of Islam to religious intolerance, and called for greater interfaith dialogue (Talbi, 1994).

While retaining their basic religious commitment to Islam, Many African Muslims, particularly the class of western educated intellectuals, support the concept of a secular state and separation of church and state. While Africans remain overwhelmingly religious, many see no contradiction between remaining loyal to one's religion and supporting secular states, separation of church and state, and some aspects of secularization (Tshimbulu, 2000).

During the first two decades of independence, the balance of power in church-state relationships was clearly on the side of the state. Most African states officially banned the establishment of religious-based political parties or discouraged their formation. When the new states assumed primary responsibility for educating its people, state schools replaced missionary schools in the former British, Belgian, and Portuguese colonies where mission schools had previously dominated the educational system. State public schools also introduced civic education stressing citizenship in terms of loyalty to the nation-state.

The first generation of African Church leaders in the newly independent states generally supported the status quo. Just as most of the new political leaders who took power had the blessings or at least the grudging acceptance of the colonial powers in countries in which independence came peacefully, the new African church leaders had the blessings of the mother Churches who appointed them.

In some countries, like Guinea, Ghana, and Sudan, relationships between the state and the churches deteriorated in the 1960s. In Guinea, Sékou Touré saw the Catholic Church as hostile to his radical policies and alliance with the Soviet Bloc. In Sudan, the government abolished the mission schools and expelled Christian missionaries in the south. In Ghana, Kwameh Nkrumah appropriated religious language and symbols to build up a personality cult which drew criticism from religious circles (Pobee, 1995). In Portuguese Africa, the Salazar regime looked at Protestant missionaries with hostility because they seemed to be too sympathetic to African demands for independence.

Church-State relationships differed markedly from one country to the other. For example, in predominantly Muslim North Africa, one saw a variety of relationships between the government and religious authorities even though all of the governments attempted to co-opt and control Islamic religious institutions. In Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba used his vast prestige and state power to push through laws banning polygamy, modernizing the family code to provide more rights to women, and discouraging fasting during the month of Ramadan (Cherif, 1997). While acknowledging Islam as the dominant religion, the secular Algerian elites who took power after waging a war for independence with France (1954-1961) failed to stop the growing tide of popular support for Political Islamists in the country, despite efforts to co-opt the clerics and violently repress Islamic opponents of the regime. The result was armed uprisings and civil war (Entelis, 1997). In Morocco, Mohammed V and Hassan II accommodated different currents of Islam. More recently, Mohammed VI has made a strong effort to promote a moderate model of Islam based on tolerance. Different varieties of political Islam—e.g., moderate, radical, non-violent, and violent), Sufi brotherhoods and liberal Islam can be found in all three of France's former North African territories. However, the degree of religious opposition to the regime and violence in each of the three countries seem to be closely related to the distance between secular rulers and Islamic populations and the degree of repression and violence used to quell religious opposition movements.

The emergence of Afro-Marxist regimes in Portuguese Africa, Ethiopia, and Madagascar during the 1970s led to increasingly hostile stances of these states towards religious freedom. Their hostility to religious institutions was reinforced by the opposition of the Catholic Church and most Protestant churches to Marxist regimes everywhere. Elsewhere in Zaire, Mobutu's personality cult and authenticity campaign in 1972 led to the banning of Christian names, all confessional organizations and most confessional newspapers and strained relationships with the Catholic Church and its titular head Cardinal Archbishop Mulula of Kinshasa (Mushete, 1978: 231-236).

In South Africa, church-state relationships became more confrontational over the years pitting the Afrikaner-dominated apartheid regime that had been closely allied with the Dutch Reform Church against the Catholic, Anglican and mainstream Protestant churches. Evangelical churches and the AICs often supported the apartheid regime which they regarded as a bulwark against Godless communism.

The decline of secular ideologies coupled with the growing disenchantment of Africans with the poor performance, corruption, and abuse of power of their governments provided a favorable environment for the emergence of a wide array of religious doctrines. At the same time, religious institutions, organizations, and associations became a major counterweight to abusive state power and lack of state responsiveness to public demands. By the end of the 1970s, these changes had led to a dramatic shift in church-state relationships. These changes were also abetted by some of the following trends:

- The Islamization of predominantly Muslim societies and growing sense of Islamic identity among Muslim minorities living in predominantly Christian countries (Brenner, 1993; O'Brien: 2003).
- An acceleration of Islamic missionary activities and spread of reformist and revivalist movements of all stripes during the 1970s supported by petrodollars and radical currents of Islam originating in the Middle East (Oyayek, 1993)
- The Africanization and decolonization of Catholic and mainstream Protestant Church hierarchies and the emergence of a new generation of African Christian religious leaders more representative of their societies and more committed to democratic norms (Fasholé-Luke, 1978)
- The growing integration of African Independent Churches into the political system and their acceptance as authentic Christian churches by the Catholic and mainstream Protestant Churches
- The rapid growth of Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches sparked by North American Protestant missionaries
- A radical shift towards incorporating support of democracy, social, justice, and human rights into religious doctrines by the Catholic Church (Vatican II) and mainstream Protestant denominations affiliated with the World Council of Churches (Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, etc.)
- A movement towards greater cooperation and collaboration between international and national level Catholic and mainstream Protestant Churches in public and political affairs, Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue (Sanneh, 1996) and efforts to bring about reconciliation in South Africa and Rwanda.

- Growing links between African Christian denominations and religious communities with the West and African Islamic communities with the Islamic world
- Growing tensions between Evangelical Christian communities and Muslim Fundamentalist communities—e.g. Northern Nigeria, urban areas in East Africa

State responses to these trends varied throughout Africa as did the perspectives of different religious groups within African countries depending on the kind of regime in power and the composition and orientation of the different religious communities within the country. In 1991, President Chiluba, an Evangelical Christian, declared Zambia to be a Christian nation. This declaration was widely criticized by the Catholic and mainstream Protestant Churches in Zambia because the decision was a unilateral one and taken by the leader of a corrupt government. In Kenya, Moi aligned himself with Evangelical and African Independent Churches to counteract growing opposition from Catholic and mainstream Protestant Churches to his autocratic regime before being finally forced out in 2003. On the other hand in Rwanda, the Catholic Church hierarchy was a close ally of the Hutu regime right up to the 1994 genocide (Longman, 2001). Under the leadership of Paul Kagame who has close ties with evangelical Christians, the Tutsi-dominated state has strained relationships with the Catholic hierarchy while national and local level Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim groups are working for reconciliation between Tutsis and Hutus, especially at the grassroots level. In Uganda, the state is still struggling to quell a religiously inspired rebellion led by the Lord's Resistance Army.

In South Africa before the end of the apartheid regime, the government had good relationships with evangelical churches, separatist AICs, and apolitical conservative Muslim communities, while facing opposition from a progressive coalition of progressive religious leaders of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities. In Morocco, the state responded to radical Islamic fundamentalists by a combination of repression, cooptation, and promotion of religious tolerance while in Algeria, the state was ruthless in its hunting down of radical Islamists who for their part were equally ruthless in their attacks on government officials, critics of their movement, and non-Muslims.

Relations between Muslims and Christians have become increasingly strained in Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. In Nigeria, the federal government has attempted to control the degree of violence resulting from inter-religious communal conflict in Northern Nigeria where evangelical Christian and radical Islamist leaders fan the flames by demonizing the religion of their opponents. In the Ivory Coast, the government's manipulation of the constitution to prevent a prominent northerner and Muslim from running for president destabilized the country and undermined the peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims under Houphoet-Boigny. In Benin, once an Afro-Marxist state, the government has cultivated good relationships with Christian, Muslim, and adherents of traditional African religions and has extended recognition to the traditional Voodoo religion. In Senegal, the main Sufi Brotherhoods continue to retain their popularity with Senegalese Muslims, despite the rise of all kinds of radical Islamic groups and views within the

country while the predominantly Muslim government continues to support tolerance and denounce Islamic movements engaging in terrorism as giving Islam a bad name.

## **Conclusions and Paths for Further Research**

This paper has attempted to identify some of the ideational and organizational elements within Africa's three major religions that can be invoked and used to support or undermine the development of democratic cultures and institutions.

### *Islam and Democracy*

Despite the disproportionate attention given to radical forms of Islam following 9/11, the reality remains that the Sudan is the only country in Africa where radical Islamists have actually come to power. Sufi doctrines and organizational forms have been predominant among African Muslims for several centuries. Without overstating the case, there is a good argument to be made that Sufi doctrines concerning the primacy of spirituality over raw political power, traditions of religious tolerance and flexibility, and organizational forms based on voluntary membership and freedom to exit constitute important ingredients needed for a democratic culture. It would also be a mistake to label all radical Islamic doctrines and movements as antithetical to democracy, especially to the narrow definition of democracy, which opens the way for radical Islamist movements to win power through the ballot box in countries where the government is exceedingly unpopular as in Algeria. Polls taken in Sub-Saharan Africa show that Muslims overwhelmingly support democracy over all other political systems (Afro-Barometer, 2002) and that there is little difference between Muslims and Christians in their support for democracy.

Although not discussed in the paper, the following areas merit further attention:

- The Organization of Muslim Associational Life. To what extent are local Muslim associations, institutions, and communities—e.g., neighborhood associations, prayer groups, mosques, business organizations, etc.—organized according to democratic principles while maintaining a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the state and higher religious authorities. In other words, to what extent can democratic forms of associational life serve as schools for democracy and provide the foundation for a democratic culture?
- The Role of Women in Islamic Societies. Since independence, Africa has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of Muslim women receiving both Koranic school and secular education and asserting themselves in all walks of life. It would be instructive to look at the role and status of women within the Sufi Brotherhoods and the reformist, revivalist, and radical Islamic movements and the extent to which their membership and participation affects their attitudes towards democracy, degree of participation in democratic institutions, and acceptance of inferior roles for women within the family and society as proposed by some Islamic groups.

- Shifts in Muslim Identities. It is often said that Islam makes no separation between religion and politics. Signs point to a growing sense of Muslim identity among African Muslims. It would be useful to ascertain the relative weight of Islamic values, norms, and practices in shaping individual and group Muslim identity vis-à-vis other variables such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, education, and environment and the extent to which these affect attitudes and support of democratic cultures and institutions, the secular state, and separation of church and state.

### *Christianity and Democracy*

Unlike Islam, Christianity has shallow roots in Africa and has advanced primarily and rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa over the past century largely at the expense of traditional African religions. For more than half this period, Christian Churches were dominated by European clergymen bringing the organizational structures, values, and cultures of their home churches to Africa under the protection of European colonial rule. Like the colonial political order, the colonial religious order did not apply the precepts of equality to Africans. However, during the second half of the twentieth century, one saw a radical change in the basic doctrines of the Catholic Church as a result of Vatican II and those of the mainstream Protestant Churches; the Africanization and decolonization of Christian churches; and the emergence of Christian churches as important actors in national politics.

While some scholars (Joseph, 1993; Afan, 2001) have argued that Christian Churches in recent years have taken the lead in spearheading democratization processes in Africa, others (Haynes, 1996; Mbembe: 1988) have argued that Christian churches have not done that much to promote democratization or done so in response to popular demands. There is evidence to support both claims. Evangelical and African Independent churches have usually not been at the center of democratization movements and often supported autocratic and oppressive regimes. And while the Catholic and mainstream Protestant Churches often took the lead in democratization processes in some countries, in other countries they supported repressive regimes and remained silent concerning state abuses of freedom for many years. The role of the Church depended to a large extent on contextual factors such as the relative size, composition, history, and dynamism of different church denominations, the number of Christians in the country, church doctrines regarding church-state relationships and the role of government, and the Church's relative weight and influence vis-à-vis other civil society organizations. One can cite an astonishing mix of factors affecting Christian stances toward the state and democracy. These include the relative weight given to the role of the individual and the community, concepts of salvation and the role of the church in insuring salvation, attitudes towards women, other religions, and non-believers, and the degree of incorporation of secular, liberal, and radical democratic values concerning freedom, social justice, and human rights into the religious belief systems.

To better understand Christianity's potential for fostering democratization processes in Africa it would be helpful to pursue research in some of the following areas:

- Relationships Between National and Local Churches. Most of the literature concerning the contribution of Christian Churches to democratization focuses on national churches and well educated religious leaders acquainted with western doctrines of democracy. On the other hand, we know relatively little about how local churches operate and the extent to which congregants at the local level are aware of the issues raised at the national level and the degree of interest in and support for getting involved in politics. To what extent do local churches in urban and rural areas accept and practice democratic ideals and critiques of government as articulated by national church leaders and theologians? To what extent are local churches "Schools for Democracy."
- The Degree of Democratization and Autonomy of Church Structures. To what extent is there a correlation between the degree of democratic practices and autonomy within church structures and attitudes towards democracy in the political arena. For example, the Catholic Church is a hierarchical institution where clergy are appointed in a top-down manner rather than being chosen by the congregants. Yet the Catholic Church has been in the forefront in many countries in promoting democratic elections, transparency and accountability, human rights, and social justice. To what extent can non-democratic religious institutions embrace secular liberal democracy or serve as a model for democracy? Many evangelical churches have democratic structures in the sense that they choose their clergy and religious leaders and participate in services as equals. Others are run autocratically by their founders. What are the factors affecting the stance of evangelical churches towards democracy and autocratic regimes?
- The Degree of Religious Syncretism. Christianity does not have deep roots in Africa, going back only a few generations for most African Christians. Christianity has made greater inroads in predominantly Animist societies. As part of the inculturation movement, Catholic and mainstream Protestant Churches have integrated traditional African dances, music, and modes of expression into the liturgy. It remains to be seen to what extent Christians still maintain traditional religious values and practices into their religious life, which ones are prevalent, and the extent to which the retention of traditional religious values has affected attitudes towards and understanding of democracy.

#### *African Traditional Religions and Democracy*

This paper has argued that certain features of African traditional religions like tolerance, pluralism and local autonomy could contribute to the building of a democratic culture. African Traditional Religions have received little attention in analyses of religion and politics because Africa has no rulers who are adherents of ATRs, no political parties based on ATRs, and no overtly political ATR movements seeking power. When scholars look at the relationship between African Traditional Religions and politics they often

focus on exotic themes like witchcraft, ancestor worship, curses, and amulets(Chabal and Dasloz, 1999) as the essence of ATRs and/or the use of traditional religious practices in uprisings against the colonial or post-colonial state (Weigert, 1996).

Although theologians have looked at the rich cosmogonies and cosmologies found in ATRs, their capacity for supporting democratic cultures and institutions has not been explored. As a result there is a big gap in knowledge concerning the relationships between African Traditional Religions, politics, and democracy. One major area of research that might fill part of this gap would entail case studies of ATRs in countries where adherents of ATRs still comprise a sizeable percentage of the population. These studies would look at ATRs in countries like Mozambique, Madagascar, Botswana, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Togo and the extent to which adherents of African traditional religions have different attitudes and understanding of democracy and the role the state than Christians and Muslims. It would also look at the impact of different forms of educations —traditional, Islamic, Christian, secular) in shaping attitudes towards democracy and the state.

The heterogeneity of religious doctrines and institutions and their wide variety of approaches towards politics in general and the state in particular underscore the need to avoid sweeping generalizations about relationships between religion and politics in Africa and to adopt a more contextual approach that will recognize the wide range of possibilities while identifying patterns between different clusters of variables that will enhance our understanding of the relationships between religion and politics in Africa.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a major collection of articles demonstrating the different forms Islam takes in North Africa, see (Férichou,1996)

<sup>2</sup> Africa has no example of Christian countries that have 98% or more of the population as in the case for Mauritania, Somalia, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. (Baur, 1994:526-527)

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of narrow (Huntington, 1999)) and broad (Tocqueville, 1988) definitions of democracy and their application to Africa, see (Gellar, 205:2-5). For a definition of democracy as a way of life, see (Ostrom, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Mahir Saul (Saul, 2006) argues that colonial anthropologists and many of their successors have failed to see the integration of many Islamic practices into non-Islamic West African societies by looking at Africans adhering to traditional African religions as living in a closed system impervious to external interactions. Conversely, scholars of Islam in West Africa have tended to focus primarily on Islamic texts and neglected the impact of Islam on non-Islamic societies.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent and comprehensive volume of the evolution of Islam in Africa, see (Levtzion and Powels, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Even the most liberal forms of the majority model ban or discourage proselytizing of Muslims by missionaries from other religions.

<sup>7</sup> For a short time (1952-69) Libya was ruled by a hereditary monarchy headed by a descendant of the Sanousiyya Brotherhood before Kaddafi took power.

<sup>8</sup> Some Nigerian Muslim thinkers have vigorously defended applying *Sharia* law and the kind of punishments meted out for criminal offenses --- cutting off of limbs, beheading, etc.—found in Saudi Arabia to Non-Muslims (Doi, 1979). For more on the emergence of radical Islamic reform movements in Northern Nigeria, see (Loimeier, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> In 1900 the vast majority of Muslims all over the Islamic world accepted Sufism as the inner, spiritual dimension of Islam and saw no contradictions between adhering to the law as interpreted by the traditional *Ulema* and following a Sufi spiritual guide (Sirriyeh, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> A vast literature exists concerning the Sufi Brotherhoods. For a general review and discussion of the main Sufi Brotherhoods operating in Africa, see (Vikor, 2000:441-476).

<sup>11</sup> Sufis traditionally were wary of political power's potential for corrupting people and diverting them from the path to God.

<sup>12</sup> Ethiopia was the only independent Christian state in Africa in the nineteenth century. The Coptic Church adhered to Orthodox doctrines associated with the Eastern Christian Churches and has close ties with the Alexandrian Coptic Patriarchate. Although Liberia was also an independent state and governed by a Christian elite, Christianity did not extend much outside the Americo-Liberian settlements along the coast.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the evolution of democratic thinking within Catholicism and Protestantism since the Reformation see (Nichols, 1951).

<sup>14</sup> Christians could also be found in Sierra Leone where freed slaves from England settled in Freetown.

<sup>15</sup> These figures are only estimates since many national censuses did not include religious affiliation and may have inflated the percentage of Christians because they came from Christian sources.

<sup>16</sup> For a definition and overview of Political Islam in Africa, see ( Dickson, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> For example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt began as a moderate non-violent movement. However, it also inspired more radical Islamist movements in Egypt and Sudan.

<sup>18</sup> The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran also stimulated interest in Iran as a model for Political Islamists in Africa. For a collection of articles looking at various strands of radical Islam in Africa, see (Otayek, 1993) and (Kane and Triaud,)1998

<sup>19</sup> For conflicts between Sufis and Islamists see (Wunderlund and Rosander, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Parallels exist between 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformers and contemporary radical Islamic reformers like Abubakar Gumi in Northern Nigeria. Gumi emphasized the importance of direct ties between the individual and God and making Islam more accessible to the masses through the expansion of Islamic education and translating the Koran into vernacular languages (Loimeier,2005).

<sup>21</sup> For a review of the evolution of Sufi thinking throughout the world, see (Sarriyeh, 2004).

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