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THE PROJECT FOR THE RESEARCH OF ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS (PRISM)

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Islam in Africa Newsletter provides and analyzes information, political, religious, and social developments, events, or documents on Radical Islam and Islamic movements in Africa.

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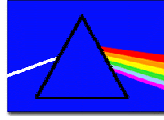
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Clashes between Sufis and Radical Muslims in Ghana

On April 8, 2007, members of the Wahhabi-oriented Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah and members of the Tijaniyyah Sufi order clashed at Ejura, located at the Ashanti region, over doctrinal differences. The Tijaniyyah accused Ahl al-Sunnah of preaching against them. Soon after, they attacked the Ahl al-Sunnah members and inflicted on ten of their members various degrees of injury, while four others were in critical condition.¹ This clash has been only one in a series of recently ongoing bloody clashes between missionary minded Muslim groups,

¹ See on-line at: http://www.e-prism.org/images/Islam_in_Africa_Newsletter- No2_vol 2 - April_2007.pdf



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inspired by Wahhabism, and the majority of traditional Ghanaian Muslim groups.

Ghana has an estimated population of 18 million people, comprising about 64 different language and people groups. Christianity, traditional religions, and Islam, are the three dominant religions. According to the latest survey conducted in 1993, Christians comprise approximately 62 percent of the population, traditional religious practitioners comprise approximately 20 percent, and Muslims comprise about 16-17 percent of the population. These figures are highly criticized by Ghanaian Muslims, who place their figure at closer to 30 percent, and in some extremes, as high as 45. Broadly speaking, the Muslim population is more concentrated in the Northern region and in the Upper East and Upper West, while Christians are predominant in the southern regions.²

Amongst the Muslim population of Ghana there are various Islamic orientations, with different influences emanating from several origins. Sufism is the dominant form of Islam prevalent in Ghana, especially the Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah orders, which are prominent in the north and in the major cities of the south. Sufism was spread from other parts of West Africa, principally from northern Nigeria by the Hausa and from the Mali–Mauritania and Niger region by the Wangarawa, Mandi and Dyula. Hausa and Dyula cultures have especially influenced Islamic practices in Ghana. The Hausa influence is manifested in Islamic education, which is conducted in the Hausa language. Therefore, Hausa is the lingua franca of most Ghanaian Muslim communities. Zongos—the name by which satellite communities throughout Ghana originally established by migrants from other parts of West Africa are known—sustain some of the links to Muslims in other parts of the region, even though most inhabitants of these Zongos have now been in Ghana for two, three or more generations.³

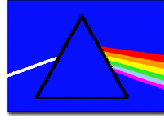
The Qadyani faction of the Ahmadiyyah Movement is also very active in Ghana. The movement was invited into Ghana in 1921 by a section of coastal (Fanti) Muslim converts. Membership and leadership of the sect remains at the hand of the Fanti and Asante ethnic groups. Thus, this faction has come to be known locally as "Fanti or Asante Islam", in contradiction to Sunni or mainstream Islam, which is dominated by northern Ghanaians and other West African nationals. The movement is known for its anti-Christian as well as for its anti-mainstream, Muslim polemics in public preaching.⁴

² See on-line at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-01.html>;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Ghana;

http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_7902.html;
<http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk/pubs/policycontext6.pdf>

³ See on-line at: <http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk/pubs/policycontext6.pdf>; <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-01.html>

⁴ See on-line at: <http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk/pubs/policycontext6.pdf>; <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-01.html>; http://www.helsinki.fi/~hweiss/ghana_muslims.pdf



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Since independence, however, the most significant focus on Islam in Ghana has been the strengthening of the links with the Middle East. This came primarily with the opening of embassies in Ghana by Egypt in 1957, Saudi Arabia in 1962, and Iran in 1982. Thus, in the last three decades, there has been a significant increase in Islamist and Wahhabist activity in Ghana, resulting in a spread of radical Islamic organizations. Several organizations were established during the 1970s and 1980s to champion the cause of Wahhabism and Islamism. First and foremost among them was a Muslim missionary organization known as the Islamic Reformation and Research Center, which was founded in Accra in 1971. Activists of the center refer to it as a Wahhabi-influenced missionary organization. It is financed by the Dar al-Iftaa of Saudi Arabia and has since produced hundreds of students who have studied in Arab universities. This and numerous other Muslim groups and organizations, such as the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, and the Islamic Charity Center for Women Orientation, embark on missionary activities. They undertake to establish schools and other social services, and carry out public preaching within the urban centers in order to propagate Islam. In 1997, the Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah was established as an umbrella organization for all Wahhabi organizations active in Ghana.⁵

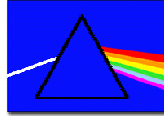
Parallel to the increase in the activity of the Wahhabi-oriented organizations in Ghana, was a similar increase in the number of Muslim NGOs active there. Muslim NGOs which have been involved in social and economic development have emerged in Ghana since the 1970s. The Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services (ICODEHS) was founded in 1982 and is tied mainly to the Kuwaiti Zakat Fund. The Centre for the Distribution of Islamic Books was founded in 1988 and is the Ghanaian representative of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), a Saudi-based organization, as well as the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations in Kuwait, and the Islamic Development Bank Scholarship Scheme. The African Muslim Agency (AMA) was also established in Ghana in 1988, and is an offshoot of the Direct Aid International with its headquarters in Kuwait.⁶ The Imam Husayn Foundation (IHF) was founded in 1988, and comprises a branch of an international organization based in Iran. In 1992, the Kuwaiti government established the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS). Other international Muslim charitable organizations active in Ghana are the Saudi-funded and UK-based Muntada Islamic Trust, also known as al-Muntada al-Islami or al-Muntada Educational Trust, as well as the Saudi- and Kuwaiti-financed Al-Huda Islamic Society.⁷

The global dimension of Islam in Ghana is perhaps best manifested by the arrival in 1996, of the American Nation of Islam in Ghana. The movement was invited into the country in the early 1990s, by the then Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC)

⁵ See on-line at: <http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk/pubs/policycontext6.pdf>; <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-01.html>

⁶ On the activity of AMA see a recent PRISM African Occasional Papers, vol. 1 no. 2 (July 2007), on "Islamization and Da'wah." See on-line at: http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_African_papers_vol_1_no_2_--_Islamization_and_Dawah_-_July_2007.pdf

⁷ See on-line at: http://www.helsinki.fi/~hweiss/ghana_muslims.pdf; <http://www.helsinki.fi/project/wopag/wopag1.pdf>



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military junta. In October 1996, the movement, which however, has little following by way of membership in Ghana, organized a national convention.⁸

In light of these diverse Islamic orientations and influences mentioned above, there have been many cases of tension and violent clashes between different Muslim groups in Ghana, especially between Ahmadis and mainstream Muslims in the 1930s. These bloody clashes have largely given way to mutual suspicion, contempt and non-cooperation. Another level of tension is prevalent between indigenous Ghanaian Muslims and other West African nationals over leadership. The latter see themselves as the right custodians of the Islamic tradition and resent taking subordinate roles to indigenous Ghanaian Muslims. This has resulted in a number of violent clashes during Friday prayers and the closure of mosques by the authorities. Another level of tension, which sometimes even comes to violence, is prevalent between Muslims with Tijaniyyah inclinations and those of Qadiriyyah persuasion. In 1999, numerous public appeals from government officials, traditional rulers and leading Muslims have helped in reducing the tension between Muslim groups in the country.⁹

More recently there have been a number of bloody confrontations between missionary minded Muslim groups, comprising of graduates from Arab universities, and the majority traditional Ghanaian Muslim groups. The most notorious of these groups is what is locally known as the Ahl al-Sunnah, a Saudi trained Wahhabi inspired group. Its members attack and publicly condemn traditional Muslim practices like production of charms and wearing of amulets as un-Islamic. The brand of Islam they see as "pure" or "orthodox" is Wahhabism or Salafism to which they were exposed to in Saudi Arabia or other parts of the Arab-Muslim world.¹⁰

In this context, it should be noted that despite all the above mentioned clashes and confrontations between the various Muslim groups, they comprise only a minority in Ghana and, their political impact is marginal. Another reason for this is the fact that the majority of the Muslims live in the northern parts of the country. Northern Ghana has been functioning as a labor reservoir for the south and has remained an economic backwater since the colonial period. Islam has, on the other hand, had some impact on the cultural level. Islamic features like Muslim offices, festivals, calendar and certain ceremonies—especially those relating to naming, marriage and death—were added to the traditional system. Thus, in the north, some of the chiefs have become at least nominal Muslims and some of the ceremonies associated with the chief himself were modified along Islamic lines. However, although a chief might recite the Muslim prayers, neither he nor any other member of the ruling estate would attend the Friday sermon in the mosque. Most chiefs have their own ritual practices, which are unacceptable to Islam, and they rule over Muslims and non-Muslims alike.¹¹

⁸ See on-line at: <http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk/pubs/policycontext6.pdf>; <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-01.html>

⁹ See on-line at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-01.html>

¹⁰ See on-line at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-01.html>

¹¹ See on-line at: http://www.helsinki.fi/~hweiss/ghana_muslims.pdf;
<http://www.helsinki.fi/project/wopag/wopag1.pdf>



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On this background, there has been a steady process of Islamization in contemporary northern Ghana, especially since the 1983 famine. Muslim countries poured aid into northern Ghana and thus, strengthened the Muslim's position and organizations there. Muslim NGO's have since then established social and educational institutions, almost all of them have been financed through aid from foreign Muslim countries and organizations. As a result of their intensive welfare work, the word circulated in 1985 around the North that all Dagbambas, Gonjas, Mamprungus, and Nanumbas, who wished to succeed in politics and business had to convert to Islam. As a result, the Northern Region, and especially Dagbon, have since then become known as a Muslim region.¹²

To sum up, the disunity of the Muslims in Ghana has been further stressed and enhanced through the entrance of various Islamist and Wahhabi-oriented groups, especially Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah, into the North and other areas inhabited by Muslims in Ghana since the 1970s. It has further fuelled anti-Christian, anti-minority (stateless people) and militantly pro-Islamic feelings as well as conflicts between the various Muslim sects, especially between the Sufis and Wahhabis. In the short run, it seems that disunity trends within the Muslims in Ghana are much stronger than unity trends. That is why it is quite improbable that the Muslims in Ghana will be able to unite under one leadership in order to care for their own common interests. That is, even if it will comprise of representatives from all the Muslim sects, as happens nowadays with the heated debate over the issue of who will be in charge of organizing the Hajj from Ghana this year. Last year, the National Hajj Council failed to organize the Hajj and a new body called Ghana Pilgrimage Organization, was established by Ghana's chief imam to handle this issue more successfully this year.¹³

Sunnification of Islam and the Creation of Muslim Identity in Mauritius¹⁴

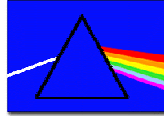
On May 15, 2007, hundreds of Muslims, led by Jamiat ul-Ulama leader, Maulana Jamil Chooramun, demonstrated in front of the Mauritian parliament, demanding an amendment of the law to allow use of amplifiers and loudspeakers when calling for prayer (*Aazan*). The demonstration was sparked by the island's Supreme Court ruling from April 2007, forbidding the mosque in Quatre-Bornes—a city located 25 Km south of the capital—to broadcast the azaan outside of the religious building. A resident of the city, who was himself affected by the noise generated by the five times daily calls to prayer from the mosque's loudspeakers, had lodged a complaint in court. Chooramun demanded also the

¹² See on-line at: http://www.helsinki.fi/~hweiss/ghana_muslims.pdf

¹³ See on-line at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200707170202.html>; <http://allafrica.com/stories/200707160084.html>; <http://allafrica.com/stories/200707120758.html>

¹⁴ This article is based mainly on two articles on this subject:

Hollup, Oddvar, "Islamic Revivalism and Political Opposition among Minority Muslims in Mauritius". See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>; Donath, Frank, "How to Carry Owls to Athens? Performing Scriptural Authenticity among Wahhabi Muslims in Mauritius". See on-line at: <http://www.gsaa.uni-halle.de/eng/gzaa/studyday.php?semid=03&tid=009&pid=037>.



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resignation of Muslim ministers and other parliamentarians, whom he accused of doing nothing to protect the interest of Islam in the island.¹⁵

Mauritius is a multi-ethnic island state comprising 720 square miles, situated in the Indian Ocean about 500 miles east of Madagascar. Despite its small size, the island is inhabited by 1.2 million people who are heterogeneous in terms of ethnic group, language, and religious differences. The island was uninhabited until the seventeenth century. Ever since, it has become populated by waves of immigrants due to colonialism, plantation slavery, the indenture system, and French and British colonial mercantile interests, which shaped the socio-cultural environment of the island. Mauritian independence in 1968 marked the transfer of political power to Indians, especially to the Hindus among them.¹⁶

The major ethnic communities in Mauritius are Hindus, Muslims, Creoles, Franco-Mauritians, and Chinese. Hindus, in the Mauritian context, comprise a distinct ethno-linguistic group, rather than a religious community. Muslims, who comprise 18 percent of the total population, are considered by themselves and others to be a separate community. They speak Kreol, but some old people also know a little Bhojpuri. They learn some Urdu/Arabic particularly for religious purposes in the primary school and the mosques. The Sunnis comprise approximately 95 percent of the Muslim population. Most of them belong to the Hanafi school of thought, reflecting their roots in the Indian sub-continent. Among the Shi'ite minority, some have originated from different parts of India, while others are Ismai'li adherents of the Agha Khan from East Africa.¹⁷

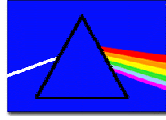
Although Muslims may appear to others as a relatively homogeneous and united social group, they are in fact highly differentiated and diversified in terms of sectarian affiliations. Bohras are Shi'ite Muslims originating in India. Another distinct religious community is the Ahmadiyyah sect, which has its own mosques. The Ahmadiyyah is a small community of some 4000 members, the majority of whom are educated, middleclass people who work as clerks, lawyers, auditors, doctors, teachers, and government servants. The government of Mauritius recognizes the Ahmadiyyah sect as part of the Muslim community, but the Sunni majority does not regard its members as Muslims. Among the Sunnis, there is a further religious division between those following the Sunnah Jamaat, those supporting Tablighi Jamaat, and adherents of Tawhid. This division is marked by the presence of different mosques and religious associations (Jamaat, or mutual aid societies) in most villages and towns where there is a substantial number of Muslims.¹⁸

¹⁵ See on-line at: <http://english.webislam.com/?idn=1405>; <http://www.africa-interactive.net/index.php?PageID=4151>; <http://allafrica.com/stories/200704180462.html>

¹⁶ See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>

¹⁷ See on-line at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Mauritius; http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1165994019738&pagename=Zone-English-News%2FNWELayout; <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>

¹⁸ See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>



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The majority of Muslims came to Mauritius under the British as indentured laborers to work in the plantations. They were mostly illiterate peasants from East India, notably Bihar. The huge number of Indians attracted to Mauritius rich Indian Muslim merchants from Gujarat in West India. They had created a web of business-contacts, which span all over the Indian Ocean. The appearance of these small but economically significant Gujarati Muslim communities in Mauritius was an important factor in the spread of Islam, as they financed the building of several mosques, madrassas, and colleges. The first arriving Gujarati Muslim community, the Memons from Kutch, built and still controls the highly influential central mosque in the capital Port-Louis. Slightly later arrived the Surtees from Surat, who started venturing into the countryside and helped establishing the first mosques there.¹⁹

Since Muslims and Hindus in Mauritius share a history of indentured labor, it was only natural that prior to 1962, Muslims formed part of the larger Indo-Mauritian population. But, the new constitution of 1948 and the extension of adult franchise brought about an increased political representation among Indians and, more importantly, an appearance of gradual politicization of ethnic identity. Therefore, the Muslims began a struggle in order to be recognized as separate community. Their attempts at expressing a religious and ethnic distinctiveness were also generated and shaped by their situation as a minority group and their fear of Hindu dominance.²⁰

Changing political conditions, Hindu political dominance of government employment opportunities, and increasing competition over the allocation of scarce resources led to a further drifting apart of the two communities. Muslims rejected being classified as Indians and encouraged a stronger religious identification with Islam. In the early 1960s some Muslims organized a small political party, Comite d'Action Musulman (CAM), to champion the interests of the Muslim community. The increasing politicization split Hindus and Muslims into opposed attitudes toward independence. The Muslims in CAM wanted to support the demand for independence on the condition that the Muslims have separate electoral rolls. However, after independence, CAM remained of little political influence and few Muslim supported the party.²¹

Despite all the divides within the Muslim community, the Muslims' need and wish to distinguish themselves from other Indians and create a separate Muslim identity, has brought about a tendency toward greater homogenization and uniformity in their midst. Thus, all the above mentioned religious classifications, such as Sunni Hanafi or Shafi'i, Ahmadiyyah, Shi'ites, Bohra, etc., were grouped together in censuses in order to collect a greater part of the religious subsidies allocated to non-Christian religions. As from the 1962 census, Muslims have started to refer to themselves as adherents of Islam without specifying sect. This tendency toward greater uniformity has been

¹⁹ See on-line at: <http://www.gsaa.uni-halle.de/eng/gzaa/studyday.php?semid=03&tid=009&pid=037>;
<http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>

²⁰ See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>

²¹ See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>



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accompanied by greater orthodoxy, described as the Sunnification of Islam in Mauritius.²²

The Sunnification of Islam has also been made possible by the work of Muslim missionaries, who have been regularly invited by the affluent Muslim merchants. In the 1920s, the Memons brought in the Sunnah Jamaat movement. From the 1950s onwards, the Surtees brought the Tablighi Jamaat into the country. They soon created an independent educational system with their own preacher seminary (Dar al-Ulum). In the 1970s, the Saudi Arabian Wahhabism started to infiltrate the island. While the Sunnah Jamaat controls an estimated 50% of all Mauritian mosques, including the most influential ones in the big cities, the Tablighi Jamaat controls about one third of the mosques and the Tawhid—as the Mauritian adherents of Wahhabism prefer to be called—controls only about fifteen mosques, almost all of them are located in the countryside. The Sunnah Jamaat follows Hanafi Islamic law and leans on the rich corpus of medieval legal Hanafi reasoning and their way to interpret Qur'an and Sunnah. The Tablighi Jamaat links their theological framework to scriptural sources of Islamic authenticity. However, the Tawhid follows some sort of Hanbali law. For them, the reformism of both the Tablighi Jamaat and the Sunnah Jamaat does not go far enough. They hold that local Islamic culture should be purged from all Indian traces and corrected along Arabian models. They try to reconstruct the Muslim society of early Islam—the *Salaf*—which they see as the perfect model for all Muslim norms of behavior. Thus, they exclusively stick to the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the only sources of Islamic jurisprudence and claim to reject all other Islamic writings, notably the corpus of medieval Islamic legal literature.²³

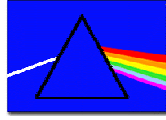
The Muslim missionaries and reformers found the largest support primarily among the educated middle class in the towns, who propagated the purity of Islam. Thus, it is no wonder that the tendency toward Islamic orthodoxy and Sunnification of Islam seems to have affected local religious practices too. A good example for that is the gradual disappearance of the Muharram (ʿAshuraa) festival in Port Louis. The celebration of ʿAshuraa is associated with Shi'ite Muslim tradition, but it became a local tradition in Mauritius in which Sunni Muslims took part too. It used to be practiced in many villages and estate camps. However, since the procession of Ta`ziah or "ghouns" at the festival of ʿAshuraa is strongly condemned as un-Islamic and unorthodox by the Tablighi Jamaat, the Surtees, and other religious groups, its practice has diminished greatly with the passing years.²⁴

This tendency towards orthodoxy and Sunnification has also led to a decline in Sufi religious practices. The existence of *pirs* or saints is held by many orthodox Muslims to be incompatible with Islam. Some may acknowledge that *pirs* had existed in the past and had even come to Mauritius, but they do not acknowledge the existence of Mauritian *pirs* today. Nevertheless, there are still Muslims who claim to be *pirs* and who receive some support for these claims. The tombs of the two most famous *pirs* receive annually many offerings of incense, money and lengths of cloth. The most

²² See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>

²³ See on-line at: <http://www.gsaa.uni-halle.de/eng/gzaa/studyday.php?semid=03&tid=009&pid=037>

²⁴ See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>



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famous Sufi is Pir Jammal Shah, an imam who came from India to Mauritius about 130 years ago, and is said to have healed many people. After his death, he was buried inside the Juma`h mosque in the capital. Those who are ill can pray to this Sufi for cures and favors. Pir Jalal al-Din, whose tomb is in the Muslim cemetery at Bois Marchand, is also credited with cures in return to vows. Some Muslims pray at the tomb of an unmarried female saint, Bibi Aminah, located at La Saline in Port Louis. Influential persons who support Sufi practices have prayers performed for them in order to be cured of their sickness. More controversial are the living *pirs* found in Port Louis who used to be particularly active during the Muharram festival. Sufism in Mauritius has become marginalized, although it was never widespread. It persists in Mauritius mainly as a folk tradition among a few Muslims in some villages.²⁵

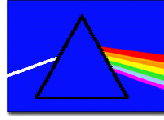
The process of Islamization in Mauritius includes also building of new mosques, schools, and Islamic centers, which are often financed by Arab and Muslim countries, such as Libya and Saudi Arabia. As part of this process, new elements deriving from Arab culture, such as the architecture of the mosque and its dome, have been introduced. Some new practices are not yet uniformly adopted by the majority, but some Muslim men have started to wear long shirts (*Jilbab*), which they acquired after the pilgrimage. Some Muslims have started to grow long beards, and some women, primarily the wives and sisters of religious leaders and a few middle-class Muslims, now wear the Hijab headdress. As yet, however, only a few women appear veiled in public. The headdress and the veil are newly introduced practices and were encouraged by Muslim missionaries. Muslim identity, along these lines, is a religious identity that surpasses all other social identities.²⁶

Today, Mauritian Muslims refer solely to religious adherence and not to ancestry, descent, or regional origin in India. That is why the Sunnification of Islam has been accompanied by another process, in which the Muslims have tried to de-emphasize their Indian origin and Indian cultural heritage by reconstructing or redefining their history. Although, as mentioned above, the majority is descendants of Indian indentured laborers, they tried to appear as descendants of Arabs and merchants. They used to talk mainly Bhojpuri and Gujarati, whereas very few were literate in Urdu. However, in the 1972 census virtually all Muslims stated their ancestral language as Urdu. In the next census held ten years later, more than half of the Muslims stated their ancestral language as Arabic. This was the result of the emergence of the Wahhabi missionaries in the mid-1970s, which made it more attractive for the orthodox Muslims in Mauritius to be part of this movement than to identify one's roots in India. The shift from Bhojpuri to Urdu is only one example that illustrates the attempts to emphasize cultural differences rather than similarities between Hindus, who promote the use of Hindi among themselves, and Muslims. Yet, it should be stressed that in Mauritius, Hindus and Muslims speak Kreol and Bhojpuri. The former represents an integrative factor in this plural society. So, the association of Bhojpuri with Hindus has made some rural Muslims giving up speaking it in favor of Kreol, which is not identified with a particular ethnic community.²⁷

²⁵ See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>

²⁶ See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>

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Still, Mauritian Muslims are not united in their Islamic belief. Although most of the Sunni Muslims in Mauritius follow the Hanafi school of thought, more and more people tend to go directly to the sources: the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The Juma`h mosque and its board of directors, who represent the Sunnah Jamaat, are still important in Mauritius and recognized by the government as the official representative of the Muslim community. However, following the establishment of different religious groups and movements among the Muslims during the last fifty years, such as the Islamic Circle, the Tablighi Jamaat, Student Islamic Movement (SIM), and Hisbullah, the ideological authority of the Sunnah Jamaat over Mauritian Muslims has been seriously challenged. The Islamic Circle religious group, started in 1958, revived Tawhid ideology. Its members have said that some imams who had come from India introduced Indian customs related to funeral rites that have no place in Islam, and generally resisted what the Juma`h Mosque preached.²⁸

As a consequence, there is no unifying force that can claim sole religious authority. The Juma`h Mosque no longer represents the majority of Muslims, and the youth in particular do not recognize the religious authority of the Sunnah Jamaat. The latter has more influence among older people, whereas Tablighi Jamaat is stronger among those between the ages of 30 to 50. The Sunnah Jamaat is accused by the Tawhid group of introducing Indian elements in faith and promoting the practice of praying to the saints to intercede on behalf of supplicants. The Tawhid accepts only the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The Tablighi Jamaat brought many visiting imams from abroad and encouraged young Muslims in Mauritius to travel and learn Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, and Egypt. When they returned, they taught the precepts of Tawhid. The Tablighi Jamaat became one of the most influential organizations in spreading the Tawhid ideology during the last twenty years. The adherents of Tawhid practice Islam through missionary activities and believe that it is insufficient to say that one is a Muslim without practicing Islam, i.e., wearing the Hijab, performing the five daily prayers in congregation. The Tablighi Jamaat has now a Mauritian base with a separate mosque and an Islamic center in Port Louis. It preaches in Kreol, which is understandable to the youth, rather than in Urdu. Among the youth the SIM, Tablighi Jamaat, and Hisbullah, which is a militant religious group of recent origin, founded by a man who had been to Saudi Arabia, exercise the most religious influence.²⁹

To sum up, the Sunnification of Islam in Mauritius and its becoming more orthodox emanates from the Muslims' need to distinguish themselves from other Indians by creating a separate Muslim identity, which, in itself, comprises a reaction to their position as an ethnic minority subject to political marginalization after independence. Only religious identity can be the basis for distinguishing Muslims from other people of Indian origin in Mauritius. Thus, as Muslims' fear from Hindu dominance becomes stronger and as Muslims feel much more politically and socially marginalized and discriminated against, so will the Sunnification and Islamization processes proceed and even become much deeper.

²⁸ See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>

²⁹ See on-line at: <http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/mauritius.htm>



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The Development of Islamic Banking in Sub-Saharan Africa

On May 31, 2007, Kenya has licensed its first ever Islamic bank, which is operating entirely under Islamic Shari'ah principles. Thus, marking a milestone in the entire East African region where conventional banks have been slowly working towards adapting this concept of Islamic banking, which prohibits the lending of money at interest. The bank is called the First Community Bank Limited. The bank is a joint venture between Kenyan and Kuwaiti nationals and has a paid-up share capital of Sh 1 billion. Furthermore, it plans to open new branches in Tanzania and Uganda, what might trigger a major competition among other players in the local banking industry as well as in the Sub-Saharan one, who have already introduced selected products from the Islamic banking in the global financial sector.³⁰

The licensing of the bank by the Kenyan Treasury and the Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) is the result of recent Amendments to the local Banking Act, allowing banks to widen their services. Kenya's decision to legalize the service is a welcome move towards Muslims who have requested it for a long time. Yet, it should be noted that leading banks had already taken advantage of the Amendments to introduce Islamic banking products. Thus, already last year, the Kenya Commercial Bank introduced an Islamic banking window to specifically address the needs of the Muslim community. Some of the specifications that come with this service include no interest loans. The Barclays Bank of Kenya also introduced the La Riba Current Account to serve the Muslim community and compete effectively with the Kenya Commercial Bank. Included in the catalogue of the Islamic banking products are interest-free banking services, mortgages, car financing as well as health financing themes. But, with large numbers of Muslims in Kenya still not using the services of those banks, this market niche of Islamic banking is still considered to be untapped and open for competition.³¹

Thus far, other banks in the country have also shown interest in operating Islamic banking. The Gulf African Bank was due to open in April 2007. A consortium of investors, including Bank Muscat Unit, the Dubai government investment agency Istithmar, Saudi investors, and the Free Trade Area Bank were the main shareholders of this bank. Gulf African Bank was due to start with \$25 million in capital, so that it could expand to other African countries, where Islamic banking is still underdeveloped. In addition, the Dubai Bank applied recently for consideration to fully operate as an Islamic bank, even though the Treasury and the Central Bank of

³⁰ See on-line at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200705310054.html>;
http://bdafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1259&Itemid=4342

³¹ See on-line at:
http://bdafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1259&Itemid=4342;
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200705310054.html>; http://www.e-prism.org/images/Islam_in_Africa_Newsletter_-_No2_-_June06.pdf



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Kenya are yet to give a verdict. Nevertheless, the bank has begun offering a wide range of Islamic products.³²

In this sense, Kenya is seen by Gulf banks and financial institutions as the gateway to East and Central Africa. This might be true even in the case of neighboring Southern Sudan. On April 19, 2007—only a month before the licensing of the first Islamic bank in Kenya—Samson Kwaje, spokesperson for the semi-autonomous southern government, announced that banks operating in Southern Sudan using Islamic banking systems have to either convert to conventional banking or leave this part of Sudan. Conversion means paying interest on deposits and charging interest on loans to customers. He based his position on the South's interpretation of the north-south peace agreement signed in January 2005. According to this agreement, the south will have its own conventional banking system, in parallel with the Islamic banking system operating in the mainly Muslim north. In spite of the ban on Islamic banking, which sparked an outcry from the Muslim community, there are nowadays three conventional commercial banks active in the south as well as at least four Islamic-system banks – Umdurman National Bank, Faisal Islamic Bank, Bank of Khartoum, and an agricultural bank. Those four banks were given time to decide whether they would convert to conventional banking or leave the south and in the meantime, continue to provide Islamic banking services to the local Muslim community.³³

The growth of Islamic banking in Kenya nowadays should be seen on the background of the stepping up of the war on terror in Kenya, which is closely linked to the developments in the Somali crisis, and to the Kenyan government's strong wish to avert a spillage of radical Islamism from Somalia into Kenya. Thus, Kenyan Muslims have regarded themselves as being much more discriminated and harassed by the Kenyan government than before. Furthermore, they seem to perceive the Kenyan government as a collaborator with the US against Kenyan Muslims, all of whom it regards as potential terrorists. Since it is an election year in Kenya and since the current Kenyan government has all the reasons to be afraid that the Muslims will try to topple it, it tries to come to terms with them and to reconcile them, even a bit. In light of this delicate situation, the licensing of the first Islamic bank is an act destined mainly to show the Muslims that the Kenyan government does not only neglect or discriminate them, as they perceive it does, but also tries to respond to their needs.³⁴

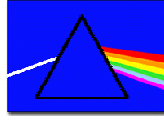
³² See on-line at:

http://bdafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1259&Itemid=4342;
<http://investhalal.blogspot.com/search/label/commercial%20bank>;
<http://abdullaharon.blogspot.com/search/label/Kenya>; <http://www.dubaichronicle.com/2007/02/gulf-arab-consortium-to-open-islamic.html>

³³ See on-line at:

http://bdafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1259&Itemid=4342;
<http://www.sudan.net/news/posted/14536.html>; <http://sudanforum.net/showthread.php?t=4364>

³⁴ See on-line at: http://www.e-prism.org/images/Islam_in_Africa_Newsletter- No2_vol_2_-_April_2007.pdf



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It should also be seen on the background of the dramatic growth in acceptability, which the Islamic banking has evidenced globally. Its main distinction is that it offers fixed-profit lending, which shields borrowers in times of rising interest rates. In addition, in adverse circumstances, where conventional banks levy penalties and penal interest on default by borrowers, Islamic banks work in partnership with borrowers to realize payment for loans. Depositors in Islamic banks have a potential upside to returns on their deposits in case the underlying assets perform well because the banks share profits with depositors. That is why, according to a report written by Kenyan financial experts titled "A Growth Model of Islamic Banking", as of 2006, there were "about 270 Islamic banks around the world, including subsidiaries of conventional banks, of which they together held assets worth more than \$265 billion". The potential growth of the Islamic banking concept, especially among the about 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide, has recently made major banks, such as HSBC and UBS, use Islamic banking systems in its branches.³⁵

However, Kenya is not the only gateway into the heart of the African continent. On May 19, 2007, ABSA Islamic Bank announced that it "would use the ABSA group's expertise and its expansion into Africa to tap into Africa's populous Islamic banking market". ABSA Islamic Bank is the youngest of the Islamic banks operating in South Africa. It began offering Islamic banking services at five branches on September 2006. Although it controlled a relatively small share of the market, it still hopes to wrestle more of the market from its old rivals. So ABSA Islamic Bank, which is offering mainly retail products, is due to launch its corporate and business bank offering in South Africa this month. But, in case it will not be able to compete with its older rivals, it seems to have found a new market among the ever-growing Muslim population in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁶

To sum up, it seems that the growth of Islamic banking in sub-Saharan Africa reflects the dramatic growth in global acceptability of this system, and the wish of the various secular African regimes to come to terms with the considerable Muslim communities and to try to reconcile them. However, much more importantly, it also reflects the ever-growing conversion of Black Africans to Islam, and, thus, the need for a religious banking system that will respond to their needs since many of them are still unbanked. Furthermore, the penetration of the concept of Islamic banking into the heart of Africa follows the footsteps of the penetration of Islam into Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whereby Kenya has served as a gateway into eastern and central Africa, and whereas South Africa has served as a gateway into south eastern and south western Africa.

³⁵ See on-line at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200705310054.html>;
http://bdafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1259&Itemid=4342

³⁶ See on-line at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200705210828.html>;
<http://investhalal.blogspot.com/2006/09/south-african-bank-begins-offering.html>



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The Islamization Process among the Namaqua in Namibia

Islam in Namibia is relatively new and is the third largest religion there after Christianity and the indigenous religions. The government of Namibia puts the number of Muslims in the country at about 70,000 or about 3% of the population. Adherents.com estimates that Muslims are 5% of the population of Namibia, though with a disclaimer that the statistical methodology used is unreliable. Most of Namibia's Muslim community is comprised of members of the Namaqua ethnic group or tribe.³⁷

The Namaqua tribe is one of Namibia's 13 indigenous tribes. In addition to Namibia, this tribe is also found in South Africa and Botswana. Originally, they lived around the Orange River in northern South Africa and in southern Namibia. But, during the nineteenth century, they were pushed northward by European farmers. For thousands of years, they maintained a nomadic pastoral way of life. However, following the discovery of diamonds at the mouth of the Orange River in the 1920s, people began moving into the region and established towns, a process that accelerated the appropriation of traditional Namaqua land, which had begun early in the colonial period. Under South Africa's apartheid regime, the remaining nomads and pastoralists from among the Namaqua were further encouraged to abandon their traditional lifestyles in favor of village or townships life. Nowadays, there are about 60,000 Namaqua people who live in Namibia. They are thought to be the true descendants of the Khoikhoi, or Hottentots, as they were referred to by the first European settlers.³⁸

Recently, many Namaqua people in Namibia have begun converting to Islam. This ever-growing conversion seems to be only due to the efforts of Jacobs Salman Dhamir, a prominent politician among the Namaqua and Namibia's incumbent Electoral Commissioner, who converted to Islam in 1980, while attending an Islamic Conference in Maseru, Lesotho, and, thus, became Namibia's first Black Muslim. After he returned from the conference, Jacobs has been busy spreading the word of Islam among his own people, the Namaqua.³⁹

It should be noted that until the early 1980s, Islam was not at all known to the majority of the Namibian indigenous peoples, despite the existence of small enclaves of Muslims from South Africa, who had settled in coastal towns, such as Walvis Bay, Lüderitz, and Swakopmund.⁴⁰

³⁷ See on-line at: <http://www.answers.com/topic/islam-in-namibia>;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Namibia

³⁸ See on-line at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Namaqua>;
<http://www.namibian.org/travel/namibia/population/nama.htm>;
<http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2006-06/01/02.shtml>

³⁹ See on-line at: <http://www.answers.com/topic/islam-in-namibia>;
<http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2006-06/01/02.shtml>;
<http://www.frontline.org.za/news/Vol%203%201989/TargettingSWANamibia.htm>

⁴⁰ See on-line at: <http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2006-06/01/02.shtml>;
http://www.streetnewsservice.org/index.php?page=archive_detail&articleID=550



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Today, there are in Namibia seven mosques, of which three are located in the capital. Other mosques can be found in Oshakati, Katima Mulio, and Walvis Bay. The first one was built in 1995 in Katutura, Windhoek's oldest Black township, which was demarcated by South Africa, Namibia's former colonial master, along the country's 13 tribes. The amount of Muslims in the country is growing steadily. Twenty four Namibians are currently studying in Saudi Arabia. Others have been sent for long term Islamic training in institutions in South Africa. The Iranians are also active in Namibia. They send imams to be stationed there for a number of years in order to spread the word of Shi'ite Islam and to head the Quba Mosque Foundation and Islamic Center (<http://www.qubamosque.com/indexh.html>), located at Windhoek.⁴¹

Yet, the Muslim community in Namibia does not have media, such as newspapers, magazines or airtime on radio to voice their beliefs. So, how can one explain the growth of Islam in Namibia? First of all, though Namibia is a secular state in terms of the constitution, as most South African countries are, freedom of religion was adopted through its Bill of Fundamental Rights. Thus, the country has observed and experienced a spread of religious institutions since independence in 1990.⁴² Secondly, and more alarming, Islam is spreading nowadays in Namibia specifically among the Blacks living in the townships, as happens in South Africa. People from all walks of life convert to Islam. It seems like Islam offers them a kind of a plight from their sufferings and hard living. So, in the struggle between Islam and Christianity on the souls of the Namibia's Black people, it seems that for the time being, Islam has the upper hand.

⁴¹ See on-line at: <http://www.answers.com/topic/islam-in-namibia>;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Namibia; <http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2006-06/01/02.shtml>; http://www.streetnewsservice.org/index.php?page=archive_detail&articleID=550;
<http://www.holidaytravel.com.na/index.php?fArticleId=10>

⁴² See on-line at: http://www.streetnewsservice.org/index.php?page=archive_detail&articleID=550;
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200706080313.html>