

Religion and Democratization in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa:
Parallels in the Evolution of Religious and Political Governance Structures

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Faith is the only permanent
state of mankind.
Alexis Tocqueville

Citizenship in the Political and Religious Orders

In modern times the concept of citizenship has been closely connected with membership in the nation-state. Citizenship in democratic societies confers certain privileges which include the protection of the state, a bundle of political and civil rights, access to public services and opportunities to participate and deliberate in public affairs. Narrow definitions of democracy stress the role of citizens primarily as electing government officials in periodic, open and fair elections (Huntington: 1990) In democratic societies all citizens have the right to choose their own national leaders and to oust them through the electoral process. Broader definitions of democracy call on the citizen to be well informed and to participate actively in public affairs and decision-making.

Besides being nominally citizens of a nation-state, most individuals also belong to religious communities and owe allegiance to religious institutions and creeds. Christianity and Islam assert that God's law takes precedence over laws legislated by states and rulers While the democratic nation-state derives its legitimacy and authority from the people, religious institutions derive their legitimacy and authority from God. Sometimes the temporal and the spiritual realms are in conflict with each other. At other times, they are supportive of each other.

Loosely speaking, congregants can be considered to be "citizens" of religious communities. Some parallels can be discerned in the way in which individuals become members of religious and nation-state political orders. Foreigners can become citizens of nation-states through naturalization, a process in which the non-citizen swears allegiance to the state and passes a series of tests--e.g., language, residency, knowledge of the laws of the land, etc -- laid down by the state. Africans can be Christians, Muslims, or Animists by birth in the same way that they are citizens of a nation-state by birth. Individuals born into or practicing a different faith can also become a "citizen" or member of a different religious community through conversion--e.g., affiliating with the religious community, accepting the basic tenets of the new faith, and performing certain

rituals. Under colonialism, it was much easier for Africans to convert to a different religion than it was for them to become a naturalized citizen of the colonial power.

Political and religious orders also display similarities in governance structures. In the political order, dichotomies exist between rulers and ruled. In non-democratic societies, the ruled are subjects rather than citizens. Although theoretically under the protection of the ruler, subjects have limited rights. In modern democratic societies, all citizens are theoretically granted the same political and civil rights and considered to be equal before the law.

In the religious order, dichotomies exist between the clergy and the laity. In most instances, clerics—i.e. religious specialists-- govern religious institutions and communities. Governance structures in religious orders can be authoritarian or democratic or some combination of the two. Some religious communities choose their own leaders and design their local governance structures. Others accept the clerics chosen by the religious hierarchy to lead their religious communities.

Modern societies have constitutions based on the principle of popular sovereignty and universal human rights that codify the rights and obligations of citizens and the organization and powers of their political institutions. Rulers and ruled are obliged to abide by the rules laid down in the constitutions. Rulers who violate the law can be removed from office and punished. Governments impose sanctions on citizens who violate the law.

Religious orders are built on credos and customary religious practices defining the basic principles of the faith. To be a member of a religious community, one must accept the basic tenets of the religion. Religious orders formulate elaborate sets of rules for behavior that are binding on all of its members (e.g. *sharia* for Muslims) and specific rules concerning the governance structures of religious institutions(e.g. canon law for Christians) and communities and the relationships between clergy and laity. Clergy who break the rules can be removed from office, excommunicated or lose their authority over the faithful. Religious communities ostracize, expel, and excommunicate members for violating religious norms and rules.

Religious and political authorities can be partners, rivals, and opponents. Religion enhances the legitimacy of political orders when religious authorities declare them in conformance with divine law. For many centuries, Christianity supported the divine right of kings to rule in European countries. Religious authorities also can undermine political orders by challenging their legitimacy. Historically, Muslim religious reformers have often advocating overthrowing Muslim rulers for being lax in their practice of Islam.

Is religion compatible with the modern secular democratic state? Tocqueville (1988) made a useful distinction between religion as a concrete institution and interest group and the values proclaimed by the religion. While recognizing the fact that the institution of the Catholic Church in France supported the old aristocratic order, Tocqueville (1988) argued that the principles inherent in Christianity supported the

emergence of the new democratic order. In affirming the equality of man before God, Christianity especially, as practiced in New England townships in America, provided the foundation for self-governing democratic societies in which citizens acting out of self-interest rightly understood would fully participate in public affairs.

He was less optimistic about Islam's potential for promoting democracy because of its detailed rules and regulations governing every aspect of life and fusion of Church and State. In Africa, we shall see that Tocqueville erred in asserting that Islam was inherently less compatible with democracy than Christianity.

Religion and the Political Order Before Colonial Rule

Before the advent of colonial rule, most Africans were affiliated with traditional religions and to a lesser extent with Islam.

Chiefs and rulers often held both temporal and sacred power. Rulers embodied the vital force of their societies. Citizenship was rooted in kinship and membership in one's lineage and ethnic group (Pobee: 1967).

From North Africa, Islam spread southward facilitated by Muslim clerics and traders involved in the Trans-Saharan trade routes. Islam advanced peacefully in West Africa where Muslims established religious communities in the capitals of the Ghana and Mali Empires. When the rulers of Ghana and Mali converted to Islam, they did not attempt to impose Islam on their subjects. As a result, religious pluralism and tolerance persisted in the Western Soudan as local kingdoms and chiefdoms were free to manage their own affairs and to practice religion as they saw fit. While nominally Muslims, the rulers of Ghana and Mali, nevertheless, continued to perform sacred rituals connected with the traditional African religions (Levtzion: 1973; Levtzion and Fisher: 1987). For many centuries, Islam remained primarily a court religion in West Africa. However, there were exceptions. In Tekrur, a kingdom established on the banks of the Senegal River, the people followed their ruler War Jabi *en masse* when he converted to Islam in the eleventh century.

While gaining ground throughout much of the savannah lands of West and Central Africa, Islam was not able to advance further south into the wetter tropical and rain forest zones of Africa. (Lewis: 1969) The populations in these areas remained attached to their traditional religions as did those in the half of the continent south of the Equator.

The decline of the Mali and Songhai Empires in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led to the disintegration of the old empires and a decline in Islam's influence on the political order (Levtzion: 1987) Rulers of the breakaway kingdoms were less devoted to Islamic practices. Some renounced Islam and returned to traditional African religions while still tolerating Muslim communities in their midst.

During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Islamic clerics in West Africa became more critical of “pagan” and lax Muslim rulers whom they accused of enslaving fellow Muslims. Some led revolts which were crushed while others succeeded in establishing theocratic political orders led by Muslim clerics and warriors as was the case in Fouta Djallon in Guinea in 1825 and Fouta Toro in 1776. In the early nineteenth century Dan Fodio led a *jihad* in Northern Nigeria and established a Hausa-Fulani theocratic state. In the mid-19th century, Islamic reformers like Ma Ba, Umar Tall and others launched *jihads* which in addition to threatening their neighbors also brought them into direct conflict with French and British interests. Traditional African religious societies fiercely resisted the attacks. The few Islamic states that emerged in West Africa and the Sudan during the nineteenth century did not endure. Their leaders were killed and their states dissolved in the wake of the colonial conquest.

For the most part, efforts by Muslim religious warriors to establish Islamic theocratic states by force took place in regions that were already highly Islamized and in territories already led by nominally Muslim rulers. The *jihads* of the seventeenth and eighteenth century were the exception to the general rule of the advance of Islam peacefully as Muslim traders and clerics coexisted with Africans adhering to traditional African religions for nearly a thousand years. In doing so, they followed Islam’s “minority tradition” of seeking peaceful coexistence with non-believers in areas where they were minorities and had no aspirations for conquest. (Ryan: 1987).

Six hundred years before the advent of Islam, Christianity flourished on the northern shore of Africa. However, by the beginning of the eighth century, most of the populations had become Muslim, following the Muslim conquest of the region (Baur, 1994). A small Copt minority managed to survive the Muslim conquest of Egypt while the hill country of Ethiopia remained predominantly Christian. Based in what is now Mauritania, the Almoravids moved north in the eighth and ninth centuries from the southern Saharan desert to conquer much of North Africa and Spain which included areas already under Muslim rule.

In 1493 a papal bull gave Portugal civil and ecclesiastic authority over the new territories discovered in Africa and encouraged the Portuguese to evangelize. The Portuguese established trading centers and colonies on the coasts of West, South, and East Africa and established tiny Catholic communities.

One of the few large-scale success stories of pre-colonial Christian evangelization in Sub-Saharan Africa took place in the Kingdom of the Kongo. The conversion of the ruler’s eldest son, who took the name of Afonso, was followed by mass conversions to the new religion. Afonso’s reign (1506-1543) marked the golden age of Christianity in the Kongo despite strong opposition from those upholding the traditional African religion. Afonso successfully integrated the traditional cult of the ancestors and matrilineal inheritance laws with Christianity. Christianity went into serious decline following the disintegration of the Kongo Kingdom due to internecine warfare during the late seventeenth century. By the mid- nineteenth century, Christianity was nearly extinct in what is now the Congo.

The decline of Portugal and the lack of interest of the major European powers, France, England, and Holland, dealing in the Atlantic slave trade to actively promote Christianity meant that Christianity made few inroads in Africa outside small European coastal trading settlements. African rulers discouraged Christian clergy from creating mission stations in the interior. As a result, Christian communities were located almost exclusively in small coastal settlements inhabited primarily by Europeans and Afro-Europeans

The abolition of the slave trade by the major European powers in the early nineteenth century was followed by a wave of Protestant missionaries who sought to explore the “Dark Continent” and to convert its peoples to Christianity. Christianity had little success in territories with Muslim majorities and sizeable Muslim minorities. Protestants had the most success in establishing tiny pockets of Christian African communities in Southern, Eastern, and Central Africa under British rule. Catholics did best in the territories around the Equator and in tropical rainforests which were under French, Portuguese and Belgian rule. In South Africa, the Dutch Reform Church became firmly established as the Church of the Afrikaners while the Anglican Church encompassed most of the British population.

The 1884-1885 Berlin Conference that carved up Africa among the major colonial powers embraced the principle of religious freedom defined as the right as Catholic missionaries to enter colonies under British rule and Protestant missionaries to enter colonies under French, Belgian, and Portuguese rule.

By the end of the century, all of the Islamic states in Sub-Saharan Africa had disappeared except for those in Northern Nigeria and the Sultanate of Zanzibar which became protectorates of the British under the system of Indirect Rule.

In 1900 traditional African religions still claimed the loyalty of at least three-quarters of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa while close to a quarter of the population embraced Islam. Outside of North Africa where Islam was clearly predominant, Islam had made its greatest inroads in the desert and savannah regions of West and Central Africa and in the Horn of Africa. Christians made up less than two per cent of the continent’s population. Outside of Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Africa which had a large European population, Christianity had hardly penetrated.

Citizens and Subjects in the Political and Religious Orders under Colonialism

Most analyses of colonial political orders see them as pluralistic multi-racial or multi-ethnic entities with the emphasis on divisions based on race and ethnicity. Another way of looking at colonialism is to view the colonial political order as a pluralistic multi-religious empire run by a very tiny foreign European Christian minority. 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 colonial conquest and imposition of European rule shattered the old political and religious orders which in the past had been closely joined because of the ruler's sacred powers. The denigration of traditional African cultures and religions and the destruction of indigenous political orders laid the foundation for the decline of traditional religious institutions and religious communities. As a result, the number of Christians and Muslims in Sub-Saharan Africa sharply increased under colonial rule while the number of Africans claiming to adhere to African traditional religions declined dramatically.

Africans as Subjects in the Colonial Political and Religious Orders

With few exceptions, the colonial powers regarded Africans in their territories as subjects with few political and civil rights. Mahmood Mamdani (Mamdani:1996) has pointed out that citizenship was limited for most of the period of colonial rule to western-educated urban elites while the great majority of Africans living in the rural areas were treated as subjects living under a system of “decentralized despotism.” The characteristics of colonial political orders in Africa are quite well known and can be summarized briefly:

- a. The domination of the political order by nationals from the *métropole*.
- b. The privileged position of European officials and European minorities, especially in white settler colonies and their belief that colonial rule was justified by its civilizing mission and that most Africans were not civilized enough to be granted the same political and civil rights as Europeans.
- c. The small numbers of European administrative officials used to administer the colonial populations.
- d. The creation of a western-educated auxiliary elite and recourse to chiefs and other so-called “traditional” authorities to help administer the colony.
- e. Resistance to granting Africans political and civil rights
- f. The imposition of the language of the *métropole* as the language of governance and the slow pace of western education.
- g. The reluctance to tolerate autonomous voluntary associations, religious organizations, and local governance institutions not directly under the control and supervision of the state.

The European colonial powers made little effort to transform their subjects into citizens during most of the colonial era. Colonialism was far from being a “School for Democracy” for several reasons. First, Africans were clearly not natives of the *métropole* and thus had no claims to citizenship by birth. Secondly, Europeans did not regard Africans as their equals. Because they were regarded as racially or culturally inferior, Africans had no business affirming claims to citizenship based on equality. Third, citizenship required knowledge of the language of the colonizer, literacy in that language, and commitment to the political and legal institutions of the *métropole*. Few Africans

had access to the kind of western education needed to achieve a certain level of cultural equality that could be used to claim the rights of citizenship.

The according of rights to overseas subjects also had much to do with the degree of democracy prevailing at home. Great Britain and France were more willing to grant political and civil rights to Africans fulfilling certain cultural requirements and living in urban areas than Belgium and Portugal. Thus, one saw the emergence of some semblance of modern representative political institutions in French and British colonies, although restricted to a very tiny electorate. Belgium and Portugal, on the other hand, had none. Belgium provided literacy on a significant scale but few political and civil rights. Portugal offered little western education and even less political rights

Like the colonial state, the Christian churches in Africa were overseas extensions of metropolitan church structures. The Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist churches set up in the British colonies, for example, were under the supervision of their church hierarchies at home while the Catholic churches set up in the colonies were under the direct supervision of Rome. The European Christian religious orders operating in colonial Africa mirrored, to a large extent, the patterns of governance structures found in the colonial political orders:

- The domination of the Churches by a tiny European minority for the most part consisting of nationals from the mother country.
- The dearth of sufficient clergy which led to a heavy reliance on African intermediaries-- e.g., catechists and trained lay preachers-- to convert the local populations and oversee local churches.
- The resistance to Africanizing the hierarchy of the colonial churches and training more African clergy.
- The belief that traditional African religions were primitive and that conversion to Christianity was an essential part of their “civilizing mission.”
- The imposition of the language of the *métropole* as the language of Church governance and Latin as the liturgical language in the Catholic churches.
- The use of western education to attract and convert Africans to Christianity
- The refusal to extend full rights, i.e., communion, to African Christians who did not adopt European Christian lifestyles and renounce polygamy, fetishes, animal sacrifice and other practices associated with traditional African religions.
- The emergence of independent African Churches led by Africans who refused to accept the domination of African churches by European clergy unwilling to integrate traditional African religious and cultural practices into Christianity.

During the autocratic phases of colonial rule, the European Christian churches in Africa were closely aligned 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 self-governance and better off under the benevolent tutelage of the colonial state. On the other hand, independent African 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.

In looking at the religious orders operating within the context of colonial rule, we see that the major colonial powers had different policies concerning religious freedom and the treatment of the multiple religious orders operating in their colonies. Portugal definitely favored Catholicism and Catholic missionaries in their African colonies and consciously limited the number of Protestant missionaries. In the Belgian colonies, the Catholic Church was a close ally of the colonial regime and one of the pillars of the colonial system. Portuguese and Belgian Africa also had few Muslims.

For their part, the French ruled 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. The anti-clerical stance of the French Third Republic was felt in Africa where Christian missionaries received little support from the colonial administration and where secular public schools provided most of the opportunities for western education for Africans, especially in the heavily Muslim territories.

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 Christian churches were integral parts of the power structure. South Africa was one of the few places where a European church, the Dutch Reform Church of the Afrikaner European majority, 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). In nearly all the British colonies, Africans adhering to traditional African religions outnumbered Christians during the autocratic phases of colonial rule. After defeating Muslim resistance movements, Britain reached an accommodation with the Islamic religious authorities in Egypt, Sudan, Zanzibar, and Northern Nigeria.

Evolution of Islam and Christianity under Colonial Rule

Both Islam and Christianity made great advances in Sub-Saharan Africa under colonialism for different reasons. Unlike Christianity, Islamic religious structures had become thoroughly Africanized before colonial rule. This was especially true in West Africa where Islam had been present for nearly a thousand years. In East Africa, Islam was less Africanized because it was less prevalent and more closely identified with Arab slave traders.

One of the most interesting characteristics of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa was the emergence of Sufi brotherhoods as the dominant form of Islam during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (Westerlund and Rosander: 1997) The collapse of the pre-colonial political orders and the defeat of the Muslim warrior reformers in West Africa (Robinson: 2000) and Sudan left a void which was filled by the rise and expansion of new Sufi Brotherhoods that rejected *jihad*. The most prominent Sufi Brotherhood in West Africa before the advent of colonial rule in West Africa was the Qadiri brotherhoods which originated in Baghdad in the thirteenth century. Although surviving the colonial conquest, the Qadiri brotherhoods lost ground to the Tijani brotherhood which had originated in North Africa in the early nineteenth century. Different branches of the Tijani brotherhoods spread all over West Africa. The Mourides founded by Ahmadou Bamba was concentrated primarily in Senegal. Sufi brotherhoods deriving from the influence of Ahmad bin Idris could be found in Chad, Sudan, Eritrea, and the Horn of Africa.

Most Sufi brotherhoods had the following traits in common during the autocratic phases of colonial rule:

- They were founded by African-born holy men (*marabouts*) whose authority derived primarily from their charisma.
- The *marabouts* had close relationships with their followers/disciples.
- Relationships between saints and disciples were hierarchical but voluntary.
- Sufi brotherhoods had few formal structures and were highly decentralized with local marabouts and Muslim communities enjoying a great deal of community.
- Sufi brotherhoods tended to be tolerant of other religions and open to people of all classes and castes.
- Although collaborating with the colonial regime, most Sufi brotherhoods resisted westernization and discouraged their followers from attending western schools.
- In the French colonies, Muslim disciples 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 social gap between Muslims and Christians was greater in British colonies because most schools there were Christian mission schools which Muslims were reluctant to attend.

- Colonial political authorities attempted to co-opt Sufi religious leaders and prevent them from having too much contact with the Muslim world outside Africa.

Sufi religious institutions had several advantages over Christianity in drawing more followers from traditional African religions, especially in West Africa. 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. 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 and converting the heathen.

The main instrument for converting the African masses 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.

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. It expanded rapidly between 1920 and 1960, a period that coincided with the acceleration of educational opportunities and a sharp increase in the number of European missionaries working in Africa. Pope Pius XI (1922-1929), known as the Pope of the missions made missionary work in Africa the cornerstone of his papacy and raised money to send thousands of Catholic missionaries to Africa (Baur, 1994). Between 1920 and 1960 the number of Catholic priests jumped from 2,000 to 10,000. Catholic sisters consistently outnumbered the male priests with 4,000 in 1920 and 14,000 in 1960.

Independent African churches also 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 that would incorporate aspects of traditional African culture like polygamy that had been rejected by Christianity (Hastings, 1994:493-539). Independent African churches took different forms. South Africa had 2000 independent Zionist churches that had broken away from the Dutch Reform and Anglican churches (Sundkler, 1961). These churches emphasized faith-healing, baptism, and speaking in tongues and referred to the need to reinvent Zion or Jerusalem in their own land on their own terms. Independent African churches, like the Aladura, were in Western Nigeria, in the Belgian Congo where Simon Kimbangu emerged as a prophet and the founder of a movement which led to mass conversions of the Bakongo to Christianity in the early 1920s, and in Nyasaland where Joseph Chilembwe, who had been educated in a black Baptist college in America started an independent African church and a movement which eventually evolved into a revolt against the colonial system.

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 independent churches. Catholics were most intensively concentrated in the Belgian territories which had 3.5 million. The 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 and in most of British Africa, and weak in Portuguese and French West Africa.

Post-World War II Reforms and the Evolution of Religious Institutions

Before 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. 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.

After World War II, one saw a major reversal in the colonial policies of France and Great Britain which gave Africans the right to elect their own representatives. In 1946 France granted its overseas Black African populations the status of citizens. Africans gained the right to join trade unions, political parties and other voluntary associations. Universal suffrage came in 1956. France had more problems in North Africa where a resurgence of Arab nationalism made second-class citizenship unacceptable in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria.

Belgium and Portugal continued to resist extending citizenship rights in their colonies during the post-World War II era. As late as 1958, Belgium was declaring that their colonies would not be ready for independence until at least the end of the century. Two years later, they granted independence to the Belgian Congo, Burundi and Rwanda despite the fact that they had given Africans little training in citizenship through their participation in political institutions. African subjects in Portuguese Africa had even less political and civil rights and launched wars of liberation to gain their rights. Independence came only after the military coup that toppled the Portuguese regime in 1974.

Political liberalization in French and British Africa provided Africans with many of the political and civil rights associated the privileges of citizenship. The expansion of the suffrage put more and more Africans into the political arena. The British permitted Africans to form political parties based on religious identity such as Moslem Association Party in Ghana and the Gambia Muslim Congress in the Gambia. These had little influence. The French did not permit political parties to organize around religious identities and this tradition was to continue after independence.

Muslims and Christians held most of the top leadership positions in post-war colonial Africa's political parties and movements even though the majority of Africans living in Sub-Saharan Africa up to independence still adhered to traditional African religions. The presence of non-Muslims in North African political parties was almost non-existent. In French West Africa's religiously pluralistic societies, Muslims emerged as political leaders where Islam was predominant or very strong. There, Christians and Muslims worked in harmony. The best example of peaceful coexistence and political alliances between Christians and Muslims was in Senegal where Léopold Sédar Senghor, a Catholic educated in mission schools, emerged as the leader of Senegal's largest political party. In Senegal, the leaders of the main Sufi Brotherhoods supported Senghor even though the leading rival party was headed by a Muslim.

Towards the very end of the colonial era, the Sufi Brotherhoods in West Africa came under attack from both radical secular nationalists and Islamic reformers. The nationalists condemned the Sufi Brotherhoods for collaborating with the colonial authorities and their alleged exploitation of their ignorant followers. Muslims influenced by Wahabi currents from the Middle East denounced the Brotherhoods for their deviations from orthodoxy and their low level of knowledge of Islamic law (Kaba, 1974). Many of the Muslim religious critics had studied in Islamic institutes of higher learning in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and North Africa. Reformist currents gained the most ground among Muslim traders and those living in urban areas. Muslim reformers frequently held strong anti-western and anti-colonial views and had ties with Pan-Islamic movements centered in the Middle East.

Men with strong Christian roots emerged as leaders in many African countries. Julius Nyerere had been educated in Catholic mission schools in Tanganyika; Kenneth Kaunda was a member of Presbyterian Church before joining the African Methodist

Episcopal Church and had strong ties with the Protestant churches in Northern Rhodesia; William Tubman, Liberia's president, was a lay preacher and the son of a Methodist clergyman; Albert Luthuli was vice-president of the Christian Council in South Africa before being elected as leader of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1952; Fulbert Youlou, a Catholic priest, emerged as Congo-Brazzaville's most popular politician.

During the last phases of colonialism, the Christian churches had excellent relationships with the colonial governments throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (Hastings, 1979:94-107). In British Africa, relations between the colonial authorities and the Catholic Church had warmed. In the Belgian Congo, Protestant missionaries were getting a fairer deal. In French Africa, anti-clericalism was on the wane.

There were exceptions. In South Africa, tensions developed between the mainline Christian churches and the Nationalist Afrikaner government when the latter decided to withdraw financial support from the church schools and to establish a system of Bantu Education to implement its apartheid policies. In independent Sudan, the Muslim-dominated government in 1957 closed down the mission schools and later expelled Christian missionaries in the south as part of a campaign to Arabize and Islamize the country.

European missionaries still dominated the hierarchies of the main-line churches and believed in the legitimacy of a benevolent colonialism (Hastings, 1979: 97). Though ready to accept some movement towards self-government, they were not in a hurry to see it become a reality because they didn't believe that Africans were ready for it. They distrusted the rise of political parties and saw many of them as hotbeds of communism.

During the 1950s, the churches began to accelerate the pace of Africanization of the clergy (Baur, 1994: 266-268). The Catholic Church in 1920 had only 50 African priests. By 1960, that number had jumped to 2000, half of them, ordained in the 1950s. However in 1960, there was still only one African archbishop and 25 African bishops for Africa's 325 dioceses. Protestant churches, especially the evangelical churches had less difficulty in Africanizing the clergy. Educational standards for becoming a Catholic priest were much higher than those required to become an ordained Protestant pastor. Moreover, outside the Anglican Church, Christian 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. Many of them had become less threatening to mainstream Christian churches and the colonial administration.

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.

The Interplay of the Political and Religious Orders after Independence

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). 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.

In most of the newly independent African nation-states, church-state relationships remained relatively cordial in Sub-Saharan Africa during the early years of independence. Though the new constitutions adopted in Africa established secular states, they also insured religious freedom. Christian Church leaders, for the most part, accepted the demise of colonial rule, announced the end of the missionary phase in Africa and took steps to accelerate the Africanization of the clergy. Several Protestant denominations also moved to formally transform their overseas mission churches into autonomous African national churches. The early years of independence did not bring a decline in the number of missionaries which continued to rise. However, the origin of the missionaries underwent some change as missionaries from the mainline British and European Protestant Churches dropped while the number of missionaries from evangelical churches increased with large numbers coming from North America.

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 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 started to appropriate religious language and symbols to build up a personality cult which drew criticism from religious circles. In Portuguese Africa, the state looked at Protestant missionaries with hostility because they seemed to be too sympathetic to African demands for independence.

Under colonialism, Muslim religious institutions had not been a formal part of the establishment. After independence, political leaders in predominantly Muslim countries became more aware of their country's Islamic identity and expanded ties with the broader Muslim world. At the same time, Muslims became more conscious of their minority status in countries now run by African Christians and formed interest groups to defend their interests and became more actively involved in national politics (Dickson, 2005).

By the mid-1970s, democracy was on the wane and personal dictatorships and military and one-party regimes ruled over most of Africa. While ruling in the name of the

people, these authoritarian regimes had little respect for the rights of their citizens, limited freedom of the press and association, and sought to domesticate the religious institutions operating in their countries.

A sharp shift in the orientation and doctrines of the Catholic Church and the mainline Christian churches in Europe and North America had major repercussions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Under the leadership of John XXIII and Paul VI, Vatican II (1962-1965) radically transformed the Catholic Church from a church hostile to democratic institutions, religious freedom in countries where it was the state religion, and changes in the Latin liturgy to a church embracing democratic ideals and human rights, seeking dialogue with all religions, and demonstrating respect for traditional African religions. Vatican II also adopted a more collegial style of decision-making and called for the expansion of the number of Cardinals from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to make the College of Cardinals that elected the Pope more representative.

In 1965, most of the mainline Protestant churches in Europe and North America adopted a more liberal stance and joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) which was an umbrella group bringing together Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Reformed and other Christian denominations. The WCC supported democracy, called for religious dialogue, and upheld human rights. It also became more sympathetic to the aspirations of liberation movements in South Africa, Rhodesia, and Portuguese Africa, critical of violations of democratic rights by authoritarian African regimes, and supportive of African clergy speaking out against government abuses of power. The WCC also attempted to join the various Protestant denominations functioning in a newly independent African state into one national organization. Their efforts failed. The search for unity applied only to the Protestant churches and did not include the Catholic Church, their main competitor (Kulu, 1978).

After independence, the Catholic and mainline Protestant churches created their own national religious organizations. The Catholics had their National Episcopal Conferences; The Protestants had their National Councils. These national level groups became the focal point of negotiations between the church and the state.

Church governance structures and norms changed at all levels after independence. Though still present, European missionaries no longer enjoyed a privileged status within the church at the national level as churches were transformed from mission institutions into autonomous African churches headed increasingly by African clergymen.

Following the Africanization of the political order after independence, the Catholic and main line Christian churches increasingly encouraged greater lay participation in church affairs at every level. For the Protestants, lay participation in church affairs was less of an innovation because of Protestant traditions of local self-governance and absence of a centralized hierarchy. For the Catholics, granting more authority to laypersons at the local level reflected both the democratization and decentralization of church governance structures and the fact that the shortage of priests precluded direct clerical control over local churches and necessitated the need for greater lay participation.

The Catholic Church formulated a program for building small Christian communities (SCCs) at the local level which would be self-ministering, self-propagating, and self-supporting (Kalilombe, 1978: 89-95). This meant that members of the local church would assume responsibility for all the essential services needed for the life and work of the church, become involved in the activities of the church, and raise most of the finances and materials needed to maintain the church and its services. To the extent that the local churches would be able to operate in this fashion, they would serve as “schools for democracy,” in much the same way that participation in the governance of voluntary associations and formal local government institutions provided individuals with experience in managing public affairs.

Independent Christian churches also flourished. These churches adopted a great variety of governance structures. Some were led by charismatic leaders who ruled their congregations like autocratic monarchs; others were more democratic in structure. Although many incorporated traditional African religious practices into their rituals and church life, some like the Aladura Church in Western Nigeria formally rejected traditional African religious practices. Independent African churches tended to spread more rapidly in areas where Protestant missionaries had been strongly present. There were fewer independent churches in Angola and Mozambique where the Catholics were clearly the dominant Christian group and where most of the population remained attached to their traditional African religions.

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. Marxist ideologies regarded religion as the opium of the people. 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 Guinea, Sékou Touré suppressed the Poro secret societies, nationalized the Catholic Church, and domesticated the Muslim religious authorities.

The 1973 oil crisis that led to soaring oil prices throughout the world supplied Saudi Arabia with huge sums of money that were partly used to support and finance Saudi-style orthodox Islamic movements throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. The Saudi brand of Wahabi orthodoxy was anti-western, anti-Christian, and highly critical of Sufism and non-Sunni forms of Islam. Those influenced by Wahabi and Salafi currents called on Muslims to return to the purity of the early period of Islam and to construct theocratic states based on the *sharia* or traditional Islamic law. The Saudis did not support western-style democratic institutions either at home or abroad. Yet, they seemed willing to maintain cordial relationships with Muslim leaders of secular states who gave them a free hand to finance Koranic schools and Islamic Institutes, finance the building of mosques, and provide scholarships to study in Saudi Arabia in exchange for extensive financial aid.

The 1979 Revolution in Iran that brought Ayatollah Khomeini and the *mullahs* to power presented an alternative model of theocratic state to that of the Wahabis. Post-revolutionary Iran claimed to be a Republic and adopted modern political institutions and national elections as the means of electing their political leaders. On the other hand, all political candidates had to be minimally acceptable to the religious authorities which held a privileged position in the political order.

The Muslim Brotherhood, originating in Egypt provided a third model of radical Islam. Fiercely nationalistic, the Muslim Brotherhood virulently opposed British hegemony over Egypt and supported the overthrow of King Farouk. They and their supporters sought to oust the secular nationalist regimes that took power in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. The philosophy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt also influenced the radicalization of Islam in Sudan and the coming to power of Hassan's al-Turabi's National Islamic Front in 1985.

A fourth source of anti-western radical Islam introduced to Sub-Saharan Africa came from oil-rich Libya under the guidance of Muammar Kaddafi who took power in a military coup in 1969. Unlike the Saudis and Iranians, Kaddafi was more interested in extending his own personal influence in Africa than in promoting Islam in Africa. Kaddafi supported various political leaders and rebel movements throughout Africa and organized training camps in Libya to overthrow African regimes. He supported non-Muslim dictators like Charles Taylor in Liberia and Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso as well as Muslim-led rebel movements in Ivory Coast, Chad, and the Gambia.

These external sources of radical Islam presented a sharp challenge to the influence of Sufi brotherhoods throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and were particularly strong in Northern Nigeria and Sudan, the two countries with the largest Muslim population in Sub-Saharan Africa (Westerlund and Rosander, 1997, Otayek, 1993, and Loimeir, 1997). Islamic radicals thus clashed frequently with the Tijani Brotherhood, the largest Sufi Brotherhood in Sub-Saharan in Sudan and Northern Nigeria. Most of the supporters of radical forms of Islam could be found in the urban areas among relatively well-educated Muslims and urban youth.

In general, the Sufi Brotherhoods managed to hold their own and retain their influence for several reasons. First, they raised the level of Islamic education among their followers and accelerated the number of girls attending Koranic schools. Second, they permitted and even encouraged their followers to attend western schools and to get higher education. Third, they modernized their organizations and encouraged the proliferation of local Muslim voluntary associations and youth groups in the urban areas which not only organized prayer sessions and lectures on Islam, but also provided mutual aid and social services to their members. Fourth, in order to be more in line with international Islam, they placed greater emphasis on Islamic law and developed closer ties with the Islamic world.

One of the consequences of the resurgence of militant Islamic fundamentalism has been the injection of religion as a divisive issue pitting Muslims against Christians in countries like Nigeria and Sudan where Muslims have imposed *sharia* on non-Muslim populations. Christians regard *sharia* as the imposition of an alien institution that delegitimizes both their religion and their political standing (Dickson, 2005:7-8). In Northern Nigeria, religious violence has become more commonplace in the towns with mixed populations. Muslim-Christian tensions have also been exacerbated by evangelical Christians who regard Islam as a false if not satanic religion.

Although radical and anti-western Islamic fundamentalism has received a great deal of attention in the West, the reality is that Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa has continued to remain a tolerant religion coexisting peacefully with Christians and Animist communities at all levels of society. In South Africa, Capetown Muslims joined an inter-faith coalition to fight apartheid (Esak, 1997). Tanzania which has a population more or less equally divided between Muslims, Christians, and Animists has enjoyed religious and ethnic harmony since independence with Muslims and Christians sharing political power. In predominantly Christian Rwanda, Muslim religious authorities have opened up their facilities to Christian students and been active in promoting reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis along with the national Catholic and Protestant Churches. In West Africa, Christians and Muslims have been engaged in interfaith dialogue for many years (Sanneh, 1996). During the civil war in Liberia, Animist Poro societies and Muslims collaborated to protect their communities against intrusions by warlords and to resolve interethnic conflicts (Sawyer, 2005:62-64)

The wave of democratization that took place in Sub-Saharan Africa during the late 1980s and 1990s coincided with the demise of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Prominent Christian clergymen, because of their moral authority, were asked to preside over National Conferences meetings in predominantly Christian countries like Benin and Zaire to transform one-party states and authoritarian regimes into democracies. The collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War was accompanied by the collapse or transformation of Sub-Saharan Africa's Afro-Marxist regimes into multi-party quasi-democracies in Benin and Madagascar and contributed to the ending of civil war in Ethiopia, Angola, and Mozambique.

Many Muslim students, intellectuals, and Marxist party leaders and militants who had been firmly attached to Marxism became devout Muslims, thus accelerating a trend that had begun in the 1970s. Some became radical Islamists; most became social democrats and demanded the end to one-party and military rule and the establishment of multiparty democracies.

Recent public opinion polls show that Muslims in Sub-Saharan Africa overwhelmingly support multiparty democracy, freedom of speech and the press, and religious freedom. A poll taken in Mali, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Uganda in 2002 showed that more than 71 percent of the Muslims polled preferred democracy to any other form of government (Afro-Barometer, 2002).

During the 1990s and first half of the new millennium, Christian church leaders increasingly included popular sovereignty and defense of human rights as part of the Gospel message (Njoya, 2003 and Afan, 2001). In Kenya, where President Moi relied on the support of conservative Independent African churches, Catholic and Protestant clergymen intensified their criticism of violations of human rights and the absence of fair and open elections. Their relentless pressure eventually forced Moi to retire and to hold fair elections in 2003 which his party lost after being in power since independence. Elsewhere, Catholic Peace and Justice Commissions have been at the forefront in attacking violations of human rights and non-democratic regimes.

Conclusion

This paper has traced in broad strokes the evolution of religious institutions in colonial and post-colonial Africa and looked at parallels between the political and religious orders in governance structures and norms. The non-democratic nature of the Christian Churches during the colonial era, their identification with the colonial political order, and their regarding of Africans as racially and/or culturally inferior reinforced the political order's treatment of Africans as subjects rather than citizens. Independent African churches emerged in opposition to the European dominated Christian churches. Indigenous Islamic institutions generally accommodated to colonial rule in exchange for religious freedom. Traditional African institutions declined with the destruction of the old political order, the denigration of traditional African culture, and the development of western education. The pace of political reform accelerated during the post-war decolonization period except in Portuguese Africa and the white settler colonies. During this period, the Sufi Brotherhoods began to come under attack from secular nationalists and Islamic reformers influenced by Wahabi orthodoxy. The mainline Christian Churches continued to be dominated by Europeans and remained conservative at the same time that the number of Christians was rapidly increasing.

After independence, changes in the doctrines of the mainline Christian churches and Africanization and democratization of church structures at the national and local levels paved the way for religion to alter its anti-democratic tendencies displayed during the colonial period. The proliferation of autonomous, democratically run Muslim and Christian associations and communities built around religious identity and principles in villages and urban neighborhoods coupled with the Africanization and adoption of democratic ideals by national-level churches have advanced the processes of democratization throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. These two phenomena have not received the attention they merit in studying democratization processes. They exist parallel to the national level, urban based civil society and the proliferation of grassroots community based voluntary associations that have received greater attention in the literature.

Although it would be unwise to minimize the existence of inter and intra-religious conflict, the support of some religious authorities and institutions for authoritarian regimes, and the potential of radical Islam to undermine democratization processes in

Africa, one should not underestimate religion's potential for reducing the intensity of inter-ethnic conflicts and promoting good citizenship and democratic cultures.

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