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## Islam and Ethnic Conflict in West Africa: The Variable Options of a Shared Identity

By Nona Zicherman

The issue of nationalism- a sense of identity and shared community among a group of people that is congruent, or aspires to be congruent, with the boundaries of a present-day state- is problematic in the reality of post-colonial Africa. There, the "modern" state is defined by boundaries drawn by Western colonial powers, that are often at odds with pre-colonial social and political groupings. African states today are almost all multilingual and ethnically heterogeneous. Traditional mechanisms for coexistence among different peoples have been disrupted by colonial strategies of ethnic favoritism and 'divide-and-conquer/' through an uneven distribution of land and mineral resources during the colonial carve-up, and more recently because of an increasingly desperate scramble for resources given Africa's deep economic crisis and dependence on foreign aid.

In recent decades, the term "nationalism" in the African context connotes neither unity among citizens nor a mobilization of resources to meet national priorities. All too often, it has meant bloody conflict among ethnic groups, competing for the spoils of the state in a vicious zero-sum game that has resulted in civil war, genocide, authoritarian rule and military coups. Cast in the popular media as upsurges of primordial 'tribalism,' Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and many other cases attest to the tragic consequences of this type of communal violence.

However, there seems to be "a dog that is not barking" in Africa. Relative to the rest of the continent, ethnic conflict in the French-speaking and predominately Muslim parts of West Africa is almost nonexistent. Neither the Sahelian countries of Niger and Mali nor the coastal nation of Senegal have experienced vicious competition along ethnic lines in any degree comparable to their Anglophone West African neighbors such as Liberia, Sierra Leone or Nigeria. Why should these countries, subject to essentially the same historical experiences of colonialism, imposed state boundaries, and economic marginalization, differ in this crucial respect? Demographically, Mali, Niger and Senegal all exhibit one characteristic that sets them apart from their neighbors. In all three countries, over 90% of the population identifies itself as Muslim<sup>1</sup> (U.S Department of State, 1993). I will argue that this is a crucial factor in explaining the lack of ethnic violence in these three countries. In most African states, ethnic identity is one of the few tools for both the elite and the masses to mobilize and "take claims on the state, or is a vehicle to seek out alternative sources of sustenance when the state fails to perform its essential functions. However, I will argue that in the Majority Muslim states of Mali, Niger and Senegal, Islam represents a comparable option and thus a viable alternative to goal-oriented ethnic mobilization.

### THE THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

There are two causal mechanisms by which Islam acts to minimize ethnic conflict. First, Islam is used on the state level, as a tool for elites. The fact that Islam is a religion shared by all, with institutionalized networks that the state can utilize, make;

patronage-based inclusive rule more efficient and less costly than exclusive rule, thus minimizing the incentive for elites to exacerbate ethnic tensions. Islam is an important potential source of legitimacy for elites, who often need it desperately given the historical realities of the African nation-state. Second, on a more localized level, identity is situational, and Islam can fulfill certain services for the people, ranging from education to local dispute resolution, that the state fails to provide. For heterogeneous societies who share the basic practice of Islam religion offers the possibility of a supra-ethnic space in which people can locate their relationship to their community, their nation and the international forces that influence their lives.

The role of Islam in mitigating ethnic conflict is best understood through an examination of the nexus between theories of the operation of the African state, and theories of ethnic mobilization. Inserting the added variable of shared religion into that nexus can lead to a better understanding of the lack of communal violence in these areas. This paper is devoted to an examination of the relationship of religion to ethnic conflict, yet it is not an examination of a bipolar relationship. Rather, the role of the state is a constant thread that often operationalizes both religion and ethnicity. The state in Africa appears to be dualistic in nature. It has proven to be remarkably strong in penetrating society, but has been unable to produce goal-oriented social change. From the colonial period onward, the state has acted as an outside force, reaching into the social realm to extract what it needs for its own operation, and then withdrawing without response to any claims its subjects attempt to make upon it for services in exchange. Fundamentally, what most contemporary African states face is a crisis of legitimacy. The state must draw on the existing social arrangements, whether by co-opting them or by placing itself in direct opposition to them, to create a basis of legitimacy that was nonexistent at independence. This crisis in relations between state and society began once the euphoria surrounding decolonization wore off and it became apparent that the independence elites were nothing more than "ineffective modernist brokers to their people" (Sanneh 180).

Joel Migdal gives us a useful model of this relationship by characterizing society as a mix of social organizations rather than any of a number of dichotomous concepts (center-periphery, modern-traditional etc.) that have been applied to the African state. He characterizes African societies as strong in relation to the state but diffuse in that social control is spread through various fairly autonomous social organizations, among which both religious and ethnic affiliations should be counted. This weakness in relation to society means that extra-national identifications (even the so-called "primordial" identifications) can have a profound influence on the state. Today the post-colonial state in Africa is basically distributive in function. To gain and maintain legitimacy, the elite engage in complex patronage and bargaining systems.

Victor Azarya (6-7) measures the legitimacy of the state to society through the theoretical distinction of "incorporation" (urbanization, cash-cropping, receptivity to mass media) versus "disengagement" (withdrawal from the state as a hedge against instability and dwindling resource base, as manifested through the growth of black markets and the resurgence of a subsistence economy). We shall see that in two of our cases, Mali and Niger, the population seems to be "disengaging" from the state, and thus the role of ethnic ties and Islam becomes particularly salient.

African states are also categorized as operating under a "communitarian" regime type because community loyalties are still strong and override other factors<sup>2</sup>. This concept of the communitarian regime is based on the "simultaneous participation of a great number of primary organizations which clamor for equal access to centrally controlled resources. Community-specific values are encouraged at the expense of

others, and governance structures are socially embedded in multifunctional relations" (Jijden 17). This competition for equal access to resources is what necessitates a state legitimacy based on patronage. Generally, patronage can be used to promote inclusive rule. A classic example of inclusive patronage rule is Senegal, where the state brokers agreements with the powerful Muslim brotherhoods, with representatives from each of the different orders present in the government. Each of these representatives is given resources to bring back to their areas brotherhood affiliation tends to operate along ethno-regional lines. This system has resulted in a lack of overt communal violence and stability of government that is rare in Africa.

The standard explanation for the frequency with which communal organization is cast in ethnic terms is the argument that, in Africa, ethnic mobilization is the most cost-effective way for relatively deprived groups to defend their interests. African populations are seen as vulnerable to manipulation by the elite in part because matrimonialism, particularly in its exclusive form, has alienated large portions of society (Deegan 198). Combined with the failure of the state to deliver even the most basic of material services to or ameliorate the living conditions of a majority of the population, collective action can take the form of "voice, exit or loyalty" (Hirshmann). Loyalty can be extracted through patronage from the included sectors of society. Exit can be demonstrated in a manner akin to the 'disengagement' referred to previously; but voice is potentially more dangerous, particularly in an authoritarian setting. A challenge to the state is often "voiced" as cast in ethnic terms because it is an attack on groups associated with the ruling elite.

The ruling elite is associated with a particular ethnic group when the distribution of patronage rule is based on exclusive rule. In this legitimation strategy, the elite of one ethnic or other salient group receives all the spoils from their "brethren" in power, at the expense of complete exclusion and domination of other groups in society. Rwanda is a tragic example of such exclusive rule. In this case, either Hutus or Tutsis enjoyed fairly complete domination of the distributive state mechanism. Control of the state swung from one group to the other several times in the period after independence, but the exclusivity of rule dating from colonial times gave rise to an ideology of ethnic hatred, and linked power so closely with ethnic identity, that it became a murderous force.

These two concepts, though simplified, are useful, as each state will look at the options it has available to utilize as a patronage network given its particular socio-historical context. Whereas most African states have very few options and ethnicity figures most prominently as the vehicle of elite patronage when Islam is a majority religion, elites can appeal to a Muslim identity and use Muslim power networks to distribute. In effect, this will make more inclusive rule possible thus defusing potential conflict.

#### ISLAM AND ISLAMICISM

Much of the literature produced in the last decade on Islam in West Africa focuses, to the exclusion of almost all else, on the increasing 'fundamentalism' and Political activism of conservative Muslim groups. Dubbed the 'Islamicists,' it is important to separate this trend (starting in the 1970's with its most radical Manifestations occurring in Northern Nigeria and the Sudan<sup>3</sup>) from the type of Islam we analyze for its historical role and potential in mitigating ethnic conflict. Islamicism is a modern and intellectual movement to bring Islam into every aspect of Political, economic and cultural life. It is reformism in its newest manifestation because

it seeks to define a single, valid Islamic identity to the exclusion of all others. Its focus, thus strongly anti-pluralistic. An Islamicist approach is what gives rise to intra-Muslim conflict, such as the Shi'a/Sunni conflict seen all over the globe. This trend, while explicable within the context of the increasing poverty and disintegrating capacity of most African states, may compromise the traditional place of Islam as a factor in mitigating conflict. However, it is not a total break with tradition. Some of the more responsible and less alarmist literature uses the same arguments to explain the new resurgence that I am using to explain the salience of more traditional Sufi Islam in the past. Elizabeth Hodgkin puts it quite elegantly:

The state makes claims for wide powers without the means to fulfill them. Its failure is double: economic in its inability to raise peoples living standards or to provide most of its population with even the bare amenities, and moral, as an offshoot of the economic...in acting as a protective shelter against state power Islamicist movements are filling a traditional role of Islam in Africa, a role filled not only by other Islamic movements (in the past) but also, in other parts of Africa, by Christian or ethnic groups (Hodgkin 87).

In West Africa, the Islamicist dynamic has manifested itself as a conflict between Sufis and non-Sufi practitioners. Traditionally, the Islam practiced in Mali, Niger and Senegal has been Sufi, in that local marabouts, teachers, and leaders of brotherhoods have great latitude in interpretation for their followers, and are often attributed mystical and charismatic traits. Now, however, the "reformers" are identifying themselves not just as Muslims, but as particular kinds of Muslims. This development, which J.F. Bayart attributes to the escalating social and economic dislocation of Africa's post-colonial state, is relatively new. One scholar claims, "One of the most frequent manifestations of this phenomenon...the confrontation of Sufi and non-Sufi factions, is also widespread elsewhere in the Muslim world today" (Brenner 3).

I argue that if the particular type of Islam practiced continues to become a more salient value, the effectiveness of the conflict-mitigating properties of the more traditional Sufi forms of West African Islam may wane. However, it is not yet clear if the reformers have as much influence on the local level as scholars seems to presume. For example, the Wahhabiyya, an anti-Sufi Malian reform movement, is vigorously criticized as "foreign," implying its recent Saudi Arabian origins, or "ignorant" in that its leaders have not been trained in "traditional" institutions using the "traditional" methods (61).

It is difficult to assess what effect the increase of Islamicist activity will have on ethnic relations because there has been little research done on the connections between Islam and ethnic relations in general. However, much of the recent Sufi/anti-Sufi conflict has manifested itself in street riots and attacks and stonings of women who are wearing "inappropriate" Western clothing. As tragic and potentially destabilizing as these types of events are, it is interesting that none of the accounts of these events describe any ethnic ramifications to these incidents. For instance, women of certain ethnic groups were targeted). Rather, to date the cleavage seems not to mobilize conflict among ethnic groups, but based on subjective criteria of what constitutes the practice "I "pure" or "good" Islam.

Now that I have provided a generalized introduction of the current trends in West African Islam, I will examine its contemporary uses by first the elite, and then by

society at a more local level, since it is these uses of Islam that have the most duplications for the occurrence of ethnically-based mobilization and violence.

#### ISLAM AS USED BY THE STATE

On the elite level Islam is becoming an increasingly crucial tool for the state to gain legitimacy. Islam was synonymous with conservatism and anti-modernization for the governing elites immediately following independence. Even in majority-Muslim states like Mali and Niger, the rhetoric of the elite was anti-Muslim. In the decades following independence, however, the elite slowly came to realize they were facing an extreme loss of legitimacy. These same regimes began to turn towards Islam, emphasizing the Muslim nature of their societies, as a way to appeal to a much wider audience both nationally and internationally.

Senyi Kountche was the military dictator of Niger from 1974 to 1987. Despite being an authoritarian regime, the Kountche years were actually quite popular until the droughts and economic crisis of the early eighties became acute. The regime was legitimated at the grass-roots level using a rhetorical strategy that "extolled the virtues of popular participation in governance" (Hyden 155) through decentralized networks of local organizations. These organizations were corporatist: they were completely state-sponsored. Kountche achieved the legitimacy he did partially by organizing along an Islamic theme, with the foundation of the moderately reformist Islamic Association of Niger (AIN), the only Muslim group allowed for decades. Its purpose was avowedly to promote the application of Islamic ideals at all levels of national life.

Beginning in 1978, Kountche dubbed his regime a "societe du developement," a restructuring of the political and economic system. It relied on the mobilization of local elites. It also aimed to broaden his political support through the distribution of resources while producing a breakthrough in the rural economy so that government revenues would not be as dependent on income from uranium mining, Niger's only valuable export and source of foreign exchange to date (Charlick 65). Village level councils were organized to carry out the water programs, agricultural productivity schemes and other projects that were handed down from the central government largely as a form of patronage.

Pearl Robinson argues that the popularity of this regime was based on "corrective legitimacy"-legitimacy through the provision of heretofore unavailable services- funded by the short-term boom in the Nigerian economy based on increases in the price of and demand for uranium during the height of the Cold War (Hyden 156). Kountche skillfully interwove this source of legitimacy with appeals based on his Muslim piety (in every public photo and poster he is depicted holding a Koran and Prayer beads) and thus his shared identity with all Nigerians. Although military in nature, Kountche's regime was very much one of personal rule, with interests distinct from those of the military as a group (Charlick 63).

This political economy of religious symbolism was extended to his international relations as well. For many leaders of African nations that plausibly could be billed as "Muslim" countries, the Arab nations are an extremely important source of economic aid, as well as an alternative geo-political faction with which to ally if this serves the interests of one of the rulers. "Kountche attempted to 'play the Arab card' by moving Nigerian foreign policy closer to the Islamic world in the hope of obtaining more political and economic support from the oil-exporting states and more legitimacy at home as a Muslim leader" (Charlick 143). The two most significant multilateral

agencies of the Arab states are the Islamic Development Bank, based in Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Bank for African Development (BADEA) in Khartoum. Bilateral assistance between many West African nations and these countries is also a source of finance.

For the question of the salience of Muslim identity in West Africa, it is interesting to note that Arab nations tend to support projects that are very important symbols of Muslim identity. The construction of large mosques (such as the Grande Mosque in Niamey, Niger, financed by Libya,) and scholarship programs that send African students to study in Arab universities, (or the construction of the Islamic University of Say in Niger) are easily observable symbols that can help increase the legitimacy of the leader who obtains them in the eyes of his population. However, the role of Arab funding should not be exaggerated, because it represented only 3% of the total overseas assistance Niger received from 1972-1979 (Charlick 109). Nevertheless, it is significant on a symbolic level.

Since the introduction of multi-party democracy in Niger in 1993, ethnic divisions within the government have resulted in several serious parliamentary stalemates. The issue of Hausa versus Djerma political representation is especially contentious because the Djerma have historically been overrepresented in government and politics in large part because they were the ethnic group favored by the French colonial authorities and thus received more western-style education.

However, there is an interesting problematique surrounding the elections and subsequent ethnic divisions. Conventional wisdom argues that Kountche was able to repress these tendencies because he was an authoritarian, and with a widening of political freedoms the typical tendencies towards ethnic politics were brought to the surface. One wouldn't want to understate the significance of ethnic politics: they are a very real part of the process in Niger, which even in its more democratic forms relies on personal rule and patronage networks (Charlick 1991). However, the first elected president of the Third Republic, Mahamane Ousmane, a devout Muslim and the first Hausa head of state in Niger, was elected despite the handicap of being considered a member of a "Hausa" political party, by partially transcending the ethnic label by presenting himself as the candidate for change and the new generation (Ibrahim 37). Kountche enhanced his legitimacy through appeals to a Muslim identity, thus minimizing the need to overtly shore up support by appealing to his ethnic base. Why were the post-dictatorship leaders so much more secular in their message?

It may be that appeals for Muslim unity were not as feasible for Ousmane as they were for Kountche, because new trends of political conditionality link aid so closely to political practices, and Niger is even more aid-dependent today than in the Kountche years, when uranium was somewhat of an alternative source of income. Western donors seem much more likely to withdraw aid from a country they can brand as fundamentalist Muslim (and thus implicitly anti-Western) than from one whose internal politics utilize ethnic rhetoric (hence the favorable opinion of Rwandan politics by most donors in the years immediately preceding the genocide). There is some evidence of this donor discrimination against the use of Islam in African domestic affairs from events in Mali. In recent years Muslim associations there have undertaken numerous projects, including the construction of schools, clinics, pharmacies and cultural centers. The infrastructure they have created has been impressive, and has been initiated by the local communities. Financing has been based on contributions from merchants and migrant workers (even when gifts/loans from Arab Muslim sources are used, the funds are largely locally controlled.) This seems to be a textbook example of grassroots development, but "despite their success certain major actors i

the development game (notably the United States and France) ignore these projects... [for] fear ... the political potential of Islam, particularly 'fundamentalist' Islam (Brenner 70).

Islamic rhetoric was used by the state in Mali under the dictatorship of JvJoussa Traore in a manner quite similar to that of Kountche in Niger. In an attempt to construct a national Islamic identity (and co-opt Islam's legitimacy). Traore directly involved himself in Islamic affairs, made a visible attendance at the mosque with all his cabinet ministers every Friday, and established Mali's national Muslim organization, the Malian Association for the Unity and Progress of Islam (AMUPI) (Brenner 72). After Traore was overthrown in a coup d'etat brought on by popular protests in 1991, the new elected president, Alpha Konare, also used Islamic networks. In his second election of June 1997 there was controversy over the results and several political parties boycotted the elections and voiced violent opposition. Konare's strategy, though only nominally successful, was to call on the Muslim leaders from various regions and brotherhoods to help arbitrate the dispute.

In arguing that Islam must be considered one of the variables that explains the relative lack of communal violence in majority-Muslim West African countries, I am not trying to imply that it is necessarily a democratic or state-building force. The methods by which the state operates, are largely the product of colonial legacies and the increasingly dire economic situation in Africa. However, the availability of Islam as another tool for elites to legitimate their rule may change the cost-benefit analysis during the decision of whether or not to "play the ethnic card." Not only can an Islamic identity be used to consolidate personal rule (as in the Kountche example) but Muslim networks represent an extremely efficient and pragmatic way for the state to distribute patronage. In Senegal, and to a lesser extent in Mali and Niger, Islam is organized through brotherhoods, whose leaders often act as intermediary brokers between their followers and the state.

Most frequently, local Muslim leaders have an ethnic/regional base of support, so in that way Islam could be seen as reinforcing ethnic divisions. Nevertheless, even if the patronage is actually being given to various ethnic and regional groups, using the Muslim networks ensures that it will be distributed to all ethnic groups, since each has their own Muslim representative. The predominance of Islam means that there are institutionalized pathways for the distribution of patronage in an inclusive manner. This diffuses the tension obvious favoritism for one ethnic group (exclusive patronage) can cause. Islam thus offers a less destructive "out" for elites when faced with issues of resource distribution.

#### THE SOCIETAL USES OF ISLAM

One of the increasingly important functions of Islam by society is as an alternative to state structure: more and more it provides services the state cannot, and is often better suited than the traditional mechanisms of ethnic groups to fill that void. Much in the same way that Kountche based his legitimacy on providing needed services through Muslim networks using uranium revenues, Islam itself is becoming more important for the people by this same mechanism of "corrective legitimacy." An extremely good example of this is the important role Islam plays in education in contemporary West Africa. The state schools in Niger, Mali and Senegal still operate on the French system. French is the only language of instruction, and despite repeated attempts at reform the curriculum is largely urban-biased, preparing students only for

civil service jobs of which there are fewer and fewer available. The curriculum has very little relevance to agricultural pursuits, which are the mainstay of these economies. Despite these shortcomings, there are still more students than educational infrastructure to support them. Classrooms are grossly overcrowded, and the examinations are extremely difficult in order to weed out as many children as possible. For the majority of children who receive some education but do not pass onto lycee or university, there are very few skilled employment options.

Many theoretical treatments of Islam underline the centrality of education in the Muslim identity. In an interesting parallel, much of the aid given to Muslim West Africa by Arab nations is educational in focus: scholarships to attend universities in the Middle East or the promotion of Islamic education in the countries themselves (for instance money from Libya and Saudi Arabia financed the construction of the Universite Islamique du Say, in Niger, creating the first alternative to the state-run, French style university in the capital). Many West Africans have recognized and acted on this centrality. "Their views on religious freedom have often been expressed by their stance on Muslim education, and they have organized themselves around educational issues to express their objection to the national secular state..." (Sanneh 119).

Muslim education certainly does not promote a national type-identity, but it does create a community of shared knowledge and status symbols that are not particular to any one ethnic group. Group prayer observances and shared honorifics such as mallam or marabout (Koranic scholar) and alhadji (a title used by someone who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca) which are used and recognized regardless of ethnic affiliation, can be seen as one particular style of "imagined community" (Anderson).

Islam also acts on the community level as a provider of welfare. Zakat, or Koran mandated charity, can be organized to build mosques, health clinics etc. In areas where the brotherhoods are the prevalent form of affiliation, this system Muslim giving has been highly organized. The role of Islam as a type of parallel state, providing many of the same functions the modern state is supposed to produce, is quite pronounced in the following passage.

As the leaders of the brotherhoods collect the disciples' pious offerings in cash or in kind, they can be seen as preceptors of a spiritual taxation...The brotherhood can provide the disciples with what amounts to the protection of an Islamic welfare state... a wide range of valuable functions, acting as a court for the arbitration of disputes, a school for pious instruction, a bureaucracy for the administration of the brotherhood's affairs, a welfare office for the distribution of charity to the indigent, or an inn for the weary traveller (O'Brien and Coulon 28).

It is interesting to note that this characterization of the brotherhoods' service provision is not particular to any one order: it has been observed among the Mourides, whose membership is drawn predominantly from the Wolof ethnic group, the Tijjany and even a Touareg brotherhood in Northern Niger (Triaud). Thus Islam, in replacing the state on the societal level in many of its functions, demonstrates common characteristics across ethnic lines. Similarly, Brenner argues that the services provided by Muslim organizations enjoy support in many diverse regions of Mali (Brenner 74).

In today's internationalizing environment even local communities are affected by international economic and political forces. In a fascinating study titled "Hausaland

provided", William Miles examined two Hausa villages on either side of the Niger/Nigeria border. Despite being of identical size and sharing the same ethnic heritage and customs, the relative economic prosperity of Nigeria and the different colonial and post-colonial relationships of the two nations had influenced day-to-day life in the village a great deal, despite the fact that the border was arbitrarily drawn to divide a pre-colonial entity and, in this remote part of the Sahelian bush, consisted of nothing more than a line drawn in the sand.

While ethnic identities persisted, both villages remaining "Hausa" villages, changes in work, consumption patterns, family arrangements and many other actions differed dramatically as a response to other forces emanating from national and international political and economic conditions. Strategies developed from their common ethnic identity seemed too localized to be an adequate or complete response to the new and changing contexts that are becoming increasingly determinant in the daily life of average villager. In this situation, one can recognize how an emphasis on an Islamic identity can give a sense of power to the disenfranchised in the face of the hegemonic paradigms of Western colonialism and its implicit association with Christianity. This identity has a universalism on par with these other paradigms that ethnic identity is too particularistic to exhibit. With the increasing pressures of structural adjustment and economic recession, association with the alternative "Eastern" doctrine of Islam can also bring very visible economic returns in the form of Arab development projects. This disillusionment with the fruits of independence and a Western/secular culture is especially strong among the Muslim youth, who are an important factor in the recent rise of Islamicism (Coulon 56).

One can measure the legitimacy of the state through the people's reactions to it. An important gauge of incorporation is the degree to which the manifold activities people carry out daily occur in the civic realm. In most of Africa, people have at best mixed engagement with the states (Chazan 124). "Disengagement" can thus be seen as a popular response to state weakness. Islam can thus be conceptualized as, although certainly not a hegemonic force, a kind of parallel political and moral economy. Much in the same way that people withdraw into the parallel economy when the state ceases to be effective in providing an enabling environment for market trade, Islam has come to represent, in effect, almost a black market state. Christian Coulon explains how Islam appeals to the lower classes, the members of society who had to pay the cost of elite, bourgeois development rhetoric, and in effect represents an alternative popular political culture (Coulon 48).

This manifestation of Islam as a form of resistance to costly and ineffective statist policies originated first with civil society, and now that the elites are embracing Islam as well it is at least partially as a reaction to that activism, which threatens their legitimacy and which they must therefore attempt to capture and bureaucratize within the state apparatus.

Although the practice of Islam varies among different regions and ethnic groups, there are common set of rules given in the scriptures that are often used for governing and dispute resolution in the customary courts on the local level. Most village populations in Mali and Niger are at least somewhat ethnically heterogenous, even though ethnic groups tend to be concentrated in particular regions. The common law of Islam may help to relieve tensions in heterogeneous communities, because it presents a decentralized, legitimate avenue (accepted by all members of the Community regardless of their ethnic affiliation) for dispute resolution that the state certainly does not have the capacity to provide on the local level. According to Adamou Oumarou (1979), while on paper the Nigerien judicial system emphasizes citizens'

individual rights, the Koran plays a large role in the actual exercise of justice, particularly in communities smaller than the cercle level, where there is no infrastructure of support a member of the bureaucracy in residence and the Muslim leaders are the immediate authorities. It can be argued that dispute resolution at the village level is less an application of scriptural Koranic law than an exercise of the personal power of the traditional leaders. This is impossible to ascertain without detailed case studies, which I have been unable to find in the existing literatures. Either way, the presence of Islam and its representatives in most villages in Niger and Mali means that there is an institutionalized framework for dispute resolution that is viewed as legitimate regardless of ethnic affiliation.

#### CONCLUSION

The role of Islam in West Africa, and particularly its relationship to state formation and ethnic identification, has not been considered an important factor in most of the scholarly attempts to characterize the ways in which the heterogeneous populations in this region mobilize and compete for both social and political goals.

S. Bernus recognized that Islam, as a religion almost universally recognized in Niger, can act as a "glue, a kind of cement and a common denominator of the different ethnic groups that make up the Nigerien people, and thus a major element in Nigerien identity and one of the most effective motivators of national sentiment" (Triand 247).

Islam is indeed a powerful force in African society, and neglecting the ways in which it shapes identity and drives political mobilization demonstrates a serious flaw in the literature on state-society relations in West Africa.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although homogeneous in religion, Niger, Mali and Senegal are, as most other African countries, ethnically diverse. Mali is 50% Mande (Bambara, Malinke and Sarakole), 17% Peul, 12% Senufo and Bwa, 6% Songhai and 5% Touareg. Niger is 50% Hausa, 22% Zarma/Songhai, 8.5% Fulani (Peul), 8% Touareg, 4.3% Kanuri, 1.2% Arab and Toubou. Senegal is 36% Wolof, 17% Fulani, 17% Serer, 9% Toucouleur, 9% Diallo, 9% Mandigo (All figures from World Facts On File 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Happily, the literature on local or ethnic identifications is slowly becoming more reflective of reality as authors acknowledge its salience outside of the stereotypical "tribalism" of Africa, particularly with reference to the former Soviet Union and Central Europe.

<sup>3</sup> My thesis in this paper applies only to states where an absolute majority of the population is Muslim. In regions where there is a divide between Muslims and non-Muslims (a fault line which often coincides with ethnic divisions as well,) such as the Sudan or Nigeria, conflict is a huge problem. Interestingly, it is often these places that are the source of much of Sub-Saharan African Islamicist activity. There may be a correlation between this increased radicalism and the fact that in these areas Islam is perceived to be under attack from either a secular state or other non-Muslim groups.

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## Greece: A Study in Nationalism

By Maria A. Raptis

This analysis seeks to emphasize the constructedness of national identity and the functional nature of nationalism through a study of the Greek case. It is less ambitious than an attempt to derive a theory of the phenomenon of nationalism from the case of the Modern Greek State. Rather, the Greek case suggests that national identity is perpetuated in the context of international or domestic constraints, so that its particular rationale will be influenced by these constraints.

In the case of Greece, this manifests itself in the construction of national identity after the formation of the state and in keeping with the myth of classical continuity, an externally directed identity which provided justification for foreign intervention in the War of Independence and legitimacy of the newly emergent Modern Greek State. Furthermore, after the formation of the new Greek nation-state, the state was supremely instrumental in consolidating national identity through expansionist doctrine while national ideology simultaneously facilitated such political aims. The state employed this same type of nationalist rhetoric continually throughout its history, so that the case of Greece suggests that weak states are more likely to revert to nationalist goals as a mobilizing technique in times of vulnerability.

Kousoulas reduces four centuries of history to a mere two sentences in his history of the Modern Greek State, ostensibly because he seeks to limit his historical scope. Kousoulas' believes Modern Greeks are the direct ancestral link to Classical Greece. For Kousoulas, the contemporary Greeks are a people whose identity is rooted in antiquity. This is, in its most simple form, the myth of classical continuity upon which Modern Greek identity was created and upon which the Modern Greek State was built. It is the conception of Greek identity that persists throughout the history of the Modern Greek State and whose vestiges influence Greek national identity to this very day, both within and outside Greece.

However, Kousoulas' treatment assumes the existence of a coherent Greek nation before the formation of a state. Kousoulas perceives nationalism as an ever-present force, waiting for some optimal moment to assert itself. The circumstances surrounding the Greek movement for independence from the Ottoman Empire, if examined in a synoptic manner, expose Kousoulas' treatment as simplistic and false.

### HISTORICAL SETTING

Today, the Modern Greek State stands where Classical Greece once stood. Consequently, although this analysis in no way pretends to provide a thorough historical treatment, it is necessary to retreat to the distant past in order to gain some appreciation of the complexity of Greek identity. The Roman Empire extended its wings to include, among others, the Greek-speaking Peoples of the Balkans. The Empire was formally divided in 395 AD between the Latin-speaking western half and the Greek-speaking eastern half. Before the end of the century, a Greek patriarchate was established and based in Constantinople, with ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Greek east. By 380 AD, Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Empire, indicating the culmination of a gradual religious shift