



# TARİHTE ve GÜNÜMÜZDE SELEFİLİK

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## THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL ISLAM (SALAFISM) IN WEST AFRICA

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### Geography of Religion in Africa:



### Overview:

Africa is divided into five regional groupings: East, North, Central, Southern and West. West Africa comprises 15 countries (English, French and Portuguese speaking). Mauritania is the only Arabic speaking country in the region which is not part of Economic Community of West-African States (Ecowas).

The Sahel runs across most West African countries. The Sahel (Bilad al Sudan) is a semi-arid strip ecosystem. It stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea over 5000 km long and 1000 kilometres wide from north to south. The population of the Sahel (mostly farmers and livestock owners) is estimated at 250 million of which 70% are under 30 years of age. For the last

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century, the Sahel has been experiencing a combination of political upheavals, socio-economic hardship and environmental stress. As a result, the area faces tremendous challenges:

- ✓ Global warming and climate change
- ✓ Increased desertification and reduced resilience
- ✓ Ungoverned spaces and general poverty
- ✓ Political, economic, and social instability
- ✓ Fierce competition for access to land, water and grazing land
- ✓ Increasing number of failed or collapsing states
- ✓ Food and water stress
- ✓ Violent uprisings

#### Multiplicity and Interdependence of Global Security Factors:



#### Religion as Part of the Cultural Set up:

The three main religious traditions:

- ✓ Islam mainly Sunnî
- ✓ Christianity
- ✓ Traditional African religions

Traditional African religions receive little official recognition from governments (except Benin). They are non-proselytizing. There is practically no religious conflict in traditional African religions.

Since the 1930s, the religious landscape in West Africa has been changing dramatically. During the last century, Islam and Christianity have

attracted new followers and they have transformed, which is to say become even more complex, over time and in the region.

Islam means "*Submission*", Muslim means "*one who submits to God.*" So how has extremism infected Islam? To understand this we must have a clear background of the history and makeup of the religion.

#### **Faith-Religion and Ideology:**

There can be no religion without a faith neither a faith without a religion:

Wahhabism: In 18<sup>th</sup> century, Muhammad Ibn Abd-Alwahhab (rigorous and puritanical reading of the Quran).

Salafism was born in under Jamal Al Din Al Afghani (Iranian) (1837-1897). Al Afghani's companions are an Egyptian (Hanafi) scholar Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida (Syrian).

✓ Rebirth (returning to traditions before the Mazahib) of the Salaaf Al Salih (forefathers of Islam)

✓ Advocate the Caliphate

Rashid Rida was instrumental in reconciling the Wahhabis (Kingdom) and Salafist (Caliphate) theses. The two movements convert to Hanbalism. Hanbalism, a strict teaching of Islam, has gained and attracted a lot of supporters.

The Muslim Brotherhood, which was created by Hassan Al Banna in 1928, is more political than religious. Sayyid Qutub was instrumental in transforming the Muslim Brotherhood's thesis (political) into a more violent philosophy.

Wahabi doctrine (Al Muwahidun) was preoccupied with extirpating bida and shirks and was aggressively hostile to turuq and the zawaya.

#### **The Origin of Salafism:**

The origins of the Salafiyya movement can be traced from 1880 to the 1930s. The movement reached North Africa in the 1920s. The progress of the

Salafists eclipsed the region's native tradition of Malikism and its suppression by Wahhabi doctrines.

The rise of the Islamist movement in 1981-82 was actively facilitated by political leadership in West Africa, which made enormous mistakes in their reading of the political situation. By 1990, the term Salafiyya no longer indicated disciples of Abduh and Rida so much as the tendency to openly orient towards and link to Wahhabism

The ideological construction of extremism goes through several stages:

- ✓ Salafi/Jihadi ideology
- ✓ Speech (opinion leaders)
- ✓ Mechanisms for increasing violence
- ✓ Salafists have popularized hate speech in order to demonize the "other" and to make an enemy of him: democracy is a threat to the divine religious order; Sufism is a religious danger, etc.

✓ Typology of the enemy:

- The near enemy
- The global rival
- The intimate enemy
- The border enemy
- The hidden enemy (conspiracy and intelligence theories)

✓ The enemy of evil against good: The other is evil and has no right to exist

✓ The triumph of religion on earth (the suicidal nature of certain religious elements)

✓ Salafism, like extremism, refuses differences of opinion. To uphold its religious point of view, the tenants of Salafism element may have to resort to indiscriminate violence (Jihad).

#### **Factors and Actors of Risks in West Africa:**

Multiple global challenges in a rapidly changing world confront West Africa. No part of the globe suffers more from global warming; no popula-

tion is more at risk from rising food and energy prices; and Africans are severely affected by the inequities of the current international trading system. At the same time, Africans must face the consequences of mis-governance, corruption, interstate and intra-state conflicts of the post- Cold War era, failed or failing states.

While addressing the crises of today in Africa, there is an urgent need to look into the future. By 2050 there will be an estimated 1.9 billion people on the continent.

Many if not all of the most critical challenges to human and international security today have particular relevance to the African continent. Africa's future will be directly affected by the on-going international debates over climate change and food insecurity.

How to respond to increased population pressures and the demands of international migration; and over the global impact of the health pandemics that have taken an enormous economic as well as human toll on the continent.

#### **Panorama of Islam in West Africa:**

Islam was brought to West Africa as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century by Arab merchants, Tuaregs etc. Islamic politics and law emerged as important factor in the region (Usman Dan Fodio in Sokoto, Northern Nigeria; Cheikh Omar Tall in Niore, the intellectual city of Timbuktu in Mali etc.).

Sunnî (80%) and Shi'ite (16%) are endemic to the sub-region. The third branch of Islam (Khawarij) has not attracted many African. Islam has always been practiced in a rather moderate, tolerant form, with considerable leeway given to practitioners of Islam mixed with traditional African religions. Africa's 450 million Muslim populations are predominantly Sunnî (75-80%). Sufi Tariqa is the oldest and most widespread Islamic organization. Tijania, Mouridisme (only in Senegal) and Qadiryyia brotherhood are the most influential tariqas in West Africa.

The Salafi/Wahhabi (Sunnî) presence could be traced back, in history, to 1900. Al Afgani's Salafi ideology (Islam of the origin) is becoming the

Islam of the young and educated African (Islam Al Ulema) as compared to the Sufism which has been described as the Islam of the old (Islam Al Zaywiya).

In many countries two strains of Islamic practice are evident:

- ✓ One steeped in mystical, subjective Sufi practice
- ✓ The other adhering to stricter, Wahhabi-inspired fundamentalism

Takfiri wa Al Hijra Jihadism (Chukri Mustafa in 1971) which is an offshoot of the Muslim Brothers was exported to North Africa and then, progressively, to the Sahel in various forms.

The concept of political and radical Islam is recent. It is also new to the African population.

#### The Arc of Islam in Africa:



#### West Africa and the Sufi Order

The last few years have seen a shifting trend toward Salafism. Sufism has come under pressure from Salafis and Wahhabis, who seek the "purification" of Islam through a return to the "uncorrupted" form that they believed was practiced in the time of the prophet Muhammad and his companions.

*Main Sufi Orders in West Africa:*

- ✓ Senegal: Qadiriyya, Mouridisme, Tijaniyya-Niassiyya; Layenne
- ✓ Mauritania: Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya
- ✓ Mali: Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya
- ✓ Niger: Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya
- ✓ Nigeria: Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya, Shadhiliyya
- ✓ Burkina-Faso: Tijaniyya, Ahamadiya

Sufism is the predominant form of Islam practiced in Chad where is geographically located in the Sahel. The most widely propagated tariqa (Sufi order) in West Africa is the Tijaniyya founded by Ahmed Tijiani. Other important tariqas are the Qadiriyya, the Shaziriyya, the Samaniyya, the Khatimiyya

**Emerging Trend of Political Islam:**

The growth of radical Islam in West Africa in recent decades has manifested itself in the spread of Salafi and Wahhabi ideologies. The development of radical Islam is due to the confluence of a number of socio-political factors, some of them at work in the Muslim world at large and others specific to the West African region.

*In the External Categories are the Following:*

- ✓ The effects of the worldwide Islamic revival of the last several decades
- ✓ The influence of international Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood
- ✓ The impact of the Islamic revolution in many Arab countries
- ✓ The spread of international radical Islamist networks

Internal dynamics that contributed to the growth of radical Islamism included; the growth of domestic Islamist movements; Muslim reaction to perceived threats to Islam, Christian missionary activity in particular.



The political Islam in Salafiyya Jihadiyya portrays the Sufi order as being apolitical religious quietism and mysticism or a politically subaltern accommodation to Western hegemony and its local post-nationalist relays, as practiced by the more prominent Western African Turuq.

#### **Groups Affiliated to Salafism or Political Islam in Africa:**

**AQIM:** *Al Qaeda* (AQ) is a politico-religious group originated in the 1990s. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI in 2006) is a successor of the Front Islamic de Salut (FIS), Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the offshoot of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). In September 2006, The GDPC joined forces with Al Qaeda. AQMI's objectives is to topple the secular government and to replace it by a *theocratic state*.

**Al-Shabab** Mujahideen is associated with Salafism-Wahhabism (2008) doctrine. It is an Al Qaeda affiliated/aligned Salafist organization. It is the arm wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU in 1990s). The fragmented ICU becomes Al-Shabab (youth). It is akin to the form of a *theocratic state*. It became an allied of the AQ in 2008; Al-Shabab began as the militant remnant of a previous Somali Islamist organization, Al-Itihaad Al-Islamiya (AIAI).

**Boko-Haram** in Northern Nigeria is an Islamic evangelization movement (2000s). *Yussifia* or Boko-Haram is now referred to as the Jamaat Ahl-i Sunna li Al-Dawa wa Al-Jihad. BH originated from Izala, a Salafi movement (Al Bidda wa Ikha Al Sunnah was first introduced in 1960 in Northern State of Nigeria). *Ansaru* is a breakaway movement from BH but with the same ideology and strategy. Under the shadow of BH original, there are now 5 movements in Nigeria.

**Ançar El Dine** in Northern Mali based tribal affiliation (Arab). Ançar Eldine is a *subsidiary of AQIM* whose stated objective is to apply Sharia in Mali, a predominantly Muslim country and to weed of the old fashion Islam from what is considered "Bid'a " and other blameable practices of the Sufi order.

**MOUJAO** is a multi-ethnic *Salafi-Jihadi* movement in Northern Mali. Its main constituency is the population in the North of Mali.

*Jamaat Tawhid Wal Jihad Fi Garbi Afriqiya*: “Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa“. A break away movement, it defected from AQIM. For this group, there is no difference between an “original infidel and apostate infidel“.

#### **The Rise of Political Islam in West Africa:**

Islamic faith is one of the most horizontal identities (including races, class and location of origin) that cut across the social fabric in West Africa.

West African recognizes two distinct authorities: traditional and religious leaders whose responsibilities in the conduct of the community affairs overlapped to the extent that Islam was essentially assimilated into tribal or clan culture. This symbiotic relationship (traditional and religious order) has persisted throughout the history and until recently (Salafi considered this as a Bid’a). West African follows the teachings of various Islamic mystics (Chieks, Awliya) and scholars have no overt political agenda and tend towards peaceful co-existence with secular political authorities.

Political Islam did not emerge in West Africa until the late 1960s when African students studying abroad and employment seekers in the Middle East were exposed to the teachings and new ideologies: Salafiyya (1837-1897), Wahhabia (1703/4-1797) etc. Islamism, Jihadist and Political Islam: the triangle formed by these three concepts and the complex and changeable realities to which they refer that is at the centre of political debate in and about West Africa today. The role of political Islam is well-known, if not necessarily well understood. The involvement of Salafism in terrorist networks – whether linked to Al Qaeda or not – has recently been underlined by the hostage taking and kidnapping for ransom (Mali, Niger and Nigeria have suffered much from terrorism over the last twelve years). The challenge of radicalization and violent extremism are:

- ✓ Extremism is the reject and refusal of the difference
- ✓ Radicalism is extremism compounded by violence

Salafism is based on reforming individuals and communities on the basis of returning to the pure Islam of the Qur’an and prophetic Sunna.

### A Complex Religious Architecture: Salafism in West Africa:

Salafists believe that the trajectory of the Islamic communities after the pious Salaf moved rather into diverse forms of polytheism (shirk), reprehensible innovation (bid'a), and superstition (khurafa). Thus, neglecting 'the purist' interpretation of Islam, that of Al Salaf Al Salih, is tantamount to neglecting Islam itself. There is particularly one distinctive wing of the Salafiyya, the so called Salafiyya Jihadiyya or "warrior Salafiyya" that is associated with anti-western rhetoric and violence as a primary strategy. The three other forms of Salafiyya ("ilmiya", "harakiya" and "cyber") are focused on moral issues.

- ✓ Salafiyya Ilmiya (scholarly or scientific)
- ✓ Salafiyya Harakiya (movement)
- ✓ Cyber Salafiyya (IT related)

The Islamic World (*Dar Al Islam*) was clearly distinct from the non-Islamic world (*Dar Al Harb*), within Dar Al Islam, *Sunnî Islam* was clearly distinct from *Shi'ite Islam* and both were also clearly distinguished from other variants of Islam, notably *Ibadism* or *Kharejism*, not mention derived sects such as the *Ismailis*, *Ahmadiyya* etc. Third, *Sunnî Islam* itself was internally structured and ordered by:

- ✓ The formal difference between the four recognized rites or schools of law (*Madahib*, its single is *Madhab*): *Hanafi*, *Hanbali*, *Maliki* and *Shafi'i*
- ✓ The informal dichotomy between the spiritualist Islam of the doctors of Islamic learning and the gnostic or mystical Islam of the Sufi orders

'Islamism' is Islam in political rather than religious mode: "Islamist movements" are those with Islamic ideological references pursuing primarily political objectives, and "Islamist" and "Islamic political" are essentially synonymous. "Islamic" is a more general expression: usually referring to Islam in religious rather than political mode but capable, depending on the context, of embracing both (e.g. references in the text to "Islamic activism").

### **Fundamentalism or Political Islam:**

The Salafiyya movement today is fundamentalist and very conservative. It is also disinclined to acknowledge or attach value to national identities and emphasizes instead the supranational Islamic identity and community.

For the mainstream of the movement, dominated by religious scholars (*ulama*) and so sometimes called the Salafiyya "*ilmiyya*" (the "*scholarly*" or "*scientific*" Salafiyya), the impulse to violence is rooted in its ambition to dictate, control and correct individual behaviour, and takes the form of occasional punitive actions against individuals or groups regarded as "*bad Muslims*".

Recourse to violence as a primary strategy is the defining characteristic of the Salafiyya movement known as the Salafiyya Jihadiyya (the "*fighting*" or "*warrior*" Salafiyya). The unsettling influence of radical Islam in West Africa is potentially exacerbated by a couple of other related factors:

- ✓ The region is home to a substantial number of Muslims most of whom are extremely poor and live under autocratic states.
- ✓ The environmental degradation as consequences and reasons that trigger poverty in rural areas

These facts prompted one African leader to suggest that if belief and ideology are the potential seed of radicalism, then poverty is the fertilizer. Unfortunately poverty (fertilizer) is everywhere in West Africa. The expansion of Islamic political activism in the West Africa occurred in the context of poverty and autocratic governments which leave rooms for large ungoverned areas.

### **Resort to Extremism:**

The factors favouring the emergence of Salafism and political Islam are political, socio-economic and cultural identity. One of the most important socio-economic factors has been, in recent years, the imposition to governments in *West Africa of Structural Adjustment Programs* (SAP in the

1980s). By emasculating state capacities, structural adjustment provided a windfall of opportunities for political Islamic movements. As a result of painful macroeconomic reforms, state capacity declined and services were increasingly restricted to urban middle class and elite areas. Income distribution polarized. The political and moral vacuum opened up great opportunities that were seized by religious activists including the Salafist or Political Islamist.

In general, the resurgence of religious devotion and the attraction to Salafism can be traced to several events:

✓ A large youth population (65% of the population are under 25 years of age)

✓ Annually, universities in the sub-region train large number of graduates without adequate provision for job to absorb them. In Nigerian alone, 4 million young people enter the job market every year of which less than 10% can be employed. Virtual economy (oil and mineral) has triggered growth without employment

✓ Employment for the 15-24 age brackets has remained largely stagnant while this group is increasing in size. Everything is dark and life has no meaning.

Political Islam portrays itself as an alternative to the secular state, also a new driving cultural and political order for West African.

#### **Conclusion:**

Radical Islam has a footprint in West Africa, but not one as pronounced and deep as in other parts of the continent. Of most significance are the weaknesses of many regimes in this area, their inability to monitor events in remote regions, and the vulnerability of impoverished populations to proselytizing and recruitment by radical Muslim elements affiliated with or drawing inspiration from Al Qaeda.

Given the importance of Nigeria to international security interests and the effect on Nigeria of developments in other countries of the region, West Africa certainly warrants continuous monitoring.

During the next decade, non-state actors will be the primary security threat to the stability of the Sahel. The Sahel is increasingly trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, illiteracy and environmental degradation. Non-state actors such as *Salafism (Salafiyya Jihadiyya)* do not observe national boundaries. Worst, they are likely to continue to grow in strength and lethality. Recent security heightened events in Northern Mali is a clear indication of threats facing the region (West Africa).

Sufi dominated area; West Africa has been drifting into the violent brand of Salafiyya (Takfir wa Al Hijra). The Salafiyya call for social justice and the eradication of corruption is too appealing to many. In the Sahel, some corners of the country are lacking strong central authority. Salafism in Political Islam emerged as a new political- military force in all ungoverned areas (rural and urban alike). In the conflict torn Sahel, many state functions that are essential for a good business environment such as the judiciary system, infrastructures, development etc. are compromised. There is an urgent need for regional and international cooperation to address the problem both vertically and horizontally.

#### **The Way Forward:**

The problem facing West Africa is neither the faith (God only knows what is in our heart) nor the religion (Islam which is a divine construction). The trouble is the particular ideology. Political Islam is a human project based in preconceived ideas. In general, Ideologies prosper when there is a general discontent among the people.

Unfortunately, the Sahel is home to the most impoverished people on earth. 60% of the population live in absolute poverty with less than USD 1 per day/person, lacking food, health, education even human rights. For the people in the area, poverty is perceived as an injustice and humiliation that needed to be rooted out. Political Islam, under the banner, of the religion is sought to be the answer. Political Islam (Salafiyya Jihadiyya) is gaining numerous constituents. Takfir wa Al Hijra (Dar Al Islam, Kufr, Harb and Shada) is emerging as a threat to stability and secular states.

West Africa can break up the trap of poverty and embark on sustained stability:

- ✓ Reducing horizontal inequalities and reducing grievances
- ✓ Tackling the imbalance between a fast growing population (driven by high fertility rate) and diminishing natural resources (depletion)
- ✓ Creating Economic prospect

The ulemas and doctors of Theology have the responsibility to teach the true Islam, a religion of the middle way, that rejects extremism (*Tataruf*) and intolerance (*Tachaddud*). But Ulema's action alone may not be enough to address West Africa's structural problems that are daily quest for survival, social injustice, corruption, autocratic government etc.

The solution to Political Islam in West Africa should be approached from a holistic view point in order to find a durable socio-economic and socio-cultural solution for Muslim in West Africa and the Sahel. The complex ethno-religious landscape in West Africa, the characteristics of the West African environment that have produced failed or weak states susceptible to exploitation by extremist groups, and the factors that have contributed to the emergence of these groups.

To date, Political Islam militants have not enjoyed much success in the urban centres of Niger, Chad, Mali, and Mauritania. However, given the weakness of the governments and the general poverty of the region, these are fertile fields for the cultivation of radical Islam. Political Islam promised the poor that their model of governance will alleviate their misery.

Africa's journey to stability and prosperity depends very much on a combination of socio-economic, cultural and intricate political factors. Hence, there is no easy solution but at least there is a way out. Thus we should start by clearly defining what Islam (religion) is and what is ideology and dogmas in the West African context hijacked by events?

Ideology and dogmas are human projects and constructions. Let's us work on these two concepts, in order to unite the Umma and avoid diverting away from the teachings of our Prophet (PBUH) and his legacy.