

Anthropology-african religions

Religion



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The roots of modern day Islam were sown a couple of centuries ago when the once proud Muslim empire began to be overwhelmed by expansionist movements dominated by European colonialists.

This has led to a cultural turmoil in Muslim world who once used to live at the pinnacle of glory saw its silent burial with the meek subjugation of the Islamic Caliphate at the hands of mighty British army in early twentieth century. While a sizable section of the Muslims chose to follow the path shown by great statesman like Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, many continued to be festered by the wounds of humiliation.

Now Muslims in many countries are looking to reassert themselves after a long period of humiliation and oppression, sometimes at the hands of foreigners and sometimes at the hands of their own leaders. Contrary to popular belief, Muslims are not a monolithic group, nor there is any centralized authority within Islam.

The Islamic civilization from its birth has gone through debates and counter debates. Except for the Shahadah (God is one and Mohammad is his messenger) and the five mandatory duties (Hajj, Zakat, Roza, Namaz and Shahadah) everything else in Islam has been subjected to deep scrutiny and analysis with the result that many schools of thoughts kept appearing and disappearing.

That is why contradictions are evident to people both inside and outside the Muslim community. The orientalist, the conventional authorities on Islam, have been accused of being essentialist and insensitive to the change, negotiation, development, and diversity that characterizes lived Islam.

Some scholars, primarily anthropologists, have responded to the tendency to essentialize by giving up the idea of conceptualizing one "Islam" and instead have focused their inquiry on what they call various "local Islams." Others have focused on sociological or political-economic approaches in explaining the modern forms of political and social activism among Muslims to the exclusion of "scriptural" Islam from their analysis. (Anjum O., 2007)

Islam was brought to Sub-Saharan Africa in the first place via the trade routes from the Arab countries and North Africa. The African Muslims have always maintained quite close links with the Arab world, from which a number of reformers came.

But Islamisation was essentially carried out by Africans themselves, who shared the same life, spoke the same language, lived in the same cultural world entirely. There is no doubt that, for African Muslims, «Africanity» and Islam are in no way opposed. For them Islam is not an imported religion.

For many, abandoning the Muslim religion is equivalent to the rejection of all their family and tribal traditions, so intermingled are the two socio-religious universes. One must conclude that Islam, in its traditional African form, is entirely a part of the African cultural heritage and thus an African reality. The long cohabitation of Islam with traditional African religion has also had an effect at the cultural level.

The African languages are in general languages with a concrete vocabulary, rather limited in the expression of more abstract realities or more developed reflections. With the Arabic language Islam has been able to fill a gap. Many African peoples, some scarcely touched by Islam, have borrowed a complete

abstract, and especially religious, vocabulary from Arabic, with no more than the changes proper to the structure of each language.

The relative success of Islam may be related to its compatibility with many aspects of Africanculture--for example, plural marriage for men, which was opposed by Christian missionaries. Nonetheless, Islam was also embraced because it provided symbolic identification with successful traders and travelers throughout the world, and it was seen as an alternative to European religion.

Its agents were black, and it preached on behalf of those who lacked the trappings of Western civilization. These adaptations of local practices by the Islamists is not only unique in Côte d'Ivoire, it has happened world over and plays an important role in shaping the thoughts and mind processes of the Muslims.