

MAMBO !

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East African Muslims and the 11th September crisis

In the three East-African countries, national politics to a large extent influenced the reaction of Muslims to the events of September 11th. For Muslims, the search for legitimacy and political representation is paramount. In view of these needs, we cannot help but recognise the opportunism of the country states which used September 11th as an excuse to reinforce oppression, towards Muslim minorities in particular.

East African Muslims traditionally look to the Arab-Muslim world for guidance. However, since the 1990s, they have had their eyes turned to the frontiers of Asia, where the Taliban seem to prosper. In this regard, the American invasion of Afghanistan could merely inspire politico-religious activity, and could thus be an opportunity to evaluate the political influence of Islamic militancy.

East-African Muslims reacted in a rather moderate manner. From this point of view, the diagnosis made by F. Constantin at the beginning of the 1990s is still valid today. *“Kenyan and Tanzanian Muslims are very aware and proud of their religious identity. However, they do not seem ready to mobilise at community level, despite being capable of having a short-term stronghold in political situations¹.”* This statement is also valid for Uganda where the Uganda Revolutionary Islamic Party was short-

lived in a country where there is no real pluri-partyism, and where fundamentalist dynamics were curtailed by a systematic police persecution. Further to the east, the Islamic Party of Kenya organised outstanding demonstrations and succeeded in getting some MPs elected. But this semi-clandestine movement has never been really able to participate in electoral democracy. In Tanzania, the authorities banned BALUKTA (Association of Readers of the Koran) which seemed to be the most closely linked to Islamic militancy. Since then, the Civic United Front (CUF) has become the frontline opposition political party. It has a large Muslim following but enhances a socio-democratic Islam rather than fundamentalism. In short, the transition to politics failed considerably on the part of East-African Muslims, a majority of whom have remained mired in a culture of

submission. This leads them to access resources of power through patronage networks. From then on, the extent of Muslim political activity after September 11th could only be limited. As a matter of fact, the country states have displayed more opportunism as they took advantage of the crisis to pass emergency legislation (Uganda) and to negotiate agreements with Muslim communities from a position of strength (Tanzania).

Uganda

Muslims are a small minority in Uganda, amounting to just about 7% of the population. It is also the only country in East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda) where certain Muslim groups (the Tablighs) had direct proven links with some components of Afghanistan and Sudanese fundamentalism. However, the reaction of the Ugandan Umma, faced with American intervention in

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Afghanistan was quite discreet—a few fainthearted declarations and no street protests. But this silence is deafening and it indicates both the efficiency of a police state which firmly gags radical Muslim groups, and the political impotence of Ugandan Muslims. Indeed, the recently acquired Muslim unity under State guardianship poorly masks the persistence of deep splits. In this regard, the September 11th crisis deepens inter-community divisions and disputes, as the debate cannot be directly handled at a political level.

Muslim communities under high police surveillance

The Ugandan state is a regime whose legitimacy is questioned by several guerrilla groups, mainly the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the North-East, and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the West of the country. The latter movement was for some time controlled by fundamentalist Muslims. Indeed, the ADF are a result of the unlikely convergence of two forces. The first comprises the Rwenzururu guerrilla which incarnates the self-determination will of the Baamba and the Bakonzo. These two groups considered themselves marginalised first within the Toro kingdom founded at the end of the 19th Century, and then by the post-colonial Ugandan state. At the end of the 1980s, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) progressively dismantled the Rwenzori secessionist elite. Nevertheless, the guerrilla movement did not die out as it was reactivated in the mid 1990s by factions of a Muslim group in Kampala, the Tabligh Youth

Movement, which was persecuted by the authorities. In 1991, the Tablighs opposed the restitution of the Aga Khan's wealth that had been nationalised by Amin in 1972. Additionally, they did not recognise the authority of the newly elected Mufti. This led to antagonisms with the forces of law and order. Several people were killed and numerous Tablighs arrested. Some fled and others went underground in the Rwenzori Mountains after having undergone training in Afghan military camps.

For several years, the ADF gravely destabilised the West of the country (particularly the districts of Bundibugyo and Kasese): several hundred dead, almost 1500 children abducted, and about 17,5000 people displaced, most of whom are living in camps². For a long time, the ADF forces displayed the lack of strength of the Ugandan army, but from October 1999, large-scale military operations seriously wore down the troublesome behaviour of the guerrillas. This did not prevent attacks on the refugee camps (for the displaced) of Kibota in February 2001. The main town of the district of Kasese was seriously attacked in March, resulting in fifteen dead and great destruction. Even worse, the bomb attack of 7th July on Jinja unleashed fears that the ADF had not denounced their strategy of urban terrorism (Kampala was attacked several times). Indeed, a series of arrests dismantled the leadership of the ADF. Numerous militants also sought to benefit from amnesty laws. In short, police and military pressure strongly confined guerrillas who could no longer rely on financing from the

Congolese and Sudanese governments.

In Kampala and in the south of the country, the 1992 crisis sharply divided the Tablighs. Under police pressure, a restrained elite took office. Therefore, through the 1993 Mbarara Unity Conference, the rulers accepted recognition of the leadership of the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council and renounced the use of violence. In the same year, another faction of the Tabligh founded the Islamic Revolutionary Party (IRP). But this little brother of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) collided with the rejection of political pluralism and the disinterest of many Muslims in a religious party. Under these conditions, Ugandan fundamentalism has kept a low profile in the political arena. Thus, in October 2001, the Tablighs condemned the American raids on the Afghan regime. They perceive it as another form of terrorism, but await authorisation from the Mufti to organise a demonstration.

Another organisation of young Muslims, the Uganda Muslim Youth Assembly (UMYA), usually moderate by nature (having never been involved in the traditional frictions within the UMSC elite), condemned the war by the Americans. Their leader, Imam Kasozi assesses that September 11th will be a pretext for increased police surveillance on the entire Muslim elite. It is true that the Uganda Umma maintains a deep historical feeling of marginalisation and persecution since the end of the 19th Century. And this paranoia can easily be rekindled. By the end of 2001, rumours were flying around that Sheikh Abdul Karim Sentamu of the Tabligh movement

fled to the UK after having undergone police harassment severally. In November, 22 out of 37 Tabligh accused after the crisis of 1992 were released. But the charges against the others appear to be flimsy. Certain female suspects claim to have been incarcerated due to their refusal to give in to sexual harassment from the police. Thus, some Muslims consider themselves second class citizens who could easily be prey to the Terrorism Bill. Indeed, the government used the events of September 11th to put forward a specific legislation giving the forces of law and order sweeping powers to arrest. Many MPs see this as Museveni's last weapon to eradicate opposition.

In view of these fears, the other representatives of Muslim institutions attempt to reassure their co-clerics without scaring the powers that be.

Muslim institutions attempting to preserve the appearance a fragile unity

Ugandans are a divided people and Muslims are part of these divisions. Muslims themselves have never been a homogenous group. Historically, the entry of Islam in the country happened in two zones—the north (Alur, Kakwa and Nubia), where they are of the Malakite orientation. They are usually associated with weapons-related professions and with the excesses of Amin's era. The Muslims from the south (Buganda, Busoga, Ankole) are mostly Shafi'ites, and are well integrated in business enterprises (taxi drivers etc.) In addition, these communities are divided according to criteria of class, education, ethnic identity and political party. This translates into increased in-fighting,

and as a result, the leadership of the UMSC is never accepted by all factions.

However, the recent election of Sheikh Shaban Mubajie as Mufti of Uganda seems to equally satisfy the elite Muslims and the powers that be. Nevertheless, the American intervention in a Muslim country has weakened his authority. He condemned the strategy of the Americans which affected many innocent citizens but he did not deem necessary any street protests like those organised in Kenya and Tanzania. Additionally, he announced that all Ugandan Muslims should support President Museveni in his fight against terrorism.

The message of the Mufti was not at any time contested in this country of East Africa where Muslim fundamentalism appears to be best rooted. But fundamentalism was heavily persecuted in the 1990s. It was enough to alienate them from any action that could be judged political. Additionally, Uganda is the one country in the region where the police arrested the highest number of suspects after the events of 11th September³. As far as the Tablighs are concerned, they did not renounce their vocation of reforming the community (Muslim community and society at large). The September crisis was an opportunity to increase the span of their activities and to publicise themselves, but only on topics without a direct link to terrorism. The Tablighs therefore denounced a public school which refused to guarantee that it would provide pork-free food to its Muslim students. They demanded that the validity of Muslim law be recognised in certain domains of civil

law (as in both Kenya and Tanzania). But most strikingly, in November, they invaded the building site of the Old Kampala mosque. This action is reminiscent of attacks of the 1980s, aimed at forcibly taking control of mosques. This action touched on a raw nerve. The construction of this great mosque was interrupted during Amin's era. Since then, it has remained as a symbol of the corruption of the Muslim elite who conscientiously diverted large sums of money destined to complete the work. In 2001, Libya took it upon itself to fund the continuation of the construction work, but in doing so, it provoked a sequence of divisions within the Ugandan Umma (and not only between the pro-Saudis and the pro-Libyans). The subject is particularly sensitive and during the speech at the end of Ramadhan at State House, the Mufti denounced the factions opposed to the continuation of the work. He also asked for an equal share of the national cake. On his part, President Museveni underlined the necessity of not inflaming a situation that threatens the particularly delicate Muslim unity. The Muslims are clearly called on to lay their differences to rest. In fact, the Anglican clergy has helped to recompose a common front.

The debate on Ugandan membership to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC)—a chance to reformulate Muslim unity

In mid-February 2002, the Anglican bishops were said to be worried by Uganda's membership to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, whereas Uganda is supposed to be a secular State. But in actual fact, in 1974, while Uganda was

under the rule of President Idi Amin, it entered the Muslim structure.

The Anglican prelate set the cat among the pigeons as the church made the headlines for several weeks. Once again, the elite of a diocese, this time that of the Muhabura (extreme south-west of the country), contested the election of the new bishop. The increase in number of dioceses did not mitigate the effects of the serious disintegration of the community of believers. Additionally, the clergy are generally of a low education level, and their management of parish affairs is authoritarian. This does not provoke respect from the believers. In the opinion of the best specialists, the Anglican institution is in poor health. Nevertheless, not only its crises but also its statements and spiritual state still receive great media attention. This is because a vast majority of the political and economical elite belong to this church.

Under these conditions, the opinion of the bishops on Uganda's membership to the OIC incited fast and furious responses. The Minister for Foreign Affairs reiterated that Uganda was only in the OIC because it had an obvious economic interest in it (access to the funds of the Islamic Development Bank). Muslim leaders took advantage of the Idd Aduha ceremonies to present a common front, accusing the bishops of threatening the unity of the country. They also emphasised that the aid that Muslim donors gave did not benefit only the believers. In short, Islam participates in the development of the whole country.

Kenya

On the 29th of September, President

Moi led a demonstration against terrorism, going to the site of the former American Embassy, which was pulled down after a bomb attack in 1998. The demonstration ended at the Kenyatta Conference Centre, where the headquarters of the ruling party are based. Far from confining the fight against terrorism to diplomatic or police territory, he brought it down to street level. This original approach not only explains the position of several Muslim organisations, but also that of other sectors of the civil and political society. They all claim to support national unity against American action (in Afghanistan, in Kenya and potentially in the neighbouring Somalia). This is in a situation of a heavily criticised, barely legitimate and ending regime.

Lesser citizens in the eyes of a corrupt State

Muslims in Kenya are a small minority: approximately 8% of the population according to credible valuations despite the fact that partisan observers give more ambitious figures (between 30–50%). Muslims are concentrated in two zones: the Coast and the North-East of the country. These two regions barely benefited from colonial development and during independence, they displayed an impulse towards self-determination. Examples are the Mwambao movement among the Swahili and the Shifta war of the Somali. Since then, the country's ruling elite has been mostly Christian, even though in the 1990s, President Moi granted Muslims a better portion of the political cake. As a whole, Muslims once more felt deeply excluded from national

dynamics. From the beginning of the 1970s, some activism was seen, aimed at catching up with the Christians. This happened notably through the development of modern schools, by lobbying in order to adjust legislation to Muslim principles, and through preaching campaigns (*Dawa*—Call) in order to convert. Nevertheless, members of these communities consider themselves as persecuted. The actions of some governing bodies following 11th September can easily add to this complex.

From the end of September, the Safina party which has several Somali officials accused the government of harassing Muslims and fleecing them⁴. As a matter of fact, identity checks increased at the Coast and in Muslim residential areas in Nairobi. This is in a context where they already feel discriminated against by the governing bodies. During the first quarter of 2001, several demonstrations were aimed at denouncing practices considered unfair on the registration of births (and thus the allocation of nationality) and in the distribution of identity cards.

At the beginning of November, a wave of arrests swept over the Coast. About 50 people were taken into police custody, and six among them transferred to Nairobi. This provoked strong reactions within Muslim circles. The families of the suspects camped in front of the office of Najib Balala, the head of the Chamber of Commerce of Mombasa, former mayor of the town. Balala, a popular and soft-spoken politician, denounced the uncouth behaviour of the police and their partisan nature. The Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, the Islamic Party of Kenya, Muslims

for Human Rights and Safina cited persecutions and demanded that these arrests be brought to an end. The police mainly targeted business men, some of whom were accused of drug-trafficking. In this manner, they could easily hold them at ransom. A politician from the Democratic Party was also arrested more for local politics than for reason of involvement in terrorist networks. The two Muslim ministers endured great pressure from their fellow Muslims to end this persecution by unbelievers (the police are predominantly Christian, originating from the mainland). But these politicians are only second fiddle to the leaders of the country, and some analysts suggest that power is only in a relative control of the forces of law and order in the Coastal region. This is particularly so after the Likoni massacres in 1997. Justice was also called upon, and a Mombasa judge was of the opinion that the accused were not liable for extradition.

In December, it was the Somali community that were the target of police action. Eighteen people were arrested in Mandera among them an imam who, unluckily, happened to have the same name as a suspect wanted by the Americans. This blunder provoked the reaction of five Muslim organisations, and that of an MP, Faraah Maalim, who saw this as additional proof of a campaign to intimidate the community. A demonstration degenerated into violence and some Muslim youth burnt down a church along with other buildings which were symbols of the Western world. Sheikh Ahmed Hassan Murzal was released after four days of detention.

The forces of law and order erred in their anti-terrorist action when they did not take advantage of the prevailing circumstances to engage in their dubious business. Nevertheless, the number of arrests is still less than that of Uganda. The passionate reaction of the Muslims can be partly explained by the political conditions which render certain topics particularly attractive.

American imperialism in East Africa as a threat to Kenya's sovereignty

The very Christian President Moi has always accorded great importance to the religious and moral dimension of his actions. He belongs to the Africa Inland Church, a Pentecostal Church of American origin, established in Kenya a long time ago. Even more, he is "saved". The "saved" are often among the few Christians who are hostile to Islam. Note that in Kenya, the Pentecostal press did not use the 11th September crisis to attack Muslims. Similarly, the anti-terrorist zeal of President Moi is perceived by some as excessively Christian, and pro-American.

At the beginning of October, the secretary-general of the conservative Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) criticised the fact that FBI officers interrogated seven Muslims in Lamu. He recalled that in the past, the FBI has displayed an "arrogant disregard for Islamic sensitivities" as seen in the enquiries after the 1998 bomb attacks in Nairobi. In this regard, he agrees with the position of leaders of both the Muslim Consultative Council and the Muslims for Human Rights (Muhuri), who see

this as a violation of Kenyan sovereignty.

The Kenyan MPs also suspect the authorities of yielding the country's sovereignty. Usually, Kenyan MPs regard foreign politics as more the realm of the Executive rather than the Legislative. In mid-December, several members of the Opposition demanded at a Parliamentary sitting that they discuss the possibility of the United States using Kenyan military bases in case of attacks on Somalia. In the name of national interest, several officials advocated for more neutrality of Kenya's diplomatic action.

It is therefore evident that the political scene in Kenya accepts the free expression of various opinions and actions, after the 11th September crisis. Political pluralism is more prevalent in Kenya than in Uganda. Even more, the resultant political activity clearly show the weak influence of Islam politics in the region.

Limited Muslim mobilisations

As in Tanzania, demonstrations were organised to denounce American intervention in Afghanistan. In Nairobi, the demonstrations were carried out by thousands of people, probably a little more than 3000. This is already a large number, seeing that the preceding demonstrations in 2001 (against Israel policy in Palestine ...) never attracted more than a few hundred youth. In Mombasa, the organisation of mobilisations was more chaotic. The Muslim leaders, fearing trouble, cancelled a first demonstration, but the youth did not accept that. They descended on the

streets and initiated chaos. The following Friday, an official march was held and once more, the youth confronted the police. The leaders have difficulty regulating this 'riot-culture' which pervades some Muslim circles. Indeed, this urban violence indicates the multiple divisions of the Kenyan Umma.

In particular in the pre-election period (the general elections should take place during 2002), this infighting places the Muslim big men in an awkward position with regard to power and to other political parties. At the moment when one should sell community votes within client networks, it is disturbing that the so-called unity be betrayed. Several Muslim organisations as well as the Sheikh Kadhi of Mombasa have since denounced extremist Islam. Even the IPK have earned themselves honour by taking the high road, and in trying to calm the relationship with Sharif Nassir.

In fact, the IPK as well as the other organisations hoping to integrate Muslims into electoral democracy aim to find legitimate political representatives. However, their action is mainly intended to lead all Muslim groups and factions into dialogue and thus achieve the unity, which is greatly desired.

In the same manner in Tanzania, the national stakes and internal politics weigh heavily on the reactions of Muslims faced with the 11th September crisis.

Tanzania

Muslims constitute a big proportion of the country's population: almost a third of Tanzanians are of the Muslim faith. Thanks to the Soufi

congregations, Islam penetrated well beyond the Swahili elite along the Coastal strip. Their situation on the political scene is different from that of Kenya's. Tanzania's Muslims took part in the nationalist fight which established the post-colonial Nation. The union with the former Sultanate of Zanzibar also gave them positions within the State system. However, the clerics only have a reduced political influence. As such, political liberalisation incited certain Muslim factions to express themselves in public, although they did not take advantage of the American invasion in Afghanistan to mobilise.

Demonstration under police surveillance

In mid-October, the Community of Islamic Institutions organised a demonstration in Dar-es-Salaam aimed at denouncing the American intervention. This march seems to have been initiated by mosque committees rather than by national Muslim bureaucracies. It was also arranged that the speeches be exclusively delivered by sheikhs. This largely publicised demonstration was organised in close cooperation with the police who imposed heavy conditions in order to avoid scuffles. Finally, this mobilisation came to pass peaceably with a much greater attendance than in Kenya.

Otherwise, the reaction of Tanzanian Muslims seems to have been astonishingly low-key. In October, the president of the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, Dr Salim Ahmed Salim stated that terrorism should be condemned, no matter what the nationality of the

victims. In December, the Eid ceremonies were an occasion to discuss problems of interest to the community of believers. During his speech, he evoked to his co-faithful the need to fight against poverty, notably by appreciating the value of education. He spoke of the gangrene of corruption and the vulnerability of young people to AIDS. In the end, he reminded the people that Islam must co-habit with other religions and that this should be done through dialogue. The local Imam oriented his speech around the tensions between different factions of the Muslim community. Tension should be resolved peacefully, he said.

It is clear that Tanzania Muslims are not very expressive concerning the situation in Afghanistan. However, this does not mean that they have no opinion on the subject. In fact, they know that this distant war affects them directly through a decreased number of tourist arrivals. Tourists usually prefer to visit the Coast and this economic sector is mostly in the hands of Muslims. Other factors allow the interpretation of their quasi-silence.

11th September crisis greatly camouflaged by the CCM⁵/CUF Peace accord

The unfolding and results of the 2000 general elections in Zanzibar were heavily contested by the main opposition party—the Civic United Front (CUF)—whose Muslim orientation is well-known⁶. Several demonstrations were successively organised, and some of these degenerated, particularly in Pemba island (January 26th–27th 2001). Police repression (official figures indicate that 24 people were killed, and

many raped; according to CUF, 74 were killed) led thousands of Tanzanians to flee to Kenya. This provoked a serious confidence crisis in a country barely accustomed to political violence. In the islands, President Karume tried to reinvigorate his regime's legitimacy by bringing the CUF to accept reintegration in the political scene. On the mainland, the authorities tried to safeguard the union that had been poisoned by the massacres.

On the 10th of October 2001, a CCM/CUF agreement was signed. Its content was progressively disclosed and discussed. The accusations linked to the 27th January demonstrations were abandoned. However, the implementation of this agreement was rapidly put to task by CCM-Zanzibar, which modified the terms, to the great displeasure of the CUF. At the beginning of 2002, these misunderstandings were rectified. In mid-January, President Mkapa appointed a Commission of Inquiry on the Pemba massacres. This gesture of reassurance was welcomed by the political class although they criticised the partisan nature of the members of the Commission. Nevertheless, the commemoration of those that were killed in January passed peacefully both in Dar and in Zanzibar. In brief, for several months, Muslim politicians had too loaded a political agenda to really bother with a war happening in another continent, even if it concerned their fellow believers.

Conclusion

At a time when news editorials easily take up the theme of the clash of civilisations, it is perhaps fair to say that in East Africa, during the Afghanistan war, the Christian clergy declared positions that were relatively close to that of Muslim moderates. Evidently this position does not emanate from the same mental perspective and does not support the same agenda. Nevertheless, their content remains quite the same. In Uganda, Anglicans as well as the "born-again" Prime Minister Prof. Nsibambi, recommended to the Americans a return to peace, some even condemning the armed intervention. In Kenya, the Anglican Archbishop, condemned the American invasion and asked the Kenyan government not to authorise the use of Kenyan military bases by Americans without a far-reaching national debate. In Tanzania, the World Council of Churches is very preoccupied with the American attacks and has demanded that they be brought to an end quickly. Also in Tanzania, a congress was organised at the end of November on "Religion and Democracy in Tanzania". From this, it clearly follows that religion is hardly a factor of political division in the country. Indeed, this statement is equally applicable to the two other countries of the region.

Hervé Maupeu
February 2002

Notes

- 1 « *Aussi conscients et fiers de leur identité religieuse que soient les musulmans kenyans et tanzaniens, celle-ci ne paraît toujours pas être à même de déclencher une action communautaire capable sinon d'investir, du moins de se situer durablement dans l'instance politique* » from « Mobilisations populistes musulmanes. Les embûches du passage au politique (Kenya, Tanzanie) », in F. CONSTANTIN & C. COULON Dir., *Religion et transition démocratique en Afrique* Paris, Karthala, 1997, p. 317.
- 2 African Rights, *Avoiding an impasse, Understanding the conflict in Western Uganda* (December 2001).
- 3 129 arrested (President Museveni's speech at ceremonies to mark the end of Ramadhan) (*The New Vision*, 17.12.2001)
- 4 Inquiries on victimisation led by Transparency International show that Kenyans consider the police as the most corrupt civil servants (*Daily Nation*, 19.1.02).
- 5 *Chama cha Mapinduzi*, the ruling party in Tanzania
- 6 The CUF which aspires to national legitimacy is far removed from fundamentalism. As it is accused of wanting to return the Arab slave-traders to Zanzibar and the sultanate that the revolution had removed, it rejects all temptations to fundamentalism.

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Editor's note :

The word "Mambo" is a Kiswahili word, which strictly speaking, means "news" or "information". However, current usage, and specifically colloquial speakers will recognise the word as a form of greeting, loosely translated as "what's up?"

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