

CONTEXTUALIZATION AND FOLK ISLAM:  
A CASE STUDY IN THE SUDAN

by

ROBIN DALE HADAWAY

submitted in accordance with the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

MISSIOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF. W. A. SAAYMAN

NOVEMBER 2010

**Abstract**

Estimates suggest that seventy percent of Muslims follow folk Islam (popular Islam), rather than the orthodox Islamic faith. Most methods for reaching Muslims with the Gospel have concentrated on one of two broad approaches with a third blending the first two methods.

Apologetic, polemic and dialogue techniques argue that Christianity is more valid or reasonable than Islam. Other approaches consist of contextualized methods seeking some common ground between Christianity and Islam.

Apologetic arguments have not been very effective with folk Muslims because cognitive propositions fail to answer the "why" questions posed by popular Islam. Most contextualized methods also miss the mark with folk Muslims; they rarely attend Islamic worship, observe the five pillars of Islam, or read the Qur'an. A few missiologists propose a fourth category for reaching Muslims - contextualizing according to their worldview.

This thesis explores what are the best approaches for evangelizing folk Muslims who are particularly influenced by African Traditional Religion (ATR). The Beja tribe of the Sudan and the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania serve as case studies. I argue for a contextualized approach to folk Muslims, addressing their unique worldviews. ATR-influenced folk Muslims lean toward a fear-power worldview, while the *Sufis* among them hold to an existential-transcendent worldview. Each group, therefore, necessitates a different evangelism approach.

The first chapter presents preliminary matters, the research question, a literature review, and a rationale for the thesis. The second chapter analyzes the case study example of Beja folk Islam. Chapter three examines folk Islam and its relationship to orthodox Islam,

including further illustrations from the Beja tribe. The fourth chapter explores the subject of ATR and its relationship to folk Islam. The Sukuma tribe of Tanzania serves as a base-line model of ATR for a comparison with Beja folk Islam. Chapter five introduces the topic of contextualization in Muslim evangelization and assesses the effectiveness and validity of methods that have been used. Chapter six suggests worldview approaches for reaching ATR and *Sufi*-influenced folk Muslims. The final chapter summarizes the thesis content, reviews the response to the research question, and analyzes the implications of the findings of the case study.

**Key words**

Beja tribe; Sukuma tribe; folk Islam; popular Islam; contextualization; African Traditional Religion (ATR); traditional religion; *Sufism*; power encounter; Camel method.

**Acknowledgements**

I must pay tribute to those who have contributed to this work. First, my wife Kathy and my children, Bethany, Seth and Joy, co-labored with me in our ministry among the Beja people of Sudan and the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania. Second, the late Paul Hiebert introduced me to the field of mission anthropology and folk religion during a course in 1990 and inspired me through his devotions in class. Third, Willem Saayman, my promoter, and Keith Eitel, my co-promoter, have greatly supported me during this project. Fourth, I extend my thanks to Paige Patterson for his encouragement to pursue a D.Th. at UNISA, as well as his friendship over the last twenty-two years. Fifth, my friends David Bledsoe and John Massey assisted the thesis editing process by reading multiple drafts and offering their advice. Last, I owe a great debt to my ministry partners Pastor Philemoni of Tanzania for his insights into Sukuma life and to *Jonadab*, *'Isa*, and *Faruk* for their assistance in understanding the tribes of Sudan, especially the Beja; I know of know no finer believers anywhere.

**Notes concerning authenticity, Bible translation, transliteration, and technical terms.**

I, the author, affirm that the content of this document is solely mine and that all sources used and quoted herein have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

All Biblical quotations and references have been taken from the New American Standard Bible (NAS).

The transliteration scheme for this thesis appears in Appendix 1.

A glossary of technical terms and foreign words is located after the appendices and before the bibliography.

Copyright © 2011 Robin Dale Hadaway

## Contents

	Abstract . . . . .	2
	Key words . . . . .	4
	Acknowledgements . . . . .	4
	Notes concerning authenticity, Bible translation, and transliteration . . . . .	5
	Contents . . . . .	6
	Abbreviations . . . . .	11
<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction . . . . .</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1	Research question . . . . .	17
1.2	Research methodology . . . . .	17
1.3	Rationale for study . . . . .	19
1.4	Personal statement . . . . .	21
1.5	Literature review . . . . .	23
1.5.1	Academic books and articles . . . . .	23
1.5.2	News and current events articles . . . . .	25
1.5.3	Interviews . . . . .	25
1.5.4	Evangelical mission books and articles . . . . .	26
1.6	Organization of chapters . . . . .	27
<b>2.</b>	<b>Folk Islam case study: the Beja tribe of the Sudan . . . . .</b>	<b>29</b>
2.1	Introduction to the Beja tribe . . . . .	30
2.2	History of the Beja tribe . . . . .	35
2.2.1	Early Beja history . . . . .	35
2.2.2	Colonial Beja history . . . . .	37
2.2.3	Recent Beja history . . . . .	39
2.3	Beja society . . . . .	43
2.3.1	Beja socio-economic situation . . . . .	44
2.3.2	The Beja personality . . . . .	46
2.3.3	The Beja culture . . . . .	48
2.3.4	The Beja language . . . . .	52
2.3.5	The Beja religion . . . . .	54

2.3.6	Beja values and worldview . . . . .	58
2.4	Conclusion . . . . .	61
<b>3.</b>	<b>Folk (popular) Islam and official Islam . .</b>	<b>62</b>
3.1	Official Islam . . . . .	64
3.1.1	Official Islam description of beliefs . .	65
3.1.2	Subdivisions and major sects in Islam . .	69
3.1.2.1	<i>Sunni</i> Islam . . . . .	70
3.1.2.2	<i>Shi'a</i> Islam . . . . .	72
3.1.2.3	<i>Sufi</i> Islam . . . . .	76
3.2	Folk (popular) religion . . . . .	80
3.3	Islamic influences upon folk Islam . . . .	82
3.3.1	<i>Sunni</i> influences upon folk Islam . . . . .	83
3.3.2	<i>Shi'a</i> influences upon folk Islam . . . . .	86
3.3.3	<i>Sufi</i> influences upon folk Islam . . . . .	89
3.3.4	Other Islamic influences upon folk Islam .	96
3.4	Folk (popular) Islam case study, the Beja of Sudan . . . . .	97
3.4.1	Beja folk religion and <i>Sunni</i> Islam . . . .	98
3.4.2	Beja folk religion and <i>Shi'a</i> Islam . . . .	100
3.4.3	Beja folk religion and <i>Sufi</i> Islam . . . .	101
3.4.4	Beja folk religion and other Islamic sources . . . . .	107
3.5	Conclusion . . . . .	109
<b>4.</b>	<b>Traditional religion and folk Islam . . .</b>	<b>110</b>
4.1	Traditional religion defined . . . . .	110
4.1.1	Arabian traditional religion and Islam .	112
4.1.2	African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Islam . . . . .	115
4.2	ATR example: the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania . . . . .	117
4.2.1	Sukuma history . . . . .	119
4.2.2	Sukuma society . . . . .	123
4.2.2.1	Sukuma socio-economic situation . . . . .	124
4.2.2.2	The Sukuma personality . . . . .	125
4.2.2.3	The Sukuma culture . . . . .	127

4.2.2.4	The Sukuma language . . . . .	130
4.2.3	Sukuma ATR . . . . .	131
4.2.3.1	Sukuma belief in a supreme being . . . .	131
4.2.3.2	Sukuma belief in spirits and divinities .	132
4.2.3.3	Sukuma belief in life after death . . . .	133
4.2.3.4	Sukuma religious personnel and sacred places . . . . .	134
4.2.3.5	Sukuma witchcraft and magic practices . .	138
4.2.4	Sukuma values and worldview . . . . .	140
4.3	ATR influence on Beja folk Islam . . . .	141
4.3.1	Early Egyptian influence . . . . .	143
4.3.2	Beja traditional religion (ATR) and folk Islam . . . . .	144
4.3.2.1	Beja belief in a supreme being . . . . .	145
4.3.2.2	Beja belief in spirits and divinities . .	147
4.3.2.3	Beja belief in a life after death . . . .	150
4.3.2.4	Beja religious personnel and sacred places . . . . .	152
4.3.2.5	Beja witchcraft and magic practices . . .	154
4.4	Conclusion . . . . .	156
<b>5.</b>	<b>Contextualization and folk Islam . . . . .</b>	<b>158</b>
5.1	Historical approaches to evangelizing Muslims. . . . .	158
5.1.1	Era of the late Ottoman empire (1800-1918) . . . . .	159
5.1.2	Era of colonialism and nationalism (1919-1946) . . . . .	161
5.1.3	Era of the rise of the Arab world (1947-1978) . . . . .	163
5.1.4	Era of Islamic fundamentalism (1979-present) . . . . .	166
5.2	Introduction to contextualization issues . . . . .	169
5.3	Contextualized approaches with Muslims . .	170
5.3.1	Debate-polemic (non-contextual) method . .	170
5.3.2	Qur'anic contextualization methods . . . .	171



5.3.2.1	The "new hermeneutics" of Qur'anic interpretation . . . . .	173
5.3.2.2	The Camel method of Qur'anic contextualization . . . . .	175
5.3.2.3	Analytical Qur'anic contextualization . . . . .	178
5.3.3	Cultural contextualization with Muslims . . . . .	181
5.3.3.1	Cultural contextualization of Muslim customs . . . . .	181
5.3.3.2	Cultural contextualization of Islamic forms . . . . .	183
5.3.3.3	Cultural contextualization and Islamic meaning . . . . .	187
5.4	Evaluating contextualization with Muslims . . . . .	191
5.5	Worldview contextualization with Muslims . . . . .	193
5.6	Conclusion . . . . .	194
<b>6.</b>	<b>A contextualized worldview approach to folk Muslims influenced by traditional Religion, especially ATR . . . . .</b>	<b>197</b>
6.1	Worldview religious values axis . . . . .	199
6.1.1	Guilt-innocence worldview axis . . . . .	202
6.1.1.1	Guilt-innocence in Islam . . . . .	206
6.1.1.2	Guilt-innocence among the folk Muslim Beja . . . . .	209
6.1.2	Shame-honor worldview axis . . . . .	214
6.1.2.1	Shame-honor in Muslim societies . . . . .	216
6.1.2.2	Shame-honor among the folk Muslim Beja tribe . . . . .	219
6.1.3	Fear-power worldview axis . . . . .	225
6.1.3.1	The first danger: denying the supernatural in ATR . . . . .	227
6.1.3.2	The second danger: overemphasizing the demonic . . . . .	231
6.1.3.3	Fear-power in Islam . . . . .	236
6.1.3.4	Fear-power among the folk Muslim Beja tribe . . . . .	240

6.1.4	A Biblical approach to the three worldview axes . . . . .	250
6.2	Existential-transcendent worldview axis . . . . .	255
6.2.1	Existential-transcendent approaches for Islam . . . . .	256
6.2.2	Existential-transcendent approaches for the Beja . . . . .	263
6.3	Conclusion . . . . .	265
<b>7.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> . . . . .	268
7.1	Review of chapters . . . . .	268
7.2	Response to the research question . . . . .	270
7.2.1	Justifications . . . . .	271
7.2.2	Personal reflections . . . . .	275
7.3	Research implications for mission . . . . .	278
	Appendix 1. Transliterations . . . . .	283
	Appendix 2. Map of Beja tribe in Sudan, Egypt and Eritrea . . . . .	284
	Appendix 3. Map of Beja tribe divisions . . . . .	284
	Appendix 4. Map of Beja tribe in Sudan . . . . .	285
	Appendix 5. Map of Beja area in Egypt . . . . .	284
	Appendix 6. Map of Beja area in Eritrea . . . . .	286
	Appendix 7. Map of Afro-Asiatic languages . . . . .	286
	Appendix 8. Map of Tanzania . . . . .	287
	Appendix 9. Map of Sukuma area, Mwanza . . . . .	287
	Appendix 10. Map of Languages of Africa . . . . .	288
	Appendix 11. Map of Bantu Migration . . . . .	289
	Appendix 12. Map of Sukumaland . . . . .	290
	Glossary . . . . .	291
	Bibliography . . . . .	301

**Abbreviations**

African Traditional Religion (ATR)  
Association of Evangelicals in Africa & Madagascar (AEAM)  
Gospel Missionary Union (GMU)  
International Mission Board (IMB)  
Middle East Christian Outreach (MECO)  
Muslim Background Believer (MBB)  
National Democratic Alliance (NDA)  
National Islamic Front (NIF)  
New American Standard Bible (NAS)  
North Africa Mission (NAM)  
Operation Mobilization (OM)  
Red Sea Mission Team (RSMT)  
Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)  
Sudan Notes and Records (SNR)  
Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA)  
Tanzanian African National Union (TANU)  
The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM)  
United Nations (UN)  
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural  
Organization (UNESCO)  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)  
United States (US)  
United States of America (USA)  
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)  
University of South Africa (UNISA)  
World Food Program (WFP)  
Youth with a Mission (YWAM)

## 1. Introduction

Muslims number slightly over 1.2 billion persons<sup>1</sup> worldwide, which makes Islam the world's second largest religion after Christianity (in Marshall, Green & Gilbert 2002:73). Folk Islam<sup>2</sup> mixes "pristine Islam with the ancient religious traditions and practices of ordinary people" (Saal 1991:51). Estimates project that seventy percent of Muslims follow folk Islam, not the orthodox<sup>3</sup> Islamic religion<sup>4</sup> (Parshall 2006:2). This finding is not surprising as Hiebert, Shaw and Tineou (1999:77) state the following.

Despite the spread of formal or high religions and modernity, folk religious beliefs<sup>5</sup> dominate around the world. In Taiwan 65 percent of all adults are believers in Chinese Folk Religion (Chiu, 1988:5, cited in Warton 1996:38). In India most Hindus are folk Hindus; In Arabia, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia most Muslims are folk Muslims; in China

---

<sup>1</sup> Esposito, Fasching and Lewis (2009:216) estimate the number of Islam's adherents at 1.3 billion persons. They add that fully fifty-six countries claim Muslim majorities.

<sup>2</sup> "Popular, or folk Islam, refers to a wide variety of non-orthodox ways of placating natural powers, as well as various ways of cursing and warding off curses" (Pikkert 2008:176). Stewart (1985:365) defines popular Islam as "practices and beliefs that stand apart from the norms of behavior sanctioned by the 'ulama' for particular communities." Braswell (1996:84) describes the *ulama* as "sort of clergy or religious scholar/practitioner class" within orthodox Islam. Noting that 'popular', 'folk', 'informal', 'low' and 'common' Islam are synonyms, Musk (1984:13) writes, "Popular Islam is used generically for the aspect of Islam which stands over and against theological Islam...In adjectival form, the expression 'folk Islamic' has been most widely used, as it seems to offer a more manageable expression than the clumsy term 'popular-Islamic'."

<sup>3</sup> Synonyms for orthodox Islam include formal, official, high and ideal Islam (Musk 1984:20).

<sup>4</sup> Anthropologists define religion as "beliefs about the ultimate nature of things, as deep feelings and motivations, and as fundamental values and allegiances" (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou, 1999:35).

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Neil (in Hesselgrave 1991:223) estimates that about forty percent of the world's population holds to a world view that can be characterized as folk religion.

most religious believers are folk Buddhists; and in America many Christians are folk Christians.

Historically the major approaches for reaching Muslims with the Gospel<sup>6</sup> coalesce around one of two broad categories with a third blending the first two methods. The techniques of apologetics, polemics and dialogue comprise the first approach. The second generally seeks some common ground between Christianity and Islam. The third approach consists of a mixture of some combination of the first two methods.

Apologetic, polemic and dialogue approaches attempt to demonstrate that the Christian faith is more valid or reasonable than Islam. These approaches dominated Christianity until fairly recently. Nonetheless, often folk religionists have to be first taught the tenets of their own belief system in order for them to be shown their faith is less viable than Christianity (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:9). Apologetic, polemic and dialog techniques possess some limited value for the educated elite who hold to Islamic orthodoxy (Schlorff 2006:58). These methods, however, are directed at the small minority of Muslims from the leadership of Islam. Not surprisingly, this group has not proved very responsive to the Gospel (Pikert 2008:73, Schlorff 2006:60).

The second category consists of contextualized approaches that seek common ground between Christianity and

---

<sup>6</sup> For this thesis I use the Apostle Paul's description of the Christian Gospel found in First Corinthians 15:1-5. "Now I make known to you, brethren, the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

Islam. Sometimes these methods entail cultural alterations and concessions toward Islamic forms. Other strategies focus on the theological intersections of Christianity and Islam often derived from some overlapping material and concepts from the Qur'an and the Bible (Hesselgrave & Rommen 2000:113-114). The former can be seen as somewhat cosmetic, while the latter more substantive.

The more controversial contextualized methods present some unique problems. Certain missionaries, for example, promote the 'insider movement'.<sup>7</sup> They advocate national Christian believers remaining Muslim in both name and cultural identity, avoiding the name Christian altogether. These Muslim background believers (MBB's) call themselves 'Isahi Muslims- Muslims who have submitted to 'Isa.<sup>8</sup> Other creative contextualized approaches feature interpreting selected portions of the Qur'an with a Biblical hermeneutic or altering Muslim worship patterns to include Christian content. Pikkert (2008:2002, bold mine) reflects on this new development.

The undoubtedly well-intentioned trend toward **contextualizing** the Christian message and worship forms **into Muslim molds** in order to make them more socially acceptable **runs the risk of fudging foundational truths** which are perceived as abhorrent to the Muslim community.

According to Schlorff (2006:149, 151), such "adventurism" and "contextualization by experimentation" has not resulted in any great breakthroughs in missions to Muslims (Pikkert 2008:187; Schlorff 2006:161-162).

A third broad classification of Muslim evangelization blends aspects of the first two approaches; recent

---

<sup>7</sup> I discuss the insider movement in section 5.3.3.2 on page 183-184.

<sup>8</sup> 'Isa is the Arabic word for Jesus in the Qur'an (Saal 1991:113).

practitioners of this category stress apologetics but also give a nod to Islamic cultural understanding and some adaptation of *Qur'anic* and Islamic forms. Pikkert (2008:94) calls this third method the 'new irenic'<sup>9</sup> approach.'

I contend in this thesis that apologetic, polemic, and dialogue methods possess limited effectiveness with folk Muslims because cognitive arguments fail to satisfy the 'why' questions posed by folk religion. Folk religions answer the questions of everyday life (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:95). Most recent contextualization techniques also miss the mark with folk Muslims because only a small number of these<sup>10</sup> individuals attend Islamic worship services, observe the five pillars of Islam, or read the Qur'an. Many remain fiercely loyal to the concept of being Muslim but ignore Islam's lifestyle practices and religious obligations (Musk 1984:338). Living in the shadow of the mosque, folk Muslims retain much of the content of their pre-Islamic traditional religions (:338).

Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:29) state, "The failure to understand folk religions has been a major blind spot in missions." This declaration is especially true in the case of folk Muslims. Musk (1984:285, bold mine) describes the inadequacies of many such approaches.

While such bridging methods may be meaningful for the intellectual Muslim, they fall a long way short of communicating with Muslims committed to a folk Islamic worldview. **To commence with the ordinary Muslim 'where he is' demands a reappraisal of such**

---

<sup>9</sup> "Promoting peace; peaceful; pacific" (Guralnik 1970:744).

<sup>10</sup> *Sufis* represent an exception to this. Most *Sufis* outwardly follow the obligations of Islam, but attach folk Islamic meanings to orthodox practices.

**attempts at communication**, however attractive they may appear to the Western mind.

This thesis attempts such a reappraisal and argues for contextualized approaches for folk Muslims addressing their unique worldviews. Several contemporary missiologists assert that cultures lean in different directions in their worldview orientations. Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou (1999:224, 226) offer a three-fold model for examining cultural religious values. They point out that whereas most Westerners operate out of a developed concept of guilt and innocence, traditional societies revolve more around the fear of the supernatural and a desire for power over the unknown spiritual entities and occurrences. Furthermore, these authors hypothesize that group based societies follow a shame-honor paradigm. I, however, advocate that Muslim evangelization should consider all three primary religious value worldview axes: (1) guilt-innocence (2) shame-honor and (3) fear-power.

Musk and Muller suggest that most Muslims view the world through a shame-honor orientation rather than the guilt-innocence motif so dominant in Western societies (Pikkert 2008:178). This thesis contends, however, that for folk Muslims influenced by African Traditional Religion (ATR) like the Beja, the fear-power worldview prevails. Despite this dominating characteristic, elements of the shame-honor as well as portions of the guilt-innocence value systems persist as secondary themes in their culture.

I also propose another religious worldview model for the *Sufi* folk Muslims among the Beja, which requires a different approach to address their 'existential-transcendent' worldview. The other worldviews and evangelism approaches fail to account for the unusual outlook of these folk Muslims who desire a deeper spiritual life.



The Beja tribe of the Sudan provides the primary case study for this examination of ATR-influenced folk Islam. The Sukuma people of Tanzania serve as a secondary case study, illustrating an ethnic group who embrace an ATR similar to Beja folk religion in all areas but Islam. This thesis examines the close ties between ATR and folk Islam and presents ways for reaching folk Muslims contextually with the Gospel.

### **1.1 Research question**

I intend to answer the following question in this thesis. What are the best approaches for communicating the Gospel and evangelizing folk Muslims, such as the Beja, who are foremost influenced by traditional religion (especially ATR) rather than orthodox Islam?

### **1.2 Research methodology**

The research question examines the folk Islam of the Beja ethnic group of the Sudan, who exemplify a Muslim people heavily affected by traditional religious beliefs. The Sukuma tribe of Tanzania serves as a secondary case study and establishes a baseline for typical ATR practice. I examine the beliefs of both tribes in order to discover what phenomenological similarities hold promise methodologically for missions. Insights for application in evangelism emerge through this study of folk Islam through the ATR worldview prism. Such a study portends positively for analyzing the beliefs of folk Muslims from other ethnic groups who are more influenced by folk religion rather than high Islam.

The research methodology consists of a literature search utilizing books, articles and dissertations in the areas of religion, contextualization, anthropology, sociology, and theology dealing with folk religion, folk Islam, and ATR. Interviews are included where appropriate.

The thesis contains observations gained from ministering in the countries of Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya, and Brazil. I served as a Christian worker both to the Beja tribe and to the Sukuma ethnic group when residing in Sudan and Tanzania, respectively. My experience with them enables me to effectively evaluate their similarities and differences.

This thesis seeks to determine which approaches best communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to ATR-influenced folk Islam. I evaluate current and past methods of contextualization and Gospel communication with Muslims and comment on their record of success in Muslim evangelization. Musk (1984:342, bold mine) speaks to the importance of this issue before the missiologist.

The **contextualization** of the gospel to the folk Muslim's worldview **will demand experiments of faith** in terms of the channels sought to bring Christ to the heart of that worldview.

My recommended methodology focuses on a contextualized approach through the worldview and felt needs of folk Muslims typified by the culture of the Beja tribe of the Sudan.

Although the thesis highlights a contextualized worldview approach for ATR-influenced folk Muslims, this research possesses implications for ministry outside Africa and even beyond Islam. I evaluate contextualization frameworks and propose conceptual schemes applicable to mission efforts with other folk religions. While not the central topic of this study, such relevant missiological issues as power encounters and the debate concerning the boundaries of legitimate contextualization are mentioned.

### 1.3 Rationale for study

While serving as a relief and development worker to the Beja tribe in the Sudan during the 1990's, I noticed the vast majority followed a folk variety of Islam rather than an orthodox version of the faith. I also observed that many aspects of Beja beliefs resembled the ATR of the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania, my assignment during the 1980's. In those days my sending agency offered little assistance in cultural acquisition and ignored ATR altogether. Westerners often perceive ATR as totally satanic -a belief system to be dismantled rather than seriously studied (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:20).

Prior to my departure for Sudan, I received specialized training in Islamic apologetics. Religious representatives to Muslim countries often receive training in answering Islam's theological objections and instruction in presenting Christian propositional arguments to them. Although never stated, this approach assumes Muslims know their own belief systems. While in Sudan, I encountered Beja folk Muslims who seldom prayed in a Mosque or participated in pilgrimages (*Hajj*) to Mecca. The latter surprised me, as the Beja tribal area borders the Red Sea and is situated directly across from Mecca. Despite the importance of the *Hajj* as one of the five pillars of Islam, I noticed that few Beja ever bothered to make the one-hour ferry-ride across the channel to Saudi Arabia.<sup>11</sup>

While interacting with other sending groups in North Africa and the Middle East, I discovered that most representatives to the Muslim world treated Islam in a similar fashion as their counterparts in ATR-dominated countries; the Christian workers either distained or ignored the

---

<sup>11</sup>When I lived in Sudan the cost was about US twenty dollars.

religions. Evangelists attempted to demonstrate the fallacies and inadequacies of these faiths rather than seriously engage the underlying worldviews of the cultures. Since the vast majority of Muslims follow folk Islam rather than orthodoxy, I determined that a contextualized approach dealing with their worldview holds the most promise for success. The following story from my own experience demonstrates why such an approach is crucial in order for the Gospel to 'make sense' to those who live in traditional religious settings.

In the summer of 1991 while living in Sudan, I traveled to Kenya for vacation with my family. We visited Don and Mary Alice Dolifka, a couple ministering to the *Samburu*<sup>12</sup> people near Maralel in northern Kenya. The nomadic *Samburu* wear traditional red robes, herd cattle and live in mud dwellings. Dolifka asked me to preach a message to a group of twenty men seated upon boulders under a tree on a Sunday morning. I spoke in Swahili and a young college student translated into the *Samburu* language.

Since these men had never attended a church service nor listened to a message from the Bible I decided to speak on a simple, but culturally relevant passage; the woman at the well in John 4:3-42. I began the sermon by asking the men, "How would you like it if a man came to your village and asked for water from your women?"

Much to my surprise, all the men arose from their rocks and began discussing the query in a small circle. Since the question was asked rhetorically, I was not prepared for this interruption. These men did not know that one did not actually respond to questions during a worship service. Dolifka and Seth, my ten-year-old son, observing my discomfort, watched with amusement.

After about five minutes the men resumed their positions on the rocks. The oldest spoke for the group and replied, "We would not like it. We do not want anyone speaking to our women, not even Jesus."

---

<sup>12</sup> The *Samburu* tribe is a Nilotic group related ethnically and linguistically to the *Maasai* tribe of Southern Kenya and Northern Tanzania (*Maasai* 1978:131).

Surprised and perplexed, I realized this sermon was going to be more difficult than I had imagined. I decided, therefore, to go in a different direction. As the message progressed I made the mistake of asking another rhetorical question. As I presented the Gospel of Christ and spoke of the resurrection of Jesus, I asked, "How many of you have ever heard of someone who died and came back from the dead after three days?"

Once again and to my surprise, all the men stood from their rocks, formed a circle and began discussing my question, but with great animation. I thought to myself, "what could they be talking about this time?" After about five minutes everyone seated themselves again on the rocks. The oldest man stood and said with great gravity, "One man here knows someone who died and came back from the dead after two days, but none of us has ever heard of anyone who came back after three days."

When this event transpired I had already served as a Christian worker in Africa for more than eight years. I realized that even when I thought I was clearly communicating, the worldview of ATR adherents differed so greatly from my own that I had to take special care. This incident caused me to reconsider the viability of Western propositional presentations when evangelizing ATR-influenced folk religionists.

#### **1.4 Personal statement**

After serving as a Christian worker in Tanzania and Sudan for a total of twelve years, I was asked to become the regional leader (director) for three hundred and forty adults ministering in the countries of Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay. In this capacity, I supervised the mission effort in the Eastern South America region of the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention for six and a half years. Although never becoming an expert in South American missions, I learned immediately that folk religion dominates that context as well.

I first encountered Brazilian Spiritism while evangelizing on the streets of Salvador, Bahia. West Africans brought their ATR with them to Brazil when Portuguese colonists forced them into slavery. Spiritism in Brazil blends ATR with South American indigenous religions and Roman Catholicism. *Umbanba* and *Condomble* represent two of the major forms of Brazilian Spiritism and possess similarities to Caribbean Voodoo. One former IMB representative (Dirks 1998:1) wrote in his doctoral dissertation, "Though Brazil is the largest Roman Catholic nation in the world with more than one hundred and twenty-one million members, Spiritism is considered the religion of the Brazilian people." Evangelical leaders in Brazil estimate that between forty and seventy percent of the population of the country is involved in Spiritism (:3). The majority of Brazilians practice a folk form of Catholicism rather than the more orthodox expression of the Roman Christian tradition.

Upon returning to the United States in 2003 after eighteen years overseas, I joined the faculty of the Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, USA, as the associate professor of missions. Besides teaching missions courses covering the religions of Africa, the Middle East, and South America, I also taught classes on missions in Asia. While studying Hinduism and Buddhism and traveling throughout the continent, I discovered that the folk beliefs of the region influence the worldview and practices of the people more than the rituals and tenets of the orthodox religions.

As I reflected upon my service in Africa and South America and my research concerning the religions of Asia, I concluded that folk religion constitutes the real faith

of the majority of ordinary people in the world today. I believe, therefore, the case studies of the folk Islam of the Beja tribe of Sudan and the ATR of the Sukuma people of Tanzania will help in understanding the current religious milieu. I also hold that the contextualization methods for evangelizing folk Muslims described herein could have traction for dealing with folk Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, as well adherents of ATR.

## **1.5 Literature review**

The bulk of the investigation for this thesis falls into four principal groupings: (1) academic books and periodicals (2) news articles (3) interviews and (4) evangelical literature.

### **1.5.1 Academic books and articles**

When I first began studying the Beja tribe in 1990, I collected excerpts from books and articles from the Young Research Library of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). During the research phase of this thesis in late 2009, I returned to its Africa studies section for further investigation. *Sudan Notes and Records* (SNR), a British colonial publication, remains a valuable resource for learning about the culture of the Beja people. I examined each SNR journal between 1918 and 1981,<sup>13</sup> reading every applicable article concerning the Beja and their sub-divisions.

When I prepared to leave for Sudan in 1990, Giorgio Ausenda's 1987 doctoral dissertation, *Leisurely nomads: the Hadendowa (Beja) of the Gash Delta and their transition to sedentary life*, represented the most recent book about the Beja tribe. This volume supplements the

---

<sup>13</sup> *Sudan Notes and Records* was published continuously from 1918-1944. The publication, however, continued sporadically thereafter (1956-1963, 1965-1976, 1979-1981). Fairly recently (2004) SNR started publication again on a limited basis.

excellent historical treatise written by A. Paul in 1954: *A history of the Beja tribes of the Sudan*. Since that time two more books have appeared about the Beja people.

In 1991 Anders Hjort af Ornas and Gudrun Dahl penned an insightful study about Beja customs. *Responsible man: the Atmaan Beja of northeastern Sudan* examines the worldview and values of both rural and urban Beja. The most important work about the Beja for my purposes appeared even more recently. Frode F. Jacobsen's 1998 *Theories of sickness and misfortune among the Hadendowa Beja of the Sudan* presents a detailed study of the tribe's folk religion. His observations of Beja folk Islamic practices form the basis for many of the conclusions in this thesis.

Despite their status as the largest tribe in Tanzania, relatively few books exist about the Sukuma people. Nonetheless, three commendable works were found at the UCLA library. Berta Millroth's *Lyuba: traditional religion of the Sukuma* (1965) provides an exceptional source concerning Sukuma ATR beliefs and practices. Written in 1974, Evie Adams Welch's *Life and literature of the Sukuma in Tanzania, East Africa* chronicles Sukuma tribal life in great detail. Frans Wijzen and Ralph Tanner penned the most valuable examination of Sukuma culture in 2002. *'I am just a Sukuma': globalization and identity construction in Northwestern Tanzania* confirms that many Sukuma ATR practices continue unabated, including the *en mass* execution of witches.

My personal library also assisted in the research which includes several rare books on African life and history. Notable volumes include Winston Churchill's *The River War* (1899) and biographies about the lives of generals Horatio Kitchener and Charles "Chinese" Gordon. I



purchased a particularly helpful book during a visit to Sudan in 2002. Ali Salih Karrar's *The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan* (1992) claims that all Islam in Sudan derives from *Sufism* and that an understanding of this sect remains crucial to comprehending the Muslim faith there. Two other volumes stand out as particularly valuable for my understanding of the *Sufis*: William Chittick's *Sufism: a short introduction* and Carl W. Ernst's *Sufism: an essential introduction to the philosophy and practice of the mystical tradition of Islam*.

### **1.5.2 News and current events articles**

Newspaper and magazine materials are used as sources for this thesis, since these periodicals document the pervasiveness of folk Islam among contemporary Muslims. Certain writings highlight the current nature of some of the contextualization issues and how these affect recent approaches to Muslim evangelization.

### **1.5.3 Interviews**

A few years ago I personally interviewed three Muslim background believers (MBB) who hold leadership positions in the Baptist churches in Sudan. One is a Beja believer while the others are from two different Muslim tribes. Questions were posed to them concerning both folk Islam and contextualizing the Gospel to Muslims. This year I traveled to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania and conducted two other interviews. T.A. Ibrahim, an educated Beja leader living in the United States, confirmed the continuation of many of the folk religious practices reported in the books about the Beja. The current strategy coordinator (SC) representative for the Beja people with the IMB was also queried concerning the status of evangelical witness to the tribe in the countries of Sudan, Egypt and Eritrea.

### 1.5.3 Evangelical books and articles

While visiting the Pretoria campus of the University of South Africa (UNISA) during registration, literature searches were conducted on folk Islam and popular Islam. This exploration revealed two books and three articles on the subject from the Christian perspective. Two of the three articles dealt with folk Islam in Africa but involved short case studies. Phil Parshall's *Bridges to Islam: a Christian perspective on folk Islam* draws upon his ministry experiences in the countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Bill Musk's 1984 UNISA doctoral thesis<sup>14</sup> on popular Islam deals with the phenomenology and ethno-theological bases of Islamic beliefs and practices in Egypt. Since publishing his doctoral dissertation, Musk has produced three additional books on reaching Muslims from a worldview perspective.<sup>15</sup>

The books written by Parshall and Musk proved invaluable to my investigation. A few other missiological works, however, exist on the examination of contextualized approaches specifically to folk religion. *The influence of animism on Islam* by Samuel Zwemer analyzes folk Islam from an early twentieth century perspective. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou's *Understanding folk religion: a Christian response to popular beliefs and practices* sets the standard for evaluating folk Islam within the larger field of folk religion.

Helpful sections concerning worldview-contextualized approaches to Muslims in general and to folk Muslims in

---

<sup>14</sup> Bill Musk's doctoral thesis, *Popular Islam: an investigation into the phenomenology and ethnotheological bases of popular Islamic belief and practice* was later published for general audiences under the title *The unseen face of Islam* (1989 & 2003).

<sup>15</sup> *Touching the soul of Islam: sharing the Gospel in Muslim cultures* (2004); *Holy war: why do some Muslims become fundamentalists?* (1992, 2003); *Kissing cousins: Christians and Muslims face to face* (2005).

particular appear in three other works. First, Peter Pikkert presents a general historical survey of missions to Muslims in *Protestant missionaries to the Middle East: ambassadors of Christ or culture?* Pikkert offers compelling contextualization observations therein. Second, Sam Schlorff masterfully unravels complex issues in *Missiological models in ministry to Muslims*. Schlorff articulates well contextualization models so the missiologist can accurately assess both their comparative value and doctrinal permissibility. Third, Rolland Muller in *Honor and shame: unlocking the door* explores the major worldviews common to all societies. Muller explains how an evangelistic approach tailored toward a particular worldview successfully engages the people of a certain culture.

## **1.6 Organization of chapters**

This thesis contains seven chapters. The introduction comprises the first chapter, which proposes the research question, surveys the literature, gives a rationale for the project and offers a personal statement.

The second chapter presents the case study example of folk Islam, the Beja tribe of the Sudan, including their history, beliefs and practices. Chapter three examines folk Islam and its relationship to orthodox Islam, including additional illustrations from the Beja culture. I also evaluate the relative influence the three major divisions of Islam (*Sunni's*, *Shi'ites* and *Sufis*) project upon folk Islam in general and Beja folk Islam in particular.

The fourth chapter studies the subject of traditional religion, especially its expression on the African continent. The secondary case study of the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania serves as a baseline for evaluating the ATR

influences upon Beja folk Islam.

Chapter five introduces the complex subject of contextualization and assesses the validity of approaches that have been used for reaching Muslims. Both contextualized and non-contextualized paradigms are assessed. I argue that methods contextualized according to the worldview of folk Muslims hold the most promise for their evangelization.

Chapter six suggests methods for reaching folk Muslims influenced by ATR and *Sufism* according to their unique worldviews. An examination of the three primary religious values axes: (1) guilt-innocence (2) shame-honor and (3) fear-power reveals that folk Muslims heavily influenced by ATR are more effectively reached through addressing the last mentioned axis. I, therefore, offer a Biblical framework for communicating Scriptural truths to Beja folk Muslims that treats all of these elements.

The sixth chapter also presents a fourth worldview religious value axis: existential-transcendent. This concept recognizes that the *Sufis* among the Beja compose a special category outside the fear-power worldview. Yearning for a personal relationship with God, these mystics require a spirituality-based strategy. The chapter offers special methods tailored to reach them.

The last chapter summarizes the thesis' content, reviews the response to the research question, and analyzes the implication of the findings of the case study for missiological inquiry.

## 2. Folk Islam<sup>1</sup> case study: the Beja tribe of Sudan

When an anthropologist asked some Beja tribesmen about the present attitude of his people toward the spirit world, they said, "We *Bedawiet*<sup>2</sup> believe that there are spirits everywhere, especially after dark. We never let our children out of sight" (Jacobson 1998:150).

I served as a strategy coordinator to the Beja tribe of Sudan from 1990-1997. During my residency in Sudan and work among the Beja people, I concluded they are an excellent example of many Muslim peoples; they profess Islam, but are actually folk Muslims. Later chapters will reveal that folk Islam resembles African Traditional Religion (ATR) rather than orthodox Islam.<sup>3</sup> The Beja tribe will serve as the case study for an examination of how to contextualize the Christian Gospel to a nominally Muslim people group who are more concerned with protection from evil spirits than practicing the tenets of orthodox Islam.

---

<sup>1</sup> Saal (1991:51) says "Folk Islam is a mixture of pristine Islam with the ancient religious traditions and practices of ordinary people." Stewart (1985:365) defines 'popular Islam' as "practices and beliefs that stand apart from the norms of behavior sanctioned by the 'ulama' [religious authorities] for particular communities." Musk (1984:20-21) describes the differences in terminology between the two; "the oft ensuing dichotomy may be described phenomenologically as one between 'formal', 'official', 'high', 'ideal' or 'theological' religion, and 'informal', 'low', 'non-official', 'popular', or 'folk' religion."

<sup>2</sup> Beja (sometimes spelled *Bega* or *Bija*) is the Arabic term for the tribe and is the commonly acknowledged name for them. Ausenda (1987:26) states, "These nomads were given, by Arabs and Abyssinians [Ethiopians], the common name of Beja." They call themselves the *Bedawiet* (Ornas & Dahl 1991:1; Jacobson 1998:5). They should not be confused with the Bedouin tribes of North Africa and the Middle East who are not racially or linguistically similar to the Beja people. One difference is that Bedouin women dress in black, while Beja females wear red (or other pastel colored) clothing (Lewis 1962:30). Beja men often can be distinguished from other tribes, wearing blue or gray vests over their white robes (*jalabiyah*).

<sup>3</sup> Orthodox Islam, official Islam and high Islam are synonyms.

## 2.1 Introduction to the Beja tribe

The Beja are a tribe of approximately 1.25 million persons<sup>4</sup> who inhabit the northeastern section of Sudan, spilling over into smaller areas of northern Eritrea and southern Egypt (see maps in Appendices 2-7). Approximately one million Beja live in Sudan, one hundred and seventy-five thousand in Eritrea, and seventy-five thousand in Egypt (Lewis 2009).<sup>5</sup> The population of Sudan stands at about thirty million people divided among four hundred and fifty ethnic groups, speaking one hundred and thirty-two languages (Pettersen 1999:5). Arabic is the native language to just over half of the Sudanese people (Hair 1966:65). The Beja compose approximately four percent of the population of Sudan, five percent of the people of Eritrea, and less than one percent of those living in Egypt.

The five major divisions of the Beja are the *Bisharin*, *Amarar*, *Handendoa*, *Ababda*,<sup>6</sup> and the *Beni-Amer*<sup>7</sup> (Gamst 1984:131). Giorgio Ausenda (1987:33) recognizes the

---

<sup>4</sup> Estimates of the number of Beja vary widely. One expert projected their number to be about two and a half million (Jenkins 1996:2) while another researcher placed the population at 700,000 (Cavendish 1979:282).

<sup>5</sup> A summary of the languages spoken by the Beja (*Bedawiyet* and *Tigre*) in *Ethnologue: languages of the world* (Lewis 2009:1) seems to be the best method of determining the Beja population. This number is taken by adding the *Bedawiyet* speakers in Egypt, Sudan and Eritrea in the articles concerning those countries (Also allowing for some Beja in Egypt who speak only Arabic and some in Eritrea who speak only the *Tigre* language).

<sup>6</sup> In Southern Egypt the *Ababda* Beja are often called the *Busharia*. Most of the *Ababda* Beja speak Arabic and not the Beja language.

<sup>7</sup> The first language of the *Beni-Amer* Beja is *Tigre*. Some *Beni-Amer* speak only *Tigre* (mostly Eritrean *Beni-Amer* Beja), while some are bilingual in Beja and *Tigre* (Nadel 1945:54). Some are trilingual in Beja, *Tigre* and Arabic (see Appendices 6 & 7).

difficulty in subdividing the Beja and adds the *Arteiga*, *Ashraf*, and the *Halenga* to the list of Beja subgroups.<sup>8</sup>

The *Bisharin*, *Amarar*, and *Handendoa*<sup>9</sup> divisions reside mostly in the northeast of Sudan (see Appendices 2-4). Some *Hadendoa* live in Eritrea, where they are called the *Hedareb* (Paul 1959:75).<sup>10</sup> The *Bisharin* dwell south of the Egyptian border from the Nile River to the Red Sea, as far south as the land of the *Amarar* and *Hadendoa*. Although their geographical focus is the Atbara River, they are intensely nomadic, and are dispersed from Egypt to the Atbara River, from the Red Sea to the Nile. Their skill with camels is legendary (Cavendish 1979:283).

The *Amarar* division dwells near Port Sudan and in the surrounding Red Sea Hills. They are said to speak the purest form of the *To-Bedawie* (ie. Beja) language, free from Arabized expressions. The *Amarar* are reputed to be the best Beja fighters but do not have the conquering proclivities of their more war-like relatives, the *Hadendoa* (Sanders 1935:216).

The *Hadendoa* sub-group dwells inland, west of the *Amarar*, south of the *Bisharin*, and northwest of the *Beni-Amer*. The *Hadendoa* are the Beja division that supplied most of the warriors when the Hillmen<sup>11</sup> fought the British

---

<sup>8</sup> A later section about the languages spoken by the Beja explains how this affects both population estimates and the difficulty with delineating the various Beja subdivisions (see Appendices 7 & 10).

<sup>9</sup>Sometimes spelled *Hadendowa*.

<sup>10</sup> The *Hedareb* division is recognized by the Eritrean government as one of the country's nine official tribes (see Appendix 6). The *Beni-Amer* (far more numerous in Eritrea) are not listed as one of the nine tribes in Eritrea, but are numbered as part of the *Tigre* 'tribe'. In my opinion and according to a linguist (Wedekind) who worked in the country, *Tigre* is a language spoken by a number of peoples in the tri-border region of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan, and should not be the designation for a tribe.

<sup>11</sup> The Beja homeland extends throughout the Red Sea hills. They are often called the Hillmen as a result.

during the latter half of the nineteenth century. They are famous for their war-like spirit, dashing dress, nomadic ways, and are the most populous of the Beja divisions (Gamst 1984:131).

Most of the *Ababda* Beja reside in southern Egypt<sup>12</sup> (see Appendices 2, 3 & 5) between the Nile River and the Red Sea (Gamst 1984:131), although many populate an area along the Nile in northern Sudan (Ausenda 1987:32). The *Ababda* are the most Arabized of all of the Beja divisions. The Egyptian *Ababda* speak only Arabic, while some of the Sudanese *Ababda* are also conversant in the Beja language.

The majority of the *Beni-Amer* Beja live in northwestern Eritrea,<sup>13</sup> but quite a number dwell along the Eritrean border<sup>14</sup> inside eastern Sudan (Jenkins 1996:1) living among their *Hadendoa* Beja neighbors (see Appendices 2 & 3). The *Beni-Amer* division ranges as far north as Suakin, a town forty kilometers south of Port Sudan (Roden 1970:1). Unlike the other subgroups, the *Beni-Amer* before the colonial era had a social stratification resembling a feudal-serf relationship. Only about fifteen percent of the division are true *Beni-Amer* and are known as the *Nabatab*. The remaining part of the division is called the

---

<sup>12</sup> In 1990 my wife and I traveled down the coast from the Red Sea Egyptian resort city of Hurghada and encountered (and drank coffee with) *Ababda* Beja as far north as Al-Quseir and Mersa Alam. In 2008 I visited with some *Ababda* Beja over coffee in Aswan near the government hospital and in Ballana between Aswan and Luxor.

<sup>13</sup> A sizeable number of *Beni-Amer* Beja live in the city of Keren, Eritrea. Many also dwell in the strategic port city of Massawa. The town of Agordat is almost totally composed of *Beni-Amer* Beja. I visited with many *Beni-Amer* Beja in these places on numerous occasions.

<sup>14</sup> I supervised a relief project in Karora, Sudan adjacent to the border with Eritrea. A Sudanese official told me that when there was food being distributed on the Sudanese side, the *Beni-Amer* Beja claimed to be Sudanese. When relief was dispensed on the Eritrean side of the border, they claimed to be Eritreans.



*Tigre* (see Appendix 6),<sup>15</sup> who belonged to the *Nabatab* as almost serfs<sup>16</sup> through a conquest that happened centuries earlier. The British abolished this practice in 1948, but the social rights, privileges and some marriage prohibition<sup>17</sup> subtly remain beneath the surface (Nadel 1945:81; Gamst 1984:143).

Although united by ancestry, language, and custom, the Beja are composed of rival confederations that compete for some of the same scarce resources, often quarrelling with one another (Ornas & Dahl 1991:5; Fleming 1922:1). Such struggling occurs because of their nomadic nature and overlapping grazing areas. An early observer summarized the loose organization of Beja society.

Individualists and unamenable to anything that cramps their style, they do not stay clustered together in big sections, each section sticking to its own field of territory. While the tie of blood and clan remains immensely strong in them, yet each individual family of a clan may go off to seek its fortune in a new direction. The result is that community living on a tribal basis is, territorially, split into a jig-saw of innumerable small and separate living units (Owen 1937:201).

Like many African peoples, the Beja are further divided into divisions, sub-divisions, clans, segmentary patri-lineages (i.e. *bedana*) and sublineages (i.e. *hissa*). Each

---

<sup>15</sup> The *Tigre* concept is confusing. The Eritrean government calls the *Beni-Amer* Beja the *Tigre* tribe (see appendix 6) but the language of *Tigre* is spoken by the *Beni-Amer* Beja subdivision on both sides of Sudanese-Eritrean border. Technically speaking the *Tigre* are the serfs of the *Nabatab Beni-Amer* Beja nobility (see footnote 16 in this chapter). However, normally both the serfs and nobility are just called the *Beni-Amer*.

<sup>16</sup> The *Nabatab* nobility make up about one-tenth of the total *Beni-Amer* population, while the serfs or *Tigre* compose the remainder (Nadel 1945:66). Paul (1959:77) claims the *Hedareb* (*Hadendoa* Beja living inside Eritrea, see Appendix 6) also kept serfs, although they were never part of the *Nabatab* (nobility of the *Beni-Amer* Beja).

<sup>17</sup> *Nabatab* noblemen may marry a *Tigre* woman, but never the reverse (Nadel 1945:81).

*bedana* has its own grazing areas, watering sites, and land usage rotation cycles. Often these subdivisions split up during the rainy season, wandering far afield into the territory of other Beja divisions searching for greener pastures for both grazing and cultivation.<sup>18</sup>

The *Hadendoa* territorial system reflects the segmented lineage structure which the tribal genealogies present...*Asl*<sup>19</sup> territorial rights are inherited collectively by male members of the lineage in the patrilineal descent line, and the land must remain constantly within this specific agnatic group... Therefore, *asl* rights belong to the whole lineage and no territory is divided into individual shares. The lineage members have equal access to pastures and natural water resources such as springs, streams and pools in their territory. But there are acknowledged individual rights to cultivable plots, wells and residential sites... The tribal rules of the *Hadendoa* do not recognize gifts (or sale) of grazing rights, wells, trees and agricultural land unless they are approved by the whole lineage (Salih 1980:118-119).

A *sheikh* loosely leads each *bedana* (or several linked together). These officials also wield some religious authority depending upon their reputation for piety (Gamst 1984:133). The *sheikh* often inherits his position, but governs with the consent of his followers. Disputes are settled by lengthy discussions based on pre-Islamic Beja law (*salif*) and compromise (Lewis 1962:37). Conflicts may be resolved through mediation by an outsider

---

<sup>18</sup> The Beja are intensely nomadic, "ranging from Egypt to the Atbara [river], and from the coast to the [Nile] River" (Sandars 1933:145). This is because Bejaland is not a fenced area and the travel of these nomadic individuals and families is legendary. I met Sudanese Beja who traveled by camel from Kassala to Southern Egypt and Port Sudan Beja who journeyed by lorry (truck) from the Red Sea to Keren in the mountains of central Eritrea.

<sup>19</sup> Arabic word meaning 'origin' and incorporated into *To-Bedawie*. It refers to the joint rights of the tribe to a certain territory. *Asl* rights were taken through conquest by the *Hadendoa* Beja from other northern Sudanese tribes in both pre-colonial and colonial days.

(Sandars 1933:147), even a foreigner, but not necessarily by the *sheikh* himself (Gamst 1984:133).

## **2.2 History of the Beja tribe**

The Beja tribe of the Sudan has long intrigued both scholars and travelers due to their long and colorful history (Ausenda 1987:11). Their isolation from and contact with many of the civilizations of the ancient world has only added to this mystique. When the Beja received the vote for the first time upon Sudanese independence in 1956, democracy among the Beja attracted attention even in the United States (Atyeo 1956:129). A short examination of their history demonstrates why the Beja have captured the imagination of so many.

### **2.2.1 Early Beja history**

The Beja are ancient Hamitic Cushites who have inhabited the desert between the Nile River and the Red Sea for the last four thousand years (Beja 1979:281). The *Amarar* Beja trace their lineage from Cush, the Biblical son of Ham and migrated to Bejaland after the flood (Paul 1954:20). Many scholars believe the Beja to be descendents of the pre-dynastic Egyptians<sup>20</sup> because of their language and physical features (Owen 1937:181; Clark 1938:3).

The Beja were quite possibly the *Medju* (Holt 1961:52), the *Anti* (Budge 1909:174), or the 'pan-grave people' depicted in Egyptian writings (Ornas & Dahl 1991:17). They eventually adopted the state religion of

---

<sup>20</sup> Northern Sudan and southern Egypt (upper Egypt) were really one contiguous land during ancient times. The Egyptian god *Re* was often regarded as wholly Cushitic. Even *Ammon-Re*, lord of the two lands (upper and lower Egypt) was considered a Cushitic god (Haycock 1968:10). The ruins of the ancient Cushitic kingdom of Meroe lie north of Shendi and Khartoum, Sudan along the Nile (Davidson 1978:47). The Cushitic kingdoms of Meroe and Napata (near Jebel Barkal in northern Sudan) sometimes were ruled by Egypt, but often the reverse was true. The lands of ancient Meroe were part of the territory the Beja nomads raided from the seventh century BC until the sixth century AD (Holt 1961:143, 155, 178-181).

Egypt in the pre-Christian era, particularly favoring the shrine of the goddess *Isis* at the Philae Temple in Aswan (Paul 1954:37).<sup>21</sup>

The Greeks and Romans, who fought against the tribe during the third and fourth centuries BC, referred to the Beja as the *Blemmyes* (Paul 1954:1; Robinson 2002:145; Ornas & Dahl 1991:18). The Beja participated in raids and skirmishes with ancient Egypt<sup>22</sup> (and Meroe<sup>23</sup>), Greece,<sup>24</sup> Rome,<sup>25</sup> and Constantinople for twenty-five hundred years.

The Christian Empress Theodora finally closed the temple of *Isis* for worship in 540 AD, ending the active worship of the ancient gods of Egypt by the Nubians, Beja and Egyptians. Due to missionary activity, the Beja later became nominally Christian by the sixth century (Theobald 1951:5; Hassan 1963:1). A Monophysite missionary by the name of Longinus from Constantinople carried a Christian message through the Nubian territory (previously evangelized by his predecessor Julian) to the Beja tribes of the northern Sudanese desert (Kirwan 1937:290). Paul (1959:77) writes, "A very considerable number also were still pagans, worshipping devils, and very much under the awe-inspiring demoniac influence of their shamans." Until their conversion to Islam,

---

<sup>21</sup> Evidence exists that the Beja tribes adopted the Egyptian dynastic state religions of *Isis*, *Serapis*, *Osiris*, and *Priapus*, including all of the gods of the Greeks. Procopius adds the *Blemmyes* may have also offered human sacrifices to the sun god, *Madulis* (Paul 1954:37).

<sup>22</sup> The first mention of the Beja came in the reign of the Egyptian Pharaoh Amenemhat I, who ruled between 2000 and 1970 BC.

<sup>23</sup> Meroe (north of Shendi, Sudan along the Nile) was the likely home of the Ethiopian Eunuch of Acts 8:23, as the Cushitic kingdom was ruled by a dynasty of queens, all bearing the name, *Candace* (Budge, 1907:169; Bruce 1951:191).

<sup>24</sup> Representatives of the Beja tribe also raided the empire when Egypt belonged to Alexander the Great.

<sup>25</sup> The Roman Emperor Diocletian (late third century AD) was one of many Roman rulers whose domain was raided by the Beja (Holt 1961:59).

Their beliefs remained a peculiar mixture of paganism, sun-and-stone worship, veneration of Isis, Serapis, and Mandulis, with a thin overlay of Jacobite Christianity (Paul 1954:62).

### 2.2.2 Colonial Beja history

Due to the isolation and inhospitable nature of their homeland's terrain (Ornas & Dahl 1991:42), the Beja successfully avoided being overly influenced by a succession of actual and potential rulers.<sup>26</sup> They were able to maintain a distance from the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and Muslim kingdoms that desired to control them. Although never completely subjugated by a foreign power,<sup>27</sup> the Beja gradually began to be absorbed into Islam by the thirteenth century through marriages, trading contacts with the nearby Arab tribes, and Muslim missionary activity (Beja 1979:281; Hassan 1963:5; Ausenda 1987:43).

Many of the Beja took part in the rebellion of the Sudanese *Mahdi*<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdallah (Moorehead 1960:99) against the Anglo-Egyptian government in the last half of the nineteenth century (Gamst 1984:132). The Beja *Hadendoa* general, Osman Digna<sup>29</sup> broke a "British

---

<sup>26</sup> "The Red Sea Hills form a stronger barrier than the Red Sea," noted one observer (Perkins 1993:185).

<sup>27</sup> In 1275 the successors of the Muslim ruler Saladin annexed the Sudan from their base in Egypt (Budge 1909:193). However, their rule did not reach into Bejaland.

<sup>28</sup> Many Muslims (especially *Sufis*) believe a second great prophet will come to Islam during a time of shame and trouble. This individual will be called the *Mahdi* who will reunite Islam as one nation (i.e. *Umma*) and lead the faithful back to Allah. Muhammad Ahmad of Sudan claimed to be this person and successfully expelled the British and Egyptians from Sudan in 1885 (Churchill 1899:27). The *Mahdia* (i.e. The *Mahdi's* government) ruled Sudan from 1885-1898 with participation from many Beja. The next chapter covers more about the *Mahdi* concept in Islam.

<sup>29</sup> The British arrested Osman Digna following the reconquest of the Sudan in 1898 after the *Khalifa's* death in battle. The old Beja warrior served a long sentence in a prison in Wadi Halfa, Sudan and

Square" (i.e. military formation), defeating a superior force in 1884 at Tokar, Sudan (Churchill 1899:49; Theobald 1951:66; Eldon 1954:359). Beja military units were also part of the *Mahdi's* army that defeated the British colonial governor, General Charles "Chinese" Gordon<sup>30</sup> at Khartoum in 1885 (Beja 1979:281).<sup>31</sup> They were also part of the *Khalifa*<sup>32</sup> Abdullah's force<sup>33</sup> defeated by General Kitchener's army<sup>34</sup> at Khartoum in 1898 (Spiers 1998:61). Rudyard Kipling referred to the Beja as the brave "Fuzzy

---

was released in 1925 at the age of almost 100. Digna returned to Suakin, Sudan where he died a free man ('Fuzzy Wuzzy' 1925:1).

<sup>30</sup> Sir Charles Gordon was a well-known Christian in Victorian Great Britain. While passing through Palestine (traveling from Asia to Africa) Gordon speculated that a rock formation and cave outside the old city of Jerusalem might be the more likely place of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ (than the Church of the Holy Sepulcher). The "Garden Tomb" and "Gordon's Calvary," visited by many tourists today, bears his name.

<sup>31</sup> The *Mahdi*, after becoming absolute ruler of the Sudan in 1885, fell sick five months after his great victory over the British and Egyptian forces and died shortly thereafter (Churchill 1899:71).

<sup>32</sup> *Khalifa* is the Sudanese Arabic name for the *Caliph*, or successor to the *Mahdi*. The rulers of united Islam after the Prophet Mohammad (and his successors) were called *Caliphs*. Therefore, when the Sudanese *Mahdi* (Muhammad Ahmed) died his successor Abdullah was also called the *Caliph* (or deputy of the *Mahdi*).

<sup>33</sup> The *Khalifa* Abdullah assumed the leadership of the *Mahdia* (rule of the *Mahdi's* followers) upon the death of Muhammad Ahmad. Although his forces were defeated at the Battle of Omdurman (near Khartoum) by General Kitchener in 1898, the *Khalifa* and many of his followers fled to Western Sudan. In 1899, at a battle near Gedid, Sudan, the *Khalifa* Abdullah died in battle with all of his generals (except the Beja general Osman Digna), ending the *Mahdia*. A young British officer, Winston Churchill, fought under Kitchener's command at the Battle of Omdurman and recounted these events in his first book, *The river war* (Churchill 1899:342). The *Khalifa* Abdullah had gone so far as to even abolish the pilgrimage to Mecca, a major violation of orthodox Islamic practice (Ornas & Dahl 1991:39).

<sup>34</sup> At least one Beja group (1,500 warriors of the *Ababda* Beja of southern Egypt) were part of Kitchener's expedition against the *Mahdi* due to internal disagreements between the Beja divisions. Kitchener dubbed these irregulars the *Ababda* Frontier Force (Magnus 1958:43).

Wuzzy's"<sup>35</sup> due to their distinctive hairstyle<sup>36</sup> and fighting spirit (Beja 1979:281).

The Beja have exhibited both indifference and rebelliousness toward Egyptian, British and now modern Sudanese administrations, preferring their independent and nomadic pastoral ways (Paul 1954:2-3). The British official who worked among the Beja and wrote the only history of the tribe spoke from personal experience about the colonial government's view toward them:

The administration of the Beja-speaking tribes of the Eastern Sudan has long presented a problem to which no entirely satisfactory solution could be found (Paul 1954:127).

### **2.2.3 Recent Beja history**

After Sudan obtained independence from Britain and Egypt<sup>37</sup> in 1956, the Beja formed a group called the Beja Congress<sup>38</sup> to represent their concerns politically and culturally before the government in Khartoum (Shurkian 2006:8). This somewhat informal group as well as Beja

---

<sup>35</sup> Rudyard Kipling (in Cooper 1929:175) wrote, "We've fought with many men acrost the seas, An' some of 'em was brave 'an some of 'em was not. The Parythan an' the Zulu an' Burmese; But the Fuzzy was the finest of the lot...So 'ere's to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, at your 'ome in the Sudan."

<sup>36</sup> The "hayrick" head of hair that inspired Kipling's appellation is called in the Beja language a "*tiffa*". Beja men believe this hairstyle impresses women and has magical powers. Many sleep with their necks resting on a wooden neck-rest (*matras*) to keep from disturbing their hair at night (Lewis 1962:35-36). The next chapter explores folk beliefs such as this.

<sup>37</sup> The end of the *Mahdia* in 1899 ushered in an Anglo-Egyptian condominium that ruled Sudan from 1899 until 1956. "Although Egypt theoretically had equal status with Britain, in actuality it was the British alone who administered Sudan until it became independent in 1956" (Petterson 1999:7).

<sup>38</sup> M.D. Ismail authored a pamphlet in 1954 entitled *Kifah al-Bija* (The struggle of the Beja) that ignited Beja political consciousness and is considered the inspiration for the founding of the Beja Congress. Ismail was concerned about the plight of the rural tribesman, but the pamphlet aroused the interest of the urban Beja (especially the stevedores) of Port Sudan (Perkins 1993:236).

individuals elected to Sudanese parliaments, brought tribal concerns to a succession of Sudanese governments. Beja Congress members won ten seats in the parliamentary elections of 1965, but only three seats in the 1968 elections. The Beja Congress was rumored to have been strongly influenced by certain urban intellectual Communists<sup>39</sup> who were trying to use Beja regional interests for their own ends (Morton 1989:67).

Beginning in 1958, power fluctuated between a series of civilian and military governments until Colonel Gaafar Muhammad Numeiry seized power in 1969 (Petterson 1999:8). In order to appeal to the growing Islamist movement in Sudan, Numeiry imposed Islamic law (*Sharia*) upon the whole country in 1983, which most northern Sudanese tribes supported, including a majority of the Beja leadership (Morton 1989:67). Another *coup d'état*, however, soon toppled the Numeiry government in 1985.

After a year of transition, a series of democratic coalition governments oversaw a period of political stagnation and decline in the face of the growing rebellion in southern Sudan. General Omar Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir, backed by the National Islamic Front (NIF)<sup>40</sup> of Hassan al Turabi,<sup>41</sup> overthrew the democratically elected government

---

<sup>39</sup> A Beja communist might seem like an odd twist. However, one of the first converts to Christianity from the Beja people (baptized by me) is a former communist.

<sup>40</sup> The NIF represents the strict Islamic fundamentalist party in Sudan and has ties to the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.

<sup>41</sup> Hassan al-Turabi is a brother-in-law to Sadiq al-Mahdi. Turabi was the spiritual leader of the NIF and assisted Omar al-Bashir in overthrowing Sadiq al-Mahdi. Turabi served as the leader of parliament during part of Bashir's presidency. However, they had a falling out and Turabi has been jailed several times for opposing his former protégé's policies. Turabi and the NIF harbored Osama bin Laden during his time of residency in Sudan in the 1990's. A US Embassy friend pointed out to me the house of bin Laden, located only about a mile away from where I lived in Khartoum with my family.



of Prime Minister (then head of state) Sadiq al-Mahdi<sup>42</sup> in June of 1989 (Petterson 1999:8-9).<sup>43</sup> As of this writing, Omar al-Bashir still rules the Sudan although under indictment by the World Court for war crimes in Dar Fur.<sup>44</sup>

Much of the turmoil in Sudan since independence has been over the fate of southern Sudan. The civil war raged from two years before independence (1954) until the peace agreement was signed in 2005, except for a ten-year break from 1972-1982 (Petterson 1999:8).

The political situation has been further complicated by the Dar Fur rebellion that began against the government of Sudan in 2003, resulting in a second concurrent civil war. Furthermore, the Beja Congress opted for an armed struggle against the Khartoum government in 1990, and by 1992 had joined the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). This embroiled Sudan in three simultaneous civil wars. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the Beja Congress freedom fighters in eastern Sudan were being supported and supplemented by the Sudan People's

---

<sup>42</sup> Sadiq al-Mahdi is a descendant of the original Sudanese *Mahdi*, Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdallah. After being overthrown as Prime Minister (and his office abolished by his successor), Sadiq al-Mahdi spent from 1989-1996 under house arrest. After his escape to Eritrea in 1996 he led the opposition from outside Sudan. During his days of house arrest, he occasionally was spotted around Khartoum. I saw him at a United States embassy day celebration in July of 1991.

<sup>43</sup> Some members of the Beja Congress were elected in several Sudanese Parliamentary elections. However, the NIF attempted to co-opt the Beja Congress' influence by establishing a competing group called the Islamic Beja Congress (Shurkian 2005:11).

<sup>44</sup> On Arabic maps, Dar Fur is written as two separate words. The Fur tribe live in the "place of the Fur," or Dar Fur. However, most English maps and newspaper articles spell the territory as Darfur. The former, more proper terminology is used in this thesis. The (Sudanese) editor of the *Sudan Times*, O.M. Shurkian, employs the term Dar Fur in one of the articles quoted for this thesis (Shurkian 2006:7). Another Sudanese (Karrar 1992:142) spells the region's name as Dar Fur, rather than Darfur. Dar Fur is also used in Kapteijns' article (1989:263).

Liberation Army<sup>45</sup> (SPLA) -the Southern Sudanese forces of the late John Garang (Shurkian 2006:12). The Beja Congress was given sanctuary by the Eritrean government and the Beja fighters operated from safe havens within their territory.<sup>46</sup>

In 2004 the SPLA withdrew from the NDA<sup>47</sup> as the Southerners approached a peace agreement with Khartoum. The Beja Congress then joined with the *Rashaida*<sup>48</sup> Free Lions and some other eastern Sudanese groups to form a force called the Eastern Front. On October 14, 2006, the Eastern Front groups signed a separate agreement with the Khartoum government to merge with the Sudanese military in exchange for some representation in the Sudanese government (Shurkian 2008:1). Although peace agreements have

---

<sup>45</sup> The SPLA is the military arm of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The SPLA (and several other splinter groups) waged the civil wars between Northerners and Southerners in Sudan sporadically from 1955 (Petterson 1999:19) until 2005. The war in the west of Sudan in Dar Fur constitutes a separate civil war. The lower grade conflict in eastern Sudan that was supported by the Beja Congress constituted (prior to the peace treaties of 2005-2006) a third simultaneous civil war.

<sup>46</sup> In 2002 I traveled by private car from Khartoum to Port Sudan with some visitors from Brazil and another Christian worker. There was a delay in Kassala. The military police explained that the Beja rebels and Eritrean forces were camped at a front only thirty miles from our location. Special permission to travel on the highway was required and obtained with great difficulty. In the office of a major in the Sudanese Army, my colleague inquired as to the problem. The officer replied, "We are in a civil war."

<sup>47</sup> Sadiq al-Mahdi, the last democratically elected leader of Sudan, returned from self-imposed exile in 2000 after his *Umma* party ended their membership in the NDA (Jok 2008:101).

<sup>48</sup> The *Rashaida* constitute a tribe who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula to eastern Sudan and northern Eritrea in the nineteenth century. They are nomadic pastoralists like the Beja who live in tents in Bejaland between Suakin on the north and east, Kassala on the south and west, and along the Red Sea between Suakin (Sudan) and into Eritrea. In Sudan they number about seventy-five thousand persons, while in Eritrea their population is approximately one hundred and fifty thousand (The *Rashaida* tribe of Sudan 1970:1). The *Rashaida* are one of the nine official ethnic groups of Eritrea (See Appendix 6).

been signed with the various groups fighting with the Khartoum government, tension still exists in eastern Sudan with the Beja tribe, in western Sudan with the Fur people, and in southern Sudan with the *Dinka*<sup>49</sup> and *Nuer* ethnic groups.

### 2.3 Beja society

The Beja tribe remains an enigma. Most seem to have remained frozen in time for the last thousand years, retaining their traditional customs and thinking (Lewis 1962:37). Some have embraced the modern world and are fully involved in the life of the Sudanese nation state. Others are caught between the two worlds and attempt to participate in both.

This section on Beja society will describe the traditional Hillmen that comprise the majority of the tribe, even in the urban areas where they live largely in ethnic enclaves. This thesis examines the more traditional majority Beja. Wealthy, modern, educated, and orthodox Muslim Beja (or some combination of these) do exist, but in much fewer numbers than their more conventional counterparts.<sup>50</sup> A survey of Beja society and culture demonstrates how this tribe serves as an excellent case study for exploring the mindset of the folk Muslim.

---

<sup>49</sup> The leadership of the SPLA (now the provisional government in southern Sudan) is largely derived from one of the *Dinka* tribal divisions. However, other southern Sudanese tribes have been part of the SPLA, including the *Nuer*, *Shulluk*, *Zandi* and *Murle*.

<sup>50</sup> I befriended a wealthy Beja family that owned several Sudanese companies. Of the five brothers in the family; one had been employed as a Boeing 737 pilot for Sudanese Airways (graduating from flight school at the Boeing company in the USA) and presently sits as a member of the Sudanese Parliament; two had graduated from Oxford University (UK); and one had obtained an engineering degree in the United States and currently serves as a minister in one of the Sudanese state governments. This family flies to the United Kingdom for vacation and medical treatment. One attended a football match in South America during the FIFA World Cup qualifications some years ago.

### 2.3.1 The Beja socio-economic situation

The majority of the Beja people are nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists, although many also raise sorghum<sup>51</sup> in the seasonable riverbeds<sup>52</sup> (Jacobson 1999:20). Many Beja men ride swift camels. They may have been some of the first people to rear camels in Africa (Ornas & Dahl 1991:1). Concerning the Beja ability with camels, Paul (1954:147) relates the following description:

Medieval observers have remarked on their ability to handle their cumbrous mounts in battle as easily as horses, and I have myself at tribal gatherings witnessed feats of great dexterity- riders who stood upright in the saddle guiding their camels with one hand while brandishing a naked sword in the other, or who carried a bowl of milk, riding at full tilt, without spilling a drop.

Presently the principal marketplace for the sale of the Beja camels (even Sudanese and Eritrean camels) is the Ababda Beja town of Darraw, Egypt (Sandars 1933:145).<sup>53</sup>

A number of Beja (both men and women) moved to the cities to pursue other occupations due to the recurring droughts in eastern Sudan that have decimated their livestock (Lewis 1962:17). One researcher estimates that seventy-five to ninety percent of all domestic livestock perished during the drought of 1984 (Jacobson 1998:20). Ornas and Dahl (1991:4) place the losses to the Beja herds at closer to ninety-five percent during the drought

---

<sup>51</sup> Arabic, *dura*.

<sup>52</sup> Arabic, *Khoor*.

<sup>53</sup> I confirmed the continued existence of this camel market by visits to the site in both 1991 and 2008. A good adult camel sells for approximately US\$ 1,500.00 altering one's view of the financial situation of nomads. Many of the *Rashaida* and Beja pastoralists who possess many camels drive Toyota (the preferred brand) double-cab pickup trucks and have satellite dishes outside their tents.

and subsequent famine of 1984.<sup>54</sup> Morton (1989:69) chronicles the severity of the situation.

Many years of drought, neglect of the pastoral sector and rising grain prices in other parts of the country caused a breakdown of the pastoral economy as Beja were left destitute by the deaths and forced sales of their livestock. The famine led to thousands of Beja coming from the hills to the Port Sudan-Kassala highway to beg, and it was only at the very end of 1984 that international agencies came in to mount emergency relief operations, which in the summer of 1986 were still feeding 300,000 people. The policy of the Numeiry government was to suppress any suggestion of famine among the Sudanese; it was portrayed as a problem of Ethiopian and Chadian refugees. The policy was one of neglect by the government, and the Beja government of (the) Eastern Region was no exception.

This situation of Eritrean-Ethiopian *Beni-Amer* Beja refugees living in camps on all sides of the tripartite border (Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia) continued through the late 1990's. Internally displaced Beja often succeeded in entering the refugee camps operated and funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). I supervised relief and development programs among the Beja in both the rural and urban areas of eastern Sudan from 1991-1997. Economic deprivation was severe in the midst of both the Beja refugees from Eritrea and the internally displaced<sup>55</sup> Sudanese Beja during the last two decades of the twentieth century.

---

<sup>54</sup> A severe drought and famine transpired in Ethiopia in 1984. Conditions were just as severe in eastern Sudan, but the Beja suffered without the attention their neighbors received across the border in Ethiopia. Eritrea was still part of Ethiopia during the 1980's, not receiving their independence until 1991.

<sup>55</sup> According to the UNHCR, a refugee is one who has crossed an international border for reasons of war, political instability or natural disaster. Often the UNHCR will establish temporary camps for refugees to dwell in while they are waiting to either return to their country of origin or resettle. Conversely, internally displaced persons are those who have had to flee their homes due to war, political instability, or natural disaster within their own countries. Often the

Frederick Gamst (1984:132, numbering & bold mine) offers a helpful distinction between four different kinds of Beja.

In socioeconomic terms **four kinds of Beja are found**, the last not being traditional. **[1]** One are the camel and shepherders of the north, who also conduct some horticulture of grain. **[2]** Two are the cattle, sheep and camel herders of the south, who are also either rain-horticulturalists or riverine cultivators. Those along rivers may live part of the year in permanent villages of mud-walled house. **[3]** Three are those in temporary or permanent commercial or subsistence cultivation of crops, principally cotton and grain, but who also have flocks of animals. Such cultivation is mainly in the Gash (*Qash*) Delta and the Barka River's Tokar delta. The two are flush-irrigated inland deltas some 200 miles apart.<sup>56</sup> **[4]** Four are townsmen and modern urbanites in the greater Khartoum area and in various towns such as Kassa-la and Port Sudan.

### 2.3.2 The Beja personality

A. Paul examined Beja behavior in *Sudan Notes and Records*, prior to publishing a book on the history of the tribe. His description of the Beja personality is striking.

Shy, aloof, independent, credulous, they have been called inarticulate, but once their initial reserve is penetrated they have a lot to say for themselves and are apt to be verbose (1950:23).

On the other hand, the Beja can be friendly and hospitable to the point of self-denial (Ornas & Dahl 1991:4). According to Owen (1937:190), *Hadendoa* Beja possess a reputation for honesty and virtue (except for casual

---

United Nations assists the internally displaced through the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) or the WFP (UN World Food Program), but never through the UNHCR. The latter's mandate only includes refugees.

<sup>56</sup> According to local inhabitants, the Barka River only contains water two or three days annually. Since this is a dry channel most of the year, there are no bridges spanning the river in Sudan. I attempted to cross *Khoor* Barka during one of the few rainy days when water suddenly filled the channel. My vehicle and I were lodged in the mud for several hours until a passing lorry extracted my automobile.

animal theft) while others have called them backward, sullen, intractable and intransigent (Cooper 1929:175; Arkell 1955:4). Paul (1954:98) reports them as sometimes standoffish, withdrawing and warlike.

The Beja men carry long swords<sup>57</sup> and are known as courageous fighters (Cooper 1929:485-486). Despite their ferocity, they possess a considerable body of poetry about love (Roper 1927:148). The complexity of the Beja character is reflected in this poem about unrequited love translated by Roper (1927:157) from the Beja language.

*I Khane te dainai nun;  
Erha dehok bibarinek  
Tan'e durai u'arit minda,  
yame bakwanese*

Unreciprocated love is futile;  
It resembles, O my uncle,  
Raindrops from those thunder clouds,  
That do not cause the *khors*<sup>58</sup> to run

The Beja possess a deserved reputation as a fighting man. The members of the tribe revel in their ferocity and virility. One observer describes the typical Beja young man.

Blood feuds were, until recently, a common and accepted custom, and tribal warfare almost a pastime for these primitive warriors...The young men are expected to be always in trouble, chasing women, fighting and quarreling amongst themselves; their behavior as young bloods always brings a smile to the face of a Beja when it is discussed (Lewis 1962:35).

---

<sup>57</sup> In the early twentieth century the Beja settled most major disputes with swords (Cooper 1929:175). Even in the last decade I observed most Beja men wearing traditional nomadic dress and carrying swords through the streets of Kassala, the second largest Beja city; considered the center of their tribal culture. Swords are usually reserved for married men. Boys and younger men practice for the future by learning sword moves by jousting with long sticks (Lewis 1962:36).

<sup>58</sup> Riverbeds that occasionally fill with water during the scarce rains in the desert.

### 2.3.3 The Beja culture

Conventional Beja culture is more easily maintained in a traditional country like Sudan than more modern Islamic nations. In the Muslim north of the country, most of the male inhabitants (even in Khartoum) wear sandal-length white cotton robes (*jalabiyah*), not the Western dress so typical of the men in Egyptian and Jordanian cities. Most of the women don a conventional dress called a *tob* (*fota*).<sup>59</sup> Therefore, when the Beja dress in a traditional manner in their tribal areas or visit other parts of Sudan, they do not attract much attention.<sup>60</sup>

As Muslims, Islamic law permits Beja men to marry multiple wives. In actual fact, few currently practice polygamy.<sup>61</sup> Prior to the coming of Islam, the Beja were matrilineal. The *Amarar* Beja transitioned to a patrilineal system when Semitic people migrated from Arabia and intermarried with the Beja. One's cousin is the preferred marriage partner but the Beja do sometimes intermarry with other Beja divisions (Lewis 1962:35). Although they are not permitted to take part in legal proceedings or tribal decision-making (:37), Beja women seem to have more freedom than their counterparts in other Muslim societies (Sandars 1935:215).

---

<sup>59</sup>In Sudan the *tob* may be black but comes in other colors. A *tob* is the long dress most women in Sudan wear. The Beja word is *fota*.

<sup>60</sup>As has been mentioned previously, Beja men often wear a blue or gray vest over their white *jalabiyahs*. Beja women wear long dresses (*tobs*) but the bright pastel colors (red, pink, yellow, green, and blue) of the garments set them apart from other Muslim females in Sudan and elsewhere in the Muslim world.

<sup>61</sup> A survey of six hundred and thirty-nine Beja dock workers (i.e. Stevedores) in Port Sudan revealed that six hundred and twenty-four had only one wife or 97.6% (Lewis 1964:25). Only fifteen of those surveyed had more than one spouse.



Sudanese culture is ordered after more of a tribal model than a typical Islamic structure.<sup>62</sup> Lewis (1962:35) presents the following description of the stratification of males within Beja society.<sup>63</sup>

The remains of an age-set system is still to be found among them. The young men progress through the stages of *dabalo hunkul*, or junior warriors, and *shinkina hunkul*, senior warriors, to the married men's grade, *otak* ("a whole man with a family" as one informant put it), and finally becomes *hadab* [elders] who are supposed to speak in proverbs and settle affairs of the tribe, as the Beja say.

*Salif* (Beja customary law) is administered by the *hadab* (ie. elders), with participation by the *otak* (married men). There is a complicated system of payment for damages, including a hundred camels for causing a death, to a small amount of money paid for a day's incapacitation. The loss of an arm, leg, hand or eye requires a significant monetary or livestock reimbursement from the perpetrator to the victim. A wound from a sword or knife results in the payment of a smaller amount of money (Lewis 1962:36).

The Beja love coffee and the Beja coffee ceremony endures as an important part of Beja community life. Many in the largely Beja *Deim*<sup>64</sup> el Arab section of Port Sudan frequent the same coffee shop almost every day of their lives (Lewis 1962:38). Beja men and women spend much of

---

<sup>62</sup> Paul (1982:57) offers a caution here, however, and says the more Arabized the Beja group, the more likely they are to have introduced something like a caste system by which "the intruders have lorded it over the indigenous tribes."

<sup>63</sup> I have visited *Deim* el Arab in Port Sudan, the neighborhood of Lewis' research, as recently as 2002. The Beja coffee shops remain there and the social condition he describes has changed but little. Port Sudan was constructed in the early twentieth century from vacant coastline that offered a deeper harbor than was provided by the ancient city of Suakin sixty kilometers away (Perkins 1993:36, 66).

<sup>64</sup> Arabic for "neighborhood" or "native dwelling area" (Perkins, 1993:40).

their time drinking coffee. Some drink five cups of coffee five times a day, others five cups four times a day. The coffee ceremony<sup>65</sup> takes about one hour to complete and avails the Beja the opportunity to visit (usually separately by gender) in a relaxed venue. Since Beja gather for this ceremony many times a day for an hour at each occurrence, one researcher sees such relaxation as a core value in their culture.

Leisure and 'leisureliness' have been identified as the Beja ethos underlying most of their material life. A special 'Marked' leisure period is afforded by the coffee ritual, which takes up to one and a quarter hours. Beja meal<sup>66</sup> times are quick and silent, but the Beja *Jabanaat*, i.e. The time of coffee drinking, is the only activity that allows [the Beja]...to relax and socialize at the same time (Wedekind 1990:102-103).

Coffee is more than an occasion to socialize with the Beja. Women make coffee for themselves and the children every morning (Ausenda 1987:186). The beverage plays a major role in the essence of their culture. Ausenda (:344, bold mine) relates coffee's importance to them.

**A Hadendowa [Beja] cannot do without coffee...**The importance of coffee to Hadendowa is due to the fact that drinking it entails a welcome relaxation in the company of friends, which enlivens his drab daily routine. Coffee has become so important to the

---

<sup>65</sup> This coffee ritual is similar in substance and style to the Ethiopian coffee ceremony, celebrated by most tribes within that country. The ceremony involves roasting the coffee beans over an open fire, grinding them into a fine powder by hand, and then brewing the coffee in a pot of heated water. Beja coffee (*jabana*) is always brewed for guests who come calling. Guests are allowed to stay and visit one hour, the approximate length of time of the coffee ceremony, and then are supposed to go home. This constitutes a cultural pattern for the regulation of social visits. Unlike many societies, visitors in Bejaland know when it is time to go home.

<sup>66</sup>The Beja diet consists largely of milk and butter mixed with a little *durra* (millet from sorghum) and coffee (Roper 1927:147). This perhaps explains why among the thousands of Beja in Sudan, Egypt and Eritrea, not one person of any age or gender I have ever seen could be described as anything but slender.

Hadendowa that **its lack is considered tantamount to utter destitution, as if on the verge of starvation...**the cost of the ingredients necessary to prepare coffee represents between 15 and 25 percent of a Hadendowa's monthly budget, adding less than two percent of the calories, contained in sugar, to his total intake. **A Hadendowa would rather starve than stay without coffee.**

Beja also spend endless hours playing the board game of *Andot*.<sup>67</sup> The game is reputed to be as complicated as bridge and as difficult as chess. *Andot* is played by all the Beja divisions and at every level of society. Even the *sheikhs* and elders enjoy the game. Often herdsmen with little else to do, play all day (Owen 1938:201). Owen observed (:201) after enjoying *Andot* with the Beja, "There is no easier passport to their acquaintance and confidence than a game of *Andot*."

Besides the game of *Andot*, which is played at leisure under the shade of Acacia trees during the heat of the day, the Beja have running and jumping games<sup>68</sup> to develop stamina and agility (Lewis 1962:36). Lewis describes the game of *yest* in this manner.

In this game two sticks are placed on the ground some distance apart, a long jump over the first is followed by a second hop over the second stick. The

---

<sup>67</sup>*Andot* (ie. manure pellets) is played by moving small camel dung pieces along a carved wooden board that roughly resembles a backgammon apparatus. The Beja also throw camel pellets at the bride and groom at weddings, substituting a readily available resource in place of the rice or seeds of Western weddings. This game is similar to other board games throughout Africa. Interestingly, a lump of camel's dung is placed in the turban of the groom at the wedding of a member of the *Nabatab Beni-Amer* Beja nobility for good luck (Paul 1950:234).

<sup>68</sup>Beja jumping games resemble the leaping ceremonies of the *Maasai* tribe of Tanzania and Kenya and their cousins the *Samburu* tribe of northern Kenya. During their jumping games, the Beja, *Maasai*, and *Samburu* men compete to see who can leap the highest. I witnessed this many times visiting the *Maasai* and *Samburu* tribes while living in Tanzania and Kenya. Once between Suakin and Tokar along the Red Sea coast, I encountered a Beja wedding ceremony where the men were jumping as part of the ceremony. The Beja women were one-quarter of a mile away participating in a different kind of celebratory activity.

sticks are placed gradually further apart until all competitors are eliminated. The importance still paid to these pursuits goes far to explain the toughness of the young men.

The principal Beja pastime is storytelling and those who are adept at this skill are valuable to a nomadic society with so much free time (Clark 1938:26). The colonial publication *Sudan Notes and Records* is replete with examples of Beja folk tales, proverbs, stories and poems. This excellent folk tale demonstrates how such stories can open a window into the culture and worldview of the Beja. The following story transcends all cultures.

A *Tigre* folk tale: the lion the hyena and the fox

The Lion, Hyena and the Fox were friends. When they went out hunting together, they killed a donkey, a gazelle, and a hare. Then the Lion said to the Hyena, "Come, this kill, divide it among us." The Hyena said, "I know all about dividing a kill; you take the donkey, I will take the gazelle, and the Fox can have the hare." The Lion was so angry and struck the Hyena so hard with his paw that she died. Then he called the Fox and said to him, "Divide the kill." The Fox said, "The donkey will do for your lunch, the gazelle for your dinner, and you can wipe your mouth with the hare." The Lion pondered long, and was very pleased and said, "O Fox, who taught you this division?" The Fox replied, "The Fate of the Hyena taught me" (Beaton 1947:146-147).

#### **2.3.4 The Beja language**

Most of the Beja speak an oral language, *To-Bedawie*, that until recently had no written script (Roper 1927:148).<sup>69</sup> They are the largest of the northern Sudanese groups to speak a single language other than Arabic (Morton 1989:65-66). The *Amarar*, *Hadendoa*, and *Bisharin*<sup>70</sup> Beja

---

<sup>69</sup> Several linguists have been working on developing a script, grammar and narratives in the Beja language since 1994. Good progress has been made but the results have not spread widely among the Beja themselves.

<sup>70</sup> These three subdivisions can be found on in Appendix 3. *Bisharin* is sometimes spelled *Bishariin* in some transliteration schemes.

divisions live in northeastern Sudan and are largely, monolingual in *To-Bedawie* (see Beja in Appendices 7 & 10), an ancient unwritten northern Hamitic Cushitic language (Gamst 1984:131). Other related languages include Somali, *Galla*, *Sidamo*, and *Kaffa* (Ausenda 1987:41). Clark (1938:3) adds *Maasai* to this list. He admired the language's ordered structure and vast vocabulary and suspects a close relationship between Beja and the language of the Egyptian hieroglyphics (:3). *To-Bedawie* possesses five principal dialects. Although Cushitic in structure, Beja contains some Semitic elements as well. Roper (1927:147) reports the following.

Points of contact between *Bedawiet* and Semitic languages are numerous yet many salient features are quite dissimilar. For instance in Semitic languages the article is usually lacking or indeclinable. In *Bedawiet* the definite article is inflected for masculine and feminine, for singular and plural, for nominative and constructive, this latter case possibly being divisible into accusative and oblique. The vocabulary is fairly evenly divided into Semitic and non-Semitic (ie. Cushitic); in recent years closer contact with merchants and government officials has led the *Bedawiet* speaking peoples to adopt many jargon Arabic words.

Although the majority of the Hillmen still speak only Beja, the educated and urban Beja populations increasingly understand and speak Arabic. Some Beja prefer Arabic in certain circumstances and even "have ambivalent attitudes toward the unwritten language that unites them" (Morton 1989:66).<sup>71</sup> John Voll (1974:91) notes this trend.

Almost all the northern Sudanese are agreed on the acceptance of the Arab heritage, and of the Islamic faith and way of life that go with it. Nor is there any significant demand among those whose mother tongue is not Arabic, whether Beja, Nubians, or *Fur*,

---

<sup>71</sup> The complexity of the situation is evident in the same article a few pages later. Morton (1989:70) reports that some Beja during the Numeiry government in the 1980's asked for *To-Bedawie* to become an official language in Sudan.

that their language be adopted in place of Arabic for administrative, educational,<sup>72</sup> or general use.

This Arabization first affected the *Ababda* Beja residing in Egypt and spread to their kinsmen in northern Sudan. Most of these Beja are monolingual in Arabic (Ausenda 1987:33). The *Beni-Amer* Beja live in northwestern Eritrea and primarily speak the Semitic language of *Tigre* (See Appendix 7) although many also are conversant in Beja (Gamst 1984:131). Some *Beni-Amer* are trilingual, speaking Arabic in addition to *Tigre* and *To-Bedawie* (Beaton 1947:146).

### 2.3.5 The Beja religion

Most Beja hold to a folk Islam, blending what they can understand of orthodoxy with their traditional beliefs and practices. Observing the Beja, an Arab historian noted, "Behind the appearance of Islam they [Beja] hide corrupt practices" (Owen 1937:196). Another researcher says,

Islam in the pre-colonial period was a corporate Islam to which all the subjects automatically belonged, despite the fact that many of the Sudanese were "mixers," retaining many non-Islamic customary practices (Kapteijns 1989:254).

During the colonial period the Beja continued their penchant for overlaying a veneer of Islam on traditional religious practices. Although the subject of traditional religion inside of Islam is covered in chapters three and four, the following description provides a good preview.

Islam sits lightly on their consciences: they are not completely irreligious but they are not devout. The prayers of the Hillmen [i.e. the Beja] are

---

<sup>72</sup> Of the three countries where the Beja reside (Sudan, Egypt, and Eritrea) only the Eritrean government has instituted a program for producing educational materials for their minority languages (see Appendix 6 for a map of the tribes and languages of Eritrea). Linguists working for the government of Eritrea completed a primer for the *Hedareb* (*Hadendoa* Beja living in Eritrea) language (*To-Bedawie*). There is little government interest in such a program in Sudan. In Egypt such activity is illegal.

perfunctory and to a great extent not comprehended by the worshipper; Ramadan is little regarded...the pilgrimage rarely made.<sup>73</sup> There are two sub-sections of the *Hannar Bisharin* [Beja], the *Agmab* and the *Abdel Nafaab*, the former of whom are, for an Atbai clan, inclined to be devout [Muslims] while the latter affect to despise them for their pseudo-religiosity, and they have been known to say that they refused to pray in the orthodox way, "smelling the ground like gazelles" and they had often obscene abuse for their pious relatives (Clark 1938:5).

As mentioned in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, the Beja fear the spirit world. Both urban and rural *Hadendoa* Beja daily converse about potential spirit attacks. The Hillmen so fear the *jinn*<sup>74</sup> that they call these spiritual beings "*ins*," not desiring to risk offending them by verbalizing their true names (Jacobson 1998:150-151). The Beja employ numerous folk Islamic practices to counter the threat of the *jinn* and other denizens of the spirit world. These are examined and explained in chapter three.

In addition to the Beja folk Islam that has so much in common with ATR (discussed at length in chapter four), there is another kind of popular Islam that is very much part of Beja life. Earlier historians once assumed that Muslim traders and intermarriage brought Islam to the Beja (Paul 1954:64). Many historians now believe the Islamization of Bejaland occurred primarily through the Muslim missionary activity of a number of *Sufi*<sup>75</sup> orders.

---

<sup>73</sup> The Red Sea port at Suakin (60 km south of Port Sudan), despite the deterioration of the city itself, serves pilgrims and travelers embarking for Mecca through Jeddah by way of a ferry (Roden 1970:18). The failure of the Beja to take advantage of their close proximity to Mecca is somewhat surprising, as the journey across the Red Sea takes about an hour, at a cost of approximately twenty US dollars.

<sup>74</sup> The *jinn*s are the spirits in Islam. Usually evil, sometime capricious, dealing with the *jinn*s is the subject of much of the attention in folk Islam.

<sup>75</sup> *Sufis* and *Sufism* are discussed at length in section 3.1.2.3.

The Islamization of the Beja in general and of *Hadendowa* in particular was stepped up by the effort of various missionaries, both from the Arabian peninsula and from the lower Nile [Egypt], who came to the region toward the end of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth. Most of these missionaries belonged to *Sufi tarikas*<sup>76</sup> (Ar.), one of the many religious expressions that go under the all-embracing bracket of Islam. *Sufi tarikas*, or "ways," are sects which profess to achieve closeness to God through the teaching of mystical thought and the performance of special ecstasy-inducing rituals. Perhaps for this reason, *Sufi* movements have had considerable success among Beja in general and *Hadendowa* in particular (Ausenda 1987:433-434).

*Sufi* Islamic practices generally possess very much of a folk religious orientation (Parshall 2006:4). Beja *Sufism* seems even more linked to traditional religion. Ausenda (1987:22, bold and italics mine) notes,

Bush-dwelling nomadic pastoralists *Hadendowa* are nominally Muslim. Their greatest concern for supernatural protection at the individual level is their own health. Witchcraft beliefs do not exist among the *Hadendowa* [Beja division], whereas there exist,<sup>77</sup> as in other ethnic groups in the region, beliefs in ***werehyenas***.<sup>78</sup> This is seen to be a result of inter-*gabila* suspicion. At *gabila*<sup>79</sup> level, the main

---

<sup>76</sup> In Arabic, *tarik* or *tarig*, is the word for a road, path or trail. In this instance, the *Sufis* use the term figuratively in the sense of a *Sufi* order (ie. way of following God).

<sup>77</sup> The *Beni-Amer* Beja practice witchcraft in their tribal division although their neighbors and cousins, the *Hadendowa*, do not. In this regard Nadel (1945:84) writes, "The *Beni-Amer*, like many Africans, believe in witches and sorcerers who 'eat the souls' (or life-substance) of people they wish to destroy."

<sup>78</sup> The *werehyena* idea resembles the werewolf of Western folklore.

<sup>79</sup> In Arabic, *gabil* or *kabil* is the simple word for tribe. The Swahili term for tribe, *Kabila*, is similar. Ausenda notes that there is no Beja word for tribe in *To-Bedawie*. Therefore when the *Hadendowa* (and other Beja) use the term, it is an Arabic loan word. To a *Hadendowa*, a *gabila* is a "genealogical group, with an average strength of approximately six hundred households, coming immediately below the tribe" (Ausenda, 1987:238). These nomads see themselves as members of the Beja tribe and *Hadendowa* division, but identify more closely with their own *gabila*, which for Ausenda (1987:239) functions more like a clan. The *Hadendowa* are further divided into family groupings.



religious form probably was an **ancestor cult**, which has now developed into Muslim *Sufi tarikas*, of which seven are present among Gash Delta *Hadendowa*.

Some *Sufi* practices in Sudan in general and among the Beja in particular resemble some of the ancestor veneration customs of ATR (African Traditional Religion). Pilgrimages are encouraged to visit the shrine of a departed *sheikh*,<sup>80</sup> usually on the *Sufi* saint's birthday or the Prophet's birthday, for those who cannot afford to go to Mecca. Ausenda (1987:449) states, "The *Sufi sheikh* is the intermediary between his followers and God." The *Hadendowa* Beja also believe the souls of dead *Sufi sheikhs* have supernatural powers- a belief that orthodox *Sunni* Muslims consider blasphemous (:437).

According to the *sheikh*, the difference between the followers of *Sufi tarikas* and the "orthodox *Jama'i Sunni*" is that the latter say that these are two different kinds of religion. The one to be followed should be only the "open religion," which has its basis the Qur'an and the Prophet's deeds and utterances contained in the *hadith* (Ar.), the written tradition. According to the Gadri (a *Sufi tariga*), and to most *Sufi*, there is also a secret religion, known only to initiates. According to the secret religion, God talked directly to special people. The *Sufi sheikhs* say that when good people die, they become better than before. Their souls can do anything as if they were not dead. According to the *Jama'i Sunni* [ie. orthodox Islam], this is not true (Ausenda 1987:436).

Of the seven *Sufi* orders that are said to exist, there is one that originated from within the *Hadendowa* tribe. In 1951 at the age of twenty-one, *Sheikh* Ali Betai of Hamash Koreb began an itinerant preaching ministry traveling by camel across eastern Sudan. The young mystic claimed to have seen the Prophet in numerous dreams,

---

<sup>80</sup> I visited a shrine at the base of *Jebel* (Mount) Kassala that is dedicated to a *Sufi* saint. The white *jalabiyah* (robe) of the departed holy man is on display. Worshipers come to pray at the *sheikh's* robe, not towards Mecca.

telling him to present a simple message. Everyone desiring piety should repeat the *shahada*<sup>81</sup> thirty times before dawn and after sunset, read the Qur'an, and recite thirteen times, 'Thanks be to God' and 'God be praised.' Despite this non-controversial message, *Sheikh* Ali Betai was hounded by the British and Egyptian-Sudanese authorities and spent time in Sudanese prisons in Aroma, Kassala, Khartoum, and Wadi-Halfa. Nevertheless, the cleric built schools and mosques in Kassala, Halfa Jedida (New Halfa), Hamash Koreb<sup>82</sup> and Gedaref in the name of his *Sufi* sect. The popularity of his as yet unnamed *tarika*<sup>83</sup> resulted in the expansion of Ali Betai's religious enterprise into Khartoum, Omdurman and El Obeid. The popular *Sheikh* died in 1978, and his son Suleiman Ali Betai,<sup>84</sup> took his place as leader of the *tarika*<sup>85</sup> (Ausenda 1987:444-446).

### 2.3.6 Beja values and worldview

The Beja people possess a high group self-identity. One key male virtue of the 'ideal, responsible man' in Beja thought is the Beja willingness to "subject individual

---

<sup>81</sup> The first pillar of Islam is the repetition of the *Shahada*; "There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God."

<sup>82</sup> In 1991 I heard a report about one hundred Beja conversions to Christ from Hamash Koreb in eastern Sudan. I drove through the desert to this Muslim town with some Sudanese Christians to find them. We did not locate the believers but passed out Bibles in Hamash Koreb and witnessed to several Beja leaders.

<sup>83</sup> Ausenda (1987:446) proposes that the *tarika* of *Sheikh* Ali Betai might be called "*Jamaa al Islamiah*" (ie. Congregation of Islam) because of their emphasis on the Qur'an.

<sup>84</sup> While in Hamash Koreb in 1991, I was told to seek out Suleiman Ali Betai to obtain some information on the new believers we failed to locate. My family and I (my wife and three children) met with *Sheikh* Suleiman Ali Betai and four of his followers in Kassala, Sudan. The Beja believers were never located or even confirmed, but relief assistance for the *Hadendoa* Beja was discussed.

<sup>85</sup> Folk (popular) Islam holds that *baraka* (grace, blessing or spiritual power) passes from the religious *sheikh* upon his death to his descendants (El Hassan 1980:102).

wishes and needs to the interests of the collective" (Ornas & Dahl 1991:70).

Despite this Beja group mentality, the tribesmen do consider their own personal, individual needs on occasion. These concerns, however, have to do with their personal health rather than any selfish desires.

At the lowest structural level is the individual. **The Hadendoa's greatest concern is his or her health.** In the tropics, where *Hadendoa* live, disease is merciless, especially when rain is scant during the season. It may leave one maimed for life. **Hadendoa [Beja] seemed to be less concerned about death than disease,** since they fear the latter's aftermath... Even Burckhardt, during his travels through Beja country in 1814, observed the Beja's terror in the face of disease (Ausenda 1987:423, bold mine).

This preoccupation with sickness predisposes the Beja toward folk Islam, which is examined in the next chapter.

A Beja man is expected to exhibit self-control at all times and resistance to pain. They also demonstrate a flexible pragmatism that allows them to do what is necessary in the face of adversity (Ornas & Dahl 1991:70, 76). Sandars (1933:149, bold mine) well captures the stoic worldview of the Beja.

To sum up, the general picture of the tribe is that of a loosely coherent patriarchal society wandering in small groups over the plains in search of grass or settled by families round the wells in the mountain valleys, which, on the whole, leads a peaceable and law-abiding existence and which has evolved in the course of time a machinery for settling its own affairs adapted to its environment and needs and based largely on the **universal Bega axioms of procrastination and forbearance.**

Honor is also an important concept in the Beja worldview. A Beja will not complain about suffering and minimizes hardship in front of strangers. They favor compromise and arbitration over conflict and confrontation (Ornas & Dahl 1991:71, 82), which is similar to another

Beja distinctive that can be called 'improvident fatalism.' Lewis (1962:37) describes this concept.

To enjoy plenty when good rains fall, and to suffer hardship stoically when they failed, has become part of their mentality, just as the sharing of both with their most distantly related kinsfolk is the natural way for them to behave.

Giorgio Ausenda (1987:15, bold mine) identifies "leisureliness" as a key Beja worldview concept in *The leisurely nomads: the Hadendoa (Beja) of the Gash Delta and their transition to sedentary village life*.

It is the writer's contention that such "leisureliness" is not a complacent attitude, as it might be characterized in a complex society, but a true and tested survival strategy, which forms the **underlying ethos of populations**, in this case of the bushdwelling Hadendoa, who are almost totally subject to the vagaries of the climate... One of the objects of the following study is to show how many facets of the life of the Hadendoa, in particular of those who live in the bush and still adhere to a nomadic pastoral sustenance, are marked by the ethos of leisureliness, which constitutes a visible aspect of their survival strategy.

Perhaps the most important Beja value is *hararenini* (hospitality). The perfect Beja host gives food even to the murderer who comes by night. Ornas and Dahl (1991:72-73, bold mine) describe the legendary Beja generosity.

To them, as individuals as well as parts of larger kinship groupings, their "symbolic capital" depends to a very high degree on their ability to prove themselves as very hospitable people (*hedareb*). Any traveler through their country is bound to have observed that hospitality is a prime value with the Beja, for hospitality is a virtue which not only figures in their own idealized picture of what it is and should be to be a good Beja, but which is also put into practice... Such cultural emphasis on hospitality is not unique to the Beja, but is a generally pervasive theme in northern Sudanese culture and, indeed in Islam. To the *Atmaan* (Beja), however, **hospitality is part of their ethnic distinction.**<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Hospitality is a distinctive feature of all African cultures, as anyone who has lived on the continent can testify.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The Beja typify a traditional Islamic people group in Africa. The Hillmen, however, are not an African people isolated from Islam geographically but live as close to Mecca as any tribe on the continent. Despite this proximity to fountainhead of the Muslim faith, Islam has not influenced them greatly. Lewis (1962:37) makes the following observation.

Little change appears to have taken place in the traditional nomadic way of life over the past 1000 years, and even the influence of Islam during the past 500 years or so has been very limited.

The majority of Beja have chosen to retain their folk traditions over orthodox Islam. This distinctive North African people, dwelling near the citadel of Islam but retaining many folk religious practices, makes this group a worthy case study for exploring Christian contextualization possibilities for ATR-influenced folk Muslims. Clark (1938:20) describes the Beja in this way.

They sit in the exiguous shade of their prized acacias watching their attenuated herds at graze, priding themselves that they are the conquering Bisharin (Beja), overlords of countless leagues of country exempted for all time from the degrading necessities of manual labor.

This chapter presented a profile of the Beja, including their history, culture, situation and circumstances. An emphasis has been placed on their religion; folk Islam. The next chapter looks more specifically at orthodox Islam and folk Islam, including examples from Beja expressions of the latter.

### 3. Folk (popular) Islam and official Islam

The subject of Islam is so vast; a complete study of the religion would be too broad to be of much assistance to anyone desiring a focused investigation concerning how to reach Muslims with the Gospel of Christ. This thesis, therefore, will concentrate primarily on one segment of the religion- folk Islam. The Beja tribe of the Sudan will serve as a case study in examining the beliefs and practices of folk Muslims with a view toward reaching them for Christ. In order to accomplish the task, this chapter will first place the case study within the larger context of Islam.

One researcher suggests that Muslims fall into one of nine classifications. Although admitting this is not an exhaustive list, Joshua Massey (1999:198, bold, numbering & underlining mine) divides adherents into the following categories.

(1) Nominal Muslims: Muslims in name only, who only go to the mosque on 'eid<sup>1</sup> (a major Islamic holiday) once or twice a year.

(2) Fringe Muslims: These Muslims, often urban youth, are infatuated with Western culture and MTV.<sup>2</sup> Some are disappointed with their religious leaders, who, they believe are living in the past and not taking advantage of all that modernity offers.

(3) Liberal left-wing Muslims: These are open-minded Muslims who are not intimidated by conservative Islamic fundamentalists. They are often well-educated and financially well off.

(4) Conservative right-wing Muslims:<sup>3</sup> These need no explanation.

---

<sup>1</sup> There are two major festivals in Islam, 'eid al-fatur (fast-breaking feast) at the conclusion of a month's fasting during Ramadan and 'eid al-adha (festivity of sacrifice) concluding the hajj (Shu'aib 2009:46). Increasingly, a third 'eid is being celebrated called *Milad al Nabi* (birthday of the Prophet) in honor of Muhammad (Ahmed 200:39-41).

<sup>2</sup> Music television; A youth-oriented cable television channel in the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Petterson (1999:191) calls this category 'political Islam' and states, "Neither political Islam nor Islamic fundamentalism should be

(5) Ultra-orthodox Muslims: Islamic reformist movements, like the *Wahhabis* (called 'The Protestants of Islam'), frown on what has become of Islam throughout the world today: a mix of Qur'anic observance with **superstitions, sacred shrines, richly ornamented tombs, divination, omens, and excessive reverence of Mohammad.**

(6) Modern Muslims: These have successfully integrated Western technology with Islamic devotion and are proud to be part of a global Islamic community.

(7) Mystical<sup>4</sup> Muslims: **Sufis and folk Muslims<sup>5</sup>** who, according to *Wahhabis* and conservative right-wing Muslims, are desperately in need of serious reform.

(8) Communitistic Muslims: In some parts of Central Asia and other former communist lands, Islamic identity has almost completely stripped away.

(9) Rice Muslims: Some poor animistic tribes of sub-Saharan Africa or low Hindu castes of South Asia convert to Islam for material benefit or economic convenience.

This thesis concentrates on folk Muslims, which represent the beliefs and practices of the majority<sup>6</sup> of Muslims in the world today (Parshall, 2006:2). Folk Islam is illustrated in this thesis by a case study of the Beja tribe of the Sudan. The Beja include the two principle

---

equated with extremism, for although some Islamists are extremists, most of course are not."

<sup>4</sup> Arberry (in Parshall 2006:10) defines mysticism as a "constant and underlying phenomenon of the universal yearning of the human spirit for personal communion with God."

<sup>5</sup> Massey places *Sufis* and folk Muslims (those who practice superstitions, divination, etc.) under the category of "mystical Muslims." I would suggest that folk Muslims should be the broader classification, and *Sufis* (or mystical Muslims) a subset. While many *Sufis* are folk Muslims, not all folk Muslims can be termed "mystical." This thesis argues that many folk Muslims have more in common with traditional religions (including African Traditional Religion-ATR) than mysticism. *Sufism* is examined more closely later in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> As noted earlier, Parshall (2006:2) presently estimates the number of folk Muslims to be about seventy percent of Islam. Ninety years ago Zwemer (1920:viii) placed the practitioners of popular Islam at ninety-four percent of the total.

types of folk Muslims within their ranks (1) *Sufi* folk Muslims<sup>7</sup> and (2) traditional religion folk Muslims.

Popular (folk) Islam and theological (high) Islam differ substantially. Besides the obvious additional practices, folk Muslims appear to possess a totally different mindset than their orthodox counterparts. Musk (1984:19-20) comments on the disparity between the two.

Theologians and laymen, good Muslims all, operate in essentially different domains. On the one hand is the formal, theological, book religion: on the other hand are the credences and practices of ordinary Muslims.

In order to understand how far folk Islam has deviated from the traditional Muslim religion, a baseline for orthodoxy in Islam should first be established. This brief overview of Muslim history, faith and practice is not intended to present an exhaustive treatment of Islam. My purpose is to introduce the major doctrines and divisions of the Muslim faith in order to later demonstrate folk Islam's divergence from orthodoxy. The aim of this section is not to evaluate the relative truth of Muslim ideas, but rather describe the official views of Islam's major subdivisions and how these influence folk Muslims.

### **3.1 Official Islam**

Disagreement exists even among Muslims as to what constitutes true Islam. There is no better source than the guardians of the sacred sites of Islam in Mecca and Medina: the Saudi Arabian religious officials. Parshall (2006:38) remarks on their set standards.

Saudi Arabia has never been able to support a mysticism that is outside the rigid interpretation of the Qur'an and the Traditions. Therefore, Saudis categorize what they find in the [Indian] subcontinent as un-Islamic. Their ambassador in one of the countries of the subcontinent goes throughout

---

<sup>7</sup> Parshall (2006:4) calls *Sufism* "a fairly well-defined influence within folk Islam."



the land holding various meetings in which he appeals to the Muslim citizenry to return to the fold of true Islam.

What is "true Islam"? This section examines certain aspects related to the history, beliefs and tenets of "official", "high", "theological", "traditional", or "orthodox" Islam as described by the Saudi Arabian authorities themselves. As custodians of the Muslim holy cities and places of worship, the Saudi's (and other Arabs) believe they reflect the purest form of the faith (Parshall 2006:3).

### **3.1.1 Official Islam description of beliefs**

The Islamic Affairs Department of the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the District of Columbia of Washington (Washington, D.C.) publishes a book that explains the Muslim religion to English speakers in North America. This work was distributed to their cultural centers<sup>8</sup> across the USA. This book summarizes the orthodox Islamic faith from the point of view of official Muslim 'insiders.'

What do Muslims believe? Muslims believe in One, Unique, Incomparable God; in the Angels created by Him; in the prophets through whom His revelations were brought to mankind; in the Day of Judgment and individual accountability for actions; in God's complete authority over human destiny and in life after death.

Muslims believe in a chain of prophets starting with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus, peace be upon them. But God's final message to man, a confirmation of the eternal message and a summing-up of all that has gone before was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, through Gabriel.

How does someone become a Muslim? Simply by saying 'there is no god apart from God, and Muhammad

---

<sup>8</sup> While studying Arabic in the Phoenix, Arizona area in 1990, I was given the book *Understanding Islam and the Muslims* by the Islamic Center near the campus of Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, U.S.A.

is the Messenger of God.' By this declaration the believer announces his or her faith in *all* [italic their's] God's messengers, and the scriptures they brought.

What does 'Islam' mean? The Arabic word 'Islam' simply means 'submission', and derives from a word meaning 'peace'. In a religious context it means complete submission to the will of God. 'Mohammedanism' is thus a misnomer because it suggests that Muslims worship Muhammad, peace be upon him, rather than God. 'Allah' is the Arabic name for God, which is used by Arab Muslims and Christians alike (*Understanding Islam* 1989:5-7).

There are many beliefs and practices important to Muslims, but in order to establish a point of departure for a study of folk Islam, the most basic beliefs are set forth herein. The Saudi officials (in *Understanding Islam* 1989:13, 16-17, 20, bold mine) continue their discussion of high Islam in the following section.

What are the '**Five Pillars**' of Islam? They are the frame-work of the Muslim life: faith, prayer, concern for the needy, self-purification, and the pilgrimage to *Makkah*<sup>9</sup> for those who are able. **1. FAITH.** There is no god worth of worship except God and Muhammad is His messenger. This declaration of faith is called the *Shahada*, a simple formula which all the faithful pronounce. **2. PRAYER.** *Salat* is the name for the obligatory prayers which are performed five times a day, and are a direct link between the worshipper and God. There is no hierarchal authority in Islam, and no priests, so the prayers are led by a learned person who knows the Qur'an, chosen by the congregation...

**3. THE 'ZAKAT.'** The word *zakat* means both 'purification' and 'growth'...Each Muslim calculates his or her own *zakat* individually. For most purposes this involves the payment each year of two and a half percent of one's capital. A pious person may also

---

<sup>9</sup> Due to differences in transliteration schemes, the Saudis spell Mecca, "*Makkah*." Transliteration differences also account for the various differences in spelling "Quran" (e.g. Qu'ran and Koran). The transliteration system used in this thesis can be found in Appendix 1.

give as much as he or she pleases as *sadaqa*,<sup>10</sup> and does so preferably in secret. Although this word can be translated as 'voluntary charity' it has a wider meaning. **4. THE FAST.** Every year in the month of Ramadan, all Muslims fast from first light until sundown, abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations...Although the fast is most beneficial to the health, it is regarded primarily as a method of self-purification.

**5. PILGRIMAGE** (*Hajj*). The annual pilgrimage to *Makkah*- the *Hajj*- is an obligation only for those who are physically and financially able to perform it... The rites of the *Hajj*, which are of Abrahamic origin, include circling the *Ka'ba* seven times, and going seven times between the mountains of *Safa* and *Marwa* as did *Hagar* during her search for water.

The importance Muslims place upon their writings, particularly the *Qur'an*, impacts the subject of folk Islam later in this chapter. *Zwemer* (1920:23) comments about folk practices related to the *Qur'an*: "Not only do we find bibliolatry, i.e. worship of the Book, but also bibliomancy, i.e. the use of the *Qur'an* for magical or superstitious purposes." The Saudi officials' discourse (in *Understanding Islam* 1989:12) concerning the *Qur'an* and *hadith*<sup>11</sup> is enlightening.

What is the *Qur'an*? The *Qur'an* is a record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel *Gabriel* to the Prophet *Mohammad*, peace be upon him. It was memorized by *Muhammad*, peace be upon him, and then dictated to his *Companions*, and written down by scribes, who cross-checked it during his lifetime. Not one of its 114 chapters, *Suras*, has been changed over the centuries, so that the *Qur'an* is in every detail the unique and miraculous text which was revealed to *Muhammad*, peace be upon him, fourteen centuries ago.

---

<sup>10</sup> This Arabic word may also be translated "offering." *Sadaka* (i.e. *sadaqa*) is also the Swahili word for "offering" (*Johnson* 1982:(2)405).

<sup>11</sup> The *hadith* is a collection of stories about *Muhammad* and sayings attributed to him (*Braswell* 1996:11). *Hadith* is also the common word for tale, narrative, speech, tradition, report, and interview in Arabic (*Wehr* 1977:161).

What is the Qur'an about? The Qur'an, the last revealed Word of God, is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects which concern us as human beings; wisdom, doctrine, worship, and law, but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures. At the same time it provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and an equitable economic system. Are there any other sacred sources? Yes, the *sunna*,<sup>12</sup> the practice and example of the Prophet, peace be upon him, is the second authority for Muslims. A *hadith* is a reliably transmitted report of what the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, did, or approved. Belief in the *sunna* is part of the Islamic faith.

The topic of Muhammad is a subject that arises when the practices of folk Muslims are mentioned. *Understanding Islam* (1989:9) presents the official view of the Prophet Muhammad.

Who is Muhammad? Muhammad, peace be upon him, was born in *Makkah* in the year 570, at a time when Christianity was not yet fully established in Europe. Since his father died before his birth, and his mother shortly afterwards, he was raised by his uncle from the respected tribe of Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity, and sincerity, so that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate disputes. The historians describe him as calm and meditative.

Muhammad, peace be upon him, was of a deeply religious nature, and had long detested the decadence of his society. It became his habit to meditate from time to time in the Cave of Hira near the summit of Jabal-al-Nur, the 'Mountain of Light' near *Makkah*.

How did he become a prophet and a messenger of God? At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad, peace be upon him, received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel.

---

<sup>12</sup> Ruthven (2006:134) says, "Employed by the legists of the so-called ancient schools, it means the living 'practical' [quotation his] tradition, assumed to be based on the general practice and authority of the Prophet and his companions." In pre-Islamic days the term in Arabic was used to describe a beaten path in the desert or well-worn instruments (:134) and then came to be associated with the meaning of something well-trusted and reliable.

This revelation, which continued for twenty-three years, is known as the Qur'an.

A number of folk practices within Islam seem to come from pre-Islamic sources. In order to discuss this later, it is helpful to have a baseline from the viewpoint of official Islam. *Understanding Islam* (1989:8) explains the significance of Islam's holiest site.

What is the *Ka'ba*? The *Ka'ba* is the place of worship which God commanded Abraham and Ishmael to build over four thousand years ago. The building was constructed of stone on what many believe was the original site of a sanctuary established by Adam. God commanded Abraham to summon all mankind to visit this place, and when pilgrims go there today they say, 'At Thy Service, O Lord', in response to Abraham's summons.

### 3.1.2 Subdivisions and major sects in Islam.

Official Islam deemphasizes the divisions within their midst and portrays Muslims as part of a unified family (i.e. *ummah*<sup>13</sup>) in the world (Nasr 2000:14-15). However, there are many groups and subgroups within the faith, as is the case with every large religion. Khalid Duran (in Marshall, Green & Gilbert 2002:27) counts seventy-three different sects within Islam. Although it is impossible and unnecessary to cover every sect in this brief overview of official Islam, a concise description of the major subdivisions is important to a later discussion of folk Islam. Marshall, Green and Gilbert (:27, bold mine) narrow the segments of Islam to three groups.

Beyond the previously mentioned **Five Pillars** of Islam and **six principles**,<sup>14</sup> no single Islamic belief system is adhered to by all Muslims. Thus it is impossible to state categorically what all Muslims believe. For simplicity's sake, however, Islam can be divided into **three fundamental groups, the third generally being part of either of the first two.**

<sup>13</sup> Community of Islam (Nasr 2000:15).

<sup>14</sup> Although not stated as the "six principles" as such, these are summarized by the Saudi officials in the section "What do Muslims believe?" earlier in this chapter (see section 3.1.1 on pages 65-66).

### 3.1.2.1 *Sunni Islam*

The *Sunnis* are identified with orthodoxy in Islam and see themselves as the true followers of the *Sunna* as the name suggests. Braswell (1996:90) places their number at ninety per cent of all Muslims, while others (Esposito & Mogahed 2007:2; Marshall, Green & Gilbert 2002:27) put the estimate at about eighty-five percent.<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of the ninth century, the Muslim theologian Shafi'i undertook a revision of Islamic law, developing what became known as *Sharia*<sup>16</sup> (Ruthven 2006:133). Shafi'i established the Islamic hermeneutic that stands today for determining orthodoxy in Islam. This theologian combined a high view of the Qur'an with an acceptable level of Mohammad veneration within orthodox Islam. Ruthven (2006:134, bold mine, parenthesis his) explains the development.

'The Qur'an does not contradict the *hadiths*, but the *hadiths* explain the Qur'an.'<sup>17</sup> In effect, the Qur'an cannot stand alone as a source of law: Shafi'i demonstrated 'by an incisive critique of its language (in which he brought out all the diverse ways in which it called for interpretation) that the Book presupposed Muhammad not only as its deliverer, but as its interpreter.' It followed that it was not the Qur'an alone, but the Qur'an plus the Prophet's *Sunna*, as recorded in *hadiths*, that must guide the Muslims. In Shaffi'i's hands **the word *sunna* acquired the specific meaning it has today**, when the mainstream followers of Islam are known as *ahl-al-sunna* - '**People of the *Sunna***' (*Sunnis* or *Sunnites*).

---

<sup>15</sup> Sookhdeo (2007:216) has the lowest figure, placing *Sunnis* at about eighty percent of Muslims.

<sup>16</sup> Watt (1970:162) says, "In addition to its doctrinal teaching the Qur'an contains liturgical and legal or social prescriptions for the life of the community of Muslims. These rules were greatly elaborated by Muslim jurists in later times to constitute what is now known as 'Islamic law' or 'the *Shari'a*'."

<sup>17</sup> These are Shafi'i's words as quoted by Ruthven (2006:135). The remainder of the block quotation is Ruthven's commentary on Shafi'i's views.

There are sub-sects and numerous legal schools within *Sunni* Islam. The *Ashari*, *Maturidi* and *Hanbal* constitute the major *Sunni* theological schools (Musk 2005:23). However, one *Sunni* sub-sect warrants special attention in this short review of the beliefs of official Islam. This sub-sect emerged victorious from conflicts within *Sunni* Islam to become the pure standard by which all Islam is judged (Ruthven 2006:368-369).

*Wahabbism* represents the puritanical Islamic movement founded in Arabia at the end of the eighteenth century. *Wahabbis* seek a return to the doctrine and practice of the early founders of Islam. Condemning idolatry and the worship of saints, *Wahhabis* despise *Sufism*, insisting on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an (Braswell 1996:98-99). Sookhdeo (2007:277) reflects on this *Sunni* sub-sect.

Al-Wahhab considered Muslim society at the time to be little better than paganism and he revived the *Khariji*<sup>18</sup> practice of *takfir*, i.e. condemning all Muslims he disagreed with as apostates in order to justify *jihad*<sup>19</sup> against them. The strictly puritanical *Wahhabism* remains today the predominant Islamic movement within Saudi Arabia.

The *Wahhabi Sunnis* with their strict interpretation of the Qur'an, *hadith*, and enforcement of *Sharia*, have become the face of official Islam (Marshall, Green & Gilbert 2002:97). The Saudi government, however, has moderated the most militant form of *Wahhabism* and its emphasis on militaristic *jihad* in recent years (Braswell 1996:99).

---

<sup>18</sup> The *Kharijites* represent a sect that disagrees with both *Sunnis* and *Shi'ites* and are discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> *Jihad* is an Arabic word meaning 'struggle' or 'strive' (Donohue & Esposito 2007:393). In Islam this can involve one's personal struggle for holiness against sin (greater *Jihad*) or a "holy war" on God's behalf against the enemies of the faith (lesser *Jihad*). Some call *Jihad* the sixth pillar of Islam (Braswell 1996:71).

Extremism does exist within many of the subdivisions and theological schools of Islam. This element is estimated at between two and fifteen percent of all Muslims (Marshall, Green, & Gilbert 2002:109). Esposito and Mogahed (2007:70) place the percentage of "politically radicalized" Muslims at about seven percent.<sup>20</sup> Of course, those who would actually carry out extremist acts would be much less than this number.

### 3.1.2.2 *Shi'a Islam*

The minority *Shi'a* branch of Islam is numerous enough to be considered a valid expression of the Muslim faith, but one disparaged by the majority *Sunnis*. The split in Islam occurred over the issue of succession to the Prophet Mohammad (Sookhdeo 2007:216). Theological and practical disputes developed later.

After Muhammad died in 632 a succession of four *caliphs*<sup>21</sup> was chosen from the *Quraysh* tribe in Arabia to lead the incipient movement during its fragile early days (Braswell 1996:90). During the reigns of the four 'rightly guided *caliphs*,'<sup>22</sup> Abu Bakr<sup>23</sup> (632-634), Umar<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> This may be the most accurate scientific estimate of Muslim extremism. This figure comes from a Gallup Poll survey conducted in the ten most populous Muslim countries, making up eighty percent of Islam worldwide: Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, Morocco, Iran, and Bangladesh (Esposito & Mogahed 2007:193). The question defining the 'politically radicalized' Muslim, translated into the local language, involved whether the respondent thought the September 9, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City were "'completely' justified" or not (:69). The random surveys were conducted in personal interviews of about an hour in countries where eighty percent of the population did not possess landlines (In countries with significant landline telephone service, random digit dial telephone surveys of thirty minutes were conducted). The survey was administered among persons who were all above the age of 15, of both sexes, and in rural and urban areas (:169).

<sup>21</sup> "*Caliph* means deputy of the Messenger of God" (Braswell, 1996: 23).

<sup>22</sup> The first four *caliphs* are called the "rightly guided *caliphs*" because they lived close with him in the first Islamic community



(634-644), Uthman<sup>25</sup> (644-656), and Ali<sup>26</sup> (656-661), there were internal disagreements but Islam remained united. Islam divided into *Shi'ites*<sup>27</sup> and *Sunnis* over the question of a successor to the fourth *caliph*, Ali (Marshall, Green & Gilbert 2002:276).

*Shi'ites* believe Ali inherited the Prophet's infallibility in Qur'anic interpretation and leadership. These qualities coupled with his blood kinship<sup>28</sup> with Mohammad cause *Shi'ites* to regard Ali as the first Imam. *Shi'ites* reject the *Sunni caliphate*<sup>29</sup> and believe Islamic spiritual authority is invested in the *Imam*. The doctrine of a hereditary Imamate holds that these qualities were passed down to Muhammad's grandsons Hassan and Hussein and their descendants (Braswell 1996:90-91). The martyrdoms of Ali (661), Hassan (680) and Hussein (680) by *Kharijite*<sup>30</sup> and *Sunni* partisans established a permanent schism in Islam

---

(Braswell 1996:90). The first four successors to Mohammad are accepted by all but a very few within Islam.

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad's father-in-law, the father of the Prophet's favorite wife, Aisha (Numani 2004:20).

<sup>24</sup> Umar was from one of the ten clans of the Quraysh tribe, but not from the clan of Muhammad (Numani 2004:3,19).

<sup>25</sup> Muhammad's son-in-law, married to his daughter Ruaqayya (Marshall, Green & Gilbert 2002:47).

<sup>26</sup> Ali was another son-in-law of the Prophet and the husband of his sole surviving child, Fatima (Numani 2004:20). Also, Ali was the father of Muhammad's only grandchildren, Hassan and Hussein.

<sup>27</sup> The meaning of *Shi'ite* is "partisan to Ali" (Braswell 1996:90).

<sup>28</sup> Ali was the Prophet's cousin, and Ali's children were also Muhammad's grandchildren.

<sup>29</sup> Ali was both the fourth *caliph* of the *Sunnis* and the first *Imam* of the *Shi'ites* (Braswell 1996:91).

<sup>30</sup> The *Karijiites* were another sect that repudiated both Ali and his *Sunni* successor, Mu'awiyya. Upon Ali's assassination by a *Kharijite*, *Sunnis* installed Mu'awiyya as the fifth *caliph*, rejecting Ali's sons (Muhammad's grandsons), Hassan and Hussein (Sookhdeo 2007:216). *Kharijites* (i.e. Seceders) continue in small communities in North Africa (Braswell 1996:95-96), persisting in their rejection of *Sunni* and *Shi'a* Islam.

that continues to embitter *Shi'ites* to this day (Sookhdeo 2007:131-132). The insistence of many *Shi'ites* on venerating the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad has led this branch of Islam down a path conducive to adopting many folk practices and beliefs. Ruthven (2006:196) sheds considerable light on the reason *Shi'ia* Islam observes so many folk practices.

Unlike the *ahl al-sunna* [people of the *Sunna*], the *Shi'a* found in the doctrine of the Imamate a device which enabled them to erect a quasi-sacerdotal structure within the framework of Islam. The *Shi'ite* *'ulama*<sup>31</sup> [religious elite] were not endowed with any formal sacerdotal authority: there are no sacraments in Islam and nothing comparable to the medieval Catholic doctrine that certain rituals are automatically efficacious, even when performed by wicked and corrupt priests. Nevertheless the *Shi'ite* idea of *nass* (designation) contains a notion of spiritual succession broadly comparable to the apostolic succession in the Catholic priesthood. This in turn permits a flexibility in the interpretation of scripture on the part of the Imams or their representatives, who are assumed to be in possession of the understanding necessary to reveal the innermost truths contained in them. The idea of *nass* was closely associated with another aspect of *Shi'ism*, namely that the Qur'an contains esoteric meanings that can only be properly interpreted by the Imams of the *ahl-al-bait*.<sup>32</sup>

I briefly mention the sub-sects within *Shi'a* Islam that are also important to folk Islam. Ninety percent of *Shi'ites* belong to the *Ithna Ashariya* (i.e. Twelvers<sup>33</sup>).

---

<sup>31</sup> Braswell (1996:84) writes "Although Islam has no ordained clergy or priesthood in a western sense, the *'ulama* are a sort of clergy or religious scholar/practitioner class... Classical Islamic theory included no provision for a clergy, but the *'ulama* arose in early Islamic societies with broad responsibilities: to study, interpret, and administer Islamic law; to preside over the rituals of the mosque; and to administer the Qur'anic schools."

<sup>32</sup> This is Arabic for "people of the house." *Shi'ites* see their movement as originating from the family of Mohammed, the prophet's household (Ruthven 2006:180).

<sup>33</sup> *Ithna asher* is the Arabic term for the number twelve. *Ithna Ashariya* is the plural form, or 'twelvers.'

Iranians compose almost ninety percent of this majority sub-group. The Twelvers believe in a series of twelve *Imams* who descended from Ali (i.e. Muhammad's son-in-law). In the year 878, the Twelfth *Imam* (i.e. Muhammad al-Mumtazzar) was born and proclaimed to be the expected *Madhi*.<sup>34</sup> When the young Muhammad disappeared at the age of nine, Twelvers developed the doctrine of the "hidden *Imam*" that holds Mohammad al-Mumtazzar remains in hiding and will return at a later date. Presently his followers are spiritually led by a series of *ayatollahs* (i.e. living *imams*), which guide the faithful during the absence of the Twelfth *Imam* (Braswell 1996:95). *Sunnis*, *Shi'ites* and *Sufis* all embrace the doctrine of a coming *Mahdi*. The messianic concept plays a significant role in folk Islam.

The remaining ten percent of *Shi'ites* are divided between the Seveners and the *Zaidis*. The latter believe any descendant of Ali can become the *Imam*, not just the descendants of Ali and Fatima (i.e. Muhammad's daughter). The *Zaidis* dominate in certain areas of Yemen and around the Caspian Sea (Ahmed 2002:48). The Seveners acknowledge only seven of the twelve *imams* recognized by the *Ithna Ashariya* (i.e. Twelvers). The Seveners are also known as the *Isma'ilis*.<sup>35</sup> Famous for founding the great Islamic Al-

---

<sup>34</sup> Muslims believe the *Mahdi* will be a messiah-like figure that returns at a time of tumult and corruption to bring tranquility and justice to the world (Ruthven 2006:9). Both *Sunnis* and *Shi'ites* embrace a concept of the *Mahdi* (Sookhdeo: 2007:129). *Shi'ites* believe he will return to Kufa, Iraq, while *Sunni's* hold that the *Mahdi* will move the *Ka'ba* from Mecca to Jerusalem and rule from there. There are other differences between the *Sunni* and *Shi'a* versions of the *Mahdi* as well (:138-139).

<sup>35</sup> *Isma'ilis*, although composing less than one percent of all Muslims, have greater influence than their number would suggest due to the sway of the Aga Khan (Ahmed 2002:48). Most major cities in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia have at least one *Isma'ili* mosque. They are widely scattered throughout the Muslim world, particularly in Pakistan and India (Nasr 2003:13).

Azhar University<sup>36</sup> in Cairo (Ruthven 2006:207), the *Isma'ilis* are led by the Aga Khan<sup>37</sup> (Braswell 1996:95).

### 3.1.2.3 *Sufi Islam*

*Sufism* represents a template or overlay upon Islam, as well as a sub-division of the faith. Some Muslims see *Sufism* as outside of Islam altogether; others view it as an integral part and the religion's most vibrant manifestation (Chittick 2000:3, Ernst 1997:xi). Many Muslims within orthodoxy see *Sufi* customs as medieval superstition perverting true Islam (Ernst 1997:xvii). *Sufis* themselves, however, claim to be within the great "animating spirit of the Islamic tradition" (Chittick 2000:3). Despite the opposition to *Sufism* by high Islam, Ernst (1997:xiii) estimates about half of all Muslims today practice a form of *Sufism*. Karrar (1992:2) observes the manner in which *Sufis* self-identify in Sudan.

The *Sufi* orders in Sudan, as in the rest of the Muslim world, never constituted a world of their own. In the view of most *Sufi shaykhs*<sup>38</sup> and followers, *Sufism* and *Sharia*<sup>39</sup> were entirely interlocking manifestations of faith.

---

<sup>36</sup> Al-Azhar University long ago abandoned *Isma'ili Sufism* and is now "a bastion of *Sunnism*" (Ruthven 2006:207).

<sup>37</sup> The Aga Khan IV leads the *Nizari Isma'ilis* who originated in India. Their adherents now live in India, Pakistan, China, Syria, East Africa, Europe, and North America. Outside oil producing families, the *Isma'ilis* are the wealthiest Muslims. The Aga Khan claims descent from a *Nizari Isma'ili* leader deposed by the Mongols in the 1250's (Ruthven 2006:209).

<sup>38</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the leader of a *Sufi* order is called a *Sheikh*. *Shaykh* is an alternative spelling due to differences in transliterating Arabic. Individual *Sufis* are often called *fakirs* or *dervishes*. Chittick (2000:70) writes, "Both *fakir* (Arabic *faqir*) and *dervish* (Persian *darwish*) mean 'poor man,' that is, a traveler of the *Sufi* path. The term is taken from the Koran, especially the verse, 'O people, you are the poor toward God; and God - He is the Wealthy, the Praiseworthy'" (35:15).

<sup>39</sup> Islamic law. Sookdheo (2007:70) writes, "Not only does *shari'a* (Islamic law) cover the personal, family, and devotional life of an individual Muslim but also it lays down how an Islamic state should be governed."

*Sufis* are often called the mystics within the religion and come from both the *Sunni* and *Shi'ite* camps<sup>40</sup> (Marshall, Green & Gilbert 2002:28; Braswell 1996:97, Sookhdeo 2008:45); On the other hand, two secular experts reject the term mysticism as too narrow a description (Ernst 1997:xvii, Chittick 2000:1). I believe the word may be employed if understood as Parshall (2006:35) describes below.

One of my scholarly Muslim friends makes a distinction between Islamic mysticism and Muslim mysticism. The former is that which is based on and can be substantiated by the Qur'an and *Hadith*. It is the mystical orientation to life that can be embraced by orthodox, practicing Muslims worldwide. There is no extremism or aberrant practices within this mysticism. All is explicitly or implicitly approved by the Holy Books of Islam. It allows for an individual's hunger for a relationship with a personal God but with boundaries.

Muslim mysticism on the other hand, is a pejorative term applied to *Sufi* practice that gives only superficial acknowledgment to Muhammad and the Qur'an, while allowing such anomalous activities as worshipping *pirs*<sup>41</sup> or presenting gifts at shrines. An example of Muslim mysticism would be the behavior of a group of *Sufis* I watched who were projecting themselves as God-intoxicated people.

According to Chittick (2000:29) there are two principle kinds of *Sufis*: (1) the drunken (i.e. God-intoxicated) and (2) the contemplative (i.e. ascetic). The former is associated with ecstatic behavior and would be considered more of a representative of Muslim mysticism of the folk variety. Contemplative *Sufis* are sober by contrast and expend effort pondering the inner life.

---

<sup>40</sup> I believe *Sufis* can be viewed as the 'charismatics' of Islam in more than one way. *Sufis* introduced mysticism to their religion, stressing feelings and emotions (Braswell 1996:97). Also, just as charismatic beliefs can be found within most branches of Christianity, so *Sufism* is present within most of the Muslim subdivisions, including *Shi'ites* and *Sunnis*.

<sup>41</sup> The Persian word for *sheikh* (Ernst 1997:30).

These quieter, more ascetic *Sufis*, emphasizing the value of a deeper devotional life could be categorized as Islamic mystics.

*Sufism* probably developed partially in reaction to a perceived sterility and formality in high Islam. Ruthven (2006:225) describes the *Sufis*.

They inject a warmth into Islam which is lacking in the legalistic observance advocated by *Sunni 'ulama*<sup>42</sup> or in the fanatical loyalty of the *Shi'ites* to the tragic memories of their Imams.

Due to *Sufism's* uniqueness and the influence it continues to project upon Islam, the movement will be treated separately from the other major divisions of the faith. Parshall (2006:12) claims folk Islam cannot be understood without a comprehension of *Sufism*.

*Sufism* developed early in Islam through teachers such as al-Muhasibi (781-837) and his pupil and contemporary, Junaid. They attempted to combine asceticism and mysticism with a proper observance of the *Sharia* (Ruthven 2006:227). This new spiritual path within Islam continues to enlarge through writers such as al-Sarraaj who penned the first surviving *Sufi* writing in 988 (Parshall 2007:15). *Sufis* hold that the path to God is not based on doctrine but on feeling, experience and introspection (Braswell 1996:97). Ruthven (2006:221-222) comments on this tendency.

Yet from the first there were Muslims whose psychic or spiritual needs were unsatisfied by mere obedience to the deity and the dutiful observance of his commandments. They sought a closer and more intimate relationship by means of ascetic practices, arduous spiritual exercises and complicated liturgies. They came to be known as *Sufis*, after the woolen garments (*suf*=wool)<sup>43</sup> allegedly worn by the early exemplars of

---

<sup>42</sup> Religious officials "from *alim* or scholar" (Ahmed 2001:9).

<sup>43</sup> Ernst (1997:22) proposes another origin of the word; "the term *Sufi* was linked with the Arabic word *suffa* or bench (source of the English word *sofa*), and in this sense it invokes the historical memory

this movement, as well as by the followers of Jesus whom they particularly admired.

It fell to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111) to bring *Sufism* to respectability. A Muslim scholar with theological training, Ghazali experienced a personal religious crisis that drove him to attempt to reconcile mysticism with official Islam (Braswell 1996:98). Ghazali believed both in the necessity of the religion's ritual observances and feeling (Ruthven 2006:233). As a theologian-mystic he held that religious certainty depends upon religious experience (Braswell 1996:98). His unique synthesis won him the appellation of *mujaddid* (i.e. renewer) of Islam (Esposito, Fasching, & Lewis 2009:252). Although never founding a *Sufi* brotherhood (i.e. *tariqa*<sup>44</sup> or *Sufi* order),<sup>45</sup> Ruthven (2006:35, bold mine) states,

Ghazali's work served to reintegrate the whole legal superstructure with the psychic or spiritual infrastructure, re-injecting into the Qur'an and the *Sunna*, and into the edifice of law built upon them, the sanctity of the Prophet's mystic consciousness. For this **he has been called the greatest Muslim after Muhammad.**

As *Sufism* grew throughout the centuries, this expression of Islam unfortunately became less orthodox in both faith

---

of the People of the Bench, a group of poor followers of the Prophet Mohammad who were homeless and slept on a bench in Medina, sharing their meager belongings and supplies. This derivation clearly attempted to link the *Sufis* with an early group of ascetic followers of the Prophet, but just as importantly, it established the ideal of shared community as the basis of *Sufi* mysticism."

<sup>44</sup> *Tariq* or *tarik* is the Arabic word for "way, road, highway, trail, track, path, track, or path." *Tariqa* or *tarika*, is a derivative of *tariq* and means "manner, mode, means, way, method, procedure, system, creed, faith religion, religious brotherhood, or dervish order" (Wehr 1976:559).

<sup>45</sup> Al-Sanusi (d. 1859) compiled a list (in Ernst 1997:112-113) of the forty traditional *Sufi* orders. The forty Sacred [*Sufi*] Traditions of the nineteenth century are still preeminent (Bakhtiar 1976:7). New *Sufi* brotherhoods, however, continue to be founded as individuals receive new visions, revelations, and commissions from the Prophet to start new *tariqas* (Ausenda 1987:444).

and practice (Braswell 2006:97). For this reason, *Sufism* can be viewed as one of the major streams of folk Islam (Parshall 2006:4).

This brief sketch of Muslim history, faith and practice was not intended to give a full-orbed view of Islam. My purpose was to present the major tenets of the Muslim faith in order to later demonstrate folk Islam's divergence from orthodoxy. The aim of the preceding discussion was not to evaluate the veracity of Muslim beliefs, practices or historical claims, but rather describe the official views of Islam's major subdivisions. Having established this framework a study of folk religion and folk Islam may begin.

### **3.2 Folk (popular) religion**

Prior to examining folk Islam, the larger subject of folk religion will be briefly introduced. Folk Islam constitutes a subset of folk religion. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:74) define folk religion as "the religious beliefs of the common people." As might be expected, folk religion is not confined only to Islam. There are folk Hindus, folk Buddhists, and folk Christians (:77). Whereas high religion ponders the questions concerning eternity and cosmology, the issues of everyday life is the purview of popular religion (Musk 1984:21). Hiebert (2008:131) compares and contrasts the two.

On the formal level, philosophical religions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity, deal with ultimate questions and claim ultimate truth. In contrast, the everyday life of most villagers is dominated by folk religions that deal with everyday questions and rely on local earthbound spirits, ancestors, witchcraft, magic, evil eye, and other unseen powers to explain and respond to human dilemmas.

Folk religions ask 'why' questions concerning disease, death, accidents, misfortunes and other unexplained events. High religions are preoccupied with the



theoretical and theological doctrines of the hereafter. Folk religions focus on influencing the supernatural toward solving the problems and issues of daily existence. High religions offer explanations of the supernatural while popular religions desire power over it.

Folk religions are not interested in an academic understanding of metaphysics and truth, but in procuring a good, meaningful life and guarding against evils that disturb it (Hiebert 2008:84).

Not surprisingly, the popular beliefs and practices of folk religion are present in the West. Most buildings in the United States lack a thirteenth floor while numerous airlines in the United States omit the thirteenth row on their aircraft. Many Americans believe the number thirteen to be unlucky. United States Senator John McCain and his staff routinely "knocked on wood" in order not to incur bad fortune during his 2008 United States presidential campaign (Extra, extra 2008:2). Athletes throughout the world often observe folk practices to supposedly bring them good luck. After describing the superstitious practice of American baseball players, Gmelch (in Lehmann & Myers 1989:298) turned his attention to the folk religious practices of American soldiers during World War II.

Social psychologists Samuel Stouffer and his colleagues found that in the face of great danger and uncertainty soldiers developed magical practices, particularly the use of protective amulets and good-luck charms (crosses, Bibles, rabbits' feet, medals), and jealously guarded articles of clothing they associated with past experiences of escape from danger. Stouffer also found that pre-battle preparations were carried out in a fixed 'ritual' order, much as ballplayers prepare for a game.

Folk religious practices, even by those who claim to belong to a high religion, are common occurrences around the world. Often many of the common people in societies dominated by high religions do not know much about them. Instead people seem more concerned with their folk

practices in order to live their lives (Hiebert 1985:222). Stephen Neil (in Hesselgrave 1991:223) estimates that about forty percent of the world's population holds to a worldview that can be characterized as folk religion.

### **3.3 Islamic influences upon folk Islam**

Even more than most high religions, Islam seems to be a particularly agreeable host for the development of folk religion (Musk 1984:229). The following excerpt describes the dichotomy that exists between orthodox and popular Islam.

Such a distinction between ideal and popular religion is as applicable to Islam as to any other monotheistic faith. Gibb goes so far as to assert that in no other great religious community has this 'duality of religious intuition and theological reason been more openly visible than it is in Islam' (Musk 1984:20).

As previously mentioned, folk Islam comprises a subset of the broader topic, folk religion. Braswell (1996:286, bold mine) depicts folk Muslims in the following manner,

Qur'anic Islam follows the formal teachings and letter of the law embedded in the Qur'an. Folk Islam tends to combine Qur'anic Islam with other beliefs and practices of a particular culture. For example in folk Islam, Muhammad and Jesus may be objects of prayer or may be considered mediators to God. There are saint's shrines or mosques in many Islamic lands. These shrines are named for important leaders like Hassan, Hussein, and Ali. Muslims attend these shrines to offer prayers through the saints.

**Folk Islam may include power encounters with the spirit world,** especially in health and healing and life decision concerns. Tribal and ethnic characteristics may be expressed in folk Islam. *Sufism* is considered the mystical arm of Islam. It stresses the love of God, the closeness of God, and feelings about God.

In speaking about the dissimilarities between ideal and popular religion in Islam, Musk (1984:25) notes great differences in almost every facet of their lives. The

contrasts entail theology, practices, speech, politics, structures, ethics and emotions.

The two worlds are essentially different in the sense that they cohere around alternative views of reality. They may coincide, or co-exist at various points along the way but the constructs of the universes are different, even largely opposed to each other. They are built on distinct paradigms...Their protagonists are traveling different roads.

Two principal streams feed into the river that can be called folk Islam. These include (1) traditional religious practices, which includes ATR, that sometimes pre-date the advent of Islam and (2) Islamic influences (including *Sufism*) from within the religion itself. The influence of ATR and other traditional religions upon folk Islam is the subject of chapter four. Prior to examining the case study of the Beja, this section shall briefly observe how the sects that emerged during the history of Islam have contributed to the development of its folk religion.

### **3.3.1 *Sunni* influences upon folk Islam**

Stuart (in Peel & Stuart 1985:365) postulates that popular Islam has two manifestations. Culturally he suggests that popular Islam represents those "Practices and beliefs that stand apart from the norms of behavior as sanctioned by the *'ulama* (religious officials) for particular communities." Those who lead official Islam often denigrate folk religious practices. *Wahhabi Sunnis* have attempted to eradicate them (Braswell 1996:77). These expressions seem to better represent the practices of the *Shi'ites*, *Sufis*, and traditional religionists treated later in this section.

The other expression of popular Islam, Stewart (1985:365) categorizes as political protest and reform movements (e.g. *Mahdism*). *Sunni* Islam is especially

vulnerable to this second manifestation of folk Islam.<sup>46</sup> Although *Sunnis* represent officialdom in Islam, the fervent *Wahhabis* in their midst sometimes stray into folk practices themselves. Sookhdeo (2007:277) recounts an event illustrating this point.

In 1979 Juhayman al-'Utaybi (1943-1979), a strict *Wahhabi* who was disillusioned by the profligate lifestyle of the Saudi royal family, attempted to revolt against the Saudi regime in the name of Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah al-Qahtani, a student at the Islamic University in Riyadh, believed to be the *Mahdi*. Qahtani's *mahdi* status had been revealed in dreams to his wife and sister. He fulfilled many of the predictions about the *Mahdi* which occur in the *Hadith*: the *Mahdi* would appear at the *Ka'ba* at the turn on the Islamic century (1979 overlapped with the year 1400 in the Islamic calendar), and was to have the same name as the Prophet and similar physical characteristics. Juhayman and his followers believed that after a long period of deviation from true Islam, the *Mahdi* would appear and put an end to corrupt, tyrannical regimes. They seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca but were eventually dislodged by the Saudi security forces after a violent siege.

Who are the populist factions within *Sunni* Islam intent on restoring spiritual and political purity to the faith?

The reform movement of Mohammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) began a return to traditional Islam when the Saudi royal family allied themselves with the *Wahhabis* to extend control over the Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century (Marshall, Green & Gilbert 2002:95-96). As has been said earlier, the *Wahhabi* theology has prevailed and is the orthodox interpretation of official Islam today (Ahmed 2001:233).

Despite Saudi Arabian and *Wahhabi* leadership in religious Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood movement of Egypt's Hassan al-Banna (1904-1949) began the resurgence of political Islam in the twentieth century (Braswell 1996:39).

---

<sup>46</sup> *Mahdism* comprises part of the belief system of *Shi'ites* and *Sufis* as well. This will be explained later in this chapter.

It would be a mistake to categorize those advocating a return to historic Islam as composed primarily of political radicals. Their writings clearly reveal a hunger for a deeper faith. Musk (2003:126) comments on a letter al-Banna wrote to the ruler of Egypt, King Faruq (Faruk).

The pure Islam towards which al-Banna urged Faruq was the Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood. Their Islam was not limited to worship and ritual or mere 'spirituality'. It was a robust Islam, touching on all the affairs of people in this world and in the hereafter. Their Islam included the virtues of all other systems and was sufficient in itself for the rebirth of Egypt. Twentieth-century Muslims needed to return to the Islamic principles of the first Muslims.

Many Muslim reformers desired only cultural and spiritual renewal, and so renounced violence and pledged to respect the political process. However, the Muslim Brotherhood spawned more radical splinter movements who did not share this view of non-violence (Sookhdeo 2007:280). These factions include Hassan al-Turabi's National Islamic Front-NIF (based in Sudan) and Osama bin Laden's *al Qaeda* (Marshall, Green & Gilbert 2002:103). The *Taliban* of Afghanistan exemplify a group desiring a return to traditional Islam and who accomplished the task by erecting an Islamist state governed by *Sharia* (Musk 2003:26).

Perhaps a case could be argued that extremist or political Islam represents a form of popular Islam.<sup>47</sup> I do not consider, however, most Muslim protest factions to be representatives of folk Islam. For the purposes of this thesis only reform or protest movements holding extreme eschatological *Mahdist* views or participating in unusual non-Islamic practices are considered part of folk Islam.

---

<sup>47</sup> Stuart (in Peel & Stuart 1985:365) defines one aspect of popular Islam as political protest and reform movements such as appeared in millennial *Mahdism*.

Addressing extreme eschatological Islam, Sookhdeo (2007: 289-290) explains this philosophy.

This mindset also results in abundant conspiracy theories. They view Muslim history as a prelude to the End and the various battles as End-Time battles or at least dress rehearsals for them. They perceive a series of cycles of victory and defeat, and are therefore not dismayed by defeat as this is only to be expected periodically, while ultimately God will bring them victory. This final victory, achieved by God himself when the Muslims face overwhelming odds, will be superior to the victories which the Muslims themselves have gained in the past by their own strength.

The *Sunni* influence upon folk Islam has more to do with its degree of fervency than depth of substance. The secular historian Wheatcroft (2004:358) links the ascetic practices of the *Wahhabi Sunnis* to folk Islam. Some *Sunni* Muslims stray into folk Islam when their fanaticism causes them to embrace the very mysticism they despise in *Sufism*. This is evident in some of the folk practices that will be examined later. During the days of Shafi'i, *Sunni* rationalists (*ahl al-kalam*<sup>48</sup>) argued for the deity of the Qur'an while *Sunni* traditionalists (*ahl al-hadith*<sup>49</sup>) made a case for the supremacy of the Prophet's example (Ruthven 2006:134-135). Although Safi'i succeeded in reconciling these theological strains within *Sunni* Islam (:133-143), folk practices concerning both the Qur'an and Muhammad have continued within *Sunnism*.

### **3.3.2 Shi'a influences in folk Islam**

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, *Shi'ites* and *Sunnis* broke ranks over the question of succession to the Prophet (Hamada 1990:117, Braswell 1996:90). Their name comes from *Shi'at 'Ali* (i.e. party or faction of

---

<sup>48</sup> People of the Word.

<sup>49</sup> People of the *Hadith* (story).

'Ali).<sup>50</sup> *Shi'ites* believe the descendants of 'Ali (the son-in-law of the Prophet) are the rightful rulers of Islam (Sookhdeo 2007:271). In a sense the *Shi'ites* can be called the "royalists" of Islam, believing in the importance of the Prophet's lineage in determining leadership. Conversely, the *Sunnis* can be seen as "parliamentary" Islam, with the community of faith (*'ummah*) determining leadership by consensus or voting.

A difference between *Sunnis* and *Shi'ites* on the matter of succession to the Prophet does not relegate the latter to the category of folk Islam on this question alone. It is the belief, rather, by many *Shi'ites* concerning the sacerdotal<sup>51</sup> role the leader of Islam that pushes them away from orthodoxy. Nasr, (2003:11-12, bold mine) a Muslim writer, expresses the difference between *Sunnis* and *Shi'ites* in the following quotation.

**The problem was, however, more profound than one of personalities.** It also concerned the **function** of the person who was to succeed the Prophet. The *Sunnis* believed that the function of such a person should be to protect the Divine Law, act as judge, and rule over the community, preserving public order and the borders of the Islamic world. The *Shi'ites* believed that such a person should also be able to **interpret the Qur'an** and the Law and in fact **possess inward knowledge**. Therefore, he had to be chosen by God and the Prophet, not by the community. Such a figure was called Imam.<sup>52</sup> Although such a person did not share in the Prophet's prophetic function (*nubuwwah*), he did receive the **inner spiritual power** of the Prophet (*walayah/wilayah*).

The personality cult surrounding Ali and his successors has opened the door to many beliefs and practices

---

<sup>50</sup> Wheatcroft (2004:158) holds the view that the name comes from the daughter (Fatima) from whom the *Shi'a* line claims descent.

<sup>51</sup> "Excessive reliance on a priesthood" (Guralnik 1970:1251).

<sup>52</sup> Ahmed (2001:9) writes, "An *Imam* is a senior figure often in charge of a large mosque. The title of *Imam* is also given to highly respected spiritual figures directly descended from the Prophet who are the basis for twelve *Imam Shi'ism*" [see footnote 50 in this chapter].

that are not acceptable to orthodox Islam. *Shi'ites* believe in the doctrine of the divine light (i.e. *nur*) that passes from *imam* to *imam*, rendering him sinless and infallible (Braswell 1996:92). Shrines to departed holy men have been erected with pilgrimages similar to the *hajj* to Mecca. A theology of persecution, death and martyrdom permeates *Shi'ism* to the extent that extreme mourning and self-flagellation often occur during the pilgrimages to the *Shi'a* shrines (Sookhdeo 2007:271). Most sub-groups of the *Shi'ites* believe in the return of the 'hidden *imam*'.<sup>53</sup> This belief causes most *Shi'ites* to reject the religious and secular authority of non-*Shi'a* Islam (Nasr 2003:12). Many problems have surfaced and even violence has erupted where *Shi'ites* and *Sunnis* reside together (Ahmed 2001:47).<sup>54</sup>

Sookhdeo (2008:44) observes, "*Shi'a* Islam touches on the emotions much more than does *Sunni* Islam; self-denial and martyrdom are strongly emphasized." This emphasis often leads *Shi'ites* into various folk practices. *Shi'a* adherents visit local shrines and rely on their religious leaders for direction (Braswell 1996:94). Folk religious beliefs and practices often flow from this desire for guidance and feeling. Ahmed (2001:46, bold mine), another Muslim writer, explains the differences between the two sects.

**Another difference between *Sunnis* and *Shi'as* rests in their belief regarding folk or cultural practices around tombs of saints. *Sunnis* are ambivalent about this, and the orthodox strongly reject these**

---

<sup>53</sup> This term refers to a *Shi'a* version of the *Mahdi* (i.e. Muslim Messiah). Ninety percent of *Shi'ites* are Twelvers and believe that the Twelfth *Imam* is in hiding, but will return to take over his rightful place of leading the world of Islam. Until that time living *imams* (*ayatollahs*) rule in his place (Braswell 1996:95). Ahmed (2001:9) says *ayatollah* means 'sign of God' and represents the highest category of the *ulama* [religious figures] in *Shi'a* Islam.

<sup>54</sup> This has been seen recently in Iraq, Pakistan and Yemen.



**practices as un-Islamic.** The *Shi'as* incorporated these as part of their custom. The difference reflects a deeper philosophic position. For *Sunnis*, God and human beings have a direct relationship; saints and scholars cannot be intermediaries to God but are only formal interpreters of religion. Belief in shrines and saints was often viewed by the *Sunni* orthodox as heretical and even dangerous deviation from the true and singular worship of God (*bida*).

By contrast, the *Shi'as* believe that intercession is an integral part of the divine plan for salvation. Ali and the other main Imams were **divinely inspired people** who because of their spirituality were **intermediaries between God and the believers**. After them, it is believed, in the absence of the Imam a distinguished religious scholar can act as the supreme guide and authority on Islamic law.

### 3.3.3 *Sufi influences in folk Islam*

Some orthodox Muslims relegate all *Sufism* to the sphere of folk Islam (Ernst 1997:xii) while others reject only the excessive elements (Ahmed 2001:49-50). Since *Sufism* consists of more feeling than doctrine, it is difficult either to define *Sufism* or explain exactly what *Sufis* believe (Ernst 1997:18). Chittick (2001:2) describes the problem.

Rather than trying to domesticate *Sufism* by giving it a more familiar label, we should recognize at the outset that there is something in the *Sufi* tradition that abhors domestication and definition.

This difficulty is evident in these *Sufi* sayings collected by the Muslim writer Al-Qushayri (in Ernst 1997:23).

*Sufism* is entry into exemplary behavior and departure from unworthy behavior.

*Sufism* means that God makes you die to yourself and make you live in him.

The *Sufi* is single in essence; nothing changes him, nor does he change anything.

The sign of the sincere *Sufi* is that he feels poor when he has wealth, is humble when he has power, and is hidden when he has fame.

*Sufism* means that you own nothing and are owned by nothing.

*Sufism* means entrusting the soul to God most high for whatever he wishes.

*Sufi* 'doctrine' can best be gleaned from poring over aphorisms such as these cited above and unraveling the riddle of their meanings. *Sufi* writers enjoy couching instruction within paradoxical proverbs and witticisms. *Sufi* (and many *Shi'a*) writers practice an allegorical hermeneutic called *tawil*<sup>55</sup> that is generally rejected by *Sunnis* (Ruthven 2006:232). This special hermeneutic deciphers the hidden, esoteric, multi-layered connotations within *Sufi* mysticism. The *Sufi* mining of the deeper significance beneath the surface of Islam is ripe for the advent of folk religious speculation that often borders on Islamic heresy. Chittick (2000:16-17, bold mine) presents this accusation.

Constant focus on God leads eventually, God willing, to the **goal of the *Sufi* path, which is union with God**, or the full realization of human perfection, or actualization of the divine image in which human beings were created. Once perfection is achieved, the separation between the divine and the human that was envisaged in the original discernment has been overcome, at least from a certain point of view. Having traversed the path, *Sufis* can say with Hallaj (d. 922), 'I am the Real,' that is '**I am God.**'

Chittick (2000:4) points out that there are three major Qur'anic themes in ancient Islamic teaching: (1) submission (i.e. *islam*), (2) faith (i.e. *iman*), and (3) doing the beautiful (i.e. *ibsan*). The first two are well known, representing the Five Pillars and the Six Principles of Islam. *Sufism* sees the latter, doing the beautiful, as its "special domain" (:05). Ibn Khaldun (in Ernst 1997:17) writes the following concerning the *Sufis*.

The *Sufi* approach is based upon constant application to divine worship, complete devotion to God, aversion to the false splendor of the world, abstinence from the pleasure, property and position to which

---

<sup>55</sup> *Tawil* is the common Arabic word for "long, large, big, tall, high" (Wehr 1976:576). *Sufis* use the word in the sense of the 'larger, greater, and deeper' meaning.

the great mass aspire, and retirement from the world into solitude for divine worship.

*Sufis* worship God in many ways, but Nasr (2003:81) identifies the essence of *Sufism* as a form of meditation called *al-dhikr* (remembrance). *Dhikr* ritual requires the *Sufi* to pronounce and repeat the ninety-nine names of God in order to unlock the special meaning within each name, producing a spiritual state in the believer (Ahmed 2001:50). The *dhikr*-Allah appears in the Qur'an twenty-six times. *Sufis* believe *dhikr* molds the character of the worshipper, bringing out his or her spiritual potential (Chittick 2000:58). This is often performed accompanied by ritual dancing, as explained by Ruthven (2001:255).

Controlled ecstasy may also be induced by certain physical movements. Among orders these range from the gentle turning from right to left with which the *Qadiris* accompany the *tahlil* formula,<sup>56</sup> a technique attributed to Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani himself, to the spinning of the *Mawlawiya* or 'Whirling Dervishes,' who have performed their famous dance in several European cities.

The recitation of the ninety-nine names in this fashion (*dhikr*) as an integral part of worship, sets the *Sufis* apart. As Chittick (2000:57) says,

The *Sufis* are distinguished from other Muslims partly because they consider the remembrance of God, in the form of mentioning His names as instructed by their *shaykhs*, as incumbent, not merely recommended.

There are other important emphases within *Sufism*. *Sufis* are known for their pursuit of esoteric, mystical knowledge called '*arif*'<sup>57</sup> (or *Gnostic*). The starting point of *Sufism*, according to adherents, began when Mohammad received the one hundred and fourteen *suras*<sup>58</sup> in the cave

---

<sup>56</sup> The *tahlil* formula is as follows (in Ruthven 2001:255), "*la ilaha il-la allah*: 'There is no deity but God.'"

<sup>57</sup> '*Arif* is derived from the Arabic word *arafa*, "to know." The term also means "expert, master, or connoisseur" (Wehr 1976:607).

<sup>58</sup> The chapter divisions in the Qur'an are called *suras*.

of Hira on the "Night of Power"<sup>59</sup> in the year 610. *Sufis* also see mysticism in Muhammad's night journey from Arabia to Jerusalem. Speaking of the unveiling of hidden truth within Islam, Ernst (1997:34) writes; "In the two-fold motion of the descent of the revelation and the ascent of the Prophet is contained the rhythm of the Qur'an." Ghazali and other *Sufis* believe in "modes of cognition beyond the intellect" (Ruthven 2006:233).

When mystical knowledge was emphasized over traditional learning, the preferred term was *ma'rifa* or '*irfan*,<sup>60</sup> meaning a special knowledge or *gnosis* that transcended ordinary reality (Ernst 1997:28).

*Sufis* also place great importance on the love of God. Although *Sufism* began in asceticism, it gave way to devotion and love (Chiddick 2000:61). This is evidenced in the poetic verse of Rumi, Junaid, and ibn Arabi. Among their themes are the concepts of affection, beauty, and truth. Their love poetry is striking as illustrated by the following citation (Rumi in Chittick 2000:72).

If you become a lion, love is a great lion-catcher.  
 Become an elephant-love is a mighty rhinoceros!  
 If you flee to the depth of a well,  
 Love's rope will bind your neck like a bucket.  
 Become a hair - love is a great hair-splitter.  
 Become a kabob - love is a spit.  
 Love is a sanctuary, the source of all justice, Even  
 if it waylays the intellects of man and woman.  
 Silence! For speech's homeland is Damascus, the  
 heart-with such a homeland, don't call it a stranger.

An emphasis upon a strong master-disciple relationship also characterizes the *Sufi* orders (Ernst 1997:29-30). "He who has no *Shaykh*, his *Shaykh* is Satan" is a

---

<sup>59</sup> The "Night of Power" is very important to Muslims today. On this twenty-seventh night of the month of Ramadan, folk Muslims believe through prayers and devotion they have the opportunity to alter what is 'written' in predestination (Musk 1984:123).

<sup>60</sup> Both *ma'rifa* (knowledge) and '*irfan* (gnosis) are also derivatives of '*arafa*, the Arabic word 'to know' (Wehr 1976:605, 606).

commonly quoted *Sufi* aphorism (Abu Yazid al-Bitami in Karrar 1992:2). New initiates enter their *Sufi* orders individually, taking an oath of fealty to God, Islam, and their *sheikh*. Often the new disciple receives a "cloak of blessing"<sup>61</sup> to wear as a symbol of their submission (Ernst 1997:144). In order to enter the *Qadiriyya* brotherhood in Sudan, the neophyte sits facing Mecca with his guide who holds his right thumb. Once he repents of his past sins and repeats the *Shahada*, he is ready to become a *Sufi*.

The *shaykh* would then ask the aspirant to close his eyes and open "the eyes of his heart" and concentrate on the litanies which he was about to dictate to him (*yulaqin*). Having received the litanies, the aspirant would declare his acceptance of the act of initiation by saying, 'I have accepted Allah as my God, Islam as my religion, Muhammad as the Prophet and Messenger and our *shaykh* as a guide.' He then would recite the *ayat al-mubaya'a* (Qur'an 48:10) and kiss the *shaykh's* hand. The initiation would conclude with a joint recital of the *Fatiha* by the *shaykh* and his *murid*; the aspirant had now become an adherent (Karrar 1992:152).

Orthodox Islam resists the claims of the *Sufi* masters, as *Sunnis* believe divine revelation has ceased (Ruthven 2006:247). On the other hand, "Most of the leading [*Sufi*] *shaikhs* claim to receive their vocations, or confirmations of them, directly from God or the Prophet in dreams and visions" (Ruthven 2006:248).

---

<sup>61</sup> There are various opinions about the source of the garment given to new *Sufi* disciples. Some *Sufis* believe the origin lies in Joseph's coat of many colors in the Book of Genesis. Others assert that Abraham received such a coat from the angel Gabriel. Some *Sufi* orders hold that Gabriel gave Muhammad a special tunic when he made his "night journey" to Jerusalem from Arabia, and the custom was passed down through the generations. Often the cloak is blue, but a patched version was also popular in the past (Ernst 1997:144). The followers of the Sudanese *Mahdi* wore patched tunics. These are on display at the *Khalifa's* house, now a museum, across the street from the *Mahdi's* tomb in Omdurman, Sudan. The *Mahdist Sufi* followers of Muhammad Ahmed mistakenly believed that their patched tunics would repel the bullets of the British during the Battle of Omdurman in 1898.

While some *Sufis* are self-possessed 'travelers' along a *Sufi* path (i.e. *tariqa*), others view themselves as intoxicated 'fools of God' who often appear mad<sup>62</sup> (Ernst 1997:29). Like *Shiites*, *Sufis* believe in the concept of sainthood (*wilaya*) achieved by especially righteous Muslims (:30). Devotion to their shrines and belief in the saints' spiritual assistance in this life leads to many excesses that can only be called folk Islam. The power of these holy men is known as *baraka*<sup>63</sup> (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:136). The spiritual power transmitted from master to disciple in both *Sufi* and *Shi'a* Islam creates a spiritual hierarchy that is absent in *Sunni* Islam. Ernst (1997:118) observes that "The basic esotericism of *Sufism* rested on the principle that only certain qualified people would be able to understand and experience the highest spiritual truths."

The practices described below illustrate the extent popular religion permeates the *dervish* orders. Poetry is important to *Sufis* and considered one of their greatest contributions to Islam (Ernst 2000:147). Even *Sunnis*<sup>64</sup> appreciate the *Sufis* in this regard, as praise to God is acceptable to all Muslims. Many *Sunnis*, however, draw the

---

<sup>62</sup> As in the British sense of the term, 'crazy.'

<sup>63</sup> When used religiously "baraka" is usually translated as either spiritual "power" or "blessing." The reason for the two meanings may be due to the similarities of the two Arabic words. The Arabic word "baraka" means (in Wehr 1976:54) "blessing, invoke a blessing, or kneel down (as a camel kneels down)." Interestingly, the similar-sounding term "baraqa" conveys (:53) "to shine, glitter, sparkle, flash (as in lightening)." I believe there is an intended connection between the two similar words (*baraka* and *baraqa*) when the terms are employed in a religious sense. *Baraka* also means "blessing" in Swahili (Johnson 1982:(1)29). Interesting, *Baraka* is the name of a popular brand of bottled mineral water in Egypt.

<sup>64</sup> Hassan al-Banna, founder of the *Sunni* (Egyptian) Muslim Brotherhood (d. 1949), read from the work of the great *Sufi* al-Ghazali at bedtime (Ruthven 2006:234).

line at the *Sufi* practice of *sama'*<sup>65</sup> (listening to chanted or recited poetry) which involves musical instruments and dancing, all designed to produce a state of ecstasy (Ernst 1997:180, 182). Some *Sufis* even recite poetry as a method of divination as Ernst (:170) describes herein.

To this day, there are many people who perform elaborate rituals to select at random a lyric from *Ha-fiz*, which is then interpreted (as with *I Ching*)<sup>66</sup> to guide everyday choices in matters as mundane as real-estate transactions.

Adherents also believe *baraka* assists *Sufi* saints in the performance of miracles (*karamat*). Such attitudes provide a fertile field for the cultivation of folk customs. Ernst (1997:68) portrays the energy of *baraka*.

This power can include such unusual abilities as thought-reading, healing the sick, reviving the dead, controlling the elements and animals, flying, walking on water, shape-shifting, and bilocation. *Sufi* theorists often warned that miracles were temptations by which God tested the adept.

The unusual folk practices of *Sufis* and *Shi'ites* continue to divide Muslims. The proliferation of intermediaries between God and the ordinary Muslim persists as the major difference between *Sunnis* and the other two divisions of Islam. Karrar (1992:2) presents the contrast. "A *tariqa shaykh* had absolute authority and expected the total submission of his followers. He was believed to be divinely inspired and incapable of sin." Ruthven (2006:257) states the crux of the matter; "Both movements [*Shi'ites* and *Sufis*] centered on the cult of personality rather than on the proclamation of Scripture." This cult

---

<sup>65</sup> *Sama'* is the common Arabic word for "listen, hear, pay attention to" (Wehr 1976:430). For *Sufis* the *sama'* means "listening with the heart." The Egyptian *Sufi* Dhu Al-Nun (in Ernst 1997:185) said, "*Sama'* is the rapture of God that incites hearts towards God."

<sup>66</sup> *I Ching* (or *Yi Jing*) is the divination system of ancient Chinese traditional religion. Both Confucianism and Taoism utilize *I Ching* practices (Morgan 2001:183).

of personality remains as the principal issue dividing the *Sunnis* from the other two segments of Islam (*Shi'ites* and *Sufis*).

### 3.3.4 Other Islamic influences upon folk Islam

An area of difficulty involves discerning the scope of the influence of traditional religion upon orthodox Islam. Musk (1984:230-238) observes folk religion within the pages of the Qur'an itself: "In Many respects, the formal religion couches within its own codifications and condoned practices, elements of folk Islam" (1984:229). Zwemer (1920:4) also reflects this position.

Even in Arabia the stern monotheism of the *Wahhabi* Reformers was unable to eradicate the pagan superstitions of Islam because they are imbedded in the Koran and were not altogether rejected by Mohammad himself, -much less by his companions.

Earlier in this chapter I quoted from a book written by Saudi Arabian religious officials explaining the significance of the *Ka'ba*. According to official Islam, the *Ka'ba* is the place founded by Abraham and Ishmael for worship over four thousand years ago (*Understanding Islam* 1989:8). Muslims today circle the *Ka'ba* seven times during the *hajj*. Muslim author Al-Hariri-Wendel (2002:43) acknowledges the ritual's pagan origins.

Pagan Arabs regarded the idols *Manah*, *al-Lat* and *al-Uzza* as daughters of Allah. The Arabs placed more emphasis on these three female divinities than on the five idols given to them by 'Amer Ibn Luhaij in Noah's time. For example, the Quraysh, the tribe to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged, used to circle the *Ka'bah* saying, 'In the name of *al-Lat*, in the name of *al-'Uzza*, and *Manah* the third, the different ones! They are the highest of all swans, and one may hope for their intercession with God! The idols *Manah*, *al-Lat*, and *al-'Uzza* were regarded as mediators with God. They were compared to cranes flying high in the sky.

*Manah*, *al-Lat*, and *al-'Uzza* reappear in the Qur'an when Muhammad first identifies them as deities. The Prophet's



abrogation of his earlier teaching is the subject matter for the "Satanic Verses"<sup>67</sup> (Braswell 1996:45).

The subject of folk Islam's influence upon official Islam is complex. The seamless combining of Qur'anic, pre-Qur'anic Arabian, and other sources by adherents over the years increases the difficulty in discovering the origin of many customs in Islam. Stuart (in Peel and Stuart 1985:365) captures some of the problems.

The genius of Islam lies in part in its receptivity and ability to incorporate diverse esoteric practices during the process of Islamization. This is readily apparent in Sub-Saharan Africa where Islam in this century has spread more rapidly than in any comparable time in the past. Yet therein also lies an inherent tension that has made the problem of defining a Muslim central to the concerns of Islamic scholars and reformers throughout the history of Islam. This tension surfaces in matters as diverse as theology (classically, the uses and abuses of *Sufism* and the *Sufi*) art and music...

I have felt some of this tension in attempting to separate the Muslim influences upon Beja folk Islam from the practices attributable to traditional religion, which includes ATR. Sometimes a clear distinction is not evident. As much as possible the latter will be examined in chapter four. The former will be considered next.

#### **3.4 Folk (popular) Islam case study: Beja of Sudan**

Jacobsen (1998:69) states "Beja people very much live in a world in which spirits are present." The Beja tribe of the Sudan serves as an ideal case study for devising a contextualized Christian approach to folk religion. Many Hillmen live within a hundred miles of the holy sites of Islam but in their customs they are worlds apart. Gamst (1984:135) describes the situation.

---

<sup>67</sup> Qur'an 53:19-23; 22:51. *The Satanic Verses* by Salmon Rushdie explores some of these discrepancies. The Iranian government called for the author's death, even though Rushdie is a Muslim himself.

Islam in its religious aspect is not deep-rooted or well understood by Beja...Prayers are perfunctory, and pilgrimage is not practiced even though pilgrims pass through Bejaland.

This thesis argues that there are two major sources of Beja popular religion: ATR and Islam (especially *Sufism*). This section will examine the seeds of folk Islam that have emerged from within the Muslim religion itself. Having previously completed a general overview of the beliefs and practices of the three large segments of Islam, the thesis shall now compare the practices of the Beja with these divisions. In addition, this section will consider the Islamic origins of Beja folk Islam irrespective of Muslim sectarianism.

#### **3.4.1 Beja folk religion and Sunni Islam**

Almost all of the Muslims in Sudan are *Sunnis* (Petterson 1999:42) and the Beja are no exception. As mentioned in chapter two, the Hillmen are nominal Muslims at best (Ausenda 1987:22); however, the Muslims in the villages of the *Hadendoa* division pray five times a day, while those in countryside (i.e. the bush) do not (:425).

A few Beja support the strictest *Sunni* sect, the *Wahhabi*. Beja *Wahhabis* in eastern Sudan carry the name, *Ansar Sunna*, the "helpers of the *Sunna*."

This is the Sudanese branch of the ultra-conservative puritanical sect of followers of Abd el Wahhab, an Arab from Hejaz, who lived between 1703 and 1787. He preached against all innovations, all waverings from orthodoxy. He considered all *Sufi tarikas* [orders] polytheistic and heretic, as all reading of prayers except those contained in the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. Very few *Hadendoa* [Beja] are *Ansar Sunna*, only those belonging to the intellectual elite, who have accepted the ultra-conservative stance of the religious movement. This conservative position is peculiar to the riverine Arabized people, who want to maintain the privileges accruing from their primacy in the Sudan. The *Ansar Sunna* are very close to the Saudi religious order of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ausenda 1987:447-448).

Although few in number, the high profile afforded the *An-sar Sunna* Beja by their wealth and status makes them a force to be reckoned with, especially in the cities. On the other hand, for most Beja, their allegiance to *Sunnism* only means they are not *Shi'ites*.

As has been stated previously, there is one other notable movement in Sudan within *Sunni* Islam that can be considered a manifestation of folk Islam. In 1881 Muhammad Ahmed proclaimed himself to be the *Mahdi* to his disciples (Churchill 1899:29). Muhammad Ahmed began his religious career as a novitiate disciple<sup>68</sup> in a Sudanese *Sufi* (*Sammaniyah*) brotherhood of the *Sunni* persuasion. *Sunni* theology expects the return of the *Al Mahdi al Mun-tazar*<sup>69</sup> in an eschatological, 'end times' scenario that restores true Islam and extends Muslim mastery over the entire world. *Sunnis* reject the hidden *Imam* doctrine of *Shi'a Mahdism*. When the Sudanese *Mahdi* amended the Five Pillars of Islam, claiming belief in him was necessary for faith (The *Sunni Mahdi* 2009:2), orthodoxy fell by the wayside. The Beja general, Osman Digna, and many *Hadendoa* Beja joined the *Mahdi* during this rebellion<sup>70</sup> against the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium in the late nineteenth century (Theobald 1951:66). However, many agreed with Lord Salisbury, proclaiming Muhammad Ahmed a false prophet in the eyes of high Islam (Steele 1998:11). Other Sudanese saw this quite differently at the time.

---

<sup>68</sup> *Faki*.

<sup>69</sup> "Awaited guide in the right path."

<sup>70</sup> Gamst (1984:135) asserts "Their [Beja] strong support for *Mahdism* was largely politically motivated rather than religiously motivated and a reaction against the Turks and Egyptians." They proved to be unreliable troops as well. Ausenda (1987:46) agrees with this assessment; "The various contingents in Osman Digna's army quickly became disaffected on account of their losses and the lack of looting possibilities. They had to be replaced by more ideologically proven contingents from Western Sudan, the hotbed of *Mahdist* revolt."

The *Mahdist* movement saw itself not as a specifically Sudanese state, but rather as the beginning of a new universal Islamic community which would unite at least all of Islam, if not the world, under the banner of a purified faith. It is indicative of the strength of the religious identification of the state in Sudanese attitudes that the *Mahdist* state has come to be seen as the first expression of Sudanese nationalism. While this may in part be due to a gradual secularization of the Sudanese Cultural tradition, it remains remarkable that not just *Ansar* politicians but even the more radical leftist groups are willing to accept this Islamic state as the foundation for the modern Sudan (Voll 1974:93).

The descendants of the *Mahdi* remain a force in Sudanese politics, but not so much in religion. Sadiq al *Mahdi* served as Prime Minister of the country for several years in the mid-1980's before his overthrow in a *coup d'état* after only a few years in office. The *Ansar Mahdi* (i.e. helpers of the *Mahdi*) unites this historic group as a political party today. Ausenda (1987:447) notes that a few Beja are members of the *Ansar Mahdi* in eastern Sudan.

#### **3.4.2 Beja folk religion and Shi'a Islam**

The number of *Shi'ites* in Sudan is small and their arrival a relatively recent phenomenon. In February of 1992 Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani traveled to Sudan for a state visit.<sup>71</sup> For several years the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir courted Iran for a favorable arrangement for the purchase of petroleum. News reports at the time suggested Revolutionary Guard military and security officials, as well as religious clerics, were descending upon the country in large numbers. Although Iranian advisors and technicians settled in Sudan, the former American Ambassador discounts both their numbers

---

<sup>71</sup> I was living with my family in Khartoum when former Iranian President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani visited Sudan. The Sudanese put on a parade for him. I watched from the crowd as Rafsanjani waved from his passing motorcade.

and influence. Sudan coveted Iran's financial assistance but not their *Shi'ism* (Petterson 1999:42-43).

Most of the *Shi'ites* settled in or near the Sudanese capital of Khartoum and not in the outlying areas where the Beja reside. There are several *Shi'a* mosques in and around Khartoum. The actual number of *Shi'ites* living in Sudan is unknown but is said to be growing (Sudanese *Shi'ites* 2009:1). No evidence exists, however, of *Shi'ism* among the Hillmen.

### 3.4.3 Beja folk religion and Sufi Islam

Karrar (1992:1) describes his country's religious historical development in his book, *The Sufi brotherhood in the Sudan*. He states "Sufism was the most fundamental characteristic of Islam in Sudan." Among a people not easily drawn to religion, participation in the pursuits of *Sufism* might be unexpected. Surprisingly, the *Sufi* path has many adherents among the Beja. Ausenda (1987:433-434, bold mine) writes about this development.

The Islamization of the Beja in general and of the *Hadendowa* in particular was stepped up by the effort of various missionaries, both from the Arabian peninsula and from the lower Nile, who came to the region toward the end of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth. Most of these missionaries belonged to *Sufi tarikas* (Ar.), one of the many religious expressions that go under the all embracing bracket of Islam. *Sufi tarikas* [orders], or "ways," are sects which profess to achieve closeness to God through the teaching of mystical thought (Eickelman 1981:223) and the performance of special ecstasy-inducing rituals. Perhaps for this reason, ***Sufi movements have had considerable success among Beja in general and Hadendowa in particular.***

Karrar (1992:233) lists twenty-nine *Sufi tarikas* in Sudan. Among the Beja in eastern Sudan, Ausenda (1987:434) identifies four "imported"<sup>72</sup> *Sufi* orders, one

---

<sup>72</sup> Orders that were started outside of the Beja homeland and imported into eastern Sudan.

indigenous order, and two "political parties" discussed earlier in this section.<sup>73</sup> The influential *Qadiriyyah* (or *Kadiriya*) order launched *Sufism* among the *Handendoa* (Beja). Founded by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani,<sup>74</sup> they remain the most popular and widespread brotherhood in the Muslim world (Karrar 1992:21). Each week the *Qadiriyya* "whirling dervishes" gather outside a mausoleum in Omdurman (a city in the Khartoum metropolitan area) to dance and sing, worshipping in the *Sufi* way.<sup>75</sup> Originally most *Hadendoa* practicing *Sufism* followed this *tarika*. However, today only fifty percent of Beja *Sufis* claim *Qadiriyya* affiliation, with the remainder distributed among the four other *Sufi* brotherhoods extant in Bejaland (Ausenda 1992:436).

The other 'imported' *Sufi* orders in eastern Sudan include the *Shazhalia* (or *Shadhiliyya*), the *Khatmiyya*<sup>76</sup> (or *Katmia*), and the *Tijania*<sup>77</sup> (or *Tijaniyya*). The latter was founded by the Moroccan Ahmad al-Tijani (d. 1781) and remains popular with West Africans<sup>78</sup> who live among the Beja in eastern Sudan (Karrar 1992:120).

---

<sup>73</sup> The *Ansar Sunna* (Muslim Brotherhood in the Sudan) do not self-identify as either as an order or generally as *Sufis*. The *Ansar Madhi* are more of a political party than a religious group (Ausenda 1992:447).

<sup>74</sup> Some times *Qadiriyyah Sufis* are called *Jilaniyya Sufis* after their founder al-Jilani (Karrar 1992: 21). Jilani died in Baghdad in 1166.

<sup>75</sup> Every Friday (except during Ramadan) an hour before sundown the *Sufis* gather to pray, dance, sing and chant at the tomb of nineteenth century Sudanese *Qadiriyyah* leader, Hamad al-Nil. The worship is open to the public and remains one of Sudan's top tourist attractions. I have observed this *Sufi* ceremony on two occasions.

<sup>76</sup> Many of the *Khatmiyya* joined the *Mahdia* under the *Mahdi*, Muhammad Ahmed in the late 1800's (Karrar 1992:97).

<sup>77</sup> According to Ausenda (1987:442), West Africans who have settled in Eastern Sudan brought *Tijania Sufism* with them and have induced some of the Beja to join their *tarika*.

<sup>78</sup> These are members of the *Fulani* tribe who stayed in Sudan on the way to or from a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The only indigenous *Hadendoa* Beja brotherhood (presently with no firm name) was briefly introduced in the last chapter.<sup>79</sup> *Sheikh* Ali Betai preached a simple message from the Qur'an, emphasizing the repetition of prayers in the traditional manner. He uniquely contextualized his new *tarika* to the Beja's nomadic lifestyle and their characteristic resistance to religious practice. Although he was a *Hadendoa*, Ali Betai's message had great crossover appeal to other Beja divisions, and even with other tribes.

People came from all over: *Hadendoa*, *Artiega*, West Africans, *Bishariin*, *Beni-Amer*. He traveled by camel along the border, by day and by night all the way to Tokar. He preached to them that they could become important men, not only by owning much livestock, but also by religion. Livestock without religion was to no avail. He also preached to them to work honestly with livestock and not to steal it (Ausenda 1992:446).

Beja *Sufis* embrace many of the folk beliefs and practices mentioned in the previous sections of this chapter concerning *Sufism*. *Hadendoa* Beja tribesmen attribute supernatural power to the souls of deceased *Sufi sheikhs*. Tradition requires annual pilgrimages (i.e. *zi-ara*) at the mausoleums of the *Sufi* saints to offer prayers to the souls entombed there (Ausenda 1987:437). Adherents believe *baraka* (i.e. supernatural power, blessing) emanates from the grave of the saints, even extending to the places where the deceased has previously resided (Karrar 1992:143). Leaders of new *Sufi tarikas* assert their commissions come directly from the Prophet Muhammad. Two of the Beja *Sufi* leaders, el Majzub and Ali

---

<sup>79</sup> Ausenda (1987:444,446) suggests this *tarika* could be called *Jamaa al Islamiah*, due to their emphasis on the Qur'an. *Sheikh* Ali Betai founded this order in 1951. Upon his death in 1978, his son Suliman Ali Betai became the *Sheikh*. I had a meeting with Suliman Ali Betai and some of his disciples in Kassala in 1991 to discuss relief and development efforts in eastern Sudan among the Beja people.

Betai, claim their charge came directly from the Prophet in a dream (Ausenda 1987:439, 444). Jacobson (1998:22) describes the Beja practice.

The veneration of saints and holy men seems to be an area where the people [Beja] are not willing to change their practices whatever efforts various *'ulama* [Sunni religious officials] might go to in persuading them that this is not in accordance with proper Islam.

Many Beja *Sufi* folk practices center on the *faki*,<sup>80</sup> or traditional healer. The word is similar to the term *fakir* (i.e. poor man) mentioned previously.<sup>81</sup> Among the Beja and other Sudanese tribes, the *faki* is revered and often also holds the office of *sheikh*<sup>82</sup> (Ausenda

---

<sup>80</sup> A Sudanese Arabic term for *fakir* (plural, *fugara*). Hussey (1923:35) offers a good description of this all-purpose word, "It [*fiki, faki, fagir or fakir*] is generally rendered in English as a holy man or religious leader and is used, indifferently to describe the Head of a religious sect big or small, the guardian of a holy tomb, a man of well known piety who has no particular diocese or religious function, a curer and a school master of a *Khalwa* or Koran school."

<sup>81</sup> The term *fakir* (poor man) describes anyone who is a member of a *Sufi tarika*. Due to transliteration differences, sometimes the term is spelled *fagir*. A female is a *fakira* or *fagira*. *Sufi* orders, on occasion, permit women to enter their number.

<sup>82</sup> Karrar (1992:126) writes about the levels of *sheikhs* as enunciated by one of the *Sufi* leaders; "Al-Mirghani distinguishes between three grades (*maratib*, sg. *martaba*) of *shaykh*. The first and most sublime was that of *shaykh al-tahqiq*, namely one who had attained complete spiritual truth and was qualified to lead aspirants toward that goal... The second category was the *Shaykh al-tabarruk*, a general title adopted by al-Mirghani for his representatives, who derived their position and *baraka* from him. Al-Mirghani stressed the fact that the *shaykh al-tabarruk* was not a true *shaykh al-tahqiq*, but merely a representative who was to be called *Khalifa*, *na'ib* or *naqib*, according to his position in the hierarchy. Al-Mirghani repeatedly reminded his representatives that they were not independent *Shaykhs* and that they should repress any tendency on the part of the followers to call them such. The *Shaykh al-tabarruk* was also expected to remind his adherents that he did not possess *madad* (divine assistance) and that they were to seek it from the head of the order alone... The last grade in al-Mirghani's category of *shaykhs* was that of *shaykh al-qira'a*, i.e., teacher of the Qur'an or other Islamic sciences. Somewhat paradoxically, al-Mirghani stated that the *shaykh al-quira'a* was to confine



1987:425). Jacobson (1998:67) describes the role of these folk practitioners among the Beja ethnic group.

Although a *fagir* in the Red Sea Hills [Beja territory] sometimes uses herbal remedies, they mainly employ treatment by the Qur'an in their practice. This treatment may be administered by different means, the most usual being:

1. *Wasl (A)*: A Qur'anic inscription is made on a piece of paper, which is then burned. The ash is mixed with water, which is given to the patient to drink.
2. *Mihaya (A)*: Qur'anic verses (often seven) are written in ink on a piece of paper or wood. The inscription is washed away with water afterward. This water is carefully collected and the patient is given the water to drink.<sup>83</sup>
3. *Hejab (A)*: A piece of paper with a Qur'anic inscription is wrapped inside an amulet as protection against attacks from evil spirits. The use of *Mihaya* as well as *hejabat* [pl.] are common all over the Muslim Sudan (Holy 1991) as well as the rest of the Muslim world (Gallagher 1983: Slikkerveer 1990; Trimmingham 1949, 1976; Wikan 1982).
4. Readings from the Qur'an by the *fagir*. The *fagir* sometimes makes the readings more effective by holding his right hand on the head of the patient, by spitting on the ground after each word or by spitting directly in the face of the patient.

One particular *Hadendoa faki sheikh* requires the recitation of the *Fateha* (i.e. the opening verses of the Qur'an) up to one hundred times by his patients depending upon the seriousness of the illness. Similar cures are prescribed for insanity, *jinn*<sup>84</sup> possession, and regular physical ailments (Ausenda 1987:426-427). Another Beja *Faki* reports expelling evil spirits from insane persons through Qur'anic readings, changes in diet, and whippings (Jacobsen 1998:60). Halim (1939:28) records traditional

---

his teaching only to the Quran and '*ilm* [Arabic for knowledge] and not to instruct people in *Sufism*."

<sup>83</sup> Drinking of magical water is common in ATR.

<sup>84</sup> Musk (1984:412) writes, "supernatural beings, usually considered to be more evil than good." The English term "Genie" comes from *jinn*.

healers fumigating patients with chameleon or hedgehog skin in order to counteract fevers caused by demonic activity. Some *Hadendoa* trace the origin of their tribe to the union of *jinn's* and Abyssinian girls (Musk 1984:216). The blow from a demon (*shaitan*) causes facial paralysis in Beja folklore. Only *faki* chants and amulets are able to cure such disabilities (Halim 1939:36).

Beja *fugara*<sup>85</sup> range beyond the normal *Sufi* practices into the realm of folk religion. According to Jacobsen (1998:68) a majority of traditional healers use 'spirit helpers' in their work. Although considered essential to the *Faki* work, these spirit beings become dangerous to the practitioner and his family if not befriended and tamed by them. Hussey (1923:35) reported this account.

Our *fiki* [*faki*] for example as a boy was placed by his father in a grass hut which was then set on fire and after its destruction the boy was discovered unscathed amid the embers.

Many Beja give little thought to *Sufi* sects in particular or religion in general. Speaking of the *Bisharin* Beja, Sandars (1933:144) observes the Beja attitude.

They are certainly not fanatical in their religion, and such of them as have ever thought about the sect they follow can be classified as *Shadiliya*, *Gadria* or *Mirghania*; the vast bulk of the tribe, however, pay no attention to this question.

Ausenda (1987:449) declares the difficulty knowing the number belonging to each *tarika* because membership is not mutually exclusive. In the cities and towns, the mosques are denominational, but the large central mosque in an urban area serves all *tarikas*. Adherents of one order may attend the services of other orders as they please, even switching to a different brotherhood each day. Ausenda (:450) wryly comments that "Attendance at

---

<sup>85</sup> *Fugara* is the plural of *Faki* (For definition of *faki* see footnote 80 on page 104).

'visits' [i.e. pilgrimages] is also meaningless, because Hadendoa like all sorts of gatherings, especially those where there is singing and free food." Paul (1950:240, bold mine) captures the Beja brand of *Sufism* in this interesting article about the saint veneration practice of the *Beni-Amer*.

Coffee drinking has also acquired an almost ritualistic significance. Materials for making it are carried on all occasions, and none but the most utter skeptics would consider the day well begun or ended without making coffee, spiced liberally with pepper, reciting a '*Fatha*,' and drinking not less than six cups, associating each with the name of a holy man or saint...The *Sheikh* in whose name the first two cups are drunk is *Sheikh* Hassan Abu Shazli, venerated as the **patron saint of coffee drinkers**.

#### 3.4.4 Beja folk religion and other Islamic sources

The previous segment delineated the *Sufi* contributions to Beja folk religion. This section identifies other Islamic influence on Beja folk Muslims. Jacobsen (1998:151) frames the task.

Obviously, both a spirit tradition having to do with the spread of Islam and a very local spirit tradition have left their marks on the view present day Beja hold of their spirit world. Rather than trying to distinguish Islamic elements from local and possibly pre-Islamic elements, however, I hold it to be more fair to speak about local or localized Islam.

Islam differs in every regional setting. A few examples from the Beja blending of Islam with their nomadic society follow.

According to the author of *The Medicine of the Prophet*, Mohammad practiced branding patients for treating wounds and sicknesses.<sup>86</sup> The Beja have continued this

---

<sup>86</sup> *The Medicine of the Prophet* quotes the Prophet Mohammad once saying (in Jacobsen 1998:92), "If a person takes honey three times a month, great disasters cannot affect."

custom through traditional healers called *Busara*<sup>87</sup> (Jacobsen 1998:128). The Beja, like many Muslim tribes, have tried to connect themselves genealogically with the Prophet's lineage (Sandars 1933:122) in an attempt to demonstrate their fealty to Islam's founder. Beja often follow a trial and error approach in medical matters, simultaneously seeking the advice of traditional healers, medical doctors, and exorcists (Jacobsen 1998:205).

Belief in *jinn's* and *shawatin*<sup>88</sup> is universal among the Beja. The *Bisharin* Beja keep a fire burning for forty days after the birth of a child to protect the family from the *jinn's* (Clark 1938:7). The Beja believe they haunt fireplaces, the threshold, and rubbish heaps. Sunrise and sunset are the propitious times for *jinn* activity. Twins are particularly susceptible to them. *Jinns* assume the form of different kinds of animals, but never the lion or crocodile. A female *jinn* (*jinniya*) known as *Silut* appears in the guise of an attractive woman and seduces young men (:14-16).

In order to secure rains some men 'fast' while others read one-half of the Qur'an, praying for rain. The very presence of the Qur'an is believed to protect from the 'evil eye'<sup>89</sup> and harm in general in Beja folk belief (Jacobsen 1998:154, 170). Jacobsen (:195) notes, "The concept of the 'evil eye' is most often related to sudden and unexpected serious sickness or death." Unfortunate events are often blamed on either the *jinns* or the 'evil

---

<sup>87</sup> Jacobsen writes, "the term *basir* is said by Arabists to mean 'one who can see the unseen'" (Jacobsen 1998:62).

<sup>88</sup> Plural of *shaitan* is *shawatin*.

<sup>89</sup> Matheny (in Musk 1984:41) says, "The concept of the evil eye implies that things or persons one holds dear are continually vulnerable to damage or destruction caused by other peoples' envy projected through their eyes...Anyone can be the agent of the evil eye...It is believed to cause sickness, death and bad luck."

eye.' Paul (1950:239) wrote the following about these Beja beliefs.

All [Beja] are extremely superstitious, and one of the reasons for the reluctance of the hillman to leave his hills is his belief in '*jinns*,' which inhabit the sea coast, and the thickets of *Khor Baraka*, where a man cannot see his neighbors. They are much given to wearing charms, bracelets of palm fiber, and rings with cabalistic [occult] signs.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter introduces the subject of folk Islam by examining the three major Muslim subdivisions, identifying the official and popular manifestations of each within the sphere of the Islamic world. The high and low Islam of the Sudanese in general and the Beja in particular are compared and contrasted with the beliefs and practices of the three major Muslim divisions, the *Sunni*, *Shi'a* and *Sufi*. Principal attention is directed toward the latter, as this group impacts folk Islam in Bejaland, Sudan, and the entire Muslim world. Other folk Muslim practices are identified, but these sources will be more fully explored in the next chapter, which treats the interplay between traditional religion (including ATR) and folk Islam.

#### 4. **Traditional religion and folk Islam**

Two main streams feed into folk Islam. These include (1) traditional religious practices (including ATR) and (2) Islamic influences (especially *Sufism*). Chapter three addresses the latter while this chapter examines the former. John Mbiti (1991:188-189, bold mine) makes the following observation concerning African peoples like the Beja who have converted to Islam but retain many of their former traditional religious practices.

This survival of African Religion in predominantly Muslim areas is in the form of beliefs, rituals, magic and medicine. **African traditional ideas and practices have been mixed with those of Islam** to suit the requirements of the people concerned, so that they get the best out of both religions. Generally the people have adopted Muslim ways of dress and other cultural forms from the Arabs. But in matters of deeper things of life, such as birth, marriage and death, they have remained largely followers of African Religion adapted to suit their social environment. This is at least the case on the east coast of Africa, and **parts of the Sudan**, Nigeria and other regions of west Africa.

The Beja tribe falls into this category. African folk Islam blends elements of the Muslim faith with the cultural and religious richness of Africa. This chapter analyzes the influence of traditional religion (especially ATR) upon the Hillmen. Traditional religions exist throughout the world, but the Beja version of Islam bears remarkable similarities to the African Traditional Religions (ATR) on this continent.

##### 4.1 **Traditional religion defined**

There has been no little discussion over the years about an accurate and proper definition of traditional religion<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Oladimeji (1975:4) rightly notes that for him traditional religion means, "native, that which is aboriginal or foundational; handed down from generation to generation; that which continues to be practiced by living men and women of today as the religion of their forbears, a heritage from the past which people of today have made theirs by living on it and practicing it as that which for them connects the

in general and ATR in particular. Byang Kato (1975:18) entitles his chapter on the subject, "African Traditional Religions: a battle of words." Mbiti (1991:18-19) identifies terms such as ancestor worship, superstition, animism, paganism, magic, and fetishism as either wrong or derogatory descriptions of African religions. Kato (1975:18-24) adds the titles idolatry, heathenism, witchcraft, *juju*, and primitive religion to the list of words considered either inadequate or pejorative in describing indigenous faiths. Animism<sup>2</sup> was the most frequently used term for traditional religion in earlier days. Concerning the word animism, Mbiti (1989:8) writes the following.

Animism is not an adequate description of these religions and it is better for that term to be abandoned once for all. It needs to be emphasized, that African religions are historically older than both Christianity and Islam.

Hiebert (2008:106-107) and Hesselgrave (1991:221-222) prefer the expression 'tribal' when describing indigenous faiths. However, while many traditional religionists belong to a tribe, many do not. Goetz (in Van Pelt 1984:38) proposes the term 'cosmobiology' in place of animism but this has not gained much traction. Kato (1975:24) offers the better, more acceptable alternative.

---

past with the present and upon which we base the connection between now and eternity with all that spiritual hope and fear." This is as opposed to a traditional faith that is out of date, old fashioned and rarely practiced.

<sup>2</sup> The term, 'animism' was originated by Edward B. Tylor in 1873 (Van Rheezen 1991:19), who called it the most primitive stage in the evolution of religion (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:17). The word is rejected by most current missiologists as either inaccurate or derogatory as Mbiti and Kato mention above. However, older writers such as Zwemer (1920:3) employed the term. Musk (1984:238), Van Rheezen (1991:20), and Parshall (2006:62) exemplify writers utilizing the word more recently. I prefer the terms 'traditional religion' or 'indigenous religion' to describe the phenomenon of localized faiths. When the word 'animism' appears in this thesis, it will only be when quoting other sources.

African Traditional Religions<sup>3</sup> this is the most comprehensive title for the religions of Africa. The religions are distinctively African, though similarities are traceable in the Caribbean Islands and other Latin American countries. The religions are traditional as opposed to the new religions in the continent such as Islam and Christianity. Tradition is the 'handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another, without written instruction.' The definition very well fits the pattern of African religions.

Traditional religion best describes the practice of indigenous religious faiths found all over the world. African Traditional Religion (ATR) represents the subset of the phenomenon on the African continent. Oladimeji (1975:5) cautions that ATR represents at best a "tentative term" and "the result of a search for an apprehensive title." Ambrose Moyo (in Gordon & Gordon 2001:301, bold mine) presents a rubric for examining ATR that I will use later in this chapter.

Although African Traditional Religions have no sacred books or definitive creeds upon which to base any analysis of these religions...the following religious phenomena seem to be basic and common to most of them: **(a)** belief in a supreme being, **(b)** belief in spirits/divinities, **(c)** belief in life after death, **(d)** religious personnel and sacred places, and **(e)** witchcraft and magic practices.

#### **4.1.1 Arabian traditional religion and Islam**

One of the most difficult aspects of studying folk Muslims involves discerning the origins of their faith. Questions emerge as to the relative percentage attributable to either Islam or traditional religion. Musk (1884:238, bold & numbering mine) views the origins of popular Islam in the following framework.

---

<sup>3</sup> Kato (1975:24) quotes Mbiti concerning the plural form of ATR; "We speak of African Traditional Religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African people (tribes) and each has its own religious system."



It would appear that many of the beliefs and practices of popular [folk] Islam, which have found entrance into what began, in intention at least, as a revolution to a high (ideal) religion, have come from **two major sources**. **1.** Many animistic practices were prevalent throughout Arabia when Muhammad appeared as the founder of a new religion; many adherents of the high religion continued with some of the practices, and many of the beliefs, with which they were already familiar. **2.** The second main source has been from the underlying continuation of ideas and practices current among people who have gradually become Muslims as Islam has spread; they have tended to retain many of their previous concepts beneath a veneer of conformity to orthodox Islam.

Indigenous religion and Islam mix together rather well. As Zwemer (1920:207) wrote many years ago, "Islam and Animism live in neighborly fashion, on the same street in the same mind." This blending of traditional religion and Islam produces a myriad of faith traditions across the world known collectively as folk Islam.

Some researchers observe Arabian traditional religious elements within the origin of Islam itself. Zwemer quotes the Muslim writer Ab'l Fida (in Zwemer 1920:4, parentheses and quotations his), identifying some customs that entered Islam from Arabian traditional religion.

"The Arabs of the times of ignorance," he says, "used to do things which the religious law of Islam has adopted...They used to, moreover, to make the pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to the house" (*the Ka'ba*), "and visit the consecrated places and wear the *Ihram*" (the single garment worn to the present day by a pilgrim when running round the *Ka'ba*), "and perform the *Tawwaf*, and run" (between the hills As Safa and Al Marway) "and make their stand at all the Stations and cast the stones" (at the devil in the valley of Mina);...He goes on to mention many other similar examples in which the religion of Islam has enjoined as religious observances ancient Arabian customs, for instance ceremonial washings after certain kinds of defilements, parting the hair, the ritual observed in cleansing the teeth, paring the nails, and other such matters.

Although evidences such as this citation suggests that some Qur'anic material entered Islam through Arabian traditional sources, their inclusion by the Prophet Mohammad renders them part and parcel with the faith delivered to Muslims and thus no less Islamic than other portions of Islam's holy book. Watt and Bell (1970:8) suggest that Judaism, Christianity, as well as a form of an old Semitic religion influenced the genesis of the Qur'an. Regardless, when the Prophet announced his revelation, it was accepted as God's exact word in its entirety.

One Muslim author demonstrates the difficulty and futility of separating pre-Islamic beginnings from the truly unique Muslim origins. Commenting on the folk Islam of the *Zaghawa* people,<sup>4</sup> a nomadic ethnic group who live in the deserts of Sudan, Chad and Niger, Sharif Harir (in Jacobsen 1998:152, ellipsis his) writes the following.

The whole notion of 'pre-Islamic survival' begs a few questions as to its utility as an explanatory tool for understanding contemporary dualism in religious practices. Given the fact that Islam has been part of the *Zaghawa* life for at least twelve centuries...to describe contemporary practices as pre-Islamic becomes not only problematic socially, but pointless epistemologically. Furthermore, the characterization 'pre-Islamic survival' implicitly based upon the notion of checking religious practices in Muslim communities against a theological register which presupposes the existence of an ideal, pure type, and a coherent religion purged of all social influences that come as a result of interaction between religion and practice.

Rather than attempting to 'root out' all of the pre-Islamic sources embedded in the Qur'an this thesis acknowledges as Islamic what Muslims themselves accept that which is included within the pages of the Qur'an.

The previous chapter examined the Islamic influences upon folk Islam that spring from the extra-Qur'anic

---

<sup>4</sup> Also called the *Beri* tribe.

practices of Muslim asceticism,<sup>5</sup> sacerdotalism,<sup>6</sup> and mysticism. This chapter concentrates on the effects of traditional religion, particularly ATR, upon the folk Islam of the Beja tribe of Sudan.

#### **4.1.2 African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Islam**

Islam came to Africa early during the second wave of the Muslim conquests. Umar, the second *caliph*, extended the western borders of Islam by taking Egypt<sup>7</sup> in the year 640. The armies of Islam under the third *caliph*, Uthman, brought Tunisia under their control by 647 (Braswell 1996:23). By 698 the ninth *caliph*, Abd al-Malik, had triumphed over the North African coastal strip (except for one small territory) and placed it under the banner of the crescent (Abd al-Malik 2005:1). The Islamization of Africa, south of the Mediterranean coastal area transpired more gradually.

As mentioned earlier, Islam spread into the East African interior through commercial traders and *Sufi* orders (Nasr 2003:21). Along the Red Sea and Indian Ocean coasts, Persian and Arab merchants established a string of settlements. After generations of intermarriage a new Swahili-speaking African-Arab Islamic culture<sup>8</sup> emerged (Moyo 2001:321). In West Africa the impetus for Islamic

---

<sup>5</sup> "The religious doctrine that one can reach a higher spiritual state by rigorous self-discipline and self-denial" (Guralnik 1970:80).

<sup>6</sup> Sacerdotalism is the "excessive reliance on a priesthood" (Guralnik 1970:1251).

<sup>7</sup> After his successful conquest of Jerusalem, *Caliph* Umar did not favor a conquest of Egypt due to the strength of the Roman garrisons at Farama, Fusat and Alexandria. Yet he was persuaded by 'Amr b. al-'As, one of his generals, to make the attempt (Numani 2004:257-258).

<sup>8</sup> Some of these towns were initially founded by the Portuguese but were always primarily composed of Arabized coastal African people. In East Africa, Islam did not spread far beyond the coastal strips of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, except in the case of a few Arab slave trading centers like Mpatwa, Tabora and Ujiji (all in modern-day Tanzania), the route taken by David Livingston, and later by his 'rescuer,' Henry Morton Stanley (Bierman 1990:93, 100).

expansion came from above as the rulers converted first. Muslim traders and *marabouts*<sup>9</sup> traveled south of the Sahara into present day Mauritania, Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Senegal, spreading Islam among African kings who in turn influenced their subjects to embrace the new religion (Ruthven 2006:258). Naude (1978:4) comments on this.

Mediterranean Africa was Islamized at an early date and an integrated Islamic culture with Arabic as a language was formed, so much so that it is at least as much part of the Arab world as it is of Africa. In fact, eight of the twenty-one members of the Arab League are part of the African continent and numerically they represent more than sixty percent of all Arabs. North Africa, therefore, is fully within the Islamic world, whereas the rest of Africa beyond the vast Sahara desert remained more on the periphery. Arabic did not replace the local languages as in North Africa, and Africans did not accept Islamic culture in *toto*. Islam remained in a "missionary situation."

When Muslim culture encounters traditional African civilizations, conflict sometimes ensues. Voll (1974:85, bold mine) designates the region where Islam meets other societies on the continent, principally indigenous religions and Christianity, the "fault line of Africa."

Upheavals along this line, including civil wars in Nigeria, Chad, the Sudan, and Ethiopia, have attracted international attention in recent years... This boundary stretches across the continent of Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. In general terms it coincides with the southern edge of the savanna belt just south of the Sahara, the region called **the geographic Sudan**.<sup>10</sup> In

---

<sup>9</sup> A *Marabout* is the name for a Muslim holy man in West Africa similar to a *Sheikh* (*Marabout* 2008:1).

<sup>10</sup> 'The Sudan' is the proper name for the geographic region also known as 'the *Sahel*', a semi-arid region between tropical Africa and the Sahara stretching from Senegal on the west to Ethiopia and Eritrea on the east. Sudan the country is part of 'the Sudan,' the larger geographical area. Collins and Burns (2007:16, bold mine) describe this geographic region, "The Northern savanna grasslands extend across Africa from Senegal on the Atlantic to the Red Sea, the area medieval Arab geographers called the *bilad al-Sudan* ('land of the blacks'), and then continues down the coast of East Africa.

most areas, however, **it is not a distinct line, but rather a broad region of interaction between peoples and religions, particularly Islam, Christianity, and local religions.** In some areas Islam has penetrated deeply into the forest areas south of the savanna, while in other places there are pockets of local religions even in the desert and steppe areas.

The Beja tribe of Sudan lives along this fault line. While living in the country, I observed a number of practices within Beja folk Islam that resembled the ATR customs of the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania.<sup>11</sup> In order to examine the ATR influences upon the Beja, the next section establishes a baseline example for ATR by briefly studying the beliefs and practices of the Sukuma. The religious practices of the Sukuma typify the ATR of Sub-Saharan Africa and serve to illustrate the religious similarities between them and folk Muslims like the Beja.

#### **4.2 ATR example: the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania**

My work with the Sukuma tribe in the 1980's prepared me for ministering to the Beja people in the 1990's. I observed that the folk Islam of the latter closely resembled the ATR of the former.

The Sukuma people of northwestern Tanzania (see the maps in Appendices 8, 9 & 12) compose the largest ethnic group in Tanzania (Welch 1974:1, 81) and represent the

---

Between the Sahara Desert and the Savanna lies a fringe of arid land known as the *Sahel* (Arabic, *Sahil* - 'shore')...The *Sahel* is a band of scrub, bush, thorns, sandy soils, and solitary trees that supports limited numbers of herdsmen and marginal agriculture characterized by erratic rainfall, ten to fifteen inches." This is the reason the countries of Mali and Ghana (West African countries) are referred to as 'Western Sudan' (Bohannon and Curtin 1995:166) even though the country 'Sudan' lies thousands of miles to the east. Collins (2008:1) says the geographic, greater Sudan (*bilad al-Sudan*) "stretches from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean..."

<sup>11</sup> My wife and I worked among the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania from 1984-1988. We lived in Mwanza, the second largest city of Tanzania with our three children [see the maps in appendices 8, 9 & 12].

second largest tribe in all of East Africa.<sup>12</sup> Numbering approximately six million persons (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:v), the Sukuma make up about sixteen percent of the country's total population.<sup>13</sup> Nestled along the southern shore of Lake Victoria, the city of Mwanza<sup>14</sup> forms the geographical and cultural center of Sukumaland. The tribe's homeland is about the size of Switzerland (Welch 1974:60). The Sukuma represent an agro-pastoral people who rely on the former for sustenance and the latter (especially cattle) for calculating wealth and social standing (Brandstrom 1985:3). They are closely related ethnically and linguistically to the *Nyamwezi* tribe to the south, the second largest people group in Tanzania (Abrahams 1967:15).

---

<sup>12</sup> The *Kikuyu* people of Kenya number six and a half million persons (*Kikuyu 2010*) and are the largest tribe in East Africa (Welch 1974:81).

<sup>13</sup> The population of the Sukuma has steadily increased over the years. Cory (1954a:1) estimated they approached one million persons in 1954. A 1967 census placed the Sukuma at one and a half million (Brandstrom 1985:4). A few years later Welch (1974:1) numbered the tribe at two million out of a total Tanzanian population of twelve million (seventeen percent of the whole). By 1991 the Sukuma were estimated at between three and five million inhabitants (Van Rheenen 1996:218). One recent article places the Sukuma population at just under three and a half million people (Palmer 2008:1). Yet the UN estimated the inhabitants of Tanzania in 2003 at just below thirty-seven million (Tanzania population). Since the Sukuma have consistently maintained their population ratio of sixteen percent to total Tanzania residents over the years, then the Wijsen and Tanner (2002:v) figure of six million Sukuma seems to be the most accurate.

<sup>14</sup> Mwanza boasts a populace of almost a half a million people (Population of Mwanza), making the city the second largest metropolitan area in the country. Welch (1974:186) said that one half of the residents were Muslims, one-third Catholics, and fifteen percent Protestants. In 1957 this city numbered only 19,877 inhabitants (Abrahams 1967:22). In those days, the Sukuma composed only thirty percent of the total population of the city. Pakistanis, Indians, and Arabs comprised twenty-one percent of Mwanza, accounting for many of the Muslims. Europeans and other non-Africans were three percent of the population. Other African tribes made up the remaining forty-six percent of the people living in the city.

#### 4.2.1 Sukuma history

The Sukuma people view themselves as a distinct social and political entity (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:41). Due to the lack of written records, unraveling Sukuma history becomes challenging. Some clues emerge from a study of their language. *Kisukuma*<sup>15</sup> forms part of the Niger-Congo linguistic family (see Appendix 10), known as Bantu<sup>16</sup> (Collins & Burns 2007:44, 50). Van Pelt (1984:26) notes that the origin of Bantu and its subsequent spread over three-fourths of sub-Saharan Africa remains a mystery (see Appendix 11). Nonetheless, contemporary scholars have utilized a method of tracking the Bantu expansion by analyzing linguistic markers. Collins and Burns (2007:51) explain.

By comparing these cognitive relationships the Bantu homeland can be located with uncommon accuracy to an area on the borderlands between the Republics of Cameroon and Nigeria. In this upland region the original eight sub-groups of Bantu are to be found. Of the eight, three expanded beyond this homeland. Two percolated east along the northern edge of equatorial East Africa, the Congo, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. The third Bantu language made its way through the rainforest to swing northeast to the

---

<sup>15</sup> *Kisukuma* is the tribal language, the people are called the *Wasukuma*, and the homeland is known as *Usukuma*. Currently most speakers omit the prefixes, using the term *Sukuma* in place of all three terms.

<sup>16</sup> According to Welch (1974:83) the expression 'Bantu' was first used in 1856 in the *Library of Sir George Grey*, vol. 1, on page forty. Welch (:90) says the pure Bantu speakers lived in central and southern Africa. Collins and Burns (2007:47) note that ethnic groups speaking Bantu languages number over four hundred (see Appendix 11). They are united by their usage of the root *ntu* for the word man, and its plural *batu* (Individual Bantu languages have variations on this, as Swahili employs *mtu* and *watu* for man and men respectively). Bantu is a linguistic definition for a family of languages, and not a tribal designation. For example, Hebrew, Arabic, and *Tigre* are Semitic tongues and members of the Afro-Asiatic family of languages (The Beja language is part of the Afro-Asiatic family -see Appendices 7 & 10- but is not Semitic, but from the Cushitic branch). Nevertheless, the Jewish, Arab, and *Beni-Amer* ethnic groups who speak them are quite different peoples. Such diversity exists among Bantu-speaking peoples as well.

East African coast and south to occupy the savanna of Central and Southern Africa.

The Bantu speakers followed various routes (see appendix 11) as they migrated through sub-Saharan Africa absorbing the original inhabitants along the way (Van Pelt 1984:27). These journeys occurred over thousands of years (Welch 1974:84) by 'pre-Bantu' people in at least four stages (Van Pelt 1984:26-27; Welch 1974:84). Migrating Bantu speakers created fresh cultures as they settled in the new territories. Collins and Burns (2007:47) elaborate on this.

Bantu came to be understood not simply as language, but as a package of economic and cultural traditions that created densely populated communities of Iron Age farmers who absorbed or supplanted indigenous people.

The emergence of the Sukuma as a distinct people from other Bantu speakers dates from about 1500 A.D. (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:37). Welch (1974:86) aptly observes; "the task of explaining the peopling of Sukumaland becomes complex." At this time Hamitic migrants arrived in northwest Tanzania from Ethiopia and were accepted by the inhabitants as their rulers.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the Hamitic nobility was absorbed into the culture of their new subjects (Millroth 1967:13-14), even adopting the Sukuma language (Cory 1954a:2). Simultaneously other Bantu speakers migrated (see appendices 11 & 12) from present day Lake Albert in Uganda to Lake Victoria (Welch 1974:90). The Sukuma tribe emerged from a mixture of the original inhabitants of the region, successive waves of

---

<sup>17</sup> In an interesting historical parallel, the *Nabatab Beni-Amer* Beja are the Hamitic rulers who subdued the more numerous Semitic *Tigre*. The *Nabatab* took the language of their serfs but the *Tigre* adopted the culture of the conquerors. The *Nabatab* Hamitic nobility compose ten percent of the *Beni-Amer* (Nadel 1945:54, 57, 66).



Bantu immigrants, followed by the entry of a Hamitic ruling class.

Discovering the origin of the word 'Sukuma' becomes only slightly less difficult. Abrahams (1967:12) postulates the term possesses a directional origin. Early British explorers Richard Burton and John Speke noticed the expression Sukuma meant 'north' in the vernacular language. Searching for the source of the White Nile in 1858, Speke was the first European to view present day Lake Victoria (Moorhead 1967:13). On this trip he noted that the people living in the northern portion of Tanganyika<sup>18</sup> were called 'northerners' or 'Sukuma' by their neighbors (Abrahams 1967:12). This theory of the beginning of the word 'Sukuma' holds sway today.

Another idea explaining the genesis of the name Sukuma comes from tribal oral history. As the incipient people group searched for new land, Wijsen and Tanner (2002:37) relate the following story.

One of the chiefs appointed his favoured son to lead a contingent of 250 men and women. Having traveled for several months they reached a place near the present town of Mwanza [see Appendices 9 & 12). This son then said to his people: 'nye-nsukumale-aha': let me camp here. Many people believe this to be the true origin of the name 'Sukuma.'

By the turn of the last century the ethnic groups (largely Bantu) had adopted names associated with their territories or accepted the monikers placed on them by their neighbors or enemies. By the time of the arrival of the Europeans, the Sukuma were ruled by approximately fifty chiefdoms among five major clans (Welch 1974:87).

Germany colonized Tanganyika in 1890 before losing the territory to Great Britain in 1919 during the First

---

<sup>18</sup> The mainland of Tanzania used to be known as Tanganyika. The name change is explained on the next page.

World War<sup>19</sup> (Abrahams 1967:26-27). Britain administered Tanganyika as a protectorate until the latter's independence in 1961. Both Germany and Great Britain governed Sukumaland through the traditional chieftainship system<sup>20</sup> (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:75). More changes occurred in 1963 when President Julius Nyerere joined the newly independent Tanganyika with the island nation of Zanzibar, creating the United Republic of Tanzania (Bessire 1998:3). Modifications enacted by the new government included creating new magistrate and district government schemes and abolishing the old chieftainship system. Sukuma chiefdoms continue on an informal basis, performing religious rituals and arbitrating disputes, but no longer governing politically (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:49).

The Arusha Declaration of 1967 brought a form of socialism to the new country known as *Ujamaa*.<sup>21</sup> Citizens (including those in Sukumaland) were forcibly moved into collective communal villages, further breaking down traditional tribal structures. For a variety of reasons, over the next three decades Tanzania gradually abandoned

---

<sup>19</sup> Europeans call the First World War "The Great War."

<sup>20</sup> Both German and British colonialists employed 'indirect rule' over Tanganyika (Abrahams 1967:26-27). The Sukuma idea of chieftainship of their *batemi* (chiefs) differed from the expectations of their colonizers. The traditional Sukuma ruler conducted religious rituals to insure punctual rains and arbitrated disputes among his subjects. Thus, sometimes the British selected their own chiefs from those qualified by lineage and sacked those who proved to be poor at the additional administrative duties required by the colonialists. Sometimes the Sukuma accepted these decisions while at other times there was unrest as a result of the replacement of a popular chief and the selection of a poor substitute (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:75-77).

<sup>21</sup> *Ujamaa* constitutes the Swahili word for 'brotherhood, kin, relationship' that was adopted by the ruling Tanzania National African Union (TANU) and President Julius Nyerere for a new program of Tanzanian-style socialism (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:123).

the socialist experiment<sup>22</sup> and transitioned to the current free market economy (Bessire 1998:3).

#### **4.2.2 Sukuma society**

Prior to examining the ATR of the Sukuma, an overview of their culture and society assists in understanding their religion. Constructing a Sukuma worldview is challenging due to the mystery of their origins discussed in the previous section.

The patchwork past of the Sukuma presents the researcher a difficulty in discovering a Sukuma cultural paradigm. The Sukuma consist of odd groups from various but unknown social and geographic backgrounds moving into land used by hunter-gatherers before them, but not permanently occupied. This was apparently not an expansion outwards from a concentrated culture with satellite settlements doing their best to emulate a single parent society. So if there was and is a cultural paradigm, it is not likely to be very specific but rather some sort of lowest common social denominator which can be used by groups of very varied origins, living under very varied conditions (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:41).

Perhaps Sukuma culture can be called exceptional in its ordinariness. Rather than exotic or romantic, Welch (1974:97) states, "Instead, Sukuma life is very subdued, with emphasis on cows, marriage, rain, religion, and social acceptance." The extreme normalcy of the Sukuma as a Bantu people makes them an excellent model for an overview of a typical ethnic group practicing ATR. These similarities with other African peoples are described below.

There are a number of Sukuma social activities which are not and never have been confined to them, and whatever these are, they will vary in their form from place to place within *Usukuma*. Thus there are

---

<sup>22</sup> Lapalombara (in Wijsen & Tanner 2002:129) says that to move the entire population of Tanzania from their original locations to over eight thousand new villages simultaneously a special administrative organization was needed, not *ad hoc* planning by politicians. Also, ethnic groups like the Sukuma had no history of living in densely populated villages (despite the advantages of wells and schools) and resisted the compulsory nature of the collectivization (:126-127).

substantial cultural overlaps involving the Sukuma and other ethnic groups, not only concerning witchcraft, but also ancestors, the status given to traditional healers, gerontocracy,<sup>23</sup> self-help and marginal communality, and subsistence cultivation methods. These are shared not just with their geographical neighbours but with social groups far away with whom there can never have been even the remotest of contacts (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:42).

This portion of the thesis has surveyed the customs separate from the Sukuma religion. The next section examines the cultural practices that comprise the tribe's ATR.

#### **4.2.2.1 Sukuma socio-economic situation**

As mentioned earlier, the Sukuma are led informally by a system of chiefs. The *Binza*, *Kwimba*, *Siha*, *Golo*, and *Sega* constitute the five major clans (Cory 1954a:2, Welch 1974:123). The matrilineal succession of the pre-colonial days gave way to a patrilineal system preferred by the European colonialists (Cory 1954a:4-5). Chiefs appointed their sons as village headmen, delegating some of their powers and responsibilities to them. Although a modern system of administrative districts, courts and magistrates replaced the authority of the chiefdoms, their local influence continues through their sponsorship of tribal rituals (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:49). Since many of their duties also include performing religious rites, a later section on Sukuma ATR covers these responsibilities.

The Sukuma expanded their tribal territory during the twentieth century by pioneering into unoccupied new lands for agriculture and livestock grazing (Brandstrom 1985:21). Despite enlarging the overall tribal territory, Sukuma emotional commitment remains more to their cattle than to their land (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:43). Cultivated as a major cash crop, Sukumaland produces more cotton

---

<sup>23</sup> "Government by old men" (Guralnik 1970:586-587).

than any other part of the country (Brandstrom 1985:18). Sukuma economics operates in the following manner.

Although cultivation is the main subsistence activity, animal husbandry is of utmost importance. Thus land, livestock, and labour constitute the main components of the Sukuma economic system the basis of which is agriculture founded on family labour. Surplus obtained from crop production is largely invested in cattle, which apart from their apparent economic significance are important in social transactions; for instance, as bridewealth for establishment of family bonds through marriage (Brandstrom 1985:6).

Although Lake Victoria forms the tribe's northern border, the Sukuma have little fishing tradition. Generally uncomfortable on boats, a few of their men cast nets along the lakeshore. Many find employment as day laborers, craftsmen, or repairmen, supplementing their income when farming halts during the dry season (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:51). Other men and women toil in the towns as merchants, builders, nurses, doctors, bankers, and as transportation and communications workers (Bessire 1998:1).

#### **4.2.2.2 the Sukuma personality**

The literature suggests and I have observed that most Sukuma possess great humility and an admirable unpretentiousness. The book title, 'I am just a Sukuma,'<sup>24</sup> penned by a former colonial officer and a retired missionary reflect these values (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:58). Generally non-assertive and non-aggressive (Welch 1974:196), the Sukuma exhibit great cooperation while achieving common goals. Their agricultural activities often involve group efforts and result in building

---

<sup>24</sup> I heard many times the Swahili phrase "*Mimi ni msukuma tu.*" It can also be translated, "I'm only a Sukuma." Behind the concept the words convey the meaning, "I'm nobody special" or "I'm just a regular guy or gal" (as females use the phrase also). Sukuma make this statement in a positive sense.

relationships within their communities (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:43).

The Sukuma lack a warlike tradition toward outsiders except for the occasional retaliation against the neighboring *Maasai* tribe for cattle rustling<sup>25</sup> (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:69). Nevertheless, within their own ethnic group, summary justice sometimes surfaces as a means for punishing delinquency and criminality. The *Sungusungu*<sup>26</sup> function as an informal vigilante group to maintain law and order in the community when the national and local governments neglect the responsibility (:4). The large number of witches and wizards annually killed in northwestern Tanzania testifies to the Sukuma propensity for taking matters into their own hands<sup>27</sup> (:135).

Sukuma enjoy storytelling as a way to pass the time during the cultivation season. Folk stories teach important social values and entertain audiences (Welch 1974:366, 368). In Sukuma fables the lion appears more frequently than any other creature. The hare replaces the fox of the Beja stories as the clever character, while

---

<sup>25</sup> Hostility persists toward the *Maasai* as this centuries-old custom continues (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:19).

<sup>26</sup> The *Sungusugu* are not primarily a Sukuma secret religious society, but an independent (generally non-religious) informal association of vigilantes. In 1984 I was driving with my family along the outskirts of Mwanza, Tanzania, on the road toward the Kenya border when I encountered a group of twenty *Sungusungu*. Despite the early hour of the morning, they were lying in the road stopping traffic in both directions. When motorists approached their blockade they charged each vehicle raising their spears, causing everyone to retreat in the opposite direction. I was able to run the roadblock by hiding my vehicle directly behind a passing bus. As the *Sungusungu* parted for the motor coach, I slipped by them, hidden by the exhaust of the bus. The *Sungusungu* rarely bother non-Sukuma, but this does happen occasionally.

<sup>27</sup> Of the four thousand five hundred and nineteen witches and wizards known by the government to have been killed in Tanzania between 1970 and 1988, forty-nine percent of them perished in Sukumaland. Much of the responsibility for this was blamed on the vigilante group, the *Sungusungu* (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:135).

the hyena remains the foil in the tales of both cultures (:314-316).

Sukuma culture lacks poets as such; instead, a caste of 'singing song-writers' fulfills this artistic mode of expression. Sukuma satiric singers compose social commentary songs performed by the authors or by one of the many dance and drum societies.<sup>28</sup> One especially popular tune laments that the medicine of the doctors in the government hospital killed more people than they cured.<sup>29</sup> The composer received two separate jail terms from the Mwanza government for this satirical song (Welch 1974:377).

#### **4.2.2.3 the Sukuma culture**

In general the Sukuma have successfully resisted many of the cultural changes attempted by Muslim and Christian missionaries, two European colonial governments, and most recently the modern Tanzanian state. Wijsen and Tanner (2002:35) speak about the legendary Sukuma resistance to change.

The Sukuma have managed to keep their culture substantially intact. The current government tried deliberately to break their social structure of well dispersed hamlets by enforcing villagization, but they returned to their previous way of living as soon as the political enforcement was abolished. Significantly, only some 12% have become Christians<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> In Sukuma civilization one part of the society depends upon other interrelated segments of the culture. For example, the singing, song-writing, poet choreographers (*balingi*) serve sometimes also as diviners (*bafumu*) and the dance and drum societies they lead include religious as well as social functions.

<sup>29</sup> When I lived in Mwanza, Tanzania during the 1980's the Sukuma called the government Buganda Hospital, 'the house of death.'

<sup>30</sup> Discerning the percentage of adherents to various religious persuasions in the Sukuma area presents major problems, as approximations differ widely. Welch (1974:186) estimates that fifty per cent of the Sukuma in the rural areas follow ATR, one-third embrace Catholicism, with less than ten per cent following Protestant denominations. Nonetheless, Welch (:187) offers a disclaimer, writing; "The situation thus is complicated, for many times the traditional beliefs and customs still persist under Islamic and Christian practices."

and a much smaller percentage have become Moslems despite a century of evangelization by missionaries and the even longer presence of Moslems.

Cattle measures relative wealth in Sukuma culture, constituting the way a man legally takes a wife. As Welch (1974:110) states, "The cattle are synonymous to the American marriage license which legally signifies a contract between two people according to the edicts of the state." Experts state that bridewealth<sup>31</sup> stabilizes marriages making divorces rare (:111, 127).

Marriage is a social process in Sukumaland which may take at least five years to complete all of the stages. Marriage is a serious, important process which involves the entire community, thus it is not just an event between a boy and a girl. Cattle is the most important thing in the life of the Sukuma which enables him to participate in the most important social process, marriage. The sole purpose of marriage is to have children, for the children will assure immortality through ancestor veneration<sup>32</sup> (Welch 1974:129).

Neither boys nor girls among the Sukuma receive circumcision (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:52-53). Polygamy rarely occurs among members of the tribe today, except in the case of chiefs who sometimes take multiple wives (Welch 2002:218-219).

The Sukuma pass through age-grade milestones beginning with the *bayanda*. Boys in this age bracket learn the

---

<sup>31</sup> Explaining the concept of bridewealth further, Welch (1974:109-110) comments; "To say that the Sukuma 'buys a wife with his cattle,' however, is erroneous. The cattle are the symbolic element which legally binds the boy to the girl, as well as to bind legally the two families."

<sup>32</sup> This quotation reveals the symbiotic, interrelated nature of Sukuma life. Cattle form the basis of determining personal wealth among the Sukuma and become meat for the family after the animals age. The exchange of cattle between families seals the social institution of marriage. Marriage produces the children that ensure one's place in the Sukuma ATR. The religion centers on the veneration of ancestors. Ancestor veneration guarantees the fertility of their cattle, soil, and marriages, and the cycle begins again.



skills of herding cattle. Upon reaching puberty young men pass into the *basumba* age group, where they learn to farm and construct domiciles. *Basumba* marry after accumulating sufficient cattle for bridewealth and demonstrating the ability to build a house without assistance. At the age of forty a man moves into the *bajaha* age grade, taking his place as member of the chief's council. Men between the ages of fifty and sixty receive an invitation to join the *banamhala*. This respected group of elders serves in the role of dispensing tribal wisdom. Females have a corresponding age-grade scheme, but with differing duties (Welch 1974:214-215).

Secret societies command great importance in Sukuma culture for both social and religious reasons. Associations practice open membership, but special knowledge and secret powers await the initiate. Two principle types of societies exist: the *mbina* (dance) and the *ngoma* (drum). Subgroups of these associations include spirit possession societies (*manga*), associations of diviners (*Bafumu*), snake charmers (*Buyeye*),<sup>33</sup> porcupine hunters (*Bunguli*),<sup>34</sup> game-hunters, and parents of twins.<sup>35</sup> Some gender specific societies exist while others admit both sexes. Most Sukuma belong to one of the secret associations chosen upon the advice of a diviner. Many maintain simultaneous membership in a number of different dancing and drum

---

<sup>33</sup> This society began as a group of diviners and medicine men treating snakebites. A sub-group, however, evolved called the *Bagoyangi*; a miming, drumming society of acrobats who actually play with and toss live snakes to one another during their routines (Millroth 1965:149).

<sup>34</sup> The porcupine society members actively dance and pantomime. Their rigorous initiation ceremony involves throwing and catching live porcupines. Commenting with great understatement, Millroth (1965:149) remarks that membership in this society is understandably small.

<sup>35</sup> Parents of twins and parents of children born in the breech-position have their own secret societies. A twin birth is a spiritual event with the parents of the phenomenon warranting their own secret society (Welch 1974:370).

societies, while others belong to none at all. New members pay both an initiation fee and an entrance levy for the privilege. Secret associations span the territory of the Sukuma, crossing clan and geographic barriers (Abrahams 1967:64-65). Wijsen and Tanner (2002:52-53) comment on this social institution; "Every Sukuma may well belong to half a dozen groups whose membership may be local but may have branches everywhere." These associations serve both leisure and religious functions. Tribal dance competitions<sup>36</sup> between different secret societies constitute the only accepted form of rivalry among the Sukuma except for football matches at school (Welch 1974:392). Besides the activities of the secret societies, the Sukuma also enjoy dances at the end of the harvest and additional nocturnal festivities during each full moon<sup>37</sup> (Van Pelt 1984:92).

#### 4.2.2.4 Sukuma language

As mentioned previously, the Sukuma tongue (*Kisukuma*) is of Bantu origin and is closely related to the neighboring *Nyamwezi* language (see Appendices 10 & 11). *Kisukuma* also possesses a few words of Hamitic origin (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:38). Almost all Sukuma are bilingual in both *Kisukuma* and Swahili (Bessire 1998:2). A few Arabic words, mostly religious and political terms, have entered the language through Arab influences (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:55, 61).

---

<sup>36</sup> The leader of a dance troop is called an *ngingi* (plural, *balingi*). They are a combination of poet, singer, songwriter, choreographer, and dance leader. Chosen for their skill in singing and agility dancing, they are much admired by the Sukuma (Welch 1974:383-383). They also sometimes serve as diviners and medicine men and in this capacity are known as a *bafumu*. Not surprisingly, men and women over thirty become spectators, not partaking in the dancing unless they are in the inner circle of the society's leadership (Millroth 1965:146-147).

<sup>37</sup> When we lived in Mwanza, Tanzania we heard the drums from the dances in the hills above our house all night long during a full moon.

### 4.2.3 Sukuma ATR

Sukuma traditional religion consists more of a loose set of private practices than the performance of public rituals. Wijzen and Tanner (2002:57, bold mine) describe Sukuma ATR in this manner.

All their religious practices were in effect so 'do-it-yourself' that it was no more difficult for them to fit into what was going on around them in 1998 than it had been in 1908. It could be theorized that this contemporary Sukuma approach to the spirit world is not something that developed under the complex and all embracing pressures of modernity but a traditional way of behaving so loosely defined as not to need any particular redefinition. **The success of the Sukuma religious system is that, in practice as well as in theory, it is no system at all,** except in very general terms.

The Sukuma religious 'system' easily follows the framework of Ambrose Moyo (in Gordon & Gordon 2001:301) described earlier. Although Moyo's rubric [see section 4.1 on page 112] assists in analyzing the tribe's various religious practices, the individual parts interrelate. A symbiosis exists in ATR systems where one portion influences another which affects still another.

#### 4.2.3.1 Sukuma belief in a supreme being

Forty different words describe God in the Sukuma language, *Liwelelo*<sup>38</sup> emerging as the most prominent (Welch 1974:175). *Liwelelo* describes more of a universal controlling force than the idea of a personal God. Ancestors dwell within the deity's life energy in tribal theology. Generally regarded as a benevolent great shepherd, the high god of the Sukuma also judges and punishes wrongs (Millroth 1965:104). In tribal belief *Liwelelo* created

---

<sup>38</sup> Sometimes the diminutive, 'Welelo' is used for brevity. Christians in Sukumaland employ *Liwelelo* as the name for the Christian God (Welch 1974:171) and it is the word translated 'God' in the Sukuma Bible.

the world and reigns omnipresent and eternal (Welch 1974:175-176).

The Sukuma and the scholars who study them disagree about the identity of another major divinity. Millroth (1965:95) believes the Sukuma worship the sun god *Lyuba* as their principle deity, and consider *Liwelelo* as one of *Lyuba's* many names. Welch (1974:183) argues the reverse. Later in his book, *Lyuba: traditional religion of the Sukuma*, Millroth (1965:100) takes the middle ground.

If the available material on the Sukuma concept of God is examined, it will be found that two ideas prevail: one in which God seems to be indentified with the sun, and another which clearly distinguishes between God and the material sun seen in the sky.

#### **4.2.3.2 Sukuma belief in spirits and divinities**

The Sukuma venerate many lesser deities in addition to the one high God. These divinities include *Ngasa Ilembe*, the god of the south who brings the rain, and *Sita*, the god of the wilderness (the spirit of the bush). Interestingly, people pray directly to *Liwelelo* (the high God) rather than to the rain god during times of drought. Sukuma also beseech the ancestral spirits<sup>39</sup> when Sukumaland lacks rain (Welch 1974:170). The Sukuma also venerate *Kongwa* or *Ndimi*, the lord of the animals (Millroth 1965:111).

Traditional Sukuma also fear a water monster called *Ngassa*,<sup>40</sup> a deity who appears in the form of a great fish, crocodile or hippopotamus, living in Lake Victoria (Millroth 1965:107; Welch 1974:183). Another deity, *Katabi* demands reverence as an evil divinity associated with a spirit possession society (Abrahams 1967:78).

---

<sup>39</sup> The Sukuma do not consider their ancestors deities nor do they worship them.

<sup>40</sup> Sometimes called *Mugassa*. Sukuma tribesmen and even some of the Arabs offered a sacrifice to the lake deity to insure safe passage across the water (Millroth 1965:110).

Other minor malevolent ghosts cause storms, floods, and droughts. Such calamities stem from improperly venerating ancestors, but Sukuma believe it is *Liwelelo* who sends the evil spirits that bring the misfortune (Welch 1974:177).

#### 4.2.3.3 Sukuma belief in life after death

Life after death for the Sukuma means to dwell in the afterlife as an ancestor. They believe each person has a soul and one's shadow represents part of this essence.<sup>41</sup> Traditional Sukuma remain uncertain about what transpires after death, except for the belief the deceased join their ancestors. The departed live among the tribe but only the *mfumu* (medicine man) can observe them due to the invisibility of the ancestors (Millroth 1965:115).

Concerning ancestors (*masamva*), Oladimeji (1980:19) observes, "It is not easy to draw a line between worship and veneration." Ancestors receive honor, not worship, so veneration more precisely describes the practice (Van Pelt 1984:54). It is inaccurate and inappropriate to characterize ATR as ancestor worship. Rather sub-Saharan ethnic groups like the Sukuma generally worship one supreme being, but they pray to their ancestral spirits for mediation between humans and deities (Oladimeji 1980:20).

Ancestors exhibit both good and bad characteristics because any of the departed can either bring helpful benefits or ill fortune to the living (Welch 1974:176). Small huts<sup>42</sup> called *numba ja masamva* (house of the

---

<sup>41</sup> Many Sukuma hold that the shadow is synonymous with life and believe dead men do not cast shadows. Sorcerers are feared due to their perceived ability to kill someone by stealing part of their shadow (Millroth 1965:115).

<sup>42</sup> Scattered around most Sukuma compounds (usually three to four thatched homes) are small 'spirit houses' about the size of a filing cabinet, but round in the shape of a soccer ball. Also called *magabilo*, these ancestor dwellings are miniature, thatched, loosely constructed, open-air houses bound with vines. They most closely

ancestors) dot the compounds of many Sukuma families (Millroth 1965:160). In this way, the forbearers of each clan remain in constant contact with their descendants. Ancestors communicate with their relatives from beyond the grave through a diviner (*mfumu*) or spirit possessed person (*manga*). Ancestors cause calamities large and small, and the diviners relay instructions to the living for proper corrective action (Van Pelt 1984:55).

Living Sukuma will pray to the deceased *Wasukuma* to control the negative forces on earth that cause his life to be unhappy. Aside, it is fitting to explain that the omnipotent spirit of the deceased will exist as long as he is remembered in the minds of his offspring and as long as his spirit is invoked in their prayers. Hence, this is one of the reasons the *Wasukuma* want to have many children. They are not interested so much in continuing a family's name or to have heirs to claim his wealth. Through his children, the traditional Sukuma believes he can achieve immortality (Welch 1974:176).

Traditional Sukuma venerate ancestors beginning with their grandparents<sup>43</sup> up to eight generations, with five of the generations remembered fairly well. After the fifth generation, forbearers are invoked only in a general way. Most Sukuma in earlier days would not kill a snake, thinking perhaps the serpent was an ancestor. Leopards, lions and even porcupines were not killed due to this reason (Millroth 1965:116-120). Few Sukuma know where their ancestors lay buried disassociating tribal graves with *masamva* veneration (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:43).

#### **4.2.3.4 Sukuma religious personnel and sacred places**

Any discussion of the religious personnel of the Sukuma begins with the *ntemi*<sup>44</sup> (chief). The Sukuma view their

---

resemble a large, transparent soccer ball constructed of thatch and vines.

<sup>43</sup> Living grandparents are not venerated. Also, other people's *masamva* (ancestors) are never feared nor honored (Millroth 1965:122).

<sup>44</sup> The plural of *ntemi* (chief) is *batemi*.

chiefs more in a religious sense than in an administrative capacity (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:89).

Every chief was considered to be the earthly representative of the most powerful spirit of the founder and of the spirits of all his successors. The people believed them to be able to influence their fate and the fate of the land for good or ill, just as their own ancestors had power over the fortunes of their own families. Thus the chief became the bringer of rain and so came to be responsible for the fertility of corn, cattle, and mankind (Cory 1954a:5-6).

Paradoxically, despite having to conduct magical ceremonies for insuring rain by invoking the help of the ancestors, "The chief<sup>45</sup> himself was not a diviner (*mfumu*) and his people never considered him a magician" (Cory 1954a:6). Instead, each *ntemi* retains an associate called the *ngemi wa mbula*<sup>46</sup> (rain-maker) who actually causes the rain to fall (Millroth 1965:134). Nevertheless, if the rainmaker fails, the chief is held responsible and may be deposed and replaced (Welch 1974:164). The new chief

---

<sup>45</sup> With the advent of the modern Tanzanian state and universal education, Cory (1954a:7a) comments about the more modern *ntemi*; "Many of the younger chiefs have themselves probably become skeptical of their own powers and perform ceremonies not because they consider them effective, but in order to please the conservative elements among their subjects." ATR, like all religions, constantly changes, and easily blends elements from modern and ancient practices. Despite these modernizing tendencies, Wijsen and Tanner (2002:147) state that the leader of the modern Sukuma vigilante group is often called *ntemi*, a traditional framework within a modern structure. The following quotation explains the manner ATR effectively penetrates contemporary society. "The '*Sungusungu*' are also based in the spiritual religious outlook of magic and counter-magic. They identify thieves and the routes they have taken after the theft by divination; before they set off on the task of tracking stolen cattle they consult the diviner [*mfumu*]. And they smear their bodies with 'traditional' protection (*lukago*) and they use medicine (*dawa*) to guard themselves against the dangers that they might encounter on the way. However, the '*Sungusungu*' groups were not just a revival of the past. Their rituals and symbols were partly old and partly new. They did borrow some 'traditional' symbols and rituals, but they also added new features" (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:150-151).

<sup>46</sup> The similarity between the Bantu languages of *Kisukuma* and *Kiswahili* is evident in the third word of this phrase. *Mbula* means 'rain' in Sukuma, while *mvula* is the term in Swahili.

always comes from within the royal family, usually a brother (Cory 1954a:7).

The *mfumu* (plural, *bafumu*) ranks as the second most important religious official in Sukuma life. The general term for diviner, this person also functions as a secret society dance leader and traditional medicine practitioner. When a problem surfaces the sufferer retains a diviner (*mfumu*) or spirit-possessed medium (*manga* or *kuding'wa mahugi*) that determines which ancestor has been offended and what must be done to satisfy the affronted spirit. Often, the diviners prescribe ritual sacrifices for the propitiation of ancestors (Welch 1974:179). Most of the *bafumu* also serve as leaders in the previously mentioned Sukuma dance and drum societies. Besides their spiritual activities, the *bafumu* treat illnesses with their knowledge of pharmacology, anatomy, and other traditional medical practices (Millroth 1965:143).

The *manga* (spirit-possessed medium) constitutes another type of diviner. However, as merely a channel for the spirit world, the *manga* interacts more passively with the supernatural than the *mfumu*. Some of these mediums display *glossolalia* (ecstatic utterances) as they connect with unseen forces (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:42). People consult the *manga* when trouble such as disease, barrenness, accident or a death transpires (Millroth 1965:141). Some clients confer with an *mfumu* first, while others bypass the diviner, and go directly to the *manga*.

Possession is fundamental to the conducting of successful séances, for, without the presence of his ancestors, the *manga* cannot attempt to get any correct solution. During the séance the *manga* works himself into a state of hysteria at which he pretends to speak in the *Tatoga* language, which is regarded as the tongue of the ancestors of some of the diviners. These *Tatoga* diviners were renowned to be very efficient (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:141).



The *nogi* (witch or sorcerer) constitutes the most powerful and feared religious figure within Sukuma ATR. Although some researchers differentiate between witchcraft and sorcery, the Sukuma language uses the terms interchangeably, calling both *bulogi*<sup>47</sup> (Welch 1974:200). Some believe one cannot become a *nogi* except by birth. Others hold an *mfumu* (diviner) can become a *nogi* (plural, *balogi*) by excelling in evil. Due to fear of reprisals, *balogi* understandably keep their identities secret. Special powers of invisibility assist in maintaining their anonymity within the community (Millroth 1965:144-145).

The word *nogi* is used more generally to acknowledge that someone has a secret, extraordinary power to cast an evil spell, which will bring sickness or death. This power can be exercised by personal contact or from a great distance. To be accused of being a *nogi* is a grave insult to a Sukuma. He will never forgive the one who makes such an accusation and never forgives or forgets the insult (Millroth 1965:145).

Much of Sukuma ATR consists of preventive medicine and cures for suspected *balogi* spells and curses. The Sukuma fear the charges of witchcraft and sorcery because of the indefensibility of such accusations.<sup>48</sup> A person so indicted must either move away or forfeit their lives (Welch 1974:188, 212).

---

<sup>47</sup> These similar terms can cause confusion. *Bulogi* means witchcraft, sorcery and evil magic. *Balogi* represent the sorcerers, witches, and magicians themselves. A *nogi* is the singular of *Balogi*. *Balogi* may be either male or female. Sometimes, spouses form a partnership and function as a husband and wife sorcery team.

<sup>48</sup> The charge is impossible to refute due to the following Sukuma rationale; "A *nogi* goes to *kulogwa* (cast his spells) by night in his own body, which he makes invisible, while at the same time he is quietly sleeping at home. Some say that the body asleep at home is not real but an optical illusion" (Millroth 1965:144). Therefore one may be visibly asleep at home and still be accused of causing harm.

#### 4.2.3.5 Sukuma witchcraft and magic practices

As mentioned previously, each segment of Sukuma ATR relates to another portion of the religion that in turn affects again a different part. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the concept of *Bufumu*<sup>49</sup> (magic) and the associated term for diviner, *Mfumu* (plural *Bafumu*).

A secret religious society is called *bufumu*, but this is also an abstract word denoting either the magic bond which links a person with his ancestors or the knowledge of any procedure which contains or is based on a magic element. All Sukuma/Nyamwezi [a related ethnic group], whether male or female, are endowed with the bond of *bufumu* because they receive it together from their parents with their lives. Before the bond of *Bufumu* becomes effective, a person must be initiated in a *ngoma ya bufumu*,<sup>50</sup> the word denoting a community of believers [in the sense of Sukuma ATR]. The man who, because of his knowledge and his influence over supernatural forces, becomes the leader of the *ngoma ya Bufumu* is called *mfumu* (pl. *bafumu*). *Mfumu*,<sup>51</sup> derived from *kufumbula*, "to discover," is also a generic term for diviner or magician (Millroth 1965:137).

Therefore, all traditional Sukuma believe they share this supernatural magical bond (*bufumu*) as part of their existence. Their diviners only possess a greater amount of these special powers than the average member of the

---

<sup>49</sup> *Bufumu* may be loosely translated 'magic' but in the sense of 'good magic.' The practitioners of *Bufumu* are the *Bafumu* (singular, *mfumu*). The terms can be confusing, as *bufumu* is also the word for a secret religious society active among the dance and drum associations.

<sup>50</sup> *Ngoma* represents the Sukuma and Swahili word for drum, but carries the meaning of dances accompanied by drum playing. Literally, *ngoma ya bufumu* means 'magic drum dance'. Due to the association drums have with magic in Sukuma ATR some Christians do not allow their performance in church.

<sup>51</sup> An *mfumu* diviner (plural, *bafumu*) practices *bufumu* (good magic) by discovering the will of the ancestors and sometimes leads an *ngoma ya bufumu* (dance and drum society) in magical and celebratory dancing rites. All this counters the activities of the witch and the sorcerer, or *nogi* (plural, *balogi*) who practice *bulogi* (evil magic) through offended ancestors, evil spirits, or their own malevolent powers.

tribe. The dance and drum societies to which most Sukuma belong serve as social and religious vehicles to cement this bond of '*Sukuma-ness*.'

The concept of causation underlies the idea of witchcraft. Unexpected deaths of persons under the age of fifty do not just happen and must be explained in Sukuma ATR. This ethnic group usually attributes life's problems and calamities to offended ancestors, evil spirits, or witchcraft (Welch 1974:200). When misfortune occurs, the sufferer (or bereaved) hires a diviner (*mfumu*) to determine the ancestor, spirit or witch (*nogi*) causing the disaster. If the divination reveals sorcery as the problem, the *nogi* may only receive a beating and be driven out of the village, especially in the case of a first offense. On the other hand, a death attributed to witchcraft or a second offense often results in execution by beating, burning or poison arrow (Millroth 1965:144-145). Tanzania outlawed witchcraft accusations years ago, but those who kill witches are rarely prosecuted (Welch 1974:210).

Many traditional Sukuma believe owls<sup>52</sup> summon sorcerers and witches to their magician's meetings and ride to their gatherings on the backs of hyenas (Van Pelt 1984:72, Welch 1974:304). Traditional Sukuma hold that evil spirits haunt crossroads where witches bury their bad medicine in order to harm passersby (Welch 1974:185).

Sukuma practice curative and preventive magic, often wearing beaded necklaces fitted with polished shells

---

<sup>52</sup> Our house in Mwanza, Tanzania stood on the outskirts of the city. In the cliffs behind our dwelling lived a family of owls (and a leopard). One day in 1986 my young children brought me an adolescent owl with a broken wing, pleading that we nurse it back to health. During the process of caring for the owl, I learned from my Tanzanian Christian friends that it was not considered appropriate for a Christian worker to befriend wildlife that traditional Sukuma considered a sorcerer's assistant.

(*lupingu*) in honor of their protecting ancestors<sup>53</sup> (Bessire 1998:4). Belief in magic so pervades Sukuma thinking, local practitioners often blend traditional and modern medicine in order to achieve the best results possible (Millroth 1965:143).

Sukuma ATR possesses its own version of the 'evil eye' known as *wisu* (jealousy). Envious tribesmen sometimes cry out, '*bulogi*' (witchcraft or sorcery) against their more prosperous neighbors (Welch 1974:198). The chief then confiscates the property of any *nogi* convicted of sorcery (Cory 1954a:13).

The diviners and spirit-possessed mediums recommend to their clients the appropriate sacrifice for each problem or request brought by the inquisitor. The simplest offering consists of spitting a mouthful of grain on the grave of an ancestor. Particularly displeased ancestors require the blood sacrifice of a bull or goat (Millroth 1965:156-157). Prior to cultivation, when the corn crop reaches three feet high and during the time of reaping, the chief offers different sacrifices to insure a bountiful harvest (:172-173). Beja cultivators have a similar practice of sacrificing an animal before planting (see section 4.3.2.5 on page 155).

#### **4.2.4 Sukuma values and worldview**

Personal independence tempered by a strong tribal identity embodies the Sukuma worldview. Young men often strike out on their own to seek their fortunes but do so normally inside the tribal homeland and within the confines

---

<sup>53</sup> On a return trip to Mwanza, Tanzania in January of 2006; I visited a Sukuma village with a pastor friend. Pastor Philemoni noticed a young woman carrying a baby wearing such a necklace. Upon questioning the lady and discovering she claimed to be a Christian, he asked why her child was wearing a magic charm. Receiving no satisfactory answer, with the woman's permission, Pastor Philemoni burned the *lupingu* on the spot.

of their culture. The phrase 'living apart together' well captures the Sukuma spirit (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:57).

...the traditional and Christian Wasukuma feel that the successful life means that one must have large holdings of cattle, that one should have many children in the family, that one must live a long life in order to be respected for having wisdom, and that one must keep peace among the members of the nucleus family, as well as the extended family (Welch 1974:189).

The Sukuma tend to be practical, 'this-worldly' people (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:57). Therefore, their ATR focuses on solving human problems and rendering "an often difficult life meaningful for people and to help them face it with the necessary confidence for coping with it" (Abrahams 1981:24).

The traditional Sukuma believes sorcerers; evil spirits or displeased ancestors cause disease, death, and all misfortunes (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:63). The cause for each accident, problem, or ailment must be determined by consulting diviners and remedied through their prescribed rituals. Much of village Sukuma life centers upon resolving these supernatural dilemmas successfully.

#### **4.3 ATR influence on Beja folk Islam**

ATR profoundly influences the practice of Islam among the peoples who embrace the Muslim faith in Africa.<sup>54</sup> Moyo (2001: 323) says, "For the masses of Muslim Africans,

---

<sup>54</sup> In an interesting and surprising twist, Welch (1974:186) says, "The Islamic religion has made an impact on the traditional religion [of the Sukuma]." This can be seen by the increasing belief by ATR Sukuma in unrelated spirits called 'majini' (Swahili for *jinn*) and rituals to chase them away which stem from Muslim origins (Wijsen and Tanner 2002:55). "It seems probable that their [Sukuma] idea of spirits such as 'mashetani' [Satan or devil], 'majini' and 'mapepo' [evil spirit] entered Sukuma understanding through contacts with Arabs. These spirits have no locus of activity but are pervasive and have a multi-purpose availability. These have become increasingly the best available explanation for personal misfortune which divination does not attribute to ancestors or to the personal animosities caused by witchcraft" (:61).

African traditional beliefs and practices have continued, although with some adaptations to conform to similar practices in Islam." This well describes the Beja, who although adopting the Muslim faith, continue to practice much of their pre-Islamic traditional religion. Ruthven (2006:259) describes how easily Islam absorbs the faith of ATR adherents.

The supreme deities which exist in many pagan traditions could be assimilated to Allah. Lesser local deities could be Islamicized or explained away as vernacular terms for God's attributes, or as the *jinn's* or spirits of Qur'anic folklore. Ancestor cults could be accommodated to Islam by tagging local kinship groups on to *Sufi silsilas* [spiritual lineages within *Sufi* orders] or Arab lineages.

A study of the Beja people of Sudan demonstrates how profoundly ATR influences their religious practices. The Hillmen live in the transitional area between Islam and ATR. Speaking of the before mentioned 'fault-line' between the Muslim northern region of Africa and the Christian-ATR southern portion of the continent, Voll (1974:85-86, bold mine) states the following.

**The Islamic experience in the eastern end of the sudanic belt** [the Beja area] the northern part of the modern Sudan republic, **is distinctive within African Islam...** This line is the southern limit of the spread of Arab and Arabized nomadic tribes which was 'checked beyond the 10<sup>th</sup> parallel by the swamps, woodlands and insects of the south.' North of this line there is a wide diversity of people, including **Beja**, Nubian and Fur as well as Arab. However, within this diversity there are many basic similarities of life style which relate to the **possibilities of irrigated cultivation or nomadic life. South of the line normal Arab style patterns were not possible.**

Since the Beja dwell along this 'transition line,' a study of their practices provides unique insights regarding contextualization issues with folk Islam. This research in turn can help missiologists to understand and reach folk Muslims in the many places in the world where

traditional religion and Islam intersect. As this section demonstrates, many ATR customs survive within Beja Islam.

#### 4.3.1 Early Egyptian influences

The earliest ATR influence upon Beja folk religion comes from the faith of the Pharaohs. The Beja have lived side by side with the Egyptians for the past four thousand years, albeit mostly as enemies (Cavendish 1979:281). From antiquity the riverain Cushitic people possessed a culture similar to their neighbors to the north and west (Davidson 1978:37). Despite a history of conflict and antagonism; eventually the Hillmen<sup>55</sup> adopted many of the Egyptian gods as their own.

At Philae [near Aswan, Egypt] the *Nobatae* [Nubian tribe] and the *Blemmyes* [Beja] worshipped *Isis*, *Osiris*<sup>56</sup>, and *Priapus*, besides other gods. The *Blemmyes* were in the habit of sacrificing men to the sun (Budge 1907: 176-177).

In fact, two of the major Egyptian gods, *Re* and *Ammon-Re*<sup>57</sup> (Lords of the thrones of the two lands)<sup>58</sup> were considered Cushitic<sup>59</sup> deities (Haycock 1968:10). The pharaohs of Cush ruled most of Egypt during the third Intermediate Period and Late Period (i.e. 1065-525 BC) of Egyptian history

---

<sup>55</sup> The Egyptians gave the Beja this nickname in the third century A.D. calling them 'Beja', the 'Anti,' or 'Hill-men' (Budge 1907:174).

<sup>56</sup> *Osiris* was the god of death, resurrection and fertility. *Isis* was worshipped as the goddess of motherhood and healing, and viewed as the wife of *Osiris* (Goldschmidt 2008:18-19).

<sup>57</sup> *Re* was the sun god during the Old (Egyptian) Kingdom but later was considered the god of the underworld. *Ammon-Re* was the principal god of the New Kingdom and closely associated with *Re* (:18-19).

<sup>58</sup> As mentioned previously, ancient Egypt consisted of a lower (northern) kingdom from the Mediterranean to Luxor (central Egypt along the Nile) and an upper (southern) kingdom from Luxor to Aswan, Egypt (at the first cataract) all the way to Meroe (at the sixth cataract), north of present-day Khartoum, Sudan.

<sup>59</sup> The people and kings of upper Egypt were Cushitic and ethnically related to the Beja. Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, (mentioned in Acts 8:27) was a Nubian Cushite, and ruled ancient Napata and Meroe, now within the borders of modern day Sudan (Budge 1907:169). The Beja raided both the Nubians and the Romans in antiquity (:174, 177, 179).

(Goldschmidt 2008:28-29). During the first five centuries AD the Beja alternately filled the role of both ally and enemy to the Cushitic rulers of Upper Egypt (Kirwan 1937:53).

According to Beja oral history, two other notable practices survive from Pharaonic times. Beja men wear their hair in a uniquely long manner inspiring the Rudyard Kipling appellation of 'Fuzzy Wuzzy.' Besides impressing the opposite sex, the Beja claim the *tiffa*<sup>60</sup> (male Beja hair style) possesses other valuable properties. According to Lewis (1962:35) many Beja men believe the *tiffa* "preserves the eyesight and teeth of the wearer and protects him from the summer's sun and winter's cold, and is good for the brain as well." The other custom dating from ancient times involves the circumcision of females in infancy and males during boyhood (:34). Besides the importance placed on these two practices and the beliefs associated with them, other Beja customs from Egyptian ATR have disappeared.

#### **4.3.2 Beja traditional religion (ATR) and folk Islam**

Due to the geographic and ethnographic distance between the Sukuma and the Beja, a one-to-one comparison of their respective African traditional religions would be forced at best. Instead, observations about Sukuma religion serve as a frame of reference for observing the lingering influences of ATR on another African people (the Beja) who have claimed to have abandoned it for Islam. For the examination of the traditional religious elements of Beja folk religion, this thesis employs the same categories as

---

<sup>60</sup> Only the men of the Beja tribe wear their hair in this unique manner among the Sudanese. The hair groomed in ringlets hangs down their backs and in front of the ears. Goat and camel fat (*darisa*) causes the hair to stand up so when the young man dances, the hair shakes upon his jumping. Men sleep on carved wooden headrests (*matras*) so their hair will not be disturbed at night (Lewis 1962:35-36).



utilized for the Sukuma assessment- the framework of Ambrose Moyo (in Gordon & Gordon 2001:301) outlined earlier in this chapter.

Drawing a line separating the Islamic elements of Beja folk Islam from their ATR influences presents many problems. If a boundary exists at all, it is a moving dotted line that varies by the locale, education, age, gender, and economic situation of each individual. Many Beja practice a version of ATR covered by a veneer of Islam, while others reflect a strict orthodoxy. This section focuses on the many instances where the ATR of the Hillmen meets Islam, blending the two into the inimitable Beja brand of folk religion. Kapteijns (1989:254, bold mine) describes this process in northern Sudan where the Beja live.

Islam in the late precolonial states was a corporate Islam to which all subjects of the state automatically belonged, irrespective of the details of their personal behavior or beliefs. From the point of view of holy men and merchants who adhered to a stricter interpretation of Islamic texts as observed in cities of the Islamic heartlands, **some subjects of Sudanic kingdoms were 'mixers,' who had retained many non-Islamic customary practices.** The transition to a more individualistic observance in Islam occurred in various parts of the Sudan at different times.

#### **4.3.2.1 Beja belief in a supreme being**

The first category of the ATR framework presents few problems for ethnic groups incorporating Islam into their religious traditions. Olowola (1993:11) states, "Modern scholarship now recognizes that a concept of God as Supreme Being and creator is virtually universal in traditional Africa." The ATR concept of a high God matches well with Islam; as Lewis (1966:60, bold mine) points out in the following paragraph.

Of course, Islam insists on the uniqueness of God as a single omnipotent creator deity, and rigorously

excludes all conflicting sources of power which could in any way impair His absolute dominion. But once this is said, and as long as God's lofty preeminence is not compromised, **the Qur'an itself provides scriptural warrant for the existence of a host of subsidiary powers and spirits.**

When the Beja accepted Islam<sup>61</sup> as their religion, the Allah of the Qur'an gradually superseded and replaced their earlier concepts of divinity. Earlier, in the sixth century, the Roman Emperor Justinian transformed the temple of Isis at Philae temple<sup>62</sup> into a church (Budge 1907:297), depriving the Beja of the center of their religion. A few years later, Jacobite Monophysite<sup>63</sup> missionaries began the conversion of the Nubian kingdoms along the upper Nile between modern day Aswan and Khartoum. Some of the Beja dwelling near the Nubian tribe adopted Christianity while others retained their traditional religion or mixed it with the new faith (Paul 1954:62).

Despite the poor quality of the Beja Christianity practiced during the sixth and seventh centuries, the introduction of monotheism eased resistance to the eventual embrace of the Muslim concept of one God. During the five hundred years of the so-called Beja 'Christian' era, the faith of the Hillmen consisted of a syncretistic

---

<sup>61</sup> As mentioned in chapter two, this was a gradual process. The Beja fought against the Muslims during the ninth and tenth centuries. With the defeat of the Christian Nubian kingdoms in 1275 and their steady conversion to Islam (complete by 1400), Bejaland increasingly became Muslim as well (Budge 1907:189, 193, 199).

<sup>62</sup> Philae temple rests on the Nile River near Aswan, Egypt. This is one of the Nubian monuments rescued and moved to higher ground by UNESCO when the construction of the Aswan High Dam threatened to submerge it. A nightly 'sound and light' show reenacts the worship of the cult of Isis for tourists. The *Ababda* Beja tribal region still includes the area near the temple site.

<sup>63</sup> Paul (1954:62) writes, "The Jacobites were Monophysites who believed in one nature of God. They were so called from the monk Jagoub el Baradai, who framed the canon of their belief."

amalgamation of sun-and-stone worship, *Isis* and *Osiris* veneration, and Monophysite Christianity (Paul 1954:62). According to Paul (:62) "as the influence of Rome declined the Beja lapsed into the various forms of idolatry which they may not even nominally have abandoned." One custom survives from their Christian past. The cross represents a sign of mercy and redemption to the Beja (Ausenda 1984:418). Sometimes a traditional Beja shaman marks the sign of the cross on the forehead of a sufferer for their healing.

Notwithstanding the adoption by the Beja of the Muslim concept of one high God, a few dissenters remain. I received quite a surprise while driving near a *Hedareb Hadendowa* Beja village in 1992 near Kassala, Sudan. Farouk (2005), a Beja Muslim background believer told me, "In that town my people worship the devil and not God. They do not worship God, only the devil." Although a startling practice for Muslims, the information squares with the following account of a *Hedareb* (Beja) ritual.

They adore the devil, and follow the example of their priests: every clan has its priest, who pitches a tent made of feathers, in the shape of a dome, wherein he practices his adorations; when they consult him about their affairs, he strips naked, and enters the tent stepping backwards; he afterwards issues the appearance of a mad and delirious person, and exclaims, "The devil salutes you, and tells you to depart from this place, for that a hostile party (naming it) will fall upon you" (Budge 1907:182-183).

#### **4.3.2.2 Beja belief in spirits and divinities**

In addition to the previously mentioned *jinns* and devils so prominent in Islam's holy book, Beja folk Islam appends other spiritual beings to the Muslim faith schema. These divinities answer to the name of 'spirit

humans'<sup>64</sup> and may alternately benefit or harm members of the tribe. Beja believe 'spirit animals' and 'spirit insects' accompany the 'spirit humans' (Jacobsen 1998:58). These beings populate a pantheon of lesser deities both feared and venerated by the Beja.

The cultural world of the Beja is a world inhabited by a host of spirits. Although there are Muslim and good intentioned spirits, most Hadendowa Beja are mainly concerned with the malevolent ones as well as the capricious ones which occasionally create problems (Jacobsen 1998:34).

*Were-hyenas* who transform themselves back and forth between animals and humans frighten many Beja. Folklore claims they steal babies and drink their blood (Ausenda 1984:429; Jacobsen 1998:36). Such lycanthropic (transformation) ideas persist among many other folk religions worldwide (Hiebert, Shaw, & Tienou 1999:86). Beja also believe in various kinds of ghosts (Jacobsen 1998:254).

In the Beja worldview, diseases consist of spirits possessing both personality and intentionality (Jacobsen 1998:89, 106). The diviner or healer, often the same person, discovers the source and prescribes the cure for a host of spiritual and physical maladies caused by evil spirits (:152-154). As a result, divination rituals command great respect among the Hillmen who see no conflict between such ATR practices and Islamic rituals.

Islam does not ask their adherents to abandon their accustomed confidence in their mystical forces. Far from it. In the voluminous Qur'anic storehouse of angels, *jinns* and devils, whose number is legion, many of these traditional powers find a hospitable home; and passages from the Qur'an are cited to justify their existence as real phenomena (Lewis 1980:60).

---

<sup>64</sup> Most Beja dismiss the notion of identifying the 'spirit humans' as ancestors. I asked an English speaking Beja leader residing in the United States about these spirit humans. Ibrahim said they are not *jinns* but "helpers of the *jinns*" (Ibrahim 2010). These spirits could be classified as 'familiar spirits.'

The zar possession cult<sup>65</sup> comprises the most important and unusual extra-Qur'anic spiritual phenomenon in the Beja region. Possessing men, women and children, zar spirits are agents believed to cause sicknesses, paralysis, bleeding, swelling, irritability, and even marriage problems (Jacobsen 1998:62,155). Satisfying zar spirits often requires a gold payment and the offering of blood sacrifices (Ausenda 1984:433; Jacobsen 1998:219, 235). In direct violation of Islamic law<sup>66</sup> "a zar ritual ideally involves even drinking of sacrificial blood by the sufferer" (Jacobsen 1998:231). In cases of severe possession, three-day parties<sup>67</sup> honoring the entity are often held. Celebrants perform a mock marriage whereby the spirit weds an individual, attaching the zar to their host for a lifetime (:156). At these festivals both the patient and those attending the ritual often fall into trances where they are beaten with whips by the zar doctors without feeling any pain (:243). Zar possession ceremonies feature the striking of sacred drums<sup>68</sup> and violent, trance-like dancing (:71), not unlike the *ngoma* (drum and dance) ATR rituals of the Sukuma tribe mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The most common kinds of zar spirits include an Ethiopian prostitute, a British colonial military

---

<sup>65</sup> Jacobsen (1998:62) says zar possession is more common among the Beja than other Muslim groups in Sudan.

<sup>66</sup> Yusuf Al-Qaradawi states in *The lawful and the prohibited in Islam* (1960:44) "...the drinking of blood is repugnant to human decency and it may be likewise injurious to health." Besides the ceremonial consumption of blood, Paul (1954:35) reports the Beja sometimes eat blood boiled with milk like the *Maasai* tribe of Tanzania and Kenya.

<sup>67</sup> Zar sacrifices involve a great economic hardship on the Beja. One zar doctor's diagnosis required seven sheep (Jacobsen 1998:211) while another zar party necessitated the expenditure of the equivalent of one half of the cost of a Mercedes-Benz automobile (:238).

<sup>68</sup> Drums are also beaten after the death of a Beja man at his funeral (Clark 1938:13).

officer, and a western Sudanese working woman (Jacobsen 1998:236). Any of these three may possess either a man or a woman. Although occurring in other Muslim societies, "zar as a phenomenon has a wide acceptance among the Beja in the Sinkat district<sup>69</sup> and (*sic*) most of them recognize the necessity of performing zar rituals" (:238).

The Beja differentiate between ordinary madness and zar spirit possession (Jacobsen 1998:244). The Hillmen also distinguish between 'Muslim spirits' such as *jinns* and devils, and the 'non-Muslim' zar spirits. Understanding the zar spirits are not part of the orthodox Muslim faith, one stated, "Well, zar ceremonies are not Islamic, but zar spirits are present among us, so what can we do?" (:71). Beja exhibit a certain pragmatism in regard to the supernatural and advise negotiating with the evil spirits when necessary (:262).

#### **4.3.2.3 Beja belief in a life after death**

As stated earlier, the *Sufi* branch dominates the Islam of Sudan (Karrar 1992:1). *Sufis* emphasize the recitation of the names of God as the key to entering heaven<sup>70</sup> (Ernst 1997:85). Many of the Beja religious healers and their ecstasy-producing rituals come from the seven *Sufi tariqas* (orders) extant in Bejaland (Ausenda 1987:433-434). Although less than ten percent of the Beja participate in pre-dawn prayers (:331), this nominally Muslim tribe by and large accepts the Islamic theological framework of the afterlife. Nevertheless, the concept of souls and soul loss largely escape the Beja (Jacobsen 1998:172).

---

<sup>69</sup> Sinkat sits on the main highway between Khartoum and Port Sudan in the Red Sea hills about an hour and a half drive from the coast. Located in the heart of Beja culture, Sinkat provides a cool respite for Port Sudan residents during the summer when the heat becomes oppressive on the coast.

<sup>70</sup> The *hadith* (in Braswell 1996:47) quotes Muhammad as saying, "There are ninety-nine names of Allah; he who memorizes them and repeats them will get into paradise."

One of the Beja ATR alterations to Islam involves *Sufism* and the spiritual activity of their departed *Sufi* saints. Many Hillmen believe the souls of deceased holy men remain in their tombs and are available to greet and assist supplicants during pilgrimages to their shrines, especially on the saint's birthday (Ausenda 1987:437). Some researchers view Beja *Sufism* as "quite close to an ancestor cult since *Sufi sheikhs* may belong to the same *gabila* [kinship group] or one bound by stipulated kinship ties" (:448). Ausenda (:442-443, bold mine) reports this example of Beja ATR-like practices.

The *Tijania* [a *Sufi* order] is spreading to the *Ha-dendowa* through the activity of an *Epschar sheikh*. This member of a *gabila* [sub-tribe] belonging to the *Bishariin*, another Beja tribe, is making the *tarika* a vehicle for the **cult of his ancestors**. On the anniversary of the prophet's birth, on the twelfth day of the month of *Rabia el Awel*, all Beja followers of this *tarika* congregate at Telhadio' about fifteen kilometers east of the Gash [river] in the hills. The *Epschar* **sheikh's ancestors are buried there** and the *ziara*, the visit, to their tombs is performed the same way as are visits by other *tarikas* to their saints' tombs.

As a general rule the Beja avoid discussing the deceased, especially children who have died (Jacobsen 1998:337), although premature death occurs frequently in Beja society (:76). Then again, most Americans also speak about death reluctantly. The Beja bury their dead in rocks mounds rather than in the traditional manner of Islam (Delany 1982: 59). Beja accept the Islamic concept of life after death (e.g. a paradise with sensual delights). Nevertheless, ATR and folk Islam convinces the Hillmen that the spirits of the departed remain to either help or hinder the living.

#### 4.3.2.4 Beja religious personnel and sacred places

Beja sacred places consist of the shrines of their *Sufi* saints mentioned in chapter three and, of course, their mosques. The Hillmen outwardly revere Islam's holy sites but rarely choose to travel the short distance across the Red Sea to participate in the pilgrimage to Mecca (Gamst 1984:35).

The Beja recognize quite an array of religious personnel. The *basir* (plural, *busara*) is a diviner who possesses the ability to see the unseen world both physically and spiritually. Combining knowledge of anatomy, herbs, and folk techniques, *busara* discern illnesses and treat patients accordingly, primarily through homeopathic medicine. This specialist also counts bleeding, cutting, and branding as techniques at his or her disposal. The spiritual quality of *Heequal*<sup>71</sup> (blessedness, holiness, or luckiness) endows some of the *busara* with special powers, but most content themselves with a mostly homeopathic approach (Jacobsen 1998:63-64).

The female cowry-shell reader represents the primary fortune-telling caste among the Beja. Other Sudanese ethnic groups practice this kind of divination as well (Ausenda 1987:419). The diviner predicts the future or diagnoses a disease by casting seven cowry shells on the ground and reading a story through their random placement. The fortune-teller may prescribe a cure but a *faki* or *zar* doctor usually administers the treatment.

Mentioned in the last chapter (see section 3.4.3, footnote 80 on page 104), the *faki* sometimes employs herbal remedies similar to the homoeopathic medicine of the *basir*. Usually the *faki* treats patients through the

---

<sup>71</sup> The Beja believe certain people possess the spiritual essence of a 'luck-bringing' ability that is very prized among healers and diviners of all kinds (Jacobsen 1998:90).



agency of the Qur'an.<sup>72</sup> Most *fugara* (plural of *faki*) utilize 'spirit helpers' (i.e. unknown spiritual beings) in their duties (Jacobsen 1998:67, 68). Serving their communities often in a dual role as *Sufi sheikhs*, *fugara* easily blend the medicinal and spiritual aspects of their healing arts (Ausenda 1987:425). Traditional Beja folk Muslims believe the *fugara* possess a hereditary *baraka*<sup>73</sup> passed down from *sheikh* to *sheikh* (el Hassan 1980:102). "The concept of *baraka* is indeed very central to religious beliefs of the Beja, and Trimmingham rightly observed that Beja pay special attention to people said to have *baraka*" (Jacobsen 1998:22). Many Beja hold that *Baraka* can be essentially 'stored up' from generation to generation through the holy lineage of *Sufi sheikhs* (:158).

*Fugara* discern the cause and prescribe treatment for most of the physical, emotional and spiritual problems experienced by the Beja. Alternatively, possession by an unpredictable and troublesome *zar* spirit requires a specialist. Should a *faki* fail to affect a cure, the patient often resorts to visiting a *zar* doctor. Not categorized as a Muslim healer, the *zar* doctor is a medium possessed by a powerful spirit himself (or herself) who successfully negotiates with the *zar* spirit dwelling inside his patient (Jacobsen 1998:156). Blood sacrifices form the foundation for affecting cures for *zar* maladies (:231). *Zar* doctors often intertwine herbal,

---

<sup>72</sup> Treatments such as reading, wearing, eating or drinking Qur'anic verses were mentioned in chapter three. A common treatment consists of whispering certain Qur'anic verses over specific parts of the body (Jacobsen 1987:105, 154). In a surprising twist, one man was told by a diviner that his sickness was due to too much Qur'anic reading (:207).

<sup>73</sup> Spiritual power and blessing. Ornas and Dahl (1991:84) define *baraka* also as 'divine grace.'

homeopathic, medical and supernatural elements in treating *zar* spirit possession (:85).

A trial and error strategy may lead people in the same instance of sickness to seek a *basir*, then a medical doctor, then another *basir*, then a *fagir* [*faki*] and finally a *zar* doctor (Jacobsen 1998:205).

#### **4.3.2.5 Beja witchcraft and magic practices**

Of necessity an interdependent relationship exists between the personnel, beliefs and practices of ATR. Some of the additional Beja witchcraft and magic practices not covered previously will be addressed herein.

The Beja observe a number of cultural taboos. The Hillmen possess a fear of persons and foodstuffs originating outside the Beja lands (Jacobsen 1998:261). Although Beja territory borders the Red Sea, the tribe has a taboo against eating fish (Cavendish 1979:283). The Beja feel the same way about consuming chickens or eggs (Ausenda 1987:340). Unlike the Arab and African tribes in other parts of Sudan, the Beja enforce a ban that prohibits their females from milking livestock (Ornas & Dahl 1991:99). Only men are permitted to do this kind of labor (Ausenda 1987:92). Camel-milk products protect consumers from illness according to Beja theory (Jacobsen 1998:26), but pregnant women should avoid crossing the trail of a camel so as not to incur the risk of a miscarriage (:257). Mother-in-law avoidance constitutes another taboo that endures as a strong cultural observance (Paul 1950:239).

The Beja believe certain magical practices bring good fortune and protect from evil influences. After speaking about an illness many Beja spit on the ground, asking for God's protection from the evil forces (Jacobsen 1998:109). Traditional Beja families hang a decorated straw mat or an embroidered blanket on the walls of their homes to repel the *jinns* from their dwellings at night

(Ausenda 1987:414-415). Some Beja burn medicine pills in the manner of incense, inhaling the smoke instead of ingesting the medicine orally (Jacobsen 1987:82). Magical ornaments adorn marriage houses to convey fortuity and fertility to newlyweds (Clark 1938:11). Most Beja children wear amulets to protect from the attack by spirits (Jacobsen 1998:150-151). The parents place hyena's teeth necklaces around the necks of their children to guard them from danger (:174,193).

The northern Beja believe the last Thursday of the month and all Fridays to be unlucky to begin a journey. The *Arteiga* and *Hadendoa* believe Wednesday is the unlucky day to start a trip (Clark 1938:19).

Beja folk religion places a high value on sacrifice. At the one-year anniversary of the death of a prominent *Sufi sheikh*, *Hadendowa* Beja offer special sacrifices at the tomb. The new *sheikh's* followers pledge their fealty to the successor by ceremonially placing tree branches upon his head. The people also sacrifice a calf or sheep, allowing the blood to ritually fall upon the new *sheikh's* feet. The novice leader receives the best of the meat and distributes the remainder to the people (Ausenda 1987:455). Many Beja sacrifice animals to spiritually prepare the soil prior to cultivation and planting.<sup>74</sup>

Before the sowing of their rain crops a *karama*<sup>75</sup> sacrifice is made on the spot. A bull, a naga, a sheep or goat is slaughtered according to the extent of the area to be sown or the wealth of the cultivator (Clark 1938:20).

Beja fear the 'evil eye', which represents the most prominent practice of witchcraft among the Hillmen.

---

<sup>74</sup> Ornas and Dahl (1991:119) report that this practice was still followed as late as 1980.

<sup>75</sup> *Karama* possesses a number of meanings in Arabic. Ideas include, "Nobility, generosity, high-mindedness, token of esteem, miracle (worked by a saint)" (Wehr 1976:822). In folk Islam *karama* often describes a sacrifice offered as a token of esteem to God in order to case something positive will happen.

Jacobsen (1998:169-170) reports that the Beja evil eye sometimes resembles the simple envy of Western societies.<sup>76</sup> The Beja also believe witches and sorcerers move around in the evenings eating the souls of their enemies (Nadel 1945:84). The Hillmen practice the projection of evil thought, and they believe in contagious magic<sup>77</sup> to improve the power of their swords (Gamst 1984:135). Despite these claims, Jacobsen (1998:171) states that witchcraft seldom occurs today, but admits that the accompanying magical spells abound.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, Clarke (1938:17, bold mine) records examples of two of these spells from an earlier day.

**Sorcery to cause dissension between a man and his wife:** A man named Mohammad must catch a chameleon and a man named Ali cut off its head. This is dried and powdered, and mixed with donkey dung. The mixture is then deposited underneath the bed or sprinkled near the house of the couple whose future happiness is to be jeopardized.

**A spell to kill one's enemy:** A dung beetle is wrapped in a piece of cloth cut from the clothing of the person against whom the spell is directed and his name written thereon. It is then buried or burned and as it decays or is consumed the bewitched person falls ill and dies.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

"You have to seek good things, but bad things come out of their own accord," observes a Beja proverb (Jacobsen 1987:35). The Hillmen view life as capricious, unpredictable, and inhabited by whimsical and sometimes malicious

---

<sup>76</sup> The Beja believe that a person can contract a sickness from an envious person. The illness is called *siir* (Jacobsen 1987:264). The Sukuma also fear the evil eye caused by envy.

<sup>77</sup> With contagious magic the object of the magic comes in contact with the agent of the magician to affect the cure or curse (Levi-Strauss 1985:194-195).

<sup>78</sup> Corduan (1998:154) describes the difference between witchcraft and magic in ATR. He says magic "is the manipulation of spiritual powers to achieve an end...In African contexts the negative use of magic is usually called witchcraft."

spirits (:34). Most of the nominally Muslim Beja approach the supernatural through their unique blend of Islam and traditional religion.

Two main streams feed into folk Islam. These include (1) traditional religious practices (including ATR) and (2) Islamic influences (especially *Sufism*). The previous chapter addressed the latter while this chapter analyzes the former.

While working with the Beja people of Sudan, I noticed their religion had much in common with the ATR practices that I also observed among the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania. For this reason, I have presented the Sukuma ethnic group as a baseline and model for observing the residual ATR of another people group (the Beja) composed largely of folk Muslims.

The question arises whether or not traditional religious practices remain among the Beja and other folk Muslim ethnic groups. Jacobsen (1998:256) writes concerning the contemporary nature of traditional Beja practices.

When I once went through old literature describing native medical practice among Hadendowa [Beja], I was struck by the similarities between practices I myself encountered and the ones described up to 200 years ago.

Since such customs continue, methods for reaching folk Muslims like the Beja with the Gospel must be calibrated for an encounter with an Islam that differs greatly from Qur'anic orthodoxy. Hence, the next chapter on contextualization deals with this question.

## **5. Contextualization and folk Islam**

The previous chapters identify the religion of the Beja people of Sudan as folk Islam. The faith of the Hillmen features an uneven blend of Islam with strong elements of traditional religion. The Beja consider themselves Muslims, but ATR (African Traditional Religion) and *Sufism* predominate in actual practice.

Although Muslims come from varying cultures and countries, mission societies rarely tailor their methods specifically to folk Muslims. Since evangelism among Muslims has born little fruit, most techniques confront theological issues rather than worldview and cultural concerns. Developing specialized procedures for what some might consider the fringes of Islam has received a lower priority than formulating apologetic approaches and contextualized experiments with Islamic forms.

This section briefly reviews the history of Christianity's attempts at evangelizing Muslims and examines some of the important contextualization concepts underlying the current witnessing efforts to them. I argue that the historical methods to evangelize Muslims and most contextualized approaches today largely miss the mark with folk Islam. Folk Muslims like the Beja require different techniques than those employed with official Islam because their worldviews differ so significantly.

### **5.1 Historical approaches to evangelizing Muslims**

Many methods exist for reaching Muslims with the Gospel. These approaches largely treat Muslims as monolithic in regards to their religious beliefs despite the many cultural differences among them. Pikkert (2008:23) identifies four historical transitions of Protestant missionary interaction with Muslims. This section examines the different approaches for reaching Muslims with the Gospel within this framework.

### 5.1.1 Era of the late Ottoman Empire (1800-1918)

During this era, Protestants of the Enlightenment Age<sup>1</sup> working in Muslim majority countries were often accompanied by occupying colonial European powers. Christian workers in this day viewed Islam as one faith and generally failed to appreciate the religion (Pikkert 2008:70). Pikkert (:24) writes, "Even if the people were divided into different sects, they were counted as one race, Arabs, with a common language, and common customs and social conditions." Enlightenment Christianity was tolerant, but only of tolerant religions (Bosch 1991:272). The 'free thought,' individualistic approach of the Enlightenment Age clashed with the dogmatism and group solidarity of Islam (Craig 2008:16; Pikkert 2008:30).

Polemics<sup>2</sup> dominated the landscape of Christian interaction with Muslims during this period. Although some Christian workers possessed great knowledge of Islam, many identified Muhammad as the Antichrist of the Bible<sup>3</sup> and termed the Qur'an a false book advocating all manner of fleshly passion (Pikkert 2008:30).

The missionary community, by and large, seemed compelled to paint Islam in the worst possible colors to justify its endeavors and, possibly, to explain the lack of success. Islam was an enemy, and an antagonist from which nothing good could be expected and which needed to be defeated. This militant attitude shared the same boldness, aggression, and

---

<sup>1</sup> The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, began in Europe in the seventeenth century and extended through the nineteenth century. An emphasis on scientific verification based upon research and testing resulted in a questioning of the miraculous. The attack on religion by the Deists led to a vigorous defense on the part of Christian apologists (Craig 2008:248). This method of evidential apologetics carried over into the Christian-Muslim encounter.

<sup>2</sup> Polemics involves "argumentation, disputation, and controversial discussion" (Guralnik 1970:1102).

<sup>3</sup> The Epistle of First John 2:18, 22.

spirit of conquest as the colonial venture (Pikkert 2008:31).

The first great polemic apologist against Islam, Karl Pfander (Germany), penned *The balance of truth* in 1829 at the age of twenty-six. Although courteous in tone, Pfander called for Muslims to choose between Muhammad and Christ while quoting liberally from the Qur'an, the *hadith*, and biographies of the Prophet (Pikkert 2008:50).

The writings of Pfander, Tisdall, *et. al*, as well as of the early Zwemer, reflect many of the assumptions prevalent among missionaries of the era: Muslims worship a different God, Muhammad was an insincere opportunist, certainly during his Medinan period, and controversy, so long as done politely, was a suitable method of Muslim evangelism. Islam and Christianity were perceived as rival civilizations, with Islam on the decline (one of Zwemer's books during this period was entitled *The disintegration of Islam* (1915). This decline, it was held, would open the way for the spreading of the gospel in Muslim countries (Pikkert 2008:51).

In addition to the lack of understanding inherent in the polemic method, Pikkert (2008:70) writes, "Tragically, the missionary community, wedded to Western ways, was loath to accommodate even simple cultural methods." A lack of contextualization either theologically or culturally characterized this first era of missions.

Pfander began a tradition of tit-for-tat attacks, arguments and polemics which raises important questions about the value of purely religious debate and the role of apologetics in Christian-Muslim dialogue (Pikkert 2008:71).

The lack of response to the evangelism methods of the day as well as government restrictions caused the denominations working in Muslim countries during the nineteenth century to turn to evangelizing members of the existing orthodox churches. The 'Great Experiment' called for reaching Muslims through "reforming and reviving the



Eastern church" (Pikkert 2008:41). These evangelism efforts caused schism rather than renewal in the ancient church (:57). Often prohibited from ministering to Muslims, most missionaries "ended up ministering to those Orthodox Christians who 'came out' from the ancient tradition to form western-style 'evangelical' churches" (:58). Although the Great Experiment failed to reach Muslims with the Gospel in the nineteenth century (:60) the descendants of the converts from Orthodoxy are leading the way in missions to Muslims in the twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup>

### **5.1.2 Era of colonialism and nationalism (1919-1946)**

After the end of the First World War, missiologists began questioning the polemic method. Out of the Enlightenment Age new social science disciplines emerged, emphasizing the study of society, culture and comparative religion. Pikkert (2008:80-81) explains the new thinking.

The scholarly examination of other religions by theologically conservative thinkers led to a new appreciation of their inner genius. With respect to Islam, the contributions of Temple Gairdner, Samuel M. Zwemer, Hendrick Kraemer and others would lead to a re-evaluation of the host culture's values as well as a revision of evangelical missiological praxis.

This re-evaluation resulted in new strategies for the Muslim world. Zwemer and Gairdner insisted on the necessity of proper views of the atonement and the incarnation (:82), but argued for "a sympathetic understanding of Islam and of Christianity's reaction to it without

---

<sup>4</sup> The Evangelical church in Sudan consists of the descendants of the first converts out of the Sudanese Coptic Church (related to the Egyptian Coptic Church). The national leaders of many of the evangelical organizations in Sudan come from the descendants of the Great Experiment. This is also true in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East. Although the first and second generation converts from Eastern orthodoxy proved to be reluctant witnesses to their Muslim neighbors, this is not the case today. Many third generation believers are enthusiastic evangelists for Christ.

compromising their own mission and message" (:93). This "Irenic"<sup>5</sup> approach sought to reach Muslims with minimal offense while appreciating their culture (:94). Eddy (in Pikkert 2008:91, bold mine) contrasts the methods.

What plan are we to follow? **Two methods stand out in clear contrast: the polemic and the irenic;** the method of argument, debate, contrast and comparison on the one hand, and on the other the method of loving approach along lines of least resistance, not to contrast one religion with another but to bring every man face-to-face with Jesus Christ and let Him make His own winsome appeal. The old method not only seemed natural to us but often seemed to be forced on us by the Moslem himself...If we won the argument we were all the more certain to lose the man.

During this era the first extensive attempts at contextualization with Muslims emerged. Gairdner urged not just an adaptation in surface matters such as dress and demeanor, but also in regard to devotional life, worship forms and music (Pikkert 2008:98-100). The 'Veterans'<sup>6</sup> taught that only "new persons in Christ" could present a fresh message to the Muslim world (:101). This new thinking in missions promoted the first extensive use of Islamic Arabic vocabulary in missionary publications (:103) and emphasized the power of prayer to overcome demonic forces (:104). Despite these innovations, many missionaries during this period denigrated the 'soft' approach toward Islam and continued the polemic methods of the nineteenth century (:100).

---

<sup>5</sup> Promoting peace, peaceful (Guralnik 1970:744).

<sup>6</sup> Zwemer and Gairdner were called 'The Veterans' because they spanned portions of both the Imperial and the Colonial ages of missions to Muslims (Pikkert 2008:56).

### 5.1.3 Era of the rise of the Arab world (1947-1978)

Protestant evangelism to Muslims stalled during this period as significant events rocked the Muslim world. Israel received independence in 1947 causing the displacement of a significant number of Palestinian refugees. Western support of the new nation enraged Muslims all over the world, ushering in an era of Islamic fundamentalism (Ahmed 2002:134). The post-war retreat of colonialism and the perceived humbling of Palestine awakened a resurgent pan-Arab nationalism (Cragg 1985:24, Ahmed 2002:137, Pikkert 2008:119). Even non-Arab Muslims sympathized with the Palestinian cause. The new-found oil wealth of many Muslim majority countries buoyed Islam's belief in their favored destiny (Pikkert 2008:124). This new consciousness sowed the seeds for the Islamic revival that would begin in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

During this period a number of independent missions agencies formed,<sup>7</sup> joining the mainline denominations already at work in the Muslim world. These included Operation Mobilization (OM), Middle East Christian Outreach (MECO), Red Sea Mission Team (RSMT), North Africa Mission (NAM), The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM), Gospel Missionary Union (GMU), and Youth with a Mission (YWAM). The spawning of such new agencies infused young Christian workers into the Muslim world more willing to experiment with novel approaches than the main-line denominations. As the number of expatriates increased in the large cities in the region a network of evangelical international churches<sup>8</sup> emerged to minister to the needs of the new

---

<sup>7</sup> Worldwide Evangelization for Christ International (WEC) already existed in the region and continued their ministry with the new groups (:117).

<sup>8</sup> Our family attended the Khartoum International Church when we lived in Sudan. Evangelical international churches usually speak English.

residents (Pikkert 2008:124). Almost every major Muslim majority city now boasts an international congregation.

During this era, missionaries continued methods such as medical ministry, education, literature, social centers, and humanitarian relief (Pikkert 2008:128-130). These ministries succeeded in gaining access to ordinary Muslims. Apologists retained the debate method of Christian witness while others developed a new approach called 'dialogue' (:131).

Schlorff (2008:13) calls the debate or polemic method in the twentieth century, the 'direct approach.' The latter technique differs little from the former, except the direct approach favors polemic arguments only as a last resort.<sup>9</sup> The direct approach favors adhering to a non-circuitous presentation of the Gospel.

Despite its beginnings in the nineteenth century, the argumentative and polemic method continued during this period. Josh McDowell famously debated the late Ahmed Deedat in 1981 (Pikkert 2008:134). Others, such as Jay Smith,<sup>10</sup> continue the method today. Many missiologists believe such methods harden existing positions (:72) and hold limited value for Muslim evangelism (Schlorff

---

They serve as a place where expatriates and national Christians can meet for worship and networking.

<sup>9</sup> J. Christy Wilson, Sr., writing in the middle of the twentieth century, said (in Schlorff 2008:13) "Today he who would present Christ to the Moslem heart should be an expert in avoiding argument."

<sup>10</sup> Jay Smith, a third generation Brethren Christian worker, serves with the Brethren in Christ in London (Deconstructing Islam 2010:1). Smith debates Muslims on most Sunday afternoons at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, London in a confrontational style. Following in the tradition of nineteenth century apologist Karl Pfander, Smith responds to Muslims by calling into question portions of the Qur'an (Alford 2008:1,5).

2006:58). Despite these reservations, Schlorff (:58) sees some narrow benefit in Smith's debate method.<sup>11</sup>

I would agree with Jay when he argues that a response like his is necessary when it is the Muslim community in Europe and America that has thrown down the gauntlet by their attacks on Christianity and that they are winning converts to Islam with few responding to their attacks. I cannot agree with those who argue categorically that history has proved that the debate approach does not work. For one thing, the argument assumes-incorrectly-that all debate is polemic. I have studied the early polemic writings extensively and would maintain that there were a number of problems with Christian polemics that had little to do with the debate format.

The dialogue method as popularized by Bishop Kenneth Cragg advocates the diametrically opposite approach, calling for Muslim and Christian unity in Christ. The dialogue technique sees Christianity, not displacing Islam but rather fulfilling "what is there" (Schlorff 2006:20). About Cragg's views Schlorff (:21) writes the following.

This involves the principle of open religion; a Christianity and an Islam open not just to a clearer understanding of their own sources but also to truth from other sources and perspectives. Yet Christ represents in some sense the fulfillment of both.

Dialogue epitomizes the most indirect of methods and has become linked to the World Council of Churches and its condemnation of proselytism (Schlorff 2006:22). A hermeneutic of acknowledging Qur'anic truth has led to

---

<sup>11</sup> Although I believe the direct approach should be used sparingly, sometimes the method proves effective. In 2002 I visited a Brazilian Christian worker in Nairobi, Kenya ministering to a very difficult Muslim people group. This Brazilian (sent out by a Brazilian Baptist church) operated a trade school for young men living in Kenya as refugees from another country. I asked about his method of reaching these men, as he had baptized seventeen of them. Speaking in Portuguese, the representative said, "I tell them Muhammad was a false prophet, Islam is wrong and they are going to hell." I asked him, "That's your method?" The young Brazilian said, "Yes, I tell them the truth." Pikkert (2008:72) states that despite the shortcomings of this method, converts to Christ do result from the polemic approach.

relativism and a resultant weak witness to Muslims. Despite their good intentions, both dialogue and debate cause more problems than they solve.

Interreligious **dialogue** is also at a theological impasse. Muslims have real difficulty with the fact that Christians are reluctant to accept the authenticity of Muhammad as a post-Christ prophet who received a major message from heaven (Nasr 1996-97:13). Christians, on the other hand, feel that the Muslims' recognition of Jesus does not really cost them anything, while a "corresponding recognition of Mohammad by Christians would go against everything they are told by the weightiest religious documents in their possession" (Zebiri 2000:5). Thus, instead of **dialogue** and **debate** leading to mutual understanding, **discord between Christians and Muslims has been growing**, with many Christians, once again, portraying Islam as the last great enemy to be conquered (Pikkert 2008:187, bold mine).

#### 5.1.4 Era of Islamic fundamentalism (1979-Present)

During the last thirty years, regimes indebted to resurgent Islam replaced secular governments in many Muslim majority countries (Esposito & Mogahed 2007:42, 44). Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, Iran, Sudan, Palestine, Turkey, Indonesia, and Pakistan all feature administrations drawing their support from the Islamic revival (Wheatcroft 2004:301). Religious fundamentalism increasingly influences nations such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia (Sookdheo 2007:299). Two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan,<sup>12</sup> and the on-going Palestinian conflict with Israel causes many Muslims to view Western nations with suspicion and hardens resistance to Christianity (Pikkert 2008:154-155).

---

<sup>12</sup> While most Americans view the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as political conflicts, many Muslims view these wars as invasions of Muslims nations by Christian countries. Although most Europeans do not view the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979-1988) as similar to the two gulf wars (1990 and 2003-until the present) most Muslims consider all of these wars as waged by Christians against the nation of Islam (Esposito & Mogahed 2007:92).

Despite these formidable hurdles to evangelism, the number of Christian workers to Muslim countries has increased. Representatives from both the 'Baby Boomer' generation and 'Generation X'<sup>13</sup> replaced the cohort of Veterans on the field. Recent emphasis on the so-called '10/40 Window'<sup>14</sup> increased interest in missions to the Islamic world. With most of the world's Muslims living within the 10/40 Window and the call for personnel publicized, many new workers have responded (Pikkert 2008:152).

As a younger and more diverse<sup>15</sup> force arrives in Muslim countries, they demonstrate more of a willingness to test new techniques in evangelism. Older approaches such as debate, dialogue, social centers, literature and relief work<sup>16</sup> continue. However, newer methods such as 'tentmaking',<sup>17</sup> and technologies like radio, satellite television, and the Internet have gained ground in the effort to spread the Gospel (Pikkert 2008:168, 171).

---

<sup>13</sup> Those born between 1946 and 1964 comprise the Baby Boomer generation (Pikkert 2008:114). Generation X consists of those born between 1965 and 1981 (:149).

<sup>14</sup> Van Rheenen (1996:209) writes, "At the 1989 Lausanne II Conference in Manila, Luis Bush proposed that if the goal of missions is to reach the unreached, mission finances and personnel must focus on what he called the '10/40 Window.' This 'window' extends from ten degrees north of the equator and stretches from North Africa through the Middle East to China and Japan."

<sup>15</sup> Pikkert (2008:152-153) notes that an increasing number of missionaries are arriving in Muslim countries from South America and Asian countries such as Korea and China.

<sup>16</sup> Relief work does not always yield the expected results. Colin Adams of the Fellowship for African Relief (FAR) told me about overhearing two old Beja men comment on his organization's food distribution program near Kassala, Sudan. "Allah has tricked the infidel into feeding us," they said.

<sup>17</sup> 'Tentmakers' use a secular skill for the purpose of Christian witness in order to enter countries that do not allow an open Christian witness. The reference stems from Acts 18:1-3, where the Apostle Paul worked as a tentmaker with Priscilla and Aquila while ministering in Corinth.

Modern travel and the relative financial prosperity of Western church members allow short-term and non-residential missionaries easier access to heretofore inaccessible countries (:173).

Advances in the social sciences in the early part of the twentieth century also led Christian workers to experiment with new methods in reaching Muslims (Pikkert 2008:175, 187). The outgrowth of this academic percolation resulted in the development of new contextualized approaches to Muslims (Schlorff 2006:25).

The most important influence behind these changes has been the social sciences and especially the increasing number of missionary scholars trained in these disciplines. I include here cultural anthropology, sociology, linguistics, translation theory, and communication science. These have changed evangelical attitudes about culture and non-Christian religions and have revolutionized the evangelical missionary enterprise through the infusion of new ideas. The explosion of missiological studies by evangelicals in recent years has been nothing short of phenomenal (Schlorff 2006:25).

After renewing an emphasis on learning vernacular languages and identifying with culture, the new contextualized missionaries set their sights on Islamic forms. Instead of using the Qur'an solely as a foil for refuting Islam, the new technique began searching for linguistic 'bridges' within the book (Schlorff 2006:25-26). The 'Dynamic Equivalence' model<sup>18</sup> adopts the following premise,

On the assumption that Islamic culture is a neutral vehicle, Islam is considered a legitimate starting point for contextualization. This means that, in theology, Qur'anic passages may be used as a theological starting point or source of truth for the gospel (e.g., trying to prove the crucifixion on the basis of certain Qur'anic passages). As concerns the church, **it means importing Muslim ritual forms**, such as the ritual prayer, into the convert church

---

<sup>18</sup> Also known as the 'Translational' Model.



**and attempting to fill them with Christian meanings** (Schlorff 2006:26).

The next section examines the methods and rationale for contextualizing the Gospel for Muslims. A later section considers contextualization techniques and their applicability and viability with folk Muslims.

## **5.2 Introduction to contextualization issues**

I.C. Brown (in Van Pelt 1984:17) states that "no custom is 'odd' to the people who practice it." As evangelists encounter different cultures they consider how to best communicate the Gospel message. Contextualization is the term that commonly describes this process. I am not presenting a comprehensive or definitive definition of contextualization, as the term is widely used and accepted. Instead, this thesis describes my understanding of the term as it applies to ATR and folk Islam.

Byang H. Kato (in Hesselgrave 2000:33) says of contextualization, "We understand the term to mean making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation." Bruce Nichols (in Hesselgrave 2000:33) states the following.

(Contextualization is) the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate cultural and within their particular existential situations.

George Peters (in Hesselgrave 2000:34) insists that contextualization be based on the proper exegesis of the Biblical text in order to be legitimate. Hesselgrave (2000:35, bold mine, italic his) describes the confusion over the term contextualization for evangelicals.

**There is not yet a commonly accepted definition of the word *contextualization*, but only a series of proposals, all of them vying for acceptance...It is not incumbent upon them to agree on the precise wording of a definition, but it is essential that they agree on the criteria necessary for an authentic biblical contextualization, that they be able to **distinguish between defensible and aberrant****

**proposals**, and that they actually contextualize the gospel and theology in ways that will commend themselves both to God and to their hearers.

Despite a lack of agreement on an exact definition of contextualization, missiologists favor the concept when supported by Biblical truth<sup>19</sup> (Van Rheenen 2006:4).

### **5.3 Contextualized approaches with Muslims**

As the current generation of missionaries to Muslims experiment with new methods, these issues take on special relevancy. Contextualization approaches abound in Christian ministry. However, this thesis only considers the issues unique to Islam.

#### **5.3.1 Debate-polemic (non-contextual) method**

Older apologists utilized a negative 'proof-text' technique in the polemic method of the nineteenth century. Pfander, Muir, and Rouse cited Qur'anic verses to support criticism of both the ethics and origin of the book (Schlorff 2008:51-53). The debate-polemic approach, later called the 'direct method,' returned toward the end of the twentieth century as Muslims living in Western countries challenged Christians to debates. Muslim champions such as Ahmad Deedat, Jamal Badawi and Shabir Ali confronted Christian apologists like Josh McDowell, Jay Smith, and Anis Shorrosh in debates, often on university campuses (:57). Although effectively boosting morale on both sides, these contests generated more heat than light.

In a nutshell, debate did not prove to be the "key" to opening the Muslim world to great receptivity to the Christian message. If anything, it sharpened and confirmed differences. Hence recognition grew afresh

---

<sup>19</sup> "According to Hesselgrave [in Van Rheenen 2006:4] 'Acceptable Contextualization is a direct result of ascertaining the meaning of the biblical text, consciously submitting to its authority, and applying or appropriating that meaning to a given situation. The results of this process may vary in form and intensity, but they will always remain within the scope of meaning prescribed by the biblical text'."

during the modern period that missionaries had to grapple with deeper aspects of Muslim culture in order to create contextualized forms of communication [Pikkert 2008:135].

Those currently using the direct approach encourage courtesy in their confrontations (Alford 2008:3). Proponents of the polemic approach exploit the Qur'an in order to place Islam in as negative a light as possible. Jay Smith (in Deconstructing Islam 2010:2) says, "The Qur'an has huge errors in it, enormous errors. My goal is to eradicate the whole edifice of Islam so that [Muslims] can then look for the alternative." This non-contextualized theological model communicates the truth of the Gospel without significantly adapting the message to the audience. Jay Smith,<sup>20</sup> an admirer of the nineteenth century apologist Carl Pfander, represents this method well.

"Propositional truth confronts," he argues in fundamentalist fashion. "If there's not a reaction, we're not preaching the gospel...The Gospel by definition is confrontational. I absolutely want to stop Islam because Islam is stopping these people (Alford 2008:3)...The only way to deal with this radical form of Islam," he asserts, "is with an equally radical form of Christianity" (in Alford 2008:3, 6).

The non-contextual debate-polemic approach represents more of a publicity and advocacy strategy than an effective evangelism method. Although some converts have responded to this method (Pikkert 2008:66), Muslims have not come to Christ in significant numbers this way.

### **5.3.2 Qur'anic contextualization methods**

Many Qur'anic passages feature phrases and refer to characters that seem Biblical at first glance. This common ground often tempts Christians to select 'proof texts' from the Qur'an to support Christian doctrines. Although

---

<sup>20</sup> Jay Smith told me (Smith 2010) "My method [direct apologetic argumentation] only works in an open democratic society with educated Muslims."

the Qur'an rejects Christ's divinity (*Sura* 5:17, 72, 75; 9:30-1) and denies the Trinity (*Sura* 4:171; 5:73, 116), Christians favoring this approach often bend Qur'anic teaching to mirror their own presuppositions. Schlorff (2008:63-64) explains the tact of these apologists.

There are, however, a number of passages that Christians have taken to teach otherwise [other than the traditional Muslim interpretation]. As we have seen, the Qur'an calls Christ "the Word of God" and "a Spirit from Him" (4:171; 3:45). It has Him born of a virgin (19:16-35) and calls Him "Illustrious (*wajiih*) in this world and the next, and among those closest to God" (3:45). He is the only prophet who is said to have created, and to have raised the dead (3:49). And of all the prophets, including Mohammad, Christ is never said to have sinned (see 3:36; 20:121; 71:29; 14:41; 28:15-16; 4:106; 40:55; 48:2). Finally, in a usage that is reminiscent somewhat of some Old Testament language, in many a *Sura* we find the pronoun "we" or other plural forms used in reference to God (e.g., 2:35; 3:25, etc., *et passim*). Traditionally Muslims have interpreted these passages in line with the totality of Qur'anic teaching. They view the "we" passages to be the Semitic "plural of majesty," also found in the Bible.

The approach of using the Qur'an as a 'bridge' to the Gospel contains at least two pitfalls. First, it is disingenuous for Christians to quote the Qur'an and claim the verses mean something not acceptable to orthodox Islam. For instance, Christians do not appreciate Muslim apologists identifying Muhammad in Qur'an *sura* 61:6 as the "other comforter" of John 14:16 (Cragg 1985:257). In the same way, knowledgeable Muslims bristle when Christians bend Qur'anic words into odd (to them) Christian interpretations. Schlorff 2006:131 states it well.

While we cannot prevent Muslims from interpreting the Bible Islamically (they have the right to try), we must, nevertheless, expose the fallacy and error in such an enterprise. If, however, we ourselves read Christian meaning into the Qur'an, we do not have a leg to stand on.

Second, when an evangelist's argument includes references to Christological insights in portions of the Qur'an, the Christian unwittingly confers tacit approval upon the whole. Schlorff (2006:131, bold mine) again speaks to the subject.

Those who use the 'proof text' method usually deny that it implies accepting the Qur'an's authority. We only quote it, they say, as one would quote any text to prove a point, because it is authoritative to Muslims. The argument is fallacious, however. The doctrines that they attempt to prove from the Qur'an- the divine authority of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the Trinity- are truths that, according to the Bible, are available to man only by divine revelation (e.g. Matt. 16:16-17; Rom. 16:25-26; I Cor. 2:6-10; Eph. 3:2-11; Col. 1:26-27).

**It is, thus a contradiction in terms to quote the Qur'an in support of specifically biblical teachings and at the same time deny that this implies an acceptance of its divine authority.** One could even go so far as to say that **it is being dishonest** to oneself as well as to Muslims.

#### **5.3.2.1 The "new hermeneutic" of Qur'an interpretation**

Many early twentieth century Christian apologists such as Tisdale, Zwemer and Gairdner employed the Qur'an as their point of departure for reasoning with Muslims. They abandoned the negative polemics of the nineteenth century as they attempted to identify and sympathize with Muslims (Schlorff 2006:73-74). The Veterans debated Muslims by referring to parts of the Qur'an they thought agreed at least tangentially with Biblical ideas. The tactic of mining Qur'anic truth in order to unveil the deeper meaning in the Bible led to others conceding some divine authority to Islam's holy book. Schlorff (2006:72) calls this mid-twentieth century development a "new hermeneutic" in Qur'anic interpretation.

Geoffrey Parrinder's *Jesus in the Qur'an* acknowledges (in Schlorff 2006:74-75) "the undoubted revelation of God in Muhammad and in the Qur'an." Kenneth Cragg

represents the foremost proponent of the new hermeneutic. In *The event of the Qur'an* and *The call of the minaret* Cragg looks sympathetically at the meaning of the Qur'an as a whole rather than examining individual verses. Cragg's new hermeneutic sees actual revelation in the Qur'an when Muslims and Christians search together for truth (:75). Other writers during this period disagree over the question of employing Qur'anic verses when witnessing to Muslims. Bevan Jones speaks against the practice, citing the Qur'an's anti-Christian bias. Christy Wilson, Sr. cautions against Qur'anic allusion, except in rare cases (:70-71).

The end of the twentieth century witnessed a return to extensive Qur'anic quoting in Christian outreach (Schlorff 2006:71). Although few present-day evangelicals ascribe actual revelation to the book (:77-78), some practitioners advocate a tolerant view toward the Qur'an. Winter (2009:671) suggests the benign approach, stating,

Cannot we think of the Qur'an as we do the Apocrypha and let it gradually take a back seat to our Bible simply because it is not as edifying intellectually or spiritually?

Another writer not only views the Qur'an rather uncritically, but quotes from the book extensively. Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq writes in *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim* (1980:72) "The rejection of the idea that Jesus Son of Mary was the Son of God is in line with the Nestorian position." Abdul-Haqq (1980:70-73) seems to view Muslims more as wayward Nestorian<sup>21</sup> Christians than members of an entirely different religion. Indeed, his

---

<sup>21</sup> Nestorius was an early Bishop of Constantinople whose views were condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. "Nestorians stressed the independence of the divine and human natures of Christ and, in effect, suggested that they were two persons loosely united" (Nestorian 2010:2).

(:75, bold mine) extensive quoting of the Qur'an approaches implicit validation.

In the former day, the eternal Son of God used the weak instrumentality of the Hebrew language to deliver His will to the prophets who, in turn, communicated it to the covenant people. In the last days—a period in sacred history which began about 2000 years ago, the same Only-Begotten Son of the Father (His Word) did not abhor a virgin's womb...The Word of God became flesh by being born of the Virgin Mary without a human father. **This miraculous inauguration of the redemptive outreach of God is freely testified to by the Koran** [Abdul-Haqq goes on to quote *Sura* 3:45-47].

The 'Camel method' constitutes another example of a bridging technique employing liberal use of the Qur'an that strays into Qur'anic validation.

#### 5.3.2.2 The Camel method of Qur'anic contextualization

Kevin Greeson serves as a representative in South Asia with the IMB of the Southern Baptist Convention. Greeson (2007:16,41-42, bold his) reports developing the Camel method while observing the evangelism techniques of Muslim converts in South Asia.

It soon became clear to us that the shortest bridge available was found in 13 verses of *Surah al-Imran*, chapter 3 of the Qur'an, which spoke of *Isa al-Masih* (Jesus Christ). This passage declared that Jesus would be born of a virgin; that He would do miracles; that He would be a sign to the whole world; that Allah would cause Him to die and raise Him again to heaven. To help us remember the key points in the chapter we used the acronym **C-A-M-E-L**.<sup>22</sup> These letters brought to mind the chapter's key teaching that *Isa's* mother, Mary, was **C**hosen to give birth to *Isa*; that **A**ngels announced the good news to her; that *Isa* would do **M**iracles, and that He knew the way

---

<sup>22</sup> Although Greeson (2007:16) claims "missionaries did not invent the Camel method. It is the method we learned from Muslim-background believers," obviously Westerners formulated the **C-A-M-E-L** acronym. The Arabic transliteration of camel would be spelled *jimel* (or *gimel*). The Arabic script version would be written from right to left and without vowels in Semitic fashion (**L-M-J**).

to **E**ternal **L**ife. In this way the *Camel* method was born.

The Camel method continues to cause controversy among Southern Baptists, a conservative American evangelical denomination. Ergun Canner, the former president of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, created headlines in the *New York Times* for labeling the method as deceitful and calling the International Mission Board (IMB) president a liar for advocating the technique<sup>23</sup> (in Oppenheimer 2010b:1). While problems inherent in extensive Qur'anic referencing have already been covered, other difficulties remain.

The Camel method refers frequently to Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the first two points of the Camel acronym (C-A). The introduction of Mary into the discussion invites a problem and confuses the issue further, as the Qur'an and Muslims believe mistakenly that the Christian trinity includes the mother of Jesus<sup>24</sup> (Braswell 1996:251). In addition, the third step in the Camel method acronym ('M') references the miracles<sup>25</sup> of Christ recorded in the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*. A Christian's allusion to a false miracle as proof of Christ's power- (i.e. Christ's magical creation of clay

---

<sup>23</sup> Canner apologized to IMB president Jerry Rankin for calling him a liar but reiterated his belief in the deceitfulness of the Camel method. "Canner said the Camel method... 'assumes that the Qur'an is partially correct' and acts as 'a valid bridge' toward understanding God. 'I would argue that it's not a valid bridge,' Canner said, 'I don't think it's a good bridge for anything'" (Allen 2010b:1).

<sup>24</sup> The Qur'an views the trinity as Father, Son, and Mary, substituting the latter for the Holy Spirit (Braswell 1996:251).

<sup>25</sup> Greeson (2007:105) quotes Qur'an Sura 3:49 in support of Jesus performing miracles. "And (make him) an apostle to the children of Israel: That I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I determine for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission, and I heal the blind and leprous and bring the dead to life with Allah's permission." Greeson does not indicate which English interpretation (translation) of the Qur'an he is using.



birds)- erects a shaky bridge at best and supports Qur'anic inspiration at the worst. Finally, the 'E-L' acronym in the Camel method stands for 'Eternal Life'. Obtaining this meaning from *Sura* 3:45<sup>26</sup> requires imagination and a determination to read Christian meaning into an obtuse passage. Greeson (2007:118, 127, 138) also believes this *sura* teaches Jesus' resurrection although neither the text nor Muslim theology warrants such an interpretation. Forcing contrived meanings upon the Qur'an abandons the high ground of textual integrity in favor of speculation. The late Muslim apologist Ahmed Deedat (1985:31, parenthesis his) describes true Islamic belief about the person of Christ.

"Christ in Islam" is really Christ in the Qur'an: and the Holy Qur'an has something definite to say about every aberration of Christianity. The Qur'an absolves Jesus (pbuh)<sup>27</sup> from all the false charges of his enemies as well as the misplaced infatuation of his followers. His enemies allege that he blasphemed against God by claiming Divinity. His misguided followers claim that he did avow Divinity, but that was not blasphemy (*kufr*) because he was God. What does the Qur'an say? Addressing both the Jews and the Christians, Allah says: "O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: So believe in God and His messengers" Holy Qur'an 4:171.

---

<sup>26</sup> Greeson (2007:105-106, italics his, bold mine) quotes from *Sura* 3:54-55 as the Qur'anic proof text that Jesus is the way to **Eternal Life**; "And they planned and Allah (also) planned, and Allah is the best of planners. And when Allah said: O *Isa*, I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the day of resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed." Again, Greeson does not source the interpretation (translation) of the Qur'anic *sura*.

<sup>27</sup> Abbreviation for 'Peace Be Upon Him.' Muslims recite this formula after saying or writing the name of any of the prophets.

The use of the name 'Camel' for the method illustrates the blind spot Western Christian workers sometimes exhibit when constructing propositional frameworks for witnessing in other cultures.<sup>28</sup> While Arab culture tolerates the camel as a necessary evil for transport, Muslims do not link these animals to their religion. On the contrary, knowledgeable Muslims resent linking camels with the Qur'an, as the dromedary figures negatively in their folk religion.

The Moslem lives constantly in dread of evil spirits; this is shown by other traditions regarding the prayer ritual. For example, we read in the *Sunna of Ibn Maja* [vol. 1, p. 134] that Mohammad forbade prayer being made on or near watering places of camels because camels were created by devils. It is an old superstition that Satan had a hand in the creation of the camel (Zwemer 1920:54-55).

### 5.3.2.3 Analytical Qur'anic contextualization

Propositional techniques such as the four-step Camel method also clash with the literature genre of the Qur'an. As demonstrated in a later section, most non-Western cultures communicate truth by poetry, narrative

---

<sup>28</sup> Greeson (2007:7) quotes the following unsourced 'Muslim Proverb' in *the Camel*; "And we know Allah has one hundred names. And that he has revealed 99 names to the sons of men that they may know and worship him, the one-hundredth name, he has told only to the camel. And, the camel, he is not talking." There is no saying or proverb such as this either in the Qur'an or *Hadith*. Muhammad is quoted in the *Hadith (Sahih Muslim, vol. 4, p. 1410)* "Verily, there are ninety-nine names of God, one hundred minus one. He who enumerates them would get into Paradise." Although *Sufism* searches for the hundredth name of God, and *Shi'ites* believe the *Mahdi* will reveal the hundredth name when he returns, only unnamed and unsourced 'folk traditions' connect the camel with the ninety-nine names of God (99 Names of God 2010:1, 6). Indeed, no branch of Islam mentions the camel in association with the names of God. Although the Camel acronym represents a clever attempt at constructing a method for remembering a western propositional gospel presentation, it is as culturally relevant as Muslims formulating an Islamic presentation for Christians based upon one of the *Brothers Grimm fairy tales*. The Beja do compose songs about their camels (Ausenda 1987:413), but do not associate them in any way with their faith (either in Islam or ATR).

and song. Many Muslims certainly understand and utilize propositional arguments (e.g. Ahmad Deedat). Nonetheless, the implanting or mixing of Biblical ideas with Qur'anic concepts offends the informed and attracts only the marginal. Rather than constructing a false Christian template (to the Muslim) over the Qur'an, a more measured methodology preserves contextual integrity and holds greater promise for a true exchange of ideas (Schlorff 2006:123). An analytical approach respects the intended meanings of both the Christian and Muslim scriptures, as Schlorff (:133, bold mine) prescribes.

Basic to the approach, as the term **'analysis'** suggests, is **the principle that the 'meaning' of a passage, as in the Bible, can only be determined by analysis of the way its individual terms are used in relation to the Qur'anic original language system and cultural context.** The focus is on what Mohammad understood the terms to mean and how his original hearers would have understood him. In practical terms, this means that **Qur'anic language may not be interpreted in terms of what one might think similar biblical language might have meant. It cannot be filled with Christian content.**

Quoting a few selected verses of the Qur'an, while respecting the traditional Islamic interpretation, crystallizes theological issues without compromising the beliefs of either side. The Christian witness may say, "The Qur'an speaks of *'Isa*,<sup>29</sup> who the Bible calls Jesus

---

<sup>29</sup> Opinions diverge regarding the use of the Qur'anic word for Jesus, *'Isa* as opposed to *Yasuu'*, a transliteration of the Greek word, *Iesus* (widely used by Christian Arabs). Forty-two New Testament translations employ the latter, while seventeen (including Henry Martyn's renowned 1814 Persian translation) use the former (Schlorff 2006:36). Some missiologists prefer *'Isa* since Muslims know the term. Others argue that the Qur'anic meaning of *'Isa* differs too radically from the Biblical understanding of Jesus (Ankerberg & Caner 2009:8). However, Schlorff (2006:37) concludes since both Christians and Christian cults use Jesus with different connotations, evangelicals can safely use *'Isa* when speaking to Muslims about Christ. The same arguments apply in the question concerning the name of God (Greear 2010:160). This case differs slightly as no good alternative exists for God apart from Allah. Every reputable Arabic Bible translation

Christ. Our holy book says this about Him." One national leader (Jonadab 2006) in Sudan advocates quoting two brief Qur'anic statements, not as bridges, but as quick references.

We start talking about [Jesus] from [the] Qur'an because [the] Qur'an says, "Jesus is the Word of God and the Spirit of God and is the Prophet of God," so we are talking [about that] He is the Word of God. ... So we go back to [the] Bible in John 1:1 "In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was with God," and also that "Jesus is the Spirit of God." So we start from there [the Qur'an] and we end up in [the] Bible. Sometimes people they start in here, in the Qur'an and they stay there. When we start here [in the Qur'an] we just move very fast to come here [to the Bible].

Such a reference does not ascribe authority to the Qur'an in the manner of the Camel<sup>30</sup> method. Instead, a short reference to the Qur'an serves as a starting point. This approach differs from reading the Qur'an from the standpoint of a Christian hermeneutic, which often offends many Muslims (Parshall 2009:667) and indirectly confers truth on the Qur'an. Schlorff (2006:149, bold mine) emphasizes this point.

**...it would be improper to begin the contextualization process from within Islam on the assumption that Islam contains "moments" of truth.<sup>31</sup> One cannot**

---

utilizes the term despite the fact that Christian and Muslim concepts of God differ significantly. Christians worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Muslims revere the Allah of Abraham and Ishmael. In addition, some of the ninety-nine names of God do not reflect a Christian idea of the Deity (e.g. *Al-Qahhar*, the All Compelling Subduer; *Al-Khafid*, the Abaser; *Al-Mudhill*, the Giver of Dishonor; *Al-Mumit*, the Bringer of Death, the Destroyer; *Al-Mu'akhkhir*, the Delayer; *Al-Wali*, the Patron; *Al-Ghani*, the All Rich, the Independent; 99 Names of God 2010:3-5).

<sup>30</sup> Greear (2010:153) calls the Camel method a C-5 methodology.

<sup>31</sup> Greeson (2007:102, bold mine) takes the opposing view in *the Camel*, saying; "Remember, there is not enough light in the Qur'an to bring Muslims to salvation, but there are enough **flickers of truth** to draw out God's person of peace among them. As soon as possible, you want to bridge them out of the Qur'an and into the Bible where they can see the truth for themselves."

use the Qur'an as a source of truth for proclaiming the gospel or **try to fill Muslim forms with Christian meanings**. One may sometimes refer to something in the Qur'an or Islamic culture to get an idea across to Muslims, but that is not the same thing. And one may do so only on certain conditions.

### **5.3.3 Cultural contextualization with Muslims**

Muslims seamlessly blend the cultural and religious elements of their society. Many contextualization concerns and concepts have been addressed in the previous discussions about the Qur'an. This section covers the contextualization issues specifically related to Muslim culture and their associated worship forms. Due to the close relationship between form and meaning in Islam, theological and doctrinal conundrums frequently surface.

#### **5.3.3.1 Cultural contextualization of Muslim customs**

The all-pervasiveness of Islamic culture impresses anyone living in a more traditional Muslim-majority country. Most men in Sudan, except for the minority Southerners, wear the flowing white robes synonymous with Islam. Although most Muslims dress in more of a Western style in the cities of Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Syria (Wheatcroft 2004:315), their counterparts in the countryside prefer the more traditional fashions. As the Muslim 'call to prayer' punctuates the daily life cycle and Muslims flow in and out of the Mosque accordingly, Christians wonder how to engage the people in such societies.

Contextualizing culture, custom and dress predates modern missions. In the nineteenth century William Carey demonstrated appreciation for Indian culture (Kane 1982:166,169) while Hudson Taylor went further, adopting Chinese national dress and customs (Anderson 1998:214). Hesselgrave and Rommen (2000:26) state that even earlier in the eighteenth century, "the leadership of the pietistic Moravian movement began to make adjustments; that is, they initiated attempts at contextualization."

For example, Count Nikolas von Zinzendorf advised his missionaries on Greenland not to use the terms lamb and sacrifice since there were no lambs on Greenland and Greenland religion knew no sacrifices. He was convinced by using terms which were outside the conceptual framework of the listeners, the process of communication would be complicated and bear undesirable fruit. "If we are not careful," said Zinzendorf, "we will, with the passing of time, have them reciting the Psalms in Latin" (Hesselgrave & Rommen 2000:26).

Christian workers today, with some exceptions, appreciate the food, dress and customs of the people they serve. Although all cultures value outsiders enjoying their cuisine,<sup>32</sup> investigation should be made and judgment used when adopting certain national clothing styles, especially in Islamic societies. For instance, Muslims wash ceremonially before prayer, and this ritual contains religious significance (Braswell 1996:62-63).

Opinions diverge concerning contextualization in dress. In some Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Egypt, Western women who cover themselves in the manner of the nationals can successfully avoid male harassment. In other Muslim countries like Sudan and Jordan women can feel comfortable in modest Western clothing. Male Christian workers also face dilemmas on the subject of national dress. Since many Western-oriented nationals wear European style clothing within Muslim majority countries, some nationals wonder about the agenda of a foreigner dressing in an Islamic manner. Sometimes an expatriate

---

<sup>32</sup> Even this must be approached cautiously as I learned while dining at an outdoor restaurant in the Muslim city of Kassala, Sudan, on April 28, 1991 (my birthday). When presented with the Arabic menu, one of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians said, "I do not eat Muslim meat." His religious beliefs required an Orthodox Christian slaughtering of animals. On another occasion during Carnival ministry in Salvador, Brazil, I noticed a woman selling fish cakes from a sidewalk outdoor griddle. As I approached the vendor to make a purchase, a Christian worker told me the Spiritist priestess had dedicated the fish cakes to a West African deity.

clothed in native attire appears odd to the cultural 'insider.' Rather than acculturating, the evangelist only succeeds in attracting unwanted attention. Contextualization even in surface matters should be approached carefully.<sup>33</sup>

### **5.3.3.2 Cultural contextualization of Islamic forms**

Due to the sluggishness of Muslim missions over the last two centuries, Christian workers began exploring new creative methods of outreach. Over the last thirty years a movement to contextualize Christianity within Islam has emerged, generating much controversy. Drawing from the field of linguistics, Charles Kraft (and later John Wilder) applied the concept of 'dynamic equivalency' to the discipline of missiology (Kraft 1978:114). Specifically, a dynamic equivalent version of Islam advocates conversion to Christianity while remaining within the Muslim faith culture. The 'Insider Movement'<sup>34</sup> within Islam cites as their model the recent phenomenon of Hebrew Christians remaining in Judaism, calling themselves Messianic Jews (Schlorff 2006:80-81). John Travis<sup>35</sup> (2006:125) writes, "In the past four decades tens of thousands of Jews have

---

<sup>33</sup> National leaders I worked with in Sudan report that a Scandinavian evangelist decided to adopt the Sudanese national dress with rather humorous results. Port Sudan is a city of almost five million people with only about ten permanent European residents. When the six foot three inch, blond haired, blue-eyed man, donned a flowing white robe and walked into the marketplace, virtually the entire crowd followed and stared at the strange foreigner. Rather than blending in with the culture quite the reverse occurred.

<sup>34</sup> The insider movement advocates staying within Islam while accepting 'Isa as the Messiah. "They want to see movements to Jesus within Islam rather than from Islam. These are called insider movements" (Greear 2010:153). Rebecca Lewis (2009:673) says, "Insider movements can be defined as movements to obedient faith in Christ that remain integrated with or inside their natural community."

<sup>35</sup> John Travis is a pseudonym for a Christian worker in Asia who has been involved in contextualized Muslim ministry since 1987 (Travis 2009b:664). He is one of the leading proponents of the insider movement.

accepted Jesus as their Messiah yet remain socio-religiously Jewish." In the same way, the Insider Movement supports 'Messianic Muslims' acknowledging 'Isa the Messiah while retaining their Islamic cultural identity (Brown 2007:8).

The 'C-Spectrum' serves as a frame of reference for discussing issues related to the insider movement by both proponents and opponents of varying degrees of Muslim contextualization. In order to differentiate between the different levels of contextualization with Muslims, Travis developed the following scale. A condensed version of *The C-Spectrum: a practical tool for defining six types of "Christ-centered communities" found in Muslim contexts* (Travis 2009b:664-665) follows (bold his, italic mine).

**C1-Traditional Church Using a Language Different from the Daily Language of the Surrounding Muslim Community.** May be Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant. Some predate Islam. Thousand of C1 churches are found in Muslim lands today. Many reflect Western culture. A huge cultural chasm often exists between the church and the surrounding Muslim community. *Some Muslim background believers may be found in C1 churches. C1 believers call themselves Christians.*

**C2-Traditional Church Using the Daily Language of the Surrounding Muslim Community.** Essentially the same as C1 except for language.

**C3-Contextualized Community Using the Daily Language of the Surrounding Muslim Community and Some Non-Muslim Cultural Forms.** Religiously neutral forms may include folk music, ethnic dress, artwork, etc. Islamic elements (where present) are "filtered out" so as to use purely "cultural" forms. The aim is to reduce the foreignness of the gospel and the church by contextualizing to biblically acceptable cultural forms. May meet in a church building or more religiously neutral location. *C3 congregations are comprised of a majority of Muslim background believers. C3 believers call themselves "Christians."*

**C4-Contextualized Community Using the Daily Language and Biblically Acceptable Socio-religious Islamic Forms.** Similar to C3, however, *Biblically acceptable Islamic religious forms and practices are also*



utilized (e.g., praying with raised hands, keeping the fast, avoiding pork, alcohol, having dogs<sup>36</sup> as pets, using Islamic terms, dress, etc.). Foreign forms are avoided. Meetings not held in church buildings. C4 communities almost entirely comprised of Muslim background believers. *C4 believers are seen as a kind of Christian by the Muslim community. C4 believers identify themselves as "followers of Isa the Messiah" (or something similar).*

**C5-Community of Muslims Who Follow Jesus Yet Remain Culturally and Officially Muslim.** C5 believers remain legally and socially within the community of Islam. Somewhat similar to the Messianic Jewish movement, aspects of Islamic theology which are incompatible with the Bible are rejected or reinterpreted if possible. *Participation in corporate Islamic worship varies from person to person and group to group. C5 believers meet regularly with other C5 believers and share their faith with unsaved Muslims. Unsaved Muslims may see C5 believers as theologically deviant and may eventually expel them from the community of Islam. C5 believers are viewed as Muslims by the Muslim community and think of themselves as Muslims who follow 'Isa the Messiah.*

**C6-Secret or Underground Muslim Followers of Jesus with Little or No Visible Community.** Similar to persecuted believers suffering under totalitarian regimes. Due to fear, isolation or threat of extreme government/community legal action or retaliation (including capital punishment), C6 believers worship Christ secretly (individually or perhaps infrequently in small clusters). Many come to Christ through dreams, visions, miracles, radio broadcasts, tracts, Christian witness while abroad, or reading the Bible on their own initiative. C6 (as opposed to C5) believers are usually silent about their faith...*C6 believers are perceived as Muslims by the Muslim community and identify themselves as Muslims.*

Whereas Qur'anic contextualization (and non-contextualization) methods involve theological arguments and hermeneutic interpretation, the insider movement focuses

---

<sup>36</sup> Practically applying contextualization principles can be challenging for children. One family I supervised in Sudan had four boys. The landlord prohibited the family from having a dog. One day I noticed the oldest son walking a chicken with a leash around its neck in the manner of a dog. The ten-year old looked at me, shrugged his shoulders and continued walking the fowl as if it were a dog.

on bridging the cultural chasm between Christian and Muslim societies. Easier entry into Christianity represents the goal of proponents such as Rebecca Lewis (2009:674). The foremost advocate, John Travis (2009a:672) clarifies the goal of C-5 insider movement contextualization.

If perhaps the single greatest hindrance to seeing Muslims come to faith in Christ is not a theological one (i.e. accepting Jesus as Lord) but rather one of culture and religious identity (i.e. having to leave the community of Islam), it seems that for the sake of God's kingdom much of our missiological energy should be devoted to seeking a path whereby Muslims can remain Muslims, yet live as true followers of the Lord Jesus.

Encouraging Christian converts to remain in Islam disturbs many, both Christian workers and nationals. Phil Parshall, a proponent of C-4 contextualization, questions C-5 methodology. Parshall sees problems with Messianic Muslims worshipping in the mosque (except transitionally) and participating in Islamic prayers that affirm Mohammad as a prophet of God (Parshall 2009:666). The principle difference between C-4 and C-5 contextualization involves the identity of the believers- both from the point of view of the community and the believers themselves. Tennent (2006:104, *italics his, bold mine*) explains.

Some of what is casually called C-5 in missionary practice is actually C-4. **The crucial issue at stake is self-identify.** C-5 believers are fully imbedded in the cultural and religious life of Islam. That is why their presence in the Mosque is referred to as an "insider movement," because they really are insiders. It is even inaccurate to refer to them (as they often are) as MBBs [Muslim Background Believers], because, for them, Islam is not in their *background*, it remains as their primary *identity*... Therefore **the real "bottom-line" question before us is whether or not there is a solid case to be made for encouraging a C-5 "Muslim" to continue to identify himself or herself as a Muslim,** fully part and parcel of the religious and cultural life of Islam, even after they have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Whereas C-4 believers may retain some Muslim cultural forms, both the community and the believers themselves identify C-4 practitioners as Christians. While C-4 contextualization focuses on Muslim culture, C-5 practitioners retain actual Islamic faith forms. Since C-5 proponents<sup>37</sup> advocate Muslim converts stay within Islam, the controversy has been associated primarily with this form of Muslim contextualization.

### 5.3.3.3 Cultural contextualization and Islamic meaning

Problems surface when outsiders attempt contextualization in unfamiliar territory. C-5 (and even sometimes C-4) contextualization assumes Muslim forms can be separated from their meanings (Schlorff 2006:150). This assumption ignores the fact that meanings and forms stem from tacit contractual agreements by insiders within a culture (Hesselgrave 1991:67). Outsiders reformulate the ethnic and religious paradigms of others at their peril. Hiebert (in Schlorff 2006:150, bold mine) sounds a warning here.

**When we try to reinterpret symbols** used by the dominant society, however, **we are in danger of being misunderstood and ultimately of being captured by its definitions of reality...We are not free to arbitrarily link meanings and forms.** To do so is to destroy people's history and culture...The greatest danger in separating meaning from form is the relativism and pragmatism this introduces.

This is especially true in Muslim societies. Christian workers wrongly suppose that they can innocently introduce Christian interpretations into Muslim forms without consequences. This sort of accommodation is often done to make Muslim converts feel more comfortable as they move from Islam to Christianity thereby reducing the

---

<sup>37</sup> John Travis and most other C-5 proponents do not advocate Christian workers becoming Muslims (or saying they are Muslims to reach Muslims). C-5 is for those already within Islam who have converted to Christ (Travis 2009a:669, Tennent 2006:108).

potential for persecution and cultural isolation. Such practices make conversion to Christianity more of a gradual linear process than a one-time event. Prolonging a Muslim background believer's (MBB's) exposure to Muslim forms may result in confusion. Schlorff (2006:151, parenthesis his, bold mine) reflects on this issue.

...there are no neutral 'religious structures' (such as ritual prayer) that may be joined to Christian faith-allegiance without creating serious semantic distortion and theological confusion. This is one reason **I reject the intuitive approach** suggested by some- **contextualization by experimentation.**

A Muslim background national leader in Sudan advises converts not to worship in the mosque due to the danger of confusion on their part. He says if the MBB attends services in both the mosque and the church (even a contextualized C-4 house-church congregation) they become confused. Jonadab<sup>38</sup> (2006) comments on the question of MBB's continuing in the mosque.

That is not also good. That will make them confused again. They will be here and here and also we saw people like that here in Sudan. They are Muslim converts and they are afraid, especially that first year. He goes to the mosque and then sometimes he goes to the church, but that also is very confusing. When he has accepted Christ we ask him to stop going to the mosque and to pray in his house and join us in our house meetings.

Even some seemingly innocuous cultural accoutrements and clothing styles carry religious significance.<sup>39</sup> Well-

---

<sup>38</sup> Jonadab, the son of strict Muslims, became a Christian at the age of nineteen. He told me that when he and seventeen other young men became believers they were threatened with death. Inside of the prison they were beaten with whips. Due to this punishment and the threat of execution, thirteen of the eighteen renounced Christianity and returned to Islam. Jonadab and 'Isa (his associate) have started over two hundred Baptist churches and preaching points (smaller house churches) among Muslims in Northern Sudan (Jonadab 2006).

<sup>39</sup> The Beja decorate their red prayer mats, blankets, and other artifacts with seashells. The tribe believes the magical power of the shells keeps away *jinns* and can be used to predict the future

meaning attempts at 'cutting edge' ministry lead to "ill-advised adventurism and the misuse of Muslim forms" (Schlorff 2006:149). Words possess subjective meanings that transcend translation. The Arabic sense of the word "Muslim" means "one who is submitted to God" according to the C-5 proponent John Travis (2009:670). However, persons calling themselves Muslims attach additional significance to the term. Greear (2010:160) believes Christians should not acknowledge Muhammad as a prophet<sup>40</sup> nor refer to themselves as 'Messianic Muslims.' Parshall (2009:666, ellipsis & parenthesis his, bold mine) concurs.

**The mosque is pregnant with Islamic theology.** There, Muhammad is affirmed as a prophet of God and the divinity of Christ is consistently denied. Uniquely Muslim prayers (*salat*) are ritually performed as in no other religion. These prayers are as sacramental to Muslims as partaking of the Lord's Supper is to Christians. How would we feel if a Muslim attended (or even joined) our evangelical church and partook of communion...all with a view to becoming an 'insider'?

Reciting the *shahada*<sup>41</sup> potentially confuses the convert and possibly deceives the Muslim community about the faith allegiance of the MBB. Brother Yusuf (in Corwin 2007:12, bold mine), a C-5 advocate, defends converts retaining their Islamic practices.

---

(Jacobsen 1998:65). Beja men dress in long white robes (*Jalabiyah*) and women often wear long red dresses (*tob*). Beja follow color symbolism with white representing masculinity and red signifying femininity (:177). The white hat (*topi*) worn by Muslim men stems from the normative practice of Muhammad in the *sunnah* of covering his head in respect to God (Kippah 2008:3). Wearing such a head covering identifies a man as a Muslim.

<sup>40</sup> Greeson (2007:144) says in *the Camel*, "The best bridge to overcome the barrier to Mohammad is to simply say: 'I agree with what the Qur'an says about Mohammad.'"

<sup>41</sup> The Islamic *shahada* intones, "There is no God but God and Muhammad is His prophet."

Some Messianic Muslims say the *shahada*, but not all of them are true believers in it. Nominal Muslims say the *shahada*, but they are not true believers. Some of them [Messianic Muslims] are engaging in dissimulation—masking one's inner thoughts and intentions. That is not the same as deceit, which involves manipulation or exploitation of others rather than mere social conformity or self-protection. **Deceit is wrong, but is dissimulation<sup>42</sup> categorically wrong or can it be used as a last resort?**

I am personally sympathetic with MBB's who are persecuted for their faith. Two national leaders associated with my work were arrested, beaten, and tortured for thirty-seven days in 1996. When I offered my sympathy to them for this ordeal they said, "We did this for Jesus." Another national Baptist leader (also previously beaten for his faith) shared a unique viewpoint about why dissimulation should not be used.

If you accept Christ and stop going to the mosque, people will feel a difference in you; your speech, your life; it will be different from [them]. And when they see that there is a difference between your life and their life and they start [to] ask and at that time you can witness also for Christ. If they stay in the Mosque, then the Muslims say, "Look at him, he has become a good person because of Islam." But if he stays away from [the] Mosque and they see his changed life, then they give the glory to Christ (Jonadab 2006).

While affirming C-4 methodology Greear (2010:159-160) rejects C-5 contextualization. Tennent (2006:113) and Parshall (2009:666-667), although expressing serious doubts about the C-5 approach, allow it as a temporary starting point for new believers transitioning toward a C-3 or C-4 version of Christianity. I concur with Greear and reject the C-5 contextualization approach.

---

<sup>42</sup> Dissimulate is "to hide one's feelings, motives, etc. by pretense" (Guralnik 1970:408).

#### 5.4 Evaluating contextualization with Muslims

Some evangelists today continue the debate and polemic method with Muslims that originated in the nineteenth century. Much of current mission activity directed at official Islam employs some type of contextualization by cultural adjustment (e.g. C-4) or the retention and augmentation of more substantive Islamic forms (e.g. C-5). A few missiologists, however, call into question the effectiveness of much current contextualization. Musk (1984:285) observes, "while such bridging movements may be meaningful to the intellectual Muslim, they fall a long way short of communicating with Muslims committed to a folk-Islamic worldview." Schlorff (2006:161) goes even further in his statement; "Contextualization is not the key whatever the model is followed." Summarizing this line of thought, Pikkert (2008:187, bold mine) concurs with both Musk and Schlorff.

**Attempts at contextualization have not led to any breakthroughs** either... Islam and Christianity are simply too different in both doctrine and worship styles to build a contextual bridge from one to the other. The simple fact that the Christian worship incorporates communal singing, for instance, makes it a radically different experience in itself. Hence even the most contextualized of churches will not look like a mosque. It will not have that "Muslim flavor" which is supposed to ease entry into Christianity.

Simply stated, neither polemics nor most contextualization techniques speak to the average person in Islam. Since folk Muslims compose approximately seventy percent<sup>43</sup> of the total of Islam (Parshall 2006:2), most Christians miss this majority population by directing their evangelism efforts toward the Muslim minority who read the Qur'an and understand the nuances of Islamic

---

<sup>43</sup> Musk (1984:339) also says folk Muslims comprise the majority of adherents to Islam.

theology. Musk poignantly (1984:262-263, bold mine) asks the following questions.

With which Islam is the Christian missionary familiar? Which Islam is known, or maybe even knowable, by most contemporary missionaries to Muslims: Qur'anic, institutionalized, official, orthodox and moral Islam; or everyday, everyman, non-publicized, local, animistic and amoral Islam?...Is the theological, apologetic approach gaining access for Christ to the **central core of worldview of most Muslims?**

The current, hotly debated issue concerning points of contact within Islam which provide potential stepping-stones to Christ, also contains an inherent danger. In the argument about, for example, the **Qur'an as a bridge to Christian faith**, both the proponents of such a view (Accad 1976; Cragg 1979:196-200); Dretke 1979:172-182) and the opponents (Schlorff 1980) are serving to maintain the traditional emphasis on formal Islam as the sole arena of concern... **Most folk Muslims value the Qur'an**, not for its intrinsic cognitive content, but **for its proven power as a protective talisman or book of fortune.**

Since polemics and contextualization methods usually fail with the majority of orthodox Islamic adherents, their chances of reaching folk Muslims with the Gospel diminish even further. Folk Muslims fear evil spirits, calamities, and the unknown. They respect the Qur'an, Muslim theology, and Islamic forms but choose folk prescriptions over religious rituals to solve everyday problems and insure a better life. Western propositional presentations and contextualized theological arguments carry little weight and seem irrelevant to this majority expression of Islam.

Therefore, since methods to date have largely failed with both orthodox and folk Muslims (Pikkert 2008:187), other avenues deserve exploration. Musk (1984:341) says, "The Gospel, in its presentation to ordinary Muslims, must 'fit' the folk-Islamic world in order to do battle with the demonic therein." Folk religion asks different



questions than the doctrinal answers provided by the high religion (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:40).

### **5.5 Worldview contextualization with Muslims**

Since most approaches largely miss the mark with Muslims, other techniques are necessary. The Christian desiring to present the Gospel to someone of another culture must respect the cultural package and adjust the presentation accordingly (Corduan 1998:41). Most evangelistic methods aim at either the mind of the Muslim or the cultural forms of Islam but miss the individual's heart. Formulating an appeal toward the latter requires a focus on the worldview of the folk Muslim. Hiebert (2008:15) defines worldview,

...as the 'fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives'. Worldviews are what people in a community take as given realities, the maps they have of reality that they use for living.

Since the 1930's Christian workers have largely ignored the issue of folk Islam (Musk 1984:277). However, some missiologists of recent have recognized the pervasiveness of popular Islam and advocate an approach in this direction (Pikkert 2008:176). Musk (1984:297) writes, "The Communication objective, in missions to Muslims, is to render the unchanging gospel as relevant and comprehensible as possible to the felt needs of real people."

Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou (1999:224, 226) present a three-fold model for observing cultural religious values. They state that whereas most Westerners function out of a sense of guilt, traditional societies operate out of fear of the supernatural and the unknown. These authors postulate that group societies follow a shame-honor orientation. Roland Muller (in Pikkert 2008:177) takes this further, pointing out that the Bible speaks to all

three kinds of societies. Pikkert (:178) says that "Musk and Muller suggest that the presentation of the gospel must be contextualized to meet these cultural-driven needs by focusing on Christianity's answer to issues of honor and shame."

I agree with Muller that the Bible speaks to all three types of cultural religious values (i.e. guilt, shame and fear). Contextualized approaches to Muslims must include all three issues (Pikkert 2008:177). Patai (in Pikkert 2008:177) states that appeals to Muslims should be weighted more in favor of the shame-honor axis than the Western based guilt-innocence formula. Clearly the shame-honor concept permeates Islamic societies; however, the fear of the supernatural and the dread of the unknown also predominate among Muslims steeped in traditional religion, especially ATR. This thesis argues that an approach to folk Muslims like the Beja should be slanted more in the direction of the fear-power axis. The next chapter argues this point.

## 5.6 Conclusion

Since the days of Zwemer, missiologists have noticed the multi-faceted nature of the Muslim faith, as well as its related forms and cultures (Zwemer 1920:vii-viii). Bill Musk, Phil Marshall, and others recognize that the majority of Muslims require an approach contextualized to a folk Islamic world-view (in Pikkert 2008:176). A recent article in the *Kansas City Star* (Sorcerer 2010:26, bold mine) emphasizes the sway folk Islam holds over many in the Muslim world today.

For more than two years, Ali Hussain Sibat of Lebanon has been imprisoned in Saudi Arabia, **convicted of sorcery and sentenced to death...His crimes: manipulating spirits, predicting the future, concocting potions and conjuring spells** on a call-in TV show called "The Hidden" on a Lebanese channel, Scheherazade. It was, in effect a Middle Eastern

psychic hot line... Sibat was jailed after agreeing to give a woman a potion so that her husband would divorce his second wife. "Most of my treatments were with honey and seeds," He said. "You would put the charm in the honey and drink from it."

**The case highlights not only the popular belief in magic and sorcery - by no means unique to Saudi Arabia - but also a legal system that critics say operates in secret and functions with little oversight, due process or even written laws. Saudi Arabia's constitution is the Qur'an.**

Since the disparity between popular and official Islam looms so large, different sorts of Muslims require tactics tailored to their specific realities. Although apologetic approaches and contextualized methods reach some Muslims, such appeals fall short with the majority. Missionaries skilled in debate confront Islam's elite with propositionally based arguments founded upon a Western oriented, guilt-innocence concept of religious values. Other workers experiment with Qur'anic hermeneutics, Islamic worship and Middle Eastern cultural forms, hoping to erase the foreignness of Christianity and painlessly ease their proselytes into the fold. The latter addresses the shame-honor value prevalent within group-oriented Muslim societies that often causes potential converts to fear cultural and familial alienation. Whereas the inflexibility of the former hardens existing divisions, the adventurism of the latter often leads to syncretism.<sup>44</sup> Neither apologetics nor cultural contextualization sufficiently engages the worldview of the folk Muslim.

I argue in this thesis that ATR-influenced folk Muslims (even those within shame-honor traditions) fear the supernatural more than being ostracized by their culture. The worldview of these folk Muslims centers on a

---

<sup>44</sup> "The combination or reconciliation of differing beliefs or practices in religion" (Guralnik 1970:1443).

fear-power axis common to traditional religious societies. All people groups require contextualized explanations of the Gospel in terms of the three types of cultural religious values: guilt-innocence, shame-honor, and fear-power. However, I believe the latter holds the most promise for striking a chord of response with folk Muslims influenced more by ATR than official Islam.

**6. A contextualized worldview approach to the evangelization of folk Muslims influenced by traditional religion, especially ATR**

Previous chapters point out that the vast majority of Muslims practice folk Islam rather than adhering to religious orthodoxy (Parshall 2006:2). Many evangelical missionaries have attempted to evangelize Muslims through complex apologetic arguments or clever contextualized cultural and religious strategies to reach the elite (Pikkert 2008:187). Apologetic approaches include both confrontational (e.g. polemic) and non-confrontational (e.g. dialogue) methods. Contextualized techniques range from small cultural concessions to boundary-blurring borrowing of Islamic and Qur'anic forms.

None of these mentioned approaches have resulted in any breakthroughs in Muslim evangelization (Pikkert 2008:187). Intellectual argumentation, cultural contextualization, and experimentation with Islamic forms miss the mark with folk Muslims because folk religion poses different questions than orthodoxy. High religion attempts to answer cosmological concerns while folk religion assists in coping with life here and now (Hiebert 2008:131). Musk (1984:262) clarifies the point.

In nearly every case, the presupposition tends to be of a stereotype 'Muslim' who has certain appreciations of Christ and difficulties with Christianity... Appeal is made almost exclusively on an intellectual level concerning the transmission of certain abstract ideas. Emphasis is placed on techniques for communicating 'truth', Christian doctrines and concepts, to counteract the misinformation of Islamic indoctrination.

Some missiologists suggest that folk Muslims should be challenged at their worldview level rather than by the methods mentioned previously. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou

(1999:224-226) present a three-fold model<sup>1</sup> for observing the worldview issues related to proclaiming salvation in different kinds of societies. They explain that individualistic societies like those in the West, based upon the rule of law, operate largely from a 'guilt-innocence' motif. Many group-conscious societies in Asia, North Africa and the Middle East follow a 'shame-honor' orientation. 'Fear-power' concerns dominate the worldview of the traditional societies of Africa, Asia and the Americas.

Pikkert (2008:177) writes, "the contemporary missionary writers Bill Musk and Roland Muller suggest that cultures are weighted in different directions." Adopting the three-model worldview framework, they hold that the Gospel should be contextualized toward a shame-honor axis among Muslims in the Middle East (:178).

Arab Muslims dwell primarily in North Africa and the Middle East. Since orthodoxy springs from Islam's home on the Arabian Peninsula, most apologetic and contextualized approaches for Muslims have been tailored largely toward Arab audiences. Even the methods directed toward the non-Arabic speaking Muslims in Central Asia, Southeast Asia and the Indian Subcontinent incline toward apologetics and the kinds of contextualized techniques mentioned in earlier chapters. Since Muslims in these regions lean toward a shame-honor religious value motif, those advocating a world-view contextualized approach usually favor this framework for approaching Islam (Pikkert 2008:177).

Writers such as Musk, Muller, Parshall, and Jabbour have written extensively about reaching Muslims through the shame-honor paradigm (Pikkert 2008:177-178). This emphasis sometimes neglects folk religionists like the

---

<sup>1</sup> Nabeel Jabbour (2008:169-172) adds a fourth paradigm to the list of worldviews. In addition to the guilt-righteousness, shame-honor, and fear-power concepts, Jabbour presents the idea of 'defilement-clean.'

Beja who although professing Islam possess a worldview resembling more traditional religious societies. Many African tribes mix ATR with Islam. Similarly, peoples in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, India, Pakistan and Indonesia superficially embrace official Islam while clinging to traditional religious practices. Many of these ethnic groups exhibit a fear-power worldview. Hiebert, Tienou and Shaw (1999:373) observe, "Most folk religions seek power as the key to prosperity, health, success, and control over their life." Their observation rings especially true with folk Muslims influenced by ATR.

This chapter presents a contextualized approach to evangelizing folk Muslims like the Beja tribe of Sudan through a fear-power cultural religious value motif. Among traditional people, the shame-honor and guilt-innocence themes also come into play as secondary themes. I introduce a fourth cultural religious value present among folk Muslims like the Beja, especially *Sufis*. Many folk Muslims yearn for a deeper spiritual life and a release from the legalism of formal Islam and the tedium and monotony of every day life. I propose reaching folk Muslims such as these through a proposed 'existential-transcendent' religious value paradigm.

### **6.1 Worldview religious values axes**

Numerous proposals for finding 'common ground' when evangelizing non-Christian faiths have been proposed (Hesseltgrave 2005:100). Commenting about worldview<sup>2</sup> paradigms, Jabbour (2008:171) writes that, "the good news of the gospel addresses the deep felt needs of all humans."

---

<sup>2</sup> Hiebert (2008:15) defines worldview "...as the 'fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives.' Worldviews are what people in a community take as given realities, the maps they have of reality that they use for living."

Parshall (2003:3) observes; "as millions of Muslims move beyond cold, dead orthodoxy, we see them desiring that felt needs be met." Indeed, genuine and effectual contextualization applies Biblical truths to respondent cultures (Hesselgrave & Rommen 2000:211). A 'felt needs' analysis constitutes an important barometer for assessing internal cultural dissonance within societies and should receive the Christian worker's attention. Musk (1984:297, bold mine) comments on this subject.

The communication objective, in missions to Muslims, is to render the unchanging gospel as relevant and comprehensible as possible to Muslim contexts, and to the **felt needs** of real people.

This "fulfillment approach," as Hesselgrave (2005:100, 102) calls it, seeks to meet humankind's yearning for God, satisfying these and other needs. Hesselgrave points out that, though, while sometimes humanity seeks spiritual fulfillment, usually they avoid God altogether.<sup>3</sup> In addition, humankind possesses 'unknown needs' and 'unfelt needs' from an eternal perspective. It also stands that people may feel needs that are not appropriate to gratify (Biblically), such as immorality, anger, jealousy, and slander to name a few from a long potential list.

Another method, the "similarity approach"<sup>4</sup> seeks to discover redemptive analogies and cultural points of contact in order to find 'common ground' with adherents of non-Christian religions. This method observes the worldview religious value axis through the prism of understanding. Muller (2000:105, bold mine) says, "Cross-cultural contextualization of the Gospel is simply knowing how to start the Gospel message from a place of **common understanding.**" Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou

---

<sup>3</sup> Hesselgrave (2005:102) quotes Romans 3:11-12 in support of this notion; "No one seeks for God. All have turned aside."

<sup>4</sup> This is the classification of Hesselgrave (2005:102).



(1999:234, bold mine) emphasize that when approaching different societies with the Gospel, the communicator should emphasize the Biblical imagery appropriate to that culture.

What does this good news of God's salvation mean to **those who need (and generally want)** salvation? The Bible uses a number of metaphors to describe God's salvation. Each of these casts light on a salvation that can never be fully understood here on earth. **Different one's make sense to different people in their varied contexts.**

The effective communicator matches the felt needs<sup>5</sup> of the culture with the actual needs of the people by crafting a presentation comprehended in a particular society.

This section evaluates the components of each of the three major cultural religious value axes as to their suitability for making sense to folk Muslims. Muller suggests (2000:20, bold & numbering mine) a three-part model for this examination.

Thus, when analyzing a culture, one must look for the primary cultural characteristic, and then the secondary ones. As an example, many North American Native cultures are made up of elements of both **(1) shame-based** and **(2) fear-based cultures**. On the other hand, much of North American culture has been made up almost exclusively of **(3) guilt-based** principles, although this has changed in the last two decades.

Muller's observations also apply to folk Muslims in general and the Beja people in particular. I propose that although the fear-power concept characterizes the most important aspect of the Beja worldview, shame-honor and guilt-innocence factors also come into play. Muller notes (in Pikkert 2008:177) that the Bible speaks to all three of the major religious value paradigms. Muller (2000:70)

---

<sup>5</sup> Meeting the felt needs of Muslims is a legitimate way of approaching Muslims. I address meeting the spiritual needs of folk Muslims later in this chapter.

says, "All cultures are made up of a mixture of all three [cultural worldviews], and individual families and even individuals in the West identify with different worldviews." Therefore, even though people from fear-based cultures may respond better to an approach that matches their own worldview, they still must be instructed in the Scriptural concepts implicit in the other paradigms. This section of the thesis identifies the Scriptures most suitable to each worldview framework and applies them for use with folk Muslims like the Beja influenced by traditional religion.

#### **6.1.1 Guilt-Innocence worldview axis**

Westerners understand this worldview paradigm because it more closely fits their cultural orientation. A guilt-innocence theme dominates many propositional Gospel presentations such as the *Four spiritual laws*<sup>6</sup> (2006:1-5), *Steps to peace with God* (2005:1-4), and the *Bridge to life* (2010:1-2). Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:226) summarize Gospel presentations crafted toward Western religious values.

In individualistic societies with a strong sense of law, sin is violating rules, and leads to feelings of guilt, fear, and judgment. Salvation is seen as paying the penalty and being declared just before the law. Here the entry point is to preach the good news that through Christ's sacrifice people are forgiven and they are restored to a right standing before God. This has been the dominant motif in Western theology which inherited the Roman forensic system of law, and Hebrew tradition of covenant commandments. There is a danger, however. It is easy to see law as an autonomous, overarching code of moral righteousness, and justification as simply paying the penalties meted out by that law.

This approach has merit, as the Bible contains these ideas. The concept of guilt and innocence before God

---

<sup>6</sup> This is a Campus Crusade for Christ witnessing tool.

characterizes not only a legitimate religious world-view value but represents Biblical truths that must be communicated in a necessary manner to all cultures when presenting salvation. If a certain way of thinking, however, is not dominant in the culture, methods other than straightforward pronouncements must be crafted in order to make sense to the culture. The message should not be compromised in content but rather contextualized in delivery. Propositional Biblical statements are important, but Musk (2005:82) suggests they must be secondary for most Muslims. "Sharing of the Gospel will best be packaged in emotive terms if it is to touch the heart of the Middle-Easterner in an effective way" (Musk 2004:188). Although propositional constructs should supplement other methods when communicating with folk Muslims, the truth embedded within cognitive arguments must be conveyed. The *Chicago statement on inerrancy* (in Hesselgrave 2005:268, bold mine) states, "We affirm that the Bible expresses God's truth in **propositional statements**, and we declare that Biblical truth is both objective and absolute."

The Apostle Paul speaks of salvation in Romans 2:14-16 from the guilt-innocence perspective.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Although various people groups possess many worldviews, according to this passage, everyone has an internal witness of a standard of guilt and innocence.<sup>7</sup> Such an

---

<sup>7</sup> Hodge (1864:54-55, bold mine) comments on this passage. "His object is to show that the heathen world have a duty written on their hearts; a fact which is not proved by some heathen obeying the law,

understanding may not be the dominant theme in a culture, but Scripture indicates all humankind comprehends some elements of this worldview. Paul continues in Romans 3:21-26 to describe humanity's guilt<sup>8</sup> and God's prescription for restoring righteousness through faith in Christ.

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He would be just<sup>9</sup> and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

Appealing to non-Christians through these arguments in the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans is known in evangelical circles as 'The Roman Road' witnessing

---

but which is proved by the moral conduct of all men. Men generally, not some men, **but all men, show by their acts that they have a knowledge of right and wrong.**"

<sup>8</sup> "All men are sinners and under the disapprobation of God. In this respect there is no difference between them; and therefore all need a righteousness not their own, in order to [receive] their justification before God" (Hodge 1864:91).

<sup>9</sup> Hodge (1864:98) writes, "Christ was set forth as a sacrifice for the manifestation of the righteousness or justice of God, that is, that he might be just, although the justifier of the ungodly. The word just expresses the idea of uprightness generally, of being or doing what the nature of the case demands...A judge is unjust when he allows a criminal to be pronounced righteous, and treated accordingly. On the other hand he acts justly when he pronounces the offender guilty, and secures the infliction of the penalty, which the law denounces. What the apostle means to say is, that there is no disregard to the claims of justice in the justification of the sinner who believes in Christ...It is thus that justice and mercy are harmoniously united in the sinner's justification."

<sup>10</sup> Hodge (1864:98-99) notes, "He whom God is just in justifying is the man who relies on Jesus as a propitiatory sacrifice. That justification is a forensic act is of necessity implied in this passage."

method.<sup>11</sup> Muller (2000:36-37, bold mine) comments about this technique.

**This plan of salvation [The Roman Road] is very legal.** It does not require much knowledge, other than accepting the fact that we are guilty and that God offers us pardon. This approach seems to work well in our western setting, because most people are aware of the concept of guilt. Because of our cultural conditioning, people often feel guilty about something already, and an explanation of how God can remove man's guilt appeals to a felt need in our society. **The limitations of this approach are that it requires the hearer to have an understanding of the concept of sin and guilt** and secondly, that it stops at the cross.

Inherent difficulties exist in trying to reach non-Westerners<sup>12</sup> through the guilt-innocence worldview axis. Despite the flaws within the Western linear propositional presentation,<sup>13</sup> I believe all ethnic groups need to understand a few of the basic Biblical guilt-innocence concepts as they come to Christ. Pikkert (2008:82) says about Zwemer and Gairdner; "When confronted with Islam both men insisted that one must believe that the

---

<sup>11</sup> Since *The Roman Road* is an extrapolation from a number of Scriptures in the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans, it is not normally copyrighted. Usually Romans 3:23, 6:23, 5:8, 10:9, 10, and 13 are the principal verses cited (*The Roman Road* 2006:1-4).

<sup>12</sup> Sometimes even Westerners have difficulty understanding propositional presentations relying on the guilt-innocence motif. When I was in secondary school, some evangelists approached me on the beach in Florida and shared the *Four spiritual laws* with me. I was not yet a believer and had no idea what they were talking about. At sixteen years of age (and an honor student) I could not conceptually understand a propositional Gospel presentation.

<sup>13</sup> While traveling off-road in the Sudanese desert between Tokar and Karora with Abraham, a *Dinka* (Southern Sudanese tribe) Christian, we encountered some *Rashaida* (a nomadic Arabian tribe living within the Beja homeland) tribesmen on camels. My colleague, trained in propositional witnessing by another Western agency, drew the *Bridge to life* presentation in the sand with a stick, showing the confused nomad in Arabic how he could cross the 'bridge' from his sin and guilt to forgiveness in Christ. The nomad's lack of understanding stemmed from the fact that there are no bridges in that part of Sudan and I doubt he had ever seen one.

incarnation and atonement were realities." I explore these concepts next.

#### 6.1.1.1 Guilt-innocence in Islam

High Islam partially comprehends the guilt-innocence perspective due to its prescriptive legalism. A Muslim friend in Sudan shared his faith with me in the following way: "Christianity is too hard. Islam is very easy- you just follow five commandments and straightaway, you are fine." Muslim websites feature propositional illustrations similar in structure to Western evangelical Gospel presentations.<sup>14</sup> Orthodox Islam places an undue emphasis on obeying rules (Ruthven 2006:121), stressing jurisprudence over doctrine (Zebiri 1997:8). Saal (1991:41) states; "Islam is law-oriented rather than theology-oriented." Although many Muslims lean more toward a shame-honor or fear-power worldview, the legalistic bent in Islam helps adherents understand guilt-innocence issues. The simplicity of Islam assists as well. Ahmed (1999:8, bold mine), a Muslim writer explains.

Islam is seen in the West as an evangelical religion, wishing to spread the message and encourage conversion. This is correct. Muslims are enthusiastic about *dawah*, the call to Islam...**Muslim conversion is a simple affair. It rests on the declaration of faith** - the *shahada* ['There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God'].

---

<sup>14</sup> *Evangelism Explosion* (Silva 2010:1) and *FAITH* (2006:4-5) feature Gospel presentations utilizing the human right hand. Scriptures or ideas signified by the five digits make propositional points. In the *FAITH* presentation, widely used by Southern Baptist churches in the USA, the first finger represents 'F' for 'Forgiveness' (Romans 3:23); the second digit signifies 'A' for 'Available' (John 3:16) referring to salvation; the third finger corresponds to 'I', symbolizing it is 'Impossible' (Ephesians 2:8-9) to get to heaven on your own; the fourth finger denotes 'T' for 'Turn', as in repentance from sin (Luke 13:3). The last finger signifies 'H' for 'Heaven' (John 14:6). Muslims have adopted a similar 'hand' illustration (*Secrets of the Hand* 2010:7). The five fingers represent the sign of 'Allahu' (his God). The *Sufi's* also state that in Arabic numerology the two hands together number the ninety-nine names of God.

Of course, Muslims do not accept the Christian doctrine of original sin nor do they believe Jesus paid a substitutionary death for humanity upon the cross (Greear 2010:62). Nevertheless, sufficient parallels exist between Christianity and Islam to the extent that many educated Muslims can be approached through arguments based upon a guilt-innocence religious worldview orientation. For folk Muslims and the less educated, however, concepts must be explained and illustrated according to their worldview.

The idea of sacrifice communicates to the ordinary Muslim. The ritual slaughtering of animals on the tenth day of *Dhu al-Hijjah* (twelfth lunar month) during the *hajj* (pilgrimage) mirrors the sacrificial system<sup>15</sup> in the Hebrew Old Testament.

*Id al-Adha* is the 'feast of the sacrifice' or 'the great feast'. It is obligatory upon all Muslims whether they are in Mecca on the pilgrimage or at home. It marks the end of the pilgrimage or *Hajj*. A sheep, cow, or camel is slaughtered, and the meat shared by family and friends. Sometimes the slaughter of the animals is held in a public place, and the meat distributed to the poor as well as to others gathered. It also commemorates the sacrificing of an animal in the place of Abraham's son, Ishmael (Braswell 1996:80).

The writer of Hebrews uses the Jewish sacrificial system to illustrate Christ's sacrifice upon the cross. This cultural point of contact assists Muslims in understanding the greater sacrifice Christ offered for sins once for all.

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:10-12).

---

<sup>15</sup> The first Muslim convert that I baptized, Muhammad, told me that a Muslim cannot understand the New Testament without the Old Testament.

Muslims object to both the historicity of the event and its theological implications (i.e. substitutionary atonement). However, they understand the sacrificial reference because many Muslim families<sup>16</sup> slaughter live animals during their religious feasts.

Using the customs within a host society to point out Scriptural truths represents a 'redemptive analogy' or cultural point of contact. Don Richardson (2009:430, *italic his, bold mine*) coined the term and describes it in the following manner.

When a missionary enters another culture, he or she is conspicuously foreign. This is to be expected, but often the gospel is labeled as foreign, too. How can it be explained so that it seems culturally right? The New Testament approach is to communicate by way of **redemptive analogy**. Consider these examples: The Jewish people practiced lamb sacrifice. John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as the perfect, personal fulfillment of that sacrifice by saying, "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" This is **redemptive analogy**.

Scriptural and cultural aspects within Muslim societies assist Christian workers in presenting Biblical truths. Even though Muslim culture is not generally oriented toward a guilt-innocence worldview, the sacrificial concept helps Muslims understand the Biblical principles of blood atonement and redemption.

---

<sup>16</sup> When I lived in Sudan we observed an interesting practice during the feast days. On many street corners in Khartoum, vendors kept goats and sheep for sale penned inside of enclosures. Families stopped to buy a live animal on the hoof to take home in obedience to this Islamic injunction. On the opposite street corners of the same intersections men with axes squatted waiting for customers to hire them to prepare the animals for consumption. These were the butchers. My children, ages four, nine and twelve at the time, received a lesson in how animals are slaughtered during Muslim holidays according to Islamic law.



### 6.1.1.2 Guilt-innocence among the folk Muslim Beja

Despite the Beja tribe's poor practice of Islam<sup>17</sup> (Ausenda 1987:22, Jacobsen 1998:21), their self-identification as Muslims and respect for piety offers Christians avenues for Gospel presentation through the guilt-innocence religious values motif. The current section explores this secondary worldview theme embedded within Beja culture.

As Muslims, the Beja understand blood sacrifices from the Islamic perspective. In addition, the Hillmen retain the practice through the ATR entrenched in their folk religion. For instance, when the *Hadendoa* Beja consecrate a new *Sufi sheikh*,<sup>18</sup> they slaughter a calf so blood spills on his feet (Ausenda 1987:455). They believe "by offering a *karama* [sacrifice to God] involving animal blood, or an apparent equivalent" drought and infertility can be alleviated (Jacobsen 1998:259).

Tribal customary law (*Salif*) trumps *Sharia*<sup>19</sup> and Sudanese statutes (Lewis 1962:37). Beja law centers upon the payment for various infractions.<sup>20</sup> Gamst (1984:135) describes the Beja legal system.

*Salif* emphasizes the mandate of hospitality and provides for rates and modes of compensation for all manner of physical injury, ranging from a blow through death at the hands of another.<sup>21</sup> Protracted

---

<sup>17</sup> Only ten percent of rural Beja pray before dawn (Ausenda 1987:331).

<sup>18</sup> Religious leader (see Section 3.4.3. in footnote 82 on page 104).

<sup>19</sup> Muslim Islamic law (see Section 3.1.2.1 and in footnote 16 on page 70).

<sup>20</sup> Lewis (1962:36) writes, "The Beja have a complicated scale of customary compensation for wounds ranging from 100 camels or 1,000 *rials* for a death payment, to 20 *piasters* for a day's incapacity resulting from a stick wound. For the loss of an eye, hand, or leg, half payment (£S.30) is paid, for a finger or toe, £S.5. Sword or knife wounds are compensated for a minimum of 50 *piasters*, and if the injury is serious it is assessed."

<sup>21</sup> The *Hadendoa* Beja are "reluctant to apply the harsh punishments for theft envisioned by the *Sharia*, because of their fear of starting a feud" (Ausenda 1987:287).

*salif* proceedings by elders invariably maintain peace between individuals.

Therefore, the Beja understand analogies involving payment for legal and moral infractions mentioned in the Scriptures earlier in this chapter. Nonetheless, such analogies should be used judiciously because the Beja concept of guilt-innocence differs from the Biblical idea. Just as the *Sawi* people of Irian Jaya described in the *Peace Child* (Richardson 2005b:9) consider treachery a virtue, so the Beja view of deceit diverges from the Western concept.

Treachery is not considered here as criminal or disgraceful, and the *Hadendoa* is not ashamed to boast of his bad faith, whenever it has led to the attainment of his object (Cumming 1937:4).

No doubt, tribes with unusual (to the Christian worker) value systems should be taught Biblical ideals. The communication of these, however, should be through alternative communication mechanisms such as 'storying'.<sup>22</sup>

The ancient Beja practice of sacrificing a sheep, bull or camel to insure fertility of the land continues in eastern Sudan (Ornas & Dahl 1991:119). The transfer of livestock constitutes the most common form of payment for both offenses and marriages (Ausenda 1987:57). Beja *fugara*<sup>23</sup> (singular *fagir*) continue to prescribe the slaughtering of animals for offerings designed to satisfy the spirits. A Beja woman reports her experience.

...when I went to Saleh [the *fagir*], he said to me that "the treatment of your son requires a big party

---

<sup>22</sup> Steffen (2009:440) says "stories from the Old Testament [help] to illustrate the abstract (theoretical) concepts in the lessons through pictorial (concrete) characters and objects." For additional communication devices see the block quotation at the bottom of page 213.

<sup>23</sup> Traditional healers, plural of *fagir* (see Section 3.4.3 pages 104-106).

[for the *zar*<sup>24</sup> spirit], which needs seven sheep for slaughtering" (in Jacobsen 1998:211).

Another Beja woman [Halima Umar] describes her treatment for possession by a *zar* spirit.

And then one *fagir* from *Ashraf*<sup>25</sup> who is living in Agwamt came, passing by Hilayet. Then I went to this *fagir*, and he said to me: "bring a white goat. Before slaughtering it, you must move around this goat seven times'. Then he slaughtered it near my feet, then when this blood came on my feet, I put some of this blood on my mouth" (Jacobsen 1998:219).

Biblical guilt-innocence concepts may be illustrated for the Beja in two ways. First, the sacrificial offerings of the Beja graphically depict the crucifixion event. Second, a belief in causality within Beja folk Islam translates into an understanding of mankind's guilt before God. Ornas and Dahl (1991:173) comment about the Beja view of causality.

Islam, as taught in Sudan, associates disasters such as droughts, floods, epidemics, etc. with questions of the moral behavior of humans. The traditions are not altogether coherent, for on the one hand the Prophet is recorded as having said, "When God favors some people, he tests them with hardships" and on the other "God has never afflicted a people with drought except for disobeying him." The second interpretation, however, appears to be the dominant one, and God's wrath a recurrent theme in our interviews with the Beja. A good Muslim would of course not question God's goodness, so the moral blame is always with humanity. Who is regarded as the scape-goat varies, but the Beja are prone to associate moral decay closely with urbanism, and the Koran also says, "Had the people of the cities believed and feared God, we would have unleashed upon them the benefits of Heaven and Earth" (7:96). An old trader in Port Sudan complained: "The lack of rain is

---

<sup>24</sup> A non-Muslim spirit that possesses individuals (see section 4.3.2.2 pages 150-151).

<sup>25</sup> The *Ashraf* are a subgroup of the Beja who claim to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad. This association makes healers and holy men from this sub-tribe more powerful in the eyes of patients and supplicants (Jacobsen 1998:223).

ordered by God. God's anger has been aroused when rich men do not help the poor."

Beja folk religion acknowledges -but does not readily accept- the claim that Christ's death satisfies God's wrath against mankind's sin. Romans 5:8-9 presents the concept.

But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

The Beja also understand the notion of reconciliation because of their own cultural mediation practices. The Hillmen prefer arbitration to fighting (Ornas & Dahl 1991:82); possess a general willingness to compromise (Sandars 1935:213); and enjoy councils and lengthy negotiations (Ausenda 1987:289). Paul (1954:4) writes, "This gift for compromise I believe to be one of the most deep-seated of all Beja characteristics." Ornas and Dahl (1991:84) state, "one of the most important qualities in a Beja leader is to be a good mediator in the sense of a negotiator and peacemaker." Sandars (1933:147) notices that the Beja refer particularly difficult quarrels to any person of high character inside or outside the tribe (even foreigners). Ornas and Dahl (1991:85) confirm that this practice continues today. "A niche for another kind of mediator has existed for centuries. That is the mediator who goes outside the internal Beja system..." These writers (:44) call the development of mediatorial roles a "striking cultural trait" among the Beja. Parshall (2006:121) claims the mediatorial role of Jesus<sup>26</sup> represents the most important bridge with folk Muslims like

---

<sup>26</sup> Muller (2000:63) also sees the mediator concept important in witnessing to Muslims but places the idea under the category of shame-honor.

*Sufis*. The Scriptural concept of mediator constitutes a powerful cultural illustration for Muslims and should be exploited with them.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to **Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood**, which speaks better than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24, bold mine).

Although the Beja need to understand the Gospel in terms of some of the concepts of the guilt-innocence worldview axis, I do not believe this should be the primary approach with them. Jacobsen (1998:263-264, 267, 309) says an unwillingness to state matters absolutely represents a central cultural trait among the Beja, which is evidenced by their subjunctive answers to many questions.<sup>27</sup> The Beja exhibit a flexible pragmatism that tolerates deviations from the stated norms (Ornas & Dahl 1991:76) which possibly explains their lenient form of folk Islam but also bodes poorly for approaches based upon cognitive propositional logic. The general Beja cultural climate flies in the face of 'rules keeping,' concrete thinking, and absolutism (e.g. answers in the form of 'yes' or 'no') inherent in the Western worldview. As Greear (2010:89) notes, "syllogisms (deductive reasoning) and God just do not mesh well in the Muslim mind." Hesselgrave and Rommen (2000:205-206) describe the contextualization avenues with the most chance of success with folk religionists.

Armed with an understanding of the penchant for concrete relational thinking among Africans, Chinese, and various tribal peoples, the contextualizer

---

<sup>27</sup> 'Maybe' (*yumkin*), 'possibly' (*mumkin*), 'if God wills' ('*in sha'allah*) (Jacobsen 1998:263).

will give more attention to the importance of history, myths, stories, parables, analogies, aphorisms, pictures, and symbols in communicating within these contexts.

This approach is important in the selection of Scriptural passages and stories for use with folk Muslims. These tactics are explored more fully in the following world-view paradigms.

### 6.1.2 Shame-honor worldview axis

Much has been written concerning this world-view axis. Patai (2002:113, bold mine) differentiates between the concepts of shame and guilt.

Shame must, of course, be carefully distinguished from guilt. "Shame" has been defined as a matter between a person and his society, while "guilt" is primarily a matter between a person and his conscience. A hermit in the desert can feel guilt; he cannot feel shame. One of the importance differences between the Arab and the Western personality is that **in Arab culture, shame is more pronounced than guilt.**

In their section concerning salvation and shame, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou (1999:226, bold & italic mine) write,

In strong group-oriented societies, such as Japan and China, people find their identity in belonging to a group. For them, **sin is the breaking of relationships and offending community, and leads to feelings of shame, embarrassment, unworthiness, and remorse.** These feelings are often associated with concepts of sin as defilement or uncleanness. Salvation is seen as reconciliation and restoration of good relationships and cleansing portrayed as washing with water or purging by blood.

Missiologists such as Musk and Muller (in Pikkert 2008:177-178) believe the gospel should be contextualized in the Middle East to meet the "culture-driven needs by focusing on Christianity's answer to issues of honor and shame."

The Bible repeatedly presents teachings, stories, and illustrations that draw upon the shame-honor theme.

Jesus' parable about the banquet guests in Luke 14:7-11 (bold mine) centers on this idea.

And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of **honor** at the table, saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of **honor**, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in **disgrace [shame]** you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have **honor** in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled [**shamed**], and he who humbles himself shall be exalted [**honored**]."

Another Biblical example of the shame-honor theme occurs in First Corinthians 1:27 (bold mine): "but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to **shame** the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to **shame** the things which are strong." Another instance surfaces in Luke 9:26 (bold mine) when Jesus says, "For whoever is **ashamed** of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be **ashamed** of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

The book of Hebrews contains much shame and honor imagery as well. Hebrews 12:2 (bold mine) describes Jesus as "the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the **shame**, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." In the paradoxical phrasing Arabs enjoy, the shame of the cross bestows honor upon the sufferer. Hebrews 2:9 (bold mine) announces the following about Jesus.

But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and **honor**, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Although Muslims reject the historicity of the crucifixion (Braswell 1996:50) and the possibility of the prophet Jesus dying (Greear 2010:116), they understand the concepts of shame and honor implicit in these Biblical passages. Evangelists can use these Scriptures to communicate Christian truths to Muslims.

#### **6.1.2.1 Shame-honor in Muslim societies**

Hamady (in Muller 2000:79) states, "Arab society is a shame-based society...There are three fundamentals of Arab society; shame, honor and revenge." Of course, all Muslims are not Arabs. Nevertheless, Patai (2002:15) says "Despite the historical difference between the Arab world and the Muslim world, Arabs often tend to identify Arabism with Islam and Islam with Arabism." Even though the majority of Muslims lack an Arab pedigree, they hold basically to the Arab worldview.<sup>28</sup> Patai (2002:13) writes, "[the term Arab] came to denote all peoples who, after having been converted to Islam, gave up their ancestral languages and adopted Arabic<sup>29</sup> instead."

Muller 2000:98 observes, "Honor in an Arab society is understood in a complex way, as the absence of shame. Honor and shame are diametrically opposed factors, and the fundamental issue that defines society." Patai (2002:103, bold mine) explains the concept in this way.

---

<sup>28</sup> Patai (2002:19, bold mine), writing about this phenomenon explains, "To take an example from the peripheries of the Arab world, one will undoubtedly find two rather different modal personalities in the Arab north and the Negro south of the **Republic of Sudan**. In fact, the difference between the two modal personalities will be so pronounced that the researcher would be hard put if he were to try to subsume the two under a general heading of the Sudanese national character." Although most northern Muslim Sudanese call themselves 'Arab,' their features belie the claim.

<sup>29</sup> The Beja fall into the middle range on this as befitting their residence along the 'fault-line' of Islam. About forty percent are bilingual in Arabic and Beja, while sixty percent speak only *To-Bedawie* (Beja) or only *Tigre*, the language of the *Beni-Amer* Beja division.



The **major features that predominate in the Arab ethics** of virtue can be summarized by three syndromes, which are themselves related: (1) the **courage-bravery syndrome**; (2) the **hospitality-generosity syndrome**; and (3) the **honor-dignity syndrome**. These syndromes are found everywhere in the Arab world, and everywhere they constitute the bulk and body of Arab ethics.

Muller (2000:47) notes, "The cultures of the Middle East are filled with thousand of tiny nuances that communicate either shame or honor." In the Arab world this includes a multitude of different kinds of honor. Hospitality, generosity, courage and bravery are all important concepts to the Arab (Patai 2002:96) and by extension to the Muslim world.

Shame and honor values are significant to Muslim societies in regard to ethics, especially with respect to the family. A person's relatives either honor or shame them (Muller 2000:91). Sexual misdeeds can be punished by death for bringing dishonor upon the extended family<sup>30</sup> (Patai 2002:128). It is important in Muslim societies for families to extend gracious hospitality to all (Ruthven 2006:430). Patai (2002:96) claims, "Hospitality and generosity are matters of honor." On the other hand, retaliation and revenge represent the polar opposite of the hospitality ideal. According to Muller (2000:87, italics his) "Shame can be eliminated by revenge. This is sanctioned by the Qur'an (*sura XI, 173*) '*Believers, retaliation is decreed for you in bloodshed*'." In fact, one forfeits honor by not taking revenge for an injury suffered (Patai 2002:221).

---

<sup>30</sup> Honor-killings by enraged kinsmen for the sexual misdeeds (both proven and unproven) of women (Muller 2000:54,86) represent the darkest and most publicized portion of this concept. Nonetheless, in one instance the female's rights trump those of the male. Patai (2002:97) writes, "Impotence in a husband is one of the few causes for divorce which can be claimed by a wife."

Since the Bible addresses the shame-honor worldview inherent in the Muslim perspective, it is incumbent upon the Christian to discover the parallels and draw them out. Pikkert (2008:203, bold mine) speaks to the issue.

The Western, logical presentation of the Gospel focuses on salvation from the **guilt** and penalty of sin. A more culturally appropriate focus in the Near East is **shame and honor**, and holds that missionaries must address the Christian implications of these when seeking to present the Gospel: "A Christology relevant to the region will present Jesus as the one who restores our **honor** with God" (Meral 2005:213). Repentance, for instance, includes turning from pride (pursuing one's own **honor**) and accepting what God has done for us. The implications of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for human **shame** and **fear** would be communicated.

The previous section identified some of the Biblical approaches directed toward the shame-honor worldview outlined in the books of Hebrews, First Corinthians, and the Gospel of Luke. Within these Biblical texts, certain sections communicate positive truths from a shame-honor perspective in a straightforward manner. Other Biblical passages challenge traditional shame-honor concepts present in the Muslim worldview. In the following verses Jesus' teaching confronts some of the presuppositions of the Arab world.

For instance, in John 8:3-11 a woman caught in adultery receives forgiveness from Jesus rather than the stoning required by Jewish and Islamic law. In another section, Jesus said, "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also"<sup>31</sup> (Luke 6:27b-29a). In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus portrays the

---

<sup>31</sup> The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:19, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

father as pardoning the son who has shamed his family (Musk 2004:105-106). In another parable Jesus appeals to the honor concept implicit in Arab hospitality (Luke 11:5-9).

And He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight, and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. And I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

These parables resonate in a shame-honor culture, while simultaneously confronting their core presuppositions. The stories may not appear evangelistic, but the ethical contrast between Jesus and Islam is so striking that a number of Muslims come to Christ this way. Pikkert (2008:192) says, "The most common reason why Muslims become Christians is the person of Jesus Christ, sometimes through fascination by the Qur'an's testimony about Him." One of the national leaders in Sudan (Jonadab 2006) told me that he came to faith because Jesus taught forgiveness instead of taking revenge.

#### **6.1.2.2 Shame-honor among the folk Muslim Beja tribe**

In reflecting on the three dominant worldviews, Muller (2000:69) writes, "It is possible to find all three dynamics in most cultures, but usually one or two are more dominant." Since the Beja claim Islam as their religion, the shame-honor religious motif certainly exists among them. Moreover, Ornas and Dahl (1991:5, bold mine) even call the shame-honor model the predominant Beja worldview

paradigm. "When we met it, this culture appeared<sup>32</sup> to us to have more in common with Mediterranean **honor and shame** based cultures than with the Cushitic cultures we knew about."

On the other hand, two other secular researchers<sup>33</sup> who spent considerable periods in the field view Beja culture as leaning more towards an ATR emphasis on fear and power. As previously noted, Ausenda (1987:423-424) says health concerns preoccupy the Beja mind. According to his research, strategies for solving these health issues mainly come through magical practices. Similarly, another author sees the Beja belief in the supernatural causation of sickness and misfortune as the key to understanding the worldview of the Hillmen. Writing about his methodology, Jacobsen (1998:3, bold mine) states the purpose of his study.

I would like to point to **some ways in which Beja make order in their life world and how they go about problematizing uncanny and troubling experiences**. I would like to go about this by looking at stories they tell about **healers and sickness**, both through histories 'from former times' and narratives of personal experiences...Since so much knowledge concerning health matters implicitly employed by the Beja when they tell stories or when they chose among treatment options, looking at those activities seemed to me to be a more tangible **point of entrance**

---

<sup>32</sup> Ornas and Dahl, the authors of *Responsible man: the Atmaan Beja of northeastern Sudan*, lived for five months each in the Red Sea Province in 1980. Each secular researcher spent another two months in the Beja area on other occasions. As a result of this, in the preface to their book they issue the following disclaimer about their limited research time. "As a consequence, the present volume is as much built on reviewing the available written sources on the Beja as on field data, and it is more exploratory in nature than conclusive" (Ornas & Dahl 1991:viii).

<sup>33</sup> Georgio Ausenda, author of *Leisurely nomads: the Hadendowa (Beja) of the Gash delta and their transition to their transition to sedentary life*, spent ten months in the field (Ausenda 1987:iv). The author of *Theories of sickness and misfortune among the Hadendowa Beja of the Sudan*, Frode F. Jacobsen, lived in the field for twelve months (Jacobsen 1998:4).

**into Beja reasoning** than for example looking at religious beliefs *per se* or 'culture' at large.

In addition to the evidence presented by Ausenda and Jacobsen in their recent books, the vast literature about the Beja in *Sudan Notes and Records*<sup>34</sup> and my extensive field interaction with this ethnic group leads me to conclude that the worldview of the Hillmen primarily reflects an ATR orientation. Since the Beja identify themselves as Muslims, they exhibit many shame-honor characteristics, but as a secondary paradigm. Ornas and Dahl (1991:9, bold mine) observe this Beja cultural value.

The strong emphasis the Beja place on **honor** is a key element for understanding not only the Beja historical perspective, but also the current situation...To comply with social norms, the individual Beja man is expected to be "a Responsible Man." By achieving this goal he becomes an **honorable** person.

Numerous examples abound illustrating the Beja cultural aspect of honor. The blood feuds of the *Beni-Amer* Beja are quite ferocious and persistent (Nadel 1945:68). Lewis (1962:35) calls these blood feuds<sup>35</sup> "a common and accepted custom, and tribal warfare almost a pastime." The Christian worker can easily draw the Biblical analogy, because Beja customary law (*salif*) allows for "the automatic right to pardon" the offender with an exchange

---

<sup>34</sup> *Sudan Notes and Records* is a scholarly journal with ethnographic and geographic articles about the Sudan. Founded in 1918, *Sudan Notes and Records* was continuously published until 1944. Scattered issues appeared between 1956 and 1981. The journal began publication again in 2004. Numerous articles about the Beja are referenced in this doctoral thesis.

<sup>35</sup> Cooper (1929:486, bold mine) writes, "If anyone is killed in such fights as these, a **blood feud** starts which is difficult to stop. Sometimes it can be arranged by the **payment of blood money**, but frequently relatives of the dead man will hunt down any member of the killer's family and cut him to pieces."

of money or livestock even in the case of a death (Ausenda 1987:282-283).<sup>36</sup>

Ancient Israel's King David<sup>37</sup> writes in Psalms 103:2-3, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities; Who heals all your diseases." As has already been mentioned, the basis of forgiveness of sins in Christianity consists of the blood payment of Jesus' death upon the cross. No clearer symbol for this exists for shame-honor societies than Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper based upon the Jewish Passover meal. As the death angel (Exodus 12:23) 'passed over' those who had placed the blood of a sacrificial lamb on their doorposts, so Jesus said in Luke 22:20, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." John the Baptist<sup>38</sup> cried out, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). These images are striking in a shame-honor Muslim setting.

Another sub-theme typical in shame and honor societies are the related ideas of hospitality and sanctuary. In this regard there exists some cultural dissonance among the Beja. The Hillmen are 'standoffish,' reserved

---

<sup>36</sup> Both the pardon and the compensation represent a face-saving device (Ausenda 1987:283) in the shame-honor tradition.

<sup>37</sup> Muslims revere four sacred books as holy: the Torah (revealed to Moses), Psalms (*Zabur*, given to David), the Gospel (*Injil*, revealed to Jesus), and the Qur'an (sent down to Muhammad). Muslims believe the Qur'an is the most sacred (Braswell 1996:50). Even though David was a Jewish king, some Muslims go by the Arabic name for David, *Daud*. Even more Muslims are named for David's son Solomon (Arabic, *Suleiman*).

<sup>38</sup> The Qur'an recognizes John the Baptist (*Yahya*) as one of the twenty-eight authentic prophets of Islam (Braswell 1996:284). I have viewed the relic of the right arm of John the Baptist in the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, Turkey. The right index finger is inscribed with the words, 'Behold the lamb of God' (Relic 2008:4).

and suspicious of strangers,<sup>39</sup> but they are also extremely hospitable (Ornas & Dahl 1991:44). One Beja said "As a guest you are allowed to be a king for three days" (Jacobsen 1998:25). As has been stated previously, "hospitality is part of their [Beja] ethnic distinction" (Ornas & Dahl 1991:44). I believe the following common Beja story could serve as a redemptive analogy from the shame-honor perspective.

A man fleeing from a murder he had committed took refuge in the house of Gwilai'or (a famous *Amarar* Beja *Sheikh*). The relatives of the dead man intent on their revenge followed the killer to his sanctuary and demanded that he be surrendered. Gwilai'or tried every means to save the refugee but the avengers were unmoved and insisted that unless their quarry was produced they would drag him by force. At this the Sheik consented to parley with them. He said, 'what you propose to do would forever disgrace me and pollute my house, but since you insist on this man's blood, I will show you the tree under which he spends the night and thus you can come on him unawares as he sleeps and dispatch him.' The pursuers somewhat reluctantly agreed to this plan and having made sure of the exact spot they departed...All that day Gwilai'or spent dividing up his wealth in money and animals. For he had decided to lay himself down beneath the fatal tree and so expiate the crime of the man who had taken sanctuary in his house...But his son, discovering his purpose refused to allow his father to carry it out insisting that he would take his father's place beneath the tree and so uphold the family honor. That night one of their number was visited by doubts that Gwilai'or would so sacrifice anyone who had taken refuge in his house. He told his companions to make sure that whoever they found under tree was the man they sought. And so the son of Gwilai'or was

---

<sup>39</sup> A. Paul (1982:55) writes about the legendary Beja reserve; "The stranger in their midst meets with an aloofness amounting to hostility, and the same is true of new ideas and foreign influences. 'They speak to no strangers: they are interested in nothing.' So wrote Diodorus Siculus in the first century B.C. in words which echo in no way strangely on modern ears." Cooper (1929:480) takes the opposing view and found the Beja a basically friendly and happy people.

discovered and the murdered man's folk were so impressed with the magnanimity of Gwilai'or that they gave up their plans of vengeance and spared the life of the refugee (Clark 1938:26-27).

In this story the beloved son volunteers to represent his father and lay down his life as the blood payment for a condemned stranger. Writing about such analogies, Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:223) contend, "Local beliefs associated with sacrifice can be used as redemptive analogies to help people understand Christ's death for all sinners." A Scriptural parallel to this also exists in Romans 5:6-10.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Although the Beja possess significant shame-honor themes and values, their society lacks some of the more important and dominant Arab worldview concepts. They, for example, merely levy fines<sup>40</sup> for adultery, and the offending parties are rarely divorced or punished in any way. Children born out of wedlock receive no social stigma (Clark 1938:5-6, 12). Historically the Beja consider adultery a minor matter. Paul (1954:79) also writes of these contrasting peculiarities.

...even among the stricter tribes complete license is allowed during festivals and celebrations such as weddings and circumcision, and a woman<sup>41</sup> is still

---

<sup>40</sup> Unusual in the Muslim world, a Beja woman has the right to claim compensation in gold or money from an unfaithful husband. When a man finds his wife unfaithful, compensation in camels is required in equal parts from both the male and female adulterers (Ornas & Dahl 1991:103).

<sup>41</sup> Burckhardt (in Sandars 1933:133) says the Beja women have none of the customary Arab modesty. Sandars (1933:138) noted that the Beja



'more valued by his husband if she gives proof of her attractiveness to other men, even by adultery.'

Family life among the Beja differs significantly from the domestic situation usually found among Arabs and in the larger Muslim world.<sup>42</sup> For instance, Beja men never beat their wives (Ornas & Dahl 1991:102). In fact, custom constrains the Hillmen to treat their wives with kindness, never behaving harshly with them (Ausenda 1987:226). In addition, Beja men do not want their women to work. Unlike many ethnic groups in the ATR world,<sup>43</sup> women do not cultivate land nor keep livestock, but only tend the camp and cook meals (Ornas & Dahl 1991:99-100). Beja women are quite autonomous from their husbands, who seek their opinion on a number of important issues such as where to live, when to move, and to whom their children should marry (Ausenda 1987:227).

According to Patai (2002:36) Arab men raise their sons in a harsh manner. On the other hand, Beja men treat their children with kindness. In fact, a father never disinherits his son (Ausenda 1987:278). I believe the previously mentioned Parable of the Prodigal Son would resonate with the forgiving Beja heart and could serve as a redemptive analogy to reach them.

### **6.1.3 Fear-power worldview axis**

Hesselgrave (2005:91, italics his) aptly notes, "Primal religionists are 'easily reached' but 'hard to win.' They lack or automatically misconstrue the categories we use - *Creator God, Redeemer, Savior, sin, salvation,* [and]

---

women had not been introduced to the veil. I have never seen a Beja woman wear a veil in my years of living and traveling in Sudan.

<sup>42</sup> This is in contrast to what Patai (2002:34) describes as "the characteristic Arab male attitude to women: that the destiny of women in general, and in particular of those within the family circle, is to serve men and obey them."

<sup>43</sup> However, as with most ATR societies, Beja men pay bridewealth when they marry, usually with two cows or camels (Ausenda 1987:217-218).

*faith.*" The fear-power concept represents the third worldview religious value paradigm in this study. Concerning cultures that see the world as a battle between supernatural forces, Muller (2000:42) observes, "The paradigm that these people live in is one of fear versus power." Van Rheenen (1991:21) states that the traditional religionist's "relationship with spiritual beings is conceived in terms of power. Spiritual beings are propitiated, coerced, and placated because they have power." In this worldview a close relationship exists between both 'power over' and 'fear of' the supernatural. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:224-225, bold & italics mine) summarize the spiritual foundation of such cultures.

**In many traditional societies, the dominant emotion is fear:** fear of ancestors, arbitrary spirits, hostile enemies, witchcraft, magic, and invisible forces that plague everyday life. Evil is manifest in demonic oppression and witchcraft, leading to withdrawal, fear of life, self-hatred, and suicidal tendencies (Mark 1:23-26; 5:2-9). **Salvation in these societies consists primarily of being saved from the powers of evil** and the problems, hardships, misfortunes, injustices, sicknesses, and death people experience in this world.

Westerners tend not to take this worldview seriously and some of them disdain it completely (Van Pelt 1984:25, Hiebert 2005:153). Despite this disregard, such practices flourish even in Western countries. Explaining why so many modern American youth embrace occult practices, Margaret Mead (1985:379) says the attraction for them represents the lure of "something secret and wonderful, something that puts them in touch with the deep wisdom of the ancients, something that can give them power too" (:381). Cautioning against classifying ATR only in terms of superstition, spirits and magic, Mbiti (1991:18-19, bold mine) writes about the essence of ATR.

Outsiders have mistakenly regarded Africans as simply believers in magic. It is true that magic,

witchcraft and sorcery feature much in the traditional life of African people. But their religion is not constructed around magic. It is much more than that. **Africans believe that there is a force or power or energy in the universe which can be tapped by those who know how to do so,** and then used for good or evil towards other people. But this is only part of their belief. It is wrong therefore to equate African Religion with magic.

According to C.S. Lewis (in Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:277) there are two dangers in approaching the supernatural. One consists of denying its existence while the other is an excessive preoccupation with the demonic.

#### **6.1.3.1 First danger: denying the supernatural in ATR**

Writing about the supernatural power within ATR, Mbiti (1989:193, bold mine) confirms the reality of it.

**This mystical power is not fiction: whatever it is, it is a reality,** and one with which African peoples have to reckon. Everyone is directly or indirectly affected, for better or for worse, by beliefs and activities connected with this **power**, particularly in its manifestation as magic, sorcery and witchcraft.

I agree with Mbiti's declaration. Real power exists within ATR, and people fear it with just cause. Musk (2004:240) asserts, "Magic, sorcery and occult practices are demonstrably real, according to the Bible. The devil is conceived of as a personal being heading a hierarchy of evil spirits." Jesus Christ (in Luke 12:4-5) recognized the reality and power of the devil.

I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell: yes, I tell you, fear Him!

The Bible teaches the presence of both good and evil spirits dwelling above humans, but inferior to the Lord (Olowola 1993:31). The 'ministering spirits' referenced

in Hebrews 1:14<sup>44</sup> represent God's angels who assist the Almighty. These beings should not receive worship or sacrifice (:31). Conversely, the Scriptures identify the evil spirits as demons. Jesus confirms their reality in Luke 13:32 saying, "Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach my goal." Olowola (:39) recognizes "Sacrifice to the spirits is indeed the centre of much African traditional worship." These sacrifices are thought to appease the spirits and ward off misfortune in ATR (Oladimeji 1980:44).

According to ATR theory, specialists tap the supernatural power from the unseen realm through magic. Medicine men (and women), diviners and rainmakers dispense 'good magic,' while sorcerers, witches, and malevolent magicians practice evil enchantment<sup>45</sup> (Mbiti 1989:193). Obviously, counterfeit conjuring infiltrates ATR. Mbiti (1989:194-195, bold mine) explains this phenomenon by positing two additional categories of mystical power:

We must point out though a great deal of belief here is based on, or derives from, fear, suspicion, jealousies, ignorance or false accusations, which go on in African villages...This is what James Frazer

---

<sup>44</sup> "Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?"

<sup>45</sup> Mbiti (1989:196-7) states that anthropologists and sociologists employ the term 'witchcraft' narrowly to refer only to women who leave their bodies at night to meet with other witches and "'eat away' the life of their victims." He prefers, in keeping with the practice of the theologian, to define the term more generally, writing, "Witchcraft is a term used more popularly and broadly, to describe all sorts of evil employment of mystical power, generally in a secret fashion. African societies do not often draw the rather academic distinction between witchcraft, sorcery, evil eye, and other ways of employing mystical power to do harm to someone or his belongings. Generally the same word is used for all three English terms; and the same person is accused or suspected of employing one or more of these ways of hurting members of his community" (:197).

distinguishes as '**contagious magic**'.<sup>46</sup> His other useful category is '**homeopathic magic**',<sup>47</sup> which in African societies could be illustrated with endless examples ...**These two categories** of magical beliefs and practices function, however, in both good and evil ways. It is when used maliciously that this mystical power is condemned as 'black magic', 'evil magic', or 'sorcery'.

Nonetheless, all magic strikes terror in the heart of the traditional religionist. For those within the culture, the real power of darkness and the imagined influence of sympathetic<sup>48</sup> and homeopathic magic frighten with equal force. The question arises, how does the Christian worker approach those within a fear-power worldview? Does one replicate the power of ATR with an equally significant manifestation of Christian power? Moreau (2006:57) deftly frames the issue.

How are we to evaluate phenomena such as words of wisdom, dreams, visions, revelations and so on? For many who grew up in more 'secularized' cultures, such phenomena are more likely to be attributed to psychological or physiological health...For people in the majority of world cultures, however, attributing dreams to purely secular sources is to miss their point entirely. For them it is during dream-time that the wall between the visible and the invisible is penetrable...Should we seek such experiences? One side attributes too much to dreams;

---

<sup>46</sup> "Materials or substance once in contact with the intended victim are used in the magical attack" (Lehmann & Myers 1989:256-257).

<sup>47</sup> Hand (1989:193, bold mine) writes, "**Homeopathic** principles of **medicine** are well-known, and are based on **analogic magic** [also known as **imitative magic**], wherein it is assumed that the external similarity rests on what would seem to be an apparent internal connection and a basic inner unity and dependence... Similarity of shape is seen in a Utah belief...that walnuts are good for diseases of the brain...'for the meat of the nut looks like the brain, and the shell resembles the skull.' In Los Angeles...it is recommended that one swim in the [cold] ocean to combat a cold."

<sup>48</sup> "Items associated with or symbolic of the intended victim are used to identify and carry and identify the spell. Obviously, **sympathetic magic** contains elements of both **imitative** and **contagious magic**" (Lehmann and Myers 1989:257, bold mine).

the other too little. Both are reading the dream from their cultural perspective. In that sense both may be syncretistic.

Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:225, 373) describe a 'split level' Christianity<sup>49</sup> whereby ethnic groups who come to Christ for eternal salvation retain their traditional religions to solve daily difficulties.<sup>50</sup> Split-level theology persists in Western Christianity (Hiebert 2008:154). Westerners tend to think dualistically, using empirical logic to analyze phenomena in the natural world (Hesselgrave 2005:194). This designation consigns the supernatural aspect of ATR to the realm of folklore.

Western theologians generally push ultimate questions toward a loosely defined afterlife. According to Hiebert (2009:411) modern Christianity often denies (i.e. excludes) the 'middle level'<sup>51</sup> between religion (e.g. faith, miracles, and other-worldly problems) and science (e.g. sight, natural causation, and this-world problems). Hiebert (:411-412) contends "When tribal people spoke of fear of evil spirits, they [the Christian worker] denied the existence of the spirits rather than claim the power

---

<sup>49</sup> In reality folk Muslims practice 'split level' Islam. They follow the teachings of the Qur'an for eternal destiny questions, while seeking answers to everyday life through their time-honored rituals.

<sup>50</sup> Writing about the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania, Van Pelt (1984:75) identifies the crux of the matter; "Until Christians can bring to their own ministers their sicknesses and their feuds, the sterility of their wives and the rebellions of their sons, with a sure expectation of enlightenment and healing, they will continue to look elsewhere for help."

<sup>51</sup> Hesselgrave calls Paul Hiebert's 'excluded middle' thesis tremendously significant and acclaimed. In this view, "Questions having to do with the everyday world of sensory experience have been relegated to science and natural laws. Those having to do with such other-worldly matters such as God, miracles, visions, and inner feelings have been relegated to religion" (2005:194-195). The 'flaw of the excluded middle' unnaturally separates the supernatural from the world of sensory perception.

of Christ over them." Adherents to a fear-power worldview reside in this middle level between the transcendent and immanent.

The Christian worker must enter the worldview of the host culture (Lingenfelter & Mayers 2003:117-118) in order to communicate the Gospel. Sometimes workers rush the cultural acquisition process in their haste to obtain results. If the evangelist hurries or omits this cultural integration process, Van Pelt (1984:14, bold mine) says,

**He will then necessarily work starting from his own premises and not even realize where the real needs are.** To mention a few things, one should know something about mythopoeia<sup>52</sup> mentality and about education; about family relations, structures and obligations; about the concept of hierarchy and authority. ...One has to take into account distrust and **fear of sorcery and spirits on the one hand and the recourse to witchdoctors and spirits** on the other hand; further also the **great confidence in medicine-men** and their practices.

This assertion is especially true when ministering with ATR and the fear-power presuppositions embedded within.

#### **6.1.3.2 Second danger: over-emphasis on the demonic**

Hiebert (2009:413) says, "The second danger is a return to a Christianized form of animism in which spirits and magic are used to explain everything." More recently this second-mentioned danger (i.e. an overemphasis on the demonic) has taken center stage in missions circles: for some Christians have developed an "undue fascination with and fear of Satan and his hosts" (Hiebert 1994:214).

In response to the resurgence of traditional religions some missiologists advocate staging 'power encounters' in order to engage in 'spiritual warfare' with the forces of darkness. As Hesselgrave (2005:180) states, "Numerous disagreements on spiritual warfare and

---

<sup>52</sup> "The making of myths" (Guralnik 1970:942).

power encounters have emerged in discussion on missions and ministry practice in recent years." Alan Tippett introduced the term 'power encounter' as a result of his ministry in Polynesia working with tribal people. Charles Kraft (2009:446, bold mine), a proponent of power encounters, describes the rationale for this method.

Tippett observed that **most of the world's peoples are power-oriented and respond** to Christ most readily **through power demonstrations**. Gospel messages about faith, love, forgiveness and the other facts of Christianity are not likely to have nearly the impact on such people as the **demonstrations of spiritual power**. My own experience confirms Tippett's thesis. Therefore, cross-cultural workers ought to learn as much as possible about the place of **power encounter** in Jesus' ministry and ours.

Although Tippett developed the concept,<sup>53</sup> Kraft, Peter Wagner and John Wimber developed the idea into a movement known as 'third wave Pentecostalism.'<sup>54</sup> Hesselgrave (2005:177, bold mine) explains how far the original concept has been expanded.

**Third wave-type power encounter** usually goes beyond demonstrating the power of the true God in the context of false gods. To engage in Christian ministry itself is to engage in **spiritual warfare, and power encounter** is an inherent part of it. Included are such supernatural phenomenon as healing the sick, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, exorcising demons and territorial spirits, neutralizing poisonous bites, overcoming Satanic attacks of various kinds, and even **raising the dead**. Related practices include concerted prayer and fasting, the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, the use of

---

<sup>53</sup> Originally proponents defined the term in this way. "A 'power encounter' was a 'visible, practical demonstration that Jesus Christ is more powerful than the false gods or spirits worshipped or feared by a given society or people group'" (Hesselgrave 2005:176).

<sup>54</sup> This term is synonymous with Neo-Pentecostalism in many parts of the world (Bledsoe 2010:14, 25, 43). He says that third-wave Pentecostalism (i.e. Neo-Pentecostalism) includes groups that in some contexts have clearly gone beyond what most evangelicals would consider orthodox in beliefs as well as practices (Bledsoe 2010).



special handkerchiefs and other objects, **slaying in the spirit, spiritual mapping**, and prayer walking.

Of course, many Scriptures speak to the concept and reality of spiritual warfare. Jesus said in John 3:8b "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil." Ephesians 6:10-12 exhorts the believer to do battle with supernatural forces.

Finally be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The question centers on the kind of power to be exercised. If the missionary attempts to match the magician miracle -for- miracle then he or she becomes another sorcerer displaying power rather than a messenger bringing the Gospel. Even Jesus refused the devil's request that He perform displays of power. In response to Satan's challenge that Jesus throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, Christ (in Luke 4:12) countered, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'."

Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:374) stress that pointing to the preeminence of the cross better represents the Gospel than manifestations of power showing God's supremacy over other deities. Miraculous displays do not necessarily result in conversions. Even the magicians of Egypt replicated the plagues<sup>55</sup> that God produced through Moses, yet Pharaoh was not convinced to let the Israelites leave the country. Hiebert, Tienou, and Shaw (1999:374-375, bold mine) advise caution at this point.

---

<sup>55</sup> "But the magicians of Egypt did the same [i.e. turn water into blood] with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said" (Exodus 7:22).

**In dealing with folk religions,** Christians need a theology of discernment. People seek signs to assure them that God is present, but apart from the fruits of the Spirit, **there are no self-authenticating phenomena.** Miraculous healings, speaking in tongues, exorcism, prophecies, resurrections, and other **extraordinary experiences are reported in all major religions.**

Regardless of one's stance on the presence or absence today of the first century apostolic miraculous gifts, few missionaries regularly attempt such displays of power. Their reticence may stem from either a fear of failure or perhaps the recognition that God normally works in quieter ways. Much has been written about power encounters (Hesselgrave 2005:179) but reports of their occurrence tend to be anecdotal and sporadic. I believe God manifests His power spectacularly,<sup>56</sup> but He utilizes

---

<sup>56</sup> I have seen God's miraculous power manifested on at least two occasions. First, when working in eastern Sudan I operated a number of relief projects (e.g. water, farming, sanitation, and education) for seven years in partnership with Sudanese nationals and refugees from two neighboring countries. One of our refugee workers threatened to expose our purpose to the government. Since he knew of our evangelistic efforts in the country, our team began to pray fervently. Within a week Kidani became so sick that we brought him from the project site to a hospital in a major city. Despite bringing him food and medicine, which is necessary in Sudanese hospitals, and paying the extra cost for a good doctor in his treatment, Kidani (a man in his early forties) died within two weeks of threatening our work. Second, a year later, the MBB's associated with my work had started a small church that met in the courtyard of the congregation of another denomination in the same city in Sudan where Kidani had been hospitalized. Boutros threatened to expose the work to the government. Our small group once again began praying. I had a meeting out of the country but upon my return the national believers told me what had transpired. Within a month of threatening to expose our work, Boutros was traveling along the Nile River in a four-wheel drive vehicle. His car broke down but he was able to secure a ride in a passing public cross-country bus. The bus driver became disoriented in the desert, and the vehicle became lodged in the sands of the Sahara (the roads are not paved in the desert in Sudan). Thirty-four passengers, including Boutros, died of thirst along the side of the road. The national believers told me in both cases, "God did that." I did not disagree for I had learned that the power of God protects His church.

the miraculous as a more ancillary method rather than a primary strategy.

Hesselgrave suggests some alternatives to 'power encounters.' The 'truth encounter' depends upon the Holy Spirit to communicate the message of the Gospel. Speaking about John 16:8-11, Hesselgrave (2005:191-192) says,

Jesus makes it clear that the Holy Spirit has a vital role in persuading, convincing, and convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment- not just in a general sense but in specifics.

Contrasting or at least complementing power encounter, a successful truth encounter involves the sharing of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and results in the miracle of a changed life. Despite the attraction of the power encounter, there is no greater miracle than when a Muslim comes to faith in Christ by an encounter with the truth.

The 'empirical encounter' represents another type of encounter. Based upon the previously mentioned 'excluded middle' thesis of Paul Hiebert,<sup>57</sup> this approach directly focuses on the fear-power concerns of folk religionists. Hesselgrave (2005:195, bold, numbering & italics mine) explains the 'empirical encounter' and differentiates it from the other kinds of encounters.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> See footnote 47 on page 230 for this definition.

<sup>58</sup> Other writers mention several more types of encounters. Charles Kraft (2009:448) adds 'allegiance encounters' to the list, writing, "Implied in the allegiance encounter is the cultivation of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, especially love toward God and man. We are to turn from love of (or commitment to) the world that is under the control of the evil one (First John 5:19) to God who loved the world and gave Himself for it." Closely related to the allegiance encounter, 'the love encounter' demonstrates the love of God to unbelievers through a servant role (Hesselgrave 2005:196-197). A final kind of encounter is the 'prayer encounter.' Although sometimes linked to the intercessory spiritual warfare praying within the power encounter grouping, Hesselgrave (2005:196) and others believe prayer encounters stand alone as a separate category.

[1] **Truth encounter** deals with 'the ultimate story of the origin, purpose, and destiny of the self, society, and the universe' [quoting Hiebert]. [2] **Power encounter** has to do with 'the uncertainties of the future, the crises of the present, and the unexplainable events of the past.' But [3] **empirical encounter** deals with *middle-level* concerns having to do with 'the nature and order of humans and their relationships, and of the natural world.' At this *middle level* (not the religious or the science level) tribals seek answers to *practical questions*: 'Which of these seeds will grow?' 'How can we make sure this marriage will last?' 'Why has my brother suddenly become ill?'

### 6.1.3.3 Fear-power in Islam

Similar tensions exist among Muslims because official Islam attempts to deny the middle level apprehensions of the common people. According to Musk (1984:259) "Ideal Islam has no resources to deal with the everyday concerns and nightly dreads of ordinary Muslims." Many folk Muslims approach the supernatural from an ATR orientation. Opposition between these two groups can be intense. Braswell (1996:77) says "The leaders of orthodox Islam disparage folk religion and preach against it. Movements like *Wahhabism* in Saudi Arabia try to eliminate it." Despite this aversion, Ruthven (2006:257) explains "that in the long term official Islam was to benefit from the very practices which orthodoxy condemned." Ruthven makes this assertion because the religion spread to the frontiers of the ancient world by Muslim missionaries from *Sufi* orders who primarily practiced folk Islam (:256). Accordingly, popular Islam and high Islam have formed an uneasy truce over the years, and each rarely criticizes the other (Parshall 2006:37).

The tolerance between folk and orthodox Islam may be due to the fact that "The *Sharia* accommodated and

legitimized many pre-Islamic Arab customs,<sup>59</sup> which made its observance less burdensome to Arabs and other peoples" (Ruthven 2006:257). Saal (1991:51, bold mine) defines folk Islam and the extent of its religious practices.

**Folk Islam is a mixture of pristine [orthodox] Islam with the ancient religious traditions and practices of ordinary people.** It exists in a world populated by angels, demons, *jinns*, magicians, fortune-tellers, healers, and [*Sufi*] **saints** (both living and dead). Every aspect of daily life, from birth to death, is governed by the spiritual realities of this world. **Ordinary Muslims regularly turn to the practice of folk religion to meet felt needs while considering themselves to be genuine followers of Islam.**

The question then surfaces, what is the best approach to reach the folk Muslim described above? Musk (1984:308) writes, "Appeal has all too often been made at a cognitive level alone" rather than by his folk beliefs, practices and questions. Since the faith and practice of folk Muslims resembles ATR, I argue for reaching them primarily through the power-fear worldview. Jabbour (2008:151) states "The fear-power paradigm exists in the minds of folk Muslims all over the Muslim world and in some African countries where some people are occupied with the demonic and magic."

---

<sup>59</sup> Zwemer mentions many of these in "*The influence of Animism on Islam.*" Nalder (1926:86) in a review of Zwemer's book writes, "The tree of bush, covered with countless pieces of rag, the cairn of stones by the wayside are familiar to all. These Dr. Zwemer suggests, are relics of the tree and stone worship prevalent in all primitive Semitic religions. Sacred trees abound throughout Islam, and the Black Stone at Mecca is the best example of the survival of stone worship. Still more curious is his account of snake worship in Islam. The provision of a bowl of milk for the serpent protector 'believing that calamity would come upon them if the serpent was neglected. This is undoubtedly a survival of the ancient belief that the serpent was the child of the earth, the oldest inhabitant of the land, and the guardian of the ground'."

This section identifies a number of encounters advocated by missiologists in order to reach cultures holding to a fear-power worldview. Some suggest the power-encounter approach for evangelizing Muslims. Sometimes this involves visions and dreams. Rick Brown (2009:706-707), for example, reports the following story about the conversion of a *Sufi* master.

One night while Ibrahim was praying to know the way of salvation, Jesus appeared to him, radiant in white clothing. He told him to travel to a certain town and consult a holy man from such-and-such a village whose father and grandfather were named so-and-so. Jesus showed him in a vision the way to the house. Ibrahim was excited, realizing that this man's grandfather had been his very own *Sufi* master...Brother Jacob [the man in the house] told Ibrahim that the Lord had appeared to him in 1969 and had shown him that He is the way of salvation. He read Jesus' words in the gospel, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'

Such stories as this are common among those identified with C-5 contextualization. Greeson (2007:82-89) devotes eight pages of his work, *The Camel*, to accounts of Muslims coming to Christ through an experience of a dream or vision of Jesus.

One of the most common themes in the dreams that Muslims are experiencing is "a man in a white robe" whom they come to see as *Isa*...Whether this is a new phenomenon or God has been doing this previously in history, we cannot know. What is clear, though, is that this phenomenon is widespread and common (Greeson 2007:80).

Greeson (2007:91) urges the formation of 'Muslim Dream Teams.' He justifies this tactic so that Christians can "Pray that the man in the white robe will appear and speak to them [Muslims]" (:91).

Although many conversion testimonies from former Muslims attest to dreams and visions (Pikkert 2008:195, Musk 1984:304), a word of caution is in order. All

spiritual experiences should be evaluated by the standard of Scripture. First John 4:1 warns, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Several of the Muslim converts associated with my work in the Sudan attest that dreams<sup>60</sup> peaked their initial interest in the Gospel, causing them to investigate Christianity. None, however, reported seeing Jesus. One must be cautious about identifying every 'man in white' in a vision or dream as Jesus Christ. Muslims, especially *Sufis*, frequently experience dreams and see visions. Ausenda (1987:444) reports that since boyhood, the Prophet Mohammad appeared in the dreams of the Beja *Sufi Sheikh* Ali Betai. Upon reaching adulthood, Betai proclaimed to the Beja people the content of his special dreams.

Now that I have returned, I saw him [Muhammad] face to face. The Prophet lit the whole countryside, and I saw with my eyes many people with him; all the good men from early times, now dead. The Prophet said to me: "Build a mosque here in this place."

As stated previously, Hiebert, Tienou and Shaw (1999:375) confirm that proponents in every major world religion report of the occurrence of miraculous events. They present the following illustration.

Bob Farid, a Pakistani Muslim saint, is said to have cured incurable diseases, raised a dying man to life, converted dried dates into gold nuggets and covered vast distances in a moment.

In my opinion, God brings power encounters at the time and place of His choosing. Christian workers who attempt

---

<sup>60</sup> 'Isa dreamed that a giant wooden cross hit him on the forehead and woke him up. This happened three times in succession. 'Isa asked a Christian worker under my supervision what this meant. He replied, "I think God is trying to get your attention" ('Isa 2006). He met with my friend and became a believer. Months later I attended 'Isa's baptism in the Red Sea.

to orchestrate or encourage others to seek these encounters risk falling prey to adopting the very folk practices they desire to expose. Both truth and empirical encounters, therefore, resonate best with the middle-level concerns of the power-fear religious value paradigm within popular Islam.

#### **6.1.3.4 Fear-power among the folk Muslim Beja tribe**

The Beja view the world primarily through a fear-power prism. I argue that approaches tackling middle-level issues hold the most promise for 'making sense' within their traditional religious framework, which resembles ATR. Jacobsen (1998:34, bold mine) summarizes the mindset of the Hillmen.

The most striking feature is the picture they give of their life world as capricious and unpredictable... The Beja world is also inhabited by other capricious and sometime malicious forces. **The cultural world of the Beja is a world inhabited by a host of spirits.** Although there are Muslim and good intentioned spirits, most Hadendowa Beja are mainly concerned with the malevolent ones as well as the capricious ones, which occasionally create problems.

Beja ATR practices cataloged in previous chapters identify the Hillmen as following a fear-power orientation. I herein present some additional evidence and propose a few ideas for reaching them with the Gospel.

Folk religions generally deal with different kinds of questions than official religions (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:77). Causality questions dominate the thought of popular religions. Folk religions peer into the supernatural and seek guidance for the cause and meaning of evil, death, sickness, misfortune, and the unknown (:77-79). The Beja also reside in such a world. Ausenda (1987:423) correctly says, "The Hadendowa's greatest



concern is his or her health<sup>61</sup>...Hadendowa seemed less concerned about death than disease, since they fear the latter's consequence." Family health and welfare issues consume the mind of the Hillmen.

A Beja husband ideally will do everything in his power in order to fulfill the wishes of his wife. Paying for treatment expenses for his sick wife is clearly expected of him...Beja people are expected to do something about sickness and, in some cases seek any kind of treatment, in order to show their responsibility for their own and other family members' health (Jacobsen 1998:228, 232).

The Beja believe sicknesses possess intentional personalities (Jacobsen 1998:106-107). Mostly women<sup>62</sup> administer homeopathic cures for minor ailments and reproductive concerns<sup>63</sup> (Ausenda 1987:423). On one hand, drinking foamed goat's milk and inhaling smoke from burning pages of the Qur'an are used to treat measles. On the other hand, a cure for mumps requires Qur'anic readings<sup>64</sup> with the sufferer wearing a thread tied in knots (Halim 1939:36-37, 40). Another magical cure features a leather amulet<sup>65</sup> stuffed with Qur'anic texts written by a *faki* (see section 3.4.3, pages 104-105 & footnote 80). The Beja believe these protect against thefts, assaults and accidents (Ausenda 1987:424). Some *faki* obtain great reputations for possessing special power in devising

---

<sup>61</sup> Jacobsen (1998:255) says that Beja parents obsess about the health of their children because of the high mortality rate in eastern Sudan.

<sup>62</sup> Beja culture reserves the occupation of fortuneteller for females (Ausenda 1987:419, Jacobsen 1998:65).

<sup>63</sup> Cowry shells are believed to promote fertility in Beja folklore (Ausenda 1987:405).

<sup>64</sup> Paul (1954:121) notes, "while the Beja are prepared to admit the benefits of modern medicine, they do so with skepticism and the conviction that a Kor'anic text or a red-hot iron is infinitely more efficacious."

<sup>65</sup> Most rural Beja wear these amulets.

cures.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes they write a 'prescription' that entails the person repeating the *Fateha*<sup>67</sup> a certain number of times (:426). Such recitations treat *jinn* possession and insanity in addition to normal sicknesses (:427).

"Belief in *jinns* and *shawatin* [devils] is universal and I have spoken to people who are sincerely convinced that they have encountered these spirits. In no case have I heard of a benevolent *jinn*. Their activities are usually harmful to men and many charms are worn to counteract their influence. Among the *Atbai* peoples certain tribes are reputed to have *jinns* in subjection (Clark 1938:14-15).

Beja cosmology holds spirits responsible for afflictions such as migraine headaches. The Hillmen consult special ascetic *faki* schooled in exorcism for such cures. While headaches require Qur'anic readings, traditional healers recommend beating deranged persons with Qur'anic sticks<sup>68</sup> (Jacobsen 1998:60, 243). Explaining the ritual, Hussey (1923:37) says that the beating "is administered to the *jinn* possessing the patient and not to the patient himself who is said not even to feel the blows."<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Jacobsen (1998:229) claims folk Muslims like the Beja believe all healing stems from God. "However, a theory of 'transubstantiation' where a positive contamination of the *fagir* [traditional healer] by God in turn contaminating the *mihaya* [Qur'anic prescription] which further endows the patient with a sacred substance may, as discussed earlier, partially resolves this theological puzzle."

<sup>67</sup> The opening of the Qur'an is as follows: "In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of the universe, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Judgment! You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path, the path of those who You have favored, Not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray" (in Dawood 1990:xvii, translation his).

<sup>68</sup> Palm stem wrapped with Qur'anic verses treats 'madness' (craziness).

<sup>69</sup> "In some cases a mad person is believed to be especially benevolent and not capable of any kind of evil. The person is thought to bestow blessing on people meeting him or her on the street...Some women will even supply them with gifts of money in the same manner as wandering Muslim preachers and holy men are treated" (Jacobsen 1998:61).

Similarly, all Beja attribute epilepsy<sup>70</sup> to spirits (Jacobsen 1998:59). The Beja hold evil powers responsible for a special 'fright sickness' (Beja language, *mirquay*) that cause children to cry for extended periods of time (:172). In the same way, Beja offspring suffer from a malady known as *mingay*, or 'left alone'. The Beja blame this ailment on paranormal activity as well. The Hillmen fear leaving children unaccompanied, lest evil befall them (Jacobsen 1998:59). Indeed, Beja fault the supernatural for all misfortunes, miscreants, and maladies.

The spirit world is thought to be reflection of the ordinary world in many ways. There are spirit herbs, spirit animals as well as spirit humans. For example, there are ordinary spiders and there are spirit spiders.<sup>71</sup> Both of them may bite people and cause skin rashes... However, the most serious sickness and the sickness of most concern to *Hadendowa* people [Beja subgroup] results from bites of the spirit spider (Jacobsen 1998:58).

A belief in 'werehyenas'<sup>72</sup> (Beja language, *karai*) pervades Beja culture (Jacobsen 1998:37, Ausenda 1987:429). The Hillmen employ housing decorations to repel the *jinns* (Ausenda 1987:416). The Beja keep their number of children and animals secret due to a fear of the evil eye (Jacobsen 1998:33,171). Both rural and urban Beja believe in the power of the evil eye, spirit attacks and possession (:46).

All Beni-Amer [Beja} are extremely superstitious, and one of the reasons for the reluctance of the Hillman to leave his hills is his belief in '*jinns*,' which inhabit the seacoast, and the thickets of *Khor Baraka*, where a man cannot see his neighbors. They are much given to wearing charms, bracelets of palm

---

<sup>70</sup> This is called 'Falling down' (*toodip*, in Beja and *sara'a* in Arabic) according to Jacobsen (1998:59).

<sup>71</sup> Ibrahim (2010) confirmed that many contemporary Beja believe in spirit spiders.

<sup>72</sup> Beja believe some humans magically turn into hyenas at night in much the same manner as were-wolves of Western folklore.

fiber, and rings with cabalistic<sup>73</sup> signs (Paul 1950:239).

The Beja also believe in *zar* 'spirit humans' who settle permanently in life-long marriages with their hosts. Exhibiting both good and bad character traits, Beja call these spirits 'naughty and unpredictable' (Jacobsen 1998:146). One informant reports that *zar* spirits desire the blood of sacrificed animals (Jacobsen 1998:147). *Zar* doctors (*fugara*) utilize assistants called 'spirit helpers' in their efforts (bold mine).

The majority of the *fugara* employ 'spirit helpers' in their work. Although the help of 'spirit helpers' is considered invaluable by the *fagir*, the cooperation is not without dangers as my *fagir* friend Ahmad explains. **"Being a *fagir* is harmful to your children.** When you are weak or make a mistake, they [the spirits] can harm your children...Also, when you get rid of the spirits from a patient, **sometimes these spirits harm you."** (Jacobsen 1998:68-69).

Since the Beja dwell in such a frightening spiritual reality, a response must be tailored to suit their worldview. As Musk (1984:341) says, "The gospel, in its presentation to ordinary Muslims, must 'fit' the folk-Islamic world in order to do battle with the demonic therein." The question remains, how to best reach them?

The previously mentioned redemptive analogy concept holds much promise with the Hillmen. The goal of a redemptive analogy "is to make the gospel understandable and to facilitate conversion" (Hesselgrave 2005:103), with the cross being the most powerful and central element.<sup>74</sup> Indigenous concepts about sacrifice can be

---

<sup>73</sup> Occult (Guralnik 1970:196).

<sup>74</sup> This insight is especially true with Muslims. Pikkert (2008:96) quotes an early Christian apologist to Muslims; "For Zwemer, 'the cross of Christ is the missing link in the Moslem's creed,' for in it the justice of God, sin and salvation come together, and men find true reconciliation."

employed to illustrate Jesus' death on behalf of all mankind (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:223).

Zar cult practices among the Beja, and other Muslim ethnic groups, possess potential for the formation of redemptive analogies by the missions practitioner. Jacobsen (1998:231) describes the following custom that contains much illustrative material.

Blood is considered of primary importance in healing zar afflictions. As discussed before, a person who is host to a zar spirit will never get rid of it. First and foremost the red zar spirit wants blood.<sup>75</sup> As we have seen, a zar ritual ideally involves even drinking sacrificial blood by the sufferer.

The Hillmen reside in a fear-power paradigm and should be reached through this prism of understanding. The Bible addresses the worldview implicit in the zar spirit concept (bold mine).

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus] likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through **fear of death** were subject to slavery all of their lives (Hebrews 2:14-15).

This verse appropriately 'fits' the worldview of the Beja as both male and female Beja<sup>76</sup> struggle with zar possession.<sup>77</sup> The passage communicates freedom from the power of the evil through Christ's death.

---

<sup>75</sup> According to Jacobsen (1998:235) all Beja know zar spirits typically appreciate and desire gold. Zar spirits are quite demanding. They desire blood, gold, jewelry, perfumes, and clothes (:242).

<sup>76</sup> Although the zar spirits possess more Beja women than men, possession is reported among both sexes (Jacobsen 1998:156, 212, 238). Jacobsen (:72) says the belief about and treatment of zar spirit possession is as common in urban areas as in the rural parts of Bejaland.

<sup>77</sup> A Christian worker (Richard 2010) told me a recent story about a Beja woman in Khartoum, Sudan. A female representative who works for my friend met with a Beja woman every Thursday last year for coffee in one of the markets. Each week she would pour an extra cup of coffee and leave it sitting on the table. After a number of weeks

Surprisingly, the Beja also possess cultural beliefs about the efficacy of the cross itself, probably due to their pre-Islamic Christian history. For instance, when a *Nabatab* (nobleman) *Beni-Amer* Beja man marries, a relative of the bride draws the sign of a cross within a rectangle (*hajrat*) with the blood of a slaughtered bull (Paul 1950:233).<sup>78</sup> Qur'anic fumigation<sup>79</sup> normally treats all kinds of fever, including malaria. Halim (1939:28, bold mine) says that serious cases with convulsions require special healing procedures involving a cross.

Some people [Beja] believe that **the fever is due to the entrance into the body of certain souls or demons...**When a child gets this fever and there are **convulsions**, the parents are not allowed to handle him (a condition which they call *habobat el soghar* ie., grandmother of young children). **To combat this condition a black cross is drawn on the child's forehead** and then a mystic *fiki*<sup>80</sup> is called to read over the child a special incantation.

---

observing that the extra coffee was never consumed, the female worker asked about the purpose of the spare cup. The Beja woman replied, "Oh, that's [a cup of coffee] for my zar [spirit]."

<sup>78</sup> This ceremony commemorates the death of Ali Nabit, the father of Amer. Amer (son of Ali Nabit) founded the *Beni-Amer* division of the Beja tribe that primarily lives in Eritrea (see Appendices 2, 3 & 6). Amer avenged the death of his father by conquering the *Bellou* tribe (*Tigre*), enslaving them, and establishing the *Nabatab* as nobility over the *Tigre*. The entire ethnic group (serfs and nobility) became known as the *Beni-Amer* (sons of Amer) Beja sub-division (Paul 1950:224).

<sup>79</sup> Qur'anic fumigation involves the healer burning selected pages of the book. The smoke fumigates the patient and is thought to cure the sufferer.

<sup>80</sup> Speaking of the *fiki* (also spelled *faki*), Hussey (1923:35, italic his) says, "It is generally rendered in English as *holy-man* or *religious leader* and is used, indifferently to describe the Head of a religious sect big or small, the guardian of a holy tomb, a man of well known piety who has no particular diocese or religious function, a curer and a school master of a *khalwa* or Koran school. But the spheres of all kinds of *fiki* overlap to a certain extent, and except perhaps in the case of some teacher in *Khalwas* where the title of *fiki* would seem to be a courtesy one, they probably all exercise most of the various functions in greater or less degree."

Jesus demonstrates His power over evil spirits in Mark 9:20; "When he [the demon-possessed boy] saw Him [Jesus], immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth." Similarly, Beja culture contains imbedded references to the power of the cross over evil. Ausenda (1987:417-418, bold mine) relates some additional Beja folk practices featuring the cross.

When a boy is born, women pick up a piece of steel or a pan and hit it with a stone making a bell-like sound. They go on for about a quarter an hour, both at dawn and sunset, for seven days. At sunset they will also light a small fire in front of the mother's tent. On the day of the child's birth, a man will kill a sheep or a goat or a small calf. The women will be given the meat to cook. **With its blood**, they will **trace several** crescents and **crosses** on each side of the first birch mat covering the front of the tent. Seven days later during the naming ceremony, the same procedure is followed.

As soon as the crescent [moon] reappears in the sky at sunset, people turn toward it standing and say: "Afoy aeb," meaning: "Pardon my shameful (acts)." The two symbols epitomize the two main traditions that have influenced the Beja. **The cross, symbol of the Christian tradition**, with which *Haden-dowa* [Beja division] may have become acquainted during the thousand-year long period of Nubian Christianity, **is a sign of mercy and redemption through expiation and purification**. The crescent, symbol of the Muslim tradition, is a sign of restoration of health and wellbeing.

The cross-cultural communicator must take care when employing redemptive analogies with those holding a power-fear worldview. After accepting the Gospel, Simon the Magician misinterpreted the apostles' miracles and desired to purchase their power with money (Acts 8:9-24). As Hesselgrave (2005:106) warns, "Points of contact have significance, but they also have limitations." Redemptive analogies should not leave the impression that the Christian worker condones the referent folk practices or

the cross may become like another charm or talisman to them. The same cautions apply to encounters with folk Muslims whose varied customs contain the grist for many a redemptive analogy. Good methodology requires a brief citation of the cultural allusion and then a quick movement to the Biblical message, spending the majority of the time making the theological point. The Apostle Paul (in Acts 17:16-34) exemplifies this tactic in his evangelistic presentation while in Athens.<sup>81</sup>

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus<sup>82</sup> and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.'<sup>83</sup> Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).

Paul began his second missionary journey in Asia Minor by assessing the welfare of his newly planted churches. After receiving the 'Macedonian Call' to preach the Gospel in Europe (Acts 16:9), the apostle traveled to Macedonia and Achaia. A brief interlude finds Paul in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy. As he preaches in the marketplace, some Greek philosophers hear a message

---

<sup>81</sup> Multiple missiologists reference this passage to prove points on different sides of many issues. Hesselgrave (2005:105), Van Rheezen (1991:246), Greeson (2007:17), Musk (2004:19), Schlorff (2006:120-121), Saal (1991:149) and Richardson (2005:9-23) represent but a few.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce (1952:333) writes, "...the most venerable Athenian court... It's traditional power was curtailed as Athens became more democratic but it retained authority over homicide and moral questions generally ...Under the Romans it increased its prestige. It had supreme authority in religious matters and seems also to have had the power at this time to appoint public lecturers and exercise some control of them in the interest of public order."

<sup>83</sup> The early Greek historian Diogenes Laertius stated (in Bruce 1952:335-336), "the Athenians during a pestilence sent for Epimenides the Cretan who advised them to sacrifice sheep at various spots and to commemorate the occasion, alters to unnamed gods were set up."



about 'strange deities' and 'take'<sup>84</sup> Paul to another location for him to plead his case. In his opening statement to the Areopagus<sup>85</sup> the apostle quickly makes the connection between an element of ancient Greek cultural worship and the Gospel. Paul opens his Gospel presentation by referring to a centuries old altar 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' He uses their concept of deity as 'a point of departure'<sup>86</sup> for defining the true nature and identity of God.

In his preaching at Athens, Paul makes use of the pantheistic sense of God common to the Greeks, and attempts on this basis to open up to them the way to a full belief in God... Hence this statement is to be regarded merely as an acknowledged starting-point for his missionary preaching, not as a full confession of his theological convictions (Kittel 1968: III,718-719).

---

<sup>84</sup> The Bible uses *epilambanomai* (take) in two senses. Negatively, the term means "take hold of, grasp, catch, sometimes with violence" (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich 1957:295) as in Luke 16:19 when Paul and Silas were seized (taken), beaten and thrown into prison. Also, in Luke 23:26 the Roman soldiers "took" Simon of Cyrene to carry Christ's cross. On the other hand, positively, the term means "take hold of," as when Jesus "took" Peter by the hand as he was sinking in the storm (Matthew 14:31) and when Jesus "took" a child and held him in their midst (Luke 9:47). Carter and Earle (1959:276) follow the former interpretation, writing, "Certainly if our thesis is correct that Paul's address before the Areopagus was his defense against charges of advocating a new, unauthorized religion, then his choice of the inscription from the alter TO AN UNKNOWN GOD was indeed a master stroke. Their UNKNOWN GOD whose worship was fully authorized and thus made legal in Athens, Paul declared to be the subject of his preaching in Athens. Thus the Athenian charge, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities' was abrogated by Paul's declaration."

<sup>85</sup> "Whether Paul appeared before the Court of the Areopagus in the Agora (market) or was led to the top of Mars Hill is a topic of perennial dispute. Ramsey argues at length that Paul spoke in the Agora...In the first century, the Court of the Areopagus met in a portico northwest of the Agora... (but] Cadbury...warns us: 'The possibilities must be left open that the council sometimes met on the hill of the Areopagus and not in the Agora even in later times, or that Paul spoke on the hill but not to an official group'" (Carter & Earle 1959:257).

<sup>86</sup> Richardson (2005a:19) calls the Apostle Paul's allusion here an "eye opener."

Contextualization reinterprets or replaces non-Christian religious concepts with Christian truths in order to cross-culturally communicate the Gospel of Christ. Paul does not link the 'UNKNOWN GOD' with the Christian God in the sense of a 'one to one' equivalency. Rather, the apostle 'fills in' their concept of divinity with God's true essence. Hesselgrave (2005:106, bold mine) insightfully observes the following.

Since **the 'unknown god' was unknown**, Paul did **not** obligate himself to **empty** the Greek concept of false notions. And Paul **moved quickly** from the general idea offered by the Greek writers to the specifics of special revelation and Christ's incarnation.

High-quality redemptive analogies, points of contact, illustrations and 'bridges' possess several positive characteristics. (1) They elucidate Biblical truth without distracting from the Gospel presentation by becoming entangled in the example itself. (2) They move quickly from the illustrative idea to the main message. (3) They refer to one of the key Gospel concepts such as the atonement, the crucifixion, or the resurrection,<sup>87</sup> rather than peripheral matters. No better model of these principles exists than Acts 17:16-34.

#### **6.1.4 A Biblical approach to the three worldview axes**

Previous sections identified 'guilt-innocence,' 'shame-honor,' and 'fear-power'- as the three primary worldview

---

<sup>87</sup> Paul makes another seldom-noticed clever cultural 'point of contact' in Acts 17. When Paul preaches about "Jesus and the resurrection" in verse 18, the Athenians misunderstand, thinking Jesus and *Anastasis* (resurrection) refer to two new "strange deities." Paul uses the same term again in the verb form in verse 31 (italics mine), saying about Jesus, "...having furnished proof by *raising* Him from the dead". Moulton and Milligan (1930:37-38) comment that in the *papyri* "the verb is frequent in inscriptions with the sense of 'erection' of a monument ...and for the verb...the 'setting up' of a statue...The narrative in Acts 17 prepares us for the total novelty of the meaning of the 'resurrection': It was a perfectly natural use of the word, but the idea itself was new." In other words, Paul use of *anastasis* (resurrecting) built upon the original meaning of the term (erecting), in the sense of erecting an alter to the 'UNKNOWN GOD.'

religious value paradigms; All cultures possess in varied proportions these three elements (Muller 2000:70). While fear-power concerns predominate among ATR ethnic groups, issues from within the other worldviews also surface within these cultures. This section offers a Biblical rubric for addressing the middle-level trepidations of folk religion. Three ways of viewing these issues present themselves.

The power encounter attempts to match the power of folk religion with the miraculous power of God. Missiologists define the subject differently. Speaking of the power encounter, Van Rheenen (1991:62, bold mine) declares, "These confrontations with the forces of Satan require **visible demonstrations** of the power of God in animistic contexts." Despite this pronouncement, all of Van Rheenen's modern examples (:86-90) describe national believers defying ATR taboos and other cultural conventions; not actively performing miracles. Over time, as previously mentioned, power encounter has come to signify the display of signs and wonders in third wave Pentecostalism (Hesselgrave 2005:176-177). No missiologist disagrees with believers refusing to participate in ATR rites and would accept a power-encounter concept defined this way. Controversy ensues when proponents favor performing miracles as an on-demand mission strategy.

Secondly, the 'scientific (or secular) encounter' largely ignores the middle-level issues of ATR; it favors agricultural, medical, educational, and developmental projects in order to alleviate this-world problems so the missionary can present the promise of the next. Christian workers of the modernist persuasion often relegate eternal matters to theological theory while science rules in solving the problems of everyday life (Hesselgrave

2005:194-195). Such an approach fails to answer the 'middle-level' causality questions about the supernatural posed by folk religions.

With the power encounter unpredictable and the scientific encounter inadequate, I propose a third method of addressing the concerns of folk religion. The 'spirit encounter' takes seriously the middle level beliefs and anxieties about the spirit world. Rather than demanding signs and wonders, the spirit encounter welcomes divine power when God chooses to bring a miracle,<sup>88</sup> but confronts the supernatural world with the true spirit, the Holy Spirit. Communicating these theological truths to ATR constitutes a daunting challenge.

Many Christian workers today understand that stories couched in parables and illustrations better convey cross-cultural spiritual truth (Pikkert 2008:2002-203) than propositional formulas written in declarative sentences. Sometimes, however, the evangelist lacks the appropriate scaffolding for communicating the doctrinal content necessary for discipleship. Stories often seem

---

<sup>88</sup> Jonadab (2006) told me in an interview that a MBB in Baptist work encountered persecution in her village along the Nile in northern Sudan. Her husband was upset because she had become a Christian. He brought her Bible outside the house, placed it on the ground, and poured gasoline over the book. The Bible, however, refused to burn. Years later, I was traveling in an open Land Rover between Gedaref and Kassala, Sudan with another Christian worker and four Ethiopian nationals. The heat was overwhelming and it had not rained in many months. The rainy season was months away (Rains come to eastern Sudan in August and this was April, the hottest time of the year in that part of the country). Despite the cloudless sky above me, I prayed out loud in the hearing of everyone, "Lord, please send some rain to cool us off." Within five minutes a cloud appeared overhead and a significant cloudburst rained directly over our vehicle. We stopped the car and stood out in the rain rejoicing. All were quite impressed. Nonetheless, I have only felt led of the Holy Spirit to pray for rain that one time in April of 1991. In addition, Jonadab told me that the incident of the Bible refusing to burn only happened once as well. I believe God brings about power encounters, but they come only at His choosing and certainly solely at His discretion.

tangential, while propositional arguments fail to inspire. Somehow the world of the theoretical; the reality of the supernatural; and the practicality of the present; must all be addressed by an encounter with the Holy Spirit. To this end, I have selected Scriptures from the epistle of First John that speak to the ATR worldview of the Beja, confronting guilt-innocence, shame-honor, and fear-power elements.

The Beja believe in the activity of the devil and his evil spirits. The Epistle of First John confronts the issues of the spirit world directly. The Apostle John (First John 2:13) tells believers "you have overcome the evil one" and "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil" (3:8). As previously mentioned, the apostle admonishes Christians to "test the spirits" to determine their origin (4:1). In contrast to the evil forces of traditional religion that require exorcism, John presents the promise of another spirit, the Spirit of Truth, who brings joy and fulfillment (John 14:16-17).<sup>89</sup> The apostle writes, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (First John 4:13).

The apostle (in First John 4:18) speaks directly to the fear-power paradigm; "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." These verses capture the essence of a comforting confrontation of the ATR worldview.

For whatever is born of God **overcomes** the world; and this is the **victory that has overcome the world**—our faith. Who is the one who **overcomes** the world, but

---

<sup>89</sup> "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the **Spirit of Truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and **will be in you**" (John 14:16-17, bold mine).

he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies because the Spirit is the truth. **For there are three that testify; the Spirit and the water and the blood;** and the three are in agreement. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son...And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son (First John 5:4-9, 11, bold mine).

This passage speaks to all three of the major religious value paradigms implanted in folk religion. First, the blood addresses the guilt-innocence worldview by fulfilling the forensic legal demands of a blood sacrifice for sin. Second, the water represents baptism; symbolizing a public identification with Christ and His church and humility before God, which deals with shame-honor concerns. Third, the Spirit of God who honored Christ at His baptism (John 1:32-33)<sup>90</sup> stands in clear contrast to the spirits of ATR. This three-fold testimony<sup>91</sup> (i.e. the

---

<sup>90</sup> "John [the Baptist] testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit'."

<sup>91</sup> Westcott (1892:181, italic his, bold mine) supports this interpretation: "There can be no doubt that the **Death upon the Cross** satisfies the conception of '**coming by blood.**' By so dying the Lord made known His work as Redeemer; and opened the fountain of His life to men. The '**coming by water,**' which naturally corresponds to this final act of sacrifice, **is the Baptism,** whereby the Lord declared His purpose '*to fulfill all righteousness*' (Matt. iii.15). The water, by Christ's voluntary acceptance of the Baptist's ministry, became the means through which the divine purpose was fulfilled (Matt. iii:17). The Baptist was sent baptizing in water that Christ might be made manifest (John i.31). Even in the case of the Lord, Baptism is shown to have been the external condition of the '*descent and abiding of the Holy Spirit*' (John i.33 f)'."

Spirit, the water and the blood) conquers the 'world'<sup>92</sup> and the spiritual forces of ATR. 'Overcoming the world' by a spirit encounter simultaneously addresses the middle-level issues of ATR as well as the religious value ideas rooted in the fear-power, shame-honor, and guilt-innocence worldviews. This passage constitutes a simple Scriptural rubric for discipling ATR background folk Muslims, helping them conquer the fears of the spirit world. In turn, the might of Christ's resurrection<sup>93</sup> enables them to live victoriously in the Holy Spirit's power in the midst of the middle-level challenges of everyday life.

## 6.2 Existential-transcendent worldview axis

Folk religions confront different questions than formal faiths. Officialdom cares about a religion's doctrines, rules, regulations, prescriptions and prohibitions. Folk religion, on the other hand, yearns for experience, feeling and power. Hiebert, Tienou and Shaw (1999:95, bold mine) explain, "Folk religions give people a sense of meaning by answering the **existential questions of everyday life**, and providing the living a sense of place and worth in their society and world."

The previous section showed that folk religions frequently address existential issues through a fear-

---

<sup>92</sup> Westcott (1892:179) writes, "Under the title 'the world' St. John gathers up the sum of all the limited transitory powers opposed to God which make obedience difficult."

<sup>93</sup> Westcott (1892:182, bold mine) argues for this interpretation, "While he hung upon the Cross, dead in regard to mortal life, but still living, He came again 'by water and blood.' The issue of 'blood and water' from His side evidently indicated that He henceforth became for men the **source of blessing** symbolized by the twofold stream, and realized in His own human life by Baptism and Death upon the Cross. The one historic coming was shown to be the foundation of a **continuous spiritual coming**; and St. John saw in this the subject of the crucial testimony which he had to give (John xix.35)...It is through Christ's 'coming by **water and blood**,' and His Life through Death, that the **life of the Spirit** and the cleansing and support of our human **life in all fullness** is assured."

power worldview framework. Nonetheless, there is also a strain within folk religion that searches for a 'deeper life.' Nilsson (in Parshall 2006:1) says, "there exists in every man a dormant longing to enter into communion with the divine, to feel himself lifted up from the temporal into the spiritual." This 'felt need' for spirituality constitutes the 'existential-transcendent' religious value worldview axis. Making the transcendence of God immanent in one's life captures the essence of this worldview. This section introduces a fourth religious value worldview as a grid for understanding and evangelizing folk Muslims among the Beja who yearn for a deeper life. I propose reaching them through the 'existential-transcendent' world-view framework.

#### **6.2.1 Existential-transcendent approaches for Islam**

Formal Islam emphasizes God's transcendence over His immanence (Zebiri 1997:9). The religious worldview of folk Islam, however, differs markedly from that of official Islam.

Folk Islam appears to address the heartfelt and spiritual needs of a people. It desires a God who is near and not far away. **Christianity is challenged** to understand the differences between Qur'anic Islam and folk Islam and **to determine if folk Islam for Muslims addresses some of the issues and needs of humanity which may be expressed in Christianity** but which may be denied or challenged in Qur'anic Islam (Braswell 1996:286, bold mine).

Muslim orthodoxy emphasizes the concrete rather than the abstract, the lawful over the devotional. The Qur'an and *hadith* describe transcendental questions such as the bodily resurrection and heaven's reward in legal, tangible, and specific terms.<sup>94</sup> The Islam of orthodoxy consists

---

<sup>94</sup> According to the *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said (in Braswell 1996:54), "Everything of the human body will decay except the coccyx bone (of the tail) and from that bone Allah will reconstruct the whole body." The Qur'an itself pictures heaven in the



of adhering to convention and observing the religion's strict statutes. Ruthven (2006:221) states, "The proper approach for a Muslim is to submit to the decrees of God, as represented by the laws of nature and the rules laid down in the Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunna*." Therefore the difference between official Islam and folk Islam is straightforward: orthodox Muslims follow a faith that is otherworldly, unknowable (Saal 1991:43) and distant from the problems of everyday people (Pikkert 2008:198). Folk Muslims desire a religion 'close to home' and accessible to answer their supernatural and existential questions. While many solve their middle-level problems by ATR-like practices, others address these issues by following the *Sufi* path.

Parshall (2006:4) calls *Sufism* "a fairly well-defined influence within folk Islam" and claims "without understanding *Sufism*, one cannot understand folk Islam" (:12). Whereas non-*Sufi*, ATR-influenced folk Muslims see life through a fear-power worldview, *Sufi*'s come at the supernatural from a different direction.<sup>95</sup> They long for a personal relationship with God (Jenkins 1984:7). Speaking of the *Sufi*, Parshall (2006:13) claims, "The Muslim mystic hopes, even in this mortal life, to win a glimpse of immortality." *Sufi*'s live in the existential 'now,' contemplating the uniqueness of each moment<sup>96</sup> (Chittick 2000:45). In other words, the *Sufi* desires the

---

vivid imagery of the Middle Eastern harem featuring sensual and sexual experiences (Ruthven 2006:55).

<sup>95</sup> Parshall (2006:15) notes that early Muslim mysticism was fear-based. By the ninth century, however, concepts of God's love, meditation, and ascetic practices entered Islam (:16).

<sup>96</sup> Chittick (2000:45) writes, "A famous aphorism tells us, 'The *Sufi* is the child of the moment' (*as-sufi ibn al-waqt*)...In some *Sufi* texts, each moment of the self is called a *nafas*, a 'breath'. The *Sufis* are then called 'the folk of the breaths' (*ahl al-anfas*)."

transcendent to invade the immanent (his/her<sup>97</sup> own existential reality), by-passing the middle-level altogether. Commenting on the *Sufi* worldview, Ruthven (2006:222) says,

...the *Sufi* movement brought an inner spirituality into an Islam which otherwise tended to crystallize into a religion concerned mainly with the outward forms of legal observance and the pursuit of political power. The contemplation of the 'god within' revitalized Islam, replenishing its psychic reserves and fructifying its structures, both legal and intellectual, with a new injection of energy.

*Sufis* have been called the mystics of Islam (Sookhdeo 2007:167, Jenkins 1984:6). However, Ernst (1997:xvii) and Chittick (2000:1) reject the mystic label as too narrow a description. Since *Sufism* was previously covered in chapter three (see section 3.1.2.3 on pages 76-80), attention here is devoted to Scriptural approaches for reaching *Sufis* by means of an 'existential-transcendent' worldview paradigm. Musk (2004:188) advises that the Gospel be expressed in "emotive terms" to reach the heart of the Muslim. This rings true especially in the case of the *Sufis* who revel in feeling, emotion and experience. Pikkert (2000:194) says, "A 'substantial number' of Muslims testify that their conversion to Christianity is the result of 'a search for truth'." Their existential longing for a personal relationship with God trumps orthodox Islam's transcendent aspirations. Parshall (2000:13) observes that "The *Sufi* generally places more emphasis on his relationship to God in this life than on that which is to come." For these reasons *Sufism* requires special consideration and a unique approach.

---

<sup>97</sup> *Sufism* permits female disciples (Ernst 1997:143).

I believe the concept of discipleship holds promise for reaching *Sufi* folk Muslims. In their eagerness to follow God in a disciplined way, individual *Sufis* submit to a mentor (*Shaykh*)<sup>98</sup> for guidance (Karrar 1992:152). An idealized chain of master-disciple relationships links the teacher to the student from generation to generation (Ausenda 1987:448). As the Christian worker challenges the *Sufi* to follow the 'Master Teacher' in discipleship, Jesus speaks to the everyday existential needs of folk Muslims.

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and 'you will find rest for your souls.' For My yoke is easy and My burden light. My yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

These verses appeal to *Sufis* because their path of asceticism and denial is hard rather than light.

*Sufism* also contains a concept similar to the 'new birth' in Christianity. When taking on the 'way of *Sufism*' (*tasawwuf*), the new initiate 'dies to self' (*fana*, self-extinction) in order to 'live to God' (Ruthven 2006:228). This new 'life in God,' *baqa* (subsistence) allows the *Sufi* to be "perfected, transmuted and eternalized through God and in God" (Arberry 1950:58). The *Sufi* desire for union with God (Ruthven 2006:227) possesses possibilities for parallels with Christianity. In John 3:3 Jesus remonstrates the Jewish ruler Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The necessity of a radically changed spiritual life, even on the part of a religious leader like Nicodemus, speaks to the *Sufi* heart. In fact, some *Sufis* refer to this mentioned

---

<sup>98</sup> For an explanation of the different kinds and levels of *sheikhs* in Sudanese *Sufi* Islam, see footnote 82 on page 104 in Section 3.4.3.

passage and the 'born twice' concept in their quest for spiritual truth<sup>99</sup> (Chittick 2000:138).

*The Sufi* respect for all Biblical characters mentioned in the Qur'an offers potential common ground for discussions with Muslims about Scriptural truths. Junaid (in Ahmed 2002:51, bold mine) lists the qualities of a *Sufi* master.

In *Sufism*, **eight qualities** must be exercised. The *Sufi* has: Liberality such as that of **Abraham**; Acceptance of his lot, as **Ismail** accepted; Patience, as possessed by **Job**; Capacity to communicate symbolism, as in the case of **Zachariah**; Estrangement from his own people, which was the case with **John**; Woolen garb like the shepherd's mantle of **Moses**; Journeying, like the traveling of **Jesus**; Humility, as **Muhammad** had humility of spirit.

Most Muslims think highly of Jesus Christ and many of them who become Christians do so because of the lofty description of Him in the *Qur'an* (Pikkert 2008:192-193). *Sufis* especially revere Christ. The *Sufi* poet Al-Hallaj "looked to Jesus as the supreme example of glorified, or perfected humanity, as the actualizer of this Qur'anic concept of the image of God in man" (Jenkins 1984:27-28). This awe about the person of Christ can serve as a point of entry with folk Muslims.

Several other concepts hold promise for *Sufi* folk Muslims as redemptive analogies. The *Sufi* poet Rumi (in Chittick 2000:64) describes the love of God<sup>100</sup> in the following manner: "What is it to be a lover? To have perfect thirst. So let me explain the water of life." Since *Sufis* view God's love as the 'water of life,' a Biblical parallel becomes evident. Jesus tells the woman at the well in

---

<sup>99</sup> Some *Sufis* suggest that the 'born again' concept is similar to the *hadith's* 'die before you die' prescription (Chittick 2000:138).

<sup>100</sup> As a response to Muslim inflexible theological beliefs, "Love became the *Sufi* byword" (Parshall 2000:36).

John 4:10<sup>101</sup> about the 'living water' that He dispenses. The analogy follows that only Jesus possesses the true 'water of life,' which is related to the love that the *Sufi* desires.

In addition, *Sufis* possess quite a developed theology of spiritual 'veils.' This interesting concept also offers a potential theological point of contact. Veil theory in *Sufism* flows from interpretations of fourteen occurrences of the Arabic verb *kashf* (remove) in the Qur'an. Chittick (2000:138, bold mine) explains one of these incidences.

In the most significant of these passages for the *Sufi* use of the term [kashf or remove], God addresses the soul that has just died: 'You were heedless of this - therefore we have **removed** from you your covering, and your sight today is piercing' (50:22). The 'covering' (*ghita*) - a term that is taken as one of several synonyms for 'veil' (*hijab*) - will be **lifted** at death. Then people will see clearly. This verse alone is enough to suggest why **the quest for voluntary death** is one of the basic **themes of Sufi literature**.

Esoteric, nuanced, and complicated, summarizes *Sufi* teaching about veils. Nonetheless, several important features stand out. Complete unveiling takes place at death. Chittick (2000:139) writes that "when the *Sufi* who achieves the death and annihilation of the lower self already in this life, they also achieve the vision of God, here and now." True *Sufis* experience the lifting of the veil in this life described in very paradoxical imagery<sup>102</sup> (:139-140). Ibn Arabi (in Chittick 2000:147)

---

<sup>101</sup> "Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

<sup>102</sup> Muhammad said in the *hadith*, according to *Sufi* teaching (in Chittick 2000:139) "God has **seventy veils of light and darkness**." The *Sufi* poet Niffari speculated that anything other than God is a **veil** (Chittick 2000:146). Mustamli asserts that a number of **veils** must be lifted before anyone can be a true follower of Allah and Muhammad.

portrays the entire universe as a veil. He further describes the goal of the *Sufi* path as an obliteration "through which all awareness of the individual self is erased by the intensity of the unveiling" (:149).

Of course, official Islam deems *Sufi* mysticism (Parshall 2000:38), rituals, and doctrinal speculation un-Islamic (Ernst 1997:213).<sup>103</sup> *Sufism's* serious and sincere desire for a personal relationship with God impresses Christians. Nonetheless, rather than arguing competing veil theories, the Christian worker should refer to the somewhat cryptic<sup>104</sup> Bible passages about

---

Mustamli says [in Chittick 2000:141, bold mine], "**The veils are four - this world, the self, people and Satan. This world is the veil** of the next world. **People are the veil** of obedience. Everyone who has busied himself at the feet of people has let go of obedience. **Satan is the veil** of religion. Everyone who conforms with Satan has let go of religion. **The self is the veil of the Real.** Everyone who goes along with the self's caprice, He says, has made his own caprice his god. God says, 'Have you seen him who has taken his caprice as his god' (45:23)...As long as these four **veils** have not been lifted from the heart, the **light of gnosis** will not find a way into it...The sum of all that has been said about the **veil** is that everything that busies the servant with other than the **Real is a veil**, and everything that takes the servant to the Real is not a **veil**. The light of *gnosis* is the strongest of all lights, and everything that tries to veil the *Gnostics* from the Real will be burned away and pushed aside by the light of *gnosis*."

<sup>103</sup> Arberry (1950:93, bold mine) writes that some *Sufis* "introduced **the Logos doctrine into Islam**, by which is meant the theory that God's vice-regent controlling the material universe is 'the Idea of Muhammad'...it successfully resolved the problem of reconciling a transcendent God with a theistic universe. If any man aspired to know God, he might seek this end by achieving **union with the 'Idea of Muhammad,**' projected by God in pre-eternity to be His likeness -so far as anything may be called God's likeness -and lead mankind back to Him."

<sup>104</sup> The Apostle Paul's 'veil passage' in Second Corinthians 3:7-4:4, a portion of which is quoted above, contains some parallel Christian mystical thoughts which should intrigue the *Sufi* seeker. Paul presents the veil as an illustration of the old covenant, represented by; Moses' wearing a veil to hide the law's fading glory (3:13) and the veiling of Israel's minds and hearts (3:14). Christian 'unveiling,' unlike *Sufi* 'unveiling,' occurs when a person turns to the Christ. Paul also contends that the Gospel is veiled to unbelievers (4:3) due to Satan's influence (4:4). A parallel exists

veils and apply the analogies for salvation in Christ. Paul writes (in Second Corinthians 3:16-18, bold mine),

But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the **veil** is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with **unveiled** face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from **glory to glory**, just as from the **Lord, the Spirit**.

The *Sufi* should be challenged to turn to the Lord through Jesus Christ, remove the veil and behold God's glory, receive the Holy Spirit and be transformed into conformity with God's magnificent image. The *Sufi* should also be told that only the believer in Jesus experiences real unveiling and receives the opportunity to view God's true glory. Another verse points to Jesus Christ as the true veil for entry into eternal life. The writer of Hebrews (10:19-20, bold mine) explains, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated through the **veil**, that is, his flesh." In this way a favorite *Sufi* concept illustrates a Biblical truth and invites the folk Muslim to enter salvation through the true veil of Christ.

#### **6.2.2 Existential-transcendence approaches for Beja**

As previously mentioned, the Beja hold primarily to a 'fear-power' worldview mixed with some elements of the 'shame-honor' and 'guilt-innocence' motifs. Despite this ATR taxonomy, another worldview projects a strong presence inside northern Sudan. Karrar (1992:1) identifies *Sufism* as "the most fundamental characteristic of Islam in Sudan." Of the twenty-nine *Sufi tarikas* (orders) operating inside Sudan (:233), seven of these claim numbers of Beja among their adherents (Ausenda 1987:434).

---

with *Sufi* veiling at this juncture because Satan is one of the four veils in Mustamli's system (Chittick 2000:141).

Although the majority of the Hillmen are nominally Muslim<sup>105</sup> (:22), those who regularly practice Islam's tenets generally follow the *Sufi* path (Jacobsen 1998:22). Ausenda (1987:434, bold mine) describes Beja *Sufism* in this way.

***Sufi tarikas***, or 'ways,' are sects, which profess to **achieve closeness to God** through the teaching of mystical thought and the performance of special **ecstasy-inducing rituals**. Perhaps for this reason, *Sufi* movements have had **considerable success among Beja** in general and *Hadendowa* in particular.

While most Beja follow an ATR mindset and fall within a fear-power worldview paradigm, a serious *Sufi* tradition exists among them as well. When I asked a MBB how the Sudanese in general and the Beja in particular viewed the *Sufis*, he told me "the people respect them" (Faruk 2006). The previously mentioned methods and concepts for communicating the Gospel with *Sufis* in general also apply to their Beja counterparts. However, another cultural point of contact stands out as a candidate for a redemptive analogy specifically for Beja *Sufis*. Shaaban (in Ornas & Dahl 1999:61) claims that a Beja territory always contains one particular mountain to which the *diwab* (clan) believes it possesses a particular ritual relationship. For example, an important Beja *Sufi* shrine rests at the foot of *Jebel* (Mount) Kassala, a

---

<sup>105</sup> The Hillmen are not very religious as evidenced by this common rhyme (*Habeit*, or poem-song) known to all Beja children (The jackal is a notorious unbeliever in Beja folklore). Roper (1927:153) reports, "A jackal by a trick robbed a Moslem of his Koran, his *abrik* (jar of water for ritual ablution), and his rosary. She indulges in the following blasphemous song: '*Te sibha kamoi nes'ag; u abrik hai hawane; u din itlawiwetun; hamis hindi kamone*'. 'We hung the rosary on a kamoi tree. The *abrik* we defiled. The Book [the Qur'an] appeared to us and we tap on it with a greet *withy* [stick]'." Of course, no good Muslim makes sport of the Qur'an or Islamic rituals. The fact that Beja children commonly sing this rhyme demonstrates the general non-religious nature of Beja culture.



mountain believed to contain magical powers and possessing unusual significance in Beja folklore. The concept of a special mountain's significance corresponds well to the cultural situation Jesus encountered with the woman at the well near Mount Gerizim (in John 4:20-24, bold mine).

[The Samaritan woman said] "Our fathers worshipped in **this mountain**, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when **neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship** the Father.<sup>106</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipper will worship the Father in **spirit and truth**; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. **God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**"

*Sufis* are truth seekers, and they believe that by passing through a series of veils, one can obtain "gnosis" (*ma'rifa*, or mystic knowledge) and approach the Throne of God spiritually in this life (Chittick 2000:141). In the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus announces the beginning of a new spiritual era. Spirit and truth within the heart would characterize true worship (Godet 1893:430). God's spiritual presence would dwell within His worshippers, not in temporal locations such as mountains and temples, and by extension to the present day: fixed locations like mosques, shrines, or

---

<sup>106</sup> A dispute existed between the Samaritans and the Jews over which mountain was the mountain of God; Mount Moriah in Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim near Jacob's well. The Samaritan nation was formed when the King of Assyria brought five eastern tribes into Palestine after the Northern Kingdom of Israel was carried away into captivity (2 Kings 17:24-41). They brought their own gods with them, but also adopted some practices from Judaism. The Samaritans held that since the Israelites raised an altar on Mount Gerizim in the time of Joshua, and the Jews' subsequent move of the temple site to Jerusalem is nowhere mentioned in the Pentateuch, the true place of worship had to be Mount Gerizim (Godet 1893:426-427).

churches. Real estate issues so important to the officials of high religions fade into obscurity in comparison to the true spiritual worship of God face to face. This analogy would make sense to Beja mystics trying to balance an allegiance to their kinship group's attachment to a special mountain with the constraints of their *Sufi* ritual observances at the shrine of their order's principal saint.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

As Hesselgrave (2005:184) aptly observes, "A mind-boggling variety of approaches to 'disciplining the nations' has been advocated during the era of modern missions." A few missiologists suggest that folk Muslims should be engaged through their worldview rather than by methods such as polemics, apologetics, dialog, cultural concessions or adjusting Qur'anic and Islamic forms.

This chapter presents a contextualized approach for evangelizing folk Muslims like the Beja tribe of Sudan through addressing their fear-power cultural religious worldview. In addition, I also attend to the worldview themes of shame-honor and guilt-innocence that possess secondary significance for the Hillmen. I propose a Scriptural model from the Epistle of First John that presents a three-fold testimony of Christ; the Spirit, the Water and the Blood; this example addresses the issues and meets the needs of all three of the major worldviews.

Second, this chapter introduces a fourth cultural religious value worldview present among folk Muslims like the Beja, especially *Sufis*. Longing for a meaningful spiritual life and tired of the legalism of formal Islam, many *Sufis* seek answers through Muslim mysticism. I propose reaching these folk Muslims through the 'existential-transcendent' religious value worldview

paradigm. I also offer Biblical passages and specific approaches to evangelizing the mystical Muslims who are among the Beja.

## **7. Conclusion**

This thesis examines contextualization approaches to folk Islam from the perspective of traditional religion. Since the examples spring from the continent of Africa, the inquiry scrutinizes the influence of ATR upon folk Islam. The Beja ethnic group of the Sudan serves as the primary case study since the tribe exemplifies a Muslim people more heavily affected by traditional religion than by formal Islam. In order to establish a baseline for analyzing their traditional religion, the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania serves as a secondary case study because their beliefs typify ATR.

As espoused earlier, most methods for reaching Muslims have focused on either constructing apologetic arguments or contextualizing Islamic and Qur'anic forms. These approaches give little attention to the characteristics of folk Islam, which is the religion practiced by the vast majority of Muslims today. This thesis, therefore, centers on popular Islam and the ATR practices that shape Muslim observances in Africa. Since the majority of Muslims live outside the Arab world, this study has great value not only for Africa, but other places located on the fringes of Islam's heartland.

The concluding chapter contains three sections. First, I present a review of each of the previous chapters. Second, the research question is answered. In the second subsection I justify my answers and offer reflections concerning the results of the examination and conclusions. Finally, I elaborate on the consequences of my research and its findings for missions in general.

### **7.1 Review of chapters**

The first chapter presents preliminary matters and the research question. The research question asks what evangelistic approaches are most appropriate for reaching

folk Muslims such as the Beja who are more influenced by traditional religion (especially ATR) rather than orthodox Islam? The chapter also elaborates on the basis for the study, personal rationale for the inquiry, and the major resources employed in the research.

The second chapter introduces the folk Islam case study: the Beja tribe of the Sudan. This section explores their history, culture, and worldview. I give particular attention to their religion, which resembles ATR more than orthodox Islam.

Chapter three explains official Islam and dissects the religion's major divisions: *Sunnis*, *Shi'ites* and *Sufis*. In addition, this chapter describes the influence of each division upon the practice of folk Islam. The third chapter also examines how the three divisions of Islam have specifically affected the folk religion of the Beja tribe of the Sudan.

The fourth chapter treats the complex relationship between traditional religion and folk Islam. Since the Beja people live along the intersection of orthodox Islam and ATR, the effects of the latter upon the former compose a major focus of this thesis. I have selected as a base line for the comparison the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania since their culture and beliefs typify ATR on the continent. An examination of Beja folk Islam from a Sukuma ATR framework shows them more influenced by traditional religion than formal Islam.

Chapter five explores the various avenues historically employed for reaching different kinds of Muslims with the Gospel. Diverse contextualized and non-contextualized techniques are evaluated for their suitability with folk Muslims like the Beja. I determine that a contextualized worldview approach aimed at the middle-level

concerns of folk religion represents the most appropriate tactic for ethnic groups like the Hillmen.

The sixth chapter presents a contextualized worldview approach for reaching folk Muslims heavily affected by ATR. The following primary religious values axes are examined: (1) guilt-innocence (2) shame-honor and (3) fear-power. I evaluate each according to their viability with folk Muslims. It is shown that folk Muslims heavily influenced by ATR are more effectively reached through a fear-power worldview orientation yet the other two axes exist to some measure in the background. I offer, therefore, a Biblical rubric for evangelizing folk Muslims by appealing to all three worldviews elements that are imbedded in Beja culture.

I include in the sixth chapter a fourth worldview religious value axis: existential-transcendent, an approach aimed at the *Sufi* folk Muslims among the Beja who do not fit the fear-power worldview orientation. *Sufis* yearn for a deeper spiritual life and desire a closer relationship to God.

## **7.2 Response to the research question**

I have proposed to discover the most effective approaches for communicating the Gospel and evangelizing ATR influenced folk Muslims like the Beja tribe of the Sudan. As a result of this pursuit, I declare that concepts contextualized to the fear-power worldview better meet the needs and coincide with the orientation of the Hillmen than other methods. Elements of the shame-honor and guilt-innocence worldviews persist within Beja society, though with lesser dominance. A contextual approach that considers these worldview characteristics in their proper proportion has been proposed as the best means to evangelize this group.

For *Sufi* folk Muslims I propose an existential-transcendent worldview approach customized to those desiring a personal spiritual relationship with God. The research determined that cognitive apologetic arguments and contextualized Islamic and Qur'anic frameworks possess limited value in reaching folk Muslim mystics such as the *Sufis* and even traditional religionists.

### **7.2.1 Justifications**

As explained (see section 5), Christian missions has responded to the Muslim challenge in diverse ways. Some evangelists over the years have formulated apologetic and polemic arguments in order to refute Islam and demonstrate the superiority of the Christian faith over it. Other Christians have fallen prey to accommodating Islam by dialogue methods that attempt to move Muslims from Islam to Christianity through discussion and mutual understanding. Recently, experimentation with various contextualization methods<sup>1</sup> has emerged as a third broad category. Such techniques attempt to fill Islamic forms with Christian meaning or overlay a Biblical hermeneutic upon Qur'anic passages. Although the apologetic approach has produced limited fruit among some adherents of orthodox Islam, such methods fall far short with folk Muslims who either fail to grasp the cognitive arguments or dismiss their applicability. Musk's (2003:114) observations are very much to the point.

...in the experience of the masses, the official faith by in large fails to meet everyday needs...The God of Islamic theology would appear to be so far removed from humans' lives that substitute focuses of power are sought in and through the practitioners of popular Islam.

---

<sup>1</sup> Schlorff (2006:151) rejects "the intuitive approach suggested by some- contextualization by experimentation."

Similarly, current trends in contextualizing Muslim forms and Qur'anic passages in Christianity are troubling. While advances in the social sciences assist Christian workers in gaining more cultural understanding of Islam, they have also spawned an ethos of contextualized experimentation. Such a trial-and-error approach of blending Christian and Islamic religious structures has resulted in syncretism and confusion. The debate on the use or non-use of apologetic and contextualized methods is a moot point with regard to folk Muslims. The presupposition underlying these broad categories stems primarily from a Western guilt-innocence worldview orientation. In other words, apologetic and most contextualized techniques set out to prove the falsity of Islam over and against the truth of Christianity from a right or wrong perspective. I certainly believe that Christianity represents the true faith whereas most of the Islamic system is false. Such questions, however, rarely cross the consciousness of popular Islam. Folk Muslims fear the spirit world and seek to gain power over it. Little has changed since Musk (1984:285, bold mine) wrote the following over twenty-five years ago.

Much controversy has raged amongst Christians, both in public debate and via printed page (e.g. Schlorff 1980:144) concerning the philosophical and moral implications of attempts to bridge long-long standing Muslim-Christian differences. Our concern in these paragraphs is not with the rights and wrongs of such a methodology. Rather it is to emphasize that, **while such bridging movements may be meaningful for the intellectual Muslim, they fall a long way short of communicating with Muslims committed to a folk-Islamic worldview. To commence with the ordinary Muslim 'where he is' demands a reappraisal of such attempts at communication,** however attractive they may appear to the Western mind (Musk 1984:285).

This thesis attempts such a reevaluation for reaching folk Muslims. Unfortunately, in the past many have simply



tried to refute folk Islam as if it were a wayward form of orthodoxy rather than to engage the religion through its worldview. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:91-92, bold mine) correctly point out the more appropriate response.

It is important to note that **a Christian response to folk religions is not to stamp them out...The Christian answer to folk religions is to bring them under the lordship of Christ** so that he can transform people in their everyday lives. Christianity does deal with heaven and eternity, but it also answers the questions folk religions raise. Its answers, however, must be rooted in a biblical, not an animistic, worldview.

Since the majority of the adherents of Islam are folk Muslims (Parshall 2006:2), I propose approaches contextualized to their unique worldview. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:224-226) observe a three-fold model for categorizing worldviews: (1) guilt-innocence (2) shame-honor and (3) fear-power. Muller (2000:70) rightly states that all cultures mix elements from all three perspectives. Not surprisingly, the Christian worker often unconsciously imports into Gospel presentations the guilt-innocence value system common to Western cultures. Many in Islam's heartland, the Arab world, follow a shame-honor orientation. I insist, however, that ATR influenced folk Muslims like the Beja hold to a fear-power paradigm not unlike tribes like the Sukuma of Tanzania. I summarize the suggested approaches to ATR-influenced folk Muslims in the following paragraphs.

Since all cultures reflect essentials of all three religious values frameworks, I point out that certain guilt-innocence and shame-honor cultural aspects remain imbedded in Beja society. The Beja tale about Gwilai'or (a famous Beja *Sheikh*) exemplifies a redemptive analogy from the shame-honor perspective, which in turn can illustrate Christ's substitutionary atonement upon the cross. Stories such as this resonate in consensus based

tribal societies. From the guilt-innocence perspective, tribal blood sacrifices and the use of the Christian cross in healing ceremonies represent cultural points of contact linking Beja ATR with the Gospel. Residual Christian practices remaining in Beja culture make accepting Christ an acceptable alternative for the Hillmen.

A number of verses in the First Epistle of John confront all three worldviews, but especially the fear-power orientation that predominates in Beja culture. For example, the Apostle John comforts his readers by telling them, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (First John 3:8). The believer overcomes the evil one by the three-fold testimony: the Spirit, the water and the blood (First John 5:8). This passage and others in the Bible indicate that Christianity holds the answer to ATR's fear of witchcraft, the spirit world, and the unknown. In First John 5:8 the (Holy) Spirit addresses the fear-power 'middle level' issues of folk Islam; the water of baptism speaks to the shame-honor worldview that honors God by submitting to baptism; and the blood sacrifice upon the cross satisfies the guilt-innocence requirements inherent in the Western worldview. Such a Scripturally sensitive approach meets the felt needs of folk Muslims within the segments of the three primary worldview axes.

Although some elements of shame-honor, fear-power, and guilt-innocence values appear within *Sufi* societies, I maintain that this sect possesses a distinct worldview requiring unique tactics. I call this the existential-transcendent religious value axis. Whereas most Muslims see God as far away and unknowable [transcendent], *Sufis* hold that He lives nearby (immanent) and yearn to know Him personally. Arberry (1950:11), in his book *Sufism: an account of the mystics of Islam*, calls mysticism a

"constant and unvarying phenomenon of the universal yearning of the human spirit for personal communion with God." Reaching *Sufis* requires appealing to their desire for a deeper spiritual life.

Since *Sufi* orders require new members to submit themselves individually to a *sheikh* for guidance, the concept of Christian discipleship holds much promise for them. In addition, all *Sufis* admire Jesus and many support the validity of the new spiritual birth concept (John 3:3). Unlike most Muslims, *Sufis* do not shy away from exploring spiritual ideas in the frontiers of the mind. The previously mentioned veil theology of *Sufism* provides a theological point of contact for the veiling passage in Second Corinthians 3:16-18. Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews (10:19-20) describes the physical body of Jesus as the veil through which the believer enters into salvation. Spiritual analogies concerning the mystery and love of God fits the *Sufi* existential worldview and represent avenues for reaching them with the Gospel.

Surprisingly, a number of Beja follow the *Sufi* path. These particular Hillmen must be approached differently than their fear-power oriented kinsmen. Beja clan groups, many of whom are led by *Sufi sheikhs*, believe certain mountains hold religious significance. Jesus argues in John 4:21-24 that future devotion will be spiritually focused rather than geographically centered. I hold that many *Sufis* should be approached through this felt need in order to experience real truth and know God personally, existentially, and Biblically.

### **7.2.2 Personal reflections**

Sometimes studies of ethnic groups describe historical practices as current culture when in fact the traditional customs have largely disappeared. This situation is not true, however, among the Beja. Jacobsen (1998:256)

observed local medical procedures described in literature written two hundred years prior to his own research. Another writer (Lewis 1962:37) reports that Beja culture had changed little during the last one thousand years and their religion minimally impacted by Islam over the last five hundred. Even urban Beja culture appears little altered over time. Jacobsen (1998:44, 45, bold mine) reaches some important conclusions in this regard.

Although living in a town clearly has some impact on rural people moving in, the towns themselves may also be changed in the process. Instead of echoing the usual point of view that the people of the Red Sea Hills are getting increasingly urbanized, one might state that **the towns in some senses may be becoming increasingly ruralized**...I am inclined to argue, however, that the tribal traditions are not weak in the towns. They may even grow in importance as **the towns get increasingly 'tribalized'**.

I believe Jacobsen makes a significant point here. I have observed this remarkable trend during my eighteen years of living in Africa and South America: rural people importing their lifestyles, beliefs and practices from the countryside into the city. Often missiologists assume that urban life impacts the rural person more than *vice versa*. Jacobsen argues the opposite, and I tend to agree. Sociologists rarely acknowledge the increasing impact of the rural worldview upon the cities of the two-thirds world.

Another important issue in missiology concerns whether or not adherents of traditional religions remain content in their ATR belief systems. Jacobsen (1998:150,264) describes the Beja as terrified of spirits and uncertain about the future. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999:87, bold mine) well identify the issue.

**A final worldview theme that runs through nearly all folk religious belief system is near constant fear and the need for security.** In a world full of

spirits, witchcraft, sorcery, black magic, curses, bad omens, broken taboos, angry ancestors, human enemies, and false accusations of many kinds, life is rarely carefree and secure...Life for common folk, however, is not all fear. People find security in their kinship groups and joy in their community gatherings. They turn to ancestors and gods for help and to magic and divination to protect them from surrounding dangers.

The Christian worker must not forget that folk religionists resemble unbelievers within Western society: people without Christ coping with life as best they can within the limitations of their culture. The evangelist must proclaim the Gospel of Christ to them for it alone possesses the power to liberate those held captive by fear. As the First Epistle of John (4:18) states, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." The Christian evangelist must respectfully and tactfully condemn unbiblical ATR religious beliefs and their accompanying practices, which inspire this fear.

The goal of the Christian worker is to introduce the folk religionist to the One who can take away the fear of death and uncertainty in life and love them unconditionally. Traditional religion must be confronted. Musk (2003:115) expresses the rationale for this view.

...folk religion represents a belonging to the kingdom of darkness. It is motivated by selfishness, and its end is manipulation. Control is sought over oneself, others, spirit beings, even God - if that were possible. It is non-ethical and non-accountable. In essence, it is a manifestation of mankind's subservience to the Evil One.

Since folk Islam dwells outside the boundaries of truth, there can be no compromise or accommodation with it. Instead, the Christian must respectfully challenge ATR and lead its adherents out of the religion's grasp.

### 7.3 Research implications for mission

The religion of Islam is very much in the news today. While writing this chapter an article in a prominent American newsmagazine asked the question: "Is America Islamophobic?" The cover story reported that the increase in anti-Islamic sentiment in the USA might be partly traced to the controversy surrounding plans by a Muslim congregation to build an Islamic center near the site of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. The following excerpt from the *Time* magazine article (Ghosh 2010:24) expresses the attitude towards Islam common in the West today.

The [anti-Islamic] arguments marshaled by Islam's detractors have become familiar: Since most terrorist attacks are conducted by Muslims and in the name of their faith, Islam must be a violent creed. Passages of the Koran taken out of context are brandished as evidence that Islam requires believers to kill or convert all others. *Shar'ia* laws requiring the stoning of adulterers or other gruesome punishments serve as proof that Muslims are savage and backward. The conclusion of this line of reasoning is that Islam is a death cult, not a real religion...Those railing against new mosques also use arguments of equivalence: Saudi Arabia does not allow churches and synagogues, so why should the U.S. permit the building of places of worship?

Although many Christians advocate tolerance toward Muslims, the article illustrates that the polemic method of engaging Muslims continues to gain ground rather than recede. One Christian pastor, explaining his opposition to the construction of a mosque in another American state, said (in Ghosh 2010:22, ellipsis his) "The political objective of Islam is to dominate the world with its teaching...and to have domination of all other religions militarily." Even when courteously employing apologetic arguments evangelists run the risk of Muslims perceiving their dialogue as polemic in nature. Rather than engaging

Muslims argumentatively, a worldview approach undergirded with cultural understanding holds more promise.

Efforts at contextualizing Islamic forms are similarly met with suspicion. Muslims living in what they perceive as a siege mentality in the West or a majority situation in the Middle East view contextualizing methods of well-meaning Christians as misguided attempts at co-opting their faith and changing their religion into something it is not. Since polemics, apologetics, and contextualization have born little fruit with Muslims, I believe efforts directed toward them should be slanted in a different direction. I offer some suggestions in this section for future study in regard to Christian outreach to Muslims.

First, since apologetic, dialogue and contextualized avenues for reaching Muslims have not led to significant breakthroughs, research must be intensified into evangelizing Muslims according to their specific worldviews. Despite the advances in applying the social sciences to the field of missions, most efforts at engaging Muslims have unfortunately concentrated on Christianizing Islamic forms and Qur'anic passages rather than contextualizing methods toward the Muslim perspective. As previously stated, I favor reaching Muslims through the felt and un-felt needs of their worldview. A few missiologists such as Paul Hiebert, Bill Musk, Phil Parshall, and Roland Muller have concurred. We represent, however, a distinct minority and much more research needs to be done in this area.

Second, other than Bill Musk and Phil Parshall (and in an earlier day, Samuel Zwemer) few have directed attention toward reaching the adherents of popular Islam. Most Christian workers have focused on the influential minority elite of Islam: the wealthy, the educated and

the powerful. Since folk Muslims compose the majority of Islam, other missiologists must labor to develop strategies for reaching the poor, the uneducated, and the powerless.

Evangelicals have been slow to engage folk Muslims. It is far easier to construct cognitive apologetic arguments that highlight doctrinal differences than to formulate approaches that empathize with the feelings, fears, and superstitions of everyday people. Many apologetic minded theologians believe that when Muslims see the error of their ways the entire edifice of Islam will fall, including folk Islam. This desired response has rarely resulted. Additionally, both evangelicals and Islamic orthodoxy itself questions the authenticity of folk Muslims within the Islamic community. The important fact remains, however, that folk Muslims self-identify as Muslims and must be approached as such. Concerning this issue Musk (1984:338-339) notes, "Sometimes the formal Islamic content of ordinary Muslims' lives is minimal. But there is no question in their minds as to whether they are Muslims or not." This self-identity also holds true for the Hillmen -as they consider themselves "good Muslims" despite their ATR proclivities and practices (Jacobsen 1998:21). Consequently, even though ATR-influenced folk Muslims may appear to be indifferent to official Islam, their self-identification as Muslims may cause them to be as resistant to the Christian message as their more orthodox brethren. For this reason, more research is necessary to develop methods that assist folk Muslims in embracing the Gospel, abandoning Islam, and still remaining within their culture.

Third, most missiologists study Islam in the Arab Middle East where the shame-honor worldview predominates and, therefore, are seldom exposed or interested in



contextualized worldview approaches to reach other kinds of folk Muslims. Some dismiss Islam outside the religion's heartland as superstitious, syncretistic and therefore not worthy of serious study. Folk Islam demands earnest examination because most Muslims live outside the Arab world and practice the popular forms of Islam. Such assessments present problems because the lines separating the Islamic elements from the ATR influences are difficult to detect. If boundaries exist at all, they constantly shift according to the ethnic group as well as the age, gender, and economic situation of the individual. Since many Muslims live outside the shame-honor worldview predominant in the Middle East, ATR-influenced Muslims holding to a fear-power worldview orientation should be seriously studied. Research in this area would benefit Christian workers in countries with large numbers of folk Muslims such as Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and Malaysia.

Fourth, approaches for evangelizing *Sufi* folk Muslims must receive greater attention by Christian researchers and practitioners. Interestingly, the previously mentioned proposed Islamic center site near the World Trade Center in New York City involves a *Sufi* congregation. The *Time* magazine article describes *Sufis* as a non-militant sect, a "mystical form of Islam reviled by extremists like Osama bin Laden" (Ghosh 2010:25). Phil Parrshall represents the foremost advocate for engaging *Sufi* folk Muslims through their unique worldview. These Muslims desiring a deeper spiritual life deserve more attention by evangelicals. *Sufi* seekers have some common ground with evangelical Christians, as both of these groups advocate forming a personal relationship with God and emphasize the spiritual over the legalistic aspects

of their religions. More methods for reaching *Sufis* must receive a priority for Christian missions to Muslims.

Last, Christians who attempt to engage folk Muslims should concentrate on approaches that aim for the heart and not only for the intellect. Although I believe Christianity possesses self-authenticating truth, becoming a Christian represents an act of faith. Individuals come to Christ as they respond to fulfilling God-given felt needs. Many in the West come to Christ upon understanding their guilt before God and their need of a Savior. Others within consensus-oriented societies perceive God's requirements from a shame-honor perspective. These people often respond to the Gospel by desiring to honor Jesus Christ as their Lord. This thesis argues that folk Muslims who dread the spirit world and desire release from fear of the unknown hold to a fear-power worldview orientation. Feelings of inadequacy at an existential level form the basis of each of these three primary worldviews. As Christian workers concentrate on the everyday needs of folk Muslims, I believe more of them will come to Christ and come to know Him personally, existentially, and Biblically.

### Bibliography

- Abd al-Malik Biography 2005 (March 5). Bookrags.com. <http://www.bookrags.com/biography/abd-al-malik/>.
- Abu, S & Abdul, H 2000. Dissertations and theses on Islam and Muslims. *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (17) 3:140-148.
- Abdul-Haqq, AA 1980. *Sharing your faith with a Muslim*. Blomington, MN: Bethany House.
- Abun-Nasr, JM 1965. *The Tijaniyya: a Suffi order in the modern world*. London: Oxford University Press.
- African languages undated map. Languages of Africa. [http://www.ivcc.edu/bigelow/Modern Africa/african languages.jpg](http://www.ivcc.edu/bigelow/Modern%20Africa/african_languages.jpg)
- Al Hariri-Wendel, T 2002. *Symbols of Islam*. New York: Sterling Publishing Company.
- Al-Qaradawi, Y 1960. *The lawful and the prohibited in Islam, Al-Halal Wal-Haram Fil Islam*, K El-Helbawy, MM Siddiqui & S Shukry (trans). Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications.
- Abdelsalam, SE 1983. *A study of contemporary Sudanese Muslim saints' legends in sociocultural contexts*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Storr, IN: Indiana University.
- Abrahams, RG 1981. *The Nyamwezi today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Abrahams, RG 1967. *The peoples of greater Unyamwezi, Tanzania (Nyamwezi, Sukuma, Sumbwa, Kimbu, Konongo)*. London: International African Institute.
- Alford, D 2008 (June). Unapologetic apologist: Jay Smith confronts Muslim fundamentalist fervor. *Christianity Today* (April 22, 2010):1-6. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/june/21.34.html>.
- Allen, B 2010a (February 11). Baptist seminary president labels IMB mission strategy 'heresy.' *Associated Baptist Press*. [Http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/4830/53/](http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/4830/53/), 1-2.
- Allen, B 2010b (February 25). Seminary president apologizes for calling IMB head a liar. *Associated Baptist Press*. <http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/4883/53/>.
- Ahmad, AH 1992. *In the shadow of conquest*. Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press.
- Ahmed, AS 2001. *Islam today: a short introduction to the Muslim world*. London: I.B. Taurus.
- Ahmad, HMG 2006. Essence of Islam: evidence for the truthfulness of the Holy Qur'an, its comprehensive nature and its superiority over revealed books. *The Review of Religions* 101(11):4-22.

- Akin, D, Nelson D & Ashford B 2008. *An assessment of the Camel*. Unpublished paper. Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- Allen, JM III 2007. *An Evaluation of the Christology of the Camel training manual*. Unpublished Master of Theology thesis. Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary.
- Anderson, J 1998. The Great Century and beyond (1792-1910), in *Missiology: an introduction to the foundations, history, and strategies of world missions*, JM Terry, E Smith & J Anderson (eds). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 199-218.
- Andrzejewski, BW 1968 *The study of the Bedauye language: the present position and prospects*. African Studies Seminar Paper No. 4, Sudan Research Unit, Faculty of Arts. Khartoum: University of Khartoum.
- Ankerberg, J & Caner, E 2009. *The truth about Islam & Jesus*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers.
- Arberry, AJ 1950. *Sufism: an account of the mystics of Islam*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Arkell, AJ 1955. *A history of the Sudan*. London: Athlone Press.
- Armstrong, K 2006. *Muhammad: a Prophet for our time*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Atterbury, AP 1987. *Islam in Africa*. London: Darf Publications.
- Atyeo, HC 1956. Fuzzy Wuzzy learns to vote. *American Mercury*, vol. 82 (2): 12-134.
- Ausenda, G 1987. *Leisurely nomads: the Hadendoa (Beja) of the Gash Delta and their transition to sedentary village life* (Sudan). Unpublished doctoral dissertation. New York: Columbia University.
- Bakhtiar, L 1976. *Sufi: expressions of the mystic quest*. New York: Avon Books.
- Bantu migrations (undated map). <http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpresse-books/data/13030/vf/ft3779>.
- Barclay, HB 1982. Sudan (North): on the frontier of Islam, in *Religions and societies: Asia and the Middle East*, C Calderora (ed). Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 147-170.
- Basilov, VN 1987. Popular Islam in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* (8 Jan):7-17.
- Bauer, W Arndt, WF & Gingrich, FW 1957. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Beaton, A.C. 1947. Tigri folk tales. *Sudan Notes and Records* (28): 136-150.
- Beja undated map. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/images/beja.jpg>.

- Beja 1979, in *The family of man: the peoples of Africa*. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Publishers, 281-283.
- Beja Congress slams Eritrean negligence of East Sudan peace implementation (2008, April 27). *Sudan Tribune*: (1): 1.
- Bledsoe, DA 2010. *Brazilian neo-Pentecostal movement: development and distinctions with a missiological case analysis of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus and its impact on Brazilian society*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Berger, M 1970. *Islam in Egypt today: social and political aspects of popular religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berry, L 1964. The Red Sea coast of Sudan. *Sudan Notes and Records* (45:148-157).
- Bessire, MHC 1998. Sukuma culture and Tanzania. <http://philip.green-spun.com/sukuma/intro.html>.
- Bierman, J 1990. *Dark Safari: the life behind the legend of Henry Morton Stanley*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Bohanna, P & Curtin, P 1995. *Africa and Africans*. Fourth edition. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Bosch, DJ 1991. *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. Marynoll: Orbis Books.
- Burton, RF 1856 & 1987. *First footsteps in East Africa*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Brandstrom, P 1985. *The Agro-pastoral dilemma: underutilization or overexploitation of land among the Sukuma of Tanzania*. Working paper number 8. Uppsala, Sweden: University of Uppsala.
- Braswell, GW Jr. 1996. *Islam: its prophet, peoples, politics and power*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers.
- Bridge to Life 2010. The Navigators Philippines. <http://philnays.org/site/literature/illustrations/thebridgetolife/>.
- Bravmanv, RA 1983. *African Islam*. Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press.
- Brelvi, M 1964. *Islam in Africa*. Lahore, Pakistan: Institute of Islamic Culture.
- Brown, R 2009. A movement to Jesus among Muslims, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*, RD Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 706-707.
- Brown, R 2007. Response to point 2 in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*. (Spring) 24(1):9.
- Bruce, FF 1952. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Budge, EAW 1907. *The Egyptian Sudan*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench & Tubner.

- Carter, CW & Earle, R 1959. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Chittick, WC 2000. *Sufism: a short introduction*. Oxford: One World Publications.
- Churchill, WS 1899 & 1985. *The river war*. London: NEL Books.
- Clarke, WT 1938. Manners, customs and beliefs of the northern Bega. *Sudan Notes and Records* (21):1-29.
- Clarke, PB (ed) 1998. *New trends and developments in African religions*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.
- Clot, A 2005. *Suleiman the magnificent*. London: Saqi Books.
- Collins, RO 2008. *A history of modern Sudan*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Collins, RO & Burns, JM 2007. *A history of sub-Saharan Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cooper, A 1985. *Ishamael, my brother*. Monrovia, CA: MARC.
- Cooper, MC 1929 (October). Two fighting tribes of the Sudan. *National Geographic* 56(1):165.
- Corduan, W 1998. *Neighboring faiths*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Cory, H 1954a. *The indigenous political system of the Sukuma and proposals for political reform*. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: The Eagle Press.
- Cory, H 1954b. *The Ntemi: the traditional rites in connection with the burial, election, enthronement and magic powers of a Sukuma chief*. London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd.
- Cory, H 1953. *Sukuma law and custom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Corwin, G 2007. A humble appeal to C5/Insider movement Muslim ministry advocates to consider 10 questions. *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (Spring): 5-21.
- Cragg, K 1985. *The call of the minaret*. Ibadan, India: Daystar Press.
- Cruise O & Donal B 2000. Satan steps out from the shadows: religion and politics in Africa. *Africa* 70(3):520-526.
- Cummings, DC 1937 The history of Kassala and the province of Taka. *Sudan Notes and Records* 20(1):1-40.
- Daniel, EL 1977. Theology and mysticism in the writings of Ziya Golalp. *Muslim World* (67)3:175-184.
- Davies, JR 1977. Biblical precedence for contextualization. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 21(3):197-214.
- Dawood, NJ 1990. *The Koran with a parallel Arabic text: translated with notes*. London: Penguin Books.

- Delany, F 1982. Graves in the Langeb-Baraka area. *Sudan Notes and Records* (33)1:58-59.
- Davidson, B. 1978. *Africa: history of a continent*. London: Spring Books.
- Deconstructing Islam: apologist Jay Smith takes a confrontational approach (2010, April 6). *Islam Daily*. <http://www.islamdaily.net/EN/Contents.aspx?AID=117>, 1-3.
- Deedat, A 1983. *Christ in Islam*. Jaipur, India: Islamic Organization of India.
- Desplat, P 2005. The articulation of religious identities and their boundaries in Ethiopia: labeling difference and processes of contextualization in Islam. *Journal of Religion in Africa* (35) 4:482-505.
- De Waal, A 2005. *Islamism and its enemies in horn of Africa*. London: Hurst.
- Dirks, DA 1998. The challenge of Kardecism to an effective evangelistic witness in Brazil. Unpublished doctoral Dissertation. Ft. Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- Donohue, JJ & Esposito, JL 2007. *Islam in transition: Muslim perspectives*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Egyptian Beja (undated map). <http://media.photobucket.com/image/Egyptian> Beja/PiAmoun/G.
- Eitel, KE 1998. "To be or not to be"?: the indigenous church question, in *Missiology: an introduction to the foundations, history, and strategies of world missions*, JM Terry, E Smith & J. Anderson, (eds). Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 301-317.
- Eldon, L 1954. *General Gordon*. London: Collins.
- El Hassan, IS 1980. *On ideology: the case of religion in Northern Sudan*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Storrs, CN: The University of Connecticut.
- Eritrean people (undated map). <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/51/Eri>.
- Ernst, CW 1997. *The Shambhala guide to Sufism*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Esposito, JL (ed) 1987. *Islam in Asia*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Esposito, JL & Mogahed, D 2007. *Who speaks for Islam? what a billion Muslims really think*. New York: Gallup Press.
- Esposito, JL, Fasching, DJ & Lewis, T (eds) 2009. *World religions today*. Third edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Extra, extra, McCain staffers knock KC. (2008, April 20). *The Kansas City Star*, Section 1:2.
- FAITH: new revised FAITH Gospel presentation 2006. LifeWay: Nashville, TN. <http://www.lifeway.com/FAITH/resources/faithFAQs.doc>.

- Farouk, F 2006. Interviewed by the author on January 18. Khartoum, Sudan.
- Fenton, JY Hein, N Reynolds, FE Miller, AL & Nielsen, NC Jr. 1988. *Religions of Asia*. Second edition. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Filbeck, D 1985. *Social context and proclamation: a socio-cognitive study in proclaiming the Gospel cross-culturally*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Fleming, GJ 1922. Kassala. *Sudan Notes and Records*, 5(2):85-95.
- Four Spiritual Laws 2006. Peachtree City, GA: New Life Resources. [Http://www.greatcom.org/english/four.htm](http://www.greatcom.org/english/four.htm).
- Foxall, G 1992. Folk Islam: the case of the Hausa of northern Nigeria. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 11(1):24-33.
- Fradin, MS 2003. *Jihad: the Mahdi rebellion in the Sudan*. Lincoln, NE: IUniverse.
- 'Fuzzy Wuzzy' will end his days a free man 1925 (February 21). *The Literary Digest* (84):55.
- Gaffney, PD 1992. Popular Islam. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 38-51.
- Gamb'ela, B undated map. Afroasiatic Languages. [HTTP://billygambela.afronasiaticanthropology.wordpress.com](http://billygambela.afronasiaticanthropology.wordpress.com).
- Gamst, FC 1984. Beja, in *Muslim Peoples*, vol. 1. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 130-136.
- Gilliland, D 2000. Contextualization, in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, AS Moreau (ed). Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 225-227.
- Gmelch, G 1989. Baseball magic, in *Magic, witchcraft, and religion*. Second edition. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 295-301.
- Ghosh, B 2010. Is America Islamophobic? *Time* (August 30):20-26.
- Godet, FL 1893. *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Third edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Goldschmidt, A. Jr. 2008. *A brief history of Egypt*. New York: Checkmark Books.
- Gordon, AA & Gordon, DL 2007. *Understanding contemporary Africa*, Fourth edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Graeva, R & Ivanova, S 2001. Researching the past and present of Muslim culture in Bulgaria: the 'Popular' and 'High' layers. *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations* (July) 12(3):317-337.
- Greear, JD 2010. *Breaking the Islam code*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.
- Green, D 1989. Guidelines from Hebrews for contextualization, in *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, JD Woodberry (ed). Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 233-250.



- Greenlee, DH (ed) 2006. *From the straight path to the narrow way*. Waynesboro, GA, USA: Authentic Media.
- Greeson, K 2007. *The Camel*. Arkadelphia, AR: WIGTakeResources.
- Gruden, W 1994. *Systematic theology*. Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Gunn, TJ 2003. Shaping an Islamic identity: religion, Islamism, and the state in Central Asia. *Sociology of Religion* (Fall) 64(3):389-410.
- Guralnik, DB (ed) 1970. *Webster's new world dictionary of the American language*. Second college edition. New York: The World Publishing Company.
- Hadaway, RD 1986. *A church planting and discipleship training project for Mwanza, Tanzania, East Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Mill Valley, CA: Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.
- Hair, PEH. 1966. A layman's guide to the languages of the Sudan Republic. *Sudan Notes and Records* (47):65-77.
- Halim, AA 1939. Native medicine and way of treatment in the northern Sudan. *Sudan Notes and Records*. (22):27-48.
- Hamada, LB 1990. *Understanding the Arab world*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Hand, WD 1989. Folk medical magic and symbolism in the West, in *Magic, witchcraft, and religion*, AC Lehmann & JE Myers (eds). Second edition. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 192-198.
- Hassan, R 1987. Religion, society, and the state in Pakistan: Pirs and politics. *Asian Survey* 27(5): 552-565.
- Hassan, YF 1980. The penetration of Islam in the Eastern Sudan, in *Islam in Tropical Africa*, IM Lewis (ed). Second edition. Bloomington, IN: International African Institute, 112-123.
- Hatfield, CR Jr. 1968. *The Nfumu in tradition and change: a study of the position on religious practitioners among the Sukuma of Tanzania, E. Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Washington: The Catholic University of America.
- Haycock, BG 1968. Towards a better understanding of the Kingdom of Cush (Napata-Meroe). *Sudan Notes and Records* (49):1-16.
- Hesselgrave, DJ 1991. *Communicating Christ cross-culturally*. Second edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Hesselgrave, DJ & Rommen, E 2000. *Contextualization: meanings, methods, and models*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Hesselgrave, DJ 2005. *Paradigms in conflict*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.
- Hiebert, PG 1994. *Anthropological reflections on missiological issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

- Hiebert, PG 1985. *Anthropological insights for missionaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Hiebert, PG 1989. Power encounter and folk Islam, in *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus road*. Monrovia, CA: MARC, 45-61.
- Hiebert, PG 2009. The flaw of the excluded middle, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*, RD Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 407-414.
- Hiebert, PG 2008. *Transforming worldviews: an anthropological understanding of how people change*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Hiebert, PG Shaw, RD & Tienou, T 1999. *Understanding folk religion: a Christian response to popular beliefs and practices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Hile, P 1977. Communicating the gospel in terms of felt needs. *Missiology, An International Review* 5(4):499-506.
- Hodge, C 1864. *Romans*. Revised edition (reprint edition 1975). Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust.
- Hoffman, VJ 1995 *Sufism, mystics and saints in modern Egypt*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Holt, PM 1961. *A modern history of the Sudan from the Funj Sultanate to the present day*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Holt, PM & Daly, MW 1988. *A history of the Sudan*. Fourth edition. London: Longman Group, UK, ltd.
- Hooker, MB 1983. *Islam in South-East Asia*. Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill.
- Hunter, GG III 2009. Evangelizing pre-Christian people: a thematic perspective. *The American Society for Church Growth* (20):5-36.
- Hussey, EJR 1923. A Fiki's clinic. *Sudan Notes and Records* (6):35-39.
- Hyatt, E 2009. *Christian witness in Muslim settings*. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (January):84-92.
- Ibrahim, AA 1989. Popular Islam: the religion of the barbarous throng. *Northeast African studies* 11(2):21-40.
- Ibrahim, TA 2010. Interviewed by the author on 1 May. Pittsburg, PA, USA.
- 'Isa, E 2006. Interviewed by the author on 8 January. Khartoum, Sudan.
- Israeli, R 1980. *Muslims in China*. Copenhagen: Scandinavian Institute of Islamic Studies.
- Jabbour, NT 2008. *The crescent through the eyes of the cross: insights from an Arab Christian*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Jacobsen, FF 1998. *Theories of sickness and misfortune among the Hadendoa Beja of the Sudan*. London & New York: Kegan Paul International.

- Jenkins, OB 1996. *Beja people summary*. Unpublished working paper. Nairobi: Interfaith Research Centre (February).
- Jenkins, OB 1984. *The path of love: Jesus in mystical Islam*. Nairobi: Communication Press.
- Jennings-Bramly, WE 1925. Northern Sudan Bisharin fables: stories of the Gerarish the soothsayer. *Sudan Notes and Records* (8):178-182.
- Johnson, F 1982. *A standard English-Swahili dictionary*, two volumes. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Jok, M 2008. *Race, religion and violence*. Oxford: One World.
- Jonadab, H 2006. Interviewed by the author on 8 January. Khartoum, Sudan.
- Kane, J 1982. *A concise history of the Christian world mission*. Revised edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Kapteijns, L 1989. The historiography of the northern Sudan from 1500 to the establishment of British colonial rule: a critical overview. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22(2):251-266.
- Karrar, AS 1992. *The Sufi brotherhoods in the Sudan*. London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd.
- Kato, BH 1975. *Theological pitfalls in Africa*. Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House.
- Katz, MH 2008. Women's Mawlin performances in Sanaa and the construction of 'Popular Islam.' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (August) 40(3):467-484.
- Kerr, DA 1997. Christianity in Muslim society: towards a contextualization of theology. *Studies in world Christianity* 3(2):121-239.
- Kerr, DA 2000. Muhammad: Prophet of liberation: a Christian perspective from political theology. *Studies in World Christianity* 6(2):139-175.
- Kikuyu-introduction 2010. Jens Finke's *Traditional Music and Cultures of Kenya*. <http://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/kiku-yu/>.
- Kippah 2008 (September 22). Articlesbase.com. <http://www.articles-base.com/international-business-articles/kippah-572140.html>.
- Kittel, G & Friedrich, G (eds) 1968. *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, ten volumes. GW Bromiley (trans). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Kirwan, LP 1937a. A contemporary account of the conversion of the Sudan to Christianity. *Sudan Notes and Records* 20(2):289-295.
- Kirwan, LP 1937b. A survey of Nubian origins. *Sudan Notes and Records* 20(1):51-53.
- Krabill, JR Shenk, DW & Stutzman, L (eds) 2005. *Anabaptists meeting Muslims: a calling for presence in the way of Christ*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.

- Kraft, CH 2009. Culture, worldview and contextualization in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*. Fourth edition. RD Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 400-406.
- Kraft, CH 1979. Dynamic equivalent churches in Muslim society, in *The Gospel and Islam: a 1978 compendium*, DM McCurry (ed). Monrovia, CA: Missions advanced research and communication center (MARC), 124-128.
- Kraft, CH 2009. Three Encounters in Christian Witness, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 445-450.
- Kraft, MG 1995. *Understanding spiritual power: a forgotten dimension of cross-cultural mission and ministry*. Marynoll: Orbis.
- Last, M 1985. The role of language in West African Islam. *Africa*; 55(4):432-447.
- Lawless, C 2005. Spiritual warfare and missions. *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9(4):34-48.
- Lehmann, AC & Myers, JE (eds) 1989. *Magic, witchcraft, and religion*, Second edition. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Levi-Strauss, C 1985. The sorcerer and his magic, in *Magic, witchcraft, and religion*, Lehmann, AC & Myers, JE (eds). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 192-202.
- Lewis, B 2002. *What went wrong? the clash between Islam and modernity in the Middle East*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Lewis, BA 1962. Deim el Arab and the Beja stevedores of Port Sudan, *Sudan Notes and Records* (43):16-49.
- Lewis, IM 1980. *Islam in tropical Africa*. Second edition. London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa.
- Lewis, IM 1990. *Saints and Somalis: popular Islam in a clan-based society*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.
- Lewis, IM 1980. *Islam in tropical Africa*. Second edition. Bergvlei, South Africa: Hutchinson Group.
- Lewis, MP (ed) 2009. *Ethnologue: languages of the world*. Sixteenth edition. Dallas, TX, USA: SIL International Online version: [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=bej](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bej), 1-3.
- Lewis, R 2009. Insider movements: retaining identity and preserving community, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*, RC Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 673-675.
- Lingenfelter, SG & Mayers, MK 2003. *Ministering cross-culturally: an incarnational model for personal relationships*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Livingstone, G 1993. *Planting churches in Muslim cities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

- Louw, ME 2007. *Everyday Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia*. New York: Routledge.
- Loewen, J 1975. *Culture and human values: Christian intervention in anthropological perspective*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Madearis, C 2008. *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.
- Marabouts 2008. *The Columbia encyclopedia*. Sixth edition. <http://www.encyclopedia.com>.
- Massey, J 1999. His ways are not our ways. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (35):194-198.
- Magnus, P 1958. *Kitchner: portrait of an imperialist*. London: John Murray.
- Marshall, P Green, R & Gilbert, L 2002. *Islam at the crossroads*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Massey, J 2000. Muslim contextualization. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17(1):1-4.
- Mbiti, JS 1989 *African religions and philosophy*. Second edition. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- Mbiti, JS 1991. *Introduction to African religion*. Second edition. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- McCurry, DM (Ed) 1979. *The gospel and Islam: a 1978 compendium*. Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research & Communications Center (MARC).
- McDowall, D 2005. *A modern history of the Kurds*. Third edition. London: I.B. Tauris & Company.
- McGavran, DA 1990. *Understanding church growth*, CP Wagner (ed). Revised third edition. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Millroth, B 1965. *Lyuba: traditional religion of the Sukuma*. Uppsala, Sweden: Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia.
- Moorehead, A 1962. *The Blue Nile*. London: Penguin Books.
- Moorehead, A 1960. *The White Nile*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Moreau, S 2006. Contextualization, syncretism, and spiritual warfare, in *Contextualization and syncretism: navigating cultural currents*, G Van Rheenen (ed). Pasadena: William Carey Library, 47-69.
- Morgan, D 2001. *The best guide to Eastern philosophy and religion*. New York: Renaissance books.
- Morton, J 1989. Ethnicity and politics in Red Sea Province, Sudan. *African Affairs* 88(350):63-76.

- Moulton, JH & Milligan, G 1930. *The vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Moyo, A 2001. Religion in Africa, in *Understanding contemporary Africa*, Gordon, AA and Gordon, DL (eds). Third edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 299-329.
- Muhajeri, M 1982. *Islamic revolution: future path of the nations*. Teheran: The external liaison section of the Central Office of Jihad-e-Sazaandegi, the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Muller, R 2000. *Honor and shame: unlocking the door*. Philadelphia: Xlibris Corporation.
- Musk, B 1986. Encounter with Jesus in popular Islam. *Evangelical Review of Theology* (July) 10(3):247-257.
- Musk, BA 2003a. *Holy War: why do some Muslims become fundamentalists?* London: Monarch Books.
- Musk, BA 2005. *Kissing cousins? Christians and Muslims face to face*. Oxford: Monarch Books.
- Musk, BA 1984. *Popular Islam: an investigation into the phenomenology and ethnotheological bases of popular Islamic belief and practice*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa (UNISA).
- Musk, BA 1979. Popular Islam: the hunger of the heart, in *The Gospel and Islam*, DM McCurry (ed). Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research & Communications Center (MARC), 208-221.
- Musk, BA 2004. *Touching the Soul of Islam: sharing the Gospel in Muslim cultures*. Oxford: Monarch Books.
- Musk, BA 2003b. *The unseen face of Islam: sharing the Gospel with ordinary Muslims at street level*. London: Monarch Books.
- Mwanza region (undated map). <http://african.lsss.wisc.edu/utamaduni/images/mwanza481w.jpg>.
- Nachtwey, J 2004. The tragedy of Sudan. *Time*, 164(14):44-46.
- Nadel, SF 1945. Notes on Beni-Amer society. *Sudan Notes and Records*, (26):53-94.
- Nalder, LF 1926. The influence of Animism in Islam. *Sudan Notes and Records* (9):75-86.
- Nasr, AA 1980. Popular Islam in al-Tayyib Salih. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, (11):88-104.
- Nasr, SH 2003. *Islam: religion, history, and civilization*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Naude, JA 1978. Islam in Africa. occasional paper in *The Bulletin of The South African Institute of International Affairs*. Braamfontein: Jan Smuts House.
- Neibuhr, RN 1951. *Christ and culture*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

- Nestorian 2009. *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/409819/Nestorians>
- New American Standard Bible* 1995. Updated edition. La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.
- Nevius, JL 1886 (2003 reprint). *The planting and development of missionary churches*. Hancock, NH: Monadock Press.
- Ninety-nine names of God 2010 (April 13). *Encyclopedia BETA*. [http://en.allexperts.com/e/0/99\\_names\\_of\\_god.htm](http://en.allexperts.com/e/0/99_names_of_god.htm)., 1-8.
- Numani, S 2004. 'Umar. London: I.B. Taurus.
- Oladimeji, O 1980. *African Traditional Religion*. Imo, Nigeria: Ile-same Press & Sons (Nigeria) Ltd.
- Olowola, C 1993. *African Traditional Religion and the Christian faith*. Ibadan, Nigeria: African Christian Press.
- Oppenheimer, M 2010. A dispute on using the Koran as a path to Jesus. *New York Times*. (March 12) <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/0313/us/13beliefs.html>, 1-3.
- Ornas, AHA & Dahl, G 1991. *Responsible man: the Atmaan Beja of north-eastern Sudan*. Stockholm: Rekalam & Katalogtryck.
- Owen, TRH 1937. The Hadendowa. *Sudan Notes and Records* 20(2):181-208.
- Ozdalga, E 1998. *The veiling issue: official secularism and popular Islam in modern Turkey*. Richmond: Curzon Press.
- Palmer, R 2008. Tribes of Tanzania. *Article Alley* (October 7). [http://www.articlealley.com/print\\_658621\\_29.html](http://www.articlealley.com/print_658621_29.html).
- Paolini, J 1969. Kabyle handling of grief: Kabyle popular Islam: background to the burial rites. *Muslim World* (59):251-274.
- Paul, A 1982. Ancient tombs in Kassala Province. *Sudan Notes and Records* 33(1):54-57.
- Paul, A 1954. *A history of the Beja tribes of the Sudan*. London: Frank Cass and Company Limited.
- Paul, A 1950. Notes on the Beni-Amer. *Sudan Notes and Records* (31):223-245.
- Paul, A 1959. The Hedareb. *Sudan Notes and Records* (40):75-78.
- Parshall, P 2006. *Bridges to Islam: a Christian perspective on folk Islam*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Parshall, P 2002. *The cross and the crescent*. Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media.
- Parshall, P 2009. Going far enough?, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, RW Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Parshall, P 1989. Lessons learned in contextualization, in *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*. Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 251-265.

- Parshall, P 2003. *Muslim evangelism*. Second edition. Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Publishing.
- Patai, R 1983. *The Arab Mind*. Revised edition. New York: Hatherleigh Press.
- Peel, JDY & Stewart, CC (eds) 1986. '*Popular Islam*' south of the Sahara. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Maasai, in *Peoples of Africa* 1978. London: Marshall Cavendish books, 131-137.
- Perkins, KJ 1983. *Port Sudan: the evolution of a colonial city*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Petterson, D 1999. *Inside Sudan: political Islam, conflict, and catastrophe*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Pikkert, P 2008. *Protestant missionaries to the Middle East: ambassadors of Christ or culture?* Hamilton, ON: WEC-Canada.
- Pocock, M Van Rheenen, GV & McConnell, D 2005. *The changing face of world missions: engaging contemporary issues and trends*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Population of Mwanza, Tanzania undated. Mongabay.com. <http://population.mongabay.com/population/tanzania/152224/mwanza>.
- Pratt, TD 1991. The need to dialog: a review of the debate on the controversy of signs, wonders, miracles and spiritual warfare raised in the literature of the third wave movement. *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 13(1):7-32.
- Relic of the right arm of Saint John the Baptist undated. Quantara Mediterranean Heritage [http://www.qantara-med.org/qantara4/public/show\\_document.php?do\\_id=726&lang=en](http://www.qantara-med.org/qantara4/public/show_document.php?do_id=726&lang=en).
- Richard, H 2010. Interview with the author on 30 April. Pittsburg, PA, USA.
- Richardson, D 2005a. *Eternity in their hearts*. Third edition. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Richardson, D 2005b. *Peace Child*. Fourth edition. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Richardson, D 2009. Redemptive analogy, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*, RW Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 430-436.
- Richardson, D 2003. *Secrets of the Koran*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Richardson, I 1959. *The role of tone in structure of Sukuma*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- Richter, J 1910. *History of protestant missions in the Near East*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, Co.
- Riddell, PG & Cotterell, P 2003. *Islam in context: past, present, and future*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker academic.



- Robinson, A 2002. *Lost Languages: the enigma of the world's undeciphered scripts*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Roden, D 1970. The twentieth century decline of Suakin. *Sudan Notes and Records*. (51):1-22.
- Roper, EM 1927. Poetry of the Hadendowa. *Sudan Notes and Records* (X):147-158.
- Ruthven, M 2006. *Islam in the world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Saal, WJ 1991. *Reaching Muslims for Christ*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- Salih, HM 1980. Hadanduwa traditional territorial rights and inter-population relations within the context of the native administration system (1927-1970). *Sudan Notes and Records* (51):118-120.
- Samatar, SS (ed) 1992. *In the shadow of conquest: Islam in colonial northeast Africa*. Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press.
- Sandars, GER 1933. The Bisharin. *Sudan Notes and Records* (XVI):119-145.
- Sandars, GER 1935. The Amrar. *Sudan Notes and Records* 18(2):195-220.
- Sauma, R 2002. Ancestor practices in the Muslim world: a problem of contextualization from Central Asia. *Missiology* 30(4):323-345.
- Schilder, K 1990. *Popular Islam in Tunisia: a regional cults analysis*. Leiden, Netherlands: African Studies Centre.
- Schlorff, SP 1983. Catholic program for dialogue with Islam: evangelical evaluation with reference to contextualization. *Missiology* 11(2):131-148.
- Schlorff, S 2006. *Missiological models in ministry to Muslims*. Upper Darby, PA: Middle East Resources.
- Secrets of the hand in Sufi meditation *muraqaba* 2010. <http://www.nur-muhammad.com/Meditation/Core/naqshbandime>, 1-7.
- Shaw, MR 1996. *The kingdom of God in Africa*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Shurkian, OM 2006 (1 September). The Beja: the plight of a people dispossessed. *The Sudan Tribune*, 1-16.
- Shu'aib, TB 1991. *Essentials of Ramadan: the fasting month*. Los Angeles: Da'awah Enterprises International.
- Silva, K 2010. Share your faith ministries (Evangelism Explosion). [http://www.eeinternational.org/pages/page.asp?page\\_id=31454](http://www.eeinternational.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=31454).
- Smith, CD 1983. *Islam and the search for social order in modern Egypt: a biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Smith, J 2010. Interviewed by the author on 11 June. Kansas City, Missouri, USA.

- Smith, RM 1999. Folk Islam in East Africa. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 18(2):83-106.
- Sookhdeo, P 2008. *The challenge of Islam to the church and its mission*. McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing.
- Sookhdeo, P 2007. *Global Jihad*. McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing.
- 'Sorcerer' awaits beheading by Saudi officials (2010, April 25). *The Kansas City Star*, Section A:26.
- Spiers, EM (ed) 1998. *Sudan: the reconquest reappraised*. London: Frank Cass.
- Steele, D 1998. Lord Salisbury: the 'false religion' of Islam, and the reconquest of the Sudan, in *Sudan: the reconquest reappraised*, D Spiers (ed). London: Frank Cass, 11-33.
- Steffen, TA 2009. Why communicate the Gospel through stories?, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*, RD Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 440-444.
- Steinbronn, A 2007. *Worldviews: a Christian response to religious pluralism*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.
- Steps to peace with God undated. Minneapolis, MN: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.
- Stewart, CC 1985. Introduction: popular Islam in twentieth-century Africa. *Africa* 55(4):363-369.
- Sudanese Shi'ites hold rare public celebration (2009, August 11). *Sudan Tribune*, Section 1:1.
- Sukumaland map 1954. Dar es Salaam, Tangayika: Department of Lands and Surveys.
- Tanner, RES 1967. *Transition in African beliefs: traditional religion and Christian change; a study in Sukumaland, Tanzania, East Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Maryknoll Publications.
- Tanzania (undated map). Tanzania.mwanza.map.jpg. <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/africa/9901/02/tanzania.big.fish/t>.
- Tanzania Population undated. *Encyclopedia to the nations*. <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Tanzania-POPULATION>
- Taylor, WD (ed) 2000. *Global missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the Iguassu dialogue*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Talman, H 2004. Comprehensive contextualization. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21(1):6-12.
- Tennent, TC 2006. Followers of Jesus ('Isa) in Islamic mosques: a closer examination of C-5 'High Spectrum' contextualization. *The International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23(3):101-117.
- Terry, JM Smith, E & Anderson, J (eds) 1998. *Missiology: an introduction to the foundations, history, and strategies of world missions*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

- Theobald, AB 1951. *The Mahdiya: a History of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*. London: Longman & Green, and Company.
- Thomas, DE 2005. *African Traditional Religions in the modern world*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., publishers.
- Tippitt, A 1999. The evangelization of Animists, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*, RW Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Third edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 623-631.
- The Beja (undated map). [http://www.joshuaproject.net/profiles/maps/m10766\\_su.gif](http://www.joshuaproject.net/profiles/maps/m10766_su.gif).
- The Rashaida tribe of Sudan 1970. Ancient Historical society virtual museum. Moer Foundation, Inc. <http://www.ancienthistorical society.org/RashaidaTribe.html>.
- The Roman road to salvation undated. Contender Ministries. <http://contenderministries.org/romanroad.php>.
- The Sunni Mahdi 2009. *GlobalSecurity.org*. <http://www.GlobalSecurity.org/military/intro/islam-sunni-mahdi.htm>, 1-3.
- Travis, JJ 2009a. Must all Muslims leave 'Islam' to follow Jesus?, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*, RD Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 668-672.
- Travis, JJ 2006. Response one in followers of Jesus ('Isa) in Islamic mosques: a closer examination of C-5 'high spectrum' contextualiation. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23(3):124-125.
- Travis, JJ 2009b. The C-Spectrum: a practical tool for defining six types of "Christ-centered communities" found in Muslim contexts, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*, RC Winter & SC Hawthorne (eds). Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 664-665.
- Trimingham, JS 1959a. *Islam in Ethiopia*. NY: Routledge.
- Trimingham, JS 1965. *Islam in the Sudan*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Trimingham, JS 1959b. *Islam in West Africa*. London: Oxford Univeristy Press.
- Tritton, AS 1951. *Islam*. London: Hutchinson's University Library.
- Understanding Islam and the Muslims* 1989. Washington, DC: Islamic affairs department, the embassy of Saudi Arabia.
- Vahed, GH 2003. A Sufi saint's day in South Africa: the legend of Badsha Peer. *South African Historical Journal* 49(11):96-122.
- Van Binsbergen, WMJ 1980. Popular and formal Islam, and supra-local relations: the highlands of Northwestern Tunisia, 1800-1970. *Middle Eastern Studies* 16(1):71-91.
- Van Binsbergen, WMJ Van 1985. The historical interpretation of myth in the context of popular Islam, in *Theoretical explorations in African religion*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 189-224.

- Van Pelt, P 1984. *Bantu customs in mainland Tanzania*. Revised edition. Tabora, Tanzania: T.M.P. Book Department.
- Van Rheenen, G (ed) 2006. *Contextualization and syncretism: navigating cultural currents*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Van Rheenen, G 1991. *Communicating Christ in animistic contexts*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Van Rheenen, G 1996. *Missions: Biblical foundations & contemporary strategies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Van Rheenen, G 2006. Syncretism and contextualization: the church on a journey defining itself, in *Contextualization and syncretism: navigating cultural currents*, G Van Rheenen (ed). Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1-29.
- Van Rheenen, G 2005. A theology of power. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (January): [http://www.emqonline.com/emq\\_article\\_read.php?ArticleID=575](http://www.emqonline.com/emq_article_read.php?ArticleID=575).
- Voll, JO 1978. *Historical dictionary of the Sudan*. London & Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press.
- Voll, JO 1974. The effects of Islamic structures on modern Islamic expansion in the Eastern Sudan. *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7(1):85-98.
- Vu, MA 2010. Missions expert clears up confusion over Muslim outreach tool. *The Christian Post* (February 24). <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20100224/missions-expert-ciea>.
- Wagner, CP 1988. *The third wave movement of the Holy Spirit*. Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books.
- Wagner, CP 1996. *Confronting the powers*. Ventura, CA: Regal.
- Warburg, GR 1973. From Ansar to Umma: sectarian politics in the Sudan, 1914-1945. *Asian and African Studies* 9(2):101-153.
- Walker, K 2010. Out of context: debate over 'Camel method' probes limits of Muslim-focused evangelism. *Christianity Today* (March 24). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/april/3.14.html>.
- Watt, WM 1970. *Bell's introduction to the Qur'an*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Watt, WM 1985. *Islamic philosophy and theology: an extended survey*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Watt, WM 1961. *Mohammad: prophet and statesman*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wedekind, K 1990. *Beja narrative: pursuit of participants and analysis of aspects*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Grutyr.
- Weeks, RV 1984. *Muslim peoples: a world ethnographic survey*. Second edition. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.
- Weerstra, HM (ed) 1996. Islam III. *International Journal of Frontier Mission* 13(4):161-216.

- Wehr, H 1976. *Arabic-English dictionary: a dictionary of modern written Arabic*, JM Cowan (ed). Third edition. Ithica, NY: Spoken Language Services.
- Westcott, BF 1892. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Second edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Welch, EA 1974. *Life and literature of the Sukuma in Tanzania, East Africa*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Washington, D.C.: Howard University.
- Wheatcroft, A 2004. *Infidels: a history of the conflict between Christendom and Islam*. New York: Random House.
- Westerlund, D 2006. *African indigenous religions and disease causation: from spiritual beings to living humans*. Boston: Brill.
- Wijsen, F & Tanner, R 2002. *I am just a Sukuma*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Winter, RD 2009. Going far enough?, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*, RD Winter & SH Hawthorne (eds). Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 670-671.
- Winter, RD & Hawthorne, SC (eds) 1999. *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*. Third edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Winter, RD & Hawthorne, SC (eds) 2009. *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*. Fourth edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Woodberry, JD 1989. Contextualization among Muslims: reusing common pillars, in *Word Among us*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 282-312.
- Woodberry, JD (ed) 1989. *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus road*. Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications.
- Yildirim, O 1998. A study on popular religion in the early modern Morocco with special reference to the political role of the saints, 1500-1700. *Hamdard Islamicus* 21(2):39-48.
- Zebiri, K 1997. *Muslims and Christians face to face*. Oxford, UK: One-world Publications.
- Zwemer, SM 1920. *The influence of Animism on Islam*. New York: The Macmillan Company.

## Glossary

Ababda: One of the five major Beja subdivisions. They live in S. Egypt and are largely mono-lingual in Arabic.

African Traditional Religion (ATR): Traditional religions on the continent of Africa generally hold to a belief in a Supreme Being, spirits, and a life after death. Many practice ancestor veneration, while their religious personnel perform beneficial magic or malevolent witchcraft.

Amarar: One of the five major Beja subdivisions. They live in Eastern Sudan and speak Beja though some are bi-lingual in Arabic.

Andot: Beja board game similar to backgammon but played with camel dung. *Andot* means "camel pellets" in Beja.

Animism: Older, outdated (and pejorative) term for traditional religion and ATR (African Traditional Religion).

Ansar Sunna: "Helpers of the *Sunna*." The Beja who follow the strict *Wahhabi* interpretation of *Sunni* Islam are loosely organized in eastern Sudan.

Ansar Mahdi: "Helpers of the *Mahdi*." Some Beja still revere the memory of the Sudanese *Mahdi* of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Muhammad Ahmed. This small political group is called the *Ansar Mahdi* (more political than religious).

'Arif: Gnostic, mystical knowledge in *Sufi* Islam. The term comes from the Arabic word *'arafa* (to know). The word also can mean expert or master. *Ma'arifa* (knowledge) and *'irfan* (*Gnosis*) are derivatives of *'arafa*.

Ashraf: A small Beja subgroup who claim to be of the bloodline and lineage of the Prophet Muhammad.

Asl: Beja tribal grazing, water and territorial rights.

ATR: See African Traditional Religion.

Ayatollahs: living *imams* (*Shi'a* Islamic clergy). Means "sign of God." They rule in place of the coming *Mahdi*.

Bafumu (*mfumu*): Plural of *mfumu*, shaman in Sukuma ATR. *Bafumu* are believed to dispense good magic.

Balogi (*nogi*): Plural of *nogi*, evil sorcerers or witches who dispense evil magic in Sukuma ATR.

Bantu: A term coined in 1856 to describe more than four hundred African tribes that speak cognate languages that utilize *ntu* and *batu* (or a variation) for man and men respectively. The first Bantu originated in Central

Africa and spread to Eastern and Southern Africa from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean and to the Cape. Sukuma and Swahili are Bantu languages (see Appendices 10 & 11).

Baqa: "Subsistence". New 'life in God' in *Sufism* that is similar to the 'born again' concept in Christianity.

Baraka (*baraqa*): spiritual power, blessing, divine grace.

Basir (*busara*): A traditional healer and spiritual diagnostician reputed to be able to "see the unseen" in Beja folk Islam.

Batemi (*ntemi*): Plural of *ntemi*. Chiefs in Sukuma ATR.

Beja (*Bega, Bedawiet, Bija*): Arabic term for a Cushitic tribe of 1.3 million people who live in E. Sudan, S. Egypt, and N. Eritrea. Also the name for the language of *To-Bedawie* spoken by a majority of the tribe.

Beni-Amer: One of the five major Beja subdivisions. Most live in northeastern Eritrea, but many also live in E. Sudan. Most speak *Tigre* but some are bilingual in Beja.

Bisharin (*Bishariin*): One of the five major Beja subdivisions. Most live in E. Sudan while a few reside in S. Egypt. Many are bi-lingual in Beja and Arabic.

Bufumu: The good or helpful magic and divination of the *bafumu* (*mfumu*) in Sukuma ATR.

Bulogi: Witchcraft, sorcery, the evil magic of a *nogi* in Sukuma ATR.

Busara: Plural of *basir*. Diviners who can see the unseen.

Busharia: Egyptian Arabic name for the *Ababda* subdivision of the Beja who live in Southern Egypt.

Blemmyes: Ancient Egyptian name for the Beja.

Caliph: Those chosen to lead the Islam after Muhammad's death. The Prophet's deputy is the meaning of *Caliph*.

Camel Method: Controversial Qur'anic bridging technique.

Contagious magic: "Materials or substances once in contact with the intended victim are used in the magical attack (Lehmann & Myers 1989:256-257).

Contextualization: "...making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation" (Kato in Hesselgrave 2000:33).

Deim: Neighborhood or native dwelling area (Arabic word).

Dervish: Persian word (from *darwish*) that means 'poor man' and traveler of the *Sufi* path.

Dhikr: Remembrance. *Sufi* ritualistic repetition of the 99 names of God. The practice is mandatory in *Sufi* Islam.

Dinka: The largest tribe in Southern Sudan.

'Eid al-Adha: The festivity ('*eid*) of sacrifice concludes the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

'Eid al-Fatur: The feast ('*eid*) of fast-breaking concludes a month's fasting during Ramadan.

Faki (*faqir, fiki, fagir*): 'poor man' (see *dervish*), or traveler on the *Sufi* path. The feminine is *fakira*. In Beja folk Islam a traditional healer is called a *faki* (plural, *fugara*).

Fana: "Dying to self" in *Sufism*, or "Self-extinction."

Fateha: the opening verses of the Qur'an. "In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of the universe, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Judgment!" (in Dawood 1990:xvii).

Fiki: Another transliterated spelling of *faki*.

Flaw of the Excluded Middle: The thesis of the late Paul Hiebert that claims that Westerners use science to explain everyday experiences and relegate otherworldly matters to religious speculation and a future afterlife. The 'flaw of the excluded middle' unnaturally separates the supernatural from the world of sensory perception. The purview of folk religion is to explain the 'middle level' problems and fears with supernatural explanations that identify the causes and recommends the cures.

Folk Islam (popular Islam): the mixture of traditional religious beliefs and practices with orthodox Islam. Also known as popular, informal, low, and common Islam.

Folk religion: The religious beliefs, faith, rituals and practices of ordinary mankind.

Fota: Beja word for a woman's long dress (Arabic, *tob*).

Fugara: Plural form of *faki*.

Fulani: West African nomadic people. Many have settled in Eastern Sudan.



Gabila (*gabil, kabila, kabil*): Arabic word for tribe or kinship group. For the Beja this designates a clan of six hundred households under the one of the five major subdivisions.

Hadendoa (*Hadendowa*): One of the five major Beja subdivisions. Most live in E. Sudan but a few dwell in Eritrea and called the *Hedareb*. Many are bi-lingual in Beja and Arabic. They are the largest of the five Beja divisions.

Hadith: A compilation of stories and about Muhammad and words attributed to him. Hadith is the common Arabic word for tale, narrative, report, story, or interview.

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca. One of Islam's five pillars.

Hararenini: The Beja word for the cultural value of hospitality.

Hedareb: The *Hadendoa* Beja living in Eritrea are called the *Hedareb*. Also the Beja word for 'hospitable.'

Heequal: Beja word for the spiritual essence of luck-bringing. This quality is prized by healers and diviners.

Hillmen: A nickname for the Beja of the Red Sea hills given to them by the Egyptians in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

Homeopathic magic: "Homeopathic principles of medicine ...are based on Analogic magic [or 'Imitative magic'], wherein it is assumed that the external similarity rests on what would seem to be an apparent internal connection and a basic inner unity and dependence" (Hand 1989:193).

Imam: A senior official in charge of a large mosque. This title is also given to the descendants of Caliph Ali in Shi'a Islam.

Insider Movement: Advocates Muslims who become believers to remain Muslims in both name and cultural identity.

Irenic (Approach): More peaceful and nonconfrontational.

'Isa (Eisa): Qur'anic Arabic name for Jesus the Messiah.

'Isahi Muslims: Muslims who have submitted to 'Isa.

Isma'ilis: See Seveners. The *Isma'ilis* are led by the Aga Khan and are the wealthiest Muslims.

Ithna Ashariya: *ithna asharah* is "twelve" in Arabic. The Twelvers, the majority sub-sect of Shi'a Islam, recognize twelve *imams*. They believe the twelfth *imam* is in hiding (Muhammad al-Mumtazzar) will return at a later date.

Jabana (*Jabanaat*): Beja word for coffee. *Jabanaat* is the "time of coffee drinking."

Jacobites: The Monophysites were adherents of an early church heresy that believed in one nature of God rather than the orthodox Trinitarian view. Named for Jagoub el Baradai who formulated their doctrinal canon.

Jalabiyah: The robes worn by Beja men (and other tribes).

Jihad: Arabic for struggle or strive. Greater *jihad* is one's personal struggle against sin. Lesser *jihad* is the holy war against the enemies of the faith.

Jinn (*jinns*): spiritual beings in Islam. They are usually evil but sometimes capricious.

Ka'ba: Muslims believe this to be the place God commanded Abraham and Ishmael to build upon the original worship site of Adam. Stone cube in the sacred mosque in Mecca. The black stone is in the southeast corner of the *ka'ba*.

Karai: Beja word for *Werehyena* (See *Werehyena*).

Karama: In folk Islam a *karama* is a sacrificial offering to God to cause something positive to happen. The word means nobility, generosity, and token of esteem (Arabic).

Karijites: "Seceders." This small Islamic sect rejects both the *Sunni* and *Shi'a* positions in regard to the succession question in Islam.

Kashf: Arabic word meaning "remove" but *Sufis* use the term for the "unveiling" concept of the mystic *Sufi* quest.

Khalifa: The Sudanese Arabic name for *Caliph*, or successor of the *Mahdi*. After Muhammad Ahmed, the Sudanese *Mahdi* died in 1885, *Khalifa* Abdullah ruled Sudan until 1898.

Kulogwa: The act of "casting spells" by the (evil) *balogi* (sorcerers/witches) in Sukuma ATR.

Liwelelo: The high god of Sukuma ATR.

Maasai: A Nilotic tribe in N. Tanzania and S. Kenya.

Mahdi (*Mahdia*): Second great prophet will come to deliver Islam during a time of shame and trouble. *Sunnis*, *Shi'ites* and *Sufis* all have versions of the *Mahdi*. Muhammad Ahmed bin Abdallah proclaimed himself the *Mahdi* and expelled the British from Sudan in 1885 but died the same year. The *Mahdia* is the *Mahdi's* government.

Manga: Spirit-possessed medium in Sukuma ATR.

Marabout: West African *Sufi* holy man similar to a *sheikh* or a *pir*.

Ma'rifa: Arabic for *Gnosis* or mystic knowledge in *Sufism*.

Masamva: The ancestors in Sukuma ATR.

Middle-level: See Flaw of the Excluded Middle.

Mingay: Beja word for a malady that strikes children called "left aloneness."

Mirguay: Beja word for "fright sickness."

Mfumu (*bafumu*, plural): The medicine man (or woman) and diviner or Sukuma ATR who heals by magic or homeopathic medicine. Second in importance only to the *Ntemi* (chief).

Milad al-Nabi: Birthday of the Prophet. Muhammad's birthday is increasingly celebrated as the third 'eid (feast).

Nabatab: Beja Cushitic nobility who subjugated the *Tigre*. They adopted the customs and *Tigre* language of the conquered people. The *Tigre* and the *Nabatab* together compose the *Beni-Amer* Beja. The *Nabatab* make up 10% of the total.

Neo-Pentecostalism: See 'Third Wave Pentecostalism' and 'Power Encounter.'

Nestorians: Followers of Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople whose heretical views were condemned in 431 AD. He held that Christ was really two person loosely divided into the divine and the human.

Ngemi wa mbula: Assistant to the chief (*ntemi*) in charge of making rain in Sukuma ATR.

Ngoma ya bufuma: Magic drum dance in Sukuma ATR.

Night of Power: The 27<sup>th</sup> night of the month of Ramadan. Folk Muslims believe prayers and devotion offered on this night can alter destiny.

Nogi (*Balogi*): Sorcerer or witch in Sukuma ATR practicing evil magic. They keep their identities secret and are often executed if discovered.

Ntemi (*Batemi*): Sukuma chief. *Batemi* are believed to have the magical power to bring rain in Sukuma ATR.

Nubians: The Nubians number approximately one million persons and live in equal numbers in Southern (upper) Egypt and Northern Sudan. The Nubians are descendants of the Egyptians of the upper Nile. They adopted Christianity and held out against Islam until about 1400 AD.

Nyamwezi: A *Bantu* people in Tanzania ethnically and linguistically related to the Sukuma tribe.

Orthodox Islam: The doctrinal Islam of the Qur'an. Also called formal, official, high, and ideal Islam.

Pir: This is the Persian word for *Sheikh*.

Polemics: Argumentative discussion by disputation.

Popular Islam: See folk Islam.

Popular religion: See folk religion.

Power Encounter: Originally a power encounter was "A visible, practical demonstration that Jesus Christ is more powerful than the false gods or spirits worshipped or feared by a given society or people group" (Hesselgrave 2005:176). The term has been expanded by 'Third Wave Pentecostalism' to include not only speaking and interpreting tongues, but exorcising demons and territorial spirits, raising the dead, slaying in the spirit, spiritual mapping, and prayer walking (:177).

Qadiriyya: Important *Sufi* order founded by Abd al-Quadir al-Jilani in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. *Qadiriya Sufis* are the "whirling dervishes" who gather each Friday at sundown at the tomb of Hamad al-Nil who led the Sudanese segment of the order in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Fifty percent of Beja *Sufis* follow this order.

Qur'an (Koran, Quran): Islam's holy book.

Rashaida: A tribe originally from Arabia that moved during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Red Sea coast of Africa. They number about 150,000 in Eritrea and half that in Sudan.

Redemptive Analogy: Concepts in a host culture that can be used to illustrate the Christian Gospel message.

Sahel: From the Arabic "*Sahil*" (shore). Arid land between the Sahara Desert and the African Savanna stretching from the Atlantic coast of West Africa to the Indian Ocean.

Salif: Beja tribal traditional law (trumps Islamic law).

Sama': The Arabic word for listen or hear. For Sufis the word means to listen to the heart through listening to chanted or recited poetry.

Samburu: Nilotic tribe in N. Kenya related to the *Maasai*.

Seveners: *Shi'ite* sub-sect who acknowledge only seven of the first twelve *imams* recognized by the majority *Ithna Ashariya* (Twelvers) *Shi'a* Muslim sect.

Shahada: The first pillar of Islam is the repetition of; "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His prophet."

Shaitan (*Shawatin*, plural): Satan, devil, demon.

Sharia (*Shari'a*): Islamic law. The Qur'an plus the Prophet's *Sunna* as recorded in the *hadiths* as interpreted by the Muslim jurists came to be called the *Sharia*.

Sheikh (*Shaykh*): The leader of a *Sufi* order. There are three grades of *sheikhs*. Only the highest grade possesses spiritual authority. The lowest grade of *sheikh* teaches or leads an Islamic school (*Khalwa*). Often an honorary title as well.

Shi'a (*Shi'ites*, partisans of Ali- from *Shi'at* 'Ali- party of Ali): The minority Muslim sect (15% of Islam) who believe the leader of Islam should be a descendant of Ali. They live mostly in Iran and Iraq.

Siir: A Beja word for illness caused by the evil eye.

Silsilas: The spiritual lineages of *Sufi sheikhs*.

Sufis (*Sufism*): The ascetic and mystical sect of Islam. Sufis are not really a division of Islam, as *Sufis* follow either *Sunni* or *Shi'a* Islam. The term may come from the woolen garments (*suf*-wool) worn by early followers or from *suffa* (Arabic, bench) or people of the bench.

Sukuma: A Bantu people who are the largest tribe in Tanzania and the second largest in E. Africa. *Kisukuma* is the language, *Wasukuma* the people, and *Usukuma* the land.

Sungusungu: An independent generally non-religious informal association of vigilantes in Tanzania.

Sunna: A beaten path in the desert or well-worn instruments. Acquired the meaning of well-trusted and reliable and came to mean the living, practical Islamic tradition.

Sunni: The majority sect (about 85%) in Islam. *Sunnis* believe the community of Islam should choose its leader.

Sura: The chapter divisions in the Qur'an are called *suras*.

Sympathetic magic: "Items associated with or symbolic of the intended victim are used to identify and carry out the spell" (Lehman & Myers 1989:257).

Syncretism: The combination, blending or reconciliation of differing or conflicting beliefs in religion.

Tahiil: The *tahiil* formula is "la ilaha il-la Allah: There is no deity but God." This is said ritually by most Muslims, but especially by *Sufis*.

Tariq (*tariqa, tarik, tarika*): Arabic word for road, way, or path. A derivative term that means manner, procedure, *Sufi* religious order, creed, faith religion, or method.

Tasawwuf: Taking up the "way [path] of *Sufism*."

Tawil: Arabic word for "long, tall, or high" but means "deeper or greater meaning" in *Sufi* Islam.

Third Wave Pentecostalism: Synonymous with Neo-Pentecostalism. Includes groups that have gone beyond what most evangelicals consider orthodox. See power encounter.

Tiffa: The male Beja hairstyle known as "fuzzy-wuzzy" hangs in ringlets down the back and along the side of the face. The Beja believe the *tiffa* possesses magical powers.

Tigre: A Semitic language spoken by the *Beni-Amer* Beja of Eritrea. In Eritrea the *Beni-Amer* are known as the *Tigre* tribe. However, historically the *Tigre* people (the serfs) were subjugated by the *Nabatab* nobility and together became the *Beni-Amer* tribe as it is known today.

Tob: Arabic word for a woman's long dress (Beja, *fota*).

To-Bedawie: The formal name for the Beja language.

Toodip: Beja word for epilepsy. Believed to be caused by evil spirits. The Arabic word is *sara'a*.

Traditional religion: Aboriginal beliefs, practices, rituals, and doctrines native and indigenous to a culture.

Twelvers: See *Ithna Ashariya*.

Ujamaa: African (Tanzanian) socialism, especially denoting collective villagization in Tanzania. This is a Swahili word for family togetherness.

'Ulama: serves as a clergy and scholarly class in Islam. The term comes from the Arabic word *alim* for scholar.

Ummah (*umah*): Community of Islam (Arabic).

Wahhabi (*Wahhabism*): The puritanical Islamic movement originating in Arabia at the end of the eighteenth century. The followers of Abd el Wahhab (1703-1787) insist on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an. *Wahhabism* has become the orthodox Islamic school of thought.

Werehyenas (*karai*): Lycanthropic Beja concept that humans can change into hyenas for witchcraft purposes.

Witchcraft: I prefer the broader definition of Mbiti (1989:196-197): "Witchcraft is a term used more popularly and broadly, to describe all sorts of evil employment of mystical power, generally in a secret fashion."

Worldview: The presuppositions a culture or ethnic group possesses about reality and the nature of things. The mental map a society uses in perceiving the world.

Zaidi's: The *Shi'a* sub-sect that believes any descendant of *Caliph* Ali can become the *Imam* (religious leader). Ali was the fourth *Caliph* of *Sunni* Islam and the first *Imam* of *Shi'a* Islam.

Zar: A "non-Muslim" evil spirit that possesses Muslim men and women and is especially prevalent among the Beja people.

## Appendix 1      Transliterations

Beja and Sukuma words are usually written in Roman script and appear in italic in this thesis. Schlorff (2006:vii) employs the simplified transliteration scheme of William Saal (1991:187) for rendering Arabic letters into English equivalents. I have followed this format, which includes placing Arabic words in italics. Exceptions include Arabic words that are commonly used in English (e.g. Qur'an; Mohammed; Hadith). The phonetic transliteration system of Arabic letters and sounds follows (Schlorff 2006:VII-VIII, bold, italic, and parenthesis his).

**Sounds as in English:** pronounce *b, d, f, j, h, k, l, m, n, s, t, w, y,* and *z,* and the short vowels *a, i,* and *u,* as in English.

**Sounds represented by two English letters:** pronounce *dh* as in *that,* *th* as in *think,* *kh* as in *Ach!* (German), *sh* as in *shall,* *gh* with a slight gargle sound as in the French *r,* and *DH* as will be explained next.

**The Arabic Emphatics:** *H, S, D, T,* and *DH* represent emphatic sounds for which there are no equivalents in English. *H* represents an aspirated *h.* For all practical purposes, the emphatics *S, D, T,* and *DH* may be pronounced like the normal *s, d, t,* and *dh* - with an emphasis if you can.

**Various:** The backward apostrophe ` (the Semitic "ayn") represents kind of a guttural grunt, the apostrophe ' (the "hamza") a simple glottal stop, and the *q,* for which again there is no English equivalent, a guttural *k.* The Arabic *r* is rolled as in Spanish.

**Long Vowels:** *aa, ii,* and *uu* represent long vowels that are stressed in pronunciation; *aa* is pronounced as in "hat," *ee* as in "beet," and *uu* as in "hoot."



Appendix 2 Beja tribe in Sudan, Egypt, and Eritrea



Appendix 3 Beja tribe divisions (Ornas & Dahl 1991:6)



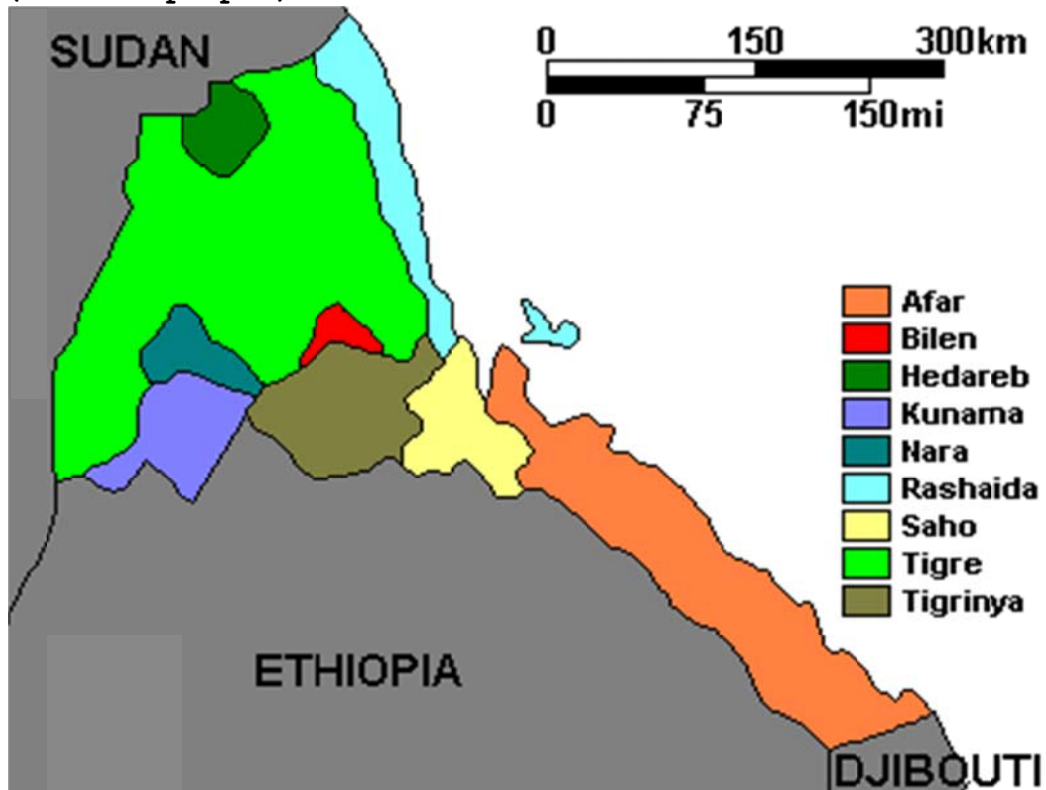
Appendix 4 Map of Beja tribe area in Sudan (The Beja)



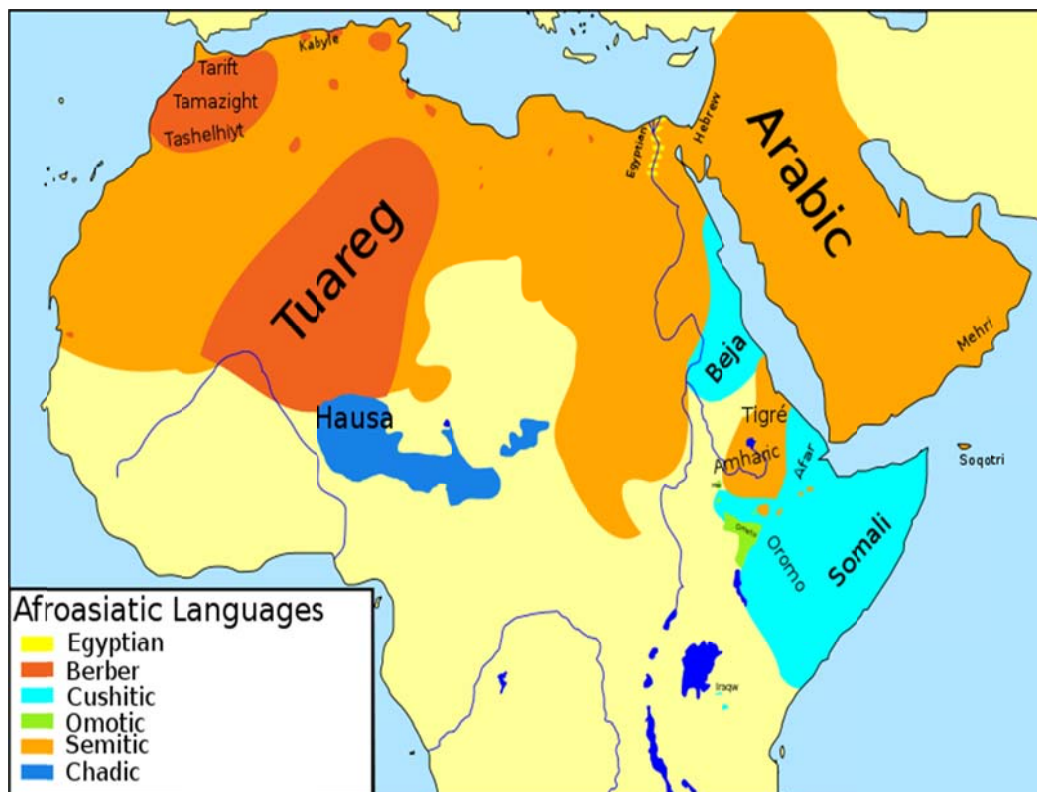
Appendix 5 Egyptian Beja map (Egyptian Beja)



Appendix 6 Eritrean Beja, Hedareb and (Beni Amer) Tigre (Eritrea people)



Appendix 7. Afro-asiatic languages (Gamb'ela)





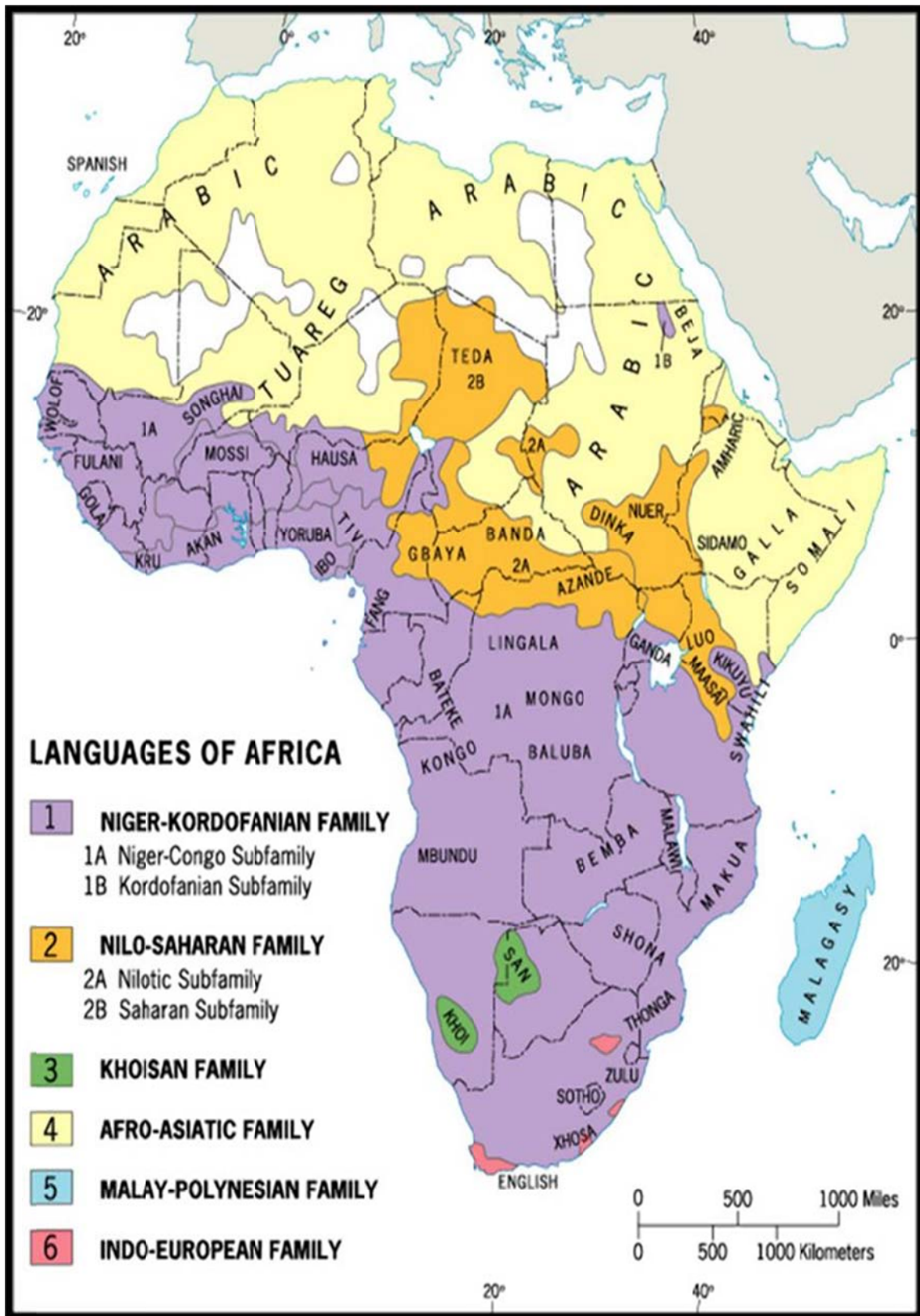
Appendix 8 Map of Tanzania (Tanzania).



Appendix 9. Map of Sukuma area, Tanzania (Mwanza)



Appendix 10 Languages of Africa (African languages)



Appendix 11 Bantu migrations





Appendix 12 Sukumaland (Dept. of Lands & Surveys 1954)

