



## Religion as a response to the rural African socio-economic transformations: A Review

Buruk Wolde-Michael Jima

Department of History and Heritage Management, Jimma University, Jimma.

E-mail: [buruk.woldemichael@ju.edu.et](mailto:buruk.woldemichael@ju.edu.et), [burukmichael@gmail.com](mailto:burukmichael@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Analysis has been made on the five works of Edward Alpers, Donal B. Cruise O'Brien, Paul M. Lubeck, Lucy E. Creevey and Sean Redding in order to check to what extent was the influence of religion among the rural African societies. The result found that the rural African societies used their respective religious beliefs as a means of overcoming the challenges during the time of socio-economic transformations: the kitimiri spirit possessing women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Zanzibar against the men favoring economic policy of the Busaidi government in the case of Edward Alpers's discussion, the Mouride disciples against the scarce land resource following the French colonial rule in the case of Donal B. Cruise O'Brien's discussion, the gardawa and malams of the Yan Tatsine movement against the developed inhospitable semi-industrial capitalist state and society in the case of Paul M. Lubeck's discussion, the Muslim brotherhoods (marabouts) against uncooperative national government in the case of Lucy E. Creevey's discussion and the witchcraft believing Transkeian Africans against their loss of wealth to the British colonial government in the case of Sean Redding's discussion. All the five reviewed works also complement each other in asserting the continued but declining religious influence among the respective African rural societies once the socio-economic interest is secured, no matter how they diverge from each other in assessing the degree of the spiritual benefit.

**Key Words:** Religion, transformation, rural, review, influence, content, source

Received 02.07.2015

Revised 29.08.2015

Accepted 12.10.2015

**How to cite this article:** Buruk Wolde-Michael Jima . Religion as a response to the rural African socio-economic transformations: A Review. *Inter. J. Edu. Res. Technol.* 6[4] 2015; 01-12. DOI: 10.15515/ijert.0976-4089.6.4.112

### INTRODUCTION

From among the issues influencing Africa's past, Africans' religions are the one. The aim of the present paper is, however, not to describe the origin and development of these religions, but to review the works dealing with the influence of these religions in the rural African socio-economic conditions. With this purpose, the paper has employed five pieces: "Ordinary Household Chores: Ritual and Power in a 19<sup>th</sup> century Swahili Women's Spirit Possession Cult" by Edward Alpers,<sup>1</sup> "Land, Cash and Charisma: An Economic Sociology of the Mouride Brotherhood" by Donal B. Cruise O'Brien,<sup>2</sup> "Islamic Protest under Semi-Industrial Capitalism: *Yan Tatsine* Explained" by Paul M. Lubeck,<sup>3</sup> "Muslim Brotherhoods and Politics in Senegal in 1985" by Lucy E. Creevey<sup>4</sup> and "Sorcery and the State: Taxation, Rituals, Witchcraft, and Colonialism in South Africa, 1880-1963" by Sean Redding.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Edward Alpers, "Ordinary Household Chores: Ritual and Power in a 19<sup>th</sup> century Swahili Women's Spirit Possession Cult", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol.17, no. 4 (1984) pp. 677-702.

<sup>2</sup> Donal B. Cruise O'Brien, "Land, Cash and Charisma: An Economic Sociology of the Mouride Brotherhood", *Saints and Politicians: Essays in the Organization of a Senegalese Peasant Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) pp, 59-83.

<sup>3</sup> Paul M. Lubeck, "Islamic Protest under Semi-Industrial Capitalism: '*Yan Tatsine* Explained,'" *Africa*, vol. 55, no. 4 (1985) pp, 369-389.

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Creevey, "Muslim Brotherhoods and Politics in Senegal in 1985", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1985) pp, 715-721.

<sup>5</sup>Sean Redding, "Sorcery and the State: Taxation, Rituals, Witchcraft, and Colonialism in South Africa, 1880-1963", in Redding, *Sorcery and Sovereignty: Taxation, Power and Rebellion in South Africa, 1880-1963* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006) pp.1-29.

The paper will attempt to evaluate the works initially in their respective content. It will then evaluate them collectively keeping the role of religion constant.

### **1. The works in their respective content**

#### **“Ordinary Household Chores: Ritual and Power in a 19<sup>th</sup> century Swahili Women’s Spirit Possession Cult” By Edward Alpers**

The theme of Alpers’s article is how spirit possession cult was used as a means to equate and even outweigh the imbalance in socio-economic roles, or guarantee socio-economic equality.<sup>6</sup> His subjects of argument are Zanzibari women of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly those of the year 1869<sup>7</sup> and as he explains the theme, the colonial Busaidi Omani state of the 1860s Zanzibar increased the demand of men labor through the expansion of public works<sup>8</sup> and this in turn left the responsibility of accomplishing the household chores largely to women.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the colonial economy entitled the men subjects to “social production for exchange but restricted the women subjects to “an ordinary household chores for family use.”<sup>10</sup> What to accompany this inequality was also the newly developed social context which gave greater social value to men’s activities:<sup>11</sup> women were usually devoid of most of the urban economic activities with the exception of few semi-skilled labor engagements.<sup>12</sup> These segregations, therefore, caused those Swahili women of the Omani regime to lose their public importance thereby hastening their socio-economic dependence on the Swahili men.<sup>13</sup>

As Alpers asserts, it was in the attempt of coping up with this socio-economic transformation which was affecting their world that the Swahili women came to align themselves with a spirit named *kitimiri*.<sup>14</sup> Considering themselves as possessors of the spirit, the women formed their own cult and introduced healing practices,<sup>15</sup> and such *kitimiri* “exorcism” reversed their declining public position to a better one:<sup>16</sup> they won the social respect and public importance through their magic and healing practices,<sup>17</sup> and through their mutual help and extraction of both the material wealth as well as labor of their patients, they won their economic independence.<sup>18</sup>

Extending the range of the issue, Alpers even considers the Swahili women’s spirit possession cult as one manifestation of the struggle against the men favoring Islamic religion.<sup>19</sup> He, however, restricts himself from discussing the reforms the struggling women brought in the national religious order<sup>20</sup> unlike their success in the socio-economic system.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Alpers, pp. 694, 698-702.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.677.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.678-679.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 678-680.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.678-680,689-699.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.679-680.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.680.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 680,694,698-702.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 700-701.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.690-694.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 694,698-702.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 691-695.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 691,694-695,700.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 700-701. Alpers is the one to argue that changes in the Islamic religion have to be studied in relation to the then socio-economic conditions. T.O.Ranger and Isaria Kimambo, “Introduction” ed. T.O.Ranger and Isaria Kimambo, *The Historical Study of African Religion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press,1972)p.17.

<sup>20</sup> Alpers, pp.689-695,700-702.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 691-695,700-702.

Alpers basis himself on enormous primary and secondary sources for the reconstruction of his article.<sup>22</sup> It seems to prove his loyalty to these sources that he prefers mostly to quote the statements in his discussion of the theme.<sup>23</sup> As he remarks, he enriched his understanding of the issue by the comments he received from his former students and participants of the 1981 conference on African women in History held at the University of Santa Clara.<sup>24</sup> His work is, therefore, the result of a close re-examination of the existing sources and the sources seem so representative and adequate enough to support his argument.<sup>25</sup> His heavy dependence on European works,<sup>26</sup> probably because of his difficulty to understand the indigenous sources,<sup>27</sup> however, doubts to what extent he gets closer to the actual fact apart from the possible Eurocentric bias.

Alpers uses analytical mode of writing with theoretical mode of argument.<sup>28</sup> He, however, seems to have based his conclusion on the historical experience of Zanzibari women of the metropolis; he seems to have ignored the experience of those women of the periphery.<sup>29</sup> His justification for this imbalance is the attention Pere Anton Horner, upon whose work he develops his argument, paid to the people.<sup>30</sup>

Alpers's major argument in his discussion is that what Pere Anton Horner, the Alsatian Catholic missionary in Zanzibar, described about the *kitimiri* cult in the year-1869 did not examine its socio-economic dimension.<sup>31</sup> As he argues, therefore, the *kitimiri* ritual was not purely religious. It instead "encapsulates" the deteriorating socio-economic condition of the possessing Zanzibari women of the period.<sup>32</sup> Since they lost their public recognition and the subsequent equal advantage in the socio-economic milieu of the Busaidi state of Zanzibar, the women resorted to their traditional religious belief and began to act as possessors of the *kitimiri* spirit.<sup>33</sup> The cult they formed and the magic ritual practices they conducted in the name of the possessed spirit, therefore, earned them not only great social respect through fear but also remarkable economic wealth through mutual help and exploitation of the material wealth of their patients.<sup>34</sup> As Alpers concludes finally, the spirit possession cult was generally a religious means by which the socio-economically oppressed Zanzibari women won their independence.<sup>35</sup>

#### **"Land, Cash and Charisma: An Economic Sociology of the Mouride Brotherhood" By Donal B. Cruise O'Brien**

The central idea of Brien's article is how religion assumes the central role in an economic system by offering "material wealth" in addition to the pre-existing "non-material wealth." His point of reference is the "economic sociology" of the Mouride brotherhood of Senegal and he examines the issue among the Mouride societies of three different levels: the early religious settlers whom he calls "sacred pioneers,"<sup>36</sup> the 'independent' rural peasants whom he calls "profane villagers"<sup>37</sup> and the migrant urban dwellers whom he calls "shanty towners."<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> See all the footnotes in his article from pp. 677-702.

<sup>23</sup> See his description from pp. 678-702.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 677.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 677-702.

<sup>26</sup> See all the sources from pp. 677-702.

<sup>27</sup> Alpers used translators for some indigenous sources. See p.696, footnote No. 69.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 678-702.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 678-682,698-702.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 677-678.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 677.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 677-682.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 682-690.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 690-695.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 698-702.

<sup>36</sup> Brien, pp, 63-64.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,63,69.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,63,72.

In the case of the early Mouride settlers, it was through the religious ideology of the founder-Amadu Bamba that the pioneering twelve Mouride brothers, who were landless by themselves,<sup>39</sup> organized the rest landless society of the Wolof states, particularly the lower classes, endured the hardships of the wilderness pastoral Fulani land and finally became organized cash crop producers in the region with a vent for their surplus produce provided by the French colonial government.<sup>40</sup> The material wealth of these early Mouride disciples was the independent plot of land each of them acquired after serving their saints for some ten years,<sup>41</sup> while their non-material wealth was the promised better life after death, the paradise.<sup>42</sup>

The liberation of the Mouride disciples from the service of their saints with the acquisition of their own plot of land in turn resulted in the creation of a Mouride village community with minimal control by the saints.<sup>43</sup> The independent disciples established their own family basing their economy on the cultivation of their acquired land with a payment of an annual land tax to the saint.<sup>44</sup> It was because of their more self-centered life and the subsequent less respect they had to their saints<sup>45</sup> that these independent Mouride peasants were considered as profane villagers as Brien explains. Nevertheless, no matter how they were not as devoted as the earlier period, they still used the saintly hierarchy of the brotherhood, particularly that of the Khalifa General, for the effectiveness of their economic cases in the national Senegalese government.<sup>46</sup> This was, therefore, the material wealth which they acquired due to their membership of the Mouride religious belief still basing their non-material wealth on the promised paradise.

Because of "ecological pressures" and interest in city life, the Mouride disciples migrated to the metropolis of Senegal and formed their own associations there in order to keep the mutual help among themselves,<sup>47</sup> and even though such associations were not represented by the Mouride saint, they had a strong link with the rural Mouride associations chaired by the local saints.<sup>48</sup> In most cases, they maintained a direct contact with the Khalifa-General, to whom the members paid an annual tribute in cash and, who in turn protected their economic interest in the competitive urban life because of his immediate access to the highest government officials.<sup>49</sup> Like the independent Mouride villagers, the material wealth for such Mouride shanty towners was also the socio-economic guarantee which they assured through their Mouride religious leaders.

Brien carefully examines the close and uninterrupted link between the Mouride disciples and their saints in both the above three type-situations: providing labor service and acquiring land in the first type situation<sup>50</sup> and paying tribute in cash and securing rural and urban economic interests in the last two type-situations.<sup>51</sup> He also assesses the threats the Mouride grouping of the three circumstances encounters: the shortage of land that would be allocated to freed disciples in the first circumstance,<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p, 68. Amadu Bamba founded the Mouride religious order in 1886. The religious order was initially within the Qadriyya sect. It was by mixing the religious doctrines of the Tijaniyya order with the existing Qadriyya that *Shaykh* Amadu founded the Mouride brotherhood. Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London and New York: Longman, 1984) pp.288-289.

<sup>40</sup> Brien, pp, 64-69.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p,68.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,67-69.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p, 69.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp, 69-70.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,70-72.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p, 72.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,72-73.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p,73.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,73-74.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p,68.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,72-74.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,68-69.

population growth and over cultivation in the second circumstance<sup>53</sup> and the poor French language command demanded for urban jobs in the third circumstance.<sup>54</sup>

Brien develops his understanding of the material profit which the Mouride religious order provides to its followers after getting in touch with the statistical information from new researches on the land and labor distribution of the Mouride villages, through re-examination of his previous study on the people and a close look at the actual Mouride economic system.<sup>55</sup> His work is, therefore, based up on both new and a close re-examination of old sources. The sources, however, do not seem representative enough. It may be because of their inadequacy on the issue that the author tends to rely mostly on guessed and unproved information<sup>56</sup> thereby failing to substantiate most of his statements.<sup>57</sup> This, therefore, may threaten the strength of his general conclusion

Brien adopts an analytical mode of interpretation basing himself on the actual economic experience of the Mouride society.<sup>58</sup> He also basis his conclusion on the assessment of the economic order among Mourides of all places and periods as highlighted above in the theme discussion.<sup>59</sup>

Brien's point of argument is that the saintly hierarchical organization of the Mouride brotherhood was not an association dedicated to the socio-economic exploitation of the religious disciples.<sup>60</sup> It was rather a form of organization by which the disciples served their saints in return for their simultaneous material and non-material rewards.<sup>61</sup> It was in their effort of assuring a better life after death that the disciples established a luxurious life before their death accepting this progress as sign of their success in the heavenly life.<sup>62</sup> Brien in general concludes that the Mouride saints exacted the labor and cash tributes of their disciples promising an independent plot of land for the former and protecting socio-economic interest for the latter keeping the joyful heavenly life constant.<sup>63</sup>

### **1.3. "Islamic Protest under Semi-Industrial Capitalism: *Yan Tatsine* Explained" By Paul M. Lubeck**

The theme of Lubeck's article is how religious reform is used as a means of protest for the socio-economic grievances of immigrant rural African societies.<sup>64</sup> He basis his justification on the *Yan Tatsine* Islamic reform movement of the early 1980s Nigeria, particularly that of Kano,<sup>65</sup> and as he explains the issue in its range, the Islamic tradition of the rural "peripatetic" koranic schools worked well with the socio-economic culture of urban Nigerians of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first three quarters of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>66</sup> The peripatetic tradition alleviated the economic hardship developed due to ecological pressure in the countryside by recruiting the most vulnerable sections of the society: children and youths as students of Koran or the *gardawa* and engaging them in productive labor activities either for their koranic teachers, the malams, or for their own livelihood,<sup>67</sup> and the Nigerian urban centers of especially the colonial and

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,70-71.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p,74.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p,61.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,61,67,69,73.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,66-67,69,74-77,80-81.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,61-81.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,63-75.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,60-62.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,61,77-81.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,75-81.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp,68,73-74,79-80.

<sup>64</sup>Lubeck, pp.385-387.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.369-389.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.372-377.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.372-374.

early post-colonial period were so conducive for these immigrant *gardawa* because of the sufficient unskilled labor demanding jobs which they provided them.<sup>68</sup>

The peripatetic koranic schools went in crisis when the “petroleum boom” of the mid 1970s developed a semi-industrial capitalist socio-economic system in place of the pre-existing pre-capitalist and early capitalist systems which favored the *gardawa*.<sup>69</sup> The new socio-economic order put the *gardawa* at the most disadvantaged socio-economic position because of the new transformations it brought.<sup>70</sup> Firstly, the unskilled labor demanding jobs which the *gardawa* used to enjoy were superseded by skilled labor demanding ones. Secondly, the availability of the “entry rooms” which the religious malams used to acquire through Islamic charity was reduced due to the greedy attitude of the new social order as well as the rising price of urban plots following the large scale urban investment. Thirdly, the surplus food which the *gardawa* used to extract through “almsgiving” now became scarce and too expensive. Fourthly, the higher religious respect which the *gardawa* had had was replaced by a secular attitude interpreting them as vagabond and robbers. Finally, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program out weighed the whole merit of the peripatetic koranic schools.<sup>71</sup>

The only ‘institution’ to favor the disadvantaged *gardawa* and satisfy their socio-economic demands was, therefore, the Islamic reform movement of the *Yan Tatsine* led by Alhaji Mohammed Marwa.<sup>72</sup> Through his strong condemnation of the corrupted and individualistic capitalist state and demand of a socialist type reform apart from his new religious order, Marwa won the support of a large number of the *gardawa* and other unemployed rural migrants<sup>73</sup> and let them for an armed struggle against the capitalist state and society,<sup>74</sup> and the struggling Marwa’s disciples became suicidal and fanatic when the government employed the police force to break their resistance.<sup>75</sup>

Lubeck has based his historical justification of the *Yan Tatsine* insurrection on both primary, secondary and oral sources<sup>76</sup> and it seems that his theme of discussion is built upon the critical interpretation he develops upon the pre-existing sources.<sup>77</sup> In fact, the sources seem representative and adequate enough to support his conclusion. His heavy dependence on his previous works,<sup>78</sup> however, doubts to what extent he is free from predetermined conclusion.

Lubeck adopts an analytical mode of writing with empirical mode of justification.<sup>79</sup> He, nevertheless, restricts his justification on the historical experience of the 1980 Kano,<sup>80</sup> even though the issue demands the inclusion of all the cities where the religious movement erupted.<sup>81</sup> The reason he provides for this sample based study is the initial and seriousness of Kano’s insurrection and its subsequent intensive study by “official commissions.”<sup>82</sup>

To Lubeck, the major argument is that it is too difficult to have a clear understanding of the *Yan Tatsine* reform movement unless one examines the deteriorating and worsening socio-economic condition of the constituting large migrant rural people: the *gardawa* and their partners.<sup>83</sup> As he finally concludes,

---

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.374-377.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.379-383.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.369-370, 385-386.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.369-370.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.383-385.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.369-370,383-387.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.387-389. For the oral sources, see pp.375, 382-383.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.370-372. See the argument here.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.370-383. See the citations here.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.369-387. Examine the entire description.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*,p.371.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*,p.369.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*,p.371.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*,pp.370-372.

therefore, the *Yan Tatsine* movement was not purely an Islamic reform movement. It was instead a socialist type economic reform movement manifested in religious terms,<sup>84</sup> and the actions to justify this feature are the strong agitations against the greedy rich merchant classes and their consumption of western goods,<sup>85</sup> the struggle against the corrupted state administration promoting unfair distribution of wealth,<sup>86</sup> the fierce fighting against the capitalist state defending police force<sup>87</sup> and the measure in transforming the privately owned properties: land and market to public ownership.<sup>88</sup>

#### 1.4. "Muslim Brotherhoods and Politics in Senegal in 1985" By Lucy E. Creevey

The central idea of Creevey's article is how religious unity influences a state thereby protecting the socio-economic demands of the religious community.<sup>89</sup> Her justification is based upon how the Muslim brotherhoods of Senegal were still influencing the national politics in the year-1985 thereby guaranteeing the economic interest of their rural religious disciples.<sup>90</sup> As she explains the theme tracing back to the colonial period, even though the French colonial officials initially suspected the Muslim brotherhood leaders called the *marabouts* for their colonial hegemony, they soon found them indispensable to win the mass support and acceptance of the large rural peasant disciples.<sup>91</sup> Hence, they co-operated them carefully by providing them both material and financial aids thereby causing their peasant disciples to resort to cash crop production, the great demand of the colonial economy.<sup>92</sup>

After independence, Leopold Sedar Senghor, the first president of independent Senegal, also based on the *marabouts* for his election campaign against his strong competitor, Lamine Gueye, and they were the *marabouts*, who enabled Senghor to win the election through directing their large rural disciples<sup>93</sup> and as she underlines, it was by extending their determining voting support to the new candidate, Abdou Diouf, during the second round national election in February 1983 that the *marabouts* recognized their continued influential position in the 1980s Senegalese politics.<sup>94</sup> In more clear words, no matter how he was not as favorable as Senghor due to his new politico-economic policies and religious attitudes, the *marabouts* also enabled Diouf to win the national election like the predecessor-Senghor thereby guaranteeing their economic benefit from the new state administration as they used to enjoy in the previous regimes.<sup>95</sup>

Creevey employs largely secondary sources for the construction of her article<sup>96</sup> and she develops her understanding of the issue through longitudinal research among the brotherhoods.<sup>97</sup> Her heavy dependence on her previous works,<sup>98</sup> however, suspects to what extent she is free from predetermined generalization and the subsequent possible bias.

Creevey adopts narrative mode of writing with empirical mode of justification.<sup>99</sup> She also tries to incorporate the major *marabouts* in her study.<sup>100</sup> She, however, focuses mainly on the pre-1985 historical experience of the brotherhoods,<sup>101</sup> even though her concern is that of the year-1985, and she provides no clear reason for this unequal coverage.

---

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.371,385-387.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.370,386-387.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.370-371,383-387.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.386-387.

<sup>89</sup> Creevey, pp.715-721.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 716-721.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.718.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.718-719.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.720.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 720-721.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 715-720. See all the sources on the footnote section.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 715.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 715-720. Examine all the authors' names.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 715-721.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 716-721.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 718-721.

The main argument of Creevey is that the *marabaouts* could not restrict themselves from extending their voting support to Diouf favoring a Muslim president who would accept them heartily and Diouf also could not abandon his ties with the *marabouts* because neither of the two could not succeed in their objectives without the help of the other: the *marabouts* would not have ensured their continued economic backing by the national government if they had opted to vote against Diouf and they could not also possess their own government because of their internal disunity. Diouf also, on his behalf, would not have won the national election if he had abandoned the voting support of the *marabouts*.<sup>102</sup>

As Creevey finally concludes, therefore, because of the unity they created within their respective religious disciples through their respective religious ideology as well as the large number they constituted in the overall population, the Muslim brotherhoods of Senegal continued to influence the national politics in the mid 1980s thereby protecting the socio-economic interest of their rural communities.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, their internal power rivalry and the subsequent secret policy of the national government to keep them divided in addition to the rising threat of the opposing Islamic purists started to decrease their higher influence scale as time went on.<sup>104</sup>

### **1.5. "Sorcery and the State: Taxation, Rituals, Witchcraft, and Colonialism in South Africa, 1880-1963" By Sean Redding**

The theme of Redding's article is how supernatural beliefs, particularly the belief in witchcraft and sorcery, influenced African societies of the rural territory to accept European colonial rule and the subsequent economic exploitation without long term resistance, or in more clear words, how African traditional beliefs helped and facilitated European colonial rule and exploitation among the rural societies of the continent.<sup>105</sup> Redding basis his justification on the historical experience of Africans of Transkei, the eastern most part of Eastern Cape province in South Africa,<sup>106</sup> and as he concludes, people of Transkei accepted their governorship by British officials without protracted resistance since they perceived the white colonial masters as possessors of or capable of manipulating supernatural powers in order to maintain their supremacy.<sup>107</sup>

What caused Africans of Transkei to interpret the British colonial state as supernatural being as Redding explains was initially the abandoning of witchcraft accusations and the practice of divining witches by the British government in order to protect single Africans from accusation and punishment for "unreal" crime.<sup>108</sup> But this prohibition caused the Transkei African subjects to suspect the colonial state as arch-defender and practitioner of the witchcraft belief.<sup>109</sup> Secondly, the hut tax, one of the colonial government's taxes, required every family in Transkei to provide personal information: the name, size and place of residence of its members as well as the wealth amount it possessed.<sup>110</sup> This requirement, therefore, strengthened the above suspicion of the colonial African subjects on the witchcraft and sorcery power of the colonial state. This was because they were witches and sorcerers which needed such kind of personal information for their harm against a person or family whom they planned to attack.<sup>111</sup> Thirdly, in order to enable the colonial subjects to pay their tax in cash form, the colonial state introduced coins minted with the effigy of the then British ruler and mysterious Latin writing. These coins, however,

---

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 720.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 720-721.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 719-721.

<sup>105</sup> Redding, pp. 1-29.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.16-24, 28-29.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12, 17.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12,17.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17,29.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.



appeared to the African subjects “unnatural” and magical objects because of their great personification of the state and their subsequent service to cause users obedient to the state through fear.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, even though they found it so useful, the African subjects also found the colonial cash money the secret means which the colonial magistrates used to cheat.<sup>113</sup> All these reasons, therefore, became the ground for Transkeian Africans’ consideration of the British colonial government as supernatural being.<sup>114</sup> Consequently, they ritually paid the colonial taxes and for their payments, they received tax receipts which enabled them to protect their family and material wealth from the malevolent legal and supernatural power of the colonial government.<sup>115</sup> Even though the imposition of taxes was secular to the colonizing Europeans aiming at generating income for the colonial administration, it was spiritual for the colonized rural Africans aiming at appeasing the sorcery colonial state as Redding generalizes.<sup>116</sup>

Redding’s discussion of Transkeian Africans’ belief of the malevolent witchcraft power of the British colonial state ranges from the time when Transkeians paid the colonial taxes ritually and spiritually during the early colonial period in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to the time when Transkeians paid the colonial taxes forcefully and secularly especially after the mid 1950s.<sup>117</sup> As Redding explains, the rural colonial subjects had a better socio-economic status during the early years of the British colonial rule<sup>118</sup> because of the sufficient land they possessed and good grain harvest they produced on their land.<sup>119</sup> During this time, therefore, they ritually paid the colonial taxes in order to be safe from the harm of the witchcraft of the state.<sup>120</sup> The gradual increase of the population size, however, created the problem of the shortage of land in line with the rapid fertility degradation of the available land through intensive use.<sup>121</sup> This problem was aggravated more by the new restrictive acts: prohibition of rural to urban migration, forced villagization, crop rotation, contour plowing and cattle culling.<sup>122</sup> These grievances were tipped by the inability of the state to control stock theft around the mid 1950s,<sup>123</sup> and even though the colonial government suppressed the widespread Transkeians’ resistance and could collect the taxes through forceful means,<sup>124</sup> it could not be as spiritual to the Transkeian subjects as it had been earlier because the worsening rural socio-economic condition and the increasing domination of the colonial state forced the people to supersede their former spiritual interpretation of the British colonial power with the secular one especially from the 1963 onwards<sup>125</sup> and Redding treats all these two extremes in balanced manner.

Redding has applied both primary and secondary sources for his justification of the great influence of rural Africans’ supernatural belief for the strengthening of European colonial rule particularly among the

---

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-24.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-24.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 18.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7, 18.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-9, 17-19.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 18, 21-23.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9, 21-24.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 23-24.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9, 23-24.

Transkeian society of southeastern South Africa.<sup>126</sup> It seems largely that his work is the result of the application of new sources obtained from anthropologists and state archival centers,<sup>127</sup> and the sources seem adequate enough to support his conclusion. His heavy dependence on the anthropologists' work,<sup>128</sup> however, doubts to what extent he approaches the real African experience as close as possible because it is too difficult to consider all of the anthropologists as indigenous and hence, their interpretation may highly be shaped by the understanding of their own culture.

Redding adopts narrative mode of writing with empirical mode of justification<sup>129</sup> and even though his concern is to the colonial experience of Africans of South Africa, he basis his justification on the experience of those Africans of the Transkei district.<sup>130</sup> The reason he provides for this unequal coverage is that the colonial experience of Transkeian Africans is more justifiable of the close relation between Africans' supernatural belief and white colonial rule than the experience of Africans of the rest South African provinces.<sup>131</sup> This imbalance, therefore, may cause us to be suspicious of his general conclusion to apply to the whole South African rural societies of the colonial period.

The major argument of Redding is that rural Africans' submission to European colonial rule was not necessitated by the rough estimation that they were equally represented and fairly administered by the colonial state.<sup>132</sup> It was instead necessitated by their traditional supernatural belief which thought (interpreted) the colonial state as destructive witch and sorcerer.<sup>133</sup>

As Redding further argues, most historians underemphasize the great influence of rural Africans' supernatural belief for their submission to European colonial rule because they want to base their historical justification on the "hard material circumstance of African life"<sup>134</sup> ignoring the very fact that people's actions are influenced not only by their material circumstances but also by their understanding of those circumstances.<sup>135</sup> Even though some historians of the more recent period also recognize the determining role of traditional African belief, they do not provide the historical analysis on how this belief worked in favor of the pursued European rule.<sup>136</sup> As he finally concludes, therefore, because of the family census they applied and the cash money they introduced in addition to their anti-witchcraft belief and accusation policy, the Transkeian African subjects extended their understanding of the witchcraft power to their British colonial officials.<sup>137</sup> They ritually paid the colonial taxes in return for the tax receipts which they thought were protectors of their life and material wealth from the harm of the sorcery state.<sup>138</sup> Even if it was a means of generating income and asserting authority for the colonizing Britons, tax payment became a magical ritual for the colonized Transkeian Africans thereby assuring their complete obedience to the British rule at least in the early period.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207-214. Examine all the source types.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* Examine also his expression on pp.9-10.

<sup>128</sup> He cites mostly the works as Monica Wilson, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff.

<sup>129</sup> Asses his whole description from pp. 1-29.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.3-29.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 12-13, 16-24.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-20, 29.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.16, 29.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

### The works in their general content

What is adequately treated in all of the five pieces reviewed is how religious belief, in line with its spiritual end, satisfied the socio-economic demands of rural African societies in time of socio-economic transformation: the *kitimiri* spirit possessing women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Zanzibar against the men favoring economic policy of the Busaidi government in the case of Alpers's discussion,<sup>140</sup> the Mouride disciples against the scarce land resource following the French colonial rule in the case of Brien's discussion,<sup>141</sup> the *gardawa* and malams of the *Yan Tatsine* movement against the developed inhospitable semi-industrial capitalist state and society in the case of Lubeck's discussion,<sup>142</sup> the Muslim brotherhoods (*marabouts*) against uncooperative national government in the case of Creevey's discussion<sup>143</sup> and the witchcraft believing Transkeian Africans against their loss of wealth to the British colonial government in the case of Redding's discussion,<sup>144</sup> and what is the source of unity and courage for all the socio-economic reform demanding rural communities, as all the reviewed works affirm, is the ideology of their particular religious beliefs: the *kitimiri* spirit belief among the Swahili women,<sup>145</sup> the religious principles of the founding Amadu Bamba among the Mouride disciples,<sup>146</sup> the religious principles of the founding Alhaji Mohammed Marwa among the *gardawa* and their malams,<sup>147</sup> the respective ideology of the *marabouts* among the Muslim brotherhoods<sup>148</sup> and the witchcraft belief among the Transkeian Africans.<sup>149</sup>

No matter how the reviewed works complement each other in asserting the continued but declining religious influence among the respective rural societies once the socio-economic interest is secured,<sup>150</sup> they diverge from each other in assessing the degree of the spiritual benefit: to Brien, Lubeck and, to some extent, to Creevey, it is in the attempt of securing a better life after death that the religious disciples secure a better life before their death, i.e, in the existing world.<sup>151</sup> To Alpers and Redding, however, the case is the reverse: the aim of the religious disciples is restricted only to the better life in the existing world.<sup>152</sup>

Finally, the reviewed works both relate and refer to each other. In four of the articles, what characterizes the socio-economic relation of the rural communities is a "give-take" system, i.e, the socio-economic advantage is in return for: the healing practice of the Swahili women in the case of Alpers's article,<sup>153</sup> the religious dedication to the *marabouts* in the case of Brien's and Creevey's articles,<sup>154</sup> and the colonial tax payment to the British government in the case of Redding's chapter,<sup>155</sup> and the type of relation that would develop in the absence of such "give and take" system is discussed in Lubeck's article - the struggle of the *gardawa* and their malams against the self-centered capitalist state and society.<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup>Alpers, pp.678-680,698-699.

<sup>141</sup>Brien, pp. 64-69.

<sup>142</sup> Lubeck, pp.371, 385-387.

<sup>143</sup>Creevey, pp.719-721.

<sup>144</sup>Redding, pp. 16-24.

<sup>145</sup>Alpers, pp.689-698.

<sup>146</sup> Brien, pp. 67-69.

<sup>147</sup> Lubeck,pp.385-387.

<sup>148</sup> Creevey,pp.716-721.

<sup>149</sup>Redding, pp.16-24.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, Creevey, pp.718-721; Lubeck,pp.379-383;Brien,pp.71-75;Alpers, p.694.

<sup>151</sup> Brien, pp.68,73-74,79-80; Lubeck, pp.385-386; Creevey, pp.716-721.

<sup>152</sup> Alpers, pp.689-698;Redding,pp.16-24.

<sup>153</sup>Alpers, pp 689-698.

<sup>154</sup>Brien, pp. 68,73-74,79-80; Creevey, pp.716-721.

<sup>155</sup> Redding, pp. 16,28-29.

<sup>156</sup>Lubeck, pp.383-387.

## CONCLUSION

Witnessing one characterizing feature of Africa's economic past, the five works reviewed explain the determining role of religion in the rural African socio-economic conditions in different ways: through the *kitimiri* spirit possession among Alepers's Swahili women, through religious dedication and loyalty among Brien's Mouride disciples, through adherence to the reform movement of Alhaji Mohammed Marwa among Lubek's *garadawa*, through keeping unity among Creevey's Muslim brotherhoods and through witchcraft belief among Redding's Transkeian Africans.

What is common in the discussion of the five works is the development of the particular religious beliefs at the time of socio-economic transformations: the male recognizing Busaidi government's economy in the case of Alpers's discussion, the socio-economic crisis of the slave trading Wolof states following the French colonial conquest in the case of Brien's discussion, the developing unfavorable semi-industrial capitalist culture in the case of Lubeck's discussion, the increasing threat of Islamic purists and internal political problem during the second round national election in the case of Creevey's discussion and the British colonial administration in the case of Redding's discussion, and in all such challenging situations, the respective religious beliefs were the source of unity and strength, no matter how the degree of their spiritual benefit varied.

Even though the works are acknowledged mainly for their good analysis and justification of the particular religious issues, their recognition as 'perfect' is threatened by the source types they employ and the unequal place and period coverage they adopt.