Book Review

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David WESTERLUND, *From Socialism to Islam? Notes on Islam as a Political Factor in Contemporary Africa.* Research Report No. 61. (Uppsala, Sweden: Scandinavia Institute of African Studies, 1982), 62pp. Bibliography. No Price.

This short study on Islam and Politics in Africa is one of a series of studies on Africa published by the well-known Swedish Institute of African Studies. The Center had previously published some excellent monographs on a wide range of African issues, but this is the first one on an Islamic theme. Written from the perspective of a researcher interested in knowing the future of the relationship between Islam and Politics in Africa, David Westerlund divides his essay into three parts: (1) an introduction, (2) a section on the advance of Socialism in Muslim-dominated countries and (3) a section on the move towards Islam.

Westerlund begins his study with a definition of terms and a clarification of concepts. Two terms, Socialism and Islam, dominate his discussion. He identifies socialism in North Africa and in Sub-Saharan Africa as that brand which has not been based on, but rather opposed to, Marxism or Marxism-Leninism. Though he recognizes certain differences between "Arab Socialism" and "African Socialism", in the context of his discussion he stresses the similarities between them. Among the common elements shared by these two variants of Socialism are (1) refutation of the Marxist idea of class struggle, (2) emphasis on a united front of all classes in the interest of economic development and nation-building, (3) a preference for a mixed economy as opposed to a Marxist economy, (4) partial nationalization, central planning and one-party rule, and (5) tolerance of private property.

After an examination of the differences between Arab/Islamic Socialism and African Socialism on the one hand, and Marxism on the other, Westerlund then discusses the term fundamentalism. He correctly notes that orthodox, non-secularist Muslims who wish for the

establishment of a rule by the *Sharia* do not call themselves fundamentalists, rather they simply identify themselves with Islam and regard it as "an all-inclusive societal order (where) God is the only legitimate law-maker, and His Will has been revealed in the Koran and the *Sunna* (the oldest traditions) especially the Prophet Muhammad's custom" (p. 7). Westerlund takes note of the "conservative" aspect of Islamic fundamentalism, but at the same time recognizes its willingness to reinterpret religious traditions.

Following his discussion of terms and concepts used in the study, Westerlund treats us to a brief historical sketch of Islam in Africa. Here he follows the path of earlier scholars on Islam in Africa. He tells us how Islam, on the one hand, served as the basis of resistance to European colonialism and, on the other, collaborated with the colonia powers. He, however, advises caution and suggests that a better view could emerge following a syntheis or a more detailed examination of local individual African societies.

The main focus of attention of Westerlund are what he calls the "Islamic countries", synonymously the North African states plus Somalia. In making a case for his argument that Arab/Islamic Socialism and African Socialism are similar, he maintains that both "are essentially similar... Partly because both have been formulated and supported primarily by Muslims." He brushes away the socialist efforts of Nkrumah in "strongly Christian Ghana" and reminds us that the present successful inroad of Marxist ideas in Mozambique, Angola and Ethiopia is a validation of the hypothesis that "Catholic or Orthodox Christianity (negatively) provides 'fertile soil' for the development of Marxism" (p. 13). This conclusion has dangerous political implications, for it tends to say that Marxism is resisted more by Muslims than by Christians, that in the special case of Africa, only Muslim socialists have managed to develop socialist alternatives to Marxism. Actually the evidence seems to show that both Christian and Muslim Africans have been advocates of African Socialism. Indeed, the two leading theoreticians of "African Socialism", as opposed to Marxism, in Africa have been Leopold Senghor of Senegal and Julius Nyerere, two African Christians who ruled over countries with predominant and significant Muslim communities respectively.

In his discussion of North African states, Westerlund finds that, except monarchies of Morocco and Sanusi Libya, socialism was used as "an instrument of socio-economic mobilization" (p. 14). He gives the same reasons that many Maghrebian scholars offered as explanations for socialist tendencies in the region. This is to say, Islam was seen as a rallying point against Western culture and imperialism in the post colonial era.

In Muslim-dominated areas south of the Sahara, he states quite correctly, neither Islamic reformism nor Pan-Islamic identity have been important. He singles out two factors to explain why Islam was not made

the sole foundation of African socialism. The first was what he calls "the mixed character of Sufi Islam...", which in his view facilitated the search for the "Arican roots of socialism". The second was the "multi-religious setting" of African society, which made it impolitic to refer officially to an "Islamic foundation of socialism" (p. 30). Westerlund concludes by concurring with Ali A. Mazrui, who argues that the leftist orientation of Muslim-dominated societies in Africa was the result of "the fusion of egalitarianism with authoritarianism, the deep-seated cultural defensiveness against the Christian West, the self-conscious and defiant sense of community, the congruence with the anti-cumulative aspects of the Marxist version of modernity...".

In his section on the move towards Islam, he identifies three reasons for such a development. First of all, the failure of Nasserite socialism coupled with the humiliating defeat of Arab socialist regimes by Israel made it possible for Muslims to reconsider more critically the political and economic programs of Muslim socialists. Another reason offered by Westerlund is that the fundamentalist movement "is partly a reaction against the materialism of the East and the West." The third reason, derived from G.H. Jansen's *Militant Islam*, is that Islam's status as the youngest of the world religions makes it attractive in the Third World. The fourth reason he gives is that the oil boom and the rise of petrodollar states caused an increase in the number of Islamic political movements.

When he examines the predominantly Muslim states, he finds that fundamentalism poses certain problems to the leadership of these states. He echoes the views of those who believe that Arab aid has generally been given to Muslim states in Africa and he attributes the absence of far-reaching success of fundamentalist Islam in Sub-Sahara Africa to the memories of Arab slavery in certain regions and to concentration of Arab aid on "Purely religious" undertakings. He also finds another reason in the fact that fundamentalism poses a threat to secular processes of nation-building. He correctly asserts that "many African politicians obviously fear religion as a divisive force..." (p. 51), that the strength of the *tariqas* and their particularistic character has apparently hindered the development of fundamentalism.

In concluding this review, one could say that Westerlund has produced an interesting and informative study. Despite its brevity, it has covered much ground. There are only three points of criticism that deserve some attention here. First of all, one can say that his assumption that Muslim states have generally been socialist is a half-truth and like all half-truths, it tends to confuse rather than describe reality accurately. Anyone who understands African society and politics would know that "African Socialism" has been a sham, a fraudulent concept used by African dictators who were trying desperately to locate themselves on the complex map of global politics in the twentieth century.

Another conclusion is that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, Arab aid is not heavily concentrated in the area of mosque building and other

religious activities. In fact, the sources Westerlund quotes to support his argument, dates to the early 1970s when Arab aid agencies were less than three years old. Last but not least, one can also conclude that Westerlund's claim that, "Islam in black Africa tends to become more 'Arab' (while) Christianity becomes more 'African' and less 'Western' " is a misstatement of facts and a misperception of reality. Islam in modern Africa is not becoming more "Arab". What is evident to most practising Muslims is the greater opportunities for African Muslims to learn proper and correct Arabic, which in turn facilitates their greater understanding of the Islamic heritage. On the other hand, what is happening in Christian Africa is the phasing out of residual colonial elements which have previously made the religion of Christianity the cultural instrument of the colonial powers. This was best symbolized by the ubiquitous presence of European leaders of congregations and in the imposition of Western values on African Christians.