



For Prayer and Profit: West Africa's Religious and Economic Ties to the Gulf 1960s to the Present

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For Prayer and Profit: West Africa's Religious and Economic Ties to the Gulf, 1960s to the Present

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Panel Title: Africa and the Gulf: Historic Ties, Contemporary Transformations

Introduction

West Africa's historic ties to the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf region date to the early centuries of Islam. Kharijite Muslims, among the first breakaway factions in Islam, moved to North Africa during the caliphate of Ali (656-661 CE) to avoid persecution, and relocated into the Sahara once Muslim soldiers overrun North Africa in the latter decades of the 7th-8th centuries CE. Kharijite Muslims and their Berber clients were central to the forging of the trans-Saharan trade routes. The first Jihad movement in West Africa in the 11th century CE, the Almoravids, was a result of the realization of leaders of the Znaga Berbers, after their visit to the holy places of Islam, that their version of Islam (Khariji Islam) was perceived as unorthodox. Pilgrimage and education at leading Islamic universities have been central aspects of West African Islam. As early as the 1240s the West African state of Kanem ran a hostel in Cairo for Kanem students. Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Islam's holy lands in 1324-5 was legendary for its extravagance, and he gave away so much gold as gifts in Cairo that the price of gold was still depressed when the Arab chronicler Al-Umari visited Cairo twelve years later. At the end of the 15th century, West African rulers such as Muhammad Rumfa of Kano (1463-99) and Askiya Muhammad of Songhai (1493-1528) corresponded with leading Islamic jurists such as Al-Maghili on Islamic governance and jurisprudence. Egypt and Saudi Arabia have remained influential as sources of Islamic inspiration and orthodoxy in contemporary West Africa with the recent addition of Iran.

Trade between West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East extends back to the early years of Islam. The Gulf area has become increasingly important to West Africa in the last two decades where trade and broader commercial ties are concerned. Sub-Saharan Africa, including West Africa, has become an important site for financial investment by Gulf businesses, especially in real estate and telecommunications. In the last two decades two distinct patterns have emerged in West Africa's economic relations with the Gulf region: an increase in trade as West African merchants have sourced consumer goods (textiles, jewelry, electronics, etc) from Jeddah, Beirut and Dubai and

the beginnings of the export of African primary products (coffee, tea, cocoa, timber) to the Gulf region and Asia more broadly; and the import of capital goods into West Africa, as well as West Africa becoming an attractive place for Gulf investment. In many ways, the Gulf region has come to parallel Africa's new economic relations with China (Alden, 2007).

This paper examines West Africa's changing religious and economic ties with the Gulf region from the 1950s-1960s period of independence to the present. It reviews the historic and central place of Saudi Arabia in the West African Muslim imaginary together with the emergence of recent rivals in the endeavor to shape Muslim sensibilities in West Africa, such as post-revolutionary Iran. Competing poles of Islamic orthodoxy have been particularly important in the context of reformist Islam or Islamism in West African countries such as Nigeria. The paper also analyzes new trade patterns between West Africa and the Gulf, as well as Gulf investments in West Africa. These economic transformations have occurred with the World's Bank structural adjustment programs or policies (SAPs) as the backdrop. The internationalization and privatization of trade from the late 1980s have had, perhaps, the unintended consequences of diversifying Africa's networks of trade away from the prior dependence on Europe and North America (Meagher, 2003). Aimed at ending unregulated trans-border trade, the effects of SAPs – devaluation, inflation, and declining real incomes – encouraged the sourcing of cheaper consumer goods from non-traditional trading partners such as Asia and the Gulf countries.

The internationalization of production from the 1980s, which has dispersed sites of production from North America and Europe to Asia, connected by more efficient transport and telecommunication networks, have inadvertently benefited trading networks in West Africa with small business coming into their own and circumventing old trade intermediaries such as the Lebanese (Bauer, 1954; Van der Lann, 1975; Hourani and Shehadi, 1992; Akyeampong, 2006; Beuving, 2006). Developments in shipping and air transport from the 1990s have placed Asia within the nexus of Africa's trading networks (Pedersen, 2001). These include the emergence of the Danish shipper Maersk and the French shipper Delmas as the major shipping lines connecting Europe and North America, Africa and Asia, and their creation of hub-ports in Africa and the Gulf area

(Dubai's Jebel Ali port) that have tended to expand the service areas of these ports and connected Africa and the Gulf in a more organized system of transport. By the early 1990s Dubai had become a major transfer center for sea and air transport between North America/Europe and Southeast Asia (Pedersen, 2001; Fleming and Hayuth, 1994), as well as becoming a major commercial entrepot in its own right. The emergence of direct airline routes between the Gulf and West African countries by airlines such as Emirates incorporated the United Arab Emirates (UAE) into the itineraries of West African traders. Today special fares are offered to entice traders from Lagos to Dubai. Many Ghanaians fly on Emirates airline to Europe and North America, using their transit stops in Dubai to go shopping. As air freight is a by-product of air passenger transport, the emergence of these airline networks holds promises for non-traditional exports in West Africa to the Gulf, such as Ghana's export of pineapples, which depends on air freight in order to retain its freshness.

The Gulf area has historically been connected to East Africa for centuries. It is clear from this introduction that it has emerged as a major economic resource for West Africa. These changing dynamics linking West Africa to the Gulf through religion and trade are explored in this paper from the 1960s to the present through the specific case studies of Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal. Though not a key component in this paper, the attraction of the Gulf region as a destination for West African professional workers is not discounted, considering the growing importance of trans-nationalism as an accumulative strategy for West Africans and the largely foreign nature of the workforce in the Gulf States.

Islamic Reform, Philanthropy and Development in Independent West Africa

Pilgrimage has been an important avenue of contact between West African Muslims and the international world of Islam. The impact was often socially revolutionary in the precolonial period, as seen in the holy war of Umar Tal and the creation of the Tokolor State in the region of present-day Mali in the mid-19th century. Umar Tal was one of the few 19th century West African Muslim leaders who went on pilgrimage to Mecca. Colonial rule witnessed both resistance and accommodation between West African Muslims and colonial governments. Muslim states militarily

confronted colonial annexation in the Senegambia, Guinea and northern Nigeria. Many northern Nigerian Muslims used the pilgrimage as *hijira* (flight) at the time of British annexation and large groups of Muslims relocated to Chad, Sudan and Saudi Arabia (Paden, 1986: 280). But Muslims would settle under European colonial rule, and the emirate system of northern Nigeria would become the model of Indirect Rule for the British in Africa, rule through indigenous structures and rulers. The French would come to appreciate Muslim Sufi contributions to the Senegalese economy, especially with the prominence of the Murid Brotherhood in groundnut cultivation, Senegal's leading export (Robinson, 2004: 182-196). Initially, the British and the French both discouraged pilgrimage, afraid of the political repercussions of Muslims from their colonies coming into contact with other Muslim communities. For the British in northern Nigeria, the fact that Muslim pilgrims would have to go through Sudan, a seat of Mahdist resistance to colonial rule, was enough for them to discourage pilgrimage. Gradually, with the consolidation of colonial rule, both French and British colonial governments would even become sponsors of pilgrimage, extending patronage to accommodating Muslim leaders (Paden, 1986: 280).

For northern Nigeria the 1950s was not only a period of decolonization, but also a decade when pilgrimage to Mecca took on greater significance. Airline travel made pilgrimage easier, and between 300 and 400 official pilgrims from Nigeria visited Mecca annually in the 1950s. In 1955 the Sardauna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello, the political leader of northern Nigeria and a prominent religious figure, undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca. The experience had a profound impact on the Sardauna, and he subsequently went on pilgrimage every year to Mecca, endearing himself to the Saudi ruling family and befriending many foreign dignitaries he met in Mecca. The Sardauna would also sponsor prominent Nigerian Muslims to accompany him in his pilgrimages as an expression of his generosity. These included Abubakar Gummi, who except in 1956 accompanied the Sardauna to Mecca each year until the Sardauna's death in 1966. Gummi from the 1950s and 1960s would emerge as one of the leading Muslim scholars in Nigeria. The Sardauna did not understand Arabic and Gummi served as his translator and attended meetings of Muslim leaders in Mecca on behalf of the Sardauna (Paden, 1986: 281). Those close to the Sardauna indicate that he developed a new passion from

this time to convert heathen northern Nigerians to Islam (Paden, 1986). In 1952 the West African Airways Corporation began special pilgrimage flights from northern Nigeria to Saudi Arabia, and a special pilgrimage passport was instituted, which was valid for a period of six months and could be obtained for 10 shillings in northern Nigeria (Paden, 1986: 283). The Northern Peoples Congress, headed by the Sardauna and which would form the northern regional government in Nigeria in the 1950s had close ties to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, a fact discomfiting to political parties in the non-Muslim south. In 1963 the Saudi royal family gave the Sardauna a plot of land in Medina to build a house, which was finished at the end of 1965 (Paden, 1986: 533). The Sardauna talked of Medina as his second home and discussed the prospect of retiring there. On the Sardauna's untimely death in 1966, King Faisal instructed that prayers were to be said for the Sardauna's soul in all the mosques in Saudi Arabia (Paden, 1986: 282). Faisal was educated in the US and spoke English, which facilitated his close relationship with the Sardauna, who did not speak Arabic.

As premier of the regional government of a federal Nigeria from 1960, the Sardauna led the drive for development, keen on combining accelerated education with cash crop agriculture (groundnuts and cotton) and light industries. He sought to galvanize internal capital from agriculture and the mercantile community, and he traveled abroad in Europe and the Muslim world in search of capital and technology to aid northern Nigeria's development. The Sardauna succeeded in mobilizing considerable investment capital in Kuwait, and in attracting skilled teachers in technology from Egypt and Pakistan (Paden, 1986: 510). The Sardauna's position as vice president of the World Muslim League assured him of an international Muslim network. Kuwait provided £5 million for the establishment of an investment company which would provide financing for development projects in northern Nigeria. The government of Kuwait also donated money for Islamic work and the building of schools. Saudi Arabia would also contribute to religious programs in northern Nigeria, while Egypt's contribution to development was in the form of manpower (Paden, 1986: 512-13). The Sardauna tried to stay out of the competition between Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the 1960s for leadership in the Muslim world. Saudi Arabia would contribute to the building of several mosques in northern Nigeria. Egypt would confer on the Sardauna the "Grand Cordon of the Order of the

Nile” in 1961 and in 1962 Al-Azhar University in Cairo would confer an honorary doctorate on the Sardauna (ibid).

As a founding member of the World Muslim League (Congress) and its vice president, Ahmadu Bello was keenly interested in Muslim unity. He traveled broadly within the world of Islam in West Africa, North Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Seen as the head of the Muslim community in Nigeria, the Sardauna was the recipient of numerous requests and petitions from Nigerian’s Muslims for mosques, schools, the settlement of local disputes, etc. He established a Council of Mallams to advise on matters of “church and state,” and later an organization called “Society for the Victory of Islam” (*Jama’atu Nasril Islam* or JNI) to spearhead the endeavor to convert non-Muslim (and non-Christian) communities in the north. Early in 1963 Abubakar Gummi as acting grand Kadi announced that JNI would promote Islamic literature in Nigerian vernacular languages, build mosques and encourage Islamic centers of learning. JNI, with the Sardauna as its backbone, consisted of all the emirs and chiefs of northern Nigeria, as well as eminent scholars and prominent Muslim leaders. The Sultan of Sokoto, as the spiritual head of northern Nigeria, was the President-General of JNI with Waziri Junaidu as its Chairman. JNI was a private organization and privately funded with some financial assistance from the Sardauna’s international Muslim network in countries such as Saudi Arabia.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Egypt for Islamic leadership would be joined from the 1970s by Iran. All had their constituencies in northern Nigeria. Gummi and his network of radical university students, *Izala*, were pro-Saudi, making strident attacks on Sufism and the ruling aristocracy. Sheikh Aminudeen Abubakar’s *Da’wa* group, while pro-Saudi, refrained from attacks on Sufis and the traditional aristocracy. And there were new movements like Ibrahim El Zakzaky’s Muslim Brothers, inspired by the Iranian revolution (Larkin and Meyer, 2006). Central to all these groups was the definition of Muslim identity in a time of reformist Islam. All espoused cosmopolitanism, and embraced modernity in a distinctly Islamist way. Gummi, fluent in English, Arabic, Hausa and Ffulde would be the first Islamic leader in Nigeria to turn to the airwaves (radio and television). El Zakzaky is fluent in English, Farsi, and Hausa. He was banned from all state media because of his trenchant attacks on the secular state (Larkin and

Meyer, 2006: 300). Though the Shi'a persuasion is very marginal in West Africa, El Zakzaky's strong rhetoric attracted the following of uneducated youth disconcerted by the growing wealth disparities in Nigerian society. Larkin notes how the "rise of Islamism paralleled the reorienting of northern Nigeria's economy towards new economic entrepôts in the Middle East, especially Jeddah, Beirut and Dubai" (Larkin and Meyer, 2006: 307). Islamism, part of modernity, offered new forms of economic advancement.

A parallel trajectory to the Sardauna's closer ties with international Islam is seen in the career of Ibrahim Niass of Kaolack in Senegal. Leader of a branch of the Tijaniyya Brotherhood in Senegal, Niass in the 1940s and 1950s visited northern Nigeria several times on his way to Mecca. He became the shaykh or spiritual advisor to Abdullahi Bayero, Emir of Kano, and to Bayero's successor Muhammad Sanusi. This would create a Tijaniyya constituency in Kano in the predominantly Qadiriyya northern Nigeria (Paden, 1986: 310-11). Niass had strong international ties to Muslim leaders in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, and until his death in 1970 was one of the prominent West African Muslims in the international Muslim community. In Senegal a recent trend since the 1980s, which has received little mention in the literature, is the switch or conversion of some Senegalese Sunni Muslims to Shi'a Islam (Leichtman, 2009). This trend is part of the larger movement of reformist Islam, the search for an *authentic* Islam. Leichtman sees the impulse not as the revolutionary model of Iran, but a return to earlier forms of Islamic practice "perceived as a solution to the failures attributed to Western influence and the innovations (*bida*) in recent Islamic practice" (Leichtman, 2009: 111). Intriguingly, Senegalese converts to Shi'a Islam have sought to indigenize their Shi'a faith by adapting Shi'a theology and ritual to Senegalese cultural practice, to make it *authentically Senegalese*, in order to distance it from the Iranian, revolutionary model (Ibid., 111-12). The Iranian Revolution and their admiration for Ayatollah Khomeini was what drew Senegalese attention to Shi'a Islam, but the result was to turn them to the earlier practice of Islam and not the post-1979 Iranian form. This journey has not been easy for Senegal's small group of Shi'a Muslims. In 1984 the president of Senegal, Abdou Diouf, closed the Iranian Embassy for distributing Shi'a literature, an action probably instigated by Senegal's Sunni Muslim leaders. The Iranian

endeavor was to counter what they see as Saudi promotion of Wahhabi-influenced Islam throughout Africa. But the Internet and the growth of cybercafés in Senegal has ensured access to a breadth of Islamist literature. Instructively, many of Senegal's new Shi'a Muslims are from the Fulbe ethnic minority and not from the Wolof majority.

That most of the Muslim Lebanese in Senegal are Shi'a must have familiarized the Senegalese with Shi'a practice, though it was the event of the Iranian Revolution that arrested the popular imagination. Leichtman notes that there was no formal Shi'a religious institution or representation in Senegal until 1978, when the Lebanese Islamic Institute was established. From the 1970s Lebanese Shi'a sheikhs, particularly Sheikh El-Zein, have provided instruction to Lebanese in Senegal, but also to some Senegalese converts. The institutions and activities of Senegalese Shi'a have been funded through these Lebanese sources. The Iranian embassy was reopened in the early 1990s but has been careful to focus its activities on trade. But Islamic and international diplomacy has retained some links between Senegal and Iran. The meetings of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1991 and 2008 were held in Dakar and were attended by the presidents of Iran, Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad respectively. Senegalese President Wade visited Iran in 2003 and 2006. An Iranian Sheikh built a Shi'a Islamic seminary, *Hawza Al-Rasul Al-Akram*, in Dakar in 2001 (Leichtman, 2009: 117). The most prominent Shi'a mosque in Dakar, was built by a Lebanese industrialist Al-hajj Ibrahim Derwiche, next to Dakar's main intercity bus station (Leichtman, 2009:127). It is patronized by Sunni Muslims of the Mouride, Tijan and Qadr Sufi orders with a few Shi'a. Sermons are directed at all Muslims and not just Shi'a. Even Ghana with its minority Muslim population has attracted Iranian educational philanthropy. The training institute for Islamic Theology founded in 1988 in Accra by the Iranian Ahlul Bait Foundation, received accreditation in 2002 as the Islamic University College (Ghana) offering Bachelors degrees in Business Administration and Religious Studies. For West Africans, Islam, pilgrimage, philanthropy and development have become so closely connected. Pilgrimage draws the attention of West African Muslims to sites of Islam that appear materially advanced, as well as impress on them the circuits of international Islam. Out of this encounter comes a new vision for remaking society ("development") and the expectation that the international Muslim community would assist in the process, as

Ferme's (1994) humorously titled article, "What 'Alhaji Airplane' saw in Mecca, and what happened when he came home," underscores in the example of a rural Sierra Leone Muslim who went on pilgrimage.

Scholars have contrasted the emergence of a major Islamist movement in Nigeria with the absence of a similar movement in Senegal, though the latter is 90 per cent Muslim. In Northern Nigeria Islamism has manifested itself sometimes in violent confrontations between Islamist movements and the military such as in Yan Tatsine in the 1980s (Lubeck, 1985), in conflicts between Muslims and Christians (Anthony, 2002), and in recent controversies over the imposition of Sharia law in some northern states in Nigeria (Kalu, 2003). In Nigeria oil revenues, major income disparities between the urban poor and the display of wealth by the affluent few, massive rural-urban migration, and other related factors have been highlighted as the basis of a radical Muslim movement (Lubeck, 1985; Keddie, 1995).

From Trade to Investment: West Africa's Changing Economic Relations with the Gulf

The link between Islam and commerce in West Africa has a long history, and for centuries before the 17th century Islam was referred to as a "religion of court [urbanity] and commerce" (Levtzion, 1968; Levtzion and Fisher, 1987).¹ Networks of pilgrimage have also been networks of trade. With the organization of special chartered flights for Muslim pilgrims from the 1950s and the more recent establishment of airline routes between major West African cities and Jeddah and Dubai have come opportunities for trade in consumer goods. Here again West African Muslims were the pioneering traders, though these networks have now expanded to include non-Muslims as well, who go specifically to Jeddah and Dubai to trade or who route their trips to Europe and North America through Dubai to afford them transit and trading opportunities.

Attention has been drawn to the centrality of the global networks of the Mouride Brotherhood to trade in present-day Senegal. With an ethic of prayer and work, and immensely loyal to leaders of a highly bureaucratized order, Murid international migration from the 1970s has created global networks linking them from France to the United States (Babou, 2002; Buggenhagen, 2009).² Networks of migration have

overlapped with trading networks, meeting consumer demand in Senegal and elsewhere, as well as creating new demands from being embedded in global networks of consumption. The emergence of a “cult of fashion” among Senegalese women in the last couple of decades, the *dirriankhe*, has transformed Senegalese women into keen connoisseurs of fashion trends and patrons of the international textile trade (Mustafa, 1998). Senegalese women avidly follow fashion trends in Jeddah, looking out for the latest cloths or the newest embroidery thread (Mustafa, 2000). The fashion and textile trade in Senegal has been dominated since the 1980s by Murid women, who not only meet the demands of high fashion, but have developed networks with textile manufacturers in Hong Kong and other Asian centers that enable them to secure imitations of luxury cloth for low-end consumers. “Dressing well” has become a Senegalese female preoccupation of both the wealthy and the poor. Murid trading networks span from Hong Kong, Jeddah and Dubai to New York. They acquire goods wholesale, usually electronic and beauty products, which they sell wholesale and retail in Senegal and in other countries (Ebin, 1995). Murid migrants in cities such as New York are also involved in street trade, selling American beauty products and Asian-made watches (Ebin, 1995; Babou, 2002).

In the last two decades there has been another form of trade to West Africa that tapped into the information technology revolution. It started off as a parallel economy based on video piracy, but out of that has emerged the Nigerian video or film industry dubbed “Nollywood.” Larkin notes how Hollywood films were copied illegally by Nigerians and sent to Asia and the Middle East for sub-titling and mass-copying in the form of video cassettes, video CDs (VCDs) and DVDs, then brought into Nigeria for distribution within the West African sub-region. He commented on the paradox that as Nigeria becomes more disembedded from the official global economy, except the oil industry, it has become more integrated into a parallel, informal world economy that orients it towards new metropolises such as Singapore and Dubai (Larkin, 2008). In the era of cassettes, Dubai was the prime source of private tapes for Nigeria. VCDs brought in Pakistan as Nigeria’s new source with the establishment of VCD factories in Pakistan. Hence West Africans have the singular, and illegal, pleasure of viewing films that are still in their first run of release in the United States. This pirate infrastructure for the

distribution of films from the US and India created the foundation for Nigeria's film industry, using the same networks that brought cassettes, VCDs and DVDs into the country, and the same machines that dubbed pirate films now copy made-in-Nigeria movies. And the ubiquity of technological breakdown and repair in Nigeria has spawned ancillary industries that feed off the Nigerian film industry and home entertainment. These developments have underpinned huge demand for televisions and video players, and Dubai has been a source of both new and used electronics for the West African market.

Capitalist infrastructure and its parallel activities spawned video piracy in Nigeria and oriented it towards new trading centers in Asia and the Middle East. But these new circuits and the accumulation of wealth in new industries in West Africa that spun off information technology had potential for trade in capital goods and technology between West Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The revolution in information technology and the huge volume of information available on the internet has made it easier for West African traders, such as the Hausa-Fulani networks in northern Nigeria and Niger that depended on Lebanese and Igbo suppliers in southern Nigeria and Cotonou in the 1970s and 1980s, to now bypass these suppliers and go directly to Dubai or Singapore for their goods (Meagher, 2003: 65). And the changes in freight transport since the 1990s, mentioned earlier in this paper, have facilitated these new economic connections between West Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Telecommunications, investment, and real estate firms from Qatar, Kuwait, Dubai and other Gulf businesses have begun to invest in West Africa. Recently, Kuwaiti-based Mobile Telecommunications Company bought Africa's largest mobile phone operator, Celtel, for \$3.4 billion. West Africa's telecommunications sector is also attracting investment from Gulf businesses, and Dubai's Mubadala Development Company recently won a \$400 million license to provide Nigeria with a range of fixed line and mobile, data and multimedia services in Nigeria's telecommunications sector (Africa Research Bulletin, 2007). To link West Africa more firmly to the Gulf region, and reflecting the growing economic importance of relations between West Africa and the Gulf, Gulf airlines such as Emirates and Qatar Airlines have commenced operation to the West African cities of Accra, Lagos, and Abidjan, and partner with local airlines to convey travelers destined to the Gulf region to these West

African hub ports. At the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, West Africa has gained in Asia and the Middle East new, valuable trade and investment partners, and the coming years will provide more comprehensive understanding of the impact of these emerging networks.

An interim assessment of Gulf-Africa trade relations reveals the growing importance of Africa to the Gulf region. Gulf exports to Africa rose in value from \$2,806 millions in 1980 to \$11,009 millions (in real 2000 terms) with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates being the major beneficiaries. Of the total value of exports in 2005 of \$13,566 millions, Saudi Arabia accounted for \$9,055 millions and UAE for \$3,814 millions. Egypt and South Africa represent the Gulf's major trading partners in Africa. Between 1980 and 2005, trade balance has grown in favor of the Gulf as much as 338 per cent in real terms (Gĩthĩnji, 2009). Perhaps, even more important, is the high proportion of technologically sophisticated products the Gulf region exports to Africa – non-agricultural manufactures, medium technology products used in processing and engineering industries such as engines and industrial machinery and others -- compared to the rest of the world, indicating that Gulf products to Africa have expanded to include valuable capital goods utilized in industry (Gĩthĩnji, 2009). The implications for industrialization in both regions are enormous. Whereas early Arab Gulf monetary flows to post-independent Africa had been in the form primarily of official development assistance (ODA), often an adjunct to foreign policy, we are beginning to see foreign direct investment by Arab Gulf companies in West Africa.

Conclusion

With trade to UAE and Jeddah flourishing and Dubai's emergence as a center of trade, tourism, real estate and finance, African professionals have taken up high-paying positions in Dubai. Lacking the oil revenues of other members of the UAE such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai has chosen a different route to economic growth and prosperity. Oil-rich Arab countries have attracted labor migrants from poorer Arab countries and from Asia. By the early 1980s migrant labor made up 85 percent of the total working force in UAE, 81 per cent in Qatar, 70 per cent in Kuwait, 75 per cent in Saudi Arabia, and 40 per cent in Bahrain (Humphrey, 1993: 6). Asians from South and Southeast Asia comprised the

fastest growing component of the Gulf area labor force. African professionals have made their presence felt, with South Africans being perhaps the largest group in the past decade. South African businesses such as Woolworths, Sasol, Nandos, and others have also extended their operations to UAE, especially Dubai. There is a small but growing Ghanaian community in Dubai and their presence and Dubai's growing international recognition encouraged the former vice president of Ghana, Alhaji Aliu Mahama, to visit Dubai in an endeavor to boost bilateral ties between the two countries. In 2004 trade between Dubai and Ghana was valued at about 267 million dirhams (about US \$66 million) with the amount of Ghana's exports to Dubai standing at 46.2 million dirhams (about US \$10.4 million). Ghanaian nurses, civil engineers, architects and banking professionals have found jobs in Dubai with a recruitment agency for nurses in the Dubai operating in Ghana.³

These promising networks linking West Africa and the Gulf stand threatened by the present global economic recession. A recent *New York Times* feature story recounted Dubai's downward economic spiral with companies making huge financial losses, cutting back workforces, leading to an exodus of foreign workers overwhelmed with debt and who stand to lose their work visas now that they are unemployed. The *Times* story painted a depressing scene:

With Dubai's economy in free fall, newspapers have reported that more than 3,000 cars sit abandoned on the parking lot of the Dubai Airport, left by fleeing debt-ridden foreigners (who could in fact be imprisoned if they failed to pay their bills). Some are said to have maxed-out credit cards inside and notes of apology taped to the windshield (NYT, February 11, 2009).

It is hard to predict what the economic landscape after the present global recession would look like, but considering the long-term ties between the Arabian Gulf and West Africa, and the important shifts in the constitution of present trade, it is likely that the relationship would continue, albeit in a transformed way.

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Notes

¹ The history of Islam and commerce in East Africa and the Indian Ocean has also received much attention. See for examples, Middleton (1992), Pearson (1998), and Alpers (2009).

² For studies of the Mouride Brotherhood, see Cruise O'Brien (1971), and Babou (2007).

³ <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/diaspora/artikel.php?ID=152586>; and <http://www.ameinfo.com/75846.html>. On remittances from the Gulf countries to Africa, see Chami (2009). From the available statistics, the major West African states benefiting from remittances from the Gulf region include the Gambia, Mali and Ghana. In 2006, Gambian remittances from the Gulf represented an estimated 14 per cent of Gambian GDP.