Teaching about Islam in Africa: A Cultural-Functional Perspective

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Abstract

What are the major pillars of education today? The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century focused on this question in its report to the premier United Nations agency in education: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In its report, "Learning: The Treasure Within," the commission stated that life-long education is based upon four pillars: *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to live together*, and *learning to be*.[1]

But is learning about religion a steel bar in these pillars? Certainly, the High-Level Group (HLG) appointed by Kofi Annan, the African UN Secretary General (1997-2006), to undertake the major UN intercultural initiative – the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) – seemed to think so. The HLG report stressed the role of learning about religion as a key element of preparing future citizens for a world characterized by cultural diversity.[2]

In his *Cultural Forces in World Politics* (1990), Ali Mazrui explored the seven functions of culture in society. Briefly put, these are culture as *a worldview*, *a source of identity*, *stratification*, *communication*, *value systems*, *motivation*, and as a *means of production and modes of consumption*. I apply this framework to my analysis of the seven functions of Islam in Africa and link them with the UNESCO and UNAOC reports to underline the need for modern well-educated Africans to learn about Islam in Africa.

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Introduction

Religion and its interaction with society, particularly with politics, has long been an area of interest for Ali Mazrui. When discussing his contributions to the academic field, many writers understandably focus on his works on Africa and, to a lesser extent, Islam. The wide attention his “The Africans” television series received in the 1980s brought public attention to a career marked by noteworthy contributions to the social sciences and humanities with special reference to Africa.[3] While he had always paid attention to Islam in his research and teaching, it is arguable that Islam became increasingly important in his scholarly output and public intellectual activity during his post-Michigan period, at least partially due to Islam’s growing importance in global politics.

This prominence reflects what I believe is an underemphasized theme of Mazruiana: the role of cultural forces in society. Although the establishment of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University highlights this theme, not enough focus has been placed on the implications of his major work in this area, *Cultural Forces in World Politics*,[4] and in his earlier writings on the seven functions of culture in society. Briefly put, these are culture as *a worldview*, *a source of identity*, *stratification*, *communication*, *value systems*, *motivation*, and as *a means of production and modes of consumption*.

In this essay, I will use this cultural-functional framework to discuss and then link the seven functions of Islam in Africa with the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and UNESCO reports to underline the need for modern well-educated Africans to learn about Islam in Africa. I begin by outlining Islam’s political and demographic significance in Africa and presenting a brief overview of the goals held by UNAOC, the principal UN project concerned with bridging cultures, and UNESCO, the principal UN agency concerned with education, as regards education. My analysis of the latter will draw upon the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century’s (hereafter “the Delors Report”) major report submitted to UNESCO on the four pillars of education: *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to live together*, and *learning to be*.[5] The necessity of education for knowledge, action, respect and acceptance of the other, as well as knowledge for one’s own full potential, is accentuated by Islam’s political and demographic significance in Africa.

Islam’s Political and Demographic Significance in Africa

As a starting point, we should point to Islam’s political and demographic presence in Africa. One way to examine this is through membership in the African Union (AU), rather than the conventional breakdown between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa (often categorized with the Middle East). Table 1 lists the current, former (#) and suspended (*) AU members as of March 2014 that are also members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).[6] As we can see from the bolded states, twenty-seven (almost half) of the states with a geographic tie to Africa are also members of OIC, the premier Islamic international organization. Further, the Central African Republic is an observer state. Without this bloc, the OIC would not be, as it is now, the largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations.[7]

Table 1: Current, Former (#), and Suspended (*) AU Members as of March 2014

Algeria
Angola
Benin
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cape Verde
Cameroon
Cent. African Repub.*
Chad
Comoros
Congo Repub.
Côte d'Ivoire
DR Congo
Djibouti
Egypt*
Equat. Guinea
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Gabon
Gambia
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau*
Kenya
Lesotho
Liberia
Libya
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali
Mauritania
Mauritius
Morocco#
Mozambique
Namibia
Niger
Nigeria
Rwanda
Sahrawi Arab D.R.
São Tomé & Príncipe
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone

Source: Websites of the African Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

However, OIC membership alone is not a sufficient indicator of Islam's importance in Africa. After all, India is neither a full member nor an observer, despite having the world's third largest Muslim population as of 2010.[8] As Mazrui has pointed out on several occasions, African countries with sizeable and politically significant Muslim populations, such as Tanzania and Ethiopia, are not OIC members. Table 2 depicts the estimated and projected populations (and percentages) of Muslims in African states in 2010 and 2030, respectively.[9]

Table 2: Estimated and Projected Muslim Population of African Countries, 2010 and 2030

Country	2010 Muslim Population	Percent Muslim	2030 Projected Muslim Pop.	Projected Muslim % of Pop.
1. **Algeria**	34,780,000	98.2	43,915,000	98.2
2. Angola	195,000	1.0	312,000	1.0
3. **Benin**	2,259,000	24.5	3,777,000	24.5
4. Botswana	8,000	0.4	10,000	0.4
5. **Burkina Faso**	9, 600,000	58.9	16,480,000	59.0
6. Burundi	184,000	2.2	258,000	2.2
7. Cameroon	3,598,000	18.0	5,481,000	19.2
8. Cape Verde	<1000	.1	<1000	.1
9. Cent. African Repub.*	403,000	8.9	550,000	8.9

10. **Chad**	6,404,000	55.7	10,086	53.0
11. **Comoros**	679,000	98.3	959,000	98.3
12. Congo (D.R.)	969,000	1.4	1,552,000	1.4
13. **Côte d'Ivoire**	7,960,000	36.9	12,977,000	39.9
14. Republic of Congo	60,000	1.6	88,000	1.6
15. **Djibouti**	853,000	97.0	1,157,000	97.0
16. **Egypt***	80,024,000	94.7	105,065,000	94.7
17. Equatorial Guinea	28,000	4.1	43,000	4.1
18. Eritrea	1,909,000	36.5	2,955,000	36.5
19. Ethiopia	28,721,000	33.8	44,466,000	33.8
20. **Gabon**	145,000	9.7	244,000	11.9
21. **Gambia**	1,669,000	95.3	2,607,000	95.3
22. Ghana	3,906,000	16.1	6,350,000	18.2
23. **Guinea**	8,693,000	84.2	14,227,000	84.2
24. **Guinea-Bissau***	705,000	42.8	1,085,000	42.8
25. Kenya	2,868,000	7.0	5,485,000	8.7
26. Lesotho	1,000	.1	1,000	.1
27. Liberia	523,000	12.8	825,000	12.8
28. **Libya**	6,325,000	96.6	8,232,000	96.6
29. Madagascar	220,000	1.1	825,000	1.0
30. Malawi	2,011,000	12.8	3,326,000	12.8
31. **Mali**	12,316,000	92.4	18,840,000	92.1
32. **Mauritania**	3,338,000	99.2	4,750,000	99.2
33. Mauritius	216,000	16.6	236,000	16.6
34. **Morocco#**	32,381,000	99.9	39,259,000	99.9
35. **Mozambique**	5,340,000	22.8	7,733,000	22.8
36. Namibia	9,000	.4	12,000	.4
37. **Niger**	15,627,000	98.3	32,022,000	98.3
38. **Nigeria**	75,728,000	47.9	116,832,000	51.5
39. Rwanda	188,000	1.8	363,000	2.3
40. Sahrawi Arab D.R./ Western Sahara	528,000	99.6	816,000	99.6
41. São Tomé & Príncipe	<1000	<0.1	<1000	<0.1
42. **Senegal**	12,333,000	95.9	18,739,000	95.9
43. Seychelles	<1,000	1.1	<1,000	1.1
44. **Sierra Leone**	4,171,000	71.5	6,527,000	73.0
45. **Somalia**	9,231,000	98.6	15,529,000	98.6
46. South Africa	737,000	1.5	799,000	1.5
47. **Sudan**	30,855,000	71.4	43,573,000	71.4
48. Swaziland	2,000	0.2	2,000	0.2
49. Tanzania	13,450,000	29.9	19,463,000	25.8
50. **Togo**	827,000	12.2	1,234,000	12.2
51. **Tunisia**	10,349,000	99.8	12,097,000	99.8
52. **Uganda**	4,060,000	12.0	6,655,00	10.9
53. Zambia	59,000	0.4	94,000	0.4
54. Zimbabwe	109,000	0.9	155,000	0.9

Source: Compiled from Pew Research Center, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2030* (Washington, DC: Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2011).

A few caveats about the statistics must be mentioned here. Generally speaking, population statistics are subject to several issues that can affect their accuracy. Even in developed countries there may be misreporting and a consequent overcounting or undercounting. In many developing countries censuses may not be held regularly or unreported publicly. Exogenous factors might also affect population projections. As Pew notes: "There may, however, be political, environmental or social events that affect fertility, mortality, migration and age structures but [*sic*] that are not captured in these projections."[10] One can reasonably estimate that especially in the case of Africa, war, civil conflict, disease, and refugee movement can affect future population projections. Furthermore, financial constraints, poor infrastructure, and a lack of trained personnel for census counts could also affect population estimates.[11] Finally, to avoid Christian-Muslim tension in countries like Nigeria, the census does not ask direct questions about one's religion or ethnicity.[12]

One way to reduce such reliability and validity issues may be to utilize past statistics, which may be corrected, rather than projections. Therefore, this analysis utilizes only the 2010 figures in an attempt to reduce these concerns. A simple examination of this data allows us to categorize the demographic presence of Muslims in Africa's fifty-four states in four ways.

1. In several African states, Muslims are a clear and acknowledged majority (51 percent and over). Of course many – though not all – of these states are in North Africa, often separated from sub-Saharan Africa, and placed with the Middle East. There are nineteen such states.
2. In a few African countries, Muslims form a significant minority (between 25 and 50 percent) in political and demographic terms, such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. There are six of these states, all of which are currently, or potentially, flashpoints for major religious tension or conflict.
3. In twelve African states, Muslims are demographically significant (between 5 and 25 percent), and politically significant, depending upon their location. States in this category include the Central African Republic, Liberia, and Kenya.
4. The last category of African states (seventeen in all) have small percentages (under 5 percent) of Muslims; however, this population in some of these states (such as South Africa) may be quite influential both regionally and globally.

Therefore, even if we discount the last category, Muslims are a critical aspect of Africa's demography and politics today in thirty-seven out of its fifty-four (more than two-thirds of the states in this analysis). Knowledge about Islam is necessary for the well-educated African who is interacting with his/her fellow citizens, whether in their neighborhood, country, continent, or world. In the following discussion, we can see that those global international organizations, in particular the UNAOC, concerned with education and cultural diversity have accelerated their calls for education about religions.[13]

The Educational Goals of UNAOC and UNESCO

During the tenure of Secretary-General Kofi Annan (1997-2006), the UN acknowledged the need for all people to acquire knowledge about religions in the report produced by its High-Level Group (HL) for the Alliance of Civilizations. Laying out the main fields of action for the subsequently formed UNAOC, it pointed out that

> Education systems today face the challenge of preparing young people for an interdependent world that is unsettling to individual and collective identities. Education about one's own history fosters a sense of community and solidarity, but it must be balanced by knowledge of global issues and an understanding and appreciation of other societies and cultures.[14]

Three important aspects of this quote must be noted: the report (1) mentions "education about one's own history" as being important to cultivating a sense of community and solidarity. Even in those countries in which Islam is the predominant religion, Muslims must know its complete, complex, and contextual history; (2) recognizes that this knowledge must be balanced with a "knowledge of global issues and an understanding and appreciation of other societies and cultures," an imperative that is especially true for Africans, given Islam's significant presence both on the continent and the world stage; and (3) appears to treat history as a potential academic vehicle to learn about religion without necessarily excluding other subjects.

In a later section, the HLG report expressed its approval of efforts to utilize an inclusive historical approach.

> In the past few decades, many prominent universities and research centers around the world have been advancing efforts to develop "world history" or "history of humanity" programs with multi-polar approaches. Growing efforts to teach interdisciplinary world history in colleges and schools contribute to developing knowledge and appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of global cultures, and to building a sense of shared human experience.[15]

Further, without violating the fundamental right of freedom of religion expressed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the report underlined the need for education about cultural diversity, including "diverse religious beliefs, practices and cultures of the world,"[16] for both leaders and society at large.

There is a considerable convergence on educational objectives between the UNAOC HLG report's call for education about diversity and UNESCO's educational emphases. Let's recall that the opening clauses of the UNESCO Preamble to the Constitution stressed the role of education about diversity as a fundamental requirement for peace.

> Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed. … The great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races.[17]

It was thus no surprise that the Delors Report submitted to UNESCO described education as the "necessary utopia" and saw it as "one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war."[18] In this spirit, it outlined the four pillars of education as *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to live together*, and *learning to be*.

Learning to know is a fundamental aspect of all education. In the context of the Delors Report, this pillar refers more to the "mastery of learning tools" than to the "acquisition of structured knowledge." From the viewpoint of learning about cultural diversity, this means that "people have to learn to understand the world around them" and "communicate with other people."[19] Naturally, it is hard to understand those worldviews and activities happening beyond one's immediate environment, as well as to communicate with those who are different, without understanding the cultural identities rooted in ethnicity, language, and religion. For Jacques Delors, chair of the commission that authored the report, this pillar includes a "broad general education" and a "passport to lifelong education."[20] A completely valid "passport" would include skills that help one to learn, such as "concentration, memory skills, and ability to think." This last-mentioned skill, particularly the aspects of critical thinking and empathetic thinking, is fundamental to learning about cultural diversity.

Indeed, one could argue that in the twenty-first century *learning to do* is not just about doing a job or having an occupation, for today's dislocating changes in the global economy mean that not only will people rarely be doing a single job, but they may have to change their career several times. This will require applying the above-mentioned skills, along with communication, team, and problem-solving skills (interpersonal skills), which necessarily include intercultural competence. As economies turn from physical work to service economies, and as societies go from being monocultural to multicultural, these skills and competences become more important. The lone farmer of yesterday may have had only rare interactions with the outside world, but even the solitary scientist of today has to interact far more frequently with peers and non-peers at work, which places even more emphasis on communication and team skills. Moreover, rapid change and ever-more intense competition require constant innovation. In this connection, it is the minority or the outsider who often solves problems and innovates. A 2012 study found that "immigrants played a role in more than three out of four patents" at the top American universities.[21]

Diversity "increases the variety of ideas and ways of doing things that can stimulate innovation."[22] But it can also lead to the tension and conflict that hamper innovation and even simple existence. A glance at today's conflicts reveals the presence – though not necessarily the cause – of such cultural factors as ethnicity, religion, and language. Thus it was not surprising that the Delors Report "put greater emphasis on one of the four pillars ... *learning to live together*, by developing an understanding of others and their history, traditions and spiritual values."[23] As Myong Won Suhr, former education minister of South Korea and member of the commission that authored the Delors Report, said: "[L]iving together in harmony must be the ultimate goal of education in the twenty-first century."[24]

Learning to live together in peace requires two fundamental elements: students should (1) learn about human diversity and interdependence through various subjects in schools, and adults – whether in the family, the community, or the school – should cultivate empathy so that children may learn to see through the eyes of the other, and, particularly as they grow older, (2) become involved in cooperative projects that have common goals, for doing so enables not only informal dialogue and learning about differences, but also to realize humanity's common existence. Commission member Rodolfo Stavanhagen clearly expressed this fundamental point when he stated that education must "lead to an awareness of diversity and to respect for others, whether those others are my next-door neighbours, workers in the field, or my fellow human beings in a faraway country."[25]

While it is obvious that *learning to live together* has a lot to do with learning about cultural diversity, *learning to be* a fully developed human being may not be as obvious. A good bridge between the two pillars is commission chair Delor's own remark.

> There is, therefore, every reason to place renewed emphasis on the moral and cultural dimensions of education, enabling each person to grasp the individuality of other people and to understand the world's erratic progression towards a certain unity; but this process must begin with self-understanding through an inner voyage whose milestones are knowledge, meditation and the practice of self-criticism.[26]

To *learn to be* a fully developed human being, education should help one develop his/her "mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality."[27] But what does this, or learning about ourselves, have to do with learning respect for and understanding the other, the latter of which requires us to know about each other *and* ourselves? As a fundamental perquisite to understanding other cultures, we should be confident in our knowledge about our own culture, cultural environment, and beliefs. For instance, studies and reports have pointed to the fact that proper education about religions, rather than promoting fanaticism, can actually serve as a vaccine for extremism.[28] The rationale here is that those who are educated about their own religion, as regards both its context and complexity, are less likely to fall prey to those who twist and selectively simplify religion for nefarious ends.[29]

The competing presence of the universalist religions of Christianity and Islam in the continent creates conditions that allow sparks of ignorance, non-understanding, and disrespect to contribute to conflicts between their adherents, although sometimes the religious differences are exaggerated.[30] A survey I conducted for a conference paper in 2013 found that in 2012, the number of serious conflicts in Africa with religious and ethnic elements (19) was actually the lowest and was marginally exceeded by the number of ethnic conflicts with no religious elements (21). Actually, there were far more conflicts with little or no ethnic and religious elements (28). Nevertheless, Islam and Christianity are clearly in conflict in several places such as the Central African Republic, Egypt, and Nigeria.

As we have seen in the preceding section, Islam has a considerable demographic and political presence in Africa. But how does it function there, and why should Africans learn about it? In the next section I will utilize Mazrui's framework of the seven functions of culture, examine the seven functions of Islam in Africa, and consider their implications for the four pillars of education described in the UNESCO report.

The Seven Functions and the Four Pillars

Mazrui regards the seven functions of culture in society in the following terms:

1. As lenses of perception and cognition, or what may be called a worldview.
2. As a basis of identity, or as one of the markers of defining what we call ourselves.
3. As a basis of stratification, or determining higher or lower status.
4. As an instrument of communication, such as language, music, arts, and ideas.
5. As a standard of judgment, whether of morality, beauty, or wisdom.
6. As a provider of motives for human behavior, rationalizing our actions.
7. As a system of production and consumption, determining partly what can be done in the economic system.[31]

Three points may be noted here: First, these functions of culture in society are just one of many factors that influence our worldviews, identities, actions, and judgments. As Amartya Sen has said, a person can be

> an American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theater lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician, and someone who is deeply committed to the view that there are intelligent beings in outer space with whom it is extremely urgent to talk (preferably in English).[32]

Second, what I see as two of the most important elements of culture – ethnicity and religion – may play roles of varying importance, depending upon the individual, his/her education, the time period in which he/she is living, and his/her geographical location. Certainly in the African context, religion "impregnates the entire texture of individual and commercial life in Africa."[33] As my discussion above on Islam's political and demographic significance in Africa revealed, Islam has and will continue to play an important role there. Third, while it may be self-explanatory, "religion" is not restricted to doctrines and beliefs, but also includes its adherents' practices, attitudes, and acts.

In considering the rationale for education about Islam, let me here consider its seven functions in Africa by slightly adapting Mazrui's seven functions of culture and relating them to those that are relevant to the four pillars of education elucidated in the Delors Report.

Islam as a worldview. For millions of Africans, Islam provides varying tints to their "lenses of perception and cognition." Its influence on a particular African Muslim's worldview may vary according to one's education, class, gender, and country. Perhaps Islam may be a negligible factor in the worldview of an educated upper-class Moroccan woman and completely color the worldview of an illiterate nomadic Nigerian man. For the non-Muslim African, *learning to live together* requires an understanding of Muslim perspectives, whether for political reasons or for good neighborliness, namely, foreign policy (e.g., the Arab-Israeli dispute and the global "war on terror") or gender relations, and more prosaic subjects like diet (no alcohol) and attire (the veil). Further, in a continent that has commercial and cultural ties with Muslim communities in the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, Africans learning to know Islam may avoid mistakes when dealing with Muslims (e.g., offering food to a visiting Muslim trade delegation during the fasting month of Ramadan).

This knowledge, coupled with the development of empathetic thinking, may enable non-Muslims who are in the majority to put themselves in the shoes of minority Muslims under threat, as seen most recently in the Central African Republic.[34] This pillar of education is closely related to the educational pillar of *learning to do*, including the development of interpersonal, communication, and teamwork skills that can enable Africans to cooperate with each other and around the world and thereby transcend religious differences. Finally, African Muslims may also need to *learn to be* better Muslims by learning about Islam's history so that they can understand their own worldviews, critically evaluate their own beliefs and practices, and resist the simplification and/or adulteration of their religion for their own negative purposes.

Islam as a source of identity. Many elements contribute to forming the foundation of our human identity. For many Muslims, even keeping in mind Sen's caution quoted above, Islam may be one of the strongest and fundamental elements of their identity as human beings. Surveys of Muslims in most countries show that Islam is very important in their lives. The African continent is no different. In fact, a Pew survey finds that **the importance of** religion ranges a high of 98 percent in Senegal to a low of 75 percent in Egypt.[35] This difference reflects the importance of religion as an element of identity in different locations.[36] Therefore, learning to live together requires education about the varieties, histories, and interactions of Islam with other religions and/or ideologies in different locations in order to understand Islam's relative roles (weak vs. strong) in forming group identity, particularly in conflict situations.

Learning to know Islam and Muslims involves understanding and discovering the commonalities between Islam and other religions – especially Christianity – to reduce religious identity differences as a source of conflict[37]; knowing the history of non-Muslim Ethiopia's extension of protection to the first Muslim migrants[38]; and contemporary stories about those who have sheltered Muslims in times of interfaith conflict. This, in turn, should inspire contemporary Muslim societies to be hospitable to non-Muslims, particularly those who are minorities. *Learning to do* implies educating Africans with enough knowledge about Islam and Muslims so that they can acquire those interpersonal skills that will enable them to be aware of Islamic identity in day-to-day activities and thus avoid situations that appear to threaten its perceived aspects. For African Muslims, *learning to be* better Muslims requires understanding and differentiating among the African, Arab, and Muslim elements of their identity, as well as those aspects that unite them with the global Muslim community.

Islam as a source of stratification. Islam's influence on social stratification is related very closely to the notion of Islam as a source of identity. While the latter primarily deals with how Muslims differentiate between themselves and the other, the former relates to how they differentiate among (or stratify) themselves. Gender and sect/denomination are two of the most important levels in which Islam plays a primary role. As in other areas of the Muslim world, stratified gender roles and their attendant practices have often been an area of contention among African Muslims. Issues of female genital mutilation, women in the non-domestic labor force, and attire are just some of the issues affected by Islam's perceived positions.[39]

For the time being, divisions between Sunni and Shia and prejudice against the Ahmaddiya and Sufis have not exploded into violent conflict, although there are tensions and minor clashes from time to time. Many of Africa's intra-Muslim conflicts are arguments over stricter vs. moderate interpretations of Islam – as seen in Somalia, Mali, and Nigeria, for example – and may also mask basic disputes about access to power and equitable resource allocation. From an educational perspective, this function refers to strengthening the pillars of education for African Muslims. Obviously, *learning to live together* is a profoundly important pillar, for any stratification and prejudice based on sects and denominations violates Q. 49:13: "O humanity, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise (each other)."[40] *Learning to know* Islam also includes knowing the history of female *mujtahid*s, remembering that early Islam released women from their previous subjugation,[41] and that the equality of men and women is perhaps most explicitly noted in the Qur'an.[42] The longer verse contains a veritable litany of "men *and* women" (emphasis mine):

> For Muslim men and women – for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise – tor them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward. (Q. 33:25)

A shorter verse specifies that the ultimate reward – entry into heaven – is open to both men and women.

> If any do deeds of righteousness – be they male or female – and have faith, they will enter heaven and not the least injustice will be done to them. (Q. 4:124)

All of this implies that *learning to be* better Muslims involves acquiring a deep knowledge of the Qur'an and Islamic history, including the role of such prominent women as Khadijah and A'ishah.[43]

Islam as a means of communication. In Africa, Islam has had three very important functions in this sphere. One of the most important aspects is how much Islam and its "chosen" language has influenced African literacy.[44] Several indigenous languages use, or have used, the Arabic script. The language of Egypt's Coptic Christians and of Niger's Zarma are examples of the former, and Kiswahili and Somali are examples of the latter. The requirement to read the Qur'an in Arabic has probably spurred literacy to a great extent. Another important aspect is the influence that Islam and Arabic have had on African languages in the form of vocabulary and concepts. As Mazrui said in an early article: "The Islamic origins of Kiswahili partly lie in its readiness to borrow concepts, words, and idioms from the Arabic language and from Islamic civilization."[45] He later pointed to Islam's influence on classical Kiswahili poetry.[46]

This brings us to the third way – that of artistic communication. Again, Mazrui has classified Islam's mixed influence on African art in three ways. In architecture and the verbal arts (e.g., poetry), Islam has acted as a stimulus; however, it has inhibited sculpture and the performing arts and had a mixed impact on painting.[47] From an educational perspective, the most important pillar of education that is relevant in this context is *learning to be* better Muslims by striving to become literate and to understand. The educational pillar of *learning to live together* could help all Africans understand exactly what kind of art Islam permits and what kind of art it considers offensive or prohibited. For non-Muslim Africans, both *learning to live together* and *learning to do* would imply that it would be useful, for both societal cohesion and professional advancement, to learn languages like Arabic and Kiswahili and of their debt to Islam.

Islam as the standard of judgment. This function is an obvious corollary to the conceptualization of Islam as a way of life. The Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the Shari'ah are meant to be comprehensive sources for devout Muslims in all areas of public and private life. Thus Muslims are supposed to look first to the sources to see what is acceptable as regards public policy and appropriate societal and individual relations. Values that are deeply grounded in Islam and provide guidance can affect the acceptance or rejection of actions in the public sphere, as well as relations between and among individuals and groups in society. In the public policy sphere, certain policy goals and instruments may be judged as conforming to or violating Islamic values. However, the lack of literacy and education about Islam can lead to misinterpretations of Islamic values and thus acceptance of public policy and societal actions that Islam is perceived as permitting or even encouraging. One example is female genital mutilation, which is not prescribed anywhere in the canonized sources of Islam.[48]

In this evaluative function, the pillar of *learning to know* about Islam's comprehensive sources is critical not only for Muslims, but also for those non-Muslims who are in positions that allow them to make policy and societal decisions that impact Muslims. Obviously, this also has implications for the *learning to live together* as well as *learning to do* pillars. Social cohesion and economic development would be enhanced by knowing what Islam encourages, permits, and prohibits. For instance, promoting literacy could be said to be an appropriately Islamic value, given the Qur'anic verse to "read" or the Prophet's statement to "pursue knowledge as far as China."[49] While it would probably not be wise for policymakers in an African Muslim country to encourage Christian missionaries to proselytize, nothing in Islam discourages marriages between Muslim men and Christian women. Finally, *learning to be* requires Muslims to become better educated about the sources of Islam and the contents therein so that they may independently evaluate public policy, societal actions, and individual relations. Anchoring this pillar in the deep knowledge of their own religion, as well as critically thinking about Islam's context, would enable Muslims to abandon practices not found in Islam's original sources and to shun those who misconstrue Islam for their own devious ends.

Islam as motivation. Islam's motivating function is closely related to its serving as a standard of judgment, for judgments are not made in a vacuum; rather, they relate to actions and instruments. This function has several implications of special interest in the African context. For example, what causes Muslims to take up arms against the authorities or Christians, as in the case of Boko Haram in Nigeria? What are the Prophet's injunctions or Qur'anic verses that could motivate Muslims in the continent's drier parts to conserve water or protect animals? Which Islamic values can be harnessed to develop equitable societies internally, and more cooperation between African Islamic states? As a religion with centuries of history, multiple interpretations, and diverse traditions, Islam can easily be utilized to motivate positive actions and methods for achieving proper goals, or negative actions and methods for achieving improper goals.

As with any other religion, Islam promises rewards and punishments based upon one's behavior and actions. The most important pillar of education in regard to this function may well be *learning to know* those Islamic values that can be mobilized to motivate both beneficial actions as well as to combat those who would misinterpret them to achieve destructive goals. In addition to *learning to be* better Muslims, African Muslims may critically investigate those Islamic values that could motivate constructive actions (e.g., promoting interfaith amity, equitable development, or environmental ethics) drawing upon their own leaders and intellectuals, such as Mahmoud Taha (d. 1985; Sudan), Ali Mazrui (Kenya), Fatima Mernissi (Morocco), and Rachid Ghannouchi (Tunisia) and such non-African Muslim intellectuals as S. H. Nasr (Iran), Tariq Ramadan (Switzerland), or Khurshid Ahmed (Pakistan).

For African non-Muslims, particularly if they are the majority, *learning to live together* would also imply education about Islam to enable them to understand its differences and commonalities with their own religions. This approach would have the added benefit of helping African non-Muslims minimize those differences that may encourage conflict and draw attention to those commonalities that may be redirected toward such common societal positive ends as coexistence, mutual respect, and equitable development.

Islam as a system of production and consumption. Here we may see production and consumption as not just stating what Muslims can and cannot produce and consume – the prohibitions on alcohol, pork, and interest immediately come to mind – but also indicating Islam's larger function as a system that tames unchecked economic activity. Three of its aspects are very relevant in the African context: (1) Muhammad was not an ascetic like the Buddha, but a successful merchant, and thus Islam approves of economic activity and development. As a continent that has made great strides in development but still has a long way to go, this is a helpful aspect of African Islam; (2) Islam has a progressive economic outlook and favors equity. As African societies work out their economic paths, those that wish to promote economic equity could ground their choices on Islamic values; and (3) under Islam, production and consumption must be morally and environmentally constrained for balance, good health, and future generations.[50]

Given that Africa as a whole is deeply vulnerable to climate change, suffers from severe health threats, and has a significantly younger population, it faces many production and consumption-related choices. Clearly the most important pillars here are *learning to know* and *learning to do*. The first one can help African Muslims know that Islam encourages economic activity. This realization can spur economic innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as cause others to follow the inspiring model of such successful African Muslim businesspeople as Mo Ibrahim. The second one has three aspects: (1) both non-Muslim and Muslim policymakers and economic actors must consider those activities and businesses that would not go over well in Muslim communities, such as wineries[51] and sandwich shops that offer ham and cheese; (2) economic activities could be pursued while keeping in mind moral and environmental imperatives for economic equity and environmental justice; and (3) whereas traditional Muslims in the past may have frowned on women's economic activity in mixed-gender public spaces and offices, the development of relevant skill sets can permit them to pursue economic activity at home through the Internet.[52] *Learning to be* better Muslims incorporates these two above-mentioned pillars.

Overall then, we can see that Mazrui's functions of culture in society can be adapted to explain the functions of Islam in Africa. Due to Islam's demographic and political significance in Africa, as well as the seven functions of Islam in Africa related to the four pillars of education elucidated above, a strong argument can be made for the necessity to learn about Islam in African educational institutions. But this activity, if it is to succeed, must transcend Islamic schools in Africa and/or Muslim-majority countries. African universities that train teachers must have courses, if not entire departments, dedicated to teaching about Islam. A glance at the websites – although limited in its comprehensiveness as a method – of most African universities reveals that while many of them offer courses and departments on Christianity, there are few courses and departments of Islamic studies. For organizations like UNAOC, in which I served as education and research manager, this state of affairs is worrisome. However, we did make some effort, in line with the HLG report's recommendations, to provide a platform and leadership in education about religions at the level of international organizations. I will outline several of these steps in the concluding section below.

Conclusion: Melding Mazrui and the Educational Efforts of International Organizations

The UNAOC-sponsored HLG report recommended a series of actions as regards intercultural education, including education about religions. One of these was that "[g]overnments should ensure that their primary and secondary educational systems provide for a balance and integration of national history and identity formation with knowledge of other cultures, religions, and regions."[53]

Two major steps were taken in this regard: (1) to urge the implementation of intercultural education in the national strategies drawn up by some UNAOC member countries.[54] However, as any one anyone familiar with domestic American politics knows, national politicians strongly resist UN suggestions regarding education about religions. Still, it is noteworthy that countries such as Canada, Russia, and Australia have started to experiment with such pilot projects despite the ensuing controversies; and (2) to launch a project, Education about Religions and Beliefs, that had three major objectives: (a) to create a website that would generate an online community for good practices, practical resources (e.g., curricula and syllabi) at the school level, as well as news and events related to this specific topic.[55] This soon became one of the top-ranked sites for those interested in finding information on "education about religions" via major Internet search engines; (b) to create a community of partners and experts in the area of religion who, in cooperation with UNAOC's media program, would serve as a resource for media queries about religion; and (3) to function as a catalyst for convening seminars and conferences related to education about religion. Examples included a history project that examined the links between Islam and the West, particularly in the Mediterranean region; a workshop on the role of spirituality in human flourishing, and public events on the role of religion. While many UN agencies deal with faith-based organizations in the course of their work, the Education about Religions and Beliefs project and UNAOC's media programs, both of which frequently responded to religious controversies, helped establish UNAOC as the main UN body that explicitly deals with issues of religion.

Another HLG report recommendation – that partnerships of intergovernmental organizations with centers and curriculum developers make materials attractive and usable for class[56] rather than producing 3,000-page volumes – has also been partly implemented: UNAOC launched a competition called "Create UNAOC."[57] Among the latest winners were apps that provide knowledge about the famous Muslim explorer Ibn Battuta to help people experience different cultures through the eyes of schoolchildren and journalists and to develop respect toward different cultures.[58]

Efforts by UNAOC and similar international organizations, as well as by several non-governmental organizations, to encourage education about religions have mostly concentrated on the West and the Middle East and North Africa. But with a population of almost 330 million in 2010, according to our calculations, Muslim Africa is a significant part of the global community. The twenty-seven African Muslim states belonging to the OIC contribute to its international clout as the largest intergovernmental organization after the UN. Further, in almost two-thirds of the African states that belong (or have belonged) to the AU, Muslims form an important segment of the population, whether as a majority or a minority. As a consequence of both its sizeable footprint on the African continent and its nature as a prescriptive and normative way of life, Islam serves several important functions. A useful way of viewing these is to adapt Mazrui's seven functions of culture: culture as l*enses of perception*, *markers of identity*, *layers of stratification*, *means of communication*, *standards of judgment*, *springs of motivation*, and means *of production and modes of consumption*.

We can collapse these functions into three categories: *framing* (the first three), *communicating* (the fourth and fifth), and *actionable* (the last two). The Delors Report to UNESCO on learning for the twenty-first century emphasizes four pillars – *learning to live together*, *learning to know*, *learning to do,* and *learning to be* – which, with varying emphases, can be related to the framing, communicating, and actionable functions of Islam in Africa. Joining the Muslims' considerable political and demographic presence with the seven functions of Islam on the continent and the four pillars of education needed for the twenty-first century, I have argued African countries must make urgent efforts to incorporate education about Islam – indeed, education about all major religions. This will enable all Africans, regardless of religion, to live together in peace and become more successful and better human beings.

Endnotes

1. UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century* (Paris: USESCO Publishing, 1996). Since the commission's chair was Jacques Delors, the report is also sometimes known as the *Delors Report*.
2. United Nations, *Alliance of Civilizations: Report of the High Level Group*, 13 November 2006 (New York: United Nations, 2006).
3. The companion volume to the series is Ali A. Mazrui*, The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986).
4. Ali A. Mazrui, *Cultural Forces in World Politics* (Oxford, Nairobi, and Portsmouth, NH: James Currey, EAEP and Heinemann, 1990, 2005 reprint).
5. UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*.
6. This list is compiled from the websites of the African Union (www.au.int/en/member_states/countryprofiles), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/home/?lan=en), and news reports.
7. For a recent article on the OIC, see Ishtiaq Hossain, "The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC): Nature, Role and the Issues," *Journal of Third World Studies* 29, no. 1 (spring 2012): 287-314.
8. Pew Research Center, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2030* (Washington, DC: Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2011), 11.
9. Note that Pew groups the North African states with the Middle East; here, I have combined them with the sub-Saharan African states.
10. Pew, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*, 166.
11. On the problems of statistics in Africa, consult Morton Jevren, *Poor Numbers: How We are Misled by African Development Statistics and What to Do about It* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).
12. See Katharine Houreld, "Curfew for a Census to Find Out Who Counts," *The Times* (UK), 22 Mar. 2006. For a general discussion of the politics of census taking, see Femi Mimiko, "Census in Nigeria: The Politics and the Imperative of Depoliticization," *African & Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2006): 1-21.
13. The main website in this context, Education about Religions and Beliefs (http://erb.unaoc.org), belongs to the UN Alliance of Civilizations project.
14. United Nations, *Alliance of Civilizations: Report of the High Level Group*, 26.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. See www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/pdf/UNESCO_E.PDF.
18. UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 13.
19. UNESCO's four pillars website is www.unesco. org/delors/fourpil.htm. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations in this section are taken from it.
20. Jacques Delors, "Education: The Necessary Utopia," in UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 23.
21. Andrew Martin, "Immigrants Are Crucial to Innovation, Study Says," *New York Times*, 26 June 2012.

22. Paul Zak, The Moral Molecule: *The Source of Love and Prosperity* (New York: Dutton, 2012), 198.
23. Delors, "Education," 23.
24. Myong Won Suhr, "Opening Our Minds for a Better Life for All," in UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 235.
25. Rodolfo Stavanhagen, "Education for a Multicultural World," in ibid., 231.
26. Delors, "Education," 19.
27. http://www.unesco.org/delors/fourpil.htm.
28. A series of reports on education discussing how religions can counter radicalization and extremism in other regions, as well as critiquing the exaggerated linkage between madrasas and terrorism, have been written over the years. For instance, for Indonesia consult Florain Pohl, *Islamic Education and the Public Sphere: Today's Pesantren in Indonesia* (Munster and New York: Waxmann, 2009) and Mark Woodward, Inayah Rohmaniyah, Ali Amin, and Diana Coleman, "Muslim Education, Celebrating Islam, and Having Fun as Counter-Radicalization Strategies in Indonesia," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 4, no. 4 (October 2010): 28-51. Two important publications from Norway on South Asian madrassas may also help debunk the madrasa-radicalization link: Kaja Borchgrevink and Kristian Berg Harpviken, "Teaching Religion, Taming Rebellion? Religious Education Reform in Afghanistan," *PRIO Policy Brief* (Oslo: PRIO, 2010) and Kaja Borchgrevink, "Pakistan's Madrasas: Moderation or Militancy? The Madrasa Debate and the Reform Process," *NOREF Report* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2011). Even in the secular West, studies have pointed to the positive effect of teaching about religions in schools. See, for instance, Emile Lester and Patrick S. Roberts, "How Teaching World Religions Brought a Truce to the Culture Wars in Modesto, California," *British Journal of Religious Education* 31, no. 3 (2009): 187-99 and "Student Voices on Teaching About World Religions" at erb.unaoc.org/images/Journal Articles/lesterrobertsarticlefinal.pdf, as well as a recent report from British MPs in which religious education was judged to play a role in defeating religious extremism. BBC News Report, "Religious Education 'Helps Communities Get Along,'" 17 Mar. 2014.
29. Although there is widespread perception of a common linkage between religious extremism and religious education, empirically there does not appear to be a strong link. In fact, the exact opposite might be true. For instance, extremists might be more likely to be secularly educated. For some related discussions on the educational background of terrorists, see Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (un)Making of Terrorists* (London: Penguin Books, 2011); Kumar Ramakrishna, "Madrassas, *Pesantrens*, and the Impact of Education on Support for Radicalism and Terrorism," in *"In the Same Light as Slavery:" Building a Global Antiterrorist Consensus*, ed. Joseph P. McMillan (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2006), 129-50; and Don Rassler, C. Christine Fair, Anirban Ghosh, Arif Jamal, and Nadia Shoeb, *The Fighters of Lashkar-e-Taiba: Recruitment, Training, Deployment, and Death* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, April 2013).

30. An excellent overview of Africa's conflicts can be found in Paul D. Williams, *War and Conflict in Africa* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011). For other perspectives on religion and conflict in Africa, see James H. Smith and Rosalind I. J. Hackett, eds., *Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in Neoliberal Africa* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012) and Seifudein Adem and Abdul S. Bemath, eds., *The Politics of War and the Culture of Violence: North-South Essays by Ali A. Mazrui* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008), esp. 60 and 276-95.
31. Mazrui, *Cultural Forces in World Politics*, 7-8. Note that I have altered the order in which Mazrui lists his functions of culture.
32. Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), xii-xiii.
33. See Tshishiku Tshibangu (with J. F. Ade Ajayi and Lemin Sanneh), "Religion and Social Evolution," in *UNESCO General History of Africa*, ed. Ali A. Mazrui and Christopher Wondji (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), 8:501.
34. See, for example, Frederick Nzwili, "War-torn Churches Shelter Muslims in Central African Republic," *Washington Post*, 20 Feb. 2014.
35. Pew Research Center, *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity* (Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012), 40-41.
36. For a comparative look at the treatment of Islam and national identity in Morocco and Algeria, consult Karim Mezran, "Negotiating National Identity in North Africa," *International Negotiation* 6, no. 2 (2001): 141-73.
37. Ian Linden, "Christian-Muslim Conflict and Reconciliation in Africa: Joint Action for Human Development," *Transformation* 22, no. 4 (October 2005): 203-10.
38. The story of his migration is recounted in W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 101-17.
39. Readers interested in a challenge to stereotypical notions of African Muslim women may find it stimulating to consult Ousseina D. Alidou, *Engaging Modernity: Muslim Women and the Politics of Agency in Postcolonial Niger* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).
40. All quotations from the Qur'an are taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 5th ed. (Brentwood, MD: amana publictions, 1994).
41. Nicole Gaouette, "Muhammad's Instructions Liberated Women of the Day," *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 Dec. 2001), 12 and Jeri Altneu Sechzer, "'Islam and Woman: Where Tradition Meets Modernity': History and Interpretations of Islamic Women's Status," *Sex Roles* 51, nos. 5-6 (September 2004): 267-68.
42. Two contemporary authors provide inspiring writings on women in Islam: Amina Wadud, particularly her *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2008).
43. One treatment of Khadijah and her life can be found in Reşit Haylamaz, *Khadija: The First Muslim and the Wife of the Prophet Muhammad* (Somerset, NJ: Tughra Books, 2009). For A'ishah, consult D. A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'A'isha bint Abu Bakr* (New York: Columbia Uni-

versity Press, 1994) and Nabia Abbott, *Aishah, the Beloved of Mohammed* (New York: Arno Press, 1973, 1942).

44. For an example, see Ibrahim Diallo, "'Every Little Tree Has Its Own Bit of Shade': Qur'an-based Literacy of the Peul Fuuta Community," *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 7, no. 3 (December 2012): 227-38.
45. Ali A. Mazrui and Pio Zirimu, "The Secularization of an Afro-Islamic Language: Church, State, and Market-Place in the Spread of Kiswahili," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 1990), 24.
46. Ibid., 26.
47. Ali A. Mazrui, "Islam and African Art: Stimulus or Stumbling Block," *African Arts* 27, no. 1 (January 1994): 50-57. Also, see René Bravmann, "Islamic Art and Material Culture in Africa," in *The History of Islam in Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 489-517. On Islam's hostility to images, see Younous Mirza, "Abraham as an Iconoclast: Understanding the Destruction of 'Images' through Qur'anic Exegesis," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 16, no. 4 (October 2005): 413-28.
48. Omar Sacirbey, "Religion Said to Be Key to Combating Female Genital Mutilation," *Christian Century* 129, no. 24 (November 28, 2012): 16-17.
49. For an example of the value placed on reading in Islam, see Andrey Rosowsky, "The Role of Liturgical Literacy in UK Muslim Communities," in *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion*, ed. Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006), 312.
50. On these aspects of Islamic development, consult, for example, M. Umer Chapra, *Islam and Economic Development: A Strategy for Development with Justice and Stability* (Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993); Ziauddin Sardar, *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come* (London and New York: Mansell, 1985); and Khurshid Ahmad, *Economic Development in an Islamic Framework* (Leicester, UK: Islamic Foundation, 1979).
51. During the 1950s Algeria was the largest exporter of wine, not France, Italy, or Argentina. Of course this was before independence, and yet it still has a wine industry. See Beppi Crosariol, "The Rise and Fall of a Wine Juggernaut (or Why Your Wine Doesn't Come from Algeria Any More)," *The Globe and Mail,* 26 Feb. 2013.
52. On the implications of new technology for Muslim women, see, for example, Ali A. Mazrui and Alamin Mazrui, "The Digital Revolution and the New Reformation," *Harvard International Review* 23, no. 1 (spring 2001): 52-55 and "The Online Ummah," *The Economist*, 18 Aug. 2012, 54-55.
53. United Nations, *Alliance of Civilizations: Report of the High Level Group*, 33.
54. These may be accessed at www.unaoc.org/actions/strategies/national-strategies.
55. This website is at erb.unaoc.org.
56. United Nations, *Alliance of Civilizations*, 33.
57. The website for this competition is www.unaoc.org/create.
58. More information on the winners is at www.unaoc.org/create/finalists.