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"Cosmopolitan Islam: Globalization, Transnationalism and Muslim Diasporas"

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ABSTRACT

""Transnational Islam, Migrancy and Cultural Congruence:
The Case of West African Muslims in the United States"

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As a social phenomenon, Islam in the United States is more readily identified with Middle Easterners and Southeast Asians than sub-Saharans. Building from a relatively high-profile murder case of a West African graduate student from the University of Chicago in the winter of 2007, this paper focuses on West African Muslim communities living in the United States, with a particular emphasis on Muslims from the former French colonies of West Africa. It examines existing educational systems in post-colonial nation-states of West Africa, with a contrast between the secular public school system backed by the state, and the privately-run Islamic schools. The public school system in most of these nation-states is generally a legacy of the colonial state. In many aspects, it was originally designed to train personnel needed to run the local colonial administration. Whereas, the privately-run Islamic schools were the result of a spontaneous effort to fulfill some of the religious needs of the indigenous community. This paper examines how important migratory movements from these former French colonies to the former colonial power were triggered by an increased demand for labor from a booming French economy from the early 1950s to the late 1960s. These migratory movements intensified during the 1970s and 1980s due to local adverse economic conditions. This presentation demonstrates how the end of the French economic expansion in the 1970s, with its attendant problems of unemployment, diverted these migratory movements in the mid-1980s towards the United States and Canada. This paper examines the ways that the newly-settled West African Muslim immigrants in the United States negotiated their integration into their new environment. It also reviews how Islam helped shape the organizational forms put into place by these new immigrants in order to ensure group solidarity while maintaining connections with their countries of origin. It also demonstrates how the type and level of education obtained in the country of origin determined the organizational forms chosen by these new immigrants, as well as the technology needed to recreate a *virtual homeland*.