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**A FRAGMENT**

**THE GLOBAL UNIVERSITY  
AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION**

**by  
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Two processes of integration have been at work for nearly a century in the global North-South relations. One process has been the integration of scholarly values and academic traditions from the days when Cambridge University in England set Cambridge School Certificate examinations for secondary schools which ranged from Jamaica and Trinidad to Nigeria and Ceylone (later Sri Lanka).

The second process of integration is *institutional* rather than merely *normative*. It went back to the days when the University of London established *de facto* extensions of itself in Khartoum, Sudan, Legon in Ghana, and Makerere in Uganda. These colonial institutions of higher learning implemented syllabi approved by the University of London and produced London graduates.

Another model has consisted of American Universities in Beirut, Cairo and Nairobi— importing into the South academic traditions of the United States.

A more recent model is Sohar University in the Sultanate of Oman. Australia is geographically in the South but industrially part of the developed northern hemisphere. Sohar University is selectively affiliated to the University of Queensland in Australia and with Muttah University of the Kingdom of Jordan.

Sultan Qaboos University is well placed for studying the history of Oman's relations with Zanzibar and Eastern Africa as a whole. While Egypt and Sudan seek the unity of the Nile Basin, the Sultanate of Oman is part of the impact of the Gulf upon Swahili civilization in Eastern Africa.

This paper addresses the evolution of higher education towards the emergence of the global university. We are focusing on how Africa and the Muslim world have been part of the history of academic globalization.

This paper is about the impact of Western-style institutions of higher learning in Africa and the Muslim world. During the period of colonial rule the Western-style institutions emanated from Western Europe, and were sometimes overseas extensions of major universities in European cities. Thus the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum, were *de facto* offspring of the University of London.

While Western institutions in such developing countries during the colonial period were European in conception, Western institutions in the post-colonial era have been disproportionately American.

Let us look more closely at the similarities and differences between Euro-colonial colleges and postcolonial American overseas branches.

Both Euro-colonial imitations and post-colonial American extensions were based on the assumption that the Western model of higher education was the international “gold standard of academia.” Both the Euro-colonial paradigm and the post-colonial American experimentation have, in fact, been stages in the evolution of “*the global university*.”

It has therefore been widely assumed that the syllabus and content of higher education in Africa and the Muslim world should, as closely as possible, approximate the education values, principles and content of the parent institutions in the Western world.

The original Euro-colonial institutions in Africa and the Muslim world included Makerere College in Uganda, Ibadan College in Nigeria, the College of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, Gordon College in Khartoum, and Legon College in Accra, Ghana.

In the post-colonial American phase the most spectacular example has been the Education City in Doha, Qatar, which has been in existence for about a decade. It has included branch campuses of Texas A and M Engineering, Cornell Medical School, Northwestern University's School of Journalism, Computer Science and Business Studies from Carnegie Mellon, International Affairs from Georgetown, and Fine Arts from Virginia Commonwealth.

A post-colonial attempt in Muslim West Africa was by Suffolk University in Senegal. But this turned out to be less than cost-effective. It has since been decided that it would be cheaper just to bring the Senegalese students to the base in Boston, rather than continue with a branch in Dakar.

But while American extensions abroad have often closed down because of the unhappy news of inadequate enrollment, Euro-colonial universities like Makerere in Uganda and Ibadan in Nigeria were transformed into expanding national universities by the happy news of political independence of their countries.

A related issue is that Euro-colonial universities in Africa declined in standards partly because of the massive expansion of enrollments due to the increase of national populations.

On the other hand, Michigan State University had to close down a Middle Eastern campus in 2010 partly due to inadequate demand.

### **The Global University: Afro-Islamic Origins**

While Euro-colonial and post-colonial American branches have been important stages towards the emergence of the global university, we should bear in mind the real origins of the global university. Muslim Africa virtually invented the global university in its simpler form. The standing monuments to that Muslim African invention consist today of Al-Azhar University in Cairo and the Qarawiyyin Center of Learning in Morocco, both of which are over a thousand years old. These two Afro-Muslim institutions are centuries older than Oxford and Cambridge in England, and certainly even more ancient than Harvard, Yale and Princeton.

But if a range of the cultural taboos in Middle Eastern universities can be traced back to Islamic origins, so can the very principle of a global university. It is not often realized that Muslim Africa invented the global university. Then there was the distinguished Timbuktu Academy in ancient Mali, which was a flourishing intellectual beehive before the establishment of higher education in the Americas. Although the archives and other assets of historical Timbuktu are currently at risk following the 2012 military coup and northern secession in today's Mali, those archives and assets are recognized by UNESCO as part of the cultural heritage of human kind.

The Center of Learning of Qarawiyn Mosque (founded in 859 C.E.) is part of the origins not merely of the university but of the *global university*. Indeed, all the three institutions of Muslim Africa [Fez, Al-Azhar and Timbuktu] were magnets attracting students from far and wide across generations. It was partly this magnetic power which gave those early Afro-Islamic institutions an influence well beyond their borders, and constituted the beginnings of a global university.

But Muslim Africa was not only the mother of the origins of the global university. It also produced the father of the social sciences, Ibn Khaldun. He was born in 1332 C.E. in present-day Tunisia, more than one hundred and fifty years before Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic Ocean. Ibn Khaldun's greatest work was, of course, *Al Muqaddimah* which has been described as follows by the British macro-historian, Arnold J. Toynbee:

Undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever been created by any mind in any time or place ... the most comprehensive and illuminating analysis of how human affairs work that has been made anywhere.

Another globalizing public intellectual produced by Muslim Africa was the geographer Ibn Battuta whose research was no less than travelling around the world. Born in

Tangier, Morocco in 1304, Ibn Battuta covered over 75,000 thousand miles [121,000km], across countries which were as diverse as West Africa, Persia, East Africa, Sumatra and China. His book about his global experiences was more than a major historic travel book. It contributed to the study of world geography and to the globalization of the Muslim Academy.

Also as part of Muslim impact on intellectual globalization has been the Arabic numerals which were a product of a synthesis between Indian and Muslim mathematics. The more general Islamic impact on Western intellectual heritage is testified by the following English words which are of Arabic origin.

*Algebra, average, amalgam, cable, rocket, atlas, cipher,  
chemistry, logarithm, zenith, tariff and (ironically) alcohol.*

Nor must it be forgotten that the academic gowns which Western professors used to wear regularly, and which young graduands continue to wear at graduation ceremonies, were originally an imitation of Muslim robes worn by the learned for sacred and academic occasions.

These were early Muslim phases towards the globalization of higher education.

The University of Cairo in Egypt is primarily an Arab institution, but not necessarily Muslim. On the other hand, Al-Azhar University in the same city has been an

Islamic university for most of the one thousands years of its history—teaching Islamic, Qur’anic and Arabic studies.

However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Al-Azhar opened new departments which taught more secular subjects, including technology and business studies. This part of Al-Azhar still constituted a Muslim institution in terms of the composition of the student-body, but Islamic Al-Azhar had a separate agenda of religious studies. Al-Azhar had become half Muslim in our sense, and half Islamic as a religious institution.

In Kuala Lumpur the University of Malaya was originally Euro-colonial, built under British rule. But in the same Malaysian city has been the International Islamic University, partly sponsored by the International Institute of Islamic Thought.

An Islamic university is partly defined by what is taught. The curriculum would include Fiqh or Islamic theology, Qur’anic studies, the study of the Sunnah. There would also be the history of Muslim civilization, the geography of Global Islam from Sumatra to Senegal, the study of the Arabic language, the study of comparative Muslim literature, and political Islam in world affairs.

These Islamic and Arabic studies can of course be combined with other broader disciplines in the same university. An Islamic university can also produce surgeons and cardiologists in modern medical tradition, modern electrical engineers, specialists in aviation, and even nuclear physicists [if Western powers would permit it].



The globalization of higher education has had its ups and downs in the tumultuous changes of regional integration.