

over 40% of the populations of Ethiopia and Tanzania, some 20% of the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and possibly 20% of the populations of the remaining five smaller members of the Nile Basin Initiative. If practicing Islam involves more water for ritual needs, Islamic culture may indeed need to be water-intensive, with consequences for women.

Devout Muslims have to observe high standards of cleanliness. The most devout have to pray five times a day. Almost each prayer has to be preceded by ablution involving washing hands, arms, feet and the face, and part of the head. The water used for one ablution cannot be saved for use in the next ablution. It is indeed one of the ironies of history that a religion which originated in the dry and hot desert of Arabia should have become ritually water-intensive. It is true that when water is really short, and there is need to save it for drinking and cooking, tradition allows for a kind of *dry ablution* using clean dusty sand for symbolic cleaning of arms, face and feet (*tayammam*). But in the Nile Basin, and in the relative proximity of the great River, drought conditions are unlikely to justify the dry ablution of sand-and dust. The demand for *wet-ablution* within the nearness of the Nile becomes inescapable. When the number of devout worshippers are in their millions (adult Egyptians are now nearly 50 million), the amount of water needed for rituals does add up enormously. Should regional integration about sharing the waters of Nile include ritual calculations and comparative religious needs of member-cultures of the Nile Basin? Muslim Africa has a complicated relationship with the concept of “clean water.” What defines clean is not only “fit to drink” but also “fit for ablution.” Let me repeat that the devout Muslim prays five times a day – and each prayer is usually preceded by the use of water for ablution. This involves wetting hands, arms, feet head and having a mouth wash before every prayer. At least traditionally, water is “clean” when it is suitable for such preparation for worship.

Clearly the standards of water suitable for sacred purposes are not the same as the standards of water suitable for human consumption. In the modern age many Muslim families have indeed recognized a dual standard of cleanliness—but in much of Muslim Africa in the rural areas, there is a belief that if water is good enough for communication with God, it is good enough for consumption by human beings. Water for ablution does not have to be boiled. It simply requires careful assessment as to whether it has been *ritually* polluted. Bird droppings falling in the water can be ritual pollution—but the diseased hand of a believer is not. In terms of human dignity this scale of values is correct. But in terms of human health more generally, it is not necessarily so. Then there is the Muslim use of water after personal excretion. Islam does not encourage the use of toilet paper on its own; it normally prescribes the use of water itself with or without toilet paper. Muslims believe that toilet paper does not clean everything from the relevant organ of the body after excretion. Only a thorough wash of that part of the body can restore the believer's ritual cleanliness. This is very hygienic in principle – but it does require that the believer subsequently clean his left hand thoroughly after the left hand has cleaned the anus. Normally this works all right, especially since orthodox Islam discourages believers from having long fingernails. Residual excreta in the nails of the left fingers are normally cleared away with additional washing and soap (if soap can be afforded). Combining toilet paper before using water may be the best solution.

But when water generally is in short supply, these standards of thoroughness may become more lax. The risk of spreading infection from one believer to another could suddenly rise. The fingernails of the left hand could suddenly become major carriers of contagion. Indeed, death could lurk in the fingernails. Perhaps the most hygienic use of water prescribed by Islam concerns sex, though this depends upon

denominations. Between copulation and the believer's next prayer, a thorough wash of the body (a thorough shower) is needed according to some Sunni denominations. Every inch of the body needs washing—including the hair. Those who have sex every night are therefore enjoined to have a thorough shower *after* the sex. For by the time of the dawn prayer the next morning, the believer should have got rid of his *janaba*, his unholy condition of sexual hedonism. Only a thorough shower can get rid of *janaba*. It is a major sin to enter a mosque before one has had his or her post-sex shower, according to Shafi'i School of Sunni Islam.

It is indeed one of the ironies of history that a religion born in the grandeur of the Arabian Desert, in all its barrenness, should have prescribed so many ritual uses of water. Christianity seems to have the concept of a once-for-all baptism for each individual. In Islam, baptism is in a sense a daily affair – covering five prayers and following every act of sexuality. When available, water in Islam is a continual ritual necessity. It is because of this that Islamic piety is water-intensive. In itself, all this is a contribution to hygiene. The problem arises when water is in short supply – and short cuts are made to make the same amount of water serve too many purposes. A little pond near the village may be used by too many believers to get rid of the post-sex *janaba* – “the morning after the night before”. If one of the believers is diseased, the danger of infection rises. Islam is indeed a religion preoccupied with cleanliness. Indeed, younger Muslim women may need extra water during their monthly period of menstrual blood. But there are risks in these ritual uses of water.

Muslim women also use a lot of water to keep their babies and children clean. Perhaps part of the explanation lies in the continuing resilience of the African family, in the mutual support it fosters among its members, and in that incredible love for children which is the hallmark of not only the Nile Basin but in our remarkable continent as a

whole. After all, the first human child ever was born there in the Nile Basin—perhaps half a million years ago. Yes, Africa invented the family. The tradition continues. But we also continue to need the protection of clean water if the family is to be strengthened—and more young ones are to be saved. Next time we *run* in a sporting race on behalf of Africa, and are ready for a nice cool drink of clean water at the end of the “race,” let us spare a thought for those to whom such a healthy drink is still a mere dream, a luxury for the future. The twin crises of food and water have their own race against time—their own race against life. Comparative cultures add to the complications. Islam first arrived in Africa through the Nile Basin. Islam came as a refugee through Ethiopia. This was when Islamized Arabs during the Prophet Muhammad’s own life time were running away from persecution by fellow Arabs in Mecca. Islam’s second arrival in the Nile Basin was as conqueror of Egypt when the Arabs captured the head of the Nile Basin from the Byzantine Empire. The arrival of Islam initiated new ritual uses of the River Nile—with consequences for Egyptian women in charge of water-supply for the home and consequences for Egyptian men in charge of water-supply in the mosque. A water-intensive religion had returned to Egypt.

A CASE STUDY OF ELITE INTEGRATION

Let us now turn to elite efforts in regional integration. During the colonial period in Africa the ultimate elites were of course the colonial policy makers both on the ground in the specific colonies and in the imperial capitals. Of the ten countries of the Nile Basin Initiative, half were ruled or occupied at one stage or another by Great Britain. Britain’s colonial policy on regional integration was quite uniquely paradoxical. Contrary to usual assumptions that imperial powers “divided in order to rule”, the British often preferred to *unite* in order to rule more efficiently. The most spectacular British preference for enlargement of scale was the unification in 1914 of Southern and