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Factors of Spread and Recession of Islam in Zimbabwe and Uganda: A Comparative Study

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Zimbabwe and Uganda represent one of the unusual instances in the Islamic history of Africa south of the Sahara, where Islam witnessed periods of recession after its establishment and spread. Although the foot-prints of Islam in Zimbabwe can be traced back to the 10th century, yet no Islamic tradition and literature as such has developed in it (neither in Arabic nor in the local languages), leave alone Uganda, where regular propagation of Islam started only in the beginning of the 19th century. Otherwise, in other regions – especially in West Africa – once Islam was established, it kept steadily gaining momentum, thus leaving behind considerable amounts of literature in both Arabic and local languages (Swahili, Fulani, Hausa, Mandingo, etc.)

Our paper will try to trace the historical contexts in which Islam reached Zimbabwe and Uganda, the agents through whom it was introduced and propagated, and the different historical, social, political factors (both internal and external) that hampered its progression and led to its recession in each of the two countries. It will then try to shed light on the relatively recent attempts and efforts made

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to resurrect Islam in these two countries and to examine the prospect of their success. Throughout this study reference will also be made to other regions of Africa for the purpose of comparison.

On the introduction and spread of Islam in Africa

Quite abundant literature exists on the history of the introduction and spread of Islam in Africa. To refresh the reader's mind, it suffices to note briefly that contacts between the Arab Peninsula - the cradle of Islam - and the African content existed centuries before the appearance of Islam. This is especially true with regard to the coasts of East Africa, to where the Arabs used to sail for commercial purposes. After the appearance of Islam, these contacts involved intermarriage with and Islamization of the local people, and developed later on into establishment of permanent settlements and political hegemonies all along the coast and in the islands (Mogadishu, Mombassa, Lamu, Kilwa, Sofala, Bemba, Zanzibar, etc.). The ultimate outcome of these historical events was the development of new societies in these coastal regions bearing a combination of local and Arab Islamic culture and most of them speaking a Bantu language, i.e. Swahili, with a great degree of Arabic influence.¹

Also in less than a century after the appearance of Islam, the Muslim Arabs were able to cross the northern part of the continent through Egypt up to the Atlantic Ocean, and south across the Sahara down to northern edges


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of Sub-Saharan Africa, from where Islam was pushed further south by early Islamized local tribes (mainly, Fulani, Takrur, Mandingo and Kanuri).²

Islam was spread in the different regions of Africa through a number of different factors/agents, depending on the nature of the specific region and the particularities of its people. The Encyclopedia of Islam lists the following four agents as being the main ones:

a-The dh'at (propagators of Islam)
b-The traders.
c-The pilgrims.
d-The religious migrations (hijra).³

But there are also other factors/agents of equal importance which are not included in this list, such as the Islamic conquests, establishment of Islamic states, the supremacy of the Islamic civilization at that time, the adaptive nature of Islam, the religious orders and the jihad movements.⁴

The degree of spread or recession of Islam in the different African states depends primarily on the presence or absence of these factors/agents, on the one hand, and on the extent to which they could act among the targeted

communities, on the other hand. However, it goes without saying that the African communities differ in their socio-historical backgrounds, cultural characteristics, political systems, economic potentials and exposure to external influences. While these state or community-bound characteristics favor the presence and action of the above-mentioned factors/agents in certain African communities, in some other communities they mitigate against that. It is within this frame of work that Islam in Zimbabwe and Uganda - the focus of this paper - is going to be examined.

**Islam in Zimbabwe: Spread and recession:**

Zimbabwe lies in Southern Africa, a region - unlike Northern Africa - which throughout its history has never known any Islamic conquest. In other words, Islam was not received in this region in 'wholesome', but rather in a series of sporadic attempts by individuals or groups of immigrants. As a result of repetition of such attempts and the accumulation of their outcome, the principles of Islam spread gradually in the different countries of the region, including South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

The reality of Islam and Muslims in Southern Africa did not attract the attention of historians until the sixties of the last century. This is probably because they never thought that Muslims could play an important role in the political, social and economic life in these countries, which are that far from the original whom of Islam (The Arab Peninsula).

The introduction of Islam in Zimbabwe dates back to the 10th century A.C. with the extension of the Muslim Arabs' commercial activities and political influence to the southern coast of East Africa (present day Mozambique).
For, the Zimbabwean town Senna (a commercial centre that linked the coastal parts with the areas of gold production) might be the same town of Sinna mentioned by the Muslim Arab historian of that time, al-Masudi, in his book "Muruuj al-Dhahab wa Maadin al-Jawhar" (The Meadows of Gold and the Mines of Jewels).^5

There is strong evidence that some local inhabitants of that region, who were mostly Swahili and Shona speakers, embraced Islam through interaction with the Muslim Arab traders. The same process of interaction led late on to the Islamization of a certain local community, and its adoption - to a certain degree - of Islamic culture, including Islamic names. That was the community of the Varembe, which, because of its importance to this study, will be the focus of the following sections in this paper.^6

Apart from the circumstance of the early history of Islam in Zimbabwe, a kind of resurrection of Islam in this country emerged following a relatively recent and very important event; that was the construction of the bridge of Victoria Cataracts in the beginning of the 19th century. A British company, whose labour power was derived from Pakistan and the neighboring countries, came to Zimbabwe for construction of a bridge on the Zambezi River. After the completion of this project in 1905, a considerable number the Asian laborers remained behind in Zimbabwe. They gradually started to interact and intermingle with the local

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people in different ways, including intermarriage and trade. These laborers represent the first badge of Asians who were responsible for the inception of some elements of Islamic culture in Zimbabwe. However, the influx of the majority of Asian immigrants (mainly, Indians and Arabs) to Zimbabwe ran subsequently. In 1912 Indians from Gujerat Province arrived in Zimbabwe, and were later on joined by their families. They got engaged as sellers in shops and laborers in the mines. Other Asian groups followed suit in the same manner as the above Indians and started to establish links with the local citizens through trade.

The Malaysians who played effective roles in the spread of Islam in Zimbabwe started their immigrations in small numbers after the British conquest of this country in 1890. Most of them headed for Zimbabwe in search for better living opportunities. They were, thus, recruited as laborers in urban centers. Later on, they settled permanently and got integrated in the Zimbabwean society. As such, they were able to interact smoothly with the local communities, and eventually to spread Islam among them.

The Varemba, to whom we pointed earlier, constituted the first African Muslim elements of a relatively significant size in Zimbabwe. They are believed to be descendants of East African Muslims who settled there before the 17th century. As a result of lack of contact with the Muslim communities of East Africa (and the Muslim World in general) following the Portuguese control of the region, besides other internal factors, members of the

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7 - Ibid., p. 3.
8 - Ibid., idem.
9 - Ibid., pp. 39-40.
Varemba community started to lose their Islamic identity and to get assimilated in the Shona and other southern African ethnicities. The internal factors relate to "the large Bantu migrations" during the 17th, 18th and till mid 19th century, and a series of civil wars (mostly the Unjwan's), which all brought about a drastic change in the demographic and social setting of that region. So, the disappearance of the Varemba from the social arena meant eventually the disappearance of the local Muslim society. Islam thus turned into a mere religion of the immigrant communities. Under such condition, it is not surprising, if historical sources remained - until recently - silent about the existence of local Islam in Zimbabwe, concentrating, instead, on the Muslim communities of Indian and Malaysian origins. In fact, Southern African historical sources point with surprise to an existence of ethnic groups known as Lamba and Varemba, whose members carry oriental (or Middle-Eastern) names and cultural traits. Some historians regarded them as descendants of Jewish, precisely Falasha, origin.

As mentioned before, the Varemba became at a certain time completely disconnected from Islam, not practicing even basic aspects of Islamic faith such as praying and fasting. They remained as such until the mid 20th century, when in 1966 an Indian businessman came accidentally across a member of their community, from whom he gathered information on their Islamic past. This accidental

meeting marked a turning point in the Islamic history of the Varemba. Finding them with such a fascinating background, the Indian and Malaysian *du'at* (Muslim missionaries) started to make serious efforts toward returning them to the hegemony of Islam. These efforts yielded fruitful results and thousands of them accepted Islam without much difficulties, since till then they carried remnants of its aspects (e.g. Muslim names), although these aspects were dormant for many centuries.\(^{13}\)

The return of a big number of the Varemba to Islam stands as a proof of the serious and organized *da'wa* activities carried out by the Zimbabwean Muslims through the “Victorian Islamic Society” and the ‘Zimbabwean Islamic Mission’. These activities were not confined to teaching and explaining the basic elements of Islam, but they also included dispatching of a number of Varemba to Islamic centers in Fort Victoria and Harare for acquisition of advanced Islamic knowledge. This is in addition to appointment and distribution of teachers to different Varemba areas. The first badge of those who studied abroad played a great role in spreading Islam in their respective areas after their return, which eventually resulted in an increase in the number of Muslims in these areas. Moreover, an Islamic centre was established in Chinyika, which in 1978 comprised an Islamic school, a health centre and a students’ hostel.\(^{14}\)

Through the joints efforts of the enlightened Varemba Muslims, on the one hand, and the Indian and Malaysian *du'at*, on the other hand, Islam in Zimbabwe continued systematically to gain more converts.


\(^{14}\) Ibid., pp. 211-212.
Although today the process of activating Islam in Zimbabwe may be accepted as "relatively satisfactory", it is still true that the bulk of the Muslims there are of Asian origins. In the absence of accurate and reliable statistics in this domain, figures indicating the number of Muslims and their ethnic background are based mostly on estimation. The highest total number of Muslims in Zimbabwe has been estimated in early 1980 at 61,000: 10,000 of them are Asians (mainly, Indians and Pakistani); 30,000 Malaysians; 20,000 local Africans (most of whom are Muslims only nominally); 1000 black Mozambiquans. So, with the exception of the third category (i.e. of local Muslims), the Muslims in Zimbabwe today are, in actual fact, settlers or descendants of settlers originating from Malawi, the Arab Peninsula, India, Pakistan, East Africa, Somalia and Mozambique.\(^{15}\)

After the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 a number of Muslims from other parts of Africa started again to come. This indicates that a new Islamic tributary is now feeding the Islamic movement in this country.\(^{16}\)

However, it is worthy to note here that the spread of Islam among the largest Zimbabwean ethnic groups; namely, the Shona and the Ndebele, is still failing. According to Ethnologue, whose information is derived from the 1998 census,\(^{17}\) the first ethnic group counts 6 million members, whereas those of the second group are in the range of one to one and half million. Thus, we can say that Islam is still unable to make any success among the two

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\(^{15}\) Cf. Mandivenga, op.cit., p. 4.  
\(^{16}\) Ibid., idem.  
\(^{17}\) See: www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Zimbabwe

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most economically, socially and politically influential groups. It is pertinent at this point to try to find out the difficulties and constraints that impede the spread of Islam among the Zimbabwean people in general.

There are many problems and constraints which have to be surmounted in order for Islam to have the chance to play the aspirated role in the Zimbabwean society, in which tribalism and Christianity is already deep-rooted. These constraints can be summarized in the following:

1- Illiteracy and ignorance of the basic elements of Islam among the local Muslim public.

2- Low rate of modern education among the Muslims due to its high cost.

3- Lack of local *Imams* (Muslim leading learned people) and *du'at*. Most of the *Imams* and *du'at* are of Indian and Pakistani origin, which makes their effect confined to the respective members of their communities, especially that they are not versed in English and Shona, the two widely spoken languages. With such incapability, these people will not be in a position to further Islamic teachings even among the local Muslims, leave alone the major Zimbabwean ethnic groups, i.e. the Shona and the Ndebele.¹⁸

**Islam in Uganda: Spread and recession:**

One can hardly speak about Islam in Uganda without reference to the history of the East African coast within the framework of its historical connections with the Arab Peninsula and Islam.

As we may remember, the beginning of the Arabs contacts with East African coast was in the form of seasonal trips for commercial purposes. But then these trips developed through history into permanent settlements and establishment of even political hegemonies, with well-established Muslim communities all along the coast and in the islands. Arab-Islamic influence continued then to expand to the Lakes Region in the direction of Tanganyika (Tanzania), Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Congo. It may not be easy to precise the date of the beginning of this expansion, but it intensified during the 18th century. The main purpose of the Arabs and the Swahilians behind this expansion was to seek ivory and slaves to port the ivory and work in cloves plantation.¹⁹

The appearance of the Portuguese in the scene during the Omani Era (ca. 1700-1900) and their threat of the Arabs interests along the East African coast was an important landmark in the history of Islam in East Africa. It was during this time and following that event that Islam was pushed inside the continent by the Arab traders and teachers until it reached as far west as Uganda and Congo.

We gather from historical records that Islam was introduced effectively in Uganda in 1844. Although the Swahilians, being primarily interested in trade, were usually not zealous about propagating and spreading Islam, yet they made a great effort in this regard in Uganda specifically. Finding in Buganda an advanced state in the measures of that time, the Arabs were encouraged by its commercial opportunities to make their way to it. It was said that the


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first Arab arrived in 1844. Groups of Arabs seemed to have immediately followed and tried to establish friendly links with its ruling circles. This is at least what we can gather from Y.F. Hasan's following report:

"The Arabs acquired some influence in Uganda during the second half of the 19th century, in spite of its distance from the centers of Islamic radiation in the north and east. That was due to the efforts of the Zanzibar and Khartoum traders and others. These traders were encouraged by King Kabaka Mutesa, and they, thus, propagated Islam among the inhabitants and constructed mosques." 21

The early attempts of Islamic propagation in Buganda ran in the period from 1844 in two phases. The first phase was during the reign of King Sunna II (1844-1854), when efforts were made in a precarious manner. Although Islam in this phase did not gain many converts, yet it succeeded to:

a-draw the attention of the local people to the existence of 'foreign' ideas and beliefs, which might supersede the local ones.

b-inculcate in the minds of these people that there was a super-power which was higher in status than the Kabaka. In this away, it created a kind of "spiritual revolution" that enabled the local mind to

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listen to the 'foreign' religious concepts and beliefs, and, consequently, to accept them.\textsuperscript{22}

The second phase was the one identified with the reign of Kabaka Mutesa I (1862-1875). It was described as "the golden era of Islam" in Buganda. In this era Islam reached its apogee of glory, as it was declared by the king as the official religion of the state. The king passed a number of resolutions aiming at making all the people to commit themselves to the Islamic law.\textsuperscript{23}

If we consider the gap between the date of the introduction in Uganda and the date of its declaration as the official religion of the state of Buganda (1862), we find that this gap does not go beyond two decades. It is quite obvious that such a short time was not enough for Islam to stand on a strong ground to the extent of becoming the religion of the state. So, it was this very hasty way of its imposition that led afterwards to its recession.

The progress of Islam during Mutesa's time was attributed to a combination of factors, most important of which being the high position the king accorded to the Arabs in exchange for fire-arms he badly needed for strengthening his rule and extending his domination over the surrounding communities.\textsuperscript{24} This is in addition to other factors, among which was that the Arab Muslims proved to have better healing means than those of the local doctors. The Muslims also helped the Bugandans to better exploit

\textsuperscript{23} - Ibid., p.38.
\textsuperscript{24} - Cf. S. Trimingham, op.cit., p. 63.
their agricultural potentials and to increase their farm products. Moreover, the Arab Muslim traders used to bring a higher quality of merchandise, including cotton clothes, which helped in embellishing the outer appearance of the royal court. Spiritually, Islam provided the people with a better understanding and explanation of the fate of the soul after death than their traditional beliefs did.\(^{25}\)

The spread of Islam in Uganda was not confined to Buganda, but it was also carried further to the other Ugandan regions by Bugandan religious refugees and small traders. In the northern parts of the country it was introduced by soldiers and junior government employees of Sudanese origins.

So, we can see that Islam also reached some areas outside Buganda. But there it faced a number of internal and external constraints which hindered its spread among the people of these areas. These constraints can be summarized in the following:

1- Most of the communities living outside Buganda were nomadic and not open.
2- The people were very committed to their customs, traditions and traditional beliefs.
3- The early British colonial administrators of the Úgandan Protectorate were very determined in preventing further Islamization of Uganda.
4- The Muslims were not well-organized in their effort to gain more converts.\(^{26}\)

The first Christian mission (the Church Missionary Society - CMS) arrived in Uganda in 1877,

\(^{26}\) Ibid., pp. 104-105.
an event that ushered the beginning of a fierce competition between two cultures, the Islamic and the Christian.

In fact, the coming of the Christian mission was just one of the reasons for the set-back in the progress of Islam in Uganda; otherwise Islam started to recess as early as 1875. The other reasons are:

1- The coming of H.M. Stanley to Buganda (a European visitor who gave Mutesa I (1844-1875) the impression that he represented a powerful European country, which would help him against any foreign invasion).

2- The Egyptian interference in the Great Lakes region, which made Mutesa to become hostile to the Egyptians and the religion to which they adhere.

3- The Muslims massacres by Mutesa, especially the 1876 massacre, when Stanley warned him against the Arabs.  

So, it is now clear that Islam, at this juncture, was living its worst time in Uganda. The negative impact of the Egyptian involvement in this affair was of complex nature. Reliance of Kidev Ismail, the then ruler of Egypt, on some Europeans, such as Baker and Gordon, to realize his expansion ambitions turned out to be harmful to Islam. For, these Europeans tried, instead, to divert Mutesa from sympathizing with the Muslims, and Gordon did his best to curtail the expansion of Islam in the Lakes Regions.  

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27. Ibid., p. 55.
However, while the competition between Islam and Christianity in Uganda was at its peak, the Sudanese army appeared in the scene and allied with the Bugandan Muslims, thus providing supportive force to Islam. At a certain time, this army constituted the backbone of the military as well as the civilian force of the Protectorate. To bring an end to that competition, Resident Lugard decided in 1892 to distribute the Ugandan chieftoms to the three competing religious factions (Muslim, Protestant and Catholic), and the Muslim faction came out with three chieftoms under the leadership of Mbogo Mwanga. With this arrangement and the support of the Sudanese army, the position of Islam in Uganda started once again to gain force.

Short afterwards, the Christian missionaries compelled the British administration to adopt an overt policy that aimed at stopping further penetration of Islam from the northern borders. For the missionaries, amelioration of land and river transport would facilitate contact between Egypt (through Sudan) and the tribes of Northern Uganda, which was deemed to be on the account of their evangelization activities. But that policy seemed not to have yielded fruits, because in 1921 (with the support of the Northern Sudanese Muslims) the position of the Muslims in Uganda was found to be better than that of the other religious factions. The Muslims succeeded in establishing their private schools in their residential areas as well as the neighboring areas.

30- Ibid., p. 228.
Broadly speaking, the period from 1900 to 1921 represents a time of stability of the Islamic faith in the hearts of the Ugandan converts. The propagation strategy changed, whereby efforts were directed towards gaining the adherence of prominent personalities rather than the general public. More Islamic schools were constructed; sheikhs and Qur'anic teachers were trained and dispatched to all directions in order to disseminate Islamic teachings. Muslims also started to celebrate Mawlid (the prophet's birth) occasion and some of them started to perform pilgrimage in the holy Islamic lands.\textsuperscript{31}

In the period from 1965 to 1970 M. Obete's regime used to exploit the tribal tensions among the Muslim communities for political ends, aiming through that at having a foot in Buganda. This resulted in the accentuation of the disputes among the Muslims more than any time before. When Idi Amin seized power in 1971, he succeeded in bringing them together through an agreement which led to the foundation of the 'Higher Islamic Council' as the sole administrative body responsible of Muslims affairs. General Amin was sincere in his legalization of that body, but in practice, the council faced a number of intricate problems relating to the old disputes inherited from the former analogous bodies. Therefore, Islamic movement failed to progress satisfactorily, even though the Head of State was a Muslim, under whom the Muslims' religious interests were expected to benefit much.\textsuperscript{32} Disputes among the Muslims seemed to have persisted until recently, thus offering the

\textsuperscript{31} - Cf. Abdu Kasazi, op.cit., p.117.
\textsuperscript{32} - Ibid., p. 163.
politicians dear opportunities to achieve their ends on the account of Muslims' interests.

Irregardless of the above situation, by 1974 there were already many Muslim graduates, who obtained academic degrees inside Uganda and abroad. These graduates succeeded in occupying high administrative positions, from which they were hitherto deprived for lack of education.\textsuperscript{33}

Abdu Kasozi thinks that Islam in Uganda still rests on an unstable foundation for the following reasons:

1- Islam in Uganda remains all the time as a mere religion without developing into a culture.

2- The number of Muslims in Uganda is not expected in the near future to count more than 50% of the total number of population. They now constitute a minority without effective control on the social power, and therefore, its ability to create a proper Islamic atmosphere in the country is limited.

3- The Muslims are still divided among themselves. Although an organization exists, i.e. the Higher Islamic Council, which is supposed to unify all the Ugandan Muslims, but unfortunately not of them adherent to it.

4- Islamic education is still very backward compared, e.g. with Christian education.

5- The Muslims failed to invest their capitals in economically viable projects, such as industry and agriculture, or in basic social services.

\textsuperscript{33} - Ibid., p. 160.
projects, such as hospitals and schools, which could raise their social position. 34

Discussion:
Earlier in this paper we listed the factors/agents that help(ed) the spread and consolidation of Islam in many parts of the African continent. These include, inter alia: Islamic conquests, establishment of Islamic states, development of centres of learning and knowledge, individual da'wawa scholars, traders, religious orders, pilgrimage and religious migrations (hijra), and jihad movements. In order to have better insight of the reasons of spread and recession or progress and set-back of Islam in East African, on the one hand, compared with the West African Islamic countries, where Islam, since its inception, never knew instances of drastic set-back, on the other hand, let us examine the presence and vitality of these factors/agents in each of the two regions.

Unlike North Africa, from where Islam was carried into West Africa, the coastal region of East Africa never witnessed Islamic conquests – in their proper sense – throughout its history. The objectives of the Muslim Arabs presence in East Africa were mainly commercial and political rather than religious. Here, propagation and spreading of Islam occupied only a secondary or subsidiary position. This is while the main objective of the Islamic conquests in North Africa and their extension into West Africa was to establish and spread Islam on its own merits. Historical records on the early arrival of Islam in Hausaland,

34 - Ibid., p. 183
e.g., speak of the Wangarawa (Mandingo) Islamic mission (ca. 1350 A.C.), the group of Fulani from Malle (ca. 1450) bringing “books on Divinity and Etymology”, a group of Kanuri scholars from Borno, and then the Arab scholars, referred to as the “Sherifs”. Among these “Sherifs” was the renowned North African scholar, Muhammad ibn Abdul-Karim al-Maghili (d. 1504), whose contribution toward promotion of Islam in Hausaland was described as follows:

“He brought with him many books. He ordered Rimfa (the then kind of Kano) to build a mosque for Friday... And when he had established the faith of Islam, and learned men had grown numerous in Kano, and all the country round accepted the faith, Abdul Karim returned to Massar, leaving Sidi Fari as his deputy” 36

A number of similar missions kept flowing into Hausaland throughout the subsequent centuries, thus contributing in laying foundation for the development of Arab-Islamic culture in that part of Africa.

So, we can see that right from the beginning the establishment of Islam in West Africa was based on primarily solid spiritual foundation, which guaranteed its stability, continuity and progression. On the contrary, the Arab Muslims’ history in East Africa hardly speaks of Islamic missions as such, or of scholars of the caliber of Al-Maghili. Instead, historical records focus on trade and business (ivory, gold, slaves, clove plantations, etc.),

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36 - Ibid., p. 111.
besides competition with imperial powers (mainly the Portuguese) on worldly interests.

Also in West Africa a number of Islamic states came into being as early as the 11th century A.C.: Ghana (1076-1085), Kanem-Borno (---), Mali (1100-1754), Soghai (1473-1591) and Sokoto (1804-1903). Most of these states were, at the same time, identified with renowned centres of knowledge and Islamic radiation: Tumbaktu, Gao, Katsina, Kano, Gazargamu, Agadez (Ahir) and Sokoto, which were constantly linked with the analogous centres in North Africa and Egypt. The early – as well as the later – local prominent scholars, such as Ahmad Baba of Tumbaktu, Dan Marina and Dan Masana of Katsina, Abdullahi Sikka of Kano, Muhammad Al-Barnawi of Borno, Mukhtar ibn Umar of Agadez (Ahir) and the members of the Fodio’s family of Sokoto, were all regarded as being the product of these centres. From the writings of these scholars we realize that by the end of the 18th century all the important branches of Islamic sciences were familiar to the scholarly elite of that time: law, exegesis, theology, Prophetic tradition, grammar, syntax, philology, logic, semantics, numerology, Qur’anic recitation, science of rhyme and metre and philology. It is worthy to note that books on all these sciences were written in Arabic.

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Of course, we do not deny the development of Islamic culture in East Africa, but firmly established centres of knowledge similar to the above-mentioned ones are not known to have existed. The Arab-Islamic literary product of this part of Africa was mostly books on travels, didactic poems and stories (derived mostly from “Thousand and One Night”). They were mainly in the Swahili Language and the majority of their writers or composers originated from outside the continent (Arabs and Persians). Otherwise, writings on deep Islamic branches of knowledge - such as the ones listed for West Africa – by East African local scholars have hardly been recovered, if ever existed.

Promotion of Islam in West Africa was also partly supported by jihad movements, such as that of Shaikh Usman ibn Fodio in Hausaland, Alhaj Umar Al-Futi in Futa Jallo and Futa Toro, and Alhaj Ahmad Lobbo in Masina. These jihad movements did not aim merely at gaining new converts, but rather at reviving of Islam and its purification from syncretic practices. In other words, besides increasing the number of converts, jihad movements also helped in awakening Islam and strengthening it in the hearts of those who were already born as Muslims. This important agent of spread of Islam in terms of both quantity and quality is completely missing in the history of Islam in East Africa.

Likewise, pilgrimage (with hardship) has been for a long time one of the important aspects of Islam in West

Africa. Historical records are abundant on royal fabulous pilgrimage caravans, such as that of Mansa Musa, the emperor of Mali, and Askia Muhammad, the emperor of Songhai. Pilgrimages of religious leaders with their followers were also recorded, such as the pilgrimage of Alhaj Umar Al-Fuli of Massina. This is besides the regular groups and individual pilgrimage travels. Pilgrimage in some West African countries, especially Nigeria, has become a deep-rooted tradition. It has become an institution by itself, which functions systematically under the direct care of the state.

Religious migrations (hijra) from West Africa (always in the direction of the Holy Land) were also frequent, especially during the second half of the 19th century, motivated by expectation of the awaited Mahdi, expected to emanate in the direction of the Nile or in Mecca itself. The last and most important migration was the one led by Sultan Attahiru Mai-Wurno from Sokoto following the fall of the Sokoto Caliphate in the hands of the British Nasara (Christians) in 1903.

In East Africa, neither pilgrimage of a large scale and systematic order similar to that of West Africa, nor historical religious migrations were recorded.

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41 For more details, see A. Abu-Manga (1991): “Sudanese-Nigerian relations within the framework of Mahdism”, Dirasat Ifriqiyya, No. 8, pp. 53-78.
Religious orders play a pivotal role in the religious and social lives of the Western (and Central) African Muslims. The Qadiriyya order was the 'tariqa' of the Kunta in Mali and the Fodios in Sokoto. It acted as an effective means of fostering unity and brotherhood among its followers, and as a potential means of their mobilization when the need arises. Similarly, the Tigganiyya order, which originated in North Africa, has a large number of followers in the Senegambia Region and the Savanna Belt in Western and Central Africa. In the second half of the 19th century Al-Haj Umar Al-Futi led a jihad movement under the banner of this tariqa, which later turned into a movement of resistance against the French colonial invasion. Today, net-works exist, which link the followers of each of the two religious orders from Senegal up to Sudan.43

Of course, religious orders do exist in East Africa, but here they have been of a quite limited vitality, compared with West Africa. At least they failed to unite the Muslims at a macro-level as they did in Western and Central Africa.

So, we can now see that all the agents/factors of the spread, consolidation, stability, continuity and progression of Islam apply perfectly in the case of West Africa. This means that Islamic culture has been for centuries deep-rooted in the lives of West African Muslims, which enabled them to resist, to a large extent, the direct anti-Islamic policies of the colonial period.

On the contrary, most of these agents/factors did not act effectively in the coastal zone of East Africa, i.e. the heart of the Arab Muslim centers themselves; leave alone the peripheries, such as Zimbabwe and Uganda.

As we have just seen, Islam was first carried to Zimbabwe as an appendix to the Arabs’ trade. Lacking all reasons of development and continuity, it shortly afterwards disappeared with the decline of the Arabs’ trade in that region. Its second phase started quite recently, identified with the Asians, and in unfavorable conditions of competition with another religion (i.e. Christianity), in the time when the Western powers were exerting total control over the entire region. So, the recession of Islam and the very slow process of its resurrection among the local people should be perceived in the light of these conditions and circumstances.

As for Uganda, I doubt if it is not the last African country to receive Islam anew. By the time the first Arab Muslim man arrived in Buganda (1844), great Islamic states and empires had already existed in West Africa, some of them had even declined, and many Islamic revival movements had taken place. The time of the arrival of Islam in Uganda was also very significant; it was just a few years before what I may call "the scramble of the Great Lakes". As we have seen above, the acceptance of Islam by the royal court of Buganda and its intermittent opportunities of success were for the sake of political and economical interests more than for its merit as a spiritual system. Soon afterwards, the entire Lakes regions witnessed a period of intensive politico-religious competitions (Egyptian and European ambitions, Islam, Catholic and Protestant
religions). So, loose beginning, short time and unfavorable political circumstances, all these combined to prevent the development of proper Islamic culture and a united Muslim community, which could be strong enough to protect Islam against recession in time of unfavorable political circumstances.

Challenges facing the Muslims in Zimbabwe and Uganda:

From the above presentation on the history of Islam and the situations of Muslims in Zimbabwe and Uganda, we realize that development of Islam in these two countries faces different kinds of challenges. These challenges can be classified into two types: challenges which are common to all the Islamic African countries south of the Sahara, and those which are particular to the two countries under study. The first type relates to:

1- Factors of internal weakness that renders the African Muslim states prone to foreign imperial intervention.
2- The experience of colonialism with all its negative impact.
3- Westernization and cultural assimilation.
4- Zionist and evangelization activities.\(^ {44} \)

The other type of challenges (also encountered, to a lesser extent, in other Islamic states) relates to:

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1- Illiteracy and ignorance of the basic teachings of Islam among the general Muslim public.

2- Lack of Imams and dā'ī'at versed in the local languages.

3- Low rate of modern (Western) education.

4- Sectarian divisions, which prevent the Muslim in one and the same country to be united under a unanimously accepted organization.

Conclusion:

To sum up, Islam was carried to both of Zimbabwe and Uganda from Islamic centers (East African coastal zones), which themselves lacked the basic factors of Islamic development and consolidation. It reached both countries as an appendix of commercial objectives and not as an objective by itself. Attempts to spread it in the two countries were carried out mainly by outsiders (Arab and Asians in the case of Zimbabwe, and Swahilians and Sudanese in the case of Uganda). However, the native Ugandan citizens, short afterwards, got seriously involved in the matter. Revival of Islam in Zimbabwe and attempt of its spread and consolidation in Uganda started very recently under conditions of serious politico-religious and cultural competitions (with Christianity and Westernization). So, under such circumstances, one would not be surprised if proper Islamic culture failed to develop in these two countries, and if Islam in both countries witnessed instances of set-back.

However, from what preceded, we can see clearly that the position of Islam and Muslim is far better than in
Zimbabwe. For while Islam in Zimbabwe still remains the religion of "foreigners" (Asians), in Uganda it has steadily been developing as a native religion. Islamic education has now been supplemented by the Islamic University of Mbale established and financed by ICO in 1988, which opened a new avenue for Muslim potential graduate and postgraduate students.

**Recommendations:**

- Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) is strongly recommended at the moment, if not to increase the financial allocation of the Islamic University of Mbale, at least to meet REGULARLY the already established financial commitments.

- The Islamic University of Mbale should not confine its curricula to Islamic Studies (and other human sciences), but modern sciences, such as medicine, engineering and informatics science should introduced and promoted.

- More scholarships and admission places should be availed for Muslim students from other poorly Muslim neighboring countries, such as Zimbabwe and Malawi.

Students from the above countries should also be assisted by ICO to further their studies (especially in modern sciences) in advanced Arab and Muslim countries, or even in other over-seas countries.