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Sudan and Uganda, being neighboring countries, have for many years affected one another in various spheres of life. One particular aspect of this interaction is in the religious field particularly Islam. The history of Islam in Uganda has a great relationship to the Sudan factor. Khartoum’s were responsible for the introduction of Islam in Uganda in the 1830s. In that regard therefore, there are always serious repercussions for the Muslims in Uganda whenever there is any strain in relations between the governments of Uganda and Sudan.

Since the National Resistance Movement took over power in Uganda in 1986, the relations between Uganda and Sudan were not always cordial. This was partly because many of the operatives of the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement (S.P.L.A) found a safe haven in Uganda. Against this background, there were allegations that the Sudan government was sponsoring Ugandan rebels. In the wake of these allegations evolved a fluid international situation in the 1990s with the increased terrorist attacks. Muslims became the state enemies everywhere, including Uganda. It was believed that the Sudanese government was supporting many of the anti-Western “Islamist” movements. In the midst of this scenario, a Muslim-led rebel movement, the Allied Democratic Forces (A.D.F), appeared on the Ugandan scene. The Sudanese government was the alleged financier. Diplomatic relations

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between the two countries were severed. Instantly it became the responsibility of all the Muslims in the country. Any association with Sudan by a muslim therefore tantamount to being a rebel. This paper therefore shows the dynamics of this fluid relationship between the governments of Sudan and Uganda between 1986 and 2003. The ideal is to establish how this situation impacted on the Muslims and Islam in Uganda.

1.0 Introduction

Sudan neighbours Uganda to the north. In many ways, and for a very long time the people of Sudan and Uganda have affected each other. In fact the introduction of Islam in Uganda was partly a direct result of this interaction. Khartoum was responsible for introducing Islam in northern Uganda during the 1830s (Soghayroun: 1980). Since that time there has been a continuous relationship between Sudan and Islam in Uganda. In the process of the establishment of the Equatorial province, Sudanese Muslim soldiers were employed by the agents of Khedive Ismail of Egypt and deployed in Uganda. As a result of this deployment areas of northern Uganda, West Nile and Bunyoro got an increasing amount of Islamic influence. This relationship has persisted to the present day where Sudanese Muslim organisations operate in many parts of Uganda contributing to the spread of Islam.

Until the 1980s, the relationship between Sudan and the Muslims in Uganda did not cause any alarm. Inspite of the long drawn out conflict between northern and southern Sudan, there had been a limited amount of cross-border interference. Sudanese refugees had crossed into Uganda since the 1960s and Ugandan refugees had moved into Sudan after the overthrow of Amin in 1979. But the movements did not lead to political interference into each other’s affairs. Indeed some of the refugees who fled Uganda even started subversive activities against the government but no one raised a finger against the Muslims. Even when the Uganda government allied with the
Anyanya rebels in the 1960s, the situation did not deteriorate into a state of unrest.

But matters were to change with the coming to power of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in 1986. The new President Yoweri Museveni and the leader of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) John Garang, had previously worked together and began the process of reinforcing the war against the Sudanese government. As relations between the two governments deteriorated, the Muslims of Uganda became the victims of this struggle.

The Muslims of Uganda underwent a very difficult and trying state of affairs during the period 1986 to 2002. This difficulty arose as a result of the deterioration of relations between Uganda and Sudan. As matters between the two powers went over board, the Muslims of Uganda were increasingly drawn into the conflict. Blanket accusations were levelled against the whole Muslim community for any subversive activity (real or imaginary) undertaken by any Muslim or group of Muslims. In about 1995, a rebel group, the Allied Democratic Force (ADF) was born out of the remnants of Amon Bazira’s Rwenzururu movement and some disgruntled Baganda petty Bourgeoisie. Because with the ranks of ADF were some Muslims; the organisation was soon associated to Sudan as the financier and all Muslims became rebels. Later in 1997 and 1998, a spate of bomb attacks were carried out in Kampala and a number of Muslims were arrested as conspirators. That “Sudanic” association made Muslims the enemies of all “peace-loving” Ugandans.

This paper therefore sets out to show how the Muslims in Uganda were affected by the strained relations between Uganda and Sudan, and how this impacted on the position of Islam in Uganda in the period 1986 to 2002.

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2.0 Sudan and Islam in Uganda: A Historical Note

The first foreigners in Northern Uganda were Egyptian and Sudanese traders and slave-hunters who came in the 17th Century. They introduced Islam and established important trade routes up to Khartoum. Early European contact in West Nile came with the Austrian Emin Pasha (1885-1889), former governor of Equatoria Province under the Anglo-Egyptian Sudanese Government. He came in with an army of some 9,000 Sudanese Muslims and settled in Wadelai. His soldiers were to play an important role in spreading Islam in Uganda.

After the colonization of Africa by the European powers the area, which is now West-Nile, became a source of dispute, largely because of the strategic importance of the river Nile. Until the partition of nations, the area west of the Nile was part of the Lado Enclave, which was leased in 1894 by the British to the Independent State of Congo. In 1900 the Belgians began to administer the region, opening several garrison posts (Yumbe, Wandi, Ofude). The Belgian administration introduced agents or "chiefs" who had wider powers than the powers, which had previously existed in the indigenous society. These chiefs were mostly Sudanese Muslims and were paid in cattle, which made them rich beyond local conception and provided them with the resources to maintain many wives. Chiefs were directly responsible for collecting levies and used the opportunity to spread the Islamic faith in the area.

In 1914, the Southern portion of the Lado Enclave was assigned to Uganda under the British Protectorate. A.E. Weatherhead took over the administration of the 'New area' as District Commissioner, building a station in Arua, the present headquarters. Following the British policy indirect rule, he used the chiefs appointed by the Belgians for the administration and control. In 1919, the chief participated in the Odupi uprising, which was the last indigenous resistance against colonization.
Weatherhead then chose to install so called “native agents” who were mostly Sudanese remnants of Emin Pasha’s troops who had settled throughout Uganda. They liaised between the District Commissioner, the chiefs and the local population. Their new position allowed them the opportunity to spread the faith of Islam in most of West Nile region of Uganda. Whereas in the late 1920s these Sudanese chiefs were eventually withdrawn with the revulsion to indigenous chiefs, their contribution to the spread of Islam remains significant.

Elsewhere in the country Sudanese Muslim troops operated to extend British colonial rule. Sudanese soldiers provided the mainstay of the Ugandan army, whose task was to preserve British interests and to launch punitive expeditions against those who rebelled against the crown. In 1890 the Imperial British East Africa Company (I.B.E.A.Co), which administered the territory that would become Uganda, established an army to defend British investments there. This force of 300 included Sudanese soldiers (most of whom were recruited in Egypt) who were organized into a Zanzibar Levy. The following year, Selim Bey, who commanded a military unit for the German explorer Emin Pasha, agreed to allow about 100 of his Sudanese troops to join the British force in East Africa. After Britain declared a provisional protectorate over Uganda in 1893, the colonial authorities formed a military unit of 600 regulars and 300 reservists, most of whom were Sudanese. Four Arabic-speaking British officers assumed responsibility for their training. In December 1893, Colvile led a force of several thousand Baganda fighters and 420 Sudanese in a campaign against Bunyoro, Buganda’s arch-rival. These troops stayed in the area where they intermarried with the local Banyoro and spread the faith of Islam. They were also able to influence many of their Baganda colleagues to convert to Islam. Throughout the colonial period and the independent eras Sudan remained instrumental in the propagation of Islam in Uganda. A number Sudan based Muslim non-governmental organizations
continued to operate in Uganda contributing greatly to the spread of Islam until the fall out between the two countries in the early 1990s.

3.0 The collapse of relations between Uganda and Sudan

In many ways Uganda and Sudan run an undeclared war on their common boarder between 1986 and 2002. Uganda progressively gave help to the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (S.P.L.A.), which was fighting the Islamic regime in Khartoum in the Southern Sudan while the Sudan government offered assistance to the Lord Resistance Army (L.R.A) under Joseph Kony in Northern Uganda.

It is true, Uganda’s record in the great lakes region is bizarre in as far as causing instability was concerned. When the NRM government took power in 1986, it offered sanctuary to many revolutionary (rebel) movements including the S.P.L.A. Although there was no official declaration of government support for S.P.L.A. until about 1993, the issues on ground were very clear. S.P.L.A leaders operated freely in the country enjoying clear government funding and support. By 1990, S.P.L.A operatives were virtually everywhere in the country. Around the same time, a big section of the Uganda army “deserted” and attacked neighbouring Rwanda leading to the victory of 1994. Later Uganda was to got involved in the Congo (Zaire) leading to the overthrow of President Mobutu. Such actions raised concern to her neighbours and given that the S.P.L.A was freely operating in Uganda, Sudan had to be particularly concerned.

As early as 1986, Uganda claimed that the Sudan government of Sadiq Al-Malid offered military assistance to the former chief of staff General Bazilio Okello’s forces to fight against it. And when the National Islamic Front (N.I.F) took power in Sudan in 1989, the N.R.M government in Uganda got more concerned that “militant” Islam was about to sweep the great lakes region. It was argued in Uganda that one way the
N.I.F started to destabilise and islamise the country was to extend support to the L.R.A. fighters who had taken on Muslim names pretending to have converted. This way, they were able to get assistance from the N.I.F increasing their forces from less than 300 in mid 1993 to over 2000 well-equipped fighters by March 1994.²

It was further alleged that the N.I.F government used Zaire to by-pass the S.P.L.A. in the Western Equatorial and delivered supplies to L.R.A. In this new route the Sudanese army was also able to get into contact with former Amin soldiers who had been living in the area since 1979 and reorganised them into a fighting front. This gave birth to the West Nile Bank Front (W.N.B.F). The argument goes that the founding and support to these organisations did not satisfy the Sudanese government. This was to be overcome with the birth of the Allied Democratic Front (A.D.F).

Interesting A.D.F was not a purely Muslim organisation. Its political leadership was actually protestant Bourgeoisie resident in London. However some Muslims, who had unsuccessfully attempted a rebel movement, the Uganda Muslim Liberation Army (U.M.L.A), joined the A.D.F at inception. Thenceforth, A.D.F became a “Muslim” rebel movement and Sudan became the automatic “financial”. This was a very unfortunate assumption, given that Uganda had a long history of people forming rebel movements whenever they felt disgruntled. Promoters of such arguments ignore the facts on ground. The major factor that drives people to the bush has a lot to do with the economic motive. Whereas the International Monetary Fund (I.M.F) lauded Uganda’s for economic success, the product of that growth was extremely unevenly distributed.³ N.R.M cadres and their crony creamed off the benefits and only a little was left for the ordinary Ugandans. It was no wonder that later on when some of the rebels were arrested; they indicated that they had joined because of the financial rewards that had been promised
to them. It therefore goes without saying that the Sudan factor is an exaggeration introduced to create a negative image of Islam.

Nonetheless, the Uganda government seriously believed that Sudan was behind the subversive activities within and outside the country. Soon it was “proved” that Sudan was actually sponsoring Ugandan dissidents. On 21 April Uganda served notice of expulsion on 11 diplomats in the Sudanese embassy in Kampala, giving four of them 48 hours to leave the country and the remainder 14 days. Those ordered to leave within 48 hours were: First Secretary Hassan Muhammad al-Tom; Military Attaché Lt-Col Haidar al-Hadi Hajj Omar; and administrative attaches Adam Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Adam and Badr ad-Din Hussein Riziq Hussein. Seven other Sudanese were to leave within 14 days, including: Mu'tasim al-Amin Muhammad al-Hassan; Awad Taha al-Tom Taha; Press Attaché Hassan al-Umdah; Abdallah al-Badr al-Bari; First Secretary, Security, Khalid Mahmud Hamad; and Abdallah Abd al-Karim Abdallah.4

On 23 April Uganda broke off diplomatic relations with the government of Sudan with the argument that diplomatic staff of the embassy of the Sudan was compromising the security of Uganda. On 24 April 1995, Uganda government authorities reported that the Ugandan police carried out a search of the residence of the Sudanese military attaché in Kampala, where numbers of unauthorized arms and ammunition were allegedly found. The search followed allegations that there were unauthorized arms and ammunition at the military attaché’s residence on Plot 29, Nakasero Road. A statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that evening indicated that during the search, two MP-5 sub-machine guns, one shotgun, three pistols, 1,338 loose live ammunition for MP-5 sub-machine guns, 19 rounds of ammunition for AK47 guns, one live round of self-loading rifle, 76 rounds of live ammunition for pistols, four high-frequency military field radios, one high-frequency transmission communication set and four Uganda and Sudan
topographical maps were found in the Sudanese military attaché's residence. That in the absence of any reasonable explanation to justify the presence of such an assortment of military equipment, it was found necessary to attach them as evidence of Sudan's continued involvement in destabilising the internal security of Uganda under diplomatic cover.

In response to the allegations, the Sudan government argued that the so-called military arsenal of heavy artillery, mines and other weapons found in the office of the Sudanese military attaché, were fabricated. This proved to be the last straw in the already strained relations. Uganda dismissed all Sudanese diplomats and ordered the closure of its Kampala embassy. The same measure was reciprocated in Khartoum against Ugandan embassy and diplomats. This collapse of relations was to underpin the subsequent suffering of the Muslims of Uganda.

4.0 The effect of the Sudan factor on the position of Uganda Muslims after 1995

Ever since the NRM government took power in 1986, its greatest fear had been the spread of Islamic fundamentalism from Sudan. As such the various government spies tended to make political capital by reporting a variety of subversive activities carried out by Muslims with the assistance of Sudan. It was largely believed that the anti-Museveni groups operating in Zaire were mainly Muslims who received support from Sudan.

Political alienation

During March, April and July 1997 bomb attacks rocked areas in and around Kampala the capital city of Uganda. The Uganda government soon indicated that they were actions of armed opposition movements operating out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the support of the Sudanese government. In this tense political climate, intensified activity by security agencies often breached international human rights
standards and Ugandan constitutional provisions. Many people mostly Muslims arrested, scores of whom were detained incommunicado in secret detention centres. Muslims were particularly targeted. These prisoners included members of the Ugandan Somali community notably Omer Ahmed Mandela, treasurer of the popular Kampala football club S.C. Villa, Sheikh Abdul Weli Abdullai, imam of the Tawheed mosque, and 27 men and boys were arrested by Ugandan security officials and by agents from the U.S.A.'s Federal Bureau of Investigation. They were questioned about the bombing of the U.S Embassy in Nairobi and alleged plans to bomb U.S targets in Uganda, they were held incommunicado in a secret place of detention. Most were released without charge after two weeks. However, Abdul Kadir Ali, a 15-year-old school student, and three men were not released until mid-October, again without charge.6

Amnesty international also went ahead to report that over 100 Muslim political prisoners, the majority from the Islamist Jumaiyat Da'awa Salafiyya sect were arrested in Kampala and other places in south and west Uganda on suspicion of involvement with the A.D.F and other armed opposition movements. For example, 40 men detained in Kampala in May, including Sheikh Abdul Karim Sentamu, a senior imam of the sect, were held incommunicado at unknown locations. There were further detentions of Muslims in July and August 1997. Although some were released, at least 14 and possibly many more were still detained at the end of the year. Torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment remained endemic in police stations and was common when soldiers and security officials detained security suspects. In August detainees held in an illegal secret location by the Directorate of Military Intelligence on suspicion of involvement with the bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi or of links with the A.D.F. were reportedly beaten and tortured with electric shocks.7

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In the same vein, in June 1998, the Uganda Human Rights Commission (U.H.R.C.) investigated a spate of arrests of Muslims associated with the Jamuiyat Ad-Daawa Asalafiya, a break-off of the more mainstream Tabliq Muslim community in Uganda. Security agencies suspected the group of having ties to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group operating in Western Uganda. The U.H.R.C.'s investigation concluded that the estimated eighty Muslims had been arbitrarily arrested, kept illegally in un gazetted places of detention, and had not been charged within the required forty-eight hours.  

During 1998, the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (F.H.R.I.) reported that members of the Tabliq sect of the Muslim faith were being held on summary hold in prisons across the country for the last three to four years even though their cases were dismissed in court. Furthermore, the Jamuiyat Women Muslim Association complained to F.H.R.I. that their husbands were haphazardly arrested by plain-clothed security officials in the first half of 1998. The Association was formed by these wives to demand the release of their detained husbands from the Government. The women alleged that no charges were preferred against their husbands; neither were their relatives aware of the charges that were stated against them. The suspects were not given a chance to inform their next of kin about their arrests nor able to give details of their whereabouts. The women have conducted searches for their husbands in all the nationally-known gazetted detention centres but this has proved fruitless.  

Sulaiti Nkonjo, Ibrahim Kimera, Zubair Sempeebwa, Mohammed Kubali, Shaikh Abdul Karim Sentamu, Mustafa Bahiiiga, Shaikh Murshia Kyazze and Sarah Nakabuye. They were all allegedly members of A.D.F who received support from Sudan.

On 9 December 1999 approximately 200 rebels raided Katojo Prison in Kabarole District. 365 inmates were abducted out of a prison population of 841. Media reports stated that the dawn raid left a Uganda Peoples Defence Force (U.P.D.F.) soldier and the wife of the prison warder dead, several injured and 24 rifles stolen. At the time of the raid the prison held a number of suspected A.D.F rebels and several treason suspects. It was reported that 23 abductees managed to escape and later around 90 bodies were found by the U.P.D.F. in the Rwenzori Mountains. The government estimated that the A.D.F were holding around 165 prisoners in captivity. Instability generated from the conflicts spilled over into Kampala, causing further insecurity, instability and the loss of life. Although the increased security to protect civilians was a welcome move, concern was about the arbitrary methods employed by the authorities in detaining suspected rebels. Greater concern arose in the way Muslims were targeted and harassed by the police. In June 1999, military police arrested and detained over 44 people, mainly Muslims, in connection with the bomb blasts.10

Interestingly, the actions of the Uganda government against the Muslims seemed to be vindicated by the U.S government. A report from one of its sources summarises its position thus:

_While in Sudan, al Qaeda and the National Islamic Front (NIF) played an important role in supporting Ugandan Islamists directly and through NGOs. In 1994, Salafi Foundation of Uganda was supported by al Qaeda/NIF to develop the Ugandan Mujahidin Freedom Fighters (UMFF). In addition to training in Juba, Nesitu,
Jebellin in the south of Sudan, camps were established in Buseruka, Hoima, near Lake Albert. Sheikh Jamil moved to Kenya where he coordinated UMFF activities. By joining other opposition forces, UMFF evolved into the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which relocated to the Democratic Republic of Congo to challenge the Kampala government. After al Qaeda moved to Afghanistan in 1996, handpicked A.D.F. members were trained in Afghanistan as explosives experts. In 1995, when Uganda closed down the Sudanese embassy in Kampala, the Sudanese intelligence officers were transferred to Kenya to continue their work. Even after Osama’s departure from Sudan, Khartoum supported the Ugandan Islamists including the West Nile Bank Front operating from Zaire along the Zaire-Ugandan border.11

The result of these measures was further alienation of the Muslims of Uganda. The Muslims still remain second class citizens in their own country. In the attempt to confirm their allegations political prisoners were given opportunity to apply for amnesty under a new law. By applying for amnesty, the person will have accepted the offence.12 A few Muslims who were fired of prison did take the option and were eventually released. This then confirmed the Uganda government allegations against the community.

Socio-economic effects

Inspite of the political problems however, the Muslims decided to take other avenues to overcome the marginalisation. Two sectors were earmarked. First was the education sector. This sector has seen great progress especially with the birth of private schools. Many Muslim founded schools sprang up started by individuals, communities and even NGOs. Munadhamat Al Dawa Al Islamiya, a Sudan based NGO established two important girls schools Hamdan Girls and Mariam High Schools. But these schools were also subject to
government checks for subversive activities. The Muslim
government aided schools were also improved to become some
of the best in the country. For example Kibuli S.S, Nabisunsa
Girls and Kawempe Muslim S.S have been among the ten best
performing secondary schools since 1990. But even on this
front, the community still faces problems with regime. For
example, the government aided Muslim schools continue to be
flooded with non-Muslim students through the so-called
computer allocation of students to schools. The principle is
presented as an innocent one of mere merit. But the problem is
that this “merit” works only in the interest of non-Muslims. In
one particular year, the computer “allocated” 120 students to
Nabisunsa Girls School. Out of them, only 20 were Muslims.
The Muslim community has found this very frustrating, since
these schools are run in the name of the Muslim community, but
they seemed to be serving only the others.  

The other area where Muslims hoped to overcome
marginalisation was in the commercial sector. This was done
with the founding of a Muslim owned bank-Greenland Bank
limited. Between 1993 and 1998 Muslims made great progress
in the economic sphere courtesy of their bank. However this
honeymoon was soon destroyed. Since among its shareholders
was a Sudanese National Mohamed Abdullah Grelneci of
Concorp International, the government of Uganda believed that
the bank was being funded by Sudan. Moves were taken and on
April 1, 1999, it was closed down. Many faked reasons were
given but eventually it emerged that the International Monetary
Fund had been party. I.M.F represents American interests and
there is doubt C.I.A and F.B.I were behind the scenes. With the
death of Greenland Bank the Ugandan Muslims suffered
economic decline which they are yet to recover from. The
community remained orphaned in dire need of rescue. Attempts
at joining the political arena in 1996 and 2001 were equally
frustrated by the Muslims themselves and the government
officials.
5.0 Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that the relations between the governments of Sudan and Uganda since the 1986 have had drastic socio-economic and political effects on the Ugandan Muslims. National politics has played an essential part in the way Muslim community has developed. Three points need to be stressed out of the above discussion. First, the Ugandan state was founded with the ideal of creating a Christian hegemony, and sets the stage for them to use their privileged position to interfere with the way the Muslim community develops.

Secondly, the culture of political injustice towards the Muslims, which was started by the colonial regime and continued by successive post independence governments especially the N.R.M, has severely affected the Muslims. Muslims have been languishing in prisons leading to the intimidation of others. Very few have the audacity to speak up for Muslim rights. Muslim schools and commercial enterprises are subject to continued interference which keeps them behind in many sectors. Those Muslims who try to demand for their rights are branded rebels or allies of Sudan.

Thirdly, the Sudan factor and the question of terrorism have become scapegoats for alienating Muslims. Sudan has been key in the development of Islam in Uganda. It is therefore not right to alienate that country from the Ugandan Muslims. Whereas terrorism has been attributed to keep Muslims away from Sudan, Ugandan Muslims should seek ways of keeping the bond without compromising their security. Note should be taken that the Americans are greatly interested in the Muslim community in Uganda. Many policy issues in Uganda relating to the Muslims have American blessing. This is borne partly out the feeling that Sudan is highly involved, and the fear terrorism. The Sudanese government should therefore utilise the prevailing peaceful conditions to assist the Ugandan Muslims achieve their goals through the IGAD arrangement. It could as well use the guise of education to that end.
Notes


5. Radio Uganda / SWB 24/Apr/95
7. Ibid