

# Peace and War in Mozambique: The Colonial Power and Islam's Impact (Twentieth and Twenty-First Century)

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## Abstract

This paper studies the Islam's impact in relation to the violence of the colonial and post-colonial state at the centre and north of Mozambique in particularly at the Zambezia and Tete Provinces. Revisiting and cross-checking sources available in the archives, especially the Mozambique Historical Archive, it is possible to determine Islam's expansion by analysing the reports of the colonial administration, interviewing the social participants of this process, and understanding the complexity of the phenomenon before and after the independence, thus enabling the rethinking of the violence, reconstruction, and reconciliation within the Mozambican society. The confrontation of the material produced by the colonial authorities in reports of the civil administration, of the so-called native business between the army and the police and the independent movements, especially the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), suggests a clandestine operational network with initiatives of Mozambican identity affirmation under the designation of "subversive" in the colonial days. A fact worth noting: the "control" function of the Muslim communities, both in the colonial state apparatus and in the post-colonial times, as a phenomenon of continuity.

## Keywords

Africa, Indian Ocean, Mozambique, Islam, independent movements

This paper is incorporated in the post-doctoral project entitled "The Colonial Power and Islam's Impact in Mozambique", 1954-1974, oriented by Professor Doctor Joana Pereira Leite at the CEsA/CSG/ISEG/UL, and developed under an FCT scholarship.

Its main objectives are the following:

- (1) To identify the Islamic communities in Mozambique;
- (2) To verify the impact of Islam on the Mozambican associative movement;
- (3) To analyse the relationships between the people of Mozambique and the colonial power and independent movements: Mozambique African

National Union (MANU)<sup>1</sup>, *União Democrática Nacional de Moçambique* (UDENAMO)<sup>2</sup>, Independent Mozambique National Union (UNAMI)<sup>3</sup>, and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO)<sup>4</sup>, questioning War and Peace;

(4) To analyse the experiences and paths of the Islamic families resulting from the colonization and decolonization processes;

(5) To know the realities of the Islamic

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**Figure 1.** Quelimane's Mosque. Source: João Loureiro's Collection.

community originally from Mozambique and at present immigrants in Portugal;

(6) To assess the relationship between the Islamic immigrant community and the Portuguese society;

(7) Confront and question the research results in the sense of developing analytical lines that allow assessment of the importance of the associative movement of Islamic inspiration in the building of the independent Mozambique.

## STATE OF ART

In the case of Mozambique, despite important studies developed by Alpers, Bonate, Leite, Khourie, Macagno, Medeiros and Vakil, as confirmed by the consulted bibliography, Islam's impact is yet to take place because, if the Portuguese colonial regime, in an applied research to control the Islamic community, produced a series of studies that the Centralization and Coordination Information's Services of Mozambique

(SCCIM)<sup>5</sup> has preserved, equally the independent movements integrated them as confirmed by documents found by us at the African Studies Centre at the Eduardo Mondlane University, and also in files reserved to the late Professor Fernando Ganhão<sup>6</sup>, who was preparing a History of Mozambique, debating questions like identity, nationalism, and an Islam of the present days that attempts to affirm itself as African and Mozambican.

## METHODOLOGY 1

The starting point: What role did the Islamic communities play in the building of independent Mozambique?

## HYPOTHESES

(1) Were the Islamic communities completely controlled by the colonial regime?

(2) Once controlled by the regime, did they develop initiatives of an independent affirmation?

(3) Did subordination and resistance to the colonial power exist?

## METHODOLOGY 2

The different perspectives of the paths taken are schematically presented below:

First of all, in disciplinary terms, considering the fact that history studies the marks of the past, discusses the present and projects the future. The social history in particular, the one that was developed in this research work, tried to understand the complexity of the Mozambican society.

Then, in interdisciplinary terms, cross-checking the views of history with sociology, cultural anthropology, psychology, political science and science of religions. The methods followed: empirical and compared, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Finally, it is worth emphasising the cross-checking of information available in oral, written, and iconographic sources, which we will develop under this heading.

## RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

Characterizing the universe studied (see Figure 2) by the analysis of oral sources, nine interviews were carried out in Quelimane, plus 17 others in Tete, which adds up to a total of 26 interviewees, of which 17 were men and nine women. The youngest interviewee was a 21-year-old student in Tete, and the oldest one, an 83-year-old chief's wife in Quelimane. As far as the profession is concerned, it was confirmed that the majority were composed by 11 tradesmen, followed by nine former combatants from the Mozambique People's Forces members of the Association of Former Combatants of the Fight for National Liberation (ACLLN)<sup>7</sup>, three of which were male and six were female, and a minority of two

religious leaders, the Caliph in Quelimane and a Sheik in Tete.

The semi-structured interviews allowed us to know the initiatives of the four associations in Quelimane, and equally four in Tete—therefore eight institutions. Thus, namely the Zambezia Province, have the following associations:

(1) Portuguese Muslim Association of Zambezia, with statutes dating from 1957 (see Figure 1) that are still valid today, dropping the “Portuguese” adjective (three interviews);

(2) Iquebal Sports Group of Quelimane, existing since 60s of the last century (one interview);

(3) Native Muslim Mozambique Community, registered in the DAR<sup>8</sup> in 2006, which defends the existence of a Caliphate in Mozambique geographically organized in three areas: North, Centre, and South, with headquarters in Quelimane (four interviews);

(4) Association of the Former Combatants of the Fight for the National Liberation (ACLLN) (one interview).

In Tete Province:

(1) The Indian Mahomedan Association (1934-1935), which gave birth to the Tete Mahomedan Association (see Figure 3), and in the post-independence to the Tete Muslim Association (seven interviews);

(2) Dharul Ulum Amir Muavia UMAT (no interviews);

(3) ACLLN (eight interviews).

The hermeneutics and the heuristics used by the author in the existing primary and secondary written sources of the AHM (Mozambique National Archives) served as the most significant documental support of this text, which intends to make the reconstitution of the marks of the past of the above mentioned Islamic associations.

The confrontation of the material produced by the colonial authorities in reports of the civil administration, of the so-called native business



**Figure 2.** Religious Groups in Mozambique (2007 Census).



**Figure 3.** Tete's Mosque. Source: the author's collection.

between the army and the police and the independent movements, especially FRELIMO, suggests a clandestine operational network with initiatives of Mozambican identity affirmation under the designation of “subversive” in the colonial days.

A fact worth noting: The “control” function of the Muslim communities, both in the colonial state apparatus and in the post-colonial times, thus reveals itself as a phenomenon of continuity.

However, the most colourful details are discovered in the iconographic sources. The image, like a time capsule, has given us significant details of the social interaction that, once interpreted, helps us to understand the complexity of the colonial society and the war and peace phenomena.

## CONCLUSIONS

Assessing the current situation in data analysis and its limitations, the author verifies that there are common aspects in both provinces, where economical growth in the agricultural sector, especially in Zambezia and in the mining area, in Tete led to the active maintenance of the Islamic communities in religion and commerce. It appears that the majority of the associations in the field are Sunni and the minority are Wahbita (e.g., the UMAT). Some elements of the Shiite community Ismailia have been equally identified, who very recently established themselves in Mozambique due to the fact that between 1973 and 1974, many families abandoned Mozambique, and only after the independence did they return in an atmosphere of multi-party system.

Apart from the different orders mentioned above, the distinct aspects verified are worth highlighting. Therefore, in the Zambezia Creole society, a greater Arab influence on the coastline is worth noting, where the Afro-Islamic are predominant, while in the interior, the greater influence is Asian/Indian, such as in Tete.

The importance of the research is maintained in

the never-ending search for subjective aspects, among which the claim for a Mozambican identity on the part of the interviewed families, and of objective initiatives of inter-religious dialogue and tolerance. New problems arise, observed with the incoming of Muslim foreigners from Nigeria, the Horn of Africa and even countries of the North of the continent, where political instability has motivated forced migrations. Islamic solidarity works there, and the mosques become too small to receive such a great number of believers.

In a multi-party system atmosphere, as part of a process of transition to democracy, it is also equally important to highlight the force of the Islamic Associations in a Mozambican fragile civil society in search for Peace. In these civic movements, such as marches that demand the end of corruption, kidnappings and war, women are the most dynamic and visible force.

## Notes

1. Mozambique African National Union created in 1959 from mutual associations, among which the Makonde Union of Mozambique, founded in 1954.
2. Mozambique National Democratic Union, created in 1960.
3. Independent Mozambique National Union of 1961.
4. Mozambique Liberation Front, founded on June 25, 1962.
5. Centralization and Coordination Information's Services of Mozambique.
6. FRELIMO's historian. After the independence, he was the Principal of Eduardo Mondlane University.
7. Association of Former Combatants of the Fight for National Liberation.
8. Department of Religious Affairs of the MJ (Ministry of Justice).

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