Preaching Islamic Revival in East Africa

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For Kinaya, Soule and Ulrike Hegemann

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INTRODUCTION

This book deals with the new conversions to fundamentalist Islam in the multi-religious societies of East Africa. It is based on field research consisting essentially of my observations, interviews, consultation of public records and other private written material (books and pamphlets from the local Islamic literature), audio and video cassettes of sermons and lectures of the well-known preachers of the region, and copies of Friday sermons given by imāms in East Africa.

Though Islam has been established in East Africa since the 8th or 9th century, it had been confined for a long time along the coastal area only. As for the interior of the continent (bara), it was not until the early 19th century that one could meet a few isolated individuals who had converted to Islam. These latter were people who were going back and forth between the bara and the coast (Pwani) for commercial business.[1]

From 1840 and especially from 1842, when Sultan Sayyid Saʿīd b. Sulṭān transferred the capital of Oman to Zanzibar, the Omani Arab traders began to penetrate the interior of the continent. Their presence there occasioned some conversions to Islam.[2] These conversions, however, were somewhat accidental, as these Arab traders were not interested in converting Africans to Islam but rather in making maximum profits in their business, especially as they were ʿIbāḍī, a minority sect in East Africa where the majority were (and still are) of the Shāfiʿī madhhab (legal and ritual school), one of the four Sunnī madhāhib (the plural of madhhab).

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[1] See August H. Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa: The Sufi Order in Tanzania*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1980, p. 6; Norman R. Bennet, "The Arab Impact," in Bethwell A. Ogot and John A. Kiernan (eds.), *Zamani: A Survey of East African History*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House and Longmans of Kenya, 1968, p. 216.

[2] See Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa*, p. 6; Edward A. Alpers, "The Coast and the Development of the Caravan Trade," in Isaria N. Kimambo and Arnold J. Temu (eds.), *A History of Tanzania*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1969, p. 56.

The followers of the two most important Sūfī brotherhoods of the region, the Qādiriyya and the Shādhiliyya, were the only Muslims on the coast to have reached the interior of the continent, in the last half of the 19th century, with the intention of converting people first to Islam and then to their respective Sūfī brotherhoods (ṭuruq, sing. ṭarīqa).[3] But these ṭuruq did not really have a specific method of conversion, or well-drawn plans or material means appropriate to their mission. During the same period, Christian missionaries also arrived in the interior of East Africa, but, unlike the ṭuruq, they were well equipped in terms of knowledge, methods and material resources.

The two religions (Islam and Christianity), introduced to the interior of the continent by these missionaries, brought also to the people, especially the leaders and their entourages, a kind of openness to the modern world, at least in prompting them to learn to write and to read, a skill which the leaders of the region would use to correspond with the outside world.

The new "Islamic missions," which were trying to imitate the Christian missions, within the framework of what I call the "Red Cross complex,"[4] began to be active within the continent only from the late 1980s. These "Islamic missions" have been based on Islamic fundamentalist doctrines: either the Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya, the Ṣaḥwa – the doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwān al-Muslimūn) – or the Shīʿa ideology of Khomeini's revolution. If we know how many conflicts these "Islamic missions" cause

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[3] See Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa*, pp. 57–86; Armand Abel, *Les musulmans noirs du Maniema* (Correspondance d'Orient, no. 2), Bruxelles, Publications du Centre pour l'Étude des Problèmes du Monde Musulman Contemporain, 1959; Bradford G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, particularly chap. 6: "The Qadiri and Shadhili Brotherhoods in East Africa, 1880–1910," pp. 152–176; Bradford G. Martin, "Muslim Resistance to Colonial Rule: Shaykh Uways b. Muhammad al-Barawi and the Qadiriya Brotherhood in East Africa," *Journal of African History*, vol. 10, 1969, pp. 471–486; Abel, *Les musulmans noirs du Maniema*.

[4] By "Red Cross complex," I mean the fascination (in its ambivalent meaning of love and detestation) that Muslims have vis-à-vis the Red Cross. Indeed, they take advantage of the services of this Catholic foundation when they are in need, while accusing it, at the same time, of taking advantage of its position to convert Muslims to Christianity. In addition, the Red Cross is also accused of being a nest of agents at the service of the hegemonic policy of the Western powers. It is therefore necessary for Muslims, if not to have organizations like the Red Cross, at least to learn from its methods.

among Muslims themselves, and between Muslims and non-Muslims, we will understand the anger of their opponents among both Muslims and non-Muslims.

While relying on the historical experience of the Christian and "Islamic missions," the following study aims to account for the way in which the "Islamic missions" have been working in the hinterland and in the interior of East Africa. The study wants to show how these "Islamic missions," while vigorously opposing the Christian missions, imitate them, just as they have been partly inspired by the Western culture that they see, nonetheless, as a danger to Islam and Muslims.

I do not want to position the opinions contained in this book in relation to the now well-known controversy raised by Robin Horton and his main opponent J. Humphrey Fisher[5] – the controversy named by Horton as "African conversion" to world religions (*Weltreligionen* in the Weberian sense): namely Judaism, Buddhism, and particularly Christianity and Islam. Nevertheless, it would be intellectually dishonest to speak of conversion in Africa without mentioning this debate and without taking a certain amount of inspiration from it. Let us quickly summarize the terms of the debate raised by Horton. Horton argued that Christianity and Islam, when they first came to Africa, did not produce in the Africans who converted to these two world religions a radical change in their cosmology and in all their traditional beliefs. Even without their contact with these two world religions, traditional African religions would, in all cases, have left their "spiritual microcosm" to enter the "spiritual macrocosm" emerging from the global change that was occurring at that time (global change today called "globalization"), including the colonial enterprise. It was, somehow, in the zeitgeist, "in the air anyway," as Horton writes.[6] Beliefs of the world religions were accepted by Africans when they were consistent with the responses that traditional African cosmology could give to the modern situation that had just appeared. They were not accepted as a result of the efforts of the missionaries. Islam and

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[5] Robin Horton, "African Conversion," *Africa*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1971, pp. 85–108; Robin Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion," part I, *Africa*, vol. 45, no. 3, 1975, pp. 219–235; Robin Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion," part II, *Africa*, vol. 45, no. 3, 1975, pp. 373–399; Humphrey J. Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered: Some Historical Aspects of Religious Conversion in Black Africa," *Africa*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1973, pp. 27–40; Humphrey J. Fisher, "The Juggernaut's Apologia: Conversion to Islam in Black Africa," *Africa*, vol. 55, no. 2, 1985, pp. 153–173.
[6] Robin Horton, "African Conversion," p. 104.

Christianity were the stimulators of a change that would have occurred in any case, according to Horton. If we follow Horton, the African conversion was a reconversion. Horton's theory had many supporters, as well as suffering a lot of criticism. Still, this theory of African conversion has at least two important merits. First, it revises the Weberian idea which viewed traditional religions as non-rational by giving them what Robert W. Hefner called "the ecological appreciation of their logic." Second, it presents Africans as actors playing a prominent role in their conversion to the world religions and not as passive consumers or victims, as is unfortunately to be observed in many studies. So, this idea of considering the Africans not as passive victims, undergoing the influence of missionaries from elsewhere, has personally guided me in my research on the new conversions to Islam in East Africa. Indeed, we have to bear in mind that the ʿulamāʾ-missionaries of Islam discussed in this book are, in their majority, people from the ethnic groups of the up-country who, having completed their Islamic studies in universities in Arab countries or Pakistan, returned to their regions to convert local people to fundamentalist Islam.

Opposing the "intellectualist" thesis of Horton which defends the strength and continuity of the traditional African cosmology, J. Humphrey Fisher argued that the world religions, Islam in particular (because it was the religion on which he was a specialist), introduced a new cosmology. For him, Islam in Africa, which he described as a juggernaut, spread by the examples, the symbols and the teachings it had drawn out of Africa, namely from the rest of the Umma.

For our study on conversions to Islam in East Africa today, the reality is to be found between the "intellectualist" thesis of Horton and the deterministic thesis of rupture defended by H. Fisher. This requires, among other things, accepting, for example, that the two world religions (Christianity and Islam) have developed differently in Africa. While in the past Islam was considered more adapted to African traditions than Christianity, which had been viewed as a Western religion, today the opposite trend occurs. Christianity has been undergoing a kind of "Africanization" while Islam, with all its reformist versions (Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, Salafism, etc.), has been undergoing a kind of "Arabization." We hear about "Christian African theology" and "African churches" but we do not hear anything like that concerning Islam in Africa.

Apart from showing concretely how Islam (especially the Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya version) spreads today in East Africa, at both the microcosmic

(locality) and the macrocosmic (nation-state) level, this book is intended to support the following thesis.

The renewed activity of conversion to Islam (especially its Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya version) in East Africa is not only the result of external factors (such as daʿwa conducted by institutions from the Gulf supported by petrodollars), it is also and above all the product of internal factors such as:

- The desire of many young Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya ʿulamāʾ (most of them from modest backgrounds) to take their revenge on the traditional Sūfī ʿulamāʾ (most of them from local important families);
- The feeling (justified or not) among East African Muslims of having been marginalized and relegated to a position of second-class citizens in their own country;
- The renewed conversion activities led by evangelists, particularly those of Pentecostal churches.

All these factors pushed young Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya ʿulamāʾ to use the local tradition of malumbano/mashindano (competition) for daʿwa. One piece of evidence that shows that internal factors are more important here than external factors is the fact that after the terrorist attacks in the US of 9/11 and the subsequent suspension of money transfers from the Gulf countries to East Africa, the Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya daʿwa activities in East Africa continued as before: local donors for daʿwa appeared and associations and other local institutions of daʿwa began to come up with internal fundraising activities. The primacy of internal over external factors is also evident in activities of conversion to Islam in the past led by Sūfī brotherhoods (ṭuruq).

Let us remember, again, that the Muslims of Kenya and Tanzania complain of being excluded in the spheres of decision-making by their fellow Christians because they are less educated than them. It is true that Christians were already educated in the schools of Catholic and Protestant missionaries while Muslims avoided sending their children to these schools out of a fear that the missionaries would convert them to Christianity. In fact, the Christian missionaries, who had the monopoly on the education system before independence, accepted, theoretically, all children in their schools. However, only parents who were Christians or those who were not but did not mind that their children might become Christians, sent their children to the mission schools. And indeed, these

children became Christians through the mission school. Many Muslims, who feared, rightly or wrongly, that their children might become Christians, refused to send them to mission schools. There were certainly some Muslim parents who did send their children to mission schools and who were able to ensure that they received a modern education without converting to Christianity. But this kind of Muslim parent with strong confidence was in the minority. And since there were not modern confessional schools for Muslims, Muslims have been left behind in terms of modern education compared with their fellow Christians.

When the newly independent states of Kenya and Tanzania established secular schools open to all children regardless of their parents' religion, Christians already had a long head start in the field of education, compared with Muslims. Moreover, Muslims accused the governments in place, led by Christians, of implementing (with the help of Christian churches and the former colonial power) a policy of marginalization of Muslims in the school system and training institutions.[7] Whether these statements are true or not is secondary. What is important to note is that we always hear these statements from Muslims. This frustration, well founded or not, helps the spread of daʿwa.

Overall, we can say that there are two main endogenous motivations for the new waves of Islamic conversion activities which we see today in East Africa (Kenya and Tanzania): a political or politico-religious motivation and a purely religious motivation. Both motivations are mixed and provide all political adventurers, missionaries and fanatic Muslims from inside and outside East Africa a fertile ground on which they can conduct their activities.

The two following factors contribute equally to daʿwa: first, the proximity of the two holy cities of Islam (Mecca and Medina) and Arabia in general; and second, the presence of Arab and Indian Muslim communities in the region for many centuries – communities that continually move back and forth between the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, bringing with them new ideas and material objects.

Another aspect this book seeks to demonstrate is the differences that may exist between the conversion model of the Sūfī brotherhoods and that of

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[7] See, among others, Mohamed Said, *Islamic Movement and Christian Hegemony. The Rise of Muslim Militancy in Tanzania 1970–2000*, Dar es Salaam, 1998 (unpublished manuscript).

the Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya, in relation to the different conceptions each model has of authority and the legitimacy of this authority, and in relation to the conception each group has of the affiliation and belonging to the group in which the individual is integrated after his convertion.

In light of the various conversion biographies recounted in this book, one could, indeed, make the following remarks. The majority of people who have converted to a ṭarīqa did so by family tradition: you are born from parents of Shādhiliyya or Qādiriyya, for example, so you are disciple (murīd) of the same ṭarīqa, or you become again a disciple if you had neglected it for a while. This is a religious affiliation or a conversion following the logic of family tradition. Having joined the ṭarīqa, the disciple bends himself to the authority of the shaykh, who is everything for the disciple: his teacher of Islamic knowledge, his spiritual guide, his advisor in private affairs, etc.

On the other hand, the majority of those who convert to Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya Islam (always, in the case of the biographies reported in this book) have not done so by family tradition, but in acting precisely against the family tradition. Indeed, they did not follow the tradition of their parents, which was also the tradition of the ʿulamāʾ who had taught them in their madāris (sing. madrasa) on the coast before they went to study in the Gulf or Pakistan. The Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya people say that their conversion is motivated by the desire to conform only to the authority of the fundamental texts of Islam (the Qurʾān and the Ḥadīth) and not to any human authority as do the followers of the Sūfī brotherhoods, who follow their guides. However, if we look closely at these Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya in their social environment, as I did, it becomes clear that the authority represented by their shaykh (the guide also known as their Amīr, their ustādh or "master", and various other names) is not too different to that of the Sūfī shaykh vis-à-vis his disciples. In both categories, we have an authority representing a center around which disciples act.

This book consists of six chapters. The first deals with the genealogy and the different meanings of the concept of daʿwa (lit. call, invitation to Islam). Daʿwa is the most widely used concept in Islam to refer to conversion activity and the "Islamic mission" toward Muslims and non-Muslims whom the Muslim missionary (dāʿī) wants to convert to the version of Islam that he believes the only true and valid one. There are, of course, other terms also used for the same activity, for example tablīgh (lit. transmission of a message), a term used by Shīʿa Ithnā ʿasharī in East Africa and the Jamāʿat al-Tablīgh movement (Tablīgh Jamāʿāt)

everywhere. But the fact remains that it is the term daʿwa which is the most commonly used. If we want to stick to the meaning of daʿwa, we will understand, for example, that traditionally the method of "Islamic mission" is to call people to come and listen to the message, while the method of the "Christian mission" would be to go to the people to bring them the message. But we know that it does not happen in this way in reality. Muslim missionaries imitate many methods of Christian missionaries, and these latter, in some places, have also in turn been inspired by Islamic methods that have already proved their efficiency. The theme of mutual borrowing, intended or not, is, moreover, one of the things that this book reveals, especially where the discussion is of the Muslim Bible Scholars (or Muslim preachers/Wahubiri wa kislamu).

Concerning the genealogy of daʿwa, as a concept denoting Islamic missionary activity it stemmed from the Shīʿa Ismāʿīlī of the 10th century. Although Muslims claim that making daʿwa was always an obligation, the ideological meaning given to this concept today, especially among Sunni Muslims, finds its origin in the Salafism of 19th century, the best-known promoters of which were Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–97), Muḥammad ʿAbdu (1849–1905) and Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935). For them, the aim was not only to convert non-Muslims to Islam but, above all, to call (daʿwa) Muslims to return to the force and the "purity" of the early days of Islam, in order to become able to counter European colonial hegemony.

Rashīd Riḍā, who, among other things, was trying in his journal *al-Manār* to counter the activities of Christian missionaries, created in Cairo in 1912 the Maʿhad al-daʿwa wa al-Irshād (Institute of Daʿwa and Religious Guidance),[8] which would train missionaries of Islam. There was, by such a leader of the Islamic reformism (Iṣlāḥ), an obvious borrowing from Christian missions. Rashīd Riḍā was very familiar with the Christian missionaries and their activities, in al-Qalamūn, his native village in Syria, where he used to meet them, and when went to Egypt, where he continued to interact with them through his journal *al-Manār*.[9]

The name "al-daʿwa wa al-Irshād" would later refer to several institutions involved in spreading Islam. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the name of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs is the "Wizāra al-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyya wa -l-

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[8] See Hashīb al-Samarrāʾī, *Rashīd Riḍā al-Mufassir*, Baghdad, Dār ar-Risāla li-aṭ-ṭibāʿa, 1397/1977, p. 309.
[9] See Umar Ryad, "Rashīd Riḍā and a Danish Missionary: Alfred Nielsen (d. 1963) and three Fatwās from Al-Manār," in *IslamoChristiana*, vol. 28, 2002, pp. 87–107.

Awqāf wa al-Daʿwa wa al-Irshād" (Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Pious Foundations, Daʿwa and Religious Guidance). In many Islamic universities of the world, Faculties of Daʿwa and Foundations of Islamic Religion (Kuliyya al-daʿwa wa uṣūl al-dīn) were created. The Wahhābiyya, the supporters of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwān al-Muslimūn) and other Islamic movements, have also seized on the concept of daʿwa as their leitmotif to make their propaganda.

The same could be said of the term generally used today by Muslims to refer to the new convert to Islam. In Islam, there is not, strictly speaking, a single fixed term to name a convert to Islam. To say that someone has converted to Islam, the classical Arabic Islamic texts use the formulas "Dakhala al-Islām" (lit. he entered to Islam) or "Iʿtanaqa al-Islām" (lit. he embraced Islam, he gave a hug to Islam). Only today does modern Arabic use the term "muhtadin" (lit. one who has followed the correct spiritual or moral path after long lost) to designate one who has converted to Islam. But again, as we can see, the meaning is biased, partisan and non-neutral, because it suggests that we are only saved and well guided if we converted to Islam.

The second chapter examines the Islamization of East Africa during the European colonization of the region. Although Islam has been implanted in East Africa since between the 8th and 9th centuries, it has long been confined to the coast and neighboring islands. It was not until the 19th century that it began to spread into the hinterland under the combined effect of the following four factors:

1. The establishment of the Oman's Sultanate in Zanzibar in 1840 and the intense trade activities within the continent which resulted from that.[10]
2. The Sūfī ṭuruq emerged in the region during this period, and its members went further into the continental interior to convert people to both Islam and to their Sūfī brotherhoods.
3. Conversion activities of Christian missionaries led Muslims to engage more, by reaction, in Islamization activity.
4. The colonial administration, which, in recruiting to their administrative system of the hinterland Swahili Muslims who could read and write, and Swahili military and askari from Sudan, unwittingly contributing to the Islamization of the up-country.

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[10] See, among others, W. D. Cooley, "The Geography of Nyassi," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, vol. 15, 1845, p. 207.

>   These soldiers and government employees, while performing their
>   duties, converted people to Islam at the same time. Thus, the
>   Islamization of the up-country was a "step-by-step conversion"
>   favored by social interactions, without having a strategy or a push
>   for Islamization set in advance by a political or any social group.

This shows us how the meeting of different factors and the force of
circumstances can create a powerful historical event which we did not
think about before.

The third chapter deals with the conversion activities carried out by the
Sūfī ṭuruq in the up-country, especially those of the two most important
ṭuruq in the region, the Qādiriyya and the Shādhiliyya. For if it is true that
the individuals and groups engaged in conversion activities in the up-
country of East Africa today are predominantly from the Salafiyya-
Wahhābiyya movement, it has not always been so. This is a phenomenon
that only began in the mid-1980s. Until that time, and since the 19th
century, Islam had been spread in the hinterland and in the up-country
mostly by members and supporters of the two Sūfī brotherhoods
mentioned above. In this chapter, I show concretely what were the ways
and means of dissemination of these ṭuruq, and the various modalities of
the process of conversion to Islam through these Sūfī brotherhoods. In the
same vein, the adhesion modalities (or reconversion) to ṭuruq are
presented here through the biographies of some followers of these ṭuruq.
In the two Sūfī brotherhoods, similarities predominate over differences.
For example, in each of these ṭuruq we see the two main methods of
conversion specific to Sūfī brotherhoods: conversion or reconversion
through the rite of passage of bayʿa (oath of allegiance to the ṭarīqa and to
the shaykh); and conversion by tradition and by family affiliation. These
Sūfī brotherhoods are not dead today – quite the contrary: they are
showing a kind of revival motivated primarily by the desire to resist their
Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya opponents.

The ṭuruq and the Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya groups share, curiously, certain
patterns of conversion. One of these, for example, is the requirement for a
disciple of the Sūfī ṭuruq to recognize the guide (Khalīfa, shaykh) as the
central authority to which he owes obedience. In Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya
circles, even if it is taught that the true muṭawwiʿ (lit. obedient to Allah
only) must only comply with the prescriptions of the Qurʾān and the
Ḥadīth, the fact remains that he is, at the same time, obedient (muṭawwiʿ)
to what the guide of the group recommends to do or not to do. In this
sense, the authority of the Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya guide, whatever name he

may have (Amīr, ustādh, etc.) , is not very different to that of the Sūfī guide.

In the last three chapters, we are in the heart of the matter of this book. Here we are concerned, essentially, with a configuration of Islamic conversion in which the actors are the "converter" or missionary of Islam (dāʿī) and the converted, where this latter may be:

1. A person who has never belonged to any religion before converting to Islam.
2. Someone who has abandoned his religion to convert to Islam, someone who has therefore changed his religion.
3. Someone who has "reconverted" to his traditional religion, after having abandoned it or neglected it or followed it in a passive way.[11] This latter is often at the forefront in Islamic fundamentalist activities like those of the Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya (Islamic revival) movement, and even those of Islamic terrorists.

The other actor in this configuration of the Islamic conversion is the "Christian converter" or Christian missionary. This actor is represented in East Africa today by the missionaries of the Pentecostal churches, by far the most aggressive among Christian missionaries in the region. They are, therefore, the primary Christian opponents to the Muslim missionary in what we may call the "marketplace of religious conversions" in East Africa.

Two factors then complete the configuration of Islamic conversion: the discourse of Islamic conversion and the sociopolitical environment, both national and transnational.

In Chapter 4 ("New institutions and Agents of the Islamic Conversion and Daʿwa: Islamic NGOs and Muslim Institutions of Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa"), after having explained the regional and international political context, I deal mainly with the issue of foundations and Islamic international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which, though having their head offices in the Gulf and Pakistan, also have offices in East Africa that are very active in the "Islamic mission" (daʿwa). This is the case, for example, with the African Muslim Agency, a Kuwaiti Islamic NGO inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood of Kuwait. This NGO, with

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[11] My typology of "the converted" is inspired by that of Danièle Hervieu-Léger in her book *Le pèlerin et le converti. La religion en mouvement*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999, p. 120.

headquarters in Kuwait, is the only Arab or Islamic NGO whose activities are focused only in Sub-Saharan Africa. Those who work in the offices of this NGO in Africa are mainly Moroccans and Sudanese (citizens of two Arab countries considered more familiar with Sub-Saharan Africa), together with locals who have studied in Arab countries. The agency runs bilingual (Arabic-French or Arabic-English) primary and secondary schools in both West Africa and East Africa. In the latter region, it ran, in addition, the College of Education in Zanzibar and a faculty of Islamic law in Thika, near Nairobi (Kenya). In 2010 this latter become the Umma University (Jāmiʿat al-Umma), with three faculties (Faculty of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Sharīʿa and Faculty of Economic Studies). The African Muslim Agency built clinics and public water wells and, of course, mosques on the coast and in the up-country.

Another Arab and Islamic NGO which was very active in East Africa was the al-Ḥaramayn Foundation, of Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya inspiration, whose headquartered was in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia). After the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States the offices of al-Ḥaramayn in East Africa (and elsewhere in the world, especially in Saudi Arabia itself) were closed. This was because al-Ḥaramayn (or al-Ḥaramain) was suspected by US authorities of having links with Islamic terrorists. Al-Ḥaramayn realized the same "development" projects in its Islamic mission activities as those of the African Muslim Agency. The only difference was that the transmission of knowledge in the educational institutions of al-Ḥaramayn took place only in Arabic. In addition, the religious knowledge which was taught was based primarily on the Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya doctrine. The accusation made against al-Ḥaramayn according to which it had relations with the Islamist terrorists of 11 September 2001 and its dissolution which followed, raised a debate in Saudi Arabia about the responsibility of Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya religious education, that of the Muslim Brotherhood and its ideology, and in general that of the Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya movement for the religious radicalization of Muslim youth, especially in Saudi Arabia. I discuss here the terms of this debate in relation to al-Ḥaramayn, and in relation to the commitment of young Islamists in the Afghan war against the Soviet army and the negative effects of this dirty war.

Besides these two Arab institutions of Islamic mission, there was also a Pakistani NGO with the same objective as the two but inspired by the ideology of Mawdūdī: this was the Islamic Foundation. This institution, whose headquarters were in England, had two offices in Sub-Saharan Africa: one in Lagos (Nigeria) and another in Nairobi (Kenya). The office

of the Islamic Foundation in Kenya realized similar daʿwa projects to those of al-Ḥaramayn and the African Muslim Agency, notably with regard to Islamic religious teaching. For example, it opened the Islamic Institute of Kisauni in Mombasa, which in 2002 became Kisauni Islamic University.

What was especially remarkable here was the relationship that these three institutions had between them in East Africa (as institutions), since they helped each other in carrying out their projects. The relationships maintained between the individuals who were working in these three NGO were also remarkable. For, though proceeding from different Islamic doctrines and ideologies, these three institutions shared certain common objectives. The worldviews and the doctrinal differences between the individuals who were working in these NGOs and foundations were not all that different. Furthermore, people who shared the same doctrine and the same Islamic ideology did not necessarily work in the same Islamic NGOs, but often in different NGOs.

Also, we should not understand that Africans submitted passively to the policies of these transnational Islamic NGOs – quite the contrary. Often, they instrumentalized them for personal and collective interests, or involved them in their internal political struggles. They succeeded particularly because African Islamist activists were very well familiar with the mechanisms of these institutions, their staff and their working language. We should not forget that they were trained in Arab countries and Pakistan, and some of them had, for a time, themselves worked in the administration of the NGOs.

The education, conversion discourse and training itineraries of some Islamist activists of the region are also a theme in this chapter. Therefore, the chapter deals with these three main themes and the interconnections between them:

1. The itineraries of imāms-missionaries, starting from their villages up-country, where they had begun their primary religious education before going to pursue religious studies in the Gulf countries and Pakistan, first passing through Islamic schools and institutes of the coast (Lamu, Mambrui, Mombasa and Kisauni in Kenya; Tanga, Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar in Tanzania). After their return, they taught in schools and Islamic institutes on the coast, or worked in transnational Islamic NGOs on the coast and in the capitals

     (Nairobi or Dar es Salaam), before going to establish themselves in the up-country as teachers and imāms- missionaries.

2. Analysis of the preaching of these missionaries, including the sermons given by imāms during Friday prayers.

3. The local social environment, characterized by the kind of relationship that Muslims of different versions of Islam have with each other, on the one hand, and with Christians and other non-Muslims, on the other. Normally these relationships have been managed by the Muslim association of the city or locality. The Muslim association has its headquarters in the offices of the main mosque, where the imām is part of the leadership of the association. In the larger cities of the up-country (Nakuru, Kisumu and Mumias in Kenya; Korogwe, Lushoto and Moshi in Tanzania) and also in those of the coast (Mombasa and Lamu in Kenya; Tanga and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania), where I conducted my fieldwork, I always encountered a conflict tearing the Muslim community: a conflict between Sunnī and Shīʿa, or between Salafiyya-Wahhābiyya and other Sunnī. This kind of conflict was primarily doctrinal. The other kind of conflict tearing the Sunnī themselves concerned the leadership, management and funds of the Muslim association. In these conflicts, ethnic divisions played a very important role.

Chapter 5 ("The Role of Kiswahili in the Work of Evangelization and Islamization in East Africa") is essentially about the following two themes: the use of Kiswahili by the first Christian missionaries in their work of evangelization and the translation of the Bible and some chapters of the Qurʾān; and the translation of the Qurʾān into Kiswahili by Muslims in order to spread Islam in the interior of the region. This work was initiated by the Ahmadiyya and then later continued by Shaykh ʿAbdallah Ṣāliḥ al-Farisi. In each of these moments of the translation of the Qurʾān for the propagation of Islam (daʿwa), I present the controversies opposing the actors at the time and the arguments of each side.

In Chapter 6 ("The Resurgence of Claims of the Autonomy and Islamic Identity of Mwombao, the coastal area of Kenya"), I present the preaching of Shaykh Abdillahi Nasser, a religious and political actor in Mombasa, very active at the time of the accession of Kenya to its independence. Abdillahi Nasser and his supporters were demanding the autonomy of Mwambao, the coastal region of Kenya, not the independence of Kenya. The importance of this preaching lies also in the fact that in the identity and political claims of Muslims in the coastal region of Kenya today and

their complaints of marginalization, the issue of the autonomy of Mwambao often resurfaces. Another reason for its importance is the figure of the author of the preaching, Shaykh Abdillahi Nasser, himself – a well-known politician and ʿālim in Kenya. He was Sunni like most Kenyan Muslims, but later converted to Shīʿa Ithnā ʿasharī.

At the end of the chapter, I talk about the kind of relationship I had with leaders of some institutions of Kenyan Muslims in Mombasa. Except in some cases, my relations with the Muslim communities in which I conducted my research were not bad. People were initially very reserved, even full of suspicion of me. They wondered (and some said that clearly to me) if I was not a CIA spy. They were reassured when they saw me living with them, talking to them in their language (Kiswahili), discussing Islam with ʿulamāʾ in mosques before and after the congregational prayers (ṣalāwāt al-jamāʿa). I was with the community almost daily. They subsequently started to appreciate my presence among them, and even more so when they knew that I was a Mngazija (from the island of Ngazija/Grande Comore). This was probably the result of the history of Islam in the region, during which the majority of specialists in the religion (ʿulamāʾ) originated from Ḥadramaut or from Grande Comore. I therefore tried to analyze my ambiguous situation as a researcher on Islam in East Africa, in the period after September 11, 2001, during which Muslims of the region were under suspicion from their fellow Christians and under police harassment. My situation was in fact somewhat ambiguous and not easy to decipher for my interlocutors. Being a Muslim from the Comoros, I shared with them the Swahili culture and in addition, while I was a researcher, I was also an ʿālim or scholar of Islam.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MISSIONS OF CONVERSION TO ISLAM, OR DAʿWA: THE MEANING OF A CONCEPT

We can consider the activities of institutions of daʿwa to be missionary activities, even though in Islam there is much less of a tradition of mission than in Christianity.

Conversion and proselytizing activities are equally well known in Islam as in Christianity. There are, however, some differences in this field between Islam and Christianity. For example, in Islam the formula used to describe the activities of conversion is daʿwa and not mission.[1] In other words, if we stick to the literal meaning of 'invitation' or 'call', in Islam the preacher does not go to the people he wants to convert, but rather calls them to him, whereas in Christianity, the preacher goes to the people he wants to convert and preaches the Gospel. The zeal to win converts stems from, among other things, the early days of Christianity. According to the tradition, the last injunction of Christ to his disciples before his ascension was: "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, until the end of the world" (Matthew xxviii, 19–20).

To say that someone has converted to Islam, the Arabic language uses the phrases "Dakhala al-Islām" (lit. he entered to Islam) or "Iʿtanaqa al-Islām" (lit. he gave a hug to Islam, he embraced Islam). In East Africa, they say "Amesilimu" (lit. in Kiswahili: he Islamized himself or he became Muslim).

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[1] Among the few studies done on the propagation of Islam in East Africa where the term "Islamic mission" is used to identify it, it is worth mentioning Armand Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs du Maniema*, pp. 20–21 (Maniema or Manyema is located in southeastern Congo).

Moreover, in Islam, there is no specific term to name someone converted to the religion. Modern Arabic uses the term "muhtadin" (which literally means, in reality, the person who has followed the correct spiritual or moral path after being lost for a long time). However, while the literal meaning is different, what is meant is the same.

In fact, the term daʿwa which Muslims use today to describe missionary activities stems from the Shīʿa Ismāʿīlī, more exactly from Abū ʿAbdallah al-Shīʿī (d. 911), who left the East in the 10th century to go and carry out propaganda (mission) in Maghreb. This would lead to the establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate, whose first khalīfa was ʿUbaydillah al-Mahdī (d. 934).

In the Sunni tradition, on the other hand, Muslims should first conquer a territory and only then start a campaign among the conquered people in order to convert them to Islam. Those who did not want to convert to Islam could continue to practice their religion as dhimmi (protected) with payment of a tax called jizya, and in return, those in power (Muslims) would ensure peace and security for the dhimmi people. But all this is according to classical Islamic studies. Practice, but also the texts used by Sunni Muslims today in their conversion activities, are not conditioned to the conquest of territory.

Although, nowadays, Muslims evoke Qurʾanic verses and ḥadīths to support the view that doing daʿwa was and still is an obligation, the whole ideology around the concept of daʿwa today dates from the Salafism of the 19th century, the best-known promoters of which were Muḥammad ʿAbdu, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī and Rashīd Riḍā. For these latter, in fact, the aim of doing daʿwa was not, first and foremost, to convert non-Muslims to Islam, but rather a call for Muslims to return to the force and "purity" of the early days of their religion in order to become able to cope with the hegemony of Europe, which was embarking on an enterprise of conquest of the Muslim world (and other non-Muslim worlds), by armed force, by its scientific discoveries and by its Christian missions. Their idea was, therefore, to say that if the Muslims, once conquerors and rulers, were now conquered and dominated, it was because they had abandoned the Islamic values of the Salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ (pious predecessors) – hence the word "Salafī" (or "Salafiyya") is used to describe this movement. According to Islamic tradition, the pious predecessors in question are the generation of Muslims who were alongside Prophet Muḥammad and the three generations that succeeded them. Therefore, we can say that the rediscovery of the concept of daʿwa

by the Salafism of the end of 19th century was an internal conversion,
(kind of reconversion of the converted, and not an external one, i.e. the
conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. But over time, the term "daʿwa"
would come to mean all activities of internal and external conversion.
Subsequently, the methods that daʿwa would adopt would resemble those
of Christian missions. That was why, while being the first opponents of
daʿwa, Christian missions represented at the same time a model of method
and strategy that daʿwa imitated in order to spreading the message.
Newspapers and magazines later carried the name "daʿwa."[2]

Rashīd Riḍā, who among others things tried in his journal *al-Manār* to
counter the activities of Christian missionaries, created in 1912 the
Jamʿiyyat al-daʿwa wa al-Irshād (Institute of Daʿwa and Religious
Guidance).[3] The Institute would engage in Islamic mission activity and
train missionaries of Islam. The idea came to him from what he saw
among the Christian missionaries who were in al-Qalamūn, his native
village, and in Tripoli, the closest city to al-Qalamūn. The Institute ceased
to operate following the outbreak of the First World War and was unable
to resume its activities after the end of the war. But Riḍā pursued daʿwa in
various forms. The term "al-daʿwat wa al-irshād", probably invented by
Riḍā and with which he named his Institute, would later be used by many
to designate several Islamic institutions aiming to spread Islam. In Saudi
Arabia, for example, the name of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs was
"Wizāra al-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyya wa al-Awqāf wa al-daʿwa wa al-irshād"
(Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Waqf, Daʿwa and Religious Guidance).

In many Islamic universities, faculties of daʿwa and foundations of Islam
(Kuliyya al-daʿwa wa uṣūl al-dīn) were created, and many Islamic
organizations created special committees of daʿwa. The word "daʿwa" is
so central among Muslims today that the true Muslim is the one who is
doing daʿwa.

The well-known group Tablīgh Jamāʿāt (Jamāʿat al-Tablīgh) employs,
instead of "daʿwa," the word "tablīgh (lit. transmission, and by extension
transmission of the Islamic message). However, even though today
members of Tablīgh Jamāʿāt practice also external conversion, the original
purpose of its creation was the internal conversion of the Muslims of the
Indian subcontinent (the region where Tablīgh Jamāʿāt first emerged) in

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[2] See, for example, the weekly *Majallat al-daʿwa*, a journal created in 1951 by the
Egyptian Muslim Brothers.
[3] See al-Samrrāʾī, *Rashīd Riḍā al-Mufassir*, p. 309.

order to make them resistant to the conversion activities of Christian missions as well as of Hindu religious groups like Arya Samaj. In East Africa, the Bilal Muslim Mission (a Shīʿa Ithnā ʿasharī group) also used the term "tablīgh" instead of "daʿwa," but ultimately the meaning remains the same.

There are many Qurʾanic verses that Muslims use as scriptural evidence of the obligation of daʿwa, but two verses seem to be the most quoted. They are:

1. "Invite people with wisdom and good teaching, to follow the path of your God and argue with them in the best courteous way."[4] This verse establishes, therefore, the ethics of daʿwa, the attitude which the Muslim should have when he performs the "duty" of daʿwa.

2. "It is not an obligation for all the believers to go all together to a battle. Why some men from each faction do not go to learn the religion in order to teach their people when they return to them? So they can guard themselves against evil."[5] This verse seems to describe one of the main methods of Islam in its mission activities. If we follow the literal meaning of the verse, a few obvious things also follow. First, the emphasis is on learning of Islamic knowledge, then, the missionaries should be (preferably) from the group they want to convert. In addition, they have to leave their group for a while, in search of Islamic knowledge, and only then return to convert the members of the group in question to Islam through the transmission of the Islamic knowledge acquired.

The meaning of the second verse reminds us both of the system of riwāq (students of the same origin living in a community and sharing the same house) which formerly prevailed in the Islamic University of al-Azhar in Cairo, and of the system of biʿtha (pl. buʿūth or biʿthāt; mission of students), initiated in Egypt by Muḥammad ʿAlī Pasha. In the case of arwiqa (pl. of riwāq), it was the foreign students who were brought together, once in al-Azhar, depending on the country or locality from which they came. The biʿtha were the students groups that the Egyptian government of Muḥammad ʿAlī and those of his successors sent to Europe for training (in universities and other training institutions), as part of their policy of modernization through the acquisition of European scientific knowledge. Today, in al-Azhar, the word "arwiqa" is no longer used. It is

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[4] 16, al-Naḥl, 125.
[5] 9, al-Tawba, 122.

precisely replaced by buʿūth (missions). Today, the dormitory for foreign students in al-Azhar is just called "Madīna al-buʿūth al-islāmiyya" (Islamic city for Islamic missions). The first and second cycle of the secondary institute of al-Azhar where foreign students spend their graduation years of high school before entering university, is called Maʿhad al-buʿūth al-Islāmiyya.

In other words, what is in question in this second verse is the idea of young people leaving their societies to go to learn elsewhere, and then to come back in order to convert the members of their society to what they think is the "right religion." The idea expressed by this verse is well illustrated by the Islamic University of Medina (Saudi Arabia), where it is the slogan written on the main entrance of the campus.

The al-Azhar University, the office of the fatwas of Saudi Arabia (Dār al-iftāʾ), the Muslim World League (Rābiṭat al-ʿālam al-Islāmī) – each of these institutions give the name of mabʿūthūn (missionaries; sing. mabʿūth) to the people whom they formally appoint and send to foreign countries to conduct daʿwa. However, in everyday life, people call them duʿāt (missionaries; sing. dāʿī or dāʿiya).

Indian Shīʿa Khoja Ithnā ʿasharī (Twelver Shīʿa) in East Africa continue, on the other hand, until today to call duʿāt the mullahs sent to the region by the Central Khoja Shīʿa Ithnā ʿasharī, which is located in Mumbai (Bombay) in India, or by the centre of all Shīʿa Ithnā ʿasharī, which is in Najaf (Iraq).

Therefore, from these various meanings which the concepts of mission and of daʿwa have follow conversion practices and methods that necessarily differ between the two religions (Christianity and Islam), that have not remained static but have been dynamic in particular in imitating and inspiring each other. Highlighting this dynamic of imitation and influence, conscious or not, between the activities of Christian conversion and those of Islamic conversion is also something that is at the heart of this book. So, we can not say today that there are pure Islamic practices of conversion on one hand, and pure Christian practices of conversion on the other.

Another difference – that is not theoretical but reflects what I encountered on the ground – is that while in Christianity (especially among Pentecostal American churches, the most active in East Africa in the field of proselytism) conversion through preaching (emotional conversion) is

paramount, it is secondary in Islam and among Muslims. In Islam, two types of conversion are paramount: conversion through social interactions and conversion through transmission of religious knowledge.

It is also to be noted that in their work of conversion in the region today, the new Muslim missionaries start first by converting long-standing Muslims (but from traditional Islam), before converting Christians and followers of traditional African religions. This is also true of the new Christian missionaries, such as Pentecostals: they begin first by converting long-standing Christians (Lutheran, Anglican or Catholic), before converting Muslims and followers of traditional African religions.

However, despite the intense work of daʿwa carried out in the up-country by supporters of various fundamentalist versions of Islam (the most active groups in the field of Muslim conversion), I noticed that in general, the inhabitants of the up-country are still reluctant to be bound to a single religion, preferring to navigate between multiple religious denominations. This led me to ask the question: why is it that, in East Africa, inhabitants of the up-country navigate easily and repeatedly from one religion to another? With reference to my personal observation, I can respond by advancing the following possible reasons.

1. Islamized or not, Christianized or not, inhabitants of the up-country, in general, are first attached to their clan, to their ethnic group and its traditional beliefs. The religion of the book has not yet succeeded in replacing the bonds of the original traditional community with those of the new confessional community. In other words, the new religion (whether Islam or Christianity) is not yet cemented and hence has not become the preferred tradition of reference.
2. There is an absence of a long tradition of the religions of the book.
3. The intense competitive work between different religious groups and different religious missions (Christian and Islamic) in the up-country means that people are very much solicited by the propaganda of various contrasting missions;[6]

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[6] This kind of intense competition did not exist in the coastal areas that had been Islamized a long time ago, at least until recently. Now, the competitive work in this area has even reached the coast, as evidenced by the profusion of open-air preaching (mihadhara) and the transposition of malumbano in this field. Malumbano (Kiswahili): interrogation, discussion. From lumbana (v.): to examine, speak publicly, relate, narrate facts; and mlumbadji: interrogator, questioner, speaker. The malumbano are closer to mashindano or ushindani (Kiswahili):

4. To convert to the religions of the book is also, for people from the up-country, to convert to modernity, which also means for the converted the opening up of new horizons of life improvement. The learning of reading and writing is the first door to this life improvement. Therefore, inhabitants of the up-country could consider their successive conversions as an accumulative method of self improvement.

5. The conversion to Islam, or rather the penetration of the Arab-Swahili people in the up-country, before European missionaries had, paradoxically, promoted the work of Christian missionaries. In this regard, Alexander Mackay said: "Where the Arab has travelled the missionary may go any day, where the Arab has not ventured, the missionary must exercise the greatest caution in trying to go."[7] This means that after they were reached by Islam, the people of the up-country were soon also solicited by Christian missionaries, primarily those affiliated to the three major churches, Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran, and then later on reached by other Protestant churches, most of them American, such as Pentecostal churches.

6. Another interesting point revealing two different methods of conversion emerges from statements of the first Christian missionaries saying that, in the interior of the continent, the Arab Muslims were not interested in converting the natives to Islam but rather in maximizing profits in their business. To the extent when they were interested in the conversion of the natives, it was to convert chiefs who would facilitate trade with them, or when the converted was a slave who would take care of cooking and slaughtering animals. This perception of Christian missionaries was not completely wrong, especially as Omani Arabs who traded in the up-country were ʿIbāḍī, not Sunni like the majority of African Muslims in the region. This difference had resulted in two different modes of conversion – conversion by Christian missionaries, done by professionals, very fast and offensive, and conversion by Arab

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emulation, rivalry, competition, match, fight. This is a very Swahili cultural practice, which, in my opinion, also plays an important role in competitive action in the field of conversions in the region. There is also the fact that many Christian missions today are conducting intense missionary activities on the coast: the large church recently built at the entrance to the city of Mombasa demonstrates that.

[7] See Mackay, *Mackay by his Sister*, p. 421, cited by Arye Oded, *Islam in Uganda. Islamization through a Centralized State in Pre-Colonial Africa*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1974, p. 225.