



### **LOCAL MUSLIM ASSOCIATIONS AND THE RESURGENCE OF ISLAM IN ZAMBIA.**

Within the past few decades, Islam has undoubtedly gained remarkable momentum in all parts of the world. The main objective of the proposed book is to put at the disposal of the readers material uncovered during three years of archival and fieldwork research in view of a PhD thesis presented and defended at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) in April 2005. Far from pretending to be exhaustive, the book has the interest of being the first attempt at a systematic study of the question of Islam in Zambia. The presentation of the material and the general content itself have been re-adapted to suite a wider public reading.

In spite of representing a small minority of the population, about 0.5% according to the National Census of 2000, Islam has become a significant component of both the religious and socio-political landscape of Zambia within the past four decades. Since the 1970s a more conspicuous and socially engaged Muslim community has emerged through the construction of mosques, schools (religious and secular), orphanages, Islamic development projects and the propagation of Islamic literature, indicating both the resurgence of the pre-existing community and its expansion through new converts. The proliferation of local Muslim associations has given a new impetus to the propagation of Islam and has also contributed significantly to the strengthening of the already existing Muslim community. Their impact on society has opened up new horizons for the understanding of contemporary Islamic dynamism. In this respect, local and trans-national Muslim organizations have become fundamental to understanding the contemporary revival of Islam in countries like Zambia.

After the introduction, chapter one analyses the concept of Islamization and the key methods previously applied to the introduction of Islam into sub-Saharan Africa, an approach that provides a comparative basis for establishing the pre-eminence of local Muslim associations as a contemporary way of Islamization.

The history of the coming of Islam into Zambia has been divided into two main parts; chapter two, dealing with “The Gateways” of Islam into the country by early Muslim migrant communities and chapters three and four, dealing with the contemporary history, characterized by recent immigrant communities and the incorporation of indigenous converts. Due to methodological preferences, the detailed study of the contemporary history has been restricted to two regions of the country, Lusaka Province (covering mainly the capital city) and Eastern Province. Nonetheless, the situation of Islam in other parts of the country has equally received due, albeit brief, attention in chapter three.

Chapters three and four present the composition and the characteristics of the Muslim communities according to the different ethnic groups present in the province. The second part of each chapter analyses the organizational structures put in place in each province. The last part studies the resulting infrastructure and institutions.

The material presented in chapters three and four leaves very little room for the analysis of the effective role played by women in the current development of Islam, due to the dominance of men in most of the organizational structures. Hence, chapter five has been consecrated to the emergence of a more affirmative identity of Muslim women. Rather than being an appendage of the male-dominated community, Muslim women constitute a “world” of their own, a sub-society, in which activities are organized for the women by the women.

The lead taken by Muslim associations in locally organizing the Muslim community has to be evaluated against the background of Muslim movements with a more international outlook, such as the *Tablighī Jamā‘at* (TJ), the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission (AMM), the Africa Muslim Agency (AMA), Iran (through a network of Islamic university graduates, particularly from Razavi University) and Islamic universities in Arab and Asian countries, which have helped to give a more *global* discourse to the *local* Islam. Trans-national Muslim movements are a response to the challenges facing Islam on a global level and also a way of generalizing particular forms of Islamic practices. They do, however, need a local context as a concrete framework for their action. The nature of the exchange between local and global Islam is the objective of chapter six.

Although the book does not directly discuss the impact of Islam on other religions such as Christianity, it does nonetheless provide valuable information that could serve as a strong basis for such a reflection. Knowledge of who the Muslims in Zambia are and the way they go about their activities helps not only to reduce unfounded prejudices but also facilitates a more genuine dialogue and collaboration with them.