

Part 1: Introduction & Coast Region
Saade Abdallah (00:00)

Assalamu alaikum, everyone. Welcome to this first podcast of Muslims for Health, Leaving No Kenyan Behind. It's the inaugural episode, which is entitled, Muslims in Kenya, Historical

Mustafa Mahmoud (00:02)
Okay.

So,

Saade Abdallah (00:25)
demographic perspectives. Muslims in Kenya cut across all races and ethnicities, yet they are a very misunderstood and undermined and often stereotyped community. The purpose of these episodes is to build an investment case ~ for ~ having a more inclusive healthcare approach in Kenya. ~ Because we cannot attain universal healthcare unless we address even the religious barriers or~ issues of ~ access, ~ uptake and outcomes of health. ~ So we are beginning this series by first ~ understanding who are Muslims in Kenya.their distribution, their origins and all that. And we are really privileged in this episode to have two ~ experts on the demographics of Muslims. And ~ here I have the pleasure of introducing Professor Hassan Ndzovu from Moi University, Eldoret, as well as Mustafa Mahmoud Youssef.

Saade Abdallah (01:50)
from NAMATI organization, the Nairobi Division branch. Let me invite the two guests. Prof, could you begin by sharing background and explaining why you went into this field of studying about Islam in Kenya? Welcome.

Hassan Ndzovu (02:12)
Okay, thank you.

Hassan Ndzovu (02:16)
saade. Thank you, Sadi, for the invitation

to be here and to participate in a podcast. I'm really excited to be one of the guests today. As you already informed our listener, my name is Hassan Ndzovu and I'm an associate professor of religious studies at Moai University. In addition to that, I'm also the current chair of

Saade Abdallah (02:30)
Mm-mm.

Hassan Ndzovu (02:45)
Department of Philosophy, Religion and Theology at Moai University. My research interests, just for the purpose of our listener, ~ revolve around religion and politics, female religious authority within the Islamic tradition, ~ Islamic movements. I also write on religion and sexuality.

Islamic education and ~ currently at the moment I'm coordinating a research project which is running for four years on Muslim and popular culture in Africa. So this is where I'm coming from basically and to a certain extent you can say I've written extensively about Muslims in Kenya ~ apart from my numerous publications.

Hassan Ndzovu (03:40)

~ One of my first book was Muslims in Kenyan politics. So this has been in my areas of interest. Thank you.

Saade Abdallah (03:54)

Mustafa.

Mustafa Mahmoud (03:59)

Good morning, good evening, good afternoon, whatever time is on end. My name is Mustafa Mahmoud. I have over 12 years experience of working on issues of inclusion, in focus on issues of right to nationality. In Kenya in particular, I'm working with the Muslim community who have been subjected for years to differential treatment that is commonly referred to as VETTING.

Mustafa Mahmoud (04:27)

And the project began with the Nubian community and branched out to other parts of the country. So my work rotates around how we include Muslims in all spheres of life.

Saade Abdallah (04:41)

Thank you. So you can see we're really having experts. ~ We are all looking forward to learning so much from you. Professor, as we know, there's so much archaeological evidence that shows that Muslims are the longest settled people in this country. In fact, long before the country was even...

formulated in the late 1800s. ~ So ~ can you kindly explain how the Muslims entered and their migration and how they went into inland since, is it the seventh or eighth century?

Hassan Ndzovu (05:31)

Okay, thank you Saade once again. ~ First, before I respond to question, I think I would want to just briefly talk about the composition and I will link it now with the historical. So ~ with regard to just briefly about the composition of Muslims in the country in Kenya, I would like to first inform our audience that

Hassan Ndzovu (06:01)

As you correctly said, Islam has been associated with Kenya for many years. And some of the studies, some of the commentators have even estimated it to be not less than a thousand years. ~ However, despite this long ~ tenure, this long, earliest existence of Islam in the country, ~ it is also possible

Hassan Ndzovu (06:31)

to argue that it is not known when and how precisely, precisely, I'm emphasizing precisely, how Islam arrived in the country. ~ But according to local chronicles, ~ Islam is said to have arrived on the East African coast around the 7th century. And it's true, archaeological studies have been done, and according to

some of these archaeological studies, they have even proved the existence of Islam in this earliest period. For instance, the study that was done on Manda Island has confirmed Islam to have been ~ in this area around the 10th century. Therefore, ~ credit to its spread and expansion

is attributed to a variety of factors. Why I'm saying this is because it is not possible to pinpoint one single factor to have been solely responsible to the development of Islam in Kenya. ~ We need to appreciate that the entire process of Islamization in Kenya was long and complex. And what I mean by this is that

~ there were multiplicity of factors that contributed to ~ corresponding variety of different cases of conversion. And ~ because of these ~ numerous factors, ~ you will notice that ~ it explains a lot about the nature of Islam ~ in Kenya. So with regard now to the composition,

of Muslims in Kenya, ~ one will notice that Muslims in the country, ~ they cut across ~ geographical, ethnic, and racial boundaries. ~ Geographically, ~ the regions ~ within Kenya that are predominantly inhabited by Muslims are the northern region and also along the coastal streets.

which extends from ~ Vanga in the south to Kipini ~ in the north. And this is why one will also realize that the history of Islam in Kenya ~ is largely ~ associated, it is largely linked with the coastal and the northern region communities. ~ In fact, ~ the cost

and the northern regions of Kenya, they have considered to be part of the Muslim world. This is because ~ Islam is part of the daily scene ~ in this area. And what I mean by Islam being part of the daily scene ~ in this area is that ~ this is in terms of the way the people are dressing.

when you go and observe in this area. It is also in terms of the sound, the kind of sounds that people will be listening and hear what I have in mind. Maybe people will be listening to Qasida. You'd be hearing the Adhan five times in the day. You'd also maybe sometimes find people sitting.

on a baraza listening to a recorded sermon. I'm also referring to the kind of foods people are eating in these areas, and also sometimes even the types of ~ incense that one would smell as you walk around the neighborhood whereby the Muslims are living. So the bulk of the Muslim population in Kenya could be traced.

from the Somalis and the Boranas who are living in the northern region of Kenya, and also among the Digos, the Swahilis, the Arabs, and the Asians who are found living along the coast. ~ So, generally speaking, ~ the coastal region and the northern region could also be described as the homeland of Islam in Kenya.

What I mean by this, it is because of its profound foundation that is found in this area. So in addition to the Muslim numerical strength that is found in the coastal region and the northern

region, ~ it is also added by a few pockets of Muslim population who are scattered in the various urban centers in the interior.

Now I would now want to turn to question. I don't know if you want me to pause or if you want me now to answer question. And here I will now try just to highlight the early Islamic history in the Kenyan context.

Would you want me to continue or would you want me to pause?

Saade Abdallah (12:10)

No, I think we would be interested in understanding where they originated from. And you said there were many reasons.

Hassan Ndzovu (12:17)

Yeah, that's what, okay, I'm now moving to that.

Now I want to respond to your question and first I will address the early Islamic history on the Kenyan coast. So what I can say about that, this is that the earliest Muslims to arrive at the present day Kenya

Saade Abdallah (12:38)

Thank

Hassan Ndzovu (12:41)

was at the coast, and this was by the sea. These earliest Muslims came from the Middle Eastern region, and here I'm referring in particular to the Arabs and the Persian. And ~ there reasons as to why ~ these earliest Muslims came or arrived at the Kenyan coast.

And one of the reasons that has been advanced is that some of these ~ earliest Muslims came as seasonal traders. There existed a long tradition of trade relations ~ between the people living along the coastal region of Kenya and those coming from the Middle Eastern region.

The other reason that I've been

Hassan Ndzovu (13:40)

given as to why some Muslims came to coastal areas, it is ~ them coming as visitors. They came as visitors on a temporary stay. And this perhaps could be because they were visiting some of their family members who had immigrated to the Kenyan coast and settled.

~ in some of the islands and mainland towns found along this area. So gradually, over time, the population of Muslim settlements in the region started to increase. ~ At this point, I would also like to bring to the attention of our listener that ~ due to lack of evidence, ~ it is not very clear.

~ if these towns were established by the immigrants who came from the Middle Eastern region or there were settlements that had been started by indigenous local Africans in which the immigrants, settlers came and found them and decided to settle in. But nevertheless,

~ What we can say without doubt is that some of the settlement towns were at least inhabited by some of the Muslim immigrants. And this is demonstrated from the ruins of mosques that are found in some of these towns that today have disappeared. However, this proof, the proof

of the ruins of mosques should not be used to claim that the Muslims exclusively lived in this settlement to the exclusion of the indigenous Africans. And why I'm saying this is because it is possible, there are two theories here, it is possible that ~ the establishment of these towns happened in a variety of ways.

And one of the ways could be these settlements could have been started ~ by the local ~ indigenous non-Muslims ~ in collaboration with the immigrant Muslims from the Middle Eastern region. The other theory could be these settlements could have been started, established by the local indigenous ~ Africans. ~

local indigenous Africans, and the immigrants came and found them and decided to come and settle in. In addition to this, the arrival, it has been recorded that the arrival of the Hadhrami Sharifs on the Kenyan coast, and this was around the 14th and 15th centuries.

played a very critical role in the expansion of Islam in the region. And with the arrival, it resulted to some of the towns ~ along the coastal strip developing into significant centers of Islamic learning. In addition to this, we are also, it is also reported that there was migration from the rural area to

these terms ~ turning them to become predominantly Muslim. Although I like also to caution our listener that it has not been precisely established as to when this process occurred.

Saade Abdallah (17:52)

~ Thank you, Prof. What I would like you to say is which towns that these migrants entered Kenya because my understanding is in Lamu, Mombasa, Malindi... They also say is it Shungwai around Lamu, right? So what my understanding is, yes, they came, but they didn't come with females, right?

Hassan Ndzovu (18:15)

Okay.

Saade Abdallah (18:21)

Many of them were males. that's how they... Yes? Okay, go on.

Hassan Ndzovu (18:24)

Okay, I understand what you are saying and how I can respond to this is that the towns, the towns in which Muslims permanently lived, according to studies that have been done, were found in three offshore islands. And these three offshore islands included one, the Lamu Island together with the Bajuni Islands to the north covering Pate,

Saade Abdallah (18:31)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Hassan Ndzovu (18:58)

~ Siyu and Faza. Then there are two in

Saade Abdallah (18:58)

Yeah. Right.

Hassan Ndzovu (19:05)

the Mombasa Island, including the Klindini village on the southern part of the island. And three is what has been described as the Shirazi Vumba area, the Shirazi Vumba area of southeastern Kenya, comprising settlements on Wasini and Funzi Island.

Hassan Ndzovu (19:28)

So arguably,

it is from these settlements that Muslims were able now to interact with the non-Muslim communities who were living ~ close to them. And I will explain how. I will explain how. Now from the first scenario on Lamu Island and the Tana River area, we see from there now it was possible

Hassan Ndzovu (19:57)

to see conversion of the Oromo people. And this was around 1830s. This was around 1830s to 1900. And initially the conversion of the Oromo is credited to have been initiated by the Nabahani Swahili of Pati. So from this interaction, a few Oromo people

were converted to Islam before the end of the 19th century. While most of them remained in the Tana River area, were not converted until later, around 1930s to 1940s. And reason for their conversion have been given as follow. One, it was one because of the trade relations. ~ I've already said they existed this long.

mutual trade relation between the indigenous and the immigrant Swahili, ~ immigrant Muslim, sorry. And as a result of this trade relation, conversions were gradually witnessed over time. The other reason that has been given or that has been advanced is that of intermarriages, and especially the marriage of non-Muslim

~ or women to Muslim men. Then later, during the second decade of the 19th century, some Nabahani Swahili are reported to have moved from Pati and settled ~ in the Tana River Delta area in places such as Ozzie, ~ Ka'u, and Witu.

And the reason for their immigration to the Tana River Delta area, the reason that has been given was because of the ~ pressure or the hostility from the ~ Busaidi, who wanted to ~ take

over and control the coastal strip. So with the settlement of the Nabahani ~ around the Tana River Delta area, this facilitated

facilitated the Islamization of the Pokomo around 1890s. What I want the listener to understand is that this does not mean that the entire Pokomo community were converted to Islam, but it's what historians have described as the lower Pokomo.

That now, turning to my second scenario on Mombasa Island area, We see now the conversion of the Mijikenda ~ in both ~ the northern and the southern side of Mombasa. And I will explain how. Around late 1850s and early 1860s, some group of the Mazrui were reported to be moving north from Mombasa and established numerous villages

in the Takaungu area just before Malindi. And the reason for their migration from Mombasa to settle in the Takaungu area is also given to have been this hostility by the Busaidi. So some of the new villages which the Mazrui established, ~ such as Mtanganyiko, ~ became important centers of Islamic influence.

thereby facilitating conversion among the Ka'uma. Ka'uma is one of the ethnic group within the Mijikenda. So it has facilitated the conversion of the Ka'uma, ~ even though there is no record of Islamization among the Ka'uma. But it is possible to argue that some of the earliest Ka'uma converts were responsible in influencing individual ~ members from their community to embrace Islam. ~ Still, on the Mijikenda, ~ overall, other Mijikenda groups such as the Chonyi and the Giriama have been described to have been in different converts. And what does it mean is that ~ some of the earliest ~ converts among the Chonyi

and the Mijikenda were noted to be reluctantly ~ practicing their new faith. And even some will renounce being Muslim after a short period. Significantly, the Giriama have been observed to have been only a minority, among them to have been converted to Islam. whereby the majority remained or continued to follow their indigenous religious belief. So this attitude of the Giriama toward Islam was drastically ~ different in comparison to that of the Digo, which I will explain briefly in another Mijikenda group.

So I'm now moving to my third scenario on the Shirazi Vumba area.

From this area, we see now the conversion of the Wumba and the Digo communities due to the influence of the Shirazi Muslim. And here the Shirazi people ~ who trace their origin ~ in Shirazi, in Persia, are believed to have migrated to the East African coast, and they settled in different towns.

~ including the Wasini area around the 10th century. So apart from this influence of the Shirazi, it is also reported that between 1830s and 1900, ~ some Muslim traders, especially among the Arabs, the Swahili, and the Baluchi, had also established very elaborate trade relationship with the Digo.

In fact, by the end of the 19th century, several Muslim traders are reported to have settled ~ in some of the Digo villages and thereby ~ intensifying conversion among the ~ Digo. So in addition to this, it is also reported that some Mazrui family

Though I've said earlier there was some Mazrui family due to the hostility of the Busaidi moved to the north, there were also some who moved to the south and settled among the Digo in Ghassi. And this settlement also is known to a certain extent facilitated to the conversion of some of the Digo people to Islam.

The other factor that is also ~ highlighted to have been responsible in the development of Islam among the Digo is the spread of the Qadiriya Muslim Brotherhood south of Mombasa. This development is known to have intensified conversion among ~ the early Digo converts ~ around 19-20.

According to reports, around 1890s, Sheikh Swaleh Aldin of the Qadiriya Brotherhood is reported to have settled in Mombasa from Brava. So from here, his order was able to gradually spread southward among the Digo.

thereby facilitating the development of Islam among this community. So in a nutshell, this is what I can say as far as the earliest development of Islam along the coast. Thank you.

Saade Abdallah (28:54)

Okay, ~ thank you, Professor. We can see that there was a lot of widespread and I must say that we, I mean, we needed to talk about the Swahilis because ~they represent a lot of this mixed race, yeah, of the Arabs and the indigenous groups along the coast, to

now became what is now known as Swahili, right? Am I right about that?

Hassan Ndzovu (29:30)

Or maybe my fellow guest commented ~ that... I think with the Lamu scenario that I've tried to paint and Nabahani, I've mentioned them, Nabahani as one of the important player and is reported to have been from among the Swahili.

Saade Abdallah (29:31)

Yeah.

Because they didn't exist before. ~

Hassan Ndzovu (29:58)

is not considered from the Arabs. The Vumba also in the south coast is considered to be one of the Swahili dialect and they also played a critical role in this development of Islam ~ in various parts ~ in south coast of Kenya. So I'm not like downplaying but I was just trying to paint it in a very sketchy

without ~ emphasizing on a particular community to have been responsible as I've indicated. It has been the development of Islam.

Saade Abdallah (30:37)

My understanding is they were the product and output of this mixed race, because now they were no longer Arabs, right? they are not fully indigenous, yeah. What does Swahili mean? Swahili means "of the coast". I'm saying, yeah, the Swahili are the mixed.

Saade Abdallah (31:03)

They are the descendants of those early Arabs who now, you know, intermarried with the locals, right? I'm Swahili myself. That is how I identify myself. I'm Kenyan. So Swahili is a dialect and Swahili is a community and Swahili is in the Kenya census, we exist, right? Yeah. Yeah. So we are...

Saade Abdallah (31:33)

We are from the Mazrui, Nabhan, etc. But we are also from the but we are also having the Giriama, the Kauma, the Digo blood in us. So we are now what has emerged and it's something that we cannot ~ say didn't exist. It's the result of intermarriage... Anyway, don't know Mustafa if you'd want to comment because ...

Hassan Ndzovu (31:45)

Yeah, yeah, what I can just mention as a footnote to what you are saying. For me, the topic on Swahili, ~ if you look at some of the recent studies that have been done about the Swahili, I'm not an expert in Swahili, but I really Islam and Swahili, are very close. So sometimes I really attend meetings about themes on Swahili. So some of the recent studies that have been done, they tend to reject the theory that the Swahili did not exist. They came into existence through the interaction of the locals and the immigrants, ~ Arabs from the Middle Eastern. a huge pool of studies and knowledge that has been done to confirm that the Swahili are indigenous. They been here. It is not a community that came into existence as a result of the interaction. This is what I can say up to where I believe this was a community that was very different from the Arabs. Maybe they borrowed a lot from them because of that close interaction, but it was a community that was already in existence.

Saade Abdallah (33:17)

Well, we are Swahilis and this is what we are told. That we have our roots in Oman and in Kenya. All right, and that's what we are told, we are the Swahilis. Yeah, the others non-Swahilis maybe they have other relations of that. All right, but anyway, thank you on covering the coast. Can you also talk about the easternization of northeastern region?

Saade Abdallah (33:54)

Okay, fine, no problem. Okay. Yeah, I think so, we can do that. Yeah, but before we conclude this session...Mustafa, do you want to comment on anything that Prof has presented so far?

Mustafa Mahmoud (34:23)

Well, it is a learning curve for me, ~ learning more about Islamization in ~ the coastal region. ~ I don't want to add to what Prof has said. I think mine, I want to dwell more in my community and mainland ~ Islamization in the mainland.

Saade: Thanks Mustafa.

Prof Hassan. Thank you for sharing your perspectives about the Muslims in Kenya along the coast. Particularly the history of Islam among the Mijikenda, which is not often discussed.

For our viewers, I hope you enjoyed this session. Please tune into the next episode to learn about Statelessness of Muslims. People who arrived long before the modern day Kenya existed.

Saade Abdallah (00:01.516)

Okay, we're back again to the second part of our podcast. Yeah, in the previous one, we were learning about the coast, how the Muslims arrived and settled in Lamu, in Mombasa, and we heard about migration of Muslims in Tana River Delta Taita taveta, and they intermarried now with the

locals who are there and gradually you know they spread, And so from this year we heard that we have like the Swahilis who have become a known a distinct ethnic group on their own in addition to those that are Muslims but retain I would say the Digos they're Muslims

Hassan Ndzovu (00:46.678)

Okay.

Saade Abdallah (00:59.63)

the Giri Ammas, they're Muslims, that there are some Taitas that are Muslims, but we also have this mixed breed. Right, Prof? Am I right in summarizing that? Yeah, because these are the different multiracial, multiethnic, multirh- whatever, and we didn't have enough time to also deliberate on the Asians, who also came from India and all and settled along the coast, I think, for the sake of time. Yeah?

Hassan Ndzovu (01:10.778)

Yeah, yeah.

Hassan Ndzovu (01:28.488)

Yeah, we can talk about the Asian, I think it will be a very important additional component.

Saade Abdallah (01:34.848)

Okay, thank you. Another talk. All right. Yeah, thank you. now we are going to shift focus and we are moving to, I think Nairobi, Mustafa. Welcome.

Mustafa Mahmoud (01:50.058)

Yeah, I don't think it's Nairobi, per se, but yeah, yes. Yeah, inland Kenya. So my role is very simple. I am supposed to just narrow down to the spread of Islam, the contribution of the Nubian community in the spread of Islam in the country. Allow me to set context by giving you background of who are the Nubians.

Saade Abdallah (01:52.42)

Okay, England, England. Yeah.

Hassan Ndzovu (02:12.401)

Okay.

Mustafa Mahmoud (02:19.724)

The Nubians came to Kenya to help the British regime and they were recruited from different parts of Sudan and also Egypt. So with those two contexts, it will give you some of the relationships in the spread of Islam, especially the partnerships that came later on. And to go back a bit,

they were recruited as slave soldiers. So they were recruited without their own consent in some times, but later on they became autonomous in Kenya. So after successfully working with the

British to secure Uganda, they were also recruited to come and secure Kenya and an attempt to also secure Tizet, which had a backlash because

Hassan Ndzovu (03:16.594)
Okay.

Mustafa Mahmoud (03:18.054)
the Germans had also recruited the Nubians and they could not fight each other. So they decided not to fight their brothers in Tanzania. Long story short, with that context, you'll realize that the settlements that Nubians had are historical in terms of where colonialists wanted to secure the area from resistance. For example, you'll find the Nubians in Rift Valley.

Hassan Ndzovu (03:45.841)
Okay.

Mustafa Mahmoud (03:47.438)
and that is because of quelling the Nandi Revolution. You'll find them in Western Kenya. And allow me to paint for you a brief of what are the key settlements that the Nubians have. The key primary settlement that we have is Kibra, or popularly called Kibera slums. And it was given to the Nubian community as early as 1889. And it was a military settlement that was gazetted specifically for the Nubian.

Hassan Ndzovu (04:14.193)
Okay.

Mustafa Mahmoud (04:15.446)
soldiers or by then they were called the Sudanese soldiers. The other settlements that we have for the Nubian community, have Kibigori in Kisumu, we have Nuguri, we have Mazaras, we have others in Kisi and later on we had others in Isiolo, Bungoma and Iten. And there are a of settlements of Nubians in Meru and

other parts of the country. And all these are because of the role that they were playing in the army. And most of the time you'll find that the Nubians were either moving with their wives or marrying in those communities that they were moving to. As Professor Hasan has already said, one of the key ways of spreading Islam was intermarriages. And the Nubian community, because of their mobile nature, they used to go and marry the communities that they moved to. For example,

One of the key pillars in the Nubian community is one, Kafe. He's one of the prominent policemen that were there in the colonial regime. He moved all the way to Lamu by foot, and when he reached Lamu, he did not move with his wife. And when he reached Lamu, he married another wife who gave birth to one of his children that is called Abed Kafe.

Hassan Ndzovu (05:40.009)
All right.

Mustafa Mahmoud (05:41.358)
Abed Kafe is very significant in the history of the Nubian community because he's one of the scholars that played a big role in the spread of Islam and the teaching of Islam within the

community. After him settling, being born around 1918, 1920, he stayed at the course for years and he was being taught at the course by one of the scholars and he became a renowned Muslim scholar at the coast. So after him being taught, he was able to take up some teaching roles in commonly called the institution called Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education or MIOME. And elders realized that this is one of our own. We have a gap of our children studying Islam. Why don't we go and bring him back to us to be able to teach our people what our religion is about? So they went to the course and demanded for him to be transferred to Kibera and he came and he was one of the scholars that began the madrasa in Kibera around 1930 that later on became the Makina Madrasa. And apart from that, you see that in all the settlements of the Nubian community were in, they were building Islamic study areas, they were building mosques that are key in those societies to be able to teach people what Islam is about. So, they played a big role in the spread of Islam in the places like Meru, Kisi, and Kibigori, Migori, and all those settlements that they had. Apart from that, we could also look at the role of building institutions. Institutions like, for example, So the Nubian community played a big role in the setup of institutions like the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, which began in Kibra. And that's the reason as to why the Nubian community have always been assured of a seat in this, Supkem. So they played a big role in the setup of SUPKEM.

Another role that I could look at in the community in terms of Islam and contribution to Islam in general is the construction of Jamia Mosque, Nairobi Jamia Mosque. In one of the things that the community boasts itself is that the elders who were then working for Kenya Bus and the military had given their employer strict instructions to deduct directly from the salaries. So that those money that were being deducted could be helped to build the Jamiah Mosque itself. And this is something that we look at as a contribution because Jamiah Mosque is a key pillar in the spread of Islam up to today. And it's an iconic place for Muslims in Nairobi. Forgive me for being everywhere. You removed me from my comfort zone of talking about discrimination.

But anyway, the other thing that we look at in terms of our contribution is the relationship between Al-Azhar University and Makina Mosque. And Makina Mosque played a big role in terms of many scholars within the country. And they were being taught by the likes of Sheikh Mahmoud Suleiman, who was one of the scholars that were key in the community. And...

As early as the 80s, we had already formed, after the independence, we were able to form a partnership between Al-Azhar University and Makina Jamia Mosque because of the relationship between Egypt and the Nubian because as I began, had talked about our roots with Egypt. So that relationship had led to the building of one of the units in Makina Mosque, which is now the Makina Madrasa or Madrasatul Falah.

Madrasatul Falah was supposed to be a sub-branch of Al-Azhar University and we were able to have a lot of people who went to Al-Azhar University and one of the earliest to go was Ismail Mohammed who is one of the oldest scholars in Makina. He went as early as in the 1950s before Kenya getting its independence. After him going, he came back and Sheikh Mahmoud Suleiman got inspired to be able to send more people to go and study. And this is where he was able to send the likes of, especially ladies, the likes of Ustadha Widha, Sebit, Maria Meido, and other known scholars that went to study in Al-Azhar. These women played a big role in terms of cementing the teaching of Islam in our community. And they are historical figures within the community, especially because of that relationship between Al-Azhar University and Makina and Jamia Mosque.

The other thing that I would like to talk about is the role of media, and KBC played a big role in terms of the spread of Islam. If you remember very well, whenever KBC was being opened, there was the opening prayer by a Muslim and a Christian. The Muslim that was making the dua before independence was Abed, Abed Kafe, who was making the opening dua at 5 a.m. And later on after independence, had Sheikh Mahmoud Suleiman, who was making the opening dua and also the closing dua when KBC was closing the station almost midnight. So it was like a propagation of what Islam is. And many people could be able to capture it from the recitation that they were doing.

Then allow me to continue with some of the roles like the spread of madrasas and we believe that Madrasatul Falah gave life to many scholars who studied under Sheikh Mahmoud Suleiman and Sheikh Ismail Mohammed, who were the reload scholars at that time in Nairobi. And I'll allow it to be that, but before I let it go, I wanted to say also the role of the community in donating their land for the construction of mosques played a big role because mosques were centers of people joining together and also learning together and the lives of Lewadi Aminallah who gave his land for the construction of Makina Mosque played a big role because it is now the center of Islam within the community. Do you have any follow-up question?

Saade Abdallah (13:04.91)

For me, it's more about how your population has settled in Kibera. you know, because my understanding is that you were given land from... from the... British. It is after the .World Wars or.. you said from the 1800s. And so you kept on... was this land exclusively for...for the Nubians or what about the other communities? Because Nairobi was divided by the colonialists, right? So we had the Arabs who came and the Swahilis who came to settle. And then we also had the indigenous tribes moving into Nairobi, the Asians, right? So for you, the Nubians were just

Mustafa Mahmoud (14:01.496)

Yeah.

Saade Abdallah (14:03.46)

Keep it always for them. Till today.

But that's another discussion that we need to have.

Mustafa Mahmoud (14:12.142)

It's not another discussion. It's an interesting question because basically, if you look at Kibira, the word Kibira means forest. It comes from an Arabic word, Kibra. So it means forest because when we were given this land after it was like a token of the recognition of the land was after the world war as a token of appreciation, but also as a way of centrally locating the Nubian community for ease of access.

It was a forest that was given to 2,000 families of the Nubian community to be able to settle. It was 2,000 families only. And those 2,000 families were given an acreage of 4,197.9 acres. And that spread from King George Hospital to Nairobi Kenya Science. King George is now Nairobi Kenyatta Hospital.

Saade Abdallah (14:47.396)

Or it was 2000 families.

Saade Abdallah (14:58.936)

Mm-hmm.

Saade Abdallah (15:06.276)

I

Kindle

Mustafa Mahmoud (15:09.656)

And on the other side, it it went as far as Langata Gardens, Uhuru Gardens, sorry. So it was that big. So even the independence of Kenya was proclaimed in Kibra itself. So this land was the only land after independence that was under the, what is it called? Because it was,

Saade Abdallah (15:16.27)

Wow.

Saade Abdallah (15:19.927)

Okay.

Saade Abdallah (15:37.27)

And postcolonial.

Mustafa Mahmoud (15:37.794)

It was an exclusive land. It was an exclusive land that was only for the military who were from the Nubian community. And it's very key to the history of Kenya because of that exclusion, even the British soldiers could not access Kibira without permit. And this land became a key area in the struggle of independence because the likes of Jomo Kenyatta, Redden Kimath, they were hidden.

Saade Abdallah (15:57.092)

Okay.

Mustafa Mahmoud (16:06.966)

in Kibira during the struggle of Mau Mau, because it was hard for even the British to access Kibira. And because of the exclusion that was there in Kibira, not everybody could access it. So it's after the independence, the land was under, was gathered under Crown Land Act, and it was directly under the office of the president. was the only land that was exclusively under the office of the president.

Mustafa Mahmoud (16:36.086)

And if you can, if you remember, if you remember the time that Kenya was trying to roll out the slam, slam upgrading project, the former prime minister had to rally a group of tenants within the community to go to court to be able to remove that land from Crown land acts to become to government and other private lands so that they could be able to access that land. So yeah.

Kibra was an exclusive land under the King's African Rifle specific for the Nubian or Sudanese soldiers. And after that, it was supposed to be transferred to the Nubian community.

Saade Abdallah (17:22.34)

But the reality today.

Mustafa Mahmoud (17:28.334)

The problem is, one of the problems that we have is the Tawakul, the level of Tawakul that the Nubian community had. It has haunted us to today because when the British wanted to give the Nubian community the title, they said, this is Arathullah, this land belongs to Allah. So the descendants now are suffering to get the tenya. But Alhamdulillah, can say that in 2013, 2015, I think it's 2013.

when Charity Ngilu was able to give the Nubian community an acreage of 270 acres of land. From 4,197.9 acres, we only received 270 acres that was remaining.

Saade Abdallah (18:11.78)
for how many families now.

Mustafa Mahmoud (18:14.99)

Now, unfortunately, the community has grown to over 20,000 people. And now from 2000, we have grown to over 20,000 people. You can imagine 4,000 acres was supposed to host 2,000 families. And now 270 acres is supposed to host over 20,000 people on it.

Saade Abdallah (18:30.756)

You're right. That's a sad situation. It's clear that your forefathers and the colonialists were farsighted in securing 4,000 acres, in anticipation of substantive growth of the Nubian Population. It is not practical to settle a growing population within 270 acre space was never designed to support this many people. Addressing the gap between what was planned and what exists now will be crucial moving forward."

Very sad. Prof, do you have anything to add there?

Hassan Ndzovu (18:46.304)

Well, I wouldn't say in that sense, but if Mustafa, I had him talking about Supkem and linking it with the Nubi community, if you could expand that a little bit, it was not clear how he was relating the formation of supkem and the Nubian community. Maybe if you could just expand.

Mustafa Mahmoud (19:21.912)

Yeah, our role in the formation of SUPKEM, as I said, is that SUPKEM was first founded in Kibra with the scholars. The think tank of formation was in Kibra and later on, that's the reason as to why we were able to get a permanent seat in SUPKEM. So if you can see in subsequent election in SUPKEM, you'll always see there's a seat reserved for the Nubian community.

Hassan Ndzovu (19:47.004)

okay. Interesting.

Saade Abdallah (19:48.854)

It was formed as an umbrella organization. The Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims is an umbrella organization that is supposed to coordinate all matters or interests with regards of Muslims. Any other Muslim organization like CIPK, KAMMP, NAMLEF, KMYA, etc.

Saade Abdallah (20:18.338)

are to be registered under SupKem. And it had several founding members, it had members like my late father, Al-Marhum Ahmed Abdullah, Professor Abdulghafur Busaidy and others. These are people who had the best interests of the Muslims at heart. And they worked with the Nubians, who was the Nubian representative, the first one, but all of them have

Hassan Ndzovu (20:23.633)

Okay.

Hassan Ndzovu (20:41.529)

Okay.

Mustafa Mahmoud (20:47.47)

I can't pin the name rights now.

Saade Abdallah (20:48.056)

you know, formed what it is today. Okay, yeah. But...

Hassan Ndzovu (20:52.108)

the name of the... Let me see if I can... Okay, for me, let me see. As you are talking, can see if I can get some of the initial, the earliest names of some of the officials in Subtem.

Saade Abdallah (21:00.036)

Okay.

Saade Abdallah (21:04.909)

Okay.

Saade Abdallah (21:11.626)

Okay, all right, so fine. I'm saying so with regards to now what our topic is, it's about the historic and graphic perspective of Muslims. So what we've understood is about 2,000 Nubians, not families, right, Mustafa, who have now expanded to about 20,000.

Hassan Ndzovu (21:25.477)

one.

Mustafa Mahmoud (21:36.675)

Yeah.

Saade Abdallah (21:39.396)

what over 100 years later family so that's what and now you have what yeah

Mustafa Mahmoud (21:41.07)

2000 families. know, that same, the root was under the father. Yeah.

Saade Abdallah (21:49.508)

Yeah, but now you see 2000 families estimated size of five people per family, maybe we say at least 10,000, right people? Can we say? And now you're saying you're 20,000, 100 years.

Mustafa Mahmoud (22:00.406)

Yeah, I feel that.

Mustafa Mahmoud (22:06.126)

Roughly 20,000, you know also assimilation has come in people. According to the 2009 census that we independently conducted, the population was around 20,000 in Kibra.

Saade Abdallah (22:09.678)

People or families. People or families.

Hassan Ndzovu (22:13.244)

Thank

Saade Abdallah (22:22.436)

So does that make sense from 2000 families 100 years ago?

Hassan Ndzovu (22:23.696)

No.

Mustafa Mahmoud (22:28.322)

But you know the margin of error also is there, so we could estimate around 30 maximum.

Saade Abdallah (22:28.821)

Anyway.

Saade Abdallah (22:35.2)

Okay, as long as you're happy, no problem. So what we have not covered here is the growth of Islam in the inland for others, because what we had was when the railway started being constructed, it's now when it opened reasons for the Arabs who were along the coast and the Asians.

who were also along the coast to start moving inland. And more Asians came with the building of the railway because they were seeing trade. So that's when they started moving to Nairobi, to Kitui, to Kisumu, Kakamega, Nandi areas, Kendo Bay, you know, these were slowly moving in even to central province like Nyeri. Whose sound is that? Is that?

Hassan Ndzovu (23:07.996)

you

Hassan Ndzovu (23:26.086)

you

Saade Abdallah (23:33.828)

So there's a sound. Yeah, thank you. Yeah, so as they moved because the colonialists as they were building the railways, they liked the Arabs because 1), they were literate. 2), because they had been there, they used to move inland. They knew the terrain much better. So they were like the... They moved like when they went to Nyeri, then from what I've read, is like the found the Muslims very mild-tempered and they actually call them one your 'Wanyohoro' which means like 'peaceful'! And then so then and they also liked the Arabs because they brought them presents

like sugar and at that time they didn't know what sugar was so it was something they valued and so some of the Arabs settled there and they married intermarried

And so that's how Islam spread among the Kikuyu's, even Kakamega, Mumia's as we say, the Arabs and Asians as well, set up trading spots and over time the Muslims grew. Like in Nandi, when you read there's somebody who wrote on his PhD on that, he says that they are like there were 25 mosques and over 30 madrasas established in Nandi region. And it was not called Nandi before. The name 'Nandi' was first used by the Swahilis. And there many other parts of the country that were named because of the influence of Swahilis like Laini Sabaa and I'm sure if you just look at Kenya, the map you'll recognize other places I think where Islam has been there long its because of that migration. So that's what I would like to add. Does anyone want to add anything to that particular session? Prof? Yes, okay, Mustafa, go on. Yes.

Mustafa Mahmoud (25:50.766)

I think I wanted to add just, yeah, I forgot the role of the Nubian community because, I know, during the setup of the Kenya railway, the Nubian community was already also using the setup of the railway as a way of propagating Islam because they are the ones who were providing security and they were able to penetrate before the Arabs were able to come.

Saade Abdallah (26:06.052)

Exactly.

Mustafa Mahmoud (26:16.022)

is that the Arabs came and did it at large scale, but the Nubian community were already laying foundation for the spread of Islam in those areas that the railway was penetrating.

Saade Abdallah (26:17.198)

Yeah.

Saade Abdallah (26:26.154)

Yeah, thank you. So in terms of Asians, we had Asians, Baluchi, there were many sects, Baluchi, Ismaili, Ithnaashari, Bohras, Kokni, you know. So these are the ones who went to Mumias and Nandi. We had those from Punjab who went to Kericho, Kakamega, Kisumu, Kitui, Nyeri, you know. So...we can see they penetrated a lot of inland. I think what we haven't covered is Somalis. Right? So I think I'll thank you both here.

Part III

Saade Abdallah (22:06.317)

Okay, so I will first do a recap of what we have talked about during this podcast. We've talked about the historical perspective of Kenyan Muslims. Where they came from: came from India, Punjab, you know, they came from the Arab world. said Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman. You know, Syria, and then we also saw then they came along the north eastern region, although we haven't covered enough on that, that's for another day, but then many settled along the coastline, and then they were able to migrate inland as the railway was being constructed, and then we also had the Nubians that came from Sudan, and they came to support...

Hassan Ndzovu (22:40.525)

Yeah.

Saade Abdallah (22:58.812)

the World War I and II, they fought, they were very brave and fearless soldiers, and they were rewarded by being settled in Kibera because by then they had no strings attached to their homeland. Unlike those that came at the coast, they settled, they established settlements as they came. So, and then we've heard from Mustafa the efforts of Islamization through mosques, through intermarriage. And also we have organizations that also try to do a lot of charitable work. I think, and then we've learned about the issue of citizenship is a very thorny issue, very sensitive and Muslims have been targeted for that. Because I remember even...for people at the coast, they are being told bring your grandfathers, your grandparents' papers. And if grandparents were born before the colonial times, they didn't have birth certificates. But even those officials who are demanding for that, even their grandparents didn't have those certificates. I mean, everyone was in the same boat. But anyway, at least this is an issue that's being resolved.

Hassan Ndzovu (24:04.885)

Thank

Saade Abdallah (24:24.392)

I want to thank you all for listening. I know it's been a very interesting conversation and I hope that you are able to follow the different dimensions that we tried to present. Prof, I request for you to also share some closing remarks, any highlights that you want to give.

Hassan Ndzovu (24:34.799)

Thank you.

Hassan Ndzovu (24:52.298)

Okay, thank you. Thank you, Saade And I think you've summed it very well, but I can also make some addition just for the clarity of our listeners that what we tried to share in this podcast is about, let me still use the word that it was the composition of Muslims in Kenya. And we've indicated that there is no doubt, no one can dispute that.

Islam has had the longest tenured existence in the country than any other religious community. Let me use in terms of community net, than any other religious community. And we've shown that it has been in this country way back from the 8th century and the studies have been done to confirm that. We also need to appreciate that there have been different factors that have been responsible for Islamization.

We cannot pick just one particular point, factor, and say this was responsible. Different factors, as Mustafa has also shown with the case of the Nubians, they've also in a certain way contributed to the development and the spread of Islam in the country. We also need to note that if you are talking about the mapping, we can just use map. But as I've also indicated that...

We also need to appreciate that when we talk about Islam in the country, yes, it is found throughout the country, but there are places specifically in Kenya where we can say these are the homeland of Islam in Kenya, and this is the northern region and the coastal region. And the predominant, I know, Muslim would be found across various communities, all the communities in the country, even those who are like 95 % Christian, you still find Muslims. But I don't want to go to that. If you talk about a predominant Muslim community, we can talk about the Swahili, we

can talk about the Arabs, we can talk about the Digo among the Mijikenda. Because I will be very reluctant to include other Mijikendas. We can talk about the Somalis, we can talk about the Borana, and then we add the Shirazi. So these would what would form as the bulk of the Muslim population. But you can also go and pinpoint the minute groups whereby pockets of Muslim population will be found in the whole country. This is what I would want to sum up for my part. Thank you.

Saade Abdallah (27:30.834)

Thank you, Prof. I think we also need to build a case for verification of the number of Muslims. There are many reasons why they are not counted, why maybe they were undercounted, because if you go to pastoralists, maybe they don't operate from a standard household, they're in the bush seeking, you know...grazing for their cattle. Maybe they are not registered because they are not aware, you know, lack of awareness of when the census is and what it means. Or even when they are being registered, maybe they will give another ethnic group for fear of maybe they don't know why they're being counted. So some of them, when they ask what is their tribe they will call themselves Kenyans, you know. Or they'll say a tribe which they think, this one is more popular and are more likely to be counted, maybe. So there are many reasons why people might not self-identify themselves as Muslims during a census, or self-identify their correct ethnic group. And also, we had Asians who it was only in the 2019 census where they featured. For the longest time they were not being counted as Asians.

Saade Abdallah (28:54.886)

So I hope that the data I've shown is that we need to understand why at some places numbers of Muslims are decreasing and whether we can also use places of worship as a location for estimating populations. But again, that's a discussion for another day.

So I hope that from the long dialogue we have had today we all recognize the urgent need to validate the current population size of Muslims in Kenya. We must refute the census report that Muslims comprise only 10-11% of all Kenyans. Due to the large Somali refugee presence, migration of Muslim diaspora, their high fertility rate, early marriages, and other factors. May we can improve the Muslim population size by using places of worship as a starting point of enquiry. But again, that's a discussion for another day.

Saade Abdallah (29:23.234)

And also I hope that we'll have another day to focus on the north eastern...Muslim migration and history and all that. But I thank you all and I'm very much appreciative of having you, Professor Hassan, and also Mustafa, for this discussion. And with that, I say thank you and goodbye.

Hassan Ndzovu (29:41.728)

Okay, thank you and bye bye.

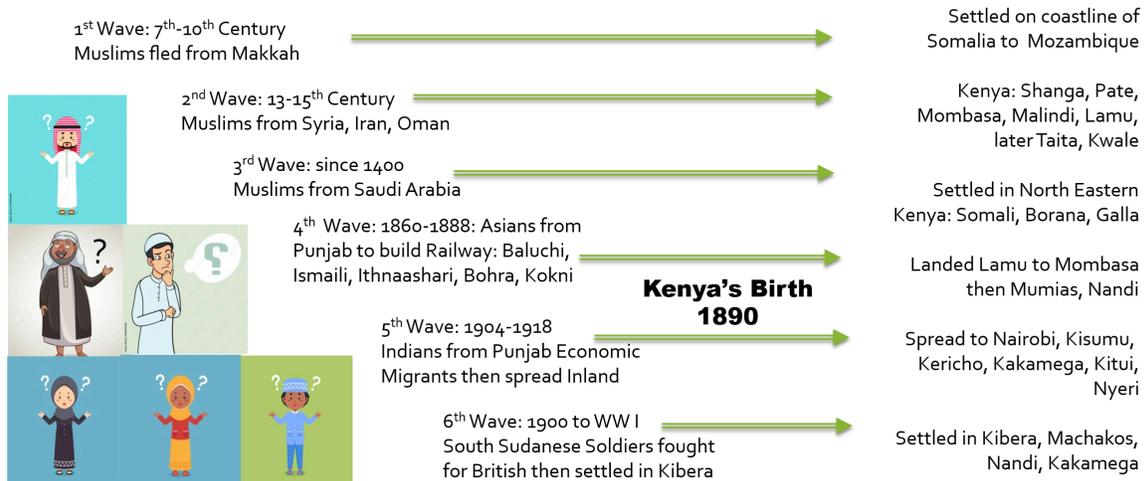
Saade Abdallah (29:42.642)

Thank you. Thank you.

Islam Precedes Kenya

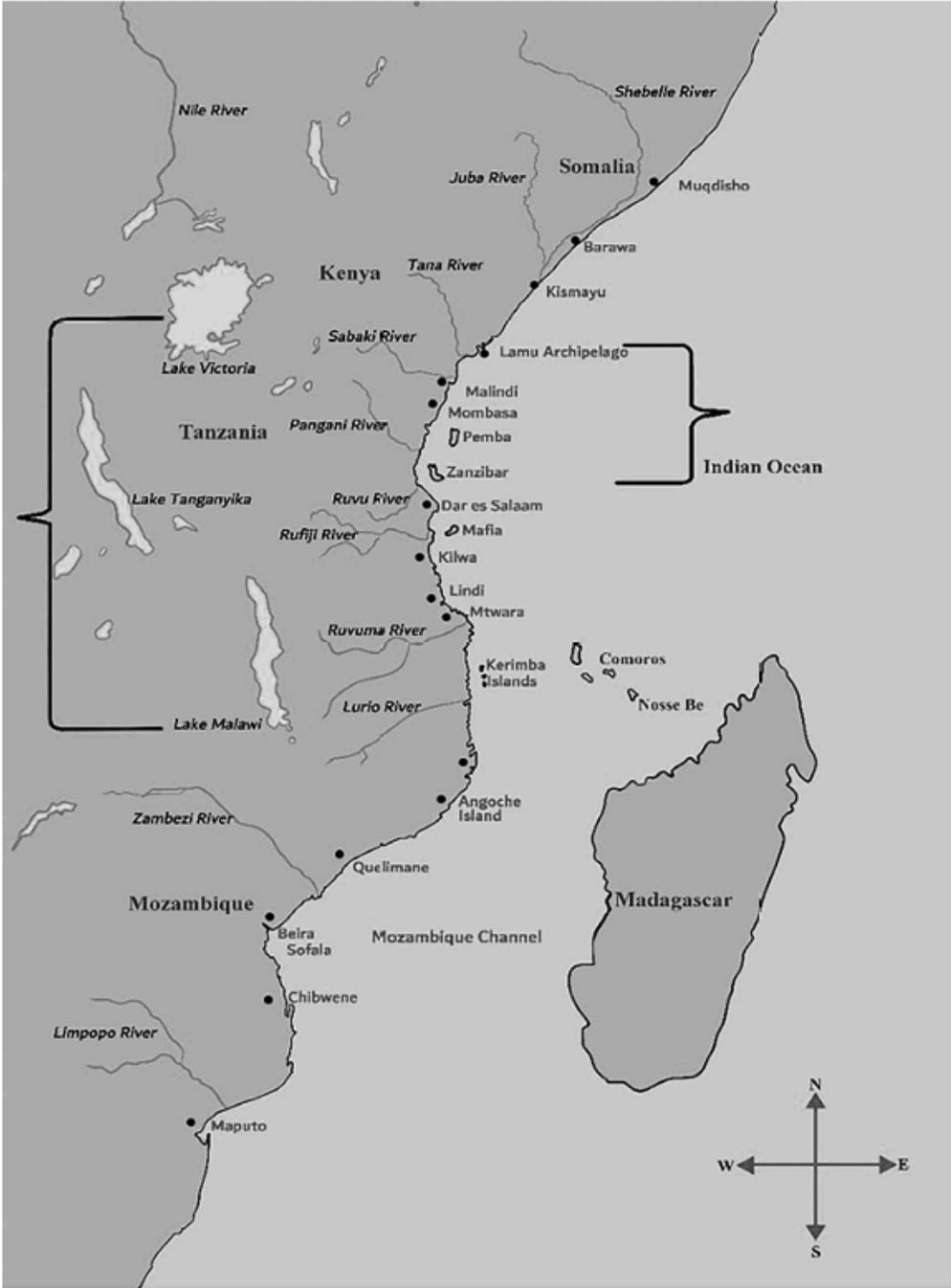
Yet for the longest time,

Muslims = The Ones Who Are But Don't Exist



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Map of East Africa Coastal Areas. The right bracket shows the coastal areas that were under direct or indirect control of Mazrui Dynasty, as per Sheikh Al-Amin Mazrui. The left bracket indicates the hinterland areas that were influenced by Mazrui's cultural and Islamic expansions. The map is designed by the author (Alio Sheikh Mohamed. 2024. "The Mazrui Dynasty: Serving Islam in East Africa")