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Identity Politics Related to the Yao Muslims through a Post-Colonial Theoretical Framework

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Design/Methodology/Approach: The study will undertake a critical scrutiny of the data with the help of two significant theoretical concepts borrowed from work of Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci1 (1891- 1937) which have been appropriated by postcolonial theory with deliberate intent, namely, the (subaltern) and the (organic intellectual). The study of these theories will enable us to engage in a conceptual investigation of the historical formation of subjectivities specifically marked by European colonialism. The article will be qualitative gathering data from secondary and related sources.

Practical Implications: The study seeks to give a voice to the Yao ethnic group, who have been silenced by European colonialists and fellow African ethnic groups across Central, East and Southern Africa.

Keywords: *achawa, mabhurandaya, mujao, machawa, manyasarandi, subaltern, yao.*

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Findings: The study reveals that societies across Central, East and Southern Africa have negative perception towards the Yao ethnic group and this is derived from misconception about Islam and belief systems.

Originality/Value: The study will also provide Yaos with an opportunity to ask or speak out against outdated and wrong perceptions against their ethnic group, religion and that is Islam. Above all the investigation will provide the Yao ethnic group with an opportunity to break out of the Manichean dichotomy that distinguishes exclusively between good and bad. The study will also present an overview of most of the critical perspectives evident in these works. It is hoped that this present study will contribute in encouraging scholars to continue to critically study and evaluate the Yao Ethnic Group of central, and Southern Africa.

Keywords: achawa, mabhurandaya, mujao, machawa, manyasarandi, subaltern, yao.

I. Introduction

The main reason that led me to embark on this research article is that I have been born a Yao. During my life I have experienced marginalization to some extent and exclusion due to my Yao-Identity. My main impetus is to study the Yao background to clarify some of the major issues in scholarship. I am confident that this study will provide valuable information to fellow Muslims and Africans in general. Generally, the study will aid our understanding of the Yao identity. On the one hand the research article seeks to give a voice to the Yao ethnic group, who have been silenced by European colonialists and fellow African ethnic groups across Central, East and Southern Africa. My study will also provide Yao Muslims with an opportunity to ask or speak out against outdated and wrong perceptions against their ethnic group. Above all the investigation will provide the Yao ethnic group with an opportunity to break out of the Manichean dichotomy that distinguishes exclusively between good and bad (see the publications by Abdul R. Jan Mohamed)[1].

The study will undertake a critical scrutiny of the data with the help of two significant theoretical concepts borrowed from the work of Italian Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) which have been appropriated by postcolonial theory with deliberate intent, namely, the (subaltern) and the (organic intellectual).[2] The study of these theories will enable us to engage in a conceptual investigation of the historical formation of subjectivities specifically marked by European colonialism. It appears that the negative perceptions of the Yao are derived from socio-cultural interactions of the Yao with other African communities during the 19th century and 20th centuries. This study will highlight and provide us with information about the socio-cultural interactions between other African ethnic groups and the Yao ethnic group. This study will also provide information on the Islamization and the cultural change experienced by the Yao. It is a fact that in the distant past, the Yao existed as an African ethnic community independent of Islam. The fact though is that they became Islamized as ethnic community prior to 19th century colonialism. Available evidence suggests that the Yao were originally Islamized and also proselytized fellow Yao and other African groups. Available research also suggests that the Yao became part of the Arab-Swahili trade systems. It is also known that the Yao became co-opted into the Arab slave trade along the east coast of Africa for some time in the past. The nature of slave trading and their participation in the Arab-Swahili trade systems need to be researched as well. There is also an evidence of Yao resistance to colonialism. The true nature of this resistance visa-a-vis the Portuguese, British and Germans as well as their

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opposition to Christian colonization need to be researched.

a) The Subaltern in Postcolonial Studies

Post colonialism is a term that has been used primarily in discussions of the geographical areas of the former colonies of the British, French, German and Portuguese empires. Today, the term has turned out to have relevance to much wider context (Shands, 2008:8). It is a general term used to describe the variety of events that have arisen in the aftermath of European decolonization since the nineteenth century. Among the events include under the rubric are social change, cultural redefinition, and political upheaval on both the small and large scale. The term also implies a breaking free or a breaking away from a colonizing force, but essentially the study of post colonialism addresses issues of power, subordination, race, gender inequity and class. It examines how these issues linger far after the colonizer has existed (Coasta, 2008:393). Post-colonial theorists like all critical scholars have tried to shift the classical thinking in the discipline and save it from the hegemony of Western conceptions by challenging "Western-theorizing" and "decolonizing" it (Tepecikliogl u, 2012:1). Therefore, post-colonial theory is a literary theory or critical approach that deals with literature or discourse produced in countries that were once, or are now, colonies of other countries. It may also deal with literature written in or by citizens of colonizing countries that take colonies or their people as its subject matter. The theory is based around the concepts of otherness and resistance. Post-colonial theorists can trace much of their initial discourse to the Italian Marxist thinker. Antonio Gramsci, who, in his *Prison Notebook* (1929-1935) examined the subaltern, or those who were exclude from power by virtue of their race, class, gender, ethnicity or colonial status. This notion of post-colonial theory was later taken up by Partha Chaterjee (1993), among others, Fanon, in the Wretched of the Earth (1961), a work considered a landmark in anticolonial studies, expressed clear anti colonialist sentiments in his discussion of the Third World. In his highly influential 1978 book, Orientalism, Edward Said argued that a set of attitudes he dubbed Orientalism was a way for the West (Euro-America) to separate itself from its progenitors. Even though Europe in its modern form was essentially a product of the East through many means, including the physical and economic.

Gayatri Spivak another significant post-colonial theorist, has like Chaterjee, focused on the subaltern, though gendered categories, both in terms of those who are colonized and those who have colonized. It has been developed in various fields, such as philosophy, literacy studies and sociology. From its beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, with Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, post-colonial theory has addressed issues such as identity, gender, race, ethnicity and class. In literary studies, post-colonial theory addresses the question of how the writing produced by the colonized and by those who colonize them responds to colonial legacies (Costa, 2008:393). This study will attempt to answer an important question that needs to be asked: How can we get clearer picture of the history of Yao socio-cultural identity formation through the lens of the subaltern in post-colonial theory? This is a very broad topic, and this study will only start to consider some of the important historical facts and perceptions. The main theoretical concepts of 'Orientalism' by Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak's understanding of the subaltern will be employed. Drawing on my interests in Said, Foucault and Gramsci, the research project will attempt to examine how the Western-Euro-American texts and discourses have represented and framed the Yaos and what this meant and may still mean for their identity formation in relation to the different African cultures with which they had immediate contact. To demonstrate this assertion this research project will examine all available literature by explorers and missionaries during the colonial and post-colonial epoch through a post-colonial lens and understanding of the subaltern.

Gayatri Chaktravorty Spivak in her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" made a profound contribution in a wide-ranging critical debate ranging around the process of recovering subaltern agency and voice in history. The aim of Spivak's essay was to clearly state criticism of the notion that subaltern voices can be heard from within Western discourse, including Marxism and post-structuralism. Spivak's narrative of colonialism exposes the exclusion and gaps in the representations of the subaltern subject in colonial records. She directly challenges and subverts the production of colonial history in the West and twisted representations of the colonized. Spivak's analysis compels theorists whatever their origin or place, to examine their political position as well as their interest of their critical approaches. Knowledge is not innocent it is always operated by power (Foucault). This Foucauldian notion informs Edward Said's book, Orientalism examines the vast tradition of Western "construction" of the Orient. It has been a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient dealing with it by making statements about it authorizing views of it. Describing it, by teaching it, setting, it, ruling over it (Said, 1978:3). Accordingly, Jan Mohamed (1995) argues that 'colonialist literature is divisible into two broad categories: the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic'. The emotive as well as the cognitive internationalities of the 'imaginary' text are structured by objectification and aggression. In such works the native functions as an image of the imperialist self in such a manner that it reveals the latter's self-alienation. Because of the subsequent projection involved in this context the 'imaginary' novel maps the European's intense internal rivalry. The 'imaginary' representation of indigenous

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people tends to coalesce the signifier with the signified. In describing the attributes or actions of the native, issues such as intention, causality, extenuating circumstances, and so forth, are completely ignored, in the 'imaginary' colonialist realm, to say 'native' is automatically to say 'evil' and to evoke immediately the economy of the Manichean allegory. The writer of such texts tends to fetishize a non-dialectical, fixed opposition between the self and the native (Jan Mohamed, 1995:19).

II. Literature Review

a) Historical Background

Historically, the Yao Muslims were referred to as Ajawa, Achawa, Mujao, or Machawa. Here reference is made to wills (1962) who attributes the term Achawa to the Yao. Wherever the Yao worked as labour migrants on the mines or on commercial farms, particularly in the countries of southern Africa mentioned by Wills, they have variously been called by these names. These names are well-known among the indigenous people of southern Africa, especially in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. If you were born or lived in Zimbabwe where the term Muchawa or Machawa in plural form is used, you would have an image of a Malawian immigrant (Yao Muslim) whenever you heard this word[3].

The first publication on the Yao people was a monograph titled *Chiikala Cha WaYawo* written by a Yao historian, Canon Yohanna Barnaba Abdallah. (Abdallah: 1919). This monograph adds value to the accounts of Yao customs and their historical background. Abdulla's *Chiikala Cha WaYawo* was published in both Yao and English by the Nyasaland Government Press. Abdallah states that his aim in writing a book that would tell about the customs of the Yao was to remind ourselves whence we sprang from and our beginnings as a nation (Abdallah 1919). Abdallah discusses the origins of the Yao, how they became as a nation and how they later split into sub-tribes. He also touches on ancient customs of the Yao tribe before the advent of Islam. Abdallah further describes wars that occurred between the Europeans and the Yao. In addition, he outlines how the trading activities of the Yao began and how the Yao interacted with the East Coast of Africa. In his discussion he includes the Yao trade in trade activities and the Proselytization of Islam that occurred in among the Yao. Although there are countless excellent scholarly works and valuable literature on the Yao people, it may be argued here that a number of these academic works, to some extent, were flawed. Arab Muslims were settled on the East Coast of Africa since 700A.D, long before the arrival of Europeans. They were a mercantile people, and their trading network was so well advanced that by the end of the twelfth century they had founded Kilwa, east of Lake Nyasa, as a commercial centre. When Vasco da Gama sailed up the East Coast of Africa in 1498, he found that the Arabs had already entrenched themselves all along the coast.

Yohanna Abdallah (1919) contends that "if you consult literature written by Europeans you would find that they say the tribe of the Yaos are the Ajawa the Achawa and the Angulu. Abdallah further argues that it is not the Europeans who are to blame, it is the Wanyasa and the Amakuwa ethnic groups and the Europeans went astray in following their lead. The Origin of this mistake emanates from mis-pronouncement of the term "Wayao" the Amakuwa Alolo cannot pronounce it properly, but they say Ajao and hence they say Ajao'wa: these, or the Ajao, and this is the mistake which the Europeans made they imitated the Amakuwa Alolo. The term Anguru came from the are Nyasa, they made the mistake through not knowing about other countries (than their own), by not travelling. Mangulu is a hill south of Blantyre near that hill live some Walolo, Amanganja and Yaos mixed together and their speech is similarly mixed. Those people who live part of that country are the Anguru but they are not the Yaos. The Europeans in imitating the Anyasa came to say the Yaos are the same as the Anguru confusing the matters as if Mangulu were in Yao region. The Yaos are from the hill Yao situated in the area between Mwembe and the Luchilingo river (the range) extending from Wisulu through Lisombe, where Malinganile used to dwell as far as Likopolwe, and up to Mkuya, that is Yao. The word Yao refers to a hill, treeless and grass grown from that hill the Yao originated and that is in norther part of Mozambique and Southern part of Tanzania Yohanna Abdallah (1919:6-7). Today the Yao Muslims are dispersed over a vast area between southern Malawi and southern Tanzania, with many more currently domiciled in northern Mozambique. A minority are also living in countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. The Yao Muslim's presence and their impact on the spread of Islam and socio-economic conditions of Southern Africa and Central Africa remain an enigma to date.

Jan Mohamed argues that the "perception of racial difference is influenced by economic motives" even though ultimately not reducible to these. Prior to colonialism, Africans were "perceived in a more or less neutral and benign light" whereas afterwards, they came to be characterized "as the epitome of evil and barbarity". Nonetheless, the relation between the Europeans (British, Germans and Portuguese) and Yaos had a Manichean structure where the Europeans as Christians were the exemplary ones and the Yaos as Muslims the evil ones. All the positive qualities were characteristics of the white man as opposed to the evil qualities that were represented by the Yaos as barbaric This relates to their association with a tradition of folk Islam and the institution of slavery. In this context the colonial society provided a strong separation between the self and the other. However, The European (white

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man) needed the African (black man) to be assured of his own existence and his superiority, whereas the African (black man) could see him or herself as inferior through the presence of the European (white man). This condition was responsible for the permanent tension between Europeans and the Yaos. Gayatri Chaktravorty Spivak in her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" made a profound contribution in wide ranging critical debate raging around the process of recovering subaltern agency and voice in history. The aim of Spivak's essay was to clearly state criticism of the notion that subaltern voices can be heard from within Western discourse, including Marxism and post-structuralism. Spivak's narrative of colonialism exposes the exclusions and gaps in the representations of the subaltern subject in colonial records. She directly challenges and subverts the production of colonial history in the West and twisted representations of the colonized. Spivak's analysis compels theoreticians, whatever their origin or place to constantly examine their political position as well their interest of their critical approaches.

The Yaos like many another African ethnic groups that resisted European presence during the colonial period were imprisoned into European prejudices for a long period of time. Saussure (1960) argues that some people regard language when reduced to its elements as naming-process only simply a list of words each corresponding to the thing that it names "signified". According to Saussure the linguistic unit is a double entity linked to the psychology, the signifier and the signified (Saussure, 1960:65). The linguistic sign is therefore a two-sided psychological entity that is a combination of sound-image and a concept. Saussure's philosophy of language indicates that the way we use language can affect our world view because of the indivisible link between our concept of something and the language we use to represent it (Mumisa, 2000:66). The most interesting example of naming-process is to be found in T. Price (1964) in the Rhodesian (Zimbabwe) Native Affairs Department Annual (NADA, 1955) in which a Swedish academic, Dr. Harald von Sicard, records traditions of the clans which make up the Lemba (Varemba) who lived along the Limpopo River. A Zimbabwean informant explains that the "Lemba people are Machawa of Muhammad", which Dr. von Sicard dismisses as Yao Muslims (Price, 1964:14). There are also two discourteous terms attributed to the Yao among the indigenous people of Zimbabwe this being maBhurandaya and maBwidi (meaning any one from Nyasaland now Malawi). MaBhurandaya is a plural form of muBhurandaya. The term muBhurandaya has been coined from Blantyre, the name of a well-known city in Malawi. As for the term MaBwidi, the origin is not known but I specifically attributed to Yaos too. The disrespect lies in the fact that when you call another ethnic group by another name you are in fact denying that ethnic group its rightful identity.

Above all, the term muBhurandaya is also highlighted several times by a prolific Shona novelist Genius T. Runyowa in "AkadaWokure" simply mean: 'she is in love with a foreigner' or she fell in love with foreigner." Across a broad spectrum of Shona literary *genres* of Zimbabwe "AkadaWokure" is one of the most ironic novel ever to be written in Shona language. According to Genius T. Runyowa (1981) a girl falls in love with her father's employee. To the parents' consternation the man is a Malawian, muBhurandaya. The parents believe it is a disgrace to have a muBhurandaya as their son-in-law. The situation is made worse by a Shona suitor whose jealousy encourages him to take drastic action to win the girl from the Malawian, muBhurandaya. Genius T. Runyowa's (1981) novel is important to the study because it possesses the power to appeal to our sense of know-how on socio-relations amid Malawian immigrants and indigenous Zimbabweans. Above all, the novel renders us with exactness of that detailed narrative of indigenous Zimbabweans and Malawian immigrants which is associated with realism of fiction. In his novel Genius T. Runyowa (1981) has commented that "Wadzanai akadaro kukanganisika, izwi rokuti muBhurandaya usarishandisa nokuti rinozvidza" Wadzanai is perturbed by Rungamirai's attribution of the term muBhurandaya to Aleke 'a Malawian' and she is cautioning Rungamirai not to use the term muBhurandaya as it is a discourteous word (Runyowa, 1981:11).

The Yao ethnic group took their ethnonym from a barren hill where they originally resided, between Mwembe (Portuguese East Africa) and the Luchinga range. It is clear that the Yao emerged from the various scattered African tribes in the East African and Southern African regions and that the distribution of the Yao today reflects the history of their movement across Southern Africa, where they played a pivotal role in the pre-colonial era. It is has been convenient to divide the history of the Yao into two major episodes, these being the movement between hills and the movement into and within the Nyasaland protectorate (Malawi). Today, the Yao tribe is dispersed over a vast area between southern Malawi and southern Tanzania, with many more currently domiciled in northern Mozambique. A minority of Yao are also living in countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. However, the Yao's presence and their impact on the spread of Islam and the political and social-economic conditions of Southern Africa remain an enigma to date. Mitchell (1956) commented that one of the earliest references to the Yao is recorded by Dr Francisco Jose de Lacerda in a letter dated March 22nd 1798 addressed to the Minister of the State of Portugal. In his letter he outlines

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his proposed visit to the Kazembe of the Luapula regions, known then as Wisa country. When it comes to trading Mitchell highlights that "It is evident from this letter that the Yao were serious competitors for the land trade against the Portuguese" (Mitchell, 1956:21).

Lacerda Writes: "The dry goods hitherto imported into this country [i.e.Wisa] have been brought by the Mujao (Yao), indirectly from the Arabs of Zanzibar and its vicinity. Hence these people received all the ivory exported from Kazembe; whereas formerly it passed in great quantities through our port of Mozambique" (Mitchell, 1956:22). Mitchell (1956) reveals that the Yao are one of the most important ethnic groups of Nyasaland because of their long-standing history as intermediaries in the trade between the coast and the highlands. Long before the arrival of the Europeans in East Africa, the Yao supplemented their agricultural activities with trade and thus became indispensable, first to the Arabs and later to the Portuguese. Above all, Fisher contextualizes the historical and religious background of the Yao and enlightens that the first Yao Muslims went to the coast for initiation; later, coastal "ulama" teachers came to Yao-land, and subsequently the Yao ulama themselves took on the main role of proselytization "dawa". Islam therefore began to spread amongst the Yao, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and became a distinguishing feature of Yao nationality. the exact period for the Yao to adopt the religion of Islam is not known. However, some academics tend to claim that it was not until the 1870s that the Yao began to adopt the religion of their trading partners. It is certain that the Yao contact with Arabs had been going on for some time, for at least 200 years before the Europeans appeared on the scene. The Yao traded along the East Coast of Africa in the early decades of the nineteenth century and entertained in their villages Arabian Muslims and Swahilis who were from the East Coast of Africa (Bone, 1982:127). Fisher also highlights the trading routes of the Yao that occurred late in the eighteenth century, whereby the Yao were sending caravans to the coast as part of their trading network, which stretched from the Indian Ocean to Katanga (Fisher, 1970: 392).

David S. Bone (1982) ascertained that the first stage in the spread of Islam among the Yao was the conversion of some of their chiefs. In the early 1870s Mkanjila 1 adopted Islam as his personal and court religion. In the same decade his example was followed by his powerful neighbours Mataka, Jalasi, and Muponda. Bone further argues that the reasons for taking on the Islamic faith included a desire to strengthen their ties with their prestigious trading partners, a desire for literacy and modernization and a needy to consolidate their authority over their village headman by enhancing their own status. The second stage in the establishment of Islam resulted from the European colonization of East Africa and the reaction of Swahili and their Yao associates to what they perceived as a threat to their mutually partnership in trade of slaves and ivory. Alpers, E.A. 1969 highlights the trade of the Yao that occurred during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whereby the Yao were the greatest long-distance traders in East Central Africa. Through their involvement with the coast they became subject to external economic pressures.

In the eighteenth century these pressures combined to produce several major changes in the routine of Yao trade goods to the coast. Alpers, E.A 1969 study is very important to this study because it provides the historical background of the Yao trading activities. Alpers highlights that the Yao before the beginning of the long-distance trade led a very self-sufficient way of life. Primarily agriculturist, they also lived from hunting and fishing. They were also known for making backcloth, and salt. Iron was abundant in Yao-land, so they were well supplied with hoes and essential implements. Some Yaos travelled the breath and length of the area and established furnaces and trading their iron. The Portuguese and the Arabs became rivals for the trade of the African interior, a rivalry that was to continue for many centuries. In 1698 the *Imam* of Oman drove the Portuguese out and the Arabs obtained sole control of the East Coast. One of the earliest references to the Yao is recorded by Dr. Francisco Jose de Lacerda in a letter dated March 22nd 1798 addressed to the Minister of the State of Portugal. In his letter he outlines his proposed visit to the Kazembe of the Luapula regions, known then as Wisa country. It is evident from this letter that the Yao were serious competitors for the land trade against the Portuguese (Mitchell, 1956:21). Lacerda writes: The dry goods hitherto imported into this country [i.e.Wisa] have been brought by the Mujao (Yao), indirectly from the Arabs of Zanzibar and its vicinity. Hence these people received all the ivory exported from Casembe; whereas formerly it passed in great quantities through our port of Mozambique (Mitchell, 1956:22).

At the end of the eighteenth century the Yao emerged as the leading transporters of goods between the interior of East Central Africa and the coast. By the early nineteenth century a well-established trade in ivory and slaves existed between the Yao and the East African coast at Kilwa (Thorold, 2002:6-9). Most of what is known about the Yao before the imposition of colonial rule was in fact documented by contemporary European observers; nearly all of them were Portuguese, until Livingstone travelled through the Yao territory in 1866. Europeans only knew the Yao as traders, as the Yao arrived once a year on the mainland opposite Mozambique Island or at Kilwa to trade in ivory, slaves and other commodities, and would then return to the interior until the next dry season (Alpers, 969:405).

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The Yao tribe is the only major ethnic group south of Somalia to have adopted Islam before colonialism. Living midway between Lake Nyasa and the Indian Ocean, the Yao were, by the late eighteenth century, sending caravans to the coast as part of their trading network, which stretched from the Indian Ocean to Katanga. The first Yao Muslims went to the coast for initiation; later, coastal *ulamā* and teachers came to Yaoland, and subsequently the Yao *ulamā themselves* took on the main role of Proselytization or *"dawa"*. Islam therefore began to spread, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and became a distinguishing feature of Yao nationality (Fisher, 1970: 392). Notably, the Yao, like any other African tribe that resisted European presence during the colonial era, were similarly trapped in European prejudices. To demonstrate this assertion, a broad spectrum of academic works in the form of monographs, anthropological studies, historical books, journals and accounts by explorers, missionaries and administrators during the colonial epoch were perused. Where a discussion of the Yao appears in these mentioned works, the Yao people are depicted as the agents of the Arabs or acting as middlemen for the Arabs and Swahili Muslims. One example of this possibly erroneous depiction is from Fallers, where he points out that the Yao interaction with the East Coast had left them with a tradition of folk Islam and the institution of slavery (Fallers, 1957:731). Pertinent to Islam, Arabs, slavery, the indigenous Africans (Yaos) or West African Muslims, Daniel asserts that while the Europeans still thought of Muslim influence on Africa largely in terms of the slave trade, some Africans were thinking very differently. Daniel argues that the best illustration of this sentiment as it existed at the end of the eighteenth century is to be found in the writings of a remarkable scholar, Edward Wilmot Blyden. From the perspective of Daniel Blyden does not attribute the spread of Islam in Africa to slavery. His view is that such an explanation is at once unworthy of a great religion and insulting to the black race, although it is one to which some later European travellers, more qualified to traduce an unfortunate people rather than to engage in the philosophical investigation of their character and history, have been quick to attribute its rapid spread and its widespread influence. The use of this insulting argument was widespread in Christian polemic against Islam. Blyden's dominating idea about Islam was that it was African and that it was not dominated by Arabs, as Christianity had been by the Europeans. On the contrary, Islam was easily and regularly Africanized; it helped Africans give it a new and attractive character (Daniel 1966:311).

On the other hand, Uya argues that the European administrators in the course of colonialism were understandably impressed by those African tribes that offered the least resistance to their expanding frontier of white domination. All in all, European records in varying degrees reflect the activities of these European elements in Africa. Where they describe African affairs, they reflect European prejudices, as is obvious from the well-known infatuation of all these segments of European actors in Africa with a large-scale political structure (Uya, 1984:4). In Weinstein & Rubi (1977), Harry Thuku and Kenneth King (1970) describe how the Kikuyu, who had no centralized system of government, did not react in sustained fashion to the imposition of foreign control, partly because they failed to perceive the threat of the European presence on their land. For example, a Kenyan recalls in his autobiography that one day his family noticed that a European "had quietly slipped onto our land. We did not know he was coming to stay, since he had just built a little mud and grass house. The Kikuyu gave him the nickname Kibara as he was always beating people, but he did not seem to do much actual planting; he did not plant any crops or coffee, and did not come into any Kikuyu village. I think he was afraid probably. No one thought that Kibara had come permanently. Suddenly, they heard that the land occupied by this European was apparently "sold" by him to another European, which was rather curious since he never owned it. But, then our people, including Waweru, the chief, were asked to move a little further west. Of course it was government policy to sell land without telling the occupiers. Then later the new owner would come along and say, "This land is mine; I bought it from the government"" (Weinstein & Rubi, 1977:69). After signing a treaty of friendship with the Italians, the Ethiopians discovered that the Italians were claiming that the Emperor had signed a protectorate treaty. They rejected the claim and in a forceful statement to Europe in 1891, Emperor Menelik I declared that Ethiopia was an independent political state and that it would remain so. Italy sent troops to support its claim. Growing conflict led to aggressive confrontations. In 1896, Menelik, with a well-organized and a well-trained military force of 100,000 men under his command, crushed the Italians (Weinstein & Rubi, 1977:69). Weinstein & Rubi asserts that there is a difference between the Kikuyu and Ethiopian scenarios. The Kikuyu lost because they failed to perceive the threat to their interests from European presence and claims.

However, the more astute Ethiopians understood the implications of sovereignty and what they stood to lose (Weinstein & Rubi, 1977: 69). With regards to the Yao, the Germans demanded the surrender of the Yao in southwest Tanzania. Machemba, the Yao Sultan, responded in Swahili that he would rather die than agree to obey the Europeans, because obedience was what the Yao perceived the Germans to be demanding; "If it should be friendship, be it friendship that you desire, then I am ready for it, today and always; but to be your subject, that I cannot be…. if

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it should be war you desire, then I am ready, but never to be your subject" (Weinstein & Rubi, 1977:69). Although it is fairly certain that the Jesuits from the Zambezi had explored the valleys and the lake regions, there are no available records of the inhabitants of these areas. The reason for this lack of archives is not known. However, we may argue here that perhaps the Jesuits, to some extent, were not willing to record anything of those inhabitants or it may have been difficult for them to collect data at that time because they were new to that part of the world. However, we do know that the Jesuits domesticated European culture and supplied intelligence data on the communities whose souls they sought to capture.

Mitchell (1956) demonstrates that the Yao are one of the most important people of Nyasaland because of their long-standing history as intermediaries in the trade between the coast and the highlands. Long before the arrival of the European in East Africa, the Yao supplemented their agricultural activities with trade and thus became essential, first to the Arabs and later to the Portuguese. Regarding the Yao migration from their home-place, it is convenient to divide the history of the Yao into two major episodes: firstly the movement from the Yao hill to other hills, and secondly, the movement into and within the Nyasaland protectorate. Mitchell subsumes two episodes of migration; the first is the scattering of the tribes from the Yao hill. The second episode is the displacement of the divisions from their homes. A detailed discussion of these episodes will be outlined below. The exact cause of the scattering of the tribes from their traditional home is not clear (Mitchell, 1956:24). Abdallah (1919:8) suggests that it could be ascribed to some internal dissension. It may be that the Yao ancestors quarreled among themselves and separated into different groups and dispersed to different countries. This exodus happened before the wars between the Amakuwa and Alolo, Msoma, Kaondo and Angoni tribes. However, irrespective of the cause, the tribe broke up into a number of sub-tribes, each of which settled at yet another hill from which it took its name (Mitchell, 1956:24). There are ten sub-tribes or divisions of the Yao, each of which took its name from the place to which it moved after the dispersal from the Yao hill. Abdallah (1919:8) lists ten sub-tribes which are:

i. The *Amasaninga* settled near the Lisaninga hill, near the Lutwesi River.
ii. The *Amachinga* settled near the Madimba hills (*Amachinga* is derived from the word '*lichinga*' meaning a ridge with a serrated outline).
iii. The *Amalombo* settled in the plain near Lisaninga
iv. The *Wambemba* settled in Mbemba hill.
v. The *Amakale* settled at Makale, the plateau extending from Mchisi hills to those near the Lake and hence the name Amakale.
vi. The *Amangoche* settled at Mangoche hill.
vii. The *Wamkula* settled in the Mkula hills which can be seen from the Mwembe area which is close to the Rovuma, on the way from Wela to Mwembe.
viii. The *Wanjese* inhabited the Njese hills.
ix. Others again, crossed the Rovuma to dwell in the hills called Chingoli Mbango.These are the *Wamwela*or *Achimbango*, who now live near the coast and their language is mixed with Chindombe.
x. The *Achingoli* settled near the Chingoli hill along the Lujenda River.
xi. Others settle near the *Chingoli* hill by the Lujenda river, and they are called Achingoli.

The above represents the first ancient Yao migration and the origin of their division into sub-tribes. As they migrated into different directions they adopted the name of their new home as that of their tribe. However, all the customs which they observed at Yao hill they also observed at their new home, although new customs arose here peculiar to them.

The Yao subsequently burgeoned in their adopted countries, and interacted on a social basis with each other. Each tribe had its own elders which led to the election of a chief who ultimately was responsible for the decision making regarding village matters. Mitchell provides the details of four different sub-tribes which migrated to what is today known as Malawi. However, Mitchell subsumes that only these four sub- tribes penetrated into British Nyasaland (Malawi) and they are as follows (Mitchell 1956: 24-25).

1) The *Achisi* Yao are represented in Nyasaland (Malawi) by the people under the authority of Katuli in the Fort Johnston district.
2) The *Amasaninga* Yao are represented in British Nyasaland (Malawi) by the people under the authority of Makanjila.
3) The Amachinga Yao are of much greater importance, and at present constitute half of the Yao population.
4) The *Amachinga* Yao were probably displaced from their traditional home, at Mandimba on the Lujenda River in Portuguese East Africa by attacks from the Lomwe inhabitants in the east.

Widespread famines forced the above-mentioned sub-tribes to migrate. Present day representatives of this group are Nkata, Jalasi, Mponda, Kalembo, Nsamala, Nyambi, Kawinga, Liwonde, Malemia and Ntumanje in the Fort Johnston and Zomba districts in Malawi. The Yao invasion into Nyasaland was not a military incursion of the Nguni, a tribe which migrated from South Africa to Malawi. Mitchell pointed out that conclusive evidence on the exact form of the invasion is not possible but it is believed that the first immigrants of the Yao came into the country peacefully and in family groups *(mbumba*). Often the immigrants were supported from the Nyanja groups. The Yao

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however took the opportunity presented by the internal struggles among the Nyanja to consolidate their position (Mitchell1956:25). Commentators have postulated a process consisting of three stages south of Sub-Saharan Africa. The first manifestation came from merchants involved in the Trans-Saharan trade. These entrepreneurs and their families lived principally in towns; often in quarters that were labelled "Muslim"; this phase is often called the "minority" or "quarantine" Islam. The second phase often goes by the name of "court" Islam, because it features the adoption of Islam by rulers and members of the ruling classes of states, in addition to the merchants. The third phase can be called the "majority" Islam stage whereby the faith spread beyond the merchants and ruling classes to the rural areas where most people lived. The three phases are thus associated with a growth of Islam in quantity and quality (Robinson, 2004:28).

However, the first Muslim on the East African coast followed in the wake of many other maritime travellers from Middle East and South Asia, primarily the Arabs who were interested in acquiring ivory, gold, other metals, leather goods and some slaves. They interacted with the local fishing and agricultural populace who spoke the language we now call Swahili. Over time the Swahili language evolved to include a considerable Arabic vocabulary in addition to some Malay and other infusions, within a simplistic African language structure. The language formed the basis for a culture and both were entrenched in small towns along the ocean, stretching for almost 2,000 miles, from Mogadishu (in today's Somalia) to Sofala in the south (now Mozambique). The inhabitants of these city states were committed to the vocations of agriculture, fishing, ship building and trade and they practised Islam (Robinson, 2004: 32-33). It can be argued that the exact period for the Yao tribe to accept Islam is not known. However, western academics tend to claim that it was not until the 1870s that the Yao began to adopt the religion of their trading partners (Bone, 1982:128). We are certain that Yao contact with Arabs had been going on for some time, for at least 200 years before the Europeans appeared on the scene. Nonetheless, the Yao traded along the East Coast of Africa in the early decades of the nineteenth century and entertained in their villages Arabian Muslims and Swahilis who were from the East Coast of Africa (Bone, 1982:127).

However, there is a view that in the course of the existence of the Islamic Kilwa Empire during the reign of Sultan Daûd bin Suleiman (d. 1158) who reigned between the eleventh and twelfth centuries of the Christian era, he sent out six caravans to Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Malawi, the then Nyasaland, to invite all these African ethnic groups into the fold of Islam. Another view of the advent of Islam into Malawi is that it came to the said countries from East Africa via Mozambique through the *Muwalimus* (*Mu'allims* or scholars) who were well versed in the Qur'an, Sunna and other Islamic studies. This was the reason why the Yao were the first to be influenced by Islam. The early arrivals included learned scholars (sheikhs) who influenced the local population due to their charismatic personalities. As soon as these scholars arrived in these areas they established *madrasahs* (Islamic schools) apart from leading prayers in the humble mosque structures that they put up throughout the areas that came under their influence. Islam was accepted with passion by a large proportion of the Yao, one of the country's main tribal groups which formed the majority of Malawian Muslims (Mumisa, 2010:281).Pertinent to the Yao at a later stage they developed a distinct cultural identity. They regarded themselves as Yao and were politically and economically clearly distinct from other people in the region. Despite the disagreements within their own ranks, they were traders and the followers of powerful chiefs. Where they settled among the *Nyanja* tribe near the lake, their villages were visibly different.

They soon established their dominance over their neighbours wherever they moved to in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Virtually every description of the Yao from that time, including the missionaries, who often found themselves in opposition to the Yao chiefs, emphasized the political hegemony and evidence of superiority over other people in the region. Their involvement in the trade and contacts with the East Coast of Africa appeared not only to have given them political and economic advantage in the region, but also to have led to the development of a sort of identity pride. In 1891 a British protectorate was declared over Nyasaland (modern Malawi). The most important aspect is the fact that the Yao maintained a clear sense of cultural identity throughout the colonial and post-colonial epoch in Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. Wherever they settled specifically across Southern African in countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa, they determinedly maintained their cultural identity. This was pivotal to their conversion to Islam, which set them apart from other groups in Malawi, if not throughout the Southern African region. The period after independence was however not positive for the Yao. In Mozambique they were caught up in civil war and in Malawi they were marginalized by the regime of Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Their fortunes improved in Malawi with the election in 1994 of a new government headed by a Yao Muslim, Bakili Muluzi. (Thorold, 2002: 7-9). Secular education in Malawi was first introduced by the United Free Church of Scotland (in Livingstone) and established by the Church of Scotland (in Blantyre) Missions. However, Islam and Christianity in Malawi embarked on aggressive competition to capture the same target market. Since their arrival in Malawi, Christian missionaries saw Islam as an immoral religion which encouraged the slave trade. For their part,

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Muslims frowned upon secular western education for a number of reasons. Apart from the derogatory missionary attitude which expected all the tribes to obtain a bible-centred education, the use of the Chichewa vernacular in the mission village schools in the Southern and Central regions of Malawi was an affront to Yao speakers who generally considered Chichewa as the language of infidels. Furthermore, the use of English, which was viewed as the language of colonial oppressors rather than Arabic in post-vernacular stages in school instruction, failed to appeal to the Muslims (Lamba, 1999:1).

The Yao most of whom are Muslims have often chosen domestic employment or outside jobs such as tailoring or fish mongering which require very little or no reading skills or English proficiency. If western schools providing religious indoctrination and de-culturalisation, Muslims were prepared to avoid them and continue in their own ways. At times the Christian schools were prepared to make concession to Muslims. In 1924, for example, the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) experimented with Arabic teaching at their Chitundu School at Manyani in the Dedza district among the predominantly Muslim Yao population. In practice, however, it was soon Chewa who mainly patronised the mission school which was avoided by the Yao (Lamba, 1999: 2) German presence was becoming increasingly noticeable on the East African coast and this exacerbated Muslim anger, and in 1889 Abûshîrî bunu Salim al-Harith took up arms. The flash-point occurred during *ramadhan*, aggravated by incidents like lowering an Islamic flag and defiling a mosque by bringing dogs in. The resistance spread and the Yao and the Kilwa joined forces. However, it was swiftly crushed, and in 1889 Abûshîrî was hanged. A poem written by Hamid al-Buahriya, Utenzi*WA Vita Uya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima,* depicts the armed struggle led by Abûshîrî bunu Salim al-Harith as a *jihad* against the Germans. Although Buhriy's poem suggests that Abûshîrî bunu Salim al-Harith's resistance against the German rule was religiously motivated, Mbongoni asserts that evidence shows that it was politically motivated (Mbongoni, 2005: 27). Due to many centuries of exposure to the Arabs, the Yao eventually became almost completely Islamized. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, many began to move away from Portuguese pressure into Nyasaland (now Malawi). Alpers pointed out that the Portuguese conquest of Northern Mozambique was difficult and protracted; for the Portuguese it assumed the character of a modern crusade against the combined forces of Islam and paganism. Not surprisingly, the Portuguese found the success of Muslim Proselytization troublesome, especially when viewed against the failure of Roman Catholicism in gaining converts.

They feared Muslim alliance with African chiefs in opposition to the Portuguese rule and influence, and specifically attacked Muslim strongholds in their quest to establish effective colonial domination. At the beginning of the 19th century, the *region of* Angoche is reported to have supported fifteen mosques and ten Qur'anic schools. Nearly all the *monhés*" (a term applied to mixed Afro-Muslims, as opposed to Swahili, i.e., Coastal Muslims) knew how to write in Arabic characters. On the island of Angoche, there are even numerous Swahili women who knew how to read and write. This was a threat the Portuguese could not tolerate, and in 1903 they sacked Angoche, destroying all its houses and mosques (Alpers, 2000:309). The British population in the shire-lands was increasing rapidly, so much so that in 1883 a British Consul was appointed. From then on, until the close of the century, the British followed a militant policy against all slave traders, amongst who were the Yao (Mitchell, 1956: 28). It is reasonable to assume that because of their geographical position, the Yao conducted a considerable trade between the interior and the coast, mainly in clothing and guns in return for slaves and ivory; their trade in slaves leading to major conflict with the British. However, Nwulia contends that an aspect of the African slave trade that seriously engaged the attention of Britain was the one plied by Christians from the European world. Britain also began to participate in this trade in the sixteenth century, graduating to the top of the list of white buyers and exploiters of Africans by the end of the eighteenth century (Nwulia, 975:11).

III. Conclusion

Today, the Yao ethnic is dispersed over a vast area between southern Malawi and southern Tanzania, with many more currently domiciled in northern Mozambique. A minority of Yao are also living in countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa if not across Southern Africa. However, the Yao's presence and their impact on the spread of Islam and the social-economic conditions of Southern Africa remain an enigma to date. It can be thus be assumed that the interaction between the Yao and the Arabs began at least two hundred years before the Europeans appeared on the East coast of Africa. Arguably, the Yao ethnic is the only major ethnic group south of Somalia to have adopted Islam before colonialism. Domiciled midway between Lake Nyasa and the Indian Ocean, the Yao were sending caravans to the coast as part of their trading network, which stretched from the Indian Ocean to Katanga. The Yao Muslims also took on the main role of Proselytization so that by the early twentieth century Islam had spread significantly and so became a distinguishing feature of Yao nationality, as is evident even today.

Footnotes

1. See especially the two books by Mohamed: *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in*

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Colonial Africa; *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (co-edited with David Lloyd); (ed.) *Reconsidering Social Identification: Race, Gender, Class, and Caste*. See also his "*The Economy of Manichean Allegory*" in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995).

2. See especially Gramsci's Selections from the Prison Notebooks, and Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995).
3. Yao commonly known as *Machawa, and Mabhurandaya* in Zimbabwe in Zambia *Bakachawa* and *Achawa* in Malawi. Yao came into Zimbabwe as labour migrant workers to service in the capital-intensive mines, plantations and commercial farms they are scattered across Zimbabwe see, *African Cultures, Memory and Space: Living the Past Presence in Zimbabwean Heritage* (2014).

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