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# REVIEW

Eric Morier-Genoud, *Towards Jihad? Muslims and Politics in Postcolonial Mozambique* (London: Hurst & Co, 2023), 240 pp., ISBN: 9781805260431

This is a collection of previously published articles addressing the relationship between the post-colonial state under the Frelimo government and Muslims of Mozambique. The book aims at understanding the state's policies towards religion and secularity, the formation of Muslim elites and counter-elites, and inter-religious and inter-Muslim competition and conflicts between 1975 and 2022. The last chapter of the book attempts to provide a historical interpretation for the origins and evolution of the current jihadi insurgency in Cabo Delgado.

Although some important research on Islam in Mozambique has been done in recent years, including by Daria Trentini, Christian Laheij, Chapane Mutiua, Mário Machaqueiro and myself, among others, this is a welcome publication because the general scope of the research on this topic still remains scarce as compared to other regions of Africa and the world.

Morier-Genoud provides important statistical data on Muslims for various periods of the independent Mozambique, and lists many diverse Islamic organisations that emerged during this time. He discusses the context for their growth or fading, explains their regional spread, interactions with Frelimo, and to a lesser extent with Renamo, and their ideological orientations and links to foreign entities and actors. Analysis of the competition between Islamic and Christian organisations is the strong point of this collection.

One of the objectives of the book, according to the author, is to probe whether the history of the interactions between the Frelimo state and Muslims could yield explanation to the current jihadi insurgency and lend some clarity to the cacophony of confusing and often controversial hypotheses engendered by scholars, security analysts and journalists. Although the answer can be inferred from the previous four chapters, in the last chapter, which focuses on the insurgency itself, the author instead concludes that the arrival of a radical Muslim sect was the main indicator and probably the cause of the insurgency. This is despite characterising the actions of this 'sect' as an insurgency. Perhaps because the author does not provide a working definition for the concept of insurgency, the reader is left in the dark as to how a

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sect, 'withdrawn and distant from society and population,[1] could organise or lead an insurgency.

Morier-Genoud humbly states that his lack of the command of the Arabic and Kiswahili languages would not allow him to be considered a specialist in the study of Islam and Muslims. However, as the book does not deal with any textual interpretations, the lack of knowledge of the aforementioned languages does not seem to lend any importance for writing it. Perhaps the analysis of the history of Muslims of Mozambique and, in particular, of the current insurgency, could have been improved if the Mozambican context was compared to various political and theological interpretations, diverse ideological positions, and actions and interactions between Muslims themselves and between various Muslim groups and political and economic powers in other regions of the world and through a historical perspective.

Several statements in the book are perplexing, such as the thesis that the insurgents are a 'scripturalist and maybe even Quranist' sect[2] who 'only follow what is in the Quran' and 'don't want to know the sayings of the Prophet', while simultaneously calling themselves *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l jamaa*, 'to present themselves as the legitimate holders of religious orthodoxy'.[3] First of all, what is the meaning of the Quranist sect? The author does not explain. Secondly, how can people who literally call themselves *ahl al-Sunna*, or people who follow the Sunna (the traditions, including the *hadith*, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), be opposed to the 'sayings of the Prophet Muhammad' and follow only the Qur'an? Moreover, the author mentions that the insurgents are similar to Al-Shabaab of Somalia, have links to Ugandan and DRC's ADF and ISIS and follow the ideology of the Kenyan cleric Aboud Rogo, the founder of al-Hijra. Should we consider these groups as Quranist sects as well?

Several other terms are not explained like, for example, Deobandi or Wahhabi movements. The Wahhabism is described as reformist and scripturalist, but what makes Wahhabism a scripturalist and reformist and how this relates to the Mozambican context is not clear.

Morier-Genoud argues that the period of the 1990s 'saw the emergence of a political form of militantism – "Islamism" – among Muslims in relation to the state'.[4] Again, the reader is left in the dark as to what the meaning of Islamism is assumed to be here. Is it only a militantism in relation to the state? Broader international scholarship has had important debates around this term.

Some statements by Morier-Genoud are not completely accurate. He declares that 'there were hardly any comparison between Islam in Mozambique and in its neighbouring countries (something that still holds true in 2023)'.[5] But it is a well-known fact that the archaeologists were the first to do this type of work starting from the 1960s, by comparing various coastal Mozambican sites with the medieval Swahili

1 E. Morier-Genoud, *Towards Jihad? Muslims and Politics in Postcolonial Mozambique* (London: Hurst & Co, 2023), 12–13, 25, 123.
2 Morier-Genoud, *Towards Jihad?*, 121.
3 Ibid..
4 Morier-Genoud, *Towards Jihad?*, 44.
5 Morier-Genoud, *Towards Jihad?*, 20.

settlements in Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia and so on. Daria Trentini, Signe Arnfred and Francesca Declich have done some comparisons from the anthropological perspective, while Chapane Muitiua has focused on *ajami* of the northern Mozambique and the Swahili to the north. Anne K. Bang has examined the historical trajectory of Sufi Orders, with all the related Islamic religious implications, in Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique and the Comoros. I have also done some research on this matter.

It does not ring particularly true that 'the reformist movement gained supporters across southern Mozambique, mostly from people with Asian *mestiço* backgrounds', while Africans allegedly abstained from it.[6] The archival documents as well as interviews with various African Muslims indicate that there were reformist African Muslims in northern Mozambique already in the 1960s, and they caused a significant controversy and even violence in places like Angoche, for example.

The Portuguese colonial archival documents and sources, such as Melo Branquinho's report and Fernando Amaro Monteiro's publications, indicate that African Sufis supported the liberation movements during the anti-colonial war. Nevertheless, Morier-Genoud states it is 'difficult to determine unambiguously how they reacted to independence'.[7]

Morier-Genoud also conflates the officially registered *Ansar al-Sunna of Cabo Delgado* organisation with the Ahl al-Sunna or Ansar al-Sunna movement in Nampula, a movement somewhat similar to Ikhwan al-Muslimin. It should be noted that the terms of Ahl al-Sunna and Ansar al-Sunna could reflect the names of particular groups or organisations, but generally-speaking, they also have broader and deeper religiously-grounded meanings that should be taken into account.

The book undoubtedly makes an important contribution to scholarship by tracing various important changes in the relationship between the post-colonial state and the Muslim population of Mozambique. But it also has some significant shortcomings, some of which are mentioned here.

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6 Morier-Genoud, *Towards Jihad?*, 29–30.
7 Morier-Genoud, *Towards Jihad?*, 25.