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“Imported Religions in Africa: The Case of Islam in Mozambique”

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Conversion to monotheism is among the major consequences of the African encounter with different civilizations. Conversion to such a new religion in Africa would not have been possible before this encounter. The civilization of the Arab peoples which was one of the first civilizations to settle in Africa began during a period in history where the Arabs spread their religion and traditions through trade. In fact, when Arab merchants went to southern Africa, they influenced local people with their civilization; thus, it is not surprising that people in this part of the world practice Islam as a religion and speak either an Arabic dialect or Swahili, a language that has its roots in Arabic. Needless to say, Arab merchants helped shape identities in this part of the world, especially in Mozambique. Indeed, this Arabo-Islamic based identity construction had been cemented throughout Mozambican history. This paper seeks to understand this dimension of history beginning with the independence in 1975 by examining the Muslim community's rise in Mozambican society. One can question if the presence of Muslims (20% of the entire population) is a threat to other religions, or vice versa. This paper hopes to address this question and explain how this community has been influencing Mozambican politics, culture, and economy. It is important to mention that much of this paper will be based on my own experience as a Muslim first, and then as a Mozambican. This theoretical framework will be based on two different perspectives: one is relative to political Islam and the other to authenticity. This approach will examine the presence of Islam in Mozambique and define its role among members of the community. This paper argues that political Islam has no room in Mozambique since the Muslim minority is integrated, not oppressed; and that the perspective of authenticity is the most relevant approach when it comes to defining the Mozambican Muslim, as well explaining the division that exists within this community.