

ABSTRACT

The historiography of Islam in Southern Africa has long been dominated by Eurocentric and colonial narratives that marginalize Black African Muslim agency, erroneously date the faith's arrival to the nineteenth-century slave trade, and reduce Yao Muslim migration to mere economic labour. *The Contribution of Yao Muslims to the Spread of Islam in Zimbabwe* presents the first comprehensive, insider-authored corrective to this historiographical silence. Written by second-generation Zimbabwean-born Yao scholars, the book challenges outsider-dominated accounts that have long portrayed Yao migrants as passive colonial labourers rather than strategic architects of religious life.

Drawing on decolonizing methodologies — over sixty vernacular oral histories (2015–2023), participant observation in Chuo classes and Ziyarah gatherings, 'Ajamī manuscript analysis (including *usulu thawab* genealogies), colonial archives, and archaeological evidence — the authors reconstruct a continuous five-century narrative. It demonstrates that Yao engagement with Islam began through sixteenth-century Indian Ocean trade networks, long predating the slave-trade thesis, and reframes twentieth-century labour migration from Nyasaland to Southern Rhodesia as a deliberate *hijra* — a strategic, sacred relocation to preserve religious autonomy against missionary "education-before-baptism" policies.

Central to the analysis is the resilience of the indigenous Chuo pedagogical system — rooted in Bau writing boards, sikiri devotional songs, and intimate ustaadh–murid apprenticeship — which sustained Shafī'i jurisprudence and ethical formation under colonial repression. The book documents the grassroots founding of Zimbabwe's first African-led mosques in Mbare and Mutare, the transformation of mutual-aid burial societies into robust community welfare infrastructures, and the post-1980 institutional maturation led by Black-led organisations (ZMYO, SCIAZ, Al-Nisaa). It further examines urban identity formation, intermarriage with VaRemba communities, and the creative negotiation between Qadiriyyah devotionism and Sukuti reformism.

By centring indigenous epistemologies, the study dismantles the "linguistic paradox" in African Islamic studies and introduces the *Yao Integration Framework* — a 2030 blueprint for sustainable bilingual Islamic education, digital waqf-funded institutional development, and SADC civic advocacy. Estimating Yao Muslims at 90% of Zimbabwe's Black Muslim population and potentially one million strong, this work restores their legacy as indispensable architects of Zimbabwean Islam and offers a scalable, decolonial model for understanding Muslim minority resilience across Southern Africa.

AUTHOR PROFILES



Dr. Jameel Asani is a researcher in the Department of Religion Studies at the University of Johannesburg, where he completed his PhD in 2024. His scholarly work sits at the intersection of Islam, migration, and Muslim communities in Southern Africa, with three years of ethnographic fieldwork conducted across Johannesburg neighbourhoods forming the empirical core of his research. He holds an MA in Semitic Languages and Cultures and an MPhil in Management (Leadership in Emerging Countries), both from the University of Johannesburg.



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