

DAR-ES-SALAAM

Professor Liyakat Takim

McMaster University

Located on the East African coast, Dar es Salaam was called Mzizima (in Swahili, the healthy town). People first settled there in the 17th century A.D. In 1865 or 1866 the Arab sultan Majid bin Said of Zanzibar began building a new city very close to Mzizima. He named it based on an Arabic phrase *bandar as-salām* meaning *harbour of Peace*. A popular but erroneous translation is "haven of peace" resulting from a mixup of the Arabic words "*dar*" (house) and "*bandar*" (harbour).

Dar es Salaam became especially prosperous from 1888 onwards, when it was a station of the German East Africa Company. The town's growth was facilitated by its role as the administrative and commercial centre of German East Africa and industrial expansion resulting from the construction of the Central Railway Line in the early 1900s. In 1916, during the First World War, it was taken by the British forces, and it became the capital of the British administration. After World War II, Dar es Salaam experienced a period of rapid growth.

Like the rest of the East African coast, and in many towns inland, Islam is the majority religion of Dar es Salaam. The local language Swahili, is derived from Bantu and Arabic. The language has an Arabic vocabulary of about 25 per cent.

Except for a small number of Ahmadis most of the inhabitants of Dar es Salaam are Sunnis of the Shafi'i madhab. Since the first century A.D. there has been a constant drift of Arab migration along the coast, and Islam reached the East African coast in the seventh century. Shafi'is were already present there when Ibn Batuta visited in 1331. Especially before the revolution in Zanzibar in 1964, most of the Arabs were from Shihr. Others came from

Hadramawt and many others from Muscat, the latter being Ibadis. Many Arabs left for Muscat after the revolution.

The wealthiest inhabitants of Dar-es-Salaam are Indians, of whom probably half are Khoja Muslims. These comprise of Isma'ili and Ithna'asheri Muslims from Indian descent. There is also a sizable Bohra Muslim community together with Sunni Memons. Many within the local African community are also Sunnis. Dar es Salaam boasts numerous mosques and about thirty Qur'anic schools are conducted by Africans. The followers of the Agha Khan have their own secular schools and run charitable institutions including a famous hospital.

In recent decades, the Ithna-asheri Shi'a Khoja community has sought to proselytize within the African community. They have built many wells as well as schools and engaged in other humanitarian projects. In the process, they have also converted many from the local African community to the Shi'i faith. The Wahhabis have also sent their missionaries to Dar es Salaam, creating, in the process, tension within the local community.