

CHAPTER 8

Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU): The Pioneers

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Introduction

The story of the establishment of the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) is multifaceted and fascinating. It is a story of international politics and diplomacy, of Ugandan politics in all its complexities, of dreams and false starts, of strategic timing and fortitude, and of patience and perseverance. The story spans the political regimes of virtually all the long-term presidents of Uganda, from President Idi Amin (1971–1979), to President Milton Obote II (1980–1985), to President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (1986–present). This study explores that story, with a focus on the years 1987–1988, when the university was born on the campus of the former Nkoma Secondary School, in Mbale district, in the Eastern region of Uganda. However, to understand the rationale for establishing IUIU, one must first understand the history of Muslim education during the pre- and postindependence eras in Uganda.

Muslim Education under the British Colonial Rule

Although Muslim Arabs had introduced Islam to the Buganda court during the 1840s (Kasozi 1986), the entry of Europeans into Buganda changed the religious landscape for good. The kingdom of Buganda's religious wars and expansions of the 1880s through 1894 pitted several groups against each other, including the Buganda kings and princes, the Christians and Muslims, and the Buganda and Bunyoro kingdoms. This conflict ended with the Muslims and the Bunyoro people permanently defeated by the British and their ally, the Buganda Kingdom. The British authorities administered Uganda as a Protectorate from 1900 until its independence in 1962. After the wars, Muslims were treated virtually as

second-class citizens and “were sidelined to the peripherals of Ugandan society” (Kalinge-Nyago 2013). As Kasozi (1986), the Ugandan historian, explained:

Muslims were excluded from positions of power and prestige. They became in the words of Ssamula Kimuli, “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” As Welbourn has pointed out, Muslims became second-class Baganda, for it became impossible to have any status without a Christian name in Ganda society. (p. 52).

The British policy was to tolerate Muslims, not to aid in the spread of Islam. According to Kasozi (1986), who quoted from government archives, the British administrator of Uganda, Sir Harry Johnston, discussed the British policy regarding Islam in Uganda with Bishop Tucker, one of the early British missionaries. Sir Johnston reportedly said that “his aim was ‘to thrust Islam as much as possible into Sudan’ . . . because of ‘the importance of Uganda as a strong bulwark in Equatorial Africa gradually spreading Christianity to its surrounding’” (p. 74). In one telling incident, when a chief named Salehe was reported to be proselytizing Islam in Busoga District, Commissioner Johnston ordered the chief’s arrest and wrote:

It is not in the interests of the British Government that Mohammedanism should receive any more adherents than we can help, as Muslims are proverbially difficult to manage and are always opposed to the administration of Christian power.
(cited in Kasozi 1986: 74)

This policy of domination and subjugation of the local population, which was common in British colonial Africa (Teferra 2008), particularly affected Muslim life in Uganda, especially in the realm of education. During the colonial period (1900–1962), the most part formal education in Uganda was largely left in the hands of Christian—primarily Protestant and Catholic—missionaries, who were given land to build schools by the British administrators (Ssekamwa and Lugumba 2001). Muslims in Buganda were only given one county of Butambala, and many became refugees, with no sizeable land or status in other parts of Uganda (Kasozi 1986; Lapidus 2002; Kalinge-Nyago 2013). Ssekamwa (1997) reported that “by 1960, Uganda had 28 secondary schools. Out of these 28 secondary schools the Uganda Protectorate government had only eight secondary schools while the missionaries had 20” (p. 125). Muslims did not have an organized missionary sponsor or organization to fund school buildings and the requisite facilities necessary for schooling. Muslim parents also feared that their children would be converted to Christianity if they enrolled in missionary schools (Lindow 2007). According to King, Kasozi, and Oded (1973: 49), “Christians had used their schools to provide education in general but also as one of their chief means of gaining adherents.” The Muslim fear of conversion was therefore real. For example, Yusuf Lule, the first African principal of Makerere University and president of Uganda after Idi Amin in 1979, was born Muslim, and was converted to Christianity after joining Buddo Secondary School (Kasozi 1986).

Consequently, Muslims had to build their own schools for access to secular education. In 1936, they formed the Uganda Muslim Education Association (UMEA), under the auspices of the late Prince Al-Hajji Badru Kakungulu Wasajja, to organize and run Muslim education. However, they had limited resources compared to the Christian missionaries. The net effect of these factors was that Muslims lagged far behind their Christian counterparts in education. By independence in 1962, Muslims reportedly had only a handful of university graduates. After independence, the government took over all schools, but left some power with the founding religious bodies, which formed the majority on the school governing boards and influenced the selection of headmasters and headmistresses. Therefore, a Catholic-founded school still retained a Catholic imprint, despite the fact that the core curriculum was set by the government and teachers were paid by the government. In higher education, Makerere University remained the only university until 1988. Admission into the university was fiercely competitive, and assumed a pyramidal structure, particularly in regard to higher education. The pyramid had a narrow base for primary education; a national exam at the end of the primary cycle allowed those who succeeded to compete for secondary enrollment. The tip of the pyramid was Makerere University, the only university that admitted the very best students after national examinations in 11th and 13th years of secondary education. As Muslim children usually started out in poorly resourced Muslim-founded elementary schools, they had a difficult time catching up with their Christian counterparts, and lagged behind all the way to the university. As a result, only about 3 percent of Makerere's student population in the 1980s was Muslim, in a country where Muslims represented about 15 percent of the total population.

This background informs the decision of pan-Islamic institutions to assist African Muslims in accessing higher education. But how was this accomplished with regard to IUIU?

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this case study is to explore the establishment of IUIU in 1988. How did the marginalized Muslim community start a new university? What were the challenges? What were the pioneers' perspectives regarding the successes and challenges of the first year of the university? This study employed the phenomenological design of the qualitative method, where respondents familiar with the phenomenon become the principal sources of data (Creswell 2007). We utilized purposive snowball sampling, where one informant refers the researcher to other qualified informants. The sample consisted of fourteen participants, including three former government officials who were involved in the project, four members of the initial staff of the university (two of whom are still working at the university), and seven students from the university's inaugural class, some of whom are now PhD holders and are working at the university as faculty members and administrators. The sample selection criteria included (i) government officials involved in the project; (ii) members of

the initial staff; (iii) students from the first class who graduated from the university; and (iv) the aforementioned participants' accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. The interviews took place (between August 2010 and December 2012) at the participants' places of work, in their homes, and in one instance by phone, in a semi-structured format (Yin 2003) with some structured questions and other spontaneous, probing questions during the interview. The second type of questions sought clarification from the respondents on different issues as they came up in the interviews. Some of the participants were interviewed again for clarification of earlier responses. The interview data were analyzed through coding and theme building (Creswell 2007; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). University records, though scarce, also provided documentary evidence. These records were mainly minutes of meetings from the early years of IUIU.

We used a chronological story format to report the results, in which the establishment of the university follows the Lahore Summit (when the decision to create the university was made in 1974) through the remaining years. This "story" continues until 1987, when the Ugandan government and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) signed a bilateral agreement to actualize the decision. The story is chronicled from the perspectives of government officials, and staff and student "pioneers" as they recount their first year at the university.

Results

The Beginning: The Lahore Summit

From February 22 to 24, 1974 (corresponding to the Islamic calendar of Moharram 29—Safar 1, 1394 AH), Pakistan hosted the second Heads of State Summit of the Organization of Islamic Conference (now known as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, or OIC) in Lahore. The OIC was founded in 1969 in Rabat, Morocco, to promote and enhance cooperation among Muslim countries and peoples. According to Al-Hajj Edirisa Mayanja-Njuki, who was then head of the Presidential Press Unit, and a member of the Ugandan delegation to the Lahore Summit, President Idi Amin Dada was overjoyed when Uganda was admitted as a full member of the OIC at the summit. Al-Hajj Njuki was present in the summit hall because at the last minute Amin had asked (or rather ordered) him to go inside with him to make sure he wrote the full story for the press back in Uganda. "You will go in as the Foreign Minister," Amin told Al-Hajj Njuki (*interview*). Among the issues discussed at the summit was the historic imbalance of Muslim education in African countries during the colonial period. As soon as it was decided to establish two Islamic universities, one for Francophone Africa and the other for Anglophone Africa, President Idi Amin raised his hand and offered to host the Anglophone university in Uganda. At this point, "everybody cheered, and Uganda was chosen unanimously as the future site of the University" (*interview*). This Amin-like instinctive and dramatic reaction was supposedly the genesis of IUIU (*interview*). According to Al-Hajj Njuki, it was never put to the vote, nor had it been planned by the Ugandan delegation

before the summit. To actualize the project would take over 13 years, long after Idi Amin, the originator of the idea, was gone from the scene.

The Roller Coaster

During President Idi Amin's tenure, a few steps were taken to implement the decision. The proposed site was first in Entebbe, but later Arua was chosen and over 5,000 acres of land was acquired at a place called Arivu. Toward the end of Amin's tenure, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia donated \$5 million for the project. Part of the money was used to design a master plan, and part was used to establish an office in Kampala. Professor Nsereko-Gyagenda was put in charge of this office, which unfortunately never took off. After Idi Amin was overthrown, the project was in limbo, as the country was going through difficult times. Sometime during President Milton Obote II's regime, the project was revived. According to Al-Hajj Ismail Dungu of the Uganda Muslim Teachers Association, Uganda's ambassador to Saudi Arabia alerted stakeholders in Uganda that Uganda was about to lose the chance to host the university. Another country was maneuvering to replace Uganda, arguing that Uganda had failed to deliver. This led to the establishment of the Islamic University Steering Committee, which was comprised of Ministry of Education officials, representatives from the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, and others. The Obote II government communicated to the OIC that Uganda was committed to fulfilling the OIC resolution to host the university. However, according to Al-Hajj Dungu, not everybody in the government was for the project. One education minister was reported to have said, "the Islamic University will only be established over my dead body" (interview). On the other hand, there were many others, Muslim and non-Muslim, who supported the project and helped to keep it alive. After President Obote II was overthrown, the project was again in limbo. In 1986, President Museveni came to power. In 1987, changes in several of the ministries were taking place, with officials who had advocated for and were familiar with the project facing replacement.

Establishing Home Base

Some of the strong supporters of the project included the late veteran minister Al-Hajj Abubakr Mayanja, who was the Minister of Regional Cooperation, and in fact served as the acting rector of the university when it opened. He was instrumental in steering the project through the cabinet. Al-Hajj Moses Kigongo, vice chairman of the National Resistance Movement, was also a crucial supporter of the project. The Hon. Ali Kirunda Kivejinja and the Hon. Gen. Moses Ali all successfully advocated for the project. Professor Badru Kateregga, then ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, played an indispensable role as well. He was a professional educator, and helped in providing curriculum materials and recommending staff. Finally, the late engineer Yunus Mpagi was also a key advocate for the project.

According to Al Hajj Abubakr Kakembo, then Chief Education Officer in the Ministry of Education:

The decision to start off the Islamic University project in 1987 was reached between the Uganda Government and the Organization of Islamic Conference. For us, our role was to implement the decision . . . Of course there were always challenges, but all challenges can be overcome.

(interview)

During this time, the Islamic University Steering Committee decided to establish the university at Nkoma Secondary School, in Mbale. Nkoma was one of the secondary schools founded by the UMEA. According to Al Hajj Kakembo, Nkoma Secondary School was well situated, with a relatively good campus. It was hoped that more land would be acquired adjacent to the campus. One of the challenges then was where to transfer the students and teachers of Nkoma Secondary School. Although it was not easy, the Ministry of Education worked with the Mbale Municipal Planning Committee and the District Kadhi's office to resolve this problem. It required numerous, long, and often contentious meetings between the ministry officials, the school administrators, and the Mbale municipal officials. The ministry officials convinced the Mbale municipal officials that hosting the university would greatly benefit Mbale in the long run, bringing jobs and educational opportunities for the region. They also had to assure the school officials that the Nkoma secondary students would not be abandoned, but would be transferred to another school located in Mbale. Another major factor in resolving the issue was Muslim pride; Nkoma was a Muslim-founded school, and its stakeholders felt proud that an Islamic university was going to be established at the site. However, no sooner had the location problem been solved than other issues emerged.

The Set-Backs

One of the critical incidents recounted by Al-Hajj Kakembo took place during the preparation for the final meeting between OIC and the Uganda government before the project go-ahead could be given. OIC sent its representative to come early so he could go to Mbale and see the proposed campus. The OIC representative came from Jordan and arrived in Kampala on a Friday. His plan was to head to Mbale that day and be back by Saturday, ready to present a report to his colleagues, who would arrive on the same day for the crucial meeting on Monday.

When the OIC official arrived at Entebbe Airport that Friday, there was nobody from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to receive him and facilitate his trip to Mbale. He took a cab to Nile Hotel in Kampala. Someone phoned Al-Hajj Kakembo and told him there was "omuwarabu" (an Arab) official semi-stranded at the hotel. Al-Hajj Kakembo rushed from his office at the Ministry of Education Crested Towers building to the hotel, and apologized to the obviously

irritated official. He hired a car to take both of them to Mbale. Al-Hajj Kakembo continued:

We had to pass by my home in Kololo, so I could pack my travel bag. We arrived in Mbale and were met at Mt. Elgon Hotel by Professor Nsereko-Gyagenda at around 10:00 p.m. The next morning, we went to the site and then headed back to Kampala by noon.

(interview)

Monday morning, Al-Hajj Kakembo went to remind the Minister of Education about the pending important meeting scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m. The minister dismissively said "Mutabani, ebikwata ku by'abasiraamu tobingamba" (My son, don't bother me with Muslim issues!). Al-Hajj Kakembo smiled and deftly replied "Kojja (Uncle), maybe Hon. John Ntimba, the Minister of State for Education, can deputize for you. All you need is to notate here that you are authorizing him." The minister notated to that effect, and Al-Hajj Kakembo rushed to the Hon. John Ntimba, who agreed to represent the minister of education. "We went to the meeting and from then on Hon. John Ntimba was on board for the establishment of the University" *(interview)*.

The Decisions

At that joint meeting between the OIC and the government of Uganda, the parties made the critical decision to start IUIU in Mbale district. The Ministry of Education was charged with implementing the decision. A lot of decisions had to be made, including the decision to appoint officers to establish the university and hand over the site to IUIU. The officials who had to make these quick and difficult decisions included the Permanent Secretary, Ahmed Settenda; the Chief Education Officer, Al-Hajj Abubakr Kakembo; and the Director of Planning at the Ministry, Al-Hajj Muhammad Mayanja.

Al-Hajj Kakembo also recounted the search for someone to take up the critical position of University Secretary.

"The first choice for the post was a certain Ugandan who at that time was an Associate Professor at Dar-es-Salaam University. We flew him here for an interview and asked him to be the University Secretary for the new University in Mbale." He declined, saying they had wasted his time. He "was at a reputable University and was not ready to transfer to a small University located on a secondary school campus."

(interview)

The gentleman bid farewell and went back to Dar-es-Salaam. Then they approached Dr. Ahmed Sengendo, who had just returned to Makerere University from his doctoral studies in the United States. Al-Hajj Kakembo added that "We had to choose between Abbas Kiyimba and Dr. Ahmed Sengendo because

we also wanted to keep someone at Makerere University.” Dr. Sengendo agreed to take the post.

Another difficult task was handing over the site. According to Al-Hajj Kakembo, the Steering Committee spent three or four days in Mbale, meeting with the Mbale Municipal Planning Committee and the District Kadhi. It was finally decided that Nkoma Secondary School students and staff would go to the Aga Khan School premises, which belonged to the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council. Although there was some initial resistance from the Nkoma Secondary School Headmaster, they were able to make that happen. Al-Hajj Kakembo continues:

With the Mbale police, Mbale Municipal Planning Committee members, the District Kadhi, and the IUIU Security Officer by our side, I declared the start of IUIU project at the premises of Nkoma Secondary School. Appointment letters to the 15 officers of IUIU had already been delivered to them.

(interview)

The OIC and the Ugandan government had now passed the torch onto the 15 officers to implement their joint decision to establish the IUIU.

The Initial Staff of IUIU

The 15 officers were charged with starting the IUIU at the former campus of the Nkoma Secondary School by January 1988. They were appointed in October 1987. They had three months to accomplish the task. The head of the team was Prof. Twaha Nsereko-Gyagenda, who was appointed vice rector. For a long time, Prof. Nsereko-Gyagenda had been the custodian of the project, which was jokingly referred to as “the Briefcase University.” The team’s charge was to turn it from a “briefcase project” to a physical and functioning university; it would become the second university in Uganda after Makerere University. Table 8.1 identifies the first 15 employees of IUIU by name and designation.

Interviews with some of these officers 24 years later tell us the real story of how IUIU began. How were they recruited? What were they thinking as they embarked on this project? What were their challenges? How did they do it?

The Challenges

As Dr. Ahmed Sengendo recalls, only 12 officers took up their positions. Abdul Karim Sessanga soon replaced Kazimbiraine, who had decided not to take up his position. Musana also did not take up his position. The public relations position remained vacant for some time. The first batch of eight officers arrived at Nkoma Secondary School campus in early October 1987. Many of the staff houses were still occupied and others were uninhabitable. The headmaster of Nkoma Secondary School was still on campus with several of his staff. According to Dr. Sengendo:

I think they thought we were not serious and would give up and go back to Kampala. We told the headmaster that we had come to stay and would sleep in the library. The first night we had to sleep at Mt. Elgon Hotel in Mbale. The next day we were on campus by 8:00 a.m. We took over the current bursary building and used it as our office. All we had was one table and a bench, and we started planning for the University. That's when the Nkoma staff realized that we were serious and one teacher vacated a house. We had to do some serious cleaning because the staff used to cook Malwa (local brew) in that house! We all stayed in that house for several days until more houses became available.

(interview)

The campus was in disarray, with overgrown grass and overrun buildings. Dr. Sengendo continued, noting:

My initial reaction was that of shock because most of the buildings were dilapidated and others were completely looted[?]; they took away everything they thought was important to them. The compound was bushy. The sight was that of disappointment that a Muslim school was destroyed because a Muslim University was to be established there.

(interview)

The immediate task of the team was to renovate the buildings by turning some of the classrooms into residential halls. This required an assessment of the buildings, designing the renovations, bidding to prospective contractors, and supervising the renovation work. The other major tasks were to come up with a curriculum for two departments (the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies), formulate an admissions policy, recruit teaching staff, recruit and admit

Table 8.1 List of the first 15 appointed pioneer staff at UIIU

<i>No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Designation</i>
1	Prof. Twaha Nsereko-Gyagenda	Vice Rector
2	Dr. Ahmed Sengendo	University Secretary
3	Abdul Khaliq Sarwari (RA)	University Registrar
4	Moyen Uddin	University Engineer
5	Abdul Kasule	University Bursar
6	Magoola (RA)	Assistant Bursar
7	Musana	University Public Relations Officer
8	Tariq Ansar (RA)	University Librarian
9	Ismail Gyagenda	Male Warden
10	Kazimbiraine	Male Warden
11	Ms. Zaitun Kiyimba	Female Warden
12	Ms. Afuwa	Executive Secretary (Vice Rector's Office)
13	Abdunoor Tomusange	Technician
14	Seklandi	Technician
15	Mulindwa	Technician

students, and buy books and educational materials. All these tasks had to be accomplished by December 31, 1987.

The Skeptics

Abdunoor Tomusange remembers how he was recommended to IUIU from Makerere University, where he had worked as senior store keeper for 19 years:

At first I refused. I had watched the confusion at [the] Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC). Because UMSC was involved in the IUIU project, I did not want to be part of a disorganized institution. But Uddin persuaded me to come and I came as the Senior Store Keeper.

(interview)

In fact, there was a lot of skepticism about the viability of the project among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Both Dr. Sengendo and Samaali concurred on this fact. This skepticism led some of the appointed officers to decline the offer to join IUIU. Meanwhile, the general public wondered how Muslims, the least educated and least organized community in Uganda, could manage to run a university. The refrain was "If they cannot run the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, how can they run a university!!"

In his interview, Tomusange continued:

On reaching Mbale, we had to start from scratch. We (in the Estates Department) used Makerere University[s] format for documentation. The biggest challenge was storage space, which has only worsened. I think about 10 companies were contracted to perform the renovation on several buildings. We used mostly local Mbale companies.

(interview)

Multitasking

All staff had to multitask, depending on their expertise. Gyagenda and Dr. Sengendo worked on curriculum issues in addition to assisting the Registrar; the late Sarwari (RA) worked on student admission applications and registration. Assisted by the wardens, Samaali, Sessanga, Gyagenda, and Ms. Zaitun worked on residential regulations and preparing residential halls for students. Uddin, with the Estates Department, worked feverishly to supervise the multiple renovations going on all over campus. Kasule, the Bursar, kept a tight rein on the university funds and withstood a lot of pressure from everybody. The late Ansaar (RA) had to order the necessary books and scholastic materials. Dr. Sengendo was overseeing the day-to-day activities all over campus, and as he put it, "I was everywhere." With his welcome sense of humor, Prof. Nserenko-Gyagenda gently but firmly steered the team to accomplish its tasks. He was patient, fatherly, and always calm.

In his interview, Samaali recalled:

The Chief Education Officer, Kakembo informed me that I was to join IUIU as the University Coordinator. I was the headmaster of Mende SS at the time. I arrived on IUIU campus in November 1987.

(interview)

Samaali credited the working relationship with the Mbale community as having been key to the success of the university. As the coordinator (or Dean of Students), he had to quickly learn how to deal with mature students: "I couldn't cane them!" he quipped.

The Deadlines

Dr. Sengendo recalled:

The deadline of December 31st from October (1987) to build, recruit and start the University was almost impossible to accomplish. But it was clear that if we worked hard we could finish by January 1988. You see, the 1986 war had just ended, the roads were so bad, army remnants and Alice Lakwena rebels were all over the place. Most of the building materials had to be bought from Kampala. The whole experience was that of shock and very challenging.

(interview)

The whole campus was soon abuzz, with multiple activities occurring simultaneously. As the Nkoma Secondary School staff vacated their houses, the houses were cleaned and the IUIU staff moved in. As some of the classrooms were turned into student residential halls, furniture was brought in. Slowly, the campus was taking shape.

Islamic Code and Ethics

One of the key tasks was to formulate rules and regulations that would shape the culture of the university. As an Islamic university, it was important that the university dress code and conduct be regulated by the moral ethos of Islam. All female students, including non-Muslims, had to wear the hijab; there would be no fraternization between male and female students and they could not go to each others' halls of residence; salah (daily prayer) would be congregational and mandatory for male students; female students could not leave campus without permission; unmarried female students who got pregnant would be expelled. These regulations were unprecedented in Uganda's institutions of higher learning, where male-female relationships were virtually unregulated.

Recruiting Staff and Students

As construction was going on, staff and student recruitment was also going on. Advertisements for students were broadcast on the radio and printed in

the newspapers. Application forms were made available at the IUIU offices at Baumann House in Kampala and in Mbale. According to the stipulations of the founding staff, 80 percent of the student body was to be Muslim and 80 students would be admitted the first year. As for teaching staff, some of the IUIU administrators would be teaching as well. For example, Dr. Sengendo would teach in the Faculty of Education and Gyagenda would teach in both the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language. Prof. Kateregga helped in convincing the late Dr. Badrudeen Sajjabi (RA), who had just completed his PhD in Saudi Arabia, to join the university and head the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language. Ms. Juliet Tembe and Ms. Victoria Muwonge were recruited to join the Faculty of Education.

As noted earlier, it was clear that the December 31 deadline would not work for the university's opening. Instead, the start of the university was pushed to early February. In an interview, Dr. Sengendo recalled:

A joint committee composed of the Uganda government and the OIC Secretariat met on January 31, 1988. The meeting took place in the current female's guest-house to deliberate on the opening of the University. The team inspected the renovations, the recruited staff and the list of 80 students that were admitted, and they agreed that we were set to start the University.

(interview)

Internal Challenges

Meanwhile, negative forces were busy plotting to sabotage the project. Dr. Sengendo stated:

As members of the joint meeting came to Mbale, a group wrote and circulated a letter stating two issues 1) that the joint committee should not start the University because it is full of Baganda and that the local people got a raw deal and 2) that the Baganda team embezzled renovation funds and that, before a thorough investigation is done, the University should not start.

(interview)

The meeting met the following day (a team that constituted the first members of the University Council), and this letter was the first item on the agenda to be discussed. According to Dr. Sengendo, the committee reviewed staff recruitment and found that the majority of the staff was not Baganda. Dr. Sengendo explained:

Regarding the misappropriation of renovation funds, we suggested that the two issues should not be held together, and that the University opening should not be held hostage to allegations, but rather the matter should be investigated and the perpetrators should be dealt with accordingly. This suggestion was accepted, and the committee decided IUIU should start.

Later on, as part of the investigations, the Acting Rector, the late Hon. Abubakr Mayanja, held a meeting with us and informed us that the embezzlement allegation

was found to be not true. But it turned out that the issue was from among us. The chief architect was embarrassed and he resigned. Unfortunately this is what we Muslims do to ourselves.

(interview)

Mission Accomplished

From the deliberations of the University Council meeting, it was decided that IUIU would start on February 10, 1988. Announcements on the radio and in the major newspapers went up for applicants to check their names in the newspapers and in IUIU offices in Kampala and Mbale. On a beautiful Wednesday on February 10, 1988, IUIU was born! A dream for the Muslim community had turned into reality. The “Briefcase University” was now of brick and mortar. The team of dedicated Muslims had accomplished their charge, and the IUIU gates were now open and waiting for the students.

The Student Pioneers

Interviews with some of the first students told us the rest of the story. How were they recruited? What was their experience at IUIU during the first year? What were their challenges?

The interview with Hakim Nyenje took place in his office at the Uganda Development Bank, where he works as a manager. He was very excited to talk about his IUIU experience as a student pioneer: “Professor Gyagenda, I can’t believe it is over twenty years since we saw each other,” he beamed.

He had heard about the university through advertisements in the newspapers and radio, and although he had doubts about the quality of the new university compared to Makerere University, he had applied. These doubts were echoed by other fellow student pioneers, Dr. Maimuna Nimulola, currently the Dean of the Faculty of Education, and Musa Kasiita, the current Academic Registrar of the University. Over time, these anxieties were allayed, as the rigor of the studies at IUIU indicated to the students that the quality would be second to none.

Resenting the New Culture

The students pioneers all talked about the discipline at IUIU, and the new culture, which was unique compared to what they had experienced at other institutions in Uganda. The strict Islamic codes and integration of Islamic principles into the curricula in some courses have endured until today (Thaver 2003; Useem 1999; Varghese 2004; Lindow 2007). Umar Mwebesa, who is currently pursuing his masters at the Islamic University in Malaysia, said:

The Islamic environment was the first test. No shaking hands with the opposite sex. No free mixing. Hijab for girls. No social hours like music or dance. In fact, there are some students who quit because they could not cope.

(interview)

At first, students were somewhat resentful. Mwebesa continued:

In the residences, we complained about you, Gyagenda, Dr. Sengendo, Karim and the Bursar Kasule for waking us up for fajr (Morning Prayer). We were saying: why are they treating us as teenagers when we are adults.

(interview)

Dr. Ayub Tahir, in the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language, echoed this sentiment:

Some of the students had taken Islamic Studies at A level and they were questioning whether it was right to force anyone to pray.

(interview)

Dr. Kasozi Mahaz, currently a lecturer at UIIU, also remembered how the male student mood in the first several months was very negative regarding the strict Islamic culture:

There was a general feeling that we were not being treated as adults compared to our counterparts at other higher educational institutions in Uganda. But eventually we realized that it was for our good. Even I, who came from a strong Muslim background, finally saw the light here at UIIU.

(interview)

Kasiita also remembers some students commenting on the hijab as part of the dress code: "This is not Saudi Arabia!" (interview)

Dr. Maimuna Nimulola, Dean of Faculty of Education, and Dr. Halima Akbar, Director of UIIU Female's Campus at Kabojja, also recalled that the restrictions were very new to all the female students, and that the initial reaction was that of resentment.

Dr. Halima Akbar recalled:

The whole environment (Islamic) also posed a challenge. Although we were Muslims from Muslim families, we came from liberal Christian-based secondary schools. So to come into an all-Muslim environment was challenging.

(interview)

Dr. Maimuna Nimulola added:

Some colleagues were very negative towards hijab but later on changed their attitudes as they appreciated the intention behind it.

(interview)

In Retrospect

From the interviews, it was clear that this adjustment to a new culture was the major challenge for the student pioneers. However, the students were unanimous

in their opinion that, by the time they left IUIU, they appreciated the IUIU staff for having been very hard on them and insisting on a strict Islamic culture.

Hakim Nyenje recalled:

Life changed once you landed on campus. But Prof. Gyagenda, I can tell you now that none of the pioneer students is currently useless. All of us are successful as Managers, Lecturers, Directors, Headmasters, teachers and so on. Not a single pioneer student is unemployed. This is because you guys were very tough on us.

(interview)

All the interviewees shared this sentiment. They all remembered the close relations that the pioneer IUIU staff developed with the students, through counseling them, admonishing them, advising them, and holding them accountable for their actions.

Kasiita recalled:

We were being treated like children of the staff; with constant counseling and contact. We were told we were going to be the torch of IUIU. And now we are all successful, both Muslim and Christian pioneer students such as Twine Joseph, who is a headmaster in Bushenyi District, and Ms. Gertrude, who is a headmistress in Mbarara District.

(interview)

The Family Atmosphere

Dr. Maimuna Nimulola also talked about the close family-style relationship among the pioneer staff and students:

The pioneer staff acted like guardians. I remember during Ramadan, they would invite us to their homes for breakfast. They did this in turn so we would move from home to home. The local Muslim community also supported us and I remember we successfully fundraised in town for the annual Ramadan Convention.

(interview)

Hakim Nyenje recalled the exceptional example set by the pioneer staff:

Prof. Gyagenda, your generation had a spirit of sacrifice and invested a lot of time on us the students. Dr. Sajjabi used to invite us to his home. The relationship with all IUIU staff was excellent. The initial negative reaction changed, and we became leaders to guide the students who joined in the second year.

Dr. Halima Akbar praised the pioneer IUIU staff for giving their time to the students:

The university staff also engaged us a lot. Right from the University Secretary at that time, Dr. Sengendo, Samaali and the wardens Ms. Zaitun, Gyagenda, and

Karim Sessanga and other lecturers . . . they would call us to discuss issues, give us advice, counseling; it really helped to shape our characters. These people concentrated on us to make sure that we were getting the best. I think that was also their focus, they wanted to see that their start was very good.

(interview)

The Academic Quality

With regard to the academics, all the student pioneers soon realized that the IUIU staff were very strict and the curriculum was tough. All students had to take an Arabic and Islamic course, which was very challenging because Arabic was a foreign language, and for some, it was their first time taking Islamic studies. As Mwebesa recalled:

This was my first time to study Islamic Studies. In fact, I did not even know that Islamic Studies was offered at secondary A level. I struggled. Moreover, our colleagues taking Education teased us in the Faculty of Arabic that we were just going to be Imams and would not join professional careers. But we were later promised scholarships for advanced Arabic in Sudan, and we picked [up] interest and persevered.

(interview)

All the pioneers talked about the insistence on a quality education that IUIU pioneer staff modeled for them. They attributed their current success to this ethos of excellence that permeated the academic culture of IUIU at the time. Although the facilities were not fancy, student welfare was excellent.

General Welfare

The pioneers reminisced about free tuition, free food, “boom” (student allowance), and transport money for vacations. They were all grateful for the free education they got at IUIU, and wished it could be the same for current students. Working with the university coordinator, Samaali, and the wardens, Mrs. Kiyimba, Karim, and Gyagenda, the students started the Student Guild Government. Dr. Ayub Twahir recalled that they got help from Makerere Guild members, who gave them their constitution as a model. The students also started extracurricular activities, such as interhall football competitions, which became very successful and attracted the local community. Dr. Ayub remembered some of them later joined a professional football club, the Mbale Heroes, and the IUIU team played Northcote Hall, at Makerere University. By August 1988, as the first year of IUIU came to a close, it was evident that the university had not just been born, but was now on its way toward heralding a new era in the history of Ugandan higher education.

Limitations of the Study

This is a case study that involved one institution and a small sample of nonrandomly selected participants based on set criteria, as mentioned in the

Methodology section. As such, no generalizations may be extrapolated to other Islamic universities, or any other university, for that matter. Second, the participants and the authors are affiliated with IUIU. Therefore, the skeptic may dismiss the participants' accounts as partisan, biased, and intended to shower praise on their role in establishing the university. However, we took extreme care to keep the interview questions neutral. Although we sought to keep the respondents' perspectives anonymous and confidential, the participants all declined anonymity, and wanted to be cited by name. We may surmise that the decision of our respondents to decline anonymity was a good indicator of their sincerity and honesty.

Discussion

The results from the study highlight the difficult circumstances under which IUIU was established. The different participants in the process had to deal with their unique issues differently. The Muslim officials working in government had to walk a tightrope to steer through the project, sometimes over their unsympathetic or apathetic bosses. As cited earlier, one of the ministers declared that the Islamic university would be built over his dead body. In another incident, on the morning of the crucial meeting between government officials and the visiting OIC officials, the then-Minister of Education refused to head the government delegation. Abubakr Kakembo, the Chief Education Officer, had to quickly resolve the issue by suggesting to the dismissive minister that he allow the state minister to represent him. These incidents are a microcosm of the historical and widespread marginalization and discrimination suffered by Muslims in Uganda, where religion, education, and political appointments have always been correlated. Muslims are constantly reminded of their minority status and their underrepresentation in the corridors of power. They learn how to adapt, how to dodge problems, and how to survive, sometimes in very hostile work environments. Kakembo, who was a seasoned civil servant, was able to head off a potentially deal-breaking problem by keeping calm, thinking on his feet, and being very pragmatic. These incidents seem to suggest that Muslim officials in government, such as Kakembo, feared that the project could easily be sabotaged, and they worked hard to guide it through often-hostile forces in government. As Constantin (1993) argued regarding East African Muslims:

Muslims are involved in secular affairs[,] and thus confronted with the problems of power. They have to cope with the realities of political life[,] which have developed according to the rules, norms, and cultural references of the post-colonial state, but they have also to take into account their own characteristics and particularly the resources and weaknesses of their own Muslim communities. (p. 37)

The officials also faced the acute task of quickly assembling Muslim professional staff in a desert of talent to implement the project. The selected pioneer staff had to implement the project in four months. Some of the staff "jumped ship"

and failed to turn up for duty. The remaining staff had to juggle multiple roles to accomplish the task. They viewed this work as a mission. It is ironic that now they were the new Ugandan "missionaries," treading the untried waters of Islamic higher education, just like the foreign Christian missionaries of the early twentieth century. They were very cognizant of their mission and their mentorship role for the student pioneers.

The student pioneers initially felt they were "guinea pigs." Would the experiment work or not? Some of them were unsure about their future. Would employers accept their degree certificates? However, as they look back now, all are proud alumni of the university, and they treasure their status as "pioneers." Their initial negative attitudes toward the strict Islamic code at the university gave way to acceptance and embracing the values of the institution. It seems they came to recognize and embrace the unique mission of the university and their special role as pioneers. Credit also goes to the university staff, who kept a close relationship with the students, constantly guiding them, admonishing them, and reminding them of the mission of the university. All the student participants in the study recollected this strong bond between them and the university staff.

The Factors for Success

Looking back, one may wonder what factors account for the pioneer staff's success in getting IUIU off the ground in a record time of four months. What enabled the small "band of brothers and sisters" to start a new university in Uganda, thereby rewriting the history of Uganda's higher education? Where did they get the will, the confidence, and the resolve to do it? How could Muslims, who had been marginalized in Ugandan education for decades, be the first group to start a new university other than Makerere, which had monopolized the higher education landscape for years? It is difficult to answer these questions, and in order to do so conclusively, researchers will have to undertake more studies, with a bigger sample size. However, a closer examination of the social, political, and religious factors affecting the Muslim community in the late 1970s and 1980s may provide a plausible explanation for the phenomenal birth of IUIU in 1987–1988.

Support from OIC and Ugandan Government

First and foremost, the OIC expressed willingness to go forward with the project, and the Ugandan government dealt with the project in a pragmatic manner. OIC provided the initial funding for the university, and has since continued to contribute to the university budget. The government, under President Museveni, has fully supported IUIU, and the charter officially establishing the university was endorsed by the Parliament later in 1991. The government also donated land to the university. To steer the project through the government also required advocates; Muslim professionals in the government helped tremendously in this regard, as will be discussed in the following section.

Dedicated Muslim Professionals

Muslim professionals, who were products of schools managed by the UMEA, had been appointed in prominent positions in government and the private sector during President Idi Amin's reign. These professionals were imbued with the UMEA "spirit" of promoting education for the marginalized Muslim community. These included the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Ahmed Settenda; the Chief Educational Officer, Abubakr Kakembo; and the Director of Planning in the Ministry of Education, Muhammad Mayanja. The head of the UIIU team, Professor Nsereko-Gyagenda, was a former Makerere University secretary. These professionals had the requisite experience to map out a course to start the university. President Museveni had also appointed several Muslims in important positions, including Al-Hajj Moses Kigongo, the vice chairman of NRM; the late Hon. Abu Mayanja, the Hon. Gen. Moses Ali, and the Hon. Kirunda-Kivejinja as cabinet members; and Prof. Kateregga as ambassador to Saudi Arabia. They all played an indispensable role in advocating for the university in the government and getting the university off the ground. However, to do so, they had to send a cadre who believed in the mission. Former members of the Makerere University Muslim Students' Association (MUMSA) came in handy.

MUMSA-Inspired Islamic Missionary Zeal

MUMSA was the acknowledged leader of Muslim students' associations in Uganda since the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, MUMSA had gained a lot of steam, and had galvanized the Muslim youth to understand the historical plight of Muslim education, and to aspire for higher education for more Muslims. MUMSA organized many student conferences that constantly urged Muslim youth to understand their role in Ugandan society. The MUMSA spirit of the late 1970s and 1980s was that of unapologetic Islamic identity and focus on intellectual pursuit. MUMSA members also forged strong bonds and developed close relationships that endured beyond graduation from Makerere. The team sent to start the university in Mbale included two former MUMSA chairmen (Ismail Gyagenda and Dr. Ahmed Sengendo), plus Abdul Kasule, Karim Sessanga, and Mrs. Zaitun Kiyimba, who had been active MUMSA members. They were young and idealistic, and they were on the same page philosophically. They were determined not to mirror the confusion and incompetence that was constantly, publicly displayed in other Muslim institutions. They totally understood the historic nature of their mission in Mbale, and were determined to accomplish it.

Banya and Elu (2001) posited that decisions to build institutions of higher learning in Africa should not be based just on monetary availability. They said: "Natural self-interest, including preservation of one's cultural heritage[,] should be paramount in such decision-making" (p. 30). The pioneer staff was probably driven by this desire to preserve their Islamic heritage and identity. Their zeal and energy had been reinforced by the reform for excellence in Muslim education taking place in the 1980s. This is what we may call the "Kawase effect."

The "Kawase Effect"

During the late 1970s and 1980s, Muslim educational administrators, led by Abbas Kawase and Swaibu Mbaziira, had embarked on a move for excellence at UMEA-founded secondary schools of Kibuli SS, and later Nabisunsa SS. These historical Muslim institutions had unfortunately become known for mediocrity and decay. Kawase's transformative philosophy was to reject the notion that Muslim-founded institutions had to play second fiddle to their Christian-founded counterparts, such as St. Mary's College (Kisubi), Gayaza Secondary School, or King's College (Buddo). By the late 1980s, these Muslim-founded institutions were among the best in the country. This phenomenon engendered confidence in young Muslim educators to replace the sense of victimhood that had plagued Muslims in Uganda with a new positive attitude. Some of the IUIU team members were witnesses or admirers of this "Kawase effect." This "can-do" spirit permeated the team in Mbale during the critical months of establishing IUIU. However, starting a university called for more than a missionary zeal and the "can do" spirit. It required quality, technical ability, and skills.

Technical Quality of the Pioneer Staff

A critical mass of professionals who knew what they were doing was assembled at a moment's notice, and they went to work without fanfare. The late Sarwari (RA) worked with Gyagenda and Dr. Sengendo, who were professional educators, on admissions and registration issues. The latter two also worked on the curriculum and recruiting faculty. Uddin, a former Makerere University engineer, assisted by Tomusange, Mulindwa, and Ssekandi, led the Estates Department charged with the renovation of the buildings. The library issues were in the capable hands of the late Ansari (RA), from the Makerere University library. The University Coordinator, Abass Samaali, a former headmaster of Mende SS, worked in conjunction with the Residential Wardens, Ismail Gyagenda, Karim Sessanga, and Mrs. Kiyimba, on student affairs. Finances were in the capable hands of Kasule and the late Magoola (RA). Professor Nsereko-Gyagenda (as Vice Rector) and Dr. Sengendo (as University Secretary) supervised the entire team. All the above were technocrats in their specific fields, and hit the road running, as was necessary. There was no time for second guessing. Mention must also be made of Ms. Afuwa, Professor Nsereko-Gyagenda's long-time executive assistant, who deftly led the secretarial duties in the hectic time of starting the university. The late Mbale elders Muluya (RA) and Nsereko (RA), the IUIU Security Officer, worked hard to forge a working relationship with the local community.

Conclusion

This combination of full support from OIC and the Ugandan government, dedicated Muslim professional experience, MUMSA-inspired Islamic missionary zeal, the "Kawase effect," and the technical quality of the pioneer staff resulted in the improbable birth of IUIU. When the university opened its doors on February 10,