



Kenyan Muslims and the Righting of Historical Injustices: the Case of Mwambao

Lecture given by Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir, at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO), 8 July 2008

Introduction by Kai Kresse



Abdilahi Nassir, Kai Kresse

Introducing the author: Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir (1932–2022)

Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir was born in Mombasa, on 1 June 1932, into the wider Kilindini family-clan, one of the original so-called ‘Twelve Tribes’ (*thenashara taifa*), the original local Swahili urban groups or founding clans of Mombasa (Berg 1968; Kindy 1972). His family was known for including a number of local intellectuals: Muslim scholars, Swahili poets, singers, healers, and politicians. His mother was a well-known healer, his father a trader, his maternal grandfather an Islamic scholar of high reputation – and his paternal grandfather Juma Bhalo a captain (*nahodha*) from Kutch in India who married into the Swahili community. Sheikh Abdilahi himself actively took on some of these occupations during his life-time, as a teacher, religious scholar, politician, editor and publisher, thus switching between politics and Islamic learning throughout his life.

His education included extensive religious madrasa training from an early age, as well as the Arab Boys Primary School in Mombasa. Between 1950 and 1951, he went for further education at the Teacher Training College in Zanzibar, and later taught back in Mombasa, at the Arab Boys School as well as the newly founded Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education (MIOME). Influenced by his mentors, most notably the cosmopolitan scholar and sufi leader Sayyid Omar Abdalla (in Zanzibar who was then in charge of the Muslim Academy) and the socially engaged teacher Muhammad Ghazali (in Mombasa, who was then in charge of the Arab Boy’s School); both urged him to educate himself in both secular and religious terms, and to read widely in all possibly directions. Thus sensitised, he

turned to politics during the pre-Independence era of public discussions and the negotiation of Kenya’s (the British colony’s) future as an independent country, in the late 1950s. With not yet thirty years of age, he became elected as an MP for the Mombasa Mvita constituency, and in turn he became a leading figure for the coastal separatist independence movement – referred to as “Mwambao”, after the term for the 10-mile coastal strip of Kenya, which formally continued to belong to the Sultanate of Zanzibar and was administered by the British as a “protectorate” and thus not formally part of the Kenyan colony proper. However, the Mwambao campaign for a separate coastal state failed during the negotiations over Independence at the Lancaster House Conference in London in 1962, in which Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir participated as an elected representative, and where he refused to sign the agreement.¹

He was a founding member of the Kenyan African National Union (KANU) which was to become the dominant (and later the only) party in government, but left KANU when he found it dominated by Kikuyu-Luo influence.

After leaving politics he joined the publishing business, becoming an editor for Oxford University Press East Africa in 1967. There, he was responsible for several key publications in Swahili literature. These included the poetry of his younger brothers Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo (1936–2019), *Malenga wa Mvita* (1971), and Abdilatif Abdalla, the political activist who was imprisoned by Jomo Kenyatta’s government and who composed his famous cycle *Sauti ya Dhiki* (*Voice of Agony*, published 1973) during his incarceration, from 1969 to 1972. In his capacity as OUP-editor, Sheikh Abdilahi also worked closely together with Tanzania’s President Julius Nyerere, on his translations of Shakespeare’s plays “Julius Caesar” and “The Merchant of Venice” into Kiswahili (both 1969). Later on, in the late 1970s, he started his own publishing house, *Shungwaya Publishers* in Nairobi (the name referring to the mythical homeland of Swahili origins), where he published two important volumes of sections of translations of

¹ See Colonial Office. 1962. *Report of the Kenya Coastal Strip Conference, 1962*. London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office. This biographical summary is based on information that I obtained through a few formal interviews with him (in 1998 and 1999, during my PhD fieldwork) and many informal conversations over the years that followed, during meetings in London, Berlin, and many times in Mombasa (for more, see also Kresse 2004: 212–223; 2007: 183–193).

the Quran into Swahili by the famous Mombasan scholar Sheikh Al-Amin Mazrui (1891–1947) (Mazrui 1980; 1981) next to a number of other important books.

In the course of the 1980s, he began to give regular public speeches on social and political issues from an Islamic perspective, e.g. on the fatwa on Salman Rushdie, and publicly declared his alliance to Shia Islam. He published a series of Swahili pamphlets that explained the relationships between Shia and Sunni Islam (with reference to the Quran, the hadith, etc.) in accessible terms and in calm language, responding to recently published (and Saudi-funded) Swahili pamphlets attacking Shiism in combative terms, which had been translated from Arabic (Nassir 1989a; 1989b; 1990; 1995; 2003a). Focusing on the power of sober reasoning in his well-attended public lectures as well as his writings, and often responding to similar attacks on Shiism by Salafi-leaning so-called “Wahhabi” groups, or commenting on pressing political issues and struggles on a national or global scale (often in response to requests from within the Muslim community), he continued his role as a public intellectual Muslim scholar from Mombasa later in the 1990s, while numerous cassette recordings of his speeches were circulating in Kenya and in Tanzania, where he often spoke in front of large and growing numbers of Shia audiences, particularly in Dar es Salaam. He became a leading figure for the new and increasingly significant group of Shia converts among the Swahili and wider East African Muslim community, and published further pamphlets, e.g. defending maulidi celebrations against attacks by local reformist groups (Nassir 2002) or regional historical accounts of Islamic history from anti-Shia attacks (Nassir 2003b; see also Kresse 2008, 232–252). Finally, he published a few short sections of his own translations of the Quran; this was a project that occupied him during the last years of his life, though he had started it earlier already (Nassir 2024; Nassir 1981).

In January 2022, he passed away in Mombasa, and his burial was attended by hundreds of mourners, despite the corona pandemic conditions at the time. He is remembered by many, as a gifted public speaker and an influential critical thinker, and is held in high esteem for his diverse kinds of social and political engagements, by people inside and outside Kenya, and within and beyond the Muslim community.

Introducing the text

This text was first presented as a public lecture in English at ZMO, in July 2008, when Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir was invited by me for a two-week-stay to Berlin, together with his brother, the poet Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo. Responding to requests from within the Kenyan Swahili community for this topic, he used the lecture to clarify certain basic aspects about a historical perspective on coastal Kenyan Muslims within postcolonial Kenyan politics, drawing from his own long-term observations and his experiences as politician, as religious leader, and as Swahili elder. A sense of historical injustice and political marginalisation has been a continuous feature and prevailing leitmotif in the experience and

self-perception of coastal Muslims throughout the post-colonial period in Kenya, and this is anchored in the colonial history and experience.² In this lecture, Sheikh Abdilahi discusses some core aspects and prominent examples of this, from the perspective of the coastal Muslim community that he belongs to, but at the same time also with a critical view on the lack of Muslim unity that he sees at the basis of the lack of activity and political engagement which he would have liked to see.

We should note that the first truly competitive general elections in Kenya, of the post-Moi era (President Moi had ruled Kenya from 1978 until 2002), had taken place just a year before, in January 2007, and had resulted in a vigorously contested re-election of President Mwai Kibaki that led to a week of clashes with hundreds of deaths. Despite its ultimate failure to stifle and stop corruption, a campaign for which Kibaki initially stood, the Kibaki period (2002–2013) was (and is still, retrospectively) seen by many as period of hope and chance for Kenya, to sort itself out and re-adjust its politics to a more fair, transparent, and inclusive nature. In fact, the investments in inclusive consultative processes of interest groups and ordinary Kenyans leading to a revised new constitution of Kenya (passed in 2010) bear this out. Thus in 2008, at the time of this lecture, an appeal to the coastal Muslim community to unify itself and engage in internal consultative processes of how best to present one's interests and brings oneself in for a more inclusive and participatory role in national politics, made a lot of sense. Even if the lecture was given outside Kenya, and to a largely academic audience, the clarifications given do also respond to needs and demands for orientation by Kenyan coastal Muslims. This text is an important historical source for the understanding of Kenyan politics as they play out and concern coastal Muslims, from someone who here comments from an internal perspective, yet also with some critical distance to recent politics and coastal Muslim political representatives.

A final note on the language used here: for the sake of accessibility, Sheikh Abdilahi was asked to present his lecture in English, a language he had been using ably during his political career until the early 1960s, but which he had hardly used in public since. This is why Sheikh Abdilahi makes an introductory comment here about his reluctance to speak in English. Such reluctance is all the more understandable when we know about his reputation as a gifted and highly praised public speaker in Swahili – a reputation that was commonly held among friends and foes, supporters and opponents (the latter at times characterizing him as “dangerous” to listen to, and advising their group-members to refrain from doing so, so as not to be tempted to change their view). As editors, we decided here to only apply a light touch of editing to the original English text as delivered by Sheikh Abdilahi, since it is clear and well understandable, and we thought it important to convey the text in a form as close and true to the original formulations as possible, so as to convey also the intent and the spirit of the lecture as well as possible.

² See also Kresse 2018: Part I.

We have added a few footnotes on historical events, names, and other contexts, for the purposes of a better understanding, especially for readers not familiar with these topical matters.

As a concluding personal note, I would like to add that I was highly fortunate to have been able to get to know Sheikh Abdilahi, who responded friendly and positively to my requests for conversations when I was a PhD student in Mombasa in 1998–1999, looking for knowledgeable elders and local intellectuals, and to work with him (and on his texts) over a long period ever since. My gratitude to him goes far beyond that of a common research relationship, as he was immensely generous in sharing his knowledge and recollections over the years, always making time if he could, to be available for questions and conversations, also inviting me to his home and baraza settings. I kept in touch over the years and visited him every time I came to Mombasa (and now I keep in exchange with his sons). My own understanding of the internal dynamics of the coastal Kenyan community has significantly been shaped by listening to his lectures and talks, and studying his texts; and my understanding of the world more widely has gained much from interactions with him. I am happy to acknowledge this special relationship of trust and mentorship. In our communications in the year before his demise, he agreed that this lecture (and another Swahili one, on Islam and Democracy) could be published as part of this new ZMO online paper series, “Texts in Contexts”. Highly indebted and in deep gratitude, and surely going to work further with his texts and thoughts as I try to learn more, I salute him and hold up his memory.

The audio- and video-recording of his lecture at ZMO is still accessible online.



Lecture Abdilahi Nassir, 2008 (audio)



Lecture Abdilahi Nassir, 2008 (video)

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Lecture by Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir

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I don't know how to start. As Bwana Kai Kresse has mentioned I think I could have done greater justice to the subject had I been allowed to speak in Kiswahili. The reason being is that I have left behind addressing people in English for the last 28 years. Since I moved to Mombasa from Nairobi I have never spoken in English in any public gathering anymore. But you'll pardon me if you find my English a bit rusty because it has been in stall for 28 years. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the ZMO for the invitation to come here and spend time with you. During our time here, we have been taken great care of. For this I say thank you.

Now the subject suggested to me is *Kenyan Muslims and the righting of historical injustices: the case of Mwambao*. Before going into the subject properly, I think there are two words, two names, in that title which we need to know about. These are Kenya and Mwambao.³

We have to understand what Kenya was before Independence and what Kenya is after Independence, just as we have to know what Mwambao was before independence and what it is after independence. Kenya before independence minus Mwambao was known as Kenya Colony under a British governor. It was ruled by Britain. Mwambao was a 10-mile strip which, before Britain had an agreement with the Sultan in 1895, was under the Sultan of Zanzibar.⁴ This was a 10-mile coastal strip which, of course, is much older than the Kenya Colony and was known as the Kenya Protectorate. The other part of Kenya was the Kenya Colony.

So, Kenya was a country in two parts. And every part of this country, the Kenya Colony and the Kenya Protectorate, had its character which is very important in appreciating the developments that followed. Both of them were under one British governor, who was in Nairobi. He was the governor of the Kenya Colony and Protectorate, although the Protectorate was the Sultan's territory. Now there was a difference in the atmosphere of the Kenya Colony and the Kenya Protectorate. There was a difference in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. And this, in reflection, determined their respective behaviors. Those who lived in Kenya Colony, the Africans who were in Kenya Colony, the treatment they got from the government was rough, hostile, even brutal. And this was largely because of the influence of the settlers. The settlers had a strong influence on the administration. In fact, the governor in some cases was subservient to the settlers. Now, the settlers were very brutal and this was reflected in what the govern-

ment came up within the form of the laws of the country. In the Kenya Protectorate, although it was under the same governor, the relationship was somewhat human and civil. It wasn't as rough as it was in the Colony. There was some respect for the Sultan's people. Those who were the Sultan's subjects were treated differently by the administration, unlike those in the Kenya Colony. This automatically was reflected in the behavior of the people in the two parts of the country. Those who were under Kenya Colony were aggressive. I think this was a reaction to the type of treatment they were getting from the settlers and the government. They were very aggressive in some cases, very rough, very hostile and to a certain degree uncouth. Those who were in the Kenya Protectorate were somewhat passive, very humble and very civil. They weren't getting the treatment which their counterparts in the Colony were getting. So it tended to make them sort of docile, they wouldn't react to any of the mis-administration by the governor.

This brought about the attitude of the upcountry people that is the Colony people, towards the people of the Protectorate. The people of upcountry found the Coast people being very soft, sometimes very meek, and in most cases, because they had not been exposed to the English education, very backward. They looked down on them as people who had no knowledge. This attitude emerged much more expressly during the struggle for Independence. Most of the leaders of the Colony were hostile to the presence of Sultan's citizens in the country, because they did not believe that that part of the country rightly belonged to the Sultan. In fact, one of the leaders at the Lancaster House Conference⁵ referred to the Sultan as a thief. And it was common in their campaigns against the Coastal people to refer to the Sultan and the Arabs as slave traders and the coastal people as very indolent, lazy people who would not work but would wait for coconuts to drop from the tree and pick them up.

Now, this in a way was arrogance. The upcountry people were very arrogant, particularly the major tribes who were at that time leading the independence movement. There was this arrogance largely by the GEMA community that is the Gikuyu, Embu, Meru, Akamba, plus Luos. They were very aggressive in their campaigns and this frightened the lesser tribes, the smaller tribes in the Kenya Colony just as it did with the Coastal people. When they started their campaign, the small tribes in the Colony came up with a form of a defense in fighting for what was called majimboism, that is regionalism. So the stand of the smaller tribes was that, when we gain independence, Kenya country should not be governed by a central government but it should have regional governments as well. So they opted for a sort of a federation, the areas that were populated by the smaller tribes to avoid being ruled over by the big tribes. This was as far as the Kenya Colony was concerned.

In the Kenya Protectorate this provoked what was known as Mwambaoism: Mwambao being a Swahili word which

³ Mwambao [Swahili]: coast/shore. The area "Mwambao" is located around Mombasa at the Kenyan coast.

⁴ In 1840 the Sultan of Oman, Said bin Sultan, moved the capital of the Sultanate from Muscat to Stone Town in Zanzibar. After his death in 1856 the Sultanate split up into the Sultanate of Zanzibar which went to his son Majid bin Said, and the Sultanate of Muscat ruled by Thuwaini bin Said. See Fair, 2001. See also Brennan, 2008: 831-861.

⁵ In the Lancaster House Conferences in 1960, 1962 and 1963 Kenya's constitutional framework and independence were negotiated. See Kresse. 2007: 187. See also Brennan, 2008: 857.

gained prominence during the struggle, Mwambaoism being a fight to establish Mwambao apart from the Kenya Colony. Of course the coastal people themselves weren't united on this. There were almost five groups. There was the group that wanted to be integrated with Zanzibar, come under the Sultan of Zanzibar. There was a group that wanted integration with Kenya Colony so that there is only one Kenya, that Kenya Colony and Protectorate be one. There were those who thought the Mwambao should be independent of Zanzibar and independent of Kenya Colony. And there were those who thought the relationship between Mwambao and Zanzibar should be federal. And those who thought the relation between the Colony and Mwambao should be federal.

This was discussed at length at the London conference, the Lancaster House Conference (in 1962) where Zanzibar political parties, Kenya Colony political parties participated as well as those from Mwambao. This discussion went on for a long time and finally the Sultan was advised by the political leaders in Zanzibar to give up the Protectorate to Kenya. In other words, it should be one Kenya and no longer two different parts of the same country. Now, the Sultan of course came up with a condition. The condition was there would be no interference in the religion of those who were his subjects and the culture would be preserved as well. So this was agreed. And this was the greatest fear the Mwambaos had, that following the threats of the upcountry politicians in their campaigns that they would remove anything to do with the Sultan, any culture, and those who would not have any relation with the Arabs. The usual thing: Arabs will go home, Indians will go home, Europeans will go home.

This agreement at the Lancaster House Conference was reconfirmed by the exchange of letters between the Prime Minister of Zanzibar, Mr. Shamte, and the Prime Minister of Kenya, Mr. Kenyatta. There was this exchange of letters the Kenyan government, now the Kenya independent government, would undertake to make sure that there would be no erosion of the culture and religion of the Sultan's ex-subjects. So this was in short the background to the struggle that prompted the subject of the fears that the Muslims largely had.

Now, immediately after independence where the subjects of the Sultan had expected following the signing of the exchange of letters that they would be taken care of – immediately after that – the first one in the injustices was the disregard of that letter. It would be said publicly that yes, people agreed to have it, but in practice there was this discrimination against the Sultan's subjects who were almost all Muslims. They would be discriminated by not giving them jobs. No jobs would be given to them. There was an undertaking that Arabic would continue to be taught in schools – it was dropped. Islamic religion was continued but not under Muslim teachers, because Muslims were being barred from joining teacher training colleges. So it would be left to non-Muslim teachers teaching elementary Islamic religious education which was not a reflection of what Islamic religious education was before independ-

ence. During colonial times for example in the schools, where most of the citizens of the Sultan would go, one would start with a Koran class what was referred to as a KC. A Koran Class and then Kindergarten and then Standard one A, Standard one B, Standard 2, Standard 3, Standard 4... In the Koran Class students would be taught the Koran, to recite the Koran just as it would be taught in the madrasas. In fact, some of the teachers who were teaching this subject in schools were ex-Koran-madrasa-school teachers. So they would be employed by the government to teach students the Koran. And of course there was Arabic, proper Arabic that was being taught in schools as well. And when it came to religion it was proper religion – jurisprudence as part of it, history as part of it, the elementary translation of the Koran etc. But after independence these things were pulled out and just a semblance of it was left.

And then, of course, there was this attempt to abolish the Kadhi's courts.⁶ They could not directly abolish them but what they did to blunt the effectiveness of the courts was to introduce English, making it compulsory for one to be a Kadhi that one should know English. This was not a condition during colonial times. But after independence it was deliberately made a condition to keep out those who could really be competent Kadhis, people with the knowledge of Islamic theory. The tendency was one would go to school and would not have much time to attend the Islamic study circles where he would have the higher knowledge of for example Islamic jurisprudence. One would not have the time to attend classes in the mosque. So most of those who would have spent time in schools to know English would be the ones who would not have had an opportunity to find time to study Islamic theory. I am speaking of the time after the independence. So when you insisted that a Kadhi must speak English, he would have a rudimentary knowledge of Islamics and a lot of English. The result was that those who would have qualified to be Kadhis didn't have the opportunities to be Kadhis because now they have to write their judgments in English. So this was used as a form of diluting whatever they had undertaken to do after independence.

Of course, initially when we attained Independence, there were Muslims in the civil service, there were Muslims in universities as lecturers, there were Muslims in parastatal bodies, but this was a carryover of what was there under the colonialists. Those who were already in the service were not thrown out, but as soon as the time for their pension had come, for retirement, then nobody else would move in. The result is if you compare, for example, the administration, there were some of the ex-Sultan's subjects who were District Commissioners and District Officers. We had a number of brothers who were university lecturers, some of them you know. There was a number of ambassadors, but these were the appointments that were made before

⁶ The Kadhi's courts are a Kenyan Muslim jurisdiction that regulate matters of family law such as inheritance, marriage, divorce and personal status. After the Kenyan independence the courts were integrated into the constitution. Despite claims to change that in 2010, the Kadhi's courts are still part of the constitution. See Mwakimako, 2003.

Independence. Because these people had been placed in the positions where they would be observed and taken care of. But as soon as that generation was phased out we haven't had a strong presence in the civil service and other government institutions.

Then, another injustice was the case of MIOME. MIOME is the "Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education". This was an institution that was established during colonial times. Financial contributions for the establishment of this institute were made by the Sultan of Zanzibar, the Aga Khan, the British government and a philanthropist in Mombasa, who donated the piece of land on which this institute was built – about 35 acres. He was a Mombasa wealthy man, called Khamis Mohamed bin Juma. The institute was established during colonial times to train Muslims from all parts of East Africa, from Kenya, from Uganda, from Tanganyika, from Zanzibar, in technical subjects. So it produced a lot of engineers, electrical engineers, motor engineers, navigators – even navigation was established and taught – and other technical subjects. These were spread all over East Africa. We had a number of Muslims, young Muslims who had positions in government. We still have some of them in Zanzibar, and some of them in Uganda. But in Kenya we don't have any. Immediately after Independence, Kenyatta grabbed the MIOME, took it over, and now it is referred to as Mombasa Polytechnic. The sad part of it is that Muslims, who attend this polytechnic at present, are less than 5 percent of the total population of the students in that institute. So this was another injustice that was done immediately after Independence.

Then, there is the question of national status. Yes, they agreed that all the ex-Sultan's subjects would be Kenyans, but the situation in the field is not so. For example, if a young man is newly born and later on reaches the age of 18, in Kenya they must have an identity card. Now to get that identity card, if you bear a Muslim name you would be required to produce your birth certificate, your father's birth certificate, and your grandfather's birth certificate. Once you bear a Muslim name, this is the same with a passport, whereas non-Muslims would go there and get it just by giving their own name. So this has forced Muslims to find themselves as if they don't belong to that country. Recently to prove this in parliament, a Luo MP, this is a MP from Binyanga Province, stood up and said how unfair this is and how unjust this is by citing a case of two Luo brothers, two full brothers. One had a Christian name to his Luo surname. The other had a Muslim name to his father's surname. They had the same father. Now this MP cited their case and said the one with the Christian name got his ID but not the one with the Muslim name. He had to produce birth certificates of his father and his grandfather. So this was another case of the injustices that we have in the country.

Then we come to land. Now, a lot of the land in the Protectorate was turned into trust land by the British colonialists. They took away some of the land from the people themselves and made them "Crown lands", that belonged to the British government.

So there was a lot of land that could not be claimed by individuals as their land, however long they might

have stayed. We are not speaking of vast pieces of land. The land on which your house was built by your ancestors, you had no right to it. You stayed there at the mercy of the government. For example, you go to Lamu district, to the Bajuni islands, or Bajuni mainland, there are no title deeds for the inhabitants, the residents of that area. But somebody coming from outside that area would have (would be able to obtain) a title deed. So all these people who had been there for centuries did not have any titles to the land. They are the tenants of the government. They can be pushed out any time.

Now, what is most painful is when the independent government wanted to look for settlements for some of their people upcountry they would look for land at the coast. There has been a lot of land that belonged to the European settlers. It was bought, the British government gave some funds to the Kenyan government on loan and they used this money to buy some of these vast lands – not in name of the respective communities but in the name of individuals. So Kenyatta would grab every land that belonged to European settlers. Other leaders would join in as well and they would share all these lands. Now, normally these would be people who the settlers allowed to settle with huts built in the land. But now they were being forced out. By who? By the Africans who said they were fighting for that land to revert to them. So they would push them out of the land they had bought. Where did they send them to? To the coast! So in Shimba Hills, one of the settlements was Shimba Hills in the south of Mombasa in the Kwale district – you had upcountry people given plots with their title deeds, whereas the people surrounding them, the Digos and the Durumas, would not have that land. Come to Lamu, a place called Mpeketoni, the government would send Kikuyus with title deeds for these plots. Whereas the Bajunis, the Bokomos, the Gallas would not have any rights to this land.⁷ Again they would sell some of these plots to foreigners coming from outside Kenya to invest and build villas or hotels. They would give them the title deed to own that piece of land and remove the natives from that area. [...] The administrators, particularly our Kikuyu brothers, some of them own islands in the Lamu district. They have their title deeds and that belongs to them. So this was another injustice that was done to the coastal Muslims.

Well, one might rightly point out, what about Somalis in Kenya? Aren't they Muslims? Because right now you find Somali ministers, Somali generals in the army, Somali provincial commissioners, Somali district commissioners, Somali education officers, Somali district officers etc. They are there, they are holding these posts. But the question is, were they given these posts because they were Muslims or because they were Somalis? In Kenya there is this belief which has been perpetuated by a lot of repetition that Somalis are not Arabs. Arabs, as I mentioned earlier, were slave traders, Somalis weren't. Somalis belonged to Somalia which is

7 Ramadan Khamis. 2011. *Sauti Muhimu. Vital Voices from Lamu.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ij5P9LyocYk&ab_channel=RAMADHANKHAMIS.

in Africa. Muscat or Oman is not in Africa. This was what Kai Kresse mentioned (in his Introduction), when I was a MP in my maiden speech, Tom Mboya kept on interrupting me as I spoke. And he got to a point where he told me: "Go back to Arabia!" So I turned to him and told him: "You go back to the Sudan!" Because at least Luos said they came from there to Kenya then 70 years ago,⁸ while Arabs had been in Kenya over a 1000 years ago. So, who has the greater right to be a Kenyan? So when he told me "Go back to Arabia", I told him "Go back to the Sudan". And he shouted: "Sudan is in Africa" and I told him "Nonetheless in the Arab League".⁹ [Laughter from the audience] So this is the same case with Somalia. Somalia is in Africa, it is a member of the Arab League. So why differentiate the two? But the reason why they have accepted the Somalis despite the fact that they are Muslims and not the Swahilis or the Digos or whoever at the coast, is because Somalis were aggressive, they fought for several years (with the government) whereas the Mwambaos did not fight, did not take arms. So the government feared Somalis, they didn't fear the Mwambaos because they have always been peaceful. In fact, this has been repeated every time politicians come to the coast that they are renowned for your peacefulness. The Coast is a very good area, everything is peaceful. As Moi would always end his speeches: "Mukae hivyo", and that means continue being what you are, never rise up. So, this in short was the situation before and after independence. But the subject of my talk refers to righting of the injustices. How would we right them? I think there are a number of factors that we have to bear in mind. The first thing is the Muslims have to be united, they have to unite. At present, they are not united. They appear to be united on the face of it, but they are not. They are not united and the main reason is this cancer of tribalism that reigns in Kenya. Throughout Kenya that tribalism is a big problem. And although as Muslims we are supposed to be united, the Muslims in Kenya are not yet a homogenous society. So this is one of the problems that Muslims face. To be able to be effective in fighting for their rights, Kenyan Muslims have to be united. Secondly, we as Kenyan Muslims have to be assertive. As I said most of us at present are docile. We have to be assertive and aggressive. Not necessarily in the military sense. But we have to speak out about our rights. Of course, this requires awareness, political awareness that as Muslims we are not foreigners, we are Kenyans as well. Now this has yet to be appreciated by the Muslims, I am sorry to say this. Normally Muslims do not regard themselves as part and parcel of the country, particularly now that they are carried away by the young activists that have come up and carried away by this wave of Pan-Islamism where they would be more interested in what is going on outside Kenya than what is going

8 The period normally given for the Kenyan Luos to have migrated from Sudan is between 1500 and 1900, which would have been about 460 to 60 years ago at the time. See e.g. Ogot, Bethwell A. *History of the Southern Luo: Volume I, Migration and Settlement, 1500–1900*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967.

9 See also Jeremy Prestholdt, 2014:249–70.

on within Kenya itself. And this is largely because of the leaders themselves, they are not that conscious. Of course, we have had some successes by being assertive. But it is not a sort of an organized form of movement. We have had successes for example with the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) that was an organization in the 1980s and 90s.¹⁰ The government refused to register the party, but it was very active and brought the government to its knees at that time. Even some of the upcountry politicians, who were fighting President Moi¹¹, wanted to join IPK because they discovered it was the most effective party against the then President of Kenya, to a point where the government sent some of its officers to the Muslims, went to the Muslims elders and said: "Look here, why all these problems? What is it that Muslims want? The government is ready to give to you". But the leader who was then the leader of IPK was a young man called Khalid Balala. He was almost mentally deranged in the face of the power he had: if he called a strike and said shops should not be opened, shops will not be opened. However much the government would assure the shop keepers of security they would just not open – he was that powerful. He was so powerful that it reached a point where at one time when the President came to Mombasa he could not drive with his usual motorcade from the airport to the statehouse. He had to fly by a helicopter because Balala had sort of marshalled his activists along the route the President would pass. So when the government discovered there was no way they could handle him, they sent a delegation to meet some of the Muslim elders, I was being included then, to say "Could you speak to your young man and let him say what is it that you want. The government is ready to accept all your demands." But the young man would not listen, and the masses would not listen to the old men. So when he said do nothing, it was do nothing! Recently of course, there was this Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK) which worked closely with the organization which is led by Raila Odinga. It was effective in getting votes for the then opposition, for example in Mombasa. All the MPs that were elected in Mombasa were members of the opposition party and located along the coast. So the majority of the MPs elected in the last election from the coast were Anti-KANU-government.¹² But this happened spontaneously. It wasn't worked out and organized. This assertion in my view

10 For the history of the IPK see Oded, 2000. The IPK's leading figure was Sheikh Khalid Balala who was also involved in the protests for a multi-party politics. He is a lecturer in Comparative Theology, Sociology and Political Sciences, which he studied in India, Britain and Saudi-Arabia. On his return to Kenya in 1990 he started preaching on the streets of Mombasa and quickly acquired a wide followership, especially under the young Muslim population. For his activism he was stripped off his citizenship for three years in 1994. See Oded, 1996: 406–15.

11 Daniel arap Moi (*02.09.1924 †04.02.2020) was Kenya's second president from 1978 to 2002.

12 The Kenya African National Union (KANU) proceeded the pre-independence party Kenya Africa Union (KAU) in the 1960s and was the ruling party in Kenya for 40 years until December 2002. See: Cheeseman, Nick, Karuti Kanyinga, and Gabrielle Lynch. 2020. *The Oxford Handbook of Kenyan Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

should be made by Muslims within the mainstream of political parties. Muslims have to join these political parties, be within them as party-members and be conscious of what they will go for, and try to influence in the discussions of the party.

Most of it is brought about by prejudice and ignorance. You meet people who do not seem to know why they believe what they believe against Muslims. They just find that this is the belief and we are with it. But once you educate them about these things and let them know about it, they seem to understand. The prejudices are very much confined to a clique in the ruling class and this is largely because they fear the influence of some of the Muslims outside the system. However, again the problem here is, Muslims isolate themselves by not joining these parties. We have left it to individuals. Yes, we have very strong Muslims with strength within these organizations.

A very good example was Shariff Nassir. Shariff Nassir was in KANU and a very powerful Muslim from the coast in Moi's government. Moi would very much listen to him because he committed himself completely to the party and was involved in the higher echelons of the party. But he was an individual, he would be trusted. If you were close to Shariff then you would get whatever others were getting. If you acquired his nod, one would say "this is the man!". But it was left to him as an individual.

Just right now as it is with some of the Muslims who are in the government, people like Balala and others – these are people who are in the system as individuals. They could use their positions to help the Muslims outside and normally whatever they would say the government would accept. But had Muslims organized themselves to join some of these organizations and worked from within them to influence the policy being made on the running of the country, I think we would have had a different story. In this case, the Somalis, who are Muslims, have succeeded much more – apart from the fact that they were *shiftas*¹³ (fighters), apart from the fact that they had fought the government. But now, because they are in some of these political parties, they are in these positions, they are able to advance their interest – not as Muslims but as Somalis. And this is the situation.

I think I would like to leave it at this, as time is almost up and I should not continue much longer. So, I would like to conclude here. Thank you very much!

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¹³ The so-called Shifita War shortly after independence in 1963–1967 was an attempt of Somali groups in northern Kenya to join Somalia. See: Keren Weitzberg. 2017. *We do not have borders*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

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