

Muslim politics in postcolonial Kenya: negotiating knowledge on the double-periphery

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This paper investigates Muslim politics in its wider social context in postcolonial Kenya, with a historical focus mainly on the Moi era (1978-2002). Hereby, I look at the introduction, integration, and internal contestation of Islamic reformist ideologies in Swahili discourse and in social practice. Central to my argument about the interconnections between Muslim politics, national politics, and coastal sociality is the notion of a 'knowledge economy', within the postcolonial setting of a 'double-periphery' in which Kenyan coastal Muslims are situated, *vis-à-vis* the state and the Muslim *umma* (community of believers). I discuss the dynamics between aspects of knowledge and rhetorics, reasoning and power, and ideology and social practice at work in this particular Muslim context. All of this is situated within national Kenyan politics, and discussed against the background of a postcolonial state governed by upcountry Christians with whom coastal Muslims have historically had a tense and antagonistic relationship.

Muslim politics, according to Eickelman and Piscatori, 'constitutes the field on which an intricate pattern of cooperation and contest over form, practice, and interpretation takes place' (1996: 21). The distinctiveness of Muslim politics, then, is linked to 'the specific, if evolving, values, symbols, ideas, and traditions that constitute "Islam"' (1996: 21) in particular places, and research should consider the multiple contexts of such politics. It follows that the distinct character of regional Muslim politics evolves out of mediation and negotiation processes that constitute Islam in specific geographical and historical contexts. Here, I explore Muslim politics in a particular postcolonial setting, the Kenyan coast. Drawing from Asad's approach to Islam as a 'discursive tradition' (1986), I investigate how regional practices and interpretations of everyday life in sociality and language make reference to, 'knowledge', and how they overlap, intersect, and feed into (or alter) the negotiation of Islam in coastal Kenya.

History and power constitute two fundamental axes underpinning a proper understanding of Muslim politics. As Zaman has argued, Islam is shaped not just by a continuous interactive link between the present and the past, 'but also by the manner in which relations of power and other forms of contestation and conflict impinge on any definition of what it is to be a Muslim' (2002: 6). Here, I examine internal negotiations of difference and sameness among Muslims in coastal Kenya. I also consider

how these processes are influenced by (and may in turn have to be balanced out against) external, non-Muslim forces and pressures, like those generated by the state. In order to reflect upon the specific postcolonial dynamics of Kenyan politics, I use Chabal and Daloz's paradigm for postcolonial African politics, 'the political instrumentalization of disorder' (1999: 13, 155).

Muslims in coastal Kenya

Since Independence from Britain in 1963, when upcountry Christians under President Jomo Kenyatta took over the rule of the Coast province and implemented 'Africanization' policies on all administrative levels, coastal Kenyan Muslims have been on the receiving end of postcolonial politics.¹ Many of them were regarded as 'less Kenyan' by the new rulers, and made to feel as outsiders, due to their Swahili, Arab, South Asian, or Persian descent. Political tensions were not surprising, since before Independence many coastal Muslims had resisted the political integration of the Coastal Strip, the so-called 'Mwambao' (which belonged to the Sultanate of Zanzibar and was administered by the British), into Kenya. Instead, they had campaigned for Coastal Independence (Brennan 2008; Salim 1970). Bitter memories of this failed endeavour live on in vivid discussions in coastal towns today. During postcolonial rule, Kenyan Muslims have increasingly organized themselves more assertively as 'Muslims' in the public arena, partly in response to the discrimination they saw themselves facing as a neglected minority.² Mutual suspicions between Muslims and the state have continued, with tensions and anxieties flaring up after each of the terrorist attacks that affected Kenya as well as the wider world: on the US embassy in Nairobi in August 1998; the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States; and on a beach hotel and aeroplane near Mombasa in 2002 (see Seesemann 2007*b*). These were condemned by Muslim communities and their representatives.

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, a different kind of pressure towards more assertive public engagement 'as Muslims' has come from within the Muslim community itself, through the growing ideological impact of Islamic trans-local networks on local Muslim discourse and practice. Especially since the 1980s, with the return of students who had studied in the Middle East, ideological confrontations between different groups of Islamic 'reformists' and their others have become more agitated (see Bakari 1995). This is visible, for instance, in the emphatic rejection of regionally established Muslim practices, like the celebration of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (*maulidi*), the visit to graves of deceased pious people (*ziyara*), and other Sufi-related practices by so-called 'Wahhabi'³ reformists. Islamic reformism in East Africa, initiated and shouldered from within the region since the 1930s, displays liberating as well as dogmatic features in a kind of 'dialectic', opening social debate on some issues while closing it on others (see Kresse 2003; for South Asia, see Osella & Osella 2008*a*). Contrary to simplifying descriptions in popular and academic writing, Islamic 'reformism' in Africa as elsewhere comes in different shapes and forms and is ambivalent in character (a potentially creative as well as destructive force).⁴ The increase of public attention on Muslim identity through reformist debates pushed coastal Kenyan Muslims to deliberate their stances more consciously.

Taking these aspects into account, we can say that there is a two-way front on which 'Muslim identity' is negotiated by coastal Muslims: an external one, *vis-à-vis* the postcolonial state; and an internal one, within the *umma* (the community of believers) itself. The internal differences and divisions are most significant since this is where the

real negotiation of paradigms of interpretation takes place, the contest about what really counts and is publicly acceptable as Islamic practice. Yet the framework conditions of the postcolonial setting also influence and affect these internal dynamics.

I argue that two aspects shaping the everyday life experience of coastal Muslims should be considered when seeking to understand postcolonial Muslim politics: first, the setting of a 'double-periphery' on the Kenyan coast; and, second, the social dynamics around a 'knowledge economy' within the Muslim community. I use 'double-periphery' to refer to coastal Muslims as situated on two peripheries at the same time, namely the postcolonial state and the *umma*. For coastal Muslims, life on the Kenyan periphery – *vis-à-vis* a state governed and administered by upcountry Christians – reflects the continuation of historical tensions between coast and upcountry (*pwani* and *bara*) which has also involved channels of serfdom and slavery (*utumwa*). These tensions are also expressed in religious and ethnic ideologies which have pitted coastal people (*wapwani*) against those from upcountry (*wabara*), Muslims against Christians (and others), or, in the simplifying language of ethnicity, 'Arabs' or 'Swahili' against 'Africans'. These basic oppositions are somewhat distorting (as there are no clear boundaries between these groups) yet they are used in political discourse, both among coastal Muslims and between them and others (see also McIntosh 2009).

The double-periphery

Throughout the postcolonial era, coastal Muslims have been ruled by upcountry Christians and, as I heard on many occasions, felt treated like second-class citizens. The most common complaints against upcountry governance included the following: the revenues of Kilindini Harbour in Mombasa (the biggest in East Africa) being channelled upcountry and not invested in the coast; lucrative fishing and mangrove-pole trade being restricted; no significant investments benefiting the coastal community being made; education being deliberately kept at a low level (with, for example, the worst teachers sent to the coast); difficulty for Muslims in obtaining identity cards and passports, or other legal documents (like title deeds); drug trafficking and abuse in coastal towns⁵ not being controlled but seemingly being condoned by the authorities. In short, it is a common sentiment among coastal Muslims that consecutive upcountry governments have worked to decrease their economic prosperity, diminish their educational perspectives, and undermine their chances for the future (see Ali A. Mazrui 1993; A. Mazrui 1994; A.M. Mazrui & Shariff 1994; Hoorweg, Foeken & Obudho 2000). Thus for many coastal Muslims, national politics *are* upcountry politics which seek to keep the coast weak and internally divided, echoing the colonial *divide et impera*. In the same vein, comments contrasting an often mythically romanticized 'golden' (colonial) past with the bleak (postcolonial) present are not infrequently made, mostly, but not exclusively, by older people. These features characterize one side of the double-periphery within which Kenyan coastal Muslims are situated.

The other side of the double-periphery refers to the position of coastal Muslims within the Muslim world. Here, too, a sense of living on the 'periphery' can sometimes be observed *vis-à-vis* the Middle East. However, we have to differentiate very carefully since the Swahili coast has been part of Muslim networks for a very long period. Islam was present from around 800 CE (Horton & Middleton 2000; Pouwels 1987). Reliable climatic conditions facilitated sailboat travel across the Western Indian Ocean, pilgrimage to Mecca, and thus social, economic, and religious interaction and exchange within the *umma* from an early stage. The Swahili coast is not a Muslim periphery in a strong

historical and geographical sense of 'distance' in time or space. Yet in everyday life, there are ways in which 'felt distance' brings a sense of being on the periphery into play, as Lambek (1990: 25) has noted for Mayotte. While arguments against a simple division between an Arab Islamic heartland and a lesser periphery (e.g. Reese 2004; Seesemann 2007a: 38) are analytically compelling, such simple oppositions are at times appropriated and deployed by local actors.

Next to their pride in the long history of Islam on the Swahili coast, Muslims also harbour insecurities about their standing within the *umma*. They are conscious of their limited ability to use Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. They also feel economically disadvantaged, especially in comparison to wealthy Gulf and Middle Eastern countries where many youths aspire to work. Educationally, established institutions of Islamic scholarship (of different sectarian orientation) based in countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Iran, or Sudan offer scholarships and funding opportunities through their respective networks, thus further increasing a sense of unequal charity-based relationships. Generally, coastal Muslims may see themselves as situated on the receiving side of patron-client relationships within the Muslim world (of Islamic knowledge, of economic and moral support). Considering that they feel treated as second-class citizens in their own country, the question arises whether they are also regarded as second-class citizens within the *umma*. These tensions are present in social discourse and practice and feed into the framework within which Muslim politics on the Kenyan coast have to be understood. Kenyan Muslims seem 'marginalized both within the national context of Kenya and within the international context of the Muslim *umma*' (Seesemann 2007a: 38).

The knowledge economy

Michael Lambek has used knowledge 'as an analytic tool' (1993: 10; cf. 1990) for the study of a Muslim community in Mayotte. Following a hermeneutical approach to ethnography, he explores how knowledge in different ways and on different levels shapes social practice. He also addresses the social relevance of knowledge in Islam generally, especially for the moral task of being a good Muslim. Muslims have an obligation to acquire knowledge: the Qur'an as God's word and the accounts of the role model of Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*) should be known in order to feel sure about what is right and wrong. Thus knowledge provides guidance, orientation, and justification for practice, through knowledgeable people who teach others. Knowledge is involved in granting authority and leadership yet also in challenging or undermining it, by those who know the sources and how to present them. From this perspective, knowledge is a kind of organizing principle. A wealth of complex sub-fields of social interaction become visible where knowledge is central to exchange relationships among social actors. I use the term 'knowledge economy' for such dynamics, and I will show more concretely how this applies to the Swahili coast, where references to knowledge are variously embedded in social interaction among Muslims.

The term 'knowledge economy' also draws from Benjamin Soares' elaborations upon a 'prayer economy' in a West African context with strong Sufi traditions (Soares 1996; 2005). Soares uses this term – after Murray Last (1988) – to discuss how exchange relationships of commodities and services for prayer are ranked around 'saints' and their networks, thus marking the wider field of social relationships more generally. Here, I argue that reciprocal patterns and obligations exist also in the ways in which knowledge, and particularly Islamic knowledge, is used, sought, passed on, and

exchanged among Kenyan Muslims. In this sense, the term 'knowledge economy' indicates an explicit interest in knowledge (and practices related to it), as part of a social economy of exchange. When investigating this further, it is not always possible to distinguish clearly between knowledge and claims to it. Within the social contestation and negotiation of knowledge, the intertwined nature of the relationship between knowledge and rhetoric is observable in the way speakers or writers seek to win over or capture their audiences. They often tend to present their own position as a valid normative interpretation supported by a majority consensus (see Kresse 2007b).

Being Muslim in Mombasa

Let me introduce the scenario of Muslims in Mombasa by means of a fictional vignette, written in 1929 by the Islamic scholar Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui (d. 1947), the initiator of Salafi-inspired Islamic reformism on the Swahili coast. Influenced by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida and his journal *al-Manar*, from which he acquired a sense of the importance of journalism to bring about change, he wrote, 'Among the modern things that show people good ways, and that bring good thoughts into their heads, and that wake up their hearts, and that even make them stand up and go forward, there is nothing like the newspaper'.⁶ He subsequently published two Swahili Islamic newspapers, *Sahifa* (literally 'page') and *al-Islah* ('reform'), that combined social commentary and critique with Islamic education. The dialogue below was first published in *Sahifa*, a weekly paper written by Sheikh al-Amin himself (see M.K. Mazrui 1980) of which about a hundred copies were distributed every Friday. The text was reprinted in 1978, on the front page of the Swahili Islamic quarterly *Sauti ya Haki* (Sound of Justice), edited by Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui (d. 1982), al-Amin's student and relative.

The scene was presented under the heading 'An educational conversation: truth in a joke, and a joke in truth ...' (*Mazungumzo ya ilmu: kweli katika mzaha na mzaha katika kweli*). Readers should imagine – as local readers would – the five speakers involved sitting on a stone bench in front of a house (or mosque), thus creating an informal gathering, or *baraza*.⁷ For a more concrete and vivid picture, readers should imagine the speakers as elderly men – those who are supposedly well versed in jokes as well as truths – wearing white gowns (*kanzu*) and white embroidered caps (*kofia*):

Abdulla: I hear that according to Imam Hanbali it is forbidden to eat a chicken that has eaten dirt, and even to eat its eggs.

Ali: What! If that is true, then all chickens would be forbidden to eat, as well as their eggs, because there is no chicken that does not eat any dirt. [Hanbali's] *madhhab* [legal school of Islam] is a difficult one, and not measured!

Swaleh: You remind me, Abdulla; I have heard that for Imam Malik it is permitted to eat a cat.

Hemed: Sallaala [expression of surprise or wonder]! That's not a real *madhhab*, that. That's like French people! They indeed eat every little creature!

Swaleh: You! And a pig is not unclean for him [Imam Malik]; yet it is forbidden to eat it.

Hemed: That is surprising, a pig is not dirty, so if a dog eats a pig, what does that mean?

Swaleh: And even a dog is not considered dirty by him.

Hemed: What's that – aah, ah! I can't agree with that. What's that with that Malik *madhhab* of yours!

Nassir: I have heard something even more strange about the *madhhab* of Imam Hanafi.

All: Oh – well, spill the news!

Nassir: I hear that for Abu Hanafi if someone marries, and he stays here and his wife is somewhere in Arabia, if the wife bears a child six months after the marriage, then the child is considered the child of that husband here, even if he has not gone to Arabia at all, nor has his wife come here!

Hemed: Mama! Mama! Sallala! Those are no real *madhhab*s, those. That doesn't even go into the head of a human being. The Banyani [Hindu Indians] are usually known for such things!

Ali: But those three *madhhabs* are heavy! One tells us to eat chicken, one of them feeds us cats, and another one makes permissible what the others forbid! There is just no *madhhab* like Shafii [most common *madhhab* in East Africa], bwana! That *madhhab* is centred and well balanced.

[...]

Ali: Have you heard that a *mganga* [traditional healer] is considered an infidel by those (other) three *madhhabs*?

Hemed: La-ilaha-illa-alla! We have never heard that from any of our sheikhs, ever, that a *mganga* should be an infidel; and all the people who went to a *mganga* for consultation were never ever told that that is an act of heresy.

Nasir: If it were really true that such matters were not permitted, our scholars would not have failed to inform us, and would have prohibited us from that. Ah! Here these imams have got it even more wrong.

Abdalla: There is some even more extraordinary news.

Ali: Ok, let's hear.

Abdalla: Well, [the scholars] Subky and Adhrai, and Ibn Swaleh and Ibn Hajar have said that to play the *matwari* and *zumari* [small hand-held drums] is forbidden by Islamic law, and that even to play the *matwari* during *maulidi* and to 'dance' or move rhythmically with it is like Hindu worship! And Ibn Hajar said that to pray to/for the Prophet Muhammad (i.e. to stand up while his birth is being praised) during *maulidi* is *bida* [an unacceptable religious innovation].

Hemed: Is that right! That really sounds like the Wahhabi *madhhab*! Our sheikhs and *masharifu* [descendants of the Prophet] play the drums, and they 'dance' – if that was worship, would they do that?! And to give special praises to the Prophet is now *bida*? By the repentance of the Lord! We are hearing strange things these days!

(commentator:)

Khulasa: And this is indeed how the people of Mombasa are. We do not follow something because it is right, nor because it is supported by the majority of scholars; nor do we follow that or this particular person – but we follow our own people only. May God forgive us (al-Amin Mazrui 1978 [1929]).

'This is indeed how the people of Mombasa are,' says the author of this humorous, yet biting self-critical text in 1929, a statement endorsed by the editor of *Sauti ya Haki* by reprinting it in 1978. There are indeed commonalities with recent discussions that allow us to use this text as an entry-point to contemporary Muslim politics. Some of the prominent contested issues in current ideological disputes are mentioned here. As elsewhere in the Muslim world, these are ranked around the so-called '*bida* debate' (about unacceptable innovation in Islamic practice); the celebration of *maulidi* and ritual behaviour associated with *maulidi*; local healing practices (*uganga*); and the status of *sheikhs* (traditional scholars) and *sharifs* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) (see, e.g., Kresse 2003; 2006).

There are several important features in the *baraza* vignette that illustrate crucial aspects of sociality, interaction, and the perception of how the world is (and should be) among urban Muslims in Mombasa. Among them are:

- the *baraza* conversation with its typical elements of humour and teasing;
- the insistence on a supposedly unquestionable and clearly defined group identity (Shafii, with local traditions of ritual practice, healing, and Islamic knowledge) – which is pointedly questioned and ridiculed in the commentator's concluding remarks;
- the way 'knowledge' and its invocation, negotiation, interrogation, and its relevance for practice are major underlying themes – even though satirically portrayed.

The commentator's remark at the end of the dialogue is revealing. His plea to God, to 'forgive us', expresses criticism of his own community, 'the people of Mombasa'. As he says, they follow 'their own people only', irrespective of what they say or do or, more precisely, irrespective of whether their position is based on correct Islamic knowledge. This is a sin, the comment implies (despite the obvious touch), for which forgiveness is required. The wrongdoing is in blindly following others, not simply in one's lack of proper Islamic knowledge as such. What is criticized is that no serious interest in such knowledge is expressed, nor any sincere attempt made to seek guidance. This violates the principal demand to put effort into the acquisition of Islamic knowledge, to ascertain that one's actions are acceptable and in accordance with Islam proper. This responsibility, it is implied, all believers have for themselves (and *can* only have for themselves). What is flagged as reprehensible is ignoring one's obligation to act responsibly and with reference to proper knowledge, for the common good. This includes monitoring one's peers, 'commanding good and forbidding wrong' of them – a principle that characterizes the central ethical task for all Muslims across historical and sectarian divisions (see Cook 2000). The criticism of the five fictional Swahili elders of the *baraza* voiced in *Sauti ya Haki* is linked to this assumption of a basic obligation for all Muslims to act according to their best knowledge of Islam. Here, as in many other places in the Muslim world, there exists an implicit social hierarchy wherein those with greater degrees of Islamic knowledge are seen as closer to God and ascribed higher status. Likewise, they shoulder the responsibility to transmit this knowledge to others (e.g. Bowen 1993; Eickelman 1985; Lambek 1990; 1993; Loeffler 1988; Salvatore & Eickelman 2004).

In contrast, the attitude that the vignette's final comments reject can be coined in local Swahili terminology as one of *ukabila* (tribalism). As many Kenyans and analysts agree, this has long been an obstacle for the cultivation of a democracy that is truly national in outlook, and the adverse effects of *ukabila* are lamented upon by both Muslims and non-Muslims. During my fieldwork, I heard many such complaints by local Muslims who were also critical of their own community (see Kresse 2007a). For instance, I noted an Islamic scholar's characterization of the troubling disunity within the Kenyan Muslim community. He stated that 'today, we do not know our religion (*leo, sisi hatujui dini yetu*; see Kresse 2007b: 241) – and, 'Islam for us is tribalism' (*Uislamu kwetu ni ukabila*). This criticism of one's own group almost echoes Sheikh al-Amin's comments above. Here, too, the need for knowledge about Islam was expressed, now in order to cope with the challenges as a minority group in a 'Christian state', and contrasted with the frustrating reality of currently dominant Muslim practice, which often meant blindly following 'one's own' without any true concern for knowledge.

Sheikh al-Amin's efforts as an Islamic reformist were explicitly directed against such self-congratulatory rhetoric. Instead, he sought to raise Muslims' awareness about what happens around them, to develop and nurture a critical consciousness, and to use knowledge and education (secular and religious) as means to social liberation and self-determination. In this way, he was engaged in anti-colonial politics as well as efforts to unite East African Muslims, advocating the use of 'modernization' to them, so that they might not lose their educational advantage and political privileges to the upcountry people (see also Farsy 1989; Kresse 2003; Lacunza Balda 1993; Pouwels 1981). Particularly with a view to knowledge and education, he warned his Muslim peers of a future 'black danger' (*khatari nyeusi*), prophesying that 'us coastal people' (*sisi watu wa pwani*) would become 'the ignorant people' (*wajinga*), due to their rejection of secular

education (al-Amin Mazrui 1955 [1944]: 33). Overall, he pushed towards an Islamically shaped modernity that is both regional and trans-regional in outlook and inspiration. His ideas became popular among East African Muslims because they addressed specific local issues and problems such as colonialism, education, and development with a view to wider contexts and frameworks (for similar visions of Islamic modernities in South Asia, see Osella & Osella 2008b; Robinson 2008; for Lebanon, see Deeb 2006).

His prophetic vision, of coastal Muslims becoming 'backward' in comparison to their compatriots, became real in postcolonial Kenya, and as the coastal region came to lag behind educationally, Sheikh al-Amin's political and social agenda remained pressing. This must have influenced the decision to reprint the dialogue above in 1978 in *Sauti ya Haki*. As the editor Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui commented, 'The goal of this article is clear, it is to show that the state of being of people during times when they are ruled by others is foolish admiration (*hawaa*), which then becomes their guide'. Foolish self-admiration among the men at the *baraza* was indeed at the centre of the narrative and the author's criticism. His critique of the lack of engagement with Islamic knowledge also castigates coastal Muslims for political and social inactivity. They are, he implies, not following the demands of Islam, but instead are self-righteously secluding themselves from the problems actually facing them.

The reprint of this dialogue also draws attention to the continuities between the colonial and postcolonial experience of coastal Muslims. Indeed, 1978 was also the year when Daniel arap Moi became Kenya's second president. He embarked on a long period of autocratic rule (1978-2002) under the mantle of the so-called *nyayo*-politics of 'peace, love, and unity', ultimately demanding blind obedience of all citizens.

National politics: the Moi era

In 1981, Moi turned Kenya into a *de jure* one-party state by prohibiting all parties other than the ruling KANU through constitutional change. In 1991, Kenya re-introduced multi-party democracy in reaction to international political pressure. Not cowed by this challenge and adept at making divide-and-rule politics or 'political tribalism' (the ugly side of ethnicity, see Lonsdale 1992) work for himself in multi-ethnic Kenya, Moi was re-elected twice (1992 and 1997). Yet, it is regarded as an open secret that before both elections the government was involved in orchestrated so-called 'ethnic clashes', armed conflicts between ethnically defined groups competing for land and other resources around the country (most prominently the Rift Valley). This fuelled existing social fears and tensions between neighbouring groups. Thus the government used the spectre of 'tribalism' (*ukabila*) to realign and rally political support behind itself, promising to be the only party able to safeguard peace, stability, and national unity.

In the pre-election months of 1997, 'ethnic clashes' also haunted the coast. South and north of Mombasa, armed vigilante groups of coastal Mijikenda youths targeted and attacked people of upcountry origin, demanding them to leave (Kenyan Human Rights Committee 1997; 1998). While urban Muslims of Swahili and Arab descent were hardly directly involved or affected by this (cf. McIntosh 2009), the rhetoric of clashes drew from the historical antagonisms between coastal and upcountry people (*wapwani* and *wabara*). Many coastal Muslims continue to view the Christian *wabara* as foreign rulers over their territory, and their task has been called 'coping with Christians' (Cruise O'Brien 1995). Whereas they resented upcountry rule in general, many preferred Moi as president, as a known entity ('the devil they know'), to any other potential upcountry ruler who could shift the political imbalance even further to their disadvantage.

As president, Moi coined a political ideology called 'nyayo' (Swahili for 'footsteps'), or 'nyayoism'. The word itself became a euphemism for the followership he demanded of all Kenyans: faithful, trusting, and unquestioning – just like he claimed he himself had followed the footsteps of the mighty Kenyatta (see Ngũgĩ 1981: 86). In return, Moi promised 'peace, love, and unity' to the people through *nyayo* politics. Without discussing the exclusively Christian bias of the *nyayo* PR campaign (A. Mazrui 1994: 196) or academically dressed versions explaining and justifying *nyayo* as 'philosophy' (Moi 1986), the implicit message to all citizens should be underscored: as long as one follows the supreme ruler unquestioningly, one will live in peace. How coastal Muslims responded to and dealt with this is beyond the scope of this paper. However, they were in general conscious and wary of the limits within which they could operate. Yet when the government threatened to abolish the constitutionally granted authority of Islamic courts for Muslim family and inheritance law in the early 1980s, Muslims unified and protested successfully. Among coastal Muslims (like among other groups), there were some who played along and prospered under the regime. Some made it to high administrative positions, though even in the Coast province itself most such jobs were given to people of upcountry origin.

With the reinstatement of multi-party politics in 1991, a coast-based political movement of Muslims sought to be registered as a national party and stand for election, the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK). The IPK was denied registration on the grounds that the constitution forbade the formation of religiously defined parties. This sparked off a string of public protests by coastal Muslims (see A.M. Mazrui & Shariff 1994; Oded 1996), who expressed frustration about treatment as second-class citizens. This was a rare public scenario of (coastal) Muslims being pitted against the (upcountry) state, and the national media eagerly picked up on this. Still remembered vividly in Old Town Mombasa today, the street-fights and skirmishes back then made public the long-harboured resentments that had been kept in check for decades. However diverse and internally complex the local Muslim community, the events around IPK activism document Muslim solidarity *vis-à-vis* the postcolonial Kenyan state – which again sought to undermine this solidarity by divide-and-rule politics.⁸ While some former IPK activists continue their civic engagement within regional politics, some IPK graffiti is still visible in Mombasa.

In some ways, the recent climate of a 'war on terror' in which the Kenyan government submits to US policies exhibits similar features to this earlier period. The Kibaki government has not seemed to care about the rights of Muslim citizens and has cast general suspicion over the Muslim community, which, in response, has again demonstrated solidarity (see Seesemann 2007b). Muslim representatives have spoken out against this latest wave of discrimination of Muslims in Kenya as the violation of their basic human rights as citizens in their own country.

The other side of the double-periphery

On the other side of the double-periphery, within the Muslim *umma*, the 1980s saw rising external influence in the ways Islamic ideologies were presented and negotiated in public. Most prominently, Saudi-funded Salafi-orientated reformists and Iranian-funded Shi'ite organizations established visible networks of Islamization. At the same time, they fought out ideological battles with each other, for instance in Islamic pamphlets (written in or translated into Swahili) distributed in large numbers. Thus factional tensions from elsewhere in the Muslim world, in this case between state-funded

reformism from Saudi Arabia and Iran, had an impact on Kenyan Muslims in a novel manner (such hostility had not existed here before, according to my interlocutors). A few representative quotations from Islamic pamphlets below indicate the scale of the rhetorical attacks. They also show an invocation of knowledge as a criterion of judgement that Muslim readers should learn to employ to find the right path of Islam. First an excerpt from a Saudi-sponsored pamphlet:

This is a very surprising phenomenon, our African brothers who have left us and converted to Shi'ism. But until now I have not heard of even one of them asking *their Iranian masters* where those books are that they have been told about? And in which belief have they been written? And what for?? *Earthly desires* [for money] have confused them, and if it were not so would they have agreed to Shi'ism? Through which *argument or truth* or which books? (Anon. n.d.: 25-6, my translation, emphasis added).

This pamphlet is entitled *Mashia na maimamu waliobuniwa* (The Shi'as and the imams who were invented by them) and was written by someone of Swahili background. The reproach of African converts to Shi'ism here is that they have been fooled into following their material desires instead of seeking knowledge and truth. The pamphlet restates the point and appeals to the converts to return to their senses and evaluate the arguments and truth claims made by the Shi'as – who are repeatedly sketched as insincere and racist 'white' foreigners taking advantage of lesser educated Africans – in order to return to the right path of the Qur'an and the Sunna. Once they have done so, the author claims, God will forgive and accept them again into his community. The author warns readers that 'Shi'as are progressing to delude those people who have little education' (Anon n.d.: 27). Thus not only do we witness an explicit invocation of claims to knowledge and truth by rhetorical means, but we can also see a picture of the East African region portrayed as a peripheral stage of the Muslim world. Shi'a converts are pictured as innocent and un-educated Africans who are susceptible to the trickeries of the Iranians, who are not only foreigners but also racists who represent 'Shi'a religion', not Islam.

Corresponding Shi'a pamphlets are readily available. The title of the following one does not mince its words: *Upotovu wa madhehebu ya 'Mawahhabi' na hatari zake* (The perversion of the Wahhabi *madhhab* and its dangers). Written originally in Swahili, it was published in Dar es Salaam in a first edition of 3,000 copies, with 10,000 copies reprinted the following year. This text responds in kind to the Wahhabi attacks on Shi'as. Here, it is no less than the destruction of Islam and the sowing of disunity among Muslims that is repeatedly said to top the agenda of the Wahhabi, who are said to 'wage a war against Islam, with all their means and resources' (Khalifa 1988 [1987]: introduction). In a mirror image of the anti-Shi'a attacks, the Wahhabi are called the 'enemies of Islam' and accused of luring the lesser educated and financially needy Africans away from the true faith. The author writes:

These youths [of the Wahhabi faction who have entered previously peaceful and unified Muslim communities] have not only been given *sufficient training to confuse people who have little education*, they are also given *huge salaries* to pursue their work of division. For what reasons, do you think, has the Saudi government agreed to pay a lot of foreign money to divide Muslims? (Khalifa 1988 [1987]: 6-7, my translation, emphasis added).

'Cunning strategies' of the 'enemy' are assumed to be at work to divide the Muslim community. Along with alleged large sums of money, there is again a clear reference to the importance of knowledge: supposedly only 'people who have little education' can be

won over by such strategies. This implies that properly educated Muslims could not be tempted; their knowledge would let them see through such tricks and stay on the right path. Reason is invoked to protect the supposedly true faith against Wahhabi attacks, whereby knowledge is rhetorically claimed by the writer.⁹

Looking at the way both 'Wahhabi' and Shi'a authors portray those whom they actually want to missionize speaks volumes on their views of ordinary East African Muslims. In both cases these are characterized as unequal and inferior within an inherently hierarchical model that places Arabs and Iranians as superior actors on top. The writers of these ideological Islamic pamphlets, even Swahili-speakers, seem to have internalized a perspective that regards East Africa on the lower end of a centre-periphery axis in the Muslim world. Africans appear as passive objects of Islamization, as lesser Muslims who can be 'saved' by the right doctrine from the Islamic heartland (either Saudi Arabia or Iran). This is similar to the colonial view of supposedly ignorant African souls waiting to be saved by Christian missionaries (see Tempels 1959) and can be related to the self-perception of coastal Muslims. I witnessed passionate rejection of such paternalism (and apparent racism) by self-confident and well-educated people. But I also noticed lingering insecurities and a tendency to submit to the powerful and supposedly more promising positions from elsewhere.

This raises questions about the claims to knowledge expressed in the pamphlets, and about the messages actually conveyed. East Africans, the presumed reading public, were not addressed by a reasoned argument seeking to convince them. Rather, the pamphlets are mostly concerned with proving their own given position *vis-à-vis* their ideological arch-enemies. Ultimately, the medium of religious pamphlets is used here as a stage for the re-enactment of existent hostilities. While engaged in the missionary project of transmitting knowledge to potential converts, writers from both sides were mainly engaged in a struggle for ideological hegemony in the Muslim world.

What can be said, then, about the effects on the self-perception of coastal Muslims? If they were regarded as ignorant, needy, and dependent by outsiders, they have also presented themselves as such, for instance to secure educational and financial aid, regular salaries, new mosques, and political support. These processes within the Muslim community have significantly re-shaped regional Muslim identities and increased the tendency towards the internal rejection of historically established positions and practices that Islamic reformism of the 'Wahhabi' kind does not tolerate. By demanding the rejection of practices that had long shaped Islam and the self-image of coastal Muslims, this had a major impact. Indirectly, it was conducive to the spread of Shi'ism in the region. Since Shi'a doctrine commonly justifies and defends practices like *maulidi* and *ziyara*, alliances between Sufi-orientated groups and Shi'as (*vis-à-vis* Wahhabi criticism) became possible. If by linking themselves to recently enforced networks of Islamic ideology local Muslims could have greater self-realization (e.g. liberation from Islam as customary practice), this might also lead to a kind of self-negation. This points to a fundamental ambivalence with regard to their agency and to the role of 'knowledge' and its rhetorical invocation as a guiding principle. Islamic ideological pressures affected coastal Muslims individually and socially, and these pressures were linked to the public revision of parameters of what it meant to be a good Muslim.

The Swahili knowledge economy

In Muslim societies across the world, seeking knowledge, and particularly Islamic knowledge, plays a central role in shaping society, as it is through knowledge of the

Qur'an (and the *hadith*) that Muslims acquire guidelines for their orientation and practical behaviour (see also Deeb 2006: 27; Hefner 2007: 4). In a sense, then, there is an implicit social hierarchy linked to the possession of Islamic knowledge which entails an obligation to transmit it to the less educated. In general terms, this applies to Muslim communities around the world, and to 'traditional' Islamic scholars (the *'ulama*) as much to 'modernizers' or 'Islamic reformists' (see Bowen 1993; Eickelman 1985; Lambek 1993; Marsden 2005; Zaman 2002). I now want to show how this basic principle operates and plays out in social interaction among coastal Muslims in Kenya and how it underpins and informs what people say and do.

In the Swahili language, a whole host of verbal expressions exist that denote activities of mutuality or reciprocity. This meaning is expressed by adding the suffix '-na' (or '-ana') to the verb, so that, for instance, the verb 'to love' (*kupenda*) can be turned into 'to love each other' (*kupendana*), or 'to leave' (*kuacha*) into 'to leave each other' (*kuachana*). Such expressions of mutuality that mark social relationships and imply knowledge-related obligations should be considered when describing and analysing sociality in the Swahili context. Five important ones that come to mind are: 'to know each other' (*kujuana*), 'to interact with each other' (*kuwasiliana*), 'to educate each other' (*kuelimishana*), 'to observe each other' (*kuangaliana*), and 'to remind each other' (*kukumbushana*). Together, through their meaningful interconnections and overlaps, they illustrate the field of social interaction in terms of mutual obligations and expectations that infer (or are linked to) knowledge, norms of Islamic behaviour, and morality. These terms are used and invoked in social discourse – in discussions, speeches, or in didactic poetry, for instance – and it seems to me that they reflect some of the general implications of Islam and Islamic knowledge for social interaction in everyday life. The social institution of the *baraza*, as a semi-public regular meeting-point for men mentioned above, illustrates these principles in social interaction.

Sociality is most basically delineated by the terms *kujuana* (to know each other) and *kuwasiliana* (to interact with each other, or to communicate). The former makes reference to the knowledge of each other with which we begin or which we end up with at the end of communication processes (as the basic axis of communication that is constantly expanded through communication). The latter refers to the activities of communicative exchange in social interaction: being connected to, involved with, 'in touch' with others is what is pronounced here. There is already a hint of obligation to social interaction and knowing about each other implied in these terms: people should communicate, should know their neighbours and others in their community and interact regularly with them, in short, be social. This is well illustrated by the Swahili saying '*mtu ni watu*' (a human being is human beings), which explicitly marks and acknowledges human beings as social beings for whom it is not only natural but also necessary to interact and live with others. Another expression indicating this is a common remark to those whom one has not seen for a while but whom one expects to see regularly (e.g. neighbours or friends): 'you have got lost' (*umepotea*), or 'where did you get lost?' (*umepotea wapi?*).

If *kujuana* and *kuwasiliana*, then, shape a basic axis for social communication and interaction, the other three terms mentioned above, *kuelimishana* (to educate each other), *kuangaliana* (to observe each other, or, better: to look out for each other), and *kukumbushana* (to remind each other), refer more explicitly to the idea of a moral community where people have the obligation to care and look out for each other. Ultimately, the community imagined here can be as wide as the global *umma*, or even

the whole of humanity itself (see Kresse 2007a: chap. 5). The social implications of each term are interlinked and refer back to the Islamic obligations of looking out for one's fellow Muslims, making sure they adhere to proper standards of behaviour. As I heard many times during fieldwork, Muslims should make sure they pass on their knowledge to those who have less; they should be observant of their social peers and assist them if necessary; and they should remind them of the proper ways and standards of doing things whenever they would observe a lack of commitment or a violation of the proper guidelines. These Swahili expressions of mutuality would often be used and invoked in public speeches, in didactic poetry (*tenzi*), or in discussions among peers.

Thus social awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity about one's neighbours and peers, and a pro-active attitude to monitor people and possible wrongdoing, are implicitly inscribed as features of a model of proper social Muslim conduct. Yet these features have also become part and parcel of a normative notion of Swahili sociality itself. Clearly, reference to knowledge – and, implicitly, Islamic knowledge setting normative standards – is present here. Still, it is important to note that we are dealing with a particular Muslim community, and one should relate these reciprocal features of a 'knowledge economy' embedded in society back to the discussion of Muslim politics in postcolonial Kenya. One can better understand some of the internal social dynamics and tensions between Muslim factions within the *umma* (in Kenya), and also the degree of their mutual ideological accusations, if we keep in mind the features and principles above as being at work within the discourses of difference and disunity that currently mark much of public Islamic discourse.

Since the 1980s, the ideological and social divisions within the Muslim community in East Africa have been accentuated in public, when external ideological pressures have become more prevalent. This accompanied a dwindling sense of being part of the same social and religious community with shared social and moral underpinnings. Once it became possible to qualify other local Muslims of different Islamic orientations no longer just as misguided peers who should be redirected toward the right path but as 'unbelievers' and 'enemies of Islam', the sense of common sociality and mutual obligations inherent in Muslim sociality had obviously broken down. At the same time, the combative rhetoric that was adopted treated the factional frontlines as irreversible, as the examples above suggested. Socially, the lack of concern for a common basic platform for negotiating disputes led to awkward instances of confusion that reflected disunity. This happened, for instance, on major Islamic festivals like Id-el-fitri, which ideally should also celebrate and reflect Muslim unity. Because of disagreements over the correct methods of sighting the moon to determine the exact date, it has become common for different groups of Muslims to begin and end their fasting period on different days (see Kresse 2007a; 2007b; van der Bruinhorst 2007).

Increased engagement with different and competing factions of the wider Muslim *umma* during the postcolonial period has helped to undermine and destabilize the unity of coastal Muslims on the whole. At the same time, some individuals have benefited for themselves, and various groups are more imbricated in transnational networks. On the other side of the double-periphery, this points to an interesting role of the postcolonial state in the minds of Kenyan Muslims. Little else is able to unify Kenyan Muslims – or at least able to create an impression of unity among them – more than the opposition to apparent discrimination by the upcountry Christian government. Here, the opponent is by definition a religious and social outsider, and there is no pre-conceived common framework of socially binding knowledge that is referred to, nor of reciprocal obligations

that members of a community commonly recognize and act upon (however different from each other they feel). Common membership in the nation (Kenya) does not automatically invoke such sentiments, in contrast to common membership of religion (Islam). Despite their frequent violations, these principles are acknowledged to be operative and adherence to them is accepted as desirable, if not obligatory.

In the end, there are two sides, or levels, of the knowledge economy and its social use and potential. If, on the one hand, it underpins common sociality among Muslims, and for each Muslim community is embedded in particular social practices in terms of care and mutual obligations, on the other hand it consists of rhetorical invocations of the knowledge of the discursive tradition that marks it as Islam. The latter characterizes a partial and instrumental use, for instance (as we have seen) as part of a strategy against Muslim 'opponents'.

Conclusion

If the two major axes of investigation of the situatedness of Kenyan coastal Muslims are marked, firstly, by Kenya as a postcolonial African state and, secondly, by the wider Muslim world and the variety of changing, developing, and transforming Islamic networks, a better understanding of the internal dynamics of Muslim identity in postcolonial Mombasa can be gained by reflecting further on the two axes, as I have tried to show here. Within Kenya, 'under postcolonial rule', coastal Muslims have often felt neglected, exploited, or even oppressed. As a cultural and religious minority *vis-à-vis* upcountry Christians dominating national politics, they are regarded as 'backward' in terms of economic development and secular education, socially disadvantaged but also dependent, as well as patient in endurance. The more this picture becomes part of their self-perception, the more peripheral coastal Muslims may think they are, and eventually might become. This suggests a kind of vicious circle at work in the post-colonial scenario in which they find themselves.

In other words, within the Muslim community, along and in parallel with a sense of 'suppression of the self' (on the axis of Islamic interaction *vis-à-vis* reformist pressures) goes a sense of 'oppression by the Other', here the upcountry Christian government (on the axis of postcoloniality). In relation to both axes, the Kenyan coastal Muslim community has experienced processes of transformation that have significantly reshaped their everyday life. From both directions strong forces negating the Muslim community and its way of life had to be absorbed. While this has led to a kind of 'dialectic' in the social formation of Muslim identity – the negation of their negation, leading to a positive re-assertion of themselves as Muslims – this scenario of a double-burden or double-challenge may also have positive effects. Being under pressure from both sides, individual Muslims grow up in a social environment that may be challenging but also ultimately rewarding once the challenges have been mastered. They experience these pressures but are also compelled to accept – and choose from – offers of outside support and alliance. In this sense, the double-periphery may be providing a 'privileged locus' (Lambek 1990: 26). Accustomed to dealing with such social, political, and ideological pressures in their everyday lives, those who do not resign and give in may acquire valuable skills in the process. Among these are patience, endurance, and a broader scope of knowledge and experience based on the variety of available perspectives on society and on Islam.

Because of the position they are in, facing two fronts – an external and an internal antagonism – those persistent to struggle through become adept at negotiating the

different demands and offers from various directions. They may be able to work themselves through several available options of Islamic ideologies, and by dealing with such challenges develop the potential to become more independently minded and (self-)critical than otherwise. By training the intellect, endurance, sensitivity, and persuasiveness of individual Muslims living in this setting, being situated on a 'double-periphery' sensitizes and prepares them for quotidian struggles different from those in more socially homogeneous Muslim contexts (see also Marsden 2005).

I have in mind the example of a young man 'trained' in such a manner. Saidi (a pseudonym) is a self-educated religious layman and civic activist who has for some time and with moderate success been giving public speeches about the need for Kenyan Muslims to unify and assert common positions as a political force. At the same time, he criticized the Muslim establishment for its long-term failure to work for the good of the community (Kresse 2007a: chap. 7). When the post-Moi government began to liberalize the media and he was offered the chance of moderating his own weekly radio programme for a new local Islamic radio station, he became far more influential within the community. On air, he facilitates public discussions about pressing and contentious issues for the wider urban community (e.g. addressing the need to improve water supplies, the coastal economy, co-operation between citizens and the town council, or speaking out against violence and 'terrorism' in the name of Islam). For this, the medium of a live radio phone-in programme can be seen as a kind of extended *baraza* – the *baraza* being the historically established and culturally distinct setting of discursive negotiation of social or political issues that affect the coastal Muslim community. Issues of social and religious relevance are again discussed on the basis of common frameworks and standards of knowledge. Through efforts and initiatives like these, the *baraza* neighbourhood setting has become projected into the wider virtual space reached by the transistor, and from there continues to mediate and negotiate public disputes, common opinions, and private convictions within a group of listeners and participants that are part of a dynamic discursive community.

If Islam as discursive tradition is constituted by 'an ongoing interaction between the present and the past' and the ways in which 'relations of power and other forms of contestation and conflict impinge upon any definition of what it means to be a Muslim' (Zaman 2002: 6), both these aspects are at work here. When considering the relationship between the postcolonial and the colonial order in contemporary Kenya (administration, political structure, etc.), core elements of the colonial are still inherent in the postcolonial sphere – often in the pragmatic sense that existent structures that 'work', or were made to 'work', in a social context continue to be used. This leads us to Chabal and Daloz's reflections about postcolonial African politics. Africa 'works' after all, they say, by means of disorder as a political instrument: 'In contemporary Africa, politics turn on the instrumentalization of disorder' (1999: 155). Yet, importantly, they also emphasize that to understand the political processes in postcolonial Africa, 'the disorder of which we speak is in fact a different "order", the outcome of different rationalities and causalities' (1999: 155). How this 'order' is created and 'works' in specific African societies follows a different paradigm from the one which political science usually assumes. It is rooted in cultural traditions, social practices, or religious conceptions that were operative in African communities before, during, and after colonial rule. The formula of 'disorder as a political instrument' is also at work in postcolonial Kenya, on the scale of national politics and, in a structurally similar manner, within the realm of Muslim politics (though both aspects still need to be investigated further).

Particularly during the Moi era, the government seemed to have used and steered political disorder in the country to secure and guard its own position of power. The coastal region was affected by some aspects of this disorder much like other Kenyan regions (in terms of 'ethnic clashes', for instance). While popular discourse among coastal Muslims may exaggerate their status as victims, the structural neglect of the Kenyan coast (economic, educational, etc.) is one feature of such 'disorder' (an inverse 'order') – understandably leading to the common complaint among Muslims of being second-class citizens in their own home region. The foundations for this kind of 'order' that is locally seen as having furthered the grip of the upcountry government on the coastal population were laid during colonial times. In a sense, then, the postcolonial government has reaped what the British colonial administration had sown.

On the stage of Muslim politics, disorder was, in a way, useful to the regional impact of the transnational Islamic reformist ideologies discussed above. The frailty of the existing socio-religious order with its shaken-up fundamentals gave reformists a chance to offer a new one, and thus to make their ideology – which was markedly different and at times hostile to the previously established Muslim 'order' on the coast – a more likely and acceptable candidate than it otherwise might have been. If this is true, the post-colonial conditions of political disorder in Kenya also enhanced the possibilities for Islamic reform (in various shapes and forms) within the Muslim community more than has been hitherto addressed.

NOTES

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¹ The term 'coastal Muslims' includes Muslims of African (particularly Mijikenda and Swahili, also Somali), South Asian (Bohora, Ismaili, Shia Ithnaashari, Memon, Badala, Kokni), and Arab (especially Hadrami and Omani) background. Using it, I draw from common parlance in Kenya, whereby 'upcountry Christians' and 'coastal Muslims' are frequently contrasted. But the generic character of the term should not detract from the considerable internal diversity of coastal Muslims (see, e.g., Bakari 1995; Faulkner 2006; Fuglesang 1994; McIntosh 2009; Parkin 1970; 1984; 2000; Seesemann 2006), the majority of whom are Sunni Shafii.

² There is no shortage of reliable data on the proportion of Muslims in Kenya. Estimates range between 6 and 35 per cent, with 20-5 per cent seeming to be a reasonable estimate (see Ayubi & Mohyuddin 1994: 147; Cruise O'Brien 1995: 201; Seesemann 2007b: 158; Sperling 2000: 159).

³ This term is commonly used (mostly by opponents, but sometimes also by adherents – see M.K. Mazrui 1971; Msallam 1991) to refer to supporters of Islamic reformism of the Salafi or Wahhabi kind, who usually call themselves 'people of the Sunna' (*watu wa sunna* or *ahlul sunna*).

⁴ For more global political context and a view of Africa within the Muslim world see Hunwick (1997) and Otaek and Soares (2007). For patterns and varieties of Islamic reform in Africa, see Loimeier (2003; in press).

⁵ See Beckerleg (1995), who presents young males in an economically and socially frustrating environment facing the alternatives of drug-taking or Islamic activism.

⁶ Sheikh al-Amin bin Ali Mazrui, 4 June 1944, in the introduction to *Uwongozi* (Leadership), a selection of texts from *Sahifa*: <http://www.swahilionline.com/features/articles/islam/amin.htm> (last accessed 6 June 2007); my translation.

⁷ A *baraza* is a prototypical institution of male sociality in the street-life on the Swahili coast. See also Kresse (2005) and Loimeier (2007). NB: the stone bench in front of a house is also called a *baraza*.

⁸ A counter-organization was formed, supposedly representing 'African' Muslims. These were government-friendly and attacked IPK supporters viciously in word and deed, as 'Arab foreigners' whom they threatened with death (see, e.g., Oded 2000: 182).

⁹ See Alam (2008) on similar enmities in South Asia.

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Enjeux politiques chez les musulmans dans le Kenya postcolonial : comment négocier le savoir à la double périphérie

Résumé

L'auteur étudie l'islam politique dans le contexte social général du Kenya postcolonial, principalement durant l'ère Moi (1978-2002). Il s'intéresse ainsi à l'introduction, à l'intégration et à la contestation interne des idéologies réformistes islamiques dans le discours et la pratique sociale des Swahilis. Son argumentation est que le lien entre islam politique, politique nationale et socialité dans les régions côtières est constitué par la notion « d'économie du savoir », dans le cadre postcolonial d'une « double périphérie » dans laquelle se situent les musulmans des côtes du Kenya : périphérie vis-à-vis de l'État, mais aussi de l'*umma*, la communauté des croyants musulmans. L'auteur commente la dynamique entre aspects du savoir et rhétorique, raisonnement et pouvoir, idéologie et pratique sociale à l'œuvre dans ce contexte musulman particulier. L'ensemble s'inscrit dans la politique nationale du Kenya et est discuté avec pour toile de fond un État postcolonial, gouverné par les chrétiens de l'arrière-pays avec lesquels les musulmans de la côte ont toujours eu des relations chargées de tensions et d'antagonismes.

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