



BRILL

---

'Swahili Enlightenment'? East African Reformist Discourse at the Turning Point: The Example of Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui

Author(s): Kai Kresse

Source: *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 33, Fasc. 3, Islamic Thought in 20th-Century Africa (Aug., 2003), pp. 279-309

Published by: Brill

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1581851>

Accessed: 11-04-2017 01:03 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



Brill is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Religion in Africa*

# 'SWAHILI ENLIGHTENMENT'? EAST AFRICAN REFORMIST DISCOURSE AT THE TURNING POINT: THE EXAMPLE OF SHEIKH MUHAMMAD KASIM MAZRUI<sup>1</sup>

BY

KAI KRESSE  
(University of St Andrews)

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui, an influential yet largely ignored figure within East African Islamic reformism, which shifted from internal to external domination in the second half of the 20th century. His educational booklet '*Hukumu za sharia*', written in Kiswahili, is analysed and contextualised. Advising local Muslims, by way of clear argument and reference to authoritative texts, on how to deal with controversial local practices from an Islamic point of view, it pushed for the development of self-reliance, and criticised dependence on Islamic clerics and dignitaries. The text itself displays the rational principles that the reformist movement relied on and propagated, while it also contains hints of a more dogmatic tone that was yet to dominate reformist discourse. Overall, the article establishes a wider comparison in discussing this African Islamic reformism as an 'enlightenment' movement. The focus hereby is on structure rather than substance, as Islamic reform is incompatible with secularism. Common features, however, can be seen in the emphasis on rationality and self-reliance of individual actors, as well as the internal dialectic of the movements, oscillating between liberation and dogmatism.

\* \* \*

In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. (M. Horkheimer/T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*)

## *Introduction*

There is a fundamental tension between locally rooted religious practices of Muslims and globally oriented Islamic reformist movements. In recent relevant collections on Islam in Africa, this has been highlighted as a leitmotif applicable to the whole African continent (cf. Westerlund/

Rosander 1997, Brenner 1993), and for Sudanic Africa in particular important organisational networks and programmatic agendas in this context have been described (Hunwick 1997). This leitmotif also applies to the Kenyan coast. Here, *sharifu*<sup>2</sup> clans and their followers have been criticised for unacceptable innovations in religious practice (*bid'a*), first by local reformist scholars and later by more radicalised, often university-educated Islamic activists, recruited and funded by Middle Eastern (particularly Saudi Arabian) institutions commonly denounced as 'Wahhabi' by local opponents (cf. Bakari 1995). This article looks at this shift within reformist criticism, from highly respected coastal scholars like Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui (1891-1947) and Sheikh Abdallah Saleh Farsy (1912-1982)—the best known proponents of what I will here call 'Swahili enlightenment'—to foreign-educated and more radical ones. While a continuity of criticisms can be identified within Islamic reformist discourse at the Kenyan Swahili coast, there is also a rupture, as nowadays the overarching consensus between the diverging groups that had previously sustained East African Islam as a relatively balanced system of regional networks of Islamic education and scholarship seems to have collapsed. Differences in practice and understanding of Islam, which were once tolerated, turned to spark off strong animosities, and the intellectual centre of reformist ideology shifted from an internal to an external position, as a multitude of Islamic groups from around the world have sought to increase their influence and support.

Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui of Mombasa (1912-1982) is at the heart of this turning point of the reformist movement at the Kenyan coast, just like his friend and companion Sheikh Abdallah Saleh Farsy, with whom he studied under Sheikh al-Amin. This is visible in his position in coastal Islamic education as well as in his reformist writings. While he was educated within the regional system of scholarship and later became Chief Qadi of Kenya (1963-68), some of his followers were later denounced as the local proponents of 'Wahhabism'. His Islamic educational booklets display the rational principles that his reformist movement relied on and propagated, while they also contain passages of an overtly rationalist attitude and a more dogmatic tone that was to characterise the later stages of reformist debate. In this paper I analyse, discuss and contextualise the first of his two publications on 'the right way' of Muslim conduct written for Swahili Muslim commoners: *Hukumu za sharia*, published in the 1970s (Mazrui 1970, 1971).<sup>3</sup>

In terms of disciplinary framework, my article approaches reformist Islamic discourse and debate at the Kenyan Swahili coast from a philosophical-cum-anthropological perspective. I sketch out part of the recent

regional intellectual history so as to capture the internal social discourse, relying mainly on Swahili documents and local publications by Islamic scholars. From a philosophical perspective, I am interested in the intellectual debate of the region, and how the eminent thinkers there engaged in the theoretical arguments they considered most important. In anthropological respects, my interests lie in the contextual documentation and discussion of such individual thinkers, their texts and their intellectual debates. Thus I relate their theoretical arguments to the practical level of politics, power and the social conditions of life, assessing the social relevance of their intellectual activities. The debate led by East African Muslim intellectuals is not only linked to global debates within Islam, but is also part of global intellectual history. It is not only part of Swahili intellectual history (which happens to be dominated by Islam), but also of African philosophical discourse, as the fundamental reflection on matters of life in an African context.

*The coastal reformist agenda: an overview*

Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui was an important reformist figure of the Swahili coast in the late colonial and early postcolonial era, between about 1940 and 1982. In my view, his work reflects a turning point of Swahili reformist discourse, which lies in a shift of its administrative power-centre, from an internal to an external dominance. While local scholars used to be the intellectual proponents and motors of Islamic reform, publicising their own written or oral criticisms themselves, the younger generation of reformist activists now often seems to act as the executive agents for the external ideological interests of the institution by which they are funded (welfare organisations from countries including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Kuwait, Iran, Pakistan and others).

In terms of education, teaching and intellectual orientation, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim was rooted in the historical networks of East African Islam.<sup>4</sup> But some of his and A.S. Farsy's students and their followers who later became the new leading figures of the reformist agenda—Sheikh Harith Swaleh, Sheikh Ali Shee, Sheikh Ahmad Msallam, Sheikh Nassor Khamis and others—acquired additional academic training and qualifications at Islamic universities in the Middle East, which had provided them with scholarships (Bakari 1995: 182-186). Their training abroad can be seen as part of the shift to a new paradigm for Islamic discourse in the East African region: the centrality of the exterior. Islamic ideologies that had previously been exterior to the region now

became implemented and even dominant, also because of economic influence. Proficient in Arabic, the graduates returned with university degrees and the reformist doctrines of their respective host institutions, which were more radical and combative in tone and content (*ibid.*). They applied these ideas to the East African context in their teachings and public speeches, thus radicalising reformist discourse and polarising Islamic debate more and more. At least in part, reformist activists began to be perceived as representatives of the externally funded Islamic groups rather than as individual thinkers in the shared social context of the local Muslim community.

I suspect that, because the criticisms of Swahili Muslim practices (e.g. *maulidi*) were formulated from foreign contexts, they failed to be successful in instigating and sustaining a complete reform. These ‘imported’ reformist ideologies caused resentment and suspicions, because they are ‘foreign’, from somewhere else. Foreign-educated reformists were sometimes estranged from their audience, even if their arguments were sound and convincing. What has become dominant in Mombasa and elsewhere along the Swahili coast is a dogmatic, largely rhetorical argument between the activists of various Islamic groups with little perspective of resolution, as it is mostly based on calls for allegiance. Under these conditions, many Swahili Muslims of different ages have become uncertain about the propriety of some of these practices, such as ways of celebrating *maulidi*, for example. Their insecurity about these matters is often increased rather than resolved by the way that reformist scholars and their opponents lead their arguments in public.

Scholars from competing Muslim factions nowadays fall into a discursive deadlock that resembles the fierce arguments of the previous generation between Mombasa-based reformists (Sheikh Muhammad Kasim among them) and the *masharifu* faction of Riyadha Mosque in Lamu, dominated by the Jamilail family, the descendants of the famous Sayyid Habib Saleh. In the past, however, the argument took place as an internal debate within East African Islam, by local participants who were educated in the region. They formulated their positions and voiced their arguments on their own, without any significant outside dependencies. Thus the question I discuss here is whether, and in which way, there might be a qualitative difference in character between the reformist discourse of the 1960s/1970s and that of the 1990s. If the reformist initiative by Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui, based on using the Swahili language, can rightfully be characterised as an ‘enlightenment’ movement, then do some of the later publications of Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui represent the end of ‘Swahili Enlightenment’?

*Opposition to the Lamu masharifu*

The head of the Muslim *qadis*, who lived in Mombasa, was continually opposed to the Riyadhha *masharifu*. He felt that *tawasul*, the idea of asking the sharifs to intervene with the higher spirits, was not part of 'pure' Islam, or Islam as it was in the days of Mohammed. He even questioned the basic idea of the purity of the sharifs. When this *qadi* grew old, he lost his sight, and of course, the sharifs related that to his previous attacks on them. They said that the Prophet tortured the man by taking his eyesight. (el-Zein 1974: 149).

The *qadi* referred to here must be Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui. Mazrui indeed suffered from failing eyesight, and he responded to this rumour in the second edition of his educational booklet describing the life of Imam Aly, *Maisha ya Imam Aly* (1973). In this book, he combined the biography with criticisms of local *masharifu*, and for this reason he was verbally attacked by their faction in return. In the foreword, Muhammad Kasim clarifies that his illness had troubled him since his early childhood (it was a hereditary family illness, known to all his acquaintances), and that he had had to receive special treatment in 1960. He was able to continue his work on this book, which was first published in 1965, but under much suffering. In 1967, when his illness worsened, it was wrongly interpreted as being caused by a curse of the local *masharifu* who retaliated against him because of his criticisms (1973: 8). He added that being justified in gaining consent and actually gaining consent are two different things, and that nobody could achieve the consent of everyone. Furthermore, he calls God as his witness that when he wrote his criticism of the *masharifu* this was with the sole intent of leading his peers to the right path ('*sikuwa na makusudio yoyote illa kuwaongoza wenzangu*'; *ibid.*). He ended the foreword asking God for forgiveness for 'whoever has erred among us' ('*Mungu amsamahe aliyekosa katika sisi*'; *ibid.*). What had happened?

El-Zein's summary of the situation, quoted above, illustrates the principal division between Sheikh Muhammad Kasim and the Lamu *masharifu*. It centred on the social and religious status of the *masharifu*, the descendants of Prophet Muhammad. In popular perception the *masharifu*, as holy persons with special blessings, fulfilled an important religious function of mediating between Muslim commoners and God, via the Prophet Muhammad, to whom they were said to be especially close. But Sheikh Muhammad Kasim insisted, with reference to the Qur'an, that they did not have any such special powers and, furthermore, it was up to each individual to establish a direct contact to God through special prayers (*dua*), independently. According to the writings of el-Zein and of Muhammad Kasim himself, along the Swahili coast, and especially in the Lamu area, it had become widely accepted that the *masharifu*

were outside the rules which governed ordinary people's lives and behaviour. So, if a non-sharif caught a sharif in some failing and attacked him for it, the Prophet would be angry and take revenge. Thus, if a sharif committed adultery, and a non-sharif knew about it, it was best for him to keep quiet and not tell anyone. (el-Zein 1974: 149).

In raising and criticising these issues publicly, first in his *Maisha ya Al-Imam Aly* and then in his volumes of *Hukuma za sharia*, Muhammad Kasim broke an established social taboo, and he was perfectly aware of this. In the foreword to the original edition, he wrote that 'this book names many things which, though largely known, are never talked about'. He continued that it is necessary and right to unveil these matters whether it pleased people or not (1965: 8; 1973: 6). Just as he had foreseen, the book sparked off a storm of disapproval by the *masharifu* and their supporters (1973: 7; cf. also Nassir 1967). All this has to be viewed in a wider framework, in relation to the intellectual biography of Sheikh Muhammad Kasim and the historical networks of regional scholarship, before we return to a closer reading of Sheikh Muhammad Kasim's writings.

### *Enlightenment as a leitmotif in the coastal reformist agenda*

In his documentation of important scholars along the Swahili coast in recent history, Sheikh Abdallah Saleh Farsy points out that Sheikh Muhammad Kasim's 'books, especially his little treatises, have done a lot to open the eyes of Muslims and have aided them greatly in augmenting their knowledge of Islam' (Farsy 1989: 122). An increase of knowledge, leading to better insight and (self-)understanding of Muslim individuals through the medium of Islam, is highlighted by this quote of Farsy as a main agenda of Muhammad Kasim's activities. The idiom of 'opening the eyes' of local Muslims is particularly telling, as it implies that Muslims were commonly not able to 'see for themselves' what was going on around them, what was right and what wrong. This image of enabling people to see (and think) for themselves is one that we are also familiar with from Western intellectual history, particularly clear in Kant's enlightenment motif, the incentive to self-reliance (Kant 1970, 1996). But it also plays a central role in the Islamic modernism that thinkers like al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida developed, partly in discussion of Western enlightenment thinkers (Hourani 1983). For other Muslim societies, as in West Africa, a similar motif has been documented, though in different socio-cultural contexts and with different thrusts of argument (e.g. Brenner 1984: 143 f.; 157 ff.).<sup>5</sup> This is surely

a leitmotif for the Swahili coastal reformist agenda which drew from Egyptian Islamic modernism. We encounter it in a variety of forms. For example, Farsy characterises Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui (1891-1947), his teacher and the initiator of this movement, as ‘the one who opened our eyes and shut our mouths’ (1989: 125).<sup>6</sup> This points to an increasing consciousness about the world (in terms of what it looks like and how else it could be seen) and an increasing awareness of the necessity of self-critique and humility (not to overestimate oneself, not to succumb to prejudice). Also, in the foreword of a posthumous publication of selected passages of Sheikh al-Amin’s translation of the Qur’an, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim praises him for his achievement ‘to take us out of the curse of foolishness’ (*kuttoa katika viza vya ujinga*; n.d.). This may well be taken to mean ‘to enlighten his peers’.<sup>7</sup>

Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui was the originator of the Islamic reformist movement that I suggest calling ‘Swahili Enlightenment’.<sup>8</sup> As a student in Zanzibar, Sheikh al-Amin was exposed to the teachings of Sheikh Abdallah Bakathir (1860-1925) and Sayyid Ahmad bin Sumayt (1861-1925). In the history of the East African coast, these are probably the two most renowned Islamic scholars internationally. Both studied in Mekka and travelled widely in the Islamic world (cf. Farsy 1989; Pouwels 1987; Bang 2000). Ahmad bin Sumayt, who was in close contact with important scholars and dignitaries from Istanbul, Egypt, the Hadramaut and Mekka, as well as with the British judiciary in Zanzibar (Pouwels 1987: 154), was critical of the locally established practices of *dhikri*, *uganga* and *falaki*. In terms of intellectual openness and global outlook, he provided a strong influence for the young Sheikh from Mombasa. Sheikh Abdallah Bakathir, on the other hand, was known for his overarching religious tolerance beyond all sectarian borders. He introduced daily lectures during the month of Ramadhan in Zanzibar’s Gofu Mosque (a practice that has been taken over widely along the coast), disseminating Islamic teachings to a wide audience of diverse social background. Under these teachers, Sheikh al-Amin was stimulated to study influential reformists like al-Afghany, Muhammad Abduh, Ibn Taymiya, Muhammad Abdul-Wahhab and others (cf. Mazrui 1980: ix). Based especially on the Egyptian model, he developed a regionally specific agenda of Islamic reformism for the Swahili coast. Crucial to the success of his agenda was the use of the Swahili language and simple printing technology to easily disseminate his ideas in print, for both addressing and educating the masses of Muslim commoners. Sheikh al-Amin was convinced that, amongst ‘modern things’, nothing is as good as a newspaper for showing people the right way, to insert good thoughts



into their minds, and ‘to wake up their hearts’ (Introduction to *Uwongozi*, 1944).<sup>9</sup> In 1930, he began to write, print (in ‘cyclostyle’), and distribute free pamphlets giving Islamic advice on current issues of social life. These weekly publications were initially written in Arabic script and called ‘*Sahifa*’ (page) because they consisted of a double-sided copy of a single page. After sixteen months, the volume grew to a bilingual publication in Arabic and Swahili in Latin script. It appeared as ‘*Al-Islah*’ for another twelve months before collapsing because Sheikh al-Amin had to take over the position of Qadi of Mombasa (Introduction to *Uwongozi*, 1944.).<sup>10</sup>

As Sheikh Abdallah Farsy states, this had a revolutionary effect on the public and popular Islamic discourse in Eastern Africa, where Swahili is the lingua franca. Over the decades, he and many other Islamic scholars used this method to publicise their Islamic concerns:

Now many people write religious books in Kiswahili, but it was he who started this good thing—even if many people imitate him in this today. Thus, everyone who writes religious pamphlets in Kiswahili will get their reward from God (*thawabu*) for having performed this good deed, and Sh. al-Amin will get it (as well) since he was the one who opened this door. (1989: 121)

As the first in the region to introduce this medium for Islamic discourse, he utilised it specifically to publicise his reformist critique of culturally embedded Swahili Muslim practices, which he considered constituted impermissible acts of *bid’a* (innovation in religious matters) and *shirk* (violating the principle of unity of God): ‘*Na yeye ndiye mtu wa mwanzo kupiga kelele kubwa na kuandika magazeti na kutunga vitabu vya kukataza mambo ya Mabidaa na Ushirikana.*’ (ibid.).

Sheikh A.S. Farsy and Sheikh Muhammad Kasim have to be seen as partisans of the same project. Their teacher Sheikh al-Amin was a role model according to which they could shape their own work. And so they did, publishing a vast amount of little educational booklets on Islam (e.g. on how to pray, fast, marry, divorce, bury and inherit correctly; also on central historical figures of Islam).<sup>11</sup> By popularising Islamic knowledge and the principles of judgement in Islamic matters, they made them accessible to the people, and thus educated the masses. Until now the booklets of these two authors are probably among the most commonly known religious booklets along the Swahili coast, and many of their writings are still sold in almost every religious bookshop. While Sheikh Farsy is the more famous of the two—not the least because he produced the first full translation of the Qur’an into Swahili by a Swahili mother-tongue speaker in 1969<sup>12</sup>—there are three booklets by Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui that are sold in virtually all book-

shops selling Islamic books. These are his biographical accounts of the first three *khalifas* Abubakr, Umar and Uthman, published in 1958, 1962 and 1964 respectively, concerned with covering the historical side of popular education on Islam in Kiswahili. In writing these books, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim gave in to the urging of a certain Sheikh Hemed Ali from Tanga, who wanted to publish a series on famous Muslims (1958: foreword).<sup>13</sup> The idea was to follow up on Sheikh Farsy's biography of the Prophet Muhammad, published in 1942. The fourth treatise was on the fourth *khalifa*, Imam Aly, published in 1965. It is almost impossible to find, probably because of the big controversy that it had caused. As mentioned above, it combined the portrayal of Aly's life with a critical discussion of practices, rituals and habits of the *masharifu* faction.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, his first three booklets were very successful, written in sober and descriptive style, with only few references and parallels to the Swahili coast. The first book was welcomed enthusiastically by Muslims from everywhere along the coast, and a second edition had to be printed after one year (1959: 1). This book was written with the explicit aim of enlightening the Muslim public, especially the youth, on the history of Islam, as a conscious counter-measure to the imbalance caused by colonial educational politics. As Muhammad Kasim despaired,

a Muslim knows the history of people like Napoleon and Christopher Columbus and other famous Western people, and he should know nothing about the history of people like Sydna Abubakar, Sydna Umar, Sydna Uthman, Sydna Aly, nor anything about the great men of Islam (1959: 2).

This quote also shows that at this initial stage of Islamic reform—which one might call the moderate phase—no contentious issue relating to the question of Muslim unity was involved. The aim was to reintroduce the basic principles of Islam into popular Muslim consciousness, against a Eurocentric perspective and its implicit threat of Christianity.

Judging from his writings and the debates he was engaged in, for Sheikh Muhammad Kasim the idea of Muslim unity along the coast was more an ideal for the future than a practical goal within reach. For this, the rift between the two dominant and oppositional factions in East African Islam had already become too big, despite the fact that the leading figures ultimately shared much of their intellectual genealogy. As for his teacher Sheikh al-Amin, who propagated publicly for Muslim unity (for instance, in his 'Jamiatul-Islam', in *Uwongozi* 1944), such unity was not to be had under any conditions. Ultimately, the quest for *the right way* of performing Islam was regarded as superior to a nominal unity of Muslims as such (cf. 1973: 6). Although the reformist concern for fellow Muslims, who (in the eyes of a reformist) were unconsciously

violating God's commandments and being led astray by others who misinterpreted the Qur'an and *hadith*, can be understood as ultimately subsumed to the quest for Muslim unity (with the stress on 'Muslim'), this is not the only, and for many not the most likely, interpretation of affairs. On the immediate surface of popular perception (and in historical interpretation, cf. Pouwels 1987, Salim 1973) this was often rather seen as part of a power struggle between Omani Arabs in Mombasa who usually held the position of Chief Qadi, and the Lamu *masharifu* who held Riyadhha and had wide popular support by the masses. For Sheikh Muhammad Kasim the guiding principle seems to have been a prevalence of reform before unity.

With this attitude he pursued his agenda of supplying the Muslim masses with educational material and information that they could understand and access for themselves without the mediation of their local *sheikh* or *sharif*, as long as they could read Swahili. As Salim says with regard to the introduction of such Swahili textbooks by Sheikh al-Amin: 'For once the new Muslim (and even the old non-Arabic speaking Muslim) could read about Islam *for himself*' (1973: 167; my emphasis). The last two words here deserve special emphasis, as they highlight the liberating character of such provision for the individual Muslim who now could acquire criteria for decision-making on Islamic grounds *for himself*. Thus the publication and distribution of reformist educational booklets was a potential source of more self-reliance and independence, but also, of more responsibility in Islamic matters for the Muslim individual. On the other hand, it was a potential threat to the position of social power that local religious figures and teachers (particularly *sheikhs* and *masharifu*) had acquired. They were now in danger of losing their status as virtually indispensable mediators between Muslim commoners and the Prophet Muhammad and God.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Muhammad Kasim's Hukumu za sharia (vol. I)*

A concrete example of such reformist writing in the early 1970s, less than a decade after Kenyan Independence, is Muhammad Kasim's *Hukumu za sharia*. 'To try to bring Islam back to its status of cleanliness' (*kujaribu kuuregeza Uislamu katika usafi wake*) is the agenda for this project, as Muhammad Kasim formulates it at the end of the second volume, when listing the various profits of consciously studying the Qur'an (1971: 42). The reader (i.e. the Muslim commoner) is told that if he reads the Qur'an by way of understanding and remembering its meaning (rather than only learning its recitation by heart), he will under-

stand why some Islamic scholars take such trouble to translate the Qur’an and attempt to return Islam to its clean status. Furthermore, he will also understand ‘the illness that has entered the Muslims of today, and also the medicine against that illness’ (*ugonjwa uliowaingilia Waislam wa leo, na dawa ya ugonjwa huo*; *ibid.*). Not only that, the reader will also better understand the fundamentals of Muslim history and the capacity of the Qur’an—how the early Muslims had been able to lead and rule the world, even when they initially seemed like a small and weak minority facing huge armies as enemies; why they were the most knowledgeable people, influencing cultures all over the world; how the Qur’an predicted things that took place only recently (e.g. the building of the Suez Canal); how it was in accordance with astonishing modern achievements (e.g. the landing on the moon); and how it taught things that were later found out by modern science (*ibid.*). Sh. Muhammad Kasim entices the reader into discovering all this important knowledge in the Qur’an on his own, by educating himself through continuous reading and studying. It is there to be taken advantage of, to be picked up and made fertile, whether in its original Arabic version (which must be studied for ultimate clarity), or through translation. He narrates an anecdote of an English sailor who became Muslim after being fascinated by an impressive and strikingly poetic account of the sea in an English version of the Qur’an, which he had picked up at random (40-41). What matters most, according to the Sheikh, is the *conscious* reading because only thus can a real understanding be acquired and sustained.

We can already see that this is in fundamental opposition to a mystical approach to the Qur’an, and, indeed, Sufi practices such as *dhikri* are strongly criticised. With the call for self-reliance in conscious Islamic orientation, then, a rationalist position is put forward and defended. The process of returning to a ‘cleaner’ Islam in society is thought to be achieved through, and goes together with, the rationalisation of the understanding of Islam, i.e. a rationalist interpretation of the Qur’an and the *hadith*. It is in this way that Sheikh Muhammad Kasim wants his own writings to be read and understood: logically, following clear arguments. The individual and concrete use of the general faculties of human *ratio* is supposed to guarantee the possibility of religious self-education and self-reliance, ultimately in direct communication and interaction with the revealed word of God, the Qur’an. In this sense, the rationalisation of Islam and the Islamisation of society are inter-linked in the reformist agenda. In the two<sup>16</sup> volumes of *Hukumu za sharia* then, we encounter an attempt to make people aware of this possibility of such self-reliance (which should be read as ‘direct reliance on God’).

This happens in the context of discussing widely spread customs, practices, beliefs and prejudices, as they occur in the Swahili area.

The first volume of *Hukumu za sharia* was written in 1970 (1970: 37), the second probably very soon thereafter. This was a period of firmly established antagonism between the Mombasa-based reformists and the Lamu *masharifu* of Riyadhha Mosque, and the row about the earlier publication of Sheikh Muhammad Kasim's *Maisha ya Imam Aly* (1965; cf. Nassir 1967) must still have been fresh in public memory. Even more recent was the scathing reaction of the Riyadhha faction on the recent publication of Sheikh Farsy's translation of the Qur'an into Swahili (cf. Badawy 1970). '*Hukumu za sharia*' literally means 'judgements (or authoritative rulings) according to Islamic law', and Muhammad Kasim covers the following fifteen topics in corresponding chapters, with these titles: going to the moon, birth control, *tawassul* and *dua*, *khitma* and *tahlili*, to command good things and to stop bad things, a Ramadhan sermon, Muslims and *uganga* (*uchawi*), *hijja*, *hijra*, Prophet Muhammad, righteousness, religious guidance ('*uongofu*'), assess your belief, whom do we follow?, the Qur'an (1-9 in book one, 10-15 in book two).

In the following, I will provide summaries of the chapters of the first volume, as well as brief discussions of selected sections in which practices of the *masharifu* faction are criticised. What should emerge from these passages is a better understanding of the concrete Swahili Muslim practices that were criticised by the local reformists, and of how the critique was formulated and put forward. The critic is obviously familiar with persons and practices that are criticised, and active within the same cultural framework. I will touch on the positive recommendations for religious practice given out to the commoners to a lesser extent only. It should be noted that Muhammad Kasim reasons out his pronouncements of limits of acceptability for the critical practices very accurately. This is done by reference to the Qur'an, certain *hadith*, or certain judgements or interpretations made by reputable scholars in Islamic history. I am, however, not including these references in my summaries.

#### 1. 'Kwenda mwezini' (*going to the moon*)

This chapter comments on the recent arrival of man on the moon, taking the much publicised landing of the US astronauts in 1969 as a point of departure to discuss conflicting Islamic opinions on this issue. The central question treated is whether the fact of human beings' presence on the moon is in contradiction with the Qur'an or not. Though

there are conflicting positions of Islamic scholars on this matter, the argument made here is straightforward: facts cannot possibly contradict the Qur'an, thus any interpretation of the Qur'an claiming a contradiction must be wrong. 'The Qur'an is always in agreement with fact, knowledge and intelligence' (*Qur'ani siku zote inakubaliana na hakika [fact], elimu na akili*; 1970: 2). Muhammad Kasim maintains that the wrong interpretation is probably based on a certain collection of wrong or unacceptable *hadith* which are in contradiction to fact. This collection, he tells us, is known under the name 'Israailiyyaat' (1970: 3).<sup>17</sup> The unshakable faith in the truth of the word of the Qur'an, linked to the level of factual, undisputable reality much more than to that of 'belief', is underlined by this quote which closes the chapter: 'When arguing about what to believe as true and what not to believe, please let us not pull religion into our argument' (*Tukibishana katika kusadiki na kutosadiki, tafadhalini tusitie dini katika mabishano yetu*; *ibid.*). Thus, this chapter is meant to demonstrate the unquestionable compatibility of Islam with modernity and the most recent technological achievements.

## 2. 'Kuzuia kizazi' (*birth control*)

This topic is introduced with reference to a recent judgement by the pope (probably the papal encyclical of 1968, *Humanae Vitae*), pronouncing for the global community of Catholics that no artificial methods of birth control were permissible. Speaking for Islam, Muhammad Kasim makes the point that permanent birth control (i.e. the destruction of the uterus) is not allowed, while methods of temporary birth control might be allowed. In this respect, social, economic and educational concerns are raised. If parents have the capacity to feed, house and educate many children, they should have them and not use birth control. On the other hand it is not recommended to have (many) children if you cannot provide for them. In general, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim adds, human beings should always try their best not to avoid having children. In the end, God will decide whether the human actions will succeed—through 'Qadar', the book of fate (4-7).

Here, one should mark the stance to cast Islam as a 'modern' religion, in contrast to Catholicism. Emphasis is put on Islam's principal openness to the social problems causing the need for birth control. Islam is seen to offer understanding for the economically desperate, and to take modern means of contraception into account, if need be. In comparison, the brief reference to the pope's strict prohibition of any kind of birth control makes Catholicism look distinctively backward and

inconsiderate towards the social problems of many. In short, next to the modernity of Islam the inferiority of its Christian rival seems evident from this section.

### 3. 'Tawassul na dua' (*prayers of request to God*)

This chapter is internally controversial in East African Islam, since it criticises and condemns certain ways of the widespread religious mediation of requests to God through the practice of *tawassul* by people who have the reputation of being particularly pious and god-fearing (markedly *sheikhs* and *masharifis*). In folk thought, their involvement in one's prayers is said to guarantee that one's wishes and requests will be granted. Muhammad Kasim laments that 'the question of *tawassul* has brought a big quarrel into our towns' (8), since not all forms that are practised are actually acceptable to Islam. He explains the quarrel by the fact that many Muslims are not aware of the varying status of acceptability of different forms of *tawassul*.

*Tawassul*, asking God for a favour, is allowed in three different ways: after reciting God's praises; after praying or fasting, or giving a sacrifice; and by asking a pious person to pray for you to God. It is not permissible, however, to invoke deceased good or pious people for one's prayers, nor to pray in the name of some good person for oneself (8).

Similar qualifications apply to *dua*, short prescribed recitations of prayers, often combined with a request to God, where certain forms of performance are unacceptable. Examples of these, as far as they are commonly practised by people who are seemingly oblivious of their wrongdoing, are pointed out. For instance, writing *dua* on the walls of the house to guard it (a practice that I witnessed during my fieldwork) is not approved (13). Also, no 'bargaining' with God about one's commitments in regard to the favour asked is allowed, for example announcing 'I will be a good person and do this x if you do that y for me . . .' (14). A promise to God may only be given with total commitment to God himself and it must be a religious offering. Linking a *dua* or a promise to a *sheikh* or *sharif* is not permitted (14). Finally, the old customary Swahili ritual of leading cattle around the town in order to ask God for rain ('*kuzungusha ng'ombe mijini*') is not an acceptable way of praying for rain, but 'a way of "worship" and customary practice that is not Islamic' (*namna za 'ibada' na milla isiyokuwa ya kiIslam*); 14).

This chapter ends with a prayer, which is a sharp attack on all persons violating the rules sketched out above, characterising such violators as pagans or unbelievers (*makafiri*): 'May God protect us from the

evil of bad *bid’a* and from pagan practices in our towns’ (*Mwenyezi Mungu atulinde na shari za bid’a mbovu na milla ya kikafiri katika miji yetu*; 14). Obviously, *sheikhs* and *masharifu* who encourage such outruled practices and participate in them are in the frontline of criticism. As in the next chapter, here the (possibly self-styled) mediating role of religious figures, which grants them social status and power, is questioned and conscribed to its acceptable limits.

#### 4. ‘*Khitma na tahlili*’ (*recitation for the dead and declaration of faith*)

This chapter deals extensively with Islamic practices of how to deal with the dying and the dead, i.e. with last rites, funeral preparations and burial practices. This is a brief summary highlighting some of the criticisms. The first question to be discussed is whether, and under what circumstances, the practice of *khitma* (recitations of the Qur’an for the dead) is actually beneficial for the dead. Three alternative practices of *khitma* in the Swahili area are recounted (15) and evaluated, namely

- children of deceased reciting: this is doubtlessly good;
- hiring someone else to recite for one’s dead: here the assessments by scholars differ, and this should lead commoners not to pursue this way because it is doubtful (an Islamic rule states you should abstain from an action when in doubt about it); Muhammad Kasim views hiring as wrong, since he says the Qur’an insists on the performance by a bereaved person;
- assembling people in a mosque or at home to commemorate the deceased person and recite *khitma* together (which I also witnessed during fieldwork). This practice is dismissed by Muhammad Kasim, judged to have the sole aim of ‘showing off’ in society, of increasing one’s own social status while the deceased person does not benefit. But this, he points, does not mean that such actions are already ‘*haramu*’ (sinful), as some reformists interpret it (16).

Several critical points are made about ways of performing *tahlili*, the Islamic declaration of faith in Allah (i.e. the exclamation of ‘*la ilaha illallah*’). Sheikh Muhammad Kasim denounces the conviction that whoever pronounces the *tahlili* 70,000 times will be granted access to heaven by God. Also, the practice of organising meetings after the death of a relative in order to let those present pronounce the *tahlili* so many times for the deceased to get into heaven is not admissible: ‘Heaven, my brothers, is no cheap and easy thing that can be bought through the movement of your lips’ (*Pepo—ndugu zangu si kitu rakhisi cha kunuliwa kwa*



*kutikisa midomo*; 17). Much better and more important for the deceased is to pay any outstanding debts, whether material or religious (days of fasting, alms, hajj), to gather at least forty people to pray for the dead, to ask for forgiveness for his sins, to give out *sadaka*, but only to the poor. Muhammad Kasim reminds us that according to the Prophet the actions and possessions of the dead will cease to have effect, except for *sadaka* given to the community, education passed on to others, and leaving a good child behind (18). Contrary to a common belief, it is pointed out that God's reward or punishment for a good or bad person is not visible during the last moments of that person. Reward and punishment for one's deeds is only experienced by (and visible for) the deceased themselves after death (19).

Sheikh Muhammad Kasim is particularly angry about the practice of '*kuuza thawabu*', selling others the recitations of *khitma* or *tahlili*, claiming the deceased would thus surely reach heaven. This, he says, is sinful and people who do so should be treated just like thieves (19). Apart from that, the practice of writing an *aya* of the Qur'an on the burial cloth, as done by some *sheikhs*, is characterised as *bid'a* (19). And, while carrying the corpse to the burial place people should be silent—not reciting *tahlili* or anything else, as is often done (20). No call to prayer for a deceased should be voiced at the burial—even though this is practice in some coastal towns ('*katika baadhi ya miji yetu ya pwani*'; 20); this is exclusively prescribed for a newborn child after birth.

Sheikh Muhammad Kasim speaks out against the practice of reciting the *hadith* 'Talqin' for the deceased in Arabic, citing proof in the Qur'an. Here, he makes much of the fact that many people who recite this *hadith* do not know Arabic, and often even those who teach recitation do not know the language at all. But knowledge is required in order for any such recitations to have a meaning (21). As he pointed out repeatedly in these books, religious recitations have to come from the heart, and they can only come from the heart if they reached there from the head, through conscious insight: only what is done consciously and not by imitation can have a special meaning. On the other hand, assisting a dying person to pronounce a final *tahlili*, or reading the sura 'Yasin' to him, will be acknowledged (21).

In regard to *ziara*, i.e. visiting graves, this is beneficial to both the one who visits and the one who is visited. But we are told that it is *bid'a* to claim that graves are only (or best) to be visited at certain times or days of the year. Visiting the dead at their graves was the way of the Prophet Muhammad (*sunna*), and people should be free to do this whenever they want. Furthermore, it is characterised as even worse

(‘*bid’a mbovu zaidi*’) to sing and play drums at the graves, ‘as it is done these days’ (*kama yafanyikavyo siku hizi*; 21). Now this is an outright attack on the Riyadhha *masharifu* and their annual *ziara* to the grave of Habib Saleh and others during *maulidi* celebrations, as it has been described by el-Zein (1974), and as I myself witnessed in 1999. Labelling this ritual practice, which is among the centrepieces of the *maulidi* celebrations, as bad *bid’a* obviously does not represent the highest art of diplomacy between competing factions; it calls for revenge, and might itself be an act of revenge. At the same time, the phrase ‘as it is done these days’ is a very interesting comment, as it clearly points at the event’s historicity. For Sheikh Muhammad Kasim as observer, this is taken as newly invented practice, but this is a relative assessment, depending on the historical point of comparison. In Lamu, where this tradition was initiated by Habib Saleh himself at the beginning of the 20th century, it is performed and presented as an almost unquestionable practice.<sup>18</sup>

#### 5. ‘Ndoa na talaka’ (*marriage and divorce*)

This chapter continues with harsh criticisms of practices that are commonly associated with the behaviour of *masharifu*. Here, Muhammad Kasim proves to follow his resolution quoted above, to raise matters of concern that are usually avoided in public, and to unveil facts that have to be scrutinised (cf. 1965: 8). I will refer to these controversial matters first, before turning to some general advice given by the Sheikh.

The reader is admonished that marriages should not be kept secret (23). Also, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim speaks out against temporary marriages (*ndoa za mut’a*). It is explained that, in duress during *jihad*, the Prophet allowed this practice for a while, but then forbade it again (23/24). Worst of all, we are told, is the so-called ‘*ndoa ya Dawood*’, a secret marriage performed without religious ceremony or permission or blessing by an imam, and also without public notice or approval. This is mostly initiated by religious men who lure women into participation, telling them it was acceptable to Islam. (Also, they take advantage of the common belief that being together with a sharif brings blessing to a woman and her descendents.) As Muhammad Kasim tells the reader, these women were exploited: when they became pregnant they were dropped by the men and left totally ostracised by their family and the whole of society. On the basis of high Islamic authority, the Sheikh dismisses this practice as totally unacceptable.<sup>19</sup> He especially regrets that this practice is often performed by so-called *sheikhs*, and he calls this ‘one of the vandalisms that have entered our midst in religion’

(*Huu ni mmoja katika uwundifu uliotuingilia katika dini*; 24). This is clear and outright condemnation. Occurrences of such incidents have been referred to in el-Zein's ethnography on the *masharifu* of Lamu (1974: 156 f.).<sup>20</sup>

In general terms, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim explains, it is not forbidden to consider ethnic group, social status, qualifications, profession, or wealth as a criterion for a couple to get married. But the main criterion, he points out, should always be the religious sincerity and dedication of the person in question. This is much more important than anything else, for it alone can guarantee a successful marriage (23). On divorce, Muhammad Kasim speaks out against intermediary pseudo-marriages arranged so that partners who have already split up thrice (thus confirming a permanent divorce) can legally reunite as husband and wife. In this matter, he claims to cite proof that people participating in such arranged marriages are cursed (24/25). Furthermore, readers are warned that under Kenyan law one cannot have both a religious Islamic and a civil marriage (25), and that getting married in a Christian wedding ritual is not compatible with Islam: a Muslim must not go to church and submit to Christian rituals (26).

#### 6. 'Kuamrishana mema na kukatazana mabaya'

(*to command each other to do good things and to stop bad things*)

To spread good things and prevent evil is a general command for all Muslims. Sheikh Muhammad Kasim characterises the latter as more important, and likens it to the need to clean oneself before dressing up. This image is applied to a social level, in relation to the reformist agenda to stop bad, unclean, or impure practices in the Swahili region. For this purpose, Muhammad Kasim introduces an entertaining but embarrassing comparison between coastal Muslims and monkeys: it is pointed out that 'we', the coastal Muslims, are doing worse than monkeys. While monkeys imitate everything someone else does, no matter whether good or bad, 'we' only imitate the bad things (*'sisi hatuigizi ila baya tu'*; 33). He points out that the immoral and repulsive behaviour of badly mannered and uncivilised Europeans (*'wahuni'*) is taken over by 'us' local Muslims. Thus the bad habits of Europeans, such as having no manners, religion, or shame, have been copied and taken over into Swahili society, while exemplary qualities of honourable Europeans, such as good education, courage and good manners, have been ignored and left aside.

Also, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim argues strongly against traditionalism in society: it is unacceptable for a Muslim to be content with any

explanation or justification for an action which simply points at custom and tradition, saying 'this is the way our fathers did it'. Similarly, he sees it as improper to point at others when countering criticisms of one's own actions, as is often done with the counter-question '*Mbona fulani anafanya . . .*', ('why is so and so doing [this] . . .'; 36). Rather, a balanced and well-reasoned orientation in social life is recommended, following the clear, rational principles of Islam as guidelines. Muhammad Kasim demands personal commitment to the moral principles of Islam from every Muslim, and he characterises it as the duty of everyone to uphold these principles (35/36). Again, a recommendation for the rationalisation of social action and the moral order can be perceived, linked to the aspects of self-reliance and social responsibility: one has to account for and justify one's action in relation to the accepted moral standards (provided by Islam). These can only be upheld—demonstrating 'right' or 'the rule of law' (*haki*)—when all people work together according to these standards. As Muhammad Kasim says, 'it is good for us to remember that ordering each other to do good and stopping each other from doing bad is actually to show each other what is right' (36).

Thus the point for an internal process of enlightenment in the Swahili context is put forward: any dependence on dogmatic demands by custom and tradition is outrightly rejected. Since the moral standards are to be known—and upheld—by all Muslims in the same way, emphasis on the knowledge and rationality of goodness here implies another liberating concept: equality. And the insistence on the principal equality of all Muslims, which Sheikh Muhammad Kasim enforces in various passages throughout his books, naturally poses a threat to the established social hierarchies for which Swahili society is known. This clarifies why not only the *masharifu* (who acquired their social status as specially 'blessed' persons, because of their supposed descendancy from Prophet Muhammad), but also the *waungwana* upper class (the local aristocrats within Swahili towns), had much to lose in terms of social power and much to fear from popular support for the reformist movement.

## 7. 'Waadhi wa Ramadhan' (*a Ramadhan sermon*)

Here, the lack of commitment by coastal Muslims to fasting is rebuked; it is described as superficial, with no source from the inside. Thus, contrary to how it should be, Ramadhan has degenerated into 'the month of hatred and jealousy' (*Mwezi wa Ramadhan kwetu ndio mwezi wa chuki na hasira*; 39). The reader is advised that fasting consciously and seriously (in all required aspects) is for one's own good (40), and that

Ramadhan as the holy month constitutes a special moral obligation to behave well, but also provides the opportunity to gain rewards (*thawabu*) from God for one's good deeds (700 times as much as usual). While the temptations to violate God's demands are higher than usual in this period, Muhammad Kasim sees no excuse for those who apparently do not even attempt fasting any more. Fasting does not necessarily weaken people, as he points out with reference to Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui, who is said to have produced more work during the month of Ramadhan than throughout the rest of the year (42). Finally, he criticises a new form of *bid'a* ('*bid'a mpya katika miji yetu*'; 43), which goes hand in hand with the complacent and lazy attitude already observed. Sheikh Muhammad Kasim refers to a newly introduced practice, an 'invented tradition' of special prayers on the last Friday of Ramadhan: some people, having performed the normal prayers, go on to pray once again, the five prayers of the day in a row, claiming that this performance makes up for all the prayers they have missed throughout the whole year. Muhammad Kasim is angry about this 'lie' (*uwongo*; 43), as this logically means that anyone who has not prayed any other prayers than these special ones for the whole year would face no punishment at all for his failure to pray, for ignoring his religious obligations. There is, he says, no basis whatsoever for this in the Qur'an or *hadith*.

#### 8. 'Mwislamu na uganga (uchawi)'

(*The Muslim and traditional healing (witchcraft)*)

*Uganga*, Swahili healing practices that include the occupation with various forms of spirit possession, has long been an extremely contentious issue for local Muslims. Although these practices are widespread (and differ) in the area, whether or not they are acceptable in Islam has never been resolved with authority or common consent. Muhammad Kasim disapproves of *uganga* already in the heading, where he simply equates *uganga* with *uchawi* (witchcraft), which has inherently negative connotations. Though there is a blurred area between these two categories, a distinction is usually made. Sometimes, *uganga* is also identified with *utabibu*, a term that means 'healing' and is sometimes confined to 'Islamic' healing, studied and performed by Muslim scholars. Equating *uganga* with *uchawi*, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim calls such activity meaningless ('*upuuzi*'), saying that practitioners had turned their back to their own good and that of the Muslim *umma* (45). He regrets that so many Muslims engage (and believe) in these practices while

leaving useful social and personal goals (approved by Islam) aside. Coastal Muslims are often regarded as *waganga* by definition by their fellow Kenyans, and Muhammad Kasim is worried by the fact that in consequence *uganga* itself is often identified as the work of Islam (ibid.).

To prove his point, he narrates many anecdotes highlighting the unreasonable stance of belief in *uganga* as superstition. Moreover, he emphasises the great sin which participation in *uchawi* implies: people would relapse into paganism, and great damages would be drawn upon the soul (*‘mwenye kushughulika na uchawi, anajipeleka katika ukafiri, na ana-jiwulia madhara ya nafsi yake duniani na Akhera’*; 46). But, aware of the large following of *uganga*, he reminds the reader that two mechanisms operating independently from it seem to confirm to the common layman the claims that *uganga* healing does work successfully: firstly psychology, the fact that belief and the force of the inner will of the patient are major factors for the success of a healing process (even when they are not based on fact, as, for example, in placebo medicine); secondly, the fact that real medicine (*utabibu*) is actually applied to the patient while also performing superstitious rituals. He points out that the healing effect is wrongly ascribed to *uchawi*. These remarks are illustrated by several exemplary narrations for both cases, which markedly dwell on how people are badly cheated and taken advantage of by those practitioners, the *waganga*.

## 9. ‘Hijja’ (*haj*—*pilgrimage to Mekka*)

Here, the reader is provided with information on obligations and benefits concerning the compulsory pilgrimage to Mekka. This is valuable for the local Muslim reader since it touches on matters concerning one of the five pillars of Islam. Lower ranking Islamic teachers, especially outside the coastal towns, might not be very knowledgeable on this. Sheikh Muhammad Kasim makes clear that going on *haj* once in a lifetime is a real obligation for Muslims, as far as they can afford it; if they can, they must not delay their *haj*. It should be treated as a goal to strive for, even if it seems a distant goal. However, no money that has been gained by immoral activities (interest, alcohol or drugs, prostitution—whether directly or indirectly) may be used to finance the *haj*, no *haj* is allowed while a person still has debts or financial obligations (to wives, children, divorcees or other people) which cannot be met otherwise. One is free to accept or decline any offers to finance one’s *haj* by other people or organisations, without any fear that declining might be viewed as a sin. It is pointed out that, while one is free

to perform *haj* as many times as one pleases, there is a moral obligation to make sure that the monies spent on *haj* could not be used in a better, more rewarding way (in terms of God's *thawabu*). In this respect, he points at the example of Muslim hardship in North-Eastern Kenya, where young war-orphans are taken in care by Christian missionary aid organisations and thus lured into Christianity. This is not right, according to Muhammad Kasim, and Muslims should provide resources for the support of these Muslim children rather than use it for *haj*; doubtlessly, God would reward such helpful expense many times more (46). Those who have performed a *haj* are reminded that they are regarded as local examples of piety and thus should put special effort into deserving such reputation. Moreover, one must know that while sins against God will be forgiven after the performance of *haj*, sins against other persons will not; they require the act of personal reconciliation and forgiveness by the wronged ('*Maovu namna hii hayasamehevi illa kwa kuregeza hakki za watu au kupata msamaha kwa wenye hakki hizi*'; 56).

*'Swahili enlightenment'? The dialectic of reformism*

Although here I have dealt with only one booklet by a specific scholar in detail, some tentative general conclusions can be drawn about this period of Islamic reform along the Swahili coast in Kenya. This is possible because of the all-encompassing character of the volumes of *Hukumu za sharia*: they are educational books written for Muslim commoners, and they attempt to deal with the full scope of important and contentious Islamic issues in the Swahili area. From the *shahada* to *haj*, from marriage laws to *uganga*, from *dhikri* via *ziara* to *maulidi*, codes and ritual practices associated with Islam are discussed. Sheikh Muhammad Kasim explains why some Swahili Muslim practices are not reconcilable with the ideals of Islam, why they should not constitute elements of East African Islam. As in much popular discourse (and anthropological literature) of the region, he invokes the dichotomy of *mila* (customs) and *dini* (Islamic religion).<sup>21</sup> He portrays the practices of *mila* as threatening cultural counterforces to *dini*, the 'true' religion of Islam. The task for the reform of East African Islam then, lies in separating Islamic religious practice from cultural customs, in keeping *dini* free of the diluting forces of *mila*. While this reformist position might perhaps not exclude all local expression of Islam, it severely restricts their possibilities. The practice of Islam, therefore, must shape itself according to the universally applicable ideals that constituted it in the first place.

Nevertheless, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim presents many of the prac-

tices he criticises as aberrations from the prescriptions of Islam rather than as intentional evils. He portrays them as errors which have resulted largely from common ignorance of the exact prescriptions given to human beings by God through Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an and *hadith*. Regarding knowledge, basic Islamic education in the region was sustained and perpetuated in what was principally an oral system, religious teaching and education hinged on learning by heart, not on understanding. It focused on the internalisation of certain dogmas and their corresponding practices, in his words: on imitation—not on providing Muslims with principles for conscious orientation and decision-making in an Islamic framework. But it was the latter that the reformists strove for, and in this Sheikh Muhammad Kasim was following his mentors Sheikh Abdalla Saleh Farsy and Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui.

For this kind of ideal and outlook, as I see it, the label 'Enlightenment' might well be an adequate one. This does not at all mean that the 'Swahili Enlightenment' sketched here had any secular traits, since of course the Qur'an and *hadith* as authoritative sources remained unquestionable. This Swahili reformism, just like Islamic modernism in Egypt under Abduh and others, had to steer carefully between 'traditionalism' and 'secularism' (Hourani 1983: 193). But it shares characteristics with the Enlightenment movement of the late 18th century, most remarkably perhaps in the insistence on rational principles for one's outlook on the world, granting self-reliance in theoretical and practical orientation. As Immanuel Kant once qualified it, enlightenment means having the courage to use one's own reason for oneself.<sup>22</sup> In a more refined version, he characterised enlightenment as the principle to persistently think for oneself<sup>23</sup>—not egotistically, but in terms of responsibility and accountability for one's own thinking and acting (as in 'no one can think—or decide—for me'). If many people follow this principle, specifically under circumstances where freedom of thought and action of individuals are limited and social hierarchies are strongly established, fundamental social change is an inevitable outcome. This also occurred during the European Enlightenment. In France, the enlightenment movement led to the French revolution and a rapid and radical transformation of social order and composition. In Germany, it initiated the secularisation of society more gradually. Applying the label 'Enlightenment' and Kant's characterisation of it (developed in a specific context of European history) to an intellectually guided religious reformist movement in Swahili history might provide a base for intercultural comparison. This, in turn, could be helpful for a thorough assessment of current Swahili Islamic reformist discourse.



In fact, recent social transformation initiated by Islamic reformism has been reported for Muslim society at the Kenyan coast. 'Wahhabism, in its puritanical, uncompromising and aggressive form has been imported into East Africa [by graduates of Middle Eastern universities, where it has] transformed the traditionally Hadhrami influenced society into one that is polarised into the pro- and anti-Wahhabi one' (Bakari 1995: 172). How this current, more radical and 'imported' reformism relates to the one that Sheikh Muhammad Kasim stood for is an important question. While the two undoubtedly share a basic doctrine, the reform movement described here was carefully started off as a *local* movement of Islamic reform, deliberately using Kiswahili, and usually careful not to appear 'aggressive' or 'uncompromising' in its argumentation.

I would now like to link these comparative ideas to questions raised above. In particular, I am interested to see how the qualitative shift in reformist discourse and its perception by the Muslim commoners between these two generations came about. Is the one just the next logical step from the other, following the internal dialectics of social reform, from the negation of an established social order to the negation of that negation? Unlike the secular French revolution which is said to have devoured its children, is Swahili Islamic reform being devoured by its radicalised children who seem to have turned against Swahili society itself? If enlightenment thought in the Swahili context was truly liberating in the beginning, perhaps it too (just as its European counterparts) has choked on its own insistence on rationalisation, radicalising itself and producing a new dogmatism, with somewhat irrational and mythological features (cf. Horkheimer/Adorno 2000). In consequence, and while fighting an enemy within Muslim society with weapons of Islamic ideology, it might have turned from rational to rationalistic, becoming increasingly insensitive to the important matters of social context and the lived reality of Swahili Muslims. These features of a dogmatic turn would have been enforced in the administration of local reform, with the final implementation of outside dominance, in terms of so-called 'Wahhabi' doctrine and its application. What we may call the centrality of the exterior thus became a *fait accompli*. If such a line of thought is correct, then this religious movement starting out to liberate Swahili Muslims from the social dominance of certain religious personalities (the *masharifū*) has now become dogmatic itself. Furthermore, it gained a position of social dominance and, as an externally dominated reformist force, started polarising and splitting the society it had initially sought to unify by reform. Its dogmatism is apparent in the practice of reformist discourse: denouncing as 'superstitious' everything that is not immedi-

ately logically explicable, calling practices '*bid'a*' in a sort of reflex, without relating them to their context. In Muhammad Kasim's writings that have been discussed here, there are already a few indicators of such a dogmatic turn within a discourse that generally subscribes to enlightenment motifs. But here these are easily understandable as emotional outbursts of bitterness, against the permanent attacks from 'enemies' (*maadui*; cf. 1973: foreword).

Nowadays, such dogmatism seems to have become part of an effective rhetorical strategy to denounce the opponent as an enemy of Islam. This is visible in Mombasa, where I did my fieldwork, as well as in Zanzibar. There, such 'intolerance' from the reformist side (Purpura 2000: 131) has been linked to the observation that young reformists often do not have a convincing foundation of Islamic knowledge (Purpura 1997: 357). Furthermore, in Zanzibar the local reformists are commonly simply called '*watu wa bid'a*' (*bid'a* people) or even only '*bid'a*' by other citizens.<sup>24</sup> This otherwise unbecoming label for human beings seems to indicate that such people are easily identified by the words that they use most prominently. People applying this label to 'anti-*bid'a*' activists (the so-called 'Wahhabi' reformists) apparently see no relevance in what those 'reformists' are uttering, and they do not seem to care much about what they are saying. On the other hand, their leader, Sheikh Khamis, is generally acknowledged as an extraordinary orator, his efforts to educate women about the Qur'an (with Swahili translation) are appreciated, and cassettes of his speeches are widely distributed (ibid.: 358 ff.; Purpura 2000: 129-131). Nevertheless, if Purpura's observation is correct that his followers, as self-proclaimed reformists, do not really know what they are talking about, it raises the question whether it makes sense at all to talk of a real social 'debate' on these issues, an exchange of critical arguments.

In Mombasa, the *bid'a* debate is noticeable in the rhetoric of public religious speeches, but also in everyday conversation in the streets. During my stay (1998-1999), I did not come across any (light-hearted) use of the term '*watu wa bid'a*' for the reformists. This may be because Mombasa has been at the centre of this controversy for many decades now, while in Zanzibar a more liberated Islamic discourse and social debate among Muslims as Muslims has probably become possible only in the last decade or so (if at all), after the introduction of multi-party democracy in Tanzania and a relaxation of government control through the ruling CCM party.<sup>25</sup> In Mombasa, the reformists were often called 'Wahhabi' by their critics, while they themselves would avoid this name and call themselves '*watu wa sunna*' (people of the *sunnah*, the way of

the Prophet) or similar names. This might be a strategic label used by reformists in order to blend into the local Muslim community, and to attract new followers more easily. The label '*sunna*' is appropriate for such a strategy, because all Muslims have to adhere to it by definition, and it provides space for the reformists to fill with their intended meaning, thus being able to change the paradigms of Islamic interpretation and orientation for the Muslim community from within.<sup>26</sup>

To conclude on the use of the label 'Wahhabi', I know of two examples in the literature where reformists have signalled their acceptance of this term. First, a group of authors of an Islamic pamphlet in Kiswahili, financed from Saudi Arabia (undated, but probably from the 1980s or 1990s), expresses that 'it is fine to be called WAHABI', if this is the adequate term for people who follow their religious obligations to God diligently and correctly (Warsha n.d.: preface). Secondly, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim himself, in the second volume of *Hukumu za sharia*, criticises the common local misuse of the label 'Wahhabi' as a kind of swearword. He continues to point out that the label 'Wahhabi' should actually be taken as a compliment, in memory of the historical achievements of the reformist Muhammad Abdul Wahhab. His efforts to clean Islam from within, at a time when it was badly undermined by 'the dirt of *bid'a* and *shirk*' (*uchafu wa bid'a na shirki*; 1971: 20), should be seen as heroic. What has happened, he says, is that a term originally indicating praise has shifted its meaning and turned to mean something bad (1971: 19).

The *bid'a* topic also came up in informal discussions at *baraza* meetings in the Old Town neighbourhood. There, arguments and exchanges of opinion were held among friends and confidants, about the status of *maulidi*, *dhikri*, *uganga*, and spirit possession. Though sometimes tempers were short during such discussions, and opinions were presented with much vigour, rarely was a consensus on any of these issues established (cf. Kresse 2002). The main issues of the early reformist agenda are still unresolved and as contentious as thirty years ago, when Sheikh Muhammad Kasim was writing his pamphlets.

### Conclusion

Judging from readings and fieldwork experience, reflecting upon the Islamic reformism along the Swahili coast in terms of 'enlightenment' does make sense, if only to a certain point. Certainly, Islamic reformism does not exactly correspond to the particular secularism of European enlightenment. But in terms of the internal structural dynamics of both

movements we can raise a parallel. In both cases, an emphatic insistence on reason, rationality and self-reliance turns into an (irrational) absolutism of a certain kind of rationality, a rationalism that has become dogmatic and unreasonable. As encapsulated by Horkheimer and Adorno (in the epigraph above), there is a dialectic twist within enlightenment itself, from liberation and self-reliance to dogmatic and destructive dominance. This expresses a tension-laden relationship between the dynamics of reason and the dynamics of power. Liberation and self-reliance are envisaged through an appeal to, and use of, reason, while dominance and intolerance are achieved through power. (Horkheimer and Adorno follow the disenchanting suspicion that, in the social experience of human history, reason and power are inextricably intertwined.) This points at the common basis on which social phenomena in different regional and cultural contexts may be reflected upon and explored as 'enlightenment'. In its general sense of 'progressive thought', as implied by Horkheimer and Adorno (2000: 3), enlightenment is such an ambivalent and dialectic social phenomenon rather than a unique and exclusive achievement of 'Western' history. Here, I aimed to point out that the inherent dynamics of a particular Islamic reformist movement of the Swahili coast may be fruitfully addressed and discussed by employing the idea of 'enlightenment' and its dialectic. Aspiring, from a particular interpretation of Islam, to free the minds of individual Muslims and raise their consciousness and sense of responsibility, but then turning towards dogmatic policing of minds, it is inextricably entangled in the dynamics of reason and power, of liberating and destructive forces.

As internal dynamism of religion itself, the dialectics of what I have here called 'Swahili enlightenment' convey radicalisation and a dogmatic turn within a movement that was created as part of an East African debate of diverse positions in Islam—a 'discursive tradition' in the sense of Asad (1986: 14-16). But if it is true that a significant part of the self-proclaimed reformists do not really know what they are talking about (as Purpura reports), does it still make sense to talk of a real debate in society, or to describe local Islamic reform as an increase of rational insight and self-reliance? Probably not. If the third and fourth generation of Islamic reformists in the Swahili area, the students of the reformist leaders who studied abroad, have started to merely imitate their reformist predecessors blindly, we seem to have come full circle. The reform movement then has itself become traditionalist and dogmatic, having lost its self-critical impulse and enlightenment motive, namely 'thinking for oneself'.

This has been a sketch of recent Swahili reformist discourse (and its

popular perception), with a focus on Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui and a limited selection of his writings. It certainly does not provide a full picture, but characteristic features of such a picture can be observed. If they apply more widely, the spirit of such reform seems contrary to the self-understanding in which Sheikh Muhammad Kasim seems to have engaged in the reformist campaign. As I understand it, Islamic knowledge, Swahili language and historical consciousness and awareness were initial pillars of a 'Swahili Enlightenment' movement that provided East African Muslims with orientation, and urged them to use it consciously and independently of other human beings, relying on their own judgement, based on the Qur'an and *hadith*, the given word of God and the Prophet Muhammad.

#### NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the conference 'Islam in Africa' at Binghamton University, New York, 19th-22nd April 2001, organized by the Institute of Global Cultural Studies. I am grateful to the conference organisers, and to members of the audience for their questions and feedback, particularly to Ali A. Mazrui, Alamin Mazrui and Fouad Kalouche. I also thank Barbara Drieskens, Louis Brenner and Joy Adapon for their comments and suggestions, and Mohamed Bakari for clarifications. The paper relates to the larger project of my PhD thesis (Kresse 2002), for which fieldwork was conducted between August 1998 and September 1999, mostly in Mombasa. It was funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD, with a HSP3 doctoral stipend), and supported by an additional fieldwork grant from SOAS, both of which are gratefully acknowledged. J.D.Y. Peel and Louis Brenner are thanked for long-term support and advice on this.

2. *Sharifu* is the Swahili term for a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. Throughout this text, I usually use Swahili versions of Islamic terms, following Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui's writing as well as local convention.

3. No exact dates of publication are given, though it is stated that the first was written in 1970. It is most likely that the two volumes were planned together and written in succession, also since the topics covered complement each other. In the text, I reference these volumes as Mazrui 1970 and 1971, and indicate the insecurity of the dates in the bibliography. I hope to discuss volume two in similar detail in the near future.

4. East African Islam was dominated by the centres of Islamic scholarship in Zanzibar, Lamu and Mombasa, and has intellectually been chiefly influenced by the Hadramaut, but also by scholars originating from Oman, the Comores, the Bajuni Islands and Somalia. Shi'ite groups of Ismaili, Ithnashari and Bohora of Indian and Persian origin have historically kept separate from Swahili society, though, for the Ithnashari particularly, this has changed since the 1980s (see also Oded 2000: 115-122).

5. How the enlightenment motif of self-reliance in thought applies to these and other intellectual movements, and how it differs between them, should be investigated more closely in a comparative study. The basis for such a comparison, in regard to the Swahili context, is only sketched out here.

6. In the original: '(...) *ndiye aliyetufunua macho akatunfungua midomo*' (Farsy 1989: 125). In his translation, Pouwels adds (in brackets) what is implied by Farsy: '(...) who opened our eyes (to new ideas) and closed our lips (i.e. from uttering foolishness)' (126).

7. I am aware that within Islamic Studies there has been an ongoing debate about the applicability of the concept of enlightenment to the Muslim world. However, inte-

grating the arguments of that debate goes beyond the scope of this paper. The point made here, I believe, may stand in its own right.

8. His works and achievements have been widely commented upon; see e.g. Pouwels 1981, Salim 1987, Lacunza-Balda 1990, Farsy 1989. Based on the general sense of progressive thought, one could present Habib Saleh's religious and social reform in 19th-century Lamu as a different kind of 'Swahili Enlightenment', with a different starting point and an almost opposite form, which was subject to its own dialectics, visible in the *sharifu*-faction.

9. This is according to the following internet documentation, which was the only one I could find: Cf. <http://baalawy.freeyellow.com/al-amin.html>.

10. As Sh. Muhammad Kasim tells us, Sh. al-Amin would have preferred to keep on his agenda of publishing, but he could not decline the wishes of his teacher and mentor (*'mlezi'*) and the public pressure that wanted him in that position (Mazrui 1980: x).

11. For example, see Farsy (1942 1966, 1980, n.d. 1, n.d. 2), Mazrui (1958, 1962, 1964, 1965).

12. Two earlier translations had been published earlier, the first by the Christian missionary G. Dale (in 1923), and the second by M.A. Ahmadi (in 1953). Farsy's translation was fiercely attacked by the Lamu *masharifu* (cf. A.A. Badawy 1970), for the same reasons discussed here. In response to the Dale translation which was regarded as embarrassing and faulty by coastal scholars, Sheikh al-Amin had started work on a translation with extended commentaries, but he never managed to finish this work. His translations were published posthumously in those parts that were finalized (cf. al-Amin Mazrui 1980, 1981, n.d.). For more details on the translations, see Lacunza-Balda 1997.

13. This must have been Sheikh Ali Hemed (1891-1957), a good friend of al-Amin Mazrui and perhaps 'the most learned Islamic scholar in Tanganyika' (Chande 1998: 101).

14. On this controversy, see especially Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir's *Al Battaar* (1967), in which he defends Muhammad Kasim against severe criticism of the Riyadhha faction of Lamu, voiced by Sayyid Ahmed Ahmed Badawy in his book *Dhul Faqaar* (1966?); I was not able to get hold of the latter.

15. A parallel to this may be seen in Weber's description of Protestant reformism where Luther, emphasizing an 'inner calling' of God for the individual Christians, attacked and undermined the powerful mediatory position of the Catholic clergy, and granted more self-reliance and responsibility in religious matters to the individual. Cf. Weber (1958). In fact, the position that 'Islam needed a Luther'—though this was surely controversial—was 'a favourite theme' of the 19th-century reformist al-Afghany (Hourani 1983: 122), who was one of the major sources of inspiration for al-Amin Mazrui. However, it can be argued that Protestantism constitutes an outer schism from the previous paradigm of Christianity, while the Islamic reformists constitute a 'purified' new centre of Islam (I thank Barbara Drieskens for this last comment).

16. In the introduction to the second volume, he announces a third one (with six chapters), but this has never been published. (Alamin M. Mazrui, personal communication in April 2001.)

17. In the second volume of *Hukumu za sharia*, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim identifies them further as a corpus of Jewish texts which were presented as *hadith* by outsiders in order to misinform Muslims and thus to cause confusion and disunity among them (M.K. Mazuri 1971: 33).

18. Sheikh Muhammad Kasim's comment indeed seems to indicate that the practice is relatively new even at the beginning of the 1970s, while Habib Saleh died already in 1935. Perhaps the annual *ziara* in its current form did not begin with the first anniversary of Habib Saleh's death.

19. At this point reference is made to several *fatwa* issued on this matter by various scholars, which had been collected in Arabic by Sheikh al-Amin before his death. These were never published, but Sheikh Muhammad Kasim invites any interested reader to

consult the original which is in his possession. One should note there is an ongoing debate between Islamic factions on these issues.

20. It should be noted, however, that el-Zein's work has, not surprisingly, been rejected by the Lamu *masharifu*. It is locally viewed as highly controversial, and its reliability is also questioned by external sources (e.g. Bang 2000).

21. On the *mila-dini* dichotomy and its conceptual problem, see Middleton (1992: 162 ff.).

22. See his call for such courage in Kant 1970 (1784; in the German original: 'Haben Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen').

23. Cf. Kant 1996 (1786; original: 'das Prinzip, jederzeit selbst zu denken').

24. Cf. Purpura 1997: 349 ff.; Purpura 2000: 129; also personal communication from Zanzibar.

25. However, the ongoing tensions in Zanzibar between CCM and the main opposition party CUF with its explicit Islamic identity, sporadic violent clashes between their supporters, as well as violent persecution of supposed CUF supporters by police forces, seem to suggest differently.

26. Such an interpretation was put forward, for instance, by Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir, during one of his Ramadhan lectures 1419 A.H. (1998/99 C.E.) in Mombasa; cf. Kresse 2002 (especially chapter 6). See also Kresse forthcoming.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Asad, Talal 1986. 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam', occasional paper, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies. Washington: Georgetown University.
- Badawy, Ahmad A. 1970. *Fimbo ya Musa. (sehemu ya kwanza)*. Lamu.
- Bakari, Mohamed 1995. 'The New 'Ulamaa in Kenya', in M. Bakari/S.S. Yahya (eds.), *Islam in Kenya*. Nairobi: MEWA.
- Bang, Anne K. 2000. *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea. The Sufi and Family Networks of Ahmad ibn Sumayt and the Tariqa Alawiyya in East Africa c. 1860-1925*. PhD thesis, University of Bergen.
- Brenner, Louis 1984. *West African Sufi. The Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal*. London: Hurst.
- (ed.) 1993. *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*. London: Hurst.
- Chande, Abdin N. 1998. *Islam, Ulamaa and Development in Tanzania*. London: Austin & Winfield.
- Farsy, Abdallah Saleh 1942. *Maisha ya Nabii Muhammad*. Zanzibar: Mwongozi Press.
- n.d. 1. *Masuala na jawabau yake. Sehemu ya kwanza*. Mombasa: Adam Traders.
- n.d. 2. *Khullafu za madhehebu nne katika sala*. Mombasa: Coronation Printers.
- 1966. (2nd ed.). *Urathi*. Zanzibar: Mulla Karimjee Mulla Mohamedbhai & Son.
- 1969. *Qurani takatifu*. Nairobi: The Islamic Foundation.
- 1980. *Maisha ya Sayyidnal Huseyn*. Mombasa.
- 1989. (orig. 1970). 'Baadhi ya mashakhe wakubwa wa kisuni wa mashariki ya Afrika', translated, edited, and annotated by Randall L. Pouwels (1989) as *The Shafi'i ulamaa of East Africa, c. 1830-1970: A Hagiographic Account*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison, African Studies Program.
- Horkheimer, Max/T.W. Adorno 2000 (orig. 1944). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Hourani, Albert 1983. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hunwick, John 1997. 'Sub-Saharan Africa and the Wider World of Islam: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives', in D. Westerlund/E.E. Rosander (eds.), *African Islam and Islam in Africa*. London: Hurst.
- Kant, Immanuel 1970 (orig. 1784). 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlighten-

- ment?’’, translated by H.B. Nisbet, in H. Reiss (ed.), *Kant’s Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 54-60.
- 1996 (orig. 1786). ‘What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?’, in *Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology*, translated and edited by A.W. Wood/G. di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kresse, Kai 2002. *Approaching Philosophical Discourse in a Swahili Context. Knowledge, Theory, and Intellectual Practice in Mombasa Old Town, 1998-1999*. PhD thesis, University of London.
- forthcoming. ‘Making People Think: The Ramadhan Lectures of Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir in Mombasa, 1419 A.H.’, in S. Reese/R.S. O’Fahey (eds.), *Libraries and the Transmission of Islamic Thought in Africa*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lacunza-Balda, Justo 1990. *Islamic Literature in Swahili*. PhD thesis, University of London.
- 1997. ‘Translations of the Quran into Swahili, and Contemporary Islamic Revival in East Africa’, in D. Westerlund/E.E. Rosander (eds.), *African Islam and Islam in Africa*. London: Hurst.
- Mazrui, al-Amin bin Ali 1980. *Tafsiri ya Qur’ani Tukufu. Al-Faatihah—Al Baqarah*. Nairobi: Shungwaya Publishers.
- 1981. *Tafsiri ya Qur’ani Tukufu. Aali Imraan—An-Nisaa*. Nairobi: Shungwaya Publishers.
- (1944). *Uwongozi*. Source: <http://baalawy.freeyellow.com/al-amin.html>.
- n.d. *Juzuu ya amma*. Mombasa: Alawiyyah Traders.
- Mazrui, Muhammad Kasim 1958. *Maisha ya Assidik Abubakar*. Mombasa: Adam Traders.
- 1962. *Maisha ya Alfaaruq Umar*. Mombasa: H.O. Adam & Sons.
- 1964. *Maisha ya Dhin-Nurain Uthman*. Mombasa: Adam Traders.
- 1965. *Maisha ya al-Imam Aly*. Nairobi: East African Institute Press.
- 1973. *Maisha ya al-Imam Aly*. (second edition) Mombasa: H.O. Adams & Sons.
- 1970(?). *Hukumu za sharia. (sehemu ya kwanza)* Mombasa: H.O. Adams & Sons.
- 1971(?). *Hukumu za sharia. (sehemu ya pili)* Mombasa: The City Bookshop.
- Middleton, John 1992. *The Swahili. An African Mercantile Civilization*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Nassir, Abdilahi 1967. *Al Battaar. Shere ya Dhul Faqaar*. Mombasa: Haji Mohamed & Sons.
- Oded, Arye 2000. *Islam and Politics in Kenya*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Pouwels, Randall L. 1981. ‘Sh. al-Amin b. Ali Mazrui and Islamic Modernism in East Africa, 1875-1947’, in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 13, 329-345.
- 1987. *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1989. *The Shafi’i ulamaa of East Africa, c. 1830-1970: A Hagiographic Account*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison, African Studies Program (cf. Farsy 1989).
- Purpura, Allyson 1997. *Knowledge and Agency: The Social Relations of Islamic Expertise in Zanzibar*. PhD thesis, City University of New York.
- 2000. ‘Portrait of Seyyid Silima from Zanzibar: Piety and Subversion in Islamic Prayer’, in D. Parkin and S. Headley (eds.), *Islamic Prayer across the Indian Ocean*. Richmond: Curzon.
- Salim, A.I. 1973. *The Swahili-speaking Peoples of Kenya’s Coast 1895-1965*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- 1987. ‘Sheikh al-Amin bin Ali Mazrui: Un Reformiste moderne au Kenya’, in F. Constantin (ed.), *Les Voies de l’Islam en Afrique orientale*. Paris: Editions Karthala.
- Warsha ya waandishi wa kiislamu Tanzania (Group of Tanzanian Islamic Writers) n.d. [1985]: *Uislamu ni njia sahihi ya maisha*. Nairobi: Lino Typesetters.
- Weber, Max 1958 (orig. 1904/5). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.
- Westerlund, D., and Rosander, E.E. (eds.) 1997. *African Islam and Islam in Africa*. London: Hurst and Co.
- el-Zein, Abdul H.M. 1974. *The Sacred Meadows*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.