

Islamic Cultural Trends in East Africa

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Abstract: The development of the maritime region of Swahili Coast is linked to fragmentation, different colonial powers and opening dynamic. For centuries Arab, Persian, Indian traders settled mostly on islands; then this migrant spread along the entire Coast from the Somali Coast, the Lamu Archipelago, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Pemba, Kilwa and the Comoro Islands south to Mozambique. After the XIII century the Swahili culture was dominated by Arabs who arrived from the Hadramauth region in South Yemen. The arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 changed everything. First of all they sacked Mombasa and Kilwa and by 1530 they controlled the entire Coast. In 1652 the Omani Arabs took Zanzibar and in 1696 they conquered Mombasa. The essay analyzes other main problems in the Swahili Coast: the trade in slaves in East Africa in the XVIII and early XIX centuries; the Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya Brotherhoods; the Mawlid, the translations of the Quran in East African languages; the Mihadhara Public Preaching, Islamic Associations, Zanzibar Sufi Orders, etc.

Keywords: Swahili language, Islamic culture in East Africa, slavery trade, Zanzibar.

The Swahili Coast

The Swahili Coast is the coastal region of Kenya and Tanzania. As everybody knows the ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam became the entry point for Islam. For centuries Arab traders along with Persian and Indian traders settled mostly on islands and all these migrants spread along the entire Coast from the Somali coast, the Lamu archipelago, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Pemba, Kilwa and the Comoro Islands south to Mozambique². The identity and the original features of the Swahili seashore mainly proceeded from the contact of the African mainland and Western Indian Ocean. This coastal interface stretching over 2000 km from Southern Somalia to Northern Mozambique is char-

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2. BART 2008, p. 9.

acterized by ancient traditions of trade movements through maritime areas and mainland as well. These trade movements spread and mixed different cultural influences originating from Africa and both from Arabic and Indian peninsulas.³

So the development of all this maritime region is linked to both fragmentation, different colonial powers and opening dynamics.⁴ In such a wide area the relaying function of islands and continental corridors in Kenya and Tanzania from main harbours is very important.

Through inter-marriage between local women and migrants, a new urban culture developed along the Coast, the Swahili culture, together with the Swahili language and as a consequence many Persian, Arabic and Indian cultural items were molded inside.⁵ Swahili is a syncretic language from Sabaki Bantu of Northern Tanzania, Comoro language, Pokomo language and of course from Iranian and Arabic languages.⁶ After the XIII century the Swahili culture was dominated by Arabs who arrived from the Hadramauth region in South Yemen.⁷ In the traditional centers of Swahili culture most Muslims adhere to the Shafi *madhab*, within Sunni Islam.⁸ Later, immigration from South-Asia introduced new forms of Islamic practices, the Ismaili form of Shi'a Islam and the heterodox Ahmadiyya. Many Asiatic Communities spread along the Coast such as Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Ismaili and Bohora.⁹

On the Swahili culture we have several and remarkable books such as, for instance, Le Guennec-Coppens and Caplan, *Les Swahili entre Afrique et Arabie* 1991, Le Guennec-Coppens and Parkin *Autorités et pouvoir chez les Swahili*, during the 90s, and more recently Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili: the Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*.

Islam was at the core of Swahili culture of these City-States deeply involved in the international trade of Indian Ocean.¹⁰ These

3. PEARSON 2000a pp. 40-44; LE GUENNEC-COPPENS, CAPLAN 1991.

4. BART 2008.

5. CONSTANTIN 1987; SPEAR 2000; POWWELS 2000; 2002.

6. *Ibidem* pp.258-9; 271-2; NURSE, HINNEBUSCH 1993.

7. NIMTZ 1980, p. 20; PEARSON 2000a, pp. 46-50.

8. CHRISTELOW 2000; PEARSON 2000a, p. 48.

9. GILBERT 2002; BART 2008.

10. BART 2008.

City-States were independent of each other politically. Moreover the Muslim-Swahili coastal communities, before the colonial period, were prosperous and maintained peaceful links with each other.¹¹

The arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 changed everything. First of all they sacked Mombasa and Kilwa and by 1530 they controlled the entire Coast.¹² The Portuguese were anti-Muslim, so they pursued deliberately a very strong anti-Muslim policy.

In 1652 the Omani Arabs took Zanzibar and in 1696 they conquered Mombasa. As a consequence, a new wave of migration from Oman and Hadramauth increased considerably.¹³

The Shirazi heritage and the Omani Sultanate

Of course the Omani Arabs with the Omani Sultanate gave to the Arabs from Yemen a special status among the communities along the Coast.¹⁴ Following August Nimtz, the Arab imprint on Islam was much more pronounced in East Africa than in West Africa.¹⁵ Indeed the major historical dichotomy in the Islamic world was between Muslims and non Muslims and later between Arabs and non Arab Muslims. Since Islam was the *sine qua non* condition of Swahili culture, this means that Arabs played a major role in this eclectic civilization. Significantly, the Swahili root *ustaarabu* means to become civilized; it derives from the Arabic verb *ista'arab*, which means to become an Arab. A *Sharif*, for instance, could be only an Arab.¹⁶ To be a *Sharif* means the power to play an extremely prestigious role in Islamic cultures. Inside this term *Sharif* there is the whole Arab pride and Arab consciousness.

In the old times the term Shirazi referred to anyone who could claim or claimed ancient Persian ancestry. Probably they were the early settlers of the coastal Cities-State.¹⁷ Afterwards this label Shirazi has taken on a more ambiguous meaning with some re-

11. MIDDLETON 1992.

12. ALPERS 1975, pp. 39ss; GILBERT 2002, p. 21.

13. GILBERT 2002.

14. FUJII 2010, p. 91.

15. Nimtz 1980, p. 33.

16. *Ibidem*, p.33.

17. *Ibidem*, pp. 29- 31; SPEAR 1984; 2000, p. 260.

gional differences. For example, along the Coast precisely from Tango to Dar es Salaam, namely the Mrima Coast, the label Shirazi concerned the earliest settlers and rulers of the coastal towns.

In Zanzibar and Pemba, on the contrary, people who once identified themselves as Swahili, about 1920-30 began to call themselves as Shirazi. Finally the Shirazi are generally not distinguishable from the African population because of centuries of intermarriage with local women. Furthermore many Africans claimed Shirazi identity to obscure their slave ancestry.¹⁸ Today few people claim to be Shirazi than in earlier periods. In the far past, Shirazi saw themselves as the Masters or the Lords, *Wenyi* in Swahili of the coastal towns. All the other population was considered as guests, *Wageni*. Shirazi male elders were often addressed as Lords *Mwenyi*. This also because some Shirazi had intimate kin ties with various *Sharif* clans who claim direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Finally the Shirazi were the indigenous population of the Coast, while all the others were considered only as immigrant communities. In the coastal area the native authority which administered the African community was constituted by the *Liwali*. The *Liwali* in addition to their administrative duties could adjudicated many matters involving Islamic law. Of course, the *Liwali* were kiswahili speaking Muslims. In one word, political authority in the City-States of the Coast was monopolized by the Shirazi group.¹⁹ Most interesting almost every coastal town had an urban section in which the Shirazi lived and another one for the immigrant population from the mainland. Even the attendance at the Mosques usually followed ethnic lines.

Slavery in East Africa

The trade in slaves in East Africa in the XVIII and early XIX centuries was very intense. Trade in slaves and ivory trade were very much connected.²⁰ Slaves were needed for the caravan journeys up-country where at that time diseases such as sleeping sickness killed

18. BURGESS 2009, p. 19.

19. LE GUENNEC-COPPENS, PARKIN 1998.

20. ALPERS 1975; PEARSON 2000a, pp. 39ss.

horses and donkeys. But thousands of slaves were not exported and remained in the clove and coconut plantations. So in 1847 there were about 60.000 slaves only in Zanzibar.²¹ Of course, the majority of slave owners were Muslims. Though nominally converted to Islam, the slaves were not allowed to take part in *waungwana*, the aristocratic class, the elite. They were also not allowed to be taught by *waungwana* religious teachers and were excluded entirely from religious life whether private or public. So, plantation slavery was very much widespread along the Coast and especially the working conditions of slaves were very painful.²² Since 1850s, the Arabs had consolidated their position in East Africa. Omani influence along the Coast intensified in the 1870 and 1880. The Busa'id dynasty owned the majority of the coconut and clove plantations. Zanzibar was a place where slavery was most extensively practiced. Clearly then, Zanzibar, the capital of the Busa'id Empire, was at the center of East Africa's slave trade and was the epitome of a slave-based economy.²³ Many slaves came from the regions of Maniema in the Eastern Congo and the Lake Malawi. We must not forget that the basic social dichotomy also in East Africa was between slaves and non slaves. The Zanzibar Sultan Barghash ibn Sa'id (1870-1888) reluctantly agreed to end slavery in 1873.²⁴ By 1887 it had virtually been ended in the British areas. But even the introduction in 1907 under colonial rule of a law enforcing manumission did not change the dramatic condition of the servile estate.²⁵ Frequently ending up as squatters on the land of their former masters and almost never making their way into the mercantile economy, former slaves had very little or no option to rise economically or socially. The hierarchy of social prestige of the colonial rulers was reflected in their allocation of governmental posts. Ethnicity and race were the two major criteria employed in the nomination process. In fact, the fundamental social distinction in the colonies for the European rulers was that between *watu wa wenpe*, the whites and *watu wa wensi*, the non-whites. In this second category, the main difference

21. SHERIFF 1987.

22. COOPER 1978.

23. NIMTZ 1980, p. 40.

24. NIMTZ, p. 42.

25. MÉDARD et alii, 2013.

was between Africans and non-Africans. At the beginning, British practices were similar to the German approach, although during the final two decades of the Indirect Rule, they made many important and significant departures. The British, like the Germans before, placed a great deal of emphasis on color and racial distinctions. For example, the legal system reflected the status-hierarchy. Corporal punishment was not to be inflicted on Arabs and Indians but it could be inflicted on natives.²⁶

Islamic Cultural Trends in East Africa. The Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya Brotherhoods

The Qadiriyya brotherhood is very important in East Africa, much more than in West Africa with the exception of course of Northern Nigeria. In East Africa this order was founded by Uways al-Barawi (1847-1909) from Brava in South Somalia and arrived in Zanzibar in 1884.²⁷ Undoubtedly the Qadiri branch of Uwaysiyya knew a growing popularity among the Swahili and in the hinterland of Tanzania.²⁸ Another well known Shaykh was Abd al-Aziz, one of Zanzibar most learned Muslim leaders. He called his own branch the Nuraniyya.²⁹ Therefore, the Qadiriyya *tariqa* reached the deep interior of the mainland as far as the Congo. Nowadays the Qadiriyya is still very influential in the whole central region of Tanzania. From Tanzania this same *tariqa* disseminated to Kenya, Congo and even Burundi. A very important branch can be found in Bagamoyo since the beginning of XX century by Shaykh Ramiyya. From Bagamoyo his influence joined the Great Lakes Region and the south of Mozambique.

The origins of Shadhiliyya, a very important Sufi Order in East Africa, can be traced to the Comoro Islands.³⁰ Interestingly this *tariqa* does not exist in West Africa at my own knowledge. Through Shaykh Husayn Mahmud of Kilwa, the Shadili Order has been disseminated throughout East Africa, Kampala, Tabora, Dar es Salaam.

26. NIMTZ 1980, p. 37.

27. *Ibidem*, pp. 58-59.

28. COULON 1987, pp. 116-117.

29. NIMTZ 1980, p. 58.

30. COULON 1987, p. 115.

The Shadiliyya branches are also connected with the *zawiya* of Acre in Lebanon. After Husayn Mahmud there was Shaykh Muhammad Abd al-Rahman, a great traveler. Furthermore, there is a *tariqa*, the Askariyya, which can be considered the only indigenous *tariqa* in East Africa. This brotherhood is very popular in South-central Tanzania and in Dar es Salaam.³¹ Another one *tariqa* called Dandarawiyya, is also called Ahmadiyya-Dandarawiyya. This one has a special character because it does not allow female initiates and this peculiar limitation, of course, restricts its popularity. Also influential in shaping contemporary Islam in East Africa is *Tablighi Jamaat*, a worldwide Muslim revivalist movement founded in India in 1927. *Tablighi Jamaat* had made significant inroads throughout East Africa. *Tablighi Jamaat* is spiritually focused and apolitical.

Mawlid in East Africa

One of the main cultural and religious features of Islam in East Africa is undoubtedly the celebration of *Mawlid*, or *Maulidi* in Swahili. *Mawlid* celebrates the Prophet's birthday and only in Zanzibar it lasts 3 weeks! *Mawlid* festivals play an interesting and exceptional role in the history and civilization of the Coast, in particular for the conversion to Islam of many people impressed by the pomp of the ceremony. In fact, Muslims in East Africa have a long-standing tradition of praising Muhammad, particularly during *Mawlid* celebrations, when they recite classical poetic compositions called *utenzi*, namely poems. The festival of *Mawlid* was born in Egypt in the XIII century and afterwards it spread very slowly throughout the entire Islamic world.³²

In the contemporary East African societies the *Ansar al-Sunna*, the neo-Wahhabi associations, have been opposing and criticizing *Mawlid* ceremonies, but often without success. In Zanzibar, for example, the *Ansar al-Sunna* had to give up because of the strong, enthusiastic, popular participation in these gatherings and rituals.³³ *Mawlid*

31. *Ibidem*, p. 61.

32. HOLDER 2009.

33. LOIMEIER 2009, pp. 126-131.

became the most efficient channel for the conversion of slaves and migrant laborers to Islam in East Africa during the last century.³⁴

Translations of the Quran in East African languages

The political power and social position of Muslim leaders on the Coast was based on the monopoly of Islamic knowledge. These leaders within the *Mwalimu*, the local marabouts, relied greatly on their good knowledge of Arabic language, the holy language, to teach and guide the Muslim community. Therefore a common factor in all the different trends for Islamic reform in East Africa is the constant reference to the Quran in all Muslim *Da'wa*. In the past, the sacred text had often been known only to a privileged class of scholars, writers and teachers who were, indeed, familiar with Arabic. The translations helped to take away the cultural and linguistic veil, behind which, they were hidden for most illiterate Muslims. One of the most significant events in the development of Islam in East Africa has been the translation of the Quran and provision of commentary in Swahili.³⁵ In this regard, translations of Quran in the vernacular languages of East Africa, as well of West Africa, constitute a topical subject in contemporary African religious studies. **Three complete translations of the Holy Book have been published in the East African cities: the first one in 1923, the second one in 1953 and the third one in 1969.** The first complete translation was made by Godfrey Dale, a Christian missionary who was a great Swahili scholar. However Muslims in East Africa have always been convinced that a right and accurate translation of the Quran could only come from Muslim scholars. Therefore Dale's translation has long fuelled and exacerbated Christian-Muslim antagonism. Certainly Muslims in East African societies believe that only they have the right to translate the *Furqa'n* into Swahili language. Therefore, Dale's translation has been greatly disliked by the Swahili Muslim community. The second translation is *Kurani Tukufu* with 10 thousand copies printed only at the first publication. Shaykh Mubarak Ahmad Ahmadi was the leader

34. NUOTIO 2006, p. 187.

35. LACUNZA-BALDA 1997, p. 96.

of the Ahmadiyya community in East Africa. Many Ahmadi teachers lived in Tabora (Tanzania), where the Ahmadiyya Muslim School had been founded in 1937 and has instructed many students from Tanganyika, Uganda, Kenya and even from Zaire and Burundi.³⁶ Also we must underline that the most important Ahmadiyya Teaching Center is the Ahmadiyya Theological Training Center in Lahore, Pakistan. It is really very interesting to remark to what extent the policy of the Ahmadiyya mission in East Africa has been to use the Swahili language as a mean for Muslim religious education. In the Ahmadiyya's vision of Islam in East Africa, Muslims need to understand in their own language what they had memorized or learned in Arabic language. Meanwhile, the Ahmadiyya translation of the Quran into Swahili has smartly linked many Muslim populations of East Africa with a very far and different region of the Islamic world, the Pakistan. Shaykh Abdallah Saleh al-Farsi is the author of the third complete translation of the Holy Book in Swahili. Al-Farsi was a poet, a literary man, a great Muslim scholar born in Malindi (Kenya) and died in Muscat (Oman) in 1982. From 1960 to 1967 he was appointed as *Chief Qadi* in Zanzibar. In al-Farsi view, the publication of an orthodox translation of the Quran in Swahili was a moral duty. Therefore, in the whole East Africa there was a mess of reciprocal accusations between Shaykh al-Farsi and the Ahmadiyya leaders. The right interpretations of this quarrel is that the Ahmadiyya founder, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, is the spiritual Reformer, the promised Messiah and the long-awaited *Mahdi*. In the Ahmadiyya interpretation of the Holy Book such claims are maiden in the same Quranic text.

The Mihadhara Public Preaching

Ideological competition within East African Islam manifests itself as a struggle between the traditional sufi Islam and Wahhabi interpretations of Islam. In regions where Wahhabis have asserted themselves, for instance tombs of Sufi Shaykh have been desecrated and traditional practices have been replaced by Wahhabi strict norms. In this ideological context a new type of public preaching is very com-

36. *Ibidem*, p. 103.

mon today: the *Mihadhara* sermons. This kind of public speech can also be interpreted as a reaction to the rise of the Pentecostal Churches scattered everywhere in Tanzania.³⁷ Therefore actually there are many Muslim-Christian conflicts in Tanzania and a huge number of serious disagreements are derived from *Mihadhara* meetings. There is a general feeling among Muslims in East Africa that Christians have for many years monopolized the political scene.³⁸ Just for instance, Mr Malacela, the Prime Minister in 1992, choose to prohibit these religious public meetings. As always, religious conflicts are not only between Muslims and Christians but also among the same Muslims. Certainly Islamic codes and symbols have been used to attack or, on the contrary, to legitimize national political decisions.

A myriad of Islamic Associations

Many Muslim Associations are spread in nowadays East Africa. Just for instance we can mention: The Society of Muslim Preachers in Tanzania, the *Juwakita* in the 1990ss, which the leader was Ustad Shaabani Maranda of the Mtoro Mosque in Dar es Salaam. We can still mention: the Youth Muslim Association in Kenya and Tanzania; the Tabligh Muslim Youth in Uganda and the Tanzanian Council for promoting the Quran, *Balukta*. Furthermore, we cannot forget the importance of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In the University field we find the Muslim Academy in Zanzibar and the Islamic University at Mbale in Uganda. The most important of the Wahabites Ansar al-Sunna groups in Tanzania is the Society of Revival and the Council of Imam has strong *Ansar al-Sunna* radical tendencies. Many competitions of Quranic recitation and memorization are organized every year in East Africa and the Iranian Cultural Centre is one of the main official sponsors. An Iranian newspaper *Sauti ya Umma*, is published in Teheran and widespread in Tanzania.³⁹

37. LOIMEIER 2007, p. 148.

38. CHANDE 2000.

39. LOIMEIER 2007, p. 117.

Zanzibar Sufi Orders

Let's now take a look at popular religion in Zanzibar where 99% of the population is Muslim. The archipelago of Zanzibar consists of two islands: Pemba and Unguja, the first one is judged very peaceful, on the contrary Unguja is considered a very conflicting place. The town of Zanzibar is in the island of Unguja. Zanzibar history has a magnificent story, just think about the Busaid dynasty, from Oman, who created the well-known Sultanate of Zanzibar.⁴⁰ Many Sufi Orders exist for a long time in these two islands of the Indian Ocean and Zanzibari are deeply convinced that mystic Orders are inclined to tolerance and social equality.⁴¹ The Qadiriyya and Alawiyya are the most important Sufi Orders in the region and have had a strong influence on the politics of Zanzibar. However, even the Shadiliyya (an Order almost unknown in West Africa) and the Rifa'iyya (one of the most ancient brotherhoods in Zanzibar) play an important role.⁴² Only in the town of Zanzibar there are more than 130 *zawiya*, spiritual centers of the Sufi Orders.⁴³

The Alawiyya *tariqa* was founded in Hadramauth, South Yemen, by Muhammad ibn Alawi. This specific Order has got a *silsila*, genealogy, and a specific character of this Order is the absolutely limited membership. This means that membership is restricted to people who can claim that they are descendants of the Prophetic family in Hadramauth. Furthermore, the Alawiyya has been very much dynamic in the field of Islamic education.

Another category of Sufi Orders includes *Mawlid ya Homu*, *Kirama*, *Kigumi*, *Hochi* and *Dufu*. *Mawlid ya Homu* is another denomination of the *tariqa* Rifaiyya, one of the oldest Orders in East Africa. The Rifaiyya came from Aden to Zanzibar. Nowadays it is called *Mawlid ya Homu* that means the *Mawlid* of the monsoon. *Kirama* is a new Sufi Order from Northern Zanzibar and his disciples are used to perform their *dhikr* every Thursday late in the evening.⁴⁴ Many researchers regard

40. DECLICH 2004; BALLARIN 2008.

41. FUJI 2010, p. 91.

42. AHMED 2006.

43. *Ibidem*, p. 92.

44. *Ibidem*, p.93.

Kirama as a branch of the most famous Qadiriyya, for instance August Nimtz (1980) and Roman Loimeier (2009). But the leader Abdoul Shadili judges *Kirama* as an original Zanzibari *tariqa*. The term *Kirama* is also the name of their *dhikr*. Their *zawiya* in Zanzibar and Pemba were in 2010 from 6 to 8 according to Chiaki Fujii (2010). In one word these *tariqas* seem to be quite characteristic of Zanzibar. In this island there is an unbelievable variety of *dhikr* rituals. Disciples perform *dhikr* rituals to unite spiritually all the followers of the *tariqa*, but only at the spiritual level with God. Men and women always practice in segregated areas, very often the *dhikr* is also practiced in the gloom and for many many hours, even often from midnight to dawn. In contrast with the other *tariqas* another one, called *Dufu*, plays a little drum whose name is always *Dufu*. The atmosphere during these long recitations of the 99 names of Allah is highly involving and reaches often collective paths.

A brief overview of Zanzibar's history

A brief overview of Zanzibar's history can help us understand the complexity of the Arabization process, as important as significant. In the Nineteenth century, an Arab dynasty of princes-merchants from Oman chose Zanzibar as the capital of a Sultanate that would exercise a political hegemony in the region, from Swahili towns on the Coast up to the Great Lakes Region. Spices, silks, coral, ivory, and especially slaves were the main goods continually exchanged between the islands in the Indian Ocean, China and India.⁴⁵ So, Zanzibar became a cosmopolitan city, the pearl of the Indian Ocean, the city of spices for excellence. But, in 1890 the British colonialism imposed the abolition of slavery, while keeping the existing social hierarchy. Much later, in 1955, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party was founded and it was sponsored by Shirazi, who identified with the indigenous population. In this regard, we can mention the fact that, in 1948, 56 % of the population of Zanzibar claimed to be Shirazi of Persian origin.⁴⁶ In 1957, the Afro-Shirazi Party was born and it was the symbol of a new alliance between Shirazi and new

45. ALPERS 1975; COOPER 1978; BURGESS 2009.

46. NIMTZ 1980; SPEAR 1984.

African immigrants on the coast.⁴⁷ This party will accuse the ZNP to defend Arab interests against the interests of Africans. The President of the ASP will be Abeid Karume. According to the ASP, the cosmopolitanism of Zanzibar only created heavy racial cleavages. In 1963, from the secession of the ZNP as small as a lively party was born: the Umma Party, led by Abdulrahman Mohamed Babou and Ali Sultan Issa, both in favor of the Chinese Maoism. The Umma Party allied with the ASP and gave rise to a cosmopolitan circle of students and travelers who had visited England, China, Cuba and Egypt.⁴⁸

The revolution in Zanzibar, in January 1964, represented the culmination of years and years of ethnic tensions and especially the refusal of the complex cosmopolitan heritage by the Zanzibar's African population. Dramatically, almost one third of the Arab inhabitants of the main island of Unguja were killed or forced into exile. Over the following years, all minorities were confiscated lands and excluded from any government activity. After the revolution, that was a military and cultural revolution at the same time, an African nationalist movement rose to the government and would transform the Arab and Asian minorities in second-class citizens. The Zanzibar Revolution denies the multicultural heritage, typical of the archipelago of Zanzibar. Formerly rich, proud and independent Sultanate, Zanzibar seemed turned off in the post-revolutionary period, while the arrests involving the entire population followed one another, in an isolated situation. Just three months after the April Revolution of 1964 there will be the creation of the United Republic of Tanzania, from the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. However Zanzibar will always be a problematic and politically unstable place. Another historical interpretation welcomes the famous Zanzibar Revolution as long as it represented the end of the rigid stratification in different social classes that characterized the pre-revolutionary society. The Revolution itself could also be considered the right tool to disavow a class of politicians always used to manipulate and exploit the different ethnic identities. Moreover, according to Africanist's propaganda, the British were not neutral, since in fact they wanted to leave an Arab

47. BURGESS 2009, pp. 19-20.

48. SHERIFF 2008.

state in Zanzibar after their domination. A central figure in the political history of Zanzibar was Ali Sultan Issa, from the Zanzibar Nationalist Party. Committed socialist, Ali Sultan nationalized all Arab and Asian land ownerships.⁴⁹

In 1967, the Tanzania African National Union, TANU and ASP merged into the Chama Cha Mapinduzi, CCM, the Revolution Party. But the CCM has never dominated undisturbed in Zanzibar, since it knew the irreducible opposition of another party, the CUF, the Civic United Front. The CCM will always accuse the CUF of wanting to restore an Arab power in Zanzibar. The conflict that divides the CUF from CCM is the result of a dichotomy between the reformist leaders and corrupt local politicians, during the 80s. The CUF has always seemed in favor of a newly independent Zanzibar from Dar es Salaam.

Baraza Associations in Zanzibar

Roman Loimeier, a German scholar expert on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, carried out many researches in Zanzibar, notably in the old city called Stone Town, a maze of narrow streets.⁵⁰ Both in the outlying suburbs called *Ng'ambo* and, especially, in Stone Town, there are widespread grassroots social organizations called *Baraza*. In the Old Town, *mji mkongue*, the *Baraza* are generally informal places of public hearing and may vary from a simple porch to stone platforms. Usually, they are masculine spaces that represent a sort of laboratory of informal socialization and active citizenship. These spaces contrast with all-female spaces, intimate and private, called *uani*, generally the inner courtyards of the houses where women meet and chat outside of social control by men.⁵¹ But *Baraza* was, in the glorious Zanzibar's past, the public hearing granted by the Sultan of Zanzibar; and today, the socio-economic and political world of this island in the Indian Ocean is full of associations called *Baraza*. Just think, for example: the *Kiswahili la Taifa*, National Kiswahili Council.

49. *Ibidem*, p. 89.

50. LOIMEIER 2007; 2009.

51. *Ibidem*, p. 173.

Majlis, in Arabic, can be a good translation of this term, as long as it emphasizes the willingness to dialogue, socialization and sharing of national and international problems that Zanzibaris face every day.⁵² Moreover, if in the past the *Baraza* were mostly located next to mosques as the *Jibrin Mosque*, or the *Mskiti Ruta* and next to popular districts such as Malindi, or next to market areas such as Kokoni e Darajani,⁵³ today the spread of *Baraza* knows no limits or boundaries of any kind. The heated political discussions that take place within the *Baraza za wazee*, the Old Men Baraza at the central Jaw's Corner are famous.

Islamic traditional virtues such as good manners, *adabu* or respect towards the elderly *heshima*, called *wazee* are nurtured within *Baraza* that have also played a prominent political role in the organization of the popular revolution in Zanzibar, just one year before the historic merger with the Tanganyika. Above all, the *Baraza za wazee* has supported the main important opposition party, the Civic United Front.

From Poets' *Baraza* to Fishermen's *Baraza* in Fungun, from *Bright Brothers*' to Businessmen's *Baraza* in Darajani, there is no doubt that this social customary institution in Zanzibar has been able to combine the traditions with the social change, as there is no doubt that today it represents the importance of the so called public sphere of Islam.

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52. LOIMEIER 2007.

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