

THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF KENYA'S SWAHILI MUSLIMS: THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND BREAKS IN ISLAMIC HISTORY

Muhammad Yunus Hidayatullah*, Abd A'la Basyir

Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya, Indonesia

Abstract

This article aims to explain the contributions and discontinuities of Islamic history in the cultural heritage of Kenya's Swahili ethnic Muslim traditions. Therefore, in this article the author formulates two problems: 1) what is the journey of Islam in Kenya 2) what is the role and contribution of Islam to Kenyan Swahili civilisation. The research method used in this paper is a historical research method that includes heuristic, verification, interpretation and historiography stages. The focus of this article is to describe the beginning of the journey of Islam to dominance in Kenya, which was then replaced by Christian dominance. And to uncover traces of the cultural heritage of Kenya's Swahili Muslims. The results of this research show that there was a break in Islamic history when Kenya entered the colonial era. This had an impact on the spread of Islam and the cultural traditions of the Swahili ethnic Muslim culture of Kenya. Islam has also played an important role and contribution, this is especially true of the Swahili ethnic culture on the coast of Kenya. It can therefore be concluded that it is very important for the Swahili ethnic group living on the coast to continue to maintain and preserve Islamic culture as their identity, which has existed for several centuries.

Keywords: Historic separation; Cultural traditions; Kenya swahili.

INTRODUCTION

Kenya is an East African nation. Kenya is home to a wide variety of languages, cultures, and customs that have persisted over the years. The numerous tribes and ethnic groups that call various parts of Kenya home include the Maasai, Mijikenda, Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Kisii, Kamba, Embu, Luhya, Luo, Meru, Taita, Turkana, Samburu, Rendille, Somali, and Swahili tribes.

The Swahili ethnic group is one of the various ethnic groups in Kenya with a distinct culture and set of customs. The Swahili ethnic group assimilated several habits and beliefs from the cultures they came across, which explains why. Since most coastal communities practise Islam, it has the greatest cultural influence on the Swahili community. Islam was historically the religion that brought its influence to Kenya's coastline region in East Africa. The coastal region was first inhabited by native people (Bantu) before the Swahili ethnic group arrived in the seventh century AD to engage in trade along East Africa's coast (Chris, 2016).

The fact that Muslims are frequently found in the northeastern regions of Somalia, Kenya, and Tanzania is not surprising as some of these traders later made permanent settlements there, married locals in coastal areas, and gave birth to Swahili ethnic descendants. Near coastal cities like Mombasa, Lamu, and Malindi, which are now a part of Kenya, reside the bulk of ethnic Swahili Muslims. From this point on, Islam emerged as the social cornerstone of local life in this coastal region, serving as a hub for trade and the development of the Swahili ethnic culture. But as time passed, Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama started to examine the East African region and desired to take control of the trading hubs surrounding the Indian Ocean, which were ruled by Muslims at the time. In addition, the Portuguese extended the influence of Western Christianity throughout East Africa. In terms of trade, culture, custom, and the influence of beliefs for Muslims who initially inhabited the coast of East Africa, this presents a threat and a challenge. The advent of the

*Correspondance Author: yunuzlif@gmail.com

Article History | Submitted: 23 Juni, 2024 | Revised: 05 Juli, 2024 | Accepted: 09 Juli, 2024 | Publish: 30 Juli 2024

HOW TO CITE (APA 6th Edition):

Hidayatullah, Muhammad Yunus., Basyir, Abd A'la. (2024). The Cultural Heritage of Kenya's Swahili Muslims: The Contributions and Breaks in Islamic History. *Juspi: Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam*. 8(1), page.185-194

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.30829/juspi.v8i1.20702>

Portuguese, who started promoting Christianity, caused a disruption in the development of Islamic preaching in Kenya, even though Islam had already become the predominant religion there before to the start of the colonial era.

When Kenya was ruled by the British, Christianity had a greater influence and a Muslim minority emerged as a result. It might be argued that Christian influence still permeates practically every aspect of people's life, particularly in Kenya. This became intriguing when Kenya had a huge religious shift, with the majority of Christians eventually displacing Islam as the dominant religion. The history of Islam in Kenya was disrupted during the colonial era. As a result, it's important to understand how Muslims are perceived as well as the part and influence Islam has had on the Swahili Muslim ethnic group in Kenya.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a four-stage historical research process. Initially, the research would employ a heuristic or collection of materials that are directly connected to the discontinuities in Islamic history and the cultural traditions of the Swahili ethnic Muslim community. The investigator used library research to gather all of the sources for this study. The second step, source verification or criticism, is used to weed out any data or sources that aren't pertinent to the study. Third, by interpreting or analysing the chosen sources, this research seeks to guarantee that all of the facts can be linked to one another and eventually result in an event. Fourth, in order to generate a comprehensive type of historical writing, historiography, or historical writing, is conducted in order to generate descriptions, narratives, and analyses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Islam's past and Swahili ethics in Kenya

Early in the history of Islam, it became known, propagated, and accepted throughout East Africa. A vast commerce network spanning the Indian Ocean developed in East Africa, particularly along the coasts of Somalia, Tanzania, and Kenya. One could argue that the Silk Road, which connected locations and developed as the hub of trade routes, was in competition with the Indian Ocean at the time. During the Islamic revival era in the 7th century, the Islamic Arabs traded with East Africa via two routes: first, by land via the Nile River, which at the time served as the foundation of Christian power and fortified the areas they passed through; and second, by sea, by successfully crossing the Indian Ocean and arriving in the coastal region of East Africa, Kenya's Lamu Islands (Batubara, 2019, p. 188).

As the eighth century approached, Arab Muslim traders started to establish themselves as permanent residents and to construct towns and trade hubs. This is where the influence of Islam started to enter and develop in the coastal areas of East Africa through trade, social interaction, and marriage between Arab Muslims and local residents (Bantu) coast. Even among Arab Islamic traders, they also married local residents and assimilated into local culture using Islamic nuances. Swahilization, rather than Arabization, was the method used by Arab Muslim traders to bring Islam and its religious customs to the indigenous populace (Bantu). The coast strives to make Islam a natural religion of East Africa and is not perceived as a foreign religion (Lodhi, 1994, p. 88).

The distinctive Swahili culture developed as a result of the blending of cultural customs created by the marriage of Bantu peoples and Islamic Arabs. The Swahili ethnic group is the product of this marriage's progeny. The Swahili people are an ethnic group that inhabits the coast of East Africa, particularly the islands and coastal regions of Kenya, Tanzania, and northern Mozambique.

The word "Swahili" is derived from the Arabic word "ساحل," which means coast. The Arabic plural of "Swahili" is "السواحل," which means "coastal residents" (Brownstok, Krause, & Galbinst, 2019, p. 42). The archaeologists In his most recent study, he has presented artifacts and archaeological documents that attest to the presence of Muslims along the shore. This has been demonstrated by

the excavation of an old mosque by the Kenyan government on the Swahili coast. The mosque was constructed of wood in the ninth and tenth century (Alkhateeb, 2017, p. 175).

The Persian ruler of Shiraz's son, Prince Ali ibn Hassan Shirazi, set out with his supporters for the coastal region of Kilwa in Swahili during the beginning of the 10th century. The Swahili ethnic group was later created by the Persians, who, like the Arab traders, started to develop towns and marry the Bantu population in Kilwa. A regional state called the Kilwa sultanate was established by Ali ibn Hassan Shirazi, and it was ruled by his children until 1277. Afterwards, an Arab family by the name of Abu al-Mawahib took over the Kilwa sultanate the next year. The Kilwa sultanate reached its zenith during Abu al-Mawahib's reign, and its influence grew extensively along the Swahili coast (Mashiku & Moshi, 2014, p. 30).

As part of the Kilwa sultanate, which had its capital on the island of Kilwa (Tanzania), Kenya was included in its domain in the 12th century. Coastal regions experienced a growing impact of Islamic architecture throughout the Kilwa sultanate. Islam has become a major part of the Swahili population's identity and is only growing stronger. This suggests that while Islam is effective in coastal areas, it has little effect on those who live in the interior of East Africa. To put it another way, Islam's growth is still restricted to coastal and urban regions, where it is mostly promoted through routine social communications. Islam therefore did not have a significant effect on the surrounding non-Swahili ethnic African communities, which is not surprising given that it only expanded to coastal areas despite reaching the nearby islands of Zanzibar, Pemba, Comoros, Kilwa, and Pate (Cartwright, 2019).

In the northeastern part of Kenya, numerous Islamic cities saw fast development during the 12th century. This is corroborated by evidence from Ibn Bathuthah, who wrote that the mosques in Mombasa were made of wood and that the Swahili society there was a deeply religious group when he visited the city in the fourteenth century (Anasy & Fath, 2022, p. 283). Aside from that, Ibn Bathuthah also wrote on the Swahili coast's civilization, claiming that all of the coastal cities served as both religious and commercial hubs. He observed the religious enthusiasm of the coastal inhabitants in Kilwa and Mombasa, as well as the enormous, immaculate mosques dotting the towns. Ibn Bathuthah even extolled the virtues of Al-Muzaffar Hasan (Abu al-Mawahib), the sultan of Kilwa, who frequently dined with the city's impoverished citizens and always accorded preferential attention to the ulama and the Prophet's descendants (Alkhateeb, 2017).

Kenya's Christianization during the Colonial Era

In 1498 AD, Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived in Mombasa, Kenya, hoping to establish trade dominance in the Indian Ocean and grow his nation's commerce network. In addition, Vasco da Gama believed that spreading Christianity would have an effect on civilization and serve as a counterbalance to Islam, which had taken over the Swahili coastline region (Nthamburi, n.d.). The Muslim population along the Swahili coast did not warmly welcome Vasco de Gama's arrival, but things changed when he allied himself with the Malindi monarch. Malindi's ruler was often at odds with those in Mombasa who possessed greater power, which is one of the reasons Vasco de Gama made Malindi an ally. However, the king of Malindi also thought that the Portuguese could be used as an ally (Gray, 1958, p. 3).

The Portuguese established Mombasa a significant trading hub along the coast of East Africa in 1505 after invading Kilwa and forcing its commanders to surrender (Cartwright, 2021; Violette & Wynne-Jones, 2018, p. 47). Attacks by the Portuguese in 1505 The Kilwa sultanate, which ruled over land and trade along the Swahili coast, lost its luster as a result. With the help of Portuguese guns, Kilwa was reduced to ruins. Next their conquest of Kilwa the next year, the Portuguese also seized control of Sofala, Mozambique, and Shama.

Under Amir 'Ali Bey's leadership, the Ottoman Turks took control of Mombasa and the Portuguese-ruled coastal regions in 1585. However, the Portuguese-aligned Malindi kingdom retaliated by taking control of Sena and Tete on the Zambezi River, and in 1587 they took Kilwa and massacred 3,000 Muslims in Mombasa. This gave the Portuguese motivation to retake Mombasa

from the Muslims (Mashiku & Moshi, 2014). The Portuguese constructed the Jesus Fort, also known as Fort Jesus, four years after capturing Mombasa. The fort served as a slave jail, a commercial hub for goods, and a haven for the Portuguese against raids by nearby Swahili coastal settlements. In 1598, following the building of the Fort Jesus fortification, the locals welcomed the missionaries of the Order of Saint Augustine to Mombasa, where they served as their priests and spread Christianity among the Bantu population (Kenya, 2024).

When the Sultanate of Oman attacked Mombasa in 1698, Portuguese rule there started to look increasingly vulnerable. The army led by Imam Yarubi were besieging Portuguese territory at the time of this fight. The Portuguese were compelled to abandon the territory they had ruled on the Swahili coast after Omani forces successfully overran Mombasa through siege and naval assaults on the fort of Jesus. East African coast territory has been ruled by the Sultanate of Oman since the Portuguese were finally driven from the Swahili coast in 1729.

The Omani Arabs' initial period of settlement would eventually be responsible for the extensive spread of Islam in Kenya. Islam was widely spread throughout the Omani sultanate for a number of reasons, including (Ahmed, 2018, pp. 24-25):

1. The foundation of the Omani sultanate following the fall of the Portuguese
2. During this time, Sufi orders emerged and expanded throughout Kenya.
3. The Church Missionary Society, a group of church missions, collaborates with the Anglican Church to bring Christianity to rural areas. Muslims need to promote Islam throughout Eastern Africa since they are facing obstacles and attacks on their faith. This is a reason for concern.
4. Colonial administration

East Africa's Islamic realm grew and expanded during the Omani era, and via caravan routes, Islam was even able to extend to various inland places. Still, the Swahili coast continued to be the center of Islam's power (Lodhi, 1994). Christianity and the Portuguese influence began to wane during the Oman sultanate period due to the massive growth of Islam. The Sultanate of Oman relocated its capital to the Zanzibar region in 1832 and installed a liwali (prime minister) in every coastal city.

Slave trade in the East African region began to flourish during Omani dominance in Zanzibar. Thus, the sultanate of Zanzibar's slave trade withdrew, asking the sultanate of Wituland for safety. Because of his strategy of constantly defending escaped slaves and requesting protection in the territory of Wituland, the sultan of Zanzibar frequently attacked the Wituland sultanate, one of the smaller Islamic sultanates on the island of Witu (Kenya) (Africian, n.d.).

Wituland's monarch, Sultan Ahmed ibn Fumo Bakari, requested German assistance in fending off raids by Zanzibari soldiers after his government launched many attacks on Wituland. Sultan Ahmed ibn Fumo Bakari acknowledged Clemens and Gustav Denhardt's accomplishment in defending Wituland against Zanzibar by appointing them as ministers of interior and foreign affairs, respectively. Under German protection, Clemens and Gustav Denhardt divided the Wituland region with the goal of constantly defending their interests in negotiations with Sultan Ahmed ibn Fumo Bakari. The Wituland sultanate was ruled by Sultan Ahmed ibn Fumo Bakari, but he gave over 25 square miles of land to the Tana business and turned the remaining country into a German protectorate (Kiarie, n.d.).

Johann Ludwig Krapf was a German Christian missionary who traveled to Kenya in 1844 with the goal of converting people to Christianity. At first, Krapf converted coastal communities to Christianity (Bariu, 2017). Subsequently, the missionaries extended their reach into Kenya's interior. The Bible was first successfully translated into Swahili by Krapf (Sawe, 2020). Before imposing Christian doctrine on the Kenyan people, Krapf realized he needed to adjust to their way of life. However, as the second part of the nineteenth century approached, Habib Swaleh Jamal al-Lail, who established the Tarim Hadramaut madrasa in Yemen as a model, also advocated for the spread of Islam. He did this by founding the Riyadha Mosque College in Lamu, Kenya (Oded, 2000).

The Sultan of Oman's sovereignty over the Swahili coastal regions began in 1895 and was progressively handed up to the British Empire. Beginning with the Berlin Conference, or the European territorial division accord, Britain was granted dominion over the majority of East Africa. Kenya formally became a British protectorate after that, when the British East Africa protectorate started to take shape. The British established a political, economic, and social structure and constructed infrastructure in Kenya during the colonial era, which continues to this day. The British protectorate, like the Portuguese, brought Christianity to the continent of East Africa with the goal of reviving it around the Indian Ocean. Before Christianity started to take over in Kenya, it was handled differently. In Kenya, colonial authorities and British immigrants set an example for students and educators alike, introducing and developing Western cultures.

In addition to their missionary work of evangelization, British colonial missionaries constructed contemporary health and education systems on behalf of the church. As a matter of fact, the government indirectly plays a major role in promoting Christianity in Kenya. A report from 1931 served as proof that the British government had spent a significant amount of money funding missionaries' efforts to propagate Christianity and Western culture (Oded, 2000).

During the British colonial era, the Swahili ethnic group in Kenya was classified into four broad geographic groups, which are as follows (Møller, 2006):

1. Ethnic groups who value ethnic identity above religion predominate in the northeastern area. These tribes are Swahili. Put another way, this group still views itself as the descendants of Arabs who left Hadramaut and as Arabs of Omani heritage who drove the Portuguese off the Kenyan coast.
2. The other half of the population is made up of ethnic Swahili who reside along Kenya's coast. Although Swahili ethnicity is divided into three categories in some coastal areas—Bantu, mixed, and Arab—and according to religious denominations in other places, it is unclear for sure whether this group originated in a single community. The ethnic Swahili community in this area has felt marginalized ever since the British used Islamic authority on sharia courts as a cover for their actions. They even believed that there was a wave of social unrest known as "religious instability" that occasionally resulted in religious riots during the movement. A blend of religious and socio-political messaging is used by radical Islam to attract new members.
3. The Eldorat, Nairobi, and Nakuru regions are home to Kenya's rural Muslim minority. In general, it is believed that these populations joined their faith very recently, sometime in the middle of the 20th century.
4. The Mumias and Homa Bay regions of Western Kenya are home to a small Muslim community.

In terms of racial and ethnic rivalry and divergent goals, the colonial heritage that split the Muslim or Swahili ethnic group still exists today (Ndzovu, 2022). Such acts of British colonialism, of course, diminished the power of Arab or Swahili politics and marginalised ethnic Swahili Muslims in Kenya. Conflicts with African nationalist parties resulted from the Swahili ethnic group's support for coastal groups calling for regional autonomy in the wake of Kenya's independence from British colonial authority.

The information above suggests that this is the cause of why Islam in Kenya is mostly practiced by those living along the shore and finds it extremely challenging to spread inland. This also depends on a number of variables. *First*, Islam's expansion into interior regions was constrained by colonial control. *Second*, the impact of church missions and Christian missionaries was successful in drawing large numbers of adherents and bolstering the status of religion in both rural and urban areas. *Third*, through church planting or direct evangelism, Christian missionaries are still working to promote Christianity throughout Kenya. *Fourth*, in an effort to expand Christianity, the British government funded missionary work.

Islam was only able to proliferate throughout Kenya through trade and social interaction. Thus, indigenous non-Swahili ethnic African communities in Kenya's interior were not significantly

impacted by the expansion of Islam (Ahmed, 2018). While the interior was somewhat impacted by the expansion of Islam during the Oman sultanate, it was not a major factor.

It is evident how the colonial administration helped Church missionaries promote Christianity throughout Kenya, and colonisation was a major factor in this process. It was even possible for Christian missionaries to propagate their faith throughout Kenya's interior. During the British colonial era, Christianity experienced a sharp increase in growth, and even after Kenya gained independence, over 80% of its population identified as Christians (Bariu, 2017). This suggests that both colonialism and the Christianization effort in Kenya were doing well. Prosperous since traditional religions and Islam predominated in Kenyan society before to the arrival of Christianity. But as the colonial era started, Christian influence was able to take hold of the political, economic, and social spheres of society and continue to rule as the predominant religion in Kenya.

Kenyan Muslims' Situation

East African nation of Kenya is organised as a republic. The president of this nation is based in Nairobi. The highest peak in the nation, Mount Kenya, is the source of the name of the nation Kenya. Geographically speaking, Kenya is on Africa's east coast. Astrologically speaking, the equator nearly exactly cuts through Kenya. Kenya's population is now 56,012,736 according to the UN statistics summary ("Kenya Population (2024)," n.d.).

Christianity is the most common religion among Kenyans, making up about 85.5% of the country's total population. Islam is followed by 10.9% of people, and the remaining religions are Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, and traditional. When it comes to the Muslim population in Kenya, the bulk of non-Swahili tribes reside in urban and interior locations, whereas the Swahili ethnic group—a mixed Arab and African ethnic group—lives largely along the coast in places like Mombasa, Lamu, and Malindi (Munawir et al., 2007). Islam's social and religious aspects are quite diverse, despite the fact that it is currently a minority religion in Kenya. This can be attributed to the variations in the educational and institutional frameworks that each ethnic Muslim Swahili community adheres to. The kind of Islam that these communities practise differ in that they follow (Møller, 2006):

1. A significant proportion of Kenyan Muslims, particularly those from the Asian minority, follow the Sunni doctrines of the Hanafi school of thought.
2. The majority of native Muslims in Kenya also follow Sufi orders, such as the Qadiriyyah and Ibadiyyah, which are more prevalent in rural regions.
3. The Shiite sect comprises a tiny percentage of Asian Americans. Bohras, Itsna'asyariyyah (followers of the Aga Khan), and Isma'iliyyah (recognising seven imams) are their three divisions.
4. Conservative Islamic communities and reformist groups that are influential among Arabs and in metropolitan regions.
5. Ahmadiyya sect members who translated the Koran into Kiswahili for the first time. This sect has only a few thousand adherents, and the majority of mainstream Muslims view them as contentious.
6. Most Muslims in Kenya also follow the Sayafi'i school of thought, which is Sunni and was propagated by Habib Swaleh from Hadramaut in the southern Arabian Peninsula (Oded, 2000).

The fact that different schools of Islam are practiced does not mean that there will never be some small-scale hostility between Sunni and Shiite organisations. A disagreement between Sunnis who opposed the growth of Shiism and those who either chose to convert from Sunni to Shiism or were born Shiites developed in the Kenyan region as a result of Iran's political and religious efforts in Kenya (Oded, 2000).

Naturally, religious authorities must make reasonable attempts to reconcile the dispute between the Sunni and Shiite communities, given the history of hostilities between them in Kenya. The author argues that while there are a number of reasons why disagreements between Sunni and

Shiite groups can arise, the government must also work to reduce their frequency. *First*, there are the Sunni and Syi'ah religious disagreements, which frequently lead to arguments. *Second*, social and political concerns that may incite hostilities between Syi'ah and Sunni communities.

It is important to examine the interaction between Islam and Christianity in Kenya in addition to the issues that arise between ethnic Swahili Muslims, given that during the colonial era, these two religions were in competition with one another to establish their respective spheres of influence. Thanks to the Kenyan government's implementation of the religious freedom law, which directly protects this stance, relations between Islam and Christianity in Kenya are currently rather well despite their differences in views. But in 1998, because of the image of terrorism following the bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi, the Muslim community in Kenya frequently faced prejudice from the state ("Muslims in Kenya," 2018; Syahrianto, 2020). This incident affected a number of social injustices, including the access to population administration that Muslims in the area face and the poverty that has resulted from the region's economic downturn. A Muslim extremist organisation, aside from that, carried out a terrorist attack on Nairobi's luxury Westgate mall in 2013 (Ali, 2016). Muslims were therefore thought to have access to and refuge for Muslim extremist groups in Muslim cities like Mombasa, Malindi, and Lamu. The radical terrorist organisation al-Shabab, which seeks to incite animosity between Muslims and Christians, is the mastermind behind all of these incidents.

In actuality, Kenya's Muslim and Christian populations remain united in their tolerance of one another, despite the plot orchestrated by al-Shabab. This is demonstrated by the several media outlets that covered Kenyan Muslims' actions in 2015 to defend Christians against attacks by al-Shabab (Ramos, 2015; Yuniswan, 2015). In 2016, a sign of tolerance between the two religions, yellow paint was concurrently applied to the mosque and church, demonstrating the positive relationship between Kenyan Muslims and Christians (Pitoko, 2016; Yulianto, 2016).

Kenya's Islamic and Cultural Heritage

Kenya has participated in international trade since the eighth century, having followed the centuries-long rhythm of the spread and travel of Islam. Kenya was therefore influenced by Islam at a young age due to Muslim traders who established themselves along the East African coast. The Muslims who made East Africa their permanent home established towns and flourished as trading hubs in the Indian Ocean, leaving behind artefacts of cultural significance in the shape of historic sites dispersed throughout the region (Couteau, Harapan, Machasin, & Feillard, 2007).

East African nations that were once home to Islamic civilization have left behind a rich cultural legacy, particularly in Kenya. This is demonstrated by the significant contribution that Arab Muslims made to the traditions, language, and culture of the Swahili ethnic group. Various facets of their way of life and culture were shaped by a unique fusion of indigenous African and Arab ethnic groups, which eventually gave rise to the Swahili ethnic group. The encounter between the Arabs and the Bantu people advanced the field of language that is currently Kenya's official national language, Swahili. Arabic is the primary source of vocabulary for the Bantu language of Swahili.

The Swahili language also makes a significant contribution to literature. Some of the most exquisite religious poetry in Swahili is the elegy (*malamiko*, *Armartsiyah*), which honours the valour of a recently deceased honourable man; other poems in the language include *ar-Qasidah*, which praises Allah's Messenger; and (*waadhi*), which offers encouragement to believers (Tohir, 2019). Arab cultural customs significantly impacted Kenya's Swahili ethnic wedding customs. Originally, coast marriages were controlled by the decision of both parents, but Islamic law grants women the freedom to reject their parents' choice of spouse and select the one of their own choosing. In a unique twist, the bride and groom pray for God's blessings on their marriage while reading their wedding songs, known as "*nyimbo za ndoa*".

The development of Swahili tradition has also been greatly influenced by Arab culture. The Swahili community's strong Islamic heritage is one of the key legacies of Arab culture. Islamic

customs govern nearly every facet of Swahili society, encompassing their ever-evolving fashion sense. According to Kenya's dress code, for instance, married Muslim women are required to cover their entire body in loose traditional clothing known as bui-bui (Mahendira.K, 2020). In addition, Swahili women's clothing is available. A popular design with vibrant colours and a striking pattern featuring a Swahili motto at the bottom is the pure cotton kanga, shaped like a rectangle and surrounded by a border (Africa, 2024). Men wear floor-length or ankle-length white kanzu robes in the meanwhile. It had a small, round white hat embroidered with elaborate brown designs (Madenge, 2021).

Even in Kenya, buildings with subtle Arabic influences can still be found. Take Lamu's old town, which features typical Swahili architectural features like labyrinthine narrow streets and thoughtfully planned spaces that are a holdover from Arab land distribution and urban planning practices. The architecture of Lamu is primarily composed of mangrove wood and coral stone, and each and every one of the buildings in the city has exquisite Arabic carvings on its wooden doors (Laffourgue, n.d.; "Traditional Swahili Architecture," n.d.). Lamu has managed to preserve Arab cultural values in terms of custom and culture, as seen by the unusual practice of moving products through small city alleyways using donkeys.

As the month of *Rabi'ul Awwal* approaches, the ethnic Swahili people of Kenya celebrate the maulidi festival, which is held on the island of Lamu for five days to honour the Messenger's birth (Kazungu, 2023). The maulidi festival's network includes the recitation of poetry (*ar-Qasidah*) in appreciation of the Messenger, artistic renditions of Qur'anic passages, music, and traditional Swahili dances performed in conjunction with art exhibits (Kazungu, 2023; "Maulidi Festival," n.d.). Following that, there will be a prayer and celebration at the tomb of the festival's originator, Habib Swaleh Jamal al-Lail.

The Swahili ethnic community on Kenya's coast greatly benefits from Lamu, which was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2001. The rationale is that Islamic civilization in Kenya is said to have originated in Lamu, according to Swahili scholars (Unesco, n.d.). With a substantial research basis of Islamic and Swahili culture spanning the 19th century to the present, Lamu is currently recognised as a major religious hub.

The aforementioned evidence indicates that the Swahili Muslim ethnic group in Kenya has derived much of its customs and culture from Islam. But, Swahili Islamic culture is still mostly restricted to coastal regions where Islamic civilization flourished, despite the fact that Islam finally spread into the interior of Kenya (Nairobi) (Patterson, 2015). The function of da'wah is also impacted by the historical division that exists. Kenyan countryside has seen an increase in Islam, particularly since the start of the colonial era. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Swahili ethnic group, who inhabit the coast of East Africa, is the only one where Islamic culture is developed and controlled.

CONCLUSION

The Swahili ethnic group on Kenya's coast has a rich heritage of Islamic customs and culture, which is greatly influenced by Arab Muslims. This conclusion is supported by the arguments provided above. Islam, however, is primarily concentrated in coastal regions because of a historical divide that has hindered Islam's growth and had an adverse effect on Kenya's inland Islamic cultural legacy. As a result, it is crucial that the Swahili ethnic group, who have lived along the shore for several centuries, maintain and preserve their Islamic culture.

REFERENCES

- Africa, E. (2024). Four Elements of Swahili Culture you'll encounter in Mombasa Kenya.
- African, R. A. H. (n.d.). Traditional Kings in Kenya.
- Ahmed, C. (2018). *Preaching Islamic Revival in East Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- Ali, A. M. (2016). *Islamist Extremism in East Africa*.
- Alkhateeb, F. (2017). *Lost Islamic History Reclaiming Muslim Civilisation From The Past*. London: Hurst Publishers.
- Anasy, M. M., & Fath, K. (2022). *Rihlah Ibnu Bathuthah Memoar Perjalanan Keliling Dunia di Abad Pertengahan*. Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar.
- Bariu, R. M. (2017). Transformations of Christianity in Kenya: A Historical Survey. *The International Journal Of Humanities & Social Studies*, 5(11).
- Batubara, F. K. (2019). *Metodologi Studi Islam Menyingkap Persoalan Ideologi Dari Arus Pemikiran Islam Dengan Berbagai Pendekatan dan Cabang Ilmu Pengetahuan Lainnya*. Yogyakarta: Deepublish.
- Brownstok, W., Krause, S. M., & Galbinst, Y. (2019). *Islam: Van Het Kalifaat Van Cordoba Tot Het Indiase Subcontinent*. Cambridge: Cambridge Stanford Books.
- Cartwright, M. (2019). Kilwa.
- Cartwright, M. (2021). The Portuguese in East Africa.
- Chris. (2016). Kenyan Tribes & Religions.
- Couteau, J., Harapan, A. A., Machasin, & Feillard, A. (2007). *Ziarah dan Wali di Dunia Islam*. Jakarta: PT. Serambi Ilmu Semesta.
- Gray, J. M. (1958). *Early Portuguese Missionaries in East Africa*. London: Macmilan.
- Kazungu, K. (2023). Maulid festival brings Lamu's Old Town to life.
- Kenya, C. C. (2024). Mombasa Martyrs.
- Kenya Population (2024). (n.d.).
- Kiarie, M. (n.d.). German adventures.
- Laffourgue, E. (n.d.). Kenya, Lamu Island.
- Lodhi, A. Y. (1994). Muslims in Eastern Africa - Their Past and Present. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 3(1), 88–98.
- Madenge. (2021). A Quick Overview of the Kanzu Dress.
- Mahendira.K. (2020). Global Textiles- Kenya.
- Mashiku, D., & Moshi, L. M. (2014). *The Swahili People and Their Language: A Teaching Handbook*. Nigeria: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd.
- Maulidi Festival. (n.d.).
- Møller, B. (2006). *Political Islam In Kenya*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies.
- Munawir, Sunarto, D., Yuniarti, Agustina, N., Umini, S., Pujiyanto, Y., & Efiaty, S. (2007). *Cakrawala Geografi*. Bogor: Ghalia Indonesia Printing.
- Muslims in Kenya. (2018).
- Ndzovu, H. J. (2022). Kenya's Muslims: a Divided Community with Little Political Clout.
- Nthamburi, Z. (n.d.). The Beginning and Development of Christianity in Kenya: A Survey - Dictionary of African Christian Biography.
- Oded, A. (2000). *Islam And Politics In Kenya*. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publisher.
- Patterson, W. R. (2015). Islamic Radicalization in Kenya. *Joint Force Quartely (JFQ)*, 3(78).
- Pitoko, R. A. (2016). Di Kenya, Masjid dan Gereja Dicat Warna Kuning.
- Ramos, A. R. (2015). Muslims Shield Christians when Al-Shabaab Attacks Bus.

Muhammad Yunus Hidayatullah, Abd A'la

Sawe, B. E. (2020). Religion in Kenya.

Syahrianto, M. (2020). Diskriminasi Islam di Kenya, Dulu Jaya Jadi Mayoritas Kini Minoritas.

Tohir, A. (2019). *Studi Kawasan Dunia Islam Perspektif Etno-Linguistik dan Geo-Politik*. Depok: Rajawali Press.

Traditional Swahili Architecture. (n.d.).

Unesco. (n.d.). Lamu Old Town.

Violette, A. La, & Wynne-Jones, S. (2018). *The Swahili World*. London: Routledge.

Yulianto, A. (2016). Di Kenya Umat Islam dan Kristen Kerja Bakti Mengecat Rumah Ibadah.

Yuniswan, T. (2015). Pasca Serangan, Umat Islam dan Kristen di Kenya tetap Akur.