SHEIKH ABD UL AZIZ RIMO (1949-2015) AND THE ANSARI MUSLIM COMMUNITY: A STUDY OF ISLAMIC REFORM IN SOUTH COAST OF KENYA

BY

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DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my two daughters, Aisha and Mishi.

May God bless, protect and guide you.

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ABSTRACT

Globally the challenge of reforming Islamic practise in a social world characterized by differing worldviews creates a crisis for reformers. The concern of this thesis is an investigation of the reform activities championed by Sheikh Abdul Aziz Rimo (1949-2015) and the development of the Ansari Muslim community. The general purpose of this research is to investigate the indigenous Muslim scholars' contribution to Islamic reform in Kenya with particular reference to the Digo Muslim community in South Coast. In addition, the study was guided by the following specific objectives, namely to: examine the rise of the Ansari Muslim community and their doctrinal views that border on reform, assess the transnational links between the Ansari Muslim community and other revivalist groups in Africa and the rest of the Muslim world; explore the methods adopted by the Ansari in disseminating their teachings; and investigate the impact of the Ansari on the religious, social and political landscape among the Digo of Kwale county. Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari represent an interpretation of socio-religious and political events which they consider to be at variance with the 'Islamic norm' and as a result the Conflict Theory was seen as relevant and appropriate in this study. Particularly, features of the Conflict Theory underpinning this study are deprivation, conflict and group boundaries as defining the framework of analysis of the reform activities of the Ansari Muslim community. As qualitative research, a descriptive approach was employed involving the historical-biographical and field survey methods research design to collect the primary data for the study. This data resulted from interviews with key members of the Ansari group, contemporaries of Sheikh Rimo, close relatives and his students. Through purposive sampling, sixteen (16) respondents identified as key informants were sampled. Oral interviews, which were based on a set of questions from a schedule, were conducted on the life, education and reform schemata of the founder of the Ansari. A review of documentary data including newspaper articles, court records and archival materials was also used to supplement primary data. The collected data was manually analysed using qualitative analysis tools such as inductive exploration of the data to identify recurring themes, patterns and ideas and then ascribing meaning and interpretations relevant to the study objectives. The main findings of the study is that the present atmosphere of religious reform activities at the South Coast of Kenya reflects the fusion of a global puritanical (*Salafiyya*) voice of reform within the local Islamic observance of indigenous Muslims. The study concludes that the Ansari community is an attempt to localize Islamic reform discourse in Kenya, albeit with a potential of polarization of the religious and political landscape. Therefore, it is recommended that there is need to investigate the changes initiated by reformist scholars exposed to formal institutions of higher learning in Muslim countries abroad especially with the view of arresting radical and extremist tendencies that may stand in the way of fragmenting the unity of the *ummah* (Muslim community).

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Deprivation: a feeling that individuals do not have what they expect is rightfully theirs.

Group Boundaries: sense of separation between the Ansari and non-Ansari Muslims.

Group Identity: the Ansari sense of belonging to an organisation where values are shared and concerns are mutual.

Islamic Reform: the attempt to reinvigorate the practise of Islam by presenting an orthodox interpretation free from syncretism.

Sunni Orthodoxy: legal and religious framework of the Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanafi and Hanbali traditions.

South Coast of Kenya: the geographical area to the south of Mombasa Island, beginning from the Likoni channel to Vanga.

Textual Sources: the Qur'an and the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

1.1 Background of the Study

John Esposito traces the historical development of reform in Islam, pointing out that the tradition of revival and renewal is ingrained in the religion of Islam from its nascent days.[1] Thus, religious renewal has been an integral part of Islamic history.[2] Within the Islamic tradition, Prophet Muhammad is considered the initial reformer who sought to purify society by teaching against superstition, polytheism and idolatry.[3] It is in this context that contemporary Muslims, orthodox and salafi, seek to reform their faith (as practised in present day societies) by limiting its practise to the dictates of the Quran and the Sunna of Muhammad.[4] Muslims' perceptions of the role of the revivalist in the *umma* (Muslim community) are based upon a tradition (Hadith) wherein the Prophet said: "God will send to this *umma* at the beginning of each century someone who will revive its faith for it."[5] This hadith is seen by Muslims as the basis and justification for attempts at reform and renewal within their communities. However, the emergent reform movements among Muslim communities have addressed both moral and political concerns of their respective communities.[6]

Religious reforms, therefore, in the 18th century Middle-East began in response to the moral decay of Muslim societies and the impending expansionism of imperial Europe. As a result, "pre-modern revivalist movements" arose in response to social and moral

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[1]John L. Esposito. 2005. *Islam; The Straight Path*. (Oxford: University Press), p.116.

[2]Randall L.Pouwels. 1981. "Sh. Al-Amin B. Ali Mazrui and Islamic Modernism in East Africa, 1875-1947."*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.13, No3, p.329.

[3]Esposito, John L., *op.cit*. p.12.

[4] For the Orthodox view, see Joseph Lumbard and Aref Ali Nayed. 2010. "The 500 Most Influential Muslims-2010." (Amman, The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre), p.13; For the salafi view, see Yunus Dumbe, "The Salafi Praxis of Constructing Religious Identity in Africa: A Comparative perspective of the Growth of The Movements in Accra and Cape Town." *Islamic Africa*, Vol.2, No.2. p.89.

[5].Abu Dawud .1973. *Sunan Abu-Dawud*. (Damascus, Dar al-Hijra), Book 36,Hadith No.1

[6]Esposito, John L. *op cit*. p.116.

decline within society. There is concern among reformists that moral decline due to disregarding of the dictates of the faith requires the revitalization of the community by returning to 'true' Islam. It is this revivalist tradition that has permeated the religion of Islam as evident among different generations. Several Muslim individual reformers and organisations have sought to reorganise key Islamic concepts, beliefs, and teachings in line with an esteemed ideal.

Therefore the study seeks to investigate the revivalist tradition as manifested within the sphere of Kenyan Islam, particularly among the Digo Muslims of Kenya's South Coast. The study analyses the key themes that include concepts, beliefs and activities of the Ansari movement to demonstrate transformative and revivalist underpinnings, and also to examine how the reforms targeted the socio-moral, religious, and political fabric of the Muslim community. Of interest are the doctrinal foundations that qualify the movement as a reformist group. It is argued in this study that while the Digo have not demonstrated tendencies for group efforts at revivalism and reform in the past, at least not on the scale of the Ansari movement, a reformist ideology seems to be taking root among sections of Digo Muslims in the region. For that reason, the study throws light on the conditions that could have facilitated the appearance of the Ansari as a religious movement.

Kwale County has four sub-county capitals at Kinango, Lungalunga, Matuga and Msambweni, which share a common commercial hub at Diani. As a popular tourist destination for both local and international visitors, Diani (commonly described as South Coast)[7], has grown into a cosmopolitan centre.[8] This implies that the area has been exposed to numerous social and cultural forces thereby influencing the society

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[7]This description is, however, limiting because geographically south coast entails the entire Kenyan coastal region from the Likoni channel to Vanga.
[8]County Government of Kwale. *First County Integrated Development Plan*. 2013, p.57.

and its people. While these influences have been positive resulting into development of better infrastructure and greater prospects for trade, there have been voices of discontent among sections of the local population around allegations of economic marginalisation and cultural colonisation.[9] Historically, South Coast has been home to the Digo who are predominantly Muslims.[10] Having embraced Islam in the pre-colonial days, the form of Islam practised by the Digo is not dissimilar to that of the rest of Kenyan Muslim communities of African origin, which has been seen to be characterized by aspects of syncretism.[11] These aspects include popular medical interventions like divination (*kupiga mburuga*) and spirit dance (*kayamba*), as well as the preparation and drinking of 'kombe', prepared by religious teachers (*maalim* or *walimu*).

As a society adjacent to tourist destinations of global standing, where tourism has been identified as one of the economic pillars of the county,[12] and with the recent settlement of non-Digo communities in the area, the Digo society was exposed to new practises, worldviews and a way of life interpreted by a section of the Muslim *Ulama* (scholars) as un-Islamic. Aspects of the new way of life resulting from cross-cultural contact include the proliferation of churches and increasing public preaching by Christian proselytizers, which contests the essentially Muslim religious identity of Diani. The emerging scenario gave way to the appearance of the Ansari movement, which is the focus of this study. It is in Diani that saw the birth of the Ansari, an Islamic reformist group founded by Sheikh Abdul Aziz Rimo (1949-2015). He was among the local religious scholars trained in the traditional Qur'an school system as

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[9]Hassan Mwakimako and Justin Willis.2014. "Islam, Politics and Violence on the Kenya Coast." Observatoire des Enjeux Politiques et Securitaires dains la corne de'l Afrique, p.11.

[10]Mohamed Bakari .1995. "The New Ulama in Kenya", in Mohamed Bakari and Saad Yahya (eds.) *Islam in Kenya,* (Nairobi: Signal Press), p.56.

[11] Bjon Molller. 2006. *Political Islam in Kenya*. D.I.S Working Paper, No 22, p.11.

[12]County Government of Kwale, *op. cit*. p.59.

well as in modern institutions of Islamic learning in Saudi Arabia.[13] The impact of the Saudi Arabia graduates upon traditional conceptions of Islam has been extensive in the East African region. Commenting on the Ugandan graduates from Saudi Arabia, Randall Pouwels observed that upon their return they "led an activist, salafi movement that, by the mid-1980's, became alienated from the old, traditional *ulamaa*."[14] In similar manner, members of the Ansari movement at Diani were a religious organization of Muslims who had a unique interpretation of Islam that could be interpreted as a Salafi inclined reformism since they propagated a return to the Islamic models of the 'pious predecessors.'[15]

This orientation was in counter distinction from the popular Islam of the majority of Muslims at the South Coast. Under the guidance of Sheikh Rimo, the Ansari preached against practices they considered un-Islamic and mere innovations (*bid'a*) such as performing funeral prayers for Muslims who themselves did not pray while alive, contracting of the '*Kuhala*' (or 'come we stay') customary marriages, and observing lengthy and 'expensive' funeral rites (*maanga,* sgl. *anga*) popular among the Digo. Further, they cautioned against practises deemed immoral in their worldview; like drinking alcohol, lewd dancing and skimpy dressing by women, among others.[16] Similar to the stance taken by Boko Haram of Northern Nigeria, secular education as presently constituted with the free mixing of boys and girls was also considered un-Islamic. Consequently, the Ansari urged the Digo Muslims to re-organize their activities in line with the teachings of Islam, which conforms to the traditions of

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[13]Mwakimako, H.and Willis, J. *op.cit*. p.9.

[14]Randall L.Pouwels. 1984. "Oral Historiography and the Shirazi of the East African Coast." In *History in Africa*. Vol.2. p.258.

[15]Seesemann, R. 2006. "African Islam or Islam in Africa? Evidence from Kenya." In Loimeier, R. and Rudiger Seesemann (eds.) *The Global Worlds of the Swahili: Interfaces of Islam, Identity and Space in 19th and 20th century East Africa.* (Berlin: LIT Verlag), p.235.

[16]Interview with Sheikh Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 20.05.2015.

Prophet Muhammad. In response, in the popular imagination of the people, the Ansari earned the title '*ma-answar*' or '*atu a sunna*', which loosely implied 'the people of the prophetic traditions.' Among the local Muslims, the zeal of the Ansari for a 'proper' Islam did not pass unnoticed thereby raising the question that the study has endeavoured to address; were the Ansari resisting changes in norms and values enhanced by contact with other cultures?

The return to Digoland of students who had studied in Islamic universities abroad threw a spanner into the works. These students (foremost among whom was Sheikh Rimo) became champions of reformist ideas critiquing the existing praxis in Digoland.[17] The reformist activities of this new class of scholars echoes the conflict between an old and a new religious authority in the 19th century Mombasa as described in detail by Pouwels who in explaining the social circumstances precipitating the reform activities of Sheikh al Amin bin Ali al-Mazrui (1891-1947) posited:

> A new sort of religious authority, however, began to emerge in the nineteenth century. Two features of this new leadership distinguished it from the old one. The first involved its emphasis on the old, essentially written Islamic tradition. The second was its cosmopolitan character. With increased immigration from Arabia and growing opportunities for travel and study abroad stimulated by growing trade and wealth, contacts were re-established with the more ''bookish'' religious tradition of the Middle East. Consequently, new elite, more literate in the written sciences and more international in outlook than the old, local *walimu* and *waganga,* appeared.'[18]

The analysis by Pouwels is true of the contemporary Digo Muslim society of South Coast Kenya. Among the Digo Muslims, the return of younger scholars after their exposure to formal institutions of learning in Saudi Arabia created a crisis of authority within the community by presenting rival camps claiming to be interpreting the faith

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[17]Mwakimako, H. and Willis, J. *op.cit*. p.9.
[18]Pouwels, R. L., *op.cit*. p.333.

on behalf of the community. The essentially locally based scholarship of the traditional *ulamaa,* with limited grounding in Arabic, came into conflict with the scriptural Islam bearing Salafist and pan-Wahhabi strains.

The political events leading to the multi-party elections of 1992 witnessed an agitative stance adopted by new Muslim activists some of whom, like Khalid Balala, called directly for the toppling of the government of Daniel arap Moi (1978-2002).[19] Within this environment of the condemnation of political agitators as unpatriotic, the activities of the Ansari could not pass unnoticed. While the main orientation of the Ansari was religious, they subsequently ran into conflict with Moi's government leading to the proscription of the Ansari activities and the confinement of their leaders.[20] The forays of the Ansari into the political sphere would ostensibly confirm the developed premise on the inseparability of the political from the religious in Islam.[21] Arguably, the main factor for the apparent clamping down on Ansari activities was their emphasis on the Quranic stipulation that "there is no judgment except Allah's," (Quran 12:40), thereby effectively disregarding the secular government of the day and its man-made laws. As a result, the sermons of the Ansari leadership were directed against aspects of the government's policies that were seen to be biased towards Muslims. This included the government's refusal to register the Islamic Party of Kenya (I.P.K), leading to frequent arrests of Sheikh Rimo by the police during Moi's presidency. The arrests of Sheikh Rimo, and other vocal Imams, triggered widespread popular anti-government demonstrations to which the state replied with considerable anti-Muslim brutalities.[22]

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[19]Moller, Bjon. *op.cit*. p.19.
[20]Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulaiman, Ukunda, held on 16.04.2015.
[21]Esposito, John L, *op.cit*. p.159.
[22]Moller, Bjon, *op. cit*. p.19.

The sentiments against the government's mistreatment of Muslims have also recently been expressed with the alleged state killings of Muslim clerics deemed to be critical of the secular system and government policies. This state cruelty against Muslims was reported by the Human Rights Watch whose report for 2014 indicated a spate of targeted attacks upon Muslim clerics deemed critical of the government.[23] There has been an increase in attacks of certain section of Muslim clerics within the coastal towns of Kenya, a fact that can be learnt from media coverage of reports of disappearances, arbitrary detentions, extra-judicial killings, torture and a host of other abuses seen to be targeting these clerics. The murder of key Muslim preachers and activists critical of the state at the coast has served to cement feelings of marginalisation amongst their supporters, portraying Muslims as a distinct and targeted group.[24] Since no arrests or prosecutions are made in the aftermath of such killings, there is a sense of lack of trust in the government.[25] Much of the blame for the killings has been directed at the Anti- Terrorist Police Unit (A.T.P.U).[26]

Sheikh Rimo's work is instrumental in redefining the moral and spiritual position of the Digo Muslim society. His work was influenced by a highly subjective awareness of the concern to conform to an already precedented moral and spiritual direction of Islam as articulated in the Quran and emphasized in the works of other revivalist scholars and movements across the Islamic world and Kenya in particular. Within the Kenyan context, this entailed the works and public preaching of Muslim *ulamaa* such

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[23] Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2014", p.131.

[24] C.Dowd and C.Raleigh. 2013. ACLED Country Report: Kenya. ACLED, p7.http://www.acleddata.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/10/ACLED-Country-ReportKenya December-2013 updated.pdf

[25] Lind, J., Mutahi, P., and Oosterom, M. 2015. "Tangled Ties: Al-Shabaab and Political Volatility in Kenya." IDS Evidence Report, No.130, p.28.

[26] D.M Anderson and J. McKnight. 2014. "Kenya at War: Al Shabaab and its enemies in Eastern Africa." *African Affairs.*114 (454), p.18.

as Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui (d.1947),[27] Sheikh Muhammad Kassim (d.1982),[28] and Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy (d.1982).[29] The parallels between Sheikh Rimo's teachings and the work of reformers in the Muslim world underscore the expanse of Sheikh Rimo's exposure during his studies in Madinah to the works of Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (d.1328) and Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (d.1792) on a Salafi oriented view of Islam.

Clearly, the Ansari community shares the reformist ideology of other similar movements that carry the same name elsewhere in Africa.[30] The religious objective of Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari, which he founded, therefore, could be defined as an attempt to realize an 'authentic' Islamic society within the context of an increasingly urbanized and in consequence morally, spiritually and to an extent politically corrupt modern society. This explains why the revivalism of Sheikh Rimo was an initiative that invites towards a return to the moral and spiritual norms as well as the guidance of the early Muslim community, the *Salaf*, considered by the Ansari a benchmark for interpreting and integrating the needs and practices of present day Muslim society. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine an understanding of the role of Sheikh Abdul Aziz Rimo and the Ansari Muslim community of Diani in relation to the socio-moral, cultural and religious factors influencing its emergence and development.

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[27]Pouwels, R.L. op.cit. pp.329-345.
[28]Kai Kresse. 2003. "Swahili Enlightenment? East African Reformist Discourse at the Turning Point: The Experiences of Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Mazrui." *Journal of Religion in Africa*.Vol.33.No.3. pp.279-309.
[29] Mohamed Mraja. 2008. "Role and Contribution of Shaykh Abdallah Salih Al-Farsy (Tanzania) to Islamic Poetry." *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*. Issue No.10.pp.46-49.
[30]Roman Loimeier. 2006. "Perceptions of Marginalisation in Contemporary Tanzania." In Benjamin Soares and Rene Otayek (eds.) *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa.* (Palgrave, Macmillan), p.143.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The early Islamic community at Makkah was a small grouping of friends, associates and close family members of Prophet Muhammad who had heeded his call to join the religion of Islam and thereby follow a set of revealed socio-moral and religious principles that ensured their redemption from the evils of an Arab society steeped in ignorance.[31] The supposed ignorance was characterized by socio-moral and religious evils permeating the Arab society and seen as corrupting the true essence of humankind. Without doubt, this community of the faithful is regarded as reformist within its historical setting. Prophet Muhammad was the central leader in this transformation of the society and his example has become the model and a source of inspiration to many reformist groups and movements throughout the Muslim world.

As a result, the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet have become the rallying points in the agenda of several classical and contemporary Muslim reformers.[32] The hadith of the Prophet that "there will rise up a *Mujaddid* (reformer) after every century" has been used as an inspiration for the rise of countless reformists with varying degrees of success in Muslim societies.[33] In the context of West Africa, they included Sheikh Ahmad Tijany Si,[34] Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba,[35] and Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio of the Sokoto caliphate.[36] In East Africa prominent reformers have included Sheikh al-Amin and Sheikh al-Farsy whose core mandate together with that of other reformist

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[31] Shaltut, M. 2013. "The Quran and Combat." In Ghazi bin Muhammad, Ibrahim Kalin and Mohammed Kamali (eds.) *War and Peace in Islam: The Uses and Abuses of Jihad*. (Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society), p.24.

[32] Felicitas Becker. 2008. "Commoners in the process of Islamization: Reassessing their Role in the Light of Evidence from Southern Tanzania." *Journal of Global History.* Vol. 3, p.30.

[33] Abu Dawud.1973. *Sunan Abu Dawud*. (Damascus, Dar ul Hijra), Book no.37. Hadith No.1.

[34] Benjamin Soares. 2014. "The Historiography of Islam in West Africa: An Anthropological view." *Journal of African History*. Vol. 55. p.32.

[35] Randall Pouwels and Nehemiah Levtzion. 2000. "Introduction: Patterns of Islamization and Varieties of Religious Experience among Muslims in Africa." In Nehemiah levtzion and Randall Pouwels (eds.) (2000): *The History of Islam in Africa.* (Ohio, Ohio University Press), p.14.

[36] Muhammad Shareef. 1998. *The Revival of the Sunna and Destruction of Innovation by Shehu Uthman Dan Fuduye*. (Sankore: Institute of Islamic-African Studies), p.45.

individuals and groups in the Muslim world has been that of changing an existing condition in society to suit what is viewed as a better alternative in line with teachings of Islam in a given sphere of life.[37]

While by some accounts the Digo are seen as "the first of the hinterlands peoples to convert to Islam,"[38] presupposing a level of Islamisation attuned to the teachings of the Quran and Sunna, the present Digo Muslim society is beset by challenges affected by syncretism, secularism, nominalism and blind following of religious figures akin to *taqlid*. This has brought changes in habits, customs and lifestyles of the Digo Muslims viewed by reformists as contradicting the basic principles of the faith. Thus, even though 95% of the Digo found at the South Coast region are Muslim, "the overwhelming majority still subscribe to traditional customary practices, most of which are at variance with the basic teachings of Islam."[39] The County government of Kwale has identified the dominance of retrogressive cultural practises, traditions and superstitions as part of the development challenges facing the county.[40] To the reformists, this scenario presented a problem calling for a need to address it. For the Ansari, the answer was clear: to return society to the guidance of the Quran and the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad.

Although much has been written about Islam in Kenya, no study has focused on the renewal activities of Muslims outside the major coastal towns of Lamu and Mombasa. In that regard, the problem to be addressed in this study is an evaluation of the work of Sheikh Rimo and the activities of the Ansari of the South Coast of Kenya in order

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[37]Pouwels (1981:339) makes the point that Sheikh al Amin worked to change the lethargy of Mombasa people by exhorting them to attend school and to change with the times in order to make Islam capable of meeting the changes in coastal societies brought about by colonial administration.

[38]David P. Bresnahan. 2010. ''Sacred spaces, Political Authority, and the Dynamics of Tradition in Mijikenda History.'' M.A Thesis, Ohio University, p.34.

[39]Shirin R. Walji. 1995. "Ismailis in Kenya: Some Perspectives on Continuity and Change." In Bakari, M and Yahya, S. *op.cit*. p.3.

[40]County Government of Kwale, *op.cit*. p.44.

to examine their teachings and assess the influence of their ideals among the local Muslims. The findings of this study will serve as documented evidence of the lasting legacy of the Ansari as a revivalist group in Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study is an effort towards exploring Islamic revival and reform tendencies in Kenya through an investigation of the reforms championed by Sheikh Abdul Aziz Rimo and the development of the Ansari Muslims of the South Coast of Kenya. In addition to this major objective, there are other minor objectives that include:

1. To examine the rise of the Ansari movement and their subsequent doctrinal views that border on reform.

2. To assess the transnational links between the Ansari movement and other revivalist groups in Africa and the rest of the Muslim world.

3. To explore the methods adopted by the Ansari movement in disseminating their teachings.

4. To investigate the impact of the Ansari on the religious, socio-moral, cultural and political landscape among the Digo of Kwale County.

1.4 Research Questions

To realize the above objectives, the study raises the following questions:

1. What possible factors triggered the genesis of the Ansari movement?

2. To what extent has the Ansari movement been successful or failed in disseminating its world view among the local Muslims?

3. Is there any transnational link between the Ansari movement and other reform groups in the Muslim world?

4. What was the impact of the teachings and activities of Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari to the Digo society?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is anchored on the concepts of renewal (*tajdid*) and reform (*islah*). In particular it evaluates the reform initiatives of Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari movement of Kenya's South Coast. It focuses primarily on the social and religious aspects of the Ansari Muslims that had a bearing on a transformative agenda within Islam. Some of the reformist activities of the Ansari were directed at practises of the non-Muslim residents deemed offensive to the Muslim majority, while yet others were directed at certain practises of the Muslims that had come to be considered 'Islamic' whereas in the estimation of the Ansari group they were cultural practises only tolerated in Islam because the community lacked proper understanding of the actual provisions of the religion.[41] The main thesis argument of this study is that the Ansari were reacting against syncretism and religious innovations commonly branded as *bid'a* that threatened to lead Muslims away from the 'proper' teachings of Islam.

Consequently, the study explored the emergence of the Ansari movement as an Islamic revivalist group, thereby enhancing the understanding of contemporary Islamic reform and the role of religion in socio-cultural change. While academic work about Islamic reform in the coastal Swahili and 'Arab' communities of East Africa is available, there is a paucity of knowledge on Islamic revivalist activities outside of the major coastal towns of Mombasa and Lamu, which is an existing gap that this study seeks to address. The contribution of this study is to bring out to the academia the role of Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari of Diani and thus create new knowledge in the discipline.

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[41] Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 18.05.2015

1.6 Literature Review

The task of reviewing literature for the purposes of this study is approached through three sub sections, which attempt to highlight some of the instances of the historical expression of Islamic reform in Africa, and its particular manifestation in Kenya as a way to contextualize the reformist activities of Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari. To achieve this, literature on Islamic reform from the broader African context was reviewed, followed by the one that explores the quest for religious reforms and Muslims' contestations for political reforms in Kenya.

1.6.1 Literature on Islamic Reform in Africa

Beginning from North Africa, Islamic reform is closely tied to the work of Sufi orders that became the leading force in the dissemination of Islam in North Africa after the 12th century.[42] The development of these reform movements was part of an intense religious revival and reform of Islam in Africa. The Sufi orders of North Africa were engaged in a religious reform of society, rejecting the relegation of Islam to the periphery, but wanting Islam to guide the central concerns of society.[43] The reality and relevance of Islamic reform is attested by the fact that even to this day there are calls for instituting Islamic governance as evidenced by the interest to reinstate for example in Libya, the Sanussi Islamic dynasty.[44]

Ira Lapidus shows that in West Africa attempts to reform Islam began in the fifteenth century with outbursts from Mauritania to Chad.[45] These began as independent attempts to rid particular communities of un-Islamic practices, but soon spread to region wide reform initiatives sweeping the entire Western Africa in its wake. They

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[42]Pouwels, R. L. *op.cit*. pp.329-345.
[43]Dollar, Cathleen. 2014. "The Arts and Crafts of Literacy: Manuscript Cultures in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*. Issue No.12/2. p.102.
[44]Mshari, A. 1996.The Return of the Senussi Dynasty. (London: Routledge), p.56
[45]Ira M Lapidus. 2012. A History of Islamic Societies. (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press), p.84.

spread from the westernmost point at Futa Toro through the Sahel to Lake Chad. The strength of these reformist movements has been attributed to a 'rising awareness of Islam' among the masses, itself deriving from intensive *da'wah* by itinerant Muslim scholars.[46] From the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, these reformist movements were led by Muslim scholars, teachers, preachers and their students who capitalized on the prevalent wave of Islamic awareness to launch criticism of un-Islamic practises of the rulers.[47] One of the most successful of these reformist movements was that of the Sokoto caliphate led by Usman Dan Fodio that gave rise to other similar initiatives.[48] The leaders of these initiatives were influenced by the earlier (fifteenth century) reformist activities, but they also took inspiration from their travels to Makkah and Madinah for hajj where they came into contact with both Sufi and non-Sufi reformist ideas.[49] It is in this regard that Ira Lapidus speaks of Makkah and Madinah as "the capital cities of the reform teaching" in Islam.[50]

While Lapidus accepts that these reform initiatives were indeed Muslim's efforts in the struggle against social injustice, he also suggests the view that these were in actuality struggles for territorial expansion and conquest in the name of Islam where military adventurers manipulated Islamic sentiments and symbols for political legitimacy.[51]In his view, while some movements aimed at reform of already existing Muslim populations and conversion of pagan populations they all aimed ultimately at territorial expansion. Throughout West Africa, Islam had come to be the almost universal language of political ambition and moral reform.

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[46]Hamza Muhammad Maishanu and Isa Muhammad Maishanu. 1999. "The Jihad and the Formation of the Sokoto Caliphate." *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, p.123.

[47]*Ibid*, p.123.

[48]. Lapidus, Ira .M. *op.cit*, p.456.

[49]Yunus Dumbe. 2011. "The Salafi Praxis of Constructing Religious Identity in Africa: A Comparative Perspective of the Growth of the Movements in Accra and Cape Town." *Islamic Africa*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 89.

[50]Lapidus, Ira M. *op.cit*, p.456.

[51]*Ibid*, p.617.

While we agree with the author in tracing the roots of West African reform to the need to purge Islam of syncretism and to return society to the model of the prophetic era, we argue that territorial expansionism was a consequence of the jihad against moral evils and injustice, but not a primary cause of the reform initiative. The motive of the *Mujaddid* (reformer) in West Africa was to purify faith, sieve local practises, and to fight injustice; where this could be achieved without war, the reformists showed no desire for war.[52] This is illustrated in the work of Jibril bin Umar who was motivated by the desire to create a just Islamic society free of indigenous influences and in fulfilment of that desire he preached not only the struggle against indigenous local rulers, corrupt Muslim governments and the co-opted *ulamaa,* but he also encouraged the inner struggle towards personal sanctity. The Jihad of Jibril Ibn Umar in West Africa dispels the argument propounded by William Montgomery Watt that the impressive geographical spread of Islam indicates that territorial expansion was the main motive for the jihad.[53]

1.6.2 Literature on the Quest for Religious Reforms in Kenya

The phenomenon of Islamic reforms in Kenya has received considerable attention among scholars such as Kai Kresse,[54] Bjonn Moller,[55] Mohamed Mraja,[56] Hassan Ndzovu,[57] Arye Oded,[58] Randall Pouwels,[59] Rudiger Sesseeman,[60] among others.

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[52]Hamza Muhammad Maishanu and Issa Muhammad Maishanu, *op.cit.* p.122

[53]W. Montgomery Watt.1972. *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe*. (Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press), pp.5-6.

[54]See for instance, Kai Kresse. 2003. "Swahili Enlightenment? East African Reformist Discourse at the Turning Point: The Experiences of Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Mazrui." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 33.No. 3. pp.279-309.

[55]Moller,Bjon. *op.cit.* p.18.

[56]Mohamed Mraja. 2009. "Role and contribution of Shaykh Abdalla Saleh al Farsy (Tanzania) to Islamic Poetry."*Annual Review of Islam in Africa*. Issue No.10.pp.46-49.

[57]Hassan Ndzovu. 2008. "Muslims and Party Politics and Electoral Campaigns in Kenya." In Souleymane Bachir Diagne and M. Sani Umar (eds.). *Islam and the Public Sphere in Africa.* (Evanston, I.S.I.T.A); Hassan Ndzovu. 2009. "Muslims and Party Politics and Electoral campaigns in Kenya." Working Paper No.09-001, Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA)

[58]Arye Oded. 2000. *Islam and Politics in Kenya*. (London: Lynne Ryennar Publications).

[59]Pouwels, R. L. *op.cit*. pp. 329-345.

Some of the scholars considered certain activities of Muslims as an aspect of Islamic reform, while others viewed the activities more as an aspect of gradual politicization of Islam. In tracing the sources of the Islamic intellectual tradition in Kenya, Mohammed Bakari observes that the descendants of the *Ashraf* formed the initial class of *ulamaa* involved in spreading Islamic religious knowledge in Kenya, and East Africa in general. He argues: "to this a day, the most influential '*ulamaa* remain those descended from the established Shariffite families, not only in Kenya but also in other parts of East Africa."[61]

By virtue of their cultural connections to Arabia, this class represented orthodox Islam, thereby being the first to articulate the discourse of Islamic reform in Kenya. My study is, therefore, a departure from Bakari's analysis and explores reform ideas outside the scope of sharrifite families. It interrogates the earlier trend of thinking, which makes the claim that intellectual religious knowledge was preserved and passed along a close-knit circle of the East African scholarly families and who thereby became responsible for the subsequent reforming ideas. This is done by exploring the intellectual and reform credentials of three Kenyan Islamic scholars (Habib Saleh from Lamu, al-Amin bin Ali al-Mazrui from Mombasa and Abdallah Saleh al-Farsy originally from Zanzibar).

Randall Pouwels has examined the contribution of Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui in the revival of Islam in Mombasa. Pouwels contends that throughout history Islam has developed "in an adversary position with Byzantine Christianity" and that this "intellectual confrontation" shaped the evolution of Islam as a religion and influenced

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[60]Rudiger Seesemann.*op.cit*. pp. 229-250.
[61]Muhamed Bakari. 1995. "The New Ulama in Kenya." In Mohamed Bakari, and Yahya, S. *op.cit*. p.170.

its reality.[62] This supposition forms the background for Pouwels' assessment of the religious reforms initiated by Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui in Mombasa in the first half of the twentieth century. It is in this regard that al-Amin is seen by Pouwels to have selectively appropriated western ideas to position Muslims in Mombasa for the changes bearing upon Mombasa with the approaching end of colonial rule.[63] Such ideas include Sheikh al-Amin's use of the print media to create awareness and to combat retrogressive cultural practises as well as promoting the learning of modern subjects in addition to the traditional Islamic curriculum.[64] This study expands the scope of Pouwels' investigation by uncovering the reformist activities of scholars outside coastal urban centres as Mombasa and Lamu. It focuses on the indigenous contribution to the reform debate in Coastal Islam fifty years after the pioneering work of Sheikh al-Amin.

The second generation of scholars to undertake Islamic reform initiatives in East Africa include Sheikh Abdallah Saleh al-Farsy who Mraja acknowledges as the "main populariser and leading proponent of Islamic reformist ideas in East Africa in the 1960's and 1970's."[65] Mraja examines Sheikh Farsy's usage of poetry to expand public awareness of Islam. While demonstrating al-Farsy's command of the poetic form, Mraja's work also suggests some salient contradiction in al-Farsy's reformist agenda as evidenced, for instance, in his criticism of poetic recitals and celebrations around the *mawlid* of the Prophet as constituting *bid'a* while accepting similar poetic recitals to celebrate and honour Farsy's own presence at events. Even as Mraja commends al-Farsy for "broadening the potential of Kiswahili as a language of religious discourse in East Africa", he leaves open the question of al-Farsy's impact

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[62]Pouwels, R. L. *op.cit*. p.329.
[63]*Ibid*, p.332.
[64]*Ibid*, p.341.
[65]Mraja, M. *op.cit*. p.47.

upon local scholars. My study picks this up and interrogates the reformist currents and ideological links between al-Farsy and his students. By studying Sheikh Rimo, this work highlights the contributions of both al-Farsy and Rimo in reforming aspects of religious practise.

1.6.3 Literature on Muslims' Contestations for Political Reforms in Kenya

Hassan Ndzovu posits that Muslims' involvement in the quest for religious and political reforms in Kenya since the period of colonial governance has been influenced more by ethnic consideration than by any sense of belonging to a single collective *umma*. He asserts, "Muslims have faced political marginalization more on the basis of race and ethnicity than religion."[66] In seeking political reforms from the colonial government, particularly, with regard to better representation of Muslims in the executive and in the legislative council, race and ethnicity have been stronger factors than religious identity in shaping Islamic activism.[67] The demands, for instance, of the Coast Arab Association in 1922 for more seats in government did benefit neither the coast as a whole nor Muslims as a faith group. They were ethnic and racial in focus, since ''racial identity was stronger than the shared Islamic identity, even though this was inconsistent with the egalitarian principles of Islam."[68] My thesis therefore, focuses on the foundations of Ansari activism to establish whether it is the sense of a collective religious *umma* that influenced the rise of the group more than the shared ethnic identity of the Diani Muslim population. My argument is that, the sense of belonging to a particular religious community became a rallying point for Ansari activism.

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[66]Ndzovu, H. *op.cit*. p.106.
[67]*Ibid*, p.1.
[68]*Ibid*, p.4.

The post-colonial period in Kenya has witnessed instances of Muslim unification in the pursuit of specific causes such as the protest against the passing of the Law of Succession Act in 1981 as well as the Suppression of Terrorism Bill (2003) and the Kadhis court debate (2010).[69] In 'Political Islam in Kenya', Bjonn Moller argues that Islam is becoming a medium to express dissatisfaction with the political structure of Kenya. He points out that, it is dissatisfaction arising from perceived marginalization that gives rise to Islamist movements,[70] which represents a form of religious response to marginalisation. This suggests that, like the jihad of West Africa under Usman Dan Fodio, Islam in Kenya is attempting in mobilizing to fight systemic injustices. Arguably, though the rise of contemporary Salafi-jihadi groups could be seen as attempts to balance the perceived wrongs in society, religious intolerance could also have influenced the appearance of these groups.[71]

My study took cognizance of the above analysis in the attempt to determine the historical influences that triggered the rise of the Ansari. It is significant to address whether the history of political marginalization proposed by Moller and Ndzovu contributed to the sentiments influencing the activities of the Ansari in which case the movement could be interpreted as an aspect of Digo nationalism, or whether its self-referencing is purely an instance of religious reform.

The report 'Trends in Kenyan Islam' acknowledges that "Muslim society in Kenya is a complex, contradictory and distinctive hybrid space filled with a mix of possibilities and productive tensions."[72] Part of what comes out of this report is that Muslims have suffered historical grievances from the Kenyan state as demonstrated in poor

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[69]Hassan, Ahmed Issack. Pitfalls of the anti-terrorism bill. Daily Nation, Friday, July4, 2003.p.8.
[70]Moller, B. *op.cit*. p.27.
[71]Dumbe, Y. *op.cit*. p.88.
[72]Hassan Mwakimako, Hassan Ndzovu and Justin Willis. 2009. "Trends in Kenyan Islam." A research report, p.6.

education provision in Muslim areas, difficulties Muslim face in accessing government services, exclusion from government employment, abuses of fundamental inalienable rights in the guise of fighting international terrorism and, significantly, the perennial problem of land rights among others.[73] The religious reform of the Ansari of Diani cannot be approached in isolation from the socio-political environment in which it was expressed. It can be contended that the reform activities of the Ansari are an aspect of mobilization by groups to pursue collective economic, social and political goals. Alamin Mazrui argued that unfair competition for resources within a global economy has seen African societies collapse and as a consequence its populations have been thrown into economic difficulties.[74]

In such cases Islam becomes the refuge to which Muslim societies turn to ''draw sustenance against the agonies of deprivation.''[75] Arguably, the Ansari constitute an Islamic awakening geared at improving the life of Muslims where Islam becomes an organisational tool to bring individuals into a collective to pursue similar goals. Confronted with these challenges, Muslims in the country have mobilized to seek ways of addressing the problems facing the community. Part of the mobilization will inevitably be political as the report by Hassan Mwakimako, Hassan Ndzovu and Justin Willis demonstrated.[76] Yet, it is difficult to discount a religious response that on the surface appears directed at reforming Muslims practise in relation to their faith, but which marks undercurrents of discontent arising from perceived marginalization. Such religious response that includes attempts at revival and reform of the faith cannot be actualized in a vacuum. The context of their expression could be construed

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[73]*Ibid*, p.7.
[74] Alamin Mazrui.2003. "Globalization and the Muslim World: Sub-Saharan Africa in a Comparative Context." Die Rolle der Zivilgesellschaft und der Religion bei der Demokratisierung Afrikas. Loccumer Protokolle 55/00, Rehburg-Loccum. Loccum Akademie.p.2.
[75]*Ibid*, p.2.
[76]Hassan Mwakimako, Hassan Ndzovu and Justin Willis, *op. cit*. p.7.

in political circles as evidence of 'radicalization among Muslims' thereby completing a cycle of mistrust between government and Muslims.

From the foregoing review of literature, the study concluded that the major currents and events in the historical expression of Islam in Africa and Kenya in particular have been well documented. Scholars like Oded, Sessemann, Kresse and Mraja among others have covered the localization of reformist discourse in East Africa. To this end, Muslim personalities like Sheikh Habib Saleh, Sheikh al-Amin al-Mazrui and Sheikh Abdallah al-Farsy have had their contribution studied and documented. Therefore, in examining the activities of Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari movement, my study sought to shed light on the contribution of Digo *ulamaa* to the Islamic discourse in Kenya. The research addressed the present imbalance by uncovering the intellectual and reform credentials of the indigenous Muslim population of the South Coast Kenya thereby demonstrating the work of Sheikh Rimo as a continuation of the global work on Islamic reform. It is expected that the study will fill the gap in the narrative of contributions to Islamic reform in Kenya.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The Conflict theory is useful in this study of reform activities of the Ansari movement. The Ansari represent a departure from Sunni reliance on what can be described as a traditional interpretation of Islam as preserved and presented in the juristic explanations of the Maliki, Hanafi, Hanbali and Shafi'i legal methods. Instead the Ansari favour individual interpretation of Islam based on an intensive study of the Qur'an and Sunna. This departure from traditional interpretation of Islam creates possibilities for tension within the *umma*. To the Ansari, social, religious and political maladies affecting society should be addressed by adherence to the dictates of the

Qur'an and the Sunna. Fashioned within a "Salafi" framework of puritanism and "return", the reform activities of the Ansari are an attempt to address the socio-religious and political problems evident in society. In this way, the Ansari's reform activities represent conflict with the prevalent societal concerns, values and understanding. This initial ideological conflict resulting from varied emphases on what should be the foundation of legitimate interpretation lead to differences in aspects of religious practise that again presents itself as conflicting behaviours and actions. Sheikh Rimo's more formal educational experiences differ from those of the traditionally schooled *ulamaa*, causing disparate interpretations and subsequently, differences in approach and action as presented in this study.

Classical conflict theory is associated with the work of the German historian Karl Marx (1818-1883) who views society in terms of classes that are always in conflict over the control of scarce resources.[77] According to Conflict theory society is in a state of competition for scarce resources, which creates the dynamism for change that drives society forward. According to Karl Marx conflict created change within structures as well as in entire social systems and this change resulting from conflicting interpretations of Islam provides the framework for examining the reformist activities of the Ansari movement.[78] In the conflict perspective, change envisioned is always sudden and at times violent, or revolutionary.[79] Marx viewed history as a continual struggle between classes where the tensions producing this continual struggle are the precipitators of social change.

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[77]Graham K. Brown and Frances Stewart. 2015. "Economic and Political Causes of Conflict: An Overview and Some Policy Implications." CRISE Working Paper, No.81, pp.125-148.

[78]Lewis A. Coser. 1957. "Social Conflict and The Theory of Social Change." *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp.197-200.

[79]Otomar Bartos and Paul Wehr. 2002. *Using Conflict Theory*. (New York: Cambridge University Press), p.8.

Another key figure in classical conflict theory is the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). In particular, Weber expanded the causes of tension to include status, wealth and power.[80] The present study attempts to examine how aspects of group identity and the ascription of status provided insight into recruitment and membership to alternate societies like the Ansari. Weber's analysis guides this study's examination of how the Ansari define themselves as a group, how they consolidate their group identity and their ascription of status. While Sheikh Rimo may not have been after socio-political power, he did present himself as a scholar who used his religious knowledge as legitimation for exercising religious authority, and this translated to a source of power used to bring change in the religious life of the *umma*. Apart from classical scholars, contemporary scholars of Conflict theory like C. Wright Mills assert that conflict arising from disparate interests in society creates social structures that separate "elites" from "others''.[81] With the solidification of group boundaries and the demarcation of insiders and outsiders to the group, of those who belong from those who do not belong, the group reinforces its identity.[82] The study will be guided by Conflict theory's concept of group boundaries in approaching the work of the Ansari as a reform group.

Further, the study was grounded in the functional consequences of conflict as demonstrated by Lewis A. Coser who presents conflict as both normal and functional. What is the nature of the conflict posed by the Ansari? And what were the possible functional consequences? These are some of the questions the study explored using the theory. The main concepts that the study borrowed from Coser are: Deprivation,

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[80] Lewis A. Coser, "Social Conflict and The Theory of Social Change." *op.cit* p.203.
[81] Jack Tittenbrun.2013. ''Ralph Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory of Social Differentiation and Elite Theory.'' *Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Science*, Vol. 6, No.3, p.125.
[82] Alan, K. 2007. *The Social Lens: An Invitation to Social and Sociology Theory*. (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications), p.219.

Conflict and Group boundaries. According to Coser absolute deprivation refers to ''the condition of being destitute, living well below the poverty line where life is dictated by uncertainty over the essentials of life."[83] Relative deprivation, however, is the "sense of being under privileged relative to some other persons or group."[84] In examining the Ansari, I argue that they represent an aspect of relative, rather than absolute, deprivation. It is possible that the Ansari could have been reacting against a sense of deprivation occasioned by the failure of the socio political system to satisfy their rising expectations of a stable economic environment.

Theoretically, Sheikh Rimo's conflict with the state arises from contrasting worldviews, one religious, and the other secular. This conflict is aggravated by the Ansari's sense of deprivation characterized by their feeling of exclusion from national development. For Coser, as for others, conflict does not always tend to violence and disorder. Indeed, conflict within a society brings the good by pointing out and remedying weak points. And lastly, the concept of group boundaries is essential in interpreting the exclusionary ideologies of the Ansari as evidenced in their migration from *Dar-ul-Kufr* (land of unbelief) into *Dar-ul-Hijra* (land of migration, also read, *Dar-ul-Islam*, the land of Islam). As a group the Ansari, therefore, reject the wider society and create a tightly knit ideological group of fellow believers that is out of reach not only to non-Muslims, but also to other Muslims outside the Ansari community.

1.8 Research Methodology

The objectives of the study were pursued through a field study that was carried out in the following format.

[83]*Ibid*, p. 216.
[84]*Ibid*, p. 219.

(1)The Research area

The selected site where field study was conducted was Diani location including its environs of Magutu and Mwabungo. The identified area has a strong concentration of adherents of the Ansari movement and was, therefore, ideal for the study given that it is the original environment for the Ansari, and captures the socio-economic environment for its rise. Since Sheikh Rimo forms part of the focus of the study, a biographical survey of the scholar was conducted to investigate his early life, education, religious orientation, and to explain how these factors influenced him towards founding the Ansari revivalist group.

(2) Sampling Procedure

Significantly, there are no official statistics on the followership of the Ansari movement, and, as a result, purposive sampling techniques as well as snowballing was employed to identify key respondents from among the students of Sheikh Rimo. One *imam* with affiliation to the Ansari introduced me to key members of the group who would in turn initiate contact to other members thereby expanding access to the Ansari network. A sample size of sixteen was chosen that included two male and two female members of the Ansari movement, four local administrators, four contemporaries of Sheikh Rimo and four representatives of two Muslim organisations; the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims and the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya. These informants were approached after they had agreed to be interviewed. Structured interviews were conducted with these key informants, revolving around specific topics of discussion.

Therefore, there were four categories of respondents selected for the research exercise. (a) Those members of the Ansari who were involved in this study were those

regarded to be students of Sheikh Rimo hence familiar with his teachings. Data collected from them included the teachings of Sheikh Rimo and aspects of his reforming ideas. Consequently, four of the self-declared Ansaris were interviewed, and effort was made to balance the views of two males with those of two females introduced to me by *imam*s.

(b) Four local administrators were chosen to cover the entire Diani location. The administrators provided certain background information important for assessing the initiatives of the Ansari. Data provided by these respondents included an analysis of the impact of the Ansari, and a discussion of the social reception of their message. This group of respondents helped in describing the conflict posed by the Ansari group in their respective constituents.

 (c) Four contemporaries of Sheikh Rimo at the University of Medina were identified for the study and provided information that addressed the forces that shaped his worldview. They provided valuable information on Rimo's educational experiences, the sheikhs that taught him, and ultimately shaped his reforming ideas. This category of respondents complemented the explanations of Rimo's followers.

(d) Four officials from recognised Muslim organisations were also interviewed. These were county level chairs and secretaries of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (C.I.P.K) and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM). The rationale for including chairs of the Council of Imams and Preachers was that as leaders of Muslim organisations they contribute in shaping the agenda for Muslims and were important as interviewees. Data received helped clarify doctrinal and ideological similarities between the Muslim population of Diani and the position of the Ansari.

(4) Instruments of Data Collection and Analysis

Structured interviews were held with the aid of closed and open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted with various categories of respondents as previously discussed. Schedules were used to guide interviews with four members of the Ansari, four local administrators, four representatives of Muslim bodies and four contemporaries of Sheikh Rimo. Interview schedules helped adduce information from interviews, which were conducted orally and such information was manually recorded in note form (see Appendix II). Further, observation technique was also employed where aspects of Ansari 'culture' were observed, including mode of dressing and architectural design of their mosques, which were captured by camera.

Apart from primary data, secondary data was collected from books, seminar papers, periodicals and articles in journals that have addressed the subject. More so, Kwale magistrate's court reports were reviewed with regards to charges that led to the imprisonment of Sheikh Rimo. Finally, in an attempt to answer the raised research questions, data collected was carefully analysed and a critical interpretation was derived from it.

1.9 Scope and Limitations of Study

Any discussion on Islamic reform in Kenya is bound to be long owing to the diverse threads that manifest Islam in the country such as the place of traditional Sunni practise embodied in the *madhhab* system, sufi practise, and the emerging role of Salafi Islam. This study has limited itself to the interplay of an old popular and literal Islam versus a new scriptural Islam. The study extends geographically from Lamu to Zanzibar through Mombasa. In Zanzibar the initiatives of Sayyid Ahmed ibn Sumayt and Sheikh Abdalla Bakathir as outstanding reformers later influenced Sheikh al-

Farsy, who settled in Kenya in the later years of his life. In Lamu, the role of Habib Saleh (1853-1936) in expanding access to Islamic education and his reform ideas that were a departure from the traditional patterns of Islamic knowledge provide a contrast to Mombasa's reform initiatives under Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui. Some of the students who perpetuated the reformist agenda of Sheikh al-Farsy in the South of Mombasa were Sheikh Rimo and Sheikh Nassor Khamis. While Sheikh Nassor Khamis operated from Mombasa, Sheikh Rimo's area of operation was the South Coast, the geographical focus of this study. The study also focuses on the Ansari community of Diani since they are the first to initiate reform of Islam at least on a collective scale. Diani is the initial instance of Muslim mobilization around the rejection of perceived innovations and the social environment for the expression of the scriptural Islam of the new class of *ulamaa*. The rest of Kwale County arguably learnt from the Ansari of Diani and responded to their initiatives by copying them or providing alternative interpretation.

In conclusion of this chapter, the next chapter will present a historical review of Islamic reforming ideas from a global context to show how the ideas took root in the local context of Diani.

CHAPTER TWO

**DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC REFORMING IDEAS: FROM THE GLOBAL
TO THE LOCAL CONTEXT IN KENYA**

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an historical overview of Islamic reform movements and the
concerns they addressed. It begins by outlining the role of Imam ibn Taymiyyah
(1268-1328) in setting the intellectual foundation for reform in the 'classical' age, a
period that he interpreted to have deviated from the path of Muhammad by
accommodating religious innovations. The chapter traces reform initiatives in Islam
from its global context beginning in the Middle East to its manifestation in Africa.
Prominent global voices and their particular methods in Islamic reform were
examined in an attempt to assess the ideological links or continuities between the
Ansari of Diani and other transnational voices for reform. Of particular importance is
Zanzibar, the capital of the East African Omani sultanate and from where the city
states of Lamu and Mombasa derived their reforming agenda. One of the major
concerns of Islamic reform is to make Islam compatible with the demands of the
modern age, a theme that has been espoused in this chapter through the views of
notable modernists, Jamal al-Afghani (1838-1897) and al-Amin Mazrui (1891-1947).
To demonstrate the localisation of Islamic reform discourse in Kenya, the study has
considered events and personalities that represented reform currents in Lamu and
Mombasa including Habib Saleh Jamal Layl (1853-1936) and the influential Riyadha
mosque college in Lamu, as well as the Zanzibari Sheikh al-Farsy (1912-1982) who
served as Chief Kadhi of Kenya while based in Mombasa.

2.2 The Foundations of Islamic Reform in the Thought of ibn Taymiyyah

Islamic reform movements are internal critiques of Islam aiming to reinvigorate Muslim societies in relation to their practice of faith and their position relative to non-Muslim societies. Scholars have conceptualized these movements under collective terms such as 'the Islamic resurgence', 'Islamic revivalism', 'Islamic fundamentalism', or 'political Islam.'[85] Political Islam, also at times termed 'Islamism', conceives of Islamic reform movements as those that use Islam as a discourse to address perceived injustices against an international Islamic *umma*.[86] This does not preclude their effort to fight local injustices and in fact gives a global dimension to their reform initiatives at the domestic or national level. To a certain extent Islamic reform, then, is activist. For countries with significant Muslim populations such as Nigeria and Tanzania, Islam has been employed as a 'platform of political mobilization' in debates about the division of national resources, access to public services and participation in national political leadership.[87]

Islamic reform movements regard reform of belief and practice as necessary to rid the faith of practices that have over time seeped into Muslim societies and are tolerated, but which are indeed considered not to be in line with the dictates of the Qur'an and the Sunna.[88] In this way Islamic reform is an attempt to remove syncretism, superstitions and innovations that threaten the basic precepts of Islam. This would include innovations like ancestor veneration (ancestor worship) and praying at tombs and gravesides, which are considered traces of customs practised before the advent of Islam, yet they have been incorporated into contemporary Islam out of perceived

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[85] John Esposito. 2005. *Islam*: *The Straight Path.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.58.

[86] Marleen Renders. 2006. "Global Concerns, Local Realities: Islam and Islamism in a Somali State under Construction." In Benjamin Soares and Rene Otayek (eds.). *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*. (Palgrave, Macmillan), p.47.

[87] Roman Loimeier. "Perceptions of Marginalization: Muslims in Contemporary Tanzania." In Benjamin Soares and Rene Otayek (eds*.) Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa. o*p.cit. p.137.

[88] Esposito, J. *op.cit.* p.117.

laxity of the Muslims and their ignorance of the faith. On the other hand, the intention of the Islamic reforming movements is to bring Muslim societies at par with modern non-Muslim societies.[89] In this way Islamic reform is a mechanism to cope with the demands of modern society thereby covering seemingly lost ground. It admits that Islamic societies are lagging behind non-Muslim societies in material and scientific progress. As a result reforms are vital to propel Muslims towards progress and to retain the values of Islam as well.[90]

This creates the need to rejuvenate Muslim societies and drive them to a model of success established in the days of the four caliphs of Islam and the 'pious ancestors' (*al-Salaf al-Salih*).[91] The age of the Prophet, the companions and the pious ancestors is deemed by some Muslims as a successful era whose feats are to be emulated. Its success encompassed Islam's political state, its military campaigns, an ethics of Islam, trade all which came into decline, according to the Imam ibn Taymiyyah (1268-1328), when Muslim scholars and leaders stopped looking into the sources of Islamic law, and relied on the views of authoritative figures of earlier generations.[92] Various Muslims have sought versions of this 'golden age' and at the international level this kind of orientation was at the core of the work of Al-Afghani while at the local level it was a feature of the reform activities of Sheikh Al-Amin.[93]

As an inward looking process to realign the practice of Islam with the dictates of the revelation, Islamic reform movements began in contemporary history in the 13th

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[89]Ozen Tur Kavli. 2001. "Protest in the name of God: Islamist Movements in the Arab World." *Journal of International Affairs*. Vol. VI, No. 2, p.37.
[90]Nasr Abu Zayd. 2006. *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), p.22.
[91]Ahmed Moussali. 2009. "Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who Is The Enemy?" A Conflict Forum Monograph, p.5.
[92]R. Kevin Jacques.2002. "Fazlur Rahman: Prophecy, the Quran and Islamic Reform." *Studies in Contemporary Islam*. Vol.4. No.2, p.64.
[93]Seesemann, R. *op.cit*. p.235.

century with the revolutionary teachings of the Imam ibn Taymiyyah (1268-1328). The writings of ibn Taymiyyah (for instance in his *Iqtidat al Sirat al Mustaqim*) identified the differences between Muslim and non-Muslim beliefs, which was an attempt to map out the acceptable from the prohibited in *iman* (faith) and *ibadat* (worship). The need was to remove centuries' old innovations that had since the passing of the Prophet grown into acceptance as valid practice. Consequently, Imam ibn Taymiyyah provided the intellectual background for Islamic reform in Muslim societies where his influence is evident in the reformist ideas of among others, Muhammad Abdul al-Wahhab (1703-1792).[94] Muslim reformists of diverse orientations justify their reform activities based on the teachings of Imam ibn Taymiyyah.[95] Drawing from the work of ibn Taymiyyah, and influenced by his ideas as articulated in his writings and in those of his students like imam ibn Qayyim al Jawziyyah (1292-1350), the classical tradition of reform within Islam was established.[96] However, it was much later, after the 1902 re-establishment of the Saudi state that the reformist ideas of Sheikh al-Wahhab took hold over contemporary Islam.[97]

2.3 Pre-Modern Era Islamic Reform: The Theoretical Justification for Reform in al-Wahhab's Approach to Islamic Monotheism

Muhammad Abdul al-Wahhab received a modest Islamic education going through the basic curriculum of Islamic jurisprudence along the Hanbali jurisprudential school. He gradually became opposed to some religious practises of his home area, which he considered not Islamic, such as veneration of saints and visiting of tombs. And,

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[94]Mousalli, A. *op.cit*. p.7.
[95]*Ibid*, p.13.
[96]Denise Bregand. 2006. "Muslim Reformists and the State in Benin." In Benjamin Soares and Rene Otayek (eds.). *op.cit*. p.123.
[97]Mousalli, A. *op.cit*. p.7.

considering these acts to be outside Islam and not sanctioned by the Sunna, he sought to return society to the fundamentals of Islam, the Qur'an and Sunna.[98] Ibn al-Wahhab realized the need to align his spiritual work with the temporal authorities of the day and in this regard supported the political designs of Uthman ibn Muammar in return for Muammar's backing his religious reforms. When Ibn al-Wahhab moved to Diriyah, one of the principalities of Arabia in the pre-Saud era, he made a political alliance with the ruler of Diriyah, Muhammad bin As-Saud (d.1765) to gain support for his effort to bring the Muslims back to the 'true' Islam. This 300-year pact between the al-Wahhab and the Saud families is the basis of the existence of the Saudi political dynasty.[99]

Ibn al-Wahhab's approach to Islamic theology derives from the works of ibn Taymiyyah and ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1290-1350).. In turn, ibn al-Wahhab influenced later scholars like Abd al Aziz ibn AbdAllah ibn Baaz (1910-1999), Muhammad ibn al-Uthaymeen (1925-2001) and Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani (1914-1999). In a manner similar to ibn Taymiyyah, ibn al-Wahhab castigated the intellectual passivity of Arab Muslims that, in his opinion, led to the dangers of *bid'a.* He wrote in his *Kitab al Tawheed* (The Book of the Oneness of God) of the need to turn society to proper worship of the 'true' faith, detailing various innovations in worship.[100] In this respect, ibn al-Wahhab considered himself a purifier of Islam, making effort to teach *tawheed* (God's unity) free from 'pagan' influences. His categorisation of *tawheed* into three sub classes was new phenomenon to Muslims who had hitherto viewed *tawheed* as one concept around the belief in a single

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[98]Christopher M. Blanchard. 2008. "The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya." CRS Report for Congress. CR21695, p.2.

[99] David Commins.2015. "Review of *Ibn Abd al Wahhab*." SCTIW Review, Aug 20, 2015. http://sctiw.org/sctiwreviewarchives/archives/ p.5.

[100]Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahhab.1988.*Kitabu cha Tawhidi*. (Trans. Sulayman Abdullah S. Shaqssy). (Nairobi, The Islamic Foundation), p.6.

indivisible deity. He taught that *tawheed* involved an acceptance of Allah's Lordship, the worship of Allah alone (which the Wahhabis interpret to mean an acceptance of Allah's legislative authority and rejection of all temporal authorities as sources of law besides the laws of Allah, hence the push for the implementation of sharia law in society) and the maintenance of Allah's divine names and attributes free from humanizing the divine or deifying the human.[101]

A few points of difference with Sunni orthodoxy present themselves from an analysis of Ibn al-Wahhab's theological posture. (i) He rejected the popularly held practises of saint veneration and the visiting of tombs. According to ibn al-Wahhab, Muslims should not be like Christians who turn graves into places of worship. (ii) He held that there could be no intercessor between man and God thereby questioning orthodoxy's veneration of saints as possible intercessors for Muslims. Although he accepted saints were rightly guided and acknowledged they performed miracles, he cautioned Muslims against seeking intercession from saints.[102] (iii) He called for Muslims to distance themselves from medieval scholarly opinions even though he held to the opinions of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Jawziyyah.[103] (iv) He called for a new interpretation of Islam by promoting individual interpretation of the sources of Islam and limiting the practise of emulation in religious matters (*taqlid*). Sunni scholars such as Ibn al-Jawziyyah and Jalaludin as-Suyuti (1445-1505) saw *taqlid* as antithetical to human reason and considered it forbidden in Islam. Instead, they regarded personal effort to arrive at interpretation of the sources (*ijtihad*) as a better method.[104] (v) He categorized *tawheed* into three sub classes; unity of Lordship, unity

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[101]Interview with Ustaadha Maimuna, Ukunda, held on 20.05.2015.
[102]Commins, D. *op.cit*. p.3.
[103]*Ibid*, p.6.
[104] Asad Abu Khalil. 1994. "The incoherence of Islamic Fundamentalism: Arab Islamic Thought at the End of the 20th Century." *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 48, No.4, p.690.

of Worship and unity of Allah's names and attributes. According to Ibn al-Wahhab, it is not sufficient that someone accepts the declaration of faith, but one need also to accept and abide by the three aspects of *tawheed*. (vi) He taught that an affirmation of belief in the heart is insufficient and called for demonstrating disbelief in words and deeds including the necessity to take action against disbelief.[105] (vii) And lastly, he labelled as disbelievers (invoking the concept of *takfir*) those who did not accept and act by his understanding of *tawheed*,[106] although many scholars rejected the practise of *takfir*, with Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058-1111) considering it erroneous and ibn Taymiyyah labelling it an innovation.[107]

Contemporary scholars like Rachid Ghanush (b.1941) opine that strict conditions apply in the process of declaring others unbelievers, including prohibiting clerics and scholars from such declarations and limiting them to governmental agencies (like judges) charged with such mandate.[108] While ibn al-Wahhab provided theoretical justification for reform, it was his union with ibn as-Saud that gave momentum to the reform agenda.[109] Ibn as-Saud came to establish and consolidate political hegemony over the tribes of the Najd and Hejaz. In the process he created a nation and a ruling dynasty that survives to date. This marriage of ideas between ibn al-Wahhab and ibn as-Saud gave the former's ideas the political support necessary to sustain the momentum for reform in a nation state setting.[110] 'Wahhabism' became the dominant ideology of the Saudi kingdom. As a result of wealth from reserves of oil, the Saudi kingdom has had influence in spreading the ideology of ibn Wahhab across nations of

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[105]Commins, D. *op.cit*. p.2.

[106]Elizabeth Sirriyeh. 1989. "Wahhabis, Unbelievers and the Problem of Excluvism." *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.16, No.2, p.125.

[107] Abu Khalil, A. pp. 678-679.

[108] Pietro Longo 2016. "Salafism and Takfirism in Tunisia." Middle East Studies Centre, the American University in Cairo, p.7.

[109]Blanchard, C. M. *op.cit*. p.2.

[110]Mousalli, A. *op.cit*. p.7.

Sunni Islam globally.[111] This influence has been achieved through construction of mosques, funding madrasas and paying teachers, distributing books and more importantly by offering scholarships for students to study in Saudi universities.

Wahhabi reform initiatives, therefore, are an extension of the ideology of imam ibn Taymiyyah. What gave the Wahhabi initiative momentum was having at its disposal the state machinery created by the family of as-Saud. Its reform agenda had been to fight innovations and superstitions among Muslim societies by emphasising a return to the model of the prophetic era founded on the key sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Sunna. At the same time, ibn al-Wahhab's reformism was criticized for not faithfully complying with the Qur'an and Sunna, but for adhering to the teachings of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal as explained in the writings of the Hanbali Imams, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyyah.[112] Al-Wahhab was further accused of diminishing the stature of Islam by denigrating its history, traditions and monuments. His practice of labelling other Muslims as infidels has as well been criticized. More so, his interpretation of the Qur'an has been questioned and termed 'deficient in learning' because he did not go through the acknowledged centers of learning of the time such as Damascus and Cairo and that his opinions are representative of a minority activist tendency within the Hanbal tradition.[113]

2.4 Modern era Islamic Reforms: The Modernizing Rhetoric of Jamal Din al-Afghani and Sheikh Muhammad Abduh

Modern reform movements in Islam trace their origin to Jamal Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) who saw that the backwardness of Muslims was a result of their reluctance to

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[111] Sheldon Geller. 2006. "Religion and Democratisation in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa: Parallels in the Evolution of Democratic Governance Structures." A paper presented to the Working Conference on Designing Constitutional Arrangements for Democratic Governance in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities. Bloomington, Indiana. p.9.

[112] Nasr abu Zayd. *op.cit*. p.18.

[113] Commins, D. *op.cit*. p.3.

modernity. In al-Afghani's viewpoint, Muslims had been attached to tradition and the result was their stagnation. As such, to break this intellectual stagnation, he sought to rejuvenate Islam by encouraging Muslims to pursue modern education. Particularly important for al-Afghani was a break with tradition not understood as a rejection of Islam in favour of western modernity, but an acceptance of the useful aspects of western modernity without diminishing the spiritual value of Islam.[114] The ready acceptance of medieval scholars' interpretation of Islam contributed to stagnation by stifling the use of reason. For him, what was needed was the courage to make new interpretations of religious sources in light of new experiences facing Muslim societies. The schemata of the past would be of little use in confronting the complexities of present day society. Muslims would need new approaches to address new challenges. In this regard, reason, knowledge, intellect and science were indispensable for Muslim societies. By way of these tools Muslims would be equipped to participate effectively in the arena of modern society.[115]

The French Philosopher, Ernest Renan (1823-1892) had argued that Islam is incompatible with science since revealed religions are by default hostile to reason and free thinking. It was in this environment of the blanket condemnation of Islam as anti-modern that al-Afghani made his response, attributing the apparent backwardness of Muslims to their misunderstanding of Islam.[116] In a way al-Afghani was echoing the sentiments of ibn Taymiyyah who had demonstrated that reason and revelation were compatible since reason has no independent status.[117] While al-Afghani did not advocate for a complete break with Islam's past, he did propose that Muslims take an

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[114] Bernard Lewis. 1988. *What went wrong? The clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East.*(New York: Oxford University Press), p.159.
[115]Moussali, A. *op.cit*. p.12.
[116]Nasr Abu Zayd, *op.cit*. p.19.
[117]Elliott A. Bazzano. 2015. "Ibn Taymiyya, Radical Polymath, Part 2: Intellectual Contributions." *Religion Compass*. 9/4, p.122.

interest in western science. For him, Islam could not exist in isolation. He proposed to Muslims that they "appropriate" positive aspects of modern western civilization and combine them with the positive aspects of Islam.[118] Clearly, al-Afghani was not averse to the benefits of modern western education and values, seeing them as part of the heritage of Islam as evidenced in his reflections on Muslims and science.[119] In al-Afghani's view Islam is capable of the highest attainments in the sciences, thereby implicitly laying the burden on Muslims themselves to rise up to the occasion by learning the sciences and mastering progress.

Because of his pragmatic ideas, al-Afghani rallied Muslims to pull Islam out of its apparent stagnation by acquiring the methods of western science.[120] The idea of appropriation conveys the sense that science was not foreign to Islam. In the words of Sedar Unsar:

> The major mission Afghani took on himself was to arouse the pride of the Islamic communities (i.e. India and Egypt). He wisely chose to emphasize their pre-Islamic history in order to creep into the elements that awaken a sense of 'pride' in society as well as to instil the idea that Western development is as a result of what pure Islam had at the time of the Prophet and that Islam should take back what it already owns from the West.[121]

Al-Afghani's influence seeped to his student Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) whose direction for reform of Islam was to look within faith to seek that which would provide a bulwark against western imperialism.[122] Abduh felt that the preservation of Islamic identity needed one to adopt a careful approach when dealing with the west. The objective for Muhammad Abduh was to find within Islam that which would push

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[118] Nikkie R.Keddie. 2004. "Imperialism, Science and Religion: Two Essays by Jamal Al Afghani." Middle East Sourcebook Project, p.10.

[119] Ibid, p.10.

[120] Margaret Kohn. "Afghani on Empire, Islam, and Civilisation." *Political Theory*, Vol. 37, No.3, p.400.

[121] Sedar Unsar. 2011. "On Jamal ad Din Al-Afghani and The 19th Century Islamic Political Thought." Gazi Universitesi Iktisadi ve Idari Bilimiler Fakultesi Dergisi, 13/3, p.84.

[122] Ahmad N. Amir, Abdi O. Shuriye and Ahmed F. Ismail. 2012. "Muhammad Abduh's Contributions to Modernity." *Asian Journal of Management Sciences and Education*. Vol.1. No.1, p.167.

Islamic society forward. He felt that at the core of Islam were values and principles sufficient for meeting the needs of Muslims. The task for Abduh, therefore, was to locate these values that would then assure Muslims of success in their predicament.

The method of choice for Muhammad Abduh in this task was a return to the security of the textual sources of Islam thereby emphasizing the duty upon every Muslim to approach the Qur'an and the Sunna with a view to learn the ''pure'' teachings of Islam.[123] This meant that Muslims needed to practice individual and independent interpretation of the sources of Islam (*ijtihad*) in a manner that would suffice the needs of contemporary Muslim society. In a manner similar to ibn Taymiyyah, Abduh argued that Muslim's predicament was a result of relying on juristic interpretations of the past that he felt were insufficient to meet the needs of contemporary society.[124] By promoting independent interpretation, Abduh was lessening the role of traditional religious authority figures in interpreting scripture for Muslims, such as jurists tasked with interpreting Islamic sharia, instead calling upon Muslims to exercise 'independent reasoning' guided by the Qur'an and the sunna.[125]

In contrast to al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh did not call for the assimilation of the values and methods of the west; he argued instead that Islam was sufficient. Rather than relying on others for interpretation, Muslims had to search the sources by themselves, and answers to their predicament would be presented in the textual sources, Abduh asserted.[126] All the good that al-Afghani appeared to find in western civilization was for Abduh nestled within the folds of the faith since Islam as a model

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[123]Zubair Hamid. 2014. "Muslim Response to the West." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, Vol.4, No.2, p.2.

[124]Jacques, R. K. *op.cit*. p.66.

[125]Ahmad N. Amir, Abdi O. Shuriye and Ahmed F. Ismail. *op.cit*. p.171.

[126]Christopher Henzel. 2005. "The Origins of al Qaeda's Ideology: Implications for US Strategy." Parameters, p.73.

was complete and sufficient. Apart from Abduh, the thought of al-Afghani was to influence others like Rashid Rida (1865-1935), and much later, it is possible to see the reformist work of Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) as following the line set by al Afghani, albeit with shifts in emphasis and approach.[127]

2.5 The 'Global' influencing the Local: The Role of Zanzibar's Omani Arabs and Sufi Orders in Initiating Reform Ideas in Kenya

Nominally administered by the Sultan of Zanzibar for the Queen of England, the Arab aristocracies of the coastal city states shared strong pan Arab cultural ties with frequent contact in educational and religious spaces. Towns like Pate, Lamu, Mambrui, Malindi, Gazi, Wasini, Zanzibar, Pemba, Kilwa and Mafia traded by boat and transferred students, imams and teachers. Because of the close-knit ties, reforming ideas and currents were passed around a class of local elites, and in this study, I focussed on three local scholars, Habib Saleh Jamal Layl, al-Amin bin Ali al-Mazrui and Sheikh Abdillah Saleh al-Farsy, whose reformist discourse serves as a background to interpreting the reformist activities of the Ansari of Sheikh Abdul AzizRimo. The intellectual chains connecting the three scholars point to the fact that Islamic reform in Kenya is firmly embedded in the history of the East African coast because Muslim scholars used to travel to acquire and disseminate knowledge beyond their local communities.[128]

The renewal efforts of reformers in East Africa are not isolated instances, but are connected to the religious renewal of Arabia and the wider Muslim world through the

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[127]Esposito, J. *op.cit.* p.1.
[128]Anne K. Bang. 2000. "Islamic Reform in East Africa ca. 1870-1925: The Alawi case." Paper presented to the Workshop Reasserting Connections, Commonalities, and Cosmopolitanism: The Western Indian Ocean since 1800. Yale University, p.17.

shared cultural identities of the Arab residents of the East African coast.[129] It is through the travels of individual scholars, like Sayyid Ahmed bin Sumayt (1861-1925), Sheikh Abdalla Bakathir (1860-1925) and Sayyid Mansab (Abu Bakar bin Abdur-Rahman al-Huseiny), (1843-1922), to the centres of Islamic learning like Hadhramout, Makkah, Madinah, Egypt and Turkey that these elites came into contact with global reformist concerns. Through them, these ideas disseminated to their students along the East African Coast thereby providing an avenue for the localization of the global reformist discourse.[130] Aside from travel of East African scholars to the 'heartland' of Islam, and settling in the region *ulamaa* schooled in Muslim countries where Islamic reforms had taken root, and coupled with the availability of literature on reform magazines, such as the Egyptian *al urwa al uthqa* (The Strong bond), ensured that East Africa also participated in the intellectual discussions taking place in the Muslim world.

While scholars of East Africa have been in contact among themselves and with their counterpart in the Middle East, it is the cultural and religious ties between Arab Zanzibaris and Omani Arabs that became a bridge for the conduit of Islamic reform ideas in the region.[131] Part of these ideas centred on Pan Arabism, but also on Pan-Islamism, which contributed to the development of reformist individuals and movements in East Africa.[132]

The role of Zanzibar in the diffusion of Islam was strengthened by the decision of

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[129]Aman N. Ghazal. 2005. "The other Andalus: The Omani Elite in Zanzibar and the Making of an Identity, 1850s-1930s." *Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol.5, p.45.

[130]Abdallah Saleh al-Farsy.1972. "Baadhi ya Wanavyuoni wa Kishafii wa Mashariki ya Afrika." (Zanzibar, Book Room), pp.21-51.

[131]Anne K. Bang. 2005. "Localising Islamic knowledge: Acquisition and Copying of the Riyadha Mosque Manuscript Collection in Lamu, Kenya." In Maja Kominko (ed.) *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endengered Archives Programme.*(Cambridge: Open Book Publishers), p.23

[132]Ghazal, A. N. "The other Andalus: The Omani Elite in Zanzibar and the Making of an Identity." *op.cit* p. 45.

Said bin Sultan al- Busaidi (1791-1856) to move the capital of Oman from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1840.[133] Intellectuals from the entire East African coast congregated at Zanzibar to partake of its Islamic scholarship, [134]leading to the city acquiring status as an intellectual capital and a nucleus for the discussion of reformist ideas in the East African coast. Aside from its role as intellectual capital of East Africa, Zanzibar was also a cultural and religious centre and, after the demise of Kilwa, East Africa's most significant trading town of that age.[135]

One other significant event seems to have been the introduction to Zanzibar of a printing press that assisted in the dissemination of print materials throughout the East African coastal towns.[136] Since East Africa was essentially an oral culture, the use of print technology heralded "an important turning point" in the dissemination of materials and ideas within the East African coast.[137] The printing press made available the writings of influential thinkers of the Islamic world of the time such as al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida. In this way magazines such as Abduh's *al Urwa al-Uthqa* (The Strong Bond) and Rida's *al-Manar* (The Beacon), together with other publications like *al-Hilal* (The Crescent) and *al-Falaq* (The Dawn) enjoyed wide circulation across East Africa.[138] The writings of these reformers became available to Zanzibar's Islamic scholars as demonstrated by one writer who commented that ''the ideas of Rashid Rida and his predecessors of the reformist movement were well known to the literate *ulamaa* of Zanzibar."[139]

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[133]Moller, B. "Political Islam in Kenya." *op.cit*. p.3.

[134]Anne K.Bang, A. K. 'Islamic Reform in East Africa, ca 1870-1925: The Alawi case." *op.cit*. p.21

[135]David H. Anthony. 2002. "Islam in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania." In Mumtaz Ahmad and Mustansir Mir (ed.) *Studies in Contemporary Islam*. Vol. 4, No. 2, p.26.

[136]Bang, A. K. "Localising Islamic knowledge". *op.cit*. p.21.

[137]Maud Saint-Lary. 2012. "From Wahhabism to Generic Reformism: Islamic Revival and the Blurring of Muslim Identities in Ougadougou." *Cahiers d'etudes africaines*, Vol. 2,No. 206-207, p.449

[138]Ghazal, Aman N. 2005. "The other Andalus: The Omani Elite in Zanzibar and the Making of an Identity, 1850s-1930s." *Journal of Middle East Studies*.Vol. 5, p.51.

[139] Bang, A. K. "Islamic Reform in East Africa." *op.cit*. p.21.

Pouwels arguing that Egyptian salafists like Muhammad Lutfi were resident in Zanzibar where they discussed reformist ideas with local *ulamaa* express similar views.[140] Arguably, this development demonstrates that global Muslim concerns on the need to reform Islam were interpreted and commented within the East African coast. In the period before East African countries gained independence, there were close relations and constant interaction between dwellers of the East African coast,[141] and debate on reform was common amongst the Muslims regardless of their town of residence.

2.5.1 Habib Saleh Jamal Layl and the Riyadha Mosque College: Educational Reforms in Lamu and Sufi Parallels in Zanzibar

In the ancient town of Lamu, Islamic reform is tied to the work of several scholars; foremost among them is the Alawi Sharif Habib Saleh. According to Kai Kresse, this Alawi Sharif:

> ...was perhaps the most significant reformer...whose efforts at opening up Islam and Islamic education...transformed local Islam from an exclusive religion for the privileged...to an inclusive one, which integrated people from all ethnic and social backgrounds.[142]

Habib Saleh is credited with founding the Riyadha mosque and college in Lamu, which became a beacon for reform by accepting students of non-Arab descent thereby expanding access to Islamic knowledge outside of race and clan interests.[143] The broad scope for Islamization initiated by Habib Saleh represent what has been termed an ''enlargement of scale'' in the process of Islamization that entailed the breaking

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[140]Pouwels, R. K. *op.cit*. p.342.

[141]Moller, B. op.cit. p.6, p11; Bang, A. K. "Islamic Reform in East Africa." op.cit. p.21; Randall L. Pouwels. 1987 *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast; 800-1900.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.170-171.

[142]Kai Kresse. 2003. "Swahili Enlightenment'? East African Reformist Discourse at the Turning Point: The Experience of Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Mazrui." *Journal of Religion in Africa*. Vol.33, No. 3, p.5

[143] Bang, A. K. "Localising Islamic knowledge." *op.cit*. p.138.

down of specific ''social and spatial niche'' occupied by the Shariffite families and a small cohort of town dwelling Swahili peoples within Islam.[144]

One reason that contributed to the slow spread of Islam both at the coast and in the interior of Kenya was the 'pride of descent' that being Arab was made to carry. In order to keep social classes apart this pride was perpetuated in a three tier codification of society that saw Arab-Asian-African as the order of merit in coastal Kenya. For this reason opportunities for Africans to rise up the ''social ladder'' were curtailed. This scenario is observed by David H. Antony below:

> As the number of Africans Muslims grew, some Arabs found subtle and even blatant means of restricting the progress of African accession to the 'ulamaa', effectively creating, principally through nepotism, a system in which African Muslims could be relegated to second class status.[145]

While it is true that the dominant cultural influences in coastal Kenya were of South Arabian origin, the conservative and exclusivist *ulamaa* was not ready to embrace reform on a large scale. It was a tight knit Islam organised around tradition and preservation of a class identity since to a certain extent the East African and coastal Kenya intellectual elite were "an annex of Hadhramawt culturally and intellectually."[146] This clique's regard for class and a supposed superiority of descent was seen by the reformist Sufi orders of Zanzibar as being against the principle of a single indivisible *umma* of Muslims.

The equality of all Muslims within the *umma* could not be realised in the face of the privileges of the educated elite. The Sufi orders sought to reform such distinctions in order to preserve the equality of Muslims and in this process were able to expand the

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[144] J. Ilife. 1974. *A Modern History of Tanganyika.* (London: Cambridge University Press), p.214.
[145] Anthony, D. H. *op.cit*. p.28.
[146] Bang, A. K. "Islamic Reform in East Africa." *op.cit*. p.4.

reach of Islam beyond the coastal towns and into the coastal mainland.[147] To the Sufi orders such distinctions in the *umma* constituted a clear innovation (*bid'a*) that had to be removed. It is in this regard that the Alawi Sharif Habib Saleh is considered to have been ahead of his time in his expansion of educational opportunities to non Swahili Muslims of Lamu and its environs.[148] In addition, this study considers the pioneering work of Habib Saleh as a precursor to the reformist activities of Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari since a detailed and text-based Islamic education occupied centre stage in moulding and transforming Rimo's followers to a puritanical group that abhorred all sorts of innovations.

The two inferences that we draw from the above scenario are that the currents for reform among Kenyan Muslims did not derive full support from the elite families of Lamu (and to a large extent Zanzibar). It was the reformist waves from Egypt that infiltrated Zanzibar and then diffused throughout East Africa, including Kenya, via activities largely of the Sufi orders, but also through individuals who were courageous enough to transcend the comfort of clan and class like Habib Saleh. Further, like in other parts of East Africa, the Islamization of coastal Kenya was galvanized through *da'wah* by the Hadhrami Alawi and the flourishing of the Qadiriyya and Shadhiliya Sufi orders, but not the elite *ulamaa* that were custodians of the exclusivist towns of Islam. The social exclusivism of the elite class of *ulamaa* slowed down the Islamization of vast swathes of inland coast and made it easy for European missionaries to proselytize and win over the interior of coastal Kenya. It is the Sufi brotherhoods who promoted the indigenization of Islam and Islamic knowledge. The inclusivism of the Sufi orders worked in gaining them popular appeal and to break the

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[147] Becker, Felicitas. 2008. "Commoners in the Process of Islamization: Reassessing their Role in the Light of Evidence from South Eastern Tanzania. *Journal of Global History* Vol. 3, p.23.

[148] Kresse, K. "Swahili Enlightenment?" *op.cit*. p.5.

distinctions between social classes that had long hampered the spread of Islam along the Kenyan coast.[149]

2.5.2 Sheikh al-Amin bin Ali al-Mazrui and the Islamic Reforms in Mombasa, Kenya

As an Islamic reformer, Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui's core mandate together with that of other reformist individuals and groups in the Muslim world has been that of changing an existing society to suit what they consider a 'proper' Islam. From his positions as a Muslim judge (Kadhi) and later as a Chief Muslim judge (Chief Kadhi), he wanted to change the conditions of Muslims in Kenya in order to strengthen the observance of faith and to rid off the *umma* of 'un-Islamic' influences. Sheikh al-Amin's approach was one that intended to make Muslims aware of their predicament, make them realize the dangers that faced an *umma* that existed without adequate knowledge of its faith, instil an appreciation for secular and religious training and work to make Islam compatible with the challenge of contemporary society.[150]

Taken in the background of Muslim society accustomed to an Islamic education in the *madrassa*, this call for appreciating secular education is a vivid illustration of al-Amin's radical proposals for the educational reform of his society. His call to make Islam compatible with the demands of modernity is yet another clear break with tradition, which is built on a strict traditionalism that rejects change and holds onto a rigid past. In this sense Sunni orthodoxy holds the view that Islam contains 'all solutions', including supposed solutions to al-Amin's challenge of contemporary society. This stance marks Sheikh al-Amin as a revolutionary thinker. So who was

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[149]Geller, S. *op.cit*. p.9.
[150]Kai Kresse. 2010. "Muslim Politics in Post-Colonial Kenya: Negotiating Knowledge on the Double –Periphery." In Filippo Osella and Benjamin Soares (eds). *Islam, Politics, Anthropology*. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, p.82.

Sheikh al-Amin?

Sheikh al-Amin was an educator, an author, a journalist, a critic, a jurist and a reformer. He was born in January 1891 in Mombasa to the distinguished religious and scholarly family of the Mazrui. He learnt under various prominent *ulamaa* in Mombasa and Zanzibar who included Sheikh Suleiman bin Ali Mazrui (1867-1937) and Ahmad bin Sumayt (1861-1925).[151] As one of the Muslim elites at the forefront for a 'modern' Islam, he advocated for the modernisation of Islamic knowledge stressing that the curricula of the traditional *chuo* (Islamic schools without a formal curriculum) was inadequate to equip Muslims for the demands of a competitive modern age.[152] He, therefore, called for the teaching of such subjects as geography, mathematics and science to prepare Muslims with knowledge that is contemporary and utilitarian. In a manner similar to al-Afghani before him, Sheikh al-Amin was of the view that "it was necessary for Muslims to become skilled in Western science and technology in order to progress."[153]

Sheikh al-Amin's involvement in educational reforms underscores his realization that transforming the *umma* through equipping them with knowledge and skills was the way to position the *umma* for the challenges of the future. His ideas were presented in his books, pamphlets and speeches showing that Islam was not averse to modernity. He encouraged Muslims to take advantage of the positive aspects of modernity such as progress in technology, arguing that if Islam was to take its lead in the development of new and modern knowledge then it was upon Muslims not to shy away from

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[151]Abdulkadir Hashim. 2003. "Qadhi's Intellectual Legacy in the East African Coast: The Contributions of Al-Amin bin Ali Al-Mazrui, Muhammad Kassim Al-Mazrui and Abdullah Saleh Al-Farsy." Proceedings of the International Symposium on Islamic Civilisation in Eastern Africa, p.205.
[152]Pouwels. R. K. *Horn and Crescent. Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast. op.cit*. p. 15.
[153]*Ibid*, p.15.

progress.[154] It seems safe to surmise from the foregoing that for Sheikh al-Amin Islam as a religion was complete and suitable for all times. He was exposed to the reformist thought of Egypt due to his access to the Azhar intellectual tradition through contact with its graduates and the Egyptian newspapers *Al-Manar* (The Beacon) and *Al-Ahram* (The Pyramids) that circulated in Zanzibar and Mombasa.

The Sheikh demonstrated his modernism through his ideas on education as well as in his numerous works commenting on various 'un-Islamic' practises within the Muslim society.[155] His novel ideas to uplift the educational standards of the *umma* included encouraging the education of both boys and girls at a time when Muslim society frowned on girls venturing outside the family home. He called for the development of an integrated model of education that would offer secular and religious curricula thereby promoting the efforts to establish a girl's school in Mombasa as a way of empowering Muslim women. These novel ideas seem to have caught up with the thinking of some of the remnants of the Ansari who today have undertaken the initiative to establish a model integrated educational project at their community run primary school, Tawba. For these post-Rimo Ansari, they seem to have deviated from the ideals of their mentor when they decided to establish an integrated school to fill in the void of the state run school system that they felt did not create an Islamic environment for the learners. Tawba became the model school at which the Ansari of Diani sought an Islamic environment permeating the learning experience. Establishing an integrated system of education represented a seismic shift from the Rimo phase of thinking that advocated a complete break with all institutions associated with a government perceived as un-islamic and hence illegitimate.

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[154]Hashim, A. "Qadhi's Intellectual Legacy in the East African Coast." *op.cit*. p.207.

[155]Mohamed S. Mraja. 2011. Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui (1891-1947) and the dilemma of Islamic law in the Kenyan legal system in the 21st century. *Journal for Islamic Studies*. Vol 31, issue 1. p.60.

As part of his effort to sensitize Muslims on matters of concern to the *umma* Sheikh al-Amin run two Swahili papers, the '*Sahifa*' and '*al-Islah*', which apart from presenting a platform to discuss his ideas on educational reform for Muslims also allowed him space to castigate local customs he felt were in contravention to textual stipulations.[156] While Sheikh al-Amin was reacting to practises of his native Mombasa, it is also true that the influences shaping his activities were broader in origin. He was part of the scholars involved in the movement for reform sweeping across East Africa. His vision is aptly presented by Rudiger Seesemann, arguing:

> [Sheikh Al-Amin] is considered as the first East African Muslim scholar who systematically and publicly denounced local religious practises as ''unislamic innovations'' and encouraged the acquisition of religious and secular knowledge in order to equip Muslims to cope with social transformations resulting from colonial rule.[157]

As an educator, Sheikh al-Amin travelled around East Africa spreading knowledge of Islam by preaching in mosques and in his writings,[158] and lobbying the government on behalf of Muslims. Given his capacity as Chief Kadhi in the period 1937-1947,[159] Sheikh al-Amin laid the foundation for later political and religious activities of some of his students. Prominent religious leaders like Sheikh Ahmad Badawi (b.1889) Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Mazrui (1912-1982) and Sheikh al-Farsy were his students. This later generation of scholars continued the reform initiative in East Africa after the death of Sheikh al-Amin. Together with Sheikh al-Farsy, Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Mazrui was active in Mombasa and along the entire East African coastal strip in the 1960s and 1970s.[160] His major work was in teaching against

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[156]Pouwels, R. L. *Horn and Crescent. Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast.op.cit*. p.18.
[157]Seesemann, R. *op.cit*. p.234.
[158]Hashim, A. "Qadhi's Intellectual Legacy in the East African Coast." op.cit. p.205.
[159]Bakari, M. "The New 'Ulama in Kenya." *op.cit*. p.38.
[160]Kresse, K. ''Swahili Enlightenment?" *op.cit*. p.285.

religious innovations and polytheistic tendencies arising from traditional African religions.[161]

2.5.3 Sheikh Abdallah Saleh al-Farsy: The Main Popularizer of Islamic Reform Ideas in East Africa

The reform work of Sheikh al-Farsy in Mombasa was a continuation of the reform activities of Sheikh al-Amin and Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Mazrui. Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Mazrui's efforts in fighting *bid'a* are considerable, and since he and Sheikh al-Farsy are near contemporaries in life mission and achievements, I feel that a discussion on Sheikh Farsy would be adequate in capturing the two Kadhis' continuous effort in presenting an Islam devoid of innovation and syncretism.

Sheikh al-Farsy was born in 1912 in Zanzibar to a prominent religious family. He is a leading East African scholar, reformer, historian and poet. Sheikh Farsy has been described as "the main popularizer and leading proponent of Islamic reform ideas in East Africa, and Kenya in particular, in the 1960s and 1970s."[162] By this account Sheikh al-Farsy becomes the leading voice articulating the idea of reviving the spirit of Islam in the decades following the death of Sheikh al-Amin. He was heir to the reformist aspirations of his mentor considering that he had the fortune to pass under the instruction of many of Zanzibar's reputed *ulamaa.*[163]

It is Sheikh Farsy's extensive training in the key texts of the Shafii jurisprudential school that was to position him as a commentator and opinion leader within East African Islam. The Egyptian Jalal al-Din Mahali (1389-1450) and the Syrian Jalal al-

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[161] *Ibid*, p.286.

[162] Mraja, M. "Role and Contribution of Shaykh Abdallah Salih Al Farsy (Tanzania) to Islamic Poetry." *op.cit*. p.47.

[163] Mohamed Mraja. 2010. "The Reform Ideas of Shaykh Abdallah Salih al Farsi and the Transformation of Marital Practices among Digo Muslims of Kenya." *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 17, p.243.

Din Suyuti (1445-1505) are among the greatest classical scholars in the Shafii tradition whose commentary of the Qur'an (commonly called '*Tafsir Jalalain'*) Sheikh al-Farsy learnt from his teachers.[164] He called upon Kenyan Muslims to study modern disciplines to serve Islam in the face of the cultural assault of the West in the guise of colonialism and westernisation.[165] This reform discourse reached Sheikh al-Farsy via two routes. The direct route by which Sheikh Farsy picked up the reformist theme was through his teacher Sheikh Ahmed bin Muhammad al-Mlomry (1873-1936) who had studied at Al-Azhar under Muhammad Abduh. To add to this, Sheikh al-Farsy studied under Sheikh al-Amin, a champion of revival and modernization of Islam as articulated by the Egyptian Abduh.[166]

From his experiences as a propagator of Islam and a purifier of religious innovations, he drew a raft of reform proposals for education. He advocated for the inclusion of Islamic religious education in government schools after noticing that the government subsidized mission schools, but not Muslim schools and *madrassas*, calling on the government to employ Muslims as full time teachers in response to the obtaining situation where teachers of Christian Education were on government's payroll whereas those of Islamic Education were paid by the community.[167] In 1960 Sheikh al-Farsy was appointed the Chief Kadhi of Zanzibar, a position he held until 1964 when events around the Zanzibar revolution caused the random arrests and detention of key political and religious figures. This was after the Zanzibar Nationalist Party's coalition government fell and was replaced by the Afro Shirazi Party of Abeid Amani

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[164]Hashim, A. "Qadhi's Intellectual Legacy in the East African Coast." Op.cit. p. 210 also see Abdalla Saleh Farsy.1972. Baadhi ya wanavyuonni wa Kishafii wa Mashariki ya Afrika. (Zanzibar, Book Room), p.44.

[165]Abu Zayd, N. *op.cit*. p.32.

[166]F. H. El-Masri. 1987. "Sheikh al-Amin b. Ali al-Mazrui and the Islamic Intellectual Tradition in East Africa." *Journal Institute of Islamic Minority Affairs.* Vol.8, No.2, p.212.

[167]Hashim, A. "Qadhi's Intellectual Legacy in the East African Coast." *op.cit*. p.211.

Karume.[168] Sheikh al-Farsy resigned his position and moved to Mombasa at the invitation of his friend Sheikh Muhammad Kassim al-Mazrui.

It was Sheikh Muhammad Kassim who recommended Sheikh al-Farsy to President Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978) for the position of Kadhi of Kenya, a position he held between 1974-1980.[169] The propagation of a 'pure' Islam saw Sheikh al-Farsy embark on writing of books in Kiswahili and Arabic. He emphasized the need to revive Islam, to fulfil religious obligations and to learn the authentic teachings of Islam as practised in the era of the prophet, the companions and the 'pious ancestors', the *Salaf as-Saalih*. In this vein Sheikh al-Farsy was at the forefront in opposing the views of the Ahmadiyya, and his '*Kurani Takatifu*', an exegetical work, was written partly in response to the Ahmadiyya's publication of their Qur'an commentary. Using his position as Chief Kadhi, he took his propagation of Islam onto a national scale to move the *umma* in Kenya to observe supposedly 'proper' Islam and abandon innovations.

As an instance, his book titled '*Bid'a*' (Religious Innovations) captures his effort to purify Islam of all those aspects that the Prophet Muhammad did not teach as religious acts, but which have subsequently been considered as acts of worship (*ibaadat*).[170] In this work Sheikh al-Farsy presents a dichotomy between 'religious acts of worship', as being those that were taught by Prophet Muhammad, and 'acts of religious innovation' as being all those that were not taught by the Prophet. It does not seem to matter to Sheikh al-Farsy whether an act is 'good' or 'beneficial.' Its

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[168] Greg Cameron. 2009. "Narratives of Democracy and Dominance in Zanzibar." In Kjersti Larsen (ed.) *Knowledge, Renewal and Religion; Repositioning and Changing Ideological and Material Circumstances among the Swahili on the East African Coast*. (Uppsala, Nordika Afrikainstitutet), p.151

[169]Hashim, A. "Qadhi's Intellectual Legacy in the East African Coast." op.cit. p.209.

[170]Abdullah Saleh Farsy.(n.d). Bid'a-Sehemu ya Kwanza. (Mombasa, Adam Traders).

permissibility as an act of worship hinges in having a precedent from the Sunna of the Prophet. It is instructive to note that Sheikh al-Farsy wrote this book as a clear expression of his popular desire to purge Islam in Kenya and East Africa of practises that had cropped up in the name of Islam. This included practices such as consulting astrologers on the most auspicious day of the week and time of the day to conduct marriage. [171] On the other hand, what Muslims take for granted as religiously proper behaviour was shown by al-Farsy to be innovations not backed by authentic reports from the sunna of the prophet, such as the communal supplications after the daily obligatory prayers (with al-Farsy preferring instead that each worshipper supplicates individually after a communal prayer); as well as chanting in unison and in a loud voice "*Aamin*" after the imam recites certain prayers (preferring instead that worshippers lower their voices).[172] Imam Malik cites several hadith of the Prophet on the desirability of the communal response of '*Aamin'* after the imam, but is silent on how loud this should be.[173]

The sincerity of his teachings had transformative impact on his audience. As such he is credited with the emergence from among his students of a class of scholars who were to continue his effort at fighting innovations and removing 'un-Islamic' beliefs and practises that Muslims had accepted as proper practise out of 'ignorance.' Among the scholars who benefitted from Sheikh al-Farsy's public lectures and mosque sermons and who were to continue the fight against *bid'a* in the South Coast was Sheikh Abdul Aziz Rimo.

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[171]*Ibid*, p.33.
[172]*Ibid*, p.6.
[173]Muhammad Rahimuddin (1981). Muwatta Imam Malik. (New Delhi, Kitab Bhavan). p.41.

2.6 Conclusion

The chapter has approached 'Islamic reform movement' as one whose efforts aim at reinvigorating Muslim societies in relation to their practise of faith as well as to their position relative to non-Muslim societies. As Islam expanded, it came into contact with many other cultures. Consequently, some Islamic practises have received local interpretations explaining why the reform of religious practise has addressed itself to the return to a 'pristine Islam.' In realizing this goal, the chapter has outlined the concerns and methods of prominent Islamic reformers such as Wahhab, al-Afghani and Abduh. While Ibn al-Wahhab represents reforms in the pre-modern era, al-Afghani represents the earliest attempts to modernize Islam. His era was reacting to imperialism at which the question was raised concerning the capacity of Islam to respond to the perceived cultural, political and military dominance of the West. Further, the chapter has endeavoured to show how the global reform voices influenced the local by examining the localization of Islamic reform discourse in Kenya through the works of Habib Saleh, al-Amin and al-Farsy. In the next chapter, we shall show how Sheikh Rimo relayed the intellectual and reformist currents within East African, and in particular Kenyan, Islam to the mainland south of Mombasa.

CHAPTER THREE

SHEIKH RIMO AND ISLAMIC REFORM IN SOUTH COAST, KENYA

3.1 Introduction

Sheikh Abdul Aziz Rimo was fortunate to receive his early Islamic education from home before embarking on a more formal education at various *madrasas* in Kenya and Tanzania, eventually joining the Islamic University of Madinah. His specialization in the studies of prophetic traditions (Hadith) at the University coupled with his earlier exposure to the reformist discourses of Sheikh al-Farsy in Mombasa was to have a lasting impact in shaping his worldview and to influence his discourse on Islamic reform among the Digo Muslim community of South Coast, Kenya. He was among an elite group of Muslim *ulamaa* from the Digo community who sought to institute the practicing of 'proper' Islam thereby embarking on teaching against religious innovations, forms of syncretism and reliance on past class of *ulamaa* for religious guidance. Through his teaching, he presented himself as the vanguard for Islamic reform, challenging popular religious practices that had traditionally been accepted to be the norm. The chapter, therefore, presents a brief biographical sketch of Sheikh Rimo, exploring his social and educational background and the experiences that shaped his reformist ideas. Effort is also made to reconstruct his worldview, outlining his struggles (*jihad*) among the local Muslims in his attempt to reinvigorate the understanding of the faith.

3.2 Sheikh Rimo's Biography: Family Background and Academic Sojourn

Abdul Aziz Rimo was born in 1949 at Diani in Kwale County to Mzee Said Rimo who was himself a prominent elder occupying an honoured position among the Digo. Mzee Rimo was chairperson of the council of elders and custodian of the traditional shrine (*kaya*) at Diani, which endeavoured to preserve Digo culture and ethics.

Having led a long life, reportedly dying at the ripe age of a hundred years, Mzee Rimo was an example of a successful life as envisioned among the Digo.[174] Despite Mzee Rimo being custodian of the Digo traditional shrine, he was instrumental in the establishment of Islamic education at least at the elementary level.[175]Since education became an important component of any Islamic society, Aziz Talbani argues, private homes of the elite members of society turned into centres of learning before the introduction of major institutions of organized learning.[176] Following this Islamic tradition, Mzee Rimo was among the earliest Digo Muslim personalities who established modest Qur'an schools (*vyuo,* sgl. *chuo*) in their homes to teach children to read the Qur'an, some selected hadith as well as the basic story of Prophet Muhammad's life and to prepare them to participate properly in the observance of Islamic rituals like prayer and fasting.

Consequently, Rimo had the opportunity to begin his Islamic education at home under the feet of his father. Like other children enrolled in the traditional *chuo* school, his education comprised learning to read and recite the Qur'an as well as studying the basic Sunna and hadith of Prophet Muhammad.[177] Since the father was a traditional elder, local sources inform that together with other elders they invited a renowned rainmaker from Tanzania in the late 1950's to fight a serious drought in the area. Impressed by his rainmaking skills, Mzee Rimo entrusted his young son, Rimo, to the rainmaker to be taught the important craft. At age eleven in the year 1960, Rimo departed for Tanga to learn the rainmaking skills. In a twist of events, the rainmaker enrolled the young Rimo at a local *madrasa* ran by Sheikh Aboud (1926-1988) at

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[174] Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulayman, Ukunda, held on 24.05.2015.
[175] *Ibid.*
[176] Aziz Talbani. 1996."Pedagogy, Power, and Discourse: Transformation of Islamic Education."*Comparative Education Review*.Vol.40, No.1, pp.66-82.
[177] Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulayman, Ukunda, held on 24.05.2015.

Pangani in Tanzania. By the time Rimo was leaving the *madrasa* at Pangani, he had

acquired the equivalent of a primary level certificate in Islamic studies.[178]

After the sojourn at Pangani, Rimo enrolled (1967-1969) at the Madrassat-ul-Falah at

Bondeni, Mombasa, where he continued his studies in the Qur'an, Arabic language,

the traditions of Muhammad and the concept of the oneness of Allah (*tawheed*). The

qualification that Rimo attained while at Falah was the equivalent of a secondary level

certificate in Islamic studies.[179] It was while studying at the *madrasa* in Mombasa that

Rimo got the opportunity to attend evening lectures of Sheikh al-Farsy. Apart from

these lectures shaping Rimo's views on *tawheed*, Sheikh al-Farsy's discourses on the

need to reform society had a lasting impression on him. After completing his studies

in Mombasa, Rimo joined the Machakos Muslim Institute at Machakos, which is part

of a network of educational institutions run by the Islamic Foundation.[180] For roughly

one year (1969-1970), Rimo attended the Machakos *madrasa* when he thereafter

returned to Mombasa and continued attending the evening classes (*darsa*) of Sheikh

al-Farsy. The reform discourse of Sheikh al-Farsy resonated with Rimo, such that

even after his studies in Madinah, he bore the influences of al-Farsy's *tawheed*.[181]

After completing his studies (1970-1971) at the feet of Sheikh al-Farsy, Rimo

acquired a scholarship from the Saudi Arabia embassy, Kenya, to study at the Islamic

University of Madinah. In 1972, he left for Madinah where for eight years he studied

and specialized in hadith and its sciences.[182] His compatriots at the University, and

who coincidentally hailed from Kwale County included Sheikh Nassor Khamis (from

Waa), Sheikh Seif Fundi Rejje (from Msambweni) and Sheikh Adam (from

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[178] Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulayman, Ukunda, held on 24.05.2015.
[179] *Ibid*.
[180] *Ibid*.
[181] *Ibid*.
[182] *Ibid*.

Mpkwiro). The reformist imprint of the University of Madinah scholars upon their students has been acknowledged and figures like Abdul Aziz ibn Baaz (1910-1999) and Nasr al-Albaniy (1914-1999) have had a lasting legacy in the work of many African graduates of the University.[183] The Madinah phase is instrumental in clarifying the reformist discourse of Sheikh al-Farsy on pure monotheism, a theme to which Rimo was exposed, and introducing him to the Salafist discourse of Wahhabi leaning. The period established an ideological link between global Salafi concerns and the Islamic awareness and propagation activities of Sheikh Rimo at Diani. Thus, it was during his stay in Madinah that Rimo was able to have "external engagement" with the reformist ideas that eventually shaped his essentially Salafist *da'wah* among the local Muslim upon his return.[184]

3.3 Conceptualizing the Reform Activities of Sheikh Rimo

Upon completion of his studies in 1980, Sheikh Rimo and his Kwale compatriots returned to Kenya and like other graduates from Madinah, they were deployed to different parts of the country (i.e., Namanga, Kajiado, Mumias, Marsabit and Isiolo) to teach in Islamic educational institutions sponsored by the Saudi Arabia embassy. However, Sheikh Rimo, together with his compatriots from Kwale requested the embassy to post them to their Digo-homeland where they felt their services in disseminating Islamic education were direly needed by the local Muslim population.[185] As a result of the appeal, Rimo was posted to his ancestral home to teach at the Madrassat-ul-Tawheed al Islamiyyah at Maganyakulo where he rose to deputy principal of the institution. It was while working at the Maganyakulo institution that the Sheikh found the need to conduct jihad in form of *da'wah* to

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[183]Dumbe, Y. *op.cit*. p.102.
[184]*Ibid*, p. 88.
[185] Interview with Ustaadha Maimuna, Ukunda, held on 20.06.2015.

preach against various aspects of *bid'a* popular with the local Digo Muslims. To realize this goal, Rimo embarked on giving Islamic lectures at Masjid Nur in Diani from 1986.[186]

Being one of the oldest mosques in Diani, Masjid Nur became central in discussions of Muslims' religious and social affairs. It is a hub for the local faithful and provides a forum for sharing knowledge on the religious and cultural situation of the local Muslims.[187] Masjid Nur became a galvanising point for discussions on the need to use Islam as a weapon against what was perceived as unhelpful effects of urbanisation such as the supposed moral and spiritual disintegration of Diani society resulting from influx of foreigners with new values, practises and ethics.[188] Arguably, the reform discourse among the Digo Muslims was centred at Masjid Nur. The mosque provided the local Muslims with a focal point to source ideas and an arena for reformist preaching as championed by Rimo.

From Masjid Nur, the Sheikh's reformist ideas were circulated among a broader local community, turning the mosque into a center for the dissemination of Islamic reform ideas. Sheikh Rimo's work in combating *bid'ah* among the Digo community reflects conflict between his new training in Madinah and the popular Islam of the local Muslims. His scriptural Islam was in conflict with popular, syncretised and 'tolerant' Islam of the local population. A vivid illustration of the tensions attending this conflict was the wrangling over the control of the Masjid Nur committee that eventually had Rimo move out of the Masjid Nur mosque to found his own mosque at Magutu.

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[186] Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 18.05.2015.
[187] Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulaiman, Ukunda, held on 16.04.2015.
[188] Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulaiman, Ukunda, held on 16.04.2015.

Olivier Roy distinguishes three strands running through the effort at Islamic reform.[189] The first area revolves around reform that calls upon Muslims to ''return to the study of the Qur'an and Sunna.'' In this category, reformers reject the scholarly directions of medieval Muslim thinkers and emphasise the need for individual Muslims to seek guidance from the key texts of Islam. The second strand evident in Islamic reform is the one that stresses "a return to the practises of the first *umma.*" The prophetic *umma* becomes not merely a reference point, but a model to be re-implemented in full. And the third category revolves around reform that seeks "the implementation of religious law." In this category reform is understood as an attempt to realise a complete institutionalisation of Islamic systems of government in society.[190] This gives the Qur'an and Sunna a public role and a framework for ordering public affairs.

Arguably, Sheikh Rimo's 'jihad' amongst the Digo Muslims spanned the period 1985-1995 and is credited for eradicating aspects of syncretism observed by the local Muslims thereby to a certain extent reinvigorating the practising of a 'correct' form of Islam.[191] This study, therefore, employs the first two strands in Roy's analysis to conceptualise the reform activities of Rimo and the Ansari community. Their activities sought to free Muslims from affiliation with popular religious thinking on dogmatic issues such as *maulid*, *qunut*, *talqin*, and a host of customary payments in ceremonies of marriage, and instead emphasised a return to the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunna. Consequently, the Ansari became a vanguard for the revival of the Sunna of Muhammad by studying it and implementing it in their daily life.[192]

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[189]Roy, Olivier. 1990. Islam *and Resistance in Afghanistan.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.39, 40.
[190]Olivier Roy. 1994. *The Failure of Political Islam*. (Cambridge,Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), p.28.
[191]Interview with Sheikh AbdiRahiiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 20.06.2015.
[192]Interview with Sheikh AbdiRahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 20.06.2015.

Olivier Roy's three category analysis of reform indicated that 'reform' in Islam is not always a monolithic concept, but consists of varieties of constructions each representing particular emphasis of individuals and groups. For instance, groups seen to espouse a 'radical view of Islam' such as Al-Qaeda offer a vision of reform, which as described below is to establish a certain form of Islam:

> Stripped of all the institutional connections to democracy, civil society, and so forth...These are dismissed as idolatry, the worshipping of gods other than God, and as part of the western cultural invasion aimed at abolishing the true understanding of Islam. Instead, reform derives from an austere reading of *Sharia*, meant to bring society and politics back from the realm of *Jahiliya* into that of *hukmiya*.[193]

This understanding of reform could be considered radical in its rejection of democracy, civil society and by implication, the electoral process. It measures the success of reform by the extent to which *sharia* is institutionalized in society, affirming Roy's third area of reform that seeks the implementation of Islamic law in society. Arguably, Rimo's denunciation to participate in national elections[194] should be construed as an operational strategy,[195] which also entails calling for the adoption of Sharia, advocating for the elimination of key government officials, as well as attacking members of other faiths.[196] In contrast to groups seen to espouse a radical view of Islam are groups that have been described as 'moderate Islamist' (such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) who seem to conceive of reform as an effort to "restore the integrity and health of the *umma,* which can only be achieved through comprehensive reform based on the principles of Islam."[197]

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[193]Marc Lynch. 2005. "Islamist Views of Reform." In *Reform in The Muslim World: The Role of Islamists and Outside Powers.* (Washington D.C. The Brookings Institution), pp.35-48.

[194]Interview with Sheikh Salim bin Juma, Ukunda, held on 20.06.2015.

[195]Ndzovu, H. J. "The Prospects of Islamism in Kenya." op.cit. p.7.

[196]*Ibid*, p.7

[197] These are the views of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi as reported by Marc Lynch, "Islamist Views of Reform." *op.cit*. p.40.

3.4 Criticism of Aspects of Religious Innovation and Exhorting on *Tawheed*

The main effort (jihad) of Sheikh Rimo against innovations entailed a two-pronged war that on the one hand was critical of any form of innovations, and on the other exhorted on the strict adherence to *tawheed*. Arising from his depth of knowledge in the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad, the Sheikh embarked on a criticism of prevalent Digo customs that were in his view incompatible with Islam. His criticism of some of the popular practises of Digo Muslims created tension between him and other local religious leaders who accused Rimo of teaching a 'new religion.'[198] Clearly the local religious elites (sheikhs, *imams* and teachers) were responding to Rimo's onslaught by branding his teaching as a form of new religious movement. His teachings on *tawheed* and criticism of prevalent positions on doctrinal matters as un-Islamic became a source of conflict between him and other Digo *ulamaa,* part of whom considered the sheikh as a threat to their position of prestige as interpreters of Islam. Some of his critics embarked on countering his view of Islam by showing that the religious innovator was in fact Rimo.[199]

Among the popular practises of the Digo Muslims that Rimo condemned in his teachings included the construction of mosques bearing the traditionally protruding structure of the *qibla* (a structure protruding from the front of the mosque that points in the direction of Makkah) and the creating of an inner sanctuary, *minbar*, (pulpit from which the *imam* delivers a lesson or sermon). According to him this architectural design is an innovation since it cannot be traced to the Prophet Muhammad's mosque of Madinah. As a result the Ansari mosques, which he commissioned, are constructed with a seamless prayer hall supposedly characteristic of mosques in the prophetic era.

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[198]Comments like "*mbona akarenha dini mpya*" (why is he initiating new religion) were common with his critics. Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 18.05.2015.
[199]Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulayman, Ukunda, held on 20.06.2015.

The pervasiveness of local cultural traits reflects the casual way in which Islam diffused into Digo society. Conversions of the Digo to Islam took place in a local setting amidst the "ordinary circumstances of everyday life."[200] This indicates that local cultural traits were not necessarily abandoned at conversion, making Digo Muslims as "half Digo and half Muslim",[201] or in other words "men of two worlds and two religions."[202] The persistence of such local cultural traits into Islam would gradually gain recognition as acceptable practise. Digo Islam has largely been about a prestige attached to association with an urban culture. For the Digo, questions of adherence to texts, details of sharia and points of doctrine "were perhaps less meaningful."[203] Thus, the "communal dimension of Islam" seems to have appealed more to the Digo than detailed laws for instance.[204]

Local sources describe Sheikh Rimo's constant attacks against the wearing of protective charms (*hirizi*),[205] which he considered a clear indication that the Digo-Muslims were still at that point bent in seeking protection from the charms and not in Allah and thereby constituting *shirk*, the sin of associating the power of God with other divinities. It was along the same lines that the Sheikh cautioned against the dangers of divination because it seems to rival Allah's sole knowledge and guardianship of the unseen. Sheikh Rimo's exhortation on purification of Islam went hand in hand with the insistence on *tawheed* because the absolute oneness of Allah is the foundation of Islam and hence any impure conception of *tawheed* threatens the Muslim with *shirk*.

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[200]David Colton Sperling. 1988. "The growth of Islam among the Mijikenda of the Kenya Coast, 1826-1933." Phd.Diss.School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, p.171.
[201]*Ibid*, p.103.
[202]*Ibid*, p.175.
[203]*Ibid*, p.175.
[204]*Ibid*, p.175.
[205]Ustaadha Maimuna mentions the Hadith "man alaqa tamimah faqad ashraka"- He who puts on Tamimah (a form of protective charm) has associated Allah.

One possible explanation for the appeal of the "communal dimension of Islam" is its affinity to traditional concepts of relatedness that imposed reciprocal relations on society. As such, socially based Islamic rituals like marriage, funerals, and *mawlid* celebrations found a ready audience on account of their similarity to local cultural patterns. In this way, the door for infusion of non-Islamic rituals became a reality, as, for instance, when Digo cultural demands for *maziya* (gifts to the bride's paternal relations), *chilemba* (gifts to the bride's maternal relations) and *chidzufyu* (gifts to the bride's brothers) became infused into and muddled with the Islamic demands for *mahr* (dowry). The affinity of the Digo-Muslims to socially based rituals of cultural significance arises from the situation where Islam had been introduced informally through trade relations and inter-personal relations. Both within the island of Mombasa, but more so in the mainland to the south, people became Muslim through association without a programmatic elaboration of the fundamentals of the faith.[206] David Colton Sperling has described this process in detail:

> Some Digo acted as local trading agents for town Muslims or came to have a Muslim patron in town who assisted them in their trading ventures. In addition to engaging in local and urban trade, a few Digo joined caravan expeditions and traded upcountry in partnership with Mombasans. As trade grew, the Digo became more involved with Muslims. Commercial interests created common affinities, which in turn gave rise to personal relations and a number of Digo were attracted and converted to Islam.[207]

With the expansion of travel and educational opportunities many young Muslims benefitted from formal education in Islamic institutions in countries like Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. These scholars would upon their return feel a need to re-energize the observance of religion and caution against laxity in matters of faith. They became activist force pushing for the adoption of the Sunna as a cure against the disintegration

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[206]. Sperling, D. C. "The growth of Islam among the Mijikenda of the Kenya Coast." p.203.
[207] *op.cit.* p.102.

of Islam.[208]

The resultant tension due to the confrontation between the Sheikh and the local religious elite was intense. Some members of the mosque (Masjid Nur) where Rimo preached were uncomfortable with the attacks on certain practises of the faith such as the wearing of Qur'anic charms (*anzima*) and Digo amulets (*hirizi*), which he regarded as a clear manifestation of *shirk*.[209] The situation got worse when at one time the sheikh decided to remove the pumping handle to the borehole within the precincts of Masjid Nur on the presumption that the move would limit women's forays into the male section of the mosque while fetching water from the well. By this measure the Sheikh aimed at curtailing women's allegedly unregulated wanderings into the male sections of the mosque. Sheikh Rimo was supposedly enforcing the prophetic Sunna on the prohibition of free mixing of the sexes, which in his estimation the mosque committee had failed to enforce. A concomitant aspect was his desire to reform the dressing habits of local Muslim women from the prevalent 'tight' *leso*s and occasional loose-fitting garments without a corresponding head cover into the actual *nikab* (complete body cover) for Muslim women.

The borehole incident provided Rimo's opponents with an opportunity to resolve their competition and confrontation through the state machinery when the encounter was reported to a local police station. Subsequently, the Sheikh was arrested, arraigned in Kwale law court on charges of vandalising public property thereby sentenced to a two-year jail term.[210] During the trial and ultimate sentencing, Rimo refused legal representation as his students and supporters worked tirelessly for his release. Later while serving his jail term, a fine was raised that allowed the Sheikh to be released

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[208]Bakari, M. "The New Ulama'a in Kenya." *op.cit*. p.183.
[209] Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 18.05.2015.
[210] Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 18.05.2015.

despite the displeasure of his critics.[211]

At this stage a question could be asked: how do we interpret the conflict between Rimo and the local *ulamaa* at Diani? In analysing this conflict of the sheikhs, we shall consider the argument by John Esposito who states:

> A critical problem that all religious reformers of whatever faith face is the relationship between their reformist thought and what for many is the authority of tradition, the need to demonstrate some kind of continuity between tradition and change. The importance of the framing narrative and its repertoire that will engage the context of its intended audience has been critical to the success and effectiveness of social movements.[212]

 Rimo was successful in negotiating this conflict for two reasons. Initially, as the son of Mzee Rimo, he was heir to that classical tradition of Islamic learning having undergone the traditional *chuo* education. In a certain way he represents that sort of continuity Esposito mentions, between 'the authority of tradition' and the change inherent in his 'reformist thought.' To add to that, however, is the fact that his training in the more formal institutions of Islamic learning guaranteed him a measure of scholarly respect from his audience. In this way Rimo had the intellectual learning and moral standing necessary to initiate an organisation of believers, the Ansari, and to sustain them as a distinct group of Muslims. This intellectual refinement qualified him as a commentator on Islam whose interpretation of the correct form of Islam gains acceptance with the Ansari.

The paradox in Sheikh Rimo's stance arises from his dismissal of traditional religious authorities as un-Islamic (by their toleration of what Rimo considers *bid'a*) while at the same time he assumes the same position as an interpreter of Islam. He dismissed the classical schools of jurisprudence (*madhahib*), and required no legitimation from

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[211] Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulayman, Ukunda, held on 24.05.2016.
[212] John Esposito, 2016. "Rethinking Islam and Secularism."ARDA Guiding Papers, p.4. Accessed on 22-10-2016 from www.theARDA.COM.

traditional religious figures, calling for a return to the authority of the Qur'an and the Sunna, all indicative of a Salafist ideology. At a personal level, this meant that Rimo dismissed the methods of the Digo religious elite, like his own father, a conflict that could have influenced both the Sheikh and his audience. How Rimo's insistence on the supremacy of the Qur'an and Sunna could have shaped his relation with the state is a question that we now address.

3.5 Political Agitation and Less Authoritarianism: Rimo's Liberation Theology

The period 1988 to 1992 was quite volatile in Kenya's political scenes that encompassed the clamour for more political space and less authoritarianism. There were national debates that led to the landmark repeal of Section 2 (a) of the Constitution and the legal acceptance of multi-party democracy. The debate in the national scope included voices of politicians, civil society, religious leaders as well as donors and diplomats.[213] In the context of this development, local politics within the Kwale region was also intense. Upon his release from prison following the borehole saga, Rimo seemingly increased the tempo of his attack on 'un-Islamic' practises, which included the Kenyan state. As he strove to make people develop a 'good' understanding of Islamic fundamentals, his opposition to the state in the early 1990's was also expressed in Islamic terms. In his lectures, he launched onto discussions based on textual evidence on how Muslims ought to rule and be ruled. He expounded on the role of government as explained in the Qur'anic revelation, and using the example of Prophet Muhammad identified and expounded on the qualities of leadership in society.[214]

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[213]Ndzovu, H. "Muslims and Party Politics and Electoral Campaigns in Kenya." *op.cit*. p. 6.
[214]Interview with Sheikh AbdiRahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 20.05.2015.

While Rimo was speaking to a predominantly Muslim audience, similar concerns on proper governance were being raised by Christian voices. As reported by Sheldon Geller:

> [While] President Moi relied on the support of conservative Independent African churches, Catholic and Protestant clergymen intensified their criticism of violations of human rights and the absence of fair and open elections. Their relentless pressure eventually forced Moi to retire and to hold fair elections in 2003 which his party lost after being in power since independence.[215]

Joining the pro-reform debate like the Catholic and Protestant clergy, Rimo castigated the political class including the presidency of Daniel Arap Moi (1978-2002). It was in 1989 while engaging in the exegesis of *surah Al-Anfal* (The Spoils of War), Q: 8), *Al-Ankabut* (The Spider, Q: 29) and *Tawbah* (The Repentance, Q: 9) that the Sheikh famously declared: "*Mimi Nur din Ansar...tangu hapo Moi sio raisi wangu...na nawaambia hii leo Moi sio raisi wangu...*" (I am Nur din Ansar...and I have never recognized Moi as my President...and today I declare before you that Moi is not my President).[216] It is plausible that Rimo's understanding of the Qur'anic message influenced his approach to national politics. Clearly, these *Surah* are key in laying the ideological foundation of the Ansari who became a community of believers aspiring to 'true faith' and a new polity guided by the shariah. Sheikh Rimo, through exegesis and anecdotes from the Sunna wished to refine the faith of Digo Muslims to a path of steadfast and piety driven Islam in religio-political terms.

In the period before the introduction of multi-party politics, criticism of Moi's leadership was not tolerated culminating in the arrest of Sheikh Rimo by security agents. Without tangible evidence the Sheikh was allegedly accused of defaming the character and person of President Moi and consequently slammed with a six year jail

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[215]Geller, S. *op.cit*. p.19
[216] Interview with Sheikh AbdiRahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 18.05.2015.

term.[217] It was while in prison between 1989 and 1991 that he had an opportunity to interact with other strong critics of Moi's leadership such as Kenneth Matiba and Khalid Salim Balala of the popular Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) who were serving various terms of detention.[218] Without the state giving any plausible explanation, in 1991 Rimo together with Matiba and other political prisoners was released from prison. By time of their release political opposition was constitutionally guaranteed and, possibly, the state had no justifiable reason to continue keeping its critics in detention.

Clearly, Rimo's jihad did not focus only on addressing the moral and spiritual character of the Digo society, but his *da'wah* also addressed issues that touched on political matters as well. Even though he exerted a lot of emphasis in addressing the purity and propriety of the faith to his audience, this did not stop him from commenting on political concerns within the context of the emerging opposition to Moi's leadership. While the sheikh was occasionally in collision with the state owing to his political viewpoint, his desire was to reform the political structure through constitutional means rather than to replace the existing one with an Islamic political model.

As a result this study conceptualises Rimo's reform initiative as both socio-political and religious. Religiously, Rimo taught a puritan *tawheed* in opposition to the traditional concepts accepted as 'proper' Islam. He emphasised the need to develop a personal piety free from the innovations accepted by the *ulamaa* who, in his view, did not practise the 'correct' Islam. According to the Sheikh all activities were to be carried out in fulfilment of the Sunna to instrumentalize it as a principle for the

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[217]Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulaiman, Ukunda, held on 16.04.2015.
[218]Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulaiman, Ukunda, held on 16.04.2015.

preservation of the *umma* in the onslaught of un-Islamic practises. He cautioned against the dangers of tolerating Digo practises that could compromise the faith.[219] In the words of Abdulaziz Sachedina, Rimo could be seen as a "living source of prescriptive guidance for the [Digo] community."[220]

3.6 Rimo's Ideal Society: Social Structure, Economic and Educational models

Like other Salafis, Sheikh Rimo discouraged his students from seeking employment in industries or sectors of the economy that he considered prohibited and thereby illegal. His followers were encouraged to seek out gainful occupation in trades that could cushion against *haram* (forbidden) earnings. Expounding on the concept of *riba* (interest from savings) he warned his audience against its evil as a financial undertaking. As a result, many of his students closed their bank accounts since there was no Islamic banking system in the country at that time. While Rimo was at that time propounding the benefits of interest free banking, he also urged Muslims to guard against *riba* and scrutinise their salaries to ensure that they do not derive from excessive profiteering made by the organizations in which they work.

As a consequence of his strict moral demands upon Muslims, some of his students stopped working for organisations like the Kenya Breweries Company (because of a Prophetic hadith that explains the displeasure of Allah on people engaged in production, sale, distribution and marketing of alcohol),[221] and the tourist hotels along Diani's beachfront.[222] After joining the Ansari community, his followers decided to become subsistence farmers, fishermen, petty traders and artisans. Earning an honest

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[219] Interview with Sheikh Ustaadha Maimuna, Ukunda, held on 20.05.2015.
[220] Abdulaziz Sachedina. 2001. *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*. (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 17.
[221] SaidAbdallah Sayf al-Hatimy. "Islam and the Evil of Intoxicants." *Rabitat Journal*, vol.6, No.3, Safar 1399.
[222] Interview with Ustaadha Maimuna, Ukunda, held on 20.05.2015.

living was emphasised as a duty incumbent upon every Muslim, and the aforementioned activities were construed by the Sheikh as consistent with the sharia. His economic model aimed at removing excesses associated with exploitation and *rib'a* (interest), but seemed not to have been extensive enough to encourage saving and investment thereby remaining at the subsistence level. It did not allow the Ansari sufficient leverage to pay Zakat, leave alone the establishment of charitable institutions for the benefit of the *umma*. The idea to compel his followers reject formal employment was retrogressive given the poverty and unemployment levels evident in Kwale County where 30% of the potential labour force is unemployed.[223]

Sheikh Rimo attempted to reform the South Coast Muslim's social structure by insisting that all previous marriages between the Ansari members were void because he doubted the religious piousness of the partners and the competence of the officiating religious clerics. In this regard he demanded from all his followers to not only make a new declaration of faith (*shahada*), but to also remarry, a view that was considered ridiculous by non-Ansari Muslims. While controversial, this new edict by Rimo saw many families break up in the clamour to realign with the sheikh's teachings. Consequently, Sheikh Rimo came to sensationally claim that many of the local Muslims were not qualified to inherit from their 'parents' or vice versa since he questioned the validity of their marriage contracts, many of which had been formulated under *kuhala* arrangements. In essense, Rimo questioned the authenticity of such Muslims' practise of Islam and doubted whether they were genuinely Muslim.

Sheikh Rimo's educational reforms reflected his desire to improve the religious knowledge of the local Muslims. His method was a departure from the prevalent rote

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[223]County Government of Kwale, *op.cit*. p.26.

learning of texts that has characterized the traditional Islamic learning. Rimo's approach did not adopt the mere memorization of the Qur'anic verses, which was common in the traditional *chuo* system. Those who attended the Sheikh's mosque *darsas* (learning sessions) reported that he taught for understanding, memorization and application of the texts in one's daily life.[224] This emphasis on the practical application of the Qur'an's teachings reflects a new approach to Islamic learning that Rimo introduced to his fellow Digo-Muslims. In teaching the Qur'an, he would teach specific *surah* (chapters) and their *tafsir* (exegesis). He would teach a single *surah* at a time till its complete verses had been understood, memorized and applied in the daily life of his students. Being a scholar of the Sunna, he strived to exemplify all that he taught. For instance, he was an avid farmer and established an orchard outside his mosque from where he derived his daily food requirements.

More so, the Sheikh reformed the teaching of religious knowledge among Digo Muslims by incorporating women in his *darsa* (lesson). Unlike public religious debates to which all Muslims are at liberty to attend, Rimo focussed on the education of women in his mosque lectures. To this end, he would hold two teaching sessions a day for the public, one in the morning after *Salat ul Fajr* (the morning prayer) and the other in the afternoon between *Salat ul Asr* (the late noon prayer) and *Salat ul Maghreb* (the evening prayer). The morning lesson begun immediately after the first prayer of the day, at about 5.30 a.m., and would last till daybreak, roughly around 6.30 a.m. This *darsa* was meant for the males. The second *darsa* would begin around 4.20 p.m., after *Salatul Asr* and continue till "about time for people to travel home for *Maghreb*", which would be around 5.30 p.m. This second *darsa* would be open to males as well although its primary target was Muslim couples and females. The

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[224] Interview with Sheikh Mab'ooth, Ukunda, 27.09.2017.

content for the two lessons was similar in terms of structure and illustrations. By this measure the Sheikh ensured that the local Muslim women did not lag behind the males in the acquisition of practical Islamic knowledge. In this way the Sheikh was empowering the women with Islamic knowledge of the Qur'an, its *tafsir* (exegesis), the Sunna and its application. This would, arguably, not only make them better informed at dispensing their ritual and religious obligations, but empower them to assert their rights as women as provided for in the sharia. Clearly, Sheikh Rimo's reforms on Islamic education as reflected in the method he adopted to disseminate his teachings, entailed broadening the prevalent reliance on rote learning of texts and memorization to an emphasis on learning the verse, understanding the implied message through translation and exegesis, and a practical dimension characterized by implementation of the teachings.

Whereas Sheikh Rimo was a strong critic of the secular system of education, some of his students who had dispersed from the Ansari's initial centre at Magutu demonstrated a willingness to have their offspring attain secular education. This position was different from the earlier antagonistic attitude toward institutions considered as symbols of *kufr* (unbelief). The Ansari community built through collective effort an educational complex that offered both secular education, along the curriculum offered by the government of Kenya, and an Islamic education whose curriculum they designed. However, at the groups' formative period, Rimo had expressed contempt for secular education terming it *haram* (forbidden). In similar measure, he encouraged his followers to sever ties with Kenya's 'un-Islamic' state by all means including burning national identity cards and educational certificates. The transformation of the Ansari, in post Rimo phase, to a people ready to have their children acquire secular education, represents a pragmatic decision to equip the next

generation of Muslims with skills, knowledge and competencies necessary for the modern world. This transformation represents the dynamism of social movements where practises may change with time especially given that it was Sheikh Rimo who consistently opposed secular education as representing the *kufr* of the Kenyan state; while it is his disciples who went on to institute an integrated educational model at Madrasa at-Tawba. The emphasis on a 'total' Islamic experience permeating instruction at the Ansari model school at Tawba is an attempt to cushion against non-Islamic influences in government run schools.[225]

The establishment of the Tawba integrated School is believed to have initiated educational reforms in the region particularly with regard to the dressing code of the Muslim students where before the appearance of this school, the boys in secular schools wore shorts and the girls did not veil themselves. But in keeping with the supposed Islamic dressing code, the boys in Tawba School were required to wear trousers, and the girls to cover their heads with headscarves. This dress code became 'fashionable' such that other schools (read secular schools) copied to cater for the needs of their Muslim students.[226] The reformist preaching of Sheikh Rimo, therefore, appears to have been attractive for two reasons: (i) It gave a sense of belonging to a society, through the formation of the Ansari community, where acceptance was guaranteed; and (ii) it supplied Islam as a viable alternative to the local Muslims. A need was felt to re-energise Islam due to the increasingly urban environment of Diani that 'weakened' the Islamic character of Diani because of the proliferation of practices considered to be 'un-Islamic.'

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[225]Interview with Ustadha Halima, Ukunda, held on 20.05.2015.
[226]Interview with Ustaadha Maimuna, Magutu, held on 30.02.2015.

3.7 Conclusion

Sheikh Rimo's education and credentials from the University of Madinah prove him to be among the new class of African *ulamaa* where his studies in Madinah brought him into contact with both Salafi and pan-Wahhabi reform ideas. Rimo intended and laboured to teach the 'proper' conception of Allah as the sole source of all succour and the refuge of all hope. The Sheikh's understanding of *tawheed* is a strict unitarianism devoid of all accreditations to the divine in essence and attribute.[227] In contradiction to the more traditional (even orthodox) conception, his view was rooted in an actual opposition to local cultural traits and practises thought to dilute the essence of *tawheed*. The clear antagonism of Rimo's theological posture to local cultural traits seems distant to orthodoxy's acceptance of varieties and even toleration of local customs.

To arrive at this new conception the Sheikh deconstructed the notions and practises that bordered on *shirk* (associationism). This led to a widespread effort against religious innovations that were seen to corrupt the 'pure' monotheistic essence of Islam. Efforts against religious innovations went hand in hand with the effort towards the establishment of conditions conducive to the practise of 'proper' Islam. The method included migration to form a new community of believers, dissociation from a society they saw as evil, the building of new structures and ways of life, and the introduction of an integrated educational model to preserve the authentic teachings and practise of Islam.

At the local level Rimo was reacting against the perceived laxity or excesses of the *ulamaa* and at the national level against bad governance. Intellectually, his discourse has polarised the opinions between 'traditional' Islam and 'modern' Islam. The

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[227] Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda, held on 18.05.2015.

'traditional' Islam was represented at the local level by the local *ulamaa of* the numerous *vyuo* and mosques, imparting the basics of Islam, but little more. The more 'modern' *ulamaa* schooled in formal Islamic institutions included Sheikh Rimo and his contemporaries from the University of Madinah. It is the modern *ulamaa* who initiated reforms out of their dissatisfaction with Islam as practised by the older generation.[228] This dissatisfaction leads to strain among Muslims and at times to open confrontation that causes division among Muslims as evident with the case of Digo Muslims in Diani. Like elsewhere in Kenya, the new *ulamaa* are seen to "be implementing an essentially Wahhabi doctrine."[229]

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[228]Sheldon Geller. 2016. "Religion and Democratisation in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa: Parallels in the Evolution of Religious and Political governance structures." A paper presented to a conference on Designing Constitutional Arrangements for Democratic Governance in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities. Bloomington, Indiana. p.12.

[229]Bakari, M. "The New 'Ulama in Kenya." *op.cit*. p.76.

CHAPTER FOUR

**THE ANSARI MUSLIM COMMUNITY: GUARDING ISLAMIC VALUES IN
THE FACE OF URBANIZING AND SECULAR ENVIRONMENT**

4.1 Introduction

The Ansari Muslim community of Diani arose out of the ideological teachings of
Sheiikh Abdul Aziz Rimo and efforts by his followers, the Ansari, to resist the
changes attendant upon an urban and modernising society. The largely youthful
Ansari were coalescing under the banner of an Islamic reform *(islah)* fundamentally
to cushion themselves against the disintegration of not only Islam, but traditions and
values in the face of an urbanizing environment.[230] Islamic reform became symbolic
of a lost cultural autonomy in the context of an increasingly complex social
environment. To the general local Muslim population, those sympathetic to their
cause referred to them as '*ma-Answari*' or '*atu a sunna.*'[231] These terms capture
popular imagination of the Ansaris of Sheikh Rimo as a group of Muslims with great
zeal for Islam. But to their critics, they were '*Wahhabi*', a term used derogatively to
suggest that the group was not a part of *Sunni* orthodoxy, but bearing an imprint of the
reformist thought of ibn Wahhab.[232]

The chapter, therefore, explores the events surrounding the founding of the Ansari
community and the conditions within which they emerged as a religious reform
movement in Diani, Kenya. In that regard, I examine the Qur'anic justification
advanced in the movement's self-definition as Ansari and explore the teachings and
practise of the community that border on reform. Of importance is the Ansari

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[230]The loss of the familiar, in this context the erosion of traditions and values, is a source for conflict, as
is pointed   out by Otomar, B.   and Wehr, P, *Using Conflict Theory, op.cit*. p.43.
[231]I have translated these terms as'the Ansari' and 'people of the *Sunna'* respectively.
[232]The same observation has been made by Denise Bregand, speaking of the reformists of Benin who
have similarly been described as '*Wahhabi*' although they do not describe themselves by the name of
their founder. See Bregand, D. "Muslim Reformists and The State in Benin." *op.cit*. p.125.

understanding of Islamic monotheism and the method they used to disseminate their teachings to the masses, particularly against alleged innovations. The chapter, finally, gives a critical assessment of the impact of the Ansari activities among the local Muslims by exploring their influence in the area of religion, education and economic activities.

4.2 The Emergence of the Ansari Muslim Community of Diani

The name 'Ansari' historically began at Madinah where the Muslim immigrants from Makkah and other areas needed help in resettling in Yathrib (later Madinah) and the local Muslims of Madinah gave that help. In popular usage, the immigrants were designated '*muhajirun*', those that moved, and the locals of Madinah became the '*ansar*', helpers. The term *ansari*, historically, refers to any one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad from the inhabitants of Madinah who received and hosted the Muslim immigrants from Makkah and other places.[233] The Qur'an is full of praise for the Madinan Ansari as attested in Q. 8:74. "And as for those who believed and migrated and strove in the way of Allah, and those who gave shelter and helped, those are the believers truly; for them is forgiveness and a noble sustenance." The verse designates as true believers two categories of early Muslims; those from Makkah who accepted the message of Muhammad including his strategic migration to Madinah, and those from Madinah who received and assisted the migrants.

Belief and migration, therefore, became a pious act and the historical Ansari became the prototype for later generations to emulate. In their explanations of the motivation for joining the Ansari community of Diani, most of the local followers quote Q. 8:75,

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[233]Rudiger Seesemann. 2006. "Between Sufism and Islamism: The Tijaniyya and Islamist Rule in the Sudan." *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 15, p. 23.

"And those who believed afterwards and migrated and strove with you, they are of you, and the blood relations are nearer to each other in the book of Allah, verily Allah knows everything." This subsequent verse maintains three characteristic of true belief, which was prescribed for those joining the Madinah Muslim community. Belief, migration and striving are implicitly the criterion for true belief. In similar measure, the Ansari community of Diani received the reformist discourse of Rimo, believed it and later migrated to their own community of believers at Magutu where they performed *da'wah* to call people to the 'true' Islam. They attempted to emulate this threefold model in pursuit of the status of true belief.

The adoption of the title Ansari by Sheikh Rimo and his students was an attempt at recreating this prophetic model in contemporary Digo society. Upon his release from detention in 1992, Rimo declared that "*mimi kuanzia leo naitwa Nur din Ansari*"[234] (As from today I am Nur din Ansari), and consequently his followers became the *Ansari-Sunna* (rescuers of the prophetic way of life). To Rimo's students the adoption of the name Ansari placed upon them the task of reviving the practises of the prophet in their daily life. Both ritual and social affairs were modelled along the code established by the conduct of Prophet Muhammad at Madinah in the seventh century.[235] Clearly, parallels were being drawn between these contemporary revivers of the *Sunna* and prophet Isa ibn Maryam who the Qur'an terms as "*Ansari-llah*" (helper of Allah in the revival of religious conduct). [236]

More so, the reform activities of the Ansari movement at Diani became possible as a

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[234]Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth. Ukunda,held on 28-02-2015.
[235]Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth. Ukunda, held on 28-02-2015.
[236]Surah Al Jumu'ah, Q.61:14. ''O you who believe! Be you helpers in the Cause of Allah as said Jesus, son of Mary to the disciples: who are my helpers in the Cause of Allah? The disciples said: ''we are Allah's helpers.'' Then a group of the children of Israel believed and a group disbelieved. Therefore, We provided those who believed Assistance against their enemies and they became triumphant.''

result of the mood obtaining in the country at the time. A confluence of social and political factors led to the opening up of political space from the previous single party rule to a multi-party system within an atmosphere of greater public participation and political awareness. Internal pressures for political reforms in Kenya came, as demonstrated in chapter one, from civil society, political leaders, agitators and religious bodies.[237] The fact that the political reforms benefitted the Muslim community and gave it voice is aptly expressed by Alamin Mazrui who argues:

> This opening up of the political space, however, has also allowed constituencies that had hitherto felt marginalised or subjected to internal colonialism to rise up, affirm their presence and demand their rights. This has been true of ethnic groups as much as of religious communities, of race as well as of gender. All this is part of the centrifugal face of globalisation. Repressed Muslim minorities or newly threatened Muslim communities have thus taken advantage of the new political space to express a new sense of identity in relation to the nation state as part and parcel of a democratic struggle to inscribe themselves in a reconfigured national space.[238]

While local conditions facilitated the emergence of Islamic reform activities, the phenomenon was also a beneficiary of global trends that opened up political spaces to allow the participation of groups that may have been subsumed in repressive political structures. Although economic globalization led to the impoverishment of already poor communities as a result of unbalanced trade and a skewed competition for resources, it pushed Muslim populations towards Islam as a solution to the crises of modernization.[239] The foregoing analysis situates the reform activities of the Ansari community of Diani also within a broader national discourse that saw the end of single party rule and the beginnings of a multi-party system. Therefore, both the religious reform messages of the Ansari community and the economic realities of deprivation and marginalisation predisposed the members of the movement to a better

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[237]Ndzovu, H. "Muslims and Party Politics and Electoral Campaigns in Kenya." op.cit. p.4.
[238] Mazrui, A. "Globalization and the Muslim World." op.cit. p.4.
[239]*Ibid*, p.6.

reception of the reformist ideas of Sheikh Rimo.

Clearly, there are numerous factors that created a suitable environment for the appearance of the Ansari Muslim community of 'true' believers. They included demographic, socio-economic, pedagogical, religious, personal and structural. Arguably, the supporters of the Ansari movement joined the community because they found its discourse as espoused by Rimo attractive. These Muslims were part of a "susceptible audience" involved in a reciprocal relationship with the reformist ideas of Sheikh Rimo.[240]

4.3.1 Local Factors: Religious, Pedagogical and Marginalization Sentiments

The membership of the Ansari community largely consisted of men in the age bracket of 18-25, and fewer were in the age bracket of 25-35. There were also very few older men in the age bracket 35 and above. The few women evident within the community were mostly spouses and daughters of the men who had joined the movement.[241] Majority of the members of the Ansari community were uneducated in the secular form of education but had some basic understanding of the Qur'an and Sunna with most being in the informal sector which predisposed them to easily give in to the reformist ideas of Sheikh Rimo, which provided vision and coherence to their lives. The socio-economic environment assisted in influencing identification with and affiliation to the Ansari community. With little prospects for absorption into the formal economy and little opportunities for economic development, the Ansari community as an alternative society appeared attractive to the marginalized segment of the local Muslim population.

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[240] Terje Ostebo. 2008. "The Question of Becoming: Islamic Reform Movements in Contemporary Ethiopia." *Journal of Religion in Africa*,Vol. 38, Fasc. 4, p.419.
[241]Interview with Ustaadha Halima, Ukunda, held on 16.04.2015.

A section of local Muslims were dissatisfied and disillusioned that their youth had found it difficult to secure formal employment, a situation that predisposed the Muslim youth to the reformist teachings of Sheikh Rimo.[242] As a result the Ansari community provided an organisational structure with which the disillusioned members of the Digo community could identify. Thus, the Ansari community emerged as an alternative body on which the young faithful were willing to pin their hopes. The local Muslims' sentiments and perceptions of marginalization by the government provided silent impetus for success at recruiting members to the Ansari community. As some scholars have observed, "the government's attitude toward and plans for the coastal communities have led citizens in coast to feel that their resources are being used for the benefit of others."[243] Whether or not that is true, the perception that Kenyan government resource allocation is skewed against the local residents fed into feelings of being marginalized and increased levels of resentment against the central government. This has given alternate societies favour as places for the articulation of collective grievances against the state.

Those fairly educated in Islam were impressed by the detail and method of Sheikh Rimo, predisposing them to accept his *da'wah*. As a scholar and preacher, Rimo built upon what they knew and probably satisfied their longing for a deeper understanding of their faith. His method on teaching the Qur'an consisted of recitation of specific portions of the Qur'an, exegesis of its meanings, focusing on memorization and consistently encouraging its application. This method and its details clarified doubts in the listeners. It made this category of audience to, in a way, 'own' their understanding of the Qur'an. This method assured the implementation of the Qur'an

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[242]Interview with Ustaadha Maimuna, Ukunda, held on 16.04.2015.

[243] Fatima Azmiya Badurdeen. 2012. "Youth Radicalisation in the Coast Province of Kenya." *Africa Peace and Conflict Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp.54-55.

rather than its mere 'rote learning.' Rimo's pedagogy was a departure from the conventional 'traditional' one that, according to respondents, had always emphasized memorization of texts sometimes without a corresponding discussion of its meaning.[244]

Sheikh Rimo's method of preaching was forthright, critical, non-compromising and non-apologetic. His binary categorizations between *haqq* (proper) and *batil* (improper), Sunna and *bid'a* (religious innovation), *tawheed (*unity of Allah*)* and *shirk* (associating Allah with others) and truth versus falsehood resulted in a polarization of the religious landscape, attracting wrathful opposition from traditional *ulamaa* who did not accept Rimo's criticism. In this regard it appealed mostly to the knowledgeable youth owing to the characteristic divide between youth and the elderly segment of the local Muslim community. In contradistinction to the older *ulamaa*, the new group of Digo Islamic scholars from religious colleges and universities had greater success in reaching out to the youth. As elsewhere in Africa, it has been observed that this category of *ulamaa* brought a reformist strand to their preaching, which (coupled with the preachers' comparative youthfulness) made them capable of relating to the concerns of the younger segment of the local Muslims.[245]

As a religious response, joining the Ansari could be seen as a rejection of the globalising influences of Diani and a conscious effort to re-awaken the spirit of Islam. The globalising influences had exposed the Diani society to bars, casinos, nightclubs, prostitution and other 'vices' seen as contrary to Islam and against the essentially Islamic character of the local area. This scenario was blamed on the older *ulamaa,* with their form of Islam interpreted as being too accommodating. The doctrinal

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[244]Interview with Ustaadha Halima, Ukunda, held on 16.04.2015.
[245]Geller, *op.cit*. p.12.

evidence cited by some of my interviewees as motivation for joining the Ansari community was the *ayah* (verse) Q. 11:117, "And your Lord would never destroy the towns wrongfully while their people were right-doers." This verse demonstrates that the Ansari community considered their activism an indication that Islam was still alive among the Digo, thereby viewing themselves as the key to the preservation of Islam and Muslims in line with the promise never to destroy towns where 'right-doers' reside.

The major sentiment of the Ansari was that they wanted to address themselves to what they saw as the diminishing religiosity of the Digo Muslims. In response to the alleged lack of 'true' faith of the Digo Muslim population, the Ansari were directing the local Muslims to the proper conduct of the faith.[246] The perceived lack of 'true' faith of the Digo Muslims could be understood as concern over the apparent disregard for religious stipulations, a phenomenon that was blamed on the reluctance of the older *ulamaa*. The reception of the reformist messages of the Ansari was enhanced by the dissatisfaction of a section of the Digo Muslims with the lack of spiritual zeal of the older clerics[247]

The activity of a number of domestic Islamic organizations supported by foreign funding have also provided an incentive for the flourishing of the Ansari movement. Organisations such as the al-Haramain Foundation, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and Africa Muslim Agency have been active in social service work and religious sensitization.[248] The ideological outlook of these organisations has been closely tied to Wahhabism, thereby supporting the propagation of an extremist

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[246]Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth.Ukunda.28-02-2015.
[247]Interview withSheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth.Ukunda. 28-02-2015.
[248]Bakari, M. 'The New 'Ulama in Kenya." *op.cit*. p.172.

interpretation of Islam.[249] These groups have brought traditional Islam of the conservative *ulamaa* into sharp focus and enabled new voices of reform to enter the religious discourse in the region. One way in which such organisations have influenced Islamic reform activities is by recruiting, training and deploying Islamic teachers and sponsoring *madrasas* and orphanages together with mosques in the region. The institutions established by these organizations played a key role as nuclei for advancing an awareness of religious reform among the local Muslims and as places for the dissemination of a Salafist message. It is through the charity activities that Salafi tendencies are inculcated.

The reformist preaching of Sheikh Rimo appears to have been attractive for two reasons: it gave a sense of belonging to a society where acceptance was guaranteed, and it supplied Islam as a viable alternative.[250] A moral argument given for the affiliation with the Ansari is that a need was felt to re-energise Islam since the increasingly urban environment of Diani attracted Muslim as well as non-Muslim populations. The Islamic character of Diani was felt to have been weakened such that there was a proliferation of bars, prostitution and morals considered improper. Such acts included 'illegal union' of local Muslim youths with 'foreign' (read non-Muslim) partners and the consumption of intoxicants and drugs.[251]

4.3.2 Reformist Teachings of the Ansari: The Attempt at Re-Islamization of the Digo Muslims

According to the Ansari, jihad as expounded by their ideologue and teacher, Rimo, is an effort to break free from un-Islamic practises and institute an environment where

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[249]A. Botha. 2013. "Assessing the vulnerability of Kenyan youths to radicalization and extremism." ISS Paper 245, Institute for Security Studies, p.16.

[251]Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulayman. Ukunda. 16-04-2015.

the practising of the faith can be attuned to the dictates of the religion. The effort to fight *bid'a,* to rid the *umma* of complacency in religious matters, to re-instil regard for prophetic traditions, to make *ibaadat* (worship of Allah) a daily reality in the community constituted their understanding of jihad. It is an understanding of jihad that, arguably, does not encourage military aggression to subdue territories for Islam, but a struggle to change the unfavourable in society to the favourable.[252] However, this understanding of jihad as only a transformative effort to uplift the individual and ultimately society is contested.[253]

The reformist activities of the Ansari were two fold; on one side they focussed on the self and on the other they addressed the general society.[254] The Ansari community was convinced that Islam as practised by the Digo Muslims was in need of reform so as to realign to the 'Islamic' ideals. For instance, the Ansari community taught against use of prayer beads (commonly called *tasbih*). These beads are used in individual prayers and invocations as part of the remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*). The reason for Ansari's admonition against the prayer beads is that the practise cannot be traced to the Prophet, which qualifies it as an innovation.

The Ansari reformed their religiosity by insisting on their members to make a new declaration of faith, the *kalimat*, as it guaranteed the community of individuals who were pious and worthy of emulation. The demand for making a new declaration of faith suggests that the Ansari were attempting at the re-Islamization of Digo-Muslim society. The measure aimed at re-orienting the practises of the Digo Muslim with the ideals of faith, making Islam not an inherited cultural heritage, but a lived experience manifested in their daily lives. According to a majority of Islamic scholars, anyone

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[254]Interview with Sheikh Abdirahiim Mab'ooth.Ukunda. 28-02-2015.

who accepts the cardinal articles of faith and maintains the pillars of Islam is considered a Muslim,[255] a view that was different to the radical interpretation of Rimo. The idea that a person became Muslim not through conscious conviction, but by having been born into Islam became questionable in the preaching of Sheikh Rimo.

Some of the religious innovations the Sheikh castigated and puzzled the local Muslim population included the sensitive issues of praying for the dead. There are in Islam four rites associated with the disposal of the body of a dead Muslim.[256] These are;(i) washing the dead body, (ii) clothing it in a shroud, (iii) praying for the body, and, (iv) burying the body as soon as is possible. While it is considered a communal obligation to pray for every dead Muslim, Rimo brought in a fresh controversy when he taught that it is merely an innovation to offer prayers to nominal Muslims.[257] In his reformist teaching, only Muslims who were regular in their prayer deserved to the fulfilment of this obligation. Muslims who did not pray while alive, according to the Sheikh did not qualify to be considered as Muslims.

Further, Sheikh Rimo also taught against reciting the prayers for the deceased at the graveside (*talqin*), which he considered as *bid'a* too. Rimo insisted that it was the duty of a Muslim to perform the compulsory daily prayers to be assured of the reward in *jannah* (paradise), than waiting for the *talqin* ritual to be observed at one's graveside. Besides *talqin*, Rimo denounced the recitation of the Qur'an ostensibly for the benefit of the dead, a practise known as *khitma*, which is a popular practice among the Kenya coastal Shafi'i Muslim population. In Rimo's interpretation, such practice

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[255] Joseph Lumbard and Aref Ali Nayed (ed.). 2010. "The 500 Most Influential Muslims 2010." (Amman, The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre), p.23.

[256] Ali al-Husaini as-Seestani. 2007. *Islamic Laws*. (Qum, Ansariyan Publications), p.101.

[257] Interview with Sheikh AbdiRahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda.28.02.2015.

will not benefit the deceased who is incapable of hearing the recital.[258]

The Ansari sought new levels of piety by forsaking all dependencies and social ties with non-Ansari family and friends, and forsaking formal employment that is liable to riba and corruption, instead they attempted cultivating total reliance on Allah (*tawakku*l). Frequently cited textual basis for making this decision is Q. 3:102; "O you who believe, Be careful of your duty to Allah with the care which is due to Him…" By severing social and familial ties to join like-minded Muslims under Sheikh Rimo, the Ansari were in their view demonstrating complete reliance on Allah to guide their temporal affairs. In building their community of believers, the Ansari encouraged intra group marriages as a way of strengthening ties among the members. Since they considered themselves as a single body to the exclusion of others, tribal affinities were broken as adherents came from far and wide to coalesce around fellow believers.

As distinguishing features, the male members of the Ansari community began wearing above ankle length trousers and keeping beards in addition to applying brown dye to the hair and beard. On the other hand, the Ansari women began to observe the full body covering (*nikab*) consisting of a long, loose black dress. These identifying marks of the Ansari have remained to date. Considering themselves as the pious community, the performance of their ritual prayer adopted postures different from the traditional one as practised by the majority of Muslims in the area. This included the folding of hands at the chest level instead of at the navel. In addition the design of the Ansari mosques is clearly different without the conventional distinct niches built into the wall from where sermons are read. This mosque architectural design is considered to be similar to the one associated with the Madinah based reform movement, *Jammat*

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[258]Interview with Sheikh AbdiRahiim Mab'ooth, Ukunda.28.02.2015.

al-Sahwa al-Mu'tasiba.[259] Such a move in religious architecture was, at least among the Digo, revolutionary as it contested their popular understanding of Islamic practices.

As the community sought new economic activities in line with Islamic commercial ethics, the members of the Ansari movement plunged into sharia compliant commerce that included crop farming and animal husbandry together with fishing. Their desire was to turn to and embrace business ventures guided by sharia as an Islamic alternative for livelihood. However, there are concerns that the fishing industry is being deliberately curtailed by government with its unpopular policies.[260]

4.4 Conclusion

The work of the Ansari provided an alternative interpretation of Islam that became for their supporters a new reality and for critics another delusion to be ignored. The Ansari of Diani found new vigour in faith as a result of a new approach to preaching that emphasized recitation, exegesis, memorization and application of the Qur'anic teachings. The Sunnah became a yardstick in the fight against religious innovation and moral laxity. Ansari members were able to recruit sympathisers by capitalising on long standing feelings of discrimination and marginalization whose indicators included uneven development patterns considered to be biased against Muslims in Kenya.[261] This attitude of the Muslims is based on what one writer has described as the conspiracy theory that state policies are designed to favour Christians.[262]

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[260] Interview with Sheikh Hamiim Sulayman, Ukunda held on 16-04-2016.
[261] Lind, J., Mutahi, P. and Oosterom, M. 2015.''Tangled Ties; Al-Shabaab and Political Volatility in Kenya. IDS Evidence Report. No. 130, Brighton, IDS, p.19.
[262] Kresse, K. ''Muslim Politics in Postcolonial Kenya''. *op.cit*, S77

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

In Kenya, attempts at Islamic reform have been witnessed among Muslims of coastal Kenya as demonstrated, in Chapter Two, with the work of scholars like Habib Saleh, Sheikh al-Amin, and Sheikh al-Farsy. Habib Saleh is credited with expanding educational opportunities to the Bajuni and other indigenous peoples around Lamu. In this way he contributed towards a reform of the social space of Islam, which had until then been a preserve of the Sharifite clans and a few town dwelling Muslims. Sheikh al-Amin's efforts were directed at uplifting the social and political status of Kenya's Muslim community in the period towards attaining political independence from Britain. He encouraged the use of secular and religious education to improve Muslim's awareness of their situation and to propel them towards social liberation and self-determination.[263] Sheikh al-Farsy's reform efforts were about instituting a 'proper' Islam devoid of religious innovations.

In the more recent past, Islamic reform in Kenya became vivid with the return of Muslim graduates of formal institutions of learning in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Sudan. Among these graduates is Sheikh Rimo whose worldview seems to have been influenced by both local and international scholars whose works exposed him to Salafi reformist ideas in Islam. While in Saudi Arabia, the Sheikh spent eight years at the University of Madinah specializing in hadith sciences. Since its inception in 1961, the institution has endeavoured to advance a reformist understanding of Islam that relies on the foundational scriptures of the faith.[264] As a result, his understanding of *tawheed* was rooted in the scripture, shaping his conception of God on the basis of the

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[263]Kresse, K. "Muslim Politics in Postcolonial Kenya." op.cit. p. S82.
[264]Hegghammer, T and Lacroix, S. "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia." *op.cit*. p.3.

Qur'an and the clarification of the prophetic traditions. After the exposure to the reformist *tawheed* of Sheikh al-Farsy and his anti-*bid'a* jihad, Rimo's ideology was further influenced by the ideas he picked during his studies at the University of Madinah. But it was at Magutu that his ideology was refined and put into practice during his mosque teaching and propagation phase.

The Magutu phase saw Sheikh Rimo build a new community of 'believers' comprising mostly of his students. He forged a strong bond among the Ansari community who came to consider themselves as one body of reformers. In his teaching, Rimo came to an appreciation of the essential purity of worship worthy of God as emphasized in the Qur'an. One verse that he seemed to dwell on mostly was *surah* Al-A'raf, "And as to those who hold fast to the book and perform *as-Salat* (prayers) certainly we shall never waste the reward of those who do righteous deeds" (Q. 7: 170). In the light of the verse, the believer who perseveres in the path of pure *tawheed* and establishes regular prayer will not lack divine reward. Undoubtedly, Rimo's ideology is tied to the superiority of the fundamental texts and the necessity for complete reliance on the texts in guiding human affairs. The organisation of society in line with the dictates of the Qur'an and the demonstration of the prophetic Sunna was seen to be as compulsory as the five daily prayers.

From this reliance on the Quran and Sunna as having the answers to human affairs arises Sheikh Rimo's conflict with state institutions. In the Sheikh's scheme, secular state institutions were in contradiction to Islamic principles thereby the notion of secular governance was an instance of *kufr* (disbelief). By organising society along a secular constitution the government was in the estimation of the Sheikh in manifest error. This error was the inevitable result of disregarding the dictates of Allah as

contained in the key revealed texts. Obeying such a government was in the lens of the Sheikh tantamount to disobeying Allah. Conversely, in affirming obedience to Allah, one had the duty to disobey such a government.

In the effort to create a spiritual environment appropriate for the implementation of *tawheed* in the life of the *umma,* Sheikh Rimo urged Muslims to distance themselves from all manner of *kufr*, including the secular state. Consequently, adherents of the Ansari movement were urged to sever all ties to institutions that represented the 'infidel' state. This led to the Ansari members relinquishing formal employment, discontinuation from various state or secular educational institutions, refusal to participate in national elections, destruction of documents of citizenship such as national identity cards, passports, and academic certificates.

With regard to politics, the administrative machinery of the Kenyan state presented further source of conflict for the Sheikh. According to him, the legitimacy of a government derives from its recognition of the ultimate authority of Allah hence the political administrative institutions are an extension of divine power on earth. In a manner similar to Sayyid Qutb before him,[265] Sheikh Rimo was suggesting that whoever rules not according to the Quran and Sunna is outside the dictates of Islam. In this regard, all governance should abide by the stipulations of the Qur'an and the explanations of the Sunna. Thus, the state established by Prophet Muhammad in Madinah is presented as the model to be followed and emulated. To the Sheikh, Kenya's political model and structures are a clear form of deviation and thereby allegedly forbidden by *sharia*. As a minority religious community being compelled to embrace the dictates of a secular state, the Sheikh instructed his supporters to

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[265]Gilles Kepel. 1958. *The Prophet and The Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt*. (Norfolk: Thetford Press Limited), p.51.

undertake migration (*hijra*) like the earlier Muslim community to establish a model community of believers.

In building this supposedly model community Sheikh Rimo was concretising the ideological shift created by the emergence of the Ansari. While it was an effort to protect its members from the wider society perceived as not Islamic enough, they were at the same time preparing themselves as a party of 'true' believers that could in the future be used in propagation of the purist brand of Islam among the Digo community. Migration from societies deemed irreligious has been noted as a foundational strategy of puritanical Salafi groups that seek to bolster an in-group sense of unity and to guard their *umma* from the wider society.[266]

By not following any particular legal school, Sheikh Rimo was able to pick opinions suitable to his construct of sharia and to prefer some over others and in this way confronted the traditional authority of the *ulamaa* in matters of Islamic jurisprudence. Theoretically, Rimo's conflict with the state arises from disparate worldviews, one religious and the other secular. This key conflict is aggravated by the Ansari sense of deprivation characterized by their feelings of exclusion from national and political development. The Ansari as a group, therefore, rejected the wider society and created a tightly knit ideological in-group of fellow believers that is out of reach not only for non-Muslims, but for Muslims as well.

Bjonn Moller pointed out that one of the main problems evident during Moi's presidency, (and which this study found the Sheikh contested), was bad governance.[267] As a result, religious bodies appeared on the political scene to speak out against bad leadership. Due to the absence of official opposition, religious

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[266]Moussali, A. "Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism." *op.cit*. p.6.
[267]Moller, B. "Political Islam." *op.cit*. p.8.

organisations and their leaders emerged to fill the void thereby undertaking active participation in pointing out the government's shortcomings. Religion ceased to be a sphere apart and passive, instead becoming an active stakeholder demanding accountability from the government.

It is against this background that Sheikh Rimo's denunciation of the Moi regime needs to be viewed. It is part of the response by religious figures to perceived failings in the functioning of the government. The relative success of the Sheikh amongst his supporters, the Ansari, stems from the view that they are residents in a region that Moller describes as "marginalised...discriminated against (and) underdeveloped."[268] The key indicators used by Moller to characterize Rimo's region of operation as marginalized and underdeveloped vis-à-vis the rest of the country are per capita income, levels of education and availability of health services.[269] The conflict attendant upon the relations of Rimo and the state deserve to be seen not only in relation to Islam as a religion, but also in relation to the socio-political context in which these were played out. According to Lewis Coser, conflict is beneficial to society because it is often the source of new values thereby sustaining the dynamism of groups and of societies.[270]

Therefore, if the perceived marginalisation of the Digo could be interpreted as evidence for differentiation based on lack of political power,[271] it provides validation for the formation of the Ansari movement as an attempt to create an ideological structure within which to seek change of unfavourable state of political subjugation. Religion, for the Ansari community, drives change within the national space by

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[268] *Ibid,* p.9.
[269] *Ibid*, p.9.
[270] Coser, L. *The Functions of Social Conflict*, *op.cit*. p.108.
[271] Mwakimako H.A. 1995. "Muslim N.G.O's and Community Development". *op.cit*. p.271.

providing the ideological platform to fight perceived imbalances. With regard to the religious innovations, secularization and forms of syncretism that Rimo and the Ansari resisted, their conflict with the Digo society reflects an in-group boundary that proposes new norms and values derived from the prophetic Sunna. These new norms were instituted as an effort to rejuvenate the 'true' spirit of Islam culminating in the establishment of an experimental utopia, the Ansari community of Diani.

The work of a number of foreign and local N.G.O's in Islamic charities and propagation also prepared the ground for the activities of the Ansari community.[272] Some of the organisations active in building madrassas, mosques as well as orphanages in the Muslim areas, particularly in the South Coast, include the Young Muslim Association and the Al-Haramain Foundation.[273] The ideological outlook of these organisations has been closely tied to Wahhabism, thereby supporting the propagation of an extremist interpretation of Islam.[274] The institutions established by these organizations played a key role as nuclei for advancing an awareness of religious reform among the local Muslims and as places for the dissemination of a Salafist message. It is through the charity activities that puritanical Salafi tendencies are inculcated.

Sheikh Rimo as an intellectual was able to synthesize his understanding of Islamic reform from the international arena and to localize that debate on reform to his own South Coast society. He facilitated the transfer of reformist concepts and interpretations of Islam from his own teachers and mentors such as Sheikh al-Farsy to the Madrassat ul Tawheed at Maganyakulo and finally to the Masjid Nur at Ukunda. In this way, Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari represent a home-grown attempt at reform of

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[272] Jeffrey Haynes. 2005. "Islamic Militancy in East Africa." *Third World Quarterly*. 26(8), p. 132.
[273] Lind, J, Mutahi, P, and Oosterom, M. *op.cit*. p.19.
[274] A. Botha, *op.cit*. p.16

Islam. Although the sheikh provided the ideological link to Saudi Arabia reformist currents by virtue of his eight year studies at the University of Madinah, the local community appropriated the reformist message and applied it to their community in an attempt to realign the practise of the faith with an ideal Islam of the prophetic era.

Rimo, however, came into conflict with the traditional *ulamaa* as a result of their different educational backgrounds. While the *chuo* system in Kenya, and its scholars, bear the imprint of the predominant Shafi'i *madhhab*, Rimo's Salafist leanings eschew affiliation to the four traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence and in this way he castigated numerous popular religious and cultural practices that the traditional *ulamaa* had tolerated. While the emerging tensions cast Rimo as radical in his view of 'proper' Islam, they also present the traditional *ulamaa* as supposedly lax in spiritual observances and tolerant of innovations. Sheikh Rimo's *da'wah* led a number of people to renounce their prior social ties to join his model community that sought to re-enact the observance of 'proper' Islam.

5.2 Contribution

This study has explored the question of Islamic reform among the Digo Muslims of South Coast, Kenya. Aware of lack of comprehension and complexity of what Islamic reform entails, the study approached the concept as the attempt to reinvigorate the practice of Islam by presenting a puritanical interpretation that is free from any form of syncretism and religious innovation. But more specific, the study showed that Islamic reform is a multi-dimensional phenomenon capable of expression in a variety of contexts; socio-cultural in its critique of non-Islamic mores seen to corrupt an essentially Islamic environment, political in its capacity to mobilize popular sentiment against injustice in state administration, and religious in its intent to return Muslims to

an ideal. As a result, the study presented Sheikh Rimo's views and those of the Ansari community to fit the above description.

Significantly, the study sought to document the teachings of Sheikh Rimo given the paucity of such knowledge. As a reform oriented Islamic scholar, Rimo's discourse resonates with the global voices of Islamic reform as articulated by ibn Taymiyyah, ibn Wahhab, al-Afghani and Abduh. To sum up, the main contribution of this research is its analysis of the teaching and Islamic propagation activities of an indigenous Muslim scholar on Islamic reform discourse among the Digo. More importantly, it paid attention to the localisation of the Islamic reform debate among a local Muslim community in Kenya, thereby documenting the work and contribution of Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari community of Diani. The resultant information will hopefully assist in adding to the available pool of knowledge and further serve as a background for subsequent research on Islamic reform currents in Kenya.

5.3 Recommendations

As a pioneering extensive study on Sheikh Rimo and the Ansari community of Diani, it is expected that future researchers with interest on Islam and Islamic reform will correct any misrepresentations in this analysis and branch into areas not covered in this work. There is need to explore the changes initiated by the exposure of Kenyan Muslim students to formal institutions of higher learning abroad, particularly, the explorations of the literary, missionary and reformist contribution of scholars like Sheikh Nassor Khamis, and Sheikh Seif Fundi, among others. It is my hope that the extant body of works by Sheikh Rimo and his contemporaries, both, audio, visual and written, shall be gathered, recorded and preserved for future reference. In addition, while Sheikh Rimo's political reformism was short-lived since he chose to remain largely silent after his release from prison, there is need for further studies to

investigate the reach of his political views and whether these had taken root in the mind of his followers, especially given the risk that there is an opinion that his views and teachings were utilized by later preachers such as Sheikh Aboud Rogo in building upon the associations to and sympathies with transnational Islamist networks in Somalia and elsewhere.

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GLOSSARY OF FOREIGN WORDS AND TRANSLATIONS

Ahl al- Sunnah wa al- jamaa: People of the traditions and community, Muslims who follow orthodox Islam.

Ahl al- bid'a: People of innovations, or Muslims accused of incorporating innovations in religious practice.

Ansari: Followers of the reformist teachings of Abdul Aziz Rimo.

Ashraf (sgl.Sharif): Muslims who claim to trace their decent from Prophet Muhammad.

Bid'a: Innovation in religious matters.

Da'wah: Islamic propagation

Kafir: A disbeliever in Allah, a person who by virtue of gross misconduct may be said to be a non-believer.

Madrasa: Traditional Qur'anic school without a formal curriculum.

Mawlid: Celebrations to mark the birth of Prophet Muhammad.

Mujaddid: Muslim Reformer.

Salaf: The pious predecessors of Prophet Muhammad whose age and practices are considered worthy of emulation.

Takfir: Act of declaring a person an unbeliever.

Talqin: Creedal invocations and instructions recited for the
                        deceased at the graveside immediately after burial.

Taqlid: The practise of following legal rulings and opinions of
                        earlier generations of scholars.

Ulamaa (sgl ʾalim):   Persons learned or knowledgeable in Islamic studies.

Qunut: Special supplications made during Muslim prayer.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: List of Respondents

1. Self declared Members of the Ansari.
   1. Sheikh Hamiim Sulaiman
   2. Sheikh Uthman Mab'ooth
   3. Ustaadha Halima
   4. Ustaadha Maimuna

2. Local Administrators.
   1. Area chief (Diani) Ibraahim Makanzu
   2. Assistant area chief
   3. Area chief (Kinondo) Muhammad Riga
   4. Assistant area chief

3. Contemporaries of Sheikh Rimo
   1. Sheikh Nassor Khamis
   2. Sheikh Seif Fundi
   3. Sheikh Swaleh
   4. Sheikh Umar Salim

4. Leaders of Muslim Organisations
   1. Chair, Supkem

   2. Secretary, Supkem

   3. Chair, C.I.P.K

   4. Secretary, C.I.P.K

Appendix II: Selected Questions

1. Who are the Ansari?

2. Why did you become a member or follower of the Ansari?

3. What are the teachings of the Ansari and how different are they from those of other Muslims?

4. Is there doctrinal justification that supports the Ansari practices?

5. Describe the relationship between the Ansari and the non-Ansari Muslims among the Digo Muslim community?

6. What do you think to be the lasting legacy initiated by the Ansari among the Digo Muslims

7. What is the position of the Ansari on the relationship between men and women in society?

8. What is the position of the Ansari on the issue of education both secular and religious?

9. Who is Sheikh Abdul Aziz Rimo? Give a brief family background and educational history

10. What was Sheikh Rimo's understanding of the concept of tawheed?

11. Was Rimo's understanding of tawheed different from that of other Muslims?

12. What religious practices observed by most Digo Muslims did Sheikh Rimo discourage and why?

13. What was the relationship between Sheikh Rimo and other local sheikhs who did not subscribe to his interpretation of Islam?

14. What was Rimo's lasting legacy in the teaching and propagation of Islam? Did his teaching qualify as Islamic reforms?

15. What was Sheikh Rimo's influence in the emergence of the Ansari Muslim community among the local Digo community?

16. Did Sheikh Rimo's preaching also address the issue of political reforms?

17. How vocal was Sheikh Rimo in advocate for political changes in the local and national politics?

18. What do you think is the attitude of the Kenya government towards the Ansari Muslim community in general?

19. Since independence do you think the state has shown enough concern for the general welfare of Muslims?

20. Do you agree that the Muslim community has been marginalized and discriminated against?

21. How would you describe Muslim appointments by the various post-colonial regimes

22. Which areas of service delivery have Muslims suffered most discrimination?

Appendix III: Informed Consent Form

INTRODUCTION

My name is Mohamed Ndaro, a Master of Philosophy in Religious Studies student at Moi University. I am carrying out a study on the life and contributions of Sheikh Abdul Aziz Rimo and the Ansari Muslim community. The field survey for this study requires the conducting of interviews with selected adults from Diani and Kinondo locations in Kwale County. I would like to seek your consent for carrying out the interview.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I am aware that the study is academic and that information from the study will be used to prepare a research report for examination purposes.

CONFIDENTIALITY: I have been assured that the information that I will give will be kept confidential.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: I have been made to understand that there will be no risks or benefits due to my involvement in this study.

COSTS

I have been informed that there are no costs involved in participating in the interviews and in case of any questions, comments, concerns or complaints relating to the study; I will contact the investigator through; mohamedndaro@gmail.com or the Department of Philosophy, Religion and Theology of Moi University.

CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this sheet/ form and have read through it and understood all its contents.

Participant;

Signature…………………………………….

Date………………………………………….

Researcher seeking consent;

Signature……………………………………..

Date…………………………………………..