INTRODUCTION

Kenya’s established tradition of separation of church and state has not successfully severed the relationship between religion and politics. This book investigates the interweaving of religion and politics and, in particular, the changing relationship between Muslims and various political developments in Kenya from precolonial times to the present. It traces the role of Muslim individuals and associations under different political regimes, and explores the ways in which Muslims have politically mobilized in a context of political authoritarianism and limited space for protest in Kenya. This has led to increasing politicization of Islam in Kenya, with the formation of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) in 1992 crystallizing the growing process of radicalization of sections of Kenyan Muslims. Bassam Tibi asserts that religion is today becoming increasingly politicized as an ideology of mobilization.¹ He holds that “the politicization of religion signifies the articulation of a concept of order designed and articulated in divine terms.”² Based on this argument, the politicization of Islam results in the belief that “Islam is a political system in as much as it is a religious one.”³

Politicization of Islam in Kenya is intrinsically connected to Muslims’ sense of their own marginalization, which shapes their understanding of Kenyan politics and governmental policies. Since the 1990s, an antigovernment stance has manifested among Muslims in Kenya, and there is much speculation about why. This book examines Muslim discontent and traces it to a myriad of factors, the most significant being perceived discrimination and marginalization, as well as divisions within Muslim communities. If one engages a Muslim in a discussion about the condition of Muslims, the conversation will likely include the following points: educationally, there is low enrollment of Muslim children in schools; economically, the majority of Muslims are jobless or low-income earners and generally poor; and politically, Muslims do not have sufficient clout to influence policy making. As a result, Muslims have come to perceive their situation as “collective discrimination, punishment and marginalization of the community.”⁴ To illustrate their oppressed condition, this is how they interpret certain events confronting Muslims: The internal security permanent secretary ordered an audit of properties in the Eastleigh Estate in Nairobi. These properties have witnessed enormous investments by both Kenyan and non-Kenyan Somalis. There is concern that
some of the wealth that the Kenyan Somalis hold is associated with illegal activities, such as piracy, and that wealthy Somalis who benefit from the proceeds of piracy are escalating the property prices in Kenya’s towns beyond the reach of most Kenyans. The audit would ascertain the income sources of Somali investors, but Muslims want to know why the government is only targeting the Somalis.

From time to time, the government has been freezing the issuance of identity cards (IDs) to Northeastern Province residents, who are predominantly Somali, on the pretext that foreigners were also being issued the IDs. This government policy has led Muslims to ask why an entire region should be punished because of a few corrupt immigration officers. Another government ministry that raised suspicions for Muslims is Environment and Natural Resources, which proposed a law seeking to regulate noise and excessive vibration. Though the statement published by the ministry did not directly identify the Muslim call to prayer (adhaan) as one of the sources of noise pollution, Muslims are concerned that such a law will impede the call to prayer because it employs loudspeakers. Muslims view the noise-reduction proposal as a strategy to curtail their freedom of worship, and claim that the government declared the adhaan to be noise. There is also the Catholic Church’s refusal to allow Muslim children wearing head scarves (hijab) to continue attending schools that are run by the church but whose teachers are paid by the government. Muslims feel that the head scarf is being used as a pretext to deny Muslim children education. These are only some of the frustrations building up in the Muslim community and waiting to erupt.

Obviously, the Kenyan government alone cannot be held responsible for this situation; a share of the blame must be placed on local and national Muslim political leaders as well. This book explores the myriad problems confronting Muslims, including failures of leadership. Besides providing lackluster service to their constituents, most Muslim politicians have done little to inspire political awareness in their communities or to initiate projects that would socially elevate their electorates, particularly Muslims. However, the overwhelming perception of marginalization and discrimination is beginning to mobilize Muslim politicians (extremists included) to demand justice and fair treatment. Poor education, economic impoverishment, and political powerlessness are some of the many reasons why frustrated Muslims have resorted to politicizing Islam to agitate for their rights. Consequently, the non-Muslim Kenyan community is concerned about the aggressive political activism by some Muslim leaders demanding justice and equality for Muslims. By examining the dynamics of Muslim politics in Kenya, this book hopes to illuminate possibilities and the potential for a positive future.

The discourse of religion and politics is often confused with what is commonly referred to as the church-state relationship. While the problem of church and state involves institutions that are independent of each other and
thereby separable, the question of religion and politics revolves around a different set of issues involving the same people. Citizens who belong to religious groups are also members of political parties, and this dual association generates complications.

Religion influences the social, cultural, and political lives of communities in different ways. From time immemorial, religion and politics have been inseparable. Islam and Christianity, in order of seniority, are the two dominant religions in Kenya. Historically, both Islam and Christianity have been state religions in different places of the world; they have even survived as such in modern times. In Kenya, the concept of state religion has not been incorporated into national politics based on the separation of church and state. However, while separation of church and state has been established, religion and politics continue to interact, and the personal involvement of politicians in religion is quite common. For example, President Daniel arap Moi takes members of his cabinet and senior government officials to participate in a Christian crusade organized by the renowned televangelist Reinhard Bonnke. The president “informed the crusade team that he had ordered the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to broadcast the final two crusade meetings LIVE across the nation on television and radio.” Such media coverage is usually restricted to “official state occasions”; hence, Bonnke sees it as “a mighty miracle in the declaration of the Gospel.” Clearly, public participation by the political leadership in religious events enhances the bond between church and state, further integrating religion with politics.

Hassan Mwakimako dismisses the legitimacy of church and state separation in Kenya, arguing that it is only employed to suppress Muslims’ political aspirations and to favor Christians. This view is misleading; if Christians were indeed favored, then church leaders would not have been critical of the Kenyan government and strongly opposed to the one-party system that dominated national politics for more than two decades. The church challenged authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and the rigging of elections that were characteristic of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) regime. President Moi’s regime was extremely unpopular, and the church pulpit provided a forum from where popular disenchantment could be raised. The religious sector is one of many that publicly express dissatisfaction with the government. Here, the term religious sector is used to refer to a vast community comprised of religious leaders, respected jurists, and teachers of the various religious groups in Kenya. In this sense, the meaning is not restricted to bishops, priests, imams, sheikhs, ulama, and Kadhis, but to a more general group of people who may be referred as “holy men.” Since the late 1990s, religious leaders have been in the forefront, advocating for people-driven constitutional reforms as opposed to government-sponsored reforms. Together with other civil bodies, religious societies have played significant roles in promoting multiparty democracy, civic education, and good governance.
However, the power of the religious sector could not match that of the state. With its loyal security forces, the government was capable of controlling any religious opposition it viewed as a political threat. President Moi’s regime perfected state control over the lives of citizens, and any criticism of the state’s excess was perceived as dissent. David Throup asserts that when Moi assumed power, he embarked on creating a political hegemony that included advancing people from his Kalenjin community into positions of influence. This process coincided with the ascension of a populist generation of politicians in the ruling party, KANU, who attacked any individual criticizing Moi’s policies. Despite this development, a section of leaders in the religious sector continued criticizing Moi’s government without fear, providing a surrogate opposition to his regime.

Vocal religious personalities like Bishop Alexander Muge of the Anglican Church, Muslim preacher Khalid Balala, and Father John Antony Kaiser of the Catholic Church suffered the consequences of opposing the regime. Muge died in a suspicious road accident in 1990, Balala was stripped of his Kenyan citizenship while he was visiting Germany in 1995, and Kaiser was mysteriously murdered in 2000. Many Kenyans believe that these incidents were politically motivated and suspect state involvement because these three religious figures were strong critics of Moi’s administration. The incumbent regime viewed criticism by religious bodies as encroachment into its political domain and insisted that religious leaders should not indulge themselves in politics, since it is an arena exclusively for politicians. As an autonomous force, Steve Bruce argues, religion is capable of creating order and stability by binding people together under a shared belief, a common cosmology, and morality. But despite promoting social cohesion, religion can also present “a potential threat to any political order” because of its ability to challenge political authority. It is this posed threat that led the political leadership in Kenya to call for a separation of religion and politics, which is meant to restrict the political engagement of religious leaders rather than to undermine a particular faith.

Religion took a prominent role in the public domain as a result of political liberalization that allowed multiparty politics in Kenya, leading Rene Otayek and Benjamin F. Soares to comment that “Islam, Christianity, and even African traditional religions have all in varying degrees ‘gone public’ and entered into politics.” Muslims in Kenya capitalized on this emerging development by increasing their political activities, with Muslim activists and preachers joining the seasoned politicians. Kenya’s political history amply illustrates the salient role of Muslims in national politics. Donal B. Cruise’s position that Kenyan Muslims “seemed to find little to say of their present situation” due to their own incompetence at engaging in national politics is not true. This book explores abundant evidence that Muslims have engaged in national politics in both the colonial and postcolonial period.
Muslims in Kenya predominantly inhabit the Northeastern Province and the coastal region. Islam has remained the dominant religion in these areas, along with traditional tribal institutions and values. Pockets of Muslim populations are concentrated in the interior of the country in various urban centers like Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kisumu, and Mumias. The most striking feature of the Kenyan Muslims, like their Christian compatriots, is a sociocultural heterogeneity that cuts across the various racial and ethnic groups in the country. Due to this heterogeneity, Muslims’ political participation has often been influenced by ethnic, racial, and sometimes religious considerations. In some cases, such racial and ethnic heterogeneity does not support a monolithic political voice. Instead, in a widely varied and plural community, the political control of certain personalities is bound to be eroded when racial and ethnic considerations constitute the main factors of political mobilization. This, in combination with other factors, has made the Muslim community in Kenya and their political direction vulnerable to external penetration and manipulation. These cleavages are traced to the British colonial policy of racially differentiating Muslims based on their Arab and African ancestries.

This study examines the contemporary consequences of that colonial policy. After independence, Muslims groups discarded their differences under the unifying umbrella of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) and also became integrated into the regimes of presidents Jomo Kenyatta (1963–78), Daniel arap Moi (1978–2002), and Mwai Kibaki (2002–13). In a study by Francois Constantin, he argues that the creation of a national Muslim association in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania was “part of a general policy of social control initiated by post-colonial governments.” It is this desire that influenced the creation of organizations such as SUPKEM, Baraza Kuu la Waislamu wa Tanzania (BAKWATA), and the National Association for the Advancement of Muslims in Uganda (NAAM). According to Constantin, all of these national associations are expected to be loyal to their respective governments and to abstain from political involvement. It is this position that compelled me to ascertain why SUPKEM, within the Kenyan context, has been reluctant to participate in partisan politics.

It is important to realize that ethnicity has remained prevalent in Kenyan politics because of its composition as a multiethnic nation-state, with subnational identities based on language, common ancestry, and religion. Sometimes, religion and ethnicity combine to provide individuals with distinct identities. There is a tendency in Kenya to associate one’s ethnicity with a particular religion; this is why Islam, for example, is associated with “Arab,” Digo, and Swahili ethnic groups living at the coast or the Somalis of northeastern Kenya, while ethnic groups from the hinterland, such as the Luo and the Kikuyu, are viewed as Christians. Due to this affiliation of different ethnic communities with particular faiths, independent Kenya has experienced ethnic and sometimes religious tension that often arises from Muslims’ claims
of marginalization by the regimes of three presidents who are all ethnically associated with Christianity.

As a minority religious group vis-à-vis Christians, it can hardly be expected that Muslims would constitute a dominating force in Kenyan politics. However, they have less political influence than their proportion suggests. Despite the integration of some Muslims into the British administration of indirect rule, Muslims did not manage to capitalize on their privileged position, particularly in the coastal region. Muslims not only failed to seize the educational opportunities offered by the colonial regime; in some cases they deliberately ignored them. This has heightened the Muslim perception of marginalization and discrimination. My study establishes that Kenyan Muslims actively give voice to the issue of political neglect, arguing that since independence the upcountry Christian ruling class has regarded them as politically insignificant and, therefore, allocated them paltry positions in government. As an emerging young nation—between 1963 and 1979—there were no Muslim cabinet members in government, demonstrating the lack of political influence of Kenyan Muslims in the country. This heightened Muslims feeling alienated and discriminated against with the advent of the upcountry Christian hegemony. This book discusses the chief manifestations of such Kenyan Muslim discrimination.

Despite this shared experience, the Muslim community in Kenya is not monolithic. The large majority of Kenyan Muslims belong to the various Sufi orders—such as the Qadiriyya and the Alawiyya—that are prominent in the rural areas.21 This diversity within the community is further reflected in the presence of the two major Sunni and Shi’a sects, both of which contain internal differences, such as the Ithna’ashari, Ismailis, and Bohora among the Shi’a, and the different schools of law among the Sunni Muslims. Furthermore, Kenyan Muslims come from culturally diverse ethnic and racial groups, who practice distinct versions of the Muslim way of life. These examples of diversity illustrate that Muslims in Kenya do not present a single cohesive community.

There are conflicting reports regarding the number of Muslims in Kenya. Statistics vary depending on the source of information. Non-Muslim sources usually estimate the Muslim population to be between 5 and 8 percent, whereas Muslim sources propose higher figures of between 25 and 35 percent.22 External sources give similarly different figures. For instance, a 2007 report by the U.S. State Department notes that “approximately 80 percent of the country practices Christianity; Protestants represents 58 percent of the Christian majority, Roman Catholics represent 42 percent. Ten percent of the population practice Islam, less than 1 percent practice Hinduism, Sikhism, and Baha’i, and the remainder follow various traditional indigenous religions. There are very few atheists.”23 Another external report ranks the population of Muslims in Kenya at 24 percent,24 while Arye Oded points out that
the 1998 census estimated the population at 20 percent. The 2009 census has been rejected by Muslim leaders; it put the community’s population at 10 percent, which they allege is underestimated. On average, Muslims claim to represent at least 30 percent of the population.

Muslims alleged that certain government officials in the department dealing with census had deliberately manipulated the 2009 census data to adjust the figures of Kenyan Somalis—and to a large extent Muslims. This demonstrates keen awareness, and even apprehension, of the numbers of Kenyan Somalis (read also Muslims) by the central government that did not exist before. Clearly, the numerical strength of the various religious groups in Kenya is a volatile issue. Muslims claim that they have received fewer resources and insignificant appointments into positions of power despite their sizeable numbers. In fact, the government does make decisions based on ethnic demography, allocating national resources according to the ratio of an ethnic group to the total population. The smaller the population, the fewer resources it receives.

My examination of majority-minority relations draws from the works of Norman R. Yetman, Joseph B. Gittler, and Otomar J. Bartos and Paul Wehr. Yetman traces the political origins of majority-minority consciousness to the emergence of nationalism and nation-states in Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the term minority “was used to characterize national or ethnic groups that had become subordinate to the peoples of another national group through imposition of, or shifts in, political boundaries.” However, by emphasizing the differences in power as the distinctive feature of majority-minority relations, Gittler defines minority as a group “whose members experience a wide range of discriminatory treatment and frequently are relegated to positions relatively low in the status structure of a society.” In the Kenyan context, where religious difference instigates the dominance of the Christian majority over the Muslim minority, conflict is evident if not always overt. In their analysis of several developments in conflict since 1800, Bartos and Wehr argue that ethnic identity and racial superiority were encouraged by European governments as they established colonial empires in Africa. Bartos and Wehr claim that European powers carved up colonial territories with little regard for the prior political arrangements, thus ensuring that civil conflict would occur in these new states. The colonial boundaries split “ethnic groups into two, creating vulnerable minorities.” The authors contend that intergroup resentments were bound to contribute to postcolonial conflict in such arrangements. Following Bartos and Wehr, I examine Muslim-Christian relations in Kenya in terms of conflict between a majority and a minority that have incompatible goals and feel hostility toward each other.

Muslims in Kenya are drawn from minority ethnic groups, thus doubling their sense of marginalization as ethnic and religious minorities. This per-
ceived marginalization led to the formation of various Muslim organizations for improving Muslims’ welfare. Of all these organizations, the most significant politically is the unregistered Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), which was founded in January 1992. The formation of the IPK coincided with the general political activism in the country that inspired Kenyan Muslims to become more forceful in their struggle for equality. This study examines the increased political activism among Muslims that took the form of campaigns for political reforms throughout the country.

This study also explores the incidents of terrorism in Nairobi (1980 and 1988) and Mombasa (2002 and 2003), which posed daunting challenges to the Kenyan government’s attempts to prevent militant Muslims from committing more acts of terrorism in the country without antagonizing its Muslim population. This study delineates the legislative steps taken by the Kenyan government to curb international terrorism and Muslims’ rejection of the Suppression of Terrorism Bill in light of the history of Muslims’ opposition to the controversial legislation. This study illuminates how these legislative contests reveal three major recurrent themes: Muslims’ perceived marginalization, their political involvement, and their minority status. I argue that despite persistent racial and ethnic cleavages, Muslims’ involvement in Kenya’s national politics is linked to their constant sense of marginalization as a minority.

In addition to defining the ideology of mobilization, Islamic symbols are also used to define Muslims as a political community. Ilter Turan defines “political community” as meaning “a collectivity whose members feel they should be under the same government.” Turan adds that the criteria of membership in a political community vary over time and across political systems. Applied to the Kenyan situation, Turan’s analysis sheds light on how Muslims have thought of themselves as a collective or as discrete groups of different tribes and races. This realization of a distinct political identity explains sections of Muslims’ secession campaigns during the early 1960s. Central to Muslim political identity and sense of community is sharia, or Islamic law, which is often used to define Muslims in local and national contexts. For example, the application of sharia is enshrined in the constitutions of Iran and Saudi Arabia, but in Nigeria it is confined to local jurisdiction over Muslims of the northern regions of the country. In Kenya, Muslims’ sense of community and political identity in relationship to sharia has focused on both the demand to retain aspects of sharia in the Kenyan constitution and the application of sharia to Muslims only. Writing about sharia and Sudan, Rex S. O’Fahey argues that the subject of sharia was central to the political and military conflicts in that country. The Islamist government continued enforcement of sharia in Sudan, and its refusal to compromise over the issue has been the source of a protracted civil war in Sudan. In Kenya, tensions between Muslims and the state have sometimes been heightened by governmental policies that are re-
garded as contradictory to certain aspects of Muslims’ personal law. Through excessive lobbying, Muslims have been able to influence governmental decisions and gain exclusion from certain laws of the country.

Since this study is concerned with the relationship between religion and politics in Kenya, it brings forward two important concepts: secularism and the secular state. The term secularism has been interpreted differently by scholars, but despite variant meanings, secularism as an ideology refers to the separation between religion and politics. However, the nature of secularism tends to differ from one state to another, culminating in several types of secular states. In some states, the concept of a secular state implies antireligious propaganda, while in others the religious institution is recognized and respected. When the idea of separation of religion and politics is contextualized within Muslim society, Muslims express divergent views. There are those who hold that religion and politics must be integrated, while other Muslims believe that the two are separable. In their insightful analysis of Muslim politics, Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori concluded that “Muslims hold a variety of opinions on the relationship between religion and politics” but despite “the intellectual diversity, the indivisibility of the two realms persists in the study of Islam.”32 The view that there is no distinction between religion and politics in Islam is widespread among Islamists scholars.

Islamist scholars reject secularism, arguing the commonly held perception that it is an externally imposed ideology that reflects European imperial interests and, therefore, is irrelevant in Muslim societies.33 This position is found in the writings of Khurshid Ahmad, Muhammad Asad, Muhammad Husayn al-Mawdudi, and Hasan al-Turabi, among others. Proponents of this view argue that religion and politics have never been separate entities since the beginning of the history of Islam.34 As evidence, they draw from the life of Prophet Muhammad as both a messenger of God and a political leader of the state of Medina. A leading Islamist, Ayatollah Khomeini, has supported this view in his numerous writings, arguing that those “who consider Islam separate from government and politics, it must be said to those ignoramuses that the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet contain more rules regarding government and politics than in other matters.”35 The ultimate goal of this interaction is the creation of an Islamic state that is subordinate to sharia, which is then regarded as the code that outlines the general norms and functions of the state. Once such a state is formed, an Islamic religious authority is established that directs people’s “lives in accordance with an interpretation of what the holders of such authority claim to be divine authority, which overrides authority established by ‘secular powers.’”36 This has led to “constant tension in the Muslim world between the realities of secular power and the idealism of those who claim religious authority,” John Hunwick observed.37

The contending view is that there is a separation between religion and politics in Islam. Among the scholars in this camp is Norma Salem, who claims:
In the first place, the Arabic language does distinguish between the concept of *din* (religion) and *siyasa* (politics), *dawla* (state) and *sultan* (power). The fact that many Muslim thinkers argue in favour of subjecting politics to the exigencies of religion indicates that such an ideal situation did not always exist either historically or even ideologically.\(^{38}\)

In support of this separation is Nazih Ayubi, who argues that the original Islamic sources, the *Quran* and the *hadith*, have not adequately addressed the issue of a state. Ayubi took up the discussion by arguing

Islam is indeed a religion of collective morals, but there is very little in it that is specifically political i.e. there is very little in the original Islamic sources on how to form state, run governments and manage organizations. If the rulers of the historical Islamic state were also spiritual leaders of their community, this was not because Islam required the religious leaders (Imams) to be also a political ruler.\(^{39}\)

Muhammad Said al-Ashmawi agrees with Ayubi and comments as follows on the question of an Islamic state:

There is no passage in the *Quran* about such a state and form of government, because the essence of religion, including Islam, is man, without regard to his terrestrial location, racial division or variety. Until the death of the prophet, there was no state in Islam; Medina approximated a city state. There was only a Muslim community led by the prophet. The basis of loyalty was religious belief, not any territorial state or nation. The *Quran* and sharia always addressed themselves to the faithful, not the citizens. In fact the idea of citizenship was alien and unknown to Islam.\(^{40}\)

This line of argument is repeated by another critic of the Islamic state, Husain Fawzi al-Najjar. He argues that there is no authentic text in the classical sources of Islam that supports the unity of religion and state where the sovereignty of God is the source of governance.\(^{41}\) The arguments of oppositional scholars form a consensus that the *Quran* and the *hadith* have not tackled the question of the form of government, thereby encouraging secularism and opposing “any institutionalized control by religion over human life, arguing that such a dominance fosters absolutist tendencies, destroys the existing intellectual life, and promotes less tolerant and anti-democratic forms of social and political control.”\(^{42}\)

According to the views of oppositional scholars, secularism has been adopted by some Muslim societies because it affords people protection
from tyranny, domination, and intolerance. There are abundant examples of secular-minded Muslim leaders who have ruled by emphasizing a separation between religion and politics, thereby disarming a potentially threatening religious authority. In determining the tension between secular powers and religious authorities, Hunwick thoughtfully observes variant forms of the strained relationship in Muslim societies. While some embraced aggressive secularization methods and programs (e.g., Mustafa Kemal Ataturk of Turkey, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, and Mohammed Reza Shah of Iran), “others manipulated Islamic symbols and pursued a more subtle and circumspect approach to secularization (Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Muammar Qaddafi of Libya, and Zulfaqar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan).” In addition to these two categories, most Muslims living as minorities have adapted to secular societies and political systems. This book examines the participation of Kenyan Muslims in national politics against this background of creating a secular state.

There is no recipe for a secular state, since the ingredients differ from one state to the other. Indeed, there are a variety of interpretations of the concept of secularism, which secular states are expected to incorporate into their constitution as a policy. From the outset, there is no consensus on whether secularism is essentially antireligious or nonreligious. For instance, England has a constitutionally established state religion but is inclusive of other faiths, while Indonesia’s constitution does not declare Islam to be the official religion of the state, despite being a predominantly Muslim country. Though the various political groups “do not espouse an Islamic state or a literal interpretation of shari’ah,” they nevertheless “tend to pursue agendas and policies guided by the principles of shari’ah.” In the former USSR, secularization implied the right to conduct antireligious propaganda, which was regarded as more important than the right to freedom of religion, whereas Turkey’s constitution does not allow the interference of religion in state affairs and politics. Despite this declaration, the state pays wages for the Sunni imams, provides Sunni religious education in public schools, and controls the content of the Friday sermons given in the mosques.

This approach to secularism, where the state controls religious affairs, is different from the U.S. model, whose objective is “to give equal freedom to its citizens, in religious, political, economic and other aspects” and “not to promote one religion at the cost of other religions.” In this form of a secular state, the religious institution is respected, but no one religion is regarded as superior to another. It is left to citizens to decide whether or not they wish to adhere to a certain religion.

The constitution of Kenya is based on the principle of a nation constituted by all citizens, irrespective of religion or other identities. The Kenyan constitution does not show preference to any one religion, but it does give special protection to minority cultural interests. This is why Muslims have enjoyed substantial autonomy in spheres that they consider important for preserving
their identity: those closely bound up with Muslim personal law. During both the colonial and postcolonial periods, Muslims have been allowed to apply their personal law in accordance with sharia via the entrenchment of the Kadhi courts in the country’s constitution. Therefore, this book examines Kenya’s form of a secular state vis-à-vis the Muslim minority in order to determine how it impacted Muslims’ political involvement in both the colonial and postcolonial periods.

I assert in this book that there have been factors within Kenya’s political scene that create both division and unity among politically engaged Muslims. Specifically, I argue that Muslim politics are grounded in ethnicity and race in both the colonial and postcolonial periods. The racial and ethnic antagonism among Muslims contributed to the emergence of different Muslim political associations, in different political periods, with great ramifications for Muslims. More significantly, this book records recent political discourses involving Muslims in Kenya, in hopes that they will serve as a background for future research on current developments in the Muslim political arena.

This book attempts to answer many questions. How do religion and politics interact in Kenya? Is it possible for religion and politics to coexist in the country? How did the perceived marginalization of Muslims affect their participation in national politics both during the liberation struggle (1950–63) and after independence? To what extent did Muslim organizations become involved in Kenyan politics before and after independence? How do Muslims cope with their minority status in the context of Kenyan politics? For instance, how do they express their rejection of legislation introduced by the government that they see as detrimental to Muslims? What role did the Islamic factor play at certain critical junctures? These questions and their answers demonstrate that religion and politics are intricately linked, and that they interact in important and complex ways.

The major recurring themes in this book are the perceived marginalization and intra-Muslims divisions that continue to shape Muslim politics in postcolonial Kenya. Although the predicament of Muslims can be traced to the colonial period, postcolonial Kenyan regimes have been accused of excluding Muslims from political power. As the rest of Kenya was struggling to attain independence from the British, some Muslims were preoccupied with the idea of secession, remaining committed to the idea even after independence rather than seeking their place in the emerging multiethnic and multicultural Kenya. These Muslims were confronted with marginalization that continues to shape Muslim politics in Kenya today, with internal divisions along racial and ethnic lines weakening their political strength even more. A recurrent paradox in Muslim politics is that repressive state measures that affect multiple disparate subgroups of Kenyan Muslims tend to bind them together through a shared increase in sense of marginalization and common misfortune. However, when it comes to pursuing objectives that are not
related to their perceived marginalization, Muslims tend to abandon their “tribal” (read: Islamic) identity and appear divided along racial and ethnic lines. This shows a dialectic play of some factors creating unity and others creating division.

Separation of church and state and integration of religion and politics are two important themes that function differently for Muslims and Christians. Muslim courts are enshrined in the Kenyan constitution, and Muslims struggle very hard to keep it that way, while Christians demand the removal of the courts from the constitution on the basis of separation of church and state. Simultaneously, Muslims are concerned about the close relationship between churches and state officials, which reached its peak during the presidency of Moi. Muslims are now eager to have their religious symbols recognized within the Kenyan state, leading to competing politics between Muslims and Christians for recognition of their respective religious symbols. This book will demonstrate how the use of Islamic symbols to articulate a “mobilisatory ideology” provides a better understanding of Muslim politics in Kenya.

This book also uses the theme of minority participation in politics to trace the various ways Muslims have engaged in Kenya’s political process. By actively engaging in both the democratic and nondemocratic aspects of national politics, Muslims earned political recognition within the Kenyan system. They have represented various political parties during parliamentary elections, which have been conducted in the country since its emergence as a sovereign state in 1963. Like other Kenyans, Muslims’ political engagement in the country underwent great transformation since the rekindling of the democratic process in the 1990s, with the role of Muslim activists becoming more visible. Due to this development, this book examines how a religious minority has challenged the uniformity of a nation-state, exploring structural power relations between the Kenyan state and a segment of its Muslim population. My narrative will follow Kenyan periodization, presenting Muslims’ political engagement from the precolonial era, through British colonial rule, and into the postcolonial period.