Chapter One: Historical Evolution of Muslim Politics in Kenya from the 1840s to 1963

Published by

Ndzovu, Hassan J.
Muslims in Kenyan Politics: Political Involvement, Marginalization, and Minority Status.
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CHAPTER ONE

Historical Evolution of Muslim Politics in Kenya from the 1840s to 1963

Religio-Political Relations in Precolonial and Colonial Times

Before examining Muslims’ political involvement in the contemporary period, this chapter puts the independence decades in proper perspective with an analysis of the precolonial and colonial eras. In the chapter, I explore the historical evolution of Muslim politics before independence. During the precolonial period, the Kenyan coast was under the rule of a political model inspired by Islam. This was the Omani, Al-Busa’id, dynasty that was a form of an Islamic sultanate. In 1749, the Omani Yarubi dynasty was overthrown by their adversary, the Al-Busa’id family, which endured dynastic conflicts that incapacitated their domestic powers forcing them to relocate their capital to Zanzibar in 1830s. Said bin Sultan al-Busa’id (1806–56), is recognized as the founder and “first seyyid (prince or ruler) of the Al-Busa’id Sultanate of Zanzibar.” The dominion covered the capital Zanzibar and the coastal strip of Kenya and Tanzania. In Kenya, apart from Mombasa, Malindi, and Lamu, the Zanzibari hegemony also covered parts of the Sabaki north bank, Chonyi, Kauma, the Bajun area south of Kiunga, and parts of Digo. Under Seyyid Said’s rule in Zanzibar, the domain extended its realm of influence, and by the end of the nineteenth century the sultanate emerged as a dynastic kingdom with Arabs (read also Muslims) at the top. Although Seyyid Said exercised little direct control, his agents, the Omani governors, were established along what is now the Kenya coastline. This implies that coastal Kenya had a long tradition of sultanate rule prior becoming a British protectorate. The appointed governors secured their political control over the assigned regions by compelling indigenous leaders to submission through the lenses of Arabo-centricism. Clearly, this illustrates that the power of the sultanate was derived from the notion of belonging to a purportedly superior racial class.
Before Seyyid Said shifted the capital to Zanzibar, the sultanate was based in Oman, where it had grown out of the original Ibadi imamate. The Ibadi imamate ensured that the religious community was politically established, providing for an intimate interaction between religion and politics. Randall Lee Pouwels describes this interaction as follows:

The Ibadi Imamate saw itself... as an *umma*, a community of the “righteous ones” which maintained its special relationship to God by walking the path of righteousness. Also... it saw itself as pursuing the “right path” through adherence to the laws of God as interpreted by a body of educated jurists. In addition they were led by an elected leader... the Imam... who was head of state and who ultimately was responsible for the administration of the *Sharia*.7

However, in the eleventh century, some changes were brought to the Oman dominion that included transition in the highest political office from imam to sultan. With the changes the sultan’s office assumed a purely political position and delegated the religious duties to another office.8 Although a clear separation of mosque and state evolved in Oman, the sultan retained most of the prerogatives that had formerly been the privilege of the imams. For that reason, when the Oman sultanate ultimately established its base in Zanzibar, efforts were made to maintain the same political system. The *Liwali* (plural, *Maliwali*) and *Kadhi* (plural, *Makadhi*) system of administration was introduced in the Zanzibar dominion to represent the sultan in various capacities.

Until 1895, if an individual was to participate in the political affairs of the dominion such as holding an administrative office, one had to be a Muslim. This was because all the upper ranks in the sultan’s administration were held by Omani Arabs who were by religious affiliation Muslims.9 The non-Muslims in the sultanate were free to practice their religion without interference, in return for recognizing and obeying the political authority of the sultan. It was not possible for non-Muslims to have the opportunity to rule the dominion because they were not members of the dominion’s political community. It is evident that during this era religion gave legitimacy to the polity. The religion of the political elites of the sultanate was Ibadi (a subsect of Kharijite) Islam, and accordingly, the political leadership was reserved for Arab Muslims, especially of the Ibadi affiliation.10 This religious affiliation assisted in distinguishing the Omanis as a distinct class and caste in the Al-Busaid dominion of Zanzibar.

Although the Arabs were a minority in the region, they managed to uphold the hegemony through force from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. As in all forms of colonialism, the Arab hegemony served the interests of their own kind. Only Arab Muslims were appointed in various parts of the dominion to represent the sultan as either *Kadhi*, or
Liwalí, or Mudir.11 By 1886 most of the governors (Maliwali) were Arabs of Omani descent, who during their service were transferred to different posts along the coast depending on their performance, a policy that thwarted them from creating an independent “local power base.”12 Beneath the Liwalí were the Wajumbe who served as mediators between the Liwalí office and the indigenous people. While executing their duties these administrative mediators also assisted in resolving cases using the local law of the people in their areas, but citizens could petition to the Liwalí, or the Kadhi, when dissatisfied with the Wajumbe ruling.13 However, in places that the Arab representative was a Mudir, he was assisted in his duties by the African Masheha, who acted as messengers for the Muslim official.14 Gradually, the Omani Arabs constructed a “racial state” crafted on a “political culture of Arabocentrism,” which for many years “ accorded status and prestige to those who claimed connections to the Islamic Middle East.”15

This trend of appointing officials of the state confirms that the dominion was firmly meant to be an Arab Muslim affair. Carl F. Hallencreutz and David Westerlund have referred to such a system of governance, like the one witnessed in the sultanate, as the state’s modified confessional policy of religion.16 In the Zanzibar sultanate, Islam was regarded as the religion of the state and privileged in various ways. Ilter Turan has argued that “in an Islamic state there may be non-Muslims” who are privileged with the “protected status (Dhimmi) but they do not have equal rights and duties with members of the umma” because they are regarded as “subjects but not members of the political community.”17 Theoretically, in Islamic political thought the political community is regarded to be synonymous with the religious community, thereby renouncing the need for autonomous politics. In such a system, non-Muslims do not have equal rights and duties with the members of the umma because they are considered subjects of the state, but not members of the political community. This argument by Turan confirms why the sultanate was dominated by Arab Muslims.

The end of the nineteenth century, during the rule of Sultan Barghash bin Said (1870–88), brought the transition from precolonial Arab Muslim hegemony to Arab Muslim dominance under colonial overlordship. As the European countries were dividing Africa in the 1880s, Barghash succeeded in safeguarding the sultanate’s sovereignty by arranging for British “protection,” which recognized Zanzibar as a “protected Arab state.”18 The roots of the contemporary relationship between Muslims and the Kenyan state can be traced back to the period of British imperialism, which lasted from about 1895 to 1963. The historical coastal strip (mwambao) that was part of the Zanzibar sultanate—2,116 square miles that extended from Kipini in the north to Vanga in the south, and stretching inland from the coast for ten nautical miles—was granted a British protectorate status by the 1895 treaty. In opposition to the colonial rule forced upon what became Kenya, the 1895 treaty
between the British government and the Zanzibar hegemony recognized the sultan’s autonomy over the mwambao. This saw the colonial administration that governed the area as a protectorate being sympathetic to the religious and cultural heritage of the Muslims in the region. The Arabs and the colonial administration maintained a working relationship throughout the period of British rule over the Kenyan coast, incorporating the Liwalis (governor), Mudirs (lieutenant), and Kadhis (court judge) into the nascent colonial administration. Initially, Muslims—especially Arabs—were appointed as colonial administrative officials to assist the British officers, but their number dwindled over time.

During this period, the British policy of indirect rule used the native institutions of government as a means to exert colonial control. The colonial administration was reluctant to tamper with local native institutions that had recognized their authority, preferring to use those institutions instead of inventing new ones. After the sultan accepted that the colonial authority would operate at the coast as overlords, the British acknowledged the sultan as a former master of the coast, thereby incorporating the institutions to impose direct rule. This recognition implied that only the welfare of “a narrow stratum at the top of coastal society” was guaranteed, excluding other coastal groups who did not share “in the benefits of Omani rule.”

Following this arrangement, freedom of religion was guaranteed, though no extra effort was made to encourage Islam. Supposedly, at least, the British colonial power respected Muslim sensitivities insofar as religious practices were concerned. This was evident with the recognition of the sultan’s administrative (Liwali and Mudir) and legal (Kadhi courts) institutions. A clear illustration of this recognition is evident in James W. Robertson’s report:

Within the administration there is a special cadre of Arab administrative officers [read also Arab Muslims] headed by the Liwali for the Coast (who is also Adviser on Arab affairs to the Governor) and consisting, apart from him, of four Liwalis and ten Mudirs. These officers also had subordinate Courts of the second and third class with jurisdiction in both civil and criminal cases. There are, in addition, Kadhis who are magistrates specialising in questions of Islamic law in relation to inheritance, marriage and divorce, and other personal matters. Jurisdiction is limited to Arabs, Somalis and Africans [Muslims]. These posts were in existence before British administration and to the Muslim peoples of the Coast they are, on nationalist, religious and historical grounds, of very great importance.

However, Donal B. Cruise O’Brien calls the arrangement between the sultan of Zanzibar and the British authority over the Kenyan coast a “fictitious autonomy” under colonial rule that provided consolation to the Muslim rulers
of the *mwambao*. He regards this arrangement to have soothed some Muslims, which in the long run isolated coastal Muslims from development in the interior of the country.\textsuperscript{22} It is this isolation, I argue, that Muslims in the postcolonial era are striving to correct. Despite the recognition of various Muslim institutions, colonial administrators had the exclusive capacity to appoint, monitor, regulate, and sanction the authority of Muslim officers. The sultan was not anymore consulted in the appointment of the three Arab officials: \textit{Liwalis}, \textit{Mudirs}, and \textit{Kadhis}.\textsuperscript{23} This Arab cadre of officers was now on the payroll of the colonial administration. Since, for instance, in the precolonial period the \textit{Kadhis} were expected to interpret the Islamic law as judges on behalf of the sultan, such an institution was retained for continuity and smooth transition. Nevertheless, cooperation between Arab Muslim elites and the colonial rule did not imply complete absence of criticism of the British administration. The latter part of the colonial period saw the emergence of Muslim groups that were not satisfied with the imposed political arrangements.

Another example that elucidates British concessions to Muslim interests, thereby demonstrating that the dominion was Islamic oriented, is the ban of alcohol in the protectorate. A notice given by Arthur H. Hardinge, consul general, in July 1897 states,

> Whereas it is provided in the ordinance for restriction of importation of alcoholic liquors into Zanzibar, dated June 15th and published in the Zanzibar Gazette of the 30th... no distilled or alcoholic liquor shall be imported whether by land or sea into any of the territories administered by or for His Highness the Sultan of Zanzibar otherwise than in accordance with this ordinance, which is thus rendered applicable to the mainland dominions of His Highness as well as to the Island of Zanzibar and Pemba.\textsuperscript{24}

Hardinge’s letter to the colonial administrators shows the extent the British authority respected the Islamic law governing foods and drinks. The ban of alcohol in the sultan’s dominion is an indication of how Islam was an important factor in the administration of the sultanate, to the extent that it was granted the status of a Muslim polity.

The clear distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Zanzibar sultanate should, however, not lead to the conclusion that the former were a unified political community. Racial and sectarian differences that divide the Muslim community were also evident in the sultanate. For example, there were certain Ibadi sultans who displayed intolerance to other sects of Islam. It was during the reign of Sultan Barghash that this religious intolerance occurred. Upon his accession, Barghash came under the influence of a reformist party of the Ibadi ulama called the Mutawwiun. This party influenced his personal religious conviction as well as the affairs of the state. One result of
this influence was the banning of the separate Friday prayer for the Sunni subjects. The move angered the Sunni Muslims who constituted the majority in the dominion, thereby undermining the popularity of the sultanate.

Apart from sectarian differences, there were also racial divisions. African Muslim inhabitants of the dominion were not integrated into the political community. Hassan A. Mwakimako has illustrated this view by saying:

> Immediately the Omani established their rule, they embarked on imposing their own governors over the indigenous communities. In appointing his representatives (liwalis, mudirs and kadhis), the sultan hardly considered the Mijikenda or the Swahili Muslims. This perhaps was a bad precedent set by the Omani which later the British built on.

It is a historical reality that the Arab settlers on the coast “used images of Arab descent to bolster their authority.” To justify the exclusion of the indigenous coastal Africans from the dominion leadership, the Arab elite regarded Africans as wajinga or washenzi, denoting ignoramuses. Such metaphors fitted absolutely with the prejudices of the colonial rule. It was the practice of British administration “to conflate race and culture” where any “Muslim of aristocratic bearing was considered an Arab, not an African, and the Arab element of coastal society was assumed to control the rest.” In the colonial view, “any upper-class Muslim might be called an ‘Arab,’” even if “he was born in Africa and spoke little or no Arabic.” This rejection of the native Africans from the political community elucidates why with the advent of nationalism, African Muslims supported the agenda for a unitary Kenya. The nationalists’ efforts inculcated a sense of Kenyan nationality with equal treatment to all citizens. The Arab Muslims, on the other hand, found it difficult to accept an ideology that challenged their monopoly in politics and their superior social status. The spread of nationalist ideas prompted resentment toward integration among Arab Muslims. As it became clear that Arabs would now lose their political monopoly, Islam was turned to as a means of securing and preserving their privileges, but to no avail. This was important as the spirit of Kenyan nationalism had become dominant.

The Fate of Muslims After the British Occupation at the Coast

The colonial power exhibited a reserved if not suspicious attitude toward Islam in Kenya. However, within this framework, British policies were varied. During the formative years of the installation of the British rule, the colonial administration did not have a clear policy regarding the Islamic faith. Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims varied among colonial officials who were influenced by their individual background. From 1895 to about 1912, the
British did not officially support or discourage the spread of Islam, but as a result of particular policies, the religion made significant gains. Sometimes consciously, but frequently not, the colonial government adopted policies that led to the unprecedented growth of the Muslim community. However, at the same time there were colonial policies that favored Christianity to the disadvantage of Islam. During the period of colonial occupation, there was a solid expansion of missionary evangelization and education. Many Kenyans in this period were exposed to Christian missionary activities such that by around 1920s, the influence of Christianity was outstripping that of Islam especially in the rural interior areas. This led to increase of the number of Christians, while the spatial boundaries of Islam became static.

For a long time Islam in precolonial Kenya was confined to the coastal region (pwani) where it was associated with foreigners—Arabs, Persians, Indians, and some Muslim merchants who were culturally oriented toward the Middle East. Some of the earliest colonial officials indirectly promoted the spread of Islam in Kenya by adopting the policy of using Muslims, mostly Arabs, in low-level administrative positions within the protectorate. The policy of appointing Arabs as state officials was based on the assumption that Arabs were superior to Africans. This was confirmed by Sir Arthur H. Hardinge, who as the high commissioner of British East Africa observed:

> The Arabs . . . are the only natives . . . who can read, or have any comprehension of politics, justice or government. Community of religion, language and intermarriage gives them an influence over negro coast populations, which the European stranger cannot as a rule possess in the same degree, and even in the interior they are as Africans more at home than he can be. Once they have thoroughly learnt the lesson that he is the predominant partner, and must be obeyed as such, their influence applied under his control may be . . . very useful; and it is, I think, very important for the future of East Africa that a native administrative element should, if possible, be formed and trained up out of the Arabs.

This colonial view of Arabs’ superiority was endorsed by the provincial commissioner of the coast, C. W. Hobley, who stated:

> The Arab has several characteristics that made him of value particularly to the coastal areas. He possesses greater intelligence than the ordinary native of the country. He possesses a hereditary gift of managing natives.

Clearly, the colonial administration considered the Arabs as enlightened and their urban centers located along the coastline as oases of “civilization.” The
Europeans’ view was grounded in racial bias that regarded native Africans as incapable of organizing themselves politically without the control and manipulation of the Arabs. It was out of such convictions that a system that reserved a special place for Arab Muslims within the colonial administration was initially recognized. In this system of administration, Arabs were incorporated in the nascent colonial administration as clerks and administrators. When the need for establishing a British African troop was mooted, Muslims of Arab, Nubi, Somali, and Swahili background were conscripted to the force. Many of these soldiers took it to be their duty to convert their non-Muslim colleagues to Islam. Also, the choice of the location of colonial administrative posts in the interior to some extent abetted the progress of Islam in the area. Most of the administrative posts were established in existing trading posts that had in the beginning been set up by Muslims before the British occupation of Kenya. It is through these and other policies that the earliest colonial rule served to reinforce Islam indirectly.

The Arab Factor in Muslim Collaboration with the Colonial Administration

Though Arabs formed a tiny minority among the mass of indigenous African Muslims, they dominated the politics of Kenya’s coast in the pre-independence era. It is after independence that the participation of the wider Muslim society is evident in Kenya’s politics. In this period, Arab influence was confined to the established coastal settlements and had no substantial impact inland. This limitation was partly from choice given that the Arab settlements had primarily a trading purpose. Apart from the period in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which the Portuguese held a tenuous disputed authority, Arab control of the coastal centers continued until the nineteenth century. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Arab control was reinforced and consolidated by Seyyid Said, who in 1832 moved his capital to Zanzibar.

Following the death of Seyyid Said, an inheritance dispute emerged between his two sons. To resolve the matter, it was referred to the governor general of India, Lord Canning, for arbitration; he decided that the sons should share their father’s possessions. According to the arbitration, Seyyid Thuwain became the sultan of Muscat and Oman, while on Seyyid Majid was bestowed the sultan of Zanzibar as an independent state from Oman. The recognition of Zanzibar’s independence was confirmed by Britain, France, and Germany in the 1862 declaration. In a 1886 agreement, Britain and Germany further recognized the sultan’s sovereignty in Zanzibar. The 1886 agreement stipulated that the sultan’s mainland dominions were defined as:

The islands of Zanzibar and Pemba and the smaller islands, as well as the islands within a radius of twelve nautical miles round those two
Historical Evolution of Muslim Politics in Kenya from the 1840s to 1963

In May 1887, the British East Africa Association received from Sultan Barghash of Zanzibar a concession for fifty years over all his mainland territories and dependencies from Vanga to Kipini. The franchise granted the association the administration of these areas to be conducted on behalf of the sultan, under his flag and subject to his sovereign rights. After acquiring the concession, the association petitioned to the queen to be granted a charter. This petition was granted in 1888, and a royal charter was vested in the association under the name of Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC).

For several reasons, the IBEAC found it difficult to continue overseeing the sultan dominion in the mainland and began negotiation with the British government to take over. Eventually, in 1895, the British government agreed to take over the property rights and assets of the company. The formal transfer of authority was conducted at Mombasa, Lamu, and Kismayu in July 1895. In the Mombasa meeting, Sir Lloyd Mathews, the wazir of the sultan, made the following remarks in relation to the transfer of authority:

I have come here today by the order of our Lord, Seyyid Hamid bin Thuwain, to inform you that the Company has retired from the administration of this territory, and that the great English Government will succeed it, and Mr. Hardinge, the Consul-General at Zanzibar, will be the head of the new administration.

On the December 14, 1895, a formal agreement was signed between the British authority and the sultan, where the IBEAC surrendered its management of the sultan's dominions, paving the way for the British government. With the collapse of IBEAC, Sultan Hamid bin Thuwain (1893–96) was prevailed upon to accept an agreement that formally entrusted the coast of Kenya to the protection of the British authority. The agreement signed between Sultan Thuwain and Hardinge, on behalf of the British authority, stated:

His Highness Seyyid Hamid bin Thuwain, Sultan of Zanzibar, agrees for himself, his heirs and successors, that as regards his possessions on the mainland and adjacent islands, exclusive of Zanzibar and Pemba, the administration shall be entrusted to officers appointed direct by Her Majesty's Government, to whom alone they shall be responsible. . . . Her Britannic Majesty's Government shall have the
This agreement ushered in the era of colonial rule over the sultan’s subjects on the Kenyan coast, and the net effect was the gradual destruction of the authority of the Arab elite. Under British rule, the sultan became only a symbol of Muslim political sovereignty without any authority to make a decision. This development saw the course of Arab Muslims changing from one colonial governor to the other. However, the British rule over the sultan’s subjects was not as devastating as that of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century.

During the formative years of colonial rule, Arabs on the coast were initially opposed to British administration before they learned to live with it and benefit when they could. Along the Kenyan coast, the Mazrui and Nabahani “were among the earliest Omani families” to settle in the region, and highly privileged “within the political framework of the Zanzibar sultanate.” The arrival of colonial rule ushered a new era that saw some “noble” Arab families at the coast losing their authority, forcing them to rebel against the British leadership. The revolts by these Arab elites were not efforts to defend the Omani state, but to safeguard their own sphere of influence, as they feared under British overlordship they would lose their local predominance. Among the notable rebellions by the Arab elites against the British were those led by the sultan of Witu and the Mazrui family around 1895. Both uprisings demonstrated dissatisfaction with colonial rule, but were successfully put down by British troops due to lack of unity among Muslims living along the coast. After these initial hostilities, the British administration found ways to establish working relations with Arab elites of the coastal region based on mutual benefit. This working relationship came in the form of the British acknowledging Arab Muslims as the local leaders of the communities living along the coast. The following extract from a report by the chief native commissioner on coast administration illustrates this clearly:

It is an axiom that the best way to govern any race is through its own acknowledged leaders and the organizations to which it is accustomed. The Arabs were masters of the Coast for centuries and are still its aristocracy.

These views were also reinforced by J. H. Fazan, resident commissioner, who in a report on the administrative relations between Arab officers and native headmen at the coast, said:

The Arab officers are a legacy of the treaty with Zanzibar. It is possible for us to use them simply in the administration of Arabs . . .
or again we may give them a recognized position in the scheme of direct administration of the coast people as a whole.  

What can be deduced from the foregoing extracts is that when the colonial government established its rule in Kenya, it assumed that Arabs were the overlords of the coastal region. As a result of the biased perception, British administrators felt it was necessary to create conducive working relationships with local Arab Muslim leaders. This working relationship excluded leaders of other communities in the region, for example, the Mijikenda and the Swahili. In this arrangement, Arab leaders were to administer their areas of influence, which included the land of the Mijikenda and the Swahili, in return for both financial rewards and a range of political and religious privileges. In the accepted political arrangement, Arabs leaders agreed to support the new administration in exchange for being recognized as notables within the new political structure. Some of the notable Arab families who were elevated to “royal” positions by the British administration were the Nabahani, Mazrui, and Busaidi families.

Therefore, after visualizing the Arabs as a special ruling class, the process of training Arab cadets started in earnest as they were viewed to be an asset to the protectorate. The imperialists decided to establish an administration of young Muslims who came from upper-class Arab families based on the assumption that Arabs at that time were the only group at the coast who had any comprehension of politics and government. With only a small European staff and little prospect of the British treasury providing resources to recruit more, it was inevitable that the earliest administration depended on an Arab Muslim workforce and experience. Though no longer rulers of the coast, Arabs were able to retain some of their previous privileges under the colonial authorities, whose notion of racial stratification served Arabs’ interests. In the colonial hierarchy of prestige, Europeans were ranked at the top, followed by Indians, then Arabs, and lastly Africans. Through their preferential policies, the colonial administration, like the earlier Al-Busaid leadership, contributed to strengthening racial groupings in coastal politics, “though by no means can it be said to have invented them.”

As soon as Hardinge took over the governorship of the protectorate, he initiated a number of changes that had far-reaching implications. This started with the promulgation of the East Africa Order in Council of 1897, which entrenched British rule as it legally established institutions of state, power, and authority. The Order in Council established the Legislative Council, which in turn enacted the Native Court Regulation that empowered colonial officials to make rules and regulations for the administration of natives. The Native Courts Authority (1897) established the Native Courts Ordinances that contained statutes like the Liwali, Mudir, and Kadhi courts ordinances. After its establishment, the Legislative Council enacted the Mohammedan
Marriage Divorce and Succession Ordinance of 1897, which institutionalized selected aspects of Muslim personal law like marriage, divorce, and succession. The unfolding events indicate Hardinge’s eagerness to fulfill the agreement that had been made between Zanzibar and Britain. In the agreement, the British had promised to continue recognizing the authority of the religious institutions in the protectorate. It was the sultan’s wish that “all affairs connected with the faith of Islam will be conducted to the honour and benefit of religion, and all ancient customs will be allowed to continue.” 56 This explains why British officers gave due regard to sharia in dealing with Muslims living along the coast. To cite Hardinge: “The Mohammedan religion will remain the public and established creed in the Sultan’s territories and all cases and law suits between natives will continue to be decided according to the sharia.” 57 One may wonder why Hardinge exhibited kind and tolerant gestures to Muslims. The answer could be that, apart from implementing the agreement, it is possible that his work experience and background influenced some of his decisions. Having worked in other Muslim societies (Egypt and the Ottoman Empire), Hardinge was willing to respect some local Islamic institutions thereby according Islam a special position in the administration. Steadily, a dual form of administration emerged on the coast: the Muslim and the colonial. In return for that recognized position, local Arab leaders were now expected to acknowledge the British administration and not the sultan. 58

All along, the affairs of the new administration were managed from Mombasa. 59 The growth and endowment of Mombasa with the necessary infrastructures during this period made it an ideal choice for an administrative capital. With the choice of Mombasa and the recognition of local Arab leaders, the Arab community began to associate itself with the colonial administration. However, the decision by Sir Charles Eliot in 1907 to transfer the capital of the colonial administration from Mombasa to Nairobi was viewed with skepticism by some Muslims. The action was interpreted as a deliberate intention to marginalize coastal Muslims and push them to political irrelevance. 60 While this could be true, the transfer of the administrative capital to Nairobi had as much to do with Nairobi’s proximity to the emerging White Highlands. 61 With the creation of the European settler class of the White Highlands, Nairobi was geographically close and a strategic location for the colonial administration. Therefore, the growth of Nairobi in size and politics was part and parcel of the history of white settlers in Kenya.

Under colonial rule, the Maliwali and the Makadhi were the most important Muslim officials to be incorporated into the native administration initiated by Hardinge. At the beginning, the two (Liwali and Kadhi) officials worked from the same office, and sometimes their duties overlapped because the duties had not been clearly defined. In order to distinguish between the two, and to define the duties of the Kadhi office, Hardinge borrowed from the Egyptian and the Ottoman systems to draft the Mohammedan Marriage Divorce and
Succession Ordinance. It was now clear that the *Kadhi’s* jurisdiction would extend to all cases affecting the personal status of Muslims. In addition, the *Makadhi* were also made legal advisers to the *Liwali* and the district officers (DOs), whom they assisted in interpreting Islamic law.\(^{62}\)

On the other hand, British administrators were supposed to work with Muslim officials known as *Liwali*, who had offices at Vanga, Gasi, Mombasa, Takaungu, Malindi, Mambrui, Mkunumbi, Kiwayu, and Lamu, and one who administered the region between Kiwayu and Tula.\(^{63}\) The scope and terms of reference for the *Liwali* were set out in a report by the chief native commissioner for the coast region as follows:

> The *liwali*. . . [are] required to perform the same sort of administrative duties as Assistant District Commissioners, viz—the collection of tax, the counting of houses, the taking of census for tax and other purposes, to supervise the work of village headmen, and generally to assist the District Commissioner in all the multifarious duties which he has to undertake.\(^{64}\)

Through these changes, a special cadre of officials known as the Arab administration emerged. Though answerable to the colonial provincial administration, the head of the entire Arab administration was a senior *Liwali* who resided in Mombasa.\(^{65}\) The Arab administrative officials acted as intermediaries between British authorities and the Muslim population at the coast. The British officials trusted and depended on them as they were the ones who were more familiar with the laws and customs of their people. There was no doubt that the British solution to governing the protectorate lay in the application of indirect rule, where they co-opted some of the Arab elites into the colonial bureaucracy though in subordinate positions.\(^{66}\) Such arrangements served to establish a belief among the Arab elites that they were the masters, a special class, over the native inhabitants.

Nevertheless, the early stages of implementing the indirect rule points to uncomfortable relations between colonial officials and the Muslim administrators they had appointed. In resolving the tension, British officials only retained Muslim individuals who were useful to the administration of the locals. When colonial officers noticed that some Muslim officials posed a threat to their authority, they did not hesitate to curb their influence. The following excerpt from the chief native commissioner on coast administration illustrates the efforts exerted by the colonial administrators to subdue Muslims officials:

> The *Liwalis, Mudirs, Kathis [Kadhis],* and *Akidas* are now, as always have been, Arabs or Swahili, but it would appear that in some cases they have been permitted to regard themselves as a class apart, instead of an ordinary integral portion of the general administrative
machinery of the protectorate. This is a condition which calls for correction. These officers must be either in the civil service or out of it. If they are in the service, they must conform to regulations, obey orders and carry out whatever is required of them as every European officer must.\textsuperscript{67}

If any Muslim officials thought that they were a distinct class of officers not linked to the colonial state bureaucracy, they were mistaken. Subsequent governors like Sir Charles Eliot and Sir Donald Stewart quickly corrected such misconceptions.\textsuperscript{68} During their tenures, they made it clear to the coastal Muslim officials that they were civil servants and should not presume to have independent authority outside the orbit of colonial administration. This implied that the position of the Muslim officials depended on the colonial administrators who monitored, regulated, and sanctioned their authority. Like other civil servants, Muslim officials also received monthly remunerations together with other benefits that accompanied their respective positions.\textsuperscript{69} The decision to pay the Muslims officials salaries and allowances can be interpreted as the colonial government’s effort to get maximum loyalty from the prospective appointee and by extension from the Muslim masses.

During this period of colonial rule, there was also close affinity between the various Christian missionaries and British administrators. Though at times some church missionaries were against certain aspects of colonial policy, such as taking peoples’ land in the White Highlands, there were more areas of agreement than disagreement between them. Not only did they share the same race and religion, but as Jeff Haynes has argued, colonialists and missionaries also shared the goal of bringing their “superior” European civilization, which included their Christian faith, to as many Africans as possible.\textsuperscript{70} Until the protectorate government began to consider its educational responsibilities, the missionaries were the primary providers of Western education. It is this colonial educational system influenced by Christian missionaries that structured the social order. The educational system privileged ethnic groups that had connections with Christian missionaries, thereby excluding Muslims who ignored the missionaries. For religious reasons, some Muslims avoided missionary schools since during these early years it was intimately bound up with Christian teachings.\textsuperscript{71} To some extent proselytizing was an ulterior motive of these mission schools, making some Muslims (both African and Arabs) reluctant to send their children to school. However, there were cases where some Muslim individuals went through these mission schools and upon completion of their education became powerful \textit{Liwali} in Mombasa. This was the case of Salim bin Muhammad Muhashami, Mbarak bin Ali Hinawi, and Sir Ali bin Salim.\textsuperscript{72}

This Muslim boycott of the missionary school had an adverse effect on the Muslim community. Lack of education severely narrowed the scope for the
participation of Muslims and the opportunities for improvement in their position in the protectorate administration. Chances of improving their conditions were very low given that government-sponsored schools were inadequate on the Muslim coast. The government felt reluctant to establish secular education for a community that did not seem to appreciate it. Whether Muslims appreciated it or not was a different question. The fact was that the British administration was not willing to support education in the protectorate, and this applied to Muslims as well. Every time the administration was approached, they gave the same response that “there was no money.” This prompted the director of education, in his letter of October 1918, to make the following retort:

> It is time that this ceased. I have informed the Education Commission that in the proportion of expenditure on Education to public expenditure generally, the East Africa Protectorate ranks the lowest of—if not all—very nearly all the colonies and Protectorate of the Empire. Where Basutoland spends 10.2% and Southern Rhodesia 9.7%, Zanzibar spends 1.4% and East Africa 0.69%.

This situation put the Muslim community at an educational disadvantage. As a result, they were rendered incapable of coping with their economic problems and of retaining positions in various departments in the colonial government. According to Robert Hamilton’s report of 1919 to the Education Commission, it was estimated that only around one hundred Muslims were employed by the government. This figure was too low given that four thousand clerks were employed by the colonial administration. At this point, Muslims came to consider education as the remedy to their pathetic condition, but not the low standard of education provided in the scarce government schools. Far from being adequate, they regarded the education presented in those schools as insufficient, producing semi-educated Muslim youths unable to compete for employment.

Although some Muslims along the coast interpreted colonial policies as unjust and biased against them, their frustration did not lead to a religious conflict with the British. This was evident in the unquestioned loyalty of most Muslim officials and troops under the colonial administration. Different segments of the Muslim population (i.e., Arabs, Swahilis, Somalis, and Sudanese) had been used several times to put down one another’s mutinies and rebellions under British order without religious sentiments. Such incidents illustrate that the Islamic factor was not strong enough to unify Muslims in sabotaging British rule as demonstrated by the sultan of Witu and the Mazrui revolts. Their call for jihad failed to inspire the coastal Muslims against the colonial administration. Even when there were indications that their fortune was changing, Arabs did not resort to religious fanaticism as a means to restore their eroding privileges. Around 1925, there were efforts to curb the influence
of Arab officials in the districts of Malindi-Kilifi and Digo because the British observed that increased Arab influence amounted to encouraging Islam, which was not desired. Despite this change of attitude of British officials toward their earlier collaborators, there is no evidence that Arab Muslims resorted to Islam to rally their coreligionists against British authority.

Muslims’ Response to Representation in the Legislative Council

Due to the position Arabs found themselves in, they felt that they had genuine reasons to complain. A need arose for an independent voice to articulate their grievances. The only Arabs within the government were the Liwalis, Kadhis, and Mudirs. All of them were civil servants unable to question the authority they served. Consequently, an independent voice had to emerge. This voice turned out to be the Coast Arab Association (CAA), which appeared on the political scene in 1921. The association believed that Arabs’ support for the colonial administration had been taken for granted, due to the inadequate representation in the Legislative Council. For that reason, the CAA demanded elected representation inspired by the growing political consciousness of the 1920s. This appeal was an attempt by Arabs to raise their status through independent representation. Although the CAA showed a lack of confidence in government appointees representing the community, it was not an Islamist body in its outlook. Rather, it could be described as a party that was secular in orientation. The actions of this Muslim body amounted to a revolt against the authority that the colonial government had worked hard to perpetuate.

In January 1922, a public meeting was held at Mombasa under the auspices of the CAA. The meeting agreed to request that the government grant Arab Muslims two seats in the Executive Council and four seats in the Legislative Council. It was also resolved during the meeting that these seats should exclusively be the preserve of Arab Muslims. This request demonstrated Arabs’ determination not to be left behind in the struggle for communal interests that had dominated the politics of the time. Ultimately, the British authority agreed to offer the community only two seats in the Legislative Council in 1923. However, the election of Arabs to the Legislative Council caused a serious split in the Arab-Swahili camp that had for a long time been regarded as a composite body. Informing this perception was that some of the earliest Omani families living on the Kenyan coast like the Mazrui and Nabahani had long become assimilated to Swahili culture, explaining why some of their descendants could no longer be regarded as “white Arabs,” but rather as people of a “mixed blood,” whom their European acquaintances referred as “black Arabs.” It is possible that in their efforts to distinguish between the “white Arab” and “black Arab” the local natives used the terms mwarabu in reference to “a Swahili speaking ‘Arab’ born at the coast,” and mmanga indicating “an Arabic speaker born in Oman.”
Etymologically, the word *Swahili* is derived from “an Arabic root meaning ‘of the coast,’” that “was used as a euphemism by which slaves and others of low status could eschew their upcountry origins and identify with the Muslim culture of the coastal town.”84 Gradually, the word took a broader meaning to imply “a term of self-identification by those engaged in popular struggles for [coastal] citizenship.”85 Considering themselves as the aristocrats of the coast, the Arab elites were reluctant to be clustered with the Waswahili as one homogenous group, taking into account the category of people the word *Swahili* incorporated, the low class in society. This schism was witnessed in 1927 when Arabs refused to allow the Swahili to vote for the Arab Legislative Council member. Clearly, the Arab elites’ attitude toward their Swahili allies was ambivalent. Arabocentrism ensured that the Swahili were classified as native Africans despite the former’s opposition to such perception.86 The Arabs considered the Swahili as Africans and therefore not legally eligible to vote for an Arab franchise seat. This argument was frequently used when it came to deciding on who had the right to vote for the Arab Legislative Council member. According to the Arabs, the Swahili were more Africans than Arabs, and that is why they refused to be treated equally with them. The Arab elites uncompromisingly disapproved the notion of being equated with the “uncivilized African” (*washenzi*). The Swahili blamed their exclusion on some influential Arabs who had embraced the government’s classification of the Muslim community as two distinct groups that received different treatment.87 Although the two groups shared the same faith, racial identity was stronger than Islamic solidarity.

The major historical cleavage in the Muslim world, other than that between Muslims and non-Muslims, was that between Arabs and non-Arab Muslims. Frequently, non-Arab Muslims were assigned second-class status by Arabs even though this was inconsistent with the egalitarian principles of Islam.88 This attitude of some Arabs was reflected in the politics of colonial Kenya where they were reluctant to concede equality to African Muslims. In a religion that advocates that no ethnic group was superior to any other, African Muslims were not accepted as equals by the influential Arabs. Despite sharing the same faith, the basis for the African-Arab cleavage was centered on the issue of race. This explains the antipathy many African Muslims developed for Arabs. Some African Muslims reacted with an underlying resentment toward Arab Muslims. This was reflected in later nationalistic politics.

Faced with Arab rejection, the Swahili community felt the need to establish their own party. It was against this background that in 1927 Swahili Muslims formed their own organization, the Afro-Asian Association (AAA). The choice of the name for the association suggests the Swahili’s willingness to be associated with the Arabs even if in a confused way. In this contradiction, it is clear that the Swahili identified themselves as both Arabs and Africans with individual racial identity changing depending on the prevailing circum-
stances. The formation of the AAA meant that two rival Muslim bodies were now in existence. The AAA was in opposition to the CAA, which a section of coastal Muslims considered to be a racist association. In the next few years, intense rivalry between the two groups was evident. However, some members of the Swahili community like the Tisa (Nine Tribes) and Thelatha Taifa (Three Tribes) struggled to have access to the voters’ roll as Arabs, while Arabs continued to resist any amendments. In their campaign, the members of the Twelve Tribes tirelessly strove to justify their claim to recognition as Arabs based on (a) alleged genealogical proof of Arab origin and (b) the possession of various letters, treaties, and proclamations from the sultans of Zanzibar granting them the status of Arabs. Clearly, the Twelve Tribes were playing at being Arabs so as to accrue the benefits of being aristocrats, but the Arab elites did not share their aspirations and denounced their claim to Arab status. In the ongoing conflict, the Swahili community sought full recognition in the urban community, while the Arab elites steadily ensured that the Waswahili were excluded and relegated to an inferior position. These struggles for recognition and supremacy in the urban community formed the core of the ambivalent relationship between Arabs and Swahili as evident in the later years. The struggles were essential in shaping the politics of the mwambo (coastal strip) that I will discuss in the next section.

For their part, the colonial authorities were adamant that they would not change the policy of appointing Arabs to both religious and political positions. This attitude later created a lasting impression that Arabs participated as collaborators within the colonial policy of indirect rule. Unless the law was changed, there was no hope of bringing the two factions together. And because division in the Muslim community was serving the colonialist political interests, they were not inclined to change the law very soon. However, in 1952 as a result of emerging new political developments, the Swahili were granted franchise as Arabs. After this recognition, the Swahili were finally able to register as Arabs for both the 1957 and 1961 national elections.

As the Swahili were eventually granted access to the voter’s roll as Arabs, still the indigenous African (black) Muslims did not feature in the scheme of the colonial administration. When both administrative and elective posts were being distributed to Arabs (and belatedly to Swahilis), African Muslims were not considered. This prompted their officials in 1958, under the banner of the African Muslim Society (AMS), to send a petition to the governor, Evelyn Baring, concerning African Muslim representation in the Kenya Legislative Council. In part the letter stated:

All races in Kenya are represented in Legislative Council either on a religious or tribal basis except the African Muslims. The European and Arab communities have their representatives, whereas the Asians are catered for on a religious basis. Although African representation
is composed on a tribal basis, all these representatives are of Christian denomination. . . . It may well be said that the Arab and Asian Muslims can well serve the religious interests of our community in all vital problems affecting our faith, but experience has shown that neither of these two communities are prepared to assist us particularly when it involves a clash with their own immediate interests.\textsuperscript{93}

The above letter by the president of AMS, A. A. Omar, was an attempt to champion the rights of African Muslims on the coast to representation in the Legislative Council. In response, F. R. Wilson, private secretary to the governor argued:

Representation in Legislative Council is accorded to various sections of the population on a racial and not on a religious basis. The only exception to this rule is the separate representation of Asian Muslim and non-Muslim communities which is based on a long tradition of separation that has culminated in the partition of their country of origin and creation of two separate states: India and Pakistan. The religious divisions among the European and African communities and inside the Asian non-Muslim community have never been recognized as a proper basis for affording representation in Legislative Council and it would be wrong to recognize them as such at this stage. African representation is on a geographical and not on tribal or religious basis, but it is open to African Muslims to contest any constituency where they think they can obtain a majority . . . In selecting candidates for appointment to the government backbenches, the Governor has always deliberately refrained from considering a person’s religion since if the government attempted to base its majority on the support of denominational groups, it would probably serve to encourage religious differences.\textsuperscript{94}

This letter downplayed a genuine concern that had been raised by African Muslims. What emerges from the letter is that the colonial administration did not have a coherent policy on how to deal with the religious factor. Its actions suggest that it was keen to emphasize racial differences, but the religious factor indirectly influenced some of its policies. By allowing Asian Muslims and Asian non-Muslims to have separate representation in the Legislative Council, the religious factor that formed the basis of the formation of India and Pakistan was in play in colonial Kenya.

While the Islamic factor was acknowledged through the recognition of Arabs and Asian Muslims, the same privilege was denied to African Muslims. The latter group did not figure in the mental map of the colonial administrators, and they did not know how to deal with them. Since Africans were
rated low in the racial hierarchy, it is possible that the British authorities did not find them worthy enough to endorse their request. As far as the administration was concerned, the solution to the issue lay in discouraging the idea of separate representation in the Legislative Council on the basis of religious affiliation. Though European, Asian, and Arab representation was influenced by religion, it was not a sufficient reason to extend the religious privilege to African Muslims. This colonial policy demonstrates the British government’s role in reinforcing racial segregation between the native African and the Arab elite. As a result of these policies of communal representation, politics were extremely polarized both racially and ethnically. During the colonial era, the politics of Kenya were racially oriented to the extent that certain groups struggled to rid themselves of the inferiority status, while striving for the benefit enjoyed by the privileged class. The colonial policy dictated that the more native a group was, the fewer privileges it enjoyed.95

According to a colonial official, A. C. Hollis, a native was “any native of Africa, not of European or American origin. It includes any person not of European or American origin, who, within the dominion of the sultan of Zanzibar, would be subject to His Highness’ jurisdiction even though such a person should not have been born in Africa.”96 This explains why certain groups rejected their “identity because belonging to the ‘wrong identity’ carried with it the irresolvable consequences of loss of privileges,” A. P. Thornton observed.97 To be a native implied one being denied human rights and important privileges that were reserved for the “civilized groups.” Due to lack of foresight, Arabs, Swahili, Bajuni, and Shirazi (all Muslims) who had no other home but the coast demanded to be accorded equal status with immigrant groups (Indians and Europeans) by denouncing their native status.98 This move by some coastal Muslim groups implied that they were not indigenous to the coast, but immigrant groups. This step was a miscalculation by these Muslim groups because they could have agitated for equality under their native status. It was this demand by certain Muslim groups that later led to the development of an ambiguous relation between them and African nationalists. Their demand for nonnative status was a dangerous move that resulted in a growing animosity toward them among indigenous black Africans. Such was the political front that a section of the Muslim community presented as Kenya was approaching independence.

Coastal Muslims’ Secession Agenda and the Politics of a Unitary Kenya

As a result of having acquired a Western formal education from the various missionary schools, upcountry Christian politicians were better prepared and equipped to take over leadership of the country from colonial authorities, raising concerns among Muslims that they would be marginalized by upcoun-
try ethnic groups. This fear of political marginalization explains the Muslim secession campaigns in the early 1960s. In postcolonial Kenya, Arabs and Somalis were destined to be under African majority rule, dominated by Christians. As a result of their lower status, both ethnically and religiously, Arabs and Somalis were concerned that their interests would not be considered in postcolonial Kenya. This prompted them to seek secession. The entire secession agenda revealed tensions among minorities, who feared domination by a majority who would subject them to an “inferior social position” where their interests would not be represented.99

During the years of agitating for Kenyan independence, a protracted debate took place regarding the political status of the mwambao and the Northern Frontier District (NFD) largely inhabited by Somalis. Incidentally, both regions—principally occupied by Muslims—advocated separately for secession to avoid being integrated into the new Kenya. The debate on secessionism highlights, on the one hand, the conflict between Arabs and African nationalists (read: other coastal and upcountry politicians), and, on the other hand, the conflict between Somalis and the African nationalists (read: upcountry Christian politicians). This demand led to an ambivalent relationship between pro-secessionists and the nationalist leaders in the country. The debate supports Bartos and Wehr’s argument that conflict is bound to erupt when there are opposing camps with different goals.100 It is evident that the goal of the Arabs and the Somalis was to secede to join Zanzibar and Somalia, respectively, while that of the African nationalists was a united Kenya. With the loss of being administered from Zanzibar and the Republic of Somalia, Kenyan Muslims became a minority group.

These sections of Muslim population—Arabs and Somalis—were suspicious and nervous about the power of the upcountry Christian politicians, which explains the emergence of a strong separatist tendency among them. The political agenda of the Kenyan Somalis who advocated joining Somalia was both ethnically and religiously influenced.101 Although Somalis perceived their struggle in ethnic terms, religious differences with the majority of Kenyans prejudiced their political cause. On the other hand, the coastal Arabs were agitating for reunification with the Busaidi sultanate in Zanzibar.102 Their political agenda was among other factors guided by religious principles. Arguably, the pro-secessionists had a nostalgic feeling of an Islamic era under the Zanzibar sultanate, which they wanted to reestablish.

The decade of the 1950s was one of the crucial phases in the political history of Kenya. This phase was momentous as it saw the rise of African nationalism, which by 1963 succeeded in removing the colonial regime. Another crucial political development in this period was the campaign for secession that was being fronted by some of the coastal Muslims. As early as 1956, once it was established that the colonial administration was on the verge of ending and as countrywide demand for independence deepened, a section of Mus-
Lims on the coast began campaigning to be either rejoined with their former compatriots in Zanzibar or granted some autonomy relative to the emerging nation. Underlying the petition was the fear of being subjugated by the largely non-Muslim upcountry ethnic groups. The history of the position of mwambao as part of the dominion of Zanzibar became a mobilizing factor and the legal rationale for demanding special consideration from the colonial authority.

According to the Arab Muslims, it was a historical blunder that led the coast to be incorporated into the colony. For them, the coastal region should have been allowed to be administered with Zanzibar because the latter had more in common with the coast culturally, religiously, and even ethnically. They viewed their culture to be similar to that of the Arab aristocrats in Zanzibar, which was reinforced by professing the same Islamic faith. Therefore, as the prospects for independence became real, the Arab Muslims feared the possibility of being denied certain privileges by the upcountry Christian administration in the impending postcolonial Kenya. African politicians from the region, however, had different views about the status of the coast. They perceived themselves to have greater cultural affinity with the other Africans in the colony than with Zanzibar. In the emotional debate that was prompted by racial politics, Arab Muslims sought refuge in separation. This view was not shared by African coastal politicians such as Ronald Ngala, Msanifu Kombo, and Francis Khamisi. The confrontation between the two sides gradually manifested itself as a competition between Africans and Arabs.

Both non-Muslim and Muslim African politicians on the coast were reluctant to embrace the idea of secession. They feared that unification with Zanzibar would imply being under Arab rule, and would mean continued subordination. Their preference was union with the rest of Kenya. On the other hand, the advocates of coastal autonomy viewed the upcountry Christian nationalist politicians who were collaborating with African coastal politicians as “foreigners.” Accordingly, the secessionists vowed that they would not allow again another leadership of “outsiders.” According to them, a foreign administration in the form of British-Christian government was preparing to pass governance of the country to another “foreigner” in the form of upcountry Christian leaders.

The attitude of the secessionists could be attributed to both social pride and the Islamic factor. One reason why the secessionists supported union with Zanzibar was their expectation that previous Arab privileges and status would be protected. Moreover, as Muslims they were unwilling to be ruled by non-Muslims. It was not until November 1958 that Governor Baring clarified the British position on the issue. The governor declared that the 1895 treaty between Britain and Zanzibar had not been abrogated and was still the basis of administration of the protectorate. Following this revelation, Africans were disappointed as they could not endorse the notion of an Arab-dominated coast. As far as they were concerned, the coast belonged to the Mijikenda
tribes, and the 1895 treaty did not alter that fact. The Africans argued that they were not consulted when the agreement was signed. In fact, there is no mention in the British official report of indigenous coastal Africans’ participation in the meetings that culminated in the treaty.\textsuperscript{107}

In late 1958, during the debate on secession, the two Arab elected members, Sharif Abdallah and Sheikh Mahfudh Mackawi, presented a memorandum to the British authority, which they claimed had the support of the Afro-Asian Association and the Bajunis.\textsuperscript{108} Confronted with the possibilities of losing their privileges in postcolonial Kenya, the Arab elites appealed for the support of the Swahili community, only to realize that the latter had their own vision of the form of coastal politics. In the memorandum, Arab elites requested the colonial authority not to relinquish the protectorate to a government of independent Kenya.\textsuperscript{109} When the AAA was informed about this development, they decided to send a telegram to London dissociating themselves from the claims made by the two leaders. The response was prompted by the fact that for a long time Arabs had considered the members of the AAA as inferior. Therefore, they seized the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the way they had been perceived. And there was no better way than denying Arabs the support that they desperately needed at that crucial moment. Clearly, as the debate raged about secession of the coastal strip, Muslim and non-Muslim sections of Swahili communities and other African indigenous groups supported the amalgamation of the Kenyan colony and protectorate. Supporters of a united Kenya abandoned the idea of seceding, fearing continued domination by the Arab elites. Their apprehension was intensified by the colonial authority’s promise that the 1895 treaty would be respected and would form the basis of considering the future of the mwambao.

Consequently, in addition to the telegram, the AAA presented a memorandum to the British administration stating that it was inaccurate to insinuate that the coast belonged to Arabs only. According to the AAA, there were other communities like Baluchi, Digo, Giriama, and Swahili among others who also had a stake in the affairs of the region. In their view, it would be necessary to involve the other sections of the population in any discussion regarding the future of the coast. This action of the AAA was interpreted by Arabs as sabotage to a united front in London. In response, some Arabs decided to send telegrams expressing their support for Mackawi and Abdallah. To calm matters, the colonial secretary, Iain Macleod, in his address to a conference in February 1960, stated that so far there were no changes being contemplated in the agreement with the sultan.\textsuperscript{110}

Arab Muslims’ attempts to form a coastal union association to protect the interests of the coast were frustrated by African politicians from the region who refused to join. In fact, the Mombasa African District Union (MADU) called upon all Africans organizations in the region not to be part of a union...
that was being sponsored by Arabs. The Africans felt that since their objec-
tives were different from those of Arabs there was no need for collaboration. It was regarded as futile to support such a union. This response supports the claim by Bartos and Wehr that conflict is likely to arise between groups with incompatible goals. Having been disappointed by the coastal Africans, the Arabs solicited support elsewhere. In May 1960, a delegation of Arabs and Swahili Muslims went to Zanzibar and sought an audience with the sultan. In the meeting with the sultan, they expressed the concern about the sultan renouncing his sovereignty over the protectorate. They requested the sultan not to make any decision on the issue without consulting them, fearing that Britain might leave them under an upcountry government, which according to them would be unsympathetic to their culture and religion. Rather than being forced into that sort of arrangement, they visualized for themselves and other residents an autonomous status of the protectorate.

It was inevitable that the Arab claim to the coast as a separate entity would meet strong African opposition. Coastal Africans under their leader Ronald Ngala were not willing to compromise. In fact, Ngala said, in a November 1960 Mombasa Times interview responding to one of the parties advocating for secession, that the “Coast People’s Party had an out of date, crazy and stupid idea about coast autonomy,” which is not supported by any African. These views were in agreement with those raised by an African Muslim, Msanifu Kombo, organizing secretary, Kenya African National Union (KANU), Mombasa branch. In an intimidating letter of June 1961 addressed to the Arabs, Kombo said:

We say that this Coast of Kenya is an integral part of Kenya and it can never be separated either by force or without force, and anyone who will try to do that, then I say that will be the day of “TROUBLE AND ANXUITIES HERE AT THE COAST.” Africans are the owners of the country and they will not tolerate either you or what your party will do. Africans have evidence that they do not want Mwamba (Coastal Strip) separated and there is no better proof than those 21,000 voters who boycotted the Mwamba Representative. Here the Africans demonstrated by deed their determination of their rejection of this matter, and so if you want to introduce it by force, then what you will reap, will be what you have sown.

It is clear that most of the coastal politicians of African descent did not embrace the idea of being under the sultan. They regarded the Arabs as an immigrant minority group whose special privileges over the years had been an obstacle to Africans advancing to majority rule. Also of concern to them was the privileged land ownership. The coastal African politicians challenged the land rights that enabled the Arabs to acquire huge tracts of land thereby ren-
dering the Africans (both Muslims and non-Muslim) as squatters in their own land. This was the case in Malindi, Kilifi, and Kwale where land from some indigenous people was taken by the Arabs.\textsuperscript{113}

The coastal African politicians emphasized that the Arabs had originally arrived in Kenya not as rulers but as traders. Therefore, they did not have any territorial rights in the country. According to them the coastal strip agreement was made between two foreign parties without due consultation with the rightful owners of the region.\textsuperscript{114} So while Arabs referred to upcountry politicians as “outsiders” or “foreigners,” African politicians from the coast regarded the Arabs as nonindigenous immigrants. This attitude of the coastal African politicians toward Arabs was fueled by the latter’s rejection of their native status earlier in the colonial period.

In general, African coastal politicians (both Muslims and non-Muslims) felt more comfortable dealing with upcountry Christian politicians than with Arab Muslims. Accordingly, African coastal leaders sought assurance from the colonial government that it would not enter into any further agreement with the sultan until Kenya had achieved \textit{uhuru} (independence). In other words, they were suggesting that the new government of Kenya should be involved in any future discussions on the status of the strip. This view was utterly rejected by the proponents of separation who considered the treaty solely bilateral and insisted that the discussions should only involve Zanzibar and Britain. Lack of understanding between Arab leaders and African politicians led to the rise of several parties at the coast each claiming to fight for the interest of \textit{mwambao} (the coastal strip). Some of the parties that emerged during that period were (i) the Shungwaya Freedom Party, (ii) the Kenya Protectorate National Party (KPNP), (iii) the Coast Peoples Party (CPP), and (iv) the Coast League.\textsuperscript{115}

The Shungwaya Freedom Party, which emerged under the leadership of Ahmed Jeneby, was believed to be a Bajuni party representing the views of the community. The main objective of the party was to champion for the improvement of the social welfare and the political rights of the Bajuni.\textsuperscript{116} Its creation reflected the Bajuni’s reaction to Mombasa-based leadership. Their disillusionment with the Mombasa leadership was evident in the 1960 general meeting where they criticized the Arab elected members for neglecting issues affecting the Bajuni community. They were bitter that the two members of the council had not bothered to visit the Bajuni district and inform the people of the political developments in the country. It was out of this resentment that the Bajuni dissociated themselves with the petition to the sultan. During the meeting, they resolved that any future decisions concerning the community would be dictated by a careful study of the political changes. To indicate their commitment to their 1960 resolutions, in May 1961, Bajunis decided to support the advocates of a unitary system based on the conviction that the Bajuni land formed part of Kenya.\textsuperscript{117}
Turning to the KPNP, the party emerged as an Arab organization in the Malindi district. The party was also dissatisfied with the established leadership in Mombasa, which allegedly only remembered the district during election periods. Some of the party’s objectives were “to constitutionally fight for independence of mwambao and later on federate with the rest of East African states. To avoid any sort of colour and/or religious discrimination; to strive for the abolition of all forms of racialism and oppression, and to uphold democratic ideals.”

Though on paper the party intended to eradicate all forms of racialism and oppression, in practice it appeared more of a party that was championing the cause of the Arabs, particularly those of Malindi. However, its main objective was to constitutionally advocate for the independence of mwambao, which it considers as part of Zanzibar and not Kenya. This explains why in March 1963, the KPNP appealed to the district officer (DO) of Malindi to permit them to raise the red flag at a public rally as a symbol that the decision about the coastal strip was with the sultan. Previously, the red flag, representing the Busaid dynasty, “was flown on Fridays and holidays” to assert the coastal region was under “a Muslim power.” However, the request was rejected by the DO on two grounds: (i) according to Section 10 of the Public Order Ordinance Cap 56 laws of Kenya it was illegal to fly a flag at a public meeting and (ii) the red flag, being the sultan’s flag, could not be permitted to be hoisted where the British were in authority because that would be tantamount to suggesting that it was the sultan who was in authority at the coast and not the British. Though that was the motive behind the demand by the KPNP, naturally, the colonialists would not encourage such a notion to be nurtured by the coastal Arabs.

Despite the fact that both the Shungwaya party and the KPNP were coastal Muslims’ political platforms, they were all sectarian in outlook, promoting the welfare of their respective communities. Through the Shungwaya party, the Bajuni resented the treatment the community was accorded by the Arab elites. This was a clear case of the “politics of reputation” as observed by Jonathon Glassman, “in which the weak might vilify the powerful for being ungenerous, and the rich ignore their obligations to those they deemed ungrateful.” Upon realizing that the Arabs had been taking them and other Swahili communities for granted, the Bajuni envisaged their aspirations being accorded in postcolonial Kenya rather than in separation dominated by Arabs. On the other hand, the KPNP championed the continued influence of the Arab elites in coastal politics, which was only guaranteed through secession.

Among all the other parties that appeared at that time, the Coast Peoples Party (CPP) emerged as the most articulate proponent of coastal autonomy in the 1960s. One of its pamphlets of September 1961 inviting people to a public rally reads: “The Coastal Strip has never and will never be one with the colony. You are all invited to a MAMMOTH meeting by the COAST PEOPLES PARTY: (CHAMPIONS OF COASTAL AUTONOMY).”
main objective of CPP was “to strive peacefully and constitutionally for the ultimate independence of the Kenyan Protectorate and its eventual federation with Kenya or other East African territories.” Through their campaign cries of mwambao hai (coast alive/arise) or umma hai (the nation/community alive/arise), they drew huge crowds to their meetings. In its effort to have a nonsectarian, nonethnic, and nonracial outlook, the party attempted to gain support outside Mombasa district. This is why its leadership had Ali Abdallah (an Arab Muslim) as its secretary and Maalim Rashid Bakuli (a Digo Muslim) as its vice president. Maalim Bakuli’s position was perceived as strategic with the hope that, being a Digo Muslim, his allegiance would sway his tribesmen to join CPP. Remarkably, at this juncture, the Arab elite begun seeking the support of groups of people they had earlier regarded as wajinga or washenzi like the Digo, only to find out that these “ignoramuses” had a different idea of the shape of coastal politics. The efforts by Bakuli to gain support from fellow Digo failed to dislodge the Kenya African National Union (KANU) and the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), both of which had already been established among the Digo of southern region of the coast.

It was in Kwale district that non-Muslim politicians from upcountry Kenya received significant support. Jomo Kenyatta and several Kenya African Union (KAU) officials had visited the region in early 1952 and established a branch of KAU among Digo Muslims. A year later when KAU was proscribed, a series of barazas (public meetings) were held in Kwale warning people against associating themselves with “subversive activities.” As Muslims, they were reminded to be good citizens and to respect those in authority. All these efforts, including the religious appeals, were ineffective in diluting the nationalistic fervor that had spread among the Digo. And when KANU and KADU were formed later in the early 1960s, they found enthusiastic supporters among the Digo. By joining these earliest nationalistic political organizations, Digo Muslims hoped to be able to contribute to policies aimed at redressing imbalances in society. This reaction can be explained by the injustices they had witnessed in the colonial period. All Africans irrespective of their religion condemned oppression, yet the only Muslim group that was accorded privileges was the Arab community. It was this injustice that influenced the relationship between African Muslims and Arab Muslims vis-à-vis African nationalism.

Yet another party was the Coast League, which was described as the party of moderation and compromise in comparison with the CPP. It was alleged that this party advocated for the establishment of a British base at the coast in return either for autonomy or continued protection of the strip until the coastal people were prepared to take over. While the Coast League was also seen as being more pro-sultan, the CPP questioned the allegiance given to a sultanate that seemed unconcerned with the welfare of its mainland subjects. The CPP was disillusioned by the leadership in Zanzibar that was not
coming forth to espouse the cause of the coastal people, especially the Arab elites. It was against this background that the CPP advocated for mwambao autonomy. The Coast League’s agenda did not resonate with most coastal inhabitants, which thereby contributed to the failure of this party to make any significant impact at the coast. The fact that more than one party emerged to fight for mwambao was symptomatic of basic divergences in approach and multilayered rivalries. Clearly, the sectarian approaches to the issue of mwambao politics demonstrate the multivariant fault lines that characterized the coastal society. The evident wrangling and lack of coordination among the mwambao parties affected the cohesion that would have been crucial to advance their cause.

The plan for mwambao autonomy that was supposed to be submitted to the British government was undermined by divisions in the Arab camp. Among the Arabs there were those who wanted to see the continuation of British protection and those who sought the complete autonomy of mwambao. The two elected Arab members favored a revision of the 1895 agreement and opposed the idea of the establishment of a British base at the coast. Their views were criticized by other Arabs including Salim Mohammed Balala, a spokesman of the Hadhrami traders and shopkeepers, who ascribed Mombasa’s development to British enterprise. Due to these divisions the Arabs were in a dilemma and could not agree which political agenda to embrace. This dilemma is expressed in an article published in the Mombasa Times:

> No clear cut (Arab) policy has been issued although the atmosphere is challenging and other races have come out in their true colours . . . the Africans have put the “Africa for Africans” slogan . . . and it is hard to believe that we shall be immune. The Coast is protected for us but it is nevertheless part of Africa. Things are moving fast and disintegration looms ahead like a nightmare. With all our long cultural and religious association with Zanzibar do we accept it?

In the midst of this confusion and division, in September 1960, Governor Patrick Renison assured Arabs that the status of the protectorate would be considered and the 1895 treaty would not be abandoned by the colonial government. He promised them that consideration would be given to proposals made by Arabs regarding the future of the protectorate. The speech provoked criticism by African nationalists from both the coast and the upcountry.

Meanwhile, the British government together with the sultan of Zanzibar commissioned Sir James W. Robertson to inquire and present appropriate suggestions concerning the future of the coastal strip. Discussions between Robertson and leading political actors of the early 1960s reveal that representatives of the indigenous African communities (Mijikenda) favored the coastal strip being integrated with the Kenya colony upon independence. The at-
titude of the coastal African politicians toward Arabs was fueled by the latter’s rejection of their native status, where under colonial rule Arabs preferred to be considered as alien so as to enjoy the privileges that status entailed. The Arab elites uncompromisingly disapproved the notion of being equated with the “uncivilized African” (*washenzi*) as that would deny them special rights. This colonial policy demonstrates the British government’s role in reinforcing racial segregation between the native African and the Arab elite. As a result of this policy of communal representation, politics was extremely polarized both racially and ethnically—and to some extent religiously—as evident during the *mwambao* debate. After Robertson concluded his consultations with the various segments of the coastal population, he compiled a report that recommended integration of the two political spheres before independence. With the commission’s findings that recognized *mwambao* as part of the Kenya territory, the Arab elites and their supporters felt shortchanged, as Governor Rension had earlier assured them of colonial administration support. The colonial government approved the suggestion, and in the London conference of 1963, it was agreed that the sultan’s government would surrender its sovereignty over the strip to Kenya and that Britain would make the necessary compensation to the sultan. The agreement implied that the issue concerning the status of the coast had been resolved and that it was legally part of Kenya.

Given that the coastal strip was heterogeneous, it increasingly became difficult for Arabs to continue advocating separatism on their own. They came to the realization that they no longer had any special political status of their own since the majority of the people living along the *mwambao* wanted the region to be part of Kenya. This awareness compelled them to unequivocally decide to place their destiny in the hands of those who would soon command power in the country. As they accepted integration into Kenya, it was important for them to attain internal reconciliation. Ali Abdallah of the CPP had earlier addressed a meeting attended by members of the various political parties at the coast advising them that “the time has come when we should be thinking of each other not as enemies, because we belonged to different political groups, but as friends, willing to settle difference and deeply interested in the welfare, progress and prosperity of our communities.” At this meeting, they agreed to forget their differences and forge a united front as coast politicians irrespective of race, ethnicity, and religion. The major factor that influenced the decision of a section of coastal Muslims to forgo their earlier political aspirations and opt for full integration with Kenya was the adoption of a regional system of government (*majimbo*). This was the idea propagated by Ngala’s KADU.

With regionalism, Arabs were assured of some degree of autonomy, escaping domination by non-Muslim politicians from upcountry. According to this system of government as agreed upon in the London conference in 1963, there would be six regional governments and a central one responsible for major matters such as foreign affairs, defense, trade, and economic develop-
During the conference, an agreement was signed in October 1963 between Kenyatta and Mohamed Shamte, the Zanzibar prime minister representing the sultan, which legally bequeathed the *mwambao* to Kenya.

Before the signing was concluded at the Lancaster conference, the Kenyan delegation led by Kenyatta gave an assurance that they would honor and respect Muslims’ way of life in assuming sovereignty. As freedom of conscience and of religion was embodied in the constitution, there was no fear of interference in their religious affairs. In principle it was agreed that the Ten-Mile Coastal Strip would become part of Kenya on the condition that the rights of Muslims as well as the *Kadhi* courts would be preserved at all times. On behalf of the Kenyan government, Kenyatta stated,

1) The free exercise of any creed or religion will at all times be safeguarded and, in particular, His Highness’s present subjects who are of the Muslim faith and their descendants will at all times be ensured of complete freedom of worship and the preservation of their own religious buildings and institutions.

2) The jurisdiction of the Chief Kadhi and of all the other Kadhis will at all times be preserved and will extend to the determination of questions of Muslim law relating to personal status (for example, marriage, divorce and inheritance) in proceedings in which all parties profess the Muslim religion.

This agreement was recognized by the United Nations as a pact between two sovereign states and embedded under the pacts of international treaty. It is this arrangement that Muslims sometimes revisit when they come into conflict with either the state or their non-Muslim compatriots in relation to the *Kadhi* courts.

**The Pan-Somalia State and Kenyan Somalis’ Secession Program**

The Somalis, on the other hand, believed that they were part of the greater Somalia before they were scattered into five different territories. The main political discourse of Somali Muslims from 1952 to independence centered on the issue of secession to Somalia and the formation of an independent pan-Somali nation-state. This agenda was based on the argument that Somali-speaking people constitute a distinct nation entitled to a separate existence, just like other nation-states in the world. Accordingly, the Republic of Somalia claimed that the Northern Frontier District (NFD), which is mainly inhabited by Somali speakers, should be part of its territory and not of Kenya. This claim was an integral part of the concept of “Greater Somalia,” which politicians in the Republic of Somali endeavored to achieve. The authorities in Mogadishu supported the idea of pan-Somalia state, which incorporated
the Italian Somalia, the British Somaliland, Djibouti on the French side, the NFD in Kenya, and the Ogaden in Ethiopia as extolled by the five-pointed star in their new flag. Though the idea of secession originally appeared to have been nurtured by politicians from the Republic of Somalia, it found acceptance among Somalis of the NFD. To realize this goal, various political parties were formed by Somalis in the region.

The most effective party was the Northern Province Peoples Party (NPPP) led by Wako Happi. As a result of its campaigns, the NPPP succeeded in gaining more support among both Somali- and non-Somali-speaking people (especially among the Boran and Rendille) than any earlier political movement in the region. The party was able to bring together Kenyan Somalis in terms of membership, geographic locations, and status within community. With the creation of the new state of the Republic of Somalia, the NPPP and its secessionist partners requested that the colonial administration conduct a referendum in the region to resolve the destiny of the NFD. To indicate their determination not to be part of independent Kenya, the Somali resorted to boycotting the 1960 electoral registration and to abstaining from any involvement in the movement toward independence in Kenya. Through such strategies, the Somali hoped that their union with Somalia would be accomplished. The reality that upcountry Christian politicians were bound to take over the leadership of the country did not augur well with the Somali Muslims. They hated the idea of being under a government dominated by people they “disliked and despised.” As a result, the party actively championed the agenda that the NFD should be part of the Republic of Somalia, at independence, with whom they shared a common culture and religion.

During the Lancaster conference of 1962, the NPPP representative in the Legislative Council, Abdi Rashid Khalif, and a delegation from the NFD presented their case for secession and unification with the Republic of Somalia. They argued that the area they represented (the districts of Isiolo, Garissa, Mandera, Marsabit, Moyale, and Wajir) should be granted autonomy as territory independent of Kenya. This arrangement would enable the region to enter into an Act of Union with the Somali republic when Kenya attained independence. They emphasized that they had more in common with the people of Somalia than those of Kenya in terms of culture and religion. This explained their desire for an administration that would respect them as a community, which they saw in the Republic of Somalia. They believed that the Republic of Somalia would uplift their colonial status and offer them prosperity because they considered its administration to be consistent with their way of life and beliefs.

This view was utterly rejected by KADU and KANU members present at the Lancaster conference. As the future Kenya’s political parties, KANU and KADU were strongly opposed to the idea of the secession of the NFD. The
leaders of these parties argued that the neglect of the NFD was not the fault of the African leaders, but that of the British administration. They promised to redress the situation upon gaining independence and assured Kenyan Somalis of a better future under independent Kenya than under the Republic of Somalia. The assertion by the Kenyan nationalists has proved to be true. Later events in Somalia have shown that one religion shared by the entire population and backed up by the same language and ethnicity was not enough to prevent a country from plunging into chaos. Since discussions on the future of NFD had reached a stalemate, the British position was highlighted in the 1962 Kenya Constitutional Conference report:

The Secretary of State informed the Conference that Her Majesty's Government had given very careful consideration to the views which had been put forward by the [NFD] Delegation and by KADU and KANU. They had come to the conclusion that an investigation should be undertaken in order to ascertain public opinion in the area regarding its future. Accordingly, the Secretary of State proposed to arrange for an independent Commission to be appointed, with appropriate terms of reference, to investigate this matter and report to him . . . Meanwhile, there would be no change in the status of the Northern Frontier District or in the arrangements for its administration.142

Arguably, the British government gave the secessionist Somalis a ray of hope when the NFD Commission and the Regional Boundaries Commission were formed to gather views and opinions—between December 1962 and March 1963—of the residents in deciding the fate of the NFD. Upon completion of gathering views, the commissions recommended the creation of an administrative unit of the NFD that would have local autonomy similarly to those accorded to the other regions in the country. Supposedly, the commissions’ recommendations were inconsistent with the colonial administration’s assurance to pro-secessionist Somalis to consider their concerns. Disillusioned with the outcome, the Republic of Somalia severed diplomatic ties with the British government, while the “Kenyan Somalis rioted and engaged in political violence across the NFD and, to a lesser extent, in Nairobi.”143 Consequently, when Somalis declined to participate in the 1963 elections, the stage was set for antagonism between the Kenyan government and its defiant Somali residents.

By the end of the Lancaster conference, the issue of Somali secession had not been resolved. In its final effort to determine the issue of the NFD, the British government arranged for a conference in Rome, on August 1963. Invited to the conference were the Somalia republic, Kenya, and Britain. The Kenyan Somalis of the NFD were not represented as the issue was now viewed
Historical Evolution of Muslim Politics in Kenya from the 1840s to 1963

as involving states. The British delegation was led by the minister of state for foreign affairs, Peter Thomas, the Somali delegation was led by the prime minister Sharmarkey, and the Kenya internal government was represented by Governor MacDonald and some government ministers. Like the earlier conference in Lancaster, the Rome conference also ended in a deadlock. This was as a result of the British position that it could not act unilaterally over the NFD and also Kenya’s insistence that it was not willing to lose that part of its territory. This development was interpreted by the Kenyan delegates as a “great victory for Kenya.” However, the inability to resolve the issue before independence meant that the demand for secession continued in the initial years of independent Kenya.

It is important to understand that in both regions, the *mwambao* and the Northern Frontier District, the aspiration to autonomy was strong where intentions to unite an otherwise heterogeneous population, divided by language, class, religion, and sects were witnessed. But as a result of numerous negotiations between the pro-secessionists and pro-unitary Kenyans, an assurance was given to the Arabs and the Somalis about their welfare in postcolonial Kenya. Though the Arabs and the Somalis have reconciled themselves to the loss of being governed from Zanzibar and Somalia, respectively, they have not abandoned the *majimbo* (federalism) ideal. There are occasions when the issue of separatism reemerges, finding its expression in the sometimes unpopular federalism (*majimbo*) debate.

Shortly after the integration of the coast, the unification of the administration led to the abolition of the offices of *Liwali* and *Mudir*. The handful who remained became district officers (DOs) and district commissioners (DCs), according to their experience and qualifications. The change of status meant better opportunities for promotion for them as the offices of DO or DC are higher in the administrative hierarchy than those of a *Mudir* or *Liwalili*. All these changes were taken in the spirit of creating a united Kenya devoid of racial discrimination that could obstruct the full equality of all Kenyans. The promises of the leaders of the independence movement that the coastal Arabs would be regarded as Africans were followed by action. As one of the smaller composite bodies of the new Kenyan state, Arabs were accorded fairly good positions in the independence government. However, the ostracism of Kenyan Somalis evident in the colonial period—socially, economically, and politically—continued in the earliest years of postcolonial period due to their enhanced adherence to an irredentist pan-Somalia cause, “their religious position within Kenyan society (Islam being a minority),” and their terrestrial isolation and distinct pastoral lifestyle, which was attributed to an arid environment. After Kenya’s independence and the Somalis’ resort to armed insurgency that soured their relations with the government, Kenyan Somalis ceased to play a visible role in national politics.
Significantly, though Muslims widely believe that the ascendancy of upcountry Christian hegemony in the postcolonial period has contributed to their perceived marginalization, this should not be seen as the only factor in their predicament. Ethnic and racial considerations that were encouraged by the colonial administration have adversely affected Muslims’ efforts to present a united political voice for the community, influencing the upcountry politicians’ relation with them. Certainly, the upcountry Christian politicians continued to divide the Muslim community, or to take advantage of the existing divisions, in order to prevent the emergence of a united Muslim political front, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent chapters.