

Chapter Title: The Development of Muslim Civic Associations and Political Parties

Book Title: Muslims in Kenyan Politics

Book Subtitle: Political Involvement, Marginalization, and Minority Status

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Published by: Northwestern University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt22727nc.9>

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## CHAPTER THREE

# The Development of Muslim Civic Associations and Political Parties

### The Creation of SUPKEM and the Need to Unify Muslims' Efforts

Many Muslims believe that the ascendancy of upcountry (*wabara*) Christian hegemony is responsible for the perceived marginalization and discrimination against Muslims in Kenya.<sup>1</sup> Although the predicament of Muslims predated colonialism, postcolonial politics is blamed for not reversing the situation. Instead, postcolonial governments have made Muslims ask themselves questions relating to their position as citizens. Such questions include their perceived social, economic, and political alienation vis-à-vis the upcountry Christian hegemony. The perception of upcountry Christian domination has influenced some Muslims to conclude that religion plays a significant role in the power game exhibited by the upcountry politicians.<sup>2</sup> As a result, some Muslims are of the opinion that it has become imperative to employ Islam for achieving their sociopolitical goals. This development of using Islam in African politics has also been observed by Louis Brenner:

Today Islam has become a major factor in world politics and in consonance with this trend African Muslims have increasingly been turning to Islam for the resolution of their own social and political problems. They are injecting themselves into the political arena as Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

In Kenya, as elsewhere, the place of Islam in the political process has been redefined as a means of dealing with new political realities. Since the 1990s, things have changed from Muslims protesting against perceived discrimination by the government to Muslims seeking to shape the direction of Kenya's politics. Several Muslim organizations have been established in Kenya, and their impact is felt in the religious as well as the political field.

The formation of Muslim associations during the colonial period reflected ethnic and racial antagonism among Muslims of Arab, Indian, and indigenous African backgrounds, which continued to be politically significant after independence. To divide the Muslim community, the colonial authority granted Arabs and Indian Muslims political favors over indigenous African Muslims as reflected in the composition of the Legislative Council. In 1920, the council had one nominated Arab member. Following agitation for *elected* rather than *nominated* representation by the Coast Arab Association formed in 1921, the British granted the Arabs two elected seats on the council in 1923. The development increased the factional rivalries among Muslims, leading the Afro-Asian Muslims to form their own association in 1927.<sup>4</sup> I discussed the political divisions of Muslims along racial lines during the colonial era in chapter 1. There were several ethnically based Muslim associations, which acted as a lobby for the interests of a particular community.<sup>5</sup> The result was the emergence of many Muslim associations, which failed to develop a nationalistic and unified Muslim approach on important issues. This fragmentation of Muslim interests across a variety of associational activities led to a diffusion of any significant Muslim impact in Kenya, which was of great value to postcolonial regimes.<sup>6</sup>

After independence, an important aspect was evident among Muslims. Muslims came to the realization that their efforts in uplifting their welfare had been weakened by the prevailing fragmentation along ethnic and racial lines. Muslims determined it was time to have an umbrella body that could articulate the demands of the community rather than having several factional ethnic associations. This led to the creation of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) in 1973. Since the issue of cleavage emanates in different forms among Kenyan Muslims, in this chapter I examine to what extent the national Muslim organization SUPKEM has succeeded in uniting Muslims. Thus, I endeavor to assess its contribution to partisan politics in Kenya as the main umbrella body for Muslims. However, more important was that the creation of a postcolonial state required Muslims to be unified into a centralized body for social control.<sup>7</sup> This became clear by the beginning of 1970s as clarified by Bakari:

The Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims was established as part of the grand strategy of the Kenyatta government to control various sections of the Kenyan society, from trades unions to religious organizations, in the name of centralization of decision making. It was established about the same time that the Central Organization of the Trade Unions (COTU) and the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCCK) [were formed]. These were umbrella organizations that were created to provide direct channels of communication between the government and important influential sectors of the Kenyan

society. All the organizations that served civil society were supposed to be affiliated to one or another of these umbrella bodies. And the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) was intended to be a clearing ground for Muslim organizations that wanted to deal with the government.<sup>8</sup>

Though creating a national Muslim association was part of a general policy of social control initiated by the postcolonial government, Muslims were also involved in this bureaucratization process. The need to have a unifying body for all Muslims was the inspiration behind the formation of a national organization. Both Muslim politicians and religious leaders were engaged in the process that culminated in the creation of SUPKEM in May 1973. The council activities are conducted from its secretariat in Nairobi, which has staff implementing the decisions of the National Executive Committee. The committee is mandated to appoint professionals to assist in the activities of the organization. Due to financial constraints, the committee works on a voluntary basis, and it is only the small secretariat that is paid.

According to Bakari, the creation of this organization could not have succeeded without the approval of the government. As a form of political control, postcolonial government encouraged the formation of religious organizations of national reach among the party loyalists. This explains why some of the Muslim senior government officials in the Kenyatta administration were also representatives of SUPKEM. This was the case of Assistant Minister Kassim Mwamzandi, who was also the chairman of SUPKEM; Assistant Minister Mohammed Salim Balala was SUPKEM's secretary general; Assistant Minister Mohamed Shaikh Aden was SUPKEM's director of education; and Deputy Director of Central Bank of Kenya Ahmad Abdallah was SUPKEM's director general.<sup>9</sup> According to Mwamzandi, the reason for incorporating government members as officials of SUPKEM was to give the organization influence in its endeavor to serve the Muslim community. He is strongly convinced that government's representation helped the organization to earn recognition, especially in its international dealings.<sup>10</sup>

Mwamzandi does not agree that it is possible to have a conflict of interest in situations where one is a government minister and at the same time representing a Muslim body. As a result, the formation of SUPKEM enjoyed political blessings. Arguably, the creation of SUPKEM was also meant to check potentially disruptive tendencies among Muslims. Prior to the introduction of multiparty politics, the council was anticipated to be in harmony with the political leadership of the day. The government presumed that the council leaders would control Muslims for the benefit of the state where open disagreement with the state was to be avoided. In return for their loyalty, Muslims found themselves rewarded in different ways. Their religious leaders were allowed to participate in state functions, while some Muslim politicians

were appointed government ministers, and a few Muslims were promoted to substantive administrative positions. The cost that Muslims had to incur to have access to these privileges was political conformism.

In essence, however, SUPKEM was set up as an umbrella body to unite all Muslim organizations, societies, mosque committees, and groups in Kenya. According to its vision statement, SUPKEM's desire was to provide a single channel of communication with the government and the rest of the world on all matters concerning Muslims in Kenya.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the organization acted as an intermediary because it created new structures through which the government could deal with the Muslim population. This recognition presents the supreme council as both an institutionalized interest group and an adviser to the government on matters concerning Muslims. This official close relationship of SUPKEM and the state has sometimes been condemned by other Muslims with the allegation that the organization is always hesitant to criticize the government.

### The “Failure” of SUPKEM in the Political Arena

In principle, all Muslim associations are required to be under SUPKEM. However, some Muslim associations have no links with SUPKEM and remain independent registered bodies. The Kenya authority has not banned these rival bodies except when they are suspected of opposing the government or supporting subversive activities deemed dangerous to the security of the state. For instance, after the August 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassy in Kenya, the government decided to ban five Islamic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which included Mercy International, Haramain Foundation, Help African People, International Islamic Relief Organization, and Ibrahim bin Abdul Aziz al-Ibrahim Foundation. According to the NGO Coordinating Board, the organizations were proscribed because they had been found to be working against the interests of Kenya's security.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, there are other popular Muslim organizations like the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK) and the National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF), which are not affiliated with SUPKEM. Their existences have challenged SUPKEM as the sole voice speaking on behalf of Kenyan Muslims.

The supreme council's authority is further weakened by its sharing of religious authority with independent sheikhs and imams and government *Kadhis*. Its main domain is limited to secular matters as it has no authority in theological or intra-Islamic legal disputes. Usually, theological issues are handled and interpreted by renowned independent sheikhs and imams of mosques. If there is an intra-Islamic legal issue to be resolved, in most instances such cases are handled by the *Kadhi* courts established by the government. This demonstrates that the leadership of the supreme council is limited. Further, intraparty wrangling has severely damaged the reputation of the organization,

where contradicting statements made by officials of the organization have left Muslims in confusion. For instance, in 2004, the SUPKEM vice chairman, Munir Mazrui (Arab descent), issued a press statement that the organization had decided to support a Muslim, Hassan Omar Sarai (mixed ethnic parentage), in the Kisauni by-election that year. Juma Ngao (Mijikenda descent), SUPKEM chairman Mombasa branch, released a statement refuting the endorsement of the candidate by SUPKEM.<sup>13</sup>

According to Mazrui, Ngao rejected his endorsement claiming that it was meant to favor a Muslim of “Swahili” descent. It happened that Ngao supported Anania Mwaboza, a non-Muslim of Mijikenda descent. This ethnic conflict was evident with the positions the two protagonists had taken. In the ensuing war of words meant to show who has supremacy in Muslim politics at the coast, Ngao allegedly sent the following short message to Mazrui’s phone. It reads (Kiswahili version):

*Jumapili ndio siku ninayo kujibu rasmi. Inshallah nitaona mimi na wewe ninani msemaji na yupi siye hapa pwani. Nasikuheshimu tena kwa tabiya yako yakutohishimu sisi tuliyo kuchangua na badala yake unatumiwa ni Dor ambaye yeye na watu wake hutukana SUPKEM matusi aina yote tena mibarini. Wallahi I will teach you a lesson. Na SUPKEM si yako ni ya Kenya Muslims na mimi ni Kenya Muslim. Utaonga na Dor wako.*<sup>14</sup>

Translation:

I will respond to you on Sunday. *Inshallah* I will know between you and me who is the spokesperson for the people of the coast. I don’t respect you anymore because you don’t respect us who elected you. Instead you have allowed [Sheikh] Dor who together with his clique use the mosque to attack and insult the officials of SUPKEM. *Wallahi* “I will teach you a lesson.” Be aware SUPKEM is not your property it belongs to Kenyan Muslims and am a “Kenya Muslim.” Dor and you are bound to fail.<sup>15</sup>

This incident illustrates in-fighting within SUPKEM that is sometimes influenced by ethnic antagonism. But more remarkably, the occurrence demonstrates the underlying tension among the various sections of the Muslim population, which was a product of Arab racial domination in the precolonial and colonial era. For Ngao, a candidate of Mijikenda background, previously perceived as *washenzi*, was more important than a Muslim of another ethnic group, while for Mazrui both the “Swahili” and Islamic factors were significant. As I have shown, the Swahili had in a confused way perceived themselves as both Africans and Arabs where a person’s racial personality altered

according to prevailing circumstances. When they wanted to benefit from the aristocratic arrangements of the Arab elites, the Swahili considered themselves part of the composite group, the *waungwana* (civilized), denouncing being clustered with the *washenzi*. It is clear from the Ngao-Mazrui confrontation how politics of racial (or ethnic) competition and domination of some parts of the coastal region is still a strong factor among Muslims. Therefore, this conflict of interest has severely hampered SUPKEM from providing leadership to the general Muslim public.

As a matter of fact, many Muslims view SUPKEM as merely an instrument for individual prestige and power rather than a serious body serving the community. The organization is alleged to have failed to deliver substantial services to Muslims.<sup>16</sup> In its self-defense, SUPKEM claims to have accomplished several projects, mostly on education.<sup>17</sup> According to the national chairman:

Through collaboration and cooperation with its member organizations, and the assistance from international donors, especially the Islamic Development Bank, the Council has initiated developments projects on behalf of the community. These include academies, separate boys' and girls' secondary schools, a joint education bursary programme, a Teachers' Training College and a scholarship programme that has seen about 140 young Muslim men and women train as doctors and engineers in Turkish universities.<sup>18</sup>

For many ordinary Muslims, enough schools have not been built, scholarships are not offered transparently, and health facilities are ignored. The Muslim national organization, therefore, comes to be seen as another extension of a corrupt system. It is as a result of this that most Muslims would prefer to be associated with structures that are efficient and transparent. The emergence of organizations such as the unregistered Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), the CIPK, and NAMLEF are evidence of the crisis and incompetence within SUPKEM. However, this statutory recognition of a national Muslim association is a form of success for a divided group. It was out of this recognized national organization that Muslim leaders lobbied for Muslims' personal affairs (e.g., the issue of the law of succession) to be administered through the *Kadhi* courts, for the development of Muslim educational facilities, and for greater access to state electronic media.<sup>19</sup> Confronted with numerous Muslim associations competing with one another for attention, one national Muslim association acting on behalf of the community should enable it to overcome the problems of leadership in a pluralist and complex group.

Though SUPKEM is expected to coordinate Muslim activities, the organization is accused of failing to play an active political role for the community. There is a perception among Muslims that SUPKEM has been

compromised by the government and that is why the state is comfortable to work with the organization. This accusation is based on the notion that whenever an alternative Muslim voice emerges, the government quickly employs SUPKEM to diffuse the emerging voice.<sup>20</sup> This political weakness of SUPKEM lies in the organization's readiness to denounce Muslim individuals or groups that are perceived to be critical of the state. At one time, SUPKEM suspended its secretary general, Ahmed Khalif, because of his critical stand against the government. As a member of parliament, Khalif advocated for the rights of his constituents and denounced the Wagalla massacre by the army in 1984.

In 1989, Khalif again condemned the government's discriminatory policy that required Kenyan Somalis to have special identity cards.<sup>21</sup> It was also clear that during the early 1990s SUPKEM was not keen to support the IPK because of its opposition to Moi's leadership. Arguably, the condemnations by Khalif and the emergence of the IPK were interpreted as antiestablishment, which angered the political authority. For fear of government retribution, SUPKEM distances itself from such individuals or groups. This explains why later in the early 1990s, after the formation of the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) in 1991 as a lobby championing for multiparty democracy, its founders sought distinguished personalities to represent the party in various parts of the country. Accordingly, FORD sought to recruit Khalif as its representative for the Northeastern Province, but he declined the offer because he did not want to embarrass his colleagues in SUPKEM.<sup>22</sup> Since SUPKEM has a close mutual relationship with the state, its member joining an opposition party was viewed as a humiliation to both the state and SUPKEM during this period.

This perceived political failure of SUPKEM could be traced to one of its mission statements, which is "to refrain from being partisan" in political issues. During its inception, political objectives were not among the reasons for the formation of SUPKEM, implying that a great deal of caution should be exercised when engaging in political matters. Its leadership carefully avoids adopting a political approach that will be viewed as antagonizing toward the government. It is this cautious engagement of SUPKEM in politics that has led to its image as a quasi-government body. However, a national official of the organization has a different view regarding SUPKEM's engagement in politics. First, he views politics as "being aware of one's rights," and to that effect, he is of the opinion that SUPKEM has strived to make Muslims aware of their rights, adding:

The council has always mobilized and advised Muslim Members of Parliament by arranging seminars to prepare them whenever Bills of particular interest to Muslims are being debated in Parliament. Despite the fact that the organization is expected to refrain from partisan



politics, SUPKEM has always been firm on political issues affecting Muslims.<sup>23</sup>

It is evident that officials of the organization vehemently refute the allegation that SUPKEM is a government organ and thereby ineffective. According to the body, whenever the rights of Muslims have been infringed, SUPKEM has not hesitated to condemn the government. Despite the officials' defense of SUPKEM, it is clear that political objectives are not among its goals and it becomes difficult for the organization to engage in partisan politics. It is against this background that Muslims formed a political party as an alternative voice, which will be examined in the following section.

### **Muslim Political Opposition from the 1990s Through the Formation of an Islamic Party**

Before the 1990s, SUPKEM was the main channel through which Muslims negotiated with the government. Whenever there were major political decisions to be made that affected the Muslim and state relationship, a delegation from SUPKEM met with the president or a minister, depending on the importance of the matter. For a long time, SUPKEM was regarded as the sole representative of Kenyan Muslims recognized by the government. Despite this acknowledgment, there were other Muslims who were not satisfied with the leadership of SUPKEM, especially its alleged uncritical role toward the government.

Consequently, in 1992 in an atmosphere of political liberalization, the IPK was founded. Despite the prevalence of several Muslim organizations in postcolonial Kenya, the only one that had clear political ambitions was the IPK. The extension of political space in the early 1990s allowed for criticism of the country's leadership and political competition that had previously been unacceptable. The emerging opposition parties to challenge the ruling party, KANU, were mostly dominated by upcountry Christian politicians. A section of Muslims noticed the void and formed the IPK to articulate community grievances that they considered to be neglected. After its formation, the IPK found a strong base of supporters among the urban coastal Muslims, especially those of Mombasa, Malindi, and Lamu. Its primary appeal was as a party that did not propagate a narrow ethnic agenda, which was displayed by the diverse background of its national officials. Within its leadership were Muslim scholars (imams/*ulama*/sheikhs) who are traditionally trained and professionals educated in the "secular-formal" institutions.<sup>24</sup> Rather than campaigning via ethnic propaganda, IPK focused on Muslim grievances that stemmed from perceived marginalization, discrimination, and injustice by the various postcolonial regimes.

With the IPK, Kenya for the first time after independence witnessed an

Islamic political body. Unlike SUPKEM, IPK wanted to make a more direct political impact in the context of the unfolding new opposition politics spurred by demands for multiparty democracy. The party had declared that its aim was to bring about a just constitutional government that upholds the ideals of democracy, human rights, and removal of all forms of discrimination at all levels.<sup>25</sup> It wanted to be recognized like any other political party in Kenya so that it could participate in elections, to make the system more open and honest rather than demolishing the existing system. This agenda can hardly be described as Islamist.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, it is appropriate to describe the party as a political lobby for the interests of Muslims, rather than as a means for Islamist political objectives.

The criticism of the state formed a common ground between IPK and the emerging opposition parties. The goal of the opposition parties was to get rid of the Moi administration, which they accused of bad governance, corruption, abuse of power, and disrespect for human and civic rights. In line with the programs of other political parties, IPK was primarily seeking reform and improvement of public institutions in order to facilitate justice and fair play. It is this approach of making the system more open, fair, and honest rather than demolishing the existing system that marks the struggle of IPK.<sup>27</sup> However, it is also possible that the formation of the IPK implied that the party was set up for contesting political power. In democratic societies, political parties compete in elections for the purpose of attaining power and controlling the resources of the state. It is when a political party wins an election that it can control the state and resources of the government either individually or in a coalition with other political parties. This is the objective that all political parties strive to attain. Therefore, a Muslim political party like IPK was not different from other political parties, which were set to attain this political objective.

The Muslim political movement played a substantial role in the development of the politics of opposition in the country. Between 1992 and 1997, IPK made common cause with some churches and opposition political parties to Moi's government, identifying restrictions and discriminatory treatment of Muslims. Vocal preachers such as Khalid Balala in Mombasa used mosques to criticize the ruling party, KANU, and to call for change.<sup>28</sup> The appearance of the IPK as an alternative political voice, and its mix of Islam and politics, attracted the attention of the country. The political leadership feared that the party would dominate Muslim politics. To counter IPK's popularity, the Kenyan government refused to register the party, which increased anxiety among its supporters and led to violent antigovernment demonstrations. Although the repeal of Section 2(a) of the constitution permitted the formation of opposition parties, political parties still had to be approved by the Registrar of Societies. The government, through this office, had the power to vet opposition parties. Several were refused registration, including the Green African

Party, the Kenya Nationalist People's Democratic Party, and the Islamic Party of Kenya. IPK was refused registration on the grounds that it was discriminatory, requiring specific religious beliefs of its members. This practice of government veto against political organizations remained a real constraint on Kenyan's freedom to organize politically.

This leads me to an important question: did Kenyan Muslims have a case in demanding the registration of IPK? One wonders whether the principles of democracy are against the registration of a party that is founded on religious lines. It is common in the world that political parties based on religious values are allowed to exist provided they are committed to the democratic process. As long as their policies and manifestos respect the rights of humanity, denying them registration has been perceived to be undemocratic. Kenya would not have been a peculiar case to have a political party founded on a religious basis. There are Christian Democrat parties in both Germany (Christlich Demokratische Union) and Italy (Democrazia Christiana),<sup>29</sup> Britain has the Christian People's Alliance (CPA),<sup>30</sup> and in Russia there is the Islamic Party of Russia.<sup>31</sup>

In fact in Russia, Muslims had earlier applied for the registration of their party under the title of the Party of the Muslims of Russia. The Russian Justice Ministry denied the party registration because they were concerned that the name would lend the organization a monoconfessional appearance contrary to the law on political parties, which prohibits monoconfessional and mononational parties. However, when the name was changed to the Islamic Party of Russia, it passed administrative review on the ground that "Islam is an ideology, a culture, and lifestyle of many people in the world."<sup>32</sup> On that basis, it was officially registered in May 2001. Provided that these parties based on religion show respect for the human and civil rights of others, and comply with the democratic process, they have the right to compete in democratic politics.

It is clear that the main reason for the rejection of IPK by Moi's government was to stifle the political ambitions of the Muslim party and restrict their activities to the social and religious spheres. Moi's party, KANU, foresaw the possibility of losing support on the coast and in the northeastern regions, which are predominately Muslim, once IPK is permitted to compete in elections.<sup>33</sup> The refusal to register the IPK apparently reflected the political leadership's fear that the Muslim community could become a coherent political force in opposition to KANU. Thereby, the government insisted that no political organization should employ religious symbols and names. As a result of this decree, it was argued that the word *Islamic* on the party's name could be interpreted as exhibiting Islamic political ambitions and also restricting the party to Muslims. This strategy to deny IPK registration was a clear suppression of the Muslims' political ambitions in Kenya. It severely weakened Islamic-oriented politics in Kenya.

Despite being denied registration, the party did not immediately disappear, though the action angered its officials and supporters. By contrast, the country's Muslim political leaders continued to maintain good relations with the government. The result was a bitter conflict in Mombasa between a section of supporters of IPK and KANU, which led to widespread violence, destruction of property and vehicles, mass arrests, and sporadic street fighting. The situation got worse when six days before the elections, Balala was arrested and remanded to prison, which led to a violent clash erupting between IPK supporters and police.<sup>34</sup> As a result of the confrontation, several cases of human rights violations were reported.<sup>35</sup> Violence against IPK was manifested through putting some of its activists in custody and harassment of its officials. This led to some of its supporters fleeing the country to seek political asylum abroad.<sup>36</sup>

Unable to field its own parliamentary and local government candidates, the IPK leadership decided to form an alliance with Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya (FORD-Kenya), but not without some IPK members protesting the action, arguing that it would undermine the party's core goal.<sup>37</sup> Though the goal of the alliance with FORD-Kenya was to increase IPK's influence in national politics, a Lamu IPK branch official rejected the idea of working with "any secular political party." In the memorandum of understanding, FORD-Kenya agreed to nominate IPK members as its parliamentary candidates in areas where it had a following. This arrangement was well illustrated in all the Mombasa constituencies. The IPK believed that FORD-Kenya best represented the "original" forum's ideology for political reform.<sup>38</sup> However, it later emerged that IPK activists in Lamu preferred to work with the Democratic Party (DP), which angered the IPK leadership in Mombasa. The fissure within IPK suggests that there was no coordination between the party's leadership and activists. It appears that the IPK leaders and activists had different visions, which resulted in disorganization and adversely affected the party's unity. Such developments reveal Muslims' divisions with regard to their political articulations.

In Mombasa, where the party was believed to be strong, its most intense election campaign took place in the Mvita constituency. This had been the seat of Shariff Nassir who had been a staunch Moi loyalist and a strong opponent of multiparty politics. Facing him for IPK (under the banner of FORD-Kenya) was *maalim* Omar Mwinyi who had a strong following among the constituency's disenchanted Muslim youths. Apart from these two strong contenders, the FORD-Asili (another splinter of the original FORD) standard-bearer was its national organizing secretary, Ahmed Salim Bamahriz, who was one of FORD's six initial founders. Bamahriz conducted a strong, highly visible campaign, but was marginalized by the IPK-KANU conflict. The DP candidate, Ismail Yunis, was also a well-known and powerful local figure. All four candidates were Muslims and all had money, though none could match

Nassir's wealth.<sup>39</sup> Since 2002, money had become a major factor in assisting a contestant to win an election. Those who did not have much money were unlikely to win an election.<sup>40</sup> The outcome of the election was that KANU won Mvita, FORD-Kenya won Likoni and Kisauni, and DP took the Changamwe seat, while FORD-Asili won nothing. Apart from the fissure in IPK that undermined its strength, it is evident that the party's political appeal was limited to Mombasa.

Other challenges confronted by the IPK included the difficulty of uniting Kenyan Muslims into a single political block and overcoming underlying ethnic differences. Some leaders of the Muslim community in the Kilifi area condemned the pronouncement of Mombasa as an IPK Muslim voting zone and appealed to the community to rally behind the ruling party. Elsewhere, especially among the largely Muslim Digo population of Kwale, Bajuni in Lamu and the Somalis in the northeastern region, support for KANU remained solid. Voters overwhelmingly supported KANU, which was secular in orientation. It was clear that despite the IPK's efforts, it was unable to mobilize most of the Muslim population on the basis of their religious identity. Two interpretations could be sieved from the unfolding scenario. One, it demonstrated that the Digos, the Bajunis, and the Somalis identified themselves in their ethnic categories first and as Muslims later. And, two, the IPK euphoria and support was an urban phenomena and weak in the rural areas, a factor aggravated by propaganda and misinformation directed at the rural residents. Despite the IPK failing to make significant inroads among the Muslim population, there is no doubt that the party marked the beginning of politicization of Islam in Kenya. Muslims are a persistent and important oppositional force to political leadership in the country. Given the political disturbances and violence between the government and IPK sympathizers, the influence of Islam in national politics cannot be underestimated. Its assertiveness in presenting a politicized Islamic opposition in Kenya deepens the already widespread fractures along ethnic competition.

### **Toward the Politicization of Islam in Kenya: The Local Factor**

With the expansion of political association and freedom of expression, politicization of Islam came to the fore. "Free Balala," "IPK," "Kill Moi," "We are fed up. We want change."—these were some of the graffiti slogans that were sprayed on the walls of houses and shops on streets of Old Town, Mombasa, in 1992. What could be deduced from these slogans is Muslims' opposition to the government and the emergence of a politicized Islam as symbolized by the formation of the IPK. Though the founders of the party had intended to capture the entire Muslim vote in the country, the party was only strong and popular in the coastal town of Mombasa. A significant number of both the young and the old in the area identified with the party's aspirations. There-

fore, an important question needs to be asked: what are the underlying factors that explain the politicization of Islam in Kenya? In this study, I found that local factors played a vital role in the politicization of Islam in the country. My analysis does not focus on the international factors because Oded has already examined this aspect in his book.<sup>41</sup> Oded's major weakness is that of failing to situate Kenyan Muslim politics within the larger historical context. Instead, he tends to interpret Muslim politics in Kenya as an extension of developments outside the country. While it is certainly correct to point to foreign influences as determinants of the politicization of Islam in Kenya, Oded occasionally seems to overstate the importance of such influences. Therefore, in this book I have paid little attention to outside influences on the politicization of Islam in Kenya, arguing that Kenyan Muslims are more concerned with national and local issues.

Abdel Salam Sidahmed has described the internal factors as particularities of each society, which are significant in shaping the nature of debate on Islam and politics.<sup>42</sup> Kenya also has its own internal particularities that have contributed to the politicization of Islam in the country. The political crisis evident in Moi's tenure increased tension between his regime and Muslims, intensifying the latter's sense of religious identity. After the IPK was denied official recognition by the government, a group of youths in the party steered the organization toward its militant direction. This direction radicalized a section of the IPK supporters with respect to the state. The behavior of the IPK sympathizers could be explained as a reaction of a group suffering from rejection complex that often drives a minority-based movement to adopt violent means, as observed by Mohammed M. Hafez. Hafez argues that because accessibility to a political system plays a vital role in influencing the tactical response of an opposition movement, an exclusionary and repressive political atmosphere forces Islamists toward radicalization.<sup>43</sup> According to Hafez, a political system is accessible to a movement when the state grants it the opportunity to influence policy making through government institutions; on the other hand, it is closed when the movement is prohibited from influencing public policy through institutional channels. Under completely accessible systems, opposition movements encounter few restrictions against forming parties, competing in elections, lobbying state officials, holding public office, engaging in policy formulation, and so on.

Conversely, completely inaccessible systems make illegal any attempt by movements to engage in formal policy making and instead opt to repress them. I build upon these insights to analyze the sporadic violent activities of Kenyan Muslims in the early 1990s as the consequences of earlier policies of exclusion and marginalization. During Moi's reign, the political system was exclusionary, characterized by intolerance of criticism. This is exemplified by his government's refusal to register the IPK, denying it an opportunity to participate in elections, which was a clear case of a system that is closed. Hafez

noted that repression could include proscription on a group's campaigning against the government, mass arrest of their supporters, and secret abduction of their members.<sup>44</sup> These descriptions accord with what the IPK encountered, thereby heightening the politicization of Islam. However, it is important to understand that this strategy was part of how Moi silenced his critics; it should not be interpreted as a deliberate policy to undermine Muslims. Even leaders of some churches and other nonreligious bodies who had criticized Moi's policy suffered the same consequences.

Significantly, however, the formation of the party indicated Muslims' efforts to pursue a constitutional path in advocating for their rights. Like other political groups in Kenya, some of the IPK supporters resorted to violence when legal means were frustrated. In this, they were pursuing the same means as other political opposition groups in pressing for their demands. The rise of political violence was due to the intransigence of the political elite of the KANU regime. At this point, I would like to raise another significant question: why did its founders decide to name the party the Islamic Party of Kenya? My investigations revealed that there was debate among its founders regarding the usage of the word *Islam* in the party's name. One of the officials of the party confirmed:

Within the IPK leadership there were those who were against the name because they felt it would give the impression that the party was not inclusive. There were also those who supported the use of the name because they wanted Muslims to be associated with a party of their own. They hoped that the use of the word *Islam* would make the party appealing to Muslims though its wide intention was to fight for the rights of all Kenyans.<sup>45</sup>

According to the party official, the usage of the word *Islam* did not imply that the IPK was a religious party, but rather it was a secular one. He argued that the IPK constitution only bore the name *Islam* in its title and does not mention *Islam* anywhere else in its content. I was unable to verify this assertion because my efforts to get a copy of the constitution from the IPK officials were not successful, leading one to wonder why the document is guarded as if it were secret. Nevertheless, the intention of retaining the name *Islam* was to ensure that Muslims also have their own party that caters to their interests. The party was not geared toward introducing a new political order based on an Islamic political model, but to compete in a democratic election that is secularly oriented. Therefore, under the leadership of the IPK, Muslims had not attempted to enter the political arena as propagators of Islamic religious agenda, that is, implementation of sharia, creation of an Islamic state, forcing women to wear *hijab*, among other things. Its role in Kenya's ethnicized



politics resembles that of a “tribe” laying claim to its own share of the national resources.

The ethnicization of Kenyan politics is attributed to having been buttressed by the institution of colonialism, which created a system that influenced how people related to each other. The colonial administrative boundaries created an impression of “a people’s own area,” and enhanced ethnic self-identity, which gradually created a sense of exclusiveness that manifested itself in the rejection of “outsiders.” Accordingly, the development strategies devised by the colonial administration tended to benefit some groups at the expense of others. Areas with more missionary stations received relatively better education than certain areas, which later proved crucial as a criterion of accessing gainful employment.<sup>46</sup> Pastoral communities and other religious groups like the Muslims did not significantly benefit from this arrangement and continued to be neglected for most of the colonial period. By the time Kenya was attaining independence, there were some ethnic groups who believed that they were not treated favorably by the colonial regime. The leadership of the various postcolonial regimes has also been accused of practicing favoritism toward a certain ethnic group. During Kenyatta’s leadership, it is alleged that the Kikuyu benefited from state patronage in terms of resource allocation and appointments. This trend was reversed and tilted to favor the Kalenjin ethnic group when Moi succeeded Kenyatta. This is why during the multiparty presidential elections of 1992 and 1997, which Moi contested, the Kalenjin voted overwhelmingly in support of Moi. Clearly, this expresses that in an ethnically plural society like Kenya, presidential elections are seen as an opportunity to compete for the control of the state because of the discriminatory use to which the state is put by the group that controls it. The formation of the IPK was, therefore, intended to bring the Muslims together as a community, who are numerically disadvantaged ethnically, and champion their political cause under the banner of Islam rather than tribe.

There is no doubt that the IPK possessed an Islamic face. This was demonstrated by its method of mobilizing support and spreading its political views to its supporters. Conspicuously, the party’s activists used a network of specific mosques that had imams who were sympathetic to the IPK in spreading the party’s political programs.<sup>47</sup> Discussions were facilitated in mosques where debates on political topics were encouraged by imams of these mosques. These discussions vocalized issues that affected Muslims such as alleged police injustice, wearing of *hijab* in public schools, and alleged discrimination at the immigration office, among others. Most effective in terms of publicity were the Friday prayers where IPK supporters attended for both worshipping and for raising political consciousness. The sermons in the mosques were overtly political and critical of the state and “enemies” of Islam, thereby drawing attention from the government. And if there was a demonstration to be observed, the IPK leadership held them on Friday after the main prayers. The



timing was crucial because the demonstrations easily mobilized thousands of supporters.

Another local experience that influenced the development of politicized Islam in Kenya is ethnicity as the defining feature of Kenya's postcolonial politics. In Kenya the politics of ethnicity are regarded as another source of power. All the major political parties in Kenya are based on an ethnic constituency. After political parties are formed, there is a tendency for those parties to have a strong base in certain parts of the country. Since it is easy to identify tribes with regions in Kenya, those parties that are strong in certain areas are associated with specific tribes. And once a political constituency is forged as a result of communal solidarity and ethnic appeal, then it becomes easy to reject other political parties on the basis that they are from different ethnic groups. In past elections, the national presidential voting pattern has been ethnically influenced, a trend that has been encouraged by politicians who insistently appealed for ethnic backing. A list of political parties in the early 1990s together with their support base will illustrate the point: FORD-Kenya under Jaramogi Oginga (a Luo) was viewed as a Luo party; the DP of Mwai Kibaki (a Kikuyu) was seen as Kikuyu party together with FORD-Asili of Kenneth Matiba (a Kikuyu); while KANU under Moi (a Tugen) was associated with the Kalenjin community.<sup>48</sup> The rest of the ethnic groups are absorbed in any of the dominant parties depending on their influence in the region.

None of these parties promises to create an ethnic state, or even to promote the interests of a specific ethnic group despite being associated with a particular community. However, when political alliances are formed among the various parties, the balance always tilts in favor of non-Muslims. This could be because the support base for the major political parties could be traced among the upcountry tribes that are non-Muslims. There is a belief that this accidental arrangement has always benefited the non-Muslims and alienated Muslims. Therefore, Muslims political consciousness in Kenya was heightened by this ethnic political competition. The founders of the IPK attempted to turn this ethnic awareness to religious consciousness for their cause. They hoped to draw their supporters among the Muslim population across the various ethnic communities. This expectation gave birth to the formation of the IPK.

And when the party officials realized that they would not be able to participate in the 1992 elections, the leadership of the IPK sought a political solution to the crisis. They decided to enter into an alliance with other legal parties (especially FORD-Kenya) in the country as a sign of their commitment to opposition politics. This decision by the IPK could also be interpreted as the party's willingness to play an active role in the democratization process. This was necessary for the IPK because for it to make an impact in politics, it had to have its candidates nominated through a party with which it had an established alliance. However, this development was to some extent a handicap to the IPK as it was not able to nominate its candidates independently. Despite

the number of political parties increasing in the early 1990s, IPK faced greater restrictions on its ability to play even a limited role in Kenya's political arena. This scenario indicates that the prevailing local circumstances shaped the growth and development of politicized Islam.

### **Ethnicized Muslims and the Future of Islamic Party Politics in Kenya**

Having examined the factors that led to the development of politicized Islam in Kenya, I wish to explore the second question: why was the Muslim opposition through the IPK short-lived? In less than a decade, the presence of IPK had already been wiped off the political landscape of Kenya. The failure of the IPK to sustain a protracted opposition against the state has been attributed to Muslims' lack of a united front. To some extent, the lack of solidarity among Muslims has been attributed to the ethnic and racial dialectic within the community.<sup>49</sup> The endemic leadership struggle within the community, which goes back to both the precolonial and colonial eras, has been the community's major weakness. Throughout Kenya's history, different political regimes have exploited the ethnic and racial difference among Muslims for political survival when necessary. It is as a result of the racial fissures that the government sponsored a Muslim movement, the United Muslims of Africa (UMA), to counter the IPK, when it began getting strong and popular among Muslims.<sup>50</sup>

Generally, political parties in Kenya embody polarization along ethnic lines. Ethnicity is increasingly the relevant reference point for political alignment, even if none of the parties have developed an ethnic ideology. The numbers within ethnic groupings are politicized as they have the potential to assist in determining the political leadership of the country. Muslims' political movement in Kenya has experienced both ethnicization and racialization where the split exists between the IPK and the United Muslims of Africa (UMA)—specifically, a growing racial polarization between Arabs (IPK) and African (UMA) Muslims. The UMA party, founded in 1993 and suspected to be supported by African Muslims, embarked on making announcements critical of the so-called Arab Muslims, stressing its African identity before Islamic solidarity. It is alleged that Moi's government engineered the formation of the UMA on the presumption that it would draw its support from Muslims of African descent. The aim of forming the UMA was to split the Muslim constituency along racial lines in order to diminish its political impact. This could be attested by a police statement allegedly made by Emanuel Karisa Maitha, a KANU coastal politician. The statement, which on its release, Maitha, a non-Muslim, strongly denied, reads in part:

I have been involved in organizing youth in the past who have organized operations which the state orders from time to time. The

operations were always sanctioned by the DSC [District Security Committee] and PSC [Provincial Security Committee] where money is spent by the state agencies. I wish to elaborate further that sometime in the year in 1991 to 1992 during the IPK resurgences and disturbances at the Coast, I was called [to] State House in Nairobi where I was engaged to [sic] a talk of how the IPK activities would be suppressed within Mombasa and the Coast. Those who had been given the authority to tell me and who assured me they had the blessing of his Excellency the President was [sic] Mr Joshua Kulei who is a personal assistant to the President and a Mr Rashid Sajjad who is a nominated MP.<sup>51</sup>

According to this statement, Maitha then arranged to recruit Omar Masumbuko to lead the government-backed UMA. Maitha continued:

Mr Masumbuko usually could visit the State House alone or I would be called to go to Kulei or Mr Sajjad for payment of any operation needed by the State. The DSC and PSC teams normally could be ordered to give us any help or even get logistic support from them. Despite all this, I recall that Masumbuko managed to silence the IPK by various operations which included petrol bombing of targeted areas, fighting, invasion of Old Town [a neighborhood in Mombasa] and hijacking of Khalid Balala and others. I wish to state further that after the silencing of the IPK, UMA was disbanded with the instructions from State House, where most of the youths and their leaders were paid or some employed for good jobs they had done. I was approached again in the year 1993 where I [was] asked now to reassemble the UMA youth who were now already trained so that they could be ordered to do a further State Operation. When ordered I assembled all the youth leaders and changed the name from UMA to Coast Protective Group (CPG). I was under the paymaster of Kulei and Sajjad.<sup>52</sup>

From the quotations, it is clear that the formation of the UMA as a rival movement to the IPK was believed to have had the backing of Moi's government. Once it was formed, the UMA directed its criticism against the IPK arguing that creation of political parties is un-Islamic and contradicts the Prophet's tradition because Muhammad did not form one to advance the interests of the Muslims in Mecca. During its existence, it positioned itself as a KANU wing, by asserting that it was interested in political ambition, an indication that there were other forces behind its establishment. Though it presented the impression that its intention was not to divide "Muslims on racial lines," it claimed (a) IPK was not a true representative of Muslims in Kenya and (b) Black Muslims have been discriminated against and sidelined by Arabs

and Asian Muslims in Kenya.<sup>53</sup> It is this division among Muslims that Moi allegedly utilized to divide them politically. He capitalized on the schism and manipulated Muslim leaders to derive maximum advantage that would guarantee his clinging to power. Unity among Muslims threatened Moi's political survival; hence he sought the means to divide them. Racial difference has pitted Muslims against each other, as is evident in the IPK-UMA saga. Among Kenyan Muslims, it is common for "Africans" to perceive a political party formed by "Arabs" as automatically having an "Arab"—and sometimes an Islamist—agenda, while on the other hand when "Africans" establish a party, "Arabs" ignore it as insignificant for their aspirations.

The recruitment of Omar Masumbuko, a Muslim of African descent, was to rally African Muslims against the IPK, which was viewed as a party of Muslims of Arab origin. While both groups were bonded with the same Islamic identity, they did not necessarily share the same political interest. This antagonistic relationship between the two is influenced by the pre-independence history where Arabs were privileged over the majority African population. Ironically, UMA was allegedly financed by a Muslim-nominated member of parliament, Rashid Sajjad, who is of Asian descent.<sup>54</sup> Sajjad's contribution to the UMA indicates that the role of race or the ethnic factor in politics is not always unanimous; it is bound to be contradicted by individual interests. The alleged involvement of Sajjad explains the willingness of some Muslim politicians to work with the political establishment. Most incumbent Muslim politicians had feared that if the IPK euphoria was not checked, there was a possibility of them losing the power given to them by the state. Therefore, the alleged plan was to split the Muslims' strength, which succeeded as violent campaigns between the two sides emerged.

Another incident to illustrate Moi's efforts to counter a Muslim alliance was the encouragement of ethnicization of Muslim politics. In an unexpected move, the government registered the Shirikisho Party of Kenya (SPK) one month before the 1997 elections. The party is believed to have its political base among the Digo Muslims who viewed the party as a *kaya* party.<sup>55</sup> The scheme was intended to channel the community's political support into ethnic solidarity and to weaken Muslim political alliances that were based on religion. During its campaign, the party paid greater attention to the suffering of the Digo during and after the 1997 Kaya Bombo violence. In 1997, an orgy of violence spearheaded by some Digo youths who had taken oaths while in the forest of Kaya Bombo was witnessed against the upcountry people in the Likoni and Kwale areas. The government responded with brutality in its effort to contain the violence, and this is why the SPK platform in 1997 focused on the anguish and agony the local people endured at the hands of the security agents. Arguably, the timing of its registration has been viewed as a strategy by the ruling party, KANU, to "ensure that the Digo did not vote for the opposition," on the one hand, and also sealing "the fate of coastal unity on the

basis of religion and regionalism,” on the other.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, its sudden registration could be interpreted as government efforts to ethnicize Digo politics and to counteract any possibility of religious alliance with the IPK that had drastically been weakened by that time. And this is why one can argue that a major obstacle that came in the way of the Muslims’ political unity was the ethnic-oriented nature of the community.

Related to the lack of a unified front among Muslims was the absence of cooperation between the leadership of the IPK and SUPKEM. While the IPK chose to oppose the state, SUPKEM cooperated with the state in undermining the IPK’s strategy, as demonstrated by the SUPKEM visit to the state house that was publicized by the media. It is likely that the umbrella organization could not identify with the IPK on the claim that it is not supposed to practice partisan politics. Arguably, both SUPKEM and the incumbent KANU Muslim politicians were intent on acting as the sole guardians of Muslim affairs in the country and felt challenged by the IPK, and as a result they ceased to show their solidarity with the party. The refusal by some Muslim politicians to support the IPK implied that they viewed the community to have performed better under the Moi leadership. This is because it was during Moi’s tenure that more Muslims were appointed to cabinet and senior positions in government.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, this constituency allegedly scuttled the antistate Muslim efforts of the IPK. Since that period, there has never been any effort to revive the party. The division of Muslims along ethnic and racial fissures makes this difficult.

Today, Muslims are divided concerning the fate of the IPK between those who are supporting and those who are opposing its recognition. The voice opposed to the registration of IPK as a political party is represented by an official of the Kenya Muslim National Advisory Council (KMNAC). According to the official, the IPK has no national outlook and proper structures to be a strong political party. He argues that for IPK to be accorded official recognition by the government it has to be reorganized and its name changed from a religious one to a neutral one to cater to all communities. These views should be seen within the context of competition for supremacy among Muslim bodies. A political party with an Islamic name will undermine the popularity of an association like KMNAC as the representative of the community.<sup>58</sup> Such a challenge is not in the interest of Muslim individuals seeking personal political gains from the state. In most cases, the government is eager to work with those Muslims who are perceived as accommodative and cooperative.

The views of those advocating for an Islamic political party should only be seen as an attempt to have a lobbying platform rather than an Islamist political agenda as discussed earlier. Despite the politicization of Islam in the country, there is no future for an Islamist agenda whose objective is to establish an Islamic political model, sanctioned by the sharia. I have argued in this book that the intention of IPK was to participate in Kenya’s politics to make the

system more open, rather than demolishing it. This agenda can hardly be described as Islamist, and therefore, IPK was not Islamist in outlook.<sup>59</sup> The realization of the Islamist objective is unattainable due to the peculiar case of Kenya because neither its earlier history nor the present composition of its society could accommodate this development and state of affairs. The particularity of the Kenyan situation stems from the following considerations: (a) in Kenya the process through which Islam had been associated with its politics and ideology greatly differs from those in Egypt, Sudan, and Nigeria, among others; and (b) the reality and complexity of today's Kenya as a multireligious country with a Christian majority makes the quest for an Islamist program impractical. As a result of these varied processes, the Muslim political approach is distinct from the ones witnessed in other parts of the Muslim world. But even with the unlikelihood of IPK being revived, Muslims in Kenya have not stopped searching for a political platform to raise their visibility.

Nonetheless, the IPK's goal was to provide a forum for the articulation of a national Muslim political awareness. The existence of the party stunned the country's political leadership, increasing a national consciousness of Muslims' political influence. For the first time in the history of the country, Muslims had an explicit political identity that articulated their aspirations. However, the failure of the party to gain national support among Muslims in other parts of the country confirms that there are internal divisions in the community apart from Islamic identity. Despite the community appearing united by Islam, a section of Muslims did not view the IPK as a suitable advocate for their welfare. In addition to the government's refusal to register the party, different aspirations and competition among party members also weakened the political force of the IPK.

### In Search of a Political Platform: The Transformation of Ulama

In postcolonial Kenya, there have been numerous competing efforts in the creation of institutions that could be viewed as representative of Kenyan Muslims and better placed to articulate the concerns of the community. The repeated use of words like *Kenya* or *National* in the titles of these organizations illustrates their efforts to be involved in the national political discourse. Though SUPKEM presents itself as the Muslim body recognized by the government, it is alleged to have failed to chart the desired political course for the community. Its alleged failure to challenge the political authority has resulted in skepticism among the people it is supposed to serve. This has inspired the formation of other organizations that are vocal and critical of the state policies viewed as unfavorable to Muslims. One critic of SUPKEM argued, "basically the reality is that a lot of Muslims have lost confidence with SUPKEM. This was as a result of them toeing the position of the government, whether they were doing justice or injustice to Muslims."<sup>60</sup>

The alleged failure of SUPKEM to guide the political direction of the community has led to the creation of other Muslim organizations that have taken a strong interest in religio-political activism. This is the case of *ulama* organizations such as the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK) and the National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF). Their appearance is evidence of a vote of no confidence in SUPKEM's ability to give the Muslims direction in political affairs. This created a kind of leadership vacuum that different players emerged to fill, including the CIPK and NAMLEF, who demonstrate the transformation of *ulamas/imams* in the Muslim public sphere as the interlocutors of the community in various issues including politics. The emerging "*ulama* mouthpieces" are challenging the view that modernization would render traditionally educated religious scholars redundant, with nothing significant to contribute to contemporary Muslim society. Their religio-political activism in articulating Muslim interests gives a clear picture of the face of Muslim politics in Kenya. Though initially formed as civic associations, the CIPK and NAMLEF have become consistent and assertive in articulating political matters that affect Muslims in the country. Arguably, the CIPK and NAMLEF were willing to strike at Kenya's political scene. Unlike SUPKEM, the CIPK and NAMLEF embodied a devotion to engage in the country's politics and to be part of a political discussion.

The CIPK is a faith-based nonprofit and charitable organization that brings together respected imams and Muslim preachers across Kenya, from which it seeks its mandate. It was conceptualized and registered in 1997 and has since grown into a strong Kenyan Muslim network. Its name was possibly chosen to deliberately evoke the memory of the unregistered IPK, which represented Muslim activism in the early 1990s. The CIPK network facilitates processes and operations aimed at representing the welfare of Muslims and the general Kenyan public. However, according to the CIPK officials, the organization was formed with the intention of addressing the welfare of imams and preachers in Kenya. Its objective was to find ways to uplift the status and lives of both the imams and preachers.<sup>61</sup> Over a period of time the organization adopted other tasks given the leadership vacuum evident among Muslims.<sup>62</sup> Among its primary objectives, the organization focuses on the promotion of social justice, human and basic rights, good governance, and equitable socioeconomic growth and development for all Kenyans. To understand more clearly the operations of CIPK, its mission statement explains:

CIPK is endeavored to sustain a strong network of Islamic religious leaders and professionals who will foster processes that address, pursue and safe guard the fundamental rights of Muslims and the community at large. The network seeks to alleviate marginalization and suffering through initiatives that enhance local capacities and



promote community based, people driven solutions to needs and problems. It is also geared towards offering hope for all Muslims in recognition of their noble role as part of a functioning stable community and to enrich their lives with dignity and fulfillment.<sup>63</sup>

Though the CIPK intends to focus on the Muslim community, the organization provides a forum in which Islamic religious scholars make a significant contribution in addressing important issues affecting the general Kenyan society. It provides an opportunity for positive engagement, dialogue, and interaction with other institutions, religions, and the government. The organization has gradually grown and developed into a national organization with its headquarters in Mombasa. As a result of its wide network, the organization boasts several branches throughout the country. The national secretary attributes this wide network to the popularity of the organization among Muslims, claiming:

Since mosques are scattered throughout the country, it is possible to find an imam even in the remote parts of the country than a SUP-KEM official. It is because of this sort of network that the organization has become popular with Muslims. Whenever Muslims are confronted with problems, they present it to their imam, who report or present it to the nearest district office and eventually to the national office in Mombasa.<sup>64</sup>

It is true that, while CIPK's leadership insists on its national credentials, it is most prominent on the coast, with local officials working hard to make themselves visible through lectures at mosques and in some places through implementing projects for donors that guarantee CIPK resources. This is most evident in Lamu, where the local CIPK branch is an implementing agent for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) APHIA II (AIDS, Population, and Health Integrated Assistance) project, which supplies an office, computer equipment, and a full-time employee. The usefulness of these donor links allows the CIPK to be involved in a range of activities from AIDS awareness to citizenship training. While it had initial reputation for "radicalism," CIPK has been increasingly drawn into the language and organizational practices of the NGO world, a trend epitomized in their strategic plan.<sup>65</sup>

This CIPK transformation could be attributed to scarce resources. Like other civic associations in Kenya, and especially Muslim organizations, the CIPK faces the problem of funding. Since 2001, funding from donors in the Muslim world has become challenging to access because of restrictions motivated by the United States since 9/11. This created problems in the provision of funding for Muslims' developmental projects. In these conditions, the alternative for the Muslim organizations to obtain resources for the



execution of their programs is through Western donors. Those who accept funding from Western donors are aware that it is given with the intention of changing their operating method, and they resent such efforts. However, the strategy does change their approach, moving them to embrace an NGO culture that is focused on Kenyan issues. In their aggrieved criticism of this Western donor scheme, the leaders provide an opportunity for others to denounce their organizations (those accepting Western donor funds) and to create new ones.

Therefore, the emergence of CIPK has to some extent undermined SUPKEM's claim as the sole mouthpiece of Muslims, thereby limiting its authority. CIPK provides an alternative unified voice for Muslims in Kenya, and in the recent past the organization has experienced needs that directly require interventions. For instance, after the allegedly rigged 2007 general elections, CIPK conducted peaceful demonstrations in Mombasa to force President Kibaki's party to accept that the elections were marred with malpractices and a political solution has to be sought.<sup>66</sup> Following the emergence of the piracy problem along the coast of Somalia, the international community signed an agreement with Kenya to have the captured pirates prosecuted in the country. This development has been opposed by CIPK, which alleges that Kenya is being misused by the international community to serve as another "Guantanamo Bay" in Africa.<sup>67</sup> More forcefully, the CIPK is among the agencies in the forefront confronting the drug problem in some of the coastal towns. Their enthusiasm in combating the menace has led them to organize workshops with members of the judiciary urging stiff penalties for the drug traffickers, whom they allege are always being protected by senior government officials.<sup>68</sup>

CIPK is vocal in politics because it has in its ranks individuals who had been associated with political activism in the past. Among the national officials of the CIPK is Sheikh Mohammed Khalifa who was formerly an official of the unregistered IPK, which provided strong Muslim activism against the state. Failure of the government to provide IPK with registration has forced some of its members to seek a platform where they could articulate political issues among other matters. This platform is provided by the CIPK, which is focused on politics, and like other civil organizations, is critical of the machinations of the country's leadership. With its own structures, the CIPK is becoming more popular and assertive in political matters than SUPKEM.<sup>69</sup>

Another prominent Muslim organization nationally is NAMLEF, which was founded in 2003, during the constitution-making debates. NAMLEF claims to be an umbrella Kenyan Muslim body with fifty-three organizations under its affiliation. Its position is to act as a national platform of leaders (imams/sheikhs) of Muslim organizations.<sup>70</sup> NAMLEF is another perfect example of traditional sheikhs and imams uniting in a single body to "empower Muslims in Kenya for the attainment of decent lives and real social, econom-

ic and spiritual freedom through principled, consultative, representative and Islamic leadership.”<sup>71</sup> By effectively addressing the various social problems that have confronted Kenyan Muslims for a long period, NAMLEF is gradually carving a niche for itself as a Muslim organization that is more consistent in articulating positions on national issues significant to the community.

Though NAMLEF is registered as a Muslim civil society, it has assumed a political language in its engagement. The organization is striving to ensure that Kenya is governed justly by upholding good governance, constitutionalism, and the rule of the law. As a Muslim lobby group, NAMLEF has engaged in various activities that have political implications.<sup>72</sup> For instance, during the constitution-making debate, NAMLEF took political position and made its intentions clear. While SUPKEM carefully avoided expressing absolute political opinions, NAMLEF advocated consistently for a devolution system of government, as well as for the entrenchment of the *kadhi* courts in the constitution. With their political activism, NAMLEF has outshone SUPKEM and transformed into an alternative Muslim political voice. The most notable political engagement NAMLEF undertook was the highly debated 2007 “MOU” between its leader, Abdullahi Abdi, and Raila Odinga, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) presidential aspirant. In part the MOU reads:

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is made between Honorable Raila Amolo Odinga on one hand and the National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF) on the other hand. At the time of execution of this MOU, on one hand, Hon. Raila Odinga has declared to vie for the presidency of Kenya during the 2007 General Elections. He has sought the support of NAMLEF in getting the backing of the Muslim community in Kenya to back him for presidency. On the other hand, NAMLEF a national umbrella platform of all leaders of Muslim organizations desires to see our country Kenya as a just, harmonious, peaceful and a prosperous nation based on good governance, constitutionalism and the rule of law, pro-poor policies, enhanced democratic space and where Kenyans effectively participate in shaping their destiny and the positive upliftment of the status and welfare of Muslims in Kenya and the correction of historical and structural injustices and marginalization meted on the Muslim through deliberate policies and programmes. In entering into this agreement, NAMLEF and the Muslim community in Kenya recognize the fact that president Mwai Kibaki’s government has meted out calculated, deliberate, unprecedented discrimination, intimidation and harassment of sections of Kenyans, including the Muslims. NAMLEF and the Muslim community in Kenya desire to see an end to this. After due consultations, NAMLEF has arrived at a decision to support the candidature of Hon. Raila Odinga for Presidency during 2007.<sup>73</sup>

According to this version of the MOU, NAMLEF promised to mobilize the Muslim constituency to support Odinga's candidacy for presidency and declared not to support any other candidate for the presidency during the 2007 elections. On his part, Odinga promised, if elected president of Kenya, to initiate deliberate policies and programs to redress historical, current, and structural marginalization and injustices meted against Muslims in Kenya. More so, Odinga also agreed to ensure that there is equitable representation of Muslims in public appointments in the country.

The MOU generated public debate with a section of church leaders condemning the alliance. The church leaders cautioned religious groups against forging alliance with presidential candidates during elections claiming that it promotes divisive politics. A section of church leaders together with Odinga's political opponents published another copy of the MOU in which Odinga had allegedly promised to recognize Islam as the only religion.<sup>74</sup> The allegedly fabricated MOU as presented by the evangelicals enumerates various issues that resonate with Muslims in Kenya and are of great concern to the community. It presented issues that Muslims are passionate about in terms of safeguarding their faith, which included establishing sharia courts in all Kenyan divisional headquarters and proscribing consumption of products regarded as *haram* (forbidden) in areas where Muslims are the majority. It was also alleged that Odinga had agreed to recognize Islam by according it the utmost favor that will ensure its expansion. After the publication of the "fabricated" MOU for the Kenyan public, the body of *ulama* (NAMLEF) together with Odinga refuted the claims in the "fabricated" version of the MOU, which they referred to as mere propaganda.

Obviously, Odinga's opponents wanted to damage his image before the Christian majority and portray him as a person who was pro-Islam thereby undermining Christianity. Despite the political intrigues, the MOU showed the willingness of Kenyan politicians to enter into political pacts with Muslims to support their candidacy, signifying the recognition of Muslim votes. In fact as a result of the MOU, the ODM party nominated the national secretary of CIPK (and also National Executive Committee member of NAMLEF), Sheikh Mohammed Dor, as a member of parliament.<sup>75</sup> His nomination was hailed as a milestone by Muslims as it witnessed the first imam (sheikh) in the Kenyan parliament. The intensive lobbying by NAMLEF is credited with this achievement.

Therefore, the political environment in Kenya appears to presage the continuation of politicized Islam, and given the experience of political disturbances and violence between government's security agents and some members of the IPK, the influence of Muslims in national politics should not be underestimated. Although the Muslims will continue to be a minority in Kenya, their impact on national politics cannot be ignored. More so, through a politicized Islamic form of opposition, Kenyan Muslims have deepened the

already prevalent fissures in the country along ethnic competition. Though an Islamic political party in Kenya is not guaranteed, this should not be interpreted to imply that the future of Muslims' civic associations is oblique. There would be more attempts by Muslims in the future to establish associations they regard to be representative and better placed in advocating the concerns of the community. Future Muslim civic organizations will continue using the terms *Kenya* or *National* in their titles to demonstrate their "commitment to engage in Kenyan politics, and to be part of a national political discourse."<sup>76</sup>

Despite elusive political unity, there are occasions when Muslims have been able to front a united voice overcoming their racial, ethnic, and sectarian differences, especially when they are convinced that it is their religion that is at stake. It is these instances that succeeded in rallying Kenyan Muslims together as a single cohesive voice and that I will examine in the next chapter.

