

Alawiyya Sufism and the Sufi: Diffusion and Counter-Diffusion of Swahili Islamic Mysticism in the Lamu Archipelago, Kenya

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Abstract: *Sufism plays an important part in the elaboration of the maulidi festival in the Lamu archipelago and contributes to its colourful character. The major thrust of this paper is to seek and discuss orthodoxy and those seeking more enthusiastic ways to express their faith centre on mysticism in Islam, what is called Sufism in the Lamu archipelago. Pouwels points out that the brotherhood in East African coast (the tariqas) went alongside the maulidi as a useful vehicle of expression (1987:4). It discusses at length the contribution of a leading Lamu Sufi Habib Swaleh Jamal al-Layl.*

This paper is premised on Trimmingham's discussion of maulidi in the context of Sufism and holds the view that the various Sufi movements are largely responsible for the growth of Muslim liturgy after the process of establishing accepted rituals had been completed in the first few years after the death of the Prophet. Trimmingham points out that little description of Sufi practice has survived in the literature, and that instead, most references either defend it or condemn it without elaboration (1971:207-217).

This paper is concerned mainly with the diffusion of Alawiyya Sufism into the Lamu archipelago which has not been well documented unlike other parts of Africa. How was it diffused and who are those countering this diffusion? The paper seeks to establish arguments and counter arguments of the proponents of the maulidi and the ideology of the sufis in the Lamu archipelago.

Keywords: Sufism, Sufi, maulidi, dhikr, tariqa, kasida, sharif, bid'a

1. INTRODUCTION

Pouwels makes a general observation that in the nineteenth-century, extensions of commercial involvement into African interior and the contact with the Arabs brought opportunities by people involving themselves with *maulidi* or religious brotherhoods (1987:4). Pouwels adds that the real future of Islam in East Africa lay with the *tariqas* since they provided an alternative system of instruction in the Islamic sciences and Arabic literacy (ibid: 5). Hiskett points out an example from Africa by saying that Sufism is popularly supposed to have been introduced into Hausaland by the North African scholar and Islamic missionary, Muhammad b. Abd al-Karim al-Maghili, who flourished during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century (1975:73). He postulates that it is more likely that the spread of Sufi ideas in the Sahara and the Sudan was one aspect of the general diffusion of Islamic culture spreading out from both North Africa and Egypt at this time.

Tradition records the names of certain personalities, near-contemporaries of al-Maghili, who were teachers of Sufism, such as, for instance, a certain Aqib b. Abdullah al-Ansamuni, a scholar who lived in the Saharan centre of Ahir during the first half of the sixteenth century (ibid). The Sufi in Morocco have participated actively in the festivities of the Prophet's birthday, which came to be considered in the hierarchy of festive days second only to the canonical feasts, that is, the *Id al-fitr* at the end of Ramadan, and the *Id al-adha*, the feast of sacrifices during the pilgrimage to Mecca (Schimmel 1985:146).

According to *the Encyclopaedia of Islam*, "everywhere, the characteristics of such celebrations are more or less the same: Crowds gather for one or more days, a fair of varying size and importance accompanies the religious celebrations, *dhikr* and / or Quran reading sessions take

place inside and /or outside the sanctuary of the saint concerned, one or more processions are held in which the keeper of the sanctuary (often the saint's descendants) and (frequently) Sufi orders participate and the cloth covering the Saint's shrine is replaced by a new one in the course of the celebration. Frequently, communal meals are staged and a centrally organised distribution of alms takes place" (1991:896).

2. METHODOLOGY

The nature of the available sources (local chronicles and religious writings, accounts by Arab geographers and travellers, and some oral traditions) allowed insight into the discussions of this paper. They formed the basis of historical data. A descriptive survey research design using a sample of twenty respondents comprising of imams, madrassa teachers and residents of Lamu, Siyu and Pate was used to execute the study. Questions were asked regarding the sufi and Sufism. The main tools for data collection were questionnaires for the residents of Lamu, Siyu and Pate which were purposively selected from the archipelago and personal interview schedules by imams and *sharifs*. The interview data was transcribed, organized, coded, categorized, and analyzed. The coding procedures was to pull the data together to present concepts and themes regarding the data. The quantitative data from questionnaires was analyzed descriptively while the qualitative data from interviews was managed through thematic techniques.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On his part, Boyd observed that religious leaders in Lamu who deny any connection between their ritual practices and Sufism give the same reasons. "They consider Lamu to be a centre of orthodox Sunni belief and practice, and wish to separate themselves from any accusation of innovation" (1980: 52). After attending the Lamu *maulidi*, I observed that its nature is deeply embedded in Sufi traditions.

In the Lamu archipelago, some *sharifs* made a claim that they were Sufi. *Sharifs* are highly regarded and occupy higher positions as leading teachers, while others are put in charge of large mosques. The Riyadhha Mosque and College is an example of a large mosque whose leadership is derived from the descendants of a *sharif*.

The observation made in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* has a close parallel with the *maulidi* festival in the Lamu archipelago in terms of the number of days crowd gather, *dhikri* and Quran memorization contests (*musabaka*). *Musabaka* is a term used in the Lamu archipelago. It is also interesting to note that Swahili people of the Lamu archipelago gather outside the tomb of a local saint, al-Habib Swaleh and that his descendants are the keeper of his sanctuary. In addition, a cloth covering al-Habib Swaleh's tomb is usually replaced by a new one during each *maulidi* festival. He is regarded as a leading sufi in the archipelago.

In the Lamu archipelago, there are those who argue against Islamic mysticism. But indeed few people are in opposition, a subject I discuss at length in a separate section in this chapter. Massignon argued that opposition to Sufism in the early centuries of Islam was based on the heterodox implications of mysticism, "that the intention is more important than the act, that practical example (*sunna*) is better than strict letter of the law and that obedience is better than observance" (1953:580).

In the Lamu archipelago, the participation of the Sufi during the *maulidi* festival was almost seen as a duty. It was like the right path to follow. They knew that they were performing what was required of them. It will be seen in the light of what Trimmingham describes the ritual practices of Sufism as "a way, a rule of life" that enables the follower to purify his self and thus to attain closer union with God (1971:197). Shah, a leading authority on Sufism, agrees with this description, although he believes that the way is not exclusively restricted to Muslims. He says:

The Sufi is an individual who believes that by practicing alternate detachment and identification with life, he becomes free. He is a mystic because he believes that he can become attuned to the purpose of all life. He is a practical man because he believes that this process must take place with normal society. And he must serve humanity because he is part of it.

(1964:26)

This seems to have been the case elsewhere. In a study of the Hamadsha in Morocco carried out by Crapanzano (1973), the Hamadsha order recruited members from the lower classes while the leadership is derived entirely from descendants of the founders-the *sharifs*. Salama, the founder of the Hamadiya was a *sharif*, while, on the other hand, the founder of the Sanusiya was actively opposed by the *sharifs* of Libya, who resented popular movements, which distracted the common people from venerating *sharifs* as a source of divine blessing (Pritchard 1949:3).

During the entire period of the Lamu *maulidi* festival, the Sufi often used *dhikri* for further edification. Trimingham uses “recollection” as a translation for *dhikri*, saying that the practice of repeating the names of God “is solidly based on the Qur’anic injunction ‘Remember God with frequent remembrance and glorify Him morning and evening’” (1971:194). Gellner states that the Sanusiya and Hamadiya brotherhoods use *dhikri* in connection with celebration of *maulidi*(1972:47). In both cases, the reference is not only to the celebration of the birth of the Prophet himself, but also to the celebration of the birthdays of the founding saints of the orders.

The saints, both living and dead, play an important role in the lives of the Sufi and of ordinary individuals. The tombs of dead saints are transformed into shrines; perhaps a humble whitewashed domed structure but often attached to a mosque. This observation is clearly manifested in the case of al-Habib Swaleh who is a local saint and a sufi in Lamu archipelago. Pouwels is explicit in the description of the Alawiyya brotherhood in which the Swahili people of the Lamu archipelago belong: “Most noteworthy was their affiliation with the Alawiyya *tariqa*, an especially austere brotherhood devoted to learning and the veneration of saints” (1987:40).

Central to the social organisation of the order was the belief in the *baraka* (blessings) embodied in famous holy men and scholars. Their spiritual influence came to be expressed through the veneration of saints and their tombs. She states further that, Alawiyya Sufism rests on the claim that the *silsila* (chain of transmission) of the *tariqa*Alawiyya goes back to the prophet Muhammad (ibid: 18). She adds that this *silsila* is embodied not only the secrets and methods of the mystical path as prescribed by the *tariqa*, but also what is understood as the *uhakika wa Muhammadi* (Muhammadan Reality) (ibid).

It is most probable that Sufimovement in Lamu has close links with the Hadhramis. Pouwels states that a combination of opportunism and an extension of the religious contacts brought a number of Benadir, Hadhrami, and Yemeni clans to Pate and Lamu after the 1520s who were affiliated to the Alawiyya *tariqa* (1987:40) and that the Alawiyya *tariqa* was south Arabian in origin, having been founded by the Hadhramis primarily as an institution to maintain social ties among them (ibid: 148). Knysh further explains:

When asked about the beginnings of the Sufi movement in Hadramawt, any educated Hadrami Muslim is likely to point to the larger-than-life figure of the great saint of Tarim Muhammad b. Ali al-Al-Alawi, better known as al-Faqih al-Muqaddam (d.653/1256). This answer reflects a standard view of this individual as the founding father of the first Sufi *tariqa* in Hadramawt- a view that is reiterated in most recent studies of Hadrami history. (1999:215)

The Alawiyya brotherhood and its members emphasize religious erudition (*ilm*) and instruction in all the sciences (*funun*), exegesis (*tafsir*), Arabic grammar (*nahw*), morphology (*sarf*), law (*fikh*), the *sunna* of the Prophet (*hadith*) and, the science based on a body of writings dealing with Sufi ideals and theory (*tasawwuf*), which are all followed in the Lamu archipelago.

3.1 Music During the Lamu *maulidi* festival

One aspect of the *maulidi* festival in the Lamu archipelago, which culminated in heightened tension between the adherents of the *maulidi* festival and those opposed to it, was the question of the permissibility of music. It will be noted that the presence of musical instruments during the *maulidi* festival, and especially the tambourines (*matwari*) and the drums (*vigoma*) have been there since al-Habib Swaleh introduced the *maulidi* festival in its present form (apart from the

activities introduced by the museums). A section of the Swahili people in the Lamu archipelago have not subscribed to al-HabibSwaleh's introduction of music during the festival. I note how some Sufi orders have viewed the presence of music during their rituals. The Muhammadiyya Shadhiliyya order, prohibits musical instruments in its *dhikri* and the Muhamidiyya Shadhiliyya has written Charter that prohibits emotional displays (like openly shedding tears), musical instruments, unintelligible sounds, or the presence of women or babies during group *dhikri* (Hoffman 1995:18).

In the Lamu archipelago, the participants in *dhikri* recite the Names of God, the leader praises the Prophet and invokes the blessings of the saints like al-HabibSwaleh. They serve the purpose of inspiring those in *dhikri* by their words and their music. They also add considerably to the attraction of *dhikri* as a form of entertainment and are even used in lieu of entertainers at weddings especially on Lamu Island. Public *dhikri* typically draw large crowds of onlookers who do not directly participate in the *dhikri* or who at some point join in under the inspiration of the music and the atmosphere it creates.

The purpose of using music is to stir people to recollect God more fervently, and with greater concentration. Those engaged in music during *dhikri* defend their practice by stating that the Holy Quran says there is nothing in heaven and on earth that does not praise God. So the musical instruments also praise God, and by setting a certain rhythm they encourage a particular movement. In the Lamu archipelago, the tambourines and the small drums are the major ensemble. Although they restrict the musical ensemble to only the tambourines and the small drums, there are other instruments, which have been used elsewhere in *dhikri*. Hoffman mentions, besides tambourines, the hand-drum (*tabla* or *darabukka*), flute (*kawla*), castanets (*sakkat* or *tura*) and violin (1995:172). Opinions concerning the permissibility of listening to music have varied widely among the Swahili people of the Lamu archipelago, and it seems that from the beginning, Sufi have felt a need to justify their use of music and to make stipulations limiting its use. It is most probable that the use of tambourine and drums during the *maulidi* festival in the Lamu archipelago may have stemmed from the above arguments and observations. The following section relates to the discussion of music during the Lamu *maulidi* festival.

3.2 The Opposition to Maulidi festival in the Lamu Archipelago

The *maulidi* festival in the Lamu archipelago sometimes evokes strong resistance. Because this festival was not celebrated in early Islam, but only came into being later, the permissibility of its celebration was, and sometimes is, disputed by some Swahili people of the Lamu archipelago. The festival has continued to become more confrontational as a new generation of Islamic scholars has emerged. They are those who either studied in the Riyadhha College or those who acquired brands of reformist doctrine during visits to the Middle Eastern institutions.

Kresse opines: "Within the vicious ideological campaign against everything deemed *bid'a* (now including *maulidi* celebrations in general), all measure and consideration for the local historical context was lost, as the lines of argumentation were provided from the outside and simply taken over. This radicalization of reformist critique, which was not interested in the specifics of the local situation, undermined the existent character of local Muslim identity" (2003:6).

Supporters of this festival often provoke a counter-reaction. The reason given by those who oppose the *maulidi* festival and the musical accompaniment is that its practice is not found in the Holy Quran. The more common understanding of those who oppose the *maulidi* festival in the Lamu archipelago say it is a *bid'a* (innovation).

Sheikh Muhammad Kasim presents a sub-differentiation in the category of *bid'a* and is cited by Kresse. He distinguishes *bid'a ya lugha* (innovation of language), referring to everything in the worldly and religious sphere; here, there is "*bid'anzuri*" (good innovation) and "*bid'ambaya*" (bad innovation) (2003:8). Kasim also mentions *bid'aya sharia* (of the Islamic law), referring to the sphere of Islam and religious worship only and that all innovation in this category is vandalism or destruction (*upotevu*). He states: "*katika bid'a hii hakuna bid'a nzuri*" (ibid) (Here, there is no good *bid'a*). Sheikh Muhammad Kasim argues that *maulidi* is objectively *bid'a* (an innovation), since it was an invented tradition, which was not practiced during the lifetime of the Prophet, but he leaves open whether it should be forbidden or considered harmless. He says, "*maulidi* is not of religious (Islamic) origin. Rather, its origin lies in the celebration or

commemoration of the Prophet's birth. Even if related to religious practice, religious worship is not at the heart of *maulidi*" (Kresse 2003:8).

There are those who oppose vehemently certain panegyrics like the *Hamziyyah* arguing that they have been exaggerated beyond belief, and that reciting the *Hamziyyah* is like equating Muhammad to God. Perhaps the views of Hountondji may explain why the Swahili people of the Lamu archipelago have freely held divergent public opinion on most issues in everyday life including the *maulidi* festival. He uses the term 'internal pluralism' within the African societies emphasizing that multivocality, debate, diversity of opinions, and the development of rational strategies to convince others, are facts of social life, in Africa as much as anywhere else (1983:132-139).

Sheikh Abdillahi Nassir, a popular Swahili Islamic scholar from Mombasa, Kenya, published a set of lectures defending the performance of *maulidi* against critics. Nassir starts by providing five reasons why there has been opposition to the *maulidi* festival, a group of people he aptly titles *wanaopinga* (those who oppose). These are found in www.al-islam.org/kiswahili:

(i) “ *Maulidi hayakuwako zama za mtume Muhammad (S.a.w.w). Basi kwa nini yazuliwe sasa?*”(There was no *maulidi* during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (P.b.u.h). Why must it be celebrated now?);

(ii) “*hayakusomwa na maswahaba wala waandamizi wao. Kama kweli yangelikuwa ni sawa kuyasoma, bila shaka mabwana wakubwa hao wangelikuwa ni wa mbele kufanya hivyo.*”(neither the Prophet's companions nor their associates read *maulidi*. If it were true that it was proper to read them, then certainly the companions would have done so themselves);

(iii)“*kuweka ada ya kusoma maulidi ni kuigiza kristo walioweka siku ya Krismasi; na muislamy haruhusiwi kufanya hivyo*”(commemorating the *maulidi* as an obligation is equating and copying the practice of Christians who 'invented' Christmas; and Muslims are not supposed to do that);

(iv)“ *kwenye sherehe za maulidi hufanywa baadhi ya mambo ambayo ni ya munkar (yanayochukiza) bali ni haramu kamwe katika sharia ya kiislamu*” (Some of the practices during the *maulidi* festival are abhorrent and an abomination to God, and are not permitted within Islamic law).

(v)“*hakuna ushahidi wowote, na Qur'ani wala hadithi za mtume Muhammad, unaothubutisha usawa wa kuyasoma maulidi, sikwambii kuyatilia nguvu.*” (There is no single proof, neither in the Quran nor the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad, which support the legality of practising *maulidi*, let alone putting emphasis on it.)

Schimmel points out that not only the Hanbalite Ibn Taimiyya, but also the theologians of the Maliki School of law, which has its stronghold in North Africa, clearly spoke against the exaggerated festivities on 12 *Rabi al-awwal* (1985:146). The ecstatic mystical poetry often recited in connection with a *maulidi* has remained a stumbling block for Muslims to our day, as a Bengali scholar wrote a few years back, in his discussion of the *maulidi* in his country:

“The main theme of the *ghazals* (which are sung after the *mīlād* proper) is to eulogize the Prophet in the most extravagant terms, often giving him an identical place with God. All the audience relish these songs enthusiastically without a murmur of dissent.”

(Haq 1975:345)

Religious leaders of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, like the mystically minded Suyuti (who composed a work defending the good innovation of the *maulidi*) and the traditionalist Ibn Hajar al-Haithami, “deemed it permissible that the Koran be recited and religious songs be sung, but they prohibited other musical entertainment and even more the use of lights and candles” (Schimmel 1985:146). Processions with candles and illuminations reminded them too much of the customs of their Christian neighbours and the celebration of Christmas or Candlemas (2nd February), which indeed may well have influenced the customs of the popular *maulidi*, (ibid).

Since music is controversial within Islam, its use is one index of orthodoxy. Thus the strictest *tariqa* (such as the Jafariyya) perform unaccompanied singing, or ban it entirely, as in the Tijaniyya, (Frishkopf 1999: 302). Another form of accompaniment is the metal cane beaten with a short stick or rosary (*sibha*). This is not considered a musical instrument. Slightly less acceptable, the frame drum (*duff*) may be employed; it in turn is considered more acceptable than its cousins bearing jingles. The funnel-shaped drum is even less used, due to its association with dance and popular music. Melodic instruments are rare in the *tariqa* and absent in the mosque. The most acceptable of these are the reed flutes whose sounds are felt to be full of sadness and hence more respectable; rarely lute, violin, and other instruments may be employed as well, though these are more closely associated with the *tarab* tradition of secular music (ibid).

Sheikh Muhammad Kasim cited by Kresse lists certain aspects and integral elements to the local celebration of the *maulidi* which he claims are wrong and have to be avoided: using any kind of drums or pipes in a mosque; using the platform of *maulidi* to encourage disunity among Muslims; using *zaka* payments for the organization of *maulidi*; using dirty money (earned by begging, the sale of alcohol, prostitution etc) for the expenses of *maulidi*; viewing *maulidi* as a competition (between various communities); claiming that (participation in) *maulidi* clears oneself from sins and wrongdoings; reciting *kasidas* which praise only the reciter and are not otherwise understood (in terms of the language used) (2003:9).

Kasim addresses ways in which the local community can make sure that their *maulidi* festival will be regarded as good, pleasing, and rightfully enjoyable. He argues that people in their own towns and villages should perform *maulidi*. He criticises the custom of people (especially men) from sets of villages or towns engaging in reciprocal systems of visiting and hosting *maulidi* festival. The consequence of this, he argues, makes it an obligation to attend the *maulidi* festival of others, thereby causing lots of travelling and huge additional expenses while not bringing any extra benefit (ibid).

One important view expressed by Kasim regards panegyrics or *kasidas* recited during the *maulidi* festival. He points out that the texts recited during the *maulidi* festival should be in a language that is known and understood by all. He criticises some old *maulidi* practices at the Swahili coast where certain *kasidas*, like the *Hamziyyah*, are pronounced in their original Arabic version. He suggests that other exemplary Muslims, (whom he does not mention) apart from Prophet Muhammad, should have a *maulid* celebrated in their name. He also demands that the preparation of food and all expenses should be organized and considered well in advance so that all local Muslims can benefit from the celebrations, and would not have to suffer financially because of them (as if it were a sudden, unforeseeable expense that had to be juggled;). These views can be seen as a normative framework, which sketches out the conditions for an acceptable celebration of *maulidi* according to Kasim (Kresse 2003:9).

3.3 The Proponents of the Maulidi Festival in the Lamu Archipelago

The general observation and impression I got during the *maulidi* festival was that, those who were in support of it were majority in comparison to those who opposed it. The Riyadhha Mosque Committee that organised the *maulidi* festival has repeatedly objected to those who were against the festival. They did this by roundly condemning them during preaching inside the mosque. They said that they were infringing on what Swahili people of the Lamu archipelago have enjoyed over the years since the inception of the *maulidi* festival there. One such person was Ahmed bin Sumayt Shariff Abdurahaman Badaawy. In my interview with him, his views on the *Hamziyyah* not withstanding, he expressed his disappointment with those who opposed the *maulidi* festival.

While there has been vigorous opposition to it, found as early as the festival of Arbela in the present day Iraq (Hoffman 1995:108; Schimmel 1985:145 ;), the practice of the *maulidi* festival in the Lamu archipelago has been strongly embedded in the religious life of the Swahili people here. Once the *maulidi* festival had been thoroughly established in the religious life of the Swahili people of the Lamu archipelago, it was bound in time to find approval as an element of devotion. Its supporters found it easy to get this *bid'a* legitimated, in theory at least, as a good innovation (*bid'ahasana*) by religious leaders in Lamu.

Sheikh Abdillahi Nassir, whom I mentioned earlier, provided five reasons for the opposition to the *maulidi* festival. Below, he provides five reasons why the Muslims perform the *maulidi*. These are also found in <http://www.al-islam.org/kiswahili/>.

He says:

(i) “*Kuikumbuka na kuitukuza siku aliyozaliwa mbora wa viumbe vyote, aliyetutoa vizani na kututia kwenye nuru*” (to commemorate and venerate the birthday of the best of all creations, he that removeth humankind from darkness to light; (ii) “*ni njia moja ya kutoa shukrani zetu kwa neema hiyo*” (It is one way of returning our gratitude to God for that compassion; (iii) “*katika sherehe hizo, hupatikana fursa ya kukumbushana maisha ya bwana mkubwa huyo na mafunzo yake*” (In this celebration, there is an opportunity to remind each other of the life and teaching of the Prophet Muhammad); (iv) “*hupatikana fursa ya waislamu wa madhihabi na mataifa mbalimbali kushirikiana na kuziweka kando hitilafu zao*” (it provides an opportune time for Muslims of different persuasions and nationalities to agree with unity of purpose and to overcome differences which, separate them; finally, (v) “*mikusanyiko hiyo huleta athari kwa wasio waislamu ya kupenda uislamu, na hata kusilimu*”. (Such gathering (*maulidi*) has the positive effect of attracting non-Muslims and even to be Islamised).

Qushayri, a sufi, said that the Prophet had allowed the recitation of religious poetry, for the spiritual benefits (Glassé 1989: 260-261). Others like Malik ibnAnas (d. 795) and other legal scholars of the Hijaz all permitted singing while his disciple al-Shari’s (d. 820), founder of another legal school, said singing was reprehensible (permitted, but disapproved) (Hoffman 1995:172). A leading Sufi in the Lamu archipelago MaalimDini argued strongly that the permissibility of music depended on the attitude and spiritual state of the person listening to it (Olali2004, 2008a, 2008b, 2012a, 2012b, 2011, 2014) . For those who are “in the spirit”, listening to music will not harm them, but will instead edify them, he says. He adds that those who were governed by their intellect (ordinary human knowledge) will be unable to appreciate the spiritual movements aroused by listening to music, and they were right to disapprove it, not because of anything inherently wrong with music, but because of its harmfulness for them personally. This is a common view among most Swahili people of the Lamu archipelago. From the earliest times, Sufi found that listening to recited poetry, particularly when it contained the imagery of love and intoxication, was one of the best ways to enhance spiritual ecstasy and higher states of consciousness (Ernst 1999:97).

Ernst says that Baqli, whose index of mystical epithets of the Prophet are documented in *Abhar al-ashiqin* (Schimmel 1985:288) holds the argument that listening to music is the refreshment of all throughout from the weight of humanity. “It is the agitator of human natures and the mover of divine secrets. For some, it is a temptation, since they are perfect. Those whose physical natures are living, but whose hearts are dead, should not listen to music, because it bears harmful fruit for them. One whose heart is cheerful, regardless of whether he has reached the Beloved or not, should be listening to music” (1999:97). He continues to say that Baqli believes that in music, there are a hundred thousand pleasures, and with a single one of those pleasures, one can travel the path of mystical knowledge for a thousand years; this feat would not be easy even for a knower of God, on the basis of religious devotion alone. Listening to music is the key to the treasure of realities, and its apportioned to the knowers of God in different ways (ibid). Some “listen with spiritual stations, some listen with spiritual states, some listen with unveilings, and some listen with witnessing” (ibid: 99).

4. THE LAMU MAULIDI FESTIVAL

The *maulidi* festival in Lamu follows the lunar calendar. Hoffman states, “the dates of most *moulids* follow the lunar Calendar and one often celebrated on a particular day of the week rather than a particular date” (1995:109). There is no record that shows when or how this celebration was introduced in Lamu. For this celebration, visitors come from as far away as Europe, America, Tanzania *Bara* (mainland), Zanzibar, Somalia, and even the Saudi Arabian peninsula, as well as from many of the towns and villages on the coast of Kenya. The active participants come from the Islands of the archipelago like Pate, Faza, Siyu and the Bajuni Islands.

The celebration of the *Lamumaulidi* is deeply embedded in Sufistic traditions as I explain below. The similarities and differences between the descriptions of Sufi orders and the religious situation in Lamu are striking as it earlier emerged. During the *Lamumaulidi*, *dhikri* is a central feature. What follows always after the recitation of every *maulidi* is a *dhikri*. In the Islands of the Lamu archipelago, *dhikri* is observed during and after the festivities.

In Pate, it is held after the recitation of the *Hamziyyah*, and occasionally, replaces the recitation of the *kasidas*. During the religious procession (*zefe*), those who chant the *dhikri* are usually found in any position of the procession, and there is no linkage between position in the procession and those who perform the *dhikri*. A good example is a group from Tanga who chanted the *dhikri* and were positioned in the middle of the procession.

4.1 Sufi Habib Swaleh Jamal al-Layl

In this paper, I use the name Swaleh, as he is referred to by the Lamuans, although, the name Salih has been used by a number of scholars (e.g. Boyd 1980; Lienhardt 1959; Khitammy 1995; Pouwels 1987 and Ahmed 1995). Elsewhere, he is known as Saleh (Kresse 2003:5). However, when quoting, any of these three forms will be used. Ahmed holds the view that it was probably “Jamal al-LaylHabibSalih, whose contribution has been most significant” (1995:164). This is in so far as *maulidi* festival is concerned. The word *Habib* is a title used in the Hadhramaut as an alternative to *Seyyid* or *Sharif* to denote a descendant of the Prophet, particularly after his death (Lienhardt 1959:229). He is a well known Sufi in the Lamu archipelago, perhaps more than any other known Sufi.

Al-HabibSwaleh was from the famous Seyyid family, Jamal al-Layl, who were distinguished descendants of the family of the Prophet Muhammad (Lienhardt 1959:229; Pouwels 1987:40). This branch had produced a number of famous scholars who had migrated to many parts of the world including the Comoro Islands and the South East Asia like Indonesia (Pouwels 1987:53). They are also found in Hadhramaut and the Hijaz. Harun bin Abdul Rahman, then settled in East Africa making his home in Pate. His great grandson, Ahmed, moved from Pate to the Comoro Islands, where both al-HabibSwaleh and his father Alawi were born. Al-HabibSwaleh came to Lamu sometime between 1876 and 1885(Pouwels 1987:199). Lienhardt says a “remote ancestor of HabibSwaleh is said to have emigrated from the Hadhramaut and settled in Siu on the Island of Pate. From Siu another ancestor had moved to Anjouan (Johanna) in the Comoro Islands.” (1959:231).

Four of al-HabibSwaleh’s *sheikhs* were Hadramis who had settled in Lamu. They were his uncle, Ali b. Abdullah Jamal al-Layl, Muhammad bin Fadl, Alawi bin Abu Bakr al-Shatiri and SeyyidMansab (Khitamy 1995: 270). Among the Arabs, the Hadramis seem to excel in *maulidi* poetry and one critic mentions more than twenty *kasidas*, “each of which has a delightful Hadhrami tune, that are used in *maulidi* celebrations in Southern Arabia, where the interaction between the singer, who recites the poem in recitative style, and the audience is very common” (Sergeant 1951:36). When Al-HabibSwaleh turned seventeen, he travelled to Lamu for medical treatment and stayed with his uncle, Ali bin Abdullah Jamal al-Layl (Pouwels 1987:199). Al-HabibSwaleh studied under his uncle’s tutorage as well as several other leading teachers. He acquainted himself with the views of the local people and was readily accepted.

Khitamy says that after one year, the young Seyyid returned to his father in Comoro Islands. On his return, he immediately expressed a desire to continue his studies in Lamu. A fellow member of the clan convinced his father, Mwenye Ba-Hassan Jamal al-Layl to allow his son to settle in Lamu (1995:270) based on Ba-Hassan’s opinion that his son has a promising future and would become an important figure in the society. Kresse adds: “HabibSaleh was perhaps the most significant reformer. He introduced the form of *maulidi* al-Habshy to Lamu in the late nineteenth century...locally, HabibSaleh was a social reformer whose efforts of opening up Islam and Islamic education to the descendants of slaves and the underprivileged *wagama* (coconut-tappers) transformed local Islam from an exclusive religion for the privileged (*Waungwana* and Arabs) to an inclusive one, which integrated people from all ethnic and social backgrounds” (2003:5). It therefore meant that the *maulidi* festival was a medium for social reform, a symbol of social change.

The major influences of al-HabibSwaleh, while in Lamu, were his uncle, Ali Jamal al-Layl; Sharif Makii, who taught him traditional medicine; Alawi bin Abu Bakr al-Shatiri, who taught him the interpretation of the Holy Quran; Abu BakrMuawwy, who taught him Arabic and the science of metrics, and, Habib Abu BakrMansab who taught him the science of *hadith* (Khitamy 1995:270). This took place sometime in the 1880s (Pouwels 1987:199). Al-HabibSwaleh was accepted as a qualified scholar and began conducting lectures in Sheikh al-Bilad Mosque in Langoni. When he had gathered some students, he read *maulidiyaBarazanji* in his own house to celebrate the birth of the Prophet. Among al-HabibSwaleh's students was Sheikh AbdallahBakathir. He and his students then began an innovation in Lamu by accompanying the *maulidi* with tambourines. Al-HabibSwaleh later on licensed his students to initiate the festival in other mosques within Lamu, the first being Anisa mosque followed by the Bawazir mosque. This later on spread to other towns outside Lamu. The first to receive this license outside Lamu was Sharif Said Al Reidh of Mambrui.

The date at which the founder of the Mosque College first arrived in Lamu is uncertain. The date of his death is recorded on his tomb in an Arabic inscription, whose translation reads:

“The grave of the distinguished in learning, the knowing of God, HabibSwalehibnHabib ‘Alawi ibnHabib ‘Abdullah Jamal al-Lail, who died on Saturday, the second Muharram, in the Year 1354. May God have mercy upon him, upon his parents and upon the Muslims.”

(Lienhardt 1959: 230)

At the time of his death, al-HabibSwaleh is said to have been probably “over eighty years. His age when he first arrived in Lamu is said to have been about thirty. This sets the date of his arrival very roughly at 1885, though the local assessment is that he arrived almost twenty years earlier”(Lienhardt 1959:231). He is buried next to his uncle's grave near to that of Sufi Sharif Mansab, a member of the Al-Husain family, who was one of his teachers and among his main supporters.

5. CONCLUSION

Considering the findings of this study, it is concluded that when the *maulidi* festival had been accepted by the consensus of the Swahili community, the essential thing had been done and legitimate ground for opposition had been removed. It was established that while the opposition thus found itself reduced to combating the outer forms of the festival and its developments, its supporters are never tired of calling attention to the merit that lies in feeding the poor, in the more frequent reading of the Holy Quran and *maulidi*, and in the expressions of joy over the birth of the Prophet and all that the day brings with it.

Secondly, it can be concluded that in the reverence shown to other Muslim saints, the *maulidi* festival in the Lamu archipelago also plays a great part. Although the success of an appeal to a saint does not depend on particular days, yet certain days and birthdays in particular are regarded as especially favourable. While the opponents of the *maulidi* festival in the Lamu archipelago have also criticized the authenticity of the *kasida* that eulogize and exalt the Prophet, its proponents have vigorously defended the panegyrics like the *Hamziyyah*. Just as the Sufi in Morocco have participated actively in the festivities of the Prophet's birthday, which came to be considered in the hierarchy of festive days second only to the canonical feasts, the same has been observed in Lamu.

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