

THE BANADIR COAST: ITS PEOPLES AND THEIR CULTURAL HISTORY

BY

Mohamed Kassim & Abdirahman Sh. Issa

This paper is presented at the Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association held in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A., from December 04th, to 07th, 1993.

December 1993

THE BANADIR COAST: ITS PEOPLES AND THEIR CULTURAL HISTORY.

by M. Kassim and A. Issa

1. Historical Background

Historically, the Banadir coast is the coastal strip which extends from Warsheikh to Ras Kiamboni in present day Somalia. The name "Banadir" is derived from the Arabic word "Bandar" which means ports but signifies the coastal areas where goods are exchanged. The history of the Banadir coast is part of the history of the East African Swahili coast. It is closely intertwined in all its economic, cultural, and historical evolution to the Swahili coast. Contemporary historians have concentrated their research on the Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Mozambican parts of the Swahili coast and neglected or did not give due merit to the Banadir coast. The Banadir coast has been merely treated as the coastal area where the first Arab-Persian settlements were built and from where some of these settlers later migrated to the southern Swahili coast.

This paper attempts to highlight the rich cultural history of this coast and at the same time calls for, not only the archaeological study, but the anthropological and ethnographic investigation of a much neglected part of the northern Swahili coast.

Most coastal historians agree that the Banadir coast is the first Swahili settlement on the East African coast settled around the 9th - 10th century¹. Tradition, coastal chroniclers, and Arab geographers suggest that the first settlers came from the Persian Gulf. Archaeological and linguistic evidence suggests that there was also a Bantu population in the nearby fertile river valleys of the Juba and Shabelli². The Swahili culture that evolved in this coast was the result of the contact of this Arab-Islamic civilization on the coast with the Bantu culture of the hinterland.

According to coastal traditions, the Arab-Persian immigration reached the Banadir coast in successively different times. This coastal area was also the first foothold of Islam in the East African coast³. Oral traditions relating to the foundation of the Banadir coastal cities

¹Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, P83-84. Also N.Chittick, "The peopling of the East African coast", *East Africa and the Orient*, P41, 1975. Refer also to E. Cerulli, "Inscrizioni e documenti Arabi per la storia della Somalia.", *Somalia, Scritti Vari Editi ed Inediti*, 1957 Vol 1, p 1-24.

²J.Trimingham, "Islam in East Africa", p 6-7, Clarendon press, Oxford, 1964. Also D.Nurse, "A linguistic Reconsideration of Swahili origins", *Azania*, vol 18, p136-137, 1983.

³R. Pouwels, "Islam and Islamic leadership in the coastal communities of Eastern Africa, 1700 to 1914", p13, PHD thesis, UCLA, 1979.

by Arab and Persian immigrants are supported by the historical sites in these areas⁴. Even the selection of the sites of these cities indicate that they were built by a maritime and mercantile community⁵. We will not indulge in the discussion of who the founders of these cities were and whether their foundation was in the tenth or twelfth century. What is important to note is that all the early historic sites found today are all credited to Arab-Persian settlers.

There is strong evidence that Swahili was originally spoken throughout the Banadir coast⁶. Several communities on this coast and some villages along the Juba River have retained their Swahili language and culture. In addition to the coastal city of Brava and the Bajunis in the Kismayo zone (which are areas of Swahili literature and culture), the native inhabitants of Mogadishu and Merka have retained the Swahili culture, traditions, and personal names⁷. Also, the origin of the place names of Mukadisho (mui wa mwisho = the end city), Shangani (on the sand), Marika, Kismayu (kisima iu = upper well) indicate that these were all Swahili cities⁸. The linguistic Somalization of the Banadir coast started around the 13th century when the first Somali-speaking nomads appeared on the Banadir coast⁹. This has gradually eroded the Swahili language in the cities of Warsheikh, Mogadishu, and Merka. The impact of the Somali language diminishes as you move south along the Banadir coast¹⁰. For example, the northern Swahili dialect of Chimini (or Chimbalazi which is spoken in Brava), has acquired some Somali vocabulary. The Bajuni dialect (also northern Swahili) has less Somali vocabulary than the Chimini, while all the rest of the southern Swahili dialects have no Somali vocabulary¹¹.

⁴E. Cerulli, *Somalia: Scritti Vari Editi e Inediti* (Rome, 1957), Vol I, 2-9, p 304. This includes inscriptions on mosques and tombs recorded by Cerulli.

⁵Puzo, "Mogadishu, Somalia: Geographic aspects of its evolution, population, functions and morphology", p 20, PHD thesis, UCLA, 1972. Note that Mogadishu was built on a slightly raised coral promontory with defensive walls on the landward side.

⁶J. Knappert, "Four centuries of Swahili verse", p xvi, Heinman, London, 1979. Also Middleton, "The world of the Swahili", p 22, Yale Univ. Press, 1992.

⁷The names of Bana (Bwana), Mana (Mwana), Munye (Mwenye), which are only used by the native people from the Banadir coast, are all Swahili names.

⁸There is also an Arabic version of some of these names. But several scholars have doubted their validity (refer to N. Chittick, "Mediaeval Mogadisho", *Paideuma*, 28, p1, 1982).

⁹Vinigi L. Grottanelli, "The peopling of the Horn of Africa", *East Africa and the Orient*, P 74, 1975.

¹⁰ With the exception of Kismayo where there has been an infusion of new immigrants.

¹¹ M. Abasheikh, "The grammar of Chimwi:ni causatives", PHD thesis, U. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, P4, 1978.

2. Town Islam and Civilization

To describe how the Banadiri coastal towns were run during the 9th to 12th centuries is a matter for future research. What is known from travellers' accounts and early chronicles is that both Mogadishu and Brava were ruled by councils of elders representing all the clans of these city-states¹². This joint leadership has probably ensured prosperity for the inhabitants and a comparatively more peaceful co-existence amongst themselves. The rule by town councils can also be attributed to the fact that some of these immigrants came to these shores to escape persecution, and hence longed for a more peaceful climate. Others came to trade or settle in a more prosperous environment. Whatever their reasons for immigration, one thing is clear: they did not come to conquer or pillage this area, nor did they aspire to build an empire¹³. The first settlers of this coastal region came from diverse parts of the Arabian peninsula and the Persian Gulf with an urban and literate cultural background and were, as Cerulli described, "bound together by ties of citizenship and not by tribal relations"¹⁴.

The Ulama and traders from this area spread the Islamic urban civilization southwards to the rest of the East African coast¹⁵. During this period the Banadir coastal towns developed into important trading centres. Similar to the other Swahili towns, the pursuit of wealth through trade and other vocational activities was the main objective of these townspeople. Even today, the two lifelong goals to be attained by a civilized "uungwana" townsman are the fulfilment of his religious obligations and the pursuit of wealth, through mainly overseas trade. But the pursuit of wealth and the access to religious education were available to all and, upto the present 20th century, these towns witnessed the upward mobility of many families and the emergence of brilliant religious scholars from the poorest members of their communities.

¹² Yaqut, "Mu'jam Al-Buldan", (C.1228). Also E. Cerulli, Vol 1, "Makdishu", p 135-136. According to traditions, Mogadishu was ruled by a federation of 39 clans: 12 from the Mukri ("Reer Faqi"), 12 from the Djid'ati ("Shanshia"), 6 from the Aqabi ("Reer Shaikh"), 6 from the Ismaili, and 3 from the Afifi ("Gudmana"). Brava was also ruled by 12 elders (Freeman-Granville, "Medieval History of the Coast of Tanganyika", p 31-32, in reference to Joao de Barros, "Decadas da Asia", I, Book 8.

¹³ Middleton p20

¹⁴ E. Cerulli, "Somaliland", Somalia: Scritti Vari Editi ed Inediti, Vol I, p 148. There were of course economic distinctions between the poor and rich and prestige and rights given to the founders of each town.

¹⁵ R. Pouwels, "Islam and Islamic leadership", p 461. Also Trimmingham, p 6. According to Freeman-Grenville Merchants from Brava were seen trading in places like Malindi.

Another factor that may have contributed to the harmony and peaceful co-existence of these towns is that wealth was dependant upon family or individual profits and not upon taxation, leaving their rulers little authority¹⁶. Obviously, East African coastal civilization, with its Islamic mercantile culture and diverse ethnic composition, has managed to glean a common interest in trade and wealth building.

Between the 10th and 13th centuries, the Banadir coast enjoyed a period of prosperity and cultural efflorescence¹⁷. Mogadishu was a splendid and prosperous city during Ibn Battuta's visit around 1330¹⁸. Recent coin finds also indicate that Mogadishu minted its own local currency from 1300 to 1700¹⁹. But this economic affluence was very much dependent on international trade, and the economic decline of these coastal city-states started when the Portuguese began intercepting the trade from these cities during the 16th century. This economic calamity was followed by the overthrow of both the Ajuran dynasty of the Banadir hinterland and Muzaffar dynasty of Mogadishu by Hawiye clans²⁰.

Although the Banadir coastal cities gradually lost their economic clout, and Mogadishu, by the nineteenth century, had become "a shadow of its former splendid self"²¹, the influence and work of the Ulama from this coastal area remained unabated.

3. The Ulama of the Banadir coastal towns

Throughout the history of the East African coast, the Ulama and Mashaikh have been the pillars of town society²². The towns of the Banadir coast were no exception. By operating both the legal and educational systems and their involvement in trade, political power was exercised by the Ulama in these city-states. In Mogadishu, for example, the Chief Qadi was chosen from among the "Reer Faqi" of Hamarweyn²³. Similarly, in Brava and

¹⁶Middleton, p44

¹⁷ Puzo, 1972, p 25.

¹⁸H.A.R. Gibb, "the Travels of Ibn Battuta", Vol II, p 373, Cambridge, 1962.

¹⁹G. Freeman-Grenville, "East African coin finds and their historical significance", JAH, Vol I, 1 (1960), p 31-42.

²⁰L.Cassanelli, "The Shaping of Somali society", p 92-93, Univ. of Pennsylvania press, 1982.

²¹E.Alpers, "Muqdisho in the nineteenth century: A regional perspective", JAH, 24(1983), p 442.

²²R. Pouwels, "Horn and Crescent: cultural change and traditional Islam on the East African coast, 800 - 1900", p93, Cambridge Univ. press, 1987.

²³Cerrina-Ferroni, Benadir, 28. The "Reer Faqi" were one of the founding clans of the city of Mogadishu. They were originally known as the Muqri clan (E. Cerulli, "Makdishu", Somalia, Scritti Vari Edit ed inediti, p 136).

Merka, the Chief Qadi was also chosen from among the religious scholars²⁴. Although the trade needs of these towns have determined ecological choices²⁵, the Islamic civilization, propagated by the Ulama, gave these towns an identity and a unique character.

To illustrate the influence of the Ulama in the Banadir coast, the profiles of five Ulama and poets from Brava will be discussed. All five lived between 1847 and 1958 and had a strong influence on this town²⁶. The most prominent of these Ulama, and one whose influence spread throughout the whole of East Africa, is Shaikh Uways Bin Muhammad Al-Barawi²⁷. Shaikh Uways was born in Brava in 1847 and studied under Shaikh Muhammad Zayini Al-Shanshi. He later continued his studies in Baghdad under the Qadiri master Sayyid Mustafa ibn al-Sayyid Salman al-Kaylani, son of Shaikh Salman al-Kaylani²⁸.

Upon Shaikh Uways's return to Somalia, he established a mosque-school that became the most important Qadiriyya education center in East Africa. From 1881 to his death in April 1909 Sheikh Uways was involved in the spread of Islam in southern Somalia and throughout East Africa (as far as eastern Congo). The Uwaisiya, a branch of the Qadiriya brotherhood founded by Shaikh Uways, were involved in the Muslim resistance to European colonization in Buganda in the 1880's, and in German controlled Tanganyika in the 1890's²⁹. Beside his missionary activities, Shaikh Uways composed several poems in the Somali and Arabic languages.

There are two remarkable factors about Shaikh Uways's missionary work that are worth mentioning here. The first is the strict use of non-violent methods in spreading his message, unlike other "Tariqas" in Somalia. The other is the phenomenal success of his "Tariqa" which spread to a vast area (from the northern regions of Somalia to the Eastern Congo).

²⁴ Shaikh Nureini Ahmed Sabir Al-Hatimy (1247H - 1327H) one of the most revered saints in Brava was also the Chief Qadi of the town during Sayyid Barqash's reign.

²⁵Middleton, p16.

²⁶ The Banadir coast has produced many distinguished scholars which should be the topic of another paper.

²⁷C. Ahmed, *God, Anti-Colonialism and Drums*, UFAHAMU, Vol XVII, 2, 1989.

²⁸B.G. Martin, *Muslim Politics and resistance to colonial rule: Shaikh Uways B. Muhammad Al-Barawi and the Qadiriya Brotherhood in East Africa*, JAH, X, 3(1969), PP. 471-486.

²⁹Ibid, also C.C. Ahmed, "God, Anti-Colonialism..".

The second alim and a distinguished jurist was Shaikh Nurein Ahmed Sabir al-Hatimy (1247H - 1327H)³⁰. Shaikh Nurein was born in Brava, and received all his education there. Shaikh Nurein was from the Hatimy clan of Brava and a follower of the "Ahmadiya" tariqa³¹ (brotherhood). Although he was trained in all the religious sciences, Shaikh Nurein was considered an expert in "Fiqh" (jurisprudence). This has earned him an appointment as the Chief Qadi of Brava during the reign of Sultan Barghash. Shaikh Nurein was well known as an honest, pious, and just jurist who trained many Bravan scholars³². Today, Shaikh Nurein is a revered saint whose Mosque-tomb is the site of an annual commemoration known as "Ziyara za Sh. Nureini".

The third alim and poet was Shaikh Qassim bin Muhyiddin al-Barawi (1295H - 14 Ramadan, 1340H). Shaikh Qassim, one of the most prolific religious poets, was the author of many qasaid (religious poems). Shaikh Qassim, who was from the Wa'ili clan, composed poems in Arabic and Chimalazi. One of Shaikh Qassim's popular qasida is called "Chidirke", a poem imploring the Prophet Muhamed's "intercession". Shaikh Qassim also composed a Chimalazi version of Al-Busiri's "Hamziya" and, as a follower of Shaikh Uways, authored "Ta'nis Al-jalis fi manaqib al-Shaikh Uways" and "Mujmu'a Al Qasaid".

The fourth poet-alim is Dada Masiti (1219H - 17 Shawal, 1339H)³³, a contemporary of both Shaikh Uways, Shaikh Nurein, and Shaikh Qassim. Dada Masiti, who was from the Al-Ahdal clan of the Asharaf (descendants of the Prophet Mohamed), was born in Brava and as a six year old child was kidnapped and taken to Zanzibar. After approximately ten years, she was found by relatives who brought her back to Brava. Upon her return, Dada Masiti became immersed in religious studies and Sufi mysticism. She composed many religious poems including "Shaikhi Chifa isiloowa", a powerful eulogy for Shaikh Nurein Ahmed Al-Sabir Al-Hatimy³⁴. Dada Masiti is the only known female-saint³⁵ and prolific poet in Somalia.

³⁰Interviews, Mombasa: Shaikh Saidi Sh. Faqih Shaikh Nurein, September 1993. Shaikh Saidi is a distinguished Bravan scholar and the grandson of Shaikh Nurein Ahmed Sabir Al-Hatimy.

³¹ Most of the inhabitants of Brava follow the Qadiriya tariqa. The Hatimy clan follow the "Salahiya" while a few Bravans follow the "Ahmadiya".

³²Among them were Sh. Abba Shaikh Haj Talha, Shaikh Moallim Nur Haj Abdulqadir, Sharif Sufi Habib, and Shaikh Qassim Al-Barawi.

³³Discussions with Dada Hajiya Shegow (101 years old) in Brava, February 1984, also interviews, Mombasa: Dr. Khalif Mowlana Sufi, September 1993.

³⁴ This poem was composed to prevent the followers of Shaikh Nureini from crying and to ease their sorrow. But the poem has such a powerful emotional effect that even today most people shed tears when it is recited.

³⁵ Dada Masiti's tomb is a site for "ziyaara" or annual commemoration.

The fifth poet-alim is Shaikh Moallim Nur Haji Abdulkadir (1299H - 27 Muharam, 1379)³⁶, better known as Moallim Nuri. Moallim Nuri, a native of Brava and a member of the Tunni clan, studied under Shaikh Qassim Al-Barawi and Shaikh Nurein Sabir Al-Hatimy. Shaikh Moallim Nuri was a "Chimbalazi" literary genius who composed a "Chimbalazi" translation in versified form of "Matn az-zubad fi al-fiqh". The "Matn az-zubad" is a classical "fiqh" (jurisprudence) work written in Arabic by Shaikh Ahmed bin Raslan. Moallim Nuri's "Zubadi", which is more than a thousand verses, is a didactic "Tenzi" that has the same metre as Shaikh Raslan's "Az-Zubad". The "Zubadi" prescribes the basic tenets of Islam and the correct procedure of performing the daily prayers, the Zakat, the Ramadan fasting, and the Haj pilgrimage. In Brava, for many years, Moallim Nuri's "Zubadi" was a required reading and was memorized by most Qoranic school students.

There are several interesting points that can be noted from these brief biographies. The first is the fact that coastal Ulama used several media to teach. In conjunction with their teaching in the Qoranic schools (Chuo, Ziwo in Chimbalazi) and the Mosque-schools, these Ulama used religious poetry to teach the basic tenets of Islam, the religio-legal laws (Fiqh) and all the Islamic rituals and beliefs. Another fact is that this education was extensive and accessible to both men and women, rich and poor that certain towns like Brava had, upto the present, an illiteracy rate of zero. This exceptionally high rate of literacy in Brava may also be due to the fact that Qoranic schools in Brava are taught mainly by women teachers³⁷.

Finally, there was a strong feeling of respect, friendship, and understanding between these Ulama. Their close friendships has in turn built cohesiveness in this multi-ethnic community. This can be gleaned also from their poetry. In one of Shaikh Qassim Al-Barawi's poems, "Chidirke", he states:

Shaikhi Uwayso Shaikhuna
Shaikhi ya Masharifuna

Shaikh Uways is our Shaikh
He is the Shaikh of our Sharifs³⁸

³⁶Interviews, Mombasa, Shaikh Saidi Sh. Faqih Shaikh Nurein, September 1993.

³⁷ Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALESCO), "A Survey of Qoranic schools in the Somali Democratic Republic", Jan. 1983.

³⁸The Sharifs or Masharifu clan-family are the descendants of the Prophet Muhamed. They are considered as the religious elite and for Shaikh Qassim to describe Shaikh Uways as the Shaikh of all "their Masharifu" is the utmost complement that can be attributed to any scholar.

In another poem, Shaikh Qassim praises Dada Masiti by saying:

Khusifawe skhadiri sifazo
 Ni Kathiri ntazimo Buldani
 Ni Sharifa afifa saliha mana
 wa sadati masultani

I can not give your rightful description
 The description of your qualities is not mentioned even in the Buldan³⁹.
 She is noble, she is chaste, she is pious,
 And the daughter of noble descendants

Besides their influence within these towns, the Ulama from the coastal towns of the Banadir have been travelling to the coastal cities of East Africa to spread Islam since the Middle Ages⁴⁰. This has continued upto the early part of the 20th century. Two of the most prominent Ulama from Brava who trained other East African Ulama were Shaikh Muhyiddin Al-Qahtani Al-Wa'ili and Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdulghany Al-Amawy.

Shaikh Muhyiddin Al-Qahtani Al-Wa'ili (1794-1869) was born and educated in Brava. Shaikh Muhyiddin, who was from the Wa'ili clan in Brava, wrote several books in Arabic and several poems in Swahili. He later moved to Mombasa and served as a Qadi in the courts of Sayid Said⁴¹.

Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdulghany Al-Amawy (1834-1896)⁴² was also born and educated in Brava. Shaikh Abdulaziz, who was from the Al-Amawy⁴³ clan of Brava, was one of Shaikh Uways's "khalifas" (Deputy or adherents)⁴⁴. Shaikh Abdulaziz was a distinguished scholar who became the Qadi of Kilwa in 1848 at the age of eighteen. He was later appointed the Qadi of Zanzibar during the reign of Sultan Barghash. Shaikh Abdulaziz was an active and vocal opponent of European expansion in East Africa.

³⁹Here Buldan means "in all our books" (ie. nobody has covered).

⁴⁰R. Pouwels, Islam and Islamic Leadership, 1979, P460.

⁴¹Ibid., p 462-462. Also B.G. Martin, "Notes on some members of the learned classes of Zanzibar and East Africa in the 19th century", African Historical Studies, IV, 3(1971).

⁴² Ibid., p 463-467.

⁴³The Al-Amawy clan-family of Brava are also known as the "Ra Moallim". Traditionally, they had the privilege of performing most of the religious functions such as the Friday "Khutba" (sermon), officiated marriage ceremonies, hereditary entitlements, etc.

⁴⁴B.Martin, "Muslim politics and resistance..", p474.

Colonial Resistance and Political Parties

Colonial resistance in the Banadir coast did not start in the 19th century but had its roots in the 14th century. This is when the self-governing city-states of Mogadishu and Brava fought the Portuguese conquest of the Banadir coast. This resistance was not without bloodshed. The fierce fighting that took place in Brava, when the Portuguese forces led by Tristao da Cunha invaded the city in 1506, is one of the landmarks of the resistance to colonial subjugation. The people of Brava while fighting with honour and bravery paid a heavy price. During this battle, forty Portuguese men were killed at the battleground in front of the Great Mosque⁴⁵. Later when the resistance crumbled under the overwhelming Portuguese forces, the city was sacked with great brutality and destruction. The brutality of the Portuguese soldiers remained horrendously famous in the area.

Tristao da Cunha attempted as well to attack Mogadishu, but the formidable defences of the city that he saw convinced him not to disembark. Instead he bombarded the city and set sail. Mogadishu was the only major city along the East African coast that remained independent⁴⁶.

At the beginning of the Italian occupation, around the end of the 19th century, the native inhabitants of the Banadir coast were the first to resist. This can be illustrated by the Asharaf case in Merka in 1904. The Asharaf clan opposed the Italian penetration in the area. As a punishment, the Italians arrested five prominent Asharaf from the "Rer Hassan"⁴⁷. They were transferred to the Garesa prison in Mogadishu for fear of public incitement in Merka, and were later executed.

In modern times, the Banadir inhabitants played a major role in the inception and development of the political parties that emerged after the Second World War. Two main reasons facilitated their participation. First, political parties (as modern institutions) could not come to exist without the support of the inhabitants of the major urban centres. Secondly, only an emerging urbanized class with a strong political consciousness and some form of financial resources could lay down the foundation of such a new and modern political structure.

⁴⁵J.Kirkman,"Men and monuments of the East African coast", p 49, 1961.

⁴⁶W. Vincent,"The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, Vol 1, 1800. As referenced by Puzo,"Mogadishu, Somalia", p 33, 1972.

⁴⁷G.Chiesi,"La Colonizzazione Europea nell'Est Africa", p 430, Unione Tipografica-Editrice Torinese, Torino, 1909. The arrested members were: Sharif Osman bin Muharrem, Sharif Ali bin Muharrem, Mukhtar Sharif Osman, Sha'nnedin Sharif Osman, and Shioble Haji Sharif.

In light of these factors, the people who initially established and supported these parties were mostly from the urban centers of the Banadir coast. Several members of the group that founded the first political party in Somalia, the "Somali Youth Club", came from the Banadir coast⁴⁸. Unlike certain minorities in East Africa⁴⁹, the native inhabitants of the Banadir coast have a strong sense of history and have actively participated in Somali politics.

A major figure in the SYC and later in the SYL, was Haji Mohamed Hussein, who played a crucial role in the struggle for Somali independence and the evolution of the SYL. Two main factors contributed to his becoming a prominent figure in contemporary Somali politics. First, he was neutral in the Somali clan intrigues⁵⁰. Secondly, he was a great communicator who could address and attract the masses. Haji Mohamed was the official spokesman for the SYL during the Four Power Commission of Investigation in Somalia, where he eloquently spoke for Somali independence and unity. In 1958, policy disagreement among the SYL Central Committee members resulted in the expulsion of Haji Mohamed Hussein from the SYL. This created a split and Haji Mohamed formed a new political party, the "Greater Somalia League" (GSL), which immediately became one of the major political parties in Somalia⁵¹.

Another political party that played a key role in the struggle for Somali independence (and established by Banadir youth) was the "Hamar Youth Club" (HYC). The HYC was formed in April 15, 1954 and its first chairman was Ahmed Sharif. After four years, the club developed into a political party and was renamed the "Unione Giovani Banadir" (Banadir Youth Union). The first general assembly of the party was held on Jan. 9, 1952, where a standing committee of 14 members were elected with Haji Muhyiddin Haji Ali as the Chairman. The bulk of the party's supporters were from the Banadir coast. But the party's political program had a national scope⁵². Later under the leadership of Sharif Mohamed Hussein Zaynow, the party set out an agenda with priorities on the struggle for

⁴⁸These included Haji Mohamed Hussein, Dheere Haji Dheere, and Mohamed Ali Nur.

⁴⁹Ghai, "Portrait of a minority: Asians in East Africa", p 1 & 76, Oxford University Press, 1970. The natives of the Banadir coastal towns consider themselves as the indigenous people who founded these towns.

⁵⁰Haji Mohamed Hussein was from the "Dhabarweyne" clan which is part of the Rer Hamar confederacy, a group that is outside the framework of the Hawiye, Darod, and Isaq antagonism.

⁵¹I.M.Lewis, "Pastoral Democracy", p 289-290, Oxford University Press, 1961.

⁵²SNU, "Le Recentissime Storie Dei: HYC, UGB, SANU, SNU", Vol I, SNU archives, 1969.

Somali independence and unity, co-operation with other parties⁵³, and stressing the urgent need for the selection of a script for the Somali language.

Besides the coastal areas, the HYC expanded to the inter-river regions where several branches of the party were opened in the 1950's⁵⁴. In 1958, the party was restructured and renamed as the "Somali National Union" and Mr Abukar Hamud Sokorow became its chairman. During the 1954-1959 Municipal and General Elections, the SNU emerged as one of the major Somali political parties⁵⁵. It is also worth noting that on the eve of Somali independence (between 1958 to 1960), all the major Somali political parties were led by natives from the Banadir coastal cities⁵⁶.

Conclusion

The Banadir coastal towns were, until the sixteenth century, very typical of other traditional Swahili towns such as Lamu, Mombasa, and Malindi. Although there has been a gradual erosion of the Swahili culture after that period, several communities along this coast still retain this culture and language. It is also significant that the Banadir coast is the birthplace of the Swahili civilization and has also been the cultural, trade, and religious center that spread this civilization to the rest of the East African coast. Here we suggest that the Ulama of the Banadir coast were the real force that drove this civilization and propagated it southwards to the rest of the East African coast. We have cited, as a case example, the rich contribution made by the Ulama of the town of Brava during the 19th and 20th centuries. With the destruction of some of the historic sites in this area and the mass exodus of the native inhabitants of these coastal towns, there is an urgent need to investigate the history and culture of this part of the Swahili coast.

We have also discussed the key role played by the natives of the Banadir coastal towns in the formation and evolution of the political parties in Somalia and in the struggle for Somali independence.

⁵³There was a good degree of co-operation between the SYL and HYC. For example, Mr. Abdullahi Issa represented both the SYL and the HYC in his 1948 presentation to the United Nations at Lake Success, U.S.A. (E.S.Pankhurst, "Ex-Italian Somaliland", p 232, Watts & co., 1951.)

⁵⁴SNU, "Le Recentissime..", 1969.

⁵⁵S.Touval, "Somali Nationalism", p 88. Refer to the election results in Somalia in 1954-1959.

⁵⁶Note that the president of the SYL in 1960 was Shaikh Issa Mohamed Abukar, the president of HDMS in 1958 was Jeilani Shaikh bin Shaikh, the president of GSL in 1958-59 was Haji Mohamed Hussein, and the president of SNU in 1958 was Abukar Hamud Sokorow.