



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Transoceanic print histories: twentieth-century Swahili Muslim networks in the Indian Ocean

Raia, A.

### Citation

Raia, A. (2023). Transoceanic print histories: twentieth-century Swahili Muslim networks in the Indian Ocean. *Islamic Africa*, 14, 55-78. doi:10.1163/21540993-20220002

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3645738>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# Transoceanic Print Histories: Twentieth-Century Swahili Muslim Networks in the Indian Ocean

*Annachiara Raia*

African Studies Centre Leiden, Leiden University, The Netherlands

*a.raia@hum.leidenuniv.nl*

## Abstract

At a time of sociocultural changes that started questioning established Islamic learning traditions (independence years, post-Cold War/book market liberalization), printing diasporas exerted influence on the circulation of Islamic texts in East Africa: published overseas (Cairo, Beirut, and the Indian subcontinent) and/or locally reprinted on the Swahili-speaking Islamic coast, they came to play a seminal role in negotiating Swahili Muslim literary culture. How have transoceanic religious and intellectual networks operating beyond national borders become intertwined? In this paper, the beginnings of Swahili Muslim book publishing—and the entities underpinning it, such as Nairobi’s Islamic Foundation Center, a Pakistani-oriented charitable foundation—will be outlined. I will then delve into the history of Indian-and-Swahili family-run publishers *Adam Traders* based in Mombasa in order to tackle hitherto neglected transoceanic connections and patterns of influence across the sea.

## Keywords

Adam traders – booksellers – Indian Ocean – Mombasa – Swahili Muslim networks

## Coordinates

“But books themselves do not respect limits, either linguistic or national. They have often been written by authors who belonged to an international republic of letters, composed by printers who did not work in their native tongue, sold by booksellers who operated across national boundaries, and read in one language by readers who spoke another. Books also

refuse to be contained within the confines of a single discipline when treated as objects of study.”<sup>1</sup>

As a starting point—and along the lines of what has been established for the Western Indian Ocean network of the nineteenth century—<sup>2</sup>we ought to ask about the identity and provenance of the texts, the organization of their production and publication,<sup>3</sup> their materiality and “capitalization,” and the impact of a medium such as print that stimulated a transoceanic book market. I cannot hope to answer all of these questions satisfactorily in this initial work, but I can at least seek to tackle the problem in a manner that sheds light on important print networks, their mutual connections, and their patterns of influence.

To better understand the trajectories and impact of print on the Swahili Muslim coast, it is worth highlighting how print spread among Muslims in the Middle East and on the Indian subcontinent.<sup>4</sup> As Francis Robinson observes, print was slow to take root in the Islamic world in comparison to the Christian world, but when its power and impact began spreading among Muslim scholars, Urdu-speaking Muslims in north India “embraced printing with [...] vigour.”<sup>5</sup> Muslim print in twentieth-century India teaches us that vernaculars assumed a more prominent role and that knowledge was no longer limited to an Arabic-speaking elite, but open to a wider public—in Robinson’s words, “to all those who could read, memorize and listen with understanding.”<sup>6</sup> The impact that the printed book, designed to reinforce contemporary learning

- 1 Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?”, *Daedalus*, 111/3 (1982), p. 80–81.
- 2 See, for instance, Edward Alpers, “The Western Indian Ocean as a Regional Food Network in the Nineteenth Century”, in *East Africa and the Indian Ocean*, ed. E. Alpers, Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009, p. 23–38.
- 3 Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?”, p. 65–83; Alessandro Gori, “Egyptian Publishing Houses in the Horn of Africa. Some General Observations on the Circulation of Islamic Books in Ethiopia (with a Glance on Djibouti and Somaliland)”, paper presented at the workshop *Travelling Islam: The Circulation of Ideas in Africa*, Leiden University, 2021.
- 4 On the situation of Cairo, Beirut, and Istanbul, Ami Ayalon claims that “Gutenberg’s invention into the Middle East began late, but once it did, it proceeded with remarkable zeal and vigour.” See Ami Ayalon, “Arab Booksellers and Bookshops in the Age of Printing, 1850–1914”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37/1 (2010), p. 73–93.
- 5 Francis Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print”, *Modern Asian Studies* 27/1 (1993), p. 229–251. On the speed and vigor of print in India, as Robinson writes, “By the 1820s in the Indian subcontinent Muslim reformist leaders were busily printing tracts. By the 1830 the first Muslim newspapers were being published. By the 1870s editions of the Quran and other religious books were selling in tens of thousands. In the last thirty years of the century, over seven hundred newspapers and magazines in Urdu were started. All who observed the world of printing noted how Muslims understood the power of the press” (232–233).
- 6 Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change”, 241.

systems—<sup>7</sup>not to mention print in general, meant to serve as the major forum in which religious ideas were forged—came to have in South Asia has followed similar trajectories in East Africa.

I will take up this topic here, looking at the diasporic and transnational existence of Swahili literary networks created by means of a lesser-known mass-media genre, namely printed booklets (Sw. *vijitabu sg. kijitabu*), which began mushrooming through reprints from the 1930s onward as a way to counterbalance the monolithic Western/British canon of African letters, and to fill a gap in Muslim works in the Swahili language. In this context, the nonelite Swahili Muslim margins of the Indian Ocean—where vernacular is used instead of Arabic—I will show how a variety of actors contributed to the circulation and production of a popular modern Muslim *Bildungskanon* in Swahili.<sup>8</sup> These actors include the Islamic Foundation Center in Nairobi; a coastal port city like Mombasa; Swahili settlers of Indian origin such as the Adam Traders; and Swahili thinkers, authors, and translators from Egypt (Sayyid Qutb), Tanzania (Saidi Musa, Jumaa Bin Mwin-Dadi), and India (al-Nadwi, Abū al-A'lā Mawdūdī)

### A Glimpse at the History of Muslim Print in East Africa

The first Arabic printing press in Zanzibar was founded in 1879 under the aegis of Sultan Barghash; it promoted a corpus of Ibadi scholarly literature.<sup>9</sup> Between 1910 and 1930, the well known Cairene publisher Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, located near Al-Azhar University, played an important role not only in the quest for knowledge among early-twentieth-century Swahili Muslim scholars

7 Before the spread of print, Islamic knowledge was assumed to have come from a learned master, not from a text. See Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 27. Knowledge was only respected as knowledge when it was “incorporated” as a body of knowledge, by memorization, and was not dependent on the consulting of texts. See Ğūrġ al-Maqdisī, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1981, p. 100.

8 Existing travelogues, e.g. the work *Safarnama-ye-Uganda wa Mumbasa*, already showed a vision of East Africa as the zenith of an Anglo-Muslim project in which the Indian Muslim settlers played the central teleological role. See Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 214.

9 See Anne Bang, “Authority and Piety, Writing and Print: A Preliminary Study of the Circulation of Islamic Texts in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Zanzibar”, *Africa* 81/1, p. 89–107.

(for instance, Ustadh Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulkadir of Lamu), but particularly in the early printing history of the works of renowned Shāfiʿī thinkers from East Africa, such as Aḥmad b. Sumayṭ of Zanzibar. Aḥmad b. Sumayṭ's early works were printed at this shop—a link that contributes to mapping both the earlier, as well as the modern, Islamic book network and circulation across Muslim East Africa and, more broadly, across the continent. As Anne Bang reports, for the publishers Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, the “greatest service of their lives” was to “print books of Islamic learning throughout the world”; accordingly, they played a very important role in the “modernizing” of African book production in the period from 1910 to 1930.<sup>10</sup> The Cairene bookshop has also been pivotal in connecting with other Indian Ocean shores, like Southeast Asia, a segment of which was represented by the Malay-speaking Jawa diaspora that had settled in Cairo by 1925, mainly consisting of Muslim students who came to Cairo to study at the famous Al-Azhar University. It has been attested that in the 1920s and 1930s, the Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī bookshop also handled the publishing of Malay books in Arabic script, known as Jawi books. The publishing of books in vernaculars like Swahili, Malay, and even Sundanese at Cairo's busy printing hubs demonstrates the direct trajectories connecting different Middle Eastern shores with booksellers in East Africa (e.g. Mombasa) and Southeast Asia (for example, Penang).

The beginning of Swahili Muslim book publishing dates back to the creation of the East African Muslim Association, which involved the participation of members of different Indian ethnic groups (Sw. *kabila*) and Islamic schools (Sw. *madhabu*), for instance Ithna'ashari, Shi'a, Bahai, Korai, and Wabora. In Kenya, the association established its headquarters at the Sikina Mosque in Mombasa but also spread to various other regions like Zanzibar and Uganda. Also known as the East African Muslim Welfare Society, the East African Muslim Association undertook and promoted the publication of several religious books, mainly those written by Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui, among which was the series *Masomo ya dini: Hadithi za Mtume na maelezo yake* (“Religious Teachings: The Hadith of the Prophet and His Explanations”), first published in 1936 and reprinted by Superior Printing Works in 1955 (third edition); *Uongozi* (1944), a booklet of articles previously published in the *Sahifa*; the *Faida ya zaka katika kuwatengeza Islamu na kuikuza dini* (“The Benefits of Zakat [Obligatory Charity] in Reforming Muslims and Elevating the Religion”), first published in 1956; the *Mirzai na jinsi wawadanganavyo* (“Mirzai/Ahmadis and How They Deceive”), printed by Gulamali Pirbhai and Co. in 1950; and the *Mtume Muhammad katika vitabu vitakatifu* (“The Prophet Muhammad in the

<sup>10</sup> Bang, “Authority and Piety”, p. 103–4.

Christian Books”) and *Dini ya Islamu: kimekusanya Ushuhuda wa watu wa Ulaya kwa dini ya isilamu* [...] (“The Islamic Religion: A Collection of Testimony by European People on the Islamic Religion [...]”), both published in 1962, with an introduction dated 1939, a foreword on the inside front cover and/or afterward on the inside of the back cover. Moreover, as Sheikh Yaseen has also noted, even Mazrui himself managed to publish his books in Pakistan, and these were mainly in Arabic or Swahili. This period is regarded as the beginning of Swahili religious book production.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Kiswahili vernacular became increasingly important as a means for propagating knowledge about Islam and Muslim revival sentiment.<sup>11</sup> East African print culture promoted Kiswahili as a language of Islamic discourse; however, as Kai Kresse has rightly pointed out, Swahili-language Islamic print culture entered late in the game compared to other vernacular print cultures elsewhere on the continent and in related Indian Ocean regions.<sup>12</sup> On the mainland, Swahili publications were first initiated by Germans: missionary texts and translations and colonial government newspapers that provided entertainment platforms while also disseminating political messages;<sup>13</sup> however, “On the British administered Kenyan coast, such a Swahiliphone public infrastructure was not established until much later, and it was up to local Muslims with limited resources to start their own print media on their own initiative.”<sup>14</sup> Even before the flourishing of booklets, between October 1930 and February 1932, Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui (1891–1947) had been publishing *Sahifa*, a weekly Swahili pamphlet commonly regarded as the first Islamic newspaper, not only in Mombasa, but also on the entire Swahili coast. *Sahifa* was published “as a new public platform to educate coastal East African Muslims about worldly and religious matters.”<sup>15</sup> The transitional period of the

11 This has been extensively studied in Justo Lacunza Balda, “An Investigation into Some Concepts and Ideas Found in Swahili Islamic Writings,” Ph.D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1989.

12 Kai Kresse, *Swahili Muslim Publics and Postcolonial Experience*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 37.

13 See other instances from East Africa in Emma Hunter, “Komkya and the Convening of a Chagga Public, 1953–1961”, in *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and their Publics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. Peterson, E. Hunter, and S. Newell, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2016, p. 283–305; Uta Reuster-Jahn, “Private Entertainment Magazines and Popular Literature Production in Socialist Tanzania”, in *African Print Cultures*, p. 224–250.

14 Kresse, *Swahili Muslim Publics*, p. 38.

15 Kai Kresse, *Philosophising in Mombasa: Knowledge, Islam and Intellectual Practice on the Swahili Coast*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2017. In the early 1950s, many other newspapers, such as *Komkya*—regarded as “political projects”—were established in Tanganyika and produced by local councils or district offices. See Hunter, “Komkya”, p. 286.

1880s to 1930s—during which East African Islam “experienced a renewed orientation towards texts, in the sense that religious authority came to be based on text reference rather than local status”—<sup>16</sup> was over. From the second half of the twentieth century onward, a Swahili vernacular print culture was firmly established in East Africa.

As attested in the introductions to several Swahili Muslim booklets printed in the second half of the twentieth century, the Lujna ya Waislamu Afrika Zanzibar (“Association of Muslims in Africa, Zanzibar”), with its office in Zanzibar, played a vital role.<sup>17</sup> Also known as the African Muslim Agency or Direct Aid, this was an association that originated in Kuwait and spread throughout several parts of Africa.<sup>18</sup> As part of their humanitarian project, several mosques and wells were built, along with a university in Zanzibar and a college in Kenya. Besides these activities, they also published a large number of books.

The proliferation of Swahili Muslim booklets was also triggered by the publishing activities of Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy, a qadi of Zanzibar who later moved to Kenya. In the '50s, he produced some very small booklets, exegesis (*tafsiri*) of parts of the Qur'an (Sw. *juzuu*) or single suras (for instance, *Tafsiri ya baadhi ya sura za Quran Yasin, Waqia, Mulk, and Tafsiri ya suratil kahf: Na hukumu za sala ya ijumaa*, 1980), which were first published in Zanzibar by Mulla Karimjee Mulla Mohamedbhai and Sons in 1952. Afterwards, when Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy moved to Kenya, he cooperated with the Chama cha Islamic Foundation in Nairobi, and they received monetary aid to publish his translations. The first edition of his translation of the Qur'an was published in 1967. It goes without saying that, based on its holy authority, Arabic would continue as the language of Islamic worship and Qur'anic memorization,<sup>19</sup> in addition to being copresent in some modern printed booklets through the

16 Bang, “Authority and Piety”, p. 91. See also Abdulla Saleh al-Farsy, *The Shaf'i Ulama of East Africa, ca. 1830–1970: A Hagiographic Account*, Madison, University of Wisconsin-Madison African Studies Program, 1989; Philip C. Sadgrove, *History of Printing and Publishing in the Languages and Countries of the Middle East*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

17 For instance, see the booklet *Visa vya Mitume* (c. 1980) by Abul Hassan Aly Al Nadawi, with an introduction by the Lujna ya Waislamu Afrika Zanzibar, published in Kuwait by the Africa Muslims Agency.

18 See Chanfi Ahmed, “Networks of Islamic NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa: Bilal Muslim Mission, African Muslim Agency (Direct Aid), and al-Haramayn”, in *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 3/3 (2009), p. 426–424. See also Mayke Kaag and S. Sahla, “Reflections on trust and trust making in the work of Islamic charities from the Gulf region in Africa” in *Muslim Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare in Africa*, ed. H. Weiss (2020), p. 61–84.

19 Lacunza Balda, “An Investigation”, p. 66.

medium of Qur'anic quotations or titles; however, in the second half of the twentieth century, Swahili Muslim publics in East Africa were finally encouraged to read about their faith in their own vernacular language and by means of printed booklets—light, inexpensive, and easy to travel with.

It is worth pointing out how Saidi Musa summoned Swahili readers with a sharp “Uzindushi Kwa Wasomaji” (“Awakening for the Readers”) in his work *Mapenzi ya Dini* (“Love for Religion”) (see Fig. 4, left):

*Wasomaji watukufu! Huu ni wakati wenu wa kusoma vitabu vya Dini yenu ya Kiislamu kila usiku uchao. Mambo yamekuwa mapesi sio kama zamani masomo ya dini yalivyo kuwa kwa Kiarabu bila Kiswahili. Sasa masomo ya dini ni kwa Kiswahili, lililobaki ni wewe msomaji kujithimu kusoma vitabu mbali mbali.*<sup>20</sup>

Esteemed readers! This is your time to study your Islamic religious books day in, day out. Things have become easier, unlike in the past, when religious books were only in Arabic. Now religious studies are available in Kiswahili. What is left is up to you: to be determined to read different books.<sup>21</sup>

As Saidi Musa clearly pointed out in the '60s, in those years, there was a better period on the horizon for Swahili readers and writers, a Swahili cultural-literary awakening. As the short quotation above shows, things had become easier, as texts and ideas were finally produced and spread by means of Kiswahili-language printed booklets. Certainly, Saidi Musa's attitude was influenced by and can be traced back to his own teacher, al-Farsy (1912–1982), who—despite belonging to that tradition of Muslim Swahili scholars writing in Arabic and recognizing the undeniable role of the language and its original primary sources—also went beyond this by acknowledging the necessity of using Kiswahili, the language that East African Muslims felt most at ease with.<sup>22</sup> A vernacular print literacy had been vigorously embraced.

In the following, after a glimpse at the Swahili religious-literature market and landscape in Nairobi, I will mainly focus on the role played by Adam Traders and the port city of Mombasa.

20 Saidi Musa, *Mapenzi ya dini*, Mombasa, H.O. Adam and Sons, 1964, p. 16.

21 Translation by Azra Mau.

22 Lacunza Balda, “An Investigation”, p. 66.

## A Pakistani-Oriented Charitable Foundation in Nairobi

The Islamic Foundation Center, currently located in Westlands, Nairobi, was founded in August 1963 by a group of Muslims inspired mainly by the influential Pakistani Islamist thinker Sayyid Abū al-A'lā Mawdūdī (1903–1979), who has influenced the development of Islamic fundamentalism worldwide.<sup>23</sup> Later, the foundation would gain a sound footing with the active help and guidance of the late Chaudri Ghulam Muhammad, the fourth Prime Minister of Pakistan (1905–1982). With its headquarters in Leicester, England and chapters in Kenya and Nigeria, the foundation is a religious, educational, missionary, and charitable welfare organization primarily engaged in producing Islamic literature in various international languages and distributing it all over the world. Their leaflet *The Islamic Foundation Nairobi*, with information on the origins and aims of the organisation, suggests that readers “Look into the activities, study the literature, visit the institutions and evaluate the projects of the Islamic Foundation, then decide objectively if you wish to lend a helping hand.”<sup>24</sup> The Islamic Foundation Center in Kenya is nowadays linked to two printing presses: the local press, called Lino Typesetter, is based on Satik Road, off Buyuda Road, Nairobi, while the second, the Kutub el-Khari, is based in Delhi. The latter is where a huge number of paperback books are printed and then shipped to Kenya because, as Bwana Latif has explained to me, paper is cheaper there and the printing less expensive.<sup>25</sup> One example is M.A. Quraishy’s *Textbook of Islam* (1998)—recognized in the Kenyan curriculum (for the Kenyan certificate of education), as well as those of Uganda and Tanzania—which is printed in Delhi and then shipped back to East Africa. The best period for selling books is during Ramadan, when they have the chance to speak to the staff of each mosque and get permission to sell their books outside—on “the street,” as

23 As observed in Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change”, p. 248, “Abū al-A'lā Mawdūdī is the founder of Islamic fundamentalism—or better put the Islamist movement—in South Asia, and the most powerful influence on its development worldwide.” Apart from Maududi, the Islamic Foundation’s own leaflet mentions the following people among its patrons: H.E. Sheikh Mohammed Ali Al-Harkan (Saudi Arabia); H.E. Sheikh Ahmed Salah Jamjoom (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia); Mr. Abdalla Ali Al-Mutawa (Kuwait); and H.E. Sheikh Abdulla Ali Al-Mahmoud (Sharjah).

24 *Introducing the Islamic Foundation*, [s.n.]. Nairobi: The Islamic Foundation, [c. 1975].

25 As Joshua Craze explains for the context of Dar es Salaam, pamphlets are almost always printed locally—which is economically feasible given their small size and limited print run—while Arabic primers and educational books are printed in India and Pakistan. If they have to reach Dar es Salaam, they are shipped there via Adam Traders in Mombasa. Joshua Craze, “The Truth of Words”, Research Report for the British Institute in Eastern Africa on the Islamic Publishing Industry in Dar es Salaam, 2007, p. 1–30.

some put it.<sup>26</sup> Prior to prayer time, they set up a book stand, and it is common for people to pass by after prayers and purchase from them. Furthermore, every year during Ramadan, Jamiya Mosque—situated on Banda Street near the large, historic building of Macmillan Library—hosts an international book fair, during which both local publishers and others from Uganda and Congo come to promote and sell their own books. Jamiya Mosque is certainly one of their best customers, since the mosque requires and uses plenty of their books.<sup>27</sup>

Among the “bestsellers” available from and sold by the Islamic Foundation Center, it is worth mentioning the works of two Muslim intellectuals from the “northern” Muslim world—Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) of Egypt and Abū l-ʿAlā al-Maudūdī (d. 1979) of Pakistan—whose writings have gained considerable influence in the last decades,<sup>28</sup> not only because “they were mostly kept in English and, thus, were easily understandable to the majority of non-Arab (and Arabic-speaking) Muslims in Africa and India,”<sup>29</sup> but also—as a few Swahili titles show below—because they even started being translated in vernacular languages. To cite a few examples, one of the foundation’s publications is the booklet *Utume wa Muhammad* (“Muhammad’s Message”), by Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), Egyptian scholar and leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. This tiny booklet of only nine pages was printed by Lino Typesetter in Nairobi and published by the foundation in 1976. Further, Sayyid Qutb’s 78-page *Dini hii ya Kiislam* (in Arabic, *Hādhā l-dīn*, “This Religion”) was translated by Sulayman ʿAbdullah Salleh al-Shaqssy and published in 1986. Among Mawdūdī’s works, *Katika kuufahamu Uislamu*, “Toward Understanding Islam” (Ur. *Risala-e-Diniyat*, “Treatise on Religion”), was originally published in Urdu in 1932, translated into Swahili by Shihabuddin Chiraghdin, and published in 1974.

### The Histories of Translocal Publishers: Mombasa as a Metropole

Besides this Pakistani-oriented charitable foundation in Nairobi, the literary book market can also be located in Mombasa, a republic of letters “from the

26 Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam. Custodians of Change*, Princeton, Oxford University Press, 2002.

27 Personal communication with al-Nur Yusuf Ali, administrator at the Islamic Foundation Center in Nairobi.

28 Robert Loimeier, “Patterns and Peculiarities of Islamic Reform in Africa,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 32/3 (2003), p. 237–262.

29 Loimeier, “Patterns”, p. 239.

margins” of the Muslim world and where locally active poets and publishers have forged vital connections with each other. Among several smaller or larger family-run bookshops, like Haji Muhammad & Sons, Sidik Mubarak, and Adam Traders, particularly noteworthy is the history of the Adam Traders bookshop, engaged in spreading religion through books for over sixty years.<sup>30</sup> Some Swahili Muslim authors themselves direct readers specifically to their store to buy real Islamic books, praising Adam Traders’ service and commitment to propagating Islamic religious literature (see below).

Located on Biashara Street in Mombasa (see fig. 1), this bookshop was originally started and run by Ali Mohammed, born in 1920, a Hanafi follower belonging to the Indian *lohār* or “blacksmith” caste. Indians of this caste are regarded as people of wood and iron; Mohammed Ali himself was a contractor, in the business of buses and lorries, as well as a carpenter working in the furniture business.<sup>31</sup>

Ali Mohammed’s father, (Haji) Ali Mohammed (Haji) Othman, was born in India and arrived in East Africa in 1880, later marrying a Swahili woman from Mombasa. Despite their being *watu wa mbaao na chuma* (“people of wood and iron”), Ali Mohammed’s path was changed by the friendship and advice of an Indian man named Sheikh Mohammed Athman, who encouraged him to establish a bookshop close to the Masjid Hidaya. They thus opened a shop



FIGURE 1 Ali Mohammed’s business card (courtesy of his son, Sheikh Yaseen).

30 The cover of the booklet *Maisha ya Nabii Yusuf* (part of the series of *Visa vya Mitume*) describes Adam Traders’ activities as follows: “At the service of spreading religion through books for over thirty years. Furthermore, [we] deal with the publishing of various Islamic religious books.”

31 A picture of a mechanic/blacksmith of the *lohār* caste in Nairobi can be found in Cynthia Salvadori, *Through Open Doors: A View of Asian Cultures in Kenya*, Nairobi, Kenway, 1983, p. 379.

on Biashara Street, the same street as the mosque. In the beginning, it was open only part-time, from 5 to 7 p.m. in the evening. Slowly, the enterprise grew more successful and became a full-time occupation. As recounted by his son Sheikh Yaseen Haji Ali, who currently runs the business, they have always nurtured a love for books, inspired by the huge number of books they found on their travels to Medina and Pakistan.

The story behind the name “Adam Traders” reveals further interesting details of their history: the name “Adam” stems from the name of the contracting business that Mohammed Ali’s father, Adam, formed together with his brother. The business was originally called H.O. Adam & Sons (where “H” stands for Haji and “O” for Othman, both names of Mohammed Ali’s father). Afterward, Mohammed Ali registered the name of the bookshop elsewhere as “Alawiyya Traders” (“Alawiyya” stemming from the name Ali); the emphasis on “traders” as a concept was due to his father’s plans to establish a trade market for other items besides books, such as perfumes coming from abroad. “Alawiyya Traders” was the name of the business until the 1980s. When Sheikh Yaseen and his brother returned from studying abroad, their father decided to entrust the business to his two sons, Yaseen and Ibrahim, and favored a fusion of the first and second names; they thus picked “Adam,” recalling Sheikh Yaseen’s grandfather, and “Traders,” which Sheikh Yaseen’s father had used for a while, hence the current name, “Adam Traders.”<sup>32</sup>

Unlike their father, Ali Mohammed, Sheikh Yaseen and Ibrahim are Shāfi‘ī and were born in Mombasa. Yaseen recalls the simple way his father started the bookshop and printing business and how he began getting in touch with well-known scholars of the time, such as al-Farsy and Mazrui, and later on their pupils, such as Saidi Musa, whose works the press began printing or reprinting one by one.<sup>33</sup> The company’s printing activities have since decreased; the top supplier of Islamic books is now Baniani, a non-Islamic enterprise with a real business in Islamic book printing. Locally, Adam Traders still does some reprinting when necessary, based on a lesson they learned from their father: for each book in stock, their late father used to put three copies in an envelope,

32 Among other names that the bookshop has briefly had, the business has also been registered as “al-Maktaba al-‘Alawiyya al-Islāmiyya.”

33 Craze, “The Truth of Words”, p. 17, writes as follows about Musa’s relationship with his teacher: “In my interview with Saidi Musa, who recently relocated to Kariakoo from Moshi, he set out his vision as a writer and publisher. He wanted to continue the tradition of Al Farsy in making Islam understandable to the Muslims of East Africa. He refused the notion that his was a particularly East African Islam, yet nonetheless he is the only writer/publisher who explicitly engages with the work of Al Farsy, producing books like *Maisha ya Al-Imam Sheikh Abdulla Saleh Farsy: Katika Ulimwengu wa Kilislamu*.”

which they were not allowed to sell; they would keep them in case a reprint was needed. However, whereas they had their own machine for reprinting books in the past, they have since sold it, since it was not worth the expense. As they themselves told me, nowadays, they do everything in India—which is less expensive than Kenya—and, surprisingly, there is a growing number of Hanafi books from South Africa arriving in Mombasa and their shop.

The earliest Islamic bookshop to be established in Mombasa is Haji Muhammad and Sons,<sup>34</sup> also known by its Arabic name, *Maktaba wa-Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥājj Muḥammad wa-Awlādihi* or *al-Ḥājj Muḥammad wa-Awlāduhu*, located on Mehru Street. Haji Muhammad and Sons belongs to the Memon community of Hanafi Muslims with roots in Gujarat, specifically in present-day Nasapar, Pakistan. As also explained in personal communication with Ustadh Mau and Zoë Goodman, we can see from their printing activities how the Memon people and *lohār* caste have been keener to interact with Swahili/Mjikenda Mombasans compared to other Indian communities, like Ismailis or Bohras, whose mosques are not open to Sunni people. Adam Traders has indeed also been very much involved in the activities of the mosque close to their shop, the *Masjid Hidayah*, and has also founded its own journal, *al-Maʿarif*—distributed in three languages, Arabic, Swahili, and English—in which they try to treat diverse topics (such as jurisprudence, how to take care of blind people, fighting within families and castes, the benefits of the hijab, etc.). The journal too is designed and printed in India.

To conclude, Adam Traders' role in Mombasa is no doubt intriguing, as it sheds light on particular understudied Indian diasporic communities within these East African Indian Ocean print geographies, where multiple religious and urban geographies are at play. Their activities add to the very prominent role played by the coastal city of Mombasa as a real metropole of the East African Indian Ocean.<sup>35</sup>

In the next section, I will focus my attention on the transnational life of both the booklets themselves and the printers engaged in the spread of Islam through book publishing, by looking at a few of the connections between authors/translators and publishers from across coastal East Africa.

34 Personal communication, Sheikh Yaseen, Adam Traders. Anne Bang writes that “as far as can be ascertained, the first bookseller in East Africa was Jevanjee Bookshop in Mombasa, established sometime around 1875.” (Bang, “Authority and Piety”, p. 104). Based on further investigation, according to Sheikh Yaseen, Jevanjee Bookshop was a general bookshop, not an Islamic bookshop.

35 As also attested in Craze, “The Truth of Words”, p. 28: “Mombasa is by far and away the major point of entry for books to Dar es Salaam.”

## Machines of Networking

In her eye-opening work *Gandhi's Printing Press*, Isabel Hofmeyr rightly points out that, while quite a bit is known about print traditions in India itself, the role and impact of printing diasporas is less known. In fact, as Hofmeyr explains, Indian printers followed their own linguistic communities into the diaspora, pursuing established trajectories—in Hofmeyr's terms, "multi[ly] diasporic environments," like those that traveled from western India to East Africa, Mauritius, and southern Africa.<sup>36</sup> Nile Green's study on Muslim printing in Bombay demonstrates the extent to which religious networks provided another avenue of movement, through which it was not just men who traveled outward from the cosmopolitan cities of the Indian Ocean, but also their machinery.<sup>37</sup> Both man and machinery thus traveled from India to destinations in East Africa, South Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia.

Historian Shamil Jeppie highlights the pivotal role played by the colonial postal service and the technical innovations that came to serve a given bibliophilic network, rightly arguing, "These machines of networking and mobility have been neglected but they were indispensable tools of communication especially over the long distances we are considering."<sup>38</sup> As I will show, Swahili print practices did not depend on the West or on colonial powers as a point of reference but drew from a common transoceanic network with centers in Bombay, Delhi, Cairo, and elsewhere.

In the following, I will try to outline two types of contacts and connections between publishers and thinkers/authors/translators who, from a number of locations—ranging from Beirut and Cairo east to Lucknow in West India, and south to Dar es Salaam and Mombasa on the Swahili Muslim coast—were engaging with and writing for a Swahili Muslim public. Drawing from Darnton's notion of the "communication circuit"—which proceeds from author to publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller, and reader, and was created in order to explain how books came into being and spread throughout society—I will suggest two models of Swahili Muslim book networks. As the charts below show, book network "type A" revolves around Swahili-speaking authors (marked in bold) and is a purely East African coastal network, whereas book network "type B" is a transoceanic network that involves non-Swahili-speaking

36 Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2013, p. 36.

37 Green, *Bombay Islam*, p.24, 97–99, 118–154, 208–234; Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Press*, p. 37.

38 Shamil Jeppie, "A Timbuktu Bibliophile between the Mediterranean and the Sahel: Ahmad Bul'arāf and the Circulation of Books in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of North African Studies*, 2011 (2015), p. 75.

authors (marked in bold) whose work made their way to East Africa and was adapted in a serial format. In both cases, the metropole of Mombasa can be observed receiving, hosting, and disseminating the books.

The main author whose oeuvre I will investigate for book network type A (see Fig. 2) is Saidi Musa, and to a lesser extent, Jumaa bin Mwin-Dadi. The main non-Swahili-speaking author I will draw on for book network type B (see Fig. 3) is the Indian scholar Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali al-Nadwi. Through close readings of the books’ paratexts, I will tease out forgotten Muslim intellectual connections in the twentieth-century Indian Ocean world.

Saidi Musa situates himself in the Swahili Muslim lineage of Islamic teaching and scholarship inaugurated by Sheikh al-Amin b. Aly Mazrui and continued by Sheikh Saleh al-Farsy. The author was born in 1943 in northeastern Tanzania, specifically in Simbom, near Ugweno, Northern Pare, on the way to Moshi, where he attended Qur’anic and primary school (1951–59).<sup>39</sup> He

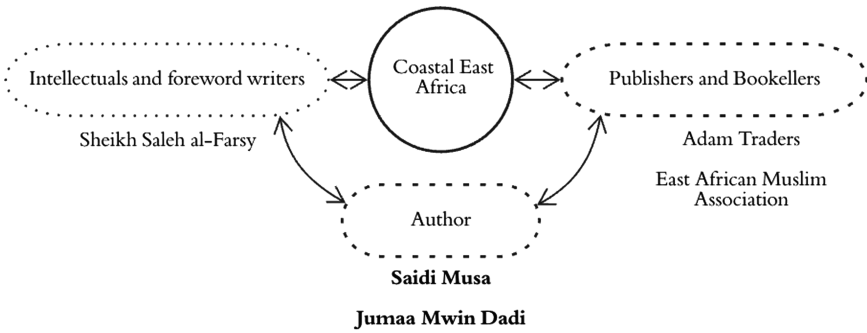


FIGURE 2 Book network “type A”: Coastal East Africa.

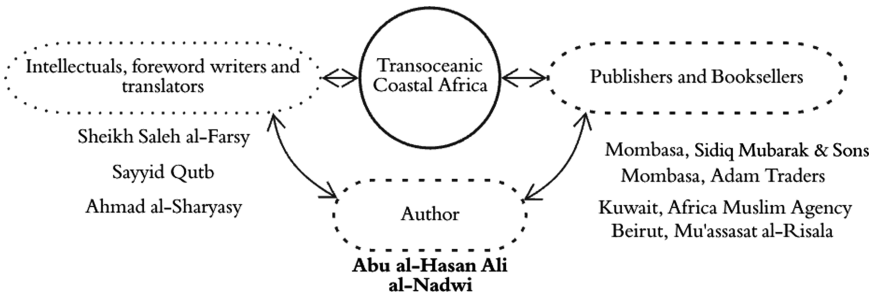


FIGURE 3 Book network “type B”: Transoceanic coastal Africa.

39 Personal communication with Roman Loimeier, August 2004 (Robert Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Islamic Education in 20th-Century Zanzibar*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 584).

became a student of Sheikh Saleh al-Farsy in 1960, when he moved to the Muslim Academy in Zanzibar. From 1968 to 1992 he worked as a shoemaker on Nyerere Road in Dar es Salaam, while also attending courses on management and adult teaching methodology. Very active in *da'wa* activities, he became an outspoken supporter of the “radical” reformist movement in Tanzania, in part by supporting the Iranian revolution.<sup>40</sup>

Saidi Musa's prolific writing demonstrates his life's endeavor to transmit orthodox Islamic literature from the important coastal and insular Swahili Islamic hubs—like Zanzibar, where he studied—to the interior, like the area of his own hometown in the Kilimanjaro region, which, as Lacunza Balda writes, was a predominantly Christian area.<sup>41</sup> His commitment to literature is attested in his own words in an interview with the Iranian magazine *Sauti ya Umma*; in speaking about Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution, Musa expresses his full agreement with Khomeini's jihad.

### Saidi Musa's *Mapenzi ya Dini* and Other Works

Saidi Musa's efforts to geographically link Islamic hubs with secluded mainland areas explain why he established firm connections beyond Tanzania with the metropole of Mombasa in Kenya. These connections are discernible on various levels. Firstly, Adam Traders published a great number of his books between 1964 and 1970.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, though, despite the fact that his home—registered as the “Sheikh Saidi Musa Islamic Development Center”—<sup>43</sup>was in Simbom, his works were also available in Islamic bookshops in the predominantly African Muslim quarter of Kariakoo, Dar es Salaam, where he had a house on Swahili Street. From Kariakoo, the author used his writings to promote and advertise Adam Traders' printing activities by inviting readers to trust and buy Islamic books produced by pious Muslims, as the family behind Adam Traders was indeed regarded.

In the so-called “awakening for the readers” (*Uzindushi kwa wasomaji*) that concludes Saidi Musa's work *Mapenzi ya Dini*—<sup>44</sup> where the author urges his audience to be vigilant in their reading (*kujihumu kusoma*)—the second part of the “awakening” reveals interesting connections in the friendly recommendations that the author provides his Swahili readers:

40 Loimeier, *Between Social Skills*, p. 584–85; Justo Lacunza Balda, “An Investigation”, p. 253.

41 See Lacunza Balda, “An Investigation”, p. 248.

42 *Utenzi wa mafunzo ya dini* (1981) and *Tenzi za dini* (1970), to name a couple.

43 Mentioned as “SSMIDC”; see Loimeier, *Between Social Skills*, p. 585.

44 Musa, *Mapenzi ya dini*, p. 16.

*Lakini katika juhudi yako ya kusoma vitabu vya dini hivi na hivi, utazame sana katika kusoma kwako. Uwe na hakika kwamba kitabu unachokisoma kimetungwa na Mwanadini kamili wa Kiislamu hasa; kwani siku hizi kuna wanadini mbali mbali wanaojigamba kuwa ni Waislamu na kutunga vitabu wakaviita kuwa ni vya Kiislamu, kumbe sio vya Kiislamu.*

*Njia nitakayokupa ya kukusaidia kwa wepesi uweze kujua vitabu vya kuku-faa visivyokuwa na shaka, vya Kiislamu hasa, ni kusoma vitabu vinavyopigishwa chapa na kutangazwa na M/s. ALAWIYYAH TRDERS Huyu Al-Haji Alawiyyah Traders ana press yake mwenyewe ya kupigisha chapa vitabu vya Kiislamu, sio vitabu wanaopotosha Waislamu.*

However, in your efforts to read such-and-such book, watch carefully while reading. Be sure that the book that you are reading has been composed precisely by a well-rounded Islamic religious man, because nowadays there are many religious figures who boast that they are Muslim and write books that they call ‘Islamic,’ but in fact they are not.

The way I shall show you—in order to help you to easily recognize good books without any doubts, specifically Islamic books—is by reading the books that are printed and published by Alawiyya Traders. Haji of the Alawiyya Traders has his own printing press for publishing Islamic books, not books that lead Muslims astray.<sup>45</sup>

As Musa stresses to his Swahili readers, the religious books on the market have to be produced by devout and trustworthy Muslims (*Mwanadini kamili wa Kiislamu*), and the only way to avoid being misled in matters of religion is to rely on those books printed and published by Alawiyyah Traders, which—as Musa highlights—is truly at the service of Islam by printing and publishing truly Islamic books, meant to guide the Muslim community and not lead them astray. Indeed, Adam Traders markets themselves as *watumishi wa kutangaza dini kwa njia ya vitabu tangu miaka thalathini za nyuma. Vile vile wahusika na uchapishaji wa vitabu mbali mbali vya dini vya kiislamu* (“At the service of spreading religion through books for over 30 years. Furthermore, [we] deal with the publishing of various Islamic religious books”).

Just as Saidi Musa promoted Adam Traders by praising them in his own writings, so too did Musa’s teacher promote his pupil through praise in the prefaces he contributed to Musa’s works. Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy would praise Musa as, for instance, *shari wetu mashuhuri* (“our own famous poet”). The epithet

45 Translation mine.

indeed does justice to Musa, whose oeuvre spans a plethora of poetic works in different forms: in 1964, he published the *Kasida za ramadhani*, with a preface by Mzee bin Ali bin Muhammad Comorian, which was the first section of a tetralogy with three other works: *Mukhtasara wa tenzi za maisha ya Mtume* (“Summary of the Poems on the Life of the Prophet”), *Utenzi wa Faida ya Elimu* (“Poem on the Benefits of Knowledge”), and *Dunia Ina Ghururi* (“The World Is Lucrative”).

In 1965, Musa wrote *Mapenzi ya Dini* (fig. 4, left), a 60-stanza composition in *shairi* form; he then wrote *Sayyidna Isa aleyhi assalam: Maisha ya Nabii Isa* (Our Master ‘Īsā, peace be upon him: Life of the Prophet ‘Īsā), a Swahili prose story about Jesus with several embedded Qur’anic quotations, a feature that Musa’s own teacher, Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy, praised in the preface to the work. The booklet, printed in India and published by Alawiyya Traders/Adam Traders in Mombasa, has an attractive cover and can also be found in bookshops in Kariakoo (fig. 4, right).

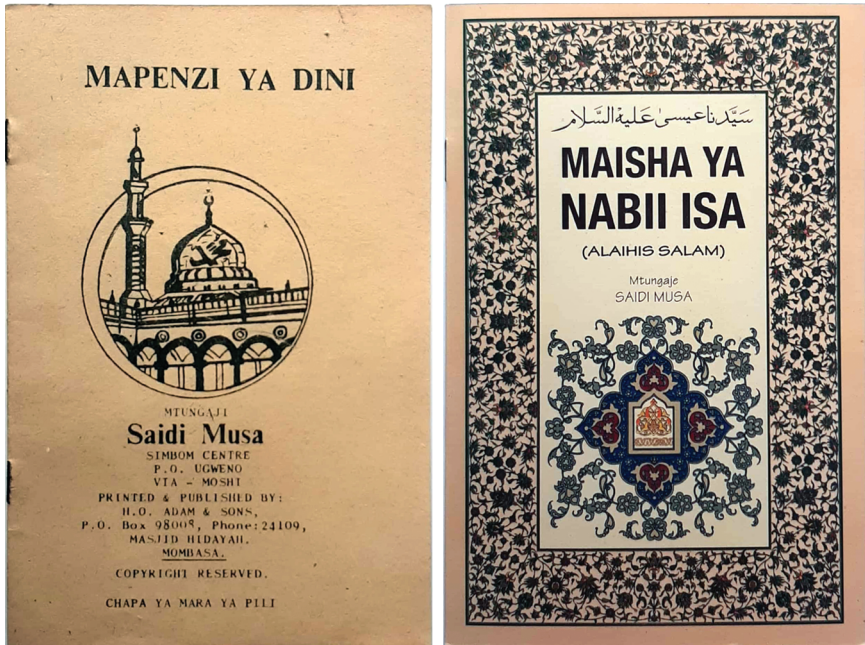


FIGURE 4 Left: *Mapenzi ya Dini* by Saidi Musa (author’s personal collection) (left). Right: the booklet *Maisha Ya Nabii Isa*, published in Mombasa, printed in India, bought in Kariakoo (author’s personal collection).

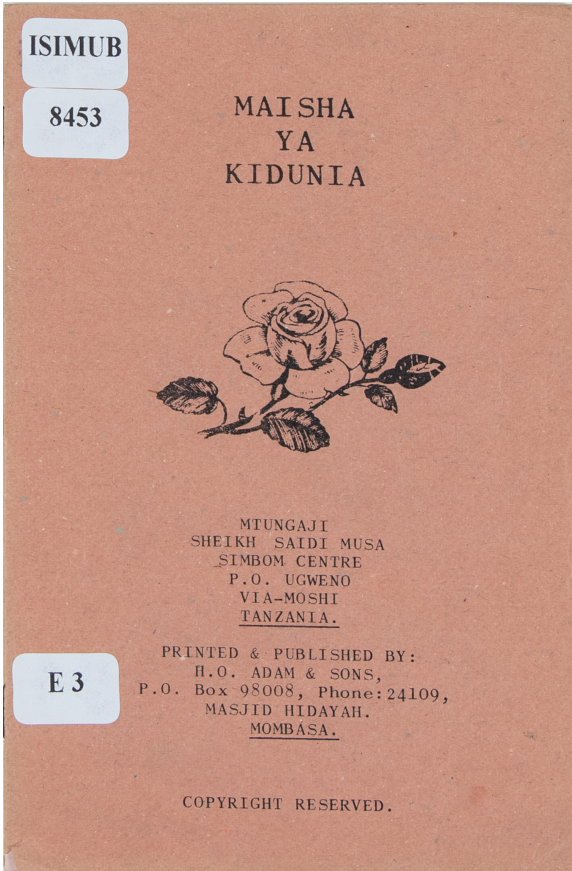


FIGURE 5 The booklet *Maisha ya Kidunia* by Saidi Musa, published in Mombasa, imported by way of Moshi (Leiden University Library Special Collections ISIMUB 8453E3).

In 1970, Musa composed the *Maisha ya Kidunia* (“Worldly Life”), an 80-stanza *shairi* poem published in Mombasa. On the frontispiece of the booklet (see fig. 5), the transregional print connections between the Simbom center in Tanzania and the printing house in Mombasa can clearly be observed. The work opens with a *dua* in *utenzi* verse form, composed by his ever-supportive teacher and foreword writer, Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy, who writes:

*Leo Sheikh Saidi Musa katutungia kitabu cha kueleza Maisha ya Kidunia, kwa njia ya Mashairi. Baada ya kutunga kile kitabu cha “Dini na Dunia” ameona bora aelezee Maisha ya kidunia kwa njia ya Mashairi. Muradi wa kueleza haya ni kuwa binadamu japo anaishi lakini hana ujuzi kamili juu*

*ya Maisha haya. Amejikuta tu yuko hapa. Basi amwabudu Mola wake ali-yefanya hayo anayoyaona ni ya ajabu.*

Today, Sheikh Saidi Musa has written a book to explain ‘worldly life’ to us by means of poetry. After having written the book *Religion and the World*, the author decided that he’d rather explain worldly life in verse form. The reason for explaining this topic is that man lives this world, but does not have full knowledge of life; s/he just stumbles through it. Therefore, let us praise God, who has created all this that looks so wonderful.<sup>46</sup>

Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy nicely captures the *raison d’être* of Musa’s work, namely the desire to guide the individual who lives without knowledge of the world (*binadamu japo anaishi lakini hana ujuzi kamili juu ya Maisha haya*). To remedy this lack of knowledge, the author has crafted a *vade mecum* in poetic form (*kwa njia ya mashairi*), with the clear intention to instruct and make the reader aware of the marvelous things God has created and that make Him worthy of being glorified.

Among the 138 books that Saidi Musa wrote—of which it seems that only 40 have been published—Musa also composed a biography of his teacher, titled *Maisha ya al-Imam Sheikh Abdulla Saleh Farsy katika ulimwengu wa Kiislamu* (“The Life of Imam Sheikh Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy in the Islamic World”), in 1986, published by Lillaahi Islamic Publications Center in Dar es Salaam.

The bond between publisher and author, like that of Adam Traders and Saidi Musa, seems to parallel that of author and the famed scholar who writes the foreword, like that of Saidi Musa and Sheikh Saleh al-Farsy. However, these bonds are not always so linear,<sup>47</sup> as the following case will show. Saidi Musa’s works also trace a connection between Moshi in Tanzania—where he was posted—and printers in the coastal Kenyan metropole of Mombasa. Given the internal economic crisis that had hit Tanzania—which, in turn, was very much dependent on Kenya—in the 1970s and 1980s, when the East African Committee (consisting of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) fell apart and the borders were closed, Saidi Musa’s evident and prolific efforts to set up and produce books in cooperation with printing houses in Kenya, on poor paper and by his own means, was remarkable and well appreciated by the local Mombasa-based publishers who worked with him.

Apart from the example of Saidi Musa, demonstrating the writer’s ties with his teacher al-Farsy, as well as a major publishing house in Mombasa,

<sup>46</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Shomari’s self-introduction, which is rather simple; his talent as a poet is not praised by any preambles written by any renowned Muslim scholar.

another example of intellectual, urban, and print culture “liaisons” between the publishing metropole of Mombasa and Tanzania is that of Adam Traders and the author Jumaa bin Mwin-Dadi. The latter, the author of the abovementioned poetic experiment *Tabia njema na adabu za madrasa*, was a magistrate (*hakimu*) in Tanzania’s port city of Tanga and a teacher at a Muslim school. The founder of Adam Traders, Haji Ali Muhammad, who started the press in 1964, was a friend of Jumaa bin Mwin-Dadi, and it is precisely from this friendship that several of his works—originally published by the East African Muslim Association—were reprinted by Adam Traders. Among these, the 86-page *Dini ya Islam* (“The Religion of Islam”), originally published in 1949, was reprinted in 1975 with an introduction by Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy and Ali-Muhammad al-Haddad, and sold for 300 shillings.

### Abu’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī’s Work

The final case I will present in this section focuses on a non-Swahili-speaking author of Indian origin, the distinguished scholar Abu’l-Hasan ‘Alī Nadwī (d. 1999), an Indian Islamic scholar from Takiya, Raebareilly (Uttar Pradesh, India)—“the most prominent Indian religious scholar of his generation and one of the leading Sunni ‘ulama on the international scene,”<sup>48</sup> who became increasingly involved in Indian politics in the 1980s. He wrote extensively, not only in Urdu, but also in Arabic, and some of his writings were addressed primarily to an Arab audience. Trained in Qur’anic studies by his mother, a pious and learned woman who composed her own poetry, he later also began formal education in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Most of ‘Alī Nadwī’s advanced education was imparted to him at the Dar al-‘Ulūm of the Nadwatul Ulama (“House of Knowledge and Assembly of Scholars University”) in Lucknow, northern India. The best known of his numerous writings is the book *What Has the World Lost with the Decline of the Muslims?* (Ar. *Madha khasira’l-‘ālam bi’l-inḥiṭāṭ al-muslimīn?*), in which he appeals to Muslims to renew their commitment to Islam, and whose later editions contain a foreword by Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb.<sup>49</sup> In East Africa, one of Nadwī’s most widely diffused works is *Qiṣaṣ al-Nabiyīn li’l-Atfāl* (“Stories of the Prophets for Children”), translated into Swahili by Said bin Abdulla Seif L-Hatimy and reprinted in both Arabic and Swahili by various local press houses, either as a single volume or separate booklets issued as part

48 Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, p. 161.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

of a series. Nadwī's *Qiṣaṣ al-Nabiyīn*—whose Arabic-language accounts of the lives of the prophets from Adam to Muhammad were originally composed for his nephew—became famous among Arabic learners, and the book was soon included in syllabi for teaching Arabic at various institutions around the globe.

In mapping the journey of another well-known classic of Arabic-language Islamic literature of the same genre along the Swahili coast—the *Stories of the Prophets* (Ar. *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*), ascribed to al-Tha'labī (born in Nishapur, d. 1035)—I find that two printing cultures and cities contributed most to the publication history and diffusion of the *Stories* in East Africa: Cairo and Bombay. In Cairo, Būlāq Press published the work ten times between 1875 and 1926, and in Bombay, it was published by the Maṭba'a al-Haydari.<sup>50</sup> As will be shown in the following, not only did the Arabic classic of the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* arrive on the coast in a printed version, but so did Nadwī's "modern" book of prophets' stories, which resonated greatly with local publishers in Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. It was published in Arabic in East Africa and also rewritten in Swahili in Roman script.

One of the overseas editions of *Qiṣaṣ al-Nabiyīn* that traveled to East Africa was printed in Kuwait by the Africa Muslim Agency. Another was published in Beirut by Mu'assasat al-Risāla, in association with the Mombasa press Ṣiddīq Mubārak wa-Awlāduhu (Sidiq Mubarak & Sons). In tandem with the latter, Mu'assasat al-Risāla reprinted 'Ali Nadwī's work in Arabic under the title *Qiṣaṣ al-nabiyīn li'l-atfāl, al-juz' al-awwal* ("Stories of the Prophets for Children, Part 1") in five separate parts, each a booklet of its own. Although there is no date of publication, it seems that this booklet series contained the seventeenth edition. The same edition seems to be the basis of the 1996 Swahili translation of 'Ali Nadwī's work, which was published as a single volume (see Fig. 5) under the title *Hadithi za mitume kwa watoto wadogo* ("Stories of the Prophets for Children"), with the additional Arabic title *Qiṣaṣ al-nabiyīn li'l-atfāl bi'l-lugha al-Sawaḥiliyya* ("Stories of the Prophets for Children in the Swahili Language").

While the single-volume *Hadithi za mitume* was 101 pages long and cost two thousand shillings, other, lighter copies, of roughly 20 pages each, focusing only on a single prophet or group of prophets, began being printed and reprinted under various titles by different publishers in Mombasa and Tanzania, either as standalone issues (namely *juzuu*) or as parts of a series (*mfululizo*).

50 See Marianna Klar, *Interpreting al-Tha'labi's Tales of the Prophets: Temptation, Responsibility and Loss*, London, Routledge, 2006, p. 339; Annachiara Raia, *Rewriting Yusuf. A Philological and Intertextual Study of a Swahili Islamic Manuscript Poem*, Cologne, Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2020, p. 651.

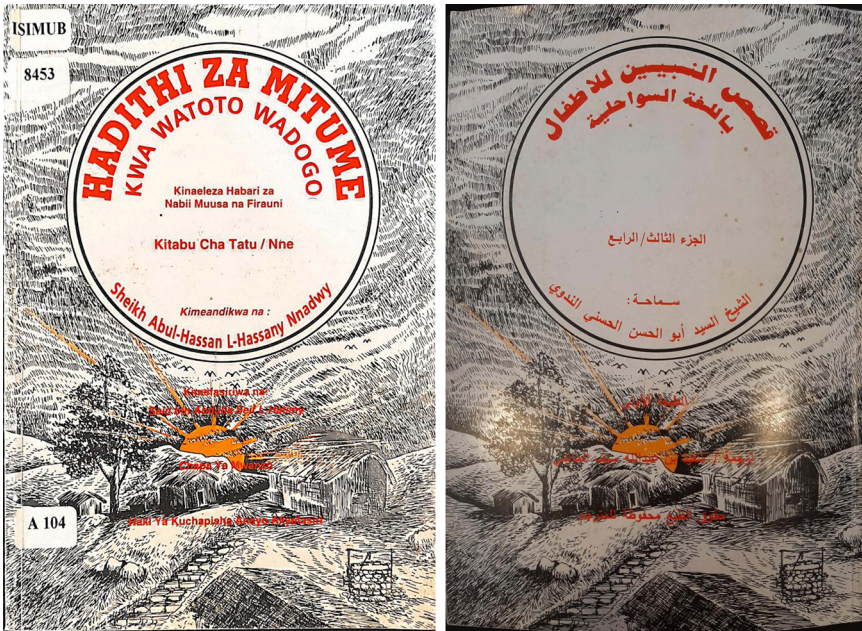


FIGURE 6 Left: Frontispiece of the *Hadithi za mitume kwa watoto wadogo* (“Stories of the Prophets for Children”). Right: Back cover of the same work, with the Arabic title *Qīṣaṣ al-nabīyīn li’l-atfāl bi’l-luġha al-Sawahīliyya*.

An example drawing from ‘Ali Nadwī’s *Qīṣaṣ* is the *Maisha ya Nabii Musa* (“The Life of the Prophet Moses”), a booklet (see Fig. 6), originally published in Arabic in 1953 and whose Swahili translation appeared in 1998. Translated by the aforementioned Jumaa bin Mwin-Dadi, the edition also contains three introductions from renowned scholars: Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy, Ahmad al-Sharyasy, and Sayyid Qutb. The *Maisha ya Nabii Musa* (Fig. 7) came into being when the publisher Haji Ali Mohammed of Adam Traders requested it from Jumaa bin Mwin-Dadi. This booklet seems to have circulated as a photographic reprint of an earlier edition and cost two hundred shillings.

The introduction by Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy, dated 1953, connects the Swahili booklet with the original work of ‘Ali Nadwī, who at the time was a professor at the Nadwatul Ulama institute in Lucknow. Al-Farsy reminds readers that the book was originally written in Arabic and used in madrassas in Indonesia, Pakistan, Beirut, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and other parts of the world.

Due precisely to the original Arabic work’s transnational Muslim fame, erudite scholars from Al-Azhar University in Cairo praised and recommended its Swahili edition. This indeed explains why, apart from al-Farsy’s preface,

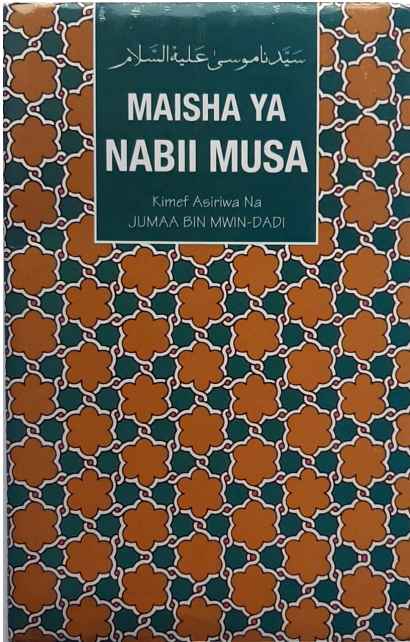


FIGURE 7 *Maisha ya Nabii Musa*, adapted from ‘Ali Nadwī’s work, translated by Jumaa Bin Mwin-Dadi (author’s personal collection).

the booklet also includes two other prefaces, written overseas, by Ahmad al-Sharyasy and Sayyid Qutb of Egypt.

To conclude, this tiny, 88-page booklet shows how pivotal connections—between the Indian author from Lucknow, the local Mombasan publisher, the Tanzanian translator, and Islamic scholars from East Africa and overseas, namely Cairo—all contributed to the overlapping transoceanic print history of the booklet itself, and, more broadly, to an alternative twentieth-century Swahili Muslim intellectual history, not defined by the British canon, in which the Swahili-speaking East African coast welcomed and promoted Indian Islamic books and knowledge.

### Conclusions

This essay has attempted to show what Darnton postulated in emphasizing an “international republic of letters.”<sup>51</sup> I have tried to expand this international republic by recalibrating the center and looking from the sea to coastal East Africa, revealing and elaborating the richness of a specific African-language print-cultural inheritance from an important region of contact with the

51 Darnton, “What is the History of Books?”, p. 80.

Middle East and Southeast Asia. In doing so, I have reinforced what has already been posited by other scholars, namely the notion of the Indian Ocean as, in Bromber's words, a "pluralised space with overlapping spatial and temporal layers [...] conceptualised as a dynamic space, the changes of which are defined by concrete social practices."<sup>52</sup>

We have looked into the activities of learned men, like the family business behind Adam Traders and their life's work of cultivating a network devoted to the production and publication or reprinting of religious and moral literature. As I have argued above, not only does their printing activity in Mombasa shed light on understudied Indian diasporas in the East African Indian Ocean, but their bibliophilic networks also seem to vaguely follow similar bibliophilic circuits between the Mediterranean and the Sahel, which were genuinely "transnational."<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, this article has also tried to document hitherto neglected transoceanic Muslim histories from the Swahili coast and to shed light on genuine Islamic publishers, Swahili authors/thinkers/translators, and popular print genres that have been neglected in literary history.

---

52 Katrin Bromber, "Ustaarabu: A Conceptual Change in the Tanganyikan Newspaper Discourse in the 1920s". in *The Global Worlds of the Swahili: Interfaces of Islam, Identity and Space in 19th and 20th Century East Africa*, ed. R. Loimeier, and R. Seesemann, Berlin, Lit Verlag, 2006, p. 67–81,135.

53 Jeppie, "A Timbuktu Bibliophile", p. 74.