

TALES WHICH PERSIST ON THE TONGUE:
ARABIC LITERACY AND THE DEFINITION OF
COMMUNAL BOUNDARIES IN *SHARĪF*
°AYDARŪS'S *BUGHYAT AL-ĀMĀL*

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'In 1928, when the Principe d'Piedemonte came to visit', *ḥājj* Ḥamūd Sokorow declared, 'the governor ordered the walls of Mogadishu pulled down'.¹ For urban Somalis, known collectively as the Benaadiri (lit. 'people of the ports'), the dismantling of the wall represented the destruction of the last physical barrier between themselves and the undifferentiated masses of what they regarded as a rural pastoral 'horde'. Its destruction, *ḥājj* Sokorow and others contend, led to a sudden and unbridled pastoral invasion of urban space which constituted a direct threat to what town dwellers viewed as their distinctive urban way of life.

Deprived of their last physical tool for excluding the undesirable rural rabble from the town, urbanites were forced to seek more subtle devices aimed at insulating the urban community from pastoral influences and, from the 1950s, creating a space for themselves in the coming post-colonial state. There existed a number of weapons in the Benaadiri arsenal aimed at negotiating the boundaries of community.

1 Interview with *ḥājj* Abukar Ḥamūd Sokorow, 5 July 1994. Unfortunately, a search of Italian archival sources has failed to uncover any conclusive evidence that confirms *ḥājj* Sokorow's account. However, since the Italian authorities carried out extensive urban renewal projects in Mogadishu during the 1920s and the Principe d'Piedemonte did visit the colony in 1928, the *ḥājj*'s story is not without merit.

These included, most notably, exclusionary marriage practices and political activism embodied in the founding of the Hamar Youth Club in the mid-1940s.² However, the most powerful tool deployed by Benaadiri townsmen in defence of their community was the one over which they held a virtual monopoly: literacy in the Arabic language. Using the tools of literacy Somali urban elites sought to execute at least two agendas. First, they looked to reinforce their own particular town identity which held them as distinct from their rural neighbours. In addition to demonstrating their inherent distinctiveness, however, élite urbanites also hoped to demonstrate that urban and rural peoples were closely tied to one another through both their common heritage as Somalis and their membership in that much more important community, the community of Muslim believers, or the *umma*.

This dual agenda is clearly laid out by the Benaadiri *‘ālim sharīf* °Aydarūs b. °Alī in his history of Somalia, *Bughyat al-āmāl fī ta’rīkh al-Ṣūmāl* published in 1954.³ Using the concepts of genealogy, sacred history and the superiority of the written word, °Aydarūs sought to maintain control over the definition of boundaries between his own urban community and the encroaching rural population in an effort to preserve their identity and social position in the coming post-colonial state.

The urban communities

The negotiation and re-negotiation of communal boundaries by Benaadiris in the twentieth century was hardly a new phenomenon. Since at least the eleventh century, the towns

- 2 ‘Hamar Youth Club’, untitled document [n.p. n.d] detailing the annual meetings of the Benaadiri political movement from 1952 to 1956.
- 3 °Aydarūs b. *al-Sharīf* °Alī al-°Aydarūs al-Naḍīrī al-°Alawī, *Bughyat al-āmāl fī ta’rīkh al-Ṣūmāl*, Mogadishu: Mṭ al-Idāra al-waṣīya °alā Ṣūmāliya 1374/1954.

of the southern Somali coast, known as the Benaadir (including Mogadishu, Marka and Barawe), were inhabited by mercantile communities whose lives were centred around the act of buying and selling. These merchants acted as middlemen, mediating trade between the southern Somali interior on the one hand and the broader world of the Indian Ocean on the other. The Benaadiri regarded themselves as '*ahl al-balad*', literally 'people of the town', a community that was culturally distinct from their rural Somali cousins who they regarded as '*ahl al-bādiyya*' ('people of the countryside') and inherently 'other'.

The key to Benaadiri success as a broker community lay in the careful maintenance of boundaries between themselves and their trade partners. By playing various social, religious, cultural or genealogical cards townsmen could either draw themselves closer to their trade partners or create a discreet amount of social distance depending upon which served their immediate needs. Benaadiris in the nineteenth century, for instance, frequently used bonds of ethnicity, religion, genealogy and even family, through the marriage of urban merchants to rural brides, to draw themselves closer to their rural brethren.⁴

However, while various links with pastoral peoples were considered integral to the success of their mercantile ventures, the maintenance of a certain social distance was considered equally, if indeed not more, vital. This was especially true within the urban milieu itself, where particular care was taken to maintain the nomadic population at arm's length. Oral traditions, as well as the writings of numerous nineteenth-century travellers, provide us with detailed accounts of the restrictions placed on nomadic movements

4 For a fuller discussion of the development of the mercantile lineages of the Benaadir towns see my doctoral dissertation, Scott Reese, 'Patricians of the Benaadir: Islamic Learning, Commerce and Somali Urban Identity in the Nineteenth Century', University of Pennsylvania 1996.

within the towns. Numerous sources from the late nineteenth century note that nomads were allowed into the towns only when they had business to conduct in the market. Furthermore, those who entered were required to leave any weapons they possessed at the town's main gate as they entered. In addition, no pastoralist was, in principle, permitted to remain in any of the Benaadir towns after nightfall. Traditions as well as early colonial reports indicate that all rural outsiders were compelled to leave the precincts of the towns after the *‘aṣr* (afternoon) and before the *maghrib* (evening) prayers at which time the city gates were closed for the night. As one early twentieth century observer noted, every evening ‘after the *‘ishā’* prayer, criers would go throughout the town ordering all those who came from without to leave. ...’⁵ In order to ensure that no unwanted rural visitors entered the city after dark, the towns were patrolled nightly by groups of armed militia drawn from the ranks of free male townsmen.⁶ Having said this, however, it is important to note that Benaadiris never sought to cut themselves off from rural society. Instead, their intention was to manage the urban–rural relationship in such a way as to maintain their own social distinctiveness and economic advantage. And, in fact, there were some notable exceptions to these restrictions. For example rural business partners and religious students were frequently allowed to reside in the towns for varying lengths of time as long as an urban notable sponsored their residency and vouched for their good behaviour and accepted responsibility for any difficulties that

- 5 See for instance, Giorgio Sorrentino, *Ricordi del Benadir*, Naples: Francesco Golia 1910, 401 & 433-4; Revoil, *Voyages au Cap des Aromates*, Paris: E. Dentu 1880, 101, and Gustavo Chiesi, *La Colonizzazione Europea nell’Est Africa: Italia, Inghilterra, Germania*, Turin: Unione Tipografico Editrice Torinese 1909, 325.
- 6 Interviews with Abukar Ḥamūd Sokorow, 5 July 1994; Shaykh Muḥammad Shaykh Abū Bakr, 2 August 1994; *ḥājjī* Ḥasan Shaykh Muḥammad, 9 October 1994, and *ḥājjī* Muḥammad Dheere, 2 July 1994.

might arise.⁷

With the advent of the Italian colonial state after 1890, however, urban Benaadiris lost control over most of these physical barriers to pastoral migration. With the introduction of colonial troops, urbanites no longer had the right to patrol the streets with their own militia, although at least for a time the Italians continued the custom of prohibiting nomads from remaining in the town overnight.⁸ Before 1920 it appears that few pastoralists succeeded in settling within the precincts of Mogadishu. However, by the middle of that decade what was only a trickle of rural-urban migration turned into a flood. From the early 1920s, the fascist administration began a military build-up, which brought thousands of pastoral troops to the coastal population centres. Then, in 1927 Italian authorities forcibly resettled the rulers of two previously autonomous northern sultanates, along with hundreds of their followers from the Majeerteen clan in the centre of Mogadishu.⁹

Given these sudden influxes it is hardly surprising that the community of Mogadishu, which at the beginning of the century was estimated to contain no more than 6,000-7,000 individuals,¹⁰ felt itself awash in a pastoral sea. The sentiments of the Benaadiri population are probably best summed up by *ḥājj* Sokorow: 'Before the Majeerteen, the people of Xamer ate their food in bed. After they came we had to sit up. When the others [e.g. other nomads] came we began to eat standing. And when the Ogadenis¹¹ arrived we began to run.'¹² As *ḥājj* Sokorow clearly states, with the town wall—

7 *Ibid.*

8 Sorrentino, *Ricordi del Benadir*, 433-4.

9 Cesare Maria de Vecchi, *Orizzonti d'impèro. Cinque anni in Somalia*, Milan: A. Mondadori 1934, 224.

10 Luigi Robecchi-Brichetti, *Lettere dal Benadir*, Milan: Società editrice 'La Poligrafica' 1904, 58-9.

11 Nomads from the distant interior used extensively as Italian troops and considered way beyond the pale of civilization.

12 Interview with *ḥājj* Ḥamūd Sokorow, May 1994.

the last physical bulwark against this deluge—destroyed, local inhabitants clearly felt themselves culturally ‘on the run’. In response, Benaadiris were forced to turn to what they may have regarded as their last best defence, the language of God and the written word: Arabic.

Benaadiris and the language of God

By the 1920s, the Benaadiris of Mogadishu had clearly lost the ability to control who could and could not live within the boundaries of the town. However, while they lost the capacity to determine who could live within Mogadishu, they still had the power to decide who had a right to claim membership in the urban community. They accomplished this through a medium which carried with it the weight of religious authority and was a virtual urban monopoly, Arabic literacy.

Arabic has been the commercial lingua franca of the western Indian Ocean, including East Africa, since at least the eleventh century. This was no less true along the Benaadir coast where, as Tomaso Carletti—an early twentieth-century Italian official—noted, ‘Arabic in the Benaadir is the language of religion, culture and commerce’.¹³ As Carletti so rightly pointed out, while Arabic served as both a commercial and liturgical language, it was also closely associated with urban culture and was viewed by more educated Benaadiris as the only ‘proper’ mode of public expression.¹⁴ More importantly, literacy in Arabic was considered a virtual urban monopoly.

13 Tomaso Carletti, *I problemi della Benadir*, Viterbo: Agneosti 1912, 63.

14 Aside from Carletti’s above statement evidence supporting this is still rather anecdotal. For instance, minutes for the annual meetings of the Hamar Youth Club during the 1950s indicate that all speeches and addresses were delivered in Arabic and then translated into Somali and Italian; ‘Hamar Youth Club’.

While no statistical data exists, commentators of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (as well as local traditions) indicate that Arabic was virtually unknown in the interior outside a relatively small circle of religious practitioners. Within the urban milieu, however, knowledge of Arabic was disseminated much more widely. In addition to the religious scholars, *‘ulamā’*, most merchants living in the coastal towns had some knowledge of Arabic. As men of commerce, most maintained at least a working knowledge of spoken Arabic in order to communicate with their overseas associates. At the same time, many urbanites also studied Arabic as part-time students of the Islamic sciences under the tutelage of more experienced, and largely professional, scholars.¹⁵

Given its comparatively broad dissemination among urbanites and its relative absence among nomads, Arabic provided one of the few means of cultural production over which town dwellers exercised almost complete control. As such, it provided the perfect venue for the defence of urban communal boundaries in the face of increasing rural-urban migration.

The wide scale production of Arabic literature in the Benaadir appears to have occurred in two phases. The first extended from *c.* 1917 through the mid-1920s when a number of hagiographies of the lives of various nineteenth-century Sufi figures began to circulate among the peoples of the coast in manuscript form. The second took place between 1950-60 during the so-called UN Mandate period, a transitional period during which the Italian government was to prepare the Somali people for independence under UN auspices. During this latter period a number of new collections of hagiographies appeared in printed form, as well as at least one of the manuscripts of the 1920s. At the same time the first known locally compiled secular history of

15 Interviews with Muḥammad al-Hādī, 2 July 1994, and *ḥājjī* Ḥasan Shaykh Muḥammad, 9 October 1994.

the coast, the *Bughyat al-āmāl*, was published, ironically, under the auspices of the Italian Mandate Authority.

Significantly, these two phases of production correspond with periods of crisis among the urban population. The first occurred roughly during the same period that the Italian colonial regime began to exert increasing control over their Somali colony and Benaadiris were losing control of the urban sphere. The second phase took place on the virtual eve of independence when urbanites once again found themselves struggling, this time for a piece of the post-colonial pie in a country which both the UN and Somali nationalists were defining as a pastoral state.

From the Benaadiri perspective these crises posed grave threats to the existence of their community. Having long since lost the ability to physically define their urban boundaries, it appears that the Benaadiris turned to the written word in order to guard their communal frontiers and guarantee their place in a soon to be independent Somalia.

Sharīf °Aydārūs and the creation of ‘History’

Both the hagiographies of the 1920s and those of the 1950s served to delineate Benaadiri communal boundaries.¹⁶ The work under scrutiny here, *sharīf* °Aydārūs b. °Alī’s *Bughyat al-āmāl fī ta’rīkh al-Ṣūmāl*, is of a more secular nature. Its origins are still rather obscure. Published under the auspices of the Italian Mandate Administration in 1954, the book itself provides no indication why it was commissioned by the authorities, why the language of choice was Arabic or why there is no Italian translation. It would appear that °Aydārūs, a businessman, urban communal leader and classically trained scholar of the Islamic sciences, was chosen as a result of his close ties with the Italian authorities as well as his

16 For a discussion of these, see Reese, ‘Patricians’.

erudition.¹⁷

As the title of the work implies, and the brief Italian preface flatly states, the *Bughya* was to be a ‘book on the history of Somalia’.¹⁸ However, even a quick pass through the pages of the text or a rapid glance at the table of contents reveals the clear urban bias of the work. The earliest chapters of °Aydarūs’s work dealing with Somalis concentrate on exclusively urban topics. °Aydarūs provides detailed accounts of town and clan origins, genealogies, and local politics covering well over one hundred of the 291 pages of the book (significantly these also happen to be at the very beginning of the book, ranging from page 30-130). Only between fifty and sixty pages are devoted to rural topics and these are restricted to discussions of clan genealogies and general geography. Again, significantly, these are among the last pages of the book, running from p. 235-87, with a few other odd pages scattered throughout the text. Much of the rest of the work (including the entire first chapter) is devoted to various religious topics. These include the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, the history of the Caliphate as well as the practice of *mawliids* (celebrations of the Prophet’s birth) and Sufism throughout Islamic history and across the Muslim world.

In terms of raw page numbers, °Aydarūs clearly devotes far more space to a discussion of his own urban world than to that of his rural cousins. In addition, he quickly informs the reader that it is the literate, urbane world of the town which is the crucible of Somali history as he writes; ‘this [is a] historical collection which contains the most important events and developments which have occurred to the Somali people. It will not be based on the stories which persist on the tongue about the history of the Somali people ... Rather, it will be based on manuscripts and the writings of travellers

17 °Aydarūs, *Bughya*, ‘Tarjamat al-mu°allif’, *alif-dāl*.

18 *Ibid.*, ‘Prefazione’.

and historians about the history of these people.’¹⁹ With these few words, °Aydarūs in effect declared a hegemony of the written (a primarily urban medium) over the oral. Oral traditions existed only within the realm of ‘story’, connoting frivolity, invention and even falsehood. Historical ‘truth’, he implies, existed only within the written.

With such an ideological bulwark in place, °Aydarūs sought to establish an urban monopoly over the definition of the past and to define the boundaries of not only the urban community but also those of the rural pastoralists through his own particular literate lens. Through the discussion of topics such as town origins, the development of Sufi orders and local urban politics, for example, °Aydarūs carefully delineates the boundaries of the urban coastal community by defining exactly who had a long-standing physical presence or political authority in the towns (and for how long). However, nowhere does he draw these lines as carefully or explicitly as in the area of genealogy, where he undertakes to define not only the lineages and characteristics of urbanites but those of pastoralists as well.

°Aydarūs devotes a great deal of space to the topic of clan genealogies in his discussion of local society. However, while he records the genealogies of both urban and rural clans with equal detail and apparent rigor, he approaches each in a significantly different manner. In his discussion of pastoral genealogies (which occurs in the latter portion of the work, long after his discussion of urban lineages), °Aydarūs prefaces this section with a lengthy ‘declaration’, in which he explains his rationale for devoting space to their ancestry, that is worth quoting at some length:

In this brief section, I have recorded the genealogies of the Somalis and the reasons for their migrations to this region. I have collected these from reliable authorized men [i.e., elders] and from ancient

19 *Ibid.*, 8.

books which have never been printed.

I have taken upon myself the recording of their genealogies because their ancestors and ours propagated together within this African land of Somalia. ... It is my desire to *render definite* their genealogies, providing blessings and teaching them with the science of genealogy, the learning of which is a duty.

... The science of genealogy is that which examines the descent of the tribes and clans of peoples, the succession of sons from fathers and grandfathers and the profusion of branches from the roots of the human tree in such a way that one knows for any given successor from what predecessors they are descended and for a given branch, what was its root. *This knowledge has many theoretical and practical benefits, [as well as] legal, social and cultural and material necessities, too numerous to mention.*

The science of genealogy is not [simply] an ornament for [one attending] literary gatherings where people learn purely to show their recondite knowledge; rather, it is a knowledge both theoretical and practical, because it is necessary in order to establish inheritance, whose provision to those entitled to them depends on establishing the degree of the relationship between the inheritors and the one inherited from. This cannot be, except with knowledge of genealogy.²⁰

From here °Aydarūs proceeds to discuss numerous rural lineages in considerable detail. However, with this statement, °Aydarūs lays claim to being the final arbiter of pastoral descent. Although he notes that his own sources are ‘reliable authorized men’ and ‘ancient manuscripts’, it is he who ‘renders them definite’ through the act of writing. His motive for doing so, he declares, is purely disinterested. He desires, merely, to prevent them from becoming yet another ‘literary ornament’, a fate which awaits most other oral genres, and to bring blessings upon them through the teaching of this noble science ‘the learning of which is a duty’. By emphasizing their place as one of the Islamic sciences, °Aydarūs’s intention is to render them immutable once committed to paper. As such, the rendering of ‘definite’ rural genealogies

20 *Ibid.*, 235. Emphases mine.

made it difficult, if not impossible, for pastoralists to claim an urban connection. The emphasis ʿAydarūs places on the importance of genealogy with regard to inheritance may have been intended to serve a similar function. As genealogy determines the degree of relationship between inheritor and inherited it also determines who has social claims on whom.

However, the codification of such genealogies did not create a complete firewall between urban and rural clans, nor was it probably meant to do so. ʿAydarūs, as he demonstrates through many of his genealogical lists, was well aware that a number of rural clans (such as the Hawiye) had important urban ties while a considerable number of urban clans (the Bendawow, for example) could point to ancestors with pastoral origins. Such links were often important elements in rural-urban commercial relationships that were the lifeblood of the community. ʿAydarūs's goal was not to cut urbanites off from the rest of Somali society but to make them a *distinctive* part of it; an agenda he reveals in his discussion of urban genealogies.

In his preface to rural genealogies, ʿAydarūs concentrates on establishing a basis for the definitive genealogy in an apparent effort to prevent rural clansmen from laying claim to unwarranted urban connections. In his discussion of urban lineages, however, this topic is never even mentioned. Instead, he focuses on what makes a clan a clan. In a section entitled 'The citizens of the clans of Mogadishu' ʿAydarūs puts forth another declaration, this one detailing the various elements that a lineage must possess in order to be considered a true Somali clan.

The provisions of a clan are seven: First, that there must be among them an ʿālim knowledgeable in the Shariʿa with no need to go to another clan. Second, they must have among them intellectuals of some standing. Third, that there must be someone of sufficient wealth to pay reparations of the clan [bloodmoney] quickly if they need to do so. Fourth, that they must be peoples of trade and occu-

pations. Fifth, there must be among them a doctor who can treat the people. Six, there must be a spokesman among them to respond to [provocations] by other clans. Seven, they must have among them a brave and intrepid [leader].

If a clan does not have these seven it has a defect. And there are four other things a clan may have which bring it adornment and honour. First, that there is among them conformity and unity. Second, their secrets must be kept amongst them, and they do not reveal them to others. Third, there is amongst them zeal in religious and worldly affairs. And fourth, their genealogy leads to a single ancestor and they live within a single boundary.²¹

°Aydarūs indicates that these are the elements that a lineage requires in order to be an urban clan. Indeed, if they are found to lack one of the first seven they are ‘with defect’. However, his agenda is not simply to isolate urbanites from pastoral society. Certainly, he cites a number of elements which distinguish urbanites from their rural cousins. Stipulations 4: that they must be a people of trades and occupations, and 5: that there must be among them a doctor who can treat the people, are attributes found commonly only among urban clans. Others, however, are elements common to all clans, rural or urban, such as 1, 3, 6 and 7 relating to learning, bloodwealth, and leadership respectively.

°Aydarūs’s agenda here is not difficult to discern. Rather than attempting to separate urban society from the pastoral majority, his goal is to demonstrate the place of urban society as an integral, but distinctive, segment of Somali society. As noted earlier, urban Somalis traditionally followed a pattern of maintaining close links with the rural community, but at the same time closely guarding their own spatial and social boundaries. Here we see an example of the same pattern, only in a literate format. Within his discussion °Aydarūs indicates that in many important ways, the social structure of urbanites is the same as their more numerous rural

21 °Aydarūs, *Bughya*, 73.

neighbours (for example, they both possess Islamic learning, pay bloodwealth, and are represented by articulate spokesmen and brave leaders). However, he gives equal weight to factors that are unique to Benaadiri clans including the following of professions and the practice of ‘medicine’. (Stipulation 2: each clan must have among them intellectuals, may also be meant to distinguish urbanite learning and scholarship from what were often regarded as less sophisticated and pseudo-magical practices found in the interior).

Finally, he notes that clans are defined not only by their genealogical unity but also certain additional bonds. Clans that present a united front, keep their ‘secrets’ to themselves, ‘... live within a single boundary’, attain adornment and honour. Thus, for ʿAydārūs a true clan possesses not only genealogical conformity but also a certain communal unity that must be closely guarded. By stressing elements such as these, ʿAydārūs is able to put forward the argument that the people of the Benaadir are fully members of Somali society, but occupying their own unique position within the wider culture.

ʿAydārūs and the umma ideal

But what about the Islamic chapters mentioned above? At first glance it might be tempting to dismiss these sections as extraneous appendages attached to the text by a classically trained scholar for the sake of form. Certainly, there are numerous examples of classical Arabic texts which take a universal approach to history.²² In the case of the *Bughya*, however, the purpose of such chapters is more than decorative. Their presence is probably meant to place Somali history within the context of sacred history and providing ʿAydārūs with yet another way to connect urban and rural

22 The works of Ibn Khaldūn and al-Ṭabarī, for example.

Somalis.

°Aydarūs, as we have seen, introduces his work as a ‘history of the Somali people’. However, the main body of the text begins not with a discussion of Somali origins but with a narrative history of the Islamic world. This starts with a brief timeline of the most important prophets leading up to the birth of Muḥammad. He begins, of course, with Adam, who he notes lived ‘many centuries’ before ‘our Prophet Muḥammad’,²³ and proceeds through the most notable prophets including Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, the last to emerge before the Seal of the prophets, Muḥammad. Following this °Aydarūs embarks on a narrative of the life and mission of the Prophet and a summarized history of the expansion of Islam and establishment of the Caliphate or Muslim political empire in the centuries following his death. In addition, he makes honourable mention of other important Islamic states, including the Ayyubids of Egypt and the rise of the Ottomans. This discussion extends over the first thirty pages of text, after which he moves on to an extended discussion of local history from the founding of the coastal towns through the colonial period.

However, °Aydarūs’s references to the wider Islamic world do not end here. Some 120 pages later (p. 152), he returns to a consideration of the larger Muslim community when he devotes fifty pages to a discussion of *mawlid* celebrations in various Muslim countries and during different eras of Islamic history. This is followed by a brief examination of the roots of Sufism and a narrative of its development in late nineteenth-century Somalia. With the exception of this last topic, all of these chapters are largely straight-forward narratives with virtually no commentary to tie them to other parts of the text.

By prefacing his discussion of local history with a lengthy outline of Islamic history, °Aydarūs sets the Somali

23 °Aydarūs, *Bughya*, 4.

past solidly within the context of the sacred past. For him, Somali history is defined by, and grows out of, the Islamic past and cannot exist outside of that paradigm. A similar agenda may be discerned with his inclusion of descriptions of *mawliids* and Sufism in the wider Muslim world. By devoting considerable space to the practice of rituals and institutions both of which hold a prominent place in Somali society, °Aydarūs again reinforces their connection to the *umma*. In the case of Sufism his discussion of Somali mysticism is presented (like his discussion of local history) as an extension of the historical development of Sufi practice in general. His discussion of *mawliids* may be cast in a similar light. While he does not discuss the practice of *mawliids* among Somalis, its celebration was an important part of the religious calendar of most Muslim communities throughout East Africa. Thus, his discussion of this practice in the rest of the Muslim world seems designed to demonstrate to Somalis that their own practice was in line with that of their co-religionists throughout the world.

It might be tempting to dismiss these chapters as literary window-dressing included by the author as a display of his own piety. It appears, however, that °Aydarūs uses these Islamic chapters towards the same ends as those on local genealogy; to draw the lines of community. As mentioned, °Aydarūs uses the science of genealogy to demonstrate that while urbanites and rural individuals were distinct from one another in important ways, they were essentially Somali. °Aydarūs uses Islamic topics to emphasize an even greater common heritage, their membership in the Muslim *umma* or community of believers. This, it can be argued, may have been for °Aydarūs the most important communal connection of all. Somalis were linked not only by common blood and heritage but also by the greater community of a common faith.

Concluding remarks

In many ways, °Aydarūs's attempts to define the urban-rural relationship merely replicates a pattern of cultural interaction and definition that had long characterized urban-rural relations. As a result of the realities of colonial occupation, however, °Aydarūs and others were forced to adopt a new medium for mediating and defining rural-urban associations. Through the codification of genealogy they sought to seal previously porous communal boundaries but without divorcing themselves from the Somali whole. Since they could no longer define these boundaries physically, they chose to do so intellectually.

The need to define themselves as a distinct but integral part of the so-called Somali nation became particularly acute in the 1950s with the immediate prospect of independence. In order to carve out a piece of the post-colonial pie, Benaadiris needed to lay claim to solid Somali credentials in a state that was being increasingly identified as pastoral. However, °Aydarūs was not satisfied with appealing to a common Somali heritage. Instead, he also sought to evoke a stronger bond, that of their common membership in the Islamic community, in his quest to secure the place of urbanites in the Somali state.