Dispute over Islamic Funeral Rites in Mozambique

*A Demolidora dos Prazeres* by Shaykh Aminuddin Mohamad

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*A Demolidora dos Prazeres* (Port., ‘A Demolisher of the Pleasures’), a book by a Mozambican *‘alim* (Ar., sing., pl. *‘ulama*, an Islamic scholar), Shaykh Aminuddin Mohamad Ibrahimo, deals with the Islamic percepts of death and the life in hereafter. Its scope, however, goes beyond that, as it also addresses controversial issues of euthanasia (p. 31), family planning, including abortion (p. 34), homosexuality (pp. 72-73, 274), suicide (pp. 115-17), collective burials (in war, pp. 132-33), etc. This paper mainly focuses on Shaykh Aminuddin’s interpretations of the Islamic funeral rites with reference to the historical and socio-cultural contexts of Mozambican Muslims. Islamic funeral rites have been contentious issues in Mozambique since the early twentieth century. Due to controversy over funeral rites some Muslims have avoided or ignored other Muslims’ funerals, even when close friends or relatives. These debates are the most visible and shocking manifestations of the underlying processes of reform within Mozambican Islam. That is why Shaykh Aminuddin Muhammad’s book has high social relevance in Mozambique.

Note on Shaykh Aminuddin Mohamad Ibrahimo

Shaykh Aminuddin Mohamad is a prominent Islamic scholar of Mozambique, who published a total of 13 books including a *sina* (Ar., ‘biography’ or ‘history’) of the Prophet Muhammad. He has also published articles on a
weekly basis in newspapers such as Savana, Zambezie and Diario de Moçam-
bique. In Mozambique, where Islamic religious authority is widely dispersed
and Islamic religious literature in local languages or Portuguese is very scarce,
the fact that Shaykh Aminuddin writes in Portuguese is acutely important.

During 1993 and 1994, Shaykh Aminuddin held weekly television pro-
gams. He has also established Islamic libraries in several mosques and mad-
ressas, including at the Malhangalene Mosque (Biblioteca Fiazul Islam), the
Anuaril Islam Mosque (Biblioteca Bait ul-Hikmah) and an Islamic Publishing
House with the financial support from the Bilal Mission of Pakistan. He
propagates modern Islamic education and has established several madrassas
of a new kind, incorporating formal secular curricula along with the Islamic
one. Some of these madrassas enjoy support from the Al-Azhar University in
Egypt that regularly sends teachers of Arabic language. This is the case with
an Islamic centre called Hamza founded in 1996 in Matola city near Maputo
under the direct control of Shaykh Aminuddin. It includes a mosque, a ma-
drassa and a boarding school for boys.

Shaykh Aminuddin is perhaps best described as an Islamist, a local rep-
resentative of the global phenomenon. Similar to other Islamists elsewhere
in Africa, he is known as 'Wabhabi', particularly among the members of the
turq (Ar., pl., sing. tariqa, 'Sufi Orders'). As other Islamists, he outlines the
overwhelming importance of the Shari'a, upholds a strict literalist interpreta-
tion of the Qur'an and Hadith, and takes the life of the Prophet Muhammad
and his Companions (Sahaba) as an ideal example for a Muslim society to
follow. He also calls for the 'purification' of Mozambican Islam from the al-
leged 'jabiliya' (Ar., 'ignorance') practices and perceptions, especially those re-
lated to local African cultures and Sufism, besides denouncing a 'blind' imitation
of Western lifestyles.

Shaykh Aminuddin Mohamad was born into a religious family in Res-
sano Garcia, a town not far from the capital city, Maputo. His father was an
Indian and his mother a local woman of a mixed-race background. By the
age of 13, he was sent to study at the Jamiiya al-Ulum al-Islamiyya college in
Karachi with the sponsorship of a South African Muslim organization. Later
he received a scholarship to study at the Qur'an Faculty of Medina Univer-
sity. His training in Saudi Arabia, the country dominated by the Wabhabi
doctrine and ideology, shaped and sustained his Islamist thinking.

Between 1980 and 1985, Shaykh Aminuddin worked as a religious ad-
viser to the Islamic Community of Lisbon (Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa) in