



**DIIS · DANISH INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**  
STRANDGADE 56 · 1401 COPENHAGEN K · DENMARK  
TEL +45 32 69 87 87 · [diis@diis.dk](mailto:diis@diis.dk) · [www.diis.dk](http://www.diis.dk)

**‘THESE YOUNG MEN SHOW NO RESPECT  
FOR LOCAL CUSTOMS’**

GLOBALISATION, YOUTH AND ISLAMIC REVIVAL  
IN ZANZIBAR

Simon Turner

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Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS

Strandgade 56, DK-1401 Copenhagen, Denmark

Ph: +45 32 69 87 87

Fax: +45 32 69 87 00

E-mails: [diis@diis.dk](mailto:diis@diis.dk)

Web: [www.diis.dk](http://www.diis.dk)

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**Simon Turner**, senior researcher, is head of the Migration unit, DIIS

# Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	4
<b>Zanzibar between Islamic Cosmopolitanism and Socialist Parochialism</b> .....	5
<b>Political Liberalisation and Islamic Revival</b> .....	8
<b>The Importance of Knowledge</b> .....	14
<b>Returning Youth</b> .....	15
<b>The Tablighi Jamaat Movement</b> .....	20
‘Keep it simple’ – Tablighi as non-intellectual.....	22
‘We are not interested in politics’ – religion and politics among the Tablighis.....	24
<b>Politics and Islam</b> .....	26
<b>Conclusion – Islam as Critique</b> .....	27
<b>References</b> .....	31

## Abstract

In recent years there has been a revival of Islam in Zanzibar, with heated debates about the nature of Islam and its role in society (Lodhi and Westerlund 1997, Gilsaa 2006). While Islam played a central role in society until independence in 1963, it was effectively removed from the public sphere by the socialist government after independence. Since the 1980s, however, Islam has again become a central issue in the public sphere, albeit in new forms. Like elsewhere in Africa, local forms of Islam are being challenged by a number of new reformist and revivalist kinds of Islam, influenced to some degree by a global Islamic revival, but shaped by the particular, local histories and politics. This has caused some friction – especially as the regime in place seeks to manipulate these tensions for political benefit. However, as it will be argued in this paper, the kind of Islamic revival taking place in Zanzibar is far from radical or violent. In fact, Islamic revivalists often coin their critique of the state in terms of human rights and good governance and provide an alternative modernity that at once challenges and articulates with secular, liberal forms of modernity. Hence, the present paper explores how global trends in Islam – but also global discourses on Human Rights and Good Governance – influence the current modes of Islamic revival in Zanzibar.

This paper explores the nature of Islamic revival in Zanzibar, its emergence and some of the consequences that this has had on society. It explores how global trends in Islam – helped along by information technology and high-speed travel – have played a role in these changes and have reconfigured the relationship between generations, between state and citizens and between religion and politics. Central to these changes are the young men who study in Arab states and return with new perceptions of Islam. But also other semi-educated youth can now access new, global knowledge about Islam via satellite TV, DVDs, booklets and the internet. In this sense, Islam becomes simultaneously globalized and individualised, challenging the religious authority of the traditional *sheiks* who used to have monopoly on interpreting Islam. The paper explores the ways in which the political and religious authorities react to these changes and how the young men in turn manoeuvre in this space, trying to avoid the label ‘fundamentalist’. After an analysis of the emergence of Islamic revivalism in Zanzibar, the paper explores the specific influence of returning youth. Finally it analyses more in depth the world views of a certain Islamic movement; the Tablighi Jamaat. While the focus of the paper is on local transformations, it is equally important to place these processes in the light of global trends in Islam that have strongly influenced the debate in Zanzibar and gained a local flavour.

## Zanzibar between Islamic Cosmopolitanism and Socialist Parochialism

The recent Islamic revival in Zanzibar reflects processes of religion entering the public sphere around the globe – in particular reformist, Islamic movements and Evangelical Christian churches – and may in this sense be analysed as a global phenomenon (cf. Westerlund 1996, Hunswick 1997). However, it also reflects very local and particular developments, shaped by the specific politics and history of this small island state. Islamic revivalism draws on transnational ideologies and identities, linking up with global trends, particularly evident in a place like Zanzibar with its long history of transnational trade, but it also draws on antagonisms that are particular to Tanzania, and is linked to a growing Islamism in Mainland Tanzania (Tambila and Rubanza 2006). These two aspects lead to the particularity of Zanzibari Islamic revivalism, linking national politics to narratives of its own cosmopolitan past.

Until 1964 Zanzibar was a cosmopolitan melting pot of races, cultures and faiths, although by far the majority were Muslim. Due to a long history of trade along the African east coast and across the Indian Ocean, the population was a cultural and racial mixture of immigrants from Africa, Arab countries, India, Mauritius and the Comoros. The majority were Sunni with small communities of Ismailis (mostly of Indian descent) and Ibadhis (mostly of Omani origin). There was a flourishing Islamic scholarly debate on the island, where various sheikhs who had travelled abroad published translations of the Qur'an in Swahili and established various 'schools' of thought.

The colonial government did not prevent these activities; on the contrary it provided scholarships for young Zanzibari men to study Islam in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Kenya and Egypt and return home to teach, for instance at the Muslim Academy. Arabic language and religious subjects had been fixed curricula since 1908, and the Zanzibar Muslim Academy was established in 1952. In accordance with British indirect rule, the colonial government integrated the returning Muslim scholars in the colonial administration – thereby avoiding them being marginalised and antagonised. Pre-independence Zanzibar is today by many Zanzibaris perceived as the 'Golden Age'; an age when people were not only stronger in their faith but also more learned, an age when Zanzibar produced great Islamic scholars and was at the centre of a great East African Muslim tradition. This picture coincides with a picture of Zanzibar as a trading capital of the Indian Ocean – part of a cosmopolitan tradition – and is opposed to the later period of scholarly and economic decline when Zanzibar became an insignificant appendix to a poor, underdeveloped African

nation – the periphery of the periphery. According to this image of the Golden Age, Islam in Zanzibar in those days was at the same time more pure and more tolerant.

Independence and the union with Tanganyika saw the end to this era. The bloody 1964 revolution was heavily founded on a secular, populist, ‘salt of the earth’ ideology, appealing especially to young marginalized youth who had migrated from the mainland to Zanzibar Town’s suburbs (Burgess 1999; 32). Playing on notes of autochthony and Pan-African socialism, the revolution targeted the elite, equating Arabs with slave traders, foreign invaders and capitalist exploiters (Burgess 1999; 36, Heilmann and Kaiser 2002; 702). This anti-Arab rhetoric and violence caused many Arabs and Islamic scholars to flee the country to Oman and to the West (Bakari 2001). With the Union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar shortly after independence in 1964, Zanzibar and the rest of Tanzania under the leadership of the charismatic Julius Nyerere followed the highly modernist and developmentalist ideology of the particular ‘African socialism’, Ujamaa. In this ideology there was not much space for religion. Not only was the state secular; it saw religion as an obstacle to socialist development (Nyerere 1968, quoted in Liviga and Tumbo-Masabo 2006; 157).

Although clearly anti-Arab and anti-religious, the revolutionary ideology of the socialist leadership would draw on so-called ‘traditional African and Islamic values’ in order to create new national citizens – freed from Western imperialism. As Burgess (2002) shows, this nation-building project (*kujenga Taifa* in Swahili) involved a Fanonist cultural revolution that sought to impose an aesthetics of modesty, self-discipline and sacrifice for the common good of the nation, opposing what was portrayed as a decadent, imperialist consumer culture. In this sense, although the rhetoric of the newly independent Zanzibar government was explicitly anti-Arab and anti-religious, it drew on Islamic symbols as signs of modesty and piousness and as a signifier of an authentic, African culture (Burgess 2002). The revolutionary government has in other words been in a tension similar to the tensions of many post-colonial nation-building projects, namely between a hyper-modernist and developmentalist call to cut away dead wood and break with the shackles of tradition on the one hand, and on the other hand seeking the authentic ‘African’ and pre-colonial identity of the people. In the Zanzibar case, this resulted in a paradoxical position in relation to Islam. The main result, however, I would argue, was that Islam was reduced to an artefact, a signifier without any meaning. Islam was left without substance and only occasionally conjured up as part of a national identity – for instance when arguing why women should not wear miniskirts.

While much of the island's secular and Islamic educated elite left the country, those sheiks and Islamic scholars who remained, kept a low profile, and only few new Islamic scholars were educated. Arabic and Islam were removed from the curricula, the Muslim Academy was closed and scholars were no longer sent abroad to study Islam. In the following years, only the conservative Sufi sheikhs were able to continue their practices. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed account of Sufism which has many branches and represents very different kinds of Islamic practice in different parts of the world. However, in the Zanzibar case – as in much of sub-Saharan Africa – Sufism has been applauded by Western scholars for its ability to cohabit with and adapt to local, African cultural practices and beliefs (cf Westerlund and Rosander 1997). Sufism is perceived by outsiders as more tolerant because it accepts singing and dancing and even drinking. It is generally more spiritual, emphasising magic, mysticism and worship of saints.

What is important to note in this connection, is the fact that it was not necessary to understand Arabic or to be able to interpret the Qur'an in order to follow the Sufi orders. In line with its mysticism, one simply had to follow the prescriptions of the sheikhs. Therefore, the children who attended *madrasabs* (Islamic religious school, organised in Zanzibar by the local mosques) were simply taught to recite the Qur'an without necessarily understanding a word of it. Sufism posed an only modest threat to the socialist regime's secular project because it dealt mainly with the other-worldly aspects of life. This period is perceived by many Zanzibaris today as a 'dark period' in their history. Not only was it an attack on Islam – more importantly it is seen as an assault on 'knowledge' and cosmopolitanism. For as much as Zanzibar national identity is Muslim, it is also built on an idea of being part of a larger Swahili culture that is open to the world in terms of travel, trade and intellectual exchange. With Ujamaa and the union with Tanganyika Zanzibaris believe that they were turning their backs on the world.

Zanzibaris – 98% being Muslim – sensed that the 'so-called secular' Union government was actually favouring Christians and marginalising Muslims (Tambila and Rubanza 2006, Bakari and Ndumbaro 2006; 345). While Tanzania officially was secular, there has been a widespread perception among Zanzibaris that especially the Catholic Church was favoured by the socialist government, because Julius Nyerere was Catholic himself.<sup>1</sup> They feel that what used to be a thriving island – due to its regional commercial activities – was now marginalised by the top-steered developmental state. In other words, the secular government was perceived to be favouring

<sup>1</sup> According to Heilmann and Kaiser, Muslims were the main force in Tanzania's early nationalist movement. There is therefore a strong sense of betrayal among Muslims who believe that they helped the Christians into power and were not rewarded equally (Heilmann and Kaiser 2002; 701).

mainland Tanzania over Zanzibar and Christians over Muslims in its economic development policies. This perception is still widespread in Zanzibar.

## Political Liberalisation and Islamic Revival

With the demise of Ujamaa, Tanzania's economy was gradually liberalised and democratic reforms introduced, and in the early 1980s (with Ali Hassan Mwinyi as president) religion was again allowed in the public sphere. This resulted in a mushrooming of Islamic activities in all spheres of life. Islamic revival can be witnessed in a number of ways: Islamic NGOs, bookshops, schools, universities, prayer groups, *da'wa*<sup>2</sup> groups, etc. have flourished over the past ten years. On the one hand, the new political environment made space for these activities. On the other hand, Islamic revival was part of 'opening up' and 'reconnecting' with the Muslim world after years of isolation. Once again, young men were given scholarships to study in Medina, Khartoum and elsewhere. Mostly these scholarships were funded by wealthy individuals from the Gulf States, who also funded mosques, *madrasabs*, health clinics, secondary schools, teachers' training colleges and universities in Zanzibar.<sup>3</sup> Two of Zanzibar's three universities are thus Islamic universities, funded by Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti individuals, respectively, and manned by teachers from Sudan, Pakistan and other East African countries. Vast amounts of literature, tapes, CDs and DVDs in Arabic, English and Swahili are widely available in bookstores, outside mosques after Friday prayer and for sale on the streets. The middle classes travel, not just to study in Medina, but also to study in Britain or on *dawa* to the rest of East Africa, etc. Finally, there is an abundance of Islamic channels on satellite TV, while the internet is flowing over with interpretations of the Qur'an. In other words, capital, people, knowledge and ideas circulate at increasing levels, which also means that knowledge of the Qur'an and other holy writings is increasing rapidly in multiple ways.

Central to Islamic movements is an idea of purifying Islam. While Islamic revivalism in mainland Tanzania is directed against the Christians (Tambila and Rubanza 2006), in Zanzibar it is directed

<sup>2</sup> *Da'wa*: the duty to inform others about Islam. For more explanation, see the section on Tabligh Jama'at

<sup>3</sup> According to Haynes, Saudi Arabia spends 1 million dollars a year on building mosques, *madrasabs* and Islamic centres in Tanzania (Haynes 2005, 1333)



against Muslims who are *munafik* – ‘Muslims by name only’ – and against the mysticism of Sufism. It is about purifying Islam from within in order to strengthen it against threats from the outside.

By the term ‘revivalist’ I am covering a number of tendencies towards strengthening Islamic thought, practice and belief in Zanzibar – something that is part of a global tendency. This tendency is not necessarily linked to any particular organisations, neither does it express any particular sect. In fact there is an expressed wish among revivalists to move beyond sect and simply be ‘Muslims’ (see also Metcalf 2003) rather than Hanafi, Hanbali, Shafi or Maliki,<sup>4</sup> Sufi or Wahabi. Their point is that the individual must find a direct link with God and behave accordingly – rather than simply follow the prescribed rituals and guidelines of the spiritual leaders. This said, they are all Sunni and highly critical towards practises of the Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqas*) that became popular in East Africa in the late 19th and early 20th century<sup>5</sup> (cf Loimeier 2003, Lodhi & Westerlund 1997).

Being post-sectarian and mostly concerned with individual faith, Islamic revivalism is more a movement than an organisation. Furthermore, it is a heterogeneous movement that covers a number of tendencies and social groups, from the Islamic scholars who have studied Islam for up to ten years in Medina, Pakistan or Sudan to lower middle-class businessmen with only basic education, from fervent young men to comfortable family fathers. Likewise their understanding of Islam, and in particular their perception of how to strengthen Islam in society, varies significantly. While some believe in putting pressure on the authorities in order to change the conditions for religious practice, others believe in individual salvation. While some believe that Islam should be purified through intellectual debate, others emphasise the purity of the heart. In the following, I try to discern some broad tendencies by presenting briefly the Ansar Sunnah before exploring more in-depth the Tablighi Jamaat movement, drawing on my own fieldwork experiences among members of this group.

The Ansar Sunnah – not to be confused with Jamaat Ansar al Sunna based in Iraq – means the ‘group of defenders/saviours/companions of the Sunnah’, and its main objective is a return to the original sources of Islam, the Qur’an and the Sunnah. In this sense the followers of the movement are keen to cleanse Islam of the impure practices of local *tariqas* (Sufi brotherhoods) –

<sup>4</sup> The four schools of thought, *madh’hab*, named after four schools of the *hadith* (*muhadithun*). The Shafi school of thought is the most widespread in Zanzibar and the rest of East Africa, while Hanbalis are mostly concentrated in Saudi Arabia (interview, Sunkar 20.11.2006).

<sup>5</sup> In Zanzibar the most common brotherhood is the Qadiriyya.

the so-called *bidha*, such as singing and dancing (Gilsaa 2006). They oppose *ziara* (the practice of visiting the sheikhs' graves), *tawasud* (blessing saints in prayer), *khitma* (praying for the dead after three days) and other rituals that express worship of human beings and signify esoteric/mystical relations with the divine (interview, Jabir 12.11.2006). They are strongly against *moulid* (the celebration of Muhammed's birthday) – something that traditionally has been a big extravagant affair in Zanzibar, including music, dance and even alcohol (interview Imam Ali, Kibweni Mosque, Nov. 2006). Apart from being against music, dance and alcohol, the Ansar Sunnah claim that Muhammed was only a prophet and should therefore not be worshipped like a God.

When discussing Ansar Sunnah with Zanzibaris of various convictions, I was given very different answers as to what the movement is. Some claim that they are Wahabis, controlled by scholars who have returned from studies in Saudi Arabia. Others claim that they are not Wahabis but prefer the term Salafiyah (the first generation after the prophet). Rarely would people therefore claim to be Ansar Sunnah and would only refer to the movement in third person, making it difficult to assess the size of Ansar Sunnah and to know exactly from where it draws its support. Because it is more of a broad movement rather than an organisation, there is no head office and no official leader in Zanzibar.<sup>6</sup>

What is the appeal of Islamic revival to ordinary Zanzibaris and which groups support this movement? From my observations it appears that it is particularly popular among the urban and semi-urban, semi-educated youth. Kibweni mosque in the northern outskirts of Zanzibar town is known to express Ansar Sunnah opinion and is typical of this new semi-urban class. Being uprooted from their rural areas, where the population to a large extent still follows the traditional Sufi customs, while still not quite a part of the settled, urban elite, these young men in the suburbs have great expectations and no means of fulfilling them. They are beyond the control of the traditional sheiks and in search of new identities. These suburbs are ideal recruitment areas for movements like Ansar Sunnah.

According to Gilsaa (2006), a number of Islamic organisations are unofficially associated with Ansar Sunnah. JUMAZA (Jumuiya ya Maimamu Zanzibar: The Council of Imams in Zanzibar), established in 2001, brings together a number of revivalist movements such as Ansar Sunnah,

<sup>6</sup> Gilsaa explores the genealogies of Islamic scholars in Zanzibar and claims that the undisputed spiritual leader of Ansar Sunnah is Sheikh Nassor Bachoo (Gilsaa 2006).

Uamsho, Tablighi Jamaat and various Islamic NGOs. Uamsho (literally: ‘awareness’<sup>7</sup>) was established in Zanzibar in the late 1990s and was registered as an NGO in 2002. Uamsho claims to be struggling for Muslim unity and for Muslim rights. Uamsho began giving public lectures on Islam as a response to an upsurge in evangelical Christian open air lectures (interview assistant secretary, Uamsho, 06.11.2006. See also Bakari and Ndumbaro 2006). Later, the organisation became concerned with Muslim rights and began advising individuals about their rights, while simultaneously putting considerable pressure on the authorities (interview assistant secretary, Uamsho, 06.11.2006). Uamsho is very vocal in its criticism of the government, and several leading members have been detained on several occasions. Interestingly, they employ a language of Human Rights and Good Governance in their critique of the authorities. Firstly, they believe that the authorities are intervening in religious affairs and hence contravening the constitution (article 19) that explicitly guarantees the freedom of religion and stipulates that the government should not intervene in matters of worship (interview Salum Toufiq, 06.11.2006). Secondly, they accuse the government of being corrupt and nepotistic. The moral decline in the country is due to this mismanagement and corruption, they claim, and although there are laws in place to regulate alcohol, dress codes (especially the scantily clad tourists are seen as a problem), the corrupt government does not enforce them.

As Burgess demonstrates, the revolutionary government in the 1960s and 1970s strictly regulated clothing – right down to the width of ‘bell bottom’ jeans, arresting young men who wore trousers that exceeded 16 inches in diameter (Burgess 2002; 310). In 1973 the government passed a decree as a ‘law to guard and respect the manners of the nations’ (quoted in Burgess 2002; 308). With economic liberalisation and an expanding tourist industry, the authorities no longer uphold their own strict laws on moral, pious behaviour in the name of socialist nation building. Instead, Islamic groups are taking over the role of upholding moral standards and resisting Western decadence and cultural decay. Interestingly, they do so by on the one hand drawing on notions of traditional Islamic virtues while on the other hand using the language of rights, good governance and the rule of law, critiquing the government for breaking its own laws. Uamsho represents, in other words, a modern, reformist Islam that is beyond sect struggling for the rights of Muslims, and drawing on liberal concepts of rights and freedom of religion.

<sup>7</sup> The official name is JUMIKI (Jumuiya ya Uamsho na Mihadhara ya Kiislamu: The organisation for Islamic awareness and propagation).

Various Western think tanks and intelligence services have accused Uamsho of supporting terrorist attacks against the tourist industry in Zanzibar. Paradoxically, this has had the unintended effect of actually strengthening the organisation vis-à-vis the authorities, since several embassies, including the British, American and Danish, have sent visitors to the organisation. The Uamsho leadership is visibly proud of these contacts and now claims to have good relationships with these countries and actually uses this as a claim to legitimacy in its struggle against the government, that can no longer dismiss Uamsho as a fundamentalist, fanatic fringe group (interview Uamsho, November 2006).<sup>8</sup>

Ansar Sunnah claims to represent a 'pure' Islam that is beyond 'sect' and the historical damages of human 'innovation'. According to my findings, however, this attitude goes for a much broader Islamic revival in Zanzibar, and is shared by a large number of Zanzibaris who would never call themselves Ansar Sunnah. Some take an intellectual approach, like Ansar Sunnah, and rely on substantial knowledge of the holy books. Others are more populist and have only rudimentary knowledge of the Qu'ran and the most popular *hadiths*<sup>9</sup>. Some want to reform politics in order to make room for religion, while others believe that Muslims should concentrate on their faith – and only then will they deserve political power. In fact, many revivalist Muslims are critical towards Ansar Sunnah, which they perceive as too closely linked to Salafism, Hanbalism and Wahabism, and hence to be sectarian and fundamentalist. There are, in other words, a number of Muslims in Zanzibar who want to purify and strengthen Islam but who reject the very uncompromising stance of some of the Salafists in the Ansar Sunnah. Whether Wahabism is actually a force to be reckoned with in Zanzibar, is hard to tell. On the one hand, not many people would openly admit to supporting such a movement. On the other hand, the Mufti's office (representing the official state religion) is keen to portray any Islamic revivalism as 'fundamentalist' or 'Wahabist'. It might, therefore, be more fruitful to see Islamic revivalism and reformist movements as a broad spectre of religious ideologies and practices. The terms Wahabi, Salafi and Hanbali have become loaded signifiers that do not necessarily characterise a specific kind of Islam but rather are inserted into political chains of equivalence in order to discredit political adversaries.

Illustrating how recent liberalisation has caused new dynamics and conflict in Islamic authority in Zanzibar – creating tension between the traditional sheikhs and the new Islamists – is the spotting of the moon at Ramadan. In short, the question is whether to break the fast when the new

<sup>8</sup> See also statement at [http://www.zanzinet.org/events/vote2005/ripoti\\_uamsho.html](http://www.zanzinet.org/events/vote2005/ripoti_uamsho.html)).

<sup>9</sup> Oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.

moon has been spotted in Mecca or when it has been spotted in Zanzibar. The argument for the former is that Muslims belong to a global *ummah*<sup>10</sup> and therefore should follow the same rituals all over the world. The argument for the latter is that the Muslims in Zanzibar should not be dictated by Mecca – and that it is the moon itself that defines the breaking of the fast. The proponents of the ‘local moon’ believe that what is claimed to represent a global *ummah*, in fact represents Saudi (and hence Wahabi) dominance. Although the issue may seem banal, it plays into important issues of religious authority and issues of local versus global control. Obviously, the revivalists who are following the moon in Mecca, are challenging the public authority of the local sheikhs. They are also challenging the state, seeing as the Mufti – appointed by the President and very much perceived to be the government’s man<sup>11</sup> – decided to side with the local version. The conflict culminated in 2005 when security forces entered the mosques that were following the ‘Saudi moon’ and used teargas to disperse the crowds (interview Toufiq 06.11.2006).

The issue of spotting the moon and breaking the fast illustrates a number of larger issues concerning the role of Islam in society and the links between religious and political authority. The Mufti’s office is concerned to contain the influence of what is perceived to be radical Wahabi youth. The secretary of the Mufti’s office explained to me that these ‘youth’ were in fact not religious at all and were hiding their political agendas in a religious cloak (interview 09.11.2006). Some perceive these Wahabis not as pious Muslims – as they claim themselves to be – but rather as the instruments of a Saudi Arabian political project to dominate the Muslim world (interview Njozi 23.11.2006). On the other hand, Muslim organisations such as Uamsho and JUMAZA as well as Human Rights organisations such as Zanzibar Law Society believe that the government is breaking article 19 in the constitution, which secures the freedom of religion and stipulates that matters of worship are an individual choice in which the government should not interfere (interview Toufiq 06.11.2006). Also many Muslims, who follow the Zanzibar moon, feel that the government should not intervene when some mosques choose to celebrate *Idd ul Fitr* (marking the end of the Ramadan) another day. According to my interviews with actors from both sides,

<sup>10</sup> Meaning the global community of believers.

<sup>11</sup> According to the *Mufti* act, decree no 9 (2001), the *Mufti* is appointed by the president and is in charge of Muslim affairs. This is seen by critics as unconstitutional, because the constitution guarantees freedom of worship.

things seem to have calmed down in the last year or so, and both sides appear to have found a *modus vivendi* where they do not provoke each other too much.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, Islamic revival is driven by younger men, who have been exposed to new ways of interpreting Islam. These ideas clash with accepted wisdoms among the established clergy who are interested in maintaining status quo, and who see these new trends as a threat to their authority. This conflict is then coined in terms of local, authentic religious practices versus global, foreign practices and in terms of the youth no longer respecting customs. The problem for the established religious authorities is that they can no longer monopolise the field of interpretation, because young Zanzibaris are increasingly being exposed to new and competing knowledge.

## The Importance of Knowledge

Education is central to Islamic revival in Zanzibar.<sup>13</sup> Whereas people used to simply recite the Qur'an in *madrasabs*, many now know Arabic and are able to interpret the texts and reflect on their meaning. Similarly, large amounts of texts are being written in English or Swahili or translated from Arabic into these languages. Apart from translating texts into Swahili, reformist Muslims are strongly engaged in creating educational opportunities at all levels in Zanzibar – from *madrasabs* to vocational training centres and universities, often funded by individuals from the Gulf States or Libya. While the focus on education is in part to seek better knowledge of Islam and become a better Muslim, it also provides more mundane opportunities for ordinary Zanzibaris. Better *madrasah* teaching is attractive to the lower middle classes who want their children to perform well at school, but who cannot afford private tuition. In Zanzibar, where the teaching in traditional mosques is confined to reciting the Qur'an and the quality of teaching in state schools is equally poor, reformist *madrasabs* provide an opportunity to learn other subjects like mathematics, history and Arabic. The best education you can get in Zanzibar – whether

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the secretary of the Mufti's office claims that he used 'scientific proof' to solve the problem. In this manner, it is science that gives him authority and not the Qur'an or his status within the clergy. I found a general tendency to compare Islam and science in order to prove the relevance of Islam. However, in doing so, they have already submitted to the paradigm of science.

<sup>13</sup> This might be a general, global characteristic of revivalist Islam, but it also draws on local perceptions of 'the Golden Days' of Zanzibar as a centre for scholarly debate.

secular or religious – is at one of the two Islamic universities, Tunguu and Chukwani, established in the past five years with funds from Kuwaiti and Saudi individuals. Here, even students who are studying business administration and other secular subjects, also follow compulsory, supplementary courses in Islamic economics, Islamic law, etc.

This process of increased knowledge in society about Islam has led to an individualization of religion, challenging the authority of the elder sheiks and traditional ways of practicing Islam. As Loimeier (2003) points out, the process resembles to a high degree the process of Protestantism in Renaissance Europe; removing divine mediators, mysticism and magic and creating a direct link between the individual and God. ‘Luther’s dictum that “the meaning of the Bible has to be understood by everybody” (...) led not only to the translation of the Bible into Europe’s vernacular languages, but also to a boom in the printing of Bibles and many other texts, including theological pamphlets’ (Loimeier 2003; 240). This led to ‘a movement of purification of the faithful’ and to a ‘second Christianisation’ of Europe, where more people began not only to read but also to interpret religion. The similarities with reformist Islam in Africa are striking.

In sum, new understandings of Islam are entering Zanzibar due to Zanzibar becoming part of global ‘scapes’ – after years of forced isolation. This leads to an individualisation of religion and a movement away from Sufism. It also threatens the authority of the old sheikhs. Nothing incarnates this tension better than the returning young men, who have studied abroad.

## Returning Youth

As mentioned earlier, a large number of young men receive international scholarships to study in a Muslim country. I had the opportunity to interview a number of such young men, after they had returned from studies abroad. Many of the men I met, who had studied in Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, Libya, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, had been abroad for up to eight years. In many Islamic circles, knowledge is an end in itself and not a means to achieve something else. Thus I came across a number of middle class Zanzibaris who invested much time, money and effort into learning about Islam. Sometimes, however, it was by chance that the young men ended up studying Islam, and several of them explained that they would equally have wanted to study medicine or engineering in London or Frankfurt, but were selected for a scholarship to study Islam because they were top of class. Many came from homes where religion did not play a central role. In other words, education abroad has simply been a career move for some, while for others it has

been part of a larger thirst for knowledge. In any case, they came home to Zanzibar with new ideas about Islam. Not only were their interpretations of Islam different from those of their fathers and their old sheiks and teachers – they were also based on years of hard study in countries that were generally believed to be stronger in their faith.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, they believed that their knowledge was superior to that of their compatriots who had remained in Zanzibar.

The issue of youth, and especially of young men, is apparent in the debates on Islamic revival and radicalisation in Zanzibar. The young men who have studied abroad and returned with new ideas of how to hold your hands during prayers or when to spot the moon of Ramadan, are not only perceived as a threat to status quo; the whole issue of Islamic revivalism is often framed by the authorities in place as a ‘youth problem’ (interview Mufti’s office 09.11.2006).

So how do these young men manoeuvre upon return to Zanzibar? When the first generation of scholars to study abroad after ‘the dark years’ returned, they very much came back to an institutional vacuum with no religious institutions to absorb them, because religion had been excluded from the public sphere for decades. Many made mistakes upon return, I was told. Having studied for years, they realised that the Islam that they had been brought up with and which their families and neighbours still practiced, was full of faults. They realised that it was far from the pure Islam of the Sunnah and was mixed with African mysticism. In their youthful boldness they felt that they ought to get things right and would start telling their families how to practice Islam ‘the correct way.’ This caused many problems, as they were challenging the authority of their fathers and others who held higher positions in society than they did. Often, I was told, they were forced to leave their fathers’ houses, because their fathers could not accept such challenges against their authority. Some would establish new Islamic movements, preaching in mosques that allowed their new ideas – mosques like Kibweni where the old-fashioned sheiks no longer had power.

However, many of the returnees with whom I spoke, explained that they had learned to keep their new ideas to themselves in order to stay out of trouble. In this manner, they could practice their new faith while not antagonising family and community. ‘You have to go gently and change people’s attitudes slowly,’ a group of returnees – now all teachers at the Muslim Academy – explained. They claimed that they had learned from the mistakes of the first generation of returning Islamic scholars (interview 29.11.2006).

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, they had quite clear opinions about the nature of faith in the various countries and did not simply follow stereotypical views of them. For instance, they all agreed that Libyans were not good Muslims, while Malaysians and in particular the Malaysian authorities were praised for their devotion to Islam.



Abdullah,<sup>15</sup> a man in his forties who now has an influential state position, explains about his own experience of studying in Medina and coming back (interview 09.11.2006). Apparently, they were taught in Medina that the Prophet Mohammed once went to pray with his shoes on. His followers were obviously shocked by this behaviour as it is one of the fundamentals of Islam to remove one's shoes and clean one's feet before prayer. The story is long, but the short version is that the Prophet explained that it is more important to be clean in other ways rather than simply follow the procedure of taking off one's shoes. After learning this, Abdullah and two of his fellow students returned to Zanzibar and Burundi, respectively. The two Burundians went straight into the local mosque in Bujumbura with their shoes on, knowing that they had the Prophet and learned Islamic scholars from Medina on their side. This did not help them, however, and they were almost lynched by the angry crowd who only could see their behaviour as blasphemy. Abdullah, on the other hand, kept a low profile about his newly acquired knowledge because he was aware that 'people were not ready to hear this truth'. Like a number of other returnees that I met, he explained that you have to be sensitive to local culture and local knowledge – even if you know it to be wrong and un-Islamic.

So while the youth seem to be able to adapt to some degree, how do the authorities perceive of them? Although there might have been an institutional vacuum when these young men returned, this does not imply that they were free to act as they wanted. Not only did they meet resistance from family and friends, the government was, and still is, keen to control these 'youngsters,' as was illustrated with 'the moon issue.' The Mufti's office has so far sided with the established sheiks and has clamped down on any attempts to introduce new kinds of Islam. Not only has it arrested activists from Uamsho and used teargas against worshippers in the Kibweni mosque, it also uses more subtle means of governing these problems. One is the way in which it articulates the problem in official discourse, linking the revivalists with Wahabis, Saudis, fundamentalists and even terrorists.

When I discussed the issue of radicalisation or revivalism with the authorities, they would often talk about the youth – although many of the individuals that they were referring to were in their late thirties. By problematizing it as a youth issue, they are drawing on a number of common perceptions about 'youth'. Youth are commonly perceived to be uncompromising and radical. They have not yet learned the art of compromise, patience and diplomatic skills. They tend to want to change the world. At the same time, youth are vulnerable to new, radical ideas because they do

<sup>15</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

not yet have the personal ballast to withstand these impulses. In the words of Henrik Vigh, we may talk of ‘youth at risk and youth as risk,’ referring to the double perception of youth as both a category that is weak and susceptible to change and as a social category that is explosive and beyond control of society (Vigh 2006; 92). Both sides rely on the basic assumption that youth are in a dangerous, transitional period in life, after childhood and before becoming part of adult society (cf Turner 2004, Vigh 2006). In Zanzibar, the youth have played a central role in the nation-building project of the revolutionary state. On the one hand, they were perceived as a threat and needed disciplining (Burgess 2002), while on the other hand the youth – especially the lumpen-proletariat from the suburbs – were used as the revolutionary spear-head of the Cultural Revolution, cutting out dead wood and creating a new, healthy society (Burgess 1999). In the Islamic debate in Zanzibar, the issue of youth is also linked to knowledge. The young men are believed to have acquired much knowledge during their studies abroad. However, this is ‘shallow knowledge’, as one old man expressed it to me (Saleh 11.11.2006). It is the kind of knowledge that you get from books and which is different from ‘wisdom’ that you gain through experience. This again draws on common perceptions of youth who learn quickly but do not have the experience to apply this knowledge or to assess the value of it.

By making it a youth problem, the government is able to contain and control Islamic revivalism. The voice of the revivalists is muted, as it is seen as a symptom of youthfulness – itself a transitional phase in life; neither here nor there (Turner 2004). Furthermore, by construing young people as easily manipulated, the government is able to establish that revivalism is an exogenous problem, implying that it is the Wahabis from Saudi Arabia who are using the vulnerable and susceptible young scholars to promote their fundamentalist kind of Islam in Zanzibar. It is therefore in the national interest to protect the people of Zanzibar from such ideological intrusions.

The government is thus able to dismiss revivalist Islam at an ideological level – not only in discourse but also by using police violence to break up gatherings. These displays of power reconfirm the picture of who has public authority – also in the religious sphere. However, at a more hidden, pragmatic level of practice, there might presently be tendencies to incorporate these young men in the system – much as the colonial government did – rather than antagonising them. Upon return from Saudi Arabia, many of these young men are given positions within government institutions – often in Wakf and Trust Commission<sup>16</sup>, the Mufti’s office or Muslim

<sup>16</sup> Wakf has existed since 1906 and was established in its present form by decree in 1980. It deals amongst other things with organising Hadj, Islamic charity, and official Muslim celebrations such as Idd el Fitir and Idd el Hadj. It also registers NGOs.

colleges. While reducing antagonisms and radicalisation, the result is also, however, that these young men gain substantial influence in shaping official Islam, while traditional, Sufi, 'African' Islam might be gradually marginalised. Thus the government institutions themselves are increasingly taking a position that is in line with revivalist Islam. This does not mean that it now supports another sect than previously, but rather that it is beginning to support a post-sectarian, individualised Islam.

An informative example is Abdulla Talib from Wakf (interviews 13.11.2006, 24.11.2006). He is an intelligent and ambitious young man who has studied six years in Saudi Arabia and followed short courses on Human Rights, gender, etc. in Malaysia, Lebanon and Indonesia as well as International Relations in Dar es Salaam. He has carried out a survey of all the *madrasabs* in Zanzibar – apparently for his own pleasure's sake, he claims. His recommendations in the survey are particularly instructive. He suggests introducing a common curriculum to all *madrasabs*, establishing national and district institutions under the Mufti's office, and providing training to teachers. This illustrates well a confluence of the ambitions of returning scholars to modernise Islamic teaching and a governmental need to map, understand and ultimately manage/control these anarchic, disparate institutions. Talib's survey and his suggestions for reform are a means to bring the *madrasabs*, which until recently were left to themselves, outside the realm of the state, under central government control. This confluence of interests, and the concomitant weakening of the traditional Sufi sheikhs, is the unintended consequence of several dynamics. First, the state believes that *madrasabs* might be breeding grounds for radical Islamic elements. Based on the same assumption, Northern development agencies like USAID and DANIDA are already supporting *madrasab* education in East Africa in order to prevent so-called radicalisation and combat the seeds of Islamic terrorism. Ironically, the result of initiatives such as Talib's is to modernise and reform traditional Sufi-oriented *madrasabs* and undermine the authority of the *sheikhs*, who traditionally support the state institutions, and by implication introduce the kind of reforms that the revivalists are pressing for. In line with the idea of reforming the *madrasabs* and modernising Islamic education, Islamist imams support the idea and claim that it was originally JUMAZA's idea and not Wakf's (interview Kibweni mosque 28.11.2006). In other words, both the government and Islamic organisations, critical of the government, are trying to control and streamline Islam. Once again we see how the cooption of the returnees has a double effect of co-opting them into the system but also changing the system – the end result being less conflict but a gradual change in Islamic practices from local forms of Sufism to post-sectarian, individualised, modern Islam.

# The Tablighi Jamaat Movement

The following fieldnotes from my fieldwork in Stone Town in late 2006 illustrate how I got in touch with a group of devout Muslims who engaged in missionary activities.

I was advised by a man on the street to go to a small shop in Malindi and talk to Ali. 'He is a devout Muslim', I am told. Ali, a chubby little man in Arabic garments, arrives on a new scooter. He has a long beard and pale skin, and he moves around as someone who is used to enjoying respect from others. He has no long education but knows some Arabic and the most important *hadiths*. We agree to meet him and Hassan, a friend of his who speaks very good English and knows a lot about Islam, later that afternoon. Hassan, a middle aged man with a long, greying beard and dressed in traditional Muslim clothes, teaches economics at one of the two Muslim universities in Zanzibar. He has his degree in economics from the University of Dar es Salaam and a Master's degree in Development economics from ISS, The Hague. He has also followed a short summer course at Oslo University in 2001. He lives in the centre of Stone Town.

When discussing the state of Islam in Zanzibar, they emphasize the need to start reforming from within. Ali says that people in Zanzibar always blame the government for all their problems rather than scrutinizing their own behaviour. Similarly, many Zanzibaris tend to blame the tourists and the mainlanders for the moral decline. The tourists are not to blame, he explains; it is the Zanzibaris who should learn to behave. 'Because black men like white women', says Ali with a smile. Similarly, Ali and Hassan argue that we should not blame the foreigners who drink alcohol. It is the Zanzibaris who import it and sell it who are to blame.

Their main aim is to improve the morality of Muslim society by improving their own acts as Muslims. There is a sense that many Muslims are only Muslims by name and that even those Muslims, who do as they are supposed to, simply follow the rituals without having the true faith in their hearts. Of course people think that Islam is bad if you see the way Muslims are behaving round the world, they say. So rather than pointing their finger at Christianity or 'The West', they believe that the Muslims should start with themselves. Despite this apparently self-effacing and modest approach, there is also a sense among these people that they are better Muslims than their neighbours and that they will be rewarded equally in the afterlife.

It turns out during the course of our discussions that Ali and Hassan are active in a loosely organized movement that performs *dawa*. They explain that as good Muslims, it is their duty to travel to other Muslim communities to teach them to become good Muslims. They are not interested in converting non-Muslims – only Muslims who are not strong in their faith. For as Hassan explains: ‘If we really act as good Muslims in all aspects of our lives – rather than being Muslims just by name or by going to the Mosque – then we do not need to convert Christians. This will happen automatically’. The following evening I get a lift with them and two Imams in a battered Nissan Patrol. We drive through the dark to a suburb called Mombasa and arrive at a large, new mosque. After evening prayers, the Imam is asking for *dawa* volunteers and organizing who to send whereto and for how long. Some travel only three days within Zanzibar. Others go for forty days to mainland Tanzania, and a few go for four months to Zambia, Malawi, Uganda and even Pakistan.

Khasim, a young Indian man with intense eyes, sits close to me on the floor of the mosque and explains the meaning of the *dawa*. He emphasizes that it is not just an outward missionary journey; it is not just about convincing others to be good Muslims. It is equally an inward journey; trying to get in touch with one’s own faith. Khasim, like Ali and Hassan, is a busy and quite successful man. He has lived in Zanzibar for four years and is the manager of a company that imports second-hand clothes. When I visit Khasim later in his home in the Chukwani suburb, he is constantly on his cell-phone, giving figures, confirming orders, etc. For him *dawa* is an opportunity to get away from this hectic mundane life and have time to contemplate his relation to God. When asking him and Ali how one can afford to leave one’s family and one’s business just like that, they explain that one simply has to have faith in God and one’s business will survive. ‘There are people who decide to stay and look after their businesses, who go bankrupt all of a sudden. This is not something we are in control of.’ (field notes 15.11.2006). In other words, *dawa* missions have a dual objective of spreading the word to fellow Muslims and of finding a focus oneself – outside the constraints of everyday life.

They all insist that this is not an organization or even a movement. Any Muslim can take part in one or another kind of *dawa* mission, and the mosque helps coordinate these trips. It actually takes me some time before I realize that this is part of the Tablighi Jama’at movement. The Tablighi movement was established in the 1920s in North India by Maulana Ilyas in order to strengthen the faith of Muslims. Ilyas felt that Islam had been in decline for centuries and that it was time

to redress this problem by strengthening the faith of the individual, ordinary Muslim. The idea was for laymen to spread the word to fellow Muslims. The movement is now one of the largest Islamic organizations worldwide. It has a very decentralized and simple organizational structure that does not require hierarchies, bureaucracies or infrastructure such as offices or mosques. Each small *dawa* group organizes and funds its own activities and uses local mosques wherever they are.

Ali and Hassan differ in terms of education, but they both belong to the urban, lower middle class. And, more interestingly, they have no formal training in Islam. So their involvement in Islam is not driven by economic hardship and marginalization, as is implied in some of the literature on religious (and particularly Islamic) mobilization. They are not joining an Islamic movement out of desperation. Neither are they joining due to a long exposure to Islamic training. They join because they are frustrated with the moral state of affairs in society. In private conversations they are highly critical of government corruption and what they perceive as unjust economic policies. Although they may not be highly educated Islamic scholars, the abundance of popular literature, DVDs and internet sites that explain and interpret Islam in comprehensible ways gives them the choice to relate to God in personal ways.

### **'KEEP IT SIMPLE' – TABLIGHI AS NON-INTELLECTUAL**

One evening, I joined Ali and Hassan in a very long sermon in the local mosque. A central message was that we should all do as much good on earth as possible in our lifetime. Then we will be rewarded tenfold in the afterlife. The Imam drew parallels to an account book in the bank. 'You deposit good deeds and you withdraw your savings in the afterworld.' Ali, the businessman, tells me that you can actually also withdraw in this world as well. Paraphrasing a Weberian concept of a protestant ethics, he explains that it is not bad for a man to earn money in this life. It actually just shows that he is acting well and making the best of the opportunities that God has provided him.

In later interviews and discussions with people in the Tablighi movement, I come across similar ways of explaining complex issues of faith in very simple ways – using examples from everyday life. A main argument is that the Qur'an explains everything from AIDS to video machines, and all you need to do is to read and follow the Qur'an, they claim.

'It is simple!' an old Arab-looking man with a well-stocked Islamic bookshop in Stone Town repeats again and again. He is the leader of the local Tablighi group, and my interviews with him

always turn into sermons. This day, I am about to leave the country and he is quite desperate to convert me before my return to Denmark (field notes 29.11.2006). ‘It is easy to be a good Muslim, because it is in the light,’ he says. ‘Nothing is hidden!’ By this he means that you simply have to follow what the Qur’an tells you and nothing will go wrong. It is not difficult, because the Qur’an tells you in unambiguous ways what to do in all situations of life – and you simply have to follow these rules. The owner of the bookshop – like many others – compares the holy book with manuals for TV sets and for cars. ‘When you buy a new car, you are provided with a manual. It tells you when to change the oil, how to grease the bearings, etc. Toyota must know best how to maintain the cars that they produce. So it would be foolish to use another kind of oil or a different size wheels. Then the car breaks down. It is the same with the Qur’an. God created everything on earth and he provided us with a manual that tells us how to treat our fellow human beings and the environment around us. It would be foolish not to follow this manual.’ (Field notes 29.11.2006)

According to Ali Sunkar, a Kenyan Islamic scholar at Chukwani College, this is a typical way for Tablighis to explain Islam. He has heard Tablighis preach many times in many countries and languages, and claims that they are all cast along the same lines. They use simple parables that uneducated people can easily relate to: like the bank account, the car service book and the TV manual. They also emphasise how short this life is compared to the afterlife. This is illustrated by a man walking across a vast field in the sun and passing under the shade of a single tree. The shade of the tree is how short life is. According to Sunkar, this kind of discourse appeals to common people who have problems in their life and who therefore are comforted by the option of a blissful afterlife (Sunkar 20.11.2006).<sup>17</sup>

Although Tablighis in many ways belong to a reformist kind of Islam, they differ substantially from some of the other kinds of Islamic revival – something that causes mutual suspicion. Many Wahabi-inspired Islamists criticize the Tablighis for using *hadiths* that are not authenticated properly.<sup>18</sup> They argue that in order to purify Islam and go back to the original followers of the Prophet – removing the stains of human (mis-)interpretation – it is important to stick to the most

<sup>17</sup> I was given long descriptions of Paradise by Tablighi members. Apart from the sheer scale of Paradise, they often emphasized the fact that one does not need to pray. And one can eat as much as one may desire without having to go to the toilet afterwards.

<sup>18</sup> Authenticating the origins of various *hadiths* is a big issue in Islamic scholarship, and much time has been devoted to verifying the genealogies of various sources back to the prophet Muhammed. All human interpretation is perceived to pollute the text.

authentic scriptures. According to Sunkar, Tablighis do not have the time or the knowledge to read much. They are all given a rudimentary ‘crash course’ on how to preach when doing their missionary work and use a book which might be called the ‘greatest hits’, containing a range of *hadiths* that are easily understood. In this sense, the Tablighis are similar to the Sufi – using just a few ‘weak’ *hadiths*.

Barbara Metcalf (2003) argues that the Tablighi movement always was anti-intellectual and that the movement’s founder, Maulana Ilyas, felt that schools were not the way to reach people. Lived experience was (Metcalf 2003; 139). ‘Tabligh (insist) that preaching must be done face to face, that intellectuality and argument are irrelevant to influencing lives, and that what counts is a meeting of hearts.’ (Metcalf 2003; 140).

Despite privileging the heart over the mind, however, they differ from the Sufi in a number of other ways. While Sufis generally assume that nothing is wrong with the world, Tablighis assume that the Muslim world is in an acute crisis. It was this sense of urgent crisis that was the catalyst behind the creation of the movement in India in the 1920s (Sikand 2006, Metcalf 2003). While the Sufis are satisfied with the way that Islam is being practiced, the Tablighis see a great need to reform and purify Islam. In this sense, they share a fundamental concern with Wahabis and reformist scholars such as Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, who talked about the age of ignorance (*jahiliyya*), that the Muslim world has been in a big crisis for several centuries and that it is time for Muslims around the world to take the responsibility of re-establishing the Khalifa. In the case of the Tablighis this is done through the greater – inner – *jihad*, and not through converting non-Muslims or seizing political power.

## **‘WE ARE NOT INTERESTED IN POLITICS’ – RELIGION AND POLITICS AMONG THE TABLIGHIS**

Tablighis have an ambiguous relation to politics. They are accused by some reformists of being ignorant of politics and of focusing exclusively on the spiritual side of life. Official statements by the movement and the Tablighis I met in Zanzibar would emphasise this point themselves. Metcalf argues that ‘the Tabligh movement stands in dramatic contrast to... the Afghan Taliban,<sup>19</sup> which sought to use state institutions to achieve morality rather than depend on invitation and persuasion directed toward individuals.’ (Metcalf 2003, 139). Although Ilyas’ motivation to create

<sup>19</sup> The Tablighi and the Taliban have roots in the same *Deobandi* school of thought.



the movement was the perceived loss of political power and marginalization of Muslims over centuries, he believed that this loss of power ‘owed entirely to Muslims having abandoned the path of the faith.’ (Sikand 2006; 180). He insisted that the solution was not to try to take political power in order to protect Islam. Rather, the individual Muslim should follow the path, then political power ‘will be granted as a blessing by God to the Muslims’ (ibid). This anti-political standpoint has caused some Muslims to accuse the Tablighis of depoliticizing Islam and actually being in the hands of anti-Islamic forces.

However, as Sikand (2006) argues, it is naive to say that the Tablighis are simply non-political, even though they link politics and religion in a different way to activist political Islam.<sup>20</sup> The movement was politically motivated to start with and was created as a response to aggressive Hindu ‘re-conversion’ in Northern India and co-existed with more explicitly political Islamic movements. The movement remains political in various parts of the world in the sense that it expresses an implicit critique of the socio-political state of affairs in a given context. In Zanzibar, the Tablighis show concern with the amoral behaviour of common people and the corrupt management of government, thereby criticizing politics. Furthermore, the movement is political in the sense that there are political consequences of its acts.

The Tablighi movement does not try to install an Islamic state. However, its understanding of the role of Islam in society does imply that an Islamic state is the ideal. Ideally, the Tablighis, whom I interviewed, would prefer Sharia law, Islamic banking and Islamic democracy (often mentioning Iran as a model to follow despite the fact that Iran is Shiite). However, by focusing on the faith of the individual, Tablighis are able to postpone the establishment of an Islamic state into the indefinite future which means that it is possible for the movement to *de facto* co-exist with secularism.

<sup>20</sup> Sikand (2006), writing about the movement at a global level – and in particular its Indian mother organization – demonstrates that the Tablighi Jama’at movement was actually politically motivated from the beginning with the same objectives and goals as political Islamist movements in India. However, in post-independence and post-division India it became dangerous to be overtly Islamist, and the movement became more spiritual.

## Politics and Islam

Most of the Islamists in Zanzibar claim to be non-political and object strongly to being accused of being political. However, in the tense political climate in Zanzibar, Islamic revivalism is often accused of 'really' being political – as if religion were a smoke screen for other intentions. Hassan complains that he is harassed by government officials because of his beard and his clothes, and that his brother – who dresses similarly – had to close his business, because the government accused him of supporting the opposition party, CUF (Civic United Front), and therefore made it almost impossible for him to get the right business permits etc. Similarly, many secular-liberal CUF leaders with whom I spoke complain about being stigmatized as fundamentalists. It appears that the government is trying to combat the political opposition, namely CUF, by accusing it of being fundamentalist, Arab and ultimately terrorist. By equating CUF with fundamentalists, the government can play the terrorist card and gain support from USA/UK – especially after the 1998 embassy bombings in . As mentioned earlier, the revolution was very much about autochthony and purging the country of Arabs and Indians – in this way putting the onus of blame on 'foreigners' and maintaining the peaceful and unified nature of the true Zanzibar people. This discourse is still prevalent today accusing 'Arabs' of being pro-Saudi fundamentalists. As Tanzanian socialism has given way to liberalism, the official discourse on religion has changed. As much as religion is tolerated – even encouraged – in a liberal democracy, this liberal ideology has created new national enemies – in particular after the embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998. In its 'war on terror' the government has constructed Islamists as potentially anti-democratic, fundamentalist, radical and violent. In the socialist era there were 'good' and 'bad' ideologies. The present regime purports to be non-ideological and tolerant. The 'others' of such a regime are therefore not ideological either, but construed as criminals and terrorists, beyond the reach of the 'moral community' of good governance and human rights.

Although CUF is not fundamentalist and Islamic revivalists are not CUF, many revivalists support CUF simply because they are critical of the present regime. What unites them is their perception of the government as being corrupt, incompetent, nepotistic and parochial – and hence immoral. Interestingly, Islamic mouthpieces such as Uamsho and JUMAZA are not emphasising authentic, cultural values or an anti-Western discourse. Rather, they are drawing on a human rights discourse, stressing the right of religious freedom, and calling for 'good governance' (interviews Uamsho and JUMAZA November 2006). In this sense, Islamic revivalists and liberal CUF members share a global language of Human Rights – just as they share a perception of themselves as modern/cosmopolitan as opposed to what they perceive as a provincial, narrow-minded government. Both claim to believe in transparency and human rights and accuse the government

of breaching the constitutional freedom of religion by establishing the Mufti's office to regulate Muslim affairs and intervene in matters such as spotting of the moon at Ramadan (interviews Muslim Law Society, Uamsho, JUMAZA and CUF members, November 2006).

Both CUF and Islamists call for better education and meritocracy, and emphasise the lack of education among current ministers. Finally, CUF and Islamists believe that Zanzibar is turning its back on the world and needs to take a more global approach. CUF believes in liberal democracy and free trade while the Islamic revivalists want to become part of a global *ummah*.

At a more fundamental level, we may claim that Islamic revival in Zanzibar is political because it is critical of the present moral state of affairs in Zanzibar and therefore is a societal and hence political critique. However, the means to change this state of affairs differ, depending on the group in question. Whereas Uamsho and JUMAZA want to change the political structures in order for a true/pure Islam to grow, the Tablighi movement believes that the change should come from within. Only when the Muslims have reformed their hearts and habits will the world change. For there is no doubt that they would prefer a different world, ruled by Islamic law.

## Conclusion – Islam as Critique

Zanzibar is unique in the sense that it links Sub-Saharan Africa with the Arab world; the junior partner in the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar – a small province in Tanzania – while simultaneously a former part of the Omani Sultanate, and politics in Zanzibar have always been marked by this tension between an African and an Arab identity (cf Bakari 2001, Burgess 1999). In pre-colonial and colonial times, Zanzibari Islam was a hybrid of influences from African traditions and various Islamic debates in the Arab world. Scholarly Islamic debate flourished and interacted with debates in the whole East African Swahili Coast area. After independence, the role of religion in public life was seriously restricted, not only due to socialist secularism, but also because Islam in the Zanzibar context was discursively linked to the 'Arab' population that was depicted as alien, imperialist and capitalist. Many Islamic scholars were forced to leave the country, and religious authority rested in the hands of Sufi sheikhs. This period is perceived by many contemporary Zanzibaris as the 'years of darkness', expressing a sense that Zanzibar, whose identity had been outward-looking and cosmopolitan, had turned its back on the world.

With economic and political liberalisation, Islam once again entered the public sphere with a mushrooming of debates, schools, NGOs, missionary groups etc. These movements all believe that Islam is under immense threat, and they want to strengthen Islamic behaviour among Muslims, who have lost their true faith, by seeking a more pure Islam, untainted by human interference. They sense that Zanzibar society generally is experiencing moral decay and believe that only true Islamic behaviour can halt this decline.

While liberalisation has opened a space and a possibility to engage with Islam, it has also brought about changes in society that are perceived to be morally wrong. The liberal economy has resulted in a boom in tourism, and scantily clad tourists are seen all around Stone Town, challenging local concepts of pious behaviour. Interestingly, the socialist state in the 1960s and 1970s was intent on controlling the moral behaviour of its citizens and limiting what it perceived as decadent, morally degenerate cultural influences from the West. The government restricted tourism to the islands and enforced strict regulations for tourists' clothing and behaviour. With liberalisation the number of foreign visitors has exploded, and the clothing policies are rarely enforced. When complaining about the tourists, many Muslims mention that women used to be stopped at the airport if they were insufficiently covered, and point to the fact that the present government has the laws, but is too corrupt and incompetent to enforce them.

So while Islamic revivalists on the one hand yearn for the 'golden years' when Zanzibar was the centre of Islamic scholarly debate, they also feel that the socialist government upheld certain moral norms in society and that the present opening up to what they term 'globalisation' is a two-edged sword; on the one hand creating new opportunities to become part of a global *ummah*, and on the other hand opening up to the dangers of Western moral decay. They are in other words not simply interested in returning to the good old days before socialism, neither are they completely comfortable with the present signs of economic liberalisation and globalisation. Finally, they are strongly against the isolation and control of the socialist years. Whereas Islamic scholars in the early twentieth century reconciled Sufism and reformist Islam, the present debates tend to pit Sufis against revivalists. There is, in other words, a tendency for Islamic revivalist movements to move towards a more uncompromising Islamist stance, overtly criticising what they perceive as impure local versions of Islam. As they critique the secular government's alleged 'mainland bias', they do not revere the good old days, when Zanzibar was a cultural and religious melting pot. Instead, this younger generation of Islamists look towards a new, global *ummah*, beyond race, nation and language.

Islamic revival in Zanzibar is not a single movement or even a single ideology. Islamists vary in terms of goals and means, as well as in their socio-demographic composition. We might, however, claim that there is a general tendency for Islam to become more individualised, emphasising the individual's relation to God rather than various rules and rituals. Similarly, Islamic knowledge is less controlled by local sheikhs, because individuals have direct access to various Islamic texts and religious authorities from all over the world via the internet, satellite TV etc.

Although Islamic revival in Zanzibar mostly is a peaceful tendency in society to become more reformist and pious, it also creates conflicts that at times become violent. While Islamic revival is inescapably involved in politics, we cannot assume that it simply is political or fundamentalist, as some government officials and foreign observers claim. It would, however, also be naïve to accept the claim by most of the Islamists in Zanzibar that they are only concerned with the religious sphere and completely apolitical. Religious reform is shaped by socio-political contexts and offers a critique of the present socio-political order. They see a need to change society as it is – whether through political means of introducing a new political system or through reforming the individual from within. In any case, they express a critique of the moral standing of society and have as their goal to change this. Furthermore, Islamic revivalists are positioned within, and position themselves in, the political field. Whether they like it or not, government officials, opposition politicians, human rights activists and international Islamic NGOs all relate to these new trends and movements and manoeuvre accordingly.

While Islamic revivalism has met resistance from the state and established religious authorities who perceive it as a threat to status quo and to their authority, at present there appears to be a tendency towards these revivalist views to permeate these very same authorities at an institutional – less vocal and politicised – level. In other words, Islam is inevitably changing – linking up with global revivalism but also adapting to local conditions and at the same time subtly changing these conditions. Islamic revival is highly modern in its outlook and in its critique of contemporary society, being individualised, reflective and highly responsive to contemporary social and political contexts at both the local and the global scale. It represents an alternative modernity to the ones that neo-liberal capitalism and one-party socialism can offer and it is highly effective in critiquing these modernities while drawing on central discursive elements from within them – from socialist concepts of austerity and individual sacrifice to liberal concepts of good governance and free markets.



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