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Salafism(s) in Tanzania: Theological Roots and Political Subtext of the Ansār Sunna

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, the role of Salafism has grown considerably in Tanzania, causing clashes and discord between Muslims, Christians and the state and among Muslims themselves. This article traces the roots of the Ansār Sunna, the “defenders of the Sunna”, which is the most conspicuously purist and fast-growing group of Salafi organizations in Tanzania at present. The article discusses the Ansār Sunna local and foreign impetuses and situates the Ansār’s defense of “pure Sunna” in Tanzania’s historical and contemporary politics. The analysis highlights the particularities of individual Ansār organizations and the significance of local actors and changing political conditions for the shaping of Salafi ideas, practices, and identities. Situating the production of Salafi expressions and identities in the ongoing Muslim dialogue within specific environments, the article suggests an inherent diversity, malleability and localizing nature of Salafism.

Keywords

Tanzania – Salafism – Islamic reform – Islamism – politics

In this day and age all major cities in Tanzania host at least one organization that is run with the specific aim of propagating basic Salafi thought and purifying local Islamic practices from “un-Islamic innovations” (in Kiswahili *bidaa*, in Arabic *bidaʿ*). Albeit differing in the specifics of their names, these organizations are referred to locally as the Ansār Sunna, i.e. the “defenders of the Sunna”. The Ansār organizations are part of larger growth of Salafi-based organizations and voices, which has paralleled the collapse of Julius Nyerere’s socialist

Ujamaa ideology and the introduction of multiparty politics. What distinguishes the Ansār organizations from other Muslim organizations is their uncovered Salafi character and explicit theological focus. The majority of the Ansār organizations show a clear foreign imprint in the sense that most of their initiators, owners, preachers and educators have studied in Islamic universities abroad, principally in Saudi Arabia. Also, a great part of the considerable infrastructure of these organizations—i.e. mosques, wells, madrassas, schools, dispensaries, health clinics etc.—has been developed via foreign funds.

Given these features and the post 9/11 climate, it is hardly surprising that the Ansār Sunna has been linked to the terrorist threat generally identified in East Africa. Their rapid growth during the 1990s and early 2000s caused great local and international concern of growing “Wahhabism”. Different kinds of security measures have surrounded the Ansār Sunna, including general surveillance and numerous violent arrests of Ansār preachers and followers (henceforth “Ansāris”, as they are referred to locally). The arrests have mainly occurred in connection with the Ansār Sunna’s insistence on celebrating the *ʿīd al-Fiṭr* and *ʿīd al-Ḥajj* in accordance with “international standards”. One explanation for this major symbolic confrontation has been the continued state enforcement of the localized form of this and other Sufi-relatable practices as symbols of national unity, as installed during the Ujamaa one-party state. Violence related to theological disagreements has reduced since the government stopped interfering with Ansār practices in 2006. However, recent developments in Kenya and the escalation of religiously rooted violence in Zanzibar, an Ansār stronghold, have renewed the focus on Salafi and Wahhabi relatable networks in Tanzania. Particular notice has been made of the Uamsho organization in Zanzibar, which in many ways is linkable to the Ansār Sunna, but positing a much more populist and political-strategic posture.¹

The Tanzanian government party CCM (Chama Cha Mapinduzi / The party of the Revolution) and local adversaries have tended to categorize and refer to the Ansār Sunna as a “Wahhabi sect” from Saudi Arabia. This discourse underscores the Ansār’s “foreignness” and hints at terrorism links, while it at the same time reinforces the historical image of the existing Muslim elites as representatives of a “tolerant Islam” that is in sync with Tanzania’s acclaimed “nationhood”. However, the idea of an intrusion of internationalist Salafism is

1 The Uamsho, literally meaning “awareness”, is the popular name for the organization Jumuiya ya Uamsho na Mihadhara ya Kiislamu (JUMIKI), literally the Organization of Islamic Awareness and Public Preaching. The organization has developed into an actual political powerbase in recent years and has been accused of terrorist-related activities since its registration in 2001.

inadequate both in terms of understanding the Ansār Sunna's theological roots, and for what this cluster of organizations comprises in terms of individuals, institutions and activities. Funding and theological influences from abroad cannot alone explain the Ansār Sunna's character and emergence in Tanzania. To understand this, one needs to look at the distinct political developments and environment that have spurred the Ansār Sunna's growth within the past three decades.

The diversity and localizing nature of Salafism have recently been pointed to in several contexts. Using the Ansār Sunna as a case, this article presents a similar picture, highlighting the roots of Salafi thought and the importance of the local economic and political context for the character of Salafi voices and identities. In the case of Tanzania, the concept of Islamic reform has thus far stood central in the scholarly literature in Islam. This is with good reason, as shall be clear below. The arrival of the Ansār Sunna, however, calls for an insertion of the concept of Salafism in the discussion of the historical and current trends within Islamization and Islamic propagation in East Africa. The notion of Salafism is not only appropriate since Ansāris identify with the notion of the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* and tend to refer to themselves as Salafis. It is also appropriate as the Ansār organizations are reflections of the much more visible role that Salafi-relatable identities have gained in Tanzania since the 1980s. This relates to a much deeper historical presence of Salafi literature and thought, which underpins the Ansār Sunna and makes these organizations less unique than their adversaries like us to think. Not only is their theological agenda rooted in a long tradition of purification, their Salafi-related ideas are continuously localized by individual preachers and clerics that draw on a range of different sources and adapt their messages to specific audiences and local issues of dispute.²

The Two Faces of Salafism

The concept of Salafism (in Arabic, *al-salafiyya*) has rarely been applied in the scholarly literature on Islam and Islamic reform in Tanzania. This, however, does not reflect a lack of empirical evidence in support of the main features typically associated with Salafism in the country. The concept has, appropriately, been used by Loimeier to describe the background for the Ansār Sunna

2 This article builds on a range of interviews and conversations with Ansāris from Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Morogoro, Mwanza, Iringa and Zanzibar since 2002. It further builds on fieldwork with focus on Muslim organizations and the dynamics of Muslim politics in Tanzania carried out between 2002 and 2008.

in Zanzibar in the historical presence of “reformism” in East Africa and Zanzibar.³ Loimeier correctly places the Ansār Sunna in Zanzibar within a broader historical “tradition of reform”. Yet his analysis underappreciates the specificity of the Ansār Sunna as a semi-interdependent cluster of organizations with a number of distinguishable features from other “reformist” groups and organizations in Tanzania.⁴

In order to capture this distinction, but also to reflect on it, this article operates with Salafism in two main conceptions. Considering the aim of demonstrating the localizing features and plurality of Salafi expressions in Tanzania, this may seem ill fated. However, using the two conceptions along the lines of Weberian ideal-types makes them very helpful tools in pointing to, discussing and drawing up major patterns within the actual diversity of Salafi expressions. Also, the distinction between two major and indeed abstract types of Salafism is helpful in discussing not only the major internal differences among Ansār followers but also the historical prevalence and political development of Salafi-related ideas in the particular context of Tanzania. Both conceptions are in other words empirically relevant to analyze Salafi expressions in Tanzania, even though they reflect two main, yet quite different tendencies in the Islamic and Western application of the concept since the early 20th century.⁵

The first conception can be termed as the “modernist” conception (henceforth “modernist Salafism”) and is by far the more popularized of the two. Here Salafism is understood as a broad (usually poorly defined) “modernist-reformist” and political movement whose beginning is closely associated with “Islamic modernism” and major figures like Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni, Rashīd Riḍā, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in general.⁶ A trademark of

3 Roman Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Education in 20th Century Zanzibar* (Brill, 2009), 109–35.

4 Loimeier rather sees the Ansār Sunna as the expression of a broader historical “reformist movement”. This is partly true, but more so in the case of Zanzibar than in most of the Ansār organizations in Tanzania Mainland, see below. See also Felicitas Becker, *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania, 1890–2000* (Oxford University Press, 2008) 241–49. Becker seems to mistake the Ansār Sunna for “Muslim activism” or “radicalism” per se.

5 I develop the two conceptions from Henri Lauzière, “The Construction of *Salafīyya*: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010), who traces their genealogy. They represent the two main discursive constructions of Salafism, which are widely applied across different genres and contexts, often without much consideration of their differences, as pointed to by Lauzière.

6 See generally Albert Hourani, *Arabic thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge, 1983), John Esposito, *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (Oxford University Press, 1983), and Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity*, (Stanford University Press, 2009).

Salafism in this discursive construction is a penetrating anti-colonial element and a characteristic looking to Western modernity as “both adversary and model”.⁷ This typically leads to a direct involvement in secular politics within secular nation-states with the ultimate aim of creating change towards a truly Islamic society.⁸ This “modernist” conception has a deep historical basis along the Swahili coast, to where the thoughts and writings of ‘Abduh and others, including al-Manār magazine, were quickly transferred via private scholarly and trade networks, with Mombasa and Zanzibar as the major urban centers.⁹ In fact, “modernist-reformist” Islam may be said to inform the far majority of erudite Tanzanian clerics and preachers today, reaching from those who embrace to those who posit degrees of disagreement with Sufi practices and thought, including those affiliated with the Ansār Sunna.

The second conception may be categorized as “contemporary Salafism”. It is characterized by a focus on purifying “innovated” un-Islamic Islamic practices and a strong emphasis on shaping present Muslim behavior by reference to the “original Muslim society” at the time of the Prophet. This conception has roots in early Hanbali thought and Wahhabism, but it has been much revived in various networks and organizations during the past four decades. Salafism here takes as an explicit starting point in the idea of the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, i.e. the pious ancestors or the first or, as the popular saying goes in these circles, “best” three generations of followers of the Prophet, who practiced the original “uncontaminated” Sunna/Ḥadīth of the Prophet. In this conception, Salafism is characterized by a rigorist creed and methodology that has a family-resemblance with Wahhabism or is linkable to the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia.¹⁰ As shall be discussed below, there are similarities between contemporary Salafism and the Ansār Sunna, which, at least to some degree, may be seen as part of the international revival of original or contemporary Salafism.

7 Hourani, *Arabic thought*, vi.

8 See for instance Carrie R Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam. Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt* (Columbia University Press, 2002).

9 See Anne K. Bang, “*Sufis and Scholars of the sea – The Sufi and Family Networks of Ahmad ibn Sumayt and the ṭarīqa ‘Alawīyya in East Africa c. 1860–1925*” (PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2000). Randall L. Pouwels, “Sh. Al-Amin ‘Ali Mazrui and Islamic Modernism in East Africa, 1875–1947”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, 3 (1981). Roman Loimeier, “Patterns and Peculiarities of Islamic Reform in Africa”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33, 3 (2003); Kai Kresse, “‘Swahili enlightenment’? East African Reformist Discourse at the Turning Point: The Example of Shaykh Mohammad Kasim Mazrui”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33, 3 (2003).

10 Lauzière, *The Construction of Salafism*, 370.

The etic employment of concepts has a tendency to impair the understanding of local meaning making and practice. The reality is that the gap between the two conceptions is debatable. Conceptually, they show a degree of overlap since Islamic modernism always involved purism and elements from “contemporary Salafism”.¹¹ Empirically, their distinction begins fading away when focus is moved to specific contexts and practice, at least in the case of Tanzania. The Ansār organizations are relatively firmly based in the idea of the *salaf*, and Ansāris work vigorously to purify what they identify as local un-Islamic innovations (*bidaʿ*). Yet overlapping but less clearly formulated purification thoughts are found in other, and at this point more influential “modernist” anchored organizations in the country, some of which have relatively strong bases in the “traditional” Sufi-relatable networks and practices that the Ansār condemn.¹² Perhaps most importantly, one finds much typical “modernist” literature and ideas present among Ansāris. This has its roots in the historical availability of Islamic modernist thought along the East African coast and in the fact that some of the main figures of local Islamic reform developed literature with anti-Sufi elements from the 1920s onwards.¹³ Moreover, most Ansār organizations have been initiated by locals who have studied in Islamic universities abroad, where they have been exposed to both genres of Salafism as set up here. The case thus is that Ansāris share “modernist Salafism” with most of Tanzania’s erudite clerics; it is the explicit emphasis on purifying local Islamic practices that distinguishes Ansāris and makes them unique in the local Islamic landscape.

There are multiple faces of Salafism in Tanzania. Preachers and clerics draw on a range of Salafī sources and there is a degree of temporality to individual theological and political positions as preachers visibly adjust their messages depending on their audiences and the issues they address at given times. This

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- 11 This seems a central part of the reason for the confusion about which specific movement Salafism refers to. In fact, the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* notion was part of ‘Abduh’s thinking, although in an interpretation that differed considerably to that of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 230–31.
- 12 See for instance on the Islamic Propagation Centre, Gerard van de Bruinhorst, “Raise your voices and kill your animals. Islamic Discourses on the Idd El-hajj and sacrifices in Tanga (Tanzania)” (PhD diss. University of Amsterdam, 2007), 98, and Søren Gilsaa, “Muslim Politics in Tanzania: Muslim and National identities before and after the collapse of Ujamaa” (PhD diss., University of Copenhagen, 2012), 235–36.
- 13 See Kresse, “Swahili Enlightenment” and Roman Loimeier, “Translating the Qurʾān in Sub-Saharan Africa: Dynamics and Disputes”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35, 4 (2005).

exposes the localizing nature of Salafi expressions and the ambiguities of Salafism as concept if it is not analyzed in particular local contexts.¹⁴

The Ansār Credo and the Local Purist Tradition

The *raison d'être* of the Ansār Sunna is reflected in its name. Depending on who you ask, Ansār Sunna is locally translated into “the defenders”, “the saviors”, “the followers” or “the helpers of the Sunna”. “Helpers” appears to be the most literal translation of the Arabic word *Ansār*, but the idea of “defending” the Sunna is the most widespread among locals.¹⁵ The notion Ansār has historical reference to the first group of people in Medina who initially responded to the prophet's call to Islam and offered him the city-state on his arrival. Ansār clerics see an apparent overlap between the notion of the initial helpers of the Prophet and the notion of the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, which refers to the first three truly pious generations of Muslims; the *ṣaḥābah* (the companions of the Prophet), the *Tabi'īn* (the followers of the Prophet) and the *Tabi' al-Tabi'īn* (the followers of the followers of the Prophet). Without much if any distinction, they identify with both notions and many refer to themselves as Salafis.

According to the Ansār outlook, the companions or followers of the Prophet (frequently referred to also as the Islamic forefathers) represented the first, and “best”, group of Muslims to follow the original “uncontaminated way of the Prophet” (Sunna/Ḥadīth). From this basis, the Ansār credo insists on the living example of the prophet and instructs that the original *umma* should form the yardstick for society and human behavior. Closely resembling contemporary Salafi groups elsewhere, they, ideally, build up their lives, preaching and organizations from “correct/pure Sunna” (in Kiswahili “Sunna Sahihi”) by only accepting the Qurʾān and the Ḥadīth as sources of belief and practice. In practice Ansāris spent much time comparing hadiths from the four *madhhabs* (schools of law) that relate to local practices and issues of debate in order to convince their audience that they represent the original Sunna and transcend sect; i.e. “pure Islam” or the “original Islam of the Prophet”. They are usually recognizable due to their dress code and beard, which supposedly mirrors

14 Østebø, Terje, “Local Reformers and the Search for Change: The Emergence of Salafism in Bale, Ethiopia”, *Africa*, 81, 4 (2011) and Scott Reese, “Salafi Transformations: Aden and the Changing Voices of Religious Reform in the Interwar Indian Ocean”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 4 (2012).

15 The Arabic word *Ansār* literally means “helper” and *Ansāri* translates into “a person who helps”.

those of the Prophet, and without any physical reasons for it, one even finds devout Ansāris walking with a stick since the Prophet is known to have done so.¹⁶ The way of praying and the mosque construction are ideally modeled on the way of the Prophet, i.e. correct Ḥadīth/Sunna. As Shaykh Sayyid Musā—an important Tanzanian publisher of local theological (see below)—summarized it during an interview, the Ansār Sunna's motto is “If the Ḥadīth is correct, then that is my way”.¹⁷

The Ansār credo epitomizes theological purism in having the idea of pure Sunna/Ḥadīth at its core. Though this is generalizing to an extreme, the idea of defending pure Sunna has two main stimuli that are linkable to the two conceptions of Salafism set up above. Both stimuli express processes of glocalization in the sense of simultaneously having grown from local and translocal sources and influences.¹⁸ Nevertheless, they are decisively local as their trajectories and “becoming” closely reflect the local East African context in terms of history, socio-economics and politics.

The first stimulus is a local purist tradition of identifying certain local Islamic practices as *bidaʿ*, i.e. human derived innovations that are unaccounted for in the Sunna and Qurʾān.¹⁹ The existence of this debate in East Africa is about as old as the presence of the Sufi *ṭuruq* (sing. *ṭariqa*), which since their arrival in the nineteenth century have been accompanied by an opposing position that insists on the un-Islamic character of Sufi-relatable practices that include local customary elements.²⁰ Central among the historically contested rituals are the *dhikr* (invocation of God), *mawlid* (the celebration of the prophet's birthday), *Khatma* (a post-burial ritual involving Qurʾān recitation), and *tawasul* (seeking the intercession of Allah through an intermediary).²¹

16 Compare, Van de Bruinhorst, “Raise your Voices”, 96.

17 Interview, Shaykh Sayyid Musā, 30.09.2005.

18 On the concept of glocalization, see Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity”, in *Global Modernities*, ed. by Mike Featherstone et al. (Sage Publications, 1995).

19 See Loimeier, “Patterns and Peculiarities”, Loimeier, “Translating the Quʾran”, and Loimeier, *Between Marketing and Social Skills*, 109–10. See also Kresse, “Swahili Enlightenment”. Both refer to this as a local “reformist tradition”.

20 See in particular Loimeier, “Patterns and Peculiarities”; Loimeier, “Translating the Quʾran”; Kresse, “Swahili Enlightenment” and Justo Lacunza-Balda, “An Investigation into some Concepts and Ideas Found in Swahili Islamic Writings” (PhD diss., University of London, SOAS, 1989).

21 Shaykh ʿAbdallāh Saleḥ al-Farsi's two books *Bidā 1* and *Bidā 2*, written after he resided in Kenya, are central sources of this local purist “tradition” and remain important sources within the Ansār Sunna. For a discussion on the contestation of *mawlid*, see Kai Kresse,

It could be tempting to label the *bida'* discourse as a local "anti-Sufi tradition". Yet these ideas emerged as part of an internal discussion about the legitimacy of specific Sufi-relatable practices that evolved among learned coastal clerics with various positions on Sufism and degrees of Sufi-affiliations.²² The contestations thus rarely, if ever, involved a denunciation of Sufi-spirituality altogether. Rather, the *bida'* discourse related to the watering down of Islamic practices as Islam, particularly through the Qādiriyya and Shādhiliyya (*ṭuruq*), began to spread to African freed slaves, lost literal anchoring and was added local customary elements; a development which in Tanganyika was related to the spread of Islam into the interior.²³ Seen in this light, the *bida'* discourse reflected a degree of contrast between the growth of "mass-Islam" and the Sultanate-infused Arabizing "high culture", wherein typical modernist writings circulated and local clerics kept up personal correspondence with such characters as Muḥammad 'Abduh.²⁴

The defense of pure Islamic culture and practice intensified from the 1920s onwards in close connection to the imposition of colonialism and the growth

"Debating *mawlid*: Ambiguities and Transformations of Muslim Identity along the Kenyan Swahili Coast", in *The Global Worlds of the Swahili. Interfaces of Islam, Identity and Space in 19th and 20th-Century East Africa*. Berlin, eds. Roman Loimeier and Rüdiger Seesemann (Lit Verlag, 2006). On specific *bida'* practices according to the Ansār Sunna in Zanzibar and Tanga, see Loimeier, *Between Marketing and Social Skills*, 129–32 and Abdin N. Chande, "Islam, Islamic leadership and Community Development in Tanga, Tanzania" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1991), 301.

22 This is well captured in the works of Bang and Pouwels, and not least in Loimeier's outlines on Shaykh al-Farsy, both while living in Zanzibar and Mombasa where and when his *bida'* discourse intensified, see Loimeier, "Patterns and Peculiarities", 249–252, and Loimeier, *Between Marketing and Social Skills*, 375–76. To give a central example, during interview Shaykh Sayyid Musā (see below) and Ansār leaders in Zanzibar confirmed that the *dhikr* ritual is accepted as "true sunnah": it is "*dhikr zamakalele*", i.e. the very loud invocation of Allah, which this "tradition" contests.

23 See David C. Sperling, "The Coastal Hinterland and Interior of East Africa", in *The History of Islam in Africa*, eds. Randall Pouwels and Nehemia Levtzion (Ohio University Press, 2000), and August Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa: The Sufi Order in Tanzania* (University of Minnesota Press, 1980). See also Nathaniel Mathews, "Imagining Arab Communities: Colonialism, Islamic Reform, and Arab Identity in Mombasa, Kenya, 1897–1933, in *Islamic Africa*, 4, 2 (2013). The analysis of Mathews is situated in Mombasa but very relevant, see particularly on the Mijikenda, 147–48.

24 See Bang, "Sufis and Scholars of the Sea", 140–41; Mathews, *Imagining Arab Communities*; and in particular Randall Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent. Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast*, (Cambridge University Press, 1987) on the notions of "ustaarabu", "new literacy" and "new ulama".

of Christianity. It is particularly visible in the initiatives of Shaykh al-Amīn al bin ‘Ali ‘Abdallāh bin Nafi al-Mazrui (1890–1947) who, in many ways rightfully, has been seen as the “major inspirer of Islamic reform” and catalyst for the local purist tradition.²⁵ Central in this evaluation stands his launching in the early 1930s of the al-Manār inspired al-Sahīfah (The Newspaper) and al-Islah (Reform) and his contribution as a publicist of local and translated Islamic literature, some of which included the identification of local practices as *bida’*. Shaykh al-Amīn’s purism was articulated within a larger modernist framework with strong anti-colonial elements, which had its reason equally in the challenges Shaykh al-Amīn saw for the Mazrui clan in Mombasa and for the Islamic-Arab Swahili coast in general.²⁶ The accusations of innovations were particularly related to the embrace of popular African ritual elements of the ‘Alawiyya-led Riyadhha Mosque in Lamu, thus replicating the diversity and rivalries of regional Muslim dynamics (Kresse 2006: 210). At the same time, the discourse publicized a local defense of pure and historical Arabic coastal culture against the spread of Christianity and Western influence.

Shaykh al-Amīn al-Mazrui’s publishing efforts were taken over first, by Shaykh ‘Abdallāh Saleh al-Farsy and Shaykh Muḥammad Qāsim al-Mazrui in Mombasa, and later again by Shaykh Sayyid Musā in Dar es Salaam, who still published well into the 2000’s.²⁷ Their publications have been important sources in most of the Ansār organizations (see below). Still, this “print Islam tradition” should not be emphasized at the expense of the many non-publishing but equally influential clerics—some as just indicated with close Sufi relations—who read largely the same literature and proselytized modernist anti-colonial and anti-Christian views in their madrassas and mosques.²⁸

25 Loimeier, “Patterns and Peculiarities”, 250, and Loimeier, *Between Social and Marketable Skills*, 109–10.

26 Mathews, “Imagining Arab Communities; A. Salim, *Swahili-Speaking Peoples of Kenya’s Coast, 1895–1965*, (East African Publishing House, 1973), 140–41; Randall Pouwels, “Sh. Al-Amin ‘Ali Mazrui and Islamic Modernism in East Africa, 1875–1947”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13, 3 (1981), 332–33.

27 On the key shaykhs in this literary “reformist tradition”, see in particular Loimeier, “Patterns and Peculiarities” and Lacunza-Balda, “An Investigation”. According to Shaykh Sayyid Musā, Shaykh al-Farsy sharpened the *bida’* discourse by including *Maulid* as an innovation. Interview, Shaykh Sayyid Musā, 07.02.2007.

28 This is visible in the literature on Islamic clerics already cited. See also Abdin N. Chande, *Islam, Ulamaa and Community Development in Tanzania. A case Study of Religious Currents in East Africa* (Austin & Winfield, 1998), a case-study of Islam in Tanga that illustrates this at the level of madrassas and mosques.

The “New” Influence from Abroad

The second main stimulus for the Ansār Sunna is the influence of local graduates who began to return to Tanzania around 1980 after having studied in Islamic universities abroad.²⁹ Though this misses a great deal of other inter-linked influences, this stimulus may be seen as the direct trigger of the Ansār Sunna, i.e. seen as organizations with specific reference in a purist agenda.

Prior to the 1960s, scholarships at Islamic universities abroad had been scarce and the influx of Islamic ideas and literature had primarily taken place in connection with private networks and travelling. This changed from the late 1960s onwards. The foreign embassies played a role in this, as did the establishment of branches of international Islamic organizations. Given the Ujamaa ideology's strong anti-colonial element and emphasis on self-reliance, and of course on nation-building, it is somewhat paradoxical that the influence of foreign religious institutions continued, in fact even were nurtured during the Ujamaa period. Yet the Ujamaa ideology and period was full of paradoxes and self-contradictions because of the great contrast between Nyerere's visions and the realities confronting him and his countrymen.³⁰ Among Christians, the major Church Councils' acceptance of the Arusha Declaration³¹ led to “a decisive contribution to building the new nation, in particular to its school and hospital sectors”, much of which came from abroad.³² Among Muslims, only a few international Islamic organizations were allowed to establish branches and to sponsor studies of local students at Islamic universities in their home countries, as well as to contribute to the construction of mosques and other Islamic infrastructure. This was done in coordination with the embassies and Tanzania's national Muslim council BAKWATA (Baraza Kuu la Waislamu wa Tanzania / the Supreme Council of Muslims in Tanzania), which

29 For an article that zooms in on the same feature in Kenya, see Muḥammad Bakari, “The new Ulama in Kenya”, in *Islam in Kenya: Proceedings of the National Seminar in Contemporary Islam in Kenya*, eds. Muḥammad Bakari and Saad S. Yahya (MEWA publications, Nairobi, 1995). See also Loimeier, *Between Social and Marketing Skills*, 116–17 on “Medina graduates” in Zanzibar.

30 See Göran Hydén, *Tanu Yajenga Nchi: Political Development in Rural Tanzania* (Lund, 1968) and Göran Hydén, *Socialism och Samhällsutveckling i Tanzania. En studie i teori og praktik* (Cavefors, 1972).

31 The Arusha Declaration was Ujamaa's “final and practical formulation”, Göran Hydén, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania. Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980), 96.

32 Frieder Ludwig, *Church and State in Tanzania – Aspects of a Changing Relationship, 1961–1994* (Brill, 1999), 91.

was established to “build the nation” among Muslims shortly after the Arusha Declaration and henceforward sanctioned all Muslim affairs, including scholarships and Hajj-travelling (on BAKWATA, see further below).

The two most important branches during the Ujamaa period appear to have been the Islamic Educational Centre (known locally as the Islamic Centre Cha'ngombe) in Dar es Salaam, an extension of sort of the al-Azhar university in Egypt (which was opened in 1968 by Nyerere himself, Yūsuf 1990: 164), and the Saudi Arabian Al-Haramayn Foundation, whose branch was established in Dar es Salaam during the 1970s. In terms of influence and Islamic theology, the Islamic Educational Centre may be said to have contributed to a further grounding and inflow of up-to-date “modernist salafi” thought and practice.³³

In contrast, the al-Haramayn's sponsoring of local mosque construction and scholarships at Saudi Arabian universities added a new “contemporary Salafi” dimension to the existing thoughts on *bida'* and purism. The first Ansār Sunna formations are in fact directly traceable to the first returning graduates from the University of Madinah and the Imam Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd Islamic University in Riyadh. Among the very first students to receive scholarships from the Al-Haramayn was Shaykh Salim 'Abdu Mālīk bin Rajab bin Sima, who studied in Medina from 1972 to 1982, where he “joined 7.000 students from all over the world, all were Salafi”, as he phrased it during an interview.³⁴ Upon his return, Shaykh Rajab bin Sima started the Ansār Sunna as a study group in his mosque in Singida, and in 1990 he was elected national *Amīr* of the Ansāris at a meeting in Singida where the existing Ansār organizations met to discuss how to organize themselves nationally. Although Shaykh Rajab bin Sima, like other Ansār clerics I interviewed, placed emphasis on the learning he had received abroad, he pointed to Shaykh Sayyid Musā, Shaykh al-Farsy, Shaykh Muḥammad Qāsim al-Mazrui and Shaykh al-Amīn as “the four fathers” of the Ansār Sunna in East Africa. As he phrased it:

Ansār Sunna in East Africa was sent by Shaykh 'Ali Amīn in Mombasa, who was born in 1882, he is the first one to propagate the Sunna. He is

33 The Islamic Educational Centre was probably the result of a “Middle East tour” of the leadership of the EAMWS, headed by Shaykh Ḥasan bin Ameir, Tanzania's most celebrated Muslim hero of colonial resistance and efforts to counter Christianity's growth through the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*. He was the figurehead of the EAMWS until he was expatriated to Zanzibar when EAMWS was banned and BAKWATA established as part of the implementation of the Arusha Declaration. See Muḥammad Sayyid, *The Life and Times of Abdulwahid Sykes (1924–1968). The Untold Story of the Muslim Struggle against British Colonialism in Tanganyika* (Minerva Press, 1998), 273–74.

34 Interview, Shaykh Rajab bin Sima 31.10.2005.

very important, he was the first shaykh to start the Ansār Sunna in the whole East Africa, even central Africa. The second one was Shaykh Muḥammad [Qāsim] Mazrui, the student of ‘Ali Amīn, also he was *qāḍī* in Mombasa. Then there is Shaykh ‘Abdallāh Saleḥ al-Farsy, and the fourth shaykh who is still alive is Shaykh Sayyidi Musā – a very important shaykh, he lives here in Dar es Salaam. Those four shaykhs are the ones to start preaching the Sunna in East Africa – in Tanzania, Shaykh Al-Farsy and Sayyidi Musā.³⁵

Several other senior Ansār shaykhs pointed to local tradition as the original source of the Ansār Sunna and maintained that they were already aware of these ideas when they went abroad to study. The quote below stems from an interview with another of the very first students who went to Medina, Shaykh Yūsuf Rajab Mnenge. He first studied at the Islamic Educational Centre from 1976 to 1978 and then received a scholarship through the Al-Haramayn at the University of Medina. He is widely considered the Mzee (grand old man) of the Ansār Sunna in Tanzania Mainland and he here explains about the Ansār Sunna's beginning:

About 35 years ago, I was one of the people who started Ansār Sunna in Tanzania Mainland, not in Dar es Salaam, in Kigoma, in the far west. We got it from Kenya and Zanzibar, from Shaykh al-Amīn al-Mazrui, who was very famous in East Africa as far as literature is concerned, he was the first to publish these things. For example, there is one book which contains many of the founding principles, it is called *Hidāyat al-Aṭfāl*, which means “Guidance to Young Boys”.³⁶ So at that time it started to spread from Mombasa and Zanzibar. In Zanzibar, there we had Shaykh al-Farsy, a very important shaykh who died some twenty years ago. He is the one who translated the Qur’ān into Kiswahili, he had everything in his head, ha-ha. So, Ansār Sunna is not new, it was not started by any one person. You see, even before the Ansār Sunna was established here, the love, the attraction of Sunna was what made me to retire from the government service so that I could take my portion of religion. I was working for the government as a forester with a diploma in forestry. I worked all over the country, I was *mbwana mkubwa* [a big man] somehow, ha-ha. I had

35 Interview, Shaykh Rajab bin Sima 31.10.2005.

36 This particular book by Shaykh al-Amīn al-Mazrui was referred to by a number of informants, including Shaykh Sayyid Musā. The book identifies certain practices as *bidaʿ*, but far from as many as Ansāris do today.

the option to retire and did this in 1976 and started to find out how to go abroad.

How did you first learn about Ansār Sunna?

From reading magazines and books, from important figures like Mawdūdī from Pakistan, like al-Amīn al-Mazrui, from Shaykh al-Farsy. At this time I was travelling around with my job. We were reading books, local books and comparing it to works from other shaykhs from abroad. At that time I was just a preacher, not a shaykh. The little material I had at that time, I spread it to people. People could see that this man was coming with new things. I had some new ideas, about our grandfathers. That is why I say that 35 years ago I was one of those people who took a special interest in the Sunna of the Prophet and went to Medina. If you ask somewhere, you will see that I was one of the first, one of the first three; you will find me there.³⁷

These quotes bear testimony to the importance of Shaykh al-Amīn and Shaykh al-Farsy's publications and the historical local accessibility of wider Islamic reformist literature. In fact, Shaykh Mnenge explained during the same interview that he much earlier "started to understand the Ansār Sunna from reading books. People understood, comparing the traditions, this was in Kigoma in the 1950s", as he phrased it. The quote is also illustrative in terms of the way in which "traditions" emerge and evolve, locally, regionally and nationally, in this case through a medium-learned preacher and government employee, who through his job, at the height of Ujamaa, travelled around the country and spread his learning as best he could.

In the 1970s and 1980s these ideas were clearly controversial due to the general dominance of Sufism and the historical link between the state and Sufi elites (see further below). Yet they slowly spread and other interviews showed the importance of this and other early shaykhs to the formation of the local study groups that slowly turned into Ansār organizations in the 1980s. A central case is Mwanza, where the Ansār Sunna's Chairman, Sherally Ḥusayn Sherally, explained during an interview how he first heard about *bida'* in the 1970s because of a visit by Shaykh Menge in his hometown of Shinyanga.³⁸ Later, Sherally became involved in the first Ansār study group that grew in Mwanza's largest mosque, the al-Jum'a Majdid (the Friday Mosque), which since 1984 has hosted the local Ansār organization and whose

37 Interview, Shaykh Yūsuf Rajab Mnenge, 06.01.2006.

38 Interview, Sherally Ḥusayn Sherally, 09.01.2006.

main preacher since the 1990s has been Shaykh Jabir Katura, an (other) Medina graduate.³⁹

Salafi Eclecticism

The formation of the first Ansār organizations is intimately linked to the scholarships in Saudi Arabia, except for the case of Zanzibar (see below). Without these scholarships it is likely that the existing *bida'* discourse would still have become institutionalized in some form when the political climate began to change in the 1980s. Yet this would have amounted to something different than what the Ansār Sunna represents today since the local purist tradition is far from equivalent to “contemporary Salafism” (as set up here). To underline this, it can be noted that Shaykh Sayyid Musā, though clearly viewed by central Ansār shaykhs as an Ansāri, does not identify with the Ansār Sunna. What he represents is, according to himself, something different. As stated during an interview, the Ansār Sunna “comes from outside” and have added a foreign dimension to the local tradition he proudly, and humbly, has advocated and sees Shaykh al-Amīn al-Mazrui and Shaykh al-Farsy as the major producers of.⁴⁰

It appears obvious that the influence from Saudi Arabia has given local Islamic expressions a push towards “contemporary Salafism”. Standard Saudi teachings certainly have become more prevalent, but the underlying and lasting importance of the local purist tradition and the continued influx and importance of up-to-date “modernist Salafism” among Ansāris calls for caution in terms of theological categorization. Like several other Ansār clerics, both Shaykh Mnenge and Shaykh Rajab bin Sima are graduates from the Faculty of Ḥadīth at the University of Madinah, but in Shaykh Mnenge’s own formulation, it merely “sharpened” their inclination to “compare the traditions” and dispute local practices.

Another interrelated reason for categorizing restraint is that Saudi Arabia is far from the only country where Tanzanians have studied in Islamic universities to return to the Ansār Sunna organizations. Since the 1980s, several local and international Islamic organizations have facilitated and sponsored scholarships in Islamic universities in different countries, counting Sudan, Malaysia, Turkey and Egypt. In 1981, the Muslim Solidarity Trust Fund, a local set-up

39 For political context and more detailed outlines of the emergences of the Ansār Sunna in Mwanza, Tanga and Morogoro, see Gilsaa, “Muslim Politics”, 258–59.

40 Interview with Shaykh Sayyid Musā, 30.09.2005. Shaykh Musā himself talks of what he represents as a “tradition”.

launched to challenge BAKWATA because of its inefficiency, was established and began to send students to Islamic universities in Turkey and Malaysia, reportedly through the personal connections of the organization's founder Aboud Maalim, an ex-Minister.⁴¹ After Ujamaa's collapse and Nyerere's step-down in 1985, President 'Ali Ḥasan Mwinyi allowed for the establishment of branches of the Sudanese Munazzamat al-Da'wa al-Islāmiyya and the Kuwaiti African Muslim Agency (both organizations registered in 1987). Of these two at least the former has (besides local mosque construction and Islamic schools) sponsored university studies for local students in Sudan, while the African Muslim Agency over the years has established several schools and constructed many local mosques in collaboration with Ansār Sunna organizations; one of these is the Islamic Foundation, which is the registered name of the Ansār Sunna organization in Morogoro. In addition, several Ansār relatable institutions, leaders and preachers pointed to the African Muslim Agency, which is typical representative of "modernist Salafism", as a main provider of educational material and books to their institutions and personal use. The Salafi influences from abroad have in other words been abundant.

The labeling of the Ansār Sunna as a "Saudi" or "Wahhabi sect" by local adversaries should thus not be trusted blindly. It foremost reflects international security politics imbued discourse and local "doctrinal politics";⁴² even Shaykh al-Farsy was denigrated as a "Wahhabi" by local opponents after he resided in Mombasa and vocally attacked the 'Alawiyya *ṭarīqa* in Lamu by including *mawlid* as *bida*.⁴³ Ansāris rely on a range of theological influences that reach from the local purist tradition to standard "Wahhabi" works of ibn Taymiyyah and Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Most Ansāris indeed refer to themselves as Salafis and to ibn Taymiyyah as a central scholar of the Ansār Sunna. Yet most tend principally, and concurrently, to refer to Shaykh al-Farsy and "modernist Salafism" scholars such as Yūsuf al-Qaradawi and earlier Muslim Brotherhood theologians like Sayyid Quṭb and Ḥasan al-Banna as their favorite scholars. One Ansār leader revealingly mentioned ibn Taymiyyah and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb as "the beginning of the Ansār Sunna internationally", and then moved on to articulate the importance of the Shaykh

41 The Muslim Solidarity Trust Fund's role was considerable in the 1980s and remains largely undocumented. See Gilsaa, "Muslim Politics", 287–88.

42 Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge, Religion, Power & Schooling in West Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 133.

43 Interview, Shaykh Sayyid Musā 30.09.2005. See also Loimeier, "Patterns and Peculiarities", 251.

al-Farsy and Shaykh Sayyid Musā and the Muslim Brotherhood scholars in general.⁴⁴

This reliance on both “modernist” and “contemporary” Salafi sources is an effect of the diversity of learning and personal preferences of Ansār shaykhs, as well as the different “stories of origins” that all Ansār Sunna organizations show at closer look. In Zanzibar, for instance, the emergence of the Ansār Sunna was closely related to the environment of the Zanzibar Muslim Academy in the 1970s and to the importance of Shaykh al-Farsy’s ideas in Zanzibar.⁴⁵ In this case, the foreign dimension is a historical and overwhelmingly “modernist” one that relates foremost to Zanzibar’s historical links to the Middle East, rather than to the influence of post 1980 “Medina-graduates”. The Saudi dimension exists in the case Zanzibar too since quite a few clerics and Muslim functionaries in the *Qāḍī* Court, the Mufti’s Office and the Waqf & Trust Commission are graduates from Saudi Arabia. In the Ansār Sunna itself however, the al-Farsy tradition sits relatively central as the organization has been synonymous with Shaykh Nassor Bachoo who has never studied abroad, but in the Zanzibar Muslim Academy and with students of Shaykh al-Farsy. As something distinctly Zanzibari and a typical “modernist Salafi” trait, the Ansār Sunna in Zanzibar has always been openly linked with the political opposition and interfering in politics by voicing its critique of the Tanzanian Union and the violence during the Zanzibar elections in 1995, 2000 and 2005.

At the other end of the range, the establishment of the Ansār Muslim Youth Centre (AMYC) in Tanga is directly traceable to the influence of returning graduates from Saudi Arabia, whom introduced “Wahhabi” teachings from around 1988 onwards in an otherwise Sufi-dominated environment.⁴⁶ In this case the theological controversies have involved greater generational clashes and the AMYC is one of the few Ansār organizations that reject the local purist tradition; as the AMYC’s Director/Amir Shaykh Salum Barahiyan, a great Ansār

44 Interview, Umar Makame Umar, 15.12.2005.

45 I base this brief account on Zanzibar on a combination of the existing academic sources and a range of interviews carried out in Zanzibar between 2002 and 2008. See Loimeier, *Between Social and Marketing Skills*, 411–12 on the academy and 128–29 on the link between Shaykh al-Farsy, Shaykh Nassor Bachoo and the Ansār Sunna. I should add here, by contrast to Loimeier (126), that the Ansār Sunna in Zanzibar, though the organization has not officially registered in order to avoid contact with the government (a tactic that some organizations find necessary), is a well-established organization. Its office is placed in the Kikwajuni Mosque.

46 See Chande, “Islam, Islamic leadership and Community”, 298–99. In terminology I here follow Chande; what specifically he refers to by “Wahhabi” teachings is not clear.

voice in the country, stated with a diverting smile when asked to the tradition of Shaykh al-Amīn, Shaykh al-Farsy, and Shaykh Sayyid Musā: “they are *bidaʿ* too.”⁴⁷ This unusual rejection gives Shaykh Barahiyan an exclusive position, not just within Ansāris but among all Tanzanian Muslims, as I shall return to below.

Ansār preachers, including Shaykh Barahiyan, usually show a great deal of eclecticism and situational pragmatism when it comes to theological specifics. They often invoke “Wahhabi” elements of Ḥadīth comparison, but always in a form and scope that their audiences can relate to by referring to specific local practices, events and discussions. This transition from universal text to the oral practice involves a localizing element. One certainly senses a great deal of cultural difference between the auditorium in Medina and Shaykh Mnego’s identification of specific practices as *bidaʿ*—such as the un-Islamic excessiveness of *dhikr zamakalele* or the playing of popular music in connection with the *ʿid al-Fiṭr*—in front of local audiences.⁴⁸ At this level of *daʿwa*, where Ansār activities usually take place, the local tradition is very useful as it addresses specific prevailing innovations in Kiswahili. Also, it is widely available and it certainly also matters that many Ansār shaykhs and preachers, some despite years of studies abroad, have limited Arabic and English proficiency.

It does stand clear that international sources and methods of Ḥadīth comparison have become important. This seems related to the returning graduates, but it is also an effect of the rising availability of foreign Islamic texts, for instance by endowment of the international Islamic organizations or local Islamic bookstores and the online availability of Islamic knowledge. As in other countries, As-Sayyid Sabiq’s book *Fiqh us-Sunna* is widely used to identify “pure Sunna” (the book is available online on the Internet, but is also found in hardcopy among Ansāris). The larger Islamic Internet websites have also become a source of acquiring expertise and legitimacy; especially among the majority of “semi-clerics” whose Islamic knowledge far from matches the returning graduates and the local ulama. A website like IslamOnline,⁴⁹ which is connected to Yūsuf al-Qaradawī, was referred to as a frequent source of knowledge and consultancy by several Ansār-related preachers. This points to a fragmentation of sacred authority while adding to the hybridity of sources that are drawn on by individual preachers at different levels of learning.⁵⁰

47 Interview, Shaykh Salum Barahiyan, 07.03.2007.

48 *Dhikr zamakalele* refers to a very loud invocation of Allah, which is popular in the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*, see also note 22.

49 See <http://www.islamonline.com>.

50 Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 72.

Salafi Growth in Context

The Ansār Sunna nowadays corresponds to a cluster of semi-interdependent organizations, which are represented in all of Tanzania's 30 regions. Together, these organizations run hundreds of mosques and madrassas, dozens of schools, dispensaries, nursery schools, and orphanages, several high schools, as well as a teacher training college in Tanga.⁵¹ This growth is unparalleled among other religious institutions in Tanzania, except for Pentecostalism.

The most obvious and direct reason behind the growth—an aspect that Ansār opponents have done their utmost to create a fear of terror around—is the fact that much of the Ansār infrastructure has been funded from abroad. Some of the funds have been channeled through the private connections of individual Ansār clerics. A key example of this supposedly is the AMYC, which reportedly has benefitted immensely from Shaykh Barahiyan's connections abroad, at least until this became more difficult after 9/11.⁵² Also, a significant part of the funds to mosques and related infrastructure has, as previously indicated, been donated by the Al-Haramayn, the Munadhama'at al-Islamiyya, and the African Muslim Agency. Last but not least, wealthy local businessmen and families, mostly of Yemeni decent, have donated private funds and offered organizational and business talent to the Ansār organizations. Major cases are the organizations in Mwanza, Iringa, Zanzibar, and Morogoro that all have found enormous help and drive in resourceful local businessmen, which accounts for much of their material success.

51 A few examples of the activities of individual organizations: People linked to the Ansār Sunna in Mwanza run more than 30 madrassas, two primary and two secondary schools, a high school, an orphanage and a large charitable healthcare center in the al-Jum'a Majdid. A teacher training college may also be up and running by now. The Islamic Foundation in Morogoro has constructed wells and staffed around 100 mosques with madrassas in seven different regions, runs a primary school, a children and women's dispensary, an orphanage, and the country's far most popular and wide-reaching Islamic Radio Station (Radio Imaan). The AMYC maintains a very strong base in Tanga, where it runs around fifteen madrassas for children and adults, two orphanages, more than ten nursery schools, four primary schools, a secondary school, a high school and a teacher training college. In addition, the AMYC has been able to establish branches in several other regions, including Bukoba, Mtwara, Arusha, Morogoro and Singida. Two other Ansār factions further exist and run madrassas in Tanga, the Dar ul-Ulum and Dar ul-Ḥadīth.

52 One may speculate, many locals do, that Shaykh Barahiyan's working at the Tanzanian Embassy after studying in Riyadh provided opportunity to create good personal contacts. He has since finished a Masters degree in Islamabad too. Understandably, he downplayed the role of foreign funding during interviewing.

Yet the growth of the Ansār Sunna is merely a part of the general growth and public manifestation of revivalist movements and organizations that Tanzania has seen since the 1980s. As the case has been in surrounding countries, the more visible role of religion is closely interwoven with processes of political and economic liberalization, state shrinkage and the need of citizens to find alternative ways of generating income, and, particularly in the case of Christianity, massive funding from abroad. In the case of the Ansār Sunna, however, growth seems even more intimately connected to the moral space left open by Ujamaa's collapse and the apparent corruption element of Tanzania's political culture. Funds matter, and the Ansār organizations have a "foreign" dimension in this respect. Yet their success must be attributed to the particular historical setting and political environment they grow in. Ultimately, they reflect this setting and environment rather than being "foreign" to it.

The link between the emergence of alternative religious-economic actors and state shrinkage is particularly conspicuous when looking at the initial reasons behind the emergence of the Ansār Sunna. The sanctioning of scholarships at Islamic universities abroad at the very pinnacle of Ujamaa was in many ways paradoxical, as mentioned above. However, the idea evidently was that the graduates would return to take part in BAKWATA and help realizing the Ujamaa vision among Muslims.⁵³ Principally, the scholarships were meant to produce qualified Muslim teachers and likely also to contribute to a much-needed "modernization" of the madrasa institution. The need to modernize was an unresolved issue that had caused great concern among Muslim notables and politicians since the 1950s due to the extreme underdevelopment and lower level of education of Muslims when compared to Christians.⁵⁴ Things

53 BAKWATA was, against a complex backdrop, instituted in order to ensure Muslim support of Ujamaa, i.e. to ensure ideological congruency between Ujamaa and Islam. See Nimtz, *Islam and Politics*, Chande, "Islam, Islamic leadership and Community"; David Westerlund, *Ujamaa na Dini. A Study of Some Aspects of Society and Religion in Tanzania, 1961–1977* (Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm, 1980); Mayanja Kiwanuka, "The Politics of Islam in Bukoba District" (Bachelor thesis, University of Dar es Salaam, 1987); Imtiyyas Yusuf, "Islam and African Socialism. A study of the interactions between Islam and Ujamaa socialism in Tanzania" (PhD diss., Temple University, 1990).

54 See Chande, *Islam, Ulamaa and Community Development*, 187 on the Cambridge Conference in 1952, which shows the centrality of this issue already then. Muslim politicians and clerics over the course of the 1950s and 1960s did their utmost to modernize Muslim schooling. In the 1960s these efforts took place within the East African Muslim Welfare Society, which initially was launched by the Shia Aga Khan but by then had a local Sunni Muslim leadership, including Muslim politicians like Tewa Sais Tewa. See Said, *The Life and Times*, 265–66.

turned out differently however. Compared to the national Church councils, BAKWATA indubitably had greater challenges: It lagged immensely behind and its leadership was less competent because it was dominated by traditional Sufi clerics with poor managerial skills. Even more troublesome, the council never managed to attract much foreign funding, despite several attempts. It is hard to tell if Ujamaa's failure became BAKWATA's failure, or if BAKWATA in any case would have failed to undertake the necessary modernization during the 25 years it held monopoly over Muslim affairs.⁵⁵ As it happened however, the council's Sufi-dominated leadership became increasingly unpopular during the 1980s when development failed and the almost inherent corruption of BAKWATA's leadership was revealed.⁵⁶ Analogous to Ujamaa's deterioration, BAKWATA's monopoly evaporated over the course of the 1980s as alternative forums and organizational platforms arose, feeding on increasingly open criticism of BAKWATA's corruption and inefficiency and its apparent ties to a likewise manifestly corrupt government (see further below). As for the graduates, some indeed returned to find state employment and have since occupied some of the highest positions in BAKWATA and other government-relatable institutions.⁵⁷

55 On BAKWATA's failure to bring Muslims development, see Chande, "Islam, Islamic leadership and Community Development", 247–48. A status of BAKWATA's achievements and the general Muslim institutional mosaic by 2008 is found in Gilsaa, "Muslim Politics", 381–95.

56 A central case was the uncovering of excessive fraud in connection with the arrangement of Hajj-travelling, see Chande, "Islam, Islamic leadership and Community Development", 251. On the link between Sufism and the state, see Nimtz, *Islam and politics in East Africa* and Westerlund, *Ujamaa na Dini*. Both point to a degree of official "alliance" between Sufi Islam and the state, which is exaggerating the fact that central Sufi practices were elevated to national symbols and many individual alliances were made between Sufi shaykhs and the state. In reality, many of the most notable Sufis refused to accept the congruencies between Ujamaa and Islam that were demanded, Shaykh Ḥasan bin Ameir of the Qādiriyya and Shaykh Nur-u-Dīn Ḥusayn of the Shadhiliyya are major cases in point. See Chande, *Islam, Ulamaa and Community development*, 140–41, for an illustrative description of the "puzzlement" BAKWATA was received with in Tanga's Sufi dominated environment. On Shaykh Nur-u-Din in this aspect, see Becker, *Becoming Muslim*, 234–40. On Shaykh Ḥasan bin Ameir and his central role in Tanzania's Muslim politics, see Muḥammad Sayyid, "Mufti Shaykh Ḥasan bin Ameir - The Moving Spirit of Muslim Emancipation in Tanganyika" (paper presented at the seminar *The Role of Educated Youth to Muslim Society*, Zanzibar University, February 27th to March 4th, 2004), and Izza Ziddy, "Shaykh Ḥasan B. Ameir Ash-Shirazi (1880–1979): His Contribution to Islamic Education in East Africa" (unpublished paper).

57 Central cases in point are Shaykh Ahmedi Jumbo, Shaykh Sulaymān Gorogozi, Shaykh Ḥasan Chizenga and Shaykh Sulaymān Amran Kilemile, all former students in Saudi Arabia and among the most respected and highest ranking BAKWATA shaykhs currently.

Many returnees, however, had to find alternative ways of making a living than official state jobs, just like so many other struggling Tanzanians in the 1980s and 1990s.

Viewed in this way, the emergence of the Ansār Sunna is at least partly a side effect of Ujamaa's failure. When the graduates returned, the economic condition was even worse than when they left, and the option of facilitating Salafi growth in the burgeoning private sector via foreign funding must have been attractive in light of BAKWATA's economic stagnation. Politically, this development was facilitated by the infamous laissez faire attitude of Nyerere's successor 'Ali Ḥasan Mwinyi, who officially introduced political liberalization in 1986, but whose nickname became "Rais Ruksa"; literally "President Permission", or as some locals prefer, the "President of do as you please". The Mwinyi years from 1985 to 1995 produced one of the most corrupt regimes in Africa and it is not coincidental that the Ansār Sunna flourished alongside general local Muslim activism with roots in modernist Salafi thought. The door was, as previously mentioned, opened up for international Islamic organizations, adding to the inflow of Salafi influences from abroad. More importantly, the fading of Ujamaa rhetoric and policies, and interconnected with this BAKWATA's decline, produced an ideological vacuum that local Muslim intellectuals, clerics and politicians soon filled with modernist Salafi based criticism of the BAKWATA and the government's poor development record, corruption, and, as the accusation goes, "giving in" to the powerful Christian clergy.⁵⁸

The Ansār Sunna's emergence was thus merely a part of a larger expanding role of Salafi-related ideas. Alternative religious voices moved from private

Other major cases in point are the deceased (2010) Chief Mufti of Zanzibar, Shaykh Harith Bin Khelef Khamis, who until appointed as Zanzibar Mufti in 2001 served as BAKWATA's Regional Secretary in Iringa. These examples merely represent the tip of the iceberg, as graduates equally are found in the lower levels of BAKWATA and the Zanzibar Waqf & Trust Commission and *Qāḍī* Court.

58 This summarizes the main components in the claim of "Christian hegemony", and BAKWATA's role in this, which has grown from within local modernist Salafi based organizations since the late 1980s. Most of these organizations have basis in the "Muslim intelligentsia" that has grown from the Muslim Student Association at the University of Dar es Salaam since the mid-1970s, paralleling BAKWATA's poor performance and Ujamaa's apparent inadequacies. Main literary references for the existing prevailing discourse on Christian hegemony are Said, *The Life and Times* and Hamza Mustafa Njozi, *The Mwembechai Killings – and the Political Future of Tanzania* (Globalink Communications Canada, 2000). The Muslim newspapers An-Nūr, Nasaha and al-Huda, with roots in the same environment, are permeated by this discourse. See Gilsaa, "Muslim Politics", 426–449 for a detailed analysis.

mosques into the open public, and the critique of the existing religious and political establishment began to form the basis for status, recognition and income. Over the course of the late 1980s and the 1990s a whole industry developed around different types of Salafi-based preaching, with the result that particular preachers reached levels of popularity that far outmatched most local politicians. Initially, this evolved around *mihadhara*⁵⁹ preaching, which was closely inspired by the Pentecostal open-air preaching and “power-crusades”. Initially, *mihadhara* involved the comparison of the Bible and Qurʾān with the aim of showing the latter’s superiority, always with a strong anti-government undertone and ill-hidden anti-Christian reference in modernist Salafi thought (including inspiration of Ahmed Deedat).⁶⁰ Over the course of the 1990s, *mihadhara* extended also to include basic Salafi teachings (particularly developed around the concept of *tawhīd*) as well as open criticism of the government’s treatment of Muslims with more and more explicit references in modernist Salafi thought. Also, the sector of Muslim private schools linked to Salafi-related organizations (including the Ansār) has been flourishing. This has contributed to the general production of a Muslim middle class where identities are influenced by basic localized Salafi ideas, including the complaint of the existence of Christian hegemony and deliberate Muslim discrimination in Tanzania and elsewhere.

Within the “mass” of Salafism-embedded voices and burgeoning organizations, Ansār clerics and preachers were initially a small minority, far outmatched by the strong presence of Sufi-related organizations and individuals that led the most serious alternative organizations to BAKWATA. To some extent their theological message drowned because of the enormous popularity of the existing Muslim newspapers and the expanding political preaching that developed around critique of BAKWATA and the government, closely mirroring ongoing political changes and events.⁶¹ Yet with time the Ansār message won

59 *Mihadhara* is the plural of *mhadhara*, which means a lecture or a public speech in Kiswahili. It has roots in the Arabic word *mahdar*, meaning assembly.

60 On *mihadhara*, see Chanfi Ahmed, “The Wahubiri wa Kislamu (Preachers of Islam) in East Africa”, in *Africa Today*, 54, 4; Lawrence Mbogoni, *The Cross versus The Crescent. Religion and Politics in Tanzania from the 1880s to the 1990s* (Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2004), 171–72; Gilsaa, “Muslim Politics”, 274–295. On power-crusades, see Frieder Ludwig, “After Ujamaa: Is Religious Revivalism a Threat to Tanzania’s Stability?”, in *Questioning the Secular State. The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*, ed. David Westerlund (Hurst & Company, London, 1996).

61 The existing Muslim newspapers are, as mentioned in note 57, closely related to the rising criticism of BAKWATA since the 1980s. The first of the newspapers was the An-Nuur, which was launched in 1991, with one of the first headlines reading: “BAKWATA – the

followers. One reason probably has been that the leaders and organizations that initially headed the critique of BAKWATA have shown largely as unproductive and to become similarly patronized by different political factions.⁶²

In this context, the archetypal Ansār preacher's insistence on "pure Islam", and their rational and morally upright way of discoursing by reference to relevant Qur'ān verses and Ḥadīth, evidently materializes as a true Islamic alternative to the existing Muslim establishment. One senses that it really matters that the Ansār Sunna has demonstrated ability to create institutions with organizational and economic foundations comparable to those of Christians. It also does not hurt that the Ansār's message has its roots in the higher learning center and civilization that many young Muslims observably find in the Middle East. Ansāris indeed possess a distinct capital that almost automatically lends them prestige, and their relatively simple message is very operational when applied in a locally meaningful way.

Salafism(s) and Local Politics

The Ansār's appearance on the local scene has caused great furor. Their fast growth took place in a period when the international pressure for distinguishing between "tolerant" and "extremist" Muslims was growing and the idea of a terrorist-related intrusion of "internationalist Salafism" clung to these organizations from the beginning. Though the terrorism link seems very feeble, it has had grave consequences for the individual organizations and impeded their growth significantly. This has particularly been the case after 9/11 when the Ansār organizations were put under surveillance, and it seems clear that most of their external financial connections were cut soon after. Related, the Al-Haramayn was closed down internationally in late 2003 and its premises, including a large secondary school, were taken over by BAKWATA.

Rather than extremism, however, the controversy surrounding the Ansār Sunna has its reason in the challenge that these preachers and institutions

archenemy of Muslims". An-Nuur and the Nasaha are produced by the Islamic Propagation Centre and the Tanzanian Muslim Professionals Organization, which both have roots in the university environment. Al-Huda is related to Shaykh Ponda Issa Ponda, Tanzania's most famous Muslim activist with a past in the Islamic Propagation Centre. Each of the newspapers publish around 5-15,000 copies per week, depending on various factors, including the prevailing financial capability and whether there are certain events of interest going on.

62 For an analysis, see Gilsaa, "Muslim Politics", 361-380.

pose to the existing Muslim and political establishment. This especially relates to BAKWATA, which, despite continuously poor results, has remained the CCM's ally and "instrument" among Muslims. Both for BAKWATA and the CCM the terrorism discourse has arisen rather conveniently. The establishment of a competitive national organization, the Baraza Kuu, de facto broke BAKWATA's monopoly in 1993.⁶³ However, BAKWATA has, somewhat obscurely and as one of many "Ujamaa remnants" that work to the CCM's advantage, maintained its special status as the national Muslim council. This has confirmed the historical link between the state and Sufi Islam due to the continued state enforcement, via BAKWATA, of the *mawlid* and the *ʿid al-Ḥajj* and *ʿid al-Fiṭr* as national holidays and symbols of national unity, as this was installed during the Ujamaa one-party state.⁶⁴ Correspondingly, the state continuously enforces the status of BAKWATA's clerical leader as the country's Mufti and even gives BAKWATA a special status among Muslim organizations with respect to taxation of its activities and assets. Muslims are in other words given a reason to support BAKWATA, which means supporting the government.

The escalation of public vocal attacks on Sufi practices, and the Ansār's insistence on practicing Islam according to "international standards", thus have great political undertones. Numerous arrests of Ansāris have occurred in connection with the Ansār Sunna's insistence on celebrating the *ʿid al-Ḥajj* and *ʿid al-Fiṭr* in accordance with "international standards", and the Ansār Sunna's open rejection of the BAKWATA Mufti's local sighting of the moon in order to determine when fasting can begin.⁶⁵ However, conflicts with the authorities have arisen on numerous other occasions, in particular in Zanzibar where the theological confrontation is deeply embroiled in politics due to the centrality of Islamic legitimacy in Zanzibar politics and to the Ansār Sunna's open support of the political opposition.

In the larger scheme of things, the CCM and BAKWATA have been united in their stigmatization of new emerging Muslim factions as "fundamentalists"

63 BAKWATA factually, but not officially, lost its monopoly when Mwinyi in 1993 personally allowed for the establishment of an alternative national council, which is popularly known simply as the Baraza Kuu; literally "the Supreme Council" (short from Baraza Kuu la Jumuiya na Taasisi za Kiislam Tanzania / the Supreme Council of Islamic Organizations and Institutions of Tanzania). Since then BAKWATA has remained its close ties to the CCM while the Baraza Kuu and others, including the Ansār Sunna, generally viewed have been linkable to the political opposition. See Gilsaa, "Muslim Politics", 297–494.

64 Westerlund, *Ujamaa na Dini*, 71.

65 On the clashes, see for instance Loimeier 2009, *Between Social Skills*, 130–31, and the US government's "Religious Freedom Report" on Tanzania 2003 and 2004.

since the 1980s.⁶⁶ The notion of fundamentalism perhaps has some truth to it in the sense that the new organizations and voices, as mentioned, are more and more openly influenced by modernist Salafi thought.⁶⁷ Yet the essence of the fundamentalism discourse is traceable back to the 1960s, as is the harsh treatment of critical Muslim voices that refuse to support the government party.⁶⁸ In reality, the link between modernist Salafism and Muslim critique of the government is only undetectable in the existing sources in the 1970s at Ujamaa's pinnacle, when BAKWATA was newly established and a range of Muslim critics had found themselves expatriated or imprisoned in the process. At this point in time, the combination of fear of state violence and Ujamaa's "secularist mantra"⁶⁹ created a "stifled Muslim opposition",⁷⁰ which, as alluded to above, gradually re-emerged from the late 1970s onwards. Still, even during the 1970s modernist Salafi thought was unquestionably cultivated within BAKWATA and in the Muslim Student Association of the University of Dar es Salaam (MSAUD), which has been a major cradle of modernist Salafism since the mid-1970s.⁷¹

The Ansār organizations evidently represent something new, and an actual addition to Tanzania's Islamic expressions and environment. They have in many ways been received and done their utmost to materialize as the "true representatives" of Islam. To some degree, they may be said to represent a shift from an existing "Salafi narrative" (i.e. the local purist tradition) to an explicit

66 See in particular Ludwig, "After Ujamaa"; John Campbell, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and Religion: Fundamental Conflicts and the Politics of Identity in Tanzania", *Nations and Nationalism*, 5, 1 (ASEN, 1999); Peter Forster, "Religion and the State in Tanzania and Malawi", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 32, 3-4 (1997).

67 The most important organizations to have confronted BAKWATA, and in consequence be reproached as "fundamentalist", since the mid 1990s are the Baraza Kuu, the Shura ya Maimamu (the Council of Imams), Tanzanian Muslim Professionals Organization, the Dar es Salaam Islamic Club, the Tanzanian Islamic Centre, and the Islamic Propagation Centre.

68 See in particular Westerlund, *Ujamaa na Dini*, 57-58 on the "don't mix religion with politics" theme.

69 Westerlund, *Ujamaa na Dini*, 64.

70 Yūsuf, "Islam and African Socialism", 176.

71 See in particularly Yusuf, "Islam and African Socialism", which is based on fieldwork in this environment in the 1980s, on the Warsha group (Warsha ya Waandishi wa Kiislamu, the Workshop of Muslim Writers), a youth group established in 1975 with origins the MSAUD and BAKWATA. See also John Chesworth, "Fundamentalism and Outreach Strategies in East Africa: Christian Evangelism and Muslim *Dawa*", *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, ed. Benjamin Soares (Brill, 2006); Joshua Craze, "Islamic Modernism: The Case of Qutb in Dar es Salaam" (MA thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2008).

“Salafi identity”.⁷² Yet they are far from Salafism per se and they are foremost distinguishable by the way they wear Salafi identity via their dress code and their rigorist attacks on local practices and effective methods of comparing and referencing Ḥadīth and the Qur’ān verses. Physically, they are generally, as mentioned above, recognizable due to their dress code and beard. However, when working their daily jobs some Ansār leaders wear typical Western clothes, and their type of beard and clothing is also widespread among *mihadhara* preachers and local *Tablighi* preachers, which represent different variants of Salafi preaching and identity.⁷³

Further underlining the pervasiveness and malleability of Salafism, it seems vital to reiterate that Saudi graduates are well represented in BAKWATA and the Mufti’s Office, the Waqf & Trust Commission and the *Qāḍi* Court in Zanzibar. Also, they are found in the other non-purifying Muslim factions that are not patronized by the CCM. This shows that no automatism exists between studying in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere abroad and returning to the Ansār Sunna, and that Saudi universities can produce “tolerant” graduates that readily assimilate upon return. More generally, it contrasts the idea of a “blanket Salafism” that can explain Muslim activism or a “fundamentalist” “challenging of the state”.⁷⁴ How individual Muslims end up acting on their Islamic learning, if acting at all, seems highly dependable on individual circumstances such as social and family relations and, not unrelated, political affiliations and the specific opportunities that present themselves.

This agency and dialectical perspective situates the production of Salafi expressions and identities in the ongoing Muslim dialogue in particular situations and contexts. Tanzania’s Muslims, as Muslims elsewhere, navigate complex social sites. In many ways they “navigate the secular”, which leaves little possibility for a full-blown Salafi identity. Moreover, preachers cannot afford not to have any listeners, which necessitates that they preach in a language and present concepts and realities with a degree of familiarity and relevance to

72 Østebø, “Local Reformers”, 639.

73 The Tablighi Jamā’at arrived in Tanzania in the early 1970s from India and Pakistan. Their particular methods of *da’wa* were soon taken over by locals. Two Tablighi organizations exist in Tanzania. The first is placed in Fuoni, Zanzibar, and the second in Vikindu in Temeke, Dar es Salaam.

74 This perspective was dominant in the initial interest for the rise of “fundamentalism” in the 1990s in Tanzania. See for instance Ludwig, “After Ujamaa”; Forster, “Religion and the State”; Campbell, “Nationalism, Ethnicity and Religion”; Nestor Luanda, “Christianity and Islam Contending for the Throne on the Tanzanian Mainland”, in *Challenges to the Nation-State in Africa*, edited by Adebayo Olukoshi and Liisa Laakso (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1996).

their audiences. Relatedly, the mushrooming Muslim private schools in Tanzania cannot afford empty classrooms and have to register in order to be able to offer authorized diplomas to their students, which means that they have to interact with the state, even if their credo ultimately forbids it. Tanzania's Salafis are, as one of them related to *mihadhara* preaching expressed it, "swimming in the pool of *jahiliyya*" (a society ignorant of divine guidance), which necessitates ongoing compromise and realism.

This necessitated pragmatism is manifest in the way Ansāris relate to local politics. Among local Muslims Ansāris are often referred to as "people of the mosques", a notion that simultaneously points to their religious agenda and their non-political character. There might be some truth to this in individual cases, but the larger picture is that no one escapes "politics" in Tanzania. Some Ansār shaykhs and organizations might initially have preferred and shown ability not to become enmeshed in local politics because of their negligible size and the possibility of refusing local patronage because of the opportunities provided by their foreign funding. However, registering mosques, organizations and running schools makes contact with the state apparatus, and thereby "politics", unavoidable, and the success of the Ansār organizations has inevitably made them part of local power-struggles. From a somewhat hidden apolitical position with emphasis only on theology in the 1980 and 1990s, the Ansār leaders and organizations are nowadays just as involved in local politics as everybody else. The fact is that mosques are very intensively used to mobilize votes in Tanzania, which makes imams, preachers and clerics political mediators too. The far majority of Ansāris nowadays argue for the necessity of Muslims to "vote for benefits" by voting for Muslim candidates, showing a direct political engagement and even working quite closely together with non-Ansār organizations in order to mobilize the "Muslim vote" around election times.⁷⁵ This intelligibly makes the line between Ansāris and others more difficult to draw and it has its theological backdrop in the common reference of Ansāris and others in modernist Salafism. At the other end of the range, one finds a few Ansār organizations and voices advocating Muslims not to vote, the most recognized being Shaykh Barahiyan of the AMYC in Tanga.

Internally among Ansāris, the two approaches are referred to as respectively "soft" and "strict" methodologies and their difference is also visible in the way

75 This cooperation has taken place within the frame of the Shura ya Maimamu (the Council of Imams) organization, which is closely connected to the Baraza Kuu. Congregating mosque leaders, the Shura ya Maimamu has worked explicitly to mobilize voters to vote for "Muslim candidates" via the influence of imams. The Shura ya Maimamu has, among other things, distributed its own "election guide" during the 2005 and 2010 election campaigns.

da'wa is performed and the attitude towards specific local practices. For instance, the “soft” approach is seen in the welcoming of non-Ansār Muslims to pray and participate in the celebration of *īd* in Ansār mosques, which offers opportunity to win “converts”. Most debated internally among Ansāris, however, is the attitude towards *mawlid* where “softies” argue that attending in the *mawlid* is allowable as long as it is for the purpose of spreading the Ansār message. As an illustration of the continued significance of the local purist tradition, this particular practice is legitimized by reference to Shaykh al-Farsy’s known preaching during *mawlid* celebrations while serving as Chief Kadhi in Mombasa, where he purportedly used the opportunity to explain the wrongness of celebrating the *mawlid* and other innovated practices. The “strict” position by contrast allows for no intermingling with non-Ansāris, insists on teaching English and Arabic in the Ansār schools, and refuses participation in *mawlid*.⁷⁶

The local purist tradition and modernist Salafism clearly infuses the “soft” methodology. By contrast, it seems apposite to align the rigorist insistence on Salafi identity of the “strict” position with the notion of contemporary Salafism, not least because of Shaykh Barahiyan’s apparent public distancing himself and the AMYC from the local purist tradition and his advocacy of non-participation. The “strict” position could be viewed as a new trend that bypasses the Tanzanian nation-state framework and among locals Shaykh Barahiyan is generally understood to advocate such position.⁷⁷ However, this advocacy seems about as rhetorical as the distinction between modernist and contemporary Salafism is theoretical. In practice, the two types are not easily separable as the AMYC on many occasions have worked closely together with other Ansār organizations since the mid-1990s, for instance through the establishment of a national Ansār organization, the Jama’at Ansār Sunna Tanzania (JASUTA).

Though Shaykh Barahiyan bypasses Kiswahili in the AMYC schools he still preaches in Kiswahili, just as the many institutions connected to and owned by the AMYC are all officially registered and play by the rules offered by the state. Much indeed suggests that Shaykh Barahiyan and the AMYC represents something new and different in Tanzania, but the point is that also in this case there are identifiable localizing and pragmatic features. It certainly seems worth noting that Shaykh Barahiyan has earned himself a special position among Muslims through his reputedly harsh tone and his “strict” position, not just in

76 For a longer analysis of the “strict” and “soft” methodologies, see Gilsaa, “Muslim Politics”, 484–494.

77 Compare, Van de Bruinhorst, “Raise your voices”.

Tanga, but nationally. This perceptibly reflects the local potential in taking this specific approach and it is far from dissimilar to the way “political preachers” like Shaykh Ponda issa Ponda and Shaykh Ally Bassaleh—frontline agitators of the claim of Christian hegemony in the country—have used their oral talents and become great heroes of the Muslim struggle for political influence.

Concluding Remarks

The emergence of the Ansār organizations has been surrounded by controversy and references to growing “Wahhabism” and “fundamentalism”, suggesting a high degree of “foreign” bearings and local dissimilarity. This disqualification, however, did not only count the Ansār Sunna, which initially represented merely a small part in the public appearance of Salafi-related organizations and preachers over the course of the 1980s and 1990s. The Ansār’s growth certainly has led to new methodologies of preaching and conversion, and these organizations and preachers are at least partly linkable to the general international progression of contemporary Salafism. However, they emerged in particular circumstances and the development of their discoursing and ways of practicing remains deeply interwoven with and reflective of the local context. In view of the high number of Christians in Tanzania, the far majority of Ansāris refer to the literature and methodologies of modernist Salafism when deciding how best to promulgate Islam and create local development for Muslims, including participating in national elections in order to create better Muslim representation in politics. The idea of a true Islamic society certainly lives among Ansāris and remains the ultimate goal to reach this stage of Islamic fulfillment through conversion of “uninformed” Christians and Muslims. Yet at this point in time Ansāris focus on growth and Muslim development and choose to interact relatively closely with the rest of the critical Muslim voices and organizations when it comes to mobilizing the “Muslim vote”.

The Ansār organizations undoubtedly represent an actual addition to Tanzania’s Muslim societies and organizations. It is questionable though, how new and internationalist their theological agenda actually is and they are slowly becoming an accepted part of the religious landscape. Structurally, this relates to the theological reference in the local purist tradition, which is traceable to the synchronized arrival of Islamic modernist thought, colonialism and Christianity. In practice, it is an effect of the localizing features of Salafism and the interwoven nature of religious, cultural and political identities in Tanzania.