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Muslim political dissent in coastal East Africa: complexities, ambiguities, entanglements

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ABSTRACT

This article stages a comparative analysis of Muslim politics in coastal Kenya and Tanzania between 2010 and 2023. We explore parallels, discontinuities, and entanglements between different expressions of – and responses to – Muslim political dissent. Our insights are drawn from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Dar es Salaam, Malindi, and Zanzibar City. We begin by investigating a sharp rise of militant jihadi activity across the region, examining responses by Kenyan, Tanzanian, and U.S. governments, as well as the perceptions of ordinary Muslim citizens. We then explore currents of Muslim civic activism, highlighting the different claims, sentiments, and memories that these movements invoke. Merging these discussions, we analyse episodes of civil unrest and violence that are associated with Muslim dissenters, but which are shrouded with uncertainty. We examine the shifting interpretive frames that Muslim residents apply to these events. We demonstrate how these uncertainties and framing practices, alongside state security strategies, impact the capacity for Muslims at large to engage in political dissent. Using our analysis, we argue that forms of Muslim political expression in coastal East Africa, though comparable and sometimes entangled, must be interpreted with close attention to the distinct experiences, demographic configurations, and political landscapes that characterise different (sub-)national contexts.

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In the early 2010s, coastal Kenya and Tanzania experienced a spike of violent incidents – ranging from episodes of civil unrest and church burnings to lethal attacks on public figures, state officials, and civilians – which have been variously associated with militant jihadi groups and Muslim civic activists. While Muslim civic activism in the region has ebbed considerably since the mid-2010s, the presence of militant jihadi activity remains tangible in Kenya and some peripheral areas of mainland Tanzania. As scholars of religion and politics who have been conducting ethnographic fieldwork in coastal East Africa since 2010, these circumstances – including state responses to them – have left a profound impact on the lives of our interlocutors.

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In this article, we stage a comparative analysis of Muslim politics in coastal Kenya and Tanzania from 2010 and 2023. We bring into view continuities, divergences, and entanglements between different expressions of Muslim political dissent across our respective field-sites. From the perspective of the Kariakoo district of Dar es Salaam (mainland Tanzania), Ben's research has examined diverse forms of Muslim political expression as a window into dynamics of religious coexistence and identity formation in Tanzania.¹ With respect to this article, his interlocutors primarily consist of residents and workers that he encountered in the Kariakoo market district, the majority of whom are working class Muslim men aged between 30 and 50 with an interest in current affairs. Erik's research has explored modes of religious coexistence in the coastal town of Malindi (Kenya) through a focus on civil society organisations (CSOs) working to build peace and to "counter violent extremism" through an "interfaith" approach involving Muslims, Christians, and so-named "Traditionalists".² His interlocutors primarily consisted of NGO workers, religious leaders, and youth from various religious backgrounds who participated in such interfaith cooperation. Hans's research has investigated Christian Pentecostal-Charismatic expansion in Zanzibar (Tanzania) and how Christian immigration from mainland Tanzania was perceived in Muslim-majority Zanzibar at a time of significant political ferment.³

We invoke the notion of *Muslim political dissent* as a means to think together different forms of opposition, protest, and resistance that are coded as Muslim insofar as they are instigated by 'Muslims acting as Muslims', who in doing so make reference to Islam and notions of Muslim identity.⁴ As such, the term encompasses currents of both jihadi militancy and civic activism. Our aim is not to stress the proximity between these distinct expressions of political dissent. Rather, the term allows us to compare the divergent trajectories and entanglements of these different movements within the region. In the first two sections of the article, then, we delve into regional currents of jihadi militancy and civic activism respectively, reflecting on how different actors – ranging from governments to citizens – have responded to these movements, thereby bearing back on their expression.

We also use the notion of Muslim political dissent to shed light on how various actors – including international commentators such as academics and policy researchers – either draw or resist associations between these different forms of dissent. Our analysis attends to the political work that such (dis)associations perform. Accordingly, in the third section of the article, we merge the insights gained from the preceding discussions to examine a series of episodes of violence and civil unrest that are marked by uncertainty but associated with Muslim dissenters. We examine how different actors – including ordinary Muslim residents – have gone about interpreting these events and their alleged perpetrators. We also assess how Muslims' capacity to express themselves politically has been influenced by state security strategies.

This article, then, applies a comparative and ethnographic lens attuned to the lived experiences of Muslim citizens as they navigate shifting political landscape marked by jihadi militancy, counterterrorism interventions, longstanding state-Muslim frictions, and climates of uncertainty and fear. More broadly, we seek to nuance accounts of Muslim political expression and religious politics in Eastern Africa which often conflate diverse Muslim social movements and expressions of political discontent in the region, and in turn associate them with a violent "contagion" of "radical Islam" that threatens the secular state.⁵ Instead, our analysis suggests that forms of Muslim political expression in different regions of coastal East Africa are, though comparable, often

influenced by the distinct experiences, demographic configurations, and political landscapes that characterise different (sub-)national contexts.

Jihadi militancy and responses

In this section, we examine the rise of militant jihadi activity in coastal East Africa since 2010. We investigate how Kenyan, Tanzanian, and U.S. governments have responded to these developments. We also discuss Muslim citizens' perceptions of these activities and interventions.

Kenya

Following the 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the U.S. and its Western allies identified Kenya as a bulwark against the spread of "Muslim extremism" from Somalia across Eastern Africa. Concerns heightened after the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) undertook military action against Al-Shabaab in Somalia in 2011, leading to increased recruitment and retaliatory attacks in Kenya, including those on the Westgate mall in 2013, Garissa University in 2015, and the Dusit Hotel in 2019.⁶

My research site (Erik) was significantly influenced by jihadist activities and state responses. Interlocutors repeatedly complained about the decline of the town's tourism industry due to the threat of Al-Shabaab attacks.⁷ They occasionally shared stories about people who had allegedly joined Al-Shabaab.⁸ Such stories suggest that Al-Shabaab recruitment was ongoing in Malindi during my fieldwork; one Muslim interlocutor estimated that hundreds of youths had disappeared from Malindi to join Al-Shabaab.⁹ Newspapers also occasionally reported that security agencies had arrested or killed terrorism suspects in the town.¹⁰

In relation to these developments, various Kenyan CSOs received funding from Western donors to conduct programmes to "counter violent extremism" (CVE) in Malindi, operating on an assumption that supporting "moderate" Muslims would mitigate the spread of "radical" interpretations of Islam.¹¹ Such "soft power" interventions have been combined with "hard power" efforts by the U.S. and the U.K. to strengthen the counterterrorism capacities of Kenyan security agencies and judiciary, and to support the KDF in their military engagements with Al-Shabaab.¹² The U.S. have also increased their own military presence in Kenya and, together with the U.K., have invested in intelligence gathering to facilitate security operations. These counterterrorism activities have been heavily criticised by scholars, CSOs, and Kenyan Muslims for the severe human rights abuses that have accompanied their implementation, such as enforced disappearances, illegal detentions, extra-judicial killings, and the profiling of Muslim and Somali Kenyans.¹³ Meanwhile, Muslims who cooperate with the government in CVE programmes have been targeted by jihadist groups. For example, one Muslim leader who allegedly cooperated with Western intelligence services was murdered in Malindi in 2012.¹⁴ Consequently, some Muslim CSOs that implemented CVE programmes refused to publicly identify that they were funded by Western donors.

These patterns of violence have created a climate of fear and suspicion which is rarely openly discussed because of the security risks involved but has significantly shaped how

Muslims publicly express themselves. I observed an almost complete absence of public expression of “Islamist” ideologies during my fieldwork in Malindi.¹⁵ I also observed that Muslims avoided any public actions that might be perceived as “radical” by the Kenyan government or security agencies, refraining from openly criticising the government and avoiding polemical preaching against Christianity.¹⁶ Furthermore, I noted a silencing of longstanding public debates between Muslims with different theological orientations. Instead, Muslims in Malindi were very reluctant to publicly distinguish between “traditionalist” or “reformist” Muslims, as such distinctions could be associated with a distinction between “moderate” and “radical” Muslims that have informed counterterrorism activities in the region. Simultaneously, my research suggests that state violence in response to jihadist activities has fuelled grievances amongst at least some Muslims in Malindi. For example, one Muslim interlocutor shared how some Muslims were reluctant to vote for then-President Uhuru Kenyatta during the August 2017 general elections because in their eyes, he ‘killed a lot of Muslims’.¹⁷

Tanzania

Because Tanzanian security forces have not been deployed in Somalia, the country has not been singled out for retaliatory attacks by Al-Shabaab in the way that Kenya has. However, between 2012 and 2017, several Tanzanian regions saw an uptick in small-scale but often deadly incidents involving firearms and explosive devices, typically targeting civilians, clerics, police, political officials, and places of worship.¹⁸ Some of these incidents were connected to the activities of local “terrorist” cells allegedly inspired by the circulation of recorded sermons by Sheikh Aboud Rogo Mohammed of Kenya (killed in Mombasa by unknown assailants in 2012) and organised through Muslim institutions, though the extent to which these respective groups were linked with Al-Shabaab or their affiliates remains unclear.¹⁹ In my (Ben) fieldwork, I found that the confusion surrounding these attacks and their associated cells was compounded by a lack of official statements from state representatives, a hesitancy among media outlets and citizens alike to publicly discuss these events, and a belief espoused by many Muslim citizens (including some prominent leaders) that these “cells” were simply bands of ‘criminals’²⁰ – or, in a more conspiratorial key, that they were the product of false flag operations staged by the government in an effort to undermine the public standing of Islam and Muslims.²¹

These observations are also broadly applicable to the semi-autonomous archipelago of Zanzibar where, in contrast to the religiously mixed mainland, 98% of the population is Muslim. Amidst the broader ‘authoritarian turn’ that Tanzania experienced under the late president John Pombe Magufuli, Zanzibar’s political opposition and dissident Muslim organisations were gradually dismantled through targeted arrests and police crackdowns.²² Some analysts have expressed fears that violent jihadi groups could take advantage of the ensuing political vacuum by capturing and mobilising Zanzibaris’ suppressed grievances.²³ These concerns are augmented by an embedded perception among security analysts that, because of its long Muslim history, as well as its associations with secessionist and pan-Islamic politics, Zanzibar is a threat to Tanzania’s national stability and a potential breeding ground for Islamic radicalisation.²⁴

The apparent decline of jihadi attacks since 2018 (and in Zanzibar since 2015) has been attributed to a vigorous kinetic response by Tanzanian security forces, accompanied

by heightened restrictions on political space more generally under President Magufuli. Since 2012, Muslims suspected of having links with violent jihadi networks have been periodically arrested under the controversial 2002 Prevention of Terrorism Act and detained for extended periods, with some estimating that hundreds of such detainees are yet to be released.²⁵ Others have alleged that Muslim residents in coastal regions have also been subject to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.²⁶

These heavy-handed interventions have sown lasting grievances. One of my (Ben's) Muslim interlocutors described the security response in Pwani, which saw the disappearance of almost 400 people,²⁷ as 'the most bad thing ever in our country's history' – an instance in which, in his eyes, 'a ruler of this country ordered his own fellow countrymen to be killed ... innocently.'²⁸ Moreover, it is widely believed that Tanzania is still an important site for militants in Somalia, northern Mozambique, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to take refuge, train new recruits, and receive practical support.²⁹ In this climate, Tanzanians are increasingly likely to be exposed to the activities of jihadi militant networks concentrated in northern Mozambique, but also online propaganda in Kiswahili circulated by Islamic State.³⁰ Due to the recent constriction of political space in the country, commentators have warned that Muslim dissenters may be more receptive to these recruitment efforts,³¹ though ironically similar concerns about "radicalisation" were made in relation to the partial *relaxing* of such restrictions from the 1990s with the reintroduction of multipartyism.³²

Against this backdrop, the Tanzanian government has sought to exert control over the activities of mosques and madrasas in affected regions in collaboration with the Supreme Council of Tanzanian Muslims (BAKWATA).³³ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the U.S. government have supported Tanzania in establishing a National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC) for delivering CVE programmes and targeting 'armed cells'.³⁴ As in Kenya, such CVE initiatives encourage religious leaders to "remain moderate".³⁵ Citizens are also encouraged by NCTC officials to cooperate closely with security agencies, government institutions, and "moderate" religious leaders in their efforts to contain the spread of "violent extremism".³⁶

Summary

Since 2010 then, coastal regions of Kenya and Tanzania have witnessed a sharp rise of jihadi militant activity. In Kenya, Al-Shabaab and affiliated cells have orchestrated high-profile attacks, while Tanzania has experienced smaller but still deadly attacks by cells with unknown affiliations. Coastal regions have also served as recruitment hubs for militant jihadi groups operating in Somalia, Mozambique, and DRC. In response, CSOs in all three settings have implemented CVE programmes promoting "moderate" over "radical" Islam. Meanwhile, the counterterrorism activities of state security forces have seen the extrajudicial killing or long-term detention of suspected militants, together with crackdowns on opposition groups and Muslim organisations critical of the government. In the case of Kenya, these counterterrorism activities have received support from the U.S. and U.K, who have also stepped up their security presence in the country. These counterterrorism responses, often raising concerns around civil liberties, have amplified Muslims' existing grievances towards the state, fostering a climate of fear and suspicion. Coastal residents have grappled with the profound uncertainty surrounding the source

and nature of violent attacks, this being sometimes compounded by silence on the part of government officials and media, therefore creating more space for conspiratorial narratives to circulate.

Civic activism and Muslim-State relations

In this section, we investigate recent expressions of civic activism led by Muslim citizens which give voice to longstanding experiences of marginalisation at the hands of the State. We draw on our research to uncover parallels and divergences between these different experiences and the forms of political consciousness they elicit.

Kenya

Kenya's secular constitution guarantees freedom of worship and state neutrality towards various religions. However, in postcolonial Kenya, Christianity has enjoyed significant influence in politics, law, and public life due to its majority status. Meanwhile, religious minorities have been left to 'cope with the Christians'³⁷ in legal and political configurations that are often balanced against them, leading to feelings of exclusion among Kenyan Muslims.³⁸ In the early years of Daniel arap Moi's rule (1978-2002), Muslims generally adhered to state-imposed limits on political activities.³⁹ Formal Muslim institutions in Kenya such as the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) were seen as 'allies of the ruling regime' under the single-party political system in place since the 1960s.⁴⁰ Muslims were able to shake off their politically 'docile' reputation with the formation of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) in the early 1990s, which grew out of a new wave of 'Muslim rights activism'.⁴¹ While the movement had popular appeal along the coast including in Malindi, it was undermined by internal rivalries, state repression and political machinations. President Moi exacerbated the controversy by accusing IPK of 'Islamic fundamentalism', despite its stated commitment to representing the interests of all Kenyan citizens.⁴²

After the 1990s, Muslim activism was partly channelled into newly established CSOs, with some seeking international donor support, such as CIPK and NAMLEF. At times, these CSOs competed with SUPKEM as intermediaries between Muslims and the Kenyan state.⁴³ Some Muslims also exhibited interest in anti-Western preachers who rejected the Kenyan state and its capitalist, democratic, and secular ideals, fuelled by the state repression experienced by Muslim activists in the 1990s.⁴⁴ Some Muslim preachers have criticised secularism and democratic elections without advocating violence, demonstrating that only a section of Muslims who criticise the Kenyan state support terrorism or violence. Mwakimako and Willis argue that Muslim participation in the 2013 presidential elections was largely determined by the politics of ethnicity and patronage.⁴⁵ Their observations highlight that most Kenyan Muslims negotiate their marginal position in postcolonial Kenya pragmatically rather than actively pursuing (Islamic) alternatives to existing political configurations.⁴⁶

During my (Erik's) fieldwork in Malindi, I observed a shift from the 'very public politics of overtly Muslim discontent' that previously characterised the coastal Kenyan political landscape.⁴⁷ Instead, I witnessed many Muslim leaders participating in peacebuilding activities and events organised by various Kenyan CSOs which receive

funding from Western donors to “counter violent extremism”. Through close examination of these programmes, I found that many participating Muslims seldom expressed political criticism. Instead, they sought equality with Christians by arguing that Islam, like Christianity, supports ideals of peace, morality, and national unity.⁴⁸ Many Muslim CSOs have been ‘studiously loyal’ to the government, focusing on development and welfare projects hoping these would be more effective than political activism in achieving Muslim emancipation.⁴⁹ Consequently, the participation of Muslim leaders in CVE programmes strongly constrains the capacity of Muslims to voice political discontent in coastal Kenya.

Mainland Tanzania

Much like Kenya, successive Tanzanian governments have espoused a commitment to secularity, warning citizens to avoid ‘mixing religion with politics’.⁵⁰ Simultaneously, government officials have enjoined religious organisations to dutifully ‘play their part’ in developing the nation, while promoting forms of civil religion⁵¹ and ‘moral religiosity’⁵² that encourage political quietism for the sake of national unity.⁵³ Despite the ostensive liberalisation of Tanzania’s public sphere since the 1990s, religious organisations remain excluded from political participation, with critical voices being quickly suppressed or co-opted.⁵⁴

In mainland Tanzania, Muslim activism centres on longstanding grievances concerning citizenship rights. One prominent claim is that Muslims’ socio-economic mobility and political representation are curtailed by entrenched educational inequalities deriving from the colonial era when Christians enjoyed greater access to mission-run schools.⁵⁵ Another source of contention concerns the Supreme Council of Tanzanian Muslims (BAKWATA), the sole state-backed organisation representing Muslim interests in mainland Tanzania. My (Ben’s) Muslim interlocutors in Dar es Salaam unanimously agreed that BAKWATA has singularly failed to improve their collective welfare, whether through development projects or advocacy efforts. Many that I spoke with regarded BAKWATA’s leaders as mere government functionaries, perceiving the organisation primarily as a tool to absorb dissent and maintain the political status quo.⁵⁶ Others went further, claiming in a conspiratorial tenor that BAKWATA seeks to perpetuate ‘Muslim marginalisation’ in service of a covert ‘Christian hegemony’ (*mfumo Kristo*).⁵⁷ These ‘rights discourses’ had similar origins to those in Kenya where they culminated in the formation of the IPK (see above).⁵⁸

From the 1990s, amidst widespread disillusionment with BAKWATA, new Muslim CSOs and media outlets emerged, drawing attention to Muslim marginalisation and fostering what I (Ben) will call a Muslim counterpublic.⁵⁹ In subsequent decades, this counterpublic has periodically addressed itself to the state through episodes of protest and civil disorder, with heavy-handed police interventions augmenting existing grievances – the most notable instance being the 1998 ‘Mwembechai crisis’ in which at least two people were killed.⁶⁰

BAKWATA remains a focal point of dissent, so much so that Muslim critics have coined the term ‘BAKWATA Islam’ to designate an adulterated expression of Islam that they associate with politically acquiescent Muslims.⁶¹ When closely attending to everyday debates in Dar es Salaam, I found this distinction between Muslims who

renounce BAKWATA and those that tolerate it to be far more politically salient than the putative division between “traditionalists” and “reformists” cited by many commentators. Indeed, I observed that the membership of Tanzania’s Muslim counterpublic actually cuts across denominational and theological lines.⁶² Put differently, the orientation of Muslims vis-a-vis the state does not map cleanly onto their theological orientation. Moreover, while much commentary foregrounds the influence of “Islamist” ideals within the Muslim counterpublic, focusing on those who reject the secular state outright, I observed that most dissenting Muslims sought to petition the state to uphold the entitlements of citizenship concerning the distribution of power, rights, and resources, thereby tacitly affirming the legitimacy of secular and democratic political norms.⁶³ One exception is Sheikh Salim Abdulrahim Barahiyan of Tanga who has discouraged Muslim participation in general elections.⁶⁴ His Salafi-oriented organisation, the Ansar Muslim Youth Centre (AMYC), has been linked to Al-Shabaab recruitment networks.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, by 2017, Sheikh Barahiyan publicly condemned militant jihadi groups for violently challenging the state and introducing division.⁶⁶

Zanzibar

As a constitutive part of the United Republic of Tanzania, Zanzibar has been influenced by the developments outlined above. However, there are two socio-political dynamics that distinguish Muslim-state relations in the semi-autonomous archipelago from those in Kenya and mainland Tanzania.

First, Muslim civic activism in Zanzibar takes place in an overwhelmingly Muslim-majority context. Here, Muslim notions of belonging are an important site from which Zanzibaris negotiate matters of inclusion and exclusion.⁶⁷ Governed by a hybrid legal configuration combining secular and Islamic legislation since the late 1800s, expressions of Islam – reform movements included – have developed in close relationship to shifting positions of the state.⁶⁸ For instance, the spread of Salafi influences in Zanzibar can be traced back to the post-revolutionary government’s efforts to replace Sufi Muslim scholars aligned with the previous state power.⁶⁹

Second, Zanzibar’s electoral landscape has, since the introduction of multi-party politics, been constituted by two political camps, with vigorous opposition movements drawing on emerging currents of Muslim reformism to contest the identity of the Zanzibari state and the islands’ position within Tanzania.⁷⁰ This dynamic has led political organisations and Muslim interest groups to increasingly frame contemporary tensions along mainland-Zanzibar divides.

These demographic, legal, and political conditions have forced CCM to strike a balance between secular and Islamic forms of governance in order to maintain social legitimacy in Zanzibar.⁷¹ However, protests and civil unrest have often been met with police crackdowns, and government messaging has framed political opposition as ‘Islamist’ in character. There have also been attempts to restrain religious power within government structures, such as the establishment of the Mufti Law in 2001 mandating the appointment of the Muslim community’s chief representative under the Zanzibar president – a move that generated widespread protests.⁷²

In Zanzibar in 2012, tensions resurfaced following a power-sharing agreement between the ruling party (CCM-Zanzibar) and the opposition (Civic United Front)

after the 2010 election. During this time, a Muslim organisation called Uamsho ('Awakening')⁷³ gained wide public support in its outspoken criticism of the Union structure.⁷⁴ Uamsho mobilised Zanzibari nationalist sentiments and a discourse of Muslim unity to create a broad-based activist movement that transcended party lines, bringing together Muslim reformists and those seeking an independent Zanzibar and constitutional reform.⁷⁵ In my interactions with Muslim supporters of Uamsho, they described the organisation as a voice of and for the Zanzibar people – one seeking to bring peace to a society in which Muslim families had too long been divided in two toxic political camps. Uamsho was also seen as a challenge to socioeconomic inequality and declining socio-moral standards.⁷⁶ It demanded that the government prioritise Zanzibaris' interests before those of the Union and invoked discourses of a mainland Christian hegemony dictating Muslim Zanzibari lives. Rallying against Zanzibar's semi-secular outlook and the Union, Uamsho's rise reveals how Muslim civic activists draw from Zanzibar's contested position, both outside yet inside the Union structure, while speaking into long-standing contestations over Muslim identity on the islands.

Summary

In this section, we have investigated currents of Muslim civic activism in coastal East Africa. In all three contexts, Muslim social movements composed of people with heterogeneous theological commitments have emerged in response to longstanding grievances rooted in experiences of marginalisation attributed to the Kenyan and Tanzanian states. However, Muslims face severe restrictions on their ability to voice dissent, both in terms of political speech and freedom of association, on the basis that they violate civil religious ideals or CVE policies. Public demonstrations in all three settings have met with robust police responses, and outspoken Muslim organisations have often been co-opted, disbanded, or silenced.

Another area of contention concerns government-backed Muslim institutions, namely SUPKEM and BAKWATA, which are widely distrusted and perceived as instruments of the ruling party, designed to quell opposition and benefit compliant officials. Similar misgivings surround Zanzibar's presidentially appointed Chief Mufti. Consequently, since the 1980s, Muslim activists have increasingly invested in CSOs which provide an alternative to government-sanctioned bodies. While some CSOs have challenged the government and its favoured umbrella organisations, others increasingly have concentrated on peacebuilding and social development.

Kenya and Tanzania have both seen popular preachers addressing established grievances, though only a minority have urged Muslims to reject the secular state or abstain from formal political processes. Most Kenyan Muslims have maintained a pragmatic stance towards democratic participation, organising largely around non-religious identity markers. In mainland Tanzania and particularly Zanzibar, mistrust of democratic processes persists among many Muslim dissenters due to the ruling party's dominance. Still, outright refusal to participate remains uncommon, as many continue to petition the state for change.

Despite apparent similarities, we do not wish to characterise these manifestations of Muslim civic activism as homogenous in nature or origin. Consider Zanzibar and mainland Tanzania where some dissenters contest a putative 'Christian hegemony'. While

Uamsho leads a broad-based secessionist movement dovetailing Muslim belonging with Zanzibari nationalist sentiments (we discuss a comparable movement in coastal Kenya below), Muslim activists in Dar es Salaam have urged the Tanzanian government to recognise their citizenship rights by affording them the liberties and the prosperity that their Christian counterparts enjoy. As this suggests, the sentiments and interpretive frameworks mobilised by Muslim activists in coastal East Africa are, though often comparable, patterned by distinct experiences, collective memories, and registers of belonging, and their concerns and claims are influenced by demographic configurations and political opportunity landscapes that are peculiar to their (sub-)national contexts.

Navigating violence and uncertainty

In what follows, we discuss several instances of violence and civil unrest involving Muslim dissenters in our three field sites between 2010 and 2023. We highlight the politics of uncertainty and speculation that surrounds these incidents, and attend to the different interpretative frames that our ethnographic interlocutors and other actors brought to these episodes.

Zanzibar

In May 2012, two churches in Zanzibar were reportedly burned down in connection with public demonstrations in Zanzibar Town.⁷⁷ These attacks gained widespread media attention, with many holding the Muslim organisation Uamsho (see above) responsible.⁷⁸ These demonstrations marked the beginning of a series of tumultuous incidents which would continue even after the government forcefully dismantled Uamsho in October 2012, when civil unrest erupted just days after Muslim protests in mainland Tanzania (see below). In the lead-up to the 2015 elections, there were acid attacks on religious leaders (both Muslim and Christian) and foreign tourists, the murder of a Catholic priest and the attempted assassination of another, and several more churches burned. All these events have widely been connected to the rise of Uamsho.⁷⁹ Commentators have interpreted support for the organisation as indicative of an emerging ‘militant neo-fundamentalism’, including calls for ‘full Sharia’ (i.e. establishing an Islamic state).⁸⁰

Amidst the government’s crackdown on Uamsho in late 2012, the Muslims that I (Hans) interacted with were divided in their opinions about the organisation. While some criticised Uamsho for going too far, others denied its involvement in the violence. The latter group contended that true Zanzibaris and Muslims, whom they saw Uamsho as representing, could not have been responsible for the church attacks because violence is at odds with Islamic ideals of peace and liberation. Instead, church attacks were attributed to a militia (known locally as ‘Janjaweed’) linked to the ruling party CCM,⁸¹ forming part of a false flag operation designed to put a ‘bad name on a dog’.⁸² Church burnings, then, were perceived as a tactic to associate political opposition to CCM with Islamic extremism and to divert attention from recurring allegations of election fraud.⁸³

None of Uamsho’s leaders were officially sentenced for participating in the attacks. Nevertheless, they remained detained in mainland Tanzania on terrorism charges without a proper trial until their eventual release in June 2021.⁸⁴ Within Zanzibar’s contested political landscape, the interpretation of instances of inter- and intra-religious

violence as indicators of a growing militant Islamic presence has played an important role in silencing Muslim protests and restricting their public space since 2015. Attempts to dismantle Uamsho and the political opposition by associating them with “external Islamism” risk oversimplifying the complex politics and violence characterising Zanzibar’s polity.

With church demolitions occasionally sanctioned by the government to appease the Muslim majority,⁸⁵ accounts of attacks on churches in Zanzibar warrant care, as such Muslim–Christian atrocities cannot be straightforwardly attributed to the influence of “radical Islam” or “militant neo-fundamentalism”. Instead, interreligious violence often reflects broader disputes over political legitimacy that cut across different political and religious identity formations in Zanzibar.

Mainland Tanzania

In 2012–13, Dar es Salaam witnessed a short-lived Muslim social movement. It emerged amidst the crackdown on Uamsho in Zanzibar and renewed criticism of BAKWATA for its perceived failure to represent Muslim interests concerning the reintroduction of *Kadhi* (Islamic law) courts. Tensions escalated when reports that BAKWATA planned to sell an endowed plot (*wakfu*) prompted accusations of corruption within its leadership. The plot was occupied by a group of protesters led by Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda, an outspoken critic of BAKWATA. In the same month, a 14-year-old allegedly desecrated a Quran, triggering riots that resulted in attacks on at least five churches and the arrest of 126 people.⁸⁶ Days later, 50 more people were arrested in connection with the *wakfu* demonstration, including Sheikh Ponda who was also charged with inciting the riots. Ponda’s detention precipitated two large-scale protests, leading to further clashes with police. After his eventual release, Ponda was allegedly shot by police at another protest, hospitalised, and subsequently imprisoned until 2015 for violating his suspended sentence.

Many researchers now include the church attacks in their catalogues of ‘Islamist-associated attacks’ in Tanzania, linking Ponda with ‘jihad[i] Islamism’ and ‘radical’ organisations with purported ties to Al-Shabaab or Al-Qaeda.⁸⁷ Tanzanian Muslims themselves typically downplay the role of transnational jihadi networks in these events. For instance, in 2012, the Chief Mufti and leader of BAKWATA, Sheikh Issa bin Shaaban Simba, publicly denounced Ponda and his ‘small’ band of ‘Wahabi’ activists for using violence and intimidation in the name of Islam, plundering mosques to enrich themselves, defying BAKWATA and the state, and attempting to impose their own rule at the expense of Tanzania’s climate of ‘peace’.⁸⁸ Simba’s statement aims to discredit Ponda and BAKWATA’s critics by combining popular tropes about seditious “Wahabi” radicals, nationalistic ideals of peace, and a widespread antipathy towards “uneducated” con-artists. One of my (Ben’s) Muslim interlocutors, himself a critic of BAKWATA, echoed the Chief Mufti’s portrayal of Ponda, dismissing him as a ‘thief who was ‘shot for his own profit’.⁸⁹ Others disagreed: one Muslim man told me that President Kikwete had orchestrated the church attacks with intelligence officers to ‘defame’ Ponda and the struggle against Muslim marginalisation, invoking the false flag trope seen above.⁹⁰ The reason, he claimed, is that Kikwete (who identifies as Muslim) is in fact ‘not a Muslim’ at all, but consciously working against

Muslim interests. He evidenced this by pointing to how Kikwete did not stop ‘the prison guards [using] sticks to torture *Uamsho* people.’ My interlocutor also complained that the Tanzanian government was telling Muslims that Ponda ‘is a Salafi supported by terrorists’ when he is only ‘65% Salafi’, insisting that Ponda belongs to a broad-based group of Muslims agitating for citizenship rights rather than instigating violence. One can see, then, that debates between Muslims did not centre on the threat of violent jihadism, but rather the (il)legitimacy of BAKWATA and the plundering of Muslim commons.

There is an intriguing twist to this tale: in 2019, I was told that Ponda had unexpectedly risen in the estimations of many Tanzanians – Christians among them – due to his outspoken criticism of President Magufuli’s ‘oppressive’ government.⁹¹ A year later, the leading opposition presidential candidate, Tundu Lissu, a Christian, expressed on Twitter that he was ‘honoured’ to have Ponda’s endorsement, describing him as ‘one of the most courageous and conscientious voices in Tanzania’s Muslim community today.’⁹² These insights underscore the complexity and contingency of Muslim and non-Muslim citizens’ varied interpretations of the 2012–13 unrest.

Ponda is, however, the exception to a broader rule: Tanzania’s Muslim counterpublic has remained largely subdued since the 2013 protests. This is partly due to restrictions on political space and the prevailing climate of fear that has persisted beyond the passing of President Magufuli. As in coastal Kenya, some dissenting Muslim leaders and institutions now avoid political confrontations with the state in order to ‘distance themselves’ from violent jihadist groups, concentrating instead on proselytisation and social development.⁹³ Several interlocutors even claimed that previously outspoken Muslim leaders had been threatened or ‘bought’ by the government, while ‘activist mosques’ had been infiltrated by security personnel, becoming ‘BAKWATA mosques’.⁹⁴ It remains to be seen whether marginalisation discourses will regain salience under President Suluhu’s premiership.

Kenya

During my (Erik’s) fieldwork in 2017, I encountered considerable uncertainty surrounding violent incidents in the coastal region. Newspapers reported several attacks that were allegedly perpetrated by Al-Shabaab in various parts of Lamu County, including along the Lamu-Malindi road.⁹⁵ While some of these attacks may indeed have been perpetrated by Al-Shabaab, not all were claimed by the group, leading to speculation about the identity and motivation of the attackers among my interlocutors. One Muslim interlocutor argued that ‘everyone knows that it is not Al-Shabaab’ because of the purportedly uncalculated manner in which some attacks were conducted.⁹⁶ He also argued against Al-Shabaab involvement due to the significant presence of security personnel that are stationed in Lamu County, including a U.S. military base (which was, it should be noted, subsequently attacked in 2020).⁹⁷ Instead, he proposed that political elites in Lamu might have been responsible for, or at least condoned, these attacks, exploiting the volatile security situation for their political gain leading up to the 2017 general elections. These accounts highlight the uncertainty and contestation surrounding the identity and motives of attackers, despite media reports and scholarly analyses often attributing them to Al-Shabaab.

Several violent incidents have also been attributed to a coastal secessionist movement, the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC). Although MRC was labelled as ‘the latest Muslim separatist group’ in some analyses,⁹⁸ it primarily mobilised a regional “coasterian” (*wapwani*) identity. This identity transcends ethnic and religious divisions amongst coastal populations in order to challenge the economic and political dominance of “upcountry” (*bara*) residents who are mostly Christians.⁹⁹ The MRC leadership has generally identified as non-violent, emphasising their use of legal and political means to pursue their goals. Nevertheless, various newspaper reports have readily attributed violent incidents to MRC, allegations that its leadership generally denied.¹⁰⁰ Some analyses have also suggested that the MRC has connections with Al-Shabaab, which MRC leaders again rejected.¹⁰¹

These observations highlight how violent incidents are sometimes ascribed to MRC, which in turn is occasionally associated with “radical Islam” on the basis of its alleged ties with Al-Shabaab. Such analyses risk misinterpretation and over-generalisation, overlooking the diverse motivations of Muslim and non-Muslim supporters of movements like MRC. For example, one of my (Erik) non-Muslim Mijikenda interlocutors explained that he supported MRC because he was critical of the relatively disadvantaged position of the Mijikenda, also relative to other coastal populations, such as Swahili Muslims.¹⁰²

Despite the diverse reasons for supporting MRC and the ambiguity surrounding violent incidents attributed to the organisation, it sometimes continues to be categorised as a “violent extremist” movement in Western policy reports by organisations that aim to “counter violent extremism” in Kenya, alongside Islamic terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab.¹⁰³ Routine associations like these between MRC and “violent extremism” in policy analyses and newspaper reports no doubt perform political work. MRC has faced government crackdowns and was banned between 2008 and 2012, regardless of whether MRC members strive towards their political goals via legal and constitutional means.¹⁰⁴

Summary

In this section, we have discussed a series of violent incidents associated with episodes of Muslim mobilisation in coastal East Africa, from demonstrations turned riots to attacks on religious leaders and churches. Several incidents carry significant uncertainty concerning the perpetrators and their motives, exacerbated by limited access to reliable information and distrust of government and government-backed Muslim leaders. Despite this ambiguity, commentators and government officials have sometimes hastily attributed these events to civic activist groups, associating them with “radical Islam” and militant jihadism. These associations, while perhaps politically expedient for governments seeking to curb dissent, also often rest on shaky foundations. For instance, the emergence of MRC and Uamsho can be primarily explained with reference to longstanding (sub-)national imaginaries and revitalised claims for greater political autonomy from the nation. While these movements sometimes draw on notions of Muslim identity for mobilisation, they are not exclusively “Muslim” as they draw support from both non-Muslim and Muslim citizens, and pursue objectives that are not primarily (or, in the case of MRC, *not at all*) framed by Islamic socio-political norms. Meanwhile, in mainland Tanzania, Ponda’s supporters became embroiled in

civil unrest due to longstanding contestations surrounding the state's role governance of Muslim structures and resources. In other words, these movements are better understood as having emerged from the currents of civic activism discussed above rather than the creeping influence of "radical Islam" and militant jihadi cells. Indeed, many Muslim leaders and citizens in the region – both dissident and otherwise – downplay or repudiate such associations.

We do not wish to deny the possibility that members of the groups under discussion were implicated in the violent events described: in some cases (e.g. Dar es Salaam) this seems almost certain; in other cases (e.g. Zanzibar) it is much less clear – though it should be noted that these clusters of incidents were very different in terms of their severity. Importantly, though, we have seen that dissenting Muslim leaders and citizens in the region often reject associations made between these movements and such violent incidents. This is particularly apparent in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar where a false flag trope has emerged among civic activists, suggesting that the ruling party seeks to defame Muslim dissenters (or all Muslims) or to divert attention from its own failings, as no "true" Muslim could perpetrate such acts. There are clear parallels here with Nigeria's 'mainstream Salafis,' as described by Alex Thurston, even if the groups under discussion do not share a coherent "Salafi" identity: by attributing responsibility for militant activity and violent incidents to the state, civic activists simultaneously disassociate themselves (and Islam) from jihadi militancy and reaffirm their critique of the state.¹⁰⁵

Muslim citizens' perceptions of these events are, then, often framed by national political concerns about representation and autonomy, struggles between Muslim organisations for legitimacy and resources, and grievances against government attempts to control and confine Muslim dissent. They also resist associations between Islam and violence that circulate at a global scale. Nevertheless, as the case of Sheikh Ponda suggests, we can see that the interpretive frames that citizens bring to violent incidents are not only diverse but may also change radically over time.

Conclusion

In this article, we have conducted a comparative analysis of Muslim politics in coastal Kenya and Tanzania between 2010 and 2023, using ethnographic insights to highlight parallels, divergences, and interconnections between diverse expressions of – and responses to – Muslim political dissent.

We began by examining militant jihadi activity in the region and government responses. These countermeasures have helped precipitate a decline in jihadi attacks, but they have also served to suppress non-violent Muslim political dissent. Heavy-handed state interventions have exacerbated Muslim grievances, fostering climates of fear and suspicion. These conditions have facilitated the proliferation of conspiratorial narratives which frame jihadi attacks as state-engineered false flag manoeuvres.

We then turned to currents of Muslim civic activism in the region. These movements are composed of people with diverse theological outlooks, being principally galvanised by experiences of marginalisation allegedly instigated or compounded by the state, as well as a profound distrust of government-backed Muslim institutions. Muslim civic activists have often met with firm police responses, sometimes due to broader constrictions of political space, but also because of the crackdown on militant jihadism. Outspoken

Muslim CSOs have also been shut down or incentivised to adopt a non-political focus. Despite their deep political misgivings, most Muslim dissenters still participate in democratic processes.

Finally, we examined a number of violent instances associated with Muslim dissenters which are shrouded in uncertainty, and then considered the different interpretive frames that actors have applied to these events. We challenged the sometimes-hasty attribution of violent incidents and episodes of civil unrest to the influence of “radical Islam” or militant jihadism among civic activists. We questioned the extent to which movements that were (rightly or wrongly) associated with these events could be called “jihadi”, or even (in the case of MRC and Uamsho) “Muslim”. We revealed how Muslims’ interpretations of these episodes often incorporate the same conspiratorial, false flag tropes invoked in relation to jihadi attacks. Such events, then, become additional sites for foregrounding grievances concerning marginalisation.

By way of conclusion, we detail how our comparative and ethnographic approach strengthens this article’s distinctive contribution to recent thinking about Muslim politics in Eastern Africa and beyond. Using a comparative lens, we have highlighted parallels and peculiarities among different currents of Muslim political dissent across coastal East Africa, as well as different actors’ responses to them. These continuities and divergences stem from a range of factors: religious demographics in (sub-)national polities, political opportunity structures available to (Muslim) citizens, forms of (religious) governance and security intervention favoured by state apparatuses, exposure to transregional circulations of Muslim ideas and practices, collaboration or lack thereof between governments and Western nations in implementing security strategies, collective memories and senses of belonging shaping grievances and claims, histories of state-Muslim and Muslim-Muslim friction, the nature of local “triggering events” for violent episodes, and so on.¹⁰⁶ Our comparative lens has also highlighted intra-regional entanglements. Concerning jihadi militancy, we discussed how militant jihadi cells in mainland Tanzania drew inspiration from recordings of Sheikh Rogo’s sermons, and described how clandestine networks across Eastern Africa have sheltered, trained, and supplied militants. Regarding civic activism, we explored how demonstrations and high-profile arrests in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar reciprocally influenced one another, and the circulation of Muslim rights discourses between Tanzania and Kenya.

By drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, we have foregrounded dynamics of uncertainty that are often absent from accounts of Muslim politics in Eastern Africa. We have taken seriously the potency of these dynamics within the political landscapes under discussion – both directly, insofar as uncertainty is a tangible reality that people are forced to navigate, but also indirectly, insofar as uncertainty (and distrust) allows room for the circulation of conspiratorial narratives. Moreover, uncertainties provide fertile ground for actors to discursively conflate disparate Muslim social movements and expressions of political discontent. The notion of Muslim political dissent has allowed us to bring currents of jihadi militancy and civic activism into the same analytical frame, revealing a pervasive politics of labelling surrounding violent but highly ambiguous incidents involving academics, journalists, and policy commentators, as well as citizens and government officials. It underscores the political work that all of these narratives, discourses, and categorisations perform, particularly concerning Muslims’ capacity for public political expression (whether they do so as Muslims, or as individuals

whose political expression can be coded by others as Muslim). Our long-term ethnographic vantage point further illuminates the multiplicity and the contingency of these interpretive frames, allowing us to trace the evolving semiotic lives of different individuals and incidents. Emphasising these dynamics of uncertainty, categorisation, and contingency, we propose, will help to nuance future accounts of Muslim political expression in Eastern Africa and beyond.

While Kenya continues to grapple with the presence of Al-Shabaab within its borders, and Tanzania confronts the ongoing insurgency in Mozambique and militant activity in the Great Lakes region,¹⁰⁷ Muslim civic activism has diminished considerably across the region. Indeed, since the mid-2010s, the gaze of the international commentariat has, in many respects, moved on from coastal Kenya and Tanzania. Our research highlights the enduring grievances held by many Muslim citizens regarding the state, the vast majority of whom have no association with jihadi militant groups. It remains open to question whether civic activist movements against Muslim marginalisation will regain political salience in the contexts we discuss. However, we conclude by stressing the importance of understanding the grievances and aspirations underpinning these movements as ongoing realities within people's life-worlds.

Notes

1. Kirby, *Muslim Mobilisation*.
2. Meinema, *Regulating Religious Coexistence*.
3. Olsson, *Jesus for Zanzibar*.
4. Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 435.
5. Metelits, *Security in Africa*, Romaniuk et al.; "What Drives Violent Extremism?," 166-67.
6. Chome, "From Islamic reform to Muslim activism."
7. Field observations, 9 February 2017; 3 January 2017; 28 June 2017.
8. Field observations, 19 September 2016; 20 November 2016; 16 December 2016.
9. Field observations, 7 August 2017.
10. See for example: Mwangi Muraguri and Joseph Masha, "Police Kill Four 'Terrorists' in Malindi and Recover Deadly Arsenal," *The Standard*, 2018, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/counties/article/2000188812/police-kill-four-terrorists-in-malindi-and-recover-deadly-arsenal>; Alphonse Gari, "Malindi Businessman Detained over al Shabaab Links," *The Star*, 19 October 2022, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2022-10-19-malindi-businessman-detained-over-al-shabaab-links/>; Fred Mukinda and Charles Lwanda, "Eight Terror Suspects held in Malindi after Police Raid," *Nation*, 2 July 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/eight-terror-suspects-held-in-malindi-after-police-raid-1212766>.
11. Meinema, "Countering 'Islamic' violent extremism," 266-70.
12. Mazrui et al., "Introduction."
13. HRW, *Kenya*.
14. IRIN, "Gunned Down in Mombasa – The Clerics that have Died," 28 July 2014, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53df59974.html>
15. Chome, "From Islamic reform to Muslim activism."
16. Meinema, "Witchcraft, Terrorism, and 'Things of Conflict'."
17. Field observations, 8 August 2017.
18. Bofin, *Tanzania and the Political Containment of Terror*, Eriksen, *Tanzania*, 31-32, ICG, "Al-Shabaab Five Years After Westgate.", 18-19, Jingu, "The Flurry of Crimes.", Perkins, "Magufuli's Reign," 6.
19. ICG, "Al-Shabaab Five Years After Westgate.", 17-19; Saalfeld, *Before and Beyond Al-Shabaab*, 28; Jingu, "The Flurry of Crimes," 96.

20. Field observations, Dar es Salaam, 2015-16; interview with Mzee Bakari, Zanzibar City, 2013.
21. Repeated interviews with Nassoro, Dar es Salaam, 2015-16.
22. Minde, "Tunataka Nchi Yetu", Paget, "Tanzania."
23. Saalfeld, "On the Divergent Trajectories of African Islamism," 215.
24. ICG, *Averting Violence*, 21; LeSage, *The Rising Terrorist Threat*, 8.
25. Bofin, *Tanzania Releases Prisoners*, 3.
26. Quinn, *From Separatism to Salafism*, 98-99; Ramadhani, "Religious Tolerance."
27. Erick Kabandera, "Where Are the Missing 380 People? Tanzanian MPs Ask Government." *The East African*, 5 May 2018.
28. Nassoro, personal communication, 2021.
29. Perkins, "Magufuli's Reign"; Saalfeld, *Before and Beyond Al-Shabaab*.
30. Bofin, *Tanzania and the Political Containment of Terror*.
31. Perkins, "Magufuli's Reign."
32. Ludwig, "After Ujamaa"; Heilman and Kaiser, "Religion, Identity and Politics."
33. Bofin, *Tanzania and the Political Containment of Terror*.
34. Eriksen, *Tanzania*, 32; USDS, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017*, 44.
35. Langås, *Peace in Zanzibar*; Olsson, *The Politics of Interfaith Institutions*.
36. Dang, *Violent Extremism*, 16-18.
37. Cruise O'Brien, "Coping with the Christians."
38. Kresse, *Swahili Muslim Publics*.
39. Ibid.
40. Mwakimako and Willis, *Islam, Politics, and Violence*, 24.
41. Kresse, *Swahili Muslim Publics*, 94; Saalfeld and Mwakimako, "Integrationism vs. rejectionism," 43-44.
42. Bakari, "Muslims and the Politics of Change," 246.
43. Deacon et al., "Preaching politics," 12.
44. Chome, "From Islamic reform to Muslim activism," 5; Mwakimako and Willis, *Islam, Politics, and Violence*, 13.
45. Mwakimako and Willis, "Islam and Democracy"; see also Elischer, "'Partisan Politics'."
46. Kresse, *Swahili Muslim Publics*, 140-41; Ndzovu, *Muslims in Kenyan Politics*, 51.
47. Deacon et al., "Preaching politics," 12.
48. Meinema, "Countering 'Islamic' violent extremism?"
49. Deacon et al., "Preaching politics."
50. Westerlund, *Ujamaa na Dini*.
51. Olsson, *The Politics of Interfaith Institutions*.
52. Meinema, "'Idle minds' and 'empty stomachs'."
53. Maddox, "The Church and Cigogo."
54. Paget, "The authoritarian origins."
55. Dilger, *Learning Morality*; Mushi, "Conceptual and Historical Perspectives."
56. Interview with Salum, Dar es Salaam, 2015; interview with Suleiman, Dar es Salaam, 2015. See also Chande, "Radicalism and Reform"; Luanda, "Christianity and Islam."
57. Interview with Khamis, Dar es Salaam, 2016; repeated interviews with Nassoro, Dar es Salaam, 2015-16. See also Gilsaa, *Muslim Politics*; Kirby, *Muslim Mobilisation*; Wijisen and Mosha, "BAKWATA is like a dead spirit."
58. Saalfeld and Mwakimako, "Integrationism vs. rejectionism."
59. Mallya, "Faith-based Organizations"; Loimeier, *Islamic Reform*.
60. Njozi, *Mwembechai Killings*.
61. Field observations, Dar es Salaam, 2015-16.
62. Kirby, *Muslim Mobilisation*.
63. See also Gilsaa, *Muslim Politics*.
64. Gilsaa, "Salafism(s) in Tanzania," 57-58.
65. LeSage, *The Rising Terrorist Threat*, 11.
66. Bofin, *Tanzania and the Political Containment of Terror*.

67. Bang, "Cosmopolitanism Colonised?"
68. Langås, *Peace in Zanzibar*, 64.
69. Gilsaa, "Salafism(s) in Tanzania.;" Saalfeld, "On the Divergent Trajectories," 209.
70. Bissell and Fouéré, *Social Memory*; Minde, "Tunataka Nchi Yetu."
71. Langås, *Peace in Zanzibar*, 230.
72. Loimeier, "Zanzibar's Geography of Evil."
73. Also known as Jumuiya ya Uamhso Mihadhara ya Kiislamu Zanzibar (the Association of Islamic Awareness and Public Discourse in Zanzibar). See Olsson, *Jesus for Zanzibar*.
74. Roop et al., "The politics of continuity and collusion."
75. Langås, *Peace in Zanzibar*, 84.
76. Field observations in Zanzibar City 2012, and focus group interview with six young Muslim men and women in Zanzibar City, November 2012.
77. Ng'wanakilala, *Zanzibar Islamists burn churches*.
78. Fouéré, "Zanzibar independent in 2015?"; Olsson, *Jesus for Zanzibar*.
79. LeSage, *The Rising Terrorist Threat*, 6; Mshigeni, "Globalization." 9-10; Ndaluka et al., "Things Are Getting Out of Control," 69.
80. Mshigeni, "Globalization," 68.
81. Mshigeni, "Globalization," 64.
82. Focus group interview (see note 70) Zanzibar City, November 2012.
83. Bakari, "Understanding Obstacles," 229; Dang, *Violent Extremism*, 8, 10; Loimeier, "Zanzibar's Geography of Evil," 11.
84. ICG, *Averting Violence in Zanzibar*, 11; Bethsheba Wambura, "DDP Drops Charges against the 36 'Uamsho' Muslim Clerics," *The Citizen (Tanzania)*, 16 June 2021.
85. Langås, *Peace in Zanzibar*, 77.
86. Maghimbi, "Secularization."
87. Chome, *Eastern Africa's Regional Extremist Threat*; Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*; LeSage, *The Rising Terrorist Threat*; Lucia, *Islamist Radicalisation*.
88. Nkoko, *Accounting for the 1990–2013 Christian-Muslim Conflicts*.
89. Interview with Salum, Dar es Salaam, 2015.
90. Repeated interviews with Nassoro, Dar es Salaam, 2015-16.
91. Mercy, personal communication, 2019; Yusuf, personal communication, 2019.
92. @TunduALissu, 18 October 2020. <https://x.com/TunduALissu/status/1317763788716769280?s=20>
93. Bofin, *Tanzania and the Political Containment*.
94. Repeated interviews with Nassoro, Dar es Salaam, 2015-16.
95. Kimari and Ramadhan, *Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks*.
96. Field observations, 7 August 2017.
97. BBC, *Camp Simba: Three Americans Killed in Kenya Base*, 5 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50997769>
98. Oded, *Islamic Extremism*.
99. Mwakimako and Willis, *Islam, Politics, and Violence*.
100. Ibid., 17, Willis and Gona, "Pwani C Kenya?," 23.
101. Mathias Ringa, "MRC Denies Having Links with Al-Shabaab," *Nation*, 2 July 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/mrc-denies-having-links-with-al-shabaab-1021996>; IGAD, *Al-Shabaab*, 33-34. cf.; Mwakimako and Willis, *Islam, Politics, and Violence*; Mwakimako and Willis, "Islam and Democracy."
102. Field observations, 2 December 2016.
103. E.g. Kilifi County, *Action Plan*.
104. Maureen Kakah, "Court Upholds Lifting of MRC Ban," *Nation*, 29 June 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/mombasa/court-upholds-lifting-of-mrc-ban--1221566>.
105. Thurston, "Nigeria's Mainstream Salafis," 134.
106. For a similar point, see Becker, *The History of Islam*, 13.
107. Bofin, *Tanzania and the Political Containment*.

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