Socio-political Situations that Influence the Emergence of Islamism in Zanzibar, Tanzania

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Abstract:
Several Muslim associations came into prominence in Zanzibar whose missions are focused on da'wa (propagation of Islam) and improving Muslims' welfare. Though structured as socio-religious organizations, recently some of them have been taking clear political stance as exposed in their strong standpoint of rejecting the existing political union of Zanzibar and Tanganyika. The political tension and violence that rocked Zanzibar in the recent past have been attributed to the organization of the so-called UAMSHO. Therefore, the proposed study intends to examine the socio-political situations that influence the emergence of Islamism in the country. This topic has been studied using a qualitative approach, in which oral interviews were applied, and the data collected from them were analyzed by using qualitative analysis methods, such as content, discourse, and phenomenological analyses. More so, observation techniques, written documents, and internet sources were also appropriate in collecting both primary and secondary data. The finding of this study revealed that the escalation of Islamism in Zanzibar is the consequence of numerous factors including the nature of Islam, poverty, unemployment, political struggle, influence from outside, Muslims` consciousness, and the right to freedom of expression. It is my hope that this paper provides people of Zanzibar with good perception of the existence of Islamism in the country. In addition, it gives assistance to the government in formulating the policy of the state that incorporates views and aspirations of the majority Muslims in Zanzibar. The study recommends that the people of Zanzibar should agitate for socio-political reforms while observing the rules and regulations instructed by the Holy Book of Qur'an and Sunnah.

Keywords: Islamism, radicalism

1. The Concept of Islamism

The term Islamism is meant a political ideology using a violent strategy to political militancy as well as competitive political parties with the aim of seeking representation in the government whereas the ultimate aim is to recreate a world Islamic community.[1] On other side, Berman asserts that Islamism is a term used by Westerners to mean the belief, that Islam should guide social and political, as well as personal life.[2]

Mehd Mozaffari in his article, "What is Islamism," attempts to define Islamism arguing that it is a religious ideology with a holistic interpretation of Islam whose aim is the conquest of the world by all means.[3] He elaborates that Islamism entails four interrelated elements, including a religious ideology, a holistic interpretation of Islam, a conquest of the world, and the use of all means to attain the third objective. In explaining the first element, 'religious ideology', Mozaffari clarifies that Islamism fulfils all requirements of an ideology thereby differing from other totalitarian ideologies as it takes its legitimacy religion. Owing to that, the actions undertaken by Islamists are seen by them as religious duties.[4]

By the element of 'holistic interpretation of Islam', Mozaffari makes clear that Islamists are convinced that 'true Islam' is holistic and embraces all aspects of Muslims` life. He adds that the holism is based on the absolute indivisibility of the trinity *Dînun* (Religion), *Dun-ya* (Way of life), and *Dawla* (Government) and that such indivisibility is supposed to be permanent and eternal.[5] On the third element, 'conquest of the world'. Mozaffari gives details that according to Islamists, the existing world is both wrong and repressive. It

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[1] Glickman, Harvey, (2011). *The threat of Islamism in sub-Saharan Africa: The case of Tanzania,* Haverford College. Online access p. 1.

[2] Berman, Sheri, (2003). "Islamism, Revolution, and Civil Society". *Perspectives on Politics,* England: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 1, Issue 02, pp 257-272.

[3] Mozaffari, Mehd, (2007). *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, what is Islamism? History and Definition of a Concept, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 21.

[4] Ibid. 22

[5] Ibid. 23

is wrong because it does not correspond to Islamic principles, and consequently, repressive since non-Muslims occupy what the Islamists consider Muslim territory. Apart from domination by non-Muslims, there is also a concern of Muslims living in severe repression from their own (anti-Islamic) governments. According to Mozaffari, the goal of the Islamists is the restoration of the Caliphate that will naturally ensure the Islamization of the society.[6]

The last element of Islamism described by Mozaffari is 'by all means', which he observed that the Islamists' means to reach the above-mentioned goal is expanding from propagation, peaceful indoctrination, and political struggle to violent methods such as assassination, hostage taking, terrorist and suicide actions, and even massacre of civil populations. However, Mozaffari confirms that not all Islamists use violence since there are various Islamist groups of different obedience and with different affiliations and histories.[7]

R. Hrair Dekmejian, in the *Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia* states that there are new Islamists composed of tens of thousands of young, middle-class urbanites who are led by preachers, teachers, and students, mostly from the religious universities. According to him, these Islamist groups are outspoken, sophisticated, better organized, and more numerous than the *Ikhwan* militants of the 1970s.[8]

On the other hand, the concept of Islamism is identified as political Islam, as a guide towards attainment of social, political as well as personal needs of an individual based on Islamic principles.[9] Moreover, Abdul Rashid Moten in his article highlights the view that the pejorative image of politics resulting from Western conception has no relevance to politics conceptualized in Islam. He explains that the essence of politics in Islam is the striving for a life focused in seeking the pleasure of Allah (sw). To him politics in Islam could be defined to mean the art of government that based on the Quranic exhortations of enjoining good and forbidding evil along with its implications that require the participation of all members of society in the affairs of government. As a result, Quran condemns anarchy and disorder, exemplified with the prophets emphasizing on the need for organization and authority in the society.[10] This ideological concept that Islam is by nature a political ideology is relevant as it influences the activities of the UAMSHO association.

2. Islamism and Radicalism in Zanzibar

Islamic radicalism is defined as a totalitarian Islamic-supremacy movement that believes it has a monopoly over Heaven, truth and justice. The *Ansar Sunnah* as a radical group means the group of defenders, saviours, or companions of the Sunnah pertaining the objective of returning to the original sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Hence, the followers of this movement are keen to cleanse Islam of the impure practices of local *tariqas* (Sufi brotherhoods). A number of Islamic organisations are unofficially associated with Ansar Sunnah including JUMAZA (Jumuiya ya Maimamu Zanzibar) and UAMSHO that they bring together a number of revivalist movements.[11]

Though it is difficult to differentiate between Islamism and radicalism in Islam, in fact by a term Islamism, I mean an Islamic political ideology aiming at handling the administrative power of human beings on the earth. Whereby a term radicalism means a tendency of having a strong faith in Islam with a high level of adherence to its principles, in that sense, it is not necessary for a radical Muslim to be an Islamist. Most Islamist and radical Muslims are found in non-government Islamic groups including UAMSHO and Imams association (JUMAZA).

The Islamist movement of Zanzibar is represented by *Jumuiya ya Uamsho na Mihadhara ya Kiislamu* (JUMIKI), popularly known as UAMSHO. Moshe Terdman in his analysis reported that the association of UAMSHO had organized a number of illegal rallies regardless the government reluctance. He states that on March 5, 2003, the Islamist group held an illegal demonstration in the streets of Zanzibar as a response to security concerns and to its refusal to seek a permit for its activities from the *Mufti's* office as required by the *Mufti* Law of 2001.[12] Either, apart from protesting against the alleged increasing of western influence on the island through the tourism industry, the UAMSHO supporters demanded for the election of the person occupying the *Mufti* office.

Several Muslim organizations, among them Uamsho, continue to criticize both Zanzibar's Mufti law and the mainland's practice of selecting a mufti, perceiving them as efforts by the union government to institutionalize government oversight of Islamic organizations.[13]

Mufti of Zanzibar serves as a public employee of the Zanzibar government, possessing among the things the authority to approve any Islamic activities or gatherings in Zanzibar, as well as religious lectures by foreign speakers or the importation of Islamic literature. However, in Tanzania mainland, the *Mufti* is not a state employee, hence elected through the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (*Baraza Kuu la Waislamu Tanzania* – BAKWATA).[14]

[6] Ibid

[7] Ibid. 24

[8] Dekmejian, Hrair R., (1994). The Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 4. P. 629

[9] Berman, Sheri (2003). p-258.

[9] Moten, Abdul Rashid, (1996). *Political Science: An Islamic Perspective,* London: Macmillan Press Ltd, pp. 17-20.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Turner, Simon (2008). *'These Young Men Show No Respect for Local Customs' Globalisation, Youth and Islamic Revival in Zanzibar,* Denmark: Danish Institute for International Studies Copenhagen, pp. 10, 11.

[12] Terdman, 2006:9

[13] Ibid

[14] Religious Report, (2004). Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, Washington: US Government Printing Office.

Further, the Terrorism Act, which was signed into law in December 2002 presented enormous challenge to Muslim groups who have been vocal in their opposition to the proposed law. Though, the legislation did not categorically mention any religious or ideological group, individual Muslim clerics, local media, the Legal and Human Rights Centre, and human rights NGOs, were highly critical of the powers the Act gave to police to conduct searches, arrests, and detentions in determining a terrorist. There was a concern among Muslims that the law would be used to intimidate the critical voice from the community against the state.[15] While viewing the war on tourism as a war against Islam and all Muslims, Muslim activists in Zanzibar confronted the United States of America (US) government, demanding for the release of prisoners being held in Iraqi jails, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

UAMSHO officials and their supporters, criticize the government as a Christian institution, charging that its Muslim leadership was merely safeguarding its well being and interests. Consequently, they attack those symbols representing the state.[16] However, Islamist groups in Zanzibar are worried by the increasingly "inappropriate behaviour" by Western tourists whose activities are alleged to offend the Islamic culture of Zanzibar.[17]

Related to tourism industry is the mushrooming of bars on the Island whose critics led by the secretary of UAMSHO, Abdullah Said Ali argues: "The courts tend to side with the tourist industry's argument that too strict an interpretation of laws controlling alcohol sales is bad for business." However, a business of tourism is expected to replace the clove export trade.

Khalfan Khamis Muhammad and Oaed Sanyan al-Harithi originating from Zanzibar have been identified as al-Qaeda operatives among those convicted in connection with the 1998 United States (U.S.) embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam[18]. This had given confirmation that there are growing roots of Islamism in the islands. On 16th October 2012, the Zanzibar Islamists went to the unrest followed the disappearance of *Amir* Farid Hadi for some days the matter, which caused bars and ruling party branches to come under attacks.[19]

Appearing to be critical and suspicious of every government move, the movement officials asked all Muslims in the country to boycott the fifth 2012 national census because of refusal to enumerate the people's religious affiliation in the country.[20] As a result, their anger and frustration have been vented to Westerners, government institutions, and non-Muslims living in Zanzibar. In August 2013, two British teenage girls who were teaching in a local school were attacked with acid by unidentified assailants. Muslim and non-Muslim religious leaders were also not spared. In February 17, 2013, a Roman Catholic Priest Rev. Evaristus Mushi was shot dead by unknown people, and several churches torched following violent protests.[21]

3. Factors for the Emergence of Islamism in Zanzibar

Historically, Zanzibar is a predominantly inhabited Muslim country with a Sunni majority. In 1832, Sultan Said Bin Sultan identified Zanzibar as the headquarters of his East African dominion.[22] With the introduction of the Oman Sultanate, Arabic became the official language. Zanzibar is a multiracial society, which consists of a great number of the Shirazis followed by Africans, and Arabs among others.[23] Though Islamic culture forms part of the daily scene, there is a small number of Christian population mostly from Mainland Tanzania.

Islamic religion is not only confined to the ritual practices but it also goes towards the intention of establishing sovereign state.[24] The Islamic state (*Khilafah*) survived up to the time of Ottoman Empire in Turkey, since then it disarrayed in 1920.[25] Subsequently, there has been the emergence of various Islamic groups and associations in various parts of the Muslim world advocating for the re-establishment of the nostalgia Islamic state (*Khilafah*) including Zanzibar. This section uncovers various factors responsible for the emergence of Islamism in Zanzibar.

4. Nature of Islam

Islamism is used as a generic concept with reference to Muslim individuals, movements, and organizations conceiving Islam as an ideology. The Islamist goal is to establish Islamic law *(sharia)* as the basis of Muslim society. Since the secular idea of human legislation is regarded as *'shirk'* (polytheism), which is the most serious sin. Muslims in their life are obliged to apply decrees of God in all religious, political, economic, social, moral, and cultural aspects.[26] Drawing from the Quran, 2:85; 2:208, the Islamists in Zanzibar insists that the verses are instructing Muslims to apply the Islamic law in totality.

Further, theological basis that drives Islamists agenda in Zanzibar is drown from Quran that regards those who judge not accordance to Allah's revelation as 'unbelievers' 'wrongdoers', and 'rebellions'.[27] The foregoing verses form the basis for declaring that there is

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[15] Ibid. pp. 117. LeSage, Andre (2007). "Terrorism Threats and Vulnerabilities in Africa," *African Counterterrorism Co-operation: Assessing Regional and Subregional Initiatives*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press.

[16] Terdman, 2006.

[17] Ibid.

[18] LeSage, 2014:5

[19] Ibid. p. 9

[20] Human Rights Practices, 2012

[21] Issa, Yussuf, *Tanzania Daily News,* Zanzibar: Uamsho leaders to remain in police custody (05/01/2013):

[22] Hettiger, 2010:6

[23] Bakari, Makulilo, 2012:196.

[24] Nabhani, 1998:42

[25] Yavuz, 2001:2

[26] Westerlund, 1997:306

[27] Quran, chapter 5, verses 44, 45, 47.

no other law that is superior to that of Islam. It is this background that the Islamists in the country have been vocal in condemning the government for not using the Divine law in its affairs and public policies. According to *Sheikh* Othman Mohamed "There is no distinction between Islam and politics," a view that could also be demonstrated by the practice of the earlier prophets before Muhammad (saw). Clearly, this view indicates that Islam is not solely locked of in spiritual practices but it is also integral with politics and advocacy. It is the moral obligation of Muslim condemns any form of oppression and injustice in society.[28]

The practice of inviting the people to perform good deeds and forbidding them from doing evils is obligatory to every Muslim. This explains UAMSHO activism in condemning inequity and immorality in society. This political activism is supported by Prophet Muhammad's (saw) Hadith calling upon Muslims remove evil in their midst with whichever means of their disposal.[29]

5. Local Factors

Tanzania ushered multiparty political system in 1992, leading to the emergence of numerous political parties challenging the ruling party CCM *(Chama Cha Mapinduzi).* The plural political atmosphere presented platform for articulating diverge opinion thereby demanding for a spirit of political tolerance.[30] Before the advent of competitive politics, UAMSHO had already been formed as a religious body that was concerned with spiritual and social aspects with minimal focus on political and economic issues.

Leaders of JUMIKI and JUMAZA[31] under the umbrella of UAMSHO have been consistent in articulating political and economical matters of the county. On that, Nahoda asserts: "The availability of the freedom of speech along with the formation of multiparty system enabled Muslims to speak on politics openly".[32] The Tanzania constitution clearly states that the freedom of conscience is the right to every person, as stipulated in section 18 of the constitution:

18. Every person -
   a) has a freedom of opinion and expression of his ideas;
   b) has out right to seek, receive and, or disseminate information regardless of national boundaries;
   c) has the freedom to communicate and a freedom with protection from interference from his communication;
   d) has a right to be informed at all times of various important events of life and activities of the people and also of issues of importance to the society.[33]

This constitutional provision has provided the Islamists with the legal justification to articulate all matters affecting the society and state.

Due to lack of political platform to advance their agenda, UAMSHO leadership decided to form a political partnership with the Civic United Front (CUF). Despite this political marriage of convenience between CUF and the Islamists, religion becomes a politically instrumentalized projection area in the context of a political arena characterized by power struggles and anxieties.[34] Clearly, multiparty political system opened the door to the growth of Islamist activities because the groups formerly prohibited have emerged to proselytize for a more purified Islam".[35]

Economically, Earlier studies show that there is unemployment and inequity in Zanzibar thereby contributing to growing grievances.[36] Despite Zanzibar being a part of the Tanzania state, there are wide disparities in terms of ruminating of the civil servants. A civil servant employed in Zanzibar is paid a lower salary then that of the mainland Tanzania irrespective of both doing the same duties and having similar educational attainment. These differences have been interpreted as deliberate marginalization of the Muslim community in the country hence strengthening the demand to secede from the union and create an Islamic state.[37] Amid economic hardship, the Islamist discourse as formulated by UAMSHO is likely to remain an attractive outlet for the unemployed and discontented people. It is these feelings of discrimination and marginalization that opposition capitalised, Islamists included, to mobilize the masses on the religio-political platform. Arguably, the popularity of UAMSHO as a representation of Islamist's ideology could be explained on the one hand through the people's desire to escape their economic miseries.[38]

The political consciousness of the Muslims in Zanzibar is attributed to the growing access to education both secular and religious. The appearance of the new Islamist organizations in the country is also associated with the establishment of schools, which seems to modernize the Islamic education thereby attracting support from a cross section of the population in Zanzibar. Hence, it put them at a better place in articulating for their rights as citizens.[39] Thus, the provision of both modern Islamic and secular education readily available in the country contributed to political awareness, which Islamist groups are topping for main advantage.

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[28] Interview with Othman Mohamed Saleh, *Muft* office, Zanzibar, 18/02/2014.

[29] Interview with Suleiman Mohamed Saleh, UAMSHO activist, Msumbiji Zanzibar, 22/02/2014.

[30] Mussa, 2005:19.

[31] *JUMIKI* stands for Jumuiya ya uamsho na mihadhara ya Kiislamu (Association for the Mobilization and Propagation of Islam – AIMP; *JUMAZA* stands for Jumuiya ya maimamu Zanzibar (Zanzibar Imams` Association).

[32] Interview with Juma Nahoda, Haille Selasie High School, Zanzibar, 19/02/2014.

[33] Tanzania constitution, 1977:16

[34] Bergmann, 2013.

[35] Glickman, 2011:3.

[36] Mutch, Thembi (20 November 2012). *Zanzibar and the Mainland - the Shaky State of the Union*, London: Think Africa Press. (English-language online magazine)

[37] Interview with Juma Nahoda

[38] Jeffrey Haynes, "Islam and Democracy in East Africa," *Democratization* 13, no. 3 (June 2006), pp.490–507.

[39] Westerlund, 1997:323

Secularism is a political system, which excludes all religious beliefs and any other spiritual concert. Normally, the human legislation is used in a secular state instead of the Divine law.[40] The national Tanzania constitution declared the country as non-religious, though the individual citizens could believe in faith of their choice. Hence, Tanzania is a secular state.[41] To the supporters of Islamist agenda, the secular political system is slammed on various maladies facing the country hence demanding for the establishment of the Islamic political models as a solution.[42], [43]

After the Zanzibar revolution of 1964, the first president of Zanzibar Abeid Amani Karume signed a pact with the first president of Tanganyika Julius Kambarage Nyerere to form The United Republic of Tanzania. The decision of uniting Tanganyika with Zanzibar was however criticized by a section of the Zanzibari population.[44] With the unification, Zanzibar had to surrender numerous responsibilities to the union government to the extent that the Union articles[45] created some problems and that is the source of grievances to Zanzibar. There are concerns among Zanzibaris that the unification was a political plunder since it left Zanzibar behind.[46]

Some Zanzibaris including mostly politicians from opposition parties support the idea of Zanzibar seceding from the union and forming their own independent government.[47] The idea has been consistently articulated by UAMSHO despite confronting numerous challenges. The union government of Tanzania is blamed for having denied Zanzibar the right to become a member of the Islamic Organization Conference (IOC). The general Zanzibar population believe that the organization would have provided with Zanzibar much needed external financing for the development of its people.[48] A number of people gave their views on the union and Islam in Zanzibar as obvious above.[49]

6. External Factors

Another situation, which could have contributed to the emergence of Islamism in Zanzibar, is the influence of external factors. The studies demonstrate that there is increase of wealthy donors from the Gulf States, funding the construction of mosques, secondary schools, and health clinics in Zanzibar.[50] Mosques are very important places where Muslims perform their prayers and get time to organize sermons and several trainings, which give awareness to Muslims on how to maintain their religion. On the other hand, the schools help to build the Islamic ethics and confidence to Zanzibar's young generation. In addition, the Gulf donors support student scholarships to study in local universities and foreign universities such as Khartoum (Sudan) and Medina (Saudi Arabia).[51] Moreover, the donors from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait finance two Islamic universities of Zanzibar namely Zanzibar University (Tunguu Zanzibar) and University College of Education (Chukwani Zanzibar).[52]

The local religious and political leaders are inspired by the triumph of Islamic revolutions in Iran and Sudan and by the activities of Islamist groups in the Middle East. As a result, the country's Islamists believe that the redemption of the Muslims could only be achieved through violent means, which guarantees the establishment of *Dar al-Islam* (Islamic state) at the expense of *Dar al-Harb*. Their support of violent means to attain their political objective has raised concern among the political elites of Zanzibar.[53] The activities of the global jihad in various parts of the Muslim world seem to have motivated Zanzibar's Islamists in embracing violence as a means to attain their goal. The Islamic revolution in Iran is an example, which Muslims around the world cherish to follow. Iran is a typical example of an Islamist movement that was successful in re-establishing an Islamic state through mobilising the masses in a revolution.[54]

Similarly, motivating the Islamist cause in the country is the activities of *Al-Shabab* of Somalia. The *Al-Shabab* group is militarily advancing its cause of annihilating the existing Somalia government in order to replace it with one described as Islamic state[55]. To the

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[40] Urban, Greg. (2008). The Circulation of Secularism, *International Journal of Political Culture,* Philadelphia – USA: University of Pennsylvani, 21:17-37.

[41] Constitution, 1977:10.

[42] Turner, 2008:7.

[43] Interview with Wahida Khalid Iddi, Mwanakwerekwe Secondary School, Zanzibar, 19/02/2014; Mahmoud Wadi, Deputy Mufti of Zanzibar, Zanzibar, 18/02/2014.

[44] Bang, 2005:350.

[45] Including foreign affairs, defence and security, police, emergency powers, citizenship, and immigration. Others are external borrowing and trade, income tax and duty (customs duty and excise duty), harbours (air transport, posts and telecommunications), currency, industrial licensing and statistics, higher education, mineral oil resources and natural gas, the national examinations council, the court of appeal, and the registration of political parties among others.

[46] Glickman, 2011:4

[47] Mutch, 2012.

[48] Gatsiounis, 2012:81.

[49] Abdalla Rashid Seif, member of UAMSHO, Msumbiji – Zanzibar, 22/02/2014; Masoud Msellem, deputy media representative of Hizb-ut-tahrir East Africa, Zanzibar, 23/02/2014; Mwanakheir Gharib Haji, member of UKUEM, Zanzibar, 24/02/2014; Said Abubakr Ali, Kiponda High School, Zanzibar, 24/02/2014.

[50] Glickman, 2011:3.

[51] Turner, 2008:15.

[52] Glickman, 2011:3.

[53] Terdman, 2006.

[54] Westerlund, 1997:326.

[55] Glickman, 2011; LeSage, 2014:5.

Zanzibari Islamists, this is something to be emulated. Furthermore, the activities of the separatist Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) on the Kenyan coast presents parallels to the situation in Zanzibar. Both Mombasa and Zanzibar were historically part of the Sultanate of Oman with a lot in common in linguistics, religion, and affinity.[56]

7. Conclusion

The paper explored on the issue of Islamism and its implications in Zanzibar. Following the detailed investigation, it is discovered that there are some elements of Islamism in the country. It is evident through various activities undergone by some Muslim associations under the umbrella of *Jumuiya ya Uamsho na Mihadhara ya Kiislamu* (JUMIKI). The study revealed that a number of factors contributed to the emergence of political Islam in Zanzibar, which can be categorized into three sections.

The nature of Islam always gives insistence on the use of Islamic laws in totality wherever the Muslims live. The theological basis drives Islamists agenda of creating Islamic state in Zanzibar as drown from Quran that regards those who judge not accordance to Allah's revelation as unbelievers.

A number of factors are noticed from inside the country that contributed to the escalation of Islamism in Zanzibar including secular system, freedom of speech and multiparty system, unemployment, perceived marginalization of the Muslim community, and provision of both modern Islamic and secular education.

In addition, the study came across external factors, which either contributed to the emergence of Islamism in Zanzibar including wealthy donors from the Gulf States funding various Islamic institutions, the Islamic revolutions in Iran and Sudan, and the activities of Islamist groups in the Middle East and elsewhere.

It is crucial to all stakeholders to keep under consideration all that have been observed in this paper in order to make the world an island of peace and harmony.

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[56] Bergmann, 2013.