MUSLIM AND EDUCATION IN TANZANIA
The Legacy of the East African Muslim Welfare Society (EAMWS)

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INTRODUCTION

It was the belief of Muslims that the coming of independence in 1961 would open new opportunities for them to advance in education. It was this perceived expectation which made them spearhead the struggle for independence making their contribution unequalled to their Christian brothers. Colonialism had been very unkind to Muslims demoting them to lower strata of society a position which they occupied for 75 years of British colonial rule. Education which under colonialism was a monopoly of Christian missionaries to dispense along with the gospel became a two pronged sword. On one end it helped in marginalising Muslims from playing any meaningful role in society by denying them education while at the same time on the other end it kept in check the spread of Islam. In this way Christianity was always as a rule associated with learning and Islam with darkness. The African Christian therefore perceived himself as a benefactor of the colonial system because colonialism had given him the opportunity through education for self advancement. This was to be the bone of contention in post-independent Tanganyika.

PROPOSAL FOR AN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, 1964

During the struggle for independence there are no records which show that Muslims had in any way organised themselves as an independent religious lobby group trying to push forward an agenda of any sort. Muslims had always incorporated Christians in any societal agenda which would help to weaken the foundation of foreign rule. The exception was the 1962 a pan-territorial congress on education in which Muslims laid down their own strategy to build educational institutions to prepare Muslims to share power with Christians in free Tanganyika. The following organisations attended the congress: The East African
Muslim Welfare Society, *Daawat Islamiyya, Jamiatul Islamiyya fi Tanganyika* and the Muslim Education Union. The top hierarchy of these Muslim organisations had provided TANU its first rank of leadership during the struggle for independence in 1950s. This leadership was now shifting from colonial agitation and nation wide mass mobilisation to confined serious issues of government and nation building underpinning equal power sharing between Muslims and Christians which would eventually eradicate all societal imbalances bequeathed from colonialism.

The congress agreed among other things of importance to establish a department of education under the auspices of the EAMWS. The congress elected Tewa Said Tewa a cabinet Minister, a veteran politician of the TAA and TANU founder member as Chairman of Territorial Council of the EAMWS. Muslims did not wait for the independence government to start fulfilling its pre-independence promise of redressing educational disparity between them and Christians. The EAMWS was given the task by the congress to build schools throughout Tanganyika and eventually build in Dar es Salaam the first Islamic University in East Africa.

This came to fruition in 1968 when EAMWS invited the President of Tanganyika Mwalimu Julius Nyerere to lay the foundation stoned for the Islamic University at Changombe, Dar es Salaam. This urge of Muslims to break free from subjugation through own efforts for development came to be the source of conflict with powers that be. This was to be the beginning of antagonism between Muslims and the now Christian dominated government under a Catholic President Mwalimu Nyerere. Politics of tolerance and conformity practiced during the struggle for independence now gave way to politics of antagonism and witch-hunting as Muslim started to initiate plans to change the colonial *status quo*. Soon after the laying of stone ceremony for the Muslim University Mwalimu Nyerere banned the EAMW and was declared an illegal society. It is beyond the scope of this paper to narrate the whole episode which led to the banning of the
EAMWS. Suffice to state that it was one of the most depressing epochs in the history of Islam in Tanzania. It was as if all the efforts and sacrifice bone by Muslims in their struggle against colonialism had come to nought. This was to be the end of the plans to build the Islamic University in Tanzania as well as primary and secondary school education project approved by the Muslim Congress in 1962. The school projects which were being built by funds from the EAMWS had to stop. The EAMWS scholarship program which had recently begun had also to be cut short. Muslim efforts for education advancement was nipped in the bud ending before it even began. Muslims were left by the wayside as bystanders watching the country marching forward without them.

Why did Mwalimu Nyerere ban the EAMWS curtailing all its development projects? How possibly could a Muslim organisation which was working for the benefit of Muslims and hence national development be declared an illegal society? Who profited from this? It is now believed that Mwalimu Nyerere out hatred mixed with fear and envy banned the EAMWS to prevent Muslims from acquisition of an institution of higher learning which would have been the first of its kind in black Africa and would have put them in the right course for national leadership. Mwalimu Nyerere had seen the power of Islam as an ideology of resistance to oppression during the struggle against the British. He knew if Muslims were to be allowed to organise independently and have a free hand to build institutions it would only be a matter of time before Muslims would assume a dominant position in the political leadership of the country. Not even the Church or the colonial government had for obvious reasons thought of such a gigantic and worthwhile project in all its over a hundred years history in Tanganyika. It would be folly to assume even for a second that Mwalimu Nyerere sabotaged Muslim efforts for development without assistance and connivance from without. We can now safely start to speculate and ask a rhetoric question – who would not want Muslims to benefit from opportunities which independence
had brought to Tanganyika. Who would stand to lose if Muslims were to be uplifted from that inferior position which they were occupying?

**Christian Hegemony in Tanzania**

The Church and the African Christian are a phenomenon of colonialism. Having this common factor the behaviour of the Church in the history of all Africa is that of loyalty and cooperation to the colonising authority. Muslims suffered as a people whose faith was antagonistic to that of the coloniser. When Tanganyika became independent the Church now found itself facing a Muslim population which though not antagonistic to Christianity but was hell bent towards changing the colonial *status quo*. This meant the end of the African Christian enjoying privileges they used to enjoy during colonialism. Muslims would not allow Christians to change horses mid stream and in so doing replace the colonial masters who Muslims dislodged from power.

For one to understand forces at play in those early days of independence one needs to analyse not only the numerical strength of Muslims vis a vis Christians, one needs also to appreciate and take note of the fact that Muslims as a distinct section of society was in control of the polity. During that time about two-thirds of East African Muslims were residing in Tanzania\(^1\) which is the most populous of the East African countries, i.e. Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. This includes Zanzibar-a predominantly Muslim country with a 99% Muslim population. According to the 1957 population census, Muslims outnumbered Christians at a ratio of three to two. This, at that time, meant that Tanzania was a leading Muslim nation south of the Sahara.\(^2\) This section of society was rising up to play


\(^2\) In the first post-independence census of 1967 the total figures for Tanzania Mainland were 32% Christian, 30% Muslim and 37% local belief. These figures show Pagans as a leading majority in Tanzania. The 1967 census has not been able to show the reasons for the sudden decrease of Muslim population nor the growth of animists amidst believers in the span of the last ten years. This was the last population census showing religious distribution. It is widely believed that the figures for the 1967
a meaningful role in society. The Church perceived this as an encroachment into a domain which had all along been their exclusive zone of monopoly which for a century it had guarded jealously. The Church had to act fast to counter what it perceived as a Muslim threat.

The Church was worried that the resources in the hands of the Aga Khan who was the Patron of the EAMWS coupled with the political power of African Muslims, particularly in Tanzania, would endanger Christian interests in East Africa. The Church therefore declared Islam as its enemy and plotted to thwart its progress. On 19th December 1968 the Minister for Home Affairs by command of the President declared the Tanzania Branch of the East African Muslim Welfare Society and Tanzania Council of the East African Muslim Welfare Society to be unlawful societies under the provision of section 6 (i) of the Societies Ordinance. The government formed Bakwata to replace the EAMWS and made amendments to the Societies Ordinance which gave it powers to transfer all assets belonging to the EAMWS to the new organisation. Plans for educating Muslims youths was not in Bakwata’s list of priorities and this came to be the end of the Islamic University project and Muslims hope for development. However Muslims refused to support Bakwata perceiving it as a puppet organisation.

Jan P van Bergen in his book, Development and Religion in Tanzania, divulges very incriminating information on Mwalimu Nyerere. The book gives details of how during his rule Nyerere used to have private confidential meetings with Bishops to discuss the future of Tanzania. In those meetings Nyerere is reported to have assured Bishops of his continued support to Christianity. Dr John C. Sivalon, in his expose, Kanisa Katoliki na Siasa ya Tanzania Bara 1953 Hadi

census were doctored for political reasons to show that Muslims were trailing behind Christians in numerical strength. There is evidence that the government having realised that Muslims were a majority in Tanzania, directed the Statistical Department to destroy all the 1967 census results.

3 The Standard, 20th December 1968.

unmasks a conspiracy in the government to subvert Islam. Sivalon revealed that the Catholic Church as far back as 1961 was worried by two prospects. First, was the unity between the Muslim madhheb (sect) of Sunni, Bohora, Ismailia and Ithnasheri in Tanganyika; and the second, was the transfer of the headquarters of the East African Muslim Welfare Society (EAMWS) from Mombasa to Dar es Salaam.

The Beginning of Islamic Movement

Sheikh Hussein Malik came to Tanzania from Pakistan in 1970s as an expatriate teacher of mathematics employed by the government. Apart from teaching mathematics he also volunteered to teach Islamics to all secondary schools in Dar es Salaam and surrounding areas. It is the irony of history that Sheikh Malik was to be brought into the country by the government. After completion of his contract with the government Dr. Malik was employed by Bakwata and he continued to teach Islamics to secondary school students during official ours and in the evenings between Isha na Maghrib he would give lectures to different mosques targeting the youth. Malik would visit these mosques with a group of his most trusted students who he used as his translators. One needed to only attend one of his lectures and will never miss any.

Overtime Sheikh Malik and his students became popular and their faces familiar in many mosques in Dar es Salaam. Dr. Malik taught Islamic knowledge in a way that no other scholar had done before him. There is a distinct system of teaching pursued by all sheikhs in East Africa. The tradition is to take student through the basics, first learning the Qur’an and fiqh. No attempt was made to intertwine Islam with the reality of social and political issues of the day as obtained in society. It was through the teaching of Sheikh Malik that the young generation came to understand itself and came to be aware of the predicament facing

Tanzania Muslims. Malik taught his students the purpose of their creation the high value of absolute integrity in Islam, which leaves no room for one class to oppress another. Through such teachings the young Muslims began to look at the government as it relates to Islam and Muslims. In a period of ten years Dr. Malik was able to mould a strong following of disciplined and committed young men who began to see the injustices committed to Muslims by Mwalimu Nyerere. Sheikh Malik’s students began to hold classes in different schools and mosques. They began to organize Muslims to fight for their rights. This created into Muslims a new sense of hope purpose and direction. Gradually this awareness spread across the whole country.

Sheikh Malik used to tell his students, ‘teach the people their rights and they will fight for them on their own. Fight for peoples’ right while they are ignorant of their rights, the people will fight you back. These young men mobilised Muslims as a distinct group in the Tanzanian society living under subjugation. This gradually came to shake the political foundation laid by Mwalimu Nyerere and Muslims began to ask questions which the government had no ready answers. The effect was noticeable. Muslims ceased to be a people ignored by the government. This group of young students of Sheikh Malik came to be known as Warsha. For strategic reasons Warsha operated without registration and no one exactly knew its leadership. But from the quality of the papers it published and distributed to Muslims throughout the country there was no doubt whatsoever that Warsha was a vanguard organisation of highly educated Muslims. The papers which were distributed to Muslims throughout the country exposed the government for what it was – an appendage of the Church.

Warsha began to strategise how to change the leadership in Bakwata to turn it from a puppet organisation to an effective Muslim institution to represent Muslim interests. With the help of few leaders in Bakwata in 1981 Warsha was able to call for elections under a new constitution and in the process Warsha was able to extricate the puppet leadership imposed on Muslims in 1968 by Nyerere. Warsha
moved in and occupied different positions in Bakwata. For the first time since 1968 Bakwata began to act and behave as a true Muslim organisation. This infused into Muslims a new sense of hope and direction. Once in Bakwata Warsha began to implement education programmes initiated by the EAMWS but were left to die after its banning in 1968. Warsha turned four schools built by the EAMWS, which were under Bakwata into Muslim seminaries.

Since the demise of the EAMWS, which published, *EAMWS Newsletter* Muslims did not have a mouthpiece of their own. For the first time Muslims were able to have their own mouthpiece. Warsha helped Bakwata to register a newspaper *Muislam* with Warsha forming the editorial board. Warsha also took over the weekly radio programme on state radio and the programmes, which were broadcasted by them, carried special message to Muslims. Warsha under Bakwata then conducted a social research project, which was unprecedented. It commissioned its educationists to write a research paper 6 to show why Muslim students were lagging behind in education.

When these findings were made public and distributed to Muslims throughout the country it came as a shock to Muslims and the government. For the first time it was revealed to the public that there is in the Ministry of Education a system which was discriminating Muslims. This disclosure, particularly coming from Muslims, threatened national unity. It sent shock waves to the corridors of power. The government was agitated. It did not have the means to respond to such very serious accusation. The government was unprepared for such revelations and was worried by the direction, which Bakwata was taking. Bakwata now under Warsha was now actually serving Muslims. This was not what Nyerere had bargained for when he subverted the EAMWS and helped to found Bakwata. The government did not want to find out for obvious reasons

6 Muslim Writers’ Workshop, “The Importance of Establishing Islamic Seminaries,” 21 December 1981.
whether those findings on education were correct or not. Their interest was to identify the brains behind Warsha so that it can isolate them and then set them up for persecution. Warsha was accused of being anti-government and perpetrating animosity between Muslims and Christians through their writings. Nyerere ordered Vice President Aboud Jumbe to close all Muslim seminaries initiated by Warsha.

Warsha’s strength lay in the umma. Warsha called a meeting of all Muslims to discuss the problem. The die was now cast for confrontation between the government under Nyerere and Muslims. The government through the state radio issued a warning that the meeting of all Muslims called by Warsha was illegal. Anyone attending that meeting would be arrested. The government accused Warsha of trying to divide the society along religious lines. Warsha retorted back that it was Nyerere and the Church which should stand on the dock. The government directed that a special meeting should be called in Dar es Salaam immediately to discuss Warsha’s role in Bakwata. The government put at its disposal its manpower and resources to make the meeting a success. The government issued a statement that Warsha is prohibited from indulging in anything which has to do with Muslims of Tanzania. Warsha’s mentor, Sheikh Malik was declared a prohibited immigrant by the government and was required to leave the country within twenty-four hours.

Muslims were sympathetic to Warsha and took Warsha’s struggle as their own. Muslims helped Warsha to establish a school Masjid Quba and Islamic Centre. The government refused to register the school. The school was perceived by the government as a centre of “Muslim fundamentalism.” The government went further to subvert the school by warning Muslim parents that students completing their education at Masjid Quba would not be recognised by it and would not be considered for further education or for employment. Warsha was

\[7\text{ Daily News} 16\text{ June 1982.}\]
not to be deterred they decided to run the school and educate Muslim children even without government registration. The school remained blacklisted by the government until 1988 when Prof. Malima as the first Muslim Minister of Education registered the school.

**Conclusion**

The period between 1980 and 1990 was a period of intensive Muslim agitation against the government and increased activity. Muslim initiated several organisations to further their development. After the Warsha-government crisis of 1982, the crisis left Bakwata severely bruised, isolated from Muslims and even more dependent on the government. There were many correspondences from Bakwata to the government requesting the latter to ban Warsha Bakwata reminded the government of its importance to control all mosques for the sake of peace and tranquillity. 8 Whenever these confidential letters were intercepted Warsha circulated them to Muslims throughout the country.9 This exposed Bakwata even more as a puppet organisation, which was fully under the control, and influence of the Church. In the coming years students of Sheikh Malik formed other powerful organisations - Islamic Propagation Centre (IPC), Jamaatu Answar Sunna, MSAUD and DUMT.10 Muslims increasingly have turned more militant and defiant. In 2006 the government donated government buildings in Morogoro allowing Muslims to have their first university the Muslim University of Morogoro. Christians had by then opened more than 20 universities throughout the country.


10 IPC are running two secondary schools, a dispensary, a newspaper *An-nuur* and have several development projects to their credit.