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SHEIKH HASSAN BIN AMEIR
(1880 - 1979)

The Moving Spirit of Muslim Emancipation in Tanganyika
(1950 - 1968)

Speaker
Mohamed Said

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Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir 1880 -1979

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Introduction

The name of Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir like the names of many other Muslim patriots is omitted from the political history of Tanzania.¹ There is no place in the official history in which his name is mentioned.

¹ This is a challenge worth taken by students to research into the tarikh of Muslim patriots who fought for independence but their contribution has not been requited.
even in passing. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s name began to feature in early 1980’s when Muslims privately began to research and document their role in the independence struggle as a reflection to their marginalisation in distribution of power. As a result of this Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s name soon came to the fore and was associated not only with politics and equal power sharing between Muslims and Christians but also with efforts by Muslims to build educational institutions.

Having accomplished his role as a patriot and a symbol of mass mobilisation under TANU during the struggle he resigned from politics soon after Tanganyika achieved its independence in 1961 and through his organisation Dawa’t Islamiyya concentrated on serving Islam and Muslims. This shift was to create an unprecedented confrontation between himself and the then President of Tanzania Julius Nyerere. On the order of the President, Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was arrested for ‘subversion’ and deported to Zanzibar and the EAWMS of which Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was among its leaders declared an ‘illegal’ society. In its place BAKWATA was formed to replace the EAMWS. The reverberations of this clash between these two giants of titanic magnitude are being felt as we speak today likewise the vacuum left by the EAMWS has not been filled. Consequently the political climate and relations between Muslims and the government was not to be the same again.

In the same breath relations between Muslims and BAKWATA to say the least has been lukewarm. Muslims perceive BAKWATA as a puppet organisation and just to mention the name leaves a bad taste in the mouth. To refer to a Muslim as a BAKWATA Muslim is like calling a
Christian a disciple of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. As to Nyerere, history is yet to judge him. But one can not be knowledgeable to all this in the absence of the political history of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir.

There are however, contrary voices disputing Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s political carrier. These voices are originating from some of his students questioning his role in politics. Students of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir prefer to remember him as a brilliant ‘ulamaa’, an outstanding translator of the Qur’an² and not as a politician. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s ‘silsila’ goes back to Sayyidna A’li b. Abu T’alib and Rasuli Lahi (SAW). Understandingly his students do not want to taint this with what they perceive as ‘trifles’. But reality and history takes exception to this. This stand if allowed to flourish would wipe out and obscure an important period in Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s life and hence erase a significant chapter in the nation’s history. Along with it, the country will also lose his thoughts, teachings and aspirations, which made him what he is in the history of Tanganyika. We will also not be able to uncover the forces behind marginalisation of Muslims. This information is vital to Muslims and has to be accessible to all and sundry. The truth however still remains that Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was in deed a politician who played a leading role in Tanganyika’s struggle for independence.³ Muslims or his obedient students should be the last persons to question Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s political carrier.

Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir - The Scholar Foot-Soldier, 1940 -1950

³ From his own mouth Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir declared himself a politician. See Sheikh Hassan bin Ameri, ‘Ubaguzi wa Elimu’ Waraka wa 1963 kwa Waislam wote wa Tanganyika, Da’awat Islamiyya.
In 1940 when Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir left Zanzibar for Tanganyika he was sixty years old. The purpose of this resettlement was to create a spring board in Tanganyika from where he could spread the message of Islam to the neighbouring countries of Congo, Nyasaland, Rwanda and Burundi which were predominantly Christian countries. In a period of about twenty eight years Sheikh Hassan bin Amir was able to establish centres in Tanganyika and in the neighbouring countries, teaching from one village or township to another. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir would stay in one place for a while holding ‘darsas’ and when he was satisfied that the message was well received he would move on leaving behind his students to continue with the work. He would move on to another town or village and do the same but always coming back to the places he had previously held court to check on progress. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was so successful in proselytising work that Belgians who were the colonising authority in Congo, Rwanda and Burundi seeing masses of their subjects reverting to Islam declared him a prohibited immigrant in all their colonies and he was therefore forcefully evicted back to Tanganyika. At that time Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir had shifted his headquarters from Dar es Salaam to Bujumbura in Burundi.

Back in Tanganyika Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir criss-crossed the country spreading the message of Islam not staying in one place more than was necessary. This was the formative years of Sheikh Hassan’s influence and the period which he was able to build a strong base of followers through out the country who looked upon him as ‘amir’. In between his travels Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir continued to write his discourses.

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4 See Issa H. Ziddy, op. cit. p. 18.
5 Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir wrote the following books from 1914 to 1979: A’qdul A’q - yaani a’ la mauled Jaylaaniy, (Cairo 1946), Wasilatul - Rajaa (Cairo 1951), Fat - hul Kabîrîr Sher - he Al - Mukhtasari Swaghiîr (Zanzibar 1955), Madarijîl - U’ laa Sherhe Tabarak Dhil - U’la (Cairo 1962), Sher-
and he wrote in Arabic, but not without a purpose. He wanted Muslims to learn Arabic because it is the language of the Qur’an. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir had excelled in the language both oral and written. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir wrote in Kiswahili only when he wanted to communicate with Muslims on political matters. This is the period when the fire of nationalism had been kindled in Africa. When nationalist politics began in Tanganyika to oust the British from the country Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir transformed the centres he had established into active centres of colonial resistance and mass mobilisation. His students and followers provided membership as well as leadership to the emerging movement.

The Years of Tabligh and Politics, 1950 - 1961

Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s political carrier began much earlier when he was travelling around the country establishing centres. Probably unknown to his students that they were being prepared as foot soldiers for an imminent onslaught on the colonial government. However, Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir came into prominence in 1950 when he was elected into the TAA-Political Subcommittee and hence became one of the signatories to the memorandum on constitutional development presented by TAA to the Governor of Tanganyika, Sir Edward Twining. The task of this committee among other issues was to clandestinely prepare the ground for formation of TANU to free Tanganyika from

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6 The memorandum which bears Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s signature together with signatures of other patriots is among historic documents which it is believed have been destroyed to pave way for official history and can now no longer be consulted.

colonialism.\textsuperscript{8} Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir as the Mufti represented the dominant Muslim interests in Tanganyika.

Open politics and mass mobilisation to agitate for independence in Tanganyika began with the formation of TANU in 1954 with Julius Nyerere, a Roman Catholic as the leader. While at the top TANU had a Christian president, Muslims, however, dominated the movement in leadership and membership composition. At the party headquarters in Dar es Salaam there was what was known as the ‘TANU Elders Council’ (\textit{Baraza la Wazee}) a polit-bureau of sorts constituting of 173 members all of them Muslims.\textsuperscript{9} While the Elders Council supported Nyerere this was not the case with other members in the party. A small faction of radical Muslims rose to oppose Nyerere’s leadership for no other reason but for being a Christian. This created an internal crisis not between Muslims and Christians but among Muslims themselves. This was a serious issue which could have derailed the movement before it even took off. A meeting was therefore called in 1955 to clarify the status of Christianity in TANU. It was at this meeting that Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir impressed upon the people of Tanganyika on the importance of secularism in TANU to preserve national unity. This meeting was held in a house in Pemba Street and its resolution was supported by Sheikh

\textsuperscript{8} Local historians most of them Christians including Nyerere himself want people to believe that TANU was the brain child of Julius Nyerere. To date the country has not honoured the founding members of TANU who most of them were Muslims. See Fr. Peter Smith, ‘Christian and Islam in Tanzania Development and Relationships’ in \textit{Islamochristiana}, 16 (1990) pp. 171-182. Also Smith, ‘Some Elements for Understanding Muslim-Christian Relations in Tanzania’. 1993 (seminar paper presented in Dakar, Senegal, ‘Islam in Africa South of Sahara’). Also see See M. Said, ‘In Praise of Ancestors’ \textit{Africa Events}, London, March/April 1988, pp. 37-41. Also See \textit{Africa Events}, May, 1988, letter by Dr K. Mayanja Kiwanuka.

\textsuperscript{9}See Elder Council Section File 376, Party Archives, Dodoma. In 1970 Nyerere attended a seminar on religion in Tabora organised by the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC). In that seminar Nyerere for the first time publicly addressed himself to the issue of TANU’s religious identity. Nyerere said ‘Our Party, the TANU, has no religion. It is just a political Party and there are no arrangements or agreements with a particular religion’. In pre-independence Tanganyika TANU had a religious identity and that identity was Islam just as CCM gradually assumed strong Christian influence, identity and excelled in its anti Islam posture.
Nurdin Hussein from Lindi and Sheikh Abdallah Chaurembo of Dar es Salaam who was a student of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir. This meeting coined the name ‘Yuda’ which was to be the label of any member of TANU who discriminated his fellow African because of his faith.¹⁰

The name ‘Yuda’ coined by TANU had direct relationship with Judas Iscariot from Christian scriptures, the traitor who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The problems which TANU encountered were mainly from colonial government or those inspired by it using fellow Africans as puppets to try to derail the movement. It was the belief of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir that the survival of Muslims as a people and Islam as a religion rested in the total overthrow of the colonial government and the strategy to achieve that goal was through national unity. It was from this cue from Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir that Nyerere and with the help of the Elders Council was able to establish in TANU the nationalist-secularist ideology.

A very critical obstacle to national unity was thus averted. Had TANU succumbed to sectarian politics of insisting that since Muslims were the most discriminated upon by colonialism and were dominant in politics and should therefore assume leadership in the party, this would have been divisive and counter productive to the movement. Christians would have been alienated and probably the colonial government in its ‘divide and rule’ tactics would have encouraged them to form a rival party. This new party certainly would not have been pro-Islam. The only power to benefit from such rivalry would have been the British and the road to independence would not have been smooth. It would have

been fraught with factional violence as is the case in all countries where sectarian politics reign supreme.

Nyerere was a familiar face at the ‘darsa’ of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir in down town Dar es Salaam. It is said whenever Nyerere went to see Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir, Sheikh Hassan would always as a rule, dismiss his students and would sit down with Nyerere and his entourage for hours on end discussing on the future of Tanganyika. Under Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s wings no Muslim dared to challenge Nyerere. Sheikh Hassan bin Amir’s ‘madras’ in Dar es Salaam therefore played a multiplicity of roles. It was a centre of religious knowledge as well as centre for mass mobilisation and agitation against the colonial government. It was difficult to distinguish between visitors who came to visit Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir. Had they come to the Mufti to seek ‘fatwa’ for a ‘mushkel’ or had they come to exchange notes on the political climate in the country. Nyerere realised very early in his political career the power and respect commandeered by Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir and he never took any important decision without consulting him.

A trying period for Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was in 1958 when TANU was in preparation for the first general election ever to be conducted in Tanganyika. The colonial government agreed to hold elections to the

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11In the formative years of TANU (1954 - 1958) the top leadership in TANU was from Al Jamiatul Ismaiyya fi Tanganyika. When Nyerere went to the United Nations for the first time in 1955 to plead for Tanganyika’s independence part of the money to finance the trip came from the coffers of Al Jamiatul Islamiyya. At that time TANU treasurer was Sheikh Idd Faiz Mafongo who was also the treasurer of Al Jamiatul Islamiyya. The TANU secretary was Ali Mwinyi Tambwe who was also Al Jamiatul Islamiyya secretary. This intertwining role of Islam and politics worked perfectly well for Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir because he could meet the same leadership either in TANU or in Al Jamiatul Islamiyya with no conflict of interest. Sheikh Mohamed Ramiya of Bagamoyo Khalifa of Tarika Quaddiriyya also commanded such political authority but his influence was within his home town, See August M. Nimitz Jr. Islam and Politics in East Africa, University of Minneapolis, 1980.
Legislative Council in which seats were to be contested mainly along racial lines. There were seats for Europeans, Asians and Africans - hence the name Tripartite Election. Other conditions for eligibility for voting required a prospecting voter to have an annual income of four hundred pounds sterling, standard twelve education (later reduced to standard ten) and be employed in a specific post. Muslims being the ‘uneducated majority’ and hence most of them not employed in what could be considered ‘specific post’ were therefore not eligible to vote. As the election conditions stood, Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir himself a prolific author and no doubt educated by all standards, could not vote or be voted into the Legislative Council had he wanted to contest. The Tripartite Election was therefore seen as colonial machinations to prevent a peoples’ leadership from coming to power. The Muslim leadership in TANU which had been democratically elected by the people to lead the struggle against the British was being barred from participating in the future of the country at a very crucial time in the history of Tanganyika. Being the majority in TANU and being most effected by the voting conditions, Muslims called for total boycott of the election.

We cannot go into the details of the Tripartite Voting as it is beyond the scope of this paper but suffice to state that against the stand of the majority and his own party, Nyerere worked behind the scene to win support and therefore participate in the election. Nyerere argued for participation and won the day thus paving the way for the educated Christians to be voted to the Legislative Council because they possessed the necessary qualifications. To some this was seen as Nyerere’s ploy to promote fellow Christian into positions of power in Tanganyika to the detriment of Muslims who formed the main-stay of
the struggle. It was feared by Muslims that once in power these missions - educated Christians would strive to maintain the colonial status quo having no obligation to lead the movement to its logical conclusion. Worse there was trepidation that once firmly established in power Christians would assume the position of colonialists and would wage war against Islam. Insha Allah we will discuss this topic later when we analyse the influence of the Church in post independent Tanganyika.

A faction in TANU opposing the party’s stand on the election resigned and formed a rival party, the All Muslim National Union of Tanganyika (AMNUT) to safeguard Muslim interests. One of the demands of AMNUT was that the British should delay independence until such time that Muslims would be educated enough to enable them assume important positions in the government. AMNUT published pamphlets and articles warning Muslims of the dangers facing Islam in post - colonial Tanganyika. This was an open rebellion against the cherished ideals of TANU, which was to refrain from mixing politics and religion.

Once again as he had done in 1955 Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir had to deal with a religious factor in politics which this time was more volatile and more threatening to national unity than the previous one. The problem threatened to split the country and the party into two contending forces. Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir supported Nyerere’s stand to participate in the election notwithstanding the domination of Christian candidates. The Mufti of Tanganyika refused to endorse AMNUT’s stand and ignored the general Muslim sentiments. It was a bold and wise decision. It was as if the Mufti had pronounced a silent ‘fatwa.’ Other sheikhs in the country supported Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s stand.
AMNUT, it was declared, would cause animosity among the people and Muslims should support TANU until independence was achieved. But the most devastating blow came from Tanga. Sheikhs and Qur’an teachers in Tanga signed a joint declaration opposing AMNUT. The declaration stated that AMNUT would create danger. The sheikhs reiterated that they would support TANU until independence was achieved because they had confidence with the objectives of TANU. With such a bombardment from the people which AMNUT claimed to be representing their interest, AMNUT could not endure. Muslims never supported AMNUT until when it was banned, by the government following the enactment of the law in 1965, which established Tanganyika as a one party state.

The first attempt by Muslims of Tanganyika to form their own political party to fight for their rights therefore failed. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir believed AMNUT would have encouraged factionalism and therefore create disunity. The country whithered the storm and Nyerere, a Roman Catholic went on to become the first Prime Minister of Tanganyika at independence in 1961 through a very strong Muslim support. Muslim had shown their trust in Nyerere. They believed as Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir had believed that Nyerere would be a just ruler and would exercise justice to all without discrimination, fear or favour.

The Rise and Fall of ‘Daa’wat Islamiyya’ (Muslim Call), 1961 -1968
After independence in 1961 Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir resigned from politics and formed ‘Daa’wat Islamiyya’ (Muslim Call), according to his

\[^{12}\text{Mwafrika, 3rd October, 1959.}\]
own words, to serve Islam better. After independence was achieved Muslims thought their chance for development had at last arrived. The struggle had reached its logical conclusion. In 1962 a pan-territorial congress of all Muslim organisations was called in Dar es Salaam to discuss the future role of Islam in independent Tanganyika. Daa’wat Islamiyya under Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was among the five Muslim organisations which attended the congress. The congress agreed among other things of importance to establish a department of education under the auspices of the EAMWS whose main task was to redress the educational disparity between Muslims and Christians. The congress passed a resolution to build schools throughout Tanganyika and eventually build in Dar es Salaam the first Islamic University in East Africa. That decision was as good as a declaration of war against the Church.

The Church felt these decisions by Muslims were a threat to its own future in Tanganyika. It had survived for a hundred years because it was propped up by the colonial government. Under a true secular government it was not sure if it could survive the challenge from Muslims. Muslims had to be prevented from organising as they had freely organised within the colonial political system during the struggle for independence. To allow Muslim to organise independent of the existing central authority dominated by Christians was to undermine the Church. It was tantamount to allowing Muslims to take over the country with Islam as the dominant religion reigning supreme without an equal. The sheer population of Muslims in the country was an enough threat, let alone their muscle in the polity. The Church had no urge to see Islam flourish nor did it desire to see the government redress the colonial legacy to enable Muslims share power with
Christians. The Church decided to have its own strategy to counter these new mass mobilisation development efforts by Daa’wat Islamiyya under Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir and the EAMWS under its Patron the Aga Khan to ensure its hegemony in post-colonial Tanganyika.

Sheikh Hassan bin Amir’s first displeasure with the government was in 1961. During independence celebrations the Catholic Church issued and distributed independence memento depicting Christian symbols associating the Church with the independence struggle. Soon after, the government established relations with the Vatican. In 1963 the Catholic Church fielded its own independent candidates to oppose Muslim candidates nominated by TANU to contest local government elections in Kigoma and Bukoba on the pretext that the Muslim candidates were of limited educational background. That same year Nyerere dissolved in TANU the Elders Council which as we have shown was dominated by Muslims among them prominent sheikhs. The Elders Council was an all Muslim advisory body which had supported TANU leadership during the whole period of the struggle. About that time Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir received information that there were plans by Nyerere to subvert Muslims in TANU. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was deeply disturbed by these events which in his analysis were following a distinct pattern. It seemed to him that the Church which had distanced itself from politics during the struggle for independence was now moving in to reap what it did not sow.

Attempts to Dismantle Muslim Unity, 1963 - 1968
The First Attempt, 1963
Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was seen as a stumbling-block to Christian hegemony. Parallel with this the EAMWS, the powerful organisation
which united Muslims of East Africa had also to be demobilised. Suddenly and without warning throughout the country, particularly in urban centres were Muslims where a majority, there seemed to be a set plan to harass and intimidate Muslim activists. There were negative overtones from the government against Islam and Muslims contrary to what Muslims had envisaged before independence. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was not unaware of all this. He decided to open a new frontline to counter these new developments.

Following the dissolution of the Elders Council it was obvious that Nyerere had abandoned Muslims as allies and was cultivating a new political power base. Encouraged by his success in abolishing the Elders Council in TANU Nyerere introduced another issue to the party, that the EAMWS should also be dissolved and a local Muslim organisation be formed. Nyerere failed to get TANU Central Committee’s support on this one.

When the EAMWS called the Second Muslim Congress in that year the main agenda was the government’s hostility to Islam. This meeting would go down in history as one in which Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir took Nyerere head on. The crux of the matter was that Nyerere had secretly proposed to certain Muslims in the EAMWS executive to propose dissolution of the EAMWS so that they have a new local organisation to be led by an African instead of the Aga Khan.

Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir saw through Nyerere’s proposal as a strategy to ‘divide and rule’ and hence sabotage Muslim unity. He knew Nyerere wanted to divide Muslims along racial lines and thus weaken African Muslims economically because Aga Khan’s financial contribution to the
EAMWS was very significant. It was Aga Khan’s resources which supported ‘tabligh’, built schools and mosques for Muslims. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was now sure that Nyerere had turned out to be an enemy of Islam. What he had heard about him after independence were not rumours but hard facts. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir without flinching, directed the congress to oppose Nyerere’s proposal. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir had taken the bull by the horns.

Nyerere was invited to close the meeting and Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir took the opportunity to speak his mind. But he did not stand in person to speak because he was not a platform politician. Sheikh Hassan’s domain was confined within the precinct of his ‘madras’ and the pulpit. One of his lieutenants from the provinces spoke, and not mincing words warned Nyerere to be careful with Muslims because it was they who had put him in power. (There was nothing which Nyerere loathed more than be reminded that he had a debt to pay to Muslims of Tanganyika). Nyerere knew that was not the EAMWS leadership speaking or even for that matter the very speaker facing him from the floor. It was Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir speaking and warning him. Worse, the person who delivered the message was none other than Sheikh Bilal Rehani Waikela, TANU founder member and a patriot who fought for independence of Tanganyika. Nyerere left the conference hall head down. His ego was wounded and he felt humiliated.

In April, 1964 Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir led a strong delegation of the EAMWS consisting of Sheikh Said Omar Abdallah, EAMWS President Tewa Said Tewa, the Secretary Abdul-Aziz Khaki and others for a tour of Islamic countries to solicit financial support to build the Islamic University agreed in the Islamic Congress of 1962 and to establish
relations with the Muslim world. This was the first time that Muslims in Tanganyika were establishing relations with fellow Muslims since Tanganyika under the British was a Christian domain. In Cairo, at Al Azhar University, Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was conferred an honorary degree in recognition of his contribution to Islamics. It is believed that he is the only sheikh in East Africa to receive that honour.

In January 1964, an army mutiny occurred in Tanganyika Rifles. Nyerere took this opportunity to detain\textsuperscript{13} EAMWS leaders in the provinces and other prominent sheikhs, some very close to Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir, on the pretext that they had instigated the mutiny. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s network built for almost three decades and which he had depended for the new struggle for Muslim emancipation was targeted and was in retreat and in other places in disarray. Many of his lieutenants and students some of them prominent scholars found themselves behind bars. Al this harassment withstanding, Muslim unity under the EAMWS remained intact.

The Second Attempt, 1966

In 1966 the EAMWS held its annual conference in Arusha. A separatist group emerged from Tanzania calling for the split of the society into three different autonomous entities, that of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. The separatist element from Tanzania also called for the ‘indigenisation’ of the constitution of the EAMWS. This meant constitutional changes had to be effected by the leadership to enable Tanzania become an independent body within the EAMWS. This was a move to isolate Tanzanian Muslims from the rest of the East Africa

\textsuperscript{13} Soon after independence the government passed the Detention Act of 1962. This Act was passed in order to put into custody or ostracise to remote places those which the government perceived were a danger to peace and security of the country.
umma. This, it was observed, would weaken not only Tanzanian Muslims, but the Muslim community in East Africa. It was clear from the outset that there was pressure from Nyerere to effect these changes. It soon became clear that Nyerere was working towards disbanding the EAMWS using few hand-picked Muslims within the EAMWS. The aim was to form a new organisation over which the government could have some control. This had to be done in order to contain Muslims as a political force and hence cripple them.

Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was fully aware of these new developments and he too laid out his strategy to counter Nyerere’s machinations. Sheikh Hassan was aware that Nyerere was planning to cripple Muslim efforts for equal power sharing with Christians. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir began to issue Friday ‘khutbas’ which were distributed throughout the country and were read in mosques in the provinces during Friday prayers. Mufti Sheikh Hassan’s thoughts were heard from pulpits of different mosques in Tanganyika. It is said those ‘khutbas’ were down to earth. His message to Muslims was to seize the opportunity brought about by the independence they had fought for and educate themselves so that they share power with Christians in governing the country. He was now mobilising Muslims afresh for what he perceived to be a more dangerous struggle than which Muslims had faced against the British. The tone and direction of his thoughts in his ‘madras’ on the future of Tanganyika now became more potent and crowds were attracted to his thoughts. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir and Nyerere, the two allies who had fought against the British were now in opposite camps and heading for a head on collision.
Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir realised that the struggle for real independence was far from finished. He now had a new enemy which he had not anticipated to fight. The irony of it all is the fact that he had moulded the enemy by the sweat of his own brow and that of the general Muslim community in Tanganyika. It was clear to him that at that stage to invoke Muslim sentiments against Nyerere as he had done against the British would have been dangerous to the country. On his part Nyerere was aware that it would not be easy to deal with Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir because he commanded a strong power base and respect among Muslims. To detain Sheikh Hassan was therefore out of question. But, as long as Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir remained in the Mainland it was not possible to control Muslims since they always looked to Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir for guidance. He was the moving spirit of Muslim unity. The only safe option open to Nyerere was to ostracise Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir in whatever manner and then ban the EAMWS. It is against this background that we can now analyse Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s arrest and the so called EAMWS crisis which characterised the last three months of 1968.

The Final Attempt, 1968

In the month of October, 1968 TANU and government mass media through a series of stories made the people believe that the EAMWS was facing a crisis of massive proportion. The most telling one was that of one unknown primary school teacher from Bukoba by the name of Adam Nasibu who announced through the state radio and the party press that his region, Bukoba, was splitting from the EAMWS.14 Overnight this obscure school teacher became a hero of sorts as the

mass media of the party and government built up his image and publicised what came to be known as the Muslim ‘crisis’. For three months Adam Nasibu shared with Nyerere the front page of the TANU dailies under its editor, Benjamin William Mkapa. The EAMWS was accused of not being a true representative of African Muslims and therefore had no relevance to Tanzania. It seemed the government was encouraging dissidents within the EAMWS to split from the society.

Muslims call to the government to stop the state controlled radio and the TANU dailies from being used as a propaganda tool against Muslim unity fell on deaf ears. The propaganda machinery against the Muslim unity EAMWS leadership never abated.

A trio strategy against the EAMWS was in top gear. Benjamin Mkapa, the Editor of ‘The Nationalist’ would publish any statement against the EAWMS, then Martin Kiama, the Director of Radio Tanzania would give the statement a news item preference in the radio to be repeated throughout the day in the news programme. The crisis took a dramatic turn when the Vice-President of Tanzania, Abeid Amani Karume, attacked the EAMWS as an organisation of exploitation, an instrument of the big bourgeoisie which was being controlled by the capitalist who are exploiting the common people’. From here Karume made a series of attacks and allegations on the society. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s khutbas from the member of the mosques was no match to this bombardment from the government propaganda machinery. In his part, Nyerere never publicly uttered a word against the EAMWS. He preferred to direct his attack behind the curtain. His hand was never revealed nor seen.

15 Barua ya Mwenyekiti Halmashauri ya Uchunguzi Migogoro ya Waislam Kwa Waziri wa Habari na Utangazaji, 21st November, 1968.
To make a long story short, Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was arrested and deported to Zanzibar. Following this escapade, the Aga Khan from his headquarters in Paris resigned his post as patron of the EAMWS and soon after the Minister for Home Affairs, on the instructions of the President, declared the EAMWS an ‘unlawful society’. After the deportation of Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir, many of his followers in Dar es Salaam and in the provinces were arrested and detained without trial. (Can one imagine President Ali Hassan Mwinyi giving an order for the sake of argument, to a Muslim IGP to arrest Cardinal Pengo of the Roman Catholic Church?).

Soon after the deportation of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir, the government convened a conference which was known as the Islamic National Conference. The main agenda of the conference held in Iringa from 12th to 15th December was to discuss a constitution for a new Muslim organisation. And this is how BAKWATA came to be imposed upon Muslims. A dark cloud had fallen over Muslims of Tanganyika. The EAMWS Islamic University project of which construction had begun stalled for lack of leadership and the school projects in the provinces were curtailed for good. Since the formation of BAKWATA, Muslims are still struggling to organise outside the central authority. But what is

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17 When Inspector General of Police (IGP), Hamza Aziz, received the order from the Commander in Chief through the Minister of Home Affairs to arrest Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir, he could not believe his ears. Unbecoming of the Force’s discipline he demanded to know the reason for the arrest of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir. When he was told that the reason was subversion, he told the Minister that there must be a mistake somewhere. Inspector General of Police told the Minister to tell the President that it was not possible for him to carry out that order because he was not convinced with the allegations levelled against the Mufti. Inspector General of Police refused to obey the order of the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and the President had to order State Intelligence to arrest Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir was arrested in the small hours of the morning and was straight away taken to the airport where a military plane was waiting to take him back to Zanzibar.

heartening is the fact that Muslims have refused to recognise BAKWATA as a representative of the umma.  

Since Mufti Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s deportation in 1968 the Mainland has had two BAKWATA Muftis. They have simply been ignored by Muslims. The office of the Mufti under BAKWATA instead of drawing respect has earned scorn, contempt and ridicule from the umma. To date no Mufti has been able to wear Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir’s ‘makbadh’. BAKWATA as an organisation is literally dead. Its stand to appease the government and to distance itself from each and every Muslims issue has made it irrelevant.

**Conclusion**

Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir lived his last years in Zanzibar a lonely man. The 1964 revolution had infused into the islands radical politics and leftist ideas which were negative to Islam. Karume had even ordered the burning of Islamic books. Most scholars and many of his students had gone into exile. Zanzibar was no longer the center of Islamic knowledge. Sheikh Hassan was now a prisoner in his own country as he was not allowed to go back to the mainland. Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir lived to an advanced age of ninety nine years and before he died in 1979 he had gradually lost sight. Blind as he was he continued to teach until his death. In his last years he was saddened by the fact that many

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19 In 1993 in desperation and in its effort to salvage BAKWATA the Minister of Home Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister Augustine Mrema convened a meeting between Muslims and Christians at the Diamond Jubilee Hall, Dar es Salaam. The Church sent a strong delegation. Muslims abstained except BAKWATA. The few Muslims who turned up were there out curiosity rather than conviction. Mrema on behalf of the government addressed the meeting revealing the fact that elections for BAKWATA were long overdue and could not be held because of lack of funds. The Church leadership volunteered to provide money to BAKWATA to enable it hold its elections. The Minister for Home Affairs Augustine Mrema also helped to collect donations from the business community to fund BAKWATA elections. When eventually BAKWATA met in Dodoma from 10th - 12th May, the guest of honour was Augustine Mrema. Instead of conducting elections BAKWATA passed some constitution changes to empower the late Sheikh Hemed bin Hemed with absolute powers to fire any executive member without being answerable to anyone.
of his students in Tanganyika had preceded him in death. He was sad he could not attend their funerals because he was barred from the Mainland. He was also sad because to him he thought he had not fulfilled his ambition to uplift Muslims from remnants and miseries of colonialism. He had told his confidants that it was his ambition to establish in Tanganyika a Muslim institution similar to Al Azhar. But we all know that Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir has left his mark in Tanzania or we would not be writing about him four decades after his death nor would Muslims throughout Tanzania and in different mosques hold ‘hawli’ in his honour to commemorate his death each year since he passed away.

TANU the party he had worked hard to popularise and establish in the country during the struggle for independence did not announce his death nor did it send representative to his funeral. The government controlled media was silent about his death. The announcement of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir death went by word of mouth from one Muslim to another and from one mosque to another, from one village and town to the next; just as he had during his lifetime moved from one place to another spreading the message of Islam and at the same time mobilising people to support TANU and fight for independence.

With the omission of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir in the country’s history, Tanzania has become a nation without heroes. But Tanzania can only be without heroes only if we Muslims refuse to honour our heroes.

Islamic Propagation Centre (IPC) in Dar es Salaam has picked up the mantle left behind by Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir. IPC has been able to establish schools in Tanzania. There is ‘The Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir
Award for Best Student’ contested by students each year in IPC schools to honour his contribution to education in Tanganyika. IPC has gone even further. It has in its curriculum in its schools the true history of the struggle for independence in Tanganyika which is taught parallel with the official version. IPC is paying the price for these bold moves. IPC schools have several times been raided by police for being centres of ‘Muslim fundamentalism’.

Epilogue...

Two years after deportation of Sheikh Hassan bin Ameir...

In 1970 Nyerere invited to the State House the then Secretary General of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference, Fr. Robert Rweyemamu and the Pope’s Representative to Tanzania Mgr. Giovano Cerrano. Among other things Nyerere told his guests that he was doing every thing in his power to strengthen Catholicism in the country. He also requested them to go and inform the Bishops that he had established a Department of Political Education in TANU (the ruling and only political party at that time), and that he had appointed a Christian Reverend to head that department, not because of his competence as a political analyst, but because of his strong faith as a Christian. His responsibility was to guide and control the political direction of the party. He also informed them that in the Party’s National Executive Committee (NEC) two members were Reverends. He said he believed that was the best way of ensuring that the party got good people (van Bergen, 1981:333-336). (Hamza Mustafa Njozi, Mwembechai Killings and the Political Future of Tanzania, Globalink Communications, Ottawa, Canada 2000).

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The book is banned in Tanzania. It is a criminal offence to read the book and have access to its contents. It is my belief that what caused the book to be banned is the above information. President Mkapa could just not allow Muslims to see through his government and mentor and therefore come to terms with the realities of ‘not mixing politics with religion’.

The Church particularly the Catholic Church is in control of the Government by proxy. Through unseen hands it manipulates the political system in such a way its influence permeates everything from the mass media to selection of students to secondary schools, institutions of higher learning, securing scholarship, employment, promotion for political office etc. etc. In short it is in control of the Executive, Judiciary and the Legislature. This is the reason the political system has been able manipulate the law with impunity as far as in effects Muslim interests, it has been able to ignore serious petitions submitted to the President, Prime Minster, and the Parliament by Muslims, it has been able to control and shape public opinion against Muslims.

Through research and many years of observations it is now possible to know a little how the unseen hand works. It works like a secret society and yet it is not one. It works in a two prong fashion. It has agents in all important institutions of the civil society who co-ordinates their activities when the need arise forming what could be identified as the ‘Christian Lobby’ similar to the powerful Jewish Lobby in The United

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21 The government in 1970, having realised that Muslims were a majority in Tanzanian Mainland directed the Statistical Department to destroy all the 1967 census results so as to show Christians were a leading majority (See Family Mirror, Second Issue, November, 1994, p. 6).
States. The Christian Lobby in Tanzania is a multi-denomination power house. Interesting is the fact that this alliance has been able to even recruit nominal Muslims and alleviated them to important positions in the government, civil societies and the media. The main function of these Muslims is to be used by the government against Muslims interests.

The dirty work for example, to order force to be used against Muslims or to undermine a Muslim in an important position who it is to the interest of the Church that he be dealt with, such tasks will always be apportioned to these Muslims in the Christian lobby. The Mwembechai tragedy rose from the hand of a Muslim. The campaign against the late Prof. Kighoma Malima in the media was spearheaded by a Muslim just to mention a few examples. These Muslims can be found in the media, echelon of the ruling party, the government, the police etc. etc. These Muslims are well rewarded and are a government into themselves. Unique in these Muslim personalities is the fact that they endure the political system. They are the show piece to display to the Muslim majority that the government does not discriminate, if it was those faces would not have been there. This system has now become self-propelling. It can work independent of whoever is in command, as seen in the ten year period (1985-1995) when a Muslim president, Ali Hassan Mwinyi was in power.

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