Baraza

Christian Hegemony and the Rise of Muslim Militancy in Tanzania Mainland

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Introduction

In order to understand the Tanzanian political environment and to appreciate this study we first need to establish even in a nut shell the source of the problem. Why is the Church in Tanzania and particularly the Catholic Church in control of the government and all that it entails? Why are Muslims, fifty years after independence still backward, uneducated and form the lower strata of society? Is this by default or design? Having seen this we have to analyse and deeply explore the hopes and aspirations of Muslims in free Tanganyika as Tanzania was known then and ask, are Muslims satisfied with this unequal status? We also have to ask again did Muslims spearhead the struggle for independence so that the Church could replace the colonial government. Although for reasons which are to be deduced later, this historical fact is still in contention. No one can ignore the role of Islam and Muslims in resisting foreign domination beginning with German colonialism when in 1907 Muslims rose up in arms against Germans in Maji Maji War to free Tanganyika from bondage; to the period of British rule when Muslims formed the backbone of resistance against British rule.

Subsequently Muslims dominated both labour and nationalist politics. Tanzania Mainland celebrates fifty years of independence this year but the role of Muslims in resisting foreign rule and in liberating Tanganyika from colonialism has not been requited nor have the heroes of independence struggle been honoured.¹ We again have to pose a question why is this so? Is it that Tanzania is an ungrateful nation and therefore hates its heroes? Answers to all those questions will lead us closer to understanding the problem which Muslims in Tanzania face. Answers to these questions will make us reflect and uncover reasons which caused Muslim independence aspirations not to be realised. This is now the bone of contention between

¹ On 27th April, 1985, Julius Nyerere, before stepping down from power, in a colourful ceremony at the State House grounds, conferred a total of 3,979 medals to Tanzanians who had contributed to the development of the nation. None of the Muslim patriots who spearheaded the independence struggle was in that list. The names of those honoured make very interesting reading.
Muslims and the government. Muslims without mincing words are now pointing an accusing finger to the Church particularly the Catholic Church which in connivance with President Nyerere for being anti Islam and for frustrating the hopes and aspirations of Muslims in free Tanganyika, a country they liberated from colonialism in 1961.2

**History in Revision**

Muslims are now organising nationwide mass rallies which openly and in live broadcasts denounce the church, criticise the government and church agents within the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and the Parliament for oppressing Muslims. Seemingly derogatory words like “pandikizi” (singular) and “mapandikizi” (plural) meaning “turncoats;” or the new coined word “Mfumo Kristo” roughly meaning “Christian dominance” are now part of the Muslim and Swahili vocabulary. These analogies are used freely in the Muslim media and among Muslims in every day conversation. But what usually thrills Muslims and utterly significant showing that times have changed is when in the rallies and in normal discussion Muslims refer to Nyerere hitherto known respectfully as “Baba wa Taifa” as “Baba wa Kanisa,” meaning “Church Elder.”5 The move by the Catholic Church to make him a saint has not

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2 Catholics form 76% of all members of Parliament the remaining 24% seats are divided between Christians of other dominations and Muslims. Muslims control a mere 6% of the seats. Most areas which are under developed in Tanzania mainland are areas with Muslim majority like Kigoma, Tabora, Kilwa, Mtwara, Lindi etc. These areas are now re-examining themselves and are gradually turning into local factions of radical Muslim politics reminiscence of the era of nationalist politics of the 1950s. This could be a source of civil unrest in the very near future. Signs of this have begun to show in the recurrent violent conflicts between Muslims and the government. Tanzania has experienced the Buzuruga Muslim—Sungusungu Conflict (1983), Pork Riots (1993) and Mwembechai Upheaval (1998). For more information See Hamza Mustafa Njozi, Mwembechai Killings and Political Future of Tanzania, Globalink Communications Ottawa, 2000. (The book is banned by the government). In all these conflicts, Muslim blood has been shed. In between these conflicts Muslims have sent several petitions to the government requesting it to look into these problems but all of them have been ignored. As a result of this Muslims from all regions of Tanzania met in Dar es Salaam at Masjid Tungi in 1990 and issued the Tungi Declaration which among other things stated that Muslim should prepare to defend their rights by all means even if it means by force of arms.

5 The late Prof. Haroub Othman after reading Sheikh Ali Muhsin’s book Conflict and Harmony in Zanzibar and the writer’s book The Life and Times of Abdulwahid Sykes 1924 – 1968 The Untold Story of the Muslim Struggle Against British Colonialism in Tanganyika, Minerva Press, London 1998 and having come across hitherto unknown information on Nyerere was devastated because he was a great admirer of Nyerere as a patriot and a nationalist. The two books had painted him differently. Prof. Haroub confronted Nyerere and told him that the allegations in those two works have tarnished his image and he advised him to respond to them. Nyerere never did. Christian lecturers at Dar es Salaam University are discouraging students from making references to those
helped matters. More so it proves all the allegations levelled against Nyerere that he never was a nationalist but a Catholic zealot. Respect and love which Muslims once had for Nyerere has been completely wiped out. The new generation of Muslims no longer believe in the official history of TANU and the propaganda that it was Nyerere who single handed defeated the British. Muslims instead are honouring the forgotten heroes of independence movement and in so doing invoking emotions particularly in the new generation to stand up against oppression as their forefathers had done against Germans and the British. Muslim heroes of the Maji Maji War like Suleiman Mamba, Ali Songea Mbano, and Muslim nationalists like Abdulwahid and Ally Sykes, Dossa Aziz, Sheikh Hassan bin Amir, Sheikh Suleiman Takadir, Sheikh Yusuf Badi, Bibi Titi Mohamed, Bibi Tatu bint Mzee, Bilali Rehani Waikela, Ali Migeyo and others are now part of nationalist history which was suppressed for many years.

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4 In all historical references to Maji Maji War hero and Chief of Wangoni Ali Songea Mbano, his Muslim name “Ali” would be omitted and he would be referred to as Songea Mbano.


8 Bibi Titi was recruited into TANU by Schneider Abdillah Plantan and began to mobilize people particularly women to join the party even before he came to know Nyerere.

9 Bilali Rehani Waikela one of the TANU founder members in Western Province in 1955 and Regional Secretary of the East African Muslim Welfare Society (EAMWS) was detained by Nyerere in 1964 for “mixing religion and politics.” His personal papers were of great help in understanding the EAMWS crisis of 1968 and the reasons why Nyerere detained prominent sheikhs banned and banned the society in 1968. A documentary of his political life has been made and although not officially recognized as a patriot Muslims now consider him as one of the heroes of the independence movement. For more information see Mohamed Said, “In Praise of Ancestors,” *Africa Events* (London) March/April 1977.


11 Maji Maji Museum in Songea which has been greatly desecrated removing all signs of Muslim symbols during the Maji Maji War with Germans. The Maji Maji Museum at Peramiho under the Catholic Church has closed its doors to young Muslims for fear of criticism for distorting history. All Muslim symbols in Maji Maji War against Germans have been obliterated in the Maji Maji Museum.
Muslims are demanding the restoration of their history and honour as true liberators of Tanganyika. This is unprecedented. One can only speculate and wonder where this would lead to. Can we identify this phenomenon as corrective and revision of history or is it a lesson of anarchy in recording history? The result of all this is that the Church has been made to stand naked. That the Church did not play any role during Maji Maji or during the struggle against the British or that it has worked hand in hand with the government to sabotage Islam and Muslims is now common knowledge.

Professor Muhajid: Kighoma Abdallah Ali Malima

And the Christian Lobby

After the introduction of multi-parties in 1992 Muslims attempted clandestinely to form a political party, trying to invoke their past history but these efforts were thwarted by the government and other factors, the main one being the problem of organising what is to be an open political party in a clandestine fashion. The mainstay of this movement was the underground Muslim nationwide network which has always been there. The aim was to have a political party which Muslims could control although not in the style of the defunct All Muslim National Union of Tanganyika (AMNUT) founded in 1958 by a splinter Muslim group from TANU following the controversial tripartite voting which came to be known as “Kura Tatu.” However Muslims managed to overcome all obstacles when Prof. Kighoma Ali Malima, a symbol of Muslim resistance to the status quo resigned from the ruling party CCM

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12 A children’s book authored by the current writer, Torch on Kilimanjaro, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 2007 has been blacklisted and cannot be included as a reader in schools because it contravenes the official history.


14 It is believed that it was when TANU voted to take part in the Tripartite Election in 1958 under discriminatory conditions which caused Muslims to lose the political dominance they had enjoyed for many years. Trying to regain their power AMNUT was formed. See Mohamed Said, Uamuzi wa Busara, Abantu Publications, Dar es Salaam, 2009.
and joined a little known opposition party, National Reconstruction Alliance (NRA) founded by an obscure Muslim politician, one Abubakar Ulotu. Prof. Malima earned the wrath of the government and church when he pointed out the existence of long standing circle of Christian functionaries in the Ministry of Education which was sabotaging and discriminating Muslim youths barring them from higher education. Through a confidential letter to President Ali Hassan Mwinyi he exposed this faction and made suggestions to the government on how to put an end to that discrimination and elevate Muslims. Prof. Malima for this he was labelled a “Muslim fundamentalist” and therefore a dangerous person out to endanger peace which has been observed since independence. To make a long story short Prof. Malima was hounded out of the ministry by the powerful Christian lobby in CCM and Mwinyi’s government. But Prof. Malima did not leave the ministry quietly. He told Muslims what he had found in the Ministry of Education. Prof Malima’s findings complimented an earlier study done by Warsha.

After the resignation of Prof. Malima from CCM, Muslims perceived that act as a signal for the second liberation. Signs that the country was being divided into two hostile camps between Muslims in opposition and Christians in the ruling party were very much evident. Had Prof. Malima lived and with the charged political atmosphere which was there at that time, and stood for presidential election to oppose Benjamin William Mkapa, a Roman Catholic and a Nyerere

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15 Prof. Malima who was the first Muslim to head the Ministry of Education found out that the population of Muslim students in primary school was more than 50% but they were few in secondary schools. He realised something must be seriously wrong in the ministry and he therefore directed that examinations numbers should be used in marking examinations instead of names. After these change the number of Muslims students admitted to secondary schools increased by 40%. Prof. Malima’s letter was leaked to the press. It is said that among those who received the report was the Church hierarchy, Nyerere, former Vice-President and Prime Minister Joseph Warioba. Warioba had an axe to grind with Mwinyi because in a government reshuffle Mwinyi dropped him from premiership replacing him with Samwel John Malecela. The Church, Nyerere and Warioba were outraged by the letter and tried to have him sacked from the government and party. Muslims were following closely Prof. Malima’s fight against the Christian bastion with great interest.

16 In 1991 Warsha, an unregistered Muslim youth organisation commissioned its educationists to write a research paper to show why Muslim students were lagging behind in education. For the first time it was revealed that there was a system in the Ministry of Education supported by Christian functionaries which was discriminatory towards Muslim youths, purposely barring them from institutions of higher learning. The paper was circulated to all Muslims in Tanzania.
protégé, one can only speculate the outcome. Although there were four presidential aspirants nationwide the battle would have narrowed down to only the two of them, which are Prof. Malima and Benjamin Mkapa. Retired President Julius Nyerere had seen the danger of such a confrontation and asked Prof. Malima not to resign from CCM. Nyerere knew for Prof. Malima to resign on a Muslim agenda that would make him a hero to his people and Muslims would rally behind him. The country would be split and polarised.

President Nyerere sent emissaries to Prof. Malima pleading with him not to resign from CCM. Prof. Malima was to receive thinly veiled threats from other quarters as to what could happen to the country was he to resign from CCM on a Muslim agenda. What Prof. Malima endured in the hands of the powerful Christian lobby, his party the CCM and his eventual death, is a drama worth documenting. This situation was averted when Prof. Malima died mysteriously in London soon after taking the leadership of NRA and announcing his candidacy for 1995 presidential elections in a well attended public rally in Tabora. Muslims gave Prof. Malima a funeral which has never been seen before. Prof. Malima had crossed the Rubicon. It was only his death which prevented Muslims from moving towards a head on collision with the government. In Prof. Malima’s death the movement was robbed of its leader and as a result the religious euphoria which was at fever pitch as the country was preparing to enter into second multiparty election waned away. It took a decade to bring the Muslim movement back on track and the irony for that was, it was not CCM the old enemy which was responsible for that but an opposition party, Chama Cha Maendeleo na Demokrasia (CHADEMA) seemingly under the tutelage of Catholic Church out to oust a Muslim president, Mrisho Jakaya Kikwete, which broke the camel’s back. The Catholic Church prior to election issued an Election Manifesto and a document of guidance on how Christians should vote. The presidential candidate for CHADEMA was a former Roman Catholic priest. That said it all. Muslims mobilised for the general election in a manner never seen before to oppose CHADEMA and

the Church. Muslims irrespective of their political affiliations campaigned for the return to office of a Muslim president.

**Religious Distribution in Tanzania**

In order to appreciate the impending danger we need to agree that Muslims are a majority in Tanzania and in any civil upheaval large numbers carry psychological advantages. The government has over the years been making deliberate efforts to conceal this fact and to portray to the world that Muslim-Christian religious distribution is more or less the same and at times to give an impression that Tanzania is a Christian nation and Muslims are a minority. The government to say the least has been very evasive on this question. When the government went into its first census after independence the government did not envisage that the results would show Muslims as a majority. In the 1957 census Muslims outnumbered Christians at a ratio of three to two. Ten years after in 1967, in the post independence census Muslims were 30%, Christians 32% and local belief 37%. Reasons were not given for this sudden decrease of Muslims or the growth of pagans. It is on record that the 1967 statistics were doctored to show that Muslims were trailing behind Christians in numerical strength. D.B.

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18 As if sensing danger the Catholic Church has in place a committee responsible for armed forces. This was revealed in a report to the Pope when he visited Tanzania in 1990. Muslims have requested the government to make a statement on Catholic Church Committee on Armed Forces but so far the government has not responded.

19 There has never been in history minorities in ethnicity or religion in any country to wage a major war on a foreign power on behalf of majority or to mobilize people for independence. Tanzania’s experience will be an exception to the rule if it is proven that as minority Muslims mobilized against Germany and also provided leadership in the struggle for independence.

20 Religious distribution in Tanzania is among the three topics made “sensitive” by Julius Nyerere and were as a result out of bounds for discussion for almost a quarter of a century. The other two are the role of Muslims in the struggle for independence and that the struggle for independence began before Julius Nyerere came to lead Tanganyika African Association in 1953.

21 It is worthwhile to quote in full a letter by one Amiri Mchomvu which appeared in the *Family Mirror* about the 1967 census: Last month I chanced to come across Africa Information Newsletter, (September 26, 1994 issue) in which there was an article on Tanzania titled: Islamic fundamentalism worries the government. I found the article by a renewed Tanzanian journalist, Lawrence Kilimwiko to be very anti-Islam. Besides, Mr. Kilimwiko says that about 40% of Tanzanians are Christians and 30% Muslims. I think that is a statistical error. During the 1967 Population Census, the first census since independence, I was one of the census enumerators in Tabora Region. It is believed that this was the only successful of the population census conducted since independence (i.e. 1967, 1978 and 1988) as it was wholly conducted by the form V students. Corruption,
Barret gives statistics which show Muslims as a minority: Muslims 26%, Christians 45% and local belief 28%. Tanzania National Demographic Survey figures for 1973 have Muslims at 40%, Christians 38.9% and local belief 28%. *Africa South of the Sahara* shows that Muslims are a majority in Tanzania at 60% this figure has remained constant in all its subsequent publications since 1991.\(^{22}\)

The Christian Lobby in Tanzania’s Political System

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 every sector of society from the mass media to selection of students to join secondary schools and other institutions of higher learning, securing scholarship, employment, promotion, for political office etc. etc. In short the Church is in control of the Executive, Judiciary and the Legislature.\(^{23}\) This is the reason the political system has been able to manipulate the law with impunity as far as it affects Muslim interests. The government has been able to ignore serious petitions submitted to the President, Prime Minster, and the Parliament by Muslims. The government with the support of the Christian dominated press has been able to control and shape public opinion against Islam and Muslims. The Church perceive Islam as an enemy it therefore has in operation strategies to counter its development.\(^{24}\) Evidence to this fact has been uncovered by Muslim as well as Christian scholars.\(^{25}\)

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\(^{23}\) The following are few names of Muslims who were over the years punished by the Christian Lobby for contravening church interests: Mufti; Sheikh Hassan bin Amir, Tewa Said Tewa, Bilal Rehani Waike, Prof. Kighoma Ali Amlima, Abubakar Mwilima, Aboud Jumbe, Kitwana Selemani Kondo, Manju Msambya, etc.

\(^{24}\) In 1968 the government banned the East African Muslim Welfare Society. In 1980s the government refused to allow Organisation of Islamic Conference (IOC) to build a university in Tanzania instead IOC built it in Mbale, Uganda. In 1990s Darul Iman from Saudi Arabia wanted to build a school but was made to understand it

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Through research and many years of observations it is now possible to know a little how the unseen hand of the Church functions. It works like a secret society and yet it is not one at least from outside. 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. This is a multi-denomination power house. Interesting is the fact that this alliance has been able to even recruit Muslims and alleviated them to important positions in the government and the media. The main function of these Muslims is to soften blows against Muslims interests and give a pleasant perception in the eyes of the public in issues where the government has to confront Muslims. 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 sorted out, such tasks will always be apportioned to these Muslims in the Christian lobby. These Muslims can be found in the media, in echelon of the CCM, the government, the police etc. etc. These Muslims are well rewarded and are a government into themselves. Unique in these Muslim personalities is that they endure the political system. They are the show piece to display to the Muslim majority that the was not wanted when it received negative press and harassment and as a result it closed its office in Dar es Salaam. In 2002 the Parliament passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2002 which targeted Muslims. See Mohamed Said, “Terrorism” in East Africa the Tanzanian Experience,”2006, paper presented at a conference organised by Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies University of Ibadan, Nigeria.


Christian lobby with the help of senior officials in the ministry stoop as low as to steal the 1994 Ministry of Finance Budget speech before it was presented to the Parliament by the minister Prof. Malima. The day before the budget speech the conspirators locked themselves in a hotel room in the city centre coaching each other on how to tackle Prof. Malima the following day. Reflecting on the stolen budget speech Prof. Malima said that the moment the lobby began commenting on his speech he had a vision of marking a paper of dumb students who had cheated an examination. The head of these conspirators was a Muslim. There was also inside the House an organised group of about 60 to 80 Christian MPs who would jeer at Prof. Malima every time he spoke inside or outside Parliament buildings or during debating of bills that he was supposed to defend. The anti-Malima committee had journalists in its payroll who would in their papers portray Prof. Malima negatively. Among those papers was the Roman Catholic paper Kiongozi. See Kiongozi March 1-15, 1994.
government does not discriminate. This system has perfected itself and is now 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 and now that another Muslim holds the reigns.

Subtle oppression and propaganda unleashed on any people for many years is bound to have negative effect in their psychology. Majority of Muslims are poor due to impediments unleashed on their path towards upward mobility and will continue to suffer if deliberate efforts are not carried out to reverse the situation. On the other hand the Church has also suffered in its own peculiar way as it now lives in fear and there are few Christians who have seen the danger of Christianity as a doctrinaire being turned into a government within a government and these “sympathizers” have crossed over to the sprouting Pentecostal churches. Tanzania has in place self-generating mammoth machinery, blind and uncontrollable. It cannot think and therefore it is failing to see the danger even when it knocks on its door, the danger which will not only destroy the Church but also the country. The Church machinery now in motion for more than a century and like a true machine it would not wake up. It would only stop when the fuel and grease which propels and oils its parts is exhausted. By then it would be too late. The Church has failed to wake up to the realities that it cannot operate as it did, first under colonialism and later under two Catholic presidents, Nyerere and Mkapa. It cannot always be business as usual. This is proven in the way the government has failed to approach the stagnating Muslim problem and the now new Muslim movement which has gained momentum since the last general election of 2010 in which religious sentiments were out in the open. If the status endures signs are that Muslims will confront the Catholic Church as they had confronted Germany and British colonialism.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show the dangerous path which Tanzania is currently heading to. It is a fact that there is a struggle currently taking place between two contending forces both at
institutional and individual levels. It is my belief that this study has provided information which would help decision makers, and those Muslims and Christians who in their apathy, innocence and at times ignorance are oblivious of the problem to realize that Tanzania is not different from Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya or any other African countries torn apart by civil strife as a result of one ethnic group or religion monopolizing all the privileges and resources of the country. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Church and Government is a good example of this. It is high time the government stopped to pretend that all is well and to approach the Muslim plight objectively, seriously and with a sober mind. It is my belief that this will also help well wishers from outside to give good advice to the government. It is also my belief that this topic will receive further research from students of African politics and conflict resolution. To my countrymen the message is that it is only through talking about these problems in the open that we can uncover and expose the unseen hand which if left unchecked would plunge Tanzania into abyss and darkness.

“There is a tide in the affairs of men.
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves.
Or lose our ventures.”

*Julius Caesar Act 4, scene 3, 218–224*

27 This agreement was prepared by Dr. Costa Mahalu, Dar Es Salaam University Faculty of Law and was signed by Minister of State in Prime Minister’s Office and First Vice-President, Edward Lowassa. The main purpose of the agreement was to turn over education, health and social services to Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) and Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC). These social services were to be run jointly between the government and the Church. This agreement, that is, the Memorandum of Understanding was prepared and signed without even consulting or informing Muslims. In order for the memorandum to take effect the government had to amend article 30 of the Education Act No. 25 of 1978. In 2011 the government provided 91 billion shillings to the Church for its development activities. Mahalu was later appointed Ambassador to Italy. He was later to face corruption charges in court and Lowassa was to resign as Prime Minister on similar charges.
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