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A SECULARISATION OF A SACRED IDEOLOGY?

CIVIL RELIGION AND INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY TANZANIA

The United Republic of Tanzania is generally perceived as a country spared from violence and conflicts despite its multi-religious and multi-ethnic setting. By and large, this has been attributed to the secular policies of *ujamaa,* the African-social ideology developed under the leadership of Tanzania's first president Julius K. Nyerere (Rasmussen 1993)**.** However, since economic liberalisation and polity reforms took place during the mid 1980s Tanzania's socio-political stability has been challenged by publicly displayed religious expressions that fill the re-opened public realm. Increased tensions along intra-religious, inter-religious and state-religious lines are today manifested and negotiated through a multitude of religious fractions, especially along Muslim and Christian lines. Accordingly, there is a growing tendency that religious organisations publicly challenge government-polices and the government's relationships to sections of the society.

This paper intends to elaborate the socio-political impact and function of religious institutions in contemporary Tanzania. By assessing current intra- and inter-religious tensions through N. J. Demarth III's theory of secularisation and sacralisation, a contextual rooted interpretation suggests that present-day religious tensions needs to be analysed within the historical and contemporary setting of establishing and maintaining an unified Tanzanian nation. In other words, how national unity and a sense of national identity are promoted and created, by the state as well as important social institutions, in a setting marked by religious and ethnic pluralism. But before assesing the Tanzanian context, a presentation of Demerath III's definition of secularisation is in place.

Demerath III define secularisation as

> a process of change by which the sacred gives way to the secular, whether in matters of personal faith, institutional practice, or social power. It involves a transition in which things once revered become ordinary, the sanctified becomes mundane, and things other-worldly may lose their prefix. Whereas 'secularity' refers to a condition of sa-

> credlessness, and 'secularism' is the ideology devoted to such a state, secularization is historical dynamic that may occur gradually or suddenly, and is sometimes temporary and occasionally reversible (Demerath III 2007:66).

With this, Demerath III does not see processes of secularisation as erasing everything sacred. On the contrary, sacred beliefs can remain constant or even be enhanced within secularisation processes. Therefore, Demerath III introduces sacralisation as the dialectically opposing process in order to understand how secular developments and modes of secularisation take place across diverse contexts.

> Sacralization is the process by which the secular becomes sacred or other new forms of the sacred emerge, whether in matters of personal faith, institutional practice or political power. And sacralization may also occur gradually or suddenly and may be sometimes temporary and occasionally reversible (Demerath III 2007:66).

By linking secularisation and sacralisation processes to each other, Demerath III (2007:75) emphasise how certain sacred cultures (such as religions) has been effective to break down (secularise) older tribal cultures and divisions which in turn has made way for clearing new nationalistic bounds and civil religions. Hence, secularisation processes could be seen desacralise sacred elements connected to societies and nations. In order to implement Demerath III's theory on the Tanzanian context, and explain contemporary intra and inter-religious tensions, the *ujamaa* ideology is a necessary starting point.

Religion and ujamaa

When Tanganyika reached independence in 1961,[1] the new nation, comprised by 120 ethnic groups and religiously divided between Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religions, needed a strong unifying policy. Under the centralised one-party rule of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), an African political ideology (*ujamaa*) that emphasised national unity, development through self-reliance, equality, socialism and secularisation, was therefore developed (Campbell 1999: 106–7, Westerlund 1980: 25–32). While officially stating that religion was of private matter, the TANU regime encouraged religious organisations to actively participate in a struggle for unity and development while emphasising religious prac-

[1] Tanganyika later became the United Republic of Tanzania, a union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar established in 1964 after a political revolution on Zanzibar (see Campbell 1999: 106). The Zanzibar islands (Unguja and Pemba being the main ones) have maintained partial autonomy from the mainland and have their own government, president and jurisdiction.

tices and values that transcended religious divides.[2] To put briefly, *ujamaa* managed to merge its political ideology with religious values into a national ethos, a civil religion that could be accepted and promoted by large groups of Muslims and Christians (Westerlund 1980: 66–69, 182).

This development of a civil religion exemplifies the success of *ujamaa's* double-edged policies, which both managed to disarm unwanted religio-political mobilisation and effectively incorporating religious organisations and religious values into the national project. According to Westerlund (1980:57-62) this was done in two main ways. First, by directing unwanted, primarily Muslim, religious institutions to not "mix politics and religion" and secondly, by encouraging, primarily Christian mission churches to "play your part" in developing the nation. Thus, during *ujamaa* large sections of the society were integrated into the state[3] making the realm of civil society and *ujamaa* basically one in every sense of the word (Bakari & Mushi 2005:42). By promoting the same values, the state and the societal institutions cemented the *ujamaa* ideology in the hearts and minds of Tanzania's citizens. Consequently, the ujamaa ideology could be perceived as the Tanzanian nation's grand narrative, in Emile Durkeim's terms, the totem, through which Tanzanians worships their own society (Collins 2007:24-9). In short, the socialist oriented ideology of the *ujamaa* came to be the fundament of the Tanzanian self-image, a sacred point of reference while touching on questions regarding unity and national identity.

When the *ujamaa* eroded as the official political ideology and became replaced by economic liberalisation and polity reforms during the 1980s, the government's strict control of Tanzania's civil society faded, giving birth to diverse forms of societal institutions contesting the public space. This freedom of expression soon revealed government-societal tensions manifested along religious lines.

[2] For instance, values that promoted (national) unity, a sense of brotherhood and human equality. The social oriented Christian liberation theologies where also promoted. See Mbogoni (2004: 104).

[3] The big religious umbrella institutions — the Catholic, Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC), the Protestant, Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) and the Muslim, *Baraza Kuu la Waislam wa Tanzania*, the Supreme Islamic Council of Tanzania (Bakwata) — were for instance the one-party state's partners in this development. See Westerlund (1980) and Jennings (2008).

Intra and Inter-religious tensions in contemporary Tanzania

After the shift from state-centred socialism to market-oriented liberalism (Bakari & Ndumbaro 2006) Tanzania today host a multitude of religious expressions and institutions — some recently created in order to revive and improve social, spiritual and moral conducts. In this context of growing religious institutional pluralism, increased tensions along intra and inter-religious lines occasionally escalates into violent confrontations.[4] Complaints that the government support a structural marginalisation along religious lines are today prominent. For instance, Muslim grievances, articulated by sections of the Muslim community, perceive Muslims in Tanzania as victims of a historical marginalisation in terms of education, employment and socio-economic development (Gilsaa 2004, Liviga & Tumbo-Masabo 2006, Loimeier 2007).[5]

These expressions of marginalisation carry intra and inter-religious dimensions that are linked to religious institutions' relationship and access to political power. The secular discourse that emerged during *ujamaa,* in order to guard the values of peace and national unity, is still applied as a means to delegitimize political opposition along religious lines (Maddox & Giblin 2005:1). This implies that in contemporary Tanzania there is ongoing struggles between religious institutions over socio-political and socio-economic issues linked to Tanzania's grand narrative, today championed by TANU's political continuation the *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) government.[6] *Ujamaa's* nationalistic ideology is still today consolidated via a mixed use of political persuasion and societal-based consent. Religious criticism against *ujamaa's* heritage could therefore be seen as contemporary expressions of counter-ideologies that represent a force of political opposition. The different positions will now be highlighted through the controversies surrounding the creation of a national inter-religious council.[7]

In partnership with the Norwegian Church Aid and affiliated to the UN-associated World Conference of Religions for Peace, the recently initiated Inter-religious Council for Peace

[4] For examples on assessments of religious tensions in Tanzania see Luanda (1996), Ludwig (1996), Forster (1997), Campbell (1999), Gilsaa (2004), Wijsen & Mfumbusa (2004) and Mukundula et al. (2006).

[5] However, discontent with government policies and perceptions of marginalisation are common features within the Christian community (Ludwig 1996:224–225) and among followers of the African Traditional Religions (Masanja & Lawi 2006:106) as well.

[6] In 1977, TANU joined hands with the Afro-Shirazi Party in Zanzibara and created the *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (the party of the revolution). The present CCM government in Tanzania is therefore a direct political continuation of TANU, the political entity which chiseled the *ujamaa* ideology.

[7] The example is based on interviews made during fieldwork in Dar es Salaam 2009.

Tanzania (IRCPT) intend to be the first official hub that represents Tanzania's major religious institutions.[8] This includes the big Catholic, Protestant and Muslim umbrella organisations,[9] alternative Muslim and Christian institutions[10] and African Traditional Religions as well as minority religions of Asian origin. By strengthening inter and intra-religious cooperation, as a response to increased religious tensions during the 1980s and 90s, the council aims to guard the peaceful societal relations and national unity attributed to the Tanzanian nation. This also implements playing "an advisory and advocacy role to the government on matters of societal interest",[11] especially when religious expressions threaten the nation's socio-political stability.

While assessing to the council's active religious stakeholders, the council soon reveals to be less representative than its intention states. This highlights tensions and lines of demarcations that cut cross intra and inter-religious boundaries. IRCPT's active members are representatives from the Christian TEC and CCT, the Muslim Bakwata and the minority religions of Asian origin. These institutions more or less are the IRCPT. Alternative Muslim and Christian institutions are not participating or not welcomed for different reasons. The intra-religious tensions this reveals are prominent, for instance between the alternative Muslim council *Baraza Kuu* and the official Muslim council of Bakwata. According to Bakwata's representatives, *Baraza Kuu* (as well as other Muslim alternative groups) should not be allowed to exist when Bakwata is the only legitimate representative for Muslims in Tanzania. Alternative Muslim organisations are perceived as dissidents and more or less labelled as Muslim extremists,[12] or fundamentalists with bad religious conducts which do not differentiate between religion and politics. In general, Bakwata, CCT and TEC's representatives all describe alternative Muslim and Christian groups (especially Pentecostal ones) in terms of religious fundamentalists whose actions threat to the nation's socio-political stability.

On the other hand, *Baraza Kuu,* which was founded in direct opposition to Bakwata, does not see Bakwata as a legitimate representative of Muslims in Tanzania. Rather, Bakwata is

[8] Despite the presence of intra and inter-religious tensions since the 1980s, and the salience of 'fundamentalist' or more radical religious expressions (Heilman 2006), no official coordinated national inter-religious body exists in present-day Tanzania. Attempts have been made to form bodies, however, all failed to establish something permanent.
[9] I.e. TEC, CCT and Bakwata.
[10] For instance, the umbrella for puritanical Muslim revival groups the Jamaat Ansar as-Sunna, an more radical alternative to Bakwata, the Supreme Council of Islamic Organisations (*Baraza Kuu*) and the umbrella organisation of Pentecostal churches, the Pentecostal Council of Tanzania (PCT).
[11] Article 2.3 in the 4th draft of the Constitution of the proposed Inter-religious Council for Peace-Tanzania (IRCPT) (2009). Document accessed at WCRP/Tz's head office 27th of February 2009.
[12] Interview with Suleiman Lolila conducted the 9th of February 2009.

seen as the Muslim wing of the CCM government, controlled by the influential Catholic and Protestant umbrella organisations TEC and CCT.[13] Hence, by joining the IRCPT, *Baraza Kuu* would explicitly cooperate with their religious and political opponents, be it the Muslim council of Bakwata or the Christian CCT and TEC. For *Baraza Kuu*, interfaith councils in Tanzania, are therefore primarily perceived as a means for the participating religious organisations "to defuse and eclipse the Muslim faith" and a way "to eclipse the Muslims politically."[14] The tension between Bakwata and *Baraza Kuu* highlights the intra-religious aspect of present-day political conducts. However, their perception that Christians control the government hints a Christian-Muslim divide as well. This cleavage is visualized in the issue of *mahakama ya Kadhi* (Islamic courts) and membership in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

The question of Islamic courts and OIC membership stirred up animosity nationally in 2008.[15] The questions, which were part of the CCM manifesto during the elections in 2005, were in 2008 discussed in the parliament. This trigged a heated debate in the media between Christians and Muslims. A group of CCT bishops publicly declared that joining OIC would be a violation of the constitution and "could pose a threat to peace and stability" in Tanzania.[16] For many Christians implementation of *mahakama ya Kadhi* and OIC membership is a step towards an Islamisation of Tanzania. On the other hand, for Muslims, these questions are issues seen as part of their religious rights. Accordingly, the OIC and Kadhi courts debate has strengthened the intra-denominational cooperation both on the Christian and Muslim side, both sides arguing that the other part entering the realm of politics in an illegitimate way. Also here, the secular discourse is put in practice, with Christians accusing the government of mixing religion and politics and Muslim accusing Christians of entering the political debate in order to influence the parliamentary decisions.

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[13] Interview with Skeikh Omari Al-Amoody conducted the 2nd of April 2009. For extensive analyses on the history and conduct of Muslim grievances in contemporary Tanzania see Gilsaa (2004), Liviga & Tumbo-Masabo (2006) and Loimeier (2007.)

[14] Interview with Skeikh Omari Al-Amoody conducted the 2nd of April 2009.

[15] The question of OIC membership has been issue of debate before. In 1992 Zanzibar tried to join OIC without the support from Union government. This caused animosity among Christian church leaders in Tanzania who saw this move to be devastating for the country and the future of the union. After months of disputes the Tanzania's parliamentary and committee on constitutional and legal affairs decided that Zanzibar's unilateral venture was a violation to the constitution of the union, and this caused the Zanzibar Revolutionary Government to withdraw their membership. (Ludwig 1996: 219-21).

[16] *The Citizen* 25/10-2008 'Christian leaders oppose Tanzania bid to join OIC.' See also the Muslim leaders responses in *Daily News* 1/11-2008 'Muslim Leaders insist OIC has more benefits than harm.', *The Guardian* 1/11-2008 'Muslim clerics warn govt on OIC stance.', *Sunday News* 26/10-2008' BAKWATA opposes bishops views on OIC membership.', *Weekend African* 1-2/11- 2008 'Muslims response to CCT: Is Govt being run by bishops' whims?'.

The question is if these tensions should be interpreted as signs of a re-sacralisation of society in religious terms, a re-sacralisation that will threat Tanzania's secular constitution and the unity of the multi-religious nation? The current tensions along intra and inter-religious lines are however primarily political, linked to access to and influence over political power (i.e. the government). An organisation like *Baraza Kuu*, which Bakwata considers being extremist, does not challenge the secular constitution of the nation.[17] They rather emphasise that Tanzania must maintain a secular constitution due to its multi-religious setting[18] and use the secular constitution as a means to highlight their religious rights in terms of worship and lived out faith. Critique against government policies and opposition towards Bakwata, CCT and TEC is primarily produced to condemn how the political ideology laid down during *ujamaa* has failed to cater for the Muslim population. Rather, the *ujamaa* regime together with the Muslim and Christian government supportive umbrella institutions are perceived by *Baraza Kuu* to have propelled a structural marginalisation of Muslims in Tanzania.

However, the continual use and reference of this sacred national creed by important political and societal organisations helps keep socio-political and socio-economic relations of power intact. The difference is that in present-day Tanzania internationally funded interfaith institutions, operating within a framework of civil society, are among the strongest proponents for directing and judging 'good' religious practices from 'bad' ones. This implicitly means that religious institutions and international development agents today participate in politicising religious issues and conducts. Yet, these externally funded interfaith institutions do at the same time maintain the civil religion set up during *ujamaa* and, perhaps unintentionally nonetheless silently, support the present CCM government.

Religious politics in Tanzania: a secularisation of a sacred ideology?

Famous for being a "haven of peace" in a part of the world in much turmoil, the Tanzanian nation, and Tanzanian national identity has been intrinsically interlinked with values such as peace, stability and unity. The grand narrative, on which these values are built, that the *ujamaa* ideology planted in the minds of Tanzanian citizens delineate how religion and the state have been closely associated in Tanzania's post-colonial history. A secular discourse,

[17] Even if there exist certain Muslim and Christian groups that to some extent do so,
[18] Interview with Sheikh Ally Bassaleh conducted the 6th of April 2009.

accusing religious groups for mixing religion with politics, was effectively used to delegitimize political sentiments of opposition along religious lines. Today this discourse is in use by the CCM government, but also effectively by historically government affiliated religious institutions that cooperate in interfaith networks promoted by external development agents. Therefore, contemporary inter-religious institutions in Tanzania could be perceived as proponents of neo-*ujamaa* like ideology adapted to present-day preconditions of market-oriented neo-liberalism (Olsson 2010).

The use of secularism as a political instrument in order to secure unity in a nation divided between different religious and ethnic groups and denominations trigged the development of a civil religion. It is through this civil religion that Tanzanians, in Durkheim's terms, worship their nation and society (Collins 2007:24-9). The civil religion of the *ujamaa* is still the creed to which Tanzanians must adhere in order to be proper Tanzanians.

How shall we then understand contemporary religious expressions and intra and inter-religious tensions in Tanzania? As elaborated above, the civil religion, which the *ujamaa* ideology came to create, stressed the values of inter-religious cooperation in favour of peace and nationalism. In this process the nationalism, the Tanzanianess promoted by the *ujamaa,* both contained a secularisation as well as sacralisation phenomena (Demerath III 2007:75). It first introduced secularisation which made religious values intrinsically mundane and part of the everyday worship of the nation. However, the values of the *ujamaa* with time turned into a sacred national culture based on ideology, infused in the hearts of Tanzanians. The intra and inter-religious tensions in Tanzania could therefore be interpreted as the beginning of a renewed secularisation process which de-sacralises the sacredness attributed to *ujamaa,* a process which also challenges the relations of power within Tanzania's contemporary society uphold by powerful religious institutions and the present-day CCM government.

By perceiving alternative religious expressions as agents of processes which break down (secularise) the sacred civil religion of the nation manifest how different religious institutions play both consolidating as well as challenging roles within the contemporary socio-political context of Tanzania. By and large, contemporary Tanzania could be interpreted as a ideological battlefield in which historical-based ideological critique and present-day political opposition today is channelled via religious institutions and networks.

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