

Religion, identity and politics in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT In Samuel Huntington's world of hostile civilisations, Tanzania would fall into the category of a torn country, a battle ground for the forces of African, Western and Islamic meta-cultures to expand their influence. On the surface, this might seem the case. Tanzania is an impoverished country where the benefits of economic liberalisation have reached only a narrow stratum and the fruits of political liberalisation are yet to be seen, placing severe strain on national social cohesion. There is certainly a possibility that pent up economic and political frustrations could be channelled into religious extremist movements. However, religion has not served as a primary fault-line for sustained political violence and conflict, although there are signs that this might be changing. In this paper we argue that uncovering and analysing these relationships elucidates how cross-cutting cleavages complicate the mobilisation of individuals and organised groups based on identity, not only in Tanzania, but in other societies as well.

According to Samuel Huntington's (1993) influential article 'The Clash of Civilizations', Tanzania would fit into the category of a torn country where Africa, the West and Islam battle to expand their influence. Evidence in support of Huntington's dire prediction is not hard to find. Tanzania has large and relatively equal sized populations of Christians and Muslims, as well as a substantial number of believers in African spiritual traditions. It is an impoverished country where the benefits of economic liberalisation have reached only a narrow stratum and the fruits of political liberalisation are yet to be seen, placing a severe strain on national social cohesion (Kaiser, 1996). Increasingly, the Tanzanian government has become engaged in a number of violent confrontations with segments of the Muslim community and an opposition party, the Civic United Front (CUF). Additionally, grassroots tensions between Christians and Muslims were inflamed in the 1980s after fundamentalist 'born again' Christian preachers began holding large 'crusades' throughout the country, prompting a response in the form of some Muslim leaders engaging in public preaching, where the Bible was used to criticise Christianity from a Muslim perspective. Within a short period of time these public religious rallies degenerated into impassioned contests to win converts based on verbal attacks against the 'other' religion (Tambila & Rubanza, 2001: 5–6).

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Despite these tensions, there is evidence that Tanzania is not a battleground for conflicting civilisations. A 2000 nationwide survey conducted by Research and Education for Democracy in Tanzania (REDET 2000) found that 78% of the respondents positively depicted relations between Muslims and Christians, while 86% also felt positively about the relationship between their religion and the state.¹

In this paper, we argue that the case of Tanzania demonstrates that uncovering and analysing relationships between identity groups as well as between identity groups and the state elucidates how cross-cutting cleavages complicate the mobilisation of individuals and organised groups based on identity, not only in Tanzania, but in other societies as well. The articulation of individual and group identities will be examined in the theoretical context of a continuum bounded by instrumentalism and constructionism at one end, and primordialism at the other extreme. This research demonstrates that this continuum does not adequately capture the process of identity group articulation in the context of political mobilisation. The combination of cross-cutting cleavages, intra-group conflict, and rough numerical parity among Muslim and Christian adherents complicates instrumentalist assumptions of elite manipulation, and these factors also limit the analytical salience of primordial expressions of religious identity in the political realm.

Identity and political leadership

A useful starting point for analysing the political mobilisation of identity groups is to recognise that the concept of identity is unclear and dynamic. Scholars have long debated a plethora of identities that are explained using approaches that range from primordialism to instrumentalism (Wilmsen & McAllister, 1996).² Pierre van den Bergh (1978) supports an extreme primordial perspective, arguing that identifiable identity groups should be defined in terms of common biological descent, while the proponents of instrumentalism define identity groups ‘as largely constructed, deployed to advance the interests and claims of the collectivity banded and mobilized as a pressure group’ (Tambiah, 1996: 139).³

This instrumentalist–constructivist notion of inventing identity has also been thoroughly addressed in current research on nationalism, with Benedict Anderson’s oft-cited concept of ‘imagined community’ germane in this regard. For Anderson, the historical evolution of the census, map and museum ‘profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion, the nature of human beings it ruled [census], the geography of its domain [map], and the legitimacy of its ancestry [museum] (Anderson, 1991: 163–164). These three factors affected the development of ‘nations’ in colonial territories, and subsequently how people related to these new group identity constructions. In Wyatt MacGaffey’s study on Congo identity, Anderson’s notion of an imagined national community is applied to ethnicity in Africa: ‘In the context of colonial occupation, “tribe” effectively meant a social unit that lent itself to convenient administration, or (from the point of view of missionaries) to convenient evangelization’ (MacGaffey, 1997: 50).

The conceptualisation of ethnicity and its relevance to other forms of identity

Despite the plethora of identity groups that comprise a given society, many scholars have focused on the concept of ethnicity. The debate on ethnic identity formation is theoretically relevant to other identity groups, in particular religious affiliation, and deserves our attention at this point. Forster *et al* (2000: 120) note that religious and ethnic identities share many similarities. Both religion and ethnicity are culturally patterned and rely on the social bonds of allegiance. While people can and do change religions, most follow the spiritual tradition into which they were socialised. Perhaps the main difference between religion and ethnicity is that scholars focusing on religion tend to put a greater emphasis on ideas and ideology, given the central role of faith, belief and spirituality in forming and maintaining religious identities (Forster *et al*, 2000: 120; Newman, 1991: 468).

Wilmsen and McAllister contend that 'ethnicity arises in the exercise of power' (Wilmsen & McAllister, 1996: 4). They cogently merge the theoretical significance of primordialism and instrumentalism, when they explain, 'successful ethnicization depends on the promotion of a primordial identity of delimited persons with the past' (1996: 10). Instead of artificially segregating the polar extremes of conceptualising ethnic identity, Wilmsen and many of the contributors to his co-edited volume, *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power* (1996), skillfully and persuasively argue that primordial identities, however defined and articulated, can and often do serve as a tool for political ethnicisation by leaders in pursuit of their own political goals. The book's contributors are not the only scholars who place ethnicity within complex matrices of power relations. Lemarchand (1994) and Kadende-Kiser and Kaiser's (1997) study of political change and ethnic genocide in Burundi, Leroy Vail's edited volume on ethnicity in southern Africa (1989), Judith Abwuna's case study of ethnicity and nationalism in western Kenya (1993), and Ted Gurr's edited volume on ethno-political conflicts (1993) all address power, primordialism, and the instrumental construction of ethnic identity in a variety of empirical and theoretical contexts.⁴ Paul Brass clearly articulates this perspective when he writes 'cultural forms, values, and practices of ethnic groups become political resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage' (Brass, 1991: 15).

The instrumentalist view correctly points out that elites do manipulate identities for their own advantage. However, these studies often discount the interests and dynamics at the grassroots level of society. Advocates of instrumentalism often assume that people at the local level are deceived into supporting leaders and taking actions that benefit a small clique of powerful people at the expense of ruining the larger social fabric. A question that the instrumentalist approach fails adequately to take into account is why average citizens allow themselves to be manipulated into a destructive course of action that often only benefits a narrow elite (Newman, 1991: 458). Bowen's (2000: 83) argument that fear and intimidation often result in situations of widespread ethnic violence is of limited utility when analysing other situations of identity group

non-violent competition. A more robust explanation needs to take into account that people at the grassroots level have their own self-interests to serve and that strategies to promote intra-group co-operation can be effective in negotiating with state agents over access to resources and opportunities. While there is a considerable degree of elite manipulation and self-serving behaviour in ethnic political mobilisation, Horowitz (1985) calls attention to the ability of ethnic ties to overwhelm those of class and other identity groups. In short, it is important to note that, while ethnicity can be manipulated (instrumental), it is also largely ascriptive (primordial). For example, if an 'in group' defines an individual as an outsider, it is difficult and sometimes impossible for that individual to redefine him/herself as an 'in group' member (Newman, 1991: 464). As this case study of Tanzania shows, people at the grassroots level advance religious identities in pursuit of their interests in regard to spiritual, material and political interests. In short, it is not just the elite who manipulate identity ties or choose between strategies of intra-group solidarity or inter-group co-operation.

How would proponents of instrumentalism and primordialism address the issue of identity group mobilisation? For the instrumentalist, group interests are defined from above, by crafty leadership that moulds group interests in a way that resonates with a pre-defined collectivity while addressing their own political concerns, however defined. Alternately, primordialism emphasises the inherent self-interests of the collective, and the ability of this collective to define and articulate a common view of the past and present, as well as a coherent vision of the future. A primordial approach suggests that individual interests are made subservient to those of the group and that leaders should be held accountable to their ethnic power bases.

The case of Tanzania demonstrates that the mobilisation of identity groups, specifically those defined in terms of religion, is a complicated process that problematises linear analyses bounded by the instrumentalist–primordialist continuum.

The case of mainland Tanzania

The emergence of identity politics and violence

While different forms of ethnic, racial and religious identities are important in Tanzania, no identity has become an all-encompassing category that takes precedence over other forms. In short, the concept of nation remains intact, despite the diversity of identity groups. This is not to say that political, religious and ethnic conflict do not exist in Tanzania. An examination of Tanzanian history demonstrates that there is a number of identity groups that have served as the basis for political organisation at one point or another,⁵ but no particular identity has served as a major societal dividing line. However, by the 1990s religion emerged as a deeply held identity, raising the question of whether Tanzanian society might polarise along sectarian lines. Forster *et al* (2000: 135) note that: 'In Tanzania there have been numerous problems rising from religious pluralism, and these have been more overt than ethnic issues'. This conclusion is reinforced by the findings of a nation-wide opinion poll taken by REDET in Tanzania in the

mid 1990s that indicated that people objected to inter-religious marriages more strongly than to other forms of cross-identity marriages (Mushi, 2001: 171).⁶ The remainder of this paper will focus on the articulation of religious identity for three reasons: 1) religious questions have been at the center of a number of violent conflicts in Tanzania; 2) there has emerged an Islamist movement that advocates advancing Islamic interest through partisan politics; 3) religious identities tend to be more strongly felt at the grassroots level than other forms of identity in Tanzania.

Religious violence. A number incidents have occurred over the past 10 years that have resulted in violence or heightened tensions between Muslims and Christians, including a 1993 confrontation over the destruction of pork butcheries in the Mwembechi area of Dar es Salaam (Forster, 1997: 173); a conflict in 1994 over whether Zanzibar could belong to the Organization of Islamic (OIC) states (Forster, 1997: 172); a 1998 incident at Dar es Salaam's Mwembechai section of Magomeni where police entered a mosque to make arrests, which sparked riots causing at least two fatalities; the arrest of a Muslim preacher in August 2001 for allegedly attempting to cause chaos by insulting the Christian religion, which was subsequently followed by a demonstration that was violently broken up by police (resulting in vandalism and two minor bomb explosions outside local ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party offices); confrontations in Dar es Salaam and other urban areas, starting the late 1990s, over the control of mosques, which pitted Muslim activists against the state-recognised Supreme Council of Muslims (BAKWATA) affiliated sheikhs (Mahenge, 2002: 1,3); and a second violent confrontation between activists and police at Mwembechai Mosque on 13 February 2002 that resulted in two deaths and numerous arrests.

Islamic revival. Part of the Islamic revival in Tanzania is an activist political movement which challenges the ruling party and secularist principles of the state (Bakari & Ndumbao 2001: 5). This movement is based on an Islamic-centric interpretation of history that maintains Muslims have been discriminated against by a Christian-dominated state since the colonial period. By no means all Muslims are united behind this activist political movement. While other Muslims may agree with some of the arguments made by political activists, they may nonetheless differ regarding goals and tactics. For example, more moderate Muslims who support change encourage Muslims to act politically on behalf of their religion to ensure their equal treatment with Christians and to advance Islamic interests in accordance with the Tanzanian constitution and existing laws. Finally, as Bakari and Ndumbaro (2001) note, many Muslims are suspicious of the government and BAKWATA and the state has been involved in direct confrontations with these activists.

A revival of Islam, with its activist and moderate Islamist reform movements, exists within a domestic context where opposition parties accuse the state and the ruling party of engaging in legal and illegal actions to repress legitimate political activities. This includes the charge that the ruling party twice rigged elections in Zanzibar (1995 and 2000) in order to keep the CUF from taking power in the semi-autonomous Indian Ocean islands. In the immediate aftermath of the

October 2000 General Elections, on 26–27 January 2001, at least 23 people were killed during demonstrations in Zanzibar, and refugees fled the islands for the comparative safety of Kenya (*Guardian*, 13 February 2001: 1,5). During this time, the government reported small-scale bombings and attacks on local officials, mainly on the island of Pemba, a CUF stronghold.

This domestic conflict between the ruling CCM and CUF takes place in a global context where the USA and many of its Western allies are quick to interpret organised political activity by Muslims as a terrorist security threat. In contrast, in Tanzania some Muslims view the USA, Western capitalism and Christianity as a challenge to Islam (Bakari & Ndumbaro 2001: 5), while the Tanzanian state has largely sought the West's co-operation in fighting terrorism. The different responses to the issue of terrorism help to highlight how domestic religious and political conflicts are related to larger political trends. Like the USA, Tanzania experienced a terrorist attack in 1998, when the US Embassy was bombed by individuals reportedly affiliated with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network. The Tanzanian government co-operated closely with the USA in investigating and trying to apprehend the perpetrators. However, the bilateral co-operation in the wake of the East African Embassy bombings must also be contrasted with evidence that some Tanzanians facilitated and were direct participants in the terrorist attack.⁷ A divided response was also evident in regard to the 11 September 2001 terror attacks on New York City and Washington DC and the subsequent US military response in Afghanistan. Immediately after the 11 September attacks the Tanzanian government pledged its support to fight international terrorism. However, soon after the USA began its bombing campaign in Afghanistan there were public expressions of opposition to the US attacks. While this opposition included Christians and Muslims who opposed the use of violence to solve international disagreements and opposition from Tanzanian intellectuals on the grounds of opposing imperialism, it also included support for Osama bin Laden and the Taliban (and their campaign against Western imperialism) among some members of Tanzania's Islamic community. This connection between actors engaged in a domestic political struggle with opposing forces in an international conflict was made clear at an 19 October 2001 demonstration in Dar es Salaam. During this demonstration the US and Tanzanian governments were singled out for criticism as some Muslim demonstrators, in addition to waving anti-USA banners, carried placards critical of CCM and accusing BAKWATA of being an arm of the ruling party (Masoud, 2001: 1,2).

A third reason for focusing on religion in Tanzania is that there exist divisions between Christians and Muslims that are more rigid and more strongly asserted at the grassroots level than is the case with other identity groups. There are several examples of popular religious conflicts, but for the purpose of this paper two illustrative incidents will be examined. The first occurred in February 2000, when Muslims and Christians clashed over the use of a graveyard in the Manzese neighbourhood of Dar es Salaam. The conflict involved an attack on a funeral procession, the destruction of crosses on graves, arrests of belligerents, and the unsuccessful attempts by the Regional Commissioner to devise and impose a solution to end the conflict. The efforts to repress and mediate the conflict were not successful, as more crosses on Christian graves were knocked down,

prompting a neighbourhood official to declare to the press that this conflict was threatening the peace of the area (*Leo ni Leo*, 2000 1:3).

Another incident that captures the essence of the intense competition that exists between the two religious communities occurred following the death of the 26-year-old Mwanza resident Lega Thomas Masunga in January 2001. Masunga's funeral was delayed for over a week as both Muslims and Christians wanted to bury her according to their traditions. Masunga's contested religious identity grew out of being born into a Christian family and marrying a Muslim. While Masunga's Christian sisters wanted her buried in a church ceremony, the family of the husband wanted the deceased to be laid to rest according to Islamic traditions. After both sides arrived at Bugando Hospital to take the body a confrontation ensued, forcing the parties to go to the central police station. Unable to reach a compromise, the case was later taken to court (*Nipahse*, 2001: 1,4).

While the controversies over the graveyard and burial rights were not overtly political, they nonetheless demonstrate that the potential exists for the political mobilisation of identities along religious lines thanks to grassroots rivalries between communities. World religions like Islam and Christianity make appeals to a shared humanity, but they nonetheless emphasise a stronger bond between members of the same religion (Forster *et al*, 2000:10). There is a danger that religion in heterogeneous societies can be linked to other identities, such as social class or ethnic groups, to deepen divisions and polarise conflicting groups. However, while efforts are being made in this area, they have not yet gained widespread acceptance. In addition to the Islamist movement, there are several instances where societal leaders have tried to mobilise along religious lines. However, to date mainstream political leaders in both the ruling and opposition parties have shunned systematic, large-scale mobilisation strategies based on religious affiliation.

Identifying the analytical lenses

In his analysis of the causes of large-scale ethnic violence, John Bowen (2000:86) identifies a set of 'raw materials for social peace' that are based on the historical context of inter-group exploitation, the demographic composition of group configurations in a country (a large number of small groups facilitates coalition building), and the (de)centralisation of power. Despite the seemingly conducive environment for polarised religious identities in Tanzania, we have identified cross-cutting identities, the lack of consensus within religious groups, and the relative equal strength of Muslims and Christians as 'raw materials for social peace'. We contend that these factors have restrained leaders from mobilising their followers along predominantly religious lines, thus complicating the lure of theoretical parsimony offered by the continuum presented earlier.

Cross-cutting identities

In Tanzania there are three main spiritual traditions: Islam, Christianity and the traditional beliefs of African cultural communities. There are no reliable estimates on what percentage of the population follow each tradition. The 1967

census was the last one to categorise people based on spiritual beliefs. According to this dated census, followers of local beliefs made up 37% of the population,⁸ Christians made up 32%, and 30% were Muslims. Many Tanzanian Muslims feel that this census was altered intentionally to reduce the percentage of Muslims in the population, since the 1957 census showed Muslims outnumbering Christians by a ratio of 3:2 (Liviga & Tumbo-Masabo, 2001: 31). In general, there are a high percentage of Muslims living on the coast and along the pre-colonial trade routes that linked the mainland to a larger Muslim-orientated, Indian Ocean trading system. For example, Zanzibar is over 95% Muslim and on the coast there is a high percentage of Muslims. Inland pre-colonial centres of trade, such as Tabora and Kigoma, also have high percentages of Muslims. In other areas, it is possible to find high percentages of Christians, especially in the southwest and north-central areas of the country. While there are some ethnic identities and geographic areas that coincide with a certain religious tradition, often other identities, such as class divisions or support for political parties, are cross-cutting and do not reinforce these religious divisions.

The strength of religious identification also varies. Not all people who claim to follow a faith are strong believers. For example, although some Africans are devout followers of either Islam or Christianity, other followers have weaker ties to these religious traditions. While conducting interviews in Dodoma and surrounding areas it was common to hear the expression '*Dini zinazoletwa*'⁹ (imported religions) used by African Muslims, Christians and followers of traditional spiritual beliefs when referring to Islam and Christianity. Referring to both Islam and Christianity as 'imported religions' indicates ambivalence toward these spiritual traditions even among some of their followers. This ambivalence was reflected in a casual conversation with a European missionary of a saved church who felt that many in his flock were not committed to the born again lifestyle (which includes giving up alcohol, having only one wife, etc).¹⁰

Among the three spiritual traditions there are instances of overlapping religious identities. Despite the fact that Islam and Christianity are mutually exclusive (it is unheard of for one person to follow both religions), there are some families made up of Muslims and Christians. Regarding the boundaries between African traditional beliefs and Christianity and Islam, the dividing lines can be fluid, as many African followers of both Christianity and Islam have not completely given up their traditional spiritual belief systems.

There is substantial Muslim and Christian representation in existing racial, ethnic, national and regional, class, and gender identity groups in the country. While no statistics are kept on the percentages of racial or ethnic groups in the national population, Africans probably make up more than 90% of Tanzania's citizens, making this the largest identity group. Africans are Muslims, Christians and followers of traditional beliefs. Likewise, the African racial category is made up of over 100 African ethnic groups, whose members are also Muslims, Christians and followers of traditional spiritual beliefs. As for class divisions, there are wealthy, poor and middle class followers of Islam and Christianity. However, there is a feeling among many Muslims that the country's educated elite is disproportionately made up of Christians.

The leaders of traditional spiritual beliefs have mainly a parochial influence

because spiritual beliefs are closely related to local cultures and customs. However, there have been times, such as the Maji Maji Rebellion against the German colonial authorities, when traditional spiritual beliefs transcended this parochialism and united African ethnic groups. In recent times traditional religions carry a social stigma, reinforced by the teachings of both Islam and Christianity. For some, African spiritual beliefs coincide with poverty, as many followers of such beliefs have low incomes and educational levels, giving the impression that these beliefs are for those who were left behind by development and modernisation.¹¹

Despite identity plurality, there are some areas where religious identity reinforces other identities. Within the Asian community the majority are Muslims, although there is an important Hindu minority. Arabs are almost all Muslims, while Europeans are almost all Christians. The overlapping European Christian and Arab Muslim identities have provided sources of unity for Christian and Muslim communities to mobilise politically based on religion, a point that we addressed earlier regarding the larger international issues of fighting terrorism or resisting Western Christian influence.

The cross-cutting characteristic of religious identity articulation is complicated by competing views of religion. The 'standard view' emanates from statist attempts to orient the practice and understanding of religion in ways that are consistent with its policies. The 'Islamist perspective' is a reinterpretation of the standard view, providing a rationale for the political mobilisation of Muslims based on an Islam-centred view of the country's history. The 'Christian response' view criticises the historical legacy of Islam in Tanzania, accounts for perceived differences among the communities as being internal problems of Muslims, and emphasises the positive role that Christians have played in national development. The next three sub-sections address these perspectives in greater detail.

Standard view. During the colonial years, the primary identity-based dividing line was race. After World War I Britain maintained the rigid colonial racial hierarchy established by Tanganyika's first colonial occupier, Germany.¹² The British tied political and legal rights to the racial categories of European, Asian, Arab and African. Residential segregation, established under German colonial rule, intensified under the British. Each group had its own schools, clubs, hospitals, places of entertainment, and even cemeteries, preventing any meaningful or even superficial mixing of the races (O'Neil, 1990: 52).

The advent of Christianity in Tanzania was closely associated with European culture and colonial rule. While European-orientated churches generally discouraged African nationalism, the colonial authorities rightfully saw Christian-educated Africans as a major threat because they had the intellectual tools to overturn the colonial order. In time, the Africans educated at mission schools questioned the legitimacy of colonialism and joined the nationalist movement, whose early leading figures were disproportionately Muslim. The addition of the better-educated Christians to the nationalist movement invigorated the anti-colonial struggle, uniting Muslims and Christians and paving the way for independence.

Despite the colonial administration's efforts to divide the African population

along ‘tribal’ lines, on 7 July 1954 the Tanganyikan African National Union (TANU) was formed as a political party that united the African population. It quickly became the uncontested vehicle for the nationalist movement on the mainland. TANU not only was the result of co-operation among the various African ethnic groups, it was also the result of Muslims and Christians working together. The colonial government-sponsored United Tanganyika Party, which stood for racial parity, or special protections for Tanganyika’s European and Asian communities (multi-racialism in the language of Tangayikan politics), was soundly defeated in the 1958–59 elections and the disbanded (Iliffe, 1979: 561–52). Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the leader of TANU, attacked colonialism on the grounds that racism, segregation and second-class citizenship were morally wrong. Nyerere espoused and implemented his vision of a Tanzania based on equal rights for all, a position he reiterated during his country’s independence ceremony on 9 December 1961:

We have agreed that our nation shall be a nation of free and equal citizens, each person having an equal right and opportunity to develop himself, and to contribute to the maximum of his capabilities to the development of our society. We have said that neither race nor tribe, nor religion nor cleverness, nor anything else, could take away from a man his own rights as an equal member of society. This is what we have now to put into practice (Nyerere, in Kaniki, 1974: 17).

In accordance with Nyerere’s views, the Tanganyika Citizenship Act 1961 (Cap 512) was enacted, providing for a multi-racial citizenship. Throughout his life Nyerere steadfastly argued that once *ukabila* (ethnic discrimination) or *udini* (religious intolerance) became acceptable, then Tanzania would balkanise into hostile identity groups.

During the *ujamaa* period the state nationalised many private schools, a large number of which belonged to the Catholic Church. The nationalisations were a way to create educational opportunities for Muslim students by changing a status quo that gave Christians the advantage because of the important role that churches played in providing education in the country. By nationalising schools the government could ensure that a secular socialist education would be provided to Tanzanian students, eliminating the stigma of attending Christian schools for Muslims.

In line with socialist policies societal organisations were either disbanded or incorporated into the party and state. This included the East African Muslim Welfare Society, which was disbanded in 1968 and replaced with the Baraza Kuu la Waislamu Tanzania (BAKWATA). BAKWATA publicly supported the TANU–CCM¹³ goal of reinforcing Nyerere’s *ujamaa* “vision”. The East African Muslim Welfare Society, which was dominated by the Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan and influential large-scale business people, was seen as hostile to socialism. Although CCM wanted to ensure that all societal organisations were supportive of building socialism, it nonetheless provided the freedom for people to worship as they pleased and this of course included both Muslims and Christians (Forster, 1997: 172).

The Islamist perspective: a revision of the standard view. According to this

perspective, the political mobilisation of Islam is, in part, justified by the preferential treatment given to Christians by the colonial authorities and by the refusal of the post-colonial state to address historical imbalances between the two communities.¹⁴ From this perspective Christianity is seen as synonymous with Western interests that have actively attempted to frustrate the Tanzanian Muslim efforts to build ties to an Islamic Middle East. Finally, activists reject the notion that religion should be separated from politics and reject the contention that Christians, despite their stated intentions, in actual practice adhere to this norm.

This perspective contends that, initially, Muslims were the main force behind the nationalist struggle. They played a key role in founding the early nationalist organisations, like the Tanganyika African Association, which later became the main nationalist party—the TANU. In an effort to frustrate the nationalist movement the colonial government forbade its African employees from joining nationalist organisations and churches discouraged nationalist political activities. This left nationalist organising to those who earned income outside the colonial state, mainly African Muslim business people, like the Sykes family. Indeed, the person who devised the name TANU was Abdul Whalid Sykes. Despite the fact that Christians were given benefits by the colonial state and churches tried to teach their African followers to despise nationalism, there were a few educated Africans, like Nyerere, who joined the struggle. The educated Christians were given leadership positions by Muslims because of their organisational capabilities and also because the colonial regime placed educational restrictions over who could vote and contest office in elections organised before independence.

An implicit agreement existed between the new cadre of Christian TANU leaders and the old Muslim leaders. In return for Muslim support for the liberation struggle, the post-independence government would address imbalances in education and leadership opportunities for Muslims after independence. However, after taking power the new Christian leaders did not honour their commitments and instead sought to mobilise a power base among their religious brethren. After independence important Muslims in the nationalist struggle, like the Sykes family, Bibi Titi Mohamed and Chief Abdallah Fundikira, were sidelined (Liviga & Tumbo-Masabo, 2001: 33–40).

Since independence the state has exhibited a double standard in dealing with Christians and Muslims. For example, although the state consistently maintained that politics and religion should not be mixed, in 1963 it nonetheless allowed the Catholic Church to run a slate of candidates in Bukoba to oppose the CCM candidates who were Muslim (Liviga & Tumbo-Masabo, 2001: 37). More recently, CCM instructed BAKWATA officials to convince Muslims to vote for CCM during the 2000 elections. If BAKWATA sheikhs can support CCM, then other sheikhs who support opposition parties should be allowed to convey their messages to fellow Muslims regarding their political preferences.

Other examples of the state's double standard can be seen in the disbanding of independent Islamic organisations, while tolerating the existence of a number of independent Christian organisations, such as the Christian Council of Tanzania. Regarding the banning of the East African Muslim Welfare Society, while the stated reason was to undermine capitalism, if this truly was the case, why couldn't the businesses owned by the society's wealthy patrons be nationalised

without the disbanding the east African Muslim Welfare Society? The real aim of this move was to curb Islamic influence in Tanzania. Again, in the 1990s the state circumscribed an opportunity for Muslims to form their own independent organisation when a rival organisation of the state-sanctioned BAKWATA, called BALUKTA, was formed. However, shortly after its creation, BALUKTA was banned on the grounds that it promoted Islamic extremism. Although other Islamic organisations have been registered, the state recognises BAKWATA as the nationwide Islamic institution in Tanzania, while many Muslims see this as a state- (or party)-related institution. The inability to form Islamic organisations independent of the state undermines the freedom of Muslims to worship as they please in Tanzania.

In terms of education Christians have used the state to limit Muslim educational advancement. In the immediate post-independence era the government frustrated the development of an Islamic University with support from Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries (Liviga & Tumbo-Masabo, 2001: 38–39). A later incident occurred when President Ali Hassan Mwinyi appointed a Muslim, Professor Kighoma Malima, as the Minister of Education. This created a political controversy and Malima was eventually relieved of his duties after Christian members of CCM launched a campaign to remove him from office because he had promoted a Muslim to the post of Education Commissioner while replacing three high ranking Christian officials in the Ministry with Muslims.

According to Islamists, the Tanzanian state has not been responsive to Muslim concerns, and they have been punished and abused by the state for their beliefs (*An-nuur*, 2000: 14). Christians are permitted to advance their group interests in politics while claiming to uphold the values of a secular state. However, Muslims are treated like second-class citizens who are harassed and occasionally arrested when they attempt to do the same. Islamists further charge that, while the state tolerates criticism from Christians, Muslims are not provided this same right of free speech. This view of history and politics has been articulated in books,¹⁵ discussions, newspapers (*An-nuur*; *Nasaha*, 2000), mosques, and on the internet.

The Christian response perspective. In regard to the Islamist perspective presented above, there is what can be termed a ‘Christian response’.¹⁶ While this ‘response’ is not as coherent or well developed as the previous two interpretations of Tanzania’s history, aspects of it sometimes find expression in private conversations, academic debates and the mainstream press, and in Christian weekly newspapers such as *Kiongozi* (a Catholic publication) or *Msemakweli*. This perspective challenges the characterisation of Muslims as exploited and instead points to their role in the pre-colonial slave trade, and pre-revolutionary Omani aristocracy in Zanzibar and to their extensive participation in the German colonial administration. It explains the perceived success of Christians in terms of a strong emphasis on education. It accuses Muslims of recklessly violating norms of merit by appointing others from their faith to high state positions under the Mwinyi administration. It is suspicious of a hidden agenda by Muslims to capture the state and use it to advance their religious interests and it charges that some of the politically militant Muslims have links to extremist groups outside the country. Finally, it argues that Christianity and Western imperialism are not

the same and should not be considered as such.

These characterisations of the standard, Islamist and Christian viewpoints outline broad categories of thought. The number of people who adhere to these or parts of these lines of thought is difficult to judge.

Relative equal strength of Muslims and Christians

The relationship between religion and the distribution of resources is important for understanding Tanzania's 'raw materials for social peace.' Until recently there was a near absence of statistics, about this relationship. However, a national conference on Politics and Religion held by REDET in November 2001 provided considerable empirical data about the correlation between religion and education, and between religion and employment. REDET's study confirmed the popular perceptions that Christians had a higher literacy rate than Muslims (87.4% to 73%) and that a higher proportion of Christians were attending school (Othman, 2001: 4,7).¹⁷ Given that employment is often dependent on educational qualifications, it is also reasonable to assume that Christians make up a larger percentage of mid to high level salary earners in the country. This conclusion is supported by Possi's (2001: 5–10) data on the religious background of teaching staff at primary and secondary schools, and teaching and non-academic staff at higher institutions of education, which confirms that a considerably higher percentage of Christians than Muslims occupy these positions.

While the REDET study sheds important light on education and employment and its relation to religion, there still remains a shortage of data on the private sector. It is possible to speculate that, while both Muslims and Christians are involved in private sector enterprises, there is a stronger trading and entrepreneurial tradition among Muslims. For example, if one visits the business districts of towns and villages, there are many enterprises that belong to Muslims. Also, Muslim Asians own many leading Tanzanian firms.¹⁸

Notable exceptions to the above trends exist and are popularly recognised. For example, the African ethnic group most often associated with business activities is the Chaga. While there are Chaga who are Muslims, they are in the minority of this predominantly Christian ethnic group. Regarding education, the Asian community has a strong tradition of community education and has created some of the nation's top high schools.

Lack of consensus within religious groups

Another variable that needs to be considered as part of Bowen's 'raw material for social peace' is the internal make-up of Tanzania's spiritual traditions. In general, each of these traditions is plural and intra-faith conflicts are often more intense than inter-faith ones. The role of leadership in these traditions is especially relevant in this regard.

Christianity. There is a small number of highly organised, well established churches in Tanzania and, in recent years, there has been a proliferation of protestant, evangelical and saved churches. The Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran

churches have highly developed administrative structures and constitutions that provide for the selection and election of bishops and other church leaders.¹⁹ In addition to providing spiritual guidance, these churches offer social services, such as medical care and schools. Despite their more elaborate and institutionalised organisational structures, these religious institutions have faced a number of intra-denominational conflicts.

The Catholic Church, for example, has been engaged in an ongoing conflict with the Marian Faith Healing Ministry of Father Nkwera (Killian, 2001; Comoro & Sivalon, 1999). The Lutheran Church has undergone three episodes in Pare, Northern, and East/Coast Dioceses) where rebel factions have attempted to create their own separate dioceses stemming from complaints of misuse of resources and nepotism long ethnic lines. In one case a violent confrontation lasted from 1990 to 1993 between followers who wanted to create a Meru Diocese and those who wanted to maintain a united Northern Diocese (Kelsall, 2000; Mmuya, 2001; Nyirabu, 201). Since 1994, the Anglican Church has experienced intense disagreements over control of its Mwanza Diocese (Tambila & Sivalon, 2001).

For the roughly 140 other churches in Tanzania,²⁰ this struggle to control resources can take a more personal dimension. In the smaller denominations leadership depends more on preaching ability and an entrepreneurial flare than on administrative capabilities. The competition for followers among these churches is sometimes as intense as the struggles to control the resources that international church connections often bring. While the larger, more bureaucratic churches are not immune, conflicts that seem more about controlling resources than about spiritual issues have been prevalent among the smaller protestant churches, leading to a splintering of churches and leaders (Tambila & Sivalon, 2001).

Islam. The largest Islamic sect in Tanzania follows Sunni traditions and most of its members are African. There are also Shia Ismailis, who have a large number of Asian followers, and a small Ibadi sect that is primarily Arab (Forster *et al*, 2000: 121). Authority can be gained by a leadership position in government-recognised Islamic organisations such as BAKWATA, or in organisations such as the Dar es Salaam Islamic club. Other organisations not officially recognised by the state, such as Warsha (Muslim Writers Workshop) and the Committee for the Defence of Islamic Rights, are also ways for leaders to emerge through providing a platform from which to challenge the state. Successful business people, intellectuals or politicians can also become influential in the Islamic community.

Shiekh (mosque leaders) and muftis (Islamic law specialists) gain authority from their understanding of Islam. This knowledge can be acquired through experience working, studying and teaching at local religious institutions or it can be obtained through studying at outside Islamic institutions of higher learning. Some of these institutions are located in Iran and Sudan. This has caused conflicts with the government because of the suspicion that people studying in such places may have received terrorist training (*An-nuur*, 2000b: 1–2). A number of Muslim community leaders, such as Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda and Sheikh Juma Mbukuzi, have emerged because of their outspoken and bold criticism of the state and its relationship to Islam. However, within the *umma*

(Islamic community) there is no set path that one must follow to get leadership accreditation. For example, former President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, the late Vice President Ali Omar Jumar, and leaders of BAKWATA have used their connections to the state to gain influence within Tanzania's Islamic community.

The multiple paths to assuming leadership positions in the Muslim community has resulted in the emergence of a variety of complementary and conflicting perspectives. There is a general division between those who feel that Muslims have been held back and oppressed by the state and those who uphold the status quo relationship between their religion and the government. This, coupled with a struggle to control resources and gain prestige within local Muslim communities, has led to a number of (occasionally violent) conflicts over the control of mosques, which usually pit a group of younger anti-government shiekhs against older sheikhs who are often associated with BAKWATA.

Traditional religions. Unlike Christianity and Islam, traditional spiritual beliefs lack formal organisational structures and ties to resources from outside the country. Leaders of traditional religions often gain their expertise serving an apprenticeship, usually under a family mentor, and their education levels can be low. While there is a widespread belief that politicians seek the help of traditional healers and spiritual leaders, this is primarily seen as a personal effort to gain a competitive advantage against rivals.²¹ In many respects the presence of traditional spiritual beliefs acts as a calming influence on religious conflict, as both leaders and followers of these beliefs are not likely to see the world through an exclusive by Christian or Muslim prism.

Limitations of the instrumentalist–primordialist continuum

Tensions are on the rise between Muslims and Christians in Tanzania. At least in part this is a result of the rise in political visibility and assertiveness of the Muslim community over the past 10 years. The continuum presented earlier is helpful in conceptualising how people identify themselves *vis à vis* religion, but it does not necessarily elucidate the complicated relationship between identity group articulation and political mobilisation. In the case of Tanzania, Bowen's 'raw materials for social peace' are a combination of cross-cutting cleavages, relative parity of group strength and size, and intra-group conflict. These 'raw materials' have affected the interplay between religion and politics.

Also, a shared value of tolerance and distaste for identity politics at the national level has influenced the conscious decisions of many of the main political actors and identity group members to eschew religious mobilisation. In recent years, these political values have emerged as one of former President Julius Nyerere's most important contributions to national development. According to the REDET study, very few people explained differences in education or employment in terms of religious bias. With regard to questions concerning job placement, promotions and favouritism in the work place, respondents who felt religion was a factor ranged from 1% to less than 1% (Musoke, 2001: 15,21; Chaligha, 2001). As for education, Othman (2001: 22) notes that, despite the differences in enrolment and pass rates in secondary school, only 2% of the

survey respondents feel that Muslims are discriminated against because of their religion in terms of access to education. 'When asked ... what strategies the government could adopt to ensure a more equitable distribution of educational resources, no one stated directly that there should be interventions on behalf of Muslims'. Othman also notes that, at the university level, while there are fewer Muslims than Christians, there appears to be no difference in percentages regarding the pass rate. In short, although disparities exist, most Tanzanians do not attribute these to be related to discrimination along religious lines.

The impact of cross-cutting cleavages. The rise of Islam as a growing political force presents, on the surface, a bipolar struggle between the followers of Islam and Christianity, with similarities and differences in terms of political mobilisation. However, the disaggregate analysis of both religious communities indicates a number of competing groups, often divided along pro- and anti-government lines, which cut across religious affiliation. Within both communities this dynamic is prevalent. The examples provided here demonstrate this point.

Group size and strength parity. There is a realisation among both opposition and ruling party leaders that using religious appeals at a national level is likely to cause a strong counter-response and mobilisation in the non-targeted group. The leaders of all the major parties feel that it is impossible to take power or to govern without the support of both Muslims and Christians. This has created a situation where political leaders see it in their self-interest to build broad coalitions of Muslims and Christians as opposed to mobilising along religious lines.

Lack of group consensus. The divisions presented in this paper between and within Christian denominations and Muslim mosques have rendered group solidarity a virtual impossibility. This, in turn, creates a strong disincentive for leaders to manipulate religion for political ends, or for primordial tendencies of religious affiliation to affect the political process, substantially.

In the name of theoretical parsimony or conceptual expediency, many scholars have relied on the continuum discussed in the paper to explain a wide range of complicated political phenomena. While this continuum is instructive in terms of conceptualising how people define and create groups in complex societies, one cannot assume that this perspective successfully elucidates the factors that directly affect the political mobilisation process.

Notes

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¹ REDET has conducted survey research for a number of years in Tanzania and has developed sophisticated and accurate methods. The REDET religion study was a three-year study that included field interviews with 839 Tanzanians, selected using a random sample method from all regions on the

- mainland and one region each in Unguja and Pemba. Of those interviewed, 48% were Christian and 46.6% were Muslim. The rest were either non-believers, followers of traditional African religions, or believers of other religions.
- ² Crawford Young (1993) and Stanley Tambiah (1996) add a third perspective to the primordialism–instrumentalism debate. This perspective, called ‘constructivism’, is closely related to instrumentalist assumptions.
 - ³ See Crawford Young’s edited volume on cultural pluralism for a cogent analysis of primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivist perspectives, along with an excellent collection of bibliographic references (1993: 21–24).
 - ⁴ Donald Horowitz (1985) presents detailed theoretical exposition.
 - ⁵ See Heilman (2001) for a detailed analysis of ethnicity in this analytical context.
 - ⁶ This study asked respondents a hypothetical question regarding whether they would approve of their children marrying someone from a number of different groups. The approval ratings were as follows: lower social class (78%); higher social class (75%); different ethnic group (73%); different race (64%); different political party (47%); and different religion (44%). The survey showed that inter-religious marriage received the lowest approval rating.
 - ⁷ One of the men convicted in a Federal Court in New York City for the embassy bombings in East Africa was a Tanzanian citizen.
 - ⁸ Forster *et al* (2000: 121) estimate that only 11% of Tanzanians follow traditional beliefs. They offer no explanation of what this estimate is based on.
 - ⁹ The phrase literally means ‘those religions that were brought’. This observation was made during field interviews in Dodoma town and in surrounding rural areas 16–28 July 2000. This fieldwork was conducted in association with a nationwide survey on religion in Tanzania by REDET.
 - ¹⁰ The church was located on the outskirts of Dodoma and the discussion took place during field research for the REDET study on religion and democracy, 16–18 July 2000.
 - ¹¹ A district government official advanced this line of argument during REDET field interviews conducted in Dodoma and in surrounding rural areas 16–28 July 2000.
 - ¹² Before the Union between mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar in 1964 the mainland was called Tanganyika.
 - ¹³ TANU merged with Zanzibar’s Afro-Shirazi Party in 1977 to form Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the Revolutionary Party.
 - ¹⁴ See Liviga and Tumbo-Masabo (2001) and Bakari and Ndumbaro (2001) for excellent accounts of the political mobilisation of Muslims.
 - ¹⁵ See, for example, Said, (1998); and Njozi (2000).
 - ¹⁶ For another interesting account of the ‘Christian response’ see Bakari and Ndumbaro (2001: 6).
 - ¹⁷ Othman (2001) estimates that, of the students who sat for the 1995 O-level exam, only 20% were Muslims. Othman also found that for that year only 15.5% of Christian candidates failed the exam while 33% of Muslim candidates failed.
 - ¹⁸ This observation is based on field research conducted between 1993 and 1994.
 - ¹⁹ Information on church structures was obtained while conducting field research for REDET’s nationwide survey on religion in Tanzania.
 - ²⁰ Tambila and Sivalon (2000) note a 1995 census of churches that identified 140 different Christian denominations.
 - ²¹ These observations are based on interviews conducted during the 2000 REDET religion study, informal conversations with colleagues at the University of Dar es Salaam, an article in newspapers on *waganga* (traditional healers), and on work with TEMCO during the 2000 General Elections.

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