

MWEMBECHAI KILLINGS

AND THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF TANZANIA

HAMZA MUSTAFA NJOZI

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to Muslim women in Tanzania in admiration for the courage they displayed at a trying moment in our history, and in gratitude for the inspiration they enkindled to those who faltered.

Preface

I have satisfied myself that President Mkapa's speech to the National Assembly in Dodoma on 4 November 1998 was such a monument of eloquence in Kiswahili language that its majesty can rarely be captured in a foreign tongue. I am keenly conscious therefore that the following brief quotation in translation in which President Mkapa provided a breath-taking description of our beautiful country is but a faint shadow of that awe-inspiring address:

Mr. Speaker, after three years of my presidency, I can dare to modify the words of a famous Zanzibari maestro, Siti binti Saad by saying: Tanzania is a good country, let one who wishes to come, do so. God has showered blessings on our country. It is a country of unity, peace, love, rejoicing, and exceeding generosity. It is a country of people who love equality and justice. Our national unity springs from our firm belief in the equality of human beings before God and before the law. A unity reinforced by correct policies of nation building -- policies based on the principles of social justice, peace, harmony and development for all. A unity which is extra-sensitive to policies, statements, behaviour, and actions which may sow seeds of discord, hatred and suspicion among Tanzanians.

With the possible exception of Tanzania, I do not know a country in the contemporary world which has been able to combine all the commendable qualities listed above. I suggest in this book that the supposed outstanding merits of Tanzania may resemble the presumed unblemished qualities of that woman in a folktale who secretly kept a human skeleton in her cupboard. According to one version of that popular story, a long and intensive search was mounted to find an individual in this world who did not have a single source of shame, trouble or anxiety. At long last, when almost everyone had lost hope of ever finding any such person, a graceful woman was discovered. She scored all the points in the check-list. When they were about to declare her the undisputed winner, she took them upstairs and showed them her secret closet which contained a human skeleton. She said, "This is a skeleton of my lover who was killed by my husband. Every night my husband forces me to kiss it."

This book is about one old skeleton in our national cabinet; the burden of religious discrimination which we have always carried in our hearts but which we have carefully managed to conceal to the rest of the world. President Reagan of the United States once boasted about the global reach of his country by saying: You can run but you cannot hide. But as far as our religious skeleton is concerned, we have managed to fool even the arrogantly boastful America. All the official reports published by the US Department of State from 1994 to 1999 have failed to detect religious discrimination in Tanzania. The focus of this book is on the discrimination which Muslims suffer in their country. This does not mean that no one has suffered in Tanzania except the Muslims. To be sure, in their numerous writings, Issa G. Shivji and Chris Peter Maina have unearthed several sickening skeletons as far as our general record in respecting human rights is concerned. But it is the suffering of Muslims in Tanzania which has rarely been acknowledged even in our own country. Who can imagine, for example, that President Mkapa's speech quoted above was delivered nine months after his government had ordered policemen to shoot and kill Muslims at Mwembechai? This book is offered as a modest attempt to understand the intricate weave of social and political factors which threaten our national unity.

Since my preoccupation has largely been on the wider implications of the Mwembechai killings, I have appended at the end of this book the long open letter which Abu Aziz submitted to the Attorney General on the government's mishandling of the Mwembechai crisis. Abu Aziz's submission offers a very insightful account of that sad episode in our national history.

Hamza Mustafa Njozi
University of Dar es Salaam
1999.

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The entire editorial staff of *An-Nuur* newspaper must receive a special word of gratitude for granting me unhindered access to their library and for allowing me to use in this book pictures which were published in their newspaper.

I also wish to note with grateful appreciation that in the course of my research, the late Sheikh Mohammed Ali, the late Sheikh Kassim bin Juma, Alhaj Sheikh Said Rupia, Sheikh Waziri Nkobo, Alhaj Aboud Jumbe and Mzee Bori Lillah honoured me with vital information that holds a rare quality of meaning about Muslims in Tanzania that I could not have possibly got anywhere else. I treasure their trust and I hope to use much of that information in subsequent works *Insha-Allah*.

I likewise wish to register my sincere thanks to Professor Rwekaza Mukandala, Dr. Palamagamba Kabudi, Dr. A.F. Lwaitama and other Christian colleagues who requested for anonymity for encouraging me to give my view of the other side of the hill despite our profound disagreement about the nature and magnitude of religious discrimination in Tanzania.

Finally I wish to pay special tribute to those Muslim women who, at the peak of Muslim persecution in Tanzania, when most of us wavered, stood up (as Muslims should) for their rights as citizens and as Muslims. For their stand they suffered torture and imprisonment. Yet after their release, their resolve did not flag. They travelled across the country to encourage Muslims to stand up for their God given and constitutional right to live as Muslims. Their courage in the face of intimidating state power has been a source of great inspiration to me. I dedicate this book to them in admiration and gratitude.

H.M.N.

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Dr. Njozi was born in Songea, southern Tanzania. He is married to Fatma binti Burhani and they have six children.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Mwembechai killings: “Difficult problems, Easy answers”

In every man’s past there are things which a man would not admit to anyone, except to his closest friends. There are things too which a man would not admit even to his friends, but only to himself, and that in strictest confidence. But there are other things which a man would not admit even to himself, and every decent man has quite an accumulation of such things...

Notes from Underground

This book takes as its central concern to look at the killings which took place outside the Mwembechai mosque on 13 February 1998 not as a cause, but as a clear manifestation of a simmering political crisis in our country. Many decent Tanzanians are likely to find the details given in this book extremely difficult to accept even in their own hearts, not because they are untrue, but because they are painful. The tendency to cherish fond illusions and to suppress ugly realities is virtually universal. In 1992 I met in Kuala Lumpur a Malay old man who told me that he had two young wives and that he was at that time 80 years old. When I expressed my surprise that he was so advanced in age, he rebuked and educated me: “Never ever say so and so is old. Old age is an attitude of mind; it is how you feel. If you feel old you are old irrespective of your chronological age. I personally feel very young. The most you can say about me is that I am experienced.” Comforting illusions. The ugly implications of old age and the chilling consciousness of mortality are quite unsettling. Many old men and women would like to believe, and to be told that they are young or at least that they look young. And such is the power of self-deception that people will go to great lengths to suppress the evidence of old age by artificially removing the wrinkles and painting the hair.

There was a time when, Tanzania as a nation was also young, beautiful and highly promising. This was a time when Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere even before Tanganyika’s independence had expressed not *his* intention but the intention of the people of Tanganyika to light a candle and put it on top of Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest in Africa as a shining symbol and example to the rest of the world of the commitment and grim determination of Tanganyikans to build a just and vibrant society. A society whose testimony by example would shine beyond her borders inspiring ‘hope where there was despair, love where there was hate and dignity where before there was only humiliation.’ The wording of Tanganyika’s lofty declaration of intent echoes, and is patterned after, the following famous prayer of a Roman Catholic saint, Francis of Assisi who prayed: ‘Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace, Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy; where there is darkness, light.’

The fact that Mwalimu Nyerere modelled Tanganyika's national ideal after the prayer of a Roman Catholic saint inspired both hope and fear. It enkindled the hope that Nyerere and his team of leaders would be as dedicated as saint Francis was in translating the dream into reality. It also awakened the fear that Nyerere was so profoundly influenced by the teachings of his church that he might consider its doctrines and ideals as necessarily coinciding with those of independent Tanganyika. In the following pages I attempt to show that this fear was not unjustified. At this point I shall give an example or two. In an interview with the *Christian Century* of March 1, 1972, Mwalimu Nyerere was quoted as saying that his efforts to build African socialism in Tanzania represented his determination to translate in practical terms the teachings contained in The Gospel of Jesus Christ. What is wrong with that? I do not think there is anything wrong with implementing the political and economic teachings of Jesus Christ at a national level, so long as those teachings are consonant with the aspirations of the nation. In this particular case, like in the case of adapting the prayer of St. Francis above, the problem lies in the principle employed not in the details. It is wrong to use the Christian Gospels to guide the political and economic course of an avowedly secular state, even if in many instances the aspirations of the two may coincide. I am not saying it is inherently wrong to use religious books to guide the nation, I am only saying that at present it is constitutionally wrong to do so. We may debate, and I suggest that we should debate the whole concept of secularism, its attractions and its disabilities. We may as a nation reject it. Only then can we use our religious books as guidelines.

A more serious problem arises when an attempt is also made to implement those Roman Catholic doctrines which clash with our national goals. A case in point is the long-standing doctrine: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* "outside the church there is no salvation". Since Vatican II (1964) this doctrine is no longer officially upheld by the Roman Catholic church. In practice it meant that both in religion and politics good people were only those Roman Catholics who unswervingly adhered to the teachings of Christianity as presented by the hierarchical church. In public Mwalimu Nyerere was a fierce defender of secularism. It is therefore quite disturbing to learn that in private he championed the sectional interests of his own church. In 1970 Nyerere invited to the State House the then Secretary General of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference, Fr. Robert Rweyemamu and the Pope's Representative to Tanzania Mgr. Giovano Cerrano. Among other things Nyerere told his guests that he was doing every thing in his power to strengthen Catholicism in the country. He also requested them to go and inform the Bishops that he had established a Department of Political Education in TANU (the ruling and only political party at that time), and that he had appointed a Christian Reverend to head that department, not because of his competence as a political analyst, but because of his strong faith as a Christian. His responsibility was to guide and control the political direction of the party. He also informed them that in the Party's National Executive Committee (NEC) two members were Reverends. He said he believed that was the best way of ensuring that the party got good people (van Bergen, 1981:333-336).

It is quite obvious that by "good people" Mwalimu Nyerere meant Christians in general and Roman Catholics in particular. It is not surprising therefore that Sivalon (1992:49) reports that in the same year 1970 Roman Catholics could boast that they constituted 70% of the 75% elected Christian members of Parliament. Out of the 108 elected Members of Parliament, 23 were Muslim, 5 Traditionalist and 80 Christian. Throughout his rule Nyerere was both President and Chairman of the ruling Party. His promise to strengthen Catholicism was not an empty one. Catholics could now use Parliament to promote their religious interests if they so wished.

Another area which is likely to generate political problems concerns the rules which Roman Catholics are supposed to follow when it comes to thinking with reference to their church. Among the "Rules for Thinking with the Church" outlined by St. Ignatius of Loyola rule number one says: "Laying aside all private judgment, we ought to hold our minds prepared and prompt to obey in all things the true Spouse of

Christ our Lord, which is our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church”, and rule number thirteen says, “To arrive at the truth in all things, we ought always to be ready to believe that what seems to us white is black, if the hierarchical church so defines it...” (Longridge, 1922:197,199). In his book referred to above, Sivalon (1992) says the Roman Catholic church in Tanzania had established a Department whose primary task was to fight both, communists and Muslims in Tanzania. Between 1959 and 1966 Fr. Schildknecht was the Director who headed this department. What is of interest for us here is the fact that in its report the church noted that Islam was growing very fast in Tanzania, and that the growth of Islam would greatly weaken Christianity. The church was particularly worried by the unity and organisational capacity of Muslims under the East African Muslim Welfare Society (1992:35-37). Because the church said the EAMWS was dangerous in that it would weaken Christianity, it had to be so. Mwalimu Nyerere used his political powers to ban this legitimate organisation, to confiscate all its properties and to impose on the Muslims a puppet organisation, BAKWATA. As its name suggests, the EAMWS was a welfare organisation whose primary objective was to provide education and health services. The intellectual brilliance of Mwalimu Nyerere is well-known, and so is his sense of social justice. But Nyerere was also a sincere Roman Catholic. He could not pick and choose what to follow and what to reject in his faith.

The Mwembechai killings followed a similar pattern. Father Camillius Lwambano of the Mburahati parish claimed that he passed at Mwembechai mosque and heard Muslims ridiculing Jesus Christ. It was later established, after the police had opened fire and killed at least four unarmed Muslims and maimed several others, that this claim by Father Lwambano was, after all, a sheer fabrication. As I am writing this book, almost two years after the killings, our government has yet to form a team to probe the killings despite repeated requests from many concerned Tanzanians across the religious divide.

I do not know if there is any serious observer of Tanzania’s political history who can deny the commitment and sacrifice of Tanzanians to the freedom fighters of Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, and even beyond Africa. In this regard Tanzania has indeed provided a shining example to the rest of the world, and has deservedly won the respect and admiration of many countries. That admirable aspect of our national history is not the focus of the present study. My interest here is to encourage my fellow country men and women to have the courage to confront the odious side of our political history. A political history of religious discrimination against Muslims. The unstated but effective policy of marginalising Muslims in education, employment and political appointments is not of recent origin. It began and was firmly entrenched during the twenty five years of Mwalimu Nyerere’s political rule. And I believe unless this problem is openly addressed Tanzania may also find itself engulfed in civil strife.

Multiple interpretations of the problem

On the political future of our country many Tanzanians irrespective of their religious affiliation seem to agree on two things: that there are deep undercurrents which threaten the country’s social cohesion and political stability; and that urgent measures be taken to arrest the situation. And as far as I am aware, our consensus ends there. We think differently about the causes of, and the solution to our political predicament. Considering the complexity of the problem and the enormous political price we may have to pay for a wrong diagnosis, it would be quite unfair to expect or to press for a uniform interpretation. There are at least four competing explanations: Tanzania’s political stability is being undermined by (a) the collapse of socialism as a national philosophy; (b) the rise of Islamic fundamentalism; (c) religious animosities engendered by Muslim public lectures; and (d) social injustice and religious discrimination against Muslims.

(a) The collapse of socialism as a national philosophy

Although political tension in Tanzania is manifesting itself in religious undertones, its actual root-cause is economic, and its real solution lies in the economic empowerment of the people. It is not coincidental that Muslim public lectures began in the mid 1980s a period which corresponds with Tanzania's official shift from socialist policies to economic liberalisation. Since Tanzania has, especially beginning with President Mwinyi's era abandoned socialism, the only ideology capable of guaranteeing economic progress, freedom and justice to all, many poor people are psychologically frustrated as a result of the economic miseries they experience under liberalisation. Left with no hope for the future in this world, these poor souls turn to religion for solace and for hope at least in the world to come. Because of their deep-seated economic frustrations and their ignorance, this group can easily be manipulated to divert its fury from the real enemy which is capitalism to a racial, ethnic or religious "other". And this is precisely what is happening in Tanzania.

This explanation has its appeal and has attracted several first class minds in Tanzania. This, for example, used to be a favourite interpretation of the late Dr. Jumanne Wagao, who until his death was serving as economic advisor to Mwalimu Nyerere. Professor Sam Maghimbi, one of the leading sociologists in the country, also seems to subscribe to this view. The only difference though is that Maghimbi does not attribute the problems to the collapse of socialism but to the harsh realities of poverty and squalid living conditions irrespective of ideology. Despite its attraction, this explanation is unsatisfactory. While appearing to analyse the Tanzanian society, this explanation is actually merely restating the Marxist theories of social progress without sifting the facts on the ground. Why did socialism, the panacea of Tanzania's all socio-economic ills, collapse in the first place? If the real cause of the problem is purely economic why should it affect and find its bitterest expression only from the Muslims? This theory can only stand if it is assumed that it is the Muslims who constitute the vast majority of the poor, or to use the Marxist jargon, *the lumpen proletariat*. Even then it leaves open the question as to why the majority of the poor are Muslims. To be sure, poverty is a serious problem in Tanzania, a country which enjoys the unenviable distinction of being among the poorest in the world. But I believe to blame the looming political crisis in our country on poverty is dangerously misleading.

(b) The rise of Islamic fundamentalism

According to this view, Tanzania's stability is being endangered by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the country. Islamic fundamentalism is dangerous because it is actually being used not as a means of religious revival or spiritual recharge but rather as a strong political resource at the hands of selfish power-hungry individuals. These deceitful people under the garb of religious leaders succeed in their endeavours largely because of the ignorance and gullibility of the masses. Generali T. K. Ulimwengu, a famous political analyst in the country, is one of the proponents of this view. In his address to the UNESCO-sponsored colloquium on the "Culture of Peace", Ulimwengu has been quoted by Ambali (1999:7) as saying:

Tanzania, which prides itself on the relative peace it has enjoyed in the midst of conflict-torn countries, cannot afford to sit on its laurels, precisely because there is every indication that there are forces working to undermine the existing state of tranquility, and one of these forces has a religious facade, even if its real nature is political...These are the ones who use their clerical status to obtain material wealth or otherwise profit from the total confidence of the multitude of poor souls who, unable to

see through their trickery, believe they can achieve deliverance with the help of these crooks. It is this type of unquestioning loyalty and trust that is cynically exploited by these con artists in robes and collars when they decide to place their considerable power at the service of political effort. Many a country in the world has known terrible suffering because of the irresponsibility of these dangerous elements

This being the case, the solution is to identify, arrest and punish all irresponsible “crooks”. To a very large extent the government has often taken this line of action, when it came to dealing with Muslim leaders and a completely different approach when it dealt with Christian “crooks”. This theory is also inadequate because its premises are not true. Like any other group, Muslims in Tanzania have their weaknesses, but unquestioning loyalty to leaders, be they religious or political is not one of them. Even if we assume, for the sake of argument that Muslims are indeed blind followers of their religious leaders, this explanation does not tell us why Muslims are so easily amenable to influence. Is it because they are exceedingly ignorant? But why should ignorance coincide with religious affiliation? If Muslims are so easily deceivable, why should their credulity be so selective; being credulous to their religious “crooks” but very critical of their political leaders?

The prescription proposed by this point of view has so far failed precisely because the diagnosis is wrong. In 1993 Tanzanians were told “*mzizi wa fitina*” which in Kiswahili means the root-cause of the problem was the late Sheikh Kassim bin Juma of the Kwamtoro mosque. He was arrested, denied bail and died several months after his release. Later we were told the trouble shooter was Sheikh Shaaban Magezi of Mwembechai mosque, and then Sheikh Omar Bashir. Later the police discovered that in fact the real engineer was Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda and called upon all peace-loving citizens to help the police in facilitating his arrest. Sheikh Ponda has since gone underground. As I am writing this book Tanzanians are being told that the problem is Sheikh Juma Mbukuzi of Mujahidun mosque, and has now been arrested! To use the words of Professor Issa G. Shivji who has always been very critical of using what he calls “police methods” to address political problems, “You can arrest Muslim leaders, but you cannot arrest social problems.” Jenerali Ulimwengu’s analysis quoted above was made before the Mwembechai killings. It appears that even Ulimwengu has significantly shifted his position after witnessing the government’s dependence on police methods during the Mwembechai saga. The title of this chapter is an English translation of a Kiswahili title: *Maswali magumu, Majibu Rahisi* written by Jenerali Ulimwengu in his weekly column in *RAI* (September 3-9, 1998). In that column and the subsequent one, Ulimwengu was very critical of how our society was giving very shallow answers to highly complicated problems.

(c) Muslim public lecturers

The most popular view, as far as newspapers are concerned, is that our country is slowly but surely being pushed into the abyss of civil strife by a small group of Muslim preachers who openly instigate religious hatred in the country. To pretend that the problem is too complex to understand or to solve would not help us. The problem is staring at us in the face and is acknowledged by all serious-minded people. What is lacking is the courage to take the necessary measures. For unknown reasons this was particularly so during President Mwinyi’s era. Muslims and Christians in Tanzania have enjoyed a long-standing history of religious harmony because they have always respected each other’s faith. Suddenly from the mid 1980s a band of Muslim preachers began preaching Islam using the Christian Bible. In the process of doing so they have been pouring scorn on Christians and their religion. Under such circumstances, quite predictably, the esteem of Christians for Islam and Muslims would also be adversely affected. To allow a group of people

to ridicule and revile another group is unconstitutional, immoral and politically dangerous. If we do not attack the crocodile at the bank of the river it will be extremely difficult to do so in the middle of the river.

This view is extremely popular because its logic is unassailable. But unfortunately it is also the most misleading. It is misleading not because it is deficient in argument, but because it is superfluous; it is attacking a straw man. The Muslim preachers who are accused of sowing seeds of discord in society are also fiercely opposed to the use of disrespectful language. Anyone who has actually attended these open air public lectures from August 1984 when they began to the present cannot fail to notice several things: (a) the large attendance of Christians, (b) the friendly atmosphere surrounding the Christian-Muslim dialogue, and (c) the number of Christians who are embracing Islam. What do Muslims stand to gain by ridiculing Christians? May be psychological satisfaction. But why should an insulted person accept Islam? And why are Christians always flocking to these public lectures? To enjoy the insults? The fact of the matter is that these lectures disturb the clergy because their followers are joining another faith. And they want the government to act on their behalf. Muslims should be prevented from preaching to their followers.

In June 1981 the Muslim Students Association of the University of Dar -es-Salaam (MSAUD) organised an international seminar on Zakat. At that time I was the Secretary General of MSAUD. Among the invited speakers was Sheikh Ahmed Deedat from South Africa, a well-known Muslim scholar of the Christian Bible. He gave his first public talk on "Muhammad in the Bible" at the Lumumba Hall in the City. Immediately after the lecture six young Christians embraced Islam, three of whom were Roman Catholic seminarians. That was a Thursday Sheikh Deedat was scheduled to present his second public talk at the Diamond Jubilee Hall on the following Sunday. On Friday the late Sheikh Mohammed Ali who was at that time the Secretary General of the Supreme Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA), received a letter jointly written by the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC) and the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT). The letter requested him as a matter of urgency to do everything in his power to prevent Sheikh Ahmed Deedat from giving his second public talk for the sake of peace and harmony in our society. But more importantly, the letter suggested two alternatives: Sheikh Deedat could make a public talk but not on comparative religion; or he could go ahead and deliver the same topic but inside a mosque. But since Ahmed Deedat was a guest of MSAUD Sheikh Mohammed Ali had no alternative but to plead with us to heed the request from the churches. When we refused, Sheikh Mohammed Ali was visibly worried. He said, "You are too young to know the power and intrigues of church leaders in this country. I can assure you by now this matter is already being handled by the government. We may face reprisals. This is not a request, it is an order." We refused. He took the matter to the First Vice President, at that time Alhaj Aboud Jumbe and requested him to impress upon us the danger of going ahead with the public talk. Jumbe said that so long as we were breaking no law, he saw no reason of forcing us to cancel the talk. We were very much relieved and the talk went ahead. Again four Christians embraced Islam there and then. Way back in 1981 church leaders were worried and attempted to block Ahmed Deedat, not because he insulted Christians but because he attracted them to Islam. It is not surprising therefore that when in 1993 President Mwinyi invited Muslim and Christian leaders to the State House, the church leaders could neither substantiate nor define the insults. And as was the case in 1981, even today Muslims are told to deliver their lectures in the mosques not in public grounds. Will Tanzania be a better place to live if Muslims are allowed to foment religious hatred in the mosques?

(d) Social injustice and religious discrimination against Muslims

The argument in this book is that the conflict in Tanzania is not between Muslims and Christians but between Muslims and the government. The problem is neither inter-religious nor horizontal but political and vertical. In all political regimes, Muslims have repeatedly pointed out, with evidence, that they are being discriminated against. But before examining that evidence it is important to appreciate the magnitude and complexity of the problem. Although the problem is political and not religious, yet it seems to me that there is a wide perceptual gulf between how Muslims and Christians look at the problem. This religious polarisation has encouraged some people to draw a wrong inference: that the problem lies in the worsening of Christian-Muslim relations. Of course it is perfectly legitimate for intelligent people to come out with different interpretations from the same data. But why should there be a general correspondence between intellectual interpretation and religious affiliation? This shows that we are not dealing with a simple problem.

The complexity and magnitude of the problem

There are factors which make Muslims and Christians who live in the same country have different views about the same problem. These factors have nothing to do with religion. They include: different sets of experiences; the loathsome implications of change; the lure of present gain versus future pain; and errors of commission versus errors of omission.

Different sets of experiences

One's judgment cannot be better than the information upon which one bases that judgment. There is a lot of significant information which is available to the majority of Muslims but which is inaccessible to the majority of Christians. As a result of the different sets of experiences an intelligent Christian, without being affected by any traces of religious prejudice may sincerely believe that Muslims are being dishonest when they claim that they are unfairly treated. A Muslim on the other hand cannot understand how any fair-minded person can fail to see the injustices perpetrated against Muslims in the country.

Let me give an example which happened in 1984. In August of that year a Christian friend who was at that time a Lecturer in the Institute of Development Studies, at the University of Dar-es-Salaam stormed into my office with a Kiswahili daily newspaper and wanted to know whether it was really true that Muslims in the various parts of the country were calling for *Jihad* against the government. I told him that although the newspaper story was highly distorted, it was indeed true that Muslim anger against the government had reached dangerous proportions and that many people were calling upon the Muslims to rise against the government. But at that time the story was several months old! My friend was amazed because as a political analyst he thought he kept himself abreast with all the events in the country.

The actual event which triggered Muslim anger occurred at Buzuruga village, in Mwanza. The leaders of the vigilante groups popularly known as *Sungusungu* were preparing a huge annual ceremony to introduce and officially install the regional leaders of the vigilante groups. Everyone was required to participate in the ceremonies. Unfortunately, the ceremonies involved many elements which were religiously unacceptable to the Muslims because they were polytheistic. They included sun-worshipping, dressing codes which required men and women to bare their chests and to mingle freely during the ceremonies, the serving of un-Islamically slaughtered meat and alcoholic drinks, and the compulsory use of Traditional prayers. And the time of beginning the ceremony coincided with the beginning of the Muslim dawn prayers. Muslims objected. They said they would participate in the day-to-day activities of self-defence but their religious conviction disallowed them from attending and participating in the ceremonies. *Sungusungu* leaders were furious. They declared that anyone who would absent himself or herself would be dealt with severely. Muslims reported the matter to Party and government officials and appealed for their intervention. The response of the government at the district level was that Muslims should not make a mountain out of an anthill. Even if the ceremonies were religiously unlawful in Islam, Muslims should participate because the ceremonies were being held only once a year, and they would last only a few hours. Unsatisfied with this response, Muslims presented the matter to the regional authorities who promised to handle it before the ceremonies. They did not. The important day arrived, and Muslims instead of going to the ceremonies went to the mosque. True to their word, *Sungusungu* members entered into the Buzuruga mosque, desecrated it, vandalised the copies of the Holy Qur'an, and severely tortured Sheikh Daudi who died several months later.

The government not only refrained from taking any legal measures against the culprits who were all known, but suppressed the story. And by suppressing it the government was merely denying this information to the non-Muslims. Within a few days the story accompanied with fiery sermons of righteous indignation had hit the pulpits of almost all mosques in the country. Muslim delegates from as far as Kigoma were flocking to Buzuruga to console their fellow Muslims and to express their solidarity. As tension was mounting, the government decided to use Mufti Hemed bin Juma bin Hemed to cool the tempers of the Muslims. He went to Mwanza in a government plane accompanied by Hon. Rashidi Kawawa, who was at that time the Secretary General of CCM and Minister of State without portfolio. He went to Buzuruga and consoled the Muslims and assured them that he would present the matter to the President. Muslims showed him how the mosque and the copies of the Qur'an were desecrated. Sheikh Daudi showed him his scars. Mufti Hemed returned to Dar-es-Salaam and then came the bomb shell. Mufti Hemed denounced the Muslims over the national radio for giving credence to unfounded rumours that *Sungusungu* members had violated the Qur'an at the Buzuruga mosque. "I went there and talked to the Muslims of Mwanza and I found that the stories being disseminated in the mosques are a sheer fabrication". Since then Muslims of Mwanza have vowed never to allow Mufti Hemed to speak in any mosque of Mwanza. They said they could not bar him from praying, but they would never allow him again to speak after his betrayal in 1984. True to their word ten years later Mufti Hemed was prevented from addressing Muslims in Mwanza. Eight years after the Buzuruga episode, Mufti Hemed revealed in an interview with the *An-Nuur* reporter that he was ordered by the government to make that statement over the radio. "I was told by security officials and top government leaders that for the sake of national peace and harmony I must deny the Buzuruga story", he said.

Even from this one example it is not difficult to see why the judgement of a Muslim is likely to differ from that of a Christian. For example, from their knowledge and experience Muslims would openly denounce Mufti Hemed who is supposed to be their highest national leader. But it would escape the understanding of a Christian to hear Muslims castigating a learned leader whose only mistake is to advise them not to depend on rumours in their decisions. Any intelligent Christian would certainly side with Mufti Hemed. In fact as recently as January 1999, His Eminence Polycarp Cardinal Pengo was quoted in a Catholic newspaper,

Kiongozi (24 Dec.- 1 Jan. 1999) as saying that he had a very high regard for Mufti Hemed for his learning, wisdom and piety. This statement came at a time when Mufti Hemed's standing in the eyes of Muslims was at its lowest ebb. Likewise, to the Muslims, Buzuruga was yet another example where the government had not only deliberately mishandled Muslim grievances, but had also added insult to an injury. The majority of Christians are not even aware that such an event occurred in their country. Or worse still, for those who are aware about the event, Buzuruga is yet another example of Muslims fabricating non-existent injustices, as Mufti Hemed, their leader had said. Muslims know that government interference in their organisations is calculated to disorganise them, the Christians notice that Muslims are often quarrelling with their leaders, and assume that they are by nature quarrelsome. This is but one example. Let us look at other examples.

I think very few Christians in Tanzania are aware that Mwalimu Nyerere had specifically instructed leaders of the Supreme Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA) to seek his prior approval before undertaking any project, and before presenting any proposals to the Muslims. And in turn, the Muslims were not allowed to do anything without the approval of BAKWATA. The word "supreme" was not redundant. And yet there is hardly a Muslim in Tanzania who does not know that Nyerere was their supreme but invisible religious leader. I shall illustrate by just one example.

In 1979 a group of enthusiastic young Muslims who were tired of being led by a Roman Catholic staged a successful coup within BAKWATA. They removed Sheikh Saleh Masasi and his team of leaders and installed a new leadership which they thought would promote and defend Muslim interests. Quite ironically, this is how Mufti Hemed initially came to power. In this way they believed they could easily sideline Nyerere. They were mistaken. Nyerere was not the kind of person to be shoved aside that easily. In the meantime the new leadership started to work, of course without seeking Nyerere's approval. With the help of young Muslims, they launched a highly educative Kiswahili newspaper *Muislamu*, wrote a new comprehensive syllabus of Islamic knowledge, and started writing teaching manuals. They also wrote a proposal to transform the Kinondoni secondary school into an Islamic seminary. That was in 1981, and at that time Christians had 23 seminaries and Muslims had none. These proposals were tabled to the National Conference and approved. And Kinondoni was transformed into an Islamic seminary. Then Nyerere intervened.

At the Dar-es-Salaam International Airport, in November 1981 as he was leaving for a long tour abroad, Nyerere instructed About Jumbe and Rashidi Kawawa who had gone to see him off, that when he came back he would like to see Kinondoni secondary school had reverted to its former status of a private secondary school. The two leaders had no alternative but to discuss the matter with the BAKWATA leadership. A meeting was held on 29 November, 1981 at About Jumbe's private residence at Mjimwema and attended by five members: About Jumbe, Rashidi Kawawa, Mustafa Maqboul, Adam Nasibu and Mohammed Ali. The meeting was mainly about how to implement Nyerere's directive. The new leaders were intimidated, and were prepared to implement Nyerere's instructions, except Sheikh Mohammed Ali, the Secretary General who said come what may he would never change a decision which was passed by a National Conference. "What shall I tell the Muslims?", he asked. To cut a long story short, Nyerere came back and Kinondoni secondary school was still being run as an Islamic seminary, because Sheikh Mohammed Ali did not want to co-operate. The government provided funds to the co-operating leaders and instructed them to call a national meeting which would expel Sheikh Mohammed Ali from leadership.

As I have said above, at that time I was the Secretary General of MSAUD. The co-operating leaders came to seek the support of our organisation in their campaign to remove Sheikh Mohammed Ali. Sheikh Juma Mikidadi who was at that time BAKWATA's Secretary of Education, (now Professor Dr. Juma Mikidadi is a Member of Parliament of the Kibiti constituency-CCM) approached MSAUD's Vice-Chairman, Mr.

Ramadhani K. Dau (now Dr. Dau is the Director of Marketing with Tanzania Harbours Authority) and revealed the plan and also that it had the backing of the government. Mr. Dau and I went to see Sheikh Adam Nasibu the then Deputy Secretary General of BAKWATA to verify the story. Nasibu confirmed the plan and sought our support. We told him there and then that we would do everything in our power to disrupt the meeting and to tell the Muslims the truth. We grossly underrated state power. The date of the meeting was announced over the national radio and delegates were promised a lot of money in the form of allowances. The meeting was held at the Ardhi Institute (now University College of Lands and Architectural Studies) in Dar-es-Salaam. The venue was heavily guarded by uniformed and plain clothes policemen. MSAUD and members of the Muslim Writers Workshop (WARSHA) distributed leaflets to inform the Muslims country-wide about the actual designs of the meeting. We saw Muslim delegates being driven to the conference in State House Mercedes Benzes!

The meeting had only one major agenda: Mohammed Ali. Sheikh Mohammed Ali was found guilty of co-operating with irresponsible youths who were bent on disrupting peace and harmony in the country; and of sowing seeds of discord among Muslims. The Chairman of this meeting was none other than Mufti Hemed, who ten years later acknowledged the innocence of Sheikh Mohammed Ali. In the meantime, Sheikh Mohammed Ali was forced to resign. But a day before his resignation, a police officer went to his house in Upanga to counsel him. He was told that the best and most honourable option for him was to resign. If he did not then the police had a way of discovering narcotics in his house!

A few weeks after Sheikh Mohammed Ali's resignation, Adam Nasibu announced that Kinondoni was an ordinary private school. Muslim parents called a meeting to deliberate on the matter. The meeting was broken down by the Field Force Unit. When Muslims complained they were told the policemen were sent there by Adam Nasibu and not by the government! In the second meeting Sheikh Juma Mikidadi, the Secretary of Education had a difficult time. Angry Muslims denounced him as a hypocrite, and that they did not know Madina University could produce people who hated Islamic teachings. Mikidadi was so provoked that he revealed at that public meeting what was supposed to be a government secret. "Do not be so simple-minded," Mikidadi said. "Do you really believe that I can willingly prevent Muslim students from learning their religion? Do you really believe that?" One Muslim responded, "It is not a matter of believing, we know that this is precisely what you are doing at this school". To which Mikidadi said, "No Muslim can take such a decision. We have been forced by the government. Do you hear, we have been ordered to change the school into a private school." And hell broke loose. Muslims vowed to confront the government. The government dismissed Mikidadi's utterances as childish, BAKWATA distanced itself from them and Mikidadi himself ended up losing both his temper and his job.

While the majority of Muslims know the above story, many Christians do not. As a result, Christians, even those who are critical of Mwalimu Nyerere, may still have a very high estimation of him. When Muslims criticise Mwalimu Nyerere for allowing Christians to run their religious affairs and for suppressing Muslims, many sincere Christians are likely to dismiss this charge as nonsensical. "How can they accuse Mwalimu of this?" And they might be tempted to conclude that in their judgment Muslims are rather emotional.

The two episodes above took place at a time when Tanzania did not have a vigorous independent press. One might think this was the major contributory factor for Christians' unawareness. More recent examples suggest otherwise. It is certainly true that the situation is far better now than it was in the early eighties. For example, on 7 August, 1999 when he was addressing a public rally at Mburahati, Dar-es-Salaam, President Mkapa said that female Muslim students had the right to put on *Hijab* in schools and that no one should harass them. This story was completely suppressed in the government-owned *Sunday News* of the following day. Despite this suppression Tanzanians were aware of the President's statement because all

other newspapers reported it in their lead stories. Nevertheless, even today, what Christians know is but a small fraction of what their fellow country men and women who are Muslims experience every day. It is like the harassment and humiliations which many women experience at work places. I do not think there is a man who is not aware that women do suffer affronts at work places. But I doubt if there is any man who fully appreciates the extent and magnitude of those indignities. Men only know those few cases which receive publicity in the mass media. And as a result men are likely to treat those few cases as “isolated”.

Among the experiences which many Christians are not aware of is the now well-established tradition of harassing Muslim leaders. In his book, *The Life and Times of Abdulwahid Sykes* Mohamed Said (1998) has given a long list of Muslim sheikhs who were arrested, detained or deported by Mwalimu Nyerere. It is now becoming more and more regular to arrest and release Muslim leaders without charge or trial. The arrests are often done following the Gestapo tradition. In the small hours of the morning a team of fully armed policemen surround the house of a Muslim sheikh and order him to come out. They handcuff him and take him away. And the usual practice is to release him after about 18 hours. When Muslims go to inquire, the standard response given by the police is that the sheikh had committed no offence, they only wanted him to help them carry out their work! Many Christians may know about Chuki Athumani, a 17 year old Muslim student who was wounded by a police gunshot at Mwembechai but who for several weeks could not be treated at the Muhimbili Hospital because the police had permanently enchained his legs and hands at the posts of his hospital bed, and that the young boy has since paralysed. Chuki's case was reported in the newspapers. But how many Christians know about two Muslim old men, the 78 year old Mzee Chatta and the 80 year old Mzee Katembo? Muslims have composed moving narrative poems about the sufferings of these old men and other Muslims in the country. Many Muslims find it very difficult to hold back tears when their stories are recounted. These old Muslim leaders were arrested in January, 1998 long before the Mwembechai saga. They were held without charge or trial for five months, before they were released in May. While in remand prison they were tortured and ridiculed. Mzee Katembo lost his sanity. They both recounted their ordeal at a large Muslim gathering held at Masjid Nnur Sinza. But because Mzee Katembo's sanity had already been unhinged, no one could make head or tail of his ravings. His sanity was intact at the time of his arrest. The audio cassettes of their stories were circulated in various parts of the country.

Likewise, few Christians are aware that the government leaders are openly interfering with the day to day affairs of mosques. The Kinondoni DC, Ms. Rita Mlaki a Christian, has on several occasions gone to Masjid Nnur to demand that new leaders be elected! When the persecution of Muslims reached its highest point following the Mwembechai killings, Muslims, in all their congregational prayers used to recite *Qunut*, a supplication made in times of persecution or adversities. Government leaders intimidated the Imams from making this supplication on the grounds that it incited the Muslims to hate the government. Many Imams ignored the order.

Immediately after their release from remand prison, Muslim women who were arrested at the Mwembechai mosque organised a large meeting at the Diamond Jubilee Hall to reveal the tortures, sexual indignities and religious humiliations they suffered at the hands of the police. The government banned the meeting. Many newspapers criticised the government for preventing Muslim women to reveal the truth. The awareness of Christians ends there. What many Christians do not know is that those women from March 1998 to December 1998 travelled throughout the country to inform fellow Muslims what actually happened at Mwembechai, and what they suffered at the hands of the police, and what they thought was the government attitude towards Muslims in the country. Almost all Muslims are informed of the harrowing ordeal which Muslim women experienced in remand prison which included the routine of male police officers searching for bombs supposedly hidden into the women's private parts! Out of respect to my readers I spare them the other gory details. At any rate I do not think recounting them serves any useful

purpose. One may understand why the government did not want the general public to hear what it was doing against the Muslims.

These are just examples of the discrepancy in information between Muslims and Christians living in the same country. From these different sets of experiences, it would be next to impossible to convince the Muslim that he and his fellow Christian are receiving equal treatment from their government. And likewise, from his knowledge and experience, I do not see how the Christian can acknowledge that there is a pattern of discrimination against Muslims in the country. From the evidence available to him the Christian may reasonably conclude that the injustices experienced by the Muslims are isolated and a result of the general abuse of political power which many citizens suffer irrespective of their ethnicity or religion.

Apart from different sets of experiences there are other factors which have generated a perceptual rift between Muslims and Christians in Tanzania.

The loathsome implications of change

The Waswahili have a saying: Truth is painful. But obviously not every true statement, like say, “You have won the election,” is painful. Truth is painful only when its acknowledgement carries fearsome implications. In the Tanzanian context to admit that there is social injustice implies a preference for change. A preference for change implies that the status quo is bad and should therefore be changed for something better. But what constitutes the better? Better to whom? Let us look at a simple example. It is generally acknowledged that Muslims constitute the majority of jail inmates in Tanzania. When the Prime Minister Mr. Frederick Sumaye inaugurated the first Board of Parole in the country, all the regional board chairpersons were Christians, five of whom were clergymen. The Muslims pointed out the government’s bias in favour of Christians. There were a number of Christians who agreed with the Muslims. *Majira* and *Rai* newspapers strongly criticised the religious composition of the parole board in their editorials. President Benjamin Mkapa disbanded the board. The majority of Muslims were overjoyed and praised him for his fair-mindedness. The majority of Christians were embittered and blamed him for setting a very dangerous precedent. When the new board was announced six months later, fifty percent of the members were Muslims. In this particular case, was the status quo changed for something better? “Definitely yes,” says the Muslim; “Definitely no,” says the Christian. The argument given by the Christian is that competence, not religion should determine appointments. This is the good reason, but the real reason is that in the new board their representation is cut down by fifty percent.

When some Christians denounced President Mkapa for setting a “dangerous” precedent they were right, if they meant dangerous to Christian interests. In almost all public appointments the situation is more or less similar to the earlier Board of Parole. A powerful and sensitive organ like the Tanzania Election Commission is all-Christian. Over ninety five percent of all District Commissioners are Christian. The implications of changing the status quo may be highly desirable to the Muslim but extremely objectionable to the Christian. As a result, the proposition that the present order is unjust is likely to be a bone of fierce contention with the majority of Christians dismissing it as a figment of Muslim imagination. One may appreciate why the laws of natural justice demand that a person cannot serve as judge in a case which he or she is an interested party. No matter how intelligent a man might be how can he fairly decide a case in which his beloved wife is a defendant? How can he possibly accept as sufficient or beyond reasonable doubt the incriminating evidence against her? In fact a friend of mine who is a medical doctor told me that physicians are debarred from performing major operations to people who are so close to them, because they would be too emotionally involved to do it competently. He told me of a case in which a doctor was tried of

manslaughter for operating his wife who died at the operation table. These are human weaknesses. I am prone to them as everyone else is. For example, Tanzania is a poor country and income distribution is both uneven and unfair. But if someone were to argue that for the sake of social justice, my salary should be cut down, I do not think I would easily see the logic of the argument. And I might even marshal evidence not only to justify why my salary should not be cut down, but why it should be increased. But that is precisely why we need, and have governments. As Russell (1938:11) said, "Every man would like to be God, if it were possible." The government should be guided by its ideals and principles, not by what I like or dislike.

The lure of present gain versus future pain

Another common human weakness which may contribute into pushing our country into civil war is the strong enchantment of present comfort compared to the threat of future problems. The joys of present bliss are to most of us very tempting, even if they may lead to future calamities. We would rather continue with our life-styles because we find them pleasurable now even if we know they may lead to cancer or cholesterol build up. As we say in Kiswahili, *ponda mali kufa kwaja*, that is, enjoy yourself now before death overtakes you! Because the political cancer of civil strife has not as yet ravaged our body-politic, the importance of changing our political life style is ignored. If the tragedy of civil war is to be averted in Tanzania, the status quo has to be changed by taking comprehensive and integrated measures as opposed to fragmented and incremental ones. As I have intimated above, the bitterest opposition would come from the beneficiaries of the present order. By its very nature prevention, whether of disease, crime or political turmoil, is often seen as a non-event. It means that nothing has happened! That Tanzania is peaceful is not news worthy. To take far-reaching measures which would prevent future civil strife in a presently peaceful Tanzania would seem to waste time on imagined problems. And success in this regard would merely mean nothing happened. As a result remedies are considered necessary only when it is already too late.

One day in April 1998 as we were having our afternoon tea at the Senior Common Room, University of Dar es Salaam, I told a Christian colleague about the threat of civil strife in our country. He said, of course quite jokingly, "In this age of science and technology, war is waged using highly sophisticated weapons. If you people imagine that you stand a chance of winning a war with swords then you want to commit mass suicide." My friend had conventional war in mind whereas I meant communal violence of the Rwanda or Burundi type. In our situation the superiority of weapons in the hands of any group cannot guarantee peace as it has failed to do so in Burundi. Once initiated the spiral of communal violence perpetuates itself. And to initiate it all you need is a kitchen knife. It will be no consolation to me to know that our group has highly sophisticated weapons, if upon returning home I learn that my youngest daughter was knifed to death along with several other children at their nursery school earlier in the day. And I do not think I would be in a mood to forget such a barbaric act in a hurry. It has happened to our neighbours, it may happen to us.

Political errors of commission versus errors of omission

While the actual break out of civil disturbances in our case may be set in motion by political errors of commission, like those of Mwembechai, the deeper underlying causes are the political errors of omission; what successive governments have failed to do as far as Muslims are concerned. Therefore rectifying errors of commission alone would not stem the tide of mounting political discontent. If the government would

today arrest and try all the people who were responsible for the wanton killings at Mwembechai, that alone would not satisfy Muslims. The lasting solution lies in structured social justice.

Mr. John Malecela, the Vice Chairman of CCM which is the current ruling party in Tanzania was quoted by a Kiswahili daily newspaper *Majira* of 5 April, 1999 as saying that if Vice President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and Presidents Laurent Kabila of Congo, Pierre Buyoya of Burundi, Daniel arap Moi of Kenya, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania were to die and required to give their accounts before God Almighty, only Mkapa would go to Heaven. The rest would be thrown into Hell-fire because of the killings which take place in their countries as a result of incessant civil wars. My interest here is not in Malecela's eschatological knowledge, but in his neglect of errors of omission. What about deaths which are a result of brutal neglect? In 1999 in Mahenge district alone, at least 45 people died of hunger at a time when the country had enough food to save their lives. The problem was reported in the newspapers, but the then DC of Mahenge Mr. Pachomius Ukugani said people were dying of witchcraft! And Mahenge was not the only district in which people were reported to have died of famine. In apartheid South Africa black people were the majority in prisons. Why is it that in Independent Tanzania Christians should be the majority in secondary schools, colleges and in government employment and Muslims should be the majority in prisons even after forty years of governing ourselves? To borrow the words used in the editorial of *The East African* (February 8-14,1999) 'Could it be true that a "John Mtanzania" is sometimes favoured over a "Suleiman Mwananchi"?'

The second level of errors of omission involves every Tanzanian who is mature enough to vote. The promotion and protection of social justice is the responsibility of every member of society, including those who are being treated unjustly. It is socially and morally wrong to acquiesce to injustice. Muslims have a moral and political responsibility to expose and to fight against all forms of social injustice and discrimination, even if their efforts would always end in failure. Heroic failure in fighting injustice is far better than success in entrenching an unjust order. If Muslims stand up against injustice, their situation may not become better, but at least it may not become worse. Non-Muslims should also stand up against cruelty even if it is directed against Muslims, because as Professor Issa Shivji said at a public talk on the Mwembechai killings, police brutality is not a cap which one decides when to put on, it is dangerously addictive. He said in the 1975 Mwanza and Shinyanga killings four high ranking leaders took political responsibility and resigned. In the 1980 Kilombero killings no one took political responsibility but at least some officials were disciplined. In the Mwembechai killings not even a probe team had been set up. He said that was a dangerous signal to the police. And he was right. Several other killings have taken place since Mwembechai. There is a proverb in my Ngoni ethnic group which says the younger wife should throw away the stick which her husband had used to beat the senior wife.

The combination of these factors makes the political crisis smouldering in Tanzania rather complex. Its solution would not be easy either. The Mwembechai killings illustrate our political dilemma. But what actually happened at Mwembechai? The following chapter addresses that question.