



The Weaponization of Identity and Citizenship: The Case of Tanzania

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Abstract

The article explores the weaponization of identity and citizenship in Tanzania that is becoming increasingly authoritarian. It illustrates the types of discriminations that a citizen can face for not affiliating with the ruling political party, from unemployment to statelessness; even refugees escaping persecution can't find refuge and are expelled in such a climate.

Keywords Refugees · Citizenship · Discrimination · Political violence · Human rights · Poverty · Budget allocation

Tanzania's track record of leadership in Africa's liberation struggle from 1960 to 1994 earned it a reputation for a foreign policy stance that was demonstrably anchored in the principles of the basic and inalienable dignity of the human person. The country's success, relative to its neighbours, of forging a cohesive nation and identity out of a salad bowl of communities and ethnicities, imbued it with an additional veneer of exceptionalism. Tanzania was different, and in a good way.

But can a country go from being a beacon of hope to the disenfranchised leaders of African liberation struggles, from providing freedom fighters with shelter, security, new identities complete with citizenship rights such as education, jobs and passports, to denying, disowning and discriminating against its own citizens? How can this happen in a country with a hard-won reputation for achieving an uncommon level of inclusion and cosmopolitanism? How has ethnic, social or political identity been weaponized by a government against its own people in a country as 'exceptional' as Tanzania?

This essay looks at the experience of Zanzibaris seeking government jobs without a ruling party membership card, the withholding of public funds from opposition-leaning constituencies, alternative voices whose citizenship has been put into question, and the expedient dispatch of Burundian refugees to an uncertain home and future.

The Partisan Job Market in Zanzibar

In Chonga, Pemba Island, during one of the opposition party, ACT-Wazalendo, meetings with members and the general public, a woman of about 40 years of age accused the government of semi-autonomous Zanzibar of having established a discriminatory employment system (Wazalendo TV 2019).

The party was on a country tour to meet citizens and solicit their views on various issues as it prepares its manifesto for the forthcoming 2020 general elections. In that meeting, the woman was asking the party to intervene and end the discrimination. She suggested that employment opportunities should be offered on the basis of merit rather than political affiliation.

She was speaking on behalf of thousands, and though the government has always been dismissing these accusations as false, random interviews carried out by one of the authors of this article with people who had experienced employment discrimination challenge the government's denials.

It is hard to understand the prevailing silence surrounding the systematic discrimination and collective punishment of people whose only crime in the eyes of the powers that be is the enjoyment of their constitutional freedom to choose which political party to join or political views to subscribe to.

In Zanzibar, an island of about 1.3 million people according to the National Census of 2012, being a member of the ruling party Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) confers distinct advantages with respect to government employment opportunities where one's qualifications matter less than one's party affiliation.

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Stories abound of people having been suspended from the civil service or denied employment opportunities within the government because of their failure to prove their *Zanzibari-ness*, by being a card-carrying member of CCM. In a country whose political contest is between two largely equally popular political parties, CCM and the Civic United Front (CUF). It is an unwritten rule, that if one or one's family belongs, or even is suspected of belonging, to the opposition party one can count themselves out of the civil service or any government employment.

This reality has made the CCM membership card one of the most sought after assets in Zanzibar. Its value has forced parents to do whatever it takes to get it so as to ensure a prosperous future for their children. Many have struggled to get the party membership card even at a price as high as US\$ 43, which is more than the average daily wage. The CCM membership card is more valuable than the Zanzibar national identity document since it is very hard to obtain the Zanzibari ID without the CCM membership card. Other conditions that must first be met before one can be provided with the card include participating in all party activities in the party branch of one's neighbourhood.

The situation is worse in Pemba, the second-largest island of the Zanzibar archipelago, whose population has a history of supporting the opposition since Tanzania's first multiparty elections in 1995, and thus has been systematically discriminated against (Crisis Group 2019). Youth from Pemba have been known to change their birth certificates to reflect they were born in the main island Unguja instead, the CCM stronghold.

Thousands of university graduates are compelled to leave Pemba, their birthplace, for other parts of the world in order to avoid punishment by the CCM 'cult system' for their parents' political views and affiliations. Those who cannot leave or choose to stay take part in any economic activities to make their ends meet by taking jobs as teachers, doctors, engineers, farmers, fisherfolk, and so on.

This situation also has far-reaching consequences for both the political stability of Zanzibar as a country as well as the accomplishment of its efforts to eradicate poverty and bring development to the people. The animosity that is building in the hearts of those who feel discriminated against is a time-bomb that poses a serious threat to the project of building a just and fair society. Apart from complicating efforts to tackle inequalities, this practice undermines efforts to improve services in the isles by systematically side-lining qualified professionals whose expertise is sorely needed to improve the living conditions of the people.

The World Bank reports come as no surprise when illustrating the poverty rates difference between the two main islands: Unguja saw a modest reduction in the poverty rate by 4.5 percentage points, Pemba saw the poverty rate increase from 48 to 55% between 2010 and 2015. 83%

of Pemba's population resides in rural areas, suggesting that the underdevelopment of the island's urban sector was the main sector for the increase (Belghith and De Boisseson 2017).

The situation in Pemba is particularly worrisome, where poverty and extreme poverty increased, pointing to the deterioration of the economic situation of the island. Poverty increased by respectively 5 and 9 percentage points in North and South Pemba between 2010 and 2015. This increase resulted mainly from a sharp increase of poverty in Pemba's rural areas, where the poverty rate rose by around 8 percentage points (Belghith and De Boisseson 2017).

Zanzibar has a long history of both political and racial discrimination going back to before 1964 when the Sultan of Zanzibar and his mainly Arab government were toppled by local African revolutionaries. The situation nevertheless took a different trajectory after the revolution as racial discrimination was replaced by political discrimination. This form of discrimination intensified with the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1992 when the two major islands took different political positions.

Every election since then has been highly contested with the opposition CUF crying foul and claiming the elections were rigged to ensure CCM retains power. Perhaps the deadliest election was that of 2000 when violence erupted leading to the killing of dozens of people and others seeking refuge abroad (Human Rights Watch 2002). This led to various initiatives to reconcile the two political camps in the Isles culminating in the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) through a referendum in 2010. The GNU lasted for only 5 years as CUF boycotted the repeat election of October 2016 following the controversial annulment of the 2015 general elections that it claimed to have won. CCM formed a government alone given its majority in Zanzibar's House of Representatives. Although CCM invited some opposition politicians to join the government, this was seen as only a means to reclaim legitimacy and preserve the symbolism of the GNU.

The consequences of this development are telling. So far, CCM is the only major actor in running the country's affairs, a fact that has given it a *carte blanche* to act as it pleases including in its relations with dissidents and opposition supporters. The discrimination against people with different political orientation is just one of the consequences Zanzibaris were made to pay for losing their GNU. It was in the realization of this crucial fact that a regional think tank, Kituo cha Katiba, recommended the reintroduction of a government of national unity in Zanzibar to deal with the persistent political crisis (The East African 2019).



The Disproportionate Distribution of Resources

The chairman of the CCM youth wing (UVCCM), Mr. Kheri James, shocked many when he said in August 2018 that the government would only take development initiatives to areas where his party had won the elections, adding that CCM alone decided whether to bring about development or not in a given area (Said 2018).

The CCM patterns of resource redistribution to constituents have been an issue of contentious debate with accusations and counter-accusations being traded between the party's loyalists and critics. However, CCM has denied accusations that the government's expenditure favours its strongholds and ignores the areas where the opposition prevails.

That the Tanzanian government directs a disproportionate amount of expenditure to the most loyal districts was the main hypothesis of the study 'The Politics of Government Expenditures in Tanzania, 1999–2007.' Using data on annual observations for the period 1998–2007, for 114 Tanzanian districts, the study revealed that CCM allocated higher levels of per capita budget expenditures to those districts that it had won with a large margin of victory, while giving lower levels of per capita budget expenditures to districts that voted with a higher degree for the opposition party.

Published in the *Journal of African Studies Review* in 2011, the study took advantage of a shift in the tax regime which saw the abolition of the local development levy in 2003–2004 (Weinstein 2011). Even though this tax constituted the primary revenue source for local government authorities, the government abolished it in response to widespread protests that enforcement was uneven and that the taxpayers did not receive commensurate benefits in the form of improved public services.

The abolition of the local development levy provided Laura Weinstein, the researcher of the study (which won the 2010 graduate student essay prize from the African Studies Association), with a convenient benchmark by which she could examine the government's budgetary moves in 2004–2005. Since the government abolished the development levy between 2003 and 2004 and replaced the lost revenue with a block grant during the 2004–2005 cycle, the researcher analyzed the net gain or loss in the change of budget allocation to determine whether or not a district was targeted to receive a greater or smaller percentage of expenditures.

The study found out that the government reduced expenditures toward opposition and marginally supportive districts that did not significantly increase the vote share to above 60% for the ruling party during the 2000 election. Arusha, Ilala, Kinondoni, Temeke, Bukoba, Moshi, and Mwanza districts all received drastic decreases in the rate at which

lost revenues were replaced with expenditures. Furthermore, the government increased the budget rate in neighbouring districts in the same region where the districts did increase the vote share for the government after the first election. This demonstration effect is evidenced in both the Arumeru district in Arusha and Biharamulo district in Kagera where the districts increased vote shares to above 60% after the first election.

In sum, the abolition of the development levy, and the subsequent block grant distributed by the government in 2005 to make up for the loss in revenue, enabled the government to reduce budget shares without raising red flags about the allocation process. It gave the government an opportunity to strategically manipulate the 'replacement' of lost revenue for political purposes.

Citizenship as a Weapon

In the political climate described above even citizenship is weaponized. Many Tanzanians, including human rights defenders, religious leaders, lawyers, politicians, journalists, researchers and student leaders, have had their citizenship questioned after sharing views deemed critical of government.

The co-author of this article, Aidan Eyakuze, is currently going through this fascinating experience. Mr. Eyakuze's passport was withdrawn by the Immigration Department in August 2018, a few weeks after *Twaweza East Africa*, the organization he leads, released an opinion poll indicating that the popularity of President John Magufuli had declined significantly between 2016 and 2018. His passport continues to be held by the Tanzanian authorities while they claim to be investigating his citizenship.

According to section 5(1) of the Tanzania Citizenship Act 1995,¹

every person born in the United Republic on or after Union Day [24 April, 1964] shall be deemed to have become and to have continued to be a citizen of the United Republic with effect from the date of his birth, and with effect from the commencement of this Act shall become and continue to be a citizen of the United Republic, subject to the provisions of section 30.

Mr. Eyakuze was born in Mwanza, in the United Republic of Tanzania, on January 15, 1969, 4 years and 9 months *after* Union Day. Section 4(1) of the Tanzania Citizenship Act 1995 also provides that,

¹ <http://citizenshiprightsafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Tanzania-Citizenship-Act-1995.pdf> (accessed on 17 January 2020).



Every person who, having been born in Mainland Tanzania or in Zanzibar before Union Day, was immediately before Union Day a citizen of the Republic of Tanganyika or of the People's Republic of Zanzibar shall be deemed to have become, on Union Day, and, with effect from Union Day, subject to section 30, to have continued, and after the commencement of this Act shall continue, to be a citizen by birth of the United Republic.

Both of Aidan Eyakuze's parents were born in Mainland Tanzania in 1930 and 1944 respectively. Thus, they too fulfil this condition of citizenship. According to the law therefore, Aidan Eyakuze is a citizen of the United Republic of Tanzania both by birth and by parentage. It is worth noting that none of his immediate family have had their citizenship questioned in any way by the government. This investigation into his citizenship therefore seems to be a way for the government to exercise some kind of pressure on him individually.

This action is by no means new or unique. In October 2017, the Tanzanian authorities questioned human rights activist Onesmo Olungurumwa, a development he associated with his activism especially regarding Maasai's land rights in Loliondo, Arusha. At that time, Mr. Olungurumwa, who is the national coordinator of the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) had reported that more than 100 Maasai huts had been burned down, allegedly, by game reserve authorities near the Serengeti National Park.

In 2014, the advocate of High Court of Tanzania Albert Msando was interrogated by the Immigration officers from Kilimanjaro over his nationality. Msando was interrogated while he was defending the Kigoma Urban Member of Parliament Mr. Zitto Kabwe in court in a case against Chama Cha Demokrasia Na Maendeleo (Chadema). The former chairman of Tanzania Students Network Programme (TSNP), Mr. Abdul Nondo, and the Full Gospel Bible Fellowship Church Bishop Zachary Kakobe also had their citizenship investigated. Both have made public statements which may displeased the incumbent administration in the country.

On 12 February 2002 the Mkapa government denied citizenship to Jenerali Ulimwengu, an advocate of High Court and Chairman of the Board of the weekly newspaper, *Raia Mwema*, after he had been declared by the government to be stateless a year earlier. Given that Mr. Ulimwengu had served the country in various senior public positions including being a member of parliament, this was a surprise. He was not given reasons for the denial of citizenship nor has he been furnished with the content of the objections said to have been raised against his application. It is speculated that he clashed with the administration of President Benjamin Mkapa, whose election campaign in 1995 he had helped

lead. In 2004, after applying for it, he was granted citizenship by naturalization.

Forceful Repatriation of Vulnerable Non-citizens

The victims of citizenship weaponization by the Tanzanian state are not limited to Tanzanian nationals. The discrimination affects refugees seeking asylum in Tanzania fleeing conflicts from countries such as Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In September 2019, Amnesty International reported on a leaked confidential document detailing a bilateral agreement by Tanzanian authorities and their Burundian counterparts, to repatriate Burundian refugees 'with or without refugees' consent'. This was described as 'extremely shocking' by Mr. Seif Magango, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes. Hundreds of Burundians have been killed in clashes with security forces since 2015, when President Pierre Nkurunziza ran for a disputed third term in office (Amnesty International 2019).

It is extremely shocking that the Government of Tanzania is willing to send people against their will to a place the UN has deemed requires close monitoring as crimes against humanity and serious human rights violations continue unchecked.

In October, after the government of Tanzania initiated the process of mass repatriation, the country's president John Magufuli said that the Burundian refugees must return home as their country had stabilized and there was no reason for them to continue staying in Tanzania. 'Go back to your home... don't insist on staying in Tanzania as refugees or expect citizenship while Burundi is now stable', Magufuli said during a rally in Katavi region near a large refugee camp in north-western Tanzania. (Ng'wanakilala 2019).

Final Thoughts

Is Tanzania exceptional? Arguably, for a period in its recent post-independent history, the country achieved some exceptional results: successful nation-building and unflinching support for the complete decolonization of the continent. But as the global community of nations becomes more parochial and turns its back on collective action, far from bucking the trend, Tanzania reflects such currents. The use of state power to exclude and intimidate people, even weaponize identity or affiliation, comes naturally for an administration with an authoritarian instinct. On that score, as this essay's explorations suggest, Tanzania is no longer exceptional.



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