Bridging Divided Identities – or an Agency of Political Domination? Reassessing the Future of the Tanzanian Union

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1. Introduction

Tanzania is often portrayed as an African success story of state and nation-building, surrounded by neighbouring countries which have been ridden by conflicts and grave human rights violations during the post-colonial period. The successive Tanzanian governments have, by most observers, been characterised as fairly benign and accountable, although the radical *ujamaa* policy has in retrospect been increasingly criticised.\(^1\) Despite this weakness of an indigenous brand of African socialism, the ‘father of the nation’, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, has left a legacy of political tolerance and nationhood on line with few other African independence leaders. This is in particular noteworthy considering the fact that Tanzania is a political Union, established in 1964 by the two independent, sovereign states of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The success of the Tanzanian polity is partly based on developing and formulating a *national* political discourse, where ethnic or parochial sentiments have been muted. This legacy of Nyerere has seemingly forged a vibrant and all-embracing Tanzanian identity. Or, this is how it was perceived until the fall of the single-party doctrine in the early 1990s.

The introduction of a multiparty democratic system in Tanzania in 1992, and thus the broadening of civil and political rights in the country, has inspired a renewed interest in the Union. A number of questions have been raised, challenging the Union system as inherited from the Nyerere era: Is the Tanzanian Union an equally relevant label or category of identity among all its citizens? Has it managed to bridge the divided identities among the mainlanders and islanders? Is the Union, as it operates today, an adequate organisational model that accommodates the political aspirations

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of all its peoples? Is the distribution of the Union’s economic assets fair, and does the system give equal opportunities to business enterprises from both sides of the Union? And, more specifically, is the Union arrangement capable of upholding and guaranteeing the right of political autonomy for Zanzibar?

By reassessing the future of the Tanzanian Union, I argue that the dominant part of the Union – the mainland – has become too strong in administering the Union framework and principles. The process of centralising power on behalf of the mainland has thus inspired a counter-force on the isles advocating for stronger autonomy. This movement has gathered strength since the Union government does not enforce and respect ‘the rules of the game’ equally in the two composite parts of the Union; since the Zanzibar government practice a more authoritarian and human rights abusing form of governance. It is thus plausible to argue that the violations of human rights in Zanzibar inhibit the creation and maintenance of an ‘overarching’ loyalty to the Union.

The issue of the Tanzanian Union deserves our attention in order to reassess its future development trends. Due to the length limitations of this publication, this article will restrict its focus to analyse how the issue of the Union appears in a Zanzibari political discourse. Two points will be emphasised in that concern: the issue of identity under the Union; and the effect the troubled democratisation process has had on the perception of the Union. The Zanzibari political discourse is selected since the opposition to the Union framework is most prominent on the isles. Focusing particularly on current affairs, the article will also address the Muafaka political reconciliation accord, which was entered into by the government party Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and the opposition party Civic United Front (CUF) in 2001, after the failed 2000 elections and the ensuing violence. This is relevant, since the Muafaka Accord is an instrument designed to accommodate the different political and cultural aspirations on the isles originating from the inherent tensions created by the Union. The article will end by drawing some conclusions on the sustainability of the Union.

2. Theoretical Pointers

It is often argued that federal solutions contribute favourably to democratic conflict resolution by containing and dispersing conflict. They reduce heterogeneity within the population at large by splitting powers, hence allowing limited self-government along regional or ‘cultural’ lines. However, recent studies have criticized the inherent problems of certain federal models, and drawn attention to possible negative effects of democratisation. Three such theoretical assumptions are in particular relevant to the Tanzanian case. Firstly, federalist theory claims ‘coming-together’ federalism (as Tanzania represents) is more likely to be unstable and collapse than the conventional type of ‘holding-together’ federalism, where a unitary state splits up in

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