

The Recurrence of Political Conflicts in Zanzibar: The Ultimate Resort to Consolidating a Democratic Culture?

Richard Mbunda* |ORCID: 0000-0002-6895-0868

Department of Political Science and Public Administration,
The University of Dar es Salaam
Email: mbunda@gmail.com

Abstract

Six general elections have been held in Zanzibar after the reintroduction of multi-party politics in 1992. A longitudinal analysis of the Zanzibar political context indicates that from the first general election, which was held in 1995, to the sixth election in 2020, the electoral results have been intensely contested, and at times followed by electoral violence and a lasting political stalemate known locally as '*Mpasuko wa Kisiasa*'. While these electoral contestations and violence are evident, they are also mere symptoms of the struggle. The real reasons and the underlying causes of the conflict lie deeper in the malfunctioning democratic system manifested through the absence of a level playing field, allegations of election rigging, harassment of opposition supporters and refusal to honor the voters' will. Drawing on Mao Tse-tung's theory of contradiction, this paper interrogates the underlying issues under dispute within the broader discourse of democratic consolidation. The paper presents the nature of the conflict as a recourse to democratic consolidation, in an attempt to push for both institutional reforms and building a democratic culture. It argues that the conflict is an inevitable cause, perpetuated in defence of democracy defined in both political and material sense, and that the durable resolution of the conflict does not depend on the will of individual actors but initiatives targeting societal healing and undertaking democratic reforms.

Keywords

Elections, Conflicts, Political Impasse, Democratic Reforms, Zanzibar

1. Introduction

Is conflict necessarily a bad thing in society? In the context of democratic transition and democratic consolidation, how do we assess political conflicts between contending groups? Are political conflicts always inimical to the democratization process? The democratic system is touted to ensure the existence of institutions and processes that allow for the expression of diverse interests and perspectives, ensuring accountability and reducing domination (Axtmann, 2013). What happens in a situation where democracy has not taken root to be able to perform these roles? For example, in a situation where one of the parties exercises dominance by any means, even at the expense of other group (s), how can a democratic culture be consolidated?

This paper attempts to address these key interrelated questions regarding conflicts and the democratic consolidation in Zanzibar. The paper intends, inter alia, to provoke a debate on

the trend and conditions essential for democratic consolidation by taking into consideration whether or not conflicts have any positive role in the process. The paper begins by interrogating the widely held belief that democracy as a system of governance endures contradictions and provides mechanisms to mitigate conflicts (Munck, 2014; Bastian & Luckham, 2003). In this case, therefore, the paper looks at the Zanzibar political conflict, between the two opposing sides, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) versus the Civic United Front (CUF) and currently ACT Wazalendo as to whether it is an impediment to or a force that propels the consolidation of the democratic culture. The paper challenges the conventional wisdom on political conflict that views conflicts as inherently negative by emphasizing the transformative effect of political conflicts in consolidating democratic norms.

This paper is structured in seven parts. The first section introduces the topic by examining the positive role of conflicts in building a democratic culture. Parts two through four provide a theoretical and historical overview, conceptualizing democracy, summarizing Zanzibar's political history, and discussing its democratic transition. Parts five and six analyze the core question: whether political conflicts are a hindrance or a tool for consolidating a democratic culture in Zanzibar. The paper concludes in part seven.

2. Conceptualizing Democracy

The debate on what democracy is or what is not remains inconclusive. This paper does not intend to engage in an intellectual show down between liberal and Marxist scholars regarding democracy, but rather will narrow down to territorial limits of the debates on democracy which has been active from the past three decades, specifically the narrow and comprehensive meanings of democracy (Sorensen, 1993: 9). The narrow meaning of democracy is quite often equated with individual enjoyment of civil and political rights. Joseph Schumpeter (in Sorensen 1993) and Axtmann (2013), for example, perceive democracy as a political system where leaders gain authority to make decisions by competing for citizens' votes. But democracy is more than voting and the enjoyment of civil and political rights.

The comprehensive view of democracy was advanced by Held (2006), who, apart from embracing civil and political rights, went further to consider other important aspects like equal rights and obligations, an accountable state and the presence of civil society. Rights in this context are not only political, but also social and economic rights. As such, this paper adopts this comprehensive meaning of democracy in the analysis. It relies on the earlier thoughts of scholars like Tandon (1979), who, in the first place, do not perceive 'democracy as a mere idea'. Yash Tandon, for example, understands democracy as a historical human struggle that is defined in terms of material question. Thus, taking the Zanzibar context in perspective, this struggle is far from over. If efforts are made or should be made to ensure these key defining features of (comprehensive) democracy are met, they will eventually consolidate a democratic culture.

For this paper, democratic consolidation is defined as the political reforms essential to creating a level playing field for all parties in elections, a process by which democracy becomes deeply institutionalized and widely accepted as the "only game in town," ensuring its stability and resilience against authoritarian regression (Egwu, 2010; Axtmann, 2013). This process aims to establish stable, functioning democratic governance through consensus-driven decision-making, conflict resolution, and the creation of institutions that ensure a mutually beneficial political environment (Nassor & Jose, 2014). In Zanzibar, this means reducing partisan division and preventing state bodies like security forces from being used to benefit the ruling CCM or to suppress the opposition (Minde, Roop & Tronvoll 2018).

3. The Political History of Zanzibar: A Synopsis

Although Zanzibar forms part of the United Republic of Tanzania following the union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar of 1964, it has a completely different political history that deserves a separate analysis. Substantial studies, including Lofchie (1963), Mukangara (2000), Mbwiliza (2000), and Ramadhani (2000), note that pre-independence inter-party conflicts were fuelled by racism and ethnicity. Accordingly, politics in Zanzibar was configured along racial and ethnic lines with major political parties organised along 'Arab', 'Afro-Shiraz' and 'African' identities (Lofchie, 1963; Mukangara, 2000). The Arab based Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) was formed in December 1955, and its counterpart, the Afro-Shiraz Party (ASP) was formed in 1957, as the union of the African Association and the Shiraz Association. The formation of ASP, however, was not a smooth endeavour. Due to a stronger cultural affinity with Arabs than with mainland Africans, the Shirazi Association initially considered a merger with the ZNP (Mukangara, 2000). The African and Shirazi associations were at odds until the end of 1956, when the President of Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), Julius Nyerere, visited Zanzibar to persuade the two associations to join forces against colonial oppression (Lofchie, 1963). After protracted negotiations, the leaders of the two Associations finally joined to form ASP, on the condition that each association should retain its identity. However, the ASP factions could not withstand the tribulations and trials, especially those associated with the ZNP's attempt to win the hearts of some Shiraz members of the ASP. This led some of the Shiraz members to defect from ASP to form the Zanzibar and Pemba People's Party (ZPPP) in 1959. ZPPP was formed by the Shirazi who felt that ASP was heavily dominated by Africans of Mainland origin. As such, although the major conflict was between the ZNP and the ASP in elections, ZPPP was automatically involved for siding with ZNP.

During the January 1961 elections, the three parties campaigned vigorously along ethnic and racial lines. In the election results, ASP edged ahead of ZNP by one seat, while ZPPP, which is regarded to be the spoiler, levelled the number of seats to a tie when two of the ZPPP's 3 seats went to ZNP, and 1 seat went to ASP (Killian & Mbunda, 2010). The British colonial masters then carved out a constituency in Pemba to break the deadlock. As the new constituency was carved out in a ZPPP stronghold in Pemba, ASP felt that the intent was to give ZNP the victory (of which the ZNP/ZPPP alliance actually won) in the re-run of the election in June 1961.

The June 1961 election triggered violent clashes, resulting in the deaths of sixty-five Africans and three Arabs (Ramadhani, 2000). Over 350 individuals sustained injuries, and numerous arrests were made. In response to the unrest, a constitutional conference was convened in Lancaster in 1962. The ZNP/ZPPP alliance demanded immediate independence, while the ASP pushed for fresh elections. The British authorities introduced eight new constituencies, a move that secured another electoral victory for the ZNP/ZPPP coalition in 1963 (Ramadhani, 2000; Othman, 2006). Notably, although the ASP won 54% of the popular vote, it secured only 13 out of 31 seats (Ramadhani, 2000). On December 9, 1963, at midnight, independence was granted to Sultan Jamshid, who led the ZNP-ZPPP government. However, the African population rejected the legitimacy of the new ruling coalition. This discontent culminated in a violent revolution in 1964, which brought the ASP to power. The new revolutionary government abolished rival political parties and suspended the constitution.

A revolution is a violent approach to conflict management where the stronger party tries to obliterate the opponent once and for all (Luttwak, 2001). In Zanzibar, in making sure that a new order was created, Abeid Karume, the President of the Revolutionary Government, declared, "There will be no elections in the isles for 50 years" (Mapuri, 1996: 66). As such, the

Revolutionary Government managed to suppress political outbursts in the isles for almost 28 years. One feature of Karume's regime was political exclusion for those who could not come to terms with the ASP. Political exclusion, however, was perpetuated by ASP leaders even after President Karume was shot dead in 1972. For instance, Seif Sharif Hamad, a leading political figure in Pemba, was dismissed from both his government position and the party in 1988. Hamad had held several high-ranking positions, including Chief Minister under interim President Ali Hassan Mwinyi in 1984, and was reappointed to the same role by President Idris Abdul-Wakil in 1985. Following the 1992 constitutional amendment permitting multiparty democracy, Hamad—along with other former revolutionary government officials, including Hamad Rashid Mohammed, Shaaban Khamis Mlool, and Ali Haji Pandu—founded the opposition party CUF. By the time multiparty elections resumed in 1995, CUF had garnered significant support, especially in Pemba, emerging as the main opposition force against CCM.

The CUF's dominant position weakened in 2019 following the defection of Seif Sharif Hamad and his faithful followers, who joined ACT Wazalendo. This defection was fuelled by Prof. Ibrahim Lipumba, who had resigned as the party's chair in 2015 in public but reinstated himself in 2016 in what was viewed as a state-engineered coup. This was especially after the Registrar of Political Parties blessed Prof. Lipumba's chairmanship. For three years, Seif Sharif Hamad and other CUF leaders sought the Court's intervention to declare Lipumba's chairmanship illegal, but the Court ruled in favour of Prof. Lipumba (REDET, 2020). Mr. Hamad's crossing to ACT Wazalendo left the CUF feebly depleted (Ibid). Therefore, ACT Wazalendo became the main opposition in Zanzibar, inheriting the CUF's political struggle. Since then, it has become, in principle, the CCM's arch political rival.

Thus, historically, Zanzibar politics has revolved around political contestations centred on marginalisation and violation of rights. We saw earlier that Pemba was persecuted by the Revolutionary regime because of their alliance with the ZNP in the pre-independence elections. Likewise, CUF supporters suffered from persecution by the post-revolution regime because of their anti-CCM stance (CUF, 2008). Studies show that CCM in Zanzibar has used a policy-making power to favour its stronghold, Unguja, and to punish its dissidents from Pemba (Mukangara 2000; Bakari 2001). At the centre of this denial of rights are 'politicized' security forces who have harassed opposition supporters in rallies and even when they demanded their rights to register for voting (Maalim, 2006; Killian & Mbunda, 2010; Minde et al., 2018).

4. The Democratic Transition in Zanzibar

Many studies have been carried out focusing on the democratization process in Tanzania and Zanzibar in particular. Three studies offer a specific focus of the democratic transition in consonance with the main line of argumentation in this article, which are Bakari (2001), Sansa (2004) and Makulilo (2007). These studies share a common conclusion that CCM has controlled the democratic transition in Tanzania and Zanzibar in particular to ensure that it continues to remain in power. Bakari (2001), for example, studied specifically the Zanzibar case and his major conclusion was that the democratization process in Zanzibar was deliberately retarded by the ruling political elites. Of particular importance is the mode of transition. By looking at the various modes of transition developed by Karl and Schmitter (1997), which are pact, reform, revolution or imposition, Bakari (2001), Sansa (2004) and Makulilo (2007) are of the view that the mode of democratic transition in Tanzania and Zanzibar, in particular, was imposition. Bakari seems to suggest that at the time of transition to democracy, the regime in power was stronger than the opposition, thus making the democratization process to be decided, managed and controlled by the ruling clique.

It can, therefore, be argued that since the transition was monopolized by the authoritarian-cum-revolutionary regime in both the union and Zanzibar, the regime made sure that the transition process did not affect their interests. Bakari refers to this as 'transition from above', where genuine democracy cannot be anticipated (Bakari, 2001: 41). Just like at the union level, the Revolutionary government therefore controlled the scope, pace and even the timing of the transition (Makulilo, 2007). As such, the democratization process was carefully crafted in such a way that the rules of the game continue to favor the ruling regime. Both in Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar, the legal and institutional framework is crafted or modified in such a way that it can ensure continuity and dominance of the ruling CCM.

It is because of this mode of transition, many impediments can be delineated that hinder the smooth operation of opposition parties in Zanzibar, as well as the existence of genuine democracy. Many of these impediments are discussed by previous research, including Bakari (2001) and Makulilo (2007). To start with, 'the mother law'- the constitution, the introduction of multiparty politics required a new constitution to provide new rules of political competition. However, the Zanzibar constitution, as was the case for the Union constitution, was just slightly amended¹. Whereas Act No. 4 of 1992 amended the Union constitution to allow multiparty politics, the Zanzibar constitution was amended in Article 5. However, just like Article 41(7) of the Union constitution of 1977, Article 34 (7) of the Zanzibar constitution of 1984 as amended from time to time provides that "when a candidate is declared by the Electoral Commission to have been duly elected in accordance with this Article, then no court of law shall have any power to inquire into the election of that candidate." This provision has two implications: first, it gives the election management body unlimited power, which is not good for a democratic culture. That is to say, even if the presidential election has been obviously rigged, so long as the Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC) declares a presidential candidate a victor its decision is final and conclusive. Secondly, this provision shuts hopes of the losing candidate (s) to seek a judicial remedy.

The impartiality of ZEC has been questioned by many analysts (TEMCO, 2005; Makulilo, 2007). Questions are raised regarding the Presidential power to appoint members of the commission and ZEC's resource dependence. On the Presidential appointment, although *Muafaka II* reorganized the appointment process², which is now adopted in Article 119 of the Zanzibar constitution, the President of Zanzibar still exercises unlimited influence. A central issue is the President's authority to appoint the five members of the electoral commission, who naturally would be expected to be the president's loyalists. Such power can be used intentionally to the disadvantage of rival political parties. For instance, in 2009, when the CUF leadership provided a ranked list of potential appointees for ZEC, President Amani Abeid Karume, to the party's immense frustration, picked the two lowest-ranked candidates from the roster. This act clearly illustrated how the executive discretion vested in the President can undermine the wishes of the opposition (Mbunda, 2010).

¹ By Union constitution we refer to the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977.

² *Muafaka II* was a political reconciliation pact signed in Zanzibar in October 2001 between the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and the opposition Civic United Front (CUF), following contentious elections in 2000. The term *Muafaka*—Swahili for "agreement" or "reconciliation"—reflects its purpose. Under *Muafaka II*, the Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC) was restructured to include: Two members each from CCM and CUF; A chairperson, appointed by the president based on qualifications; Two members selected by the Zanzibar president upon recommendation from the House of Representatives' government leader; One High Court judge appointed by the president; and One additional member appointed at the president's discretion. These provisions were later enshrined in Chapter 9 of the Zanzibar Constitution.

Regarding resource dependence, it is important to categorize resources into two: financial and personnel. To run its activities, ZEC needs funds from the government and donors (TEMCO 2005). As such, the government uses the funds as a 'stick and carrot' to coerce or induce ZEC to abide by its wishes. Similarly, during elections, ZEC utilizes civil servants to serve as its Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers (Ibid.). Henceforth, the regime in power not only uses its employees who work for ZEC to influence the commission's decisions, even ZEC has also been unable to control some of these government employees who act maliciously in favor of the incumbent party, CCM.

The transitional framework also provided the ruling party with a significant and unfair advantage over opposition parties. This is due to a phenomenon Makulilo (2007) describes as an "informal fusion" between the party and the state. Makulilo (2007: 112) holds that:

All the amendments in the legal and institutional framework to conform to the multiparty democracy in Tanzania are insignificant. While one can observe some structural reforms, the content and the logical framework of the political system has remained almost intact.

Accordingly, the ruling party and state departments such as electoral management bodies, the security forces, the public service and the national assembly (in Zanzibar, the House of Representatives), as well as the civil society, the business community and the media operate in partnership (Makulilo, 2007). As such, CCM has been enjoying immense support from these bodies to successfully exercise electoral authoritarianism and remain in power. As Maalim (2006) once remarked, while state-party fusion has weakened the opposition in Mainland Tanzania, in Zanzibar, it has helped CCM Zanzibar to mock democracy.

The mockery of democracy during elections in Zanzibar has resulted in a persistent political conflict between CCM and the major opposition, previously CUF and later ACT-Wazalendo. In fact, the political conflict in Zanzibar has existed for over 20 years now, although the intensity of the conflict is highly manifest during the election period. The conflict is characterized by sporadic acts of violence, grassroots hostilities, mutual distrust, and a continuing political impasse. According to Ramadhani (2017), this conflict is characteristically deep-seated and a protracted struggle rooted in identity politics, historical grievances, and socio-economic inequalities. Previous studies have considered the conflicts in Zanzibar as an impediment to democratic consolidation (Maliyamkono & Kanyongolo, 2003; Killian, 2008; Shivji, 2006). The subsequent part ponders on this view.

5. The Political Conflict as a Hurdle to Democratic Consolidation

Analysts of the democratization process in Zanzibar are wary of the tug of war between the ruling CCM and the opposition parties (CUF/ACT Wazalendo). The core of the conflict lies in the rules that govern political competition and participation, which are fundamental to a democratic culture. According to Killian (2008), although the first three general elections in Zanzibar have been competitive, the prospect for consolidation of a democratic political culture seems to be bleak. Killian (2008) was concerned with the fact that the first three general elections were marred by gross irregularities, fraud, violence and insecurity- conditions that are inimical to the process of building a democratic society. Instead of elections being a tool that allows a smooth transfer of power, elections in Zanzibar have been a source of violence and at times, the rule of law is abrogated, while potential voters are disenfranchised. Unconventionally, there are also attempts by people to carry out an insurrection (Ibid.).

In light of factors advanced by Valenzuela (2000), Killian argues that at least three factors can explain why the democratization process in Zanzibar is stalling. The first factor, according to Killian, is that free elections in Zanzibar are not perceived as a credible means of changing regimes. The relevant actors, including political parties in Zanzibar, do not put trust in elections as a way to create a government. For example, some CCM members argue categorically that, given the fact that they took power through a revolution, they are not ready to give away that power through a ballot box (TEMCO, 2000). CUF, for its part, has often claimed victory during campaigns before the voting (Killian, 2008). As such, CUF/ACT Wazalendo are always prepared to counter any electoral results that would be against their wish.

The second factor that is discussed by Killian is the role of historical memories of the past. These entail "political symbols, institutions, leaders, parties and social organizations that might be a source of division among different segments of the population" (Killian, 2008: 5). The assumption here is that good memories of the past should be shared by all the parties to the conflict to be able to lead them to social harmony. There is clear evidence of division between CCM and CUF/ACT- Wazalendo regarding memories of the past. It is seen that while CCM glorifies the 1964 Revolution, the opposition considers it unjustifiable (Mapuri, 1996; Mbunda, 2010). The Pemba-based CUF/ACT Wazalendo supporters also appear to hold adverse memories of the authoritarian revolutionary government, which persecuted the Pemba people for their siding with Arabs in the pre-independence political struggles and in the elections. While CCM, for its part, still remembers the legacy of slavery, Arab domination, and exploitation. Persistent tensions between the ruling party and the opposition have also been linked to politicization of identities which has led to exclusionary practices, where groups label themselves as "insiders" and others as "aliens" (Ramadhani, 2017).

The last factor discussed by Killian (2008) is the absence of a proper framework for managing social conflicts. The transition to democracy in Zanzibar, Killian argues, was not accompanied by new institutions or even by modifying the old structures that could mitigate the inter-party conflicts. For instance, Killian argues that the majoritarian electoral system has merely heightened the tensions by emphasizing competitive elections without healing the social divisions. This system, it is supposed, has continued to polarize voters between Pemba and Unguja islands. Much as CCM can continue to hold power without winning seats and the Presidential vote in Pemba, it will not make any effort at cross-ethnic campaigns. As such, the CCM government will automatically continue to marginalize Pemba over Unguja since the former is not important to its winning power in Zanzibar.

These arguments on the factors that impede democratization in Zanzibar seem to be very appealing. But it appears to me that this line of thinking presupposes that Zanzibar is in a state where it cannot move forward. If we all agree that Zanzibar was ruled by an 'iron arm' in the post-revolution era, can we also say that its political transition has been moving from authoritarianism to democracy or, as Zakaria (2003) would argue, from authoritarianism to *illiberal* democracy?³ The discussion that follows is whether illiberal democracy in Zanzibar is a permanent state, which most scholars like Killian (2008) seem to suggest, or whether it is a transitional stage, and what role does political conflicts play in that process?

6. Conflicts as a Recourse to Democratic Consolidation

We started with a question whether conflicts are necessarily bad in society. Akerlund (2005) believes that peace and conflict are not incongruous, as conflicts exist even in a peaceful social setting and that a conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. This argument is also supported

³Alternatively, "illiberal democracy" can be termed as "an electoral authoritarian."

by the 20th Century analysts who lived in conflict-prone societies. Of particular interest for this case are scholars of the Marxist tradition who perceive a conflict as an essential condition for society to develop (Tse-tung, 1937). From the Marxist perspective, society is perpetually in conflict due to competition for limited resources, primarily between the competing groups, and that conflicts is a necessary process for societal evolution (Saroj & Dhanju, 2019). Mao Tse-tung referred to conflicts as contradictions. He argued that “every contradiction is an objective reality, and it is our task to understand it and resolve it as correctly as we can” (Tse-tung, 1957: 368)⁴. Tse-tung drew a line between internal contradictions and external contradictions, where an internal incompatibility is the fundamental cause for the development of a society, and the conflicts that may arise from an interaction between one society and another are just secondary. Mao Tse-tung, however, does not dismiss completely the role of external contradictions, as they may bring about change. However, believes that the changes that can occur due to external contradictions are just quantitative rather than qualitative. If we apply Tse-tung’s perspective to the democratic consolidation discourse, we can see that external forces like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and donors influenced only quantitative change in Africa, which can be understood as the adoption of multiparty elections itself. But the qualitative change, which is now the consolidation of democratic culture, has to emerge from the contradictions within the societies concerned. This logic can also apply to the Zanzibar conflicts as a propeller to the consolidation of a democratic culture. How then can this happen?

At the core of the Zanzibar political conflicts, there are about three areas of contention. Over time, CCM has been denying the mere existence of the conflict (Mbunda, 2010). Thus, we consider these areas of contention as the opposition’s demands. One can also notice that initially there were four demands, including the power-sharing demand, which has been implemented, albeit the challenges (Haji, 2024). However, these demands are closely related to the negotiation agenda of the *Muafaka* dialogue, which collapsed in March 2008, and the *maridhiano* process that culminated in the establishment of the government of national unity (GNU) in 2010. Killian & Mbunda (2010) summarise opposition demands in three points:

1. All post-1992 elections have been allegedly rigged! Except for the 2010 and 2020 elections, which the main opposition parties accepted with little or no reservations, the results of the other elections were instantaneously rejected. The opposition has always voiced concerns that the electoral process in Zanzibar is not transparent. They claim that ZEC is biased and manipulates election results to steal their victories.
2. In Zanzibar, there's no fair competition among political parties. The current political system is deliberately structured to benefit CCM to the disadvantage of the opposition parties.
3. There are widespread human rights abuses against opposition supporters, with the ruling party using government forces to torture, intimidate or harass them.

Election rigging, which the opposition parties have complained about since 1995, is the key evidence that the CCM government is not prepared to relinquish power to the opposition

⁴ See-Redspak Collective. (2019). Mao Zedong’s “On Contradiction” Study Companion. Foreign Languages Press <https://foreignlanguages.press-> where the Chinese word for “contradiction” is made up of two characters: “mao” or spear and “dun” or shield. The word’s origins are from a 3rd century China story where a traveling merchant selling spears and shields boasted to one customer that his spears were the best in the world and could pierce any shield and to another that his shields were impervious to any spear. When a bystander asked what would happen if the spear and shield came into contact the merchant was caught in the contradiction and thus the word “mao dun” was born – literally: spear shield.

parties. In the 1995 presidential election in Zanzibar, ZEC declared the CCM presidential candidate, Dr. Salmin Amour was the victor with a slim majority of 50.2% against CUF's presidential candidate Seif Sharif Hamad, who got 49.8%. Reports from both domestic and international election observers highlighted significant discrepancies in the presidential vote count. For example, a 1995 statement from donor countries—including Belgium, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, the United States, and the United Kingdom—declared that the numbers released by ZEC did not match those recorded at the polling stations (Donor Countries, 1995).

The 2000 general elections saw a serious mismanagement pushing CUF to stage nationwide demonstrations on January 26th and 27th 2001 (Karume, 2004).⁵ The CUF's mission was to ensure that Zanzibar undergo a comprehensive democratic reform. For instance, apart from calls for a repeat of the 2000 general election, CUF demanded a new constitution, both the union and the Zanzibar constitution and the reconstitution of the Tanzania National Election Commission (NEC) and ZEC to make them independent. The CCM government deployed forces to stop CUF, which resulted in physical confrontation.⁶ It is this physical confrontation that eventually compelled the disputants to negotiate. Although the accord that resulted from the negotiation was more of a 'cease fire' (Heilman, 2004), or a strategy by CCM Zanzibar to contain CUF's outburst (Mbunda, 2010), it still set a precedent for the major grievances of the opposition and the basis for political reforms in Zanzibar. While ZEC takes much of the blame for failing to conduct free and fair elections, the violent acts that followed CUF's nationwide demonstrations on January 26 and 27 forced the parties to negotiate *Muafaka II*. One of the significant issues they agreed on in *Muafaka II* was the establishment of the Permanent Voters Register (PVR). The PVR, updated before elections, serve as a guiding register of who is entitled to vote and the denominator of how many voters have actually voted. Although Zanzibar witnessed irregularities in voting in 2005, the PVR served as a check on the manipulation of the number of voters. It also reduced previous claims of disenfranchising opposition supporters during the voter registration process. If well managed, the PVR can, in the long run, ensure a smooth voting in Zanzibar.

The second major outcome of the conflict is the restructuring of ZEC to include political representation among the commissioners. The CUF/ACT Wazalendo and CCM could now appoint their representatives to the commission. Although the presence of CUF/ACT-Wazalendo representatives in ZEC has not fully prevented its malicious conduct, at least it enables the opposition to know what transpires within the ZEC circles, thus making it easy for them to expose whatever injustices. A good case was in 2015 when the two commissioners representing CUF exposed the unilateral decision of ZEC Chairman, Mr. Jecha Salum Jecha, to annul the election. The 2015 election, despite being praised by national and international observers as the best-run election on the Isles, the process was marred by controversy. The CUF claimed victory based on their independent tally, but ZEC Chairman unilaterally annulled

⁵ Voting materials were not available in some polling stations of the Urban West Region, which led to ZEC's decision to cancel the voting and counting process in the whole of Zanzibar. All the vote casted on the election day 29th October were then kept by ZEC until the Urban West region voted on 5th November, 2000, when they resumed counting.

⁶ Some people were shot by the police, others were injured and many others fled to Kenya. According to the Report by the Presidential Commission of enquiry led by Brigadier Hashim Mbita, the number of people who died in the violence was thirty-one including one policeman. CUF, however, says that the number was over 45 (See Bakari 2008).

the elections, citing alleged irregularities (Minde, et al., 2018; TEMCO, 2015)⁷. CUF representatives called a press conference, revealing that the decision to annul the election was taken unilaterally without the knowledge of the commissioners. This gave CUF a ground to boycott fresh elections in 2016.

The power-sharing agreement is the third outcome whose genesis cannot be divorced from the political contestations, especially after the 2000 and 2005 general elections in Zanzibar. After the disputed 2005 Zanzibar presidential elections, CCM and CUF entered into formal negotiations from the 1st of February 2007 in Dodoma. The main agenda was trying to invent a power-sharing arrangement (TEMCO, 2010). But this idea did not get the support of CCM hardliners; that's why the talks continued secretly for more than a year until 17th March 2008, when they broke down (Mbunda, 2010). Analysts think that, in principle, a power-sharing deal was struck, but it was not agreed when it should be implemented. It took an extraordinary meeting between the then-President Amani Abeid Karume and the main opposition figure, Maalim Seif Sharif Hamad, to lay a foundation for the power-sharing deal. This meeting took place on 5th November 2009, which was immediately followed by a constitutional review to implement the power-sharing arrangement (Killian & Mbunda, 2010). The implementation required the involvement of the masses, which is why a referendum was held in July 2010. The results of the referendum indicated that 66.4 per cent of the voters were in favour of the formation of the GNU. A recent study also shows that the majority of ordinary Zanzibaris still support it (Haji, 2024).

The general election in Zanzibar, which was held on 31st October 2010, was probably the closest to call, particularly between the presidential contestants Ali Mohamed Shein and Seif Sharif Hamad. The CCM presidential candidate, Mr. Shein, won by 50.11 per cent against 49.14 of the CUF's candidate, Mr. Hamad. Even in the House of Representatives, the margin was small, where CCM won 28 seats against CUF's 22 seats. However, because of the goodwill that had started with the *Maridhiano* process, Hamad and CUF accepted the results without fuss. A Government of National Unity was created, whereas Ali Mohammed Shein, the newly elected Zanzibar president, appointed the CUF Secretary General Seif Sharif Hamad as First Vice President and CCM's Seif Ali Iddi as Second Vice President. It was composed of 19 Ministers and 7 Deputy Ministers. CCM had 11 ministries to CUF's 8, while the latter also had 3 deputy ministers and the former 4.

The GNU was originally seen as a means to alleviate the mistrust and to usher in an era of cooperation between the two rival sides in the politics of Zanzibar. But most importantly, the GNU arrangement lessened the bitter rivalry that was erstwhile rife in the isles, and ZEC was afforded the opportunity to manage the 2010 general elections with minimum complaints (Moss & Tronvoll, 2015; TEMCO, 2015). For instance, both local and international observers acclaimed the work of ZEC for adeptly and successfully managing the elections (TEMCO, 2010). It is also true that, for the first time and probably the only time since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in Zanzibar, the losing candidate in the presidential election accepted the outcome even for the narrowest margin. This confirmed that the winner-takes-all system could never have guided Zanzibar into democratic consolidation, let alone political harmony.

Notwithstanding the good signs recorded from the 2010 general elections, Zanzibar has neither been at peace going forward, nor ensured political stability in the two elections that succeeded the power-sharing. The situation in the 2015 general elections was worse inasmuch as the general elections were annulled by the ZEC Chairperson. As CUF refused to participate

⁷ On 28th October 2015, the ZEC Chairperson gave about six reasons that justified the annulment of elections results, however, one reason stood out that the CUF had usurped the mandate of ZEC to declare themselves victors of the general elections on 26th October, 2015 (TEMCO, 2015)

in the fresh elections in 2016, no GNU was created after that election, thus widening the political divisions that had somewhat begun to heal.

In the 2020 general elections, REDET (2020) reported the disqualification of opposition candidates based on irrational reasons. For instance, ACT-Wazalendo was disproportionately affected, with 24 out of 28 disqualifications involving its candidates. This significantly weakened the party's ability to compete, especially in Pemba, where it had strong support. The disqualifications were perceived by ACT-Wazalendo as a deliberate strategy by CCM and ZEC to undermine the opposition. The post-election phase was marked by violence, including the arrest and torture of Ismail Jussa, a member of the Central Committee of ACT-Wazalendo. Notwithstanding its limited role in improving the equality of elections in Zanzibar, the GNU presents an opportunity for the contending parties to strengthen shared political values. It also charts out the framework for future democratic consolidation.

The foregoing discussion confirms Mao Tse-tung's perspective that conflicts can lead to development depending on the way they are handled. It is difficult to imagine whether the reforms in the political system discussed above could be possible if not for the contestations brought about by the opposition side. The fact that political conflicts have not culminated in landmark democratic reforms can be due to the low-intensity nature of the Zanzibar conflict. It is because of this scenario, CCM Zanzibar has ignored the opposition demands and it has handled the talks in a rather flippant manner (Mbunda, 2010). Probably, the conflict intensity has not reached a hurting stalemate. As Zartman (1995) puts it, high intensity in such situations may be necessary to create the 'hurting stalemate' because it is the hurting stalemate that forces the parties to the dispute to resolve the conflict.

The political conflicts have also pushed development partners to increase pressure for political reform. For example, donor countries withheld development assistance to Zanzibar, explicitly tying the resumption of aid to the resolution of the political impasse (Anglin, 2000; Ramadhani, 2017). Similarly, history has taught us that low-intensity conflicts affect political stability, economic development, and international relations, especially when the context of the dispute is in emerging economies and development partners are concerned with the impacts of the conflict (Ware et al., 1988; Bakari, 2001; Anglin, 2000). Even though the Zanzibar conflict is characterized as low intensity, it can still propel the process of democratic consolidation in the isles-though marginally, especially when coupled with the intervention of other actors such as the donor community. It is also imperative to note that a conflict is a nuisance that leaders find difficult to come to terms with. Unmet demands in a dispute may escalate to unmanageable levels, bringing up a bigger political challenge, as was the case in January 2001.

7. Conclusion

Based on Yash Tandon's (1979) perspective, democracy is fundamentally a "material question" rooted in people's daily struggles for survival. This is reflected in the Zanzibar opposition's demand for power on equal terms with the ruling party, CCM. Their struggle for political equality is not just about abstract rights, but is a legitimate human struggle for fair access to economic resources and opportunities. On the one hand, the Zanzibar conflict displays grudges inhibited by the marginalized opposition leaders and supporters who believe equal access to the reins of power would guarantee material existence. On the other hand, we see the determination of the ruling party and its government to remain in control. In their entirety, the demands advanced by the opposition bloc intend to reform Zanzibar away from 'illiberal democracy' to a democratic political culture in which all Zanzibaris can enjoy what life has to offer. The solutions that are suggested sum up to two major reforms, which are creating a

level playing field that will ensure maximum participation and competition, giving both parties to have access to the reins of power through a specified power-sharing scheme.

We have seen in this paper that two pathways could be taken to reach there. The first one entails a peaceful and voluntary compromise between the parties to create a satisfactory power-sharing scheme. If this option is unavailable, the parties should anticipate a bitter path. Undesirable as it may be, Zanzibar will have no option but to confront the reality and face unrelenting confrontation and, at times, violence. This paper characterizes this conflict as an inevitable cause, perpetuated in defence of democracy defined in both political and material sense, a recourse to consolidating democratic culture. Failure to reform the political landscape in the low-intensity conflicts context risks losing control when reforms will have to be made after the hurting stalemate.

Funding

No funding was received for this work.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest to disclose.

References

- Akerlund, A. (2005). *Transforming Conflict and Building Peace: Experience and Ideas of Swedish Civil Society Organization*. Sweden: SIDA Studies.
- Anglin, D. G. (2000). Zanzibar: Political impasse and Commonwealth mediation. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 18(1), 39–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/025890000111968>.
- Axtmann, R. (2013). Conceptualising Democracy. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 48(1), 118–128.
- Bakari, M. (2001). *The Democratization Process in Zanzibar: A Retarded Transition*. PhD Thesis, Hamburg: Institute of African Studies.
- Bastian, S & Luckham, R. (2003). Can Democracy be designed? in Bastian, S & R. Luckham *Can Democracy be Designed? The Politics of Institutional Choice in Conflict-torn Societies*, London and New York: Zed Books.
- CUF. (2008). 'Ukweli Unaofichwa na CCM Kuhusu Mazungumzo ya Muafaka'. Dar es Salaam: The Report of the Civic United Front.
- Donor Countries (1995). *The Presidential and House of Representatives Elections*. Statement of Donor Countries Cooperating in the Social Economic Development of Tanzania, released on 22nd October.
- Egwu, S. (2010). Elections and conflict in Nigeria. In K. Matlosa, G. M. Khadiagala, & V. Shale (Eds.), *When elephants fight: Preventing and resolving election-related conflicts in Africa*. Johannesburg: EISA.
- Haji, M. J. (2024). The institutionalisation of power-sharing in Zanzibar: Strengths and challenges. *The African Review*, 51(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889X-bja10141>
- Heilman, B. (2004). The Second Muafaka: A Ceasefire or Conflict Resolution? in *The African Review* Vol. 31, No 1&2.
- Held, D. (2006). *Models of Democracy* (3rd ed.). Stanford University Press.

- Karl, L & Schmitter, P. (1997). "Modes of Transition and the Emergence of Democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe" in Etzioni Halevy, E. (Ed.). *Classes and Elites in Democracy and Democratization: A Collection of Readings* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203765173>.
- Karume, S. (2004). Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Conflict in Zanzibar. EISA Occasional Paper, No 27.
- Killian, B., & Mbunda, R. (2010). Elections and conflict in Zanzibar. In K. Matlosa, G. M. Khadiagala, & V. Shale (Eds.), *When elephants fight: Preventing and resolving election-related conflicts in Africa* (pp. 117–128). Johannesburg: EISA.
- Killian, B., (2008) .Do Elections Matter in Zanzibar. Unpublished paper. <https://www.eisa.org/storage/2023/05/2009-journal-of-african-elections-v8n2-do-elections-matter-zanzibar-eisa.pdf?x29006>
- Lofchie, M., (1963). Party Conflict in Zanzibar. in *Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 1, No. 2.
- Luttwak, E.N. (2001). The Curse of Inconclusive Intervention. in Crocker, C et al., (eds) *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, Washington D.C: United States Institute for Peace.
- Maalim, M.J. (2006). The Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar and the Right of Secession under International Law. in Peter, C.M, & H. Othman (eds) *Zanzibar and the Union Question*, Zanzibar Legal Services Center Publication Series, Book No. 4.
- Makulilo, A. (2007). Tanzania: A De facto One-Party State. M.A Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam.
- Maliyamkono, T.L & Kanyongolo, F.E. (2003). *When Political Parties Clash*. Dar es Salaam: TEMA Publishers.
- Mapuri, O. R. (1996). *Zanzibar, the 1964 Revolution: Achievement and Prospects*. Dar es Salaam: TEMA Publishers.
- Mbunda, R. (2010). Resolution or Containment? An Evaluation of Direct Negotiation and
- Mbwiliza, J. (2000). 'The Birth of a Political Dilemma and the Challenge of the Quest for New Politics in Zanzibar'. In T L Maliyamkono (ed). *The Political Plight of Zanzibar*. Dar es Salaam: TEMA Publishers.
- Minde, N, Roop, S., & Tronvoll, K. (2018). The rise and fall of the Government of National Unity in Zanzibar: A critical analysis of the 2015 elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 17(1), 182–184. <https://doi.org/10.20940/JAE/2018/v17i1a8>
- Moss, S. M., & Tronvoll, K. (2015). "We are all Zanzibari!" Identity formation and political reconciliation in Zanzibar. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 9(1), 91–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2014.985357>.
- Mukangara, D. (2000). Race, Ethnicity, Religion, and Politics in Zanzibar. in T. L Maliyamkono (ed) *The Political Plight of Zanzibar*, Dar es Salaam: TEMA Publishers.
- Munck, G. L. (2014). What is democracy? A reconceptualization of the quality of democracy. *Democratization*, 32 (4), 912–937.DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2014.918104.
- Nassor, A. S., & Jose, J. (2014). Power-sharing in Zanzibar: From zero-sum politics to democratic consensus? *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40(2), 247–265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2014.896719>.
- Othman, H. (2006). Political Succession in Zanzibar. in C.M. Peter and F. Kopsieker (eds) *Political Succession in East Africa: In Search for a limited Leadership*, Nairobi: Kituo Cha Katiba and Fredrich Ebert Stiftung- Kenya.
- Ramadhani, A.S.L. (2000). The Political Situation of Zanzibar: Institutional and Legal Framework. in T. L Maliyamkono (ed) *The Political Plight of Zanzibar*, Dar es Salaam: TEMA Publishers.

- Ramadhani, L. (2017). Politics and Conflicts in Zanzibar. *The African Review: A Journal of African Politics, Development and International Affairs*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 172-202.
- REDET. (2020). The 2020 General Elections in Tanzania: Report of the Research and Education for Democracy in Tanzania. Dar es Salaam; University of Dar es Salaam.
- Redspak Collective. (2019). Mao Zedong's "On Contradiction" Study Companion. Foreign Languages Press <https://foreignlanguages.press-> Accessed 16 May 2025.
- Sansa, G. (2004). The Mode of Transition to Democracy and its Impact on the Multiparty Politics in Tanzania. M.A Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam.
- Saroj, P. & Dhanju, S. S. (2019). Conflict society and Marxism: A critical analysis. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, 7(4), 315-333. <https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.74.315>.
- Shivji, I. (2006). *Let the People Speak. Tanzania Down the Road to Neo-Liberalism*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Sorensen, G., (1993). *Democracy and Democratization: Processes and Prospects in a Changing World*. San Francisco: West View Press.
- Tandon, Y. (1979). In Defence of Democracy. *University of Dar es Salaam Inaugural Lecture Series* No 14.
- TEMCO. (2000). *Report of the Tanzania Election Monitoring Committee on the 2000 General Elections in Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam.
- TEMCO. (2005). *Report of the Tanzania Election Monitoring Committee on the 2005 General Elections in Zanzibar*. Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam.
- TEMCO. (2010). *Report of the Tanzania Election Monitoring Committee on the 2010 General Elections in Zanzibar*. Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam.
- TEMCO. (2015). *Report of the Tanzania Election Monitoring Committee on the 2015 General Elections in Zanzibar*. Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam
- Third-party Facilitation in the Zanzibar Conflict'. M.A Dissertation, University of Dar es Salaam.
- Tse-tung, M. (1937). On Contradiction: A Lecture Delivered at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College in Yenan.
- Tse-tung, M. (1957). on "Contradictions." *Current History*, 33(196), 361-368. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45309833>.
- Valenzuela, S. (2000). 'Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings: Notion, Process, and Facilitating Conditions'. Working Paper, no 150.
- Ware, L. B., Blank, S., Grinter, L. E., Klingaman, J. W., Ofcansky, T. P., & Weathers, B. E. (1988). *Low-intensity conflict in the Third World*. Air University Press. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235073860>
- Zakaria, F. (2003). *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. New York, ww. Norton & Company.
- Zartman, W. I., (1995). *Elusive Peace, Negotiating and End to Civil Wars*. Washington D.C: The Brookings Institute.