

The Status Quo of Public Relations in Liaising Political and Religious Affairs in Tanzania

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Abstract

The focus of this study was to examine the position of Public Relations in liaising political and religious affairs in Tanzania. Specifically the study sought to explore the types of activities and affairs which bring together religious leaders and politicians in Tanzania. To explore this, two research questions were posed: (i) *what are the political issues that religious leaders have often been involved with between 2010 and 2016?* And (ii) *what are the religious activities which political leaders have often been involved with?* The study employed qualitative case study research design. The area of study was St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Mwanza. The data were collected using qualitative data collections methods of interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Whereas purposive and convenience sampling procedures were utilized to get the respondents for the study. A total of thirty (30) informants were involved in the interviews, and the Focus Group Discussion was comprised of ten (10) informants. The findings suggest that Public Relations has a significant share in liaising and integrating the political and religious affairs in Tanzania. It was revealed that through Public Relations, religious leaders in Tanzania have been preaching for peace, love, unit and oneness amongst citizens during political affairs. The findings further suggest that there have numerous fundraising activities in the places of worships which bring together religious leaders and politicians.

Keywords: The position; public relations; liaising; political; religious; affairs; Tanzania.

1. Background to the Study

The existing separation between religion and state in Tanzania seem to have less impact to individuals' personal faith when they become political leaders.

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The reason is because religion as a belief in a spiritual being; it is a key component of individual and group identity [37]. Religion has been argued to give a spiritual meaning to human life especially to facts which transcend human reasoning and understanding like death [19; 1]. The same when comes to religious physical healing, not only that religious healers attract common people but also political leaders as studies presented some scholars [51; 52; 54] about Ambilikile Mwasapila who was known as Babu wa Loliondo, suggest that political leaders too attended his services. Political and religious leaders hold significant positions to their faith followers. They are thus expected to lead people justly, observing moral values and avoiding political violences. Despite the fact that the Tanzanian state is secular, the involvement of religious leaders in political affairs has been voiced continuously. In most cases, religious leaders have not been allowed to involve in politics for the fear of the challenges and threats religion can pause in the country. However, little attention has been paid to the positive contribution of religion than negative as it has been argued that the involvement of religious leaders in political affairs also contributes to national unity and identity consolidation [18; 27; 28].

According to some scholars [3; 8; 41], religious institutions and leaders are considered to have been crucial to democratic transitions in the African continent. In many states, which were undergoing multiparty system it is argued that protestors who were involved in organizing national conventions, demanding multiparty elections, religious leaders were also involved. They contributed in pushing out or rather opposing authoritarian governments, which were said to have lost legitimacy because of poor economic policy, corruption, and high levels of poverty [4; 5; 42; 43]. It has been further argued that from 1989 to 1995, there were notable rapid improvements in democracy compared to past years. This was due to the contribution of religious leaders who took steps to involve in political affairs [20; 44]. As it was stated in this literature, in 68 percent of the continent's democratic changes have occurred basically during this period. Religious leaders were involved in fostering social changes especially in situations where the government or political leaders failed to attend the needs of citizens. However, the direct or indirect involvement of religious leaders in politics has not always been considered positively because it challenged some existing regimes but favoring the good of the people [6; 21]. The literature has shown that, in Malawi Catholic bishops issued a scathing letter. This letter strongly condemned the government of Hastings Banda for its lack of concern about poverty and its human rights abuses. That letter was said to have galvanized a movement that eventually led to Banda's ousting [41]. Religious leaders through their institutions have been argued to have played a much more prominent role in the second liberation than they did in the first liberation from European colonialism. This gives an account of the direct and indirect involvement of religious leaders in political affairs. On the same way in Zambia, the mainline Protestant and Catholic leaders were argued to foster an agreement between the opposition and the incumbent president for multiparty elections in past few years. Likewise in Senegal, whereby high-level Muslim religious leaders known as *marabouts* refused to issue statements or directions which could directly support the ruling party in the 2000 elections the fact which expressed direct opposition to political affairs. However, despite multiparty elections as well as assured freedom of assembly, speech, and the press, most of the new democracies in Africa are embedded with corruption, power centralization, weak rule of law, and underdeveloped notions of citizenship [9; 12; 41]. In responding to political dissatisfactions, other religious leaders and organizations have been said to take different ways to illustrate their concern towards the state. Firstly, with their focusing or emphasis on spiritual rebirth and morality, Pentecostal Christians have become in Africa increasingly involved in national politics. They consider themselves as have been called for anti-corruption campaigns and recruit

candidates they perceive to be morally upstanding as good examples of uprightness. Secondly, religion has also been involved in election processes, as it has been argued that the Christian Council of Mozambique, as an ecumenical organization, which was composed primarily of mainline Protestant denominations, was prominent in the aftermath of the country's long civil war. Thirdly, religious organizations have been working across faith lines such as for Ghanaian Muslims and Christians when they decided to organize candidate debates and called for peaceful elections in 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012. Finally, some grassroots religious organizations which are coordinated such as the Jubilee Centre in Zambia, train church leaders in advocacy skills [40; 53]. Thus, the given African perspective gives an overview to why religious leaders involve in politics especially after multiparty system. Clearly, religion and politics are strong institutions, and the relationship between religious and political leaders can affect significantly national politics by either strengthening or weakening political support and maintaining national unity. Since its independence in 1961 and for many decades now, Tanzania is numbered among countries which have maintained political unity. The peace which is counted as a pride of Tanzania resulted from political culture rooted in deliberate actions and specific visions established by earlier national founders [10; 11; 47; 56]. Pointedly, some researchers [2; 31; 32; 47] agree that since independence national founders recognized the potential dangers of religious discord. This is one of the factors discouraging religious groups to involve in politics. However, when it happens it better to ask what Tetti recommends what went wrong in the political system because religious leaders involve in politics for a reason. According to Bluwstein [7], when religious leaders involve in political affairs, they are expected to correct wisely what is wrong rather than being sources of violence. In addition, they are expected to foster religious tolerance and looking for ways which can strengthen mutual assistance on political affairs as well as political and economical development. Furthermore, another concern for religious leaders to involve in political affairs in the country is due to the fact that since the beginning these faith traditions emphasize compassion and concern especially for the marginalized members of society. This is illustrated for instance by Muslim almsgiving and Christian notions of charity which aim at helping the needy. It is argued that, during the colonial period, mainline Protestant and Catholic missionaries established clinics, hospitals, schools, and universities for providing social services. In the last generation, however, Pentecostal Christians which hardly involve in world affairs have begun to provide social service programs to couple with evangelism [41; 55]. Furthermore, Davis [14] in her study about religion at the University of Dar es salaam came with the conclusion that; it is undeniable the significance of religion in Tanzania. In her study she found how negative practices (religious) affect socially and culturally Tanzania. The author also pointed that religion in Tanzania as well as other traditions which are religiously affiliated instead of fostering coexistence, have created divisions. The study selected this case to show the limitations of previous theories which are; the servant leadership theory and transformation leadership theory. The servant leadership theory advocates that leaders who are effective are servants of the people they lead while transformation leadership theory advocates that positive values in leadership influence change to followers. What was known in the topic understudy is that leaders who become servants of their followers are esteemed. Also, positive values in leadership contribute influence change in the society. The study will advance knew knowledge by recommending religious and political leaders to internalize the theories of leadership which are provided.

2. Research Question

Considering the position of public relations, what are the key issues and affairs that bring together politicians and religious leaders in Tanzania?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Relation between religion and politics

Religion and state are two different concepts and different functionally, their goals are also different. While religion deals with souls, the state is about power [13]. Downie further ascertains that religious actors have been always assuming a role for themselves in public life and because of this as time has passed; they have become more assertive in claiming greater freedom to participate in politics and policy debates. Moreover, religious leaders have been fully involved in politics to anticipate conflicts which would arise especially when dissatisfactions from the citizens are increasing and the possibility of entering into chaos is predicted. Stiftung [46] says that during the 2015 election in Tanzania the ruling party government lacked capacity to manage state affairs combined with a weak economic base and that internal democracy within the ruling party CCM would continue to be dominated by more intrigues due to political corruption which had penetrated the party at all levels with the party and its government lacking the capacity to uproot it among its ranks. As society becomes more stratified and interest groups emerge which do no longer find satisfaction within the current arrangement, one may also predict instability thus killing the myth that Tanzania is a peaceful and stable country [46]. Such political atmosphere which leads to killing the myth that Tanzania is a peaceful and stable country is one of the factors in which stimulates religious leaders to involve in politics so as to redeem the situation. This has also been one of the factors which make university students to be in favor of opposition parties, and others involving indirectly. However, there seems to be a division between the new generation and the older. The generation above sixty years has been noted to incline with CCM while the young generation including most university students seemed to be liberal joining oppositions [46]. According to religious ministry's educational goals, the political education of the masses through seminars and its prophetic role as the conscience of society, are inseparable activities [53]. Church leaders according to Yirenkyi "take steps to educate the people and the government on the issues at stake; they discourage violence, chaos and bitterness". Thus when religious leaders involve in politics, positive effects are expected to happen rather than the negative. This is what students also perceive to be, because they trust them as their leaders. Religious leaders should express concern about justice for the people and insecurity in the country. However, they are called to express concern on people coupled with frustration, socio-economic deterioration, education, and attacks on churches. Also Pabee [42] writes: "the historic churches have continued to be *'the voice of the voiceless,'* the champion of freedom, integrity, and fair play in national politics". He further points out that "the churches stood guard over human dignity and justice with a human face" [50] by demanding and ensuring justice is done to the people especially to the poor and marginalized. Forcefully, the role of religion is to act as an instrument of change not through protest but through conscientization [17]. The exercise of a well-formed conscience is needed in difficult political decisions such as in general elections. Such exercise begins with always opposing policies that violate human rights, life or weaken their protection. Church leaders are to encourage followers developing virtues of prudence, which

enable them to discern their true good in every circumstance and choosing the right means of achieving it. Emphatically, Musodza [34] argues, the question to ask is “is it good for church leaders to become involved directly in the political processes or party politics?” This subject is quite controversial and debatable. Some people are of the view that political activism is important for church leaders and the more active the better. This argument is on line with the positive trend of university students who argued that when religious leaders involve in politics help to keep moral values and minimize corruption. On the contrary others argue that political activism is an issue of wisdom and not an issue of morality. In other words, it is not morally wrong to participate in political affairs and it is also not morally wrong to completely refrain from political affairs. This is online with students who maintained neutral balance. According to Macionis [30], the main three functions of religion in society include “maintaining social cohesion, social control, and providing meaning and purpose to life. This is what university students also expect to see when religious leaders involve in political affairs. However, religious leaders because they touch areas on the purpose of life, when seen involving in political affairs students expect they will do the same. Politics on the other hand contributes to religion in the provision of education, preserving social order, provision of health services, security and other economic services [35].

3.2 Religion and Politics in the Middle East

Religious leadership involvement in political affairs in the Middle East act as a command spokesmen in the absence of other credible political actors, lack of widespread political participation, failure of economic development and chronic insecurity. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations organized a panel discussion on “The Role of Religious Leaders in Peace building in the Middle East”. This event took place on 18 July 2017 at the United Nations headquarters, New York. It featured keynote speakers as well as religious leaders from the three monotheistic religions of the Holy Land which are Jewish, Christian and Muslim. Religious leaders, as part of civil society were addressed, to have great influence in their communities, with a very significant role to play especially in peace building and in stability. This is through promoting reconciliation, peaceful coexistence among communities and facing extremism through preaching tolerance. The Summit of Religious Leaders for Peace in the Middle East held on November in Alicante Spain 2016 discussed that “The Middle East is a key region for the stability of the world and where religious leaders have a valuable role to play in the promotion of peace, trust and mutual understanding for the two peoples living in the Holy Land”. The objectives and goals of the meeting which involved religious leaders from Christians, Jewish, and Muslim was to support peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestinian societies and emphasized religious leaders to be first in promoting peace. The meeting declared that religious leaders bear a special responsibility in contributing to the desired peace and they urged the Israel and Palestinian political leadership to work towards solutions. Other objectives and goals included strengthening dialogue among religious leaders, building trust, and peaceful coexistence, promoting mutual respect between people of all faiths in the Middle East, stressing the positive role of religious leaders and their contribution to peace building, acting as peacemakers through reconciliation, preventing religion from being used as a source of conflict, promoting education of religious leaders and young people for a culture of peace.

3.3 Religion and Politics in Africa

Moreover, in (2000) Kwasi Yireny [38] conducted a research on “the role of Christian churches in national politics: reflections from laity and Clergy in Ghana”. He intended to examine the role of Christian churches in national politics in Ghana. It was a mixed method research whereby he used survey, in-depth interview and content analysis to get the data. The findings revealed that the majority of Ghanaian Christians had been more actively involved in politics than before. This had an impact in politics whereby it took into consideration the demands of the people. The findings presented the role religion played. Likewise, Parsitau [40] conducted a research titled “from prophetic voices to lack of voice: Christian Churches in Kenya and the dynamics of voice and voicelessness in a multi-religious space”. Based on recent ethnographic research carried out in the last five years, he examined the changing roles of mainline churches in public life by exploring the perceived loss of prophetic voice on the part of mainline church clergy and the emergence of other voices in the context of increased ethnicity and religious pluralism in a multi-cultural space. The conclusion was that, the role of Christianity during the late 2007 and early 2008 post -election crisis engulfed Kenya after the bungled 2007 presidential elections. The study of Christian churches’ involvement in Kenyan politics not only requires that we go back to history to retrace the ever changing and obviously ever evolving roles of Christian churches in public life. Even though religion may have beneficial impacts in politics, empirical studies have found out that this outcome is not always there. Letsie [26] published a research titled, “the role of Christian churches in political conflict in Lesotho”. The paper examined the role played by Christian churches in political conflict in Lesotho. It argues that Christianity has played changing roles in the conflict that has characterized Lesotho's politics since 1970. At first, the two largest Christian denominations – the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) – were associated with the rival Basotho National Party and Basutoland Congress Party (and its offshoots) respectively. The differences between the two denominations trickled down and became a source or intensifier of political conflict. In 2014 Maanga [29] conducted a research on “Political leadership and the future of Tanzania: a historical-theological examination”. The paper aimed at examining the historical development and the role of political leadership in Tanzania, using historical sources as well as presenting a theological interpretation and commentary on the past, present and future political spectrum in the country. Four main findings were revealed: first; In Tanzania there is no clear connectivity between the current political leadership and the future aspirations; second; Political leadership and economic development in the past have been done haphazardly by political leaders and economic planners; thirdly; Most political strategies in the country have failed to take off because they are mostly theoretical rather than practical; and fourthly; Social maladies like corruption and unaccountability are some of the factors behind the failure of development initiatives in the country. The strength of these findings is that they addressed the shortcomings of the political systems such as lack of clear connectivity in political systems with future aspirations, haphazardly conducted economic development and social maladies like corruption but it did not offer the way forward. The current study emphasize on qualities and values of good leadership suggested as articulated by university students.

4. Research Methods

This study employed qualitative case study research design since it aimed at understanding from within the subjective reality of the study participants. The area of study was St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Mwanza. The reason for conducting the study to this area was due to the fact that no such study have been

conducted before. The targeted populations for this study were St Augustine University of Tanzania students' community. The data collection for the present study was based on two methods of interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). In order to get informants and interviewees for this study two sampling procedures of purposive and convenience sampling were used. A total of thirty (30) informants were involved in the interviews, and the Focus Group Discussion was comprised of ten (10) informants. This selected sample was adequate and enabled the researcher to collect the information which was useful for the study as endorsed by (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Saunders and Thorhill, 2007). Highlighters were used to spot all required information and specific quotes that seemed relevant, important and of interest to the study. The discussions were transcribed by the moderator herself by listening to the tape recorder vis-à-vis reconciling with the information taken in the note book. Thereafter, before the commencement of the analysis, the data were categorized, coded and assigned relevant themes basing on the research questions.

5. Results and Discussions

The study intended to find out the types of political affairs in which religious leaders have often been involved in. The findings revealed that political rallies were the commonly political activities which attract majority of religious leaders in Tanzania. Majority of informants said that during political rallies in Tanzania, particularly in election periods, majority of religious leaders are found of involving themselves into political affairs. During the focus group discussions, majority of informants mentioned the provision of civic education done by religious leaders was one of the major political fairs which attract the attention of the religious leaders in Tanzania. The findings show that religious leaders in Tanzania have fully been educating their followers on their basic rights such as the rights to vote for leaders of their choices, their rights to question on the misuse of public funds and or resources, their rights to participate in their democracy and many other civic educations. The words of REC.57, 34 years, represents majority of other informants.

REC.51, [FGD] said, "Yearh, it is true that religious leaders in our country have played a significant role in providing civic education to their followers especially during election period where they devote most of their preachings by educating their followers the importance of choosing leaders who are not corrupt, selfish, thieves, or any other undesired characters."

The implication of these findings is that there is a very close tie between religion and politics in Tanzania. This is because during political rallies and or crises among politicians or political parties, majority of religious leaders in Tanzania mostly Muslims and Christians have been fully involved. Some of the crises which had attracted the attention of religious leaders in Tanzania include the 2001 post election violence in Zanzibar and the 2016 crisis between the opposition party CHADEMA and the ruling party CCM. The 2001 post election violence in Zanzibar was one of the severe political crisis which involved the opposition party CUF and the ruling party CCM whereby majority of their supporters and other civilians were killed and others injured. On the other hand, the 2016 political crisis was between members and followers of the opposition party CHADEMA who were fighting against what they labeled as "dictatorship" of the President of the United Republic of Tanzania Dr. John Magufuli. These two crises represent other political crises which had threatened the tranquility of the country whereby religious leaders played a tremendous role by preaching for peace to their followers. Thus, the

findings from this study appear to reflect the contributions of religious leaders in Tanzania into political affairs as discussed in this text. Likewise, peace building was another political affair mentioned by majority of informant that it attracts the attention of religious leaders in Tanzania. During the discussions, majority of informants said that religious leaders in Tanzania have been intervening in most of the events which threaten or tend to threaten the peace and tranquility of the country. Majority of informants cited different cases which appeared to threaten the peace and tranquility of the country. They cited the various riots and demonstrations done by politicians, university students, workers, and other trade unions. They also cited the frequency fight and killing done between the peasants and pastorolists in the regions of Kilimanjaro, Morogoro, and other parts of the country. In all these threats to the peace and tranquility of the country, religious leaders in Tanzania have fully been involved in preaching for peace among these conflicting groups. The implications of these findings are that religious leaders in Tanzania are the hub for the peace building in the country. This is due to the fact that even the government officials in Tanzania who majority of them are politicians have often been calling upon religious leaders to help the government to restore peace and tranquility in the country. Thus, the findings from this study seem to reflect the real contributions of religious leaders into peace building in the country and they agree with Patterson (2014) and Stiftung (2007) who also confirms the contributions of religious leaders into peace building. However, the second focus of this study was also to determine the type of religious activities which often involve politicians in Tanzania. The finding revealed that fundraising was one of the major religious activities which mostly involve politicians. It was revealed that during fundraising among religious institutions in Tanzania the major players in those fundraising are politicians. During the focus group discussions, majority of informants confirmed that there is a very close tie between politicians and religious leaders in Tanzania during fundraising events. It was noted that because of the prominent of politicians, religious leaders often rely on politicians such as District Commissioners, Regional Commissioners, Members of Parliaments, Ministers, and many others when they want to raise fund for their various projects. Another area which was revealed to have been fully involving politicians in Tanzania was the issue of funerals. It was noted that during funerals, majority of politicians tend to attend and give some assistences to the morners. Majority of informants said that during funerals, many politicians from different political parties tend to join with the religious leaders whereby they are usually given some platforms to speak with the morners. The other area mentioned to have been involving politicians into the religious activities was on peace building in the country. The finding show that there is a very close partnership between politicians and religious leaders when it comes to the issue of peace building whereby both parts call upon their followers to maintain peace and security in the country. It was mentioned by majority of informants that during campaigns periods and sometimes during the new year celebrations it has been a routine for the politicians to be joins hand with religious leaders to pray for peace in the country. The practical implications of this finding is that there is very little tie between religious leaders and politicians in Tanzania. This is because the present closeness or collaborations between the two parts appear to be not very usefull to the citizens of Tanzania due to the fact that politicians seem to involve themselves only in gatherings which brings together many people so that they utilize thoseoccassions to inject their political aspirations. For a truly partnership between politicians and religious in any country should be frequently done throughout the year and in all political, economic, socially or cultural affairs something which lacks in the present partnership between the two parts.

6. Conclusion

The findings from this study can generally be considered that there is a very significant tie between politics and religion in Tanzania and perhaps in other countries, and that the two can never be separated in any ways. These results can be interpreted that during political elections in Tanzania, politicians often use religious forums to propagate and advertise their election manifestos to the worshippers win intentions to win elections. Likewise, the findings propose that Public Relations has a substantial portion in liaising and integrating the political and religious affairs in Tanzania. It can also be considered that through Public Relations, religious leaders in Tanzania have been preaching for peace, love, unit and oneness amongst citizens during political affairs. The findings further suggest that there have numerous fundraising activities in the places of worships which bring together religious leaders and politicians.

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