

*African Leadership: A Tanzanian example.*

Rumors on life and death of Dr. John Pombe Magufuli.



On 17th March 2021, Dr. John Pombe Magufuli, at the time president of Tanzania, passed away. Article headlines of popular European newspapers focused on the president's controversial attitude towards the Corona pandemic that kept the world in its grip: "Tanzania's Covid-denying president, John Magufuli, dies aged 61" (Burke 2021). However, Dr. J. P. Magufuli had done much more during his tenure than denying Corona risks. Dr. Magufuli had successfully established several important infrastructure projects in Tanzania, he actively fought against corruption in the country and lowered his own salary to 4 000 US Dollars, a third of what his predecessor had earned (Hamza 2017). In 2015, instead of celebrating Independence Day he ordered a national cleaning day in which he participated himself (DW 2015). His approach was soon known as the "no-nonsense approach". But in times of Corona, these achievements were less important in the face of a Covid-19 sceptic attitude, and it was clear - in Europe at least - that the president who had denied the danger of Corona for Tanzanians had ironically died of Corona himself.

Although many African leaders have a reputation for being corrupt and having dictator-like tendencies, this is not the whole story. Many African presidents who had the best interests for their country and the whole African continent had to give up their position in tragic ways: for example, Patrice Lumumba of the DR Congo, Muammar Gaddafi of Lybia, Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso or Modibo Keita of Mali. All of them were assassinated. Patrice Lumumba, first president of the DR Congo, was murdered by former colonial power Belgium who supported the opposition in the country (Britannica 2022). Gaddafi wanted to establish a "United Nations of Africa", with an African currency independent of Western currencies (Forte 2005: 194). Others such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania or Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana were not assassinated but had to give up leadership mainly due to the failing economies of their countries. They followed socialist political and economic ideas that don't correspond to capitalist aims and despite the best interests, destroyed their country's economies.

Many presidents with Pan African interests pass away suddenly or must give up their leadership. Their vision does not correspond to the "Western" political and economic systems that former colonial powers forced on them and they dare to question the continued dependance of their countries on former colonial powers in the West ever since independence (Forte 2005: 210, 222).

There are many theories amongst Tanzanian citizens on the reasons for the sudden disappearance of Magufuli in March 2021 and his death on 17th March 2021 that do not all correspond to the abovementioned popular version in Europe. I collect these theories to determine Tanzanian perspectives on Magufuli's death, and what this implies about Tanzanian perspectives on the relation between their country and "the West" today. 60 years after the official end of colonialism, relations between many African countries and the West are still marked by colonial patterns. In order to be able to point out the strategies Western countries use to keep oppressing African countries such as Tanzania, we need to gather information on the Tanzanian perspective on Dr. John Pombe Magufuli's presidency and his death.