

My nasty encounter with Tanzanian repression

By [Angela Quintal](#)

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Muthoki Mumo and I are journalists turned press freedom advocates for the Committee to Protect Journalists. We embarked on a 10-day visit to Tanzania, primarily as a networking and fact-finding mission to gauge media freedom in Magufuli's Tanzania. We had nothing to hide, and even had a letter of invitation from the government-recognised press regulator. But then I heard a knock on my hotel room door...



Angela Quintal of the CPJ. Image © [Daily Maverick](#)

US President Donald Trump was [berating](#) CNN White House correspondent Jim Acosta on cable news when I heard a knock on my hotel room door. I opened it to find the hotel manager flanked by several men and women in plain clothes. They were there for a regular immigration check, she said.

"Wow. So many of you? I feel like a criminal," I joked.

The manager smiled, but it was no joke. It was the evening of 7 November and we were in Dar Es Salaam, about to experience first-hand the repression, Afrophobia, and paranoia that have become the hallmark of Tanzania under President [John Magufuli](#) – the very antithesis of what the country's founding father [Julius Nyerere](#) espoused.

My Kenyan colleague [Muthoki Mumo](#) and I are journalists turned press freedom advocates for the New York-based [Committee to Protect Journalists](#). We embarked on a 10-day visit to Tanzania on 31 October to meet journalists, human rights defenders, and politicians. It was primarily a networking and fact-finding mission to gauge media freedom in Magufuli's Tanzania. It was slated as preparation for a possible special report in 2019, as well as a high-level advocacy mission that would include our advocacy director and members of CPJ's international advisory board.



Detained CPJ staffers released in Tanzania

9 Nov 2018



A lot of preparation goes into CPJ missions abroad. We do not travel undercover and are always open about our visits. We even had a letter of invitation from the government-recognised press regulator, the [Media Council of Tanzania](#), and double-

checked the visa requirements. We stayed at a hotel near State House which is frequented by cabinet ministers, government officials, and business people and we held several of our meetings there even though we spotted the ubiquitous intelligence agents lurking in the shadows. We had nothing to hide. We also met others in their offices or in venues they believed were more convenient or less public.

It soon became clear that we had underestimated the scale of attacks on the [Tanzanian press and government repression](#). Journalists spoke of anti-press laws, including the Media Services Act, the Cybercrimes Act—under which many were being prosecuted for “insulting” the president—as well as onerous content regulations aimed at bloggers that require hefty and unaffordable registration fees. We were told about the suspension of newspapers, journalists charged with sedition, spies in newsrooms, and much, much more. Many spoke about last year’s 21 November disappearance of freelance journalist [Azory Gwanda](#), who was investigating extrajudicial killings in Kibiti. Gwanda has not been heard from since. Many journalists were frightened that they would suffer the same fate. Fear and self-censorship became a constant refrain.

While we were there, an outspoken Magufuli critic and opposition MP, [Zitto Kabwe](#), was arrested and charged with incitement. Then Dar es Salaam’s governor, Paul Makonda, announced a special task force to [hunt down](#) gay people and the European Union’s top diplomat was recalled (read expelled) because of his pro-human rights stance.

A week into our visit we got a slight taste of what our colleagues have endured. We were raided in our hotel rooms by agents purporting to be immigration officials. Our passports and electronic devices were seized and we were denied access to a lawyer and embassy officials. I managed to alert CPJ in New York so that our emergency protocols could kick in and called my partner in Johannesburg to ensure high-level government intervention. I also took to [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) to alert the world to our impending arrest. Little did I know that I would cause a social media storm.

We were bundled into the back of a minivan with several agents. The rear and side curtains were closed and there was an attempt to disorientate us by apparently driving aimlessly around Dar. We were eventually taken to a house in a suburb we recognised only because we spotted a sign for the new offices of Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition. We were told earlier that the area was popular with Tanzanian intelligence and I had no doubt that we were in their custody. I also discovered later that an immigration spokesman had denied they were responsible for our detention. We drove down a dirt road and entered the premises of what appeared to be a safe house, through a large gate. Several men in plain clothes stood in the front yard. At least one appeared to be armed with a rifle. Their animosity was palpable.

We were ordered out of the vehicle into the house and taken upstairs for interrogation. The men specifically targeted Muthoki, because she was a young black female and Kenyan to boot. Relations between Kenya and Tanzania have deteriorated over the years, with the Kenyan foreign minister officially [protesting](#) in late 2017 about the “hostile and aggressive behaviour towards Kenyan citizens”. Clearly things had not changed.



Media activist Angela Quintal reported to be safe

Louise Marsland 8 Nov 2018



Muthoki was questioned in Kiswahili, accused of betraying black people, and asked whether I was really South African. They tried to separate us, but failed. Our phones and computers were confiscated, and we were forced to share our passwords so that they could access our devices and content. The fact that Muthoki had wiped her cellphone in line with our digital security protocols was viewed with outright suspicion and she was accused of deleting confidential information. They tried repeatedly to access my emails, but CPJ had changed my password to avoid unauthorised access. They boasted about their use of Israeli technology and claimed they could still retrieve our data. CPJ also ensured that our social media accounts were disabled after Tanzanian intelligence sent a [false tweet](#) from my Twitter account praising God and claiming we were released, in an obvious attempt to fool, but my niece [countered](#) this with a tweet of her own.

The agents claimed they had been watching us for several days and knew whom we had met. They repeatedly accused us

of lying. They wanted to know why we were interested in Gwanda and whether we had visited [Kibiti](#), the area where he lived, and where he had chronicled the violence in the area, including enforced disappearances and alleged extrajudicial killings. They also asked about JamiiForums, whose founder Maxence Melo was charged under the Cybercrimes Act and continues to be persecuted. At no stage were we questioned about the so-called contravention of visa conditions.

We were alone at the mercy of a posse of men, some of whom were very abusive and hostile. The only woman agent had long gone home. We were taken back downstairs into a shabby sitting room and asked gendered questions. An intelligence agent was particularly abusive towards Muthoki. He even slapped and shoved her. I tried to intervene and was told to back off. I was terrified that Muthoki would be sexually assaulted and I would be powerless to stop them. Muthoki's interrogator suddenly left the room and she was unharmed. Throughout our ordeal we remained outwardly calm and friendly. Rather than antagonise the men, we chose to joke and even discussed regional and liberation politics with some of them. It was an Oscar-winning performance.

After five hours in custody, our handbags were removed and we were told to sleep on the couches. The men's superior, who later claimed his name was Yusuf Mohamed, reappeared after a long absence. His hostile questioning of Muthoki had been interrupted very early in our interrogation after he received a call and left the room, leaving it to the others to continue with the questioning.

He addressed me directly: "I did not know you were the Africa programme co-ordinator. You are so clever."

I wondered whether that was a reference to my social media appeal. I asked that the air conditioner be switched on, and he replied: "You want an air conditioner? Do you want to go to the hotel?"

"Of course," I said.

Mohamed announced that we were free to return, but that our passports would be sent to immigration to check whether we were in the country legally. He promised to personally return it later that morning. It was clear he had received orders to release us, although some of his subordinates were furious. I asked whether we could continue our meetings for the rest of our visit and he said yes.



#FairnessFirst: Why investigative journalism and media freedom matters

Leigh Andrews 12 Nov 2018



I have no doubt that my Facebook SOS and tweet about our impending arrest contributed to our release. The [statement](#) issued by CPJ, as well as a range of efforts to ensure government and diplomatic intervention, were also key. The solidarity from partner organisations, activists, human rights defenders, journalists, among others, was amazing. The driver, who returned us to our hotel at about 3am, even called for backup, fearing the media had descended on the hotel to await our

arrival, but the hotel lobby was deserted when we finally arrived. The Tanzanian government had underestimated the backlash and was later forced into damage control mode. Hence the [false claim](#) that we had violated our visa conditions.

South African diplomats, who were later joined by their Kenyan counterparts, were at our hotel at 8am and we briefed them in full. They and local human rights lawyers stuck by our side until our passports were finally returned. I feared we would be re-arrested on trumped-up charges.

The South Africans were superb and even escorted us to the airport and waited until we were safely on the flight to OR Tambo International. So [on Monday](#), when Minister Lindiwe Sisulu ignored what we had told the SA High Commission and [accepted](#) Tanzania's false justification that we had been detained for working with tourist visas, I was outraged. I took it more personally than the government-aligned Tanzanite newspaper's ludicrous attempts to discredit us with a false and defamatory [cover story](#) branding us as spies.

The front page of the Kiswahili newspaper, Tanzanite, dated November 10, 2018. The top banner features a photo of Donald Trump and a photo of Jim Acosta, with the headline "Serikali yatoa siku nne kwa wanunuzi wa Korosho" and the sub-headline "IKULU ya Marekani imelita kihalli cha kuingia ikulu kwa muda mtojulikana kwa Mwanahabari wa CNN Jim Acosta baada ya Mwanahabari huyu kujibzana na Rais Trump IKULU wakali Rais huyo akiongea na Waandishi wa Habari". The main title "Tanzanite" is prominently displayed in large blue letters, with "Fahari ya Tanzania" above it. A red circular badge indicates a price of "Bei 1000/-". Below the main title, the subtitle "Hawa si waandishi ni majasusi" is written in large black letters. The page is filled with several news articles and photos, including a large photo of Muthoki Mumo and a photo of Angela Quintal. The bottom section features a large headline "Waitara amlipua Zitto Bungeni" and two columns of news items. The footer contains legal and contact information for the newspaper.

IKULU ya Marekani imelita
kihalli cha kuingia ikulu
kwa muda mtojulikana kwa
Mwanahabari wa CNN Jim
Acosta baada ya Mwanahabari
huyu kujibzana na Rais Trump
IKULU wakali Rais huyo
akiongea na Waandishi wa
Habari.

Serikali yatoa siku nne kwa
wanunuzi wa Korosho

HABARI UK.5

Fahari ya Tanzania

Tanzanite

Bei 1000/-

Hawa si waandishi ni majasusi

Ni Angela Quintal Afrika
Kusini, Muthoki Mumo Kenya

Kikao cha Septemba 14 17
Jijini Nairobi ndiyo kiliwateua

Kilifanyika katika Hoteli
ya Intercontinental iliyopo
Jijini humo

Kiliongozwa na Lowassa,
Mlowola na maafisa nchini Kenya

Muthoki Mumo

Angela Quintal

HABARI UK.4

Waitara amlipua Zitto Bungeni

Atibua mipango ya Zitto na
genge lake ya kuihujumu
Tanzania

Atobia siri kikao cha Novemba
4 walivyo azimia kuvuruga
Bunge, amani ya nchi

WANAHITAJIKA MAWAKALA WA KUSAMBAZA MAGAZETI KATIKA MIKOYA YOYE TANZANIA

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MWISHO WA KUTUMA MAOMBE NI
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15 NOVEMBER, 2018.

The front page of the Kiswahili newspaper, Tanzanite, at the weekend which claimed that CPJ media activists Muthoki Mumo and Angela Quintal were spies. Photo: Twitter.

While we could fly out of Dar, we remain concerned that the journalists we left behind did not have the luxury of doing the

same. We fear they will be targeted when the furore dies down and that the suppression of the Tanzanian press will escalate in the lead-up to the 2020 election. Local journalists deserve the same support and solidarity that Muthoki and I received.

Yet if there is a silver lining, it is that many people the world over have finally woken up to Magufuli's repression. Pressure must be stepped up to allow a free and diverse press to flourish and for the government to finally come clean about the fate of Azory Gwanda.

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