

Nationalism and Pan-Africanism: Decisive Moments in Nyerere's Intellectual and Political Thought Preliminary Notes

By

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Introduction: the Man

Julius Kambarage Nyerere belonged to the first generation of African nationalists. He was among the most articulate, intense and militant. Leading a country like Tanganyika, which was essentially a semi-commoditized peasant society and ruled as a trust territory, provided space to an individual leader which was not available, for example, to a much more differentiated society like that of Kenya under the white settler rule or Uganda with a history of fairly developed kingdoms. While individuals may make history, they do not choose the circumstances in which they do so. The circumstances are given by history (Marx 1869, 1973: 146, Carr: 1961: *passim*, Plekhanov 1969.). The circumstances of the then Tanganyika where social forces were not developed produced a prominent individual like Nyerere who no doubt appeared to tower above society and so did the state, which he headed after independence. An understanding of the trajectory of Nyerere's intellectual and political thought is not only rewarding in its own right but also because it tells a lot on and about the context, circumstances and the lives and struggles of his fellow Tanganyikans.

In the first section of the paper, I develop a conceptual framework for structuring, periodising and laying bare the tensions in Nyerere's thought. Subsequent sections tentatively periodise the trajectory based on decisive moments or turning points in his political journey.

Nyerere no doubt was a great man. But he was also a politician at the pinnacle of state power and as such at times pragmatism, even Machiavellism, overshadowed his avowed

principles. Unlike others, though, Nyerere had a great ability and talent to rationalize his political action with an astute exposition of principles. (In that respect he could have his cake and eat it.) Thus he was also a great thinker and intellectually stood head and shoulders above many of his political contemporaries. He could be truly described as a philosopher-king.¹ While we have touched on some of his political practices, which needless to say did not always conform to his avowed principles, full justice to it can only be done in a larger work, which is in the process of being developed.

The Conceptual Framework

Mwalimu Nyerere was an ardent and militant African nationalist and an equally convinced and persuasive pan-Africanist. Unlike, Nkrumah, though, Nyerere arrived at continental pan-Africanism through Tanganyikan nationalism. Nkrumah arrived at Ghanaian nationalism through pan-Africanism. Nyerere saw an irresolvable tension between nationalism and pan-Africanism, which he perceived as a ‘dilemma of the pan-Africanist’ in his famous 1966 address (Nyerere 1966 in 1968). As head of state he was supposed to build and nurture ‘territorial nationalism’ based on a sovereign independent state while pan-Africanism required him to dissolve individual sovereignty and therefore the basis of ‘territorial nationalism’. For Nkrumah, Ghanaian nationalism and sovereignty were a momentary expression in the struggle for pan-Africanism. (This was captured in his famous dictum that Ghana’s independence was meaningless without the independence of the rest of the continent.) This brings out other two poles of the tension, imperialism and ethnicity or tribalism.

Nyerere counterposed nationalism to tribalism. He constantly emphasised that the newly independent countries had to weave together a nation out of tribes and ethnicity. He would not succumb to ideologisation and politicization of tribe. On this he remained steadfast throughout his political life. In a dialogue with academics in 1991, he was

¹ No wonder one of his last works was the translation of Plato’s *The Republic*. He revealed this to us at a conference commemorating his 75th birthday held at the University of Dar es Salaam. He had just completed translating Plato’s *The Republic* into Kiswahili. To date unfortunately it has not seen the light of the day.

questioned as to why he saw tribal identities as inherently negative when he himself was a 'proud Mzanaki',² Nyerere retorted:

I'm a good Mzanaki, but I won't advocate a Kizanaki-based political party. ... So I'm a Tanzanian, and of course I am Mzanaki; politically I'm a Tanzanian, culturally I'm Mzanaki. (Sandbrook & Halfani eds. 1993: 31-32).

Nyerere's perception of the other two poles, 'imperialism' and 'state', was interesting but he did not sufficiently problematise these concepts. To be sure, as a leader of the independence movement, and later as a head of state, he intensely hated colonialism and imperial powers. His opposition and resistance to colonial form of imperialism and imperial powers was articulated in terms of the sovereign right of a people to make their own decisions, that is, in the language of the right of peoples to political self-determination. He thus located the tension with imperialism at the level of the sovereignty of the state rather than that between imperialism and the nation or people. His opposition to colonial powers, and occasionally to imperialism, was politically perceptive and often couched in very caustic terms. However, he did not always fully understand or appreciate imperialism as a world system based on the political economy of capitalism. For Nkrumah, on the other hand, neo-colonialism was a stage of imperialism embedded in the processes of capitalist accumulation (Nkrumah 1965).

As for the state, Nyerere's perception was strongly coloured by the fact that he headed it. He held a typically liberal view of the state. Given that at the time of independence there was no organised force other than the state, Nyerere perceived the state as the agency both for nation-building and economic development as well as a unifier and organiser of society. Being a head of state, such conceptualisation of the state logically led to the suppression of any independent initiative of the people to organise themselves, independent of, and opposed to the state. This is where the greatest contradiction in Nyerere's political practice lay. His well-intended policies were meant *for* the people executed by the state from top. Top-down approach is a distinct mark of Nyerere's political rule (see, for instance, Havnevik 1993). He had little faith in the people and

² Nyerere came from a small 'tribe' from around Lake Victoria called *Wazanaki*.

people's own initiative. While he recognised the limitations of his bureaucracy, he sought to overcome them partly by training and partly by keeping their excesses in check using his fiat as the head of state. The result was that Nyerere's politics became typically authoritarian on the one hand, and destructive of people's organisational capacity, on the other (see generally articles in Shivji ed. 1986).

The conceptual framework in which we have deployed a number of conceptual categories and ideological constructs, namely, imperialism, state, nationalism, pan-Africanism, and ethnicity, helps us to organise our discussion of Nyerere's thought. The tensions between them and in his thought are of course in the last instance a reflection of real social relations and struggles. History is not made by tensions between abstract categories; rather it is the product of the interaction and struggles between real social beings. As Marx says,

History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather *man*, real living *man* who does everything, who possesses and fights. (Quoted in Carr 1961: 49)

We will undoubtedly locate the contradictions of Nyerere and his thought in the real men and women who possess wealth and fight battles in the proposed larger work. The present paper only schematically identifies some of the decisive or critical moments both in his thought and the historical events in Tanzania.

Contradictions of National-Building and Political Survival: 1961-1966

The immediate post-independence period in Africa was generally tumultuous. More than a dozen countries got their independence at a go. Many of them, almost immediately, faced problems of stability and survival. In 1966 alone there were eight military coups including the one that overthrew Kwame Nkrumah (Nyong'o 1998:78). Among them the Congo experience was the most traumatic with the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and the outbreak of violence and chaos. In 1964, there were army mutinies in all the three East African countries. In Tanganyika, it almost succeeded. Nyerere went into hiding for a week. Eventually the mutineers were subdued with the assistance of British troops. Nyerere's nationalist ego was wounded. Soon after, he called a meeting of the O.A.U (Organisation of African Unity) foreign ministers to explain (Nyerere 1964 in 1966: 286-

290). Nyerere took one of the most dramatic steps of his rule: he disbanded the colonial army completely. During a period of one year when the new army was being rebuilt and soldiers recruited from the youth wing of the ruling party TANU (Tanganyika African National Union)³, Nigerian troops looked after the country's defense.

In the same year there was another momentous event, the revolution in Zanzibar, which overthrew the newly independent government led by a coalition of the Arab-dominated Zanzibar Nationalist Party and the Shirazi-dominated Zanzibar and Pemba People's Party. Influenced by the left-wing party Umma, of Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu, the revolution immediately attracted Cold War rivalries on the door step of the East African mainland. Nyerere came under intense pressure from Western powers to do something about the 'communist' revolution on the Islands. Only three months after the revolution, on failing to persuade the Kenyans to join the federation, Tanganyika and Zanzibar formed a union, which was put together hurriedly. The preparations for the union had been made under great secrecy (see generally Shivji 2008). Nyerere's later rationalisation of the union as a step towards pan-Africanism did not cut much ice. To be sure, he would have preferred an East African Federation of the three East African countries and Zanzibar. He had passionately advocated an East African Federation and was prepared to delay Tanganyika's independence should the three East African countries agree to federate (see generally Nye 1966). When Uganda pulled out of this, he was prepared to go ahead with Kenya and Zanzibar. When this too failed he had no alternative but to go it alone with Zanzibar. There can be little doubt that the Tanganyika-Zanzibar union was driven more by pragmatism and the necessity for political survival in the storm of Cold War rivalries, than principles of pan-Africanism. Zanzibarian nationalism continued to test Mwalimu's pan-Africanism throughout his political life.

In another twist of events, Nyerere clashed with West Germans who threatened to withdraw aid should Tanzania continue to allow the then East Germany to have their Consulate in Zanzibar. The German Democratic Republic was among the first to

³ This was the nationalist movement, which fought for independence and ruled as the only party under the one-party system until 1977. In 1977 TANU and ASP (Afro-Shirazi Party) of Zanzibar merged to form CCM (Chama cha Mapinduzi).

recognise the revolution and establish an Embassy there. After the Union, Zanzibar continued to have the embassy but now called it a Consulate. West Germany would not compromise. In a strident response Nyerere asked West Germans to take away all their aid. In an assertion of the country's sovereignty, he said, we would not allow our friends to choose enemies for us.

While Nyerere refused to see the problem of the union as a quintessential expression of Zanzibar nationalism against his territorial pan-Africanism, the tension between his *territorial* nationalism and ethnic/racial parochialism was dramatically expressed only a couple of months before independence in the debate over the citizenship law. The Government had proposed a citizenship bill, which would allow all residents of Tanganyika regardless of their race to obtain Tanganyikan citizenship provided they satisfied certain conditions. A large number of militant members of the parliament from the ruling party opposed the bill arguing that citizenship ought to be based on race. Nyerere retorted with an uncompromising condemnation of the racial position and threatened to resign.

You know what happens when people begin to get drunk with power and glorify their race, the Hitlers, that is what they do. You know where they lead the human race, the Verwoerds of South Africa, that is what they do. You know where they are leading the human race. These people are telling us to discriminate because of the 'special circumstance of Tanganyika.' Verwoerd says, 'the circumstances of South Africa are different.' This is the argument used by the racialists.

[T]his Government has rejected, and rejected completely, any ideas that citizenship with the duties and the rights of citizenship of this country, are going to be based on anything except loyalty to this country. (Applause.) ... The views of those Hon. Members and those of the Government could not be further apart. I am therefore asking for a free vote, and the moment the majority of the representatives of our people show that their views are different from ours, we resign at that point. (Applause.) (Nyerere 1961, 1966:128-9. For a detailed discussion see Listowel 1965.)

Immediately after independence, Nyerere's regime was threatened from not only external but also internal forces. Two other centers of power, besides the state, were the army and the trade unions. The army was dismantled following the mutiny. The state took the opportunity also to ban free trade unions on the allegation that some trade union leaders had collaborated with the mutineers. Instead a law of the parliament established a single

trade union subordinate to the state. The subsequent year saw the establishment of the one-party state, which marked the end of independent organisations of the civil society.

Centralisation of power in the state had an obverse effect though. As in many other African countries the new petty bourgeoisie that had come to power began to differentiate rapidly as the state positions were being used to gain a foothold in the economy giving birth to what came to be called *wabenzi* (meaning owners of Mercedes Benz, a symbol of the political *nouveau riche* then) in Tanzania. The state became a terrain of accumulation. This development would have two-fold effect. It would fracture the unity of the new rulers with the masses built around the promise of independence and mobilized under the nationalist rhetoric. Secondly, the new political class would fortify and safeguard the unequal structures inherited from colonialism. Nyerere saw this and deeply agonized over it.

The opportunity came in October 1966 when university students of the then University College, Dar es Salaam (the only university in the country established on the eve of independence) demonstrated in opposition to the national service law that required all graduates to work in national service camps for six months and then contribute 40% of their salary for the next 18 months. Nyerere commanded all the demonstrators to be brought to the compounds of the state house. The cabinet was there sitting at the high table as Nyerere listened carefully to student demands. Then he erupted like a volcano reaching a crescendo with an order: 'Go home'. 'Go home' meant over 300 students were expelled from the University.

You're right when you talk about salaries. Our salaries are too high. You want me to cut them? (some applause) ... Do you want me to start with my salary? Yes, I'll slash mine (cries of 'No'.) I'll slash the damned salaries in this country. Mine I slash by twenty per cent as from this hour.

...

The damned salaries! These are the salaries which build this kind of attitude in the educated people, all of them. Me and you. We belong to a class of exploiters. I belong to your class. Where I think three hundred and eighty pounds a year [the minimum wage that would be paid in the National Service] is a prison camp, is forced labour. We belong to this damned exploiting class on top. Is this what the country fought for? Is this what we worked for? In order to maintain a class of exploiters on top? ...

You are right, salaries are too high. Everybody in this country is demanding a pound of flesh. Everybody except the poor peasant. How can he demand it? He doesn't know the language. ... *What kind of country are we building?* [Smith 1971: 30 – 31]

That event was a turning point. It paved the way for the adoption of the policy of socialism and self-reliance a few months later.

The Militant Mellowed: 1967-1974

In February 1967 the ruling party TANU adopted the policy of Socialism and Self-reliance proclaimed in the document famously called the Arusha Declaration. It was a historic document. Its significance lay in providing a vision around which masses could rally. Hitherto, Nyerere had made his beliefs regarding socialism, or what he called *Ujamaa*, known in the famous 1962 article called *Ujamaa – The Basis of African Socialism*. There he announced: 'Socialism ... is an attitude of mind.' (Nyerere 1962 in 1966: 162). He went further.

The basic difference between a socialist society and a capitalist society does not lie in their methods of producing wealth, but in the way that wealth is distributed. While, therefore, a millionaire could be a good socialist, he could hardly be the product of a socialist society. (ibid. 162-63).

Nyerere's conception of socialism then could at best be described as Owenite, if not utopian. It did not inspire anybody nor did it mobilize the masses. It was not meant for them. In any case, it was written in English.

The Arusha Declaration was of a different genre. It was written in Kiswahili, perhaps the best, yet understandable, linguistic articulation. It inspired, it mobilized. It was a call for a revolution, yet not a call to arms. It went beyond the 'attitude of mind' to take concrete action. Major means of production – big plantations, banks, insurance, wholesale business, etc. – were nationalized. More importantly, it imposed by law 'leadership conditions' on top state and party leaders and civil servants, including executives in the public sector. Those occupying leadership positions were prohibited from having shares and taking directorships in private companies. They could not own houses for rent. They could not have more than one income and so on. In short, they were legally barred from

using their public positions to accumulate private wealth. The moving call of the Arusha declaration echoed all over the country.

We have been oppressed a great deal, we have been exploited a great deal and we have been disregarded a great deal. It is our weakness that has led to our being oppressed, exploited and disregarded. Now we want a revolution – a revolution which brings to an end our weakness, so that we are never again exploited, oppressed, or humiliated. (Nyerere 1967: 235)

The revolution was going to be made from the top, by the state, with the support of the masses, - peasant populism at its best. Nyerere was making politics in the Leninist sense. 'Politics begin where the masses are; not where there are thousands, but where there are millions, that is where serious politics begin.' But he was also laying a basis for a hegemonic state. The great Caribbean historian, C. L. R. James, got it right when he said:

... Dr. Julius Nyerere in theory and practice laid the basis of an African state, which Nkrumah had failed to do, and the Arusha Declaration in which Nyerere laid down his principles is one of the great documents of post-World War II. (James 1977 : 7)

Nyerere had indeed laid the basis for a state. This helped him survive until he voluntarily retired from formal politics in 1985. Nkrumah did not. He was overthrown by a CIA (Central Intelligence Agency, the notorious spy agency of the United States) engineered military coup with the collusion of right wing Ghanaian politicians.

The period 1967 to 1974, the heyday of the Arusha Declaration, was undoubtedly the most momentous period in the political history of Tanzania. In terms of time it was short; in terms of politics it was epochal.

The most decisive moment of the period, and a turning point in Nyerere's intellectual and political trajectory, was 1971. It marks the high point of Nyerere's resolute nationalism, militant anti-imperialism and shrewd pragmatic politics. Nyerere's speeches and lectures in the immediate post-Arusha period were some of the most militant, some of the most articulate, increasingly showing his appreciation of the political economy of capitalism and imperialism. He undoubtedly read Marx but perhaps much more Lenin. He gave a lecture in Kiswahili at the Kivukoni Ideological College – equivalent of Nkrumah's Ideological Institute at Winneba (Milne 2000: 119) – on 'The part played by Labour in

the transformation of Man', which was very close to Engel's article⁴ (personal memory). But Nyerere was no Marxist or a proletarian revolutionary. He detested the notion of 'class struggle' although by his own admission he was no Gandhinian pacifist either. Where all other means failed, he was prepared to support armed struggles waged by liberation movements in Southern Africa. He got on very well with and even admired freedom fighters like Samora Machel and Amilcar Cabral who were avowed Marxists. He often visited the University and conducted teach-ins on the Arusha Declaration. He was well informed of the ideological fervour on the campus where radical students had formed a militant organisation called the University Students African Revolutionary Front (USARF). To preempt and disarm 'revolutionary students' who advocated 'scientific socialism' and likened *Ujamaa* to 'utopian socialism', he often quoted Lenin's dictum of the need for 'concrete analysis of the concrete situation'. In one of such teach-ins he made the famous statement that, 'if Marx had been born in Sumbawanga⁵, he would have come up with the Arusha Declaration instead of *Das Capital*.'

Two events with lasting impact on Nyerere's politics happen in 1971. Guinea, then the rear base of the struggle of Guinea-Bissau against Portuguese colonialism, was invaded by Portugal. Although Guinean forces including the people's militia rebuffed the attack, it was a clear warning to Tanzania, which was a steadfast rear base for a number of liberation movements including the FRELIMO of Mozambique. In the same year, as Uganda's Milton Obote was attending the Commonwealth conference in Singapore where he had strongly backed Nyerere on the issue of arm sales to South Africa by Britain, his regime was overthrown by Idi Amin Dada. Amin was supported by Britain and Israel. Obote had started moving to the Left and had become quite close to Nyerere.

⁴ Engels, F., 1876, 'The part played by Labour in the Transition of Ape to Man' at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/index.htm>, visited on 24th September 2010.

⁵ Ironically, Sumbawanga, a remote region in southwest Tanganyika, was considered Tanzania's Siberia by militant students. It is the area to which some of the militant nationalists were exiled by the colonial government. When one of the radical students and a member of USARF wrote a piece critical of Nyerere's Education for Self-reliance, the over-zealous University administrator's transferred him to Sumbawanga to the post of a junior officer.

This was also the time when Numeiry in Sudan had declared socialism. A kind of 'corridor of progressive states' was thus in the making when imperialist powers struck to overthrow Obote to break the chain while at the same time send warning signals to Tanzania. Ngombale-Mwiru, one of the most articulate Marxists in the party, was sent to Guinea to learn the secret of Guinean success against Portuguese invasion. He came back with the idea of people's militia (Ngombale/Shivji 2009).

Nyerere argued that the *coup* was 'directed against progressive African countries in a desperate move to blow up the bridge between Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia (quoted in Shivji 1976:124). Nyerere went further and interestingly linked imperialism with local reactionary forces antagonized by the measures taken by the Arusha Declaration and similar measures that Obote was contemplating to take in Uganda.

When President Obote set for the control of the economy, naturally he angered some of the Uganda Africans who wanted to mass wealth and they branded him as their enemy and will work hard to slow the process of his return. When we in Tanzania nationalized the major means of production, we basically angered the British and even some of our leaders and to those aspiring for wealth we laid down a code of behaviour. President Obote was working for a similar goal to define the function of the leader and that was why some of these Ugandan Africans are enthusiastic towards the rebel regime in Kampala (Interview with Mustafa Amin, *The Standard*, Tanzania, 16 February 1971).

Immediately after the Uganda coup, the National Executive Committee of the Party met and adopted one of the most militant documents, the *Mwongozo* or Guidelines. The *Mwongozo* analysed the security situation and underlined the need for the party to control the army and for the people to be armed. People must be involved in decision-making, it demanded, and the habits of leaders must be scrutinized, it asserted. Clause 15 of *Mwongozo* was a short but succinct summation of the developing contradiction between the bureaucracy in the public sector and the working class. 'For a Tanzanian leader it must be forbidden to be arrogant, extravagant, contemptuous and oppressive.' This set off a wave of strikes and workers struggles in the public and private sector. The struggle quickly moved from strikes to locking out of managers and then on to taking over of factories. Between February 1971 and September 1973, there were some 31 industrial disputes involving almost 23 000 workers with a loss of some 64 000 man-days. This was

almost twice the man-days lost and workers involved for the previous six years (Shivji 1976: 135 *et seq*). Almost two-thirds of these strikes were in the public sector.

Mwongozo was thus a document of different genre compared to the Arusha Declaration. It was undoubtedly the work of the Left⁶ in the party, in particular Ngombale-Mwiru and Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu (Ngombale/Shivji interview 2009: 69). Whereas the Arusha Declaration mobilized people's demonstrations in support, the *Mwongozo* lit the fire of class struggle against the 'new class', the state based proto-bourgeoisie. During the workers struggle Nyerere kept quiet. The sides to the contention did not know where he stood. But behind the scenes there seems to have been pressure on him in the usual language of the *status quo*. 'Workers were causing havoc, there was no industrial discipline, the country and the economy would suffer, etc.' On 1st May 1974, Nyerere came down on workers in his famous speech '*unapogoma, unamgomea nani?*' 'when you strike, against whom are you striking?' The logic was standard. Nationalized enterprises were public property, workers own property through their state. When they struck, therefore, they were hurting themselves. Nyerere chose his side. The 1974 marked the end of Nyerere's socialist militancy. Demagogues in the party took over. A number of events happened subsequently in quick succession.

Demagoguery sets in: 1975-1979

Statutory workers committees at the work place led the post-*Mwongozo* workers struggles. The committees, composed exclusively of elected workers from non-management cadre, were originally meant to help the employer discipline workers at the work place. They had no relationship with the trade union. During the post-*Mwongozo* struggle, however, the committees spearheaded the struggle because they were the only organised and legitimate organs available at the workplace. The trade union established by the state had no role; in fact in many cases workers either ignored the trade union or were openly hostile to it. After the 1974 speech, managers managed to push through the law that abolished workers committees and substituted them with trade union branches.

⁶ Interestingly this historic document does not appear in the collection of three volumes of speeches and writings of Nyerere from 1952-1973. The documents of the Arusha period, on the other hand, are included.

The aim was to bring workers under the control of the state through the trade union (Kapinga 1986: 87-106).

In the sister paper of the Arusha Declaration, *Socialism and Rural Development* (1968), Nyerere had advocated the establishment of *ujamaa* villages based on collective ownership of means of production and collective work. But they were meant to be voluntary associations. Between 1969 and 1972, the process of villagisation was slow. The party stalwarts were for speeding up the process. In November 1973, Nyerere directed that living in villages was no longer voluntary. By the end of 1976, the whole rural population should have moved into villages. Thus began the forced villagisation in which millions of peasants were resettled in villages. There was no prior planning. Villagers were not consulted or involved in decision-making (Land Commission 1994: 43). Politically the peasantry was alienated and Nyerere began to lose his popular rural base. Meanwhile, co-operatives, which had played a major role in the 1950s and early 1960s were abolished in 1976 by fiat. State crop authorities were given monopoly powers to buy crops. These authorities became a siphon to transfer the surplus from the peasantry to state bureaucracy. Peasants were paid as low as 20-30% of the market price for their crops.

As the economy was showing signs of decline, politically the demagogues in the party began to wield more and more power resulting in the state becoming more and more authoritarian. In 1975, the party was declared supreme. The National Executive Committee of the party was now the real powerhouse. The parliament was sidelined. The line between the party and the state were blurred. Politics were monopolized as the civil society was statified. Within the state, power was concentrated in the executive and within the executive in the presidency. Extreme concentration and centralisation of power was formally consecrated in the 1977 Constitution so much so that Nyerere could quip to a BBC reporter that, 'I have sufficient powers under the Constitution to be a dictator.' (Quoted in Mwakyembe 1986: 45). To be sure, Nyerere was not a dictator. That is commendable of the man. But the same cannot be said of the constitutional order which he created and presided over.

The stroke that broke the camel's back came in 1979 with the Uganda war. Although the Tanzanian army was able to drive Iddi Amin out of Kagera and finally even out of Uganda, it proved to be very costly to the economy. As it was, the economy had already entered into a crisis. The Ugandan war only deepened it. The last term of Nyerere as president was the worst of his 25-year rule.

The Crisis: 1980-1985

In his 25 years at the helm of the state, there was no period when Nyerere had to face such a deep crisis in his leadership. It was a crisis of both the economy as well as politics when Nyerere's own popularity and the legitimacy of his state were challenged. Foreign exchange was scarce. Commodities disappeared from the shelves. Traders and smugglers took advantage. Parastatals were running below capacity. There was no foreign exchange to import raw materials and spare parts (Coulson 1982, *passim*). Corruption became endemic. The army that had tasted power in Uganda began to flex its muscles on return. The attempted army coup in 1982 came very close to success. Negotiations with the IMF and the World Bank dragged on, as the latter would not budge, imposing severe conditionalities. The Reagan-Thatcher duo had declared the 'Washington Consensus' to build the world in the image of a rampant neo-liberal model. Even the social-democratic friends of Nyerere from the Scandinavian countries turned away as Europe turned right. Country after country in Africa succumbed to structural adjustment programmes mindlessly imposing liberalization policies and withdrawal of crucial subsidies. Nyerere's rhetoric on the unfair international system and the need for the Third World to come together fell on deaf ears. Pan-Africanism was at its lowest. In an interview with American academics in 1983, Nyerere put up a brave face but the despondence was clear: 'At present, Africa is not in the mood for its continental unity, rather it has settled for economic cooperation. We are still panafricanists but we have lowered our objectives and have become more realistic.'⁷

⁷ Question-and-answer session given by President Nyerere to a group of university professors from the USA : June 22 1983. State house, Dar es salaam, recorded by Annar Cassam (in author's possession)

The union with Zanzibar, which Nyerere had sacrificed his principles to maintain, was shaken to the core in the famous one-year debate in 1983. Zanzibaris openly questioned its legitimacy and demanded revisiting the Articles of Union that had ordained a two-government structure. In a seven days meeting of the National Executive Committee of the Party convened to discuss what was dubbed as the ‘pollution of political atmosphere’ Zanzibar’s president, Aboud Jumbe, was made a sacrificial lamb. He was forced to resign from all his state and party posts (see generally Shivji 2008). Nonetheless the crisis of the union was only shoved under the carpet. It continued to bedevil the Tanzanian polity.

Much research needs to be done to uncover the struggles and tensions in the party during this period. There can be no doubt that there was such a struggle. The 1981 *Mwongozo* of the party, one of the most candid documents ever produced, and no doubt the work of the left in the party (see Ngombale/Shivji interview 2009), openly admitted that under the umbrella of the Arusha Declaration and the parastatals, a new class had emerged. It was this class that was now demanding that the party and the country change its course. The document went further and for the first time in any party document, talked about class struggle, which was anathema to Nyerere himself.⁸ Where did Nyerere stand? It is not clear but indications are that he tried to steer a middle course, an impossible course of action at that time. When asked about factional struggles in the party in the 1983 conversation with American academics, once again, Nyerere in his characteristic style evaded the question. He tried to underplay the reality of factional struggles:

It is much clearer, the left/right conflicts are more clearly contained in a single-party system than in a multi-party one where they break away. In a huge single-party system like ours, the right and the left factions are very strong. We find that the younger members are more theoretical and the older members are more to the right and « wiser ». This describes the socialists but I am not sure all CCM members are socialists ! This is the problem with a single-party system. I am quite sure we have non-socialists

⁸ It is interesting that in his interview with the author (Ngombale/Shivji interview 2009) Ngombale does not directly answer the question as to Nyerere’s stand on the 1981 *Mwongozo*. Ngombale admits though that for unknown reasons Nyerere refused at the last moment to present the draft document to the meeting of the Party Congress and ordered Ngombale to do so. (Interview p. 74)

and also sure that we have communists inside the CCM but the tendencies are to gravitate towards the centre - and I am supposed to be in the centre !

The truth perhaps was that the right-tendency was gaining ground and it clearly reared its head once Nyerere stepped down in 1985. Edward Moringe Sokoine, the prime minister, put up the last defense for Nyerere's socialism. Sokoine was a no-nonsense politician. He was a man of great integrity but at loggerheads with his fellow politicians surrounding Nyerere. He was one politician who became popular with the masses in his own right, not under the shadow of Nyerere. In the process, he almost overshadowed Mwalimu and Mwalimu did not always like it. When he was killed in a car accident on his way back from parliament in Dodoma where he had promised to uncover and sack all corrupt leaders on his return to Dar es Salaam, no one believed that the accident was genuine.

In 1985, Nyerere stepped down from the presidency and left the reigns of power to Ali Hassan Mwinyi. It is widely believed that Mwinyi was not Nyerere's first choice. Nyerere would have liked Salim Ahmed Salim, whom he had appointed prime minister after Sokoine's death, to take over. Like Mwinyi, Salim is from Zanzibar, but from Pemba Island, a neglected part of Zanzibar and the hotbed of political opposition. A seasoned diplomat and a Nyerere loyalist, Salim would have certainly been an obvious choice from within the mainstream politicians in the party. Rumour has it that an alliance between the right-wing mainland party stalwarts and hardliner 'revolutionists' from Zanzibar in the Central Committee of the party, thwarted Nyerere's efforts using, ironically, the race factor against Salim. (Salim is perceived to be half-Arab.) If this is true, then it shows how far Nyerere's power even within the party had begun to wane when he stepped down from the presidency.

'Out of State Power': 1986-1999

Mwinyi's regime quickly gave in to the dictates of the IMF and World Bank, out of necessity, if not choice. Mwinyi was no socialist nor were there any socialists in the party to pressurize him. Even the icon of the Left in the party, Ngombale-Mwiru, abandoned ship. When the workers and peasants party opened its doors to capitalists and business people, it was Ngombale, deploying his Marxist rhetoric, who rationalized and justified it, including pulling in the example of one of the founders of 'scientific socialism' Engels

who, he said, was after all an industrialist. It is telling on Nyerere's political style and practice that there was no one in his party or the state to defend his ideology.

As the Arusha Declaration was being abandoned, so the leaders of the party under Mwinyi abandoned the 'leadership code'. The public sector executives of yesteryears became the frontliners to clamor for privatization of the parastatals for they were a burden to the 'poor' Tanzanian taxpayer, they lamented. And, of course, they should be privatized to *wazawa*, that is, indigenous Tanzanians. Parochial ideologies against which Nyerere had stood steadfast in his attempt to build a nation were making a comeback. Nonetheless, Mwinyi moved somewhat cautiously, partly because he still worked under the shadow of Mwalimu, and partly because he was still an old guard nationalist. His successor, president Benjamin William Mkapa, had no such qualms or constraints. He led the neo-liberal counter-revolution at full steam. Mkapa's 10 years in power (1995-2005) saw the final burial of all vestiges of the Arusha Declaration and the policy of socialism and self-reliance. Mkapa opened the doors to financialisation of the economy, to the pillage of natural resources and to the uninhibited entry of speculative capital in the real estate sector. State positions became a means of private accumulation and wealth. Overnight Tanzanian politicians became filthy rich as class polarization deepened. Nyerere watched the beginnings of this development from political sidelines. His last ditch effort to save the state-owned National Bank of Commerce from being decimated and privatized failed miserably.

Nyerere, out of power, probably flowered much more as an intellectual thinker than an elder statesman although it is for the latter that he is often eulogized. He returned to his pet subject of South-South co-operation as head of the South Commission. Coming at a time when neo-liberalism was in its triumphal stage, it did not have much of an impact. In fact, some of the prominent members of his Commission (Manmohan Singh of India, for example) were to become uncompromising neo-liberal reformers in their own countries. I am not sure if Nyerere fully appreciated the extent to which the countries in the South had differentiated. The South of the 1990s was not the same South that Mwalimu spearheaded in the non-alignment movement and the New International Economic Order of the '60s and '70s.

Through the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation he also ventured into the Burundian peace process. That initiative and Mwalimu's leadership needs to be closely studied and analyzed. My hunch is that it was only moderately successful. In any case, Mwalimu did not live long enough to take it to the end.

Another much less publicized attempt by Mwalimu on the African political front was in DRC, the then Zaire. Given the mess that his protégés created there, it is doubtful if that initiative too can be considered a roaring success.

Much more refreshing and inspirational though was Mwalimu's return to Pan-Africanism. His speech in 1997 on the occasion of celebrating forty years of Ghana's independence is one of the most candid admissions on the failures of the first generation African nationalists and the restating of the case for Pan-Africanism. Reading between the lines, one gets the impression that Nyerere is admitting to the failure of the national project. One does not see the same agonizing over the tension that he perceived between African (territorial) nationalism and Pan-Africanism in 1966 in his address on the dilemma of a pan-Africanist (Nyerere 1966 in 1968:207). He even comes close to admitting that in their 1960s debate with Nkrumah when he (Nyerere) advocated 'gradualism' and opposed Nkrumah's call for 'African Union now', he was wrong. He no longer posits tension between 'tribalism' and ('territorial') nationalism; rather he sees Africa at crossroads, either it goes down the road of Pan-Africanism or descends into ethnic divisions and tribalism. He calls upon the new generation to reject the 'return to the tribe'. He characterizes the upsurge of ethnic, racial, and other forms of narrow nationalisms as fossilising 'Africa into the wounds inflicted upon it by the vultures of imperialism.' (Nyerere 1997a) In his *Reflections* on the occasion of his 75th birthday, Nyerere returned to the issue of balkanization of Africa which was predominant in the debate of the 1960s around the time of independence. He said the Balkans themselves are being Africanised as they are absorbed in the larger European Union, while, we, Africans, are being tribalised! Mwalimu said:

...these powerful European states are moving towards unity, and you people are talking about the atavism of the tribe, this is nonsense! I am telling you people. How can anybody think of the tribe as the unity of the future, hakuna! (Nyerere 1997b: 22)

On the Arusha Declaration, Nyerere seems to have had an intellectually ambivalent attitude. He admitted that some mistakes were made under the Declaration, in particular hasty and unplanned nationalizations but still believed that the Arusha Declaration was the correct course of action for Tanzania then and that the country would return to the values and principles of the Declaration (Nyerere & Ikaweba Bunting, 1999). Intellectually, Nyerere's analysis of the Arusha Declaration as an ideology is more interesting than his political position on it. Towards the end of 1980s and early 1990s, there were rumblings to abandon the Arusha Declaration and the leadership code. In a meeting of parastatal and state leaders, Nyerere made an *ex tempore* speech, one of his best. On whether or not the Arusha Declaration should be abandoned, he said:

It is not that peace has come by itself. The source of peace in Tanzania is not that the Arusha Declaration has done away with poverty even a little bit. Isn't there this poverty we are still living with? This poverty is right here with us. Is it not the same economy we are grappling with? The fact is not that the Arusha Declaration has banished poverty even by an iota - nor did it promise to do so. The Arusha Declaration offered hope. A promise of justice, hope to the many, indeed the majority of Tanzanians continue to live this hope. So long as there is this hope, you'll continue to have peace. Here in Tanzania we have poverty but no "social cancer" [original in English]. It is possible it has just begun. But otherwise we don't have a social cancer. There isn't a volcano [in English] in the making such that if you pressed your ear to the ground you'd hear a volcano in the making, that one day it is bound to erupt. We have not yet reached that stage because the people still have hopes based on the stand taken by the Arusha Declaration. It did not do away with poverty but it has given you all in this hall, capitalists and socialists alike, an opportunity to build a country which holds out a future of hopes to the many. ...

To be sure, you few Waswahili [a colloquial for, in this case, 'people'], do you really expect to rule Tanzanians through coercion, when there is no hope, and then expect that they will sit quiet in peace? Peace is born of hope, when hope is gone there will be social upheavals. I'd be surprised if these Tanzanians refuse to rebel, why?

When the majority don't have any hope you are building a volcano. It is bound to erupt one day. Unless these people are fools. Many in these countries are fools, to accept being ruled just like that. To be oppressed just like that when they have the force of numbers, they are fools. So Tanzanians would be fools, idiots, if they continued to accept to be oppressed by a minority in their own country. Why? ...

Therefore we cannot say that we have now reached a stage when we can forget the Arusha Declaration. Don't fool yourselves. This would be like

that fool who uses a ladder to climb and when he is up there kicks it away. Alright you're up there, you've kicked away the ladder, right, so stay there because we'll cut the branch. You're up there, we're down here and you've kicked away the ladder. This branch is high up, we'll cut it. Your fall will be no ordinary fall either.

Let me say no more. It is sufficient to say we should accept our principles, we should continue with our principles of building peace and peace itself. Tanzanians should continue to have faith in the Party, in the Government and in you in positions. Tanzanians should see you as part of them not their enemies. They should trust the Party, the Government and you who have opportunities for there is no country where everyone is equal. These fingers of mine are not equal, and in that sense there is no such equality anywhere. (Quoted in Shivji 1995).

In this speech, Nyerere is at his best as the philosopher-king. The Arusha Declaration was a legitimizing ideology without which the country would break up into violence. You cannot have a society polarized into the filthy rich and the miserably poor and still expect the poor to maintain peace while the rich continue living in peace. So the Arusha Declaration did not bring about equality, nor was it meant to do so. The Arusha Declaration was meant to give *hope*, hope which would preserve peace both for the 'capitalists and the socialists'.

Was Nyerere's socialism then a strategy for political survival⁹ or a philosophical conviction of a vision for a future society or both? Perhaps both, as was Nyerere himself both, a king and a philosopher.

⁹ Indeed two of his close expatriate associates, Roland and Irene Browne, trace the origins of the Declaration to the need to survive both against external forces and the budding internal elites who would become a bulwark of the status quo. (Brown, 1995: 12-13.)

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