

Visionary leadership in Africa: the example of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania 1922 to 1999

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Abstract

This article recaptures the philosophy of Nyerere and the idea of Ujamaa (familyhood) in modern African socialism. Nyerere's political idea for Tanzania centred on the creation of an egalitarian socialist society based on cooperative agriculture, racial and tribal harmony, as well as moralistic self-sacrifice. The study argues that contemporary challenges in Africa caused by colonialism, misrule, and corruption have called for backwards-looking and integration to prevent political and economic chaos on the continent. Presently, the Corona Virus-19 Pandemic (COVID-19) like its twin disease, the Influenza Pandemic of 1918, had triggered unemployment, food shortages, inflation, price instability, the balance of payment disequilibrium, and social vices. Drawing on primary and secondary sources to substantiate its claim, this study found that the present state of affairs in the world has introduced the new normal and new methods of doing things; hence the need for indigenous solutions to Africa's problems. This article recommends that African leaders need re-invent indigenous political philosophy such as the Nyerere's African socialism to save its citizens from poverty rather than the present dependency on colonial masters and donor countries.

Keywords: Backward-looking, politics, economy, Ujamaa, COVID-19 Pandemic.

Introduction

Nwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere of Tanzania was a man of his time and age. He was one of the few African leaders who had the



interest of their people at heart and an unwavering determination to replace the colonial political system with indigenous African socialism. He recognised that the new states of Africa are faced with the task of rapid economic development and the creation of new values. Hence, the need to rediscover one's identity became important amidst conflicting image(s) of Africa and Africans in the eyes of Europeans. The negative perception of the black race began with European imperialism and the freighting away of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean as slaves for about 400 years.¹ Since then, Africa has been associated with negative perceptions such as 'a dark continent,' 'backward,' 'primitive,' and 'uncivilised,' among others. These colonially scripted images still shape the contemporary Western understanding of Africa in general and of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in particular.²

Nevertheless, the reactions of African scholars in this regard have been well documented in academic journals and books. Suffice it to say that pan-Africanism was one of the earliest attempts to sensitise the consciousness of Africans on race and inequality. It was an emotional and intellectual reaction on the part of peoples of African descent against the inhuman treatment, degradation, injustice, oppression and alienation they suffered in a predominantly white society. Consequently, "it became a movement directed at restoring *dignity* to the African through the rediscovery of the *African personality*."³ Also in the period of decolonisation, African nationalists reflected on the political ideas that would be suitable for their people, so, African political philosophy emerged as a reaction to the different experiences of the African and his interpretation of such experiences.⁴ There

¹ G. Martin, *African Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 43.

² K. C. Dunn, *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 4-6; Also see Gabriel Olusanya, "African Historians and the Pan-Africanist Tradition." in Erim O. Erim and Okon E. Uya (ed.) *Perspectives and Methods of Studying African History*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publisher, 1984), 10-17.

³ Olusanya, "African Historians," 10.

⁴ M. Falaiye, "Socio-Political Philosophy," in E.K. Ogundowole (ed.) *Philosophy and Logic, A Student Companion* (Yaba: Dmodus Publishers, 2002), 128-141.

was, therefore, the idea of Negritude propounded by Leopold Sedar Senghor with Leon Demas and Aimie Cessaire, in which they advocated a total political, social and cultural value of African civilization, and of the entire black race. Kwame Nkrumah also emphasised socialism as a way out of Africa's political quagmire. At the heart of his argument was the need to understand Western political ideas as the genesis of Africa's backwardness, corruption and poverty.

Similarly, Kofi Busia's exciting study, *African in search of Democracy* noted that: "in traditional African communities, politics and religion were closely associated...behind Africa's search for modernization and new political and social institutions lie an interpretation of the universe which is intensely and pervasively religious."⁵ He concluded that the solution to the political challenges in Africa lies in the shift from ethnic groups based on kinship to the nation-state.⁶ Sekou Toure's view equally centred on socialism, this he called '*communaucratique*', though it was similar to that of Senghor's however, at the heart of his idea was Marxism which he believed was the solution to Africa's political problems. But the twist in his thesis was that he rejected the underlying principles of Marxism. He believed in the liberation of Africans from the shackles of foreign domination, capitalism, and communism since these were the causes of inequality in African societies. As he puts it, "When people ask us if we are for capitalism or socialism, for the East or the West, we invariably answer that what we consider first and above all is the Africa we intend to liberate from Foreign domination, sickness, misery and ignorance".⁷ In his opinion, neither communism nor capitalism applies to African because European and Soviet economies are more developed than that of Africa.

Writing in the same vein, Kenneth Kaunda advocated for African humanism, popular democracy, liberty and pursuit of happiness but rejected capitalism which he claimed was the bane of Africa's

⁵K A. Busia, *Africa in Search of Democracy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 9, 16.

⁶Busia, *Africa in Search of Democracy*, 20.

⁷S.Toure, *La planification economique* (Conakry: Imprimerie National, 1960), 292.

problems.⁸ From the above, it is clear that the central idea in African political thought in the 1960s was the eradication of the Western political system, poverty, misery, and backwardness. But this did not come to fruition because of the problems of identity, attachment to colonial masters, language, and western intervention in African politics. African leaders were also faced with suspicions and lack of trust considering the wave of politics of capitalism and communism in post-World War II, a phenomenon that divided the world into bipolar politics. Consequently, African nationalist decided on a gradual approach to African integration in transportation, science and technology, telecommunications and the economy. Their efforts were to see Africa participate in the world economy and be self-reliant.⁹ Can African leaders recapture these lofty ideas in contemporary times to give direction to their people since neither capitalism nor communism has worked for the continent? Therefore in concert with Nyerere's call...get the benefit of European society... and yet return to the African own structure of society in which the individual is a member of a kind of fellowship. My objective in this study is to recapture Nyerere's African socialism as well as contribute to the existing literature on African political discourse.

Several works have already discussed Nyerere's *Ujamaa*. These include Major and Mulvihill; Mosoke; Fouere; Cruz; Stoger-Eising; Martin; and Meredith, among others.¹⁰ These works are useful for

⁸Martin, *African Political Thought*, 53.

⁹Martin, *African Political Thought*, 54.

¹⁰ T. Major and T M. Mulvihill, "Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), an African Philosopher, Re-envision Teacher Education to Escape Colonialism," *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, 3, 1 (2009), 15-22; I.K.S. Musoke, "Building Socialism in Bukoba: The Establishment of Rugazi (Nyerere) Ujamaa Village," *International Journal of Politics*, 4, 4 (1974-75), 102-118; Marie-Aude, Fouere, "Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa, and Political Morality in Contemporary Tanzania," *African Studies Review*, 57, 1 (2014), 1-24; Adriana, Cruz, "Ujamaa: A Venture in Cooperative Living," *Black View* 1, 4 (1973), 13, 19-20; Viktoria. Stoger-Eising, "Ujamaa Revisited: Indigenous and European Influences in Nyerere's Social and Political Thought," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 70, 1 (2000), 118-143; Guy Martin, *African Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa*, A

the background knowledge they provide on Nyerere and his African socialism. Nevertheless, the present study is a focused study from the historical perspective since existing literature is from the domain of philosophy and political science. To give us a real insight into the study, we adopt the 'how and why tradition' of historical analysis. First, how did Nyerere become "Nwalimu" (a teacher and philosopher)? Second, what was the background to African socialism (*Ujamaa*)? Third, to what extent was *Ujamaa* an experiment in African socialism? Additionally, what were the challenges of implementation in Nyerere's Tanzania? To answer these questions, I have divided this paper into four main parts, beginning with the making of Mwalimu, (the teacher), the background to *Ujamaa*, the *Ujamaa* philosophy, an experiment in African socialism, and challenges of implementation. The conclusion of the paper brings together the various arguments, findings, and recommendations.

The Making of Mwalimu, 'the Teacher'

Julius Kambarage Nyerere was widely regarded as a great leader whose personal contributions and modest lifestyle was in contrast to the extravagance and corrupt practices of most African leaders. A combination of factors set Nyerere apart as a visionary leader in Africa. He believed that he would have been a preacher in a church rather than the president of a republic probably because of his love for country and people and the desire to liberate them from foreign domination. He lived a stoic and epicurean life, often dressed modestly and took no interest in the spoils of leadership or possession of worldly things, but pursued his objectives with candour.¹¹ He was known to have behaved on the world stage as the spokesman for the poorest of the poor demanding a new international economic order that would give people a greater share in the world's wealth.¹² His idea seems plausible when we juxtaposed Nyerere's training in economics and his vision of equality and democratic principles. As a philosopher per-excellence, he affirmed that "it is stupid to rely on money as the major instrument when we know only too

History of the Continent since Independence. London: Simon and Schuster Ltd, 2011).

¹¹Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 249.

¹²Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 249.

well that our country is poor. It is equally stupid, indeed it is even more stupid, for us to imagine that we shall rid ourselves of our poverty through financial assistance rather than our financial resources.”¹³ This suggests that Nyerere from the outset opposed African dependency on donor nations since it was the European powers that worked their nations to the top. As a historian, Nyerere contributed knowledge in books, memoirs and political treatise, some of which are widely read in modern times and others have translated to the classical treatise. He also took time to translate into Ki-Swahili William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar* because of the wisdom contained in the works. And using the tools of history, Nyerere educated his people on the meaning and challenges of independence:

Independence means self-reliance. Independence cannot be real if a nation depends upon gifts and loans from another for its development. How can we depend upon foreign governments and companies for the major part of our development without giving to those governments and countries a great part of our freedom to act as we please? The truth is we cannot.¹⁴

He further reassured his people that the only answer to the problems of national development was slower growth through self-reliance and an emphasis on the development of the peasant agricultural economy and to rely too much on foreign aid meant that Tanzania would be exposed to donor pressure and perhaps undermined its ability to take independent action. Nyerere did not deny the need for foreign aid when necessary but wanted it to be regarded as supplementary to a national development effort. It was owing to his vast knowledge that Margery Perham said, “Certainly the most poised, confident, extrovert and indeed, radiant of all the African leaders I have met”¹⁵ From the above, it should be noted that Nyerere told his people the naked truth about economics and politics, as well as, the challenges of dependency. Therefore, it is safe to argue that Nyerere was a

¹³ Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 251.

¹⁴ Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 251.

¹⁵ M.Perham, quoted in Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 250.

crusader for Africa's self-reliance because of his visionary leadership and political engineering.

As a teacher, Nyerere possessed a genuine concern for egalitarianism and an intense dislike for all forms of elitism. Consequently, he argued that "capitalism fosters excessive individualism, promotes the competitive rather than the cooperative instinct in man, exploits the weak, divides the society into hostile groups and generally promotes inequality in the society"¹⁶ This implies that in Africa, wealth in whatever form was shared equally before the coming of colonial rule. The real question is what was the nature of Nyerere's community, peoples and culture before the advent of colonial rule? This would probably throw light on his distaste for the Western political system.

Nyerere's Tanganyika was present-day Tanzania in East Africa, formerly a German colony based on the 1886 and 1890 Partition Treaties.¹⁷ Its history since 1886 could be divided into four main periods. The first lasted until 1907 and was primarily dedicated to the suppression of indigenous resistance, while the second ended with the German colonisation of 1914. The third period was between 1914 and 1918, while the fourth was the period of British administration. We can only discuss briefly the German exploits in Zanaki because of the manner it distorted a vibrant indigenous society through the creation of arbitrary or warrant chiefs similar to the British colonial rule in Igboland, Nigeria. German rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Zanaki was the architect of Captain Gaston Schlobach who wanted to plant western political culture. The Germans came to Zanaki looking for a king or a sultan, since "the Europeans could not get their minds around the idea of a non-centralised and non-hierarchical social structure. Consequently, they "invented traditions of chiefdom that transformed a flexible and dynamic socio-political reality into one bounded by all the rigidities of an

¹⁶Nyerere, quoted in Major and Mulvihill, "Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), an African Philosopher, 16.

¹⁷Z.A. Marsh, Z. A and G. Kingsnorth, *Introduction to the History of East Africa* (London: Cambridge University Press. 1957), 221.

invented tradition.”¹⁸ Since Schlobach could not find a king among the people he had to appoint eight chiefs, one for each of the Zanaki provinces and made them warrant chiefs. It should be recalled that the appointment of warrant chiefs in Igboland contributed immensely to the Aba Women’s Riots of 1929.¹⁹

This development marked the end of the *erisaga* institution and communal life in Zanaki Country. The *erisaga* institution had to do with cooperativeness and communal lifestyle which promoted symbiotic relationship and collective identity of a people. The home country of Nyerere was Zanaki, a community on a hilly and fertile land for agriculture and animal husbandry. Cattle rearing appeared to be the economic livelihood of the people and cattle ownership was seen as a sign of family prosperity. Therefore, in Zanaki, as in many other East African societies, the religious and symbolic significance of cattle was enormous (cattle complex). Also at the social level, the people practised polygyny and, following their patrilocal residence regulations, married women live in their husband’s compound while they engaged in domesticity and reproduction.²⁰

Nyerere was the son of Nyerere Burite, a community leader of the Wazanaki. He obtained a teacher’s certificate from Makerere College, and from 1946 to 1949, taught at a Catholic School in Tabora (Tanganyika). Thereafter, he travelled abroad for further studies, graduating with an M.A in history and economics from the University of Edinburgh, Britain in 1952.²¹ By 1954, Nyerere had developed himself for politics and administration, he became a founding member and President of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) and at independence in 1960, Nyerere became the Chief Minister of Tanganyika. He later took over the Presidency immediately after the country became a republic in

¹⁸ T.O. Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa,” in E. Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger (eds), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-century Africa: essays in honour of A.H.M. Kirk-Greene* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1993), 62- 111, particularly, 62-63.

¹⁹JS. Coleman, *Nigeria, Background to Nationalism*(California, USA: University of California Press, 1958), 174-175

²⁰Stoger-Eising, “Ujamaa Revisited,” 120.

²¹Martin, *African Political Thought*, 98.

1962.²²Nyerere also brought his wealth of experience to bear in the merger of Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1964 which led to the formation of the United Republic of Tanzania. He achieved this feat due to age and time because not many people had the privilege of educational training and determination to liberate their people from foreign domination. It is observed that Nyerere's involvement in politics was stimulated by his informal and formal training. He was also guided by the principles of management, which says that a leader is a servant, and must be ready to offer his service in the interest of the generality of the people.

His role in TANU was equally remarkable because it contributed to the merger of TANU and Zanzibar's Afro-Shirazi Party into a single national party known as *Chama Cha Mavinduzi* (CCM). This was a necessary move to reposition the party and probably redirect it to the vision of African socialism. In consequence, the "Arusha Declaration of 1968 became the foundations of Tanzania's socialism and self-reliance, encapsulated in the concept of *Ujamaa* meaning 'community' or familyhood" in Ki-Swahili.²³The making of *Mwalimu*, meaning "a teacher in Ki-Swahili," transcended classroom work and politics. As Nyerere has written, "Education is the process of cultural transition and renewal, the process whereby adult members of a society carefully guide the development of infants and young children, initiating them into the culture of the society."²⁴ He observes further that the purpose of education should be to liberate a human being, therefore "people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves. For while an outsider can build a man's house an outsider cannot give a man a pride of self-confidence in him as a human being."²⁵

²² S. Gideon. Were and A. Derek. Wilson, *East Africa through A Thousand Years, A History of the Years A.D. 1000 to the Present Day*. London: Evans Brother Ltd 1975), 286-287.

²³ Martin, *African Political Thought*, 99.

²⁴ Nyerere, quoted in Major and Mulvihill, "Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), an African Philosopher, 17.

²⁵ J. Akinpelu, *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1981), 118.

This illustrates that foreign culture and politics cannot be the answer to African development. African development can only come from African and not from outside. Nyerere believed that Africans had acquired the attitude of the mind through socialization because African socialism was guided by equality, freedom and unity. Nyerere pointed out that “there must be equality because only on that basis will men work cooperatively, there must be freedom, because the individual is not served by society unless it is his, and there must be unity because only when the society is united can its members live and work in peace, security and well-being.”²⁶ It is probably on account of these that Nyerere prepared himself for the leadership position of his country and the desire to change his society from Western political culture to African socialism. The question is, to what extent did Nyerere deployed the philosophy of African socialism into the politics of Tanzania? Perhaps the question would help us to dissect or distil the idea of *Ujamaa* from Western political thought.

Background to “Ujamaa” (Familyhood)

Nyerere’s philosophy of African socialism was drawn from his traditional and communal background. The Zanaki society of his youth was in its entirety a school in the ordinary sense of it. As he put it, “I grew up in a perfectly democratic and egalitarian society”²⁷ His people were involved in subsistence agriculture primarily encouraged by the *erisaga* system, “a form of a traditional social security association.” It should be recalled that in most pre-colonial African societies communalism was practised because it encouraged cooperativeness and understanding. It existed on the premise of oneness and kinship, and throughout the traditional society, it survived as an acceptable social system. In the case of Zanaki, “the inhabitants of several adjacent homesteads – not necessarily belonging to the same clan-form a distinct community or *erisaga* that works co-operatively in times of harvest and house building, they also

²⁶Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity* (Oxford University Press: Dar-es-Salaam, 1966), 8.

²⁷Nyerere, quoted in Stoger-Eising, “Ujamaa Revisited,” 119.

gather for recreational activities.”²⁸ The *erisaga* system also flourished as a kind of voluntary association for mutual assistance in the event of recurrent conditions of uncertainty. As one of the scholars observed, “*erisaga* appeared to be the only option in periods of endemic insecurity during planting and harvest, particularly because rainfall was never reliable in the Musoma hinterland, therefore reciprocal help constituted a form of ‘life insurance’ that can sometimes spell the difference between flourishing and disaster.”²⁹ This was the nature of the egalitarian system in Zanaki, where everyone worked and helped one another even in time of disaster or bounty harvest. The republican system of the Zanaki people was similar to that of the Igbo and Tiv peoples of Nigeria. They live according to democratic principles where everyone (male and female) was allowed to contribute their views to the general assembly. This political system made it difficult for Nyerere’s society to have a visible king; rather they opted for local chiefs who exercised communal control, law and order.

Records have shown that private ownership of land was not allowed in Zanaki because the land was communally owned, therefore, the rights to use land (usufructuary), as well as access to resources was determined by lineage. It was, therefore, the responsibility of elders to allocate or appropriate land for agriculture and construction of buildings, while the only forms of private ownership resided in the ownership of farm implements such as hoes, cutlasses, hammer, digger, and dwelling places.³⁰ This explained the nature of the egalitarian system in Zanaki communities. The equality of man as Nyerere declared was central to the theory of *Ujamaa*: “I do not believe in land ownership as you Europeans do; land cannot be ‘owned’ in the same sense as you own a T-shirt, or as I own my sandals. You can only have the rights to use it.”³¹

Apart from the *erisaga* system, another political culture from the Zanaki society that helped in the conception of *Ujamaa* was

²⁸O. Bischofberger, *The Generation Classes of the Zanaki (Tanzania)* (Fribourg: Studio Ethnographica Friburgensia, 1972), 14.

²⁹Stoger-Eising, “Ujamaa Revisited,” 120.

³⁰Falaiye, “Socio-Political Philosophy,” 134.

³¹Nyerere, quoted in Stoger-Eising, “Ujamaa Revisited,” 121.

the *hamati* system. It was not locally based as the *erisaga* but composed of members who live in different homesteads and provinces and gave allegiance to the elders of Zanaki. This group intervened in time of crisis and offenders punished in the context of the *hamati*. The *hamati* leaders were traditionally male elders thought to be wise and distinguished in their chosen fields. They made their mark in debates and dialogue for which they were recognised as leading mediators and judges.³² These elders talk till they agree and this suggests the republican nature of the Zanaki just like the Igbo democracy where people talk and talk until a resolution was reached. Because of the efficacy of this culture, Nyereredid not hesitate to incorporate it in the *Ujamaa* philosophy because people were familiar with the system. It should be clear from our discussion that the politics and social life of the Zanaki people had developed before the coming of the Europeans. It is for this reason that *erisaga* and *hemati* cultures were essential components of Nyerere's *Ujamaa*.

Nyerere's *Ujamaa*: an Experiment.

There is no doubt that there exist other forms of economic systems such as capitalism, communism and communalism, the question is where did Nyerere derive his African socialism? Was it an original concept different from other economic systems or was it a revisionist approach? These are issues that demand our attention in this section. African socialism as advocated by Nyerere appeared to have taken its roots from communalism practised in pre-colonial Africa, particularly when we interrogate Nyerere's background in Zanaki society. Nyerere sometimes used interchangeably 'African socialism' and 'Tanzanian socialism' to refer to his political ideas, though the terms simply mean *Ujamaa*. African socialism conveys a strong sense of communal spirit, belonging together and attending to mutual responsibilities.³³

³²Bischofberger, *The Generation Classes of the Zanaki*, 18.

³³A. Mohiddin, "UjamaanaKujitegemea," in L. Cliffe and J.S. Saul (eds), *Socialism in Tanzania* (Dar es Salaam and Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972), 165-76.

The concept in its entire ramification, deals with the joint ownership of basic property, land and cooperativeness in the social and economic spheres. Personal property did exist and was accepted, but this took second place in the order of preference. It was the family property that mattered both to the family and the individual. "But no member of the family starved so that another could accumulate personal property. And because it was family property, all had a right to share in its use."³⁴ The beauty of communalism is that it did not create classes or inequality in African societies; rather it centred on cooperation and social integration. Nyerere opined that the man who uses wealth to dominate any of his fellows is a capitalist, and so is the man who would if he could.³⁵ Therefore, Africa communalism can be summarised as the obligation to work, and the communality of basic property and mutual respect which in turn brought about African generosity and hospitality. Therefore, one can safely argue that the system was successful in Africa during the period irrespective of language, distance, and ethnicity.

On the other hand, the Marxist ideology which began in Russia encouraged collective ownership of the means of production and central planning to replace autonomous markets. It explains that capitalism is immoral, unjust and humanly degrading because it is only labour that creates value, therefore only labour should receive income. Yet, "workers get only subsistence wages and are degraded as men by the market which turns their labour into commodities, and by the factory in which they were mere appendages."³⁶ On the other hand, the socialists believe that collectivization was a way to expand agricultural production by organising farms into many larger-sized units and by mechanizing agricultural work. To collectivize agriculture was to confer control over the disposition of agricultural output to the government which could then allocate the produce to enlarge the productive capacity of the industry.³⁷

³⁴Mohiddin, "UjamaanaKujitegemea,"163.

³⁵Nyerere, "Freedom and Unity, Ujamaa - the Basis of African Socialism," Inaugural Address to Parliament, 1962, 162.

³⁶ GeorgeDalton, *Economic Systems and Society, Capitalism, Communism and the Third World* (Penguin Books Ltd, 1975), 79.

³⁷Dalton,*Economic Systems and Society*, 121.

Another feature of the socialist economy was central planning which was lacking in both capitalist economy and communalism, though capitalist economies were largely determined by the forces of demand and supply. Having briefly highlighted the different kinds of economic systems, what therefore was Nyerere's African Socialism? As Tanzania approached independence, Nyerere resolved that African socialism was the answer to the socio-political problems of his country, thus *Ujamaa* was guided by the principles of "*equality, freedom, and unity*." Though, these three elements had been part of the African traditional system but were upturned by colonial rule, which introduced classes, capitalism, and division in Africa's socio-political space. African languages do not have the vocabulary to embrace the concept of class; therefore it was the making of colonial rule and the lust for empire.³⁸

Comparatively, the French society of the eighteenth century was divided into classes not until the people came with the spirit of revolution in 1789 encapsulated in the slogan, "liberty, equality, and fraternity." Since then the French society had remained different compared to the ancien regime. Equality in the African context means that there were no rich because wealth in whatever form was shared equally according to African values. The millionaire and the beggar are both capable of being socialist or capitalist; the mere physical possession of wealth is therefore not the deciding factor.³⁹ This, Nyerere called the basic feeling of recognition and respect for one another.

Related to the above is Nyerere's conception of communal ownership, that is, ownership of land and other means of production. *Ujamaa* was conceived along African communalism because without the acceptance of equality of all men there can be no socialism. It is the principle of equality that provided the lever for political participation and social inclusiveness. It is, therefore, noted that Nyerere's socialism derived the principle of 'equality' from the indigenous African political system, and perhaps aspects of the French revolution of the eighteenth century and the Russian collectivization arrangement in the 1920s. Another fundamental principle in the *Ujamaa* philosophy

³⁸Nyerere, quoted in Falaiye, "Socio-Political Philosophy," 133.

³⁹Falaiye, "Socio-Political Philosophy," 134.

was the obligation to work' summarised in the Swahili proverb "Mgenisikumbili; sikuyatatumpejembe," meaning "Treat your guest as a guest for two days; on the third day give him a hoe!" Nyerere said, "in fact, the guest was likely to ask for the hoe even before his host had to give him one – for he knew what was expected of him, and he would have been ashamed to remain idle any longer."⁴⁰ This was the African egalitarian system incorporated in the *Ujamaa* philosophy but Nyerere's idea did not completely depart from Marxists socialist principles because Nyerere, perhaps borrowed some concepts of the command economy.

It is also argued that Nyerere at a point integrated central planning and control in his African socialism, even though he did not completely subscribe to the idea of collectivization of industrial and agricultural produce. Perhaps, this was one of the reasons why some scholars contend that Nyerere's *Ujamaa* was influenced by Western political thought and this observation remained potent. Available evidence also indicates that some African scholars criticised Nyerere's socialism on many fronts because of their attachment to Western political ideals but this did not in any way affect or diminish Nyerere's African socialism.

Nyerere's opponents described his theory as 'Tanzaphiles', meaning, a promised land of communitarian peace, a 'new heaven on earth.'⁴¹ That is a utopian society that cannot be achieved while on earth but in the heavenly kingdom. Some others claim that Nyerere derived inspiration from the achievements of Mao Tse-Tung of China who carried out the cultural revolution of China in 1968.⁴² However, it is observed that there was no correlation between Mao's Marxist socialism and Nyerere's African socialism (*Ujamaa*) because the Chinese Cultural Revolution did not espouse egalitarianism but socialist

⁴⁰Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity, UhurunaUmoja: a Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1952-65* (Dar-es-Salaam: Oxford University Press.1967), 165.

⁴¹Nurse-Bray, P. F. (ed.,) *Aspects of Africa's Identity* (Kampala: Makerere Institute of Social Research, 1980), 56-57.

⁴² G. Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry* (London, Ibadan and Nairobi: Heinemann, 1980), 100.

ideals. Thus, Nyerere's vision came from his native Zanzaki society but with a blend of Western ideals. As he puts it, "When I read the book of John Stuart Mill, I was instantaneously reminded of my Zanzaki society and the situation of my mother. She had to toil a lot!"⁴³

This suggests that Nyerere had a background where agriculture was the dominant economic livelihood. The egalitarian principles in *Ujamaa* philosophy was also a tradition in the African socio-political system because socialism, like democracy, is an attitude of mind because the rich shared part of their wealth with the poor, therefore the Arusha Declaration of 5 February 1967 was a turning point in the transition from Tanzania's nation-building to socialist development.⁴⁴ The question is what lessons would African leaders learn from *Ujamaa*? The *Ujamaa* experiment had shown that a little effort by African leaders could make a difference in the political and economic spheres. It also showed that nothing is impossible if we tried individually and collectively, focusing on a mission. Nyerere succeeded where others had failed because he believed in his project and the liberation of his people from western influences. He became the cynosure of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on account that there were prospects in his political and economic ideals. The challenge for African leaders at this point is to look inwards for enduring political socialism that can drive integration and cooperation among Africans similar to African communalism.

Challenges

The impact of Nyerere's *Ujamaa* cannot be overlooked in African political thought. This is because it was a distinctive African idea that drew extensively from the principles of communalism. Since Nyerere's socialism was an attempt to liberate Tanzania from foreign domination; some observers believe that it would fraught with difficulties within and outside the continent. Some of the difficulties included: impact of colonial rule, opposition from the

⁴³Nyerere, quoted in Stoger-Eising, "Ujamaa Revisited," 129

⁴⁴C.R. Pratt, "The Cabinet and Presidential Leadership in Tanzania 1960-66", in L. Cliff and J.S. Saul (eds.), *Socialism in Tanzania* (Dar es Salaam, and Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1976), 227-64

new elite, and the mass nationalisation of key infrastructure and combines. Others were a forceful collection of land (*Ujamaa* village), lack of external reserve or financial base, and Nyerere's personality, among others. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, colonial rule of the Germans and the British changed an already traditional and egalitarian Tanganyika society. The emergence of European colonisers brought about capitalism and exploitation; through their exploits, they recruited indigenous agents into their illicit enterprise. This group of agents turned African Merchants accumulated resources with which they had hoped to launch themselves into power after independence. However, they became part of the emergent class that never wanted African leaders to break away from colonial tutelage because of their economic interests.

Another group that challenged *Ujamaa* projects was the nationalists in opposition parties. Some of them were involved in the liberation struggle for independence and believed that it was their turn to profit from their efforts but were not happy with the *Ujamaa* policies because it denied them the aspiration of projecting themselves into post-colonial politics. But since they could not venture into leadership positions with their resources, they worked against the success of *Ujamaa*. With the Arusha Declaration in 1967, there was further agitation on the part of the elite and this contributed to the slow take-off of *Ujamaa*. The opposition became stiffer in successive years when Nyerere's code stipulated that all senior government and party officials had to be either a peasant or a worker and should in no way be associated with the practice of capitalism. This arrangement subsequently excluded most nationalists from holding company shares and private directorships; they were also excluded from receiving more than one salary, and from owning houses for rent.⁴⁵ Additionally, their fringe benefits were slashed and restrictions imposed on the importation of luxury goods.

This showed that the *Ujamaa* policy on the elite and the rich could be likened to the "biblical parable of a camel passing through the eye of a needle"⁴⁶ This implies that it is difficult to tell a rich man to abandon his wealth and position to join the

⁴⁵Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 252.

⁴⁶*The Holy Bible NKJV Luke*, 18:24-25

ranks of the poor. In defence of this policy, Nyerere opined that the wide income differences between the Tanzania elite and the masses were the major obstacle to the effective socialist strategy.⁴⁷ Consequently, the rich resisted the programme on the grounds they were the target, but their struggle was transient because *Ujamaa* had gain currency. The policy of mass nationalisation also compounded an already difficult situation in Tanzania. This was the nationalisation of private banks, insurance companies, and major food processors. Others were eight major foreign export trading companies, controlling interest in the majority of sisal plantations, and manufacturing companies producing cement, cigarettes, shoes and beer, and thereafter a mopping-up operation on all buildings except those lived in by their owners.⁴⁸ In the exercise, the most affected were the rich Asian community; the wealthy class whose buildings worth over 100,000 Tanzanian shillings (£6,000). In consequence, the implementation of *Ujamaa* became more challenging as the agricultural and industrial combines were in the hands of the government. Thus, the centralisation policy of Nyerere appeared autocratic in approach and authoritarian in implementation. It should be recalled that the implementation of communism in Russian at a time caused a lot of challenges, such as inflation, revolt, price increase, unemployment, black market operation, racketeering, and reduction in output until the policy was streamlined by Stalin.⁴⁹

The seizure of land from chiefs and villagers to establish *Ujamaa* villages was equally a factor. At the early beginning, Nyerere assured the people that *Ujamaa* villages would be introduced voluntarily without coercion but the reverse appeared to be the case. An *Ujamaa* village was meant to be a voluntary association of people who decided on their own to live and work together for their common good but the slow pace of the project was discouraging to Nyerere, hence the offer of inducements to people which brought about significant development in 1973. It was subsequently discovered that many of the cooperatives were primarily formed for the prospects of

⁴⁷Quoted in Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 252.

⁴⁸Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 252.

⁴⁹L.Kochan, *The Making of Modern Russia* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1965), 266-273.

obtaining water supply, or provision of schools or other infrastructure, and government assistance. Thus only a few were organised along cooperative lines for lack of supervision and selfish interest. The lack of supervision during the period also made some peasants living on the margins of poverty not to invest their security in the fortunes of the land but chose to keep back their existing landholdings. This affected in no small measure the *Ujamaa* policies and programmes in the 1970s.

“Another setback indeed was that the main beneficiaries in many cases were the host of party officials, agricultural officers and community development officers paid government salaries who settled on to *Ujamaa* villages like flies. This was the beginning of official corruption in the system.”⁵⁰ Therefore, as a remedy, Nyerere announced the compulsory resettlement of the entire rural population within three years which did not go down well with many people because of the nature of coercion and brutality, thus, many became disillusioned while others resorted to foot-dragging. Following the sharp decline in agricultural outputs, caused by drought between 1974 and 1977, Tanzania had no option than to call for import to make up the shortfall, for this reason, it received aids and loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank which violated the spirit of African socialism. This development marked the beginning of Tanzania’s dependency on foreign hand-outs.

In successive years, Tanzania’s economic woes escalated, it became one form of borrowing or another in the economic history of Tanzania. Nyerere resorted to a complaint, laying the blame on the indifference of the people to the *Ujamaa* programmes. Even when he reverted to state industries in 1979, the spirit of *Ujamaa* had declined, and at a Party Conference in 1982, Nyerere confessed that Tanzania had many ‘very serious’ and ‘very real’ problems, but socialism, he argued, was not one of them. “We have good policies. We have good plans. “We have good leadership.”⁵¹

The personality of Nyerere contributed to the factors that hindered the smooth implementation of *Ujamaa*. According to

⁵⁰Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 254-255.

⁵¹Quoted in Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 254-255.

one of the scholars, "If one looks at the power that Nyerere gave himself, one might suggest that he was 'hungry' for power. It seems as if he wanted to be a dictator. A Head of State should have good advisors who will greatly assist him in the ruling of the country."⁵² But the reverse was the case, for example, Nyerere introduced a new constitution that gave him sweeping powers compared to some European presidents. In this case, he was both the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces and also had full executive authority that would not even bind him to accept the cabinet's advice, and more importantly to rule for seven years.⁵³

Another illustration that portrayed the dark side of Nyerere was his uncompromising attitude to the political elite. He did not see them as partners or collaborators because of his personality which dominated *Ujamaa* policies, and this was one of the factors that hindered his successes. In a historical account entitled the *Dark Side of Nyerere* (1984), Ludovick Mwijage tells the story of his years of persecution and imprisonment, which he attributed to Nyerere's despotic rule"⁵⁴ Nyerere was equally depicted as a condescending, disloyal, and self-interested man who resorted to backroom political intrigues and scheming to acquire and retain the power to get rid of popular politicians who got in his way, including faithful companions. This perhaps corroborated the thinking that Nyerere played clandestine roles in the revolution that overthrew the post-independent constitutional monarchy of Zanzibar in 1964.⁵⁵

His authoritarian posture was also captured in the Newspaper Ordinance Bill of 1968, in which the President of Tanzania could ban any material from the press that was considered subversive (Konde, 1984: 56). He also mandated that the *Standard* Newspaper published by the Tanganyika Standard Ltd, a Parastatal, be converted to a socialist paper, to support the socialist ideology which did not go down well with many people.

⁵²Nyerere (1922-1999), an African Philosopher, 21.

⁵³R. Sadleir, *Tanzania, Journey to Republic* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1999), 257.

⁵⁴Mwijage, quoted in Marie-Aude Fouere, "Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa, and Political Morality," 15

⁵⁵Fouere, "Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa, and Political Morality," 15.

It should be clear from our discussion that Nyerere's *Ujamaa* was affected by a combination of factors. First, it was believed that Nyerere's personality contributed extensively to the failure of African socialism. Second, was the palpable indifference and self-centredness of operators in most *Ujamaa* villages, and third was the fact that *Ujamaa* villages were affected one way or the other by natural disasters, drought, locust invasion and climate change and desertification.

In 1985, Nyerere gave up the Presidency but remained as Chair of the Party-Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). He gradually withdrew from active politics, retiring to his farm in Butiama and by 1990; he had relinquished his chairmanship of CCM but remained dynamic on the world stage as Chair of the Intergovernmental South Centre. He died in 1999 of leukaemia, but before then, *Ujamaa* villages were almost on the verge of collapse due to lack of innovation and problems of food security.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to consider the visionary leadership of Julius Nwalimu Nyerere and the conception of African socialism. Nyerere was born in 1922 in Zanaki society, one of the regions in Tanganyika, present-day Tanzania. He grew up in a community where equality, respect, and freedom reigned supreme among the people. His foray into politics began in 1949 soon after his tertiary education at the University College of Makerere in Uganda and his Master's of Arts (M.A) degree from Edinburgh University. In 1952 Nyerere was employed as a teacher at St Francis College and in 1953, he was elected President of the Tanganyikan African Association (TAA) where he contributed enormously to its development until appointed temporary member of the Legislative Council (LC) following the gradual removal of traditional authorities and their replacement by elected councils.

It was the politics of Independence that brought Nyerere to the limelight and was subsequently appointed Chief Minister of Tanganyika in 1960. In 1964, he was elected the president of the United Republic of Tanzania. Nyerere was discovered in Tanzania's politics on account of his educational qualification and personal ideology. His traditional background also contributed to

his endeavours and successes. Therefore the idea of African political philosophy did not come as a surprise in the 1960s following the independence of many African countries. The main agenda of African leaders of the period was how to liberate African from the colonial legacy, politics and economy of western countries. In consequence, Nyerere's vision became known as African Socialism, popularly known as *Ujamaa* or familyhood.

Three important developments shaped Nyerere's ideas of African socialism, first was the Western political thought of John Stuart Mill, the great liberal utilitarian thinker of nineteenth-century England, second, his Edinburgh years where he became interested in political philosophy and practical politics, and third was Nyerere's Zanaki society which was practically an egalitarian society. In the pre-colonial Zanaki communities, there was recognition and respect for one another. This was also reinforced in the communal ownership of important commodities such as land which was held in trust by the elders, and appropriated to individuals for use. In the same vein, there was the principle to work and African hospitality, as encapsulated in the Swahili proverb: *Mgenisikumbili; sikuyatatumpejembe* or "Treat your guests as a guest for two days; on the third day give him a hoe!" These were the building blocks of *Ujamaa* philosophy in Tanzania.

Nyerere's socialism was fraught with challenges that cannot be overlooked. Some of these included colonial legacies of capitalism and individualism, opposition from the colonial elite, nationalisation of key industries and plantations, forceful collection of land from chiefs and villager heads, lack of supervision of *Ujamaa* Village, Nyerere's personality and dictatorial tendencies, and others. These factors hindered the successful implementation of *Ujamaa* policies in Tanzania. *Ujamaa's* educational policy also contributed to the difficulties of the period. This is because many did not welcome the emphasis on practical subjects. After all, most of the teachers were educated in the colonial system in which the male teachers were dress in tie and jackets and were not ready to engage in the policy of manual labour or agricultural work. Similarly, the teachers had been indoctrinated by a functionalist approach to education where different skills are valued differently.

Despite the challenges of implementation, Nyerere's visionary leadership and African socialism are still relevant in African political thought. His determination to rid Africa of western culture and colonial domination marked him out as a patriotic African visionary leader. His political ideas also provided direction for some African leaders to follow, particularly, his austere and stoic life which made it impossible for him to accumulate wealth or own palatial houses in Tanzania. He would be remembered for his ideas on African interdependence and cooperation which he demonstrated in *Ujamaa* and scholars continue to be encouraged by the values of Nyerere and others who held a vision for schools guided by African morals. Therefore the re-envisioning of teacher education to escape colonialism was an essential part of Nyerere's political agenda.

This study revealed that African socialism cannot be sustained because of colonial factors and the challenges of the new world order which had far overtaken African socialism. It also established that the lack of industrial foundations in most African countries will continue to cause dependency on colonial masters and international financial institutions. This was one of the challenges of African socialism in the 1980s when it began to obtain loans from the World Bank and advanced countries to support *Ujamaa* villages and food shortages. It is therefore recommended that African leaders need to re-invent African socialism to achieve self-reliance and industrial and agricultural development of their peoples. This will help alleviate the problems of unemployment, food shortages, and backwardness in the post-Corona Virus 19 (COVID -19) era.

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