Building a Peaceful Nation in Tanzania is a significant contribution to the growing literature on state-and nation-building in Africa. Cast in the analytic framework of sovereignty and discursive agency, the book examines the historical context within which, Julius Nyerere, the founding President of Tanzania, navigated the challenges and policy processes of reconstituting a colonial state apparatus and re-fashioning into a new sovereign state with an enduring national identity and a collective consciousness. Based on the interpretation and analysis of extensive archival materials and interviews, the author demonstrates how the colonial history, experiences and expectations of subject citizens provided critical conjunctures that informed and defined policy options for nationalist leaders. The book further argues that the social, political and economic policies and institutions that were subsequently designed and implemented formed a robust anchor for the interpretation and analysis of extensive archival materials and interviews.

The book is divided into three main parts constituting a total of ten chapters. Part One is sub-titled Searching for a Sovereign Discourse and has two chapters, the first sub-titled the Education of Julius Nyerere and the second sub-titled Contemplating the Political Economy. Part Two discusses Internal Sovereignty and has five chapters, namely: Independence and the Fear of Divisions, Invention of Ujamaa, Origins of Villagization, the Army Munity and the National Youth Service. Part Three discusses External Sovereignty and has three chapters namely: A Realist Foreign Policy, the Cold War and the Union Treaty, and Contending with International Intrigues.

The characterization of Julius Nyerere as a pre-eminent, transformative and charismatic leader is also shared by Goran Hyden and Donald William who argue that ‘Nyerere’s presidency was the most symbolic in all of Africa, carefully framing the nation-building project with the goal of remaking the entire nation into a super community’.1 Such characterizations would neatly fit into Professors Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba’s now famous concept of ‘subject citizens’ who are meant to be served by the post-colonial state in Tanzania.2 Not surprisingly, one of the more recent Afro-Barometer public opinion surveys conducted among representative adult samples in twelve countries provides further evidence that popular notions of ethnic and national identity in Tanzania are in fact radically different from those found in other African countries. When asked the open question ‘which specific group do you feel you belong to first and foremost?’ Only 3 percent of Tanzanians responded in terms of ethnic, language or tribal affiliation, the lowest of the 12 countries in the sample with the exception of small and relatively homogeneous Lesotho at 2 percent. This is in contrast to 76 percent of the respondents who answered the relevant question in terms of occupational affiliations. Moreover, about 90 percent of the respondents claimed they were proud to be called Tanzanians. This low rate of attachment to ethnic identity stands in sharp contrast to Nigeria (48 percent), Namibia (46 percent), Mali (39 percent), Malawi (38 percent), and Zimbabwe (36 percent).3 To be sure, Julius Nyerere’s nation-building experiment would seem to have left an indelible mark on Tanzania’s political culture!

After his resignation from the premiership position only six weeks after independence, Nyerere embarked on creating a sustained common narrative and a shared political culture for Tanzanians through a series of well-calculated nation-building strategies. These strategies were firmly grounded in his profound belief in the intrinsic equality of all mankind and his unwavering commitment to the building of social, economic and political institutions that would reflect and ensure such equality. He began earnestly by re-invigorating TANU (the Tanganyika African National Union), the nationalist political party, transforming it from a mere nationalist movement into a robust and powerful political organization, with massive popular support at all levels of society. Its membership was not structurally linked to any particular group – religious, ethnic, racial class or regional. The mass political party represented many divergent interests and was held together by electoral rules that helped to strengthen its national dominance. By revitalizing the party, the political leadership sought to counterbalance the power of the new political and bureaucratic elites by establishing a political mechanism meant to promote the effective mobilization of the popular masses thus creating grass-root-based political power.

The book further discusses how the state swiftly enacted and rigorously enforced several contentious stiff laws that were designed to promote national unity and discourage societal divisiveness. The struggle to concentrate power, authority and influence gradually led to the abolition of fissiparous tendencies in the body politic. Politically restrictive legislations included the Preventive Detention Laws targeting supposedly rancorous trade unions and opposition political parties as well as the introduction of a one-party state system. Civil society organizations such as trade unions and the youth, women’s and students’ organizations that had supported nationalist struggles were either banned or turned into affiliates...
of the ruling political party. It was claimed that fully open competition between candidates might have generated poisonous ethnic, class and/or religious factionalism in a fragile political environment. Other politically restrictive laws abolished the post of traditional chief in 1962 while strengthening the role of elected village councils. The book notes that the abolition of traditional chiefs played a pivotal role in further diminishing ethnicity in Tanzania’s public life relative to other politically turbulent African countries where such authorities remained firmly anchored in the local governance organizational structures.

Moreover, through the virtual monopoly of public mass media, schools, public service and civil society organizations, the state-party oligarchy successfully inculcated citizens with “desirable” political ideas and opinions including, often, a strong attachment to the nation, over and above ethnic, religious or even regional identities. During the immediate post-independence years, the state created an environment in which the freedom of the mass media was severely curtailed and the dissemination of news and information was monopolized by its own agencies. The state-controlled media was geared largely to inform, educate and propagate national policies and values.

The private press was forced to exercise self-censorship by constraining its coverage of certain controversial issues. The book argues that the state’s ultimate virtual hegemony over citizens was aided by the control and monopolization of public messages on nation-building to the extent that it has been difficult to dislodge its impact even after over three decades of political and economic liberalization.

Secondly, the book further addresses the role of political mobilization and training of the youths as yet another crucial nation-building strategy in Tanzania. It comprised, among other aspects, a compulsory national service for all secondary school graduates. The newly established military camps received and trained youths from different regions, including the experiences of Adolf Hitler’s Germany, Benito Mussolini’s Italy and Emperor Hirohito’s Japan. However, this hypothesized fear has not materialized in Tanzania. In fact, the proud Tanzanian state has been an excellent neighbor, accepting millions of refugees fleeing armed conflicts in the region and facilitating peacekeeping and conflict resolution in Africa’s troubled neighborhoods thanks to the pan-Africanist ideals that are at the very heart of Nyere’s enduring political philosophy. The analysis in this otherwise well-written and thought-provoking book fails to go this far.

Finally, the author also fails to examine the down side of extensive nation-building interventions. Admittedly, it could be argued that the deliberate equitable resource distribution policies promoted by the Arusha Declaration would seem to have hugely served to depoliticize ethnicity and potential religious conflicts to a far greater extent in Tanzania than in other comparable African countries.

Moreover, although nation-building can bind people together and reduce the likelihood of domestic civil strife, it may equally provide nationalist impulses that may lead to war with neighboring countries. This would happen if the people’s national identity and pride were perceived to be under potential external threat. The history of the world is replete with examples of such tendencies including the experiences of Adolf Hitler’s Germany, Benito Mussolini’s Italy and Emperor Hirohito’s Japan. However, this hypothesized fear has not materialized in Tanzania. In fact, the proud Tanzanian state has been an excellent neighbor, accepting millions of refugees fleeing armed conflicts in the region and facilitating peacekeeping and conflict resolution in Africa’s troubled neighborhoods thanks to the pan-Africanist ideals that are at the very heart of Nyere’s enduring political philosophy. The analysis in this otherwise well-written and thought-provoking book fails to go this far.


7. The colonial mouthpiece, the Tanganyika Broadcasting Services, was nationalized at independence and became Tanganyika Broadcasting Corporation (TBC) the radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam Act No. 11 of 1965.