

**B**uilding 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 reconstructing 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 resulting passive political culture that was largely responsible for Tanzania's apparent unique peace and stability in the subsequent decades. In the midst of an army mutiny, bitter Cold War-engineered conflicts and international political intrigues, the contested Union Treaty between Tanganyika and Zanzibar, pervasive poverty, heterogeneous ethnic, racial and religious social groups as well as regional political instabilities – otherwise veritable indicators of instability for any young nation – Tanzania, unlike her immediate African neighbors, remained largely unscathed during the entire period under discussion.

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

## Nation-building Project in Tanzania: Actors, Institutions and Processes

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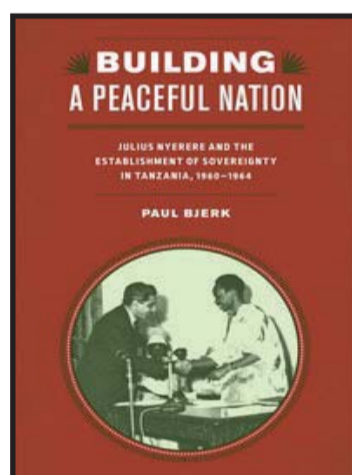
### *Building a Peaceful Nation: Julius Nyerere and the Establishment of Sovereignty in Tanzania 1960-1964*

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Treaty, and Contending with International Intrigues.

The book goes to great lengths and details in discussing what is presented as Nyerere's profound and deep-seated fears and anxieties about the possible negative role of identity politics in undermining the establishment and resilience of a peaceful and prosperous nation.

Right from the early independence days, the Tanzanian state set itself the task of undertaking a vigorous process of nation-building with the aim of welding its multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious country into one nation. It is argued that the First President deliberately embarked on developing discursive strategies of uniting a historically divided post-colonial nation by craftily declaring an all-out war on what was characterized as three common national enemies, namely ignorance, disease and poverty. The very choice of the war imagery served as a unifying factor against the real and imagined national enemies, calling on all citizens to unquestioningly support all the development policies, projects and programs identified and promoted by the Government, not least, the nation-building experiment. The project was therefore, state-driven from the outset, relying on a top-down approach that carried far-reaching centralizing implications. The only shared experience of Tanzanians was that of German and British colonial administrations.



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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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).<sup>3</sup> 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 rival political parties 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 and control of the 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.<sup>4</sup>

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 further enhanced 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 core 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 which, arguably, helped them to create age-based social networks rather than ethnic or religious-based networks. While in military camps, youths received a heavy dose of military training and civic education. Both programs were considered important in getting the youth committed to the nation as they grew up and were expected to unquestionably support rather than oppose the government's development policies and programs. More importantly, civic education was geared to the molding of the youth into good and responsible citizens as well as being politically competent members of society.

Thirdly, the book discusses the role of the education curriculum in the molding of a national identity in Tanzania. It is noted that schools which belonged to different sections of society – missionary, Asian, European, cooperative and private – were nationalized and turned into public schools. This policy intervention created equal educational opportunities

and accessibility for all. Moreover, the allocation of secondary school admissions was based on a quota system which tended to favor localities which had lagged behind educationally. In addition, schools became arenas for promoting a national culture. Better still, sports, traditional dances, stories, songs and other cultural practices were taught to all students. Finally, public school curricula in independent Tanzania were aggressively employed as a strategic nation-building tool. The curricula stressed a common Tanzanian history, culture, loyalty and values. In this way, the education system inculcated the youth with a strong sense of national and pan-African identity. Bringing and mixing together students from different ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds helped to create networks among educated elites across social divisions.

Fourthly, the book analyzes the role played by the promotion of the Kiswahili language as yet another political factor that most obviously distinguishes Tanzania from all other African nations. The Kiswahili language became a source of shared identity among Tanzanians of all ethnic and racial social groups. As other experts on Tanzania have insightfully observed, the political leadership quickly pushed for total 'Swahilization' of the government administration and established the National Kiswahili Council to promote its use in all spheres of public life. Using the Kiswahili language as a medium of instruction at the primary school level was very central to Nyerere's nation-building project. The language spread throughout the country as primary school children could teach it to their own parents at home. The book strongly notes that the spread of Kiswahili increased friendships, business partnerships and marriages across ethnic, racial and religious groups that shared a common national language. In short, the role of the Kiswahili language in the nation-building project in Tanzania could hardly be overstated. The book concludes that the above self-perpetuating norms, values and institutions fostered widespread acceptance of the preferred national identity and a rejection of political violence as being un-Tanzanian. They were said to have weakened identity consciousness and ties, secularized the society and promoted the new sense of nationhood just as the experience of industrialization had supposedly done in Europe!

However, *Building a Peaceful Nation* is a provocative and interesting book but falls short of persuading. As the agency in the discursive condition, the book tends to over-play the ideas, interests and perceptions of the First President at the expense of other equally critical policy actors such as his very close nationalist leaders, opposition political parties and leaders, to say nothing of the broad masses of Tanzanian citizens. It provides massive evidence to demonstrate the immense power and ability of the President in supposedly always making the right policy choices and always building unflinching political coalitions around certain discourses while controlling and often marginalizing counter narratives.

The book is equally pre-occupied with a thinly-veiled but largely lop-sided discussion about the immense personal skills, intelligence, rhetorical capabilities of the President, while paying lip services to the capabilities of other principal actors and their respective counter discourses and strategies employed to challenge the establishment. In short, it grossly inflates his role! A more useful and better nuanced analysis of political developments in Tanzania would have required a balanced recognition of the complexity of Julius Nyerere, as a person, the complexity of the development process and the challenges of leading a country that was underdeveloped, coupled with the complexity of the international system that the country found itself interacting with immediately after independence in 1961.

Equally disappointing is the fact that the book fails to capture and analytically designate the Arusha Declaration and its policy strategy of Socialism and Self-Reliance as the critical historical juncture in the analysis of the nation- and state-building project in Tanzania. To be sure, the Declaration came to provide a sweeping but detailed political, social and economic compass for Tanzania for decades along the road. Viewed retrospectively, the immediate post-independence nation-building measures detailed by the book would not have gone far and deep enough in building the coherent and peaceful nation, state and society that we have come to know and celebrate if the momentous Arusha Declaration interventions had not taken place. The whole book project required being anchored in some all-encompassing ideology and policy strategy such as was provided by the Arusha Declaration. This is the policy blue-print that promised a non-racial, non-tribal, and non-religious development strategy in order to arrest and even reverse the already creeping processes of class formation and regional economic disparities through the national distribution of central government resources – for education, health and infrastructure. Surprisingly, the author fails to conceptualize this nuanced peculiarity of Tanzania's development intervention. Admittedly, it could be argued, 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 Nyerere'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 on the economic development trajectory of a poor and dependent African country, like Tanzania. A single-minded pursuit of the nation-building project would arguably tend to compromise other equally important national interests, including a focused approach to a balanced economic growth and development. A poorly calibrated public ownership stance with respect to the major means of production and distribution, preference for cooperative over private ownership, the uncompromised policy of self-reliance with a diminishing reliance on foreign direct investment – all these forces could dynamically conspire to generate negative incentives for entrepreneurship, productivity, technology transfer and innovation, living the dependent and struggling national economy highly uncompetitive, ineffective and vulnerable to externally generated shocks. This is another way in which Julius Nyerere's nation-building project could also be assessed. Nonetheless, *Building a Peaceful Nation* is an important contribution to a growing literature on state-and nation-building in Africa. It ably explains how and why Tanzania's apparent national identity was created and propagated.

#### Notes

1. Goran Hyden and Donald William, 1993, 'Community Model of African Politics: Illustrations from Nigeria and Tanzania,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 36 (1), 68-96.
2. Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba, 1963, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
3. Afro-Barometer Network, 2002, "Afro-Barometer Round 1: Compendium of Comparative Data from a 12-Nation Survey", Afro-Barometer Paper #11.
4. 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.