

Rehabilitating nationalisms: conviviality and national consciousness in postcolonial Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper explores the link between nationalism, development and national consciousness. In Tanzania, post-independence nation-building resulted in the establishment of a national consciousness sufficiently versatile to balance and contain most of the competing ideas about what it means to be part of the Tanzanian nation. By giving insight into how this has variably been related to a discourse on development and the responsibilities of the Tanzanian citizen, the paper argues for a convivial reading of national consciousness that recognises that nationalism remains a process of collective bargaining, with official versions constantly challenged, re-formulated and re-emerging in new forms.

Introduction

‘Nationalism’ as an object of social science enquiry has fallen out of fashion in recent years. Characterised as an atavistic force in a globalised world, nationalism rarely features in contemporary analyses of the politics of development in Africa. Recent scholarship in this area has instead been preoccupied with struggles over territorialized power and the politics of belonging.¹ Yet in parts of the continent often absent from these debates, such as Tanzania, nationalism remains meaningful beyond struggles to control the state.² In this paper we argue that the achievement of nation-building in Tanzania has been the creation of a national consciousness sufficiently versatile to balance and contain most (but not all) of the competing ideas about what it means to be part of the Tanzanian nation.

Five decades on from the emergence of Tanzania as an independent nation-state, it is worth re-visiting the National Question.³ The standard narrative of postcolonial Tanzania highlights the relative success with which it undertook and achieved the creation of a viable nation-state. Whilst this narrative has raised questions about Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* ideology and the attempt to impose villagisation from the late 1960s, it has been far kinder in its assessment of his nation-building project. Fusing *Ujamaa* ideology, self-help development, and a national lingua franca, Swahili, the state managed the transition from a nominal state containing a collection of disparate ethnic, linguistic, religious and geographical groups under colonial rule, to a meaningful nation-state.

However, standard narratives of nation-building that focus on what is described as the ‘*Ujamaa*-period’ do not tell the whole story. First, they underplay the extent of dissent. Being part of the Tanzanian nation meant different things to different people, even if it existed in some over-arching nebulous form. Second, they present the nation-building project as a monolithic process of creation, so that understandings of the nation are still dominated by its original iterations rather than reflect new ways of conceptualising or thinking about the nation.. But building the nation was an on-going process, an amalgamation of different strata of ideas laid down by subsequent generations. Modern nationalism is founded upon the late-colonial nationalist movement and the *Ujamaa* period, but it also reflects the aftermath of structural adjustment, increasingly penetrating globalised networks and the perennially thorny (and at times openly conflictual) state of the union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Third, historical accounts have tended to close with the end to *Ujamaa*. The narratives of the post-socialist period remain to be researched and recounted in depth. This is all the more urgent since some recent assessments of Tanzanian politics have been characterized by anxiety about the atomising effect of the scarcity, uncertainty and competition ushered in by the post-liberalization era. The specific concern is that political and economic liberalization will unpick

¹ S. Dorman, D. Hammett and P. Nugent (eds), *Making nations, creating strangers*, Leiden, Brill, 2007; P. Geschiere, *The perils of belonging: autochthony, citizenship and exclusion in Africa and Europe*, University of Chicago Press, London, 2009.

² P. Chatterjee, *The nation and its fragments*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993.

³ A. Mafeje, *In Search of an Alternative: A Collection of Essays on Revolutionary Theory and Politics*, Harare, Shaping Books, 1992.

Tanzania's unique sense of national identity and replace it with a set of exclusive (and excluding) identities based on race, religion, ethnicity and region.⁴ The signs of a tip towards a balkanizing identity politics became visible in the main cities from the early 1990s, as indicated by the 'pork riots' in Dar es Salaam in 1993,⁵ the increased political tensions and violence on Zanzibar from the mid-1990s, as well as the mobilization of political support in politicians' rural homelands. By the turn of the millennium the educated elite in Dar es Salaam were preoccupied with the potential for religious tension between (and among) Muslims and Christians, and with questions of race, belonging and economic opportunity.

The sub-text has been that the national identity achieved during the *Ujamaa* period might now be undone. Clearly, such phenomena are alarming and have understandably attracted critical attention. But after more than two decades since the shift to political and economic liberalization, the standard narrative of Tanzanian nationalism requires some revision. From the current vantage point, how convincing is the argument that Tanzanian national identity has come under serious threat in the post-liberalization era?

A crucial point of departure is to recognize that such challenges are not new. The history of postcolonial Tanzania is characterised by the state's management of various claims to belong to different political communities.⁶ That the state's version of national consciousness achieved hegemony in the post-colonial period did not obliterate the 'great wealth of political discourses which exist within the nation'.⁷ What is new, is the dynamic way in which these competing voices interact with each other and with the state in the post-liberalization era. We argue in this paper that the existence of alternative

⁴ R. Aminzade, « From race to citizenship: the indigenization debate in post-socialist Tanzania », *Comparative Studies in International Development*, vol. 38, n°1, 2003, p. 43-63; C. Baroin, « Religious conflict in 1990-1993 among the Rwa: Secession in a Lutheran diocese in northern Tanzania », *African Affairs*, vol. 95, n°381, 1996, p. 529-554; J. Campbell, « Nationalism, ethnicity and religion: fundamental conflicts and the politics of identity in Tanzania », *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 5, n°1, 1999, p. 105-25; S. Falk Moore, « Post-socialist micro-politics: Kilimanjaro, 1993 », *Africa*, vol. 66, n°4, 1996, p. 587-606; P. Gibbon, « Civil society in Tanzania: a 40-year perspective », *Development and Change*, vol. 32, n°5, 2001, p. 819-844; T. Kelsall, « Shop windows and smoke-filled rooms: governance and the re-politicization of Tanzania », *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 40, 2002, p. 579-619.

⁵ In 1993, a group of Muslims organised by the now defunct Balukta Muslim organisation, attacked butchers selling pork in the Kigogo area of Dar es Salaam, angered by their presence. Around 38 people were arrested in connection with the attacks (Campbell, J., « Nationalism, ethnicity and religion... », *op cit.*

⁶ J. Brennan, *Nation, race and urbanization in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 1916-1976*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Northwestern University (2002); J.L. Giblin, *A history of the excluded: making family and memory a refuge from state in twentieth-century Tanzania*, Oxford, James Currey, 2006; E. Hunter, « Revisiting ujamaa: political legitimacy and the construction of community in post-colonial Tanzania », *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, vol. 2, n°3, 2008, p. 471-485; J. Iliffe, *A modern history of Tanganyika*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979; G.H. Maddox and J.L. Giblin (eds), « *In search of a nation: histories of authority and dissidence in Tanzania* », Oxford, James Currey, 2005; T. Ranger, « The invention of tradition in colonial Africa », in E. J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The invention of tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p.211-261.

⁷ G. H. Maddox & J. L. Giblin, « Introduction », in G. H. Maddox & J. L. Giblin (eds), *In search of a nation...*, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

discourses of political community should not lead us down an analytical cul-de-sac in which identity is conceptualized in binary terms, where the apparent rejection of the state's version of national identity is always in favour of another, more 'localized' or 'authentic' identity. People may well reject the state's version of national identity, but that does not mean that they reject a sense of belonging to the nation.

There is a long seam of community activity in local rural development in Tanzania. In this paper, we use the changing practice of rural self-help development across two time periods as windows on the ways in which different versions of national consciousness have been imagined, practiced and debated. Both self-help/nation-building schemes, and the work of home associations, tap into this rich seam, and have played similar roles in mobilising not just activity, but also ideas about what engagement means, the responsibility of the citizen for the development of the nation, and through this national consciousness.

Whilst not entirely new from independence, self-help as a strategy was formally incorporated into national development planning in the 1960s, in ways that home associations have not been. A tool for mobilisation by TANU during the nationalist struggle from the mid-1950s, and tapping into longer traditions of community engagement in local improvement schemes, the formalisation of self-help as a national strategy post-independence bound it more tightly to the priorities of the state. Village self-help schemes thus frequently reflect official priorities. In contrast to home association projects, then, self-help schemes appear more tightly bound to the state, rather than more "genuine" expressions of local needs and priorities.

However, looking more closely, some of the apparent differences, whilst not disappearing, do become more muted and complex. First, while home associations are generally associated with migrants in urban centres, they are led by urban elites in association with rural elites. Self-help was also subject to control and influence specifically from rural elites, who sought to shape projects to suit their interests, and became sites of conflict and tensions over local development priorities. Second, official self-help activity appears most in the records, but the extent of informal self-help activity is also clear: informal in the sense of not being officially sanctioned by incorporation in village, district or regional plans, not 'directed' from above, often without formal funding, and appearing before officials only when completed. Throughout the 1960s officials at all levels expressed growing concern over the apparent rise of informal self-help activity and potential ramifications for the state. Such activity thus is a more accurate reflection of a community's own priorities than might be assumed.⁸ Whilst Home Associations may be 'informal' in the sense of not being part of official development planning, they are not completely isolated from state interest and engagement, and have been (especially in recent years) actively encouraged by the state.

In what follows we outline a convivial reading of national consciousness and a reconsideration of the 'death of nationalism'. We then draw on archival evidence on self-

⁸ Michael Jennings, 'We Must Run While Others Walk: Popular Participation And Development Crisis In Tanzania, 1961-9', *Journal of Modern African Studies* (2003), 41, pp.163-187

help development from the first decade of Independence, when state efforts to construct a national consciousness were partly articulated through development policy. Through a discussion of the tensions that arose from the enactment of this policy, we show that alternatives to the top-down narrative of national belonging have a history in Tanzania; but that rejection of the state's narrative did not necessarily mean a rejection of belonging to the nation. Second, we draw on recent interviews with the leaders of contemporary self-help home associations from two rural districts in the south. Home associations are of interest here because they have been interpreted as evidence of the increasingly unpredictable social and political landscape in which the one-party state's achievement of regional, ethnic and religious conviviality has come under strain. Indeed, for some in Tanzania, home associations are to be distrusted because they raise the spectre of ethnic politics. However, through a discussion of the work of the home associations connected to Rungwe and Newala districts we argue that there is no inevitable relationship between home associations and a destructive identity politics.

Conviviality and national consciousness

This paper develops a more convivial reading of postcolonial politics in Tanzania. In so doing we follow Nyamnjoh's call for scholars to pay more attention to the 'success stories' which demonstrate the inclusive and convivial character of political subject-making in Africa.⁹ The use of 'conviviality' here clearly differs from Mbembe's influential and far darker reading of conviviality as *commandement* in Cameroon.¹⁰ Instead we follow those scholars of Tanzanian popular culture who have argued that too great an emphasis on state coercion overlooks the ways in which national narratives are reproduced through complicit and interdependent relations between the producers of popular culture and the Tanzanian state.¹¹ While we recognise that there are exclusionary elements within Tanzanian nationalist discourse,¹² nevertheless in this paper we wish to draw attention to the sense in which 'nationalism works',¹³ and the ways in which the 'everyday relations' between people from different backgrounds 'can be normal, civil and mutually valued'.¹⁴

⁹ F. Nyamnjoh, «From bounded to flexible citizenship: lessons from Africa », *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 11, n°1, 2007, p. 73-82; also J. Fontein, «Shared legacies of the war: spirit mediums and war veterans in southern Zimbabwe», *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 36, n°2, 2007, p. 167-199.

¹⁰ A. Mbembe, *On the postcolony*, University of California Press, London, 2001.

¹¹ L. Edmondson, *Performance and politics...*, *op.cit.*, p.5; also K. Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*, University of Chicago Press, London, 2002.

¹² F. Becker, *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania, 1980-2000*, Oxford and London, Oxford University Press and British Academy, 2008; G. Cameron, «Zanzibar's turbulent transition », *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 29, n°92, 2002, p. 313-330; P. Caplan and F. Topan (eds) *Swahili modernities: identity, development and power on the coast of East Africa*, Africa World Press, 2004; J. Giblin, *A history of...* *op.cit.*; J. Igoe, «Becoming indigenous peoples: difference, inequality, and the globalization of East African identity politics », *African Affairs*, vol.105, n°420, (2006) p. 399-420; A. Ivaska, « 'Anti-mini militants meet modern misses': urban style, gender and the politics of 'national culture' in 1960s Dar es Salaam, Tanzania », *Gender and History*, vol. 14, n°3, 2002, p. 584-607.

¹³ L. Edmondson, *Performance and politics...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁴ N. Bertz, « Educating the nation: race and nationalism in Tanzanian schools », in S.R. Dorman et al, *Making nations...*, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

Social life in Tanzania is far more complex than any putative division along lines of race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity or geography might suggest.¹⁵ For instance, political parties and party membership are not easily reducible to identity politics. Data on party membership and voting patterns according to categories such as race, class, religion, ethnicity and gender are not widely available (as demonstrated by the lack of such data collected and published by the Research and Education for Democracy in Tanzania unit at the University of Dar es Salaam). Data on voting patterns by geography is however available, and shows that support for the ruling party since independence, *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM), is widely dispersed across the country,¹⁶ while support for the biggest opposition party in 2005, the Civic United Front, has its stronghold of support on Zanzibar. CUF has been associated with Muslims, but the party's presence on the Mainland suggests that this particular assumption is not necessarily borne out in practice (even if parliamentary election results to date suggest otherwise).¹⁷ On the Mainland however, the 2010 election saw significant and geographically dispersed gains for other parties, particularly for CHADEMA (which won urban seats in Arusha, Dar es Salaam, Mbeya, Moshi, Mwanza, and rural seats in Arusha, Kagera, Kigoma, Mbeya, Rukwa, Shinyanga and Singida regions); while NCCR-Mageuzi took seats in Kigoma Region.

The polycentric and overlapping nature of individuals' interests and obligations is one important reason why the apparent threats to national cohesion have, to date, remained threats rather than direct attacks.. However, the complex nature of subjectivity in the postcolony is an important yet limited argument, since it can obscure more than it reveals. Are we content to explain the achievement of national identity in Tanzania as the fortuitous yet accidental outcome of individuals' multiple identities? And how do we square this with evidence that, when invited to comment on their sense of self-identification (in public), a majority of Tanzanians choose the national option? For example, the 2008 Afrobarometer survey found that in response to the question 'which of the following statements best expresses your feelings', 69% responded 'I feel only Tanzanian', 13% responded 'I feel equally Tanzanian and [ethnic group]', and 9% responded 'I feel more Tanzanian than [ethnic group].'¹⁸ In the 2001 Afrobarometer survey just three percent of respondents in Tanzania claimed their identity was based on language, tribe or ethnicity, and five percent claimed a predominantly religious identity. Even if one is suspicious of such large-scale closed-response survey techniques, these findings require explanation.

Our suggestion is that a relatively robust and dynamic sense of national consciousness maintains in postcolonial Tanzania. We prefer the term 'national consciousness' as

¹⁵ Heilman and Kaiser, op.cit.

¹⁶ REDET, *Maoni ya wananchi kuhusu uchaguzi mkuu ujao Octoba 2010*, University of Dar es Salaam, April 2010.

¹⁷ T. Kelsall, «The presidential and parliamentary elections in Tanzania, October and December 2005 », *Electoral Studies*, vol. 26, 2007, p. 525-529. Early analyses of the October 2010 presidential and parliamentary election results

¹⁸ Afrobarometer, *Summary of results. Round 4: Afrobarometer survey in Tanzania*, REPOA and Michigan State University, 2008.

opposed to 'national identity'.¹⁹ Others have opined the limited purchase on human subjectivity offered by the concept of identity – and with it the implied notion that there is an identifiable stable essence that remains, in this instance, 'Tanzanian'.²⁰ Even appeals to 'multiple identities' are unable to escape the implication of multiple essences,²¹ too often dovetailing with a scalar view of nested identities as a series of Russian dolls. The use of identity as an analytical tool in Africa has been particularly problematic because of the tendency to explain contemporary social and political phenomena as the inevitable outcome of the reassertion of more 'fundamental' or 'precolonial' identities.

In making national consciousness in Tanzania the object of enquiry, its apparent dynamism, coherence and durability to date becomes an achievement to be explained in relation to social, political and economic processes, rather than taken as given. It suggests a national 'groupness' in which people are invested. It clears space for an explanation which foregrounds individuals as mature political and moral actors, who have, collectively, found a way to live with difference in the postcolony. Here we have much in common with Geiger's analysis of TANU women activists in the 1980s:

'A positive sense of nationalism existed, at least in part, because this sense was rooted in the forms of popular mobilization expressed by 'ordinary' Swahili women. Dignity, self-respect, equality regardless of ethnicity or level of education, pan-ethnic solidarity – these aspects of a nationalist consciousness continue to carry weight, although it is appropriate to ask whether their force will be felt when the older generation of activists is gone'.²²

This perspective raises important questions in the current period. To what extent do people choose to invest in national consciousness, or is a national consciousness the outcome of self-discipline, or fear of state power?²³ To what extent do people 'buy into' an instrumentalized vision of national belonging orchestrated by the state? Our immediate response is that these questions require further dedicated ethnographic research in the post-socialist context, particularly among those too young to remember life in socialist Tanzania. Existing scholarly research on the post-socialist period²⁴ has tended not to ask these questions in favour of the balkanization thesis,²⁵ or has only dealt

¹⁹ Although we recognize that 'national consciousness' can also be problematic (F. Fanon, *The wretched of the earth*, New York, Grove Press, 1963).

²⁰ J.-F. Bayart, *The illusion of cultural identity*, London, Hurst and Company, 2005; P. Geschiere, *The perils of belonging: autochtony, citizenship and exclusion in Africa and Europe*, London, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

²¹ R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, « Beyond 'identity' », *Theory and Society*, vol. 29, 2000, p. 1-47.

²² S. Geiger, *TANU women: gender and culture in the making of Tanganyikan nationalism, 1955-1965*, Oxford, James Currey, 2007, p. 204.

²³ L. Edmondson, *Performance and politics...*, *op.cit.*

²⁴ Notable exceptions include E. Green, « The political economy of nation formation in modern Tanzania », Paper presented to Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Toronto, 2009; K. Askew, *Performing the nation...op.cit.*, and L. Edmondson, *Performance and politics...*, *op.cit.*

²⁵ See footnote 4.

with the question of national identity as a by-product of broader political economic processes, most commonly captured in the state-society couplet.²⁶

This links in with a broader reluctance in the literature of nationalism to move beyond a focus on its dark side.²⁷ As Neil Lazarus notes:

Naturalizing the trajectories of the European nationalisms...mainstream scholars have characteristically deplored 'new' nationalisms...on the grounds that they foment revolution, or that they are totalitarian.²⁸

The limiting and limited set of horizons of nationalism has become indented as an impediment to progress (whether social, political, economic, developmental).

In its place have arisen wider identity perspectives, emphasising the supra-national: David Held's 'overlapping communities of fate' as part of 'Cosmopolitan multilateralism',²⁹ or Brzezinski's 'planetary consciousness'.³⁰ Nationalism, linked to violence, exclusivity and an inward-facing myopia must be challenged, western analysis proposes, by transnational, global movements and linkages that champion the rights of all to be represented in the global community. The implication is that nationalism is not a worthy, or worthwhile, focus of enquiry.

But arguably sub-Saharan Africa has suffered from a dearth, not a surfeit, of nationalism. African nationalism was undermined by the arbitrary nature of colonial-era boundaries, the weak structural legacy of colonialism, and the neo-colonial depredations of international trade, aid and diplomacy. Nevertheless, some new nations were better able than others to construct a viable state and nation: some through struggle and resistance (South Africa); others from a more easily manageable geographic legacy (Botswana); and others through strong leadership and more peaceful political processes guiding the path to, and early years of, independence (Tanzania).

If nationalism has become broadly characterised as an impediment to progress, it is not a characterisation that would be recognised by early African thinkers and writers on nationalisation (and the related issue of pan-Africanism). Nationalism here is a dynamic force, fostering progress and change. Within African intellectual thought, African

²⁶ E. Miguel, « Nation building and public goods in Kenya versus Tanzania », *World Politics*, vol. 56, 2004, p. 327-362.; O. Therikildsen and A. M. Kjaer, « Do ethnicity and elections affect policy outcomes in Tanzania and Uganda? », Paper presented at the European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, Potsdam, September, 2009; A.M. Tripp, « The political mediation of ethnic and religious diversity in Tanzania », in C. Young (ed.), *The Accommodation of Cultural Pluralism*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 37-71.

²⁷ A. J. Motyl, « The Modernity of Nationalism: Nations, States and Nation-States in the Contemporary World », *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 45, n°2, 1992, p.309.

²⁸ N. Lazarus, « Disavowing Decolonization: Fanon, Nationalism, and the Problematic Representation in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse », *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 24, n°4, 1993, p. 69.

²⁹ D. Held, « Cosmopolitanism: Globalisation Tamed », *Review of International Studies*, vol. 29, n°4, 2003, p. 475.

³⁰ Z. Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technotronic Era*, New York, Viking Press, 1970.

nationalism is presented as a reaction against colonialism and neo-colonialism; a search for broader pan-Africanism beyond the narrow confines of borders erected by Imperial powers. Amilcar Cabral's 're-Africanisation of minds',³¹ or Nkrumah's 'African personality' spoke to the broader efforts of early (1950s and 1960s) nationalist movements to create a form of nationalism that consciously rejected European formations. 'African nationalism is meaningless, is anachronistic, and is dangerous', Nyerere wrote in 1963, 'if it is not at the same time Pan Africanism'.³² Anti-imperialist struggle, too, has been seen as essential to understanding African nationalism: Archie Mafeje's suggestion that it must always be a reaction against something to have meaning;³³ Shivji's 'claim-in-struggle' of a people reacting to 'a common experience of domination and exploitation'.³⁴ Cabral presented the nationalist struggle as a battle against imperialist forces abroad, and internal forces who 'do anything which could prejudice our people's march to total conquest of their dignity, their liberty and their progress'.³⁵

'The betrayal came when [n]ation building turns into state building'³⁶; when nationalism became, according to Fanon, a means for an indigenous middle class to entrench its political and economic power.³⁷ But others held out hope. For Mazrui, 'national integration' was a process: moving from a 'relationship of bare co-existence' through to the 'coalescence of identities'. Mazrui highlighted the continuation of differentiated interests within the higher stage of national consciousness: 'at the same time as [society] is getting nationally integrated, the diversity of interests would increase'.³⁸ But such fragmentation is presented as a product of, rather than threat to, an emerging national consciousness.

Within Tanzania, the official reaction to 'differentiated interests', the potential fragmentation of identities from versions of national consciousness promulgated by the state, was largely perceived of as such a threat. The reaction of the state, as explored next, was to respond with fear to iterations of nationalism or national identities that did not fall within the narrow confines of official version(s). We can see, through the response of the state to challenges faced in its development policy in the 1960s, this fears in action.

³¹ A. Cabral, *Unity and struggle: speeches and writings*, London, Heinemann, 1980, p. xxii.

³² J. K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity: A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1952-65*, Dar es Salaam, Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 194.

³³ A. Mafeje, *In search...*, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

³⁴ I. Shivji, « The Rise, the Fall, and the Insurrection of Nationalism in Africa », Paper from Keynote Address to the Codesria East African Regional Conference held in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, October 29-31, 2003, p. 6. Alongside 'Pan-Africanism' and 'Independence or Freedom', Shivji also highlights '(racial) equality' as common to 'all African nationalism thought and consciousness'.

³⁵ A. Cabral, *Unity and struggle...*, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

³⁶ I. Shivji, « The Rise... », *art.cit.*, p. 8.

³⁷ F. Fanon, *The Wretched...*, *op.cit.*, p. 166-199.

³⁸ A. A. Mazrui, « Pluralism and National Integration », *art.cit.*, p. 334.

The 'National Question': 'Self-Help', development and national consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s

In the two decades after independence, nationalism came to be defined primarily through the policies and rhetoric of the state and TANU/CCM.³⁹ Seeing itself as a transforming social force, it sought to impose its vision of national consciousness and the ideal citizen. Tanzanians were exhorted to be loyal to the state, to 'contribute to the maintenance of peace and good Government', and to be fully engaged in their own, and by extension the country's, development – 'you should well and truly contribute both mentally and physically to the many development projects'.⁴⁰ The struggle against poverty became one of the main channels for expressing official ideas about what it meant to be a Tanzanian. 'Development' (and participation) was to be the hallmark of the National Project in this period.

But the (relatively) successful state-imposed nationalist consensus did not smother alternative forms of belonging. Rather, the state relied on increasing authoritarianism to manage opposition. Focusing on the elite-promulgated National Project misses the extent to which it was challenged at different levels by different groups. Claims to belong to more localized polities did not imply a conscious rejection of national belonging, even if it was interpreted as such.

For the state, the duty of Tanzanians to participate in development, and in particular, 'self-help' schemes (also known as 'Nation Building' schemes within official development plans) became a marker of commitment to the new nation.⁴¹ This construction of the developmental space as a visible signal of an individual or group willingness to eschew narrowly-focused boundaries of interest continued into the current period, as will be explored below. However, in the early Independence period, by making acceptance of the official ideology of development a condition of citizenship, the state turned local development into an arena for contested notions of development and progress – and implicit in this was the question of national consciousness.

The place of non-Africans (especially 'Asian' Tanzanians) within this narrative was an acute point of tension. It came to the fore in mid-1962 in Lake Region (later Mwanza). Non-African Tanzanians refusing to participate in nation-building projects were 'compelled ... to take part', and 'subjected to abuse as a result of their refusal'.⁴² Putting the episode down to the 'over enthusiasm and inexperience of young men',⁴³ the episode

³⁹ TANU (Tanganyika African National Union) was re-named *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) in 1977 (following a merger with the Zanzibari Afro-Shirazi Party).

⁴⁰ Regional Commissions, Southern Highlands Region, 12th October 1963. TNA 465 D3/1/II.

⁴¹ M. Jennings, « A very real war: popular participation in Tanzania during the 1950s and 1960s », *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 40, n°1, 2007, p. 71-95. Self-help schemes covered a wide range of activities, from building classrooms and schools, health clinics, improving (or constructing new) roads and bridges, planting certain crops, improving market places, etc.

⁴² Regional Commissioner, Lake Region, to Area Commissioners, 18th July 1962. Tanzanian National Archives 544, D4/28.

⁴³ Ibid.

highlighted gaps between official and popular notions of the appropriate duties and responsibilities of the Tanzanian citizen.

The position of non-Africans in the formation of national consciousness was tenuous, but they were not the only group to present a challenge to the hegemony of the state. In 1963, the District Officer in Mbozi, Mbeya Region, noted the 'lack of spirit and enthusiasm' for nation-building projects. 'People do not care to remove weeds from their shambas', he complained. A community centre, built in Msangano, 'has fallen down due to neglect and lack of support'. 'There is not a single eye-catching development project in this area', the District Officer wrote, 'Msangano is an eye-sore'. The blame was placed on the 'ex-Mfuma Mkoma',⁴⁴ the 'chief cause of the trouble'. A bull presented to the Regional Commissioner was returned to the Mfuma Mkoma to sell, the money raised to be spent on local self-help projects. However, the bull was slaughtered and eaten by 'Mfuma Mkoma and his development wreckers'.⁴⁵ In March, after Mfuma Mkoma's appointment as Executive Officer in Msangano, enquiries were made as to his work and attitude. 'Should you be dissatisfied with his work', the Regional Administrative Secretary informed the District Council, 'I would advise you to transfer him to Vwawa where he could closely be watched by the District Office'.⁴⁶

Whilst the actions of individuals or groups in hindering progress might threaten the success of individual projects (and ultimately the successful achievement of official development plans, their actions were increasingly interpreted as a more serious threat to the nation itself. The reluctance of one, or a few, officials to fall in with official expectations was a potential danger to the state, not because it could present a threat to state security or legitimacy, but because in making acceptance of official development policy a test of Tanzanian-ness, any resistance, no matter how small, challenged the nationalist project.⁴⁷

Elsewhere there were other efforts to resist the challenge the state made towards localised identities. Local government efforts to promote literacy classes and women's organisations in North Mara collapsed in 1963. Officials initially reported that the collapse was due to the inherent conservatism of the people.⁴⁸ However, more likely was the attempt by local authorities to load these interventions with a direct challenge to local traditional customs. Women 'refuse to appear in public places', an officer from the Community Development Department noted, having been warned that anyone with 'bored ears would have their ears sown up', and 'wires' worn around the arms would be removed 'by force'. Village leaders and chiefs had tried to force attendance at literacy

⁴⁴ A local official.

⁴⁵ District Officer, Mbozi District, to Regional Commissioner, 12 February 1963. TNA 465 D3/21.

⁴⁶ Administrative Secretary Southern Highlands Region to Executive Officer, Mbeya District Council, 26 March 1963. TNA 465 D3/21

⁴⁷ Although the Tanzanian state in the 1960s was quick to see a crisis in the smallest challenge to its authority. M. Jennings, art. cit., 2003.

⁴⁸ Community Development Assistant, North Mara, monthly report for October 1963. TNA 544 S1/III; W I G Kasera, «A periodical report on community development in North Mara», no date but appears to be 1963, p.2. TNA 544 S1/III.

classes,⁴⁹ becoming increasingly alarmed at the growth of non-compliance. What was rejected in North Mara was not the efforts to improve literacy or organise women's groups, but the cultural baggage with which these interventions were loaded.

Similarly, efforts to restrict Maasai from wearing traditional dress in the town of Arusha,⁵⁰ or complaints from officials that traditional mudbricks were being used for building rather than modern concrete,⁵¹ were deliberate attempts to replace markers of local group identities with national 'trappings of modernity'.⁵²

Perhaps reflecting a lack of confidence in its ability to confront challenges directly, the state appears more tolerant of dissenting voices and alternative visions of nationalism in the 1960s, seeking collusion and cooperation rather than outright coercion. In Lake Region, the government was keen to encourage rather than enforce acceptance that 'all communities should cooperate' in self-help schemes. 'Nothing will be achieved except resentment', the Regional Commissioner noted, 'if one community tries to score off the other'.⁵³

This tolerance had vanished by the early 1970s. The state was more willing to crack down on potential rivals to its hegemony. Challenges certainly continued. Whilst the shooting of Iringa's Regional Commissioner in 1972 during the mass villagisation⁵⁴ campaign was extreme in the level of violence, resistance to the government's social engineering project was widespread. In Chunya District in the early 1970s, Operation Chunya (the campaign to impose mass villagisation) faced resistance from groups such as gold miners, honey-gatherers, traditional healers and fishermen, for whom communal living implied a rejection of local social and economic organisation.⁵⁵ Resistance there was met with a strong measure of 'persuasion'. Rumours of 'area commissioners ... sacked almost daily by the President' for failing to support the government's policy, suggest opposition to the government's development project was wider than it admitted publicly.⁵⁶

Thus during the early Independence period in Tanzania, official versions of national consciousness competed with other claims to belong. Having linked so firmly national identity to the responsibilities that it conferred (participation in the development of the country), the state had created a visible marker of Tanzanian-ness. And having done so, it interpreted resistance or non-compliance through this lens: failure to participate in

⁴⁹ Community Development Assistant, North Mara, monthly report for October 1963. TNA 544 S1/III.

⁵⁰ A.A. Mazrui, « The Robes of Rebellion: Sex, Dress and Politics in Africa », *Encounter*, vol. 34, n°2, 1970, p. 19

⁵¹ Area Commissioner, North Mara, 16 October 1964. TNA 544 P4/27.

⁵² Mazrui, « Robes of Rebellion... », p. 19.

⁵³ Regional Commissioner, Lake Region, to Area Commissioners, 18th July 1962. Tanzanian National Archives 544, D 4/28.

⁵⁴ Between 1967-76, around 6 million people were physically relocated in newly created villages across the country. Initially envisaged as a voluntary programme, in 1973 the government announced villagisation (the process of moving into newly constituted villages) would be compulsory, and achieved within three years.

⁵⁵ Oxfam Field Director, *Two Revolutions Per Year*, 1975, p. 2. Oxfam Archives, TAN 64.

⁵⁶ Oxfam correspondence, Mason to Hilton, 6 February 1973. Oxfam Archives TAN 69.

official development was a conscious rejection of this broader National Project. The encounter was not inevitably conflictual, although it increasingly became so in the 1970s. As Tanzania shifted to the post-socialist period from the mid-1980s, and especially in the 1990s, so too relationships between state and society changed. But development remained important tropes through which such ideas could be explored. The privatisation of the developmental space (including service provision) brought new challenges in the framing of the National Question as economic and political imperatives weakened the state's role as chief architect of national belonging. Through participation in local development, the nationalist arena was potentially opened up to new expressions of belonging, new ways of seeking to bridge the space between the local and the national.

Home associations: self-help and development in the twenty-first century

In recent years the most spectacular national self-help development drive has been in secondary education. The Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP; URT 2004), seen as crucial to the nation's economic growth and productivity,⁵⁷ aspired to build at least one secondary school in every ward. Some funding for SEDP came from international donors and the government, but it also relied on communities to fund 25% of school construction. The resulting school-building initiative saw the secondary gross enrolment ratio rise from 7% in 2003 to 15% in 2006.⁵⁸ This was partly achieved through fund-raising efforts across the country that tapped into the history of self-help, and that included local taxation, contributions (in cash and kind), donations, and the mobilisation of the 'domestic diaspora' – those who had left the countryside for employment in Tanzania's towns and cities.

Here we focus on the home associations formed by members of the domestic diaspora that supported rural school building through donations and collections of cash and materials for schools in their rural home area. These home associations include district trust funds, development trusts and education trusts, as well as associations of urban dwellers sharing a lineage, village, ward, division or constituency.⁵⁹ Providing an accurate number of home associations is difficult because different kinds of association have registered with different government offices. Lange et al estimate 850 District Development Trusts were formed between 1960 and 1991, while Mercer et al demonstrate that the number of 'place-based groups' registered with the Registrar of Societies, including home associations, increased from the mid-1990s.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ United Republic of Tanzania, *The Tanzania National Development Vision 2025*, Dar es Salaam, Planning Commission; *National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty* (NSGRP), Dar es Salaam, Vice President's Office (also known by Swahili acronym MKUKUTA), 2005.

⁵⁸ *Sunday Observer*, Dar es Salaam, 15th March 2009.

⁵⁹ C. Mercer, B. Page and M. Evans, *Development and the African diaspora: place and the politics of home*, London, Zed, 2008.

⁶⁰ S. Lange, H. Wallevik and A.S.Z. Kiondo, *Civil society in Tanzania*, Bergen, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2000; C. Mercer, B. Page and M. Evans, *Development and the African diaspora: place and the politics of home*, London, Zed, 2008; see also A.S.Z. Kiondo, « When the state withdraws: local development, politics and liberalisation in Tanzania », in P. Gibbon (ed) *Liberalised development in Tanzania: studies on accumulation processes and local institutions*, Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, p. 109-176.

At first glance the increasing number of associations organized around an apparently exclusive territorialized identity might be a worrying barometer of social and political change. In other African countries home associations have actively fomented ethnic or regional consciousness, struggled to secure a larger share of national resources for their people, and lent traction to the currency of autochthony in politics.⁶¹ But a closer look at their history suggests that there is no automatic relationship between home associations and the politics of belonging. As elsewhere, rural-urban connections have a long history in Tanzania. The burial societies established under colonial labour migration were the precursors to the more recent district trusts that began to organise migrants from a shared homeplace to support secondary education in rural home areas in the 1980s. Most variants of home associations operated informally until the 1980s, when the Registrar of Societies began to register increasing numbers of home associations, reflecting the increasing numbers of NGOs and home associations' more explicit orientation towards development at that time.⁶² Given their longevity then, particularly through the period of postcolonial nation-building, the social and political effects of home associations in a given context remain an open question.

Home association leaders and government officials themselves reject the charge that they pose a challenge to national unity.⁶³ Rather home associations are seen as legitimate because they contribute to the development of the nation, which government has made clear is the responsibility of the people themselves. Leaders play down alleged partiality by pointing to the administrative and geographical, rather than ethnic, basis of the village, ward and district associations. None of the associations encountered in the course of research bore the name of an ethnic group. A particular ethnic group (or groups) might form a majority in a given district, but districts tend to be ethnically heterogeneous as a result of historical and contemporary migration (whether labour, temporary or permanent) and inter-marriage. Moreover, the members of any given ethnic group often live in more than one district. For these reasons home associations can rarely be said to act in the interests of all members of a particular ethnic group. Leaders also point out that their interest is in the development of the place in question, not the interests of the ethnic group; even if, in practice, those who are mobilised for particular initiatives are predominantly drawn from one ethnic community. This dovetails with the government's claim that any association with exclusive cultural objectives, or which favours a particular ethnic group, will not? be sanctioned.⁶⁴ In foregrounding the legitimacy bestowed by the goal of national development both government and home association

⁶¹ F. Nyamnjoh and M. Rowlands, « Elite associations and the politics of belonging in Cameroon », *Africa*, vol. 68, n°3, 1998 p. 320-337. A. Olukoshi, « Associational life », in L. Diamond, A. Kirk-Greene and O. Oyediran (eds), *Transition without end: Nigerian politics and civil society under Babangida*, Ibadan, Vantage Publishers, p. 459-476; R. Honey and S. Okafor (eds), *Hometown associations: indigenous knowledge and development in Nigeria*, London, Intermediate Technology Publications.

⁶² C. Mercer et al, *Development....op.cit.*; C. Mercer, « Reconceptualising state-society relations in Tanzania: are NGOs 'making a difference'? », *Area*, vol. 31, n°3, p. 247-258.

⁶³ The interviews on which this discussion draws were conducted with association leaders, most of whom were men well into their middle age. While their views are clearly those of a particular class of urbanites, their experiences of migration and mobilisation around the development of 'home' nevertheless resonate with a wider problem for many urban dwellers: how to fulfil one's obligation to one's home community.

⁶⁴ Interview, Legal Officer, Registrar of Societies, Ministry of Home Affairs, Dar es Salaam, 6th September 2005; Interview, Head of NGO Division, Vice-President's Office, Dar es Salaam, 8th September 2005.

leaders suspend discussions of identity politics and regional inequality. Government is thus able to devolve more local service provision to 'communities' and home association leaders can fulfil their role as the 'elite' actively developing their homeplace.

Yet reading the relationship between home association leaders and the state in terms of elite collusion glosses over the fact that home associations dovetail with multiple political agendas which makes their position far more ambiguous. For example, home associations' development work, though consistent with national agendas, also presents a potential threat to the government's claim to legitimacy. Local politicians are often closely involved with the home association connected to their constituency and use its achievements to bolster support for them at election time, claiming that development goods accrue to their constituency because of their hard work, commitment and connections; not as a result of government largesse.

The Newala Development Foundation (NDF), headquartered in Newala, Mtwara, and heavily reliant on the NDF 'branch' in Dar es Salaam, demonstrates this ambiguity. It has been led by a string of CCM politicians who balanced their high-ranking appointments in the party administration with a critique of government attempts to develop their home place. Established as an NGO in 1988, NDF has played an important role in the development of secondary education in Newala and Tandahimba districts (before Tandahimba was carved out of Newala in 1996). Until 1989 there was no secondary school in Newala District, which meant that those who gained entrance to Form I had to study outside of the district. Today, the historical lack of schools in the district is widely blamed for the district's poor position in national indicators of 'development'.⁶⁵ Through a combination of fund-raising, local taxation and lobbying external donors, NDF converted seven schools to secondaries by 1996. All were subsequently handed over to government management except Kitangari, which remains under NDF management much to the District Council's chagrin. Newala District Council complains that NDF's management of the school is inefficient and leads to poor quality education, while NDF refuses to relinquish the school, partly because it is their only tangible development project, but also because they claim that, given the government's historical neglect of Newala, only NDF can be relied upon to provide a high school for the district.

Occasionally home associations' implicit critique of central government development policy finds more direct expression. In the late 1990s, for example, the then Chairman of NDF and Newala parliamentarian led a coalition of disgruntled MPs from the 'Southern Zone' (Mtwara, Lindi and Ruvuma) in a challenge to central government neglect of their region. Their plan, entitled 'The New Economic Development Strategy for Southern Regions of Tanzania' proposed a Special Development Zone (SDZ) for the South. What is notable about the document is that, unusually, it justifies the SDZ through a stringent critique of post-colonial government policy that has resulted in the long-term neglect of the South since the war in Mozambique. The plan states that this under-investment needs to be rectified if the region is not to fall further behind the rest of the country. However, to the extent that dissatisfaction with the centre informs parliamentary politics, the

⁶⁵ P. Seppälä and B. Koda (eds), *The making of a periphery: economic development and cultural encounters in southern Tanzania*, Dar es Salaam, Mkuki na Nyota, 1998.

evidence of the last decade suggests that even when MPs act together as regional blocs, such alliances are usually ephemeral, opportunistic and issue-based rather than part of a sustained campaign for regional favouritism.⁶⁶

The role of home associations is then ambiguous since they both collaborate in the state's project of national development at the same time that they criticize it. As the case of NDF demonstrates, this ambiguity is literally embodied in the leaders of home associations, nearly all of whom are connected to the state as career politicians, members of CCM, public servants or employees of state institutions. There is a sense in which these people *are* the state, and are therefore implicated in the dissemination of a national consciousness through localised self-help efforts to 'develop the nation'. However, such an analysis risks overlooking the mundane moral arguments that home association leaders make about the role of home associations within the nation – that national consciousness in Tanzania is sufficiently robust and able to tolerate localised obligations.

From this perspective a legitimate national consciousness is achieved not only because the government constantly reminds Tanzanians of their role in developing the nation, the importance of national unity, and the spectre of disintegration, but also because many people are invested in the state or the party. Whether this arises from self-policing or from fear of retribution or social sanction is open to question, but the effects are real. Home association leaders and the political elites connected with them consciously do not use their associations as ethnic platforms, since this would be taboo. There is little appetite for *ethnic* associations. For example the leaders of one Rungwe ward association in Dar es Salaam were uninterested in establishing an association for members of the dominant ethnic group in Rungwe, the Nyakyusa, because it might remind some 'sub-groups' of the Nyakyusa that they had been subsumed into the Nyakyusa ethnic group during the colonial period. As one put it, 'don't remind people they are not Nyakyusa'⁶⁷ (meaning that Rungwe is in fact populated by people from many ethnic groups, some of whom feel subordinated to the Nyakyusa). The broader point that the Rungwe home association leaders were making was that the protocols for 'being Nyakyusa' in public in Dar es Salaam are unfamiliar and unrehearsed. Similarly a Cabinet Minister who acknowledged that he would only be able to stand for election in the district of his birth, also pointed out that he would never draw attention to his ethnicity in the context of public debate. For that reason, he had declined an invitation to speak to the student association for his home area at the University of Dar es Salaam, explaining 'there are times and places to play the ethnic card'.⁶⁸ For the same reason, former President Mkapa declined to speak at the Makua Day held at the Village Museum in Dar es Salaam.⁶⁹

The fact that people have multiple obligations arising from social relations in rural and urban areas must also be taken into account. Urban dwellers are prevailed upon to support various initiatives and social welfare events along family, clan and village lines as much as along ethnic or regional ones. People give money for their colleagues' fund-

⁶⁶ T. Kelsall, « Shop windows... », art.cit.

⁶⁷ Interview, Rungwe home association leaders, Dar es Salaam, 2nd August 2005.

⁶⁸ Interview, Cabinet Minister, Dar es Salaam, 4th September 2005.

⁶⁹ Interview, Curator, Village Museum, Dar es Salaam, 30th August 2005.

raising activities. Among urbanites, these are only those claims on their resources from home; in the city, there are constant requests for contributions for the ward, local church, mosque, school, and for friends' weddings. If the act of contributing reveals something about the nature of subjectivity, then there is no reason to suppose that the demands from home outweigh all other obligations. The fact that most home association leaders complained of the problem of mobilising people to support development projects at home suggests that an obligation to a home place does not even automatically resonate with the majority of people.

Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that the idea of nationalism in postcolonial Africa need not be dismissed as regressive. In the case of Tanzania we see the achievement of nationalist consciousness as having constructed a sense of a common history and a shared future: that it is better faced together as a nation rather than as disparate groups, even if it is acknowledged that 'the nation' consists of differentiated but over-lapping groups. In this, nationalism is Janus-faced⁷⁰ – looking forwards as well as looking backwards. This perspective, we argue, differs from Manichean ones, most notably those positing fundamental incompatibilities between smaller, ethno-religious identities and wider (and implicitly superior) national or regional ones.

While we recognize that the post-liberalization period has precipitated sweeping social, political and economic changes with ramifications for state-society relations, we argue that to read Tanzania's future from the experiences of other African countries is to do the country a disservice. The existing narrative on nationalism in post-liberalization Tanzania – that ethnic or regional attachments, somehow more ingrained, will inevitably come to the fore as the national project unravels – tends to rely on observations from the main cities urban and lacks recourse to in-depth research. We do not mean to uncritically celebrate Tanzanian nationalism, which can be exclusionary and ride roughshod over difference. But we do think that the ways in which a national consciousness has endured to date merits attention and reflection.

Compared to the early Independence period, what seems to define national consciousness in the post-socialist period, however, is far greater ambiguity. Home associations and their leaders occupy contradictory positions, being wary of 'back-sliding' into tribalism and yet arguably reproducing its very possibility through their work. They deal with this contradiction by denouncing tribalism, and by foregrounding the 'development' aspect of what they do. We should not overlook the investment in *uhuru na umoja* (peace and unity). Of course this is a political slogan that can be used to the ruling party's political advantage, but it also speaks to a set of meaningful values for many people, not least in the aftermath of the election violence in Kenya in 2008. Nationalism remains an 'expression of collective sensibility'⁷¹ to be reckoned with in Tanzania. As one

⁷⁰ T. Ranger (ed), *The historical dimensions of democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe*, Vol 2: 'Nationalism, democracy and human rights', Harare, University of Zimbabwe Press, 2003; T. Nairn, *Faces of nationalism: Janus revisited*, London, Verso, 1998.

⁷¹ S. Geiger, *TANU...op.cit.*, p. 202.

commentator in Dar es Salaam put it, 'we are far away from there [tribalism]...we say, that is gone, that is history.'⁷²

⁷² Interview, Curator, Village Museum, Dar es Salaam, 30th August 2005.