

Tanzanian Socialism and Africa's Future: Mere Footnote or First Step on a Long March

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The "moment" of Tanzania's socialism - *Ujamaa* - was, when situated within the long arc of African history or even African post-colonial history, brief. In the late sixties and early seventies Tanzania was certainly an exciting place to be. But the implications of what had been begun with the Arusha Declaration in 1968 were too dangerous and irreverent even for its initial champion, Julius Nyerere. Surely Horace Campbell is correct to eulogize Nyerere himself as "a great human being who demonstrated his respect for the ordinary African and for the lives of all human beings" (and Campbell then proceeds to compile a convincing list of Nyerere's many achievements). Yet the continent will learn too little by not also registering the man's - and the ujamaa project's - weaknesses, for from these too we must all learn. As Firoz Manji explicitly notes in her preface to the book *Africa's Liberation: The Legacy of Nyerere* (in which the article by Campbell quoted from above also appears) that while we "should not be shy in celebrating his achievements...at the same time, he would be among the first to condemn any attempts to romanticise his period in office."ⁱⁱ It is in the spirit of Manji's observations that I offer the present paper.

Thus Nyerere spoke of empowering the people and, with Mwongozo ("Tanu Guidelines 1971"), seemed to have persuaded his fellow TANU leaders actually to embrace the notion of genuine control, by the people, from below. Yet when that same "people" actually began to move - workers at the Mount Carmel Rubber Factory,ⁱⁱⁱ peasants in Ruvuma,^{iv} students at the university^v - Nyerere joined with the state and its bureaucrats, political and administrative, to slash back: to crush the workers, to smash the Ruvuma Development Association (and then forward "Ujamaa Vijini" only from on high and by means of a self-defeating policy of "enforced villagization") and to have student president Akivaga whisked away from the

campus and summarily despatched back home to Kenya in a waiting plane: his crime, apparently, having been to invoke "Mwongozo" in criticism of the university's hierarchy! Tanzania: an exciting place, momentarily, to be, then, but ultimately and in many ways a sad and defeated one.

Against my memories of the excitement of the time two images pull me back to sobriety. One was the aforementioned Akivaga incident, seared in my mind as the cold wind of reality and of a very different kind of memory blow through it. Here I refer to the invasion of the campus of the University of Dar es Salaam by the Field Force Unit in 1970. Standing in the nearby faculty coffee area next to the central administration building, straining to see what the soldiers were up to, I saw my own student Simon Akivaga, the Kenyan leader of the University Student Council, having been summoned for a meeting with the principal, being dragged, at gun-point, down the cement stairs at the front of the building, tossed like a sack of old clothes into a waiting army vehicle and sped away to his aforementioned expulsion both from the university and from the country.^{vi}

Nor can I forget those (admittedly few) Tanzanian faculty members who had tended to side with the students at the time, for they were also to be disciplined (as were a number of we non-Tanzanians, who were very soon to find our contracts not renewed). Arnold Temu of the History Department provides a particularly sobering case in point: "thrown out of Parliament for questioning the regime's handling of university matters and later sacked from the university itself, he [was] effectively soon sent into exile as an itinerant academic." In fact, I was to live to add an illuminating footnote to Temu's story, for he provided one of the most poignant moments of a research trip I took to Dar es Salaam in the summer of 2001. Sitting at the bar in the New Africa Hotel, I glanced to my right and eventually recognized, quite by chance and under the shared disguise of age, Arnold Temu himself. As it turned out he had just returned to Dar to take up a job at the new Open University there. Further discussion

brought, unsolicited, a startling statement from him: he had sworn to himself not to return to live in Tanzania as long as Nyerere was alive. He thus offered a perspective on "Mwalimu" and his "democratic sensibility" that is, at the very least, worth pondering.^{vii}

Much else was happening, at least momentarily, of a far more positive nature, of course. After all, this was the period when Fanon was writing eloquently of the dangers of a neo-colonialism spearheaded by, precisely, the emergent African elite itself. And this potential problem was exactly what the Arusha declaration and Mwongozo seemed, equally eloquently, to be about: the concrete attempt to control elitism within the ranks of the newly emergent nations. True, both declarations were more powerful in their mere statement than in the substance of their realization. Yet I have found some of the most forthright (and most Fanonist!) perspectives on the post-colonial reality to surface during the Arusha years - perhaps most strikingly in a newspaper account (in *The Nationalist*) of a public speech given by Nyerere at that time:

Nyerere called on the people of Tanzania to have great confidence in themselves and to safeguard the nation's hard-won freedom. Mwalimu [Nyerere] warned that the people should not allow their freedom to be pawned as most of their leaders were purchasable. He warned further that in running the affairs of the nation the people should not look on their leaders as saints and prophets.

The President stated that the attainment of freedom in many cases resulted merely in the change of colours, white faces to black faces without ending exploitation and injustices, and above all without the betterment of the life of the masses. He said that while struggling for freedom the objective was clear but it was another thing to remove your own people from the position of exploiters.^{viii}

Sounds good but was a lot more of substance actually possible? Much of scholarly debate of the time centred on this question. Tanzania was, after all, a small, economically backward country, with, it was argued, no really strong and coherent internal class forces pressing from below. There were also global constraints of course: neo-colonial pressures and the like. Most strikingly, however, much of the country's radical project seemed to have been hatched in the sensibility of one man, a man (Nyerere) who had, as we know, his own limitations, both of possibility (*vis-à-vis* his own colleagues and *vis-a-vis* the external world), but also of vision. Of course, Nyerere did remain usefully suspicious of the congealing western-dominated global system. Unfortunately, however, and despite his (entirely accurate) nervousness about the Soviet Union and its own "alternative" model, he was not strengthened in his thinking by a reluctance to give any very clear Marxist resonance and analytical edge to his voice as a critic of imperialism and global capitalism.

True, he did continue to offer a usefully critical voice, remaining one of the sharpest commentators on the negative role of the IFIs until the very end of his life. Moreover, he committed both himself and Tanzania to the on-going liberation of southern Africa - although here it was also unfortunate that he did not envisage any particularly democratic or expansively liberated future for the people of the countries of southern Africa so freed (as foreshadowed by Nyerere's taking the accused "leaders" of the SWAPO opposition into Tanzania's own custody when the latter, seized by the Zambian army on behalf of Sam Nujoma and the SWAPO elite, threatened to seek their legal self-defense through the right to *habeas corpus* still available to them in Zambia - but not in Tanzania!) Yet Nyerere did counsel staying the course of the struggle in the southern part of the continent and it is also true that with regard to Frelimo in Mozambique, for example, he determined to back the most committed of the movement's leaders in the internal struggle that followed the assassination of Mondlane.

These latter aspects were important, of course. Nonetheless, Nyerere's lack of democratic sensibility with reference both to internal dynamics of the regional liberation struggle as well as to Tanzania itself was troubling.^{ix} Thus, for all his own suspicion of the Soviet Union, Nyerere embraced, for Tanzania itself, much the same vanguard party model as the Soviets exemplified - even if he sought to sweeten that system with an ingenious (too ingenious?) innovation of his own: "one-party democracy." In short, "Mwalimu" as "teacher" too often became, at best, benign autocrat of the class-room and, at worst, stern and officious head-master - at great long-run cost, one fears, to the emergence of a strong and self-confident citizenry. Indeed, if one had not learned to be sufficiently suspicious of the vanguard party model from the experience of socialism in Eastern Europe, Tanzania and Mozambique would have been useful refresher courses as to the real price to be paid for choosing uncritically such a vanguardist option.

Neither TANU nor Frelimo quite learned enough about the complex dynamics of rural development either. For the suspicion of peasants - as of any genuinely democratic empowerment of the mass of the population from below - proved to run deep in Tanzania and the same, for all their criticisms of Tanzania's own practice, was equally true of the Mozambican leadership. Thus, in spite of their many statements as to the crucial "class belonging" (as workers and peasants!) of "the people," such class descriptors were all too readily collapsed into merely populist categories - instead of their facilitating a view of such "classes" as being potentially "empowerable" in genuinely radical terms.

As Leander Schneider, one of the most careful and incisive of all scholars of the "ujamaa vijijini" initiative, suggests, in this central rural policy "several of the most inspiring strands of Nyerere's politics flow together - in particular, an exemplary commitment to improving the condition of the poor, as well as his theorizing about the nexus of development, freedom, empowerment, and

participation. However, it is also in the field of rural development that problematic dimensions of Nyerere's leadership become, perhaps, most starkly apparent. Not only did the policy of enforced ujamaa/villagization fail to improve the material conditions of Tanzania's rural population, but the adoption of coercive means to further it also points to the authoritarian side of Nyerere's rule."^x

Nor is the word "authoritarian" chosen lightly by Schneider. In fact, its use lies at the very centre of the argument he wishes to make - and it is not accidental that he concludes his analysis of what he calls the "statist bent and the related overtly coercive character observed in 1970s Tanzania" with the observation that "Tanzanian history shows, above all, that turning a blind eye to the tensions of participatory development will neither make them go away nor allow one to avoid the serious costs implied by swiftly reducing participation to near meaninglessness."^{xi} Shocking then that much-cited analysts like Cranford Pratt can demur somewhat at Nyerere's *too leftist* economic policies but laud him for his fervent embrace of democracy! Because, put quite simply, the latter emphasis is almost entirely inaccurate.

In this connection I am forced to recall an all-too-acrimonious debate I had several decades ago with Pratt himself regarding the Tanzanian experience. Pratt professed to find in my then criticisms of Tanzania's politics a preference for an approach that was far more dangerously and self-righteously authoritarian, far too Marxist and Leninist, than anything that Nyerere was inclined towards. Indeed, for Pratt, Nyerere's political practice was essentially democratic, albeit a practice that sought assertively to guide from above the consolidation of democracy in such a way that the country could weather the very real threats to national consolidation that Pratt apparently thought to characterize the immediate post-independence years.

For my part, while rejecting Pratt's charge that I had favoured some extreme and overtly authoritarian

approach (although I did later concede that I had erred in too uncritically sanctioning the embrace of "vanguardism"), I argued that Pratt had himself quite seriously underestimated both the authoritarian nature of Nyerere's own "democratic" practice and the very high costs that the president's chosen methods (and that of TANU, the party he led) had inflicted upon the movement for progressive change in Tanzania. Accepting, at the time and with Pratt, the prevailing framework of the one-party state, I argued that Nyerere's polity could only hope to provide this as a framework for nurturing democracy if popular forces - workers, peasants, students, women - were empowered to act quite dramatically from below in order to ensure the safeguarding of their own interests and the maintenance of a socialist direction for the country.^{xii} But this was not to be.

There are those who still argue at this point that Nyerere was merely blocked in his own high-minded intentions by the global realities of power and by recalcitrant politicians and bureaucrats in his own camp; there is some truth in this, of course, but not, I would argue, nearly enough to cover all the data nor to explain all the contradictions in the ujamaa project. Not that anyone would wish to argue that Nyerere's intentions were anything but "benign." Nor would one suggest that "Tanzanian socialism" could ever merely have sprung, "spontaneously," from the Tanzanian populace. No, *leadership*, clearly explaining costs and benefits and the complexities of seeking to realize progressive outcomes while helping to "raise popular consciousness," would inevitably have to have been part of any revolutionary political equation. And no doubt much of Nyerere's political practice squares with such a model. Yet surely twentieth century history has taught us, if nothing else, the extreme dangers of any such "leadership," even at its most benign, slipping the leash of popular control and doing what it perceives by its own lights to be "best" for its ostensibly "backward" wards. And just as surely one might legitimately fear that Nyerere drifted much too close to the authoritarian horn of this dilemma on numerous occasions for one to be entirely confident

of his own good judgment in each case.

Additional support for Nyerere's political project is also offered by scholars precisely along the same lines originally hinted at by Pratt. Even if acknowledging (albeit somewhat *sotto voce*) that Nyerere may well have blunted the assertions of workers and peasants in Tanzania it is claimed that, in enacting a "guided democracy," he nonetheless derailed any too regionalist or "tribalist" political projects and this in the long-term interests of a unified and pacific Tanzania.^{xiii} A tempting argument if one compares developments in Tanzania with those elsewhere on the continent, though one recalls that it was often stated in the early days how fortunate Tanzania was both in the multiplicity of its diverse ethnicities (without any one being too overbearing numerically to be considered a particular threat by others) and in having Swahili as a national *lingua franca*. Some points may nonetheless be granted to TANU for its politics of self-consciously downgrading and transcending "tribalism" by means of "one-partyism" and the like, but, as noted, this was surely at the expense of any very radical form of "class struggle" - with the price of downplaying the latter being very high in terms of the realization of a possible socialist outcome.

Moreover, any genuinely rural tilt in the county's macro-economic strategies was lost too. After all, economists like Samir Amin have argued that only an ever more radical decolonization of Africa from central capitalist control - in his dramatic word, in an actual "delinking" of the economies of the Global South from the Empire of Capital that otherwise holds the South in its sway^{xiv} - could actually be developmental in any meaningful sense.^{xv} Yet, as Amin readily admits, there is no realistic haven of "autarky" that one can look to, no way of avoiding some involvement in the broader market (as opportunity, though not, he argues, as seduction). What must occur, however, is the substitution of the present political economy of recolonization with an alternative that tilts effectively towards "delinking" as a notional goal - invoking an auto-centric socio-economic alternative that is at once effective,

efficient and productive. What would the programme of a national strategy erected on the premise of a strong tilt towards radical delinking from the presently existent and profoundly cancerous global capitalist system look like? The answer to this question could only begin to be found in a new project of genuine socialist planning - established on a national or regional scale - that sought to smash, precisely, the crippling (il)logic of present "market limitations" upon development.

This, in turn, suggests the need for a programme that (following the formulations of Clive Thomas, the Guyanese economist who also taught in Tanzania) would embody "the progressive convergence of the demand structure of the community and the needs of the population"^{xvi} - this being the very reverse of the market fundamentalist's global orthodoxy. One could then ground a "socialism of expanded reproduction" - one that refuses the dilemma that has heretofore undermined the promise of the many "socialisms" which have then proven prone to falling into the Stalinist trap of "violently repressing mass consumption" in the name of the supposed requirements of accumulation. For, far from accumulation and mass consumption being warring opposites, the premise would then be that accumulation could be driven forward precisely by finding outlets for production in meeting the growing requirements, the needs, of the mass of the population!

An effective industrialization strategy would thus base its "expanded reproduction" on ever increasing exchanges between city and country, between industry and agriculture, with food and raw materials moving to the cities and with consumer goods and producer goods (with the latter defined to include centrally such modest items as scythes, iron ploughs, hoes, axes, fertilizers and the like) moving to the countryside. Collective saving geared to investment could then be seen as being drawn essentially, if not exclusively, from an expanding economic pool. Note that such a socialism of expanded reproduction makes the betterment of the people's lot a short-term rather than a long-term project and thus promises a much sounder basis for an effective (rather than merely rhetorical) alliance of workers, peasants and others -

on a democratic road to revolutionary socialism.^{xvii}

But this is, of course, precisely an emphasis that Nyerere and company turned their backs on. Thus Bill Luttrell, writing quite explicitly within the framework established by Thomas, demonstrates the almost complete failure of the "bureaucratic class" in Tanzania to do so, their continued subservience to the logic of global capitalism, and their long-term failure to actually develop the country. He then spells out an alternative track that might have been taken had the elite really wanted to pursue transformation. Moreover, while Luttrell says little about Nyerere himself, another crucial missing link - industrial strategy (to be added to silences about democracy and failures of imagination in the rural sector) - in Nyerere's presumed socialist strategy stands starkly exposed.^{xviii}

There are other fronts upon which to locate such a critical perspective. As noted earlier, Borbonniere, in discussing students as a "social category" of potentially radical provenance, concludes her account of the early years at the University by suggesting that "the Akivaga crisis, which was seen as a failure to follow through on the promise of *Mwongozo* at the university, was the first indication of a gap between Nyerere's political theory and practice."^{xix} And what of women, the entire sphere of struggle for gender emancipation and gender equality? This was a front of "liberation" little discussed at the time in Tanzania, and, indeed, the record was not an encouraging one. For example, Bibi Titi, admittedly no great socialist but a prominent TANU leader in the early days, underscored some years ago the starkness of the male sense of entitlement that marked TANU in those years, the vital role of women militants in the liberation struggle itself soon being more or less deposed.

When power was transferred to the nationalist government...the story changed. Women's experience was no longer relevant to the postcolonial struggles against neo-colonialism, imperialism and the management of the state apparatus. In [our] discussion Bibi Titi ironically said, "I started smelling fish" when the first cabinet was named.^{xx}

Indeed, so incensed by this was Bibi Titi that, by her account, she actually refused Nyerere's offer to co-author with him a joint history of Tanzania's nationalist liberation struggle! Meanwhile, the prevailing silences of that time have continued to scar present-day reality in Tanzania, despite the best efforts of many women activists then and now to keep the struggle for gender emancipation alive.

Strengths and weaknesses, then. But the question remains: should not Tanzania's socialist moment constitute a very real learning experience for a continent that has still not fully confronted the threat of continuing subordination by global capital (including in its present-day Chinese form)? A lot depends, of course, on what you wish to learn. But in a very real sense one is tempted to say that *nothing* has been learned - or, if something has indeed been "learned," it has been entirely the wrong thing. Thus, in South Africa, to take one example, the latter is precisely the case. There, the cases of Tanzania and Mozambique have been viewed, particularly by that country's black elite, entirely one-sidedly and quite opportunistically - as having been, quite simply, case-studies of misguided policies, case-studies of, precisely, what NOT TO DO.

Not to attempt to realize socialism and instead settle for a kind of recolonization by global capital? For, the truth is that the lesson actually being taken was NOT TO DARE: not to dare to challenge global capital, not to dare to challenge local hierarchies, not to dare to challenge the presumed logic of the market-place. But is this really what Africa should learn from Tanzania? No, I would suggest, the lesson could be quite a different one: the very real costs of not to have dared ENOUGH. Indeed, with respect to this issue posed in this way the jury is surely still out. The deeper problems and challenges that existed in the 1960s and 1970s continue to confront Africa today. They had begun to be sketched by Nyerere and the early TANU leadership, as they had been earlier by Nkrumah (for all the weaknesses of his own project), by Cabral (and Fanon), and later by Machel. Here, warts and all, Nyerere, the Mwalimu,

can still teach us. Whether other Africans, in either Tanzania or elsewhere, can or will so learn and again take up, ever more effectively, the struggle and move to confront and to overcome their sobering post-colonial legacy is an open question - for all of us.

(3,786 words)

i. John S. Saul, professor emeritus of social and political science at York University in Canada was senior lecturer in Political Science at the University of Dar es Salaam from 1965-72. He has also taught in Mozambique and South Africa, has had a long career as a liberation-support/anti-apartheid activist with reference to southern Africa and has published almost 20 books as well as numerous articles on Africa and on development theory over the years. An earlier version of this paper was prepared for a special issue of the journal *Chemchemi*, published in Dar es Salaam and forthcoming.

ii. Horace Campbell, "Julius Nyerere: between state-centred and people-centred Pan-Africanism" and Firoze Mamji, "Preface" both appear in Chambi Chachage and Annar Cassam (eds.), *Africa's Liberation: The Legacy of Nyerere* (Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi and London: Pamabazuka Press, 2010), pp. 45-6. As Annar Cassam also adds in the Introduction to this volume, "The words 'living memory' acquire a deeper meaning when one considers the place that Mwalimu Julius Nyerere occupies in the minds, hearts, lives, consciousness and subconscious of those who knew him and those who did not, those who live in Tanzania and those who do not, those who pay attention to Africa and those who judge it, from near and afar."

iii. See Pascal Mihyo, "The Struggle for Workers Control in Tanzania" in *MajiMaji* (Dar es Salaam, 1974) and, in edited form, in *Review of African Political Economy*, #4 (1974), and Henry Mapolu (ed.), *Workers and Management* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1976).

iv. See Leander Schneider, "Developmentalism and its failings: why rural development went wrong in 1960s and 1970s Tanzania," Ph.D dissertation, Columbia University, 2003, and his "Freedom and Unfreedom in Rural Development: The Theory and Practice of Julius Nyerere's Rural Socialism," in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 38, 2 (2004).

v See John S. Saul, *Revolutionary Traveller: Freeze-Frames from a Life*, (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2009), ch. 1, "The 1960s - Tanzania" and, especially, Michelle Borbonniere, "Debating Socialism on the Hill: The University of Dar es Salaam. 1961-71," M.A. dissertation, Dalhousie University, August, 2007. Borbonniere concludes that "The Akivaga crisis, which was seen as a failure to follow through on the promise of *Mwongozo* at the university, was the first [sic] indication of a gap between Nyerere's political theory and practice" (p. 146).

vi. Nor can I ignore the first-hand accounts of other witnesses of the time who recorded the fact that protesting students were savagely beaten by security forces as they marched in protest down the Morogoro Road to town in 1978.

vii. I draw here on my account of the Akivaga and Temu cases to be found in my essay "Julius Nyerere's Socialism: Learning from Tanzania," which is chapter 7 of my *The Next Liberation Struggle: Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy in Southern Africa* (Toronto, Durban, New York and London: Between the Lines, University of KwaZulu/Natal Press, Monthly Review Press and Merlin Press, 2005), pp. 149-50 and 156.

viii. *The Nationalist* (Dar es Salaam), September 5, 1967.

ix. For a broader perspective on such issues, see John S. Saul, "Race, class, gender and voice: four terrains of liberation," *Review of African Political Economy*, #123 (2010).

x. Schneider, "Freedom and Unfreedom in Rural Development" (op. cit.).

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- xi. Schneider, *ibid.* See also his "Colonial Legacies and Postcolonial Authoritarianism in Tanzania: Connects and Disconnects," *African Studies Review*, 49, 1 (Apr., 2006).
- xii. Here, too, I draw in writing this paragraph on some of my own formulations in "Julius Nyerere's Socialism" (*op. cit.*) where this perspective is advanced more extensively.
- xiii. In this regard, too, one notes, shortly after independence, the importance of the dramatic disempowering and rapid neutralization, by Nyerere and the new Tanganyikan state, of the various traditional authorities previously at work in Tanganyika. This initiative is an important aspect of the Tanzanian story not well covered in the literature on the country to my knowledge.
- xiv. I have cited Amin's concept of "delinking" in preparing the essay "The Empire of Capital, Recolonization and Resistance: Rethinking the Political Economy of Development in the Global South" for its inclusion in my *Revolutionary Traveller* (*op. cit.*), pp. 354-367, and I have here only mildly recrafted that argument for present purposes.
- xv. "Delinking" is defined, by Amin, as "the submission of external relations [to internal requirements], the opposite of the internal adjustment of the peripheries to the demands of the polarizing worldwide expansion of capital" and seen as being "the only realistic alternative [since] reform of the [present] world system is utopian." In his view, "history shows us that it is impossible to 'catch up' within the framework of world capitalism"; in fact, "only a very long transition" (with a self-conscious choice for delinking from the world of capitalist globalization as an essential first step) beyond the present global polarization will suffice.
- xvi. I first cited Thomas' formulation in the book I edited, *Mozambique, A Difficult Road: The Transition to Socialism in Mozambique* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985) and evoked it to complement Amin's concept of "delinking" in the

essay noted above in *Revolutionary Traveller* (*ibid.*).

xvii. This position is also spelled out at greater length in my article "Is Socialism Still an Alternative?" in *Studies in Political Economy* (Ottawa: forthcoming).

xviii. William L. Luttrell, *Post-Capitalist Industrialization: Planning Economic Independence in Tanzania* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

xix. Borbonniere, "Debating Socialism on the Hill" (*op. cit.*), p.146.

xx. Ruth Meena, "A Conversation with Bibi Titi: A Political Veteran" in Marjorie Mbilinyi, Mary Rusimbi, Chachage S. L. Chachage, and Demere Kiyunga (ed.), *Activist Voices: Feminist Struggles for an Alternative World* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Gender Networking Programme, 2003), p. 152; the interview with Bibi Titi, on which this article focusses was carried out by Ms. Meena in 1988.