

## **JULIUS NYERERE, COMPREHENSION OF SLAVERY, AND NATION BUILDING: SOME NOTES ON POPULAR CONSCIOUSNESS IN MODERN TANZANIA**

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***Abstract.** This article examines the image of Julius Nyerere, the first president of independent Tanzania, among present-day citizens. Spotting of both the presence and persistence of his image in popular consciousness became an unexpected result of unrelated field research on the historical memory of 19th century slave trade and its influence on interethnic relations in the country. The study did not include any questions about Julius Nyerere, colonialism, or Tanzania's independence. However, many respondents on their own will start talking about Nyerere's role in connection with the abolition of the slave trade (sic), about his contribution to building a peaceful nation without ethnic tensions, the spread of the Swahili language, and education. The variety of answers shows that almost any positive shift in the development of Tanganyika and Tanzania can be attributed to him in popular consciousness. This demonstrates the continuing importance of Nyerere's image and legacy for ordinary Tanzanians.*

***Keywords:** Julius Nyerere, Tanzania, Arab-Swahili slave trade, spread of the Swahili language, popular consciousness, nation building*

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### INTRODUCTION

This article is based on the results of field research conducted from 2018 to 2022 by A.A. Banshchikova, V.N. Bryndina and O.V. Ivanchenko in the United Republic of Tanzania, including the autonomy of Zanzibar. This study was focused on the cultural memory of the Arab-Swahili slave trade in East Africa and the Indian Ocean in the 19th century and its influence on interethnic relations in the country nowadays. The research was carried out in the following locations on the mainland (Dar es Salaam, Bagamoyo, Kaole, Tanga, Pangani, Kilwa Masoko, Kigoma, Ujiji, Tabora, and others) and in the insular part of the country (Zanzibar City, Nungwi, Mbweni, Kiungani, and Chapwani Island). Structured interviews were conducted in English and Swahili, and respondents were asked what they knew about the slave trade, for example, who were the slave traders, where it was happening, to which countries slaves were shipped finally, which tribes were the most affected, how the slave trade was abolished, and why, among others. As a result, more than 180 interviews were conducted. The results of this study revealed, in particular, the influence of Nyerere's approach on the phenomenon we studied.

The legacy of the first president of Tanzania, the Father of the Nation, Mwalimu Nyerere, in the public consciousness of the country's citizens, deserves to become the subject of historical, anthropological, and political studies. In recent years, many common and specialized studies have been published on this topic, primarily M.-A. Fouéré [Mazrui 2002; McDonald & Sahle 2002; Chachage 2010; Becker 2013; Fouéré 2009; 2014 a, b; 2015; Gro-

mová 2000; Bondarenko 2022; Teterin 2022]. This legacy also affects the perception of former East African slavery by modern Tanzanians. The scale of Nyerere's heritage, the public love for this truly outstanding person, the memory, and the presence of his image in the hearts of common Tanzanians are so remarkable that they emerged even in our field study, which had nothing to do with Nyerere in person and did not include any questions about him.

The slavery and slave trade provide for the most traumatic and sensitive discourses of the East African past, ranking second in this regard after colonialism, both in terms of importance and comparative distance in time. The overcoming and comprehension of their aftermath took an important place in the concept of an independent Tanzanian nation, as this concept was put forward by the country's first president, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, and still plays an important role in the implementation of this concept. First, it opposed the new society to the negative phenomena of the past, including slavery. In no case should these pages of the past have gone out of public memory; some key points of J. Nyerere's ideas, including his very concept of *ujamaa*, were built on a conscious and directly proclaimed antagonism to those approaches that slavery had once presumed [cf. Cornelli 2012: 54-62]. First, this is his general principles "all people are equal" (*watu wote sawa*) and are valuable as individuals; slavery was seen as the greatest antipode of equality, i.e. treating a human being as a commodity [Lema et al. 2004: 122; Cornelli 2012: 57; Becker 2020: 11]. Second, Nyerere's call for self-reliance, that is, the independence of Africans and their reliance on confidence in themselves and their own strength, also included reflective opposition to slavery. The lack of such confidence was perceived by Nyerere as a "slave mentality", a malignant legacy both of slavery and colonialism [Lema et al. 2004: 122; Cornelli 2012: 58].

The relevance of such references to slavery is evidenced by the fact that even at the beginning of the 21st century, there still existed, albeit in very small numbers, some older people in Tanzania who, being the descendants of the one-time rich and influential Arab and Arab-African families, did not hesitate to deny Nyerere's principles, arguing that slavery is a legitimate and justified institution that reflects the "real inequality of men", and were proud of their Arab roots as a pledge of their alleged natural and fundamental superiority over black Africans [Becker 2020: 11].

The other side of Nyerere's thinking about former slavery in the framework of his nation-building concept was connected to the forces once involved in it. Different groups of the population of future Tanzania participated in slavery and slave trade in different ways and roles; their main beneficiaries and organizers belonged to the Arab and Arab-African elite, some tribes, and tribal leaders actively took part in the capture and delivery of slaves, while other groups turned out to be the victims of these processes. The memories of all of this had an impact on the intergroup relations in East Africa, contributed to the tragic events in Zanzibar in 1964 (the mass pogroms and murders of the Arab and Arabized population), and could generate group emotions that could undermine the national unity of Tanzanians. Characteristically, Nyerere's opponents in Zanzibar attributed and still attribute to him a certain hostility towards Zanzibar, supposedly generated by the fact that the island was the center of the slave trade in the past [Fouéré 2014: 15-16]. In fact, Nyerere's concept of the maximal internal unity of the new Tanzanian nation and the equality of all its members was directed against any growth of such sentiments or the use of the past to settle group scores. The discourse laid down by the Father of the Nation emphasized first of all the connection of slavery and the slave trade with a factor external to Africa, i.e. with European colonialism, which connection had really existed in East Africa (this approach continued pan-Africanist concepts, including their Tanzanian and Kenyan variants, see [Mbogoma 2018: 31-32]). Nyerere came to the idea of the connection of slavery mostly with European colonialism while studying in England [Cornelli 2012: 53-54].

All these approaches and their implementation in government political discourse and state education were superimposed on the natural and spontaneous memories of slavery and slave trade, which were self-reproduced in Tanzanian society, with the current perception of these pages of the past in Tanzania as a result. It is obvious that the widespread ideas about the connection between the slave trade and the Western white world bear the imprint of Nyerere nation-building concepts to the greatest extent.

Moving on to our field study of the historical memory of the Arab-Swahili slave trade of the 19th century, it is necessary to note that even while answering questions very distant from the Nyerere era, our respondents recalled him, his activities, and ideas. Chronologically, most of our questions referred to the 19th century (e.g., who were the slave traders, where the slaves were shipped, how and why the slave trade was abolished, etc.); one question was about the Zanzibar revolution (for some people believe the massacre of Arabs during those events is related to the slave trade history); and a block of questions touched upon modern interethnic relations (including questions about cases of modern slavery and possible social problems of the descendants of slaves nowadays). The study did not include any questions about Julius Nyerere, colonialism, or Tanzania's independence. However, 22 of 181 respondents mentioned the first president in their answers and explained how his name was related to a particular question. Thus, we have an array of materials in which our interlocutors spoke about Julius Nyerere on their initiative, without any interviewer's clues, which leads to a conclusion about the presence of his image in the public consciousness of Tanzanians. In this regard, it is very interesting to consider the contexts in which this image was mentioned and the main messages that the respondents wanted to express speaking about Nyerere.

#### NYERERE AS THE ABOLISHER OF SLAVE TRADE

The first and most surprising block of opinions reflects the idea that Nyerere had stopped the slave trade, and we are talking about the Arab-Swahili slave trade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (sic). Here are some examples:

*O.I. (Oksana Ivanchenko):* Maybe you know some personalities who helped to abolish the slave trade here in Tanzania? Some people who helped to abolish, any personalities, you know? Maybe you remember.

*R. (Respondent):* Yeah.

*O.I.:* Who was it?

*R.:* Our first Prime Minister, Mwalimu Nyerere, yeah.

*O.I.:* He helped to abolish the slave trade?

*R.:* Yeah. And another noble woman was Bibi Titi Mohammed.

*(Interview with a young man, a medical college student. Gongo la Mboto, 2019)*

*V.B. (Valentina Bryndina):* Who supported the abolition of the slave trade? Who helped?

*R.:* White people and it had some relation to Nyerere<sup>1</sup>.

*(Interview with a woman working on a farm. Mbwani, Zanzibar, 2020)*

*V.B.:* And do you know when the slave trade ended? Who stopped the slave trade?

*R.:* After Tanzania got independence that's when the slave trade ended. And the one who helped us get independence was Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere.

*(Interview with a young girl, who graduated from college. Beit el-Ras, Zanzibar, 2021)*

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<sup>1</sup> In Kiswahili: "Wazungu na mambo ya Nyerere".

V.B.: And who helped to abolish the slave trade?

R.: That was our first president. <...> In the books... A large percentage of the books have explained about people being sent to slavery, but after that when President Nyerere refused to continue slavery, it disappeared and we were freed.

*(Interview with middle-aged woman, working in housekeeping. Kigoma, 2022)*

V.B.: How the slave trade was abolished and why?

R.: ... Yes, after independence... the slave trade ended and those who helped a country like us in Tanzania, on our side, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, who is the father of the nation, that's what I know<sup>2</sup>.

*(Interview with aged woman with a primary education. Kigoma, 2022)*

The next three opinions include the first president of independent Tanganyika and then Tanzania and also the first president of post-revolutionary Zanzibar Abeid Amani Karume.

V.B.: When did the slave trade end?

R.: <...> Freedom, like fighting for freedom of our country, Tanzania, it has started in Tanganyika, started with Nyerere, Julius Kambarage Nyerere. When they got freedom in Tanganyika, Mr. Karume and Mwalimu Nyerere started to fight for freedom in Zanzibar. When they get this, they realized they must stop the slave trade business.

*(Interview with a middle-aged man. Mbweni, Zanzibar, 2020)*

V.B.: How did the slave trade end?

R.: In Zanzibar President Karume helped to end it by revolution while in inland Tanzania President Nyerere helped to end it through peaceful negotiations.

*(Interview with a middle-aged man. Mbweni, Zanzibar, 2021)*

A.B. (*Anastasia Banshchikova*): Why was the slave trade abolished?

R.: Our old politicians helped to abolish slave trade, Karume and Nyerere were among them.

*(Interview with aged worker. Tabora, 2022)*

Of course, some of the respondents probably confused and connected the real abolition of slave trade to the rhetoric of *watu wote sawa*, but the reason for the existence of this image of "Nyerere as the Abolisher" is not just a confusion and simplification of history. In the course of this field study, it has already been noticed that for Tanzanians, the history of colonialism is more essential and timelier than the slave trade history; much more attention is paid to it in educational materials as well. At the same time, the story of gaining independence and the role of Julius Nyerere is the main source of pride and joy in the national consciousness: it unites people, encourages them to talk about these events literally "with bright eyes". Paradoxically, the slave trade is also precepted as part of colonialism, the period then Africans were subjugated by external forces, be it Arabs or Europeans [Banshchikova and Ivanchenko 2020: 101-106; Banshchikova, Bryndina, and Ivanchenko 2020: 90-91]. With independence, the period of subjugation ended, so the main protagonist of its acquisition also became the abolisher.

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<sup>2</sup> In Kiswahili: "Ndio, baada ya independence... biashara ya utumwa ikawa imemalizika na waliosaidia kwa nchi kama sisi Tanzania kwa upande wetu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, ambae ndio Baba wa taifa, hivyo ndio ninavyojua mimi".

## NYERERE AS THE BUILDER OF THE NATION, EDUCATOR, AND UNIONIST

The next block of opinions is connected with some real, much more historical achievements of the Father of Nation, these responses can be summarized by the phrase "Nyerere united Tanzanians." The presence of such a block of opinions, especially in an unrelated study, is the best evidence of the real success of the nation-building process, and the relevance of Nyerere's legacy in the modern public consciousness of Tanzanians. The following fragments are related to the question about interethnic relations in the country today (see Banshchikova & Ivanchenko 2019; Banshchikova, Ivanchenko 2020; Bondarenko et al. 2021).

*O.I.:* Do you think the slave trade has influenced the relations between Arabs and Tanzanians today? Do people have some negative towards Arabs because of these events or was it all left in the past and forgotten?

*R.:* We still have good relations because we are living with them, talking with them. So, because. Because of Mwalimu Nyerere in Tanzania we do not have racism.

*(Interview with a woman-shopkeeper. Bagamoyo, 2018)*

*A.B.:* What do you think about the relations between Arabs and Tanzanians?

*R.:* [Relations are good] because Nyerere came to unify all of us. You cannot directly reject your fellow human being. Only because if you have a certain jealousy but there are some things coming up.

*(Interview with a woman with higher education. Kaole, 2018)*

*R.:* The father of the nation, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, one of the persons who lighted Tanzania and at the end of the day we see each other, even if you are different from another person, it is very hard to show it [to demonstrate discrimination in any way – *A.B.*], because the other person is going to say "What has happened? We are all Tanzanians!". We are all African, we are all one world, we do not see the difference, even if we feel the difference, we cannot show it openly. He contributed so much reputation, to make you see other human being as a part of yourself.

*(Interview with a female accountant. Gongo la Mboto, 2018<sup>3</sup>)*

*O.I.:* So you do not have negative feelings towards Arabs?

*R.:* No, no negative feelings. <...> After Mwalimu Nyerere took this country, he made everybody equal. So far we have forgotten all the bad memories.

*(Interview with a young man with a university degree. Dar es Salaam, 2018)*

*R.:* Mkwawa, *Hehe* chief, fought and put his people into freedom. When he did that, he became an example for other chiefs<sup>4</sup>. He tried to make unity, to sort out that problem of fighting for freedom of generation. <...> Nyerere, to be the president, he studied from the school, his mind being strong for the school, so he was a good man since he was a young person. So that's what happened in the country [slave trade – *A.B.*], but thanks for everything and we forget it, no need to remind us, because the government does not need to wake up people to remember it. So we just take it now like the [forgotten] history.

*(Interview with the founder of the orphan asylum. Dar es Salaam, 2018)*

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that this respondent did not estimate the relations between Afro-Tanzanians and Arab-Tanzanians trouble-free.

<sup>4</sup> Mkwawa is a hero of armed resistance to the German colonialists; apparently, the respondent does not really remember that he lost the war and committed suicide.

R.: In Tanzania we have our unique culture, I do not think about the world, I am proud of Tanzania, very proud of Tanzania. We have a very unique culture, it is like this... Our former president, Mwalimu Nyerere, discouraged the religion from becoming a weapon to achieve political success. He realized that we do have our religions, all together, but the government has no religion. Whenever any person enters in power, whether it is a Christian or Muslim, they allow them to enter in their prayers house, is not it? For instance, the former Magufuli, Magufuli was allowed to enter the Muslim house. Kikwete was allowed to enter even in Christian house. We have very good relations instead of... [fighting. – A.B.].

*(Interview with a teacher with higher education. Tabora, 2022)*

Speaking about the role and activities of Julius Nyerere, some respondents mentioned the spread of the Swahili language as an important factor that united the nation.

R.: Our president, our first president, tried to keep us together, yeah, to keep our mind "we are all equal". But before people were bleeding each other, you understand? But after the first president tried to keep us together, then... that thing stopped. <...> As I remember, Mwalimu Nyerere said: "*Karne ya ishirini na moja hatuwezi kupanda basi la ukabila*<sup>5</sup>". But in 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can't stand and say "I am *Sambaa*", "I am *Mbugu*", "I am *Chagga*" – no, we have to speak only language, we can stand as only Tanzanians. And the language connecting us – is *Swahili*. So, *Sambaa*, *Mbugu*, and *Chagga* remain only in... maybe traditional beliefs. <...> But if it's not Mwalimu Nyerere – it's my belief, that until today we would have that [tribalism – A.B.].

*(Interview with a Dodoma University student. Tanga, 2019)*

V.B.: So, memory about slave trade doesn't influence the relationships between different tribes in Tanzania nowadays?

R.: Nowadays, different tribes in Tanzania, I think it's very good [relations] and this was organized by our elder... I mean Julius Kambarage Nyerere, after rising Swahili language. <...> He used to unite all tribes in Tanzania, in Zanzibar also. And he completed this process very well. We can cooperate with no problem, with any tribe, meaning that if someone does not know to speak to Sukuma tribal language, he can use the Swahili language to communicate. Also, he can use, if someone does not know the Chagga language, he can use what? Swahili language. So, Swahili language has become a connection language in Tanzania.

*(Interview with a middle-aged man. Bweni, Zanzibar, 2020)*

R.: For instance, Zanzibar does not live in tribalism, but the mainland has more than 123 tribes and still lives in tribalism. Swahili, which was declared by President Nyerere in the 1960s, was to bring together all tribes <...> avoiding tribalism, avoiding misunderstanding between tribes.

*(Interview with a middle-aged man. Stone Town, Zanzibar, 2020)*

Apart from Swahili, Tanzanians associate the spread of education with the name of the first president: for example, one respondent said that the slave trade ended when people began getting education and realized that this "business" could not be continued.

The last context, in which Nyerere's name was mentioned, emerged when mainland residents answered the question about the Zanzibar revolution (for more information on the

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<sup>5</sup> Literally: "In the 21st century we cannot take the bus of tribal identifications / tribalism", that is, in the 21st century we cannot be guided by ethnic identifications that divide us, the time has come to be guided by a single national identity that unites us, the perception of all citizens as Tanzanians.

difference in perception of the heritage of Nyerere among mainland and Zanzibar residents, see [Fouéré 2014b]).

R.: Zanzibar was very dangerous before. When Nyerere was president, he put Zanzibar today into a good place, but before it was very bad, because it was Arabic, all the place was Arabic, and they did not want people to go to school apart from studying Arabic. <...> but after Nyerere took the sands from Zanzibar and the sands from here and put together, the agreement [was reached] and he said "this is Tanzania" and everything has changed.

*(Interview with the founder of the orphan asylum. Dar es Salaam, 2018)*

R.: They [Arab elite of Zanzibar sultanate – A.B.] wanted Zanzibar to belong to the Arabic people. Nyerere said "No, we do not want this, we can manage ourselves". <...> If you want to share with us, join the business. You come, but you want other things [to rule the island without the participation of Africans – A.B.] – we do not want this".

*(Interview with a middle-aged woman. Bagamoyo, 2019)*

R.: This [murder of Arabs during the revolution – A.B.] was because of the slave trade, but these people had the idea that this country is so rich that [it can be colonized]... But Abedi Amani Karume and Julius Kambarage Nyerere, said this is our country, you cannot stay here, you should go.

*(Interview with a middle-aged man of mainland origin working in Zanzibar. Stone Town, Zanzibar, 2019)*

R.: Nyerere told Karume that "You are not a member of Zanzibar, a slave. If you want to be strong and you are a leader, we must join together because you are a leader like me. I am a president of Tanganyika and you are the president of Zanzibar, let us join together. I will bring you soldiers there to protect you, to be safe, because Zanzibar is a very small country. So let us join in order to protect you." Karume agreed to be vice-president of Tanzania and president of Zanzibar. After that they decided Zanzibar and Tanganyika to come together.

*(Interview with a middle-aged man. Tabora, 2022)*

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, several generalizations can be made. The fact that our interlocutors unexpectedly mentioned the country's first president, answering the questions of an absolutely unrelated field study, proves the exceptional importance and relevance of his image for modern Tanzanians. His name is associated with the attainment of independence (of course, if a question about this was asked intentionally, a flow of corresponding answers would be received), the development of education and the spread of the Swahili language as a language of interethnic communication, the introduction of the ideals of national unity, national identity, equality of all citizens, and non-discrimination on any grounds. In addition, he (together with Karume) is given credit for the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar and for the creation of the Zanzibari government representing the interests of Africans, not Arabs (opinions expressed by mainland residents). It is interesting to note that Julius Nyerere has already functioned as a fantastic character: any positive shifts in the development of Tanganyika and Tanzania can be attributed to him, up to the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century, although key agreements in this field were reached long before his birth and the beginning of political activities. Of course, the maintenance and functioning of his image are not only (and not so much) because of the cultural memory that does not depend on the state, according to M.-O. Fouéré, his name has become a part of political language and a metaphor

in the rhetoric of modern political parties, a part of the past, which can be used to form and reform perception of the nation [Fouéré 2015: 5, 11] or to achieve consensus [Becker 2013: 240]. However, the presence of fantastic details in the image of Nyerere, the fact that he has become a hero of folk tales, demonstrates his continuing importance for ordinary people of Tanzania.

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**ДЖУЛИУС НЬЕРЕРЕ,  
ВОСПРИЯТИЕ РАБСТВА И НАЦИЕСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО:  
НЕКОТОРЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ ОБЩЕСТВЕННОГО СОЗНАНИЯ  
СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ТАНЗАНИЙЦЕВ**

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***Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается восприятие образа Джулиуса Ньерере, первого президента независимой Танзании, в общественном сознании современных жителей страны. Выявление устойчивого и яркого образа Ньерере стало неожиданным результатом несвязанного полевого исследования, посвященного исторической памяти об арабо-суахилийской работорговле XIX в. и ее влиянию на межэтнические отношения. Это исследование не включало каких-либо вопросов о Ньерере, колониализме или обретении Танзанией независимости, однако многие респонденты по собственной воле начинали рассказывать о нем и его роли в деле отмены работорговли (sic), о вкладе в строительство мирной нации без этнических конфликтов, о распространении языка суахили и образования. Ответы респондентов показывают, что практически любой позитивный сдвиг в истории Танганьики и Танзании, в том числе отмена работорговли, которая имела место до рождения Ньерере, – может быть приписана ему в общественном сознании (другие сопутствующие причины распространения такого мнения рассмотрены в работе). Это демонстрирует важность образа Отца нации и его наследия для современных танзанийцев.*

***Ключевые слова:** Джулиус Ньерере, Танзания, арабо-суахилийская работорговля, распространение языка суахили, общественное сознание, нациестроительство*

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