

Bryceson, Deborah Fahy

**Working Paper**

## Dar es Salaam as a 'harbour of peace' in East Africa: Tracing the role of creolized urban ethnicity in nation-state formation

WIDER Working Paper, No. 2010/19

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

United Nations University (UNU), World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER)

*Suggested Citation:* Bryceson, Deborah Fahy (2010) : Dar es Salaam as a 'harbour of peace' in East Africa: Tracing the role of creolized urban ethnicity in nation-state formation, WIDER Working Paper, No. 2010/19, ISBN 978-92-9230-254-2, The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/53988>

**Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

**Terms of use:**

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY

**UNU-WIDER**

World Institute for Development  
Economics Research

Working Paper No. 2010/19

## **Dar es Salaam as a ‘Harbour of Peace’ in East Africa**

Tracing the Role of Creolized Urban  
Ethnicity in Nation-State Formation

Deborah Fahy Bryceson\*

March 2010

### **Abstract**

Dar es Salaam is exceptional in East Africa for having a record of relatively little ethnic tension, and remaining tranquil and true to its name, the ‘harbour of peace’. This paper explores the interface between ethnic and national identities in Tanzania’s capital city, focusing on its ethnic foundations and their malleability with regard to nationalism, asking how nationalist identities were negotiated vis-à-vis existing local ethnic identities. How willing were ethnic groups that were indigenous to the locality to ‘share’ the city, its land, and amenities with newcomer compatriots, given that the city was almost as new as the nation-state? How did their modus operandi affect nation-building?

Keywords: nation-state, Tanzania, nationalism, urbanization

JEL classification: N37, N97, F54

Copyright © UNU-WIDER 2010

\* University of Glasgow, e-mail: [dfbryceson@bryceson.net](mailto:dfbryceson@bryceson.net)

This study has been prepared within the UNU-WIDER project on Beyond the Tipping Point: Development in an Urban World directed by Jo Beall, Basudeb Guha-Khasnabis, and Ravi Kanbur.

UNU-WIDER gratefully acknowledges the financial contributions to the research programme by the governments of Denmark (Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Finland (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency—Sida) and the United Kingdom (Department for International Development).

ISSN 1798-7237

ISBN 978-92-9230-254-2

*The World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER) was established by the United Nations University (UNU) as its first research and training centre and started work in Helsinki, Finland in 1985. The Institute undertakes applied research and policy analysis on structural changes affecting the developing and transitional economies, provides a forum for the advocacy of policies leading to robust, equitable and environmentally sustainable growth, and promotes capacity strengthening and training in the field of economic and social policy making. Work is carried out by staff researchers and visiting scholars in Helsinki and through networks of collaborating scholars and institutions around the world.*

*[www.wider.unu.edu](http://www.wider.unu.edu)*

*[publications@wider.unu.edu](mailto:publications@wider.unu.edu)*

UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER)  
Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

Typescript prepared by Anne Ruohonen at UNU-WIDER

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s). Publication does not imply endorsement by the Institute or the United Nations University, nor by the programme/project sponsors, of any of the views expressed.

## **1 Introduction**

As metropolitan centres, East Africa's capital cities are barely a century old. They have grown significantly over the past four decades since national independence, absorbing people of a variety of ethnic identities and levels of national consciousness. Much has been written about the history of nation-building in East Africa (Tordoff 1967; Temu 1969; Beinen 1970; Mamdani 1976; Hansen and Twaddle 1988; Geiger 1997). A quite separate literature has focused on East African urbanization (O'Connor 1983; Anderson and Rathbone 2000; Burton 2000; Bryceson and Potts 2006). Nonetheless, there has been scant attention accorded to how urbanization and nationalism relate to one another. By contrast, the literature on European urbanization has generated a wealth of insights into the interaction between urban population growth, economic change, and the formation of nation-states. Although European towns are generally portrayed as political catalysts for the breakdown of the agrarian feudal order, and the ascendance of nation-states and democratic processes, others cite cases of towns dominated by vested interests that resisted nationalist aspirations (Braudel 1973, 1982; Jones 1981; Munck 1990; van Creveld 1999).

Over the last three decades, Kampala, Bujumbura, Kigali, Asmara, and Mogadishu have experienced civil war, while Nairobi and Addis Ababa have witnessed violent demonstrations and the martyrdom of protestors at the hands of security forces. Only Dar es Salaam and Djibouti, a very small city-state, have remained comparatively tranquil in East Africa. Time and again, tribal divides are cited in the western media as the root cause of East Africa's sporadic conflictual flare-ups. Amidst rapid urbanization, multi-ethnic populations have formed – yet, it seems that they have generally failed to exert sufficiently strong cosmopolitanism to ease ethnic tension and lubricate nation-state formation and political stability.

Dar es Salaam is exceptional in East Africa for having a record of relatively little ethnic tension, and remaining tranquil and true to its name, the 'harbour of peace'. This paper explores the interface between ethnic and national identities in Tanzania's capital city, focusing on Dar es Salaam's ethnic foundations and their malleability with regard to nationalism, asking how nationalist identities were negotiated vis-à-vis existing local ethnic identities. How willing were ethnic groups that were indigenous to the locality to 'share' the city, its land, and amenities with newcomer compatriots, given that the city was almost as new as the nation-state? How did their modus operandi affect nation-building?

## **2 The urban milieu: melding, or mêlée of national and ethnic identities**

Small groups with continual face-to-face encounters are widely believed to facilitate the development of trust, mutual support, and cooperation amongst individuals – and, ultimately, group solidarity (de Waal 2001, 2005). Urban areas defy such moral foundations. City populations grow to sizes far beyond the limits of interpersonal encounters, begging the question of how social distrust, economic envy, political friction, and violent confrontation are avoided in urban contexts.

The issue of welfare collectivity surfaces at the tribal level as well. Tribal group identity represents a scaling up of associational ties beyond the bounds of small bands of

cooperating individuals as well, resting on the acceptance of a shared political allegiance, and common cultural values and restraints. Urban areas, by contrast, represent the spatial concentration of people of often dissimilar – and even discordant – cultural values who, nonetheless, encounter each other face-to-face both randomly and in various organized ways for purposes of economic and social interaction. Nationalism is, in many senses, even further removed from the security and trust of the small group, requiring people to identify abstractly with each other on the basis of a shared notion of collective welfare and progress.

In his insightful book, *Imagined Communities* (1985), Benedict Anderson illustrates how the concept of nationalism is extremely remote from the daily experience of non-industrial, primarily rural societies where people are accustomed to personally knowing the people with whom they interact. Anderson argues that nationalist consciousness in the colonial world of the twentieth century entailed the philosophical repositioning of minds – a change in time and space perception of the nascent national population. A decline of religiosity, the spread of the printed word and literacy, as well as the extension of certain languages beyond local boundaries to become major means of communication, make possible an ‘imagined community’ of people with a shared sense of welfare and temporality across bounded space. Nationalism denotes a scaling up of the collective welfare unit, an insistence on the sovereignty of the unit, and an awareness of the ‘other’ beyond one’s spatial boundaries.

Gellner (1983), more from the historical experience of European nationalism, maintains that nation-states flourish where culture is homogenized under conditions of urban industrialization. Urban areas and education provide the necessary development of skills and social mobility, generating economic flexibility and harmony. A metropolitan ‘high culture’ congeals, which attracts adherents. Hobsbawm (1991) from a Marxist perspective, on the other hand, argues that nationalism is more exclusionist than inclusive in its effect. For Hobsbawm, those taking up the mantle of nationalism are, for the most part, highly instrumentalist in furthering their material interests relative to the population at large. Nonetheless, a common national identity emerges, often fuelled by the otherness of surrounding nation-states.

Interestingly, Mamdani (1996, 2000) writing primarily about Uganda, posits that colonial indirect rule policies rigidly restricted Africans’ identity politically to that of the rural tribe, fettering nationalist aspirations. His position lends support to Gellner’s thesis on the importance of mobility and the urban experience in fostering a vibrant nationalism. However, Mamdani combines his stress on the dichotomy between rural tribal subjects and urban citizens with class analysis similar to Hobsbawm’s perspective. Iliffe’s (1979) work on Tanzanian nationalism, on the other hand, stresses the individual agency of nationalists in nation-building amidst ethnic pluralism.

### **3 Dar es Salaam: harbour of multi-ethnic peace and creole culture**

Since the ninth century, the East African littoral was the site of trading between Africans and Arabs in a string of urban coastal settlements and the maritime spread of

the Swahili language, a creole lingua franca and associated culture.<sup>1</sup> Dar es Salaam was founded comparatively late, in 1866, at the instigation of the Omani Sultan Seyyid Majid, who recognized the potential of its sheltered, natural, deep-water port with regard to the strengthening of his Zanzibari ivory and slave trading empire.

The matrilineal Zaramo people occupied the area at that time. They were recent arrivals who had responded to the request of local Shomvi<sup>2</sup> coastal traders to assist in warding off attacks during the political upheaval of the nineteenth-century slave trade (L.W. Swantz 1970; M.-L. Swantz 1970). Thereafter, the Zaramo were closely identified with the Shomvi. Zaramo women often married and bore the children of the Shomvi traders. Furthermore, many up-country Africans, who came to the coast as slaves, remained and were absorbed by the Zaramo; first, by working in their plantations and, later, through inter-marriage (Iliffe 1979). Hence, the Zaramo are not a cohesive tribal group with a clear identity. Being relatively recent migrants to the East African coast and of mixed ethnic origin themselves, they culturally accommodated themselves to the influx of successive waves of migrants of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The intimate political and cultural ties between the Zaramo and Shomvi often make it difficult to distinguish them as two separate ethnic identities. The Shomvi were perceived as cosmopolitan town-dwelling traders and owners of coastal slave plantations (Nicholls 1971; Allen 1993). The Zaramo, on the other hand, were considered – by virtue of being African – to be the ‘original’ inhabitants who farmed the land. Nonetheless, the Zaramo were lodged between the extremes of slave and slave master in a polarized social hierarchy. Seeking to distinguish themselves from the African slave population, many aspired to Swahili metropolitan culture associated with Arab influence and Islam (*ustaarabu*), preferring to identify as Shomvi. The Zaramo’s dual identity afforded them claim to tribal clan ties and usufruct rural land rights, on the one hand, and participation in Swahili town culture, on the other (M.-L. Swantz 1970; Glassman 1995).

Colonial authorities, intent on delineating tribal boundaries and authorities, were perplexed by the Zaramo’s lack of a clear tribal identity. They failed to acknowledge that coastal Swahili society – with its own common historical experience, culture, mercantile economy, and language – made it futile to try to disaggregate the Zaramo and Shomvi into separate ethnic categories, and defied the ethnic definitional rigidities of indirect rule (Allen 1993). Furthermore, neighbouring coastal ethnic groups – the Kutu, Matumbi, Rufiji, and Ndengereko, who shared the Swahili cultural identity and dance styles with the Zaramo – were part of this creole society (Tsuruta 2003).

Similar to other mercantile-based creole cultures, the status hierarchy of Swahili society was softened by various avenues of social fluidity through polygamous marriage, slave concubinage, Islamic conversion, and participation in status-raising rituals (Mazrui and

---

<sup>1</sup> Kiswahili is composed of Bantu grammatical structure with considerable Arabic vocabulary. For a discussion of the evolution of Swahili creole culture see Bryceson (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Localized term for the Shirazi, Arabs with legendary connections to Persia who are considered the ‘old Swahili’, as opposed to newer Arab settlers, such as those of the Omani sultanate (Nurse and Spear 1985). Shirazi traders historically married daughters of local leaders. The Shomvi paid tribute to the Zaramo, a practice dating back to when the Shomvi enlisted the support of the Zaramo to repel the invading Kamba.

Shariff 1994; Glassman 1995). Supported by domestic slave labour, the affluent elite's luxurious lifestyle encompassed a unique cuisine, intricate architectural features, and conspicuous dress styles with which the broader, lower-ranked Swahili population identified or which they even aspired to achieve.

Dar es Salaam, founded as a planned settlement, received infrastructural investment from the Sultan, keen to build the settlement as a viable alternative to the far older slave port of Bagamoyo, where the Shomvi's plantation interests were construed to be counter to the Sultan and other Omani Arabs' interests.

While the local African–Arab power balance was being contested, European rivalry between Britain, Germany, and France was threatening the Sultan's dominance over the East African coast (Sheriff 1987). The Anglo-German agreement of 1886 restricted the Sultan's claims to a 10-mile coastal strip, and imposed German custom duty collection at Dar es Salaam. The following year, the Germans insisted on extending their control over the full length of the East African coast. Suddenly, coastal politics erupted. The Bushiri rebellion, based on a coalition of the Swahili landed property elite, quickly spread along the coast.

### 3.1 German colonialism

Dar es Salaam, where the intensity of the rebellion was relatively subdued compared with other Swahili towns, became the headquarters of the German East Africa Company in 1891. During the subsequent three decades, German rule laid the foundation for urban governance and resource access in Dar es Salaam. The Germans opted for an *akida* governance system based on the appointment of school-educated, Swahili-speaking agents rather than one based on tribal authority (Iliffe 1979). After the Zaramo's participation in the Maji Maji rebellion<sup>3</sup> of 1905, the *akida* system was further extended to all of the Zaramo's tribal territory, undermining the authority of Zaramo *pazi* headmen and limiting the Zaramo's scope for political expression (Beidelman 1967).

The economic and social fluidity of creolized urban Swahili society was thoroughly at odds with German colonialism. Dar es Salaam was racially zoned into 'native' and 'non-native' areas in 1912. Administratively, the Zaramo became one of numerous 'native' groups. Alongside their political marginalization, the Zaramo were declining as a proportion of the total town population. The Germans held the view that slavery had made the coastal population 'indolent', and therefore encouraged more 'industrious' up-country migrants to work in the town. A labour survey of Dar es Salaam in 1894 revealed a cosmopolitan unskilled labour force in which those identifying themselves as Zaramo fell just short of constituting a majority.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Becker (2004) argues that the Maji Maji rebellion was not only a reaction to colonial rule, but also an attack on the indigenous coastal elites by acephalous tribal people in south-east Tanzania, where the rebellion had its epicentre. The participation of the Zaramo in the rebellion could be interpreted as belying their dual character as a tribal group with acephalous matrilineal origins. See also Deutsch (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Out of 100 unskilled workers, 47 were Zaramo, 23 Swahili, and 30 from an assortment of tribes (Iliffe 1979: 161).

The dwindling caravan trade and gradual abolishment of slavery during the German period undermined the economic position of the Zaramo and the Shomvi. The Zaramo commonly engaged in farming of rice in the valley bottoms, and coconut and cashew trees planted on the less fertile soils on small plots in the surrounding hilly areas around Dar es Salaam where they held usufruct rights. The Shomvi held larger plantations around the town but, without fresh supplies of slave labour, they were gradually selling their plantation holdings to Germans as freehold land (Baker 1931; McCleery 1939; Bryceson 1987). Shomvi traders were losing out to more competitive Indian traders. Their status as a local elite was being inverted with the imposition of German racial segregation and the exclusivity of 'non-natives'. Lacking political assertiveness, the Zaramo's and the Shomvi's cultural ambiguity translated into a Swahili creole cultural identity, which was often denigrated by colonial officials and up-country African migrants alike.

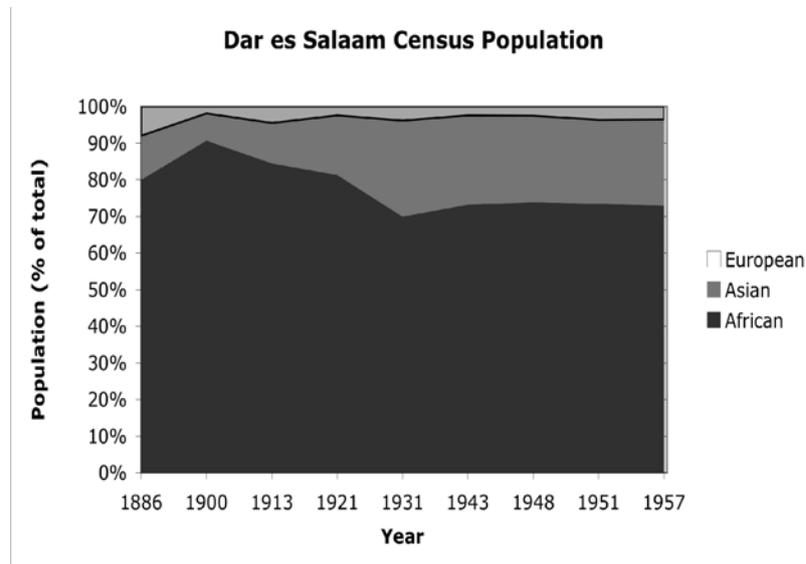
### **3.2 British colonialism**

German colonialism was a transitory interlude of three decades. German East Africa was transferred to Britain as a League of Nations mandated territory following World War I. The mandate put checks on the degree to which European settlers could manoeuvre to procure land and labour at the expense of the welfare of Africans, with the intent of preventing the creation of a landless peasantry. This foundational principle of British colonial policy in Tanganyika rebounded in a curious way on African interests in urban areas. As Mamdani (1996) argues, Africans were designated as rural subjects rather than urban citizens. Their presence in town was strictly delimited in terms of employment and housing. The urban division of labour was monolithically racial: Europeans were government administrators, Asians were merchants and clerical staff, and Africans were almost exclusively manual labourers.

Figure 1 shows that Europeans accounted for a minute proportion of the total population; Asian immigration was on the increase, boosted by their 'non-native' status under the mandate, and Africans, despite their urban settlement being officially discouraged, constituted roughly 70 per cent of the population throughout most of the British colonial period.

British indirect rule in towns was invariably problematic, given the diverse tribal composition of the African urban population. However, in the eyes of the colonial administration the Zaramo–Shomvi posed a particular challenge because they did not constitute a 'proper tribe' in terms of clan structure, leadership, and customary land tenure. Their presence posed the threat of 'detrribalization', challenging the essence of indirect rule and conjuring up worry of African moral degeneration and crime (Burton 2002).

Figure 1: Dar es Salaam census population



Source: Census data collated by Sutton (1970: 19).

Zaramo village headmen in the settlements surrounding the town disregarded the authority of the government-appointed town *jumbe*, seemingly confirming the colonial fear of lawlessness. In turn, the non-Zaramo migrants who settled in the outlying settlements were loath to accept the authority of the Zaramo village headmen. During the 1940s, a Zaramo political identity began to take shape alongside Dar es Salaam's wartime growth spurt and colonial attempts to reform the structure of native authorities and streamline the rural/urban divide in Zaramo administration. These developments might help to explain the enigmatic census figures showing the Zaramo as only 32 per cent in 1928, rising to 51 per cent in 1948.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that many Swahili people felt it was advantageous to be seen as an indigenous Zaramo during the 1940s.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Migration to Dar es Salaam from up-country was believed to have risen during and in the aftermath of World War II.

<sup>6</sup> In 1942, Dar es Salaam urban district and Temeke rural district were combined to form the Uzaramo district, which might have prodded people to identify as Zaramo. Dar es Salaam town had a separate governance structure of three appointed *wakili* with responsibility for 24 *majumbe* headmen, who were most involved in daily administrative matters at the neighbourhood level. Furthermore, a *liwali* was appointed to adjudicate Islamic law. In 1957, 50 per cent of the *majumbe* were Zaramo (Burton 2002).

Table 1: Ethnic composition of Dar es Salaam, 1928–67\*

Ethnic group	1895	1905	1928	1948	1957	1967
Zaramo	47	27	32	51	36	27
Swahili	23					
Rufiji			5	8	7	7
Luguru				4	6	6
Nyamwezi	7	26		3	5	5
Others	23	47	63	34	46	55

Note: \* The Tanzanian government did not record ethnic affiliations in the 1978, 1988 and 2002 censuses.

Sources: 1895 and 1905: Brennan (2002: 98), citing colonial estimates from a malarial survey (quoted in Anthony 1983). The noticeable decline of the Zaramo in 1905 may have related to their participation in the Maji Maji rebellion, when their physical withdrawal from the city, or at least an unwillingness to identify as a Zaramo, could have influenced the tribal tallies.

1928: Brennan (2002: 100), citing Dar es Salaam Township Census 1928 List III, TNA 61/167/A/6 and Native census Dar-es-Salaam District, TNA 61/167/A/7.

1948–67; Mwamfupe (1994: 56) compilation of national census data.

### 3.3 Incongruity of Swahili coastal identity and tribal political assertion

Paradoxically, the Swahili began to recognize the opportunities of Dar es Salaam's demographic growth and attempted to organize collectively on a tribal basis during the 1940s. Brennan (2002) documents how both the Shomvi and the Zaramo came, politically, to the fore. The Shomvi's initiative took the form of demanding freehold tenure over land in the Upanga area of the city that they had occupied since the German period. Previously, they had endeavoured to secure freehold title as individuals. When Upanga was slated for a major postwar housing development, they collectively began demanding freehold rights to their land. A Shomvi representative seized the opportunity of the visit to Dar es Salaam of the Colonial Secretary, Arthur Creech-Jones, in 1946 to petition him:

we Shomvi are the only real natives of this particular District for many generations ... Though there are many who join in claiming the right to own land in these coastal regions but that does not give a true fact (Mahadi bin Mwinjuma to Arthur Creech-Jones, TAN 10849/1206/1, cited in Brennan 2002: 219).

Their land claim was based on drawing boundaries marked by traditional Shomvi cemeteries. Rather than relying simply on German land title claims, the Shomvi were demanding the right to land on a tribal basis but, incongruously, with the aim of obtaining freehold rather than tribal usufruct rights. Although they met with initial success in the courts, the logical inconsistency of their tribal claim for non-native freehold was unacceptable in the eyes of the colonial state. The case dragged on for five

years. Finally, in 1953, the claim was dismissed. Trees and crops on tribal land in question could be bought and sold but not the land per se.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, while the Shomvi sought to secure freehold land, the Zaramo were actively building tribal associational ties (Brennan 2002). The Wazaramo Union was formed in 1938, gaining momentum as an agency furthering the Zaramo's political and economic interests during the following decade. Living proximate to Tanganyika's largest Indian population concentration, the Zaramo were one of the first tribal groups to voice resentment against Indian traders' profiteering – a resentment that would reverberate throughout the country in the 1950s. The Union's bold demands captured the imagination of the coastal population and it began recruiting members from beyond the boundaries of Uzaramo, which met with suspicion from the Zaramo Native Authority. Its membership ballooned to 8000, bridging urban occupational and class divisions. Riding on a crest of popular support, the Union's ambitions extended to nothing short of a separatist state along the lines of the Sultanate of Zanzibar but with an elected government, which would elevate the prestige and power of its leaders (Brennan 2002).

But, in setting its political ambitions so high, the Wazaramo Union sowed the seeds of its demise. Without the support of the Zaramo Native Authority and African town leadership, the colonial government became increasingly wary of it. In the early 1950s, the Union started imploding, with chronic financial mismanagement and corruption on the part of leadership (Brennan 2002). By the late 1950s, eclipsed by the nationalist struggle, the Wazaramo Union's main effort was directed at operating a bus from Dar es Salaam to the Zaramo heartland of Kisarawe (Vincent 1970).

The Wazaramo Union and Shomvi land case both represented the disaggregation of the Zaramo–Shomvi–Arab continuum into a 'tribal' identity discourse aimed at securing resource access and power that ultimately translated into individual material advancement. Both rested on a broader backward-looking vision of Swahili creole society in its heyday prior to colonial rule. It could be argued that the timing and political content of these two initiatives amounted to the brief emergence of Swahili creolism as an ersatz nationalism in a period of burgeoning creative thinking about political alternatives to the colonial order. Inevitably, Swahili creolism was pushed aside by the nationalist imperative of that era.

### **3.4 Nationalist activity in Dar es Salaam**

Dar es Salaam was a hotspot for nationalist awareness due to the pioneering efforts of a growing group of African intellectuals resident in and around the town during the 1950s. The Wazaramo Union's failed tribal-cum-nationalist initiative would have undoubtedly been observed first-hand by Julius Nyerere, then a young man teaching at Pugu Secondary School in the traditional heartland of Uzaramo. Nyerere was surfacing as an articulate spokesman of nationalist goals and a clever political strategist for the movement.

Tanzanian nationalism is generally depicted as a process of widening people's frame of reference and transposing the African social identity from that of tribe to nation-state. Paradoxically, within the early stages of nationalist activity, those identifying themselves along the Zaramo–Shomvi–Arab continuum of Swahili creolism temporarily

narrowed their social identity by adopting a tribal label. In so doing, they put themselves on par with tribal groups in Tanzania, clearing the way for a pan-territorial nationalist identity beyond that of the coastal Swahili society. The glue of Tanganyikan nationalism, in the first instance, was common African descent. Interestingly, the Arab segment of the Zaramo–Shomvi–Arab continuum associated itself with the African nationalist identity, in stark contrast to the separatist tendency Arabs displayed in Zanzibar. It is possible that the process of justifying Shomvi land claims on an African tribal basis might, paradoxically, have helped to pave the way for this outcome on the mainland.

Throughout the 1950s, sensitive to popular sentiment, TANU (Tanganyika African National Union) remained restrictively a political party for Africans, strategically using regional and tribal associational ties to further its struggle for independence. While the inclinations of Nyerere were non-racial and non-tribal, TANU was cast as a party encompassing a wide spectrum of people with various views. The TANU leadership was heavily Dar es Salaam-based but, primarily, of migrant rather than coastal origin. Bibi Titi Mohamed, a Dar es Salaam-born Swahili<sup>7</sup> woman, was extremely successful in mobilizing the Swahili town-based vote for TANU. Her fame as an outspoken woman and singer, made her second only to Nyerere in terms of national recognition. However, in general, Tanganyikan national politics remained primarily a complex mosaic of local, mostly tribally-based political affiliations led by leaders with regional constituencies.

Nyerere deftly removed the tribal element of national politics in 1960, by dissolving ethnic voluntary associations and announcing that chiefs would not be accorded political power at the local or national level by virtue of their hereditary titles. Instead, chiefs became cultural figureheads. These simple strictures had profound long-term effects, precluding the tribal power plays that are a feature of neighbouring East African countries. The ease with which Nyerere took this measure, and the lack of objection that followed, is likely to have arisen from a variety of sources: his unchallenged authoritative role in the nationalist movement's mass mobilization; the fact that Tanzania has over 100 tribes, none of which had an overwhelming demographic majority; and, not least, the fact that the Swahili language had been chosen as the lingua franca for nationalist party activities and that the TANU party's mass mobilization effort was headquartered in Dar es Salaam, a multi-ethnic town with cosmopolitan origins from its inception.

National independence was achieved in 1961. Nyerere's long presidency from then to 1985 had the stated aim of eliminating ignorance, poverty and disease – unifying broad-based objectives for the African population. Underpinned by an egalitarian philosophy of *ujamaa*, African socialism was premised on rural development and the avoidance of urban elitism. Nonetheless, urban dwellers had material concerns. Tens of thousands of urban migrants were being drawn to the nation's political and commercial capital, Dar es Salaam. Urban housing was of particular concern.

---

<sup>7</sup> Geiger (1997) notes that, in her interviews with Bibi Titi, she identified herself as generically Swahili or tribally Rufiji, Ndegereko, or Matumbi, depending on the context. She claims to have coached Nyerere in the use of Kiswahili idioms in public speaking.

### 3.5 Swahili as urban gatekeepers to ‘God’s property’

The pressing accommodation needs of Dar es Salaam’s expanding population after independence enhanced the value of Swahili property interests in housing and land, regardless of the socialist policies of the government. In 1971, the government’s response to the housing shortage was to nationalize all residential buildings valued over TShs 100,000 that were not the main residences of their owners. Many Asian apartment blocks became state property, whereas the less expensive Swahili houses providing private rental accommodation were largely exempt, allowing Swahili landlords to maintain their town-based rental income. The Swahili houses’ multi-tribal occupation and frequent tenant turnover were sources of ethnic mixing in the city.

Meanwhile, the Zaramo’s rural land assets were being squeezed. Within Dar es Salaam, the post-independence development of factory production exposed parts of the Zaramo’s low-lying rice lands to toxic effluents. In 1973–74, serious food shortages coincided with the first international oil price rise. Contracting foreign exchange reserves made it difficult for the country to import staple foods. The government instigated the *Kilimo cha Kufa na Kupona* (Agriculture for Life or Death) campaign, rallying the formally employed to farm on large plots temporarily allocated to their places of work. Exceptionally poorly organized, the campaign is unlikely to have contributed much to the city’s food supplies (Bryceson 1990). It did, however, open the floodgates for Dar es Salaam residents eager to secure access to farmland in and around Dar es Salaam and, ultimately, might have provided an inroad into residential land acquisition on the part of Dar es Salaam’s middle- and high-income earners, the vast majority being migrants to the city (Mwamfupe 1994).

During the late 1960s and 1970s, roughly 12 per cent of the city’s land was residential. By 1996, it had climbed to 26 per cent. An extensive clandestine land market operated in the 1980s that surfaced openly during the 1990s and boomed as the city expanded in the millennium. Dar es Salaam has grown radially outwards along the four main roads leading upcountry, propelled by a process of social and spatial differentiation as middle-class households settled along the Morogoro and Bagamoyo roads in the northern reaches of the city, while the Zaramo and other poorer households tended to concentrate away from the road or in the southern peri-urban areas in the direction of the Zaramo’s heartland (Mwamfupe 1994; Briggs and Mwamfupe 2000) (see Figure 1).

Commonly, prospective land purchasers approached Zaramo village leaders with the request for a plot to cultivate crops. Zaramo leaders charged the outsiders ‘fees’ for the use of the land or outright sale (Sherrington 2006). In other cases, or in addition, the outsider would also have to reckon with a Zaramo farmer who laid claim to the usufruct rights of a particular parcel of land. The farmer was receptive to striking up deals that gave them cash in exchange for the land<sup>8</sup> and frequently provided them with a small income working as a casual labourer on the farm plot. This open door policy contrasted sharply with neighbouring countries, where principles of tribal land compelled the indigenous population not to sell land to outsiders, as evidenced especially by the Baganda of Kampala (Bryceson 2009).

---

<sup>8</sup> Usually, the purchase of usufruct land was made under the guise of buying the crops and trees on the land, which was an entirely legal practice. Who ‘owned’ the land thereafter was, of course, legally disputable.

As one Zaramo commentator explained, when asked why his people were willing to sell the land of their birthplace, it would not be right to do otherwise, for this was *mali ya mungu* (God's property). The land was for those who wanted to farm it and the Zaramo have never been keen farmers.<sup>9</sup> Despite the Zaramo's lack of enthusiasm for farming, they nonetheless relied heavily on their own farm subsistence fallback, such that a 'land poor' group of farmers was arising alongside the large volume of land sales. Cultivation patterns of the peri-urban landscape altered from the characteristic cassava, rice and coconut, and cashew tree plantings of the Zaramo to the maize and banana production of the non-coastal migrant population (Mwamfupe 1994). The local Zaramo were usually phlegmatic, welcoming rather than condemning the influx. Devoid of tribal friction, the casual labour and petty trade opportunities of Dar es Salaam's expanding city population compensated their agrarian land loss.

#### **4 Ethnicity, urbanization and nationalism in East Africa**

The rise of Tanzanian nationalism coincided with a strong surge towards urbanization. As elsewhere in East Africa, the 1950s was a period of vocal tribalism, much of it emanating from the capital city where articulate migrant people from various tribal areas rubbed shoulders and formed patterns of ethnic cooperation and competition that became engrained in the national ethos. Nationalist leaders had to create the 'imagined community' of the nation-state but, to gain political independence, they often took the shortcut of mobilizing on tribal lines, fanning tribal differences.

The capital city was an ethnic microcosm of the nation-state. Living in a rapidly expanding urban space made one acutely aware of the 'other'. Migrants who had been born and raised in rural areas amongst their tribal kith and kin formed the majority of the urban population. By contrast, in the city, neighbours and workmates were likely to be ethnic 'strangers', who could be hostile or friendly. Tranquillity of ethnic relations in the capital boded well for stability of the nation-state and it was in nation-builders' long-term interests to encourage a shared identity and mutual support amongst the citizenry, regardless of ethnicity. However, beyond the political rhetoric, urban housing and land allocation patterns, which highlighted ethnic differences in access to economic resources and cultural preferences increased the likelihood of turmoil.

Unlike most other capital cities in East Africa, Dar es Salaam had a more cosmopolitan heritage, located on the coast with a multi-cultural trading origin encapsulated in the melding and inter-marriage of Shomvi and Zaramo, an integral part of Tanzania's creole Swahili culture. From the outset of urban growth, the Shomvi and Zaramo were prone to selling land given their precarious economic standing and lack of an agrarian tribal identity. In doing so, they facilitated incoming migrants' access to land. Indigenous residents of other East African cities, acting within a tribal frame of mind, were generally far less likely to sell their land and sometimes formed a landlord class. This is exemplified by the Baganda of Kampala who were resented for retaining a tight hold on land in the Kibuga of Kampala (Southall and Gutkind 1957).

---

<sup>9</sup> Author's interview with M. Saidi, Dar es Salaam, 7 August 2007. The Zaramo, and other tribes who identified with coastal Swahili culture, traditionally associated agriculture work with that of a slave and preferred to project an urban or elevated class status.

The Zaramo, the Shomvi and, indeed, other coastal Swahili groups of Tanzania have had very low political visibility. Consequently, there has been scant attention to the role of Swahili creolism in Dar es Salaam's urbanization process and Tanzania's national development. The Swahili creole culture's chameleon-like ethnic character, their association with the faded past history of the Omani mercantilist empire, their low levels of education, and their ostensive lack of success in the new economic order largely precluded them from being perceived as threatening or a source of resentment. They generally avoided involvement in politics, except for a short interlude during the 1950s. Their sense of self-esteem derived primarily from their Swahili creole identity, Islamic faith, and nostalgia for a bygone era. Ironically, and counter to Gellner's argument regarding nationalist homogenization, the Swahili, as the indigenous resource holders with an elite past associated with slavery, were marginalized rather than homogenized with the increasing numbers of migrants to Dar es Salaam. Unlike the Baganda of Kampala, the Kikuyu of Nairobi, the Tutsi of Kigali, and so on, the Zaramo and Shomvi of Dar es Salaam have been far from claiming, or even vying for, power in the Tanzanian nation-state.

It can be argued that Nyerere's decisions to circumvent tribal loyalties in politics on the eve of independence and to make Kiswahili the national language were measures that maximized nationalist aspirations as opposed to tribal particularism. The use of creole Kiswahili, instead of English or one of the country's many tribal languages, was an inclusive policy reaching out to the broadest spectrum of the electorate. So too, banning chiefs avoided tribal elite capture. In effect, the rural tribal subject and urban cosmopolitan citizen dichotomy that Mamdani (1996) writes about was muted, as both rural and urban areas were subject to egalitarian goals of the country's socialist national development strategy.

In Tanzania, the dampening of an ethnic factor in the politics and economy of the national capital has facilitated the stability of the nation-state as a political entity. The Swahili population's creole identity, founded on ethnic diversity, has been conducive to the tranquil growth of an urban metropolis. Dar es Salaam's ethnic plurality tends to be a source of good-natured humour and social tolerance rather than hierarchical political and economic control. In the East African region as a whole, the transplanting of rural tribal identities to urban capitals has more often than not sparked urban tension, if not national dissension and violence. Uniquely, Dar es Salaam's creole foundations and cosmopolitan outlook have helped to chart a more peaceful path to urbanization.

## References

- Allen, J. de Vere (1993). *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Anderson, B. (1985). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Anderson, D.M., and Rathbone, R. (eds) (2000). *Africa's Urban Past*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Baker, E.C. (1931). 'History and Social Conditions of Dar es Salaam during the Early Days'. Oxford: Rhodes House Library. Unpublished manuscript.
- Becker, F. (2004). 'Traders, "Big Men" and Prophets: Political Continuity and Crisis in the Maji Maji Rebellion in Southeast Tanzania'. *Journal of African History*, 45: 1–22.
- Beidelman, T.O. (1967). *The Matrilineal Peoples of Eastern Tanzania*. London: International African Institute.
- Beinen, H. (1970). *Tanzania: Party Transformation and Economic Development*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Braudel, F. (1973). *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800*. London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd.
- Braudel, F. (1982). *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century, Vol. 3, The Wheels of Commerce*. London: Fontana Press.
- Brennan, J.R. (2002). 'Nations, Race and Urbanization in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 1916–1976'. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University. PhD thesis.
- Briggs, J., and Mwamfupe, D. (2000). 'Peri-Urban Development in an Era of Structural Adjustment in Africa: The City of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania'. *Urban Studies*, 37(4): 797–809.
- Bryceson, D.F. (1987). 'A Century of Food Supply in Dar es Salaam'. In J. Guyer (ed.), *Feeding African Cities: Studies in Regional Social History*. London: International African Institute, Manchester University Press, 155–202.
- Bryceson, D.F. (1990). *Food Insecurity and the Social Division of Labour in Tanzania, 1919–1985*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Bryceson, D.F. (2009). 'The Urban Melting Pot in East Africa: Ethnicity and Urban Growth in Kampala and Dar es Salaam'. In P. Nugent, and F. Locatelli (eds), *African Cities: Competing Claims on Urban Space*. Leiden: Brill, 241–60.
- Bryceson, D.F. (2010, forthcoming), 'Swahili Creolization: The Case of Dar es Salaam'. In R. Cohen and P. Toninato (eds), *The Creolization Reader: Studies in Mixed Identities and Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Bryceson, D.F., and Potts, D. (eds) (2006). *African Urban Economies: Viability, Vitality or Vitiation?* London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burton, A. (ed.) (2000). *The Urban Experience in Eastern Africa c. 1750–2000*. Nairobi: British Institute in East Africa.

- Burton, A. (2002). 'Adjutants, Agents, Intermediaries: The Native Administration in Dar es Salaam Township, 1919–1961'. In A. Burton (ed.), *The Urban Experience in Eastern Africa c. 1750–2000*. Nairobi: British Institute in East Africa.
- Deutsch, J.-G. (2006). *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, 1884–1914*. Oxford: James Currey.
- de Waal, F. (2001). *Tree of Origin*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- de Waal, F. (2005). *Our Inner Ape*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Geiger, S. (1997). *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955–1965*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism: New Perspectives on the Past*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Glassman, J. (1995). *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1956–1888*. London: James Currey.
- Hansen, H.B., and Twaddle, M. (eds) (1988). *Uganda Now: Between Decay and Development*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1991). *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Iliffe, J. (1979). *A Modern History of Tanganyika*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, E.L. (1981). *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mamdani, M. (1976). *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. London: James Currey.
- Mamdani, M. (2000). 'The Politics of Peasant Ethnic Communities and Urban Civil Society: Reflections on an African Dilemma'. In D.F. Bryceson, C. Kay, and J. Mooij (eds), *Disappearing Peasantries: Rural Labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America*. London: Intermediate Technologies Publications, 99-111.
- Mazrui, A.M., and Shariff, I.N. (1994). *The Swahili: Idiom and Identity of an African People*. Trenton: African World Press.
- McCleery, H.H. (1939). 'Extent and Conditions under which Natives are Occupying Land in the Outskirts of Dar es Salaam'. Oxford: Rhodes House Library, Oxford: RH MSS Afr. s. 870. Unpublished manuscript.
- Munck, T. (1990). *Seventeenth Century Europe 1598–1700*. London: Macmillan.
- Mwamfuge, D. (1994). 'Changes in Agricultural Land Use in the Peri-Urban Zone of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania'. Glasgow: University of Glasgow. PhD. Thesis.
- Nicholls, C.S. (1971). *The Swahili Coast: Politics, Diplomacy and Trade on the East African Littoral, 1798-1856*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

- Nurse, D., and Spear, T. (1985). *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800–1500*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- O'Connor, A. (1983). *The African City*. London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa.
- Sheriff, A. (1987). *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar*. London: James Currey.
- Sherrington, R. (2006). 'Developing Disparities: Consumption and Social Differentiation in Post Adjustment Dar es Salaam'. Manchester: University of Manchester. PhD. Thesis.
- Southall, A.W., and Gutkind, P. (1957). *Townsmen in the Making: Kampala and Its Suburbs*. Kampala: East African Institute of Social Research.
- Sutton, J.E.G. (1970). 'Dar es Salaam: A Sketch of a Hundred Years'. *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 71: 1–19.
- Swantz, L.W. (1970). 'The Zaramo of Dar es Salaam: A Study of Continuity and Change'. In *Dar es Salaam: City, Port and Region*, *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 71: 157–64.
- Swantz, M.-L. (1970). *Ritual and Symbol in Transitional Zaramo Society*. Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksells.
- Temu, A.J. (1969). 'The Rise and Triumph of Nationalism'. In I.N. Kimambo and A.J. Temu (eds), *A History of Tanzania*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 189–213.
- Tordoff, W. (1967). *Government and Politics in Tanzania*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- Tsuruta, T. (2003). 'Urban–Rural Relationships in Colonial Dar es Salaam: Some Notes on Ethnic Associations and Recreations, 1930s–1950s'. *Memoirs of the Faculty of Agriculture of Kinki University*, 36: 59–72.
- van Creveld, M. (1999). *The Rise and Decline of the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vincent, J. (1970). 'The Dar es Salaam Townsman: Social and Political Aspects of City Life'. *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 71: 149–56.