

## CINEMA AND NATION FORMATION IN TANZANIA

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### Abstract

*Through a national cinema theoretical framework, this article interrogates how cinema aided the Tanzanian government in the invention of a national culture identity during the country's nation-building phase of the 1960s and 1970s. It is argued that in its initial stage of nation formation after Independence, the government used cinema as an apparatus to construct a national identity that confirmed and adhered to the ruling class's interests and idea of a nation. Thus by controlling how cinema was produced, distributed, and exhibited to the masses through the 1960s and 1970s, the government did not bring about unification of the people; rather it helped in solidifying the primacy of the government. The cinema produced by the government was a cheer leading cinema which provided no space for analysis of issues; further, it was a cinema that denied freedom of expression to its filmmakers and to its audiences.*

**Key words:** National Building Project, national cinema, national identity, social engineering, Tanganyika African Nationalist Union (TANU), *Ujamaa*

### Introduction

*Cinema is one of the means by which nationhood is gained.*

Andrew Higson (2002: 65)

The euphoric mood that Tanzanian people found themselves on the eve of Independence, December 9, 1961, quickly turned into anxiety and uncertainties soon after. Could a new nation be held together once the galvanizing impact of achieving Independence had subsided? Could the new flag truly symbolize both freedom and unity of a nation? These were some of the questions that plagued the minds of the Tanzanian people and their newly elected political leaders. To deal with these issues, the ruling

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political party Tanganyika African Nationalist Union (TANU), led by the widely respected Julius Kambarage Nyerere, heralded a strategy to legitimize the party and solidify its power. TANU embarked on a five year strategic plan intended to homogenize 120 different ethnic groups into a unified nation known as Tanzania.

The plan was given the name 'The National Building Project'. Through legislation, social programs, ideology, and cultural products, the plan was to amalgamate diverse traditions, customs and ethnic groups into a homogeneous national identity that would propel a path toward economic and social development. This government apparatus implemented development plans that were expected to produce a cohesive nation in years to come. Once an agent of colonization, cinema was employed to achieve this objective by calculated programming. This article examines how cinema in the 1960s and 1970s was produced, distributed and exhibited to the masses, in the invention of this nation and its national identity. The study interrogates whether these political strategies determining the Tanzanian filmic experience of those decades thereby succeeded in producing a national cinema according to conventional theoretical frameworks of what constitutes a national cinema. This theoretical inquiry thus contributes to the literature that contests social engineering projects devoted to inventing cultural identities as a means of nation building and at what expense.

Recently the question of the national project has re-surfaced in the intellectual and academic circle of Africa, Tanzania specifically, calling for a re-evaluation, revisiting and re visioning of the national building project of the 1960s and 1970s. The questioning and re visioning comes in the midst of social, political, economic and cultural transformation that has characterized Tanzania's state of affairs since the early 1990s, the capitalist global system. It was the stagnation of socialism in Tanzania and the intensification of global capital which brought about changes in the country's mores. To combat this, the government of Tanzania has called upon learning institutions to aggressively embark on teaching 'patriotism' and national pride. Thus the issue of national unity and culture has resurfaced recently in the agendas of numerous conferences, workshops and on the menus of academic curricula in Tanzania. This renaissance of

the nation building project debunks the prediction that the ‘nation state’ in the twenty first century globalized political economic order is irrelevant and in decline. The Tanzanian experience suggests the opposite is true: nation states are reorganizing and reinventing themselves to fit the current social, economic and political conditions. It is therefore worthwhile to consider how the nation of Tanzania emerged in the 1960s, especially through the use of cinema.

### **The formation of a nation through cinema**

A number of scholars have written on the question of nation and nationalism (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Lazarus 2004, Ranger and Habsbawn 1983, Norbu 1992). Notable among these scholars is Benedict Anderson and his notion of a nation as an “imagined community” – imagined because “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives a image of their communion” (1983:6). Anderson attributes this imagined community to the national consciousness created by the primacy of capitalism specifically through the print media. In Anderson's terms the newspaper created a “unified field of exchange and communication . . . and helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation” (1983:12).

Although Anderson's notion is laudable, Tanzania's experience of national consciousness does not fit this picture. Tanzanians' emergent “imagined community” was borne out people’s struggle to liberate themselves from colonial rule. In his discussion of the history of Tanzania and the rise and triumph of nationalism, Temu (1969) notes that:

. . . nationalism in Tanzania began long before the end of World War II, the period often mistakenly cited. Indeed our nationalism began with the onset of colonialism; for it was then that, threatened with German invasion, the people of mainland Tanzania rose to defend their country.

Temu (1969: 90)

Through the process of the struggle, nationalism as a mobilizing force uniting resistance against empire (Sivanandan 2006) became an important

unifying and liberating tool in Tanzania. To spearhead this resistance, national identities were invented to achieve and maintain cohesion. Habsbawn and Ranger (1983) observed this in their discussion of traditions in colonial Africa constructed from the fabric of colonial experience and imagination:

[T]he invented traditions imported from Europe not only provided whites with models of command but also offered many Africans models of “modern” behavior. The invented tradition of African societies – whether invented by the European or by Africans themselves in response – distorted the past but became in themselves realities through which a good deal of colonial encounter was expressed . . . Educated Africans came to realize that the way towards real power to bring about modernizing change did not lie in relatively small-scale African kingdoms, they began to invent nationalist rather than tribal tradition.

Habsbawn and Ranger (1983: 212, 243)

These invented traditions were to transform African ways of life. Modern African nation states were all born out of European social, economic and political traditions. This legacy compelled African leaders to create national identities that not only embraced ‘modernity’ but also relied upon their pre-colonial pasts to find revered traditional values and cultural norms to fashion their new nations independently of colonial notions of what it meant to be African. Norbu (1992: 24) calls Third World nationalism “a fusion of traditional culture and modern ideology capable of generating great social power.” In this sense African nations had to invent past traditions, using present circumstances to conceive and mould a future that could resolve their hybrid predicaments. This mandate is exemplified in Frantz Fanon's (1963: 95) ideal of intellectual elites’ participation in creating a combative and liberative future, by using the past and the present to move forward, ensuring that the masses participate in their nation’s formation. In contrast, the questions raised here concern the actual historical formation of Tanzania’s national identity. Did its masses participate? Were they genuine partners in nation formation; or were they

relegated to the sideline, cheerleading and praising their newly elected government?

Anderson (1983) noted that in the nineteenth century, the print media was central in nation formation in the West. As the twentieth century's emergent media, has cinema been comparably central in the formation and maintenance of nationhood in post colonized Tanzania? Was cinema intentionally appropriated by the Tanzanian political leaders as a tool for creating and maintaining what Anderson called an "imagined community"?

A.D. Smith's (1991) analysis of national identity suggests an affirmative answer to this question. Smith argues that popular media have been utilized quite often by ruling classes in postcolonial modernity. As he observes:

[when] looking at the role of the media in creating certain uniformity within the nation-state, we are in essence looking at the process of nation-building, and at how the media is consciously brought into play to construct a 'national' culture and a 'national' community. Nation-states must have a measure of common culture and civic ideology, a set of common understanding and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together in their homeland.

Smith (1991: 11)

It can be argued that the government of Tanzania, in its initial stage of nation formation, followed this pattern of using cinema as an apparatus to construct a national identity that confirmed and adhered to the ruling class's interests in, and their idea of, a nation.

The intentional manufacture of nationalist traditions has been posited by other scholars (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawn 1990) as an agenda that embodies imperialism and aggressive tyranny. Although these critics do not deal specifically with the use of cinema in spearheading the agenda of national unity and identity, their critique of nationalism is conceived more as a European movement.

But other theorists such as Lazarus (2004), Norbu (1992) and Sivanandan (2006) have noted that Western critics generally are “insensitive to the use made of nationalism by anticolonial forces.” Anticolonial forces, including African nationalists, used nationalism as a defensive ideology to unite the resistance movement. Sivanandan questions Western scholarly criticism of nationalism:

[I]t is striking that whereas during the period of “high” colonialism western spokespeople were perfectly happy to license its ideologies as the legitimate ones for consumption by colonized societies, these ideologies are suddenly deemed unsuitable for export in the anti-colonial moment.

Sivanandan (2006: 46)

Tanzania, as was the case with other countries that fought for their Independence, used nationalism intentionally and methodically as an instrument for unification and protection against foreign hegemony.

It has become the fashion among some scholars, following Ernest Gellner, to assume a holistic definition of a nation building, whereby its genesis is attributed as the inevitable consequence of circumstances and conditions for which only industrialization and the spread of capitalism can be held responsible. This popular view altogether overlooks nation building in the ‘developing world’; and it tacitly denies the impact of subjective, rational agency as a source of political change, especially in Africa. On this view, the fact that there have been different historical experiences and careers of development throughout the world is disregarded out of hand. Therefore the fact that certain developments of some nations, in particular colonialism, have impeded, retarded, and even undermined the development of other nations, remains inadequately considered and under-analysed. More importantly, Gellner’s ‘natural’ model compliments the West as ‘advanced’ by assuming that progressive and desirable political changes are the predictable outcome of industrialization.

Third World scholars have tried to counterattack this view by what Salman Rushdie (1982) has characterised as “the empire writes back” – whereby a scrutinising, questioning, disrupting, rewriting, and filling in of historical

gaps by the intellectuals of colonized countries, provides an alternative re-conception of history. In this way, postcolonial people assert themselves, bring to light their histories by their own lights, and command space to articulate their ideas. Cinema has been employed as one such form of ‘shooting back’. The question that arises, then, is who has been doing the ‘shooting back’; and how have they been ‘shooting back’; and most importantly who has benefited from, and continues to benefit from, the ‘shooting back’. As Ian Jarvie (2002) observes:

National Cinema as nation-builder . . . was a project to socialize newly emancipated populations away from radicalism and towards acceptance of the moral outlook and continuing hegemony of the governing and cultural elites. Movies were to be part of the undertaking . . .

Jarvie (2002: 81)

### **Cinema and the Tanzanian government**

The independence of Tanzania in 1961 brought about an extensive transformation that saw, within a short period, the emergence of a one party state and the propagation of socialism by the elected Tanzanian leaders as the path to social, economic and political development. In 1962, to spearhead its national building project and its ideologies, the Tanzanian government established two film units, one under the Department of Community Development and the other under the Information Service Division. Armes (1987: 215) certifies this when he examines the national film industry in Black Africa: [T]here has been extensive application of film to official developmental ends . . . film is seen as a tool-as a medium of mass communication with enormous educational potential.” At this stage of nation forming, film was seen as an instrumental tool that could speak to a population of whom the majority were non-literate. John McCall (2007: 92) emphasises this aspect of cinema when talking of Pan-African advocacy: “cinema, an art form free of the demands of literacy, seemed an ideal medium to impart a Pan African discourse that could engage the entire continent.” Ousmane Sembene put it famously when he called cinema “a night school” (Opondo2014). The government film units’ newsreels and documentary films such as *Tanganyika Triumphant* (1962),

*The Road Ahead* (1963) and *The Land of Promise* (1963), were made to mobilize the masses for self-reliance and to praise the government for their efforts in bringing development to improve the quality of life for the people. These films were expected to persuade ordinary citizens to participate in bettering their lives by learning new methods of agriculture, building roads, schools and dispensaries.

The point to stress is that the films produced adhered to government interests. The information in these films was disseminated by the government by state-centric, top-down means and the effect was to sideline the population, relegating the people's role in cinema to that of cheerleading audience, applauding on cue. As the playwright and cultural studies scholar, Penina Mluma (1985: 17) so notes, in the government's agenda for creating a national culture, "the ministry is trying to impose culture from above in the name of developing a 'national culture'; cultural planning and undertakings are decided at a national level and directions are sent down to the regions, districts and villages on what is to be done." It was expected that the masses would implement those directives or watch a film and accept the messages advocated therein without question or hesitation. Thus the films and arts produced by the government have been criticized as a parroting art, film propaganda which only praises and cheers but never analyses and critically reflects.

In 1963 the Community Development and Information Service units were merged into one and housed in Dar es Salaam's Ministry of Information and Tourism. This new film unit was opened to work with other government ministries on producing films to fill their specific requirements. Government ministries would either rent films from the unit and show them to their employees and rural partners, or utilize the film equipment and production experts to manufacture films that adhered to their own agendas. For example the Ministry of Agriculture produced a film titled *Panda Pamba Kisasa* (Modern method of growing cotton – 1967) and distributed it to its regional and district officers for screening in rural villages, especially in those regions that cultivated cotton. At this stage of nation formation, film productions were expected to help the government accomplish its objective of mobilizing the masses towards specific behavioural change objectives, in the hope of building a society of

unified people. To accomplish this, the government, specifically President Nyerere, whose familiar honorific was “Mwalimu” (Teacher), sought a coherent strategy that would rally the people to build the nation in their common interest. By 1967, this agenda was christened with the name *Ujamaa* (family hood), promulgated as a progressive philosophy advocating communal existence and socio-economic development plans designed to nourish the nation.

*Ujamaa* which came to be known as an amalgam of self-reliance and socialism, based upon “on an idealization of pre-colonial Africa as a communalist paradise in which everyone worked for the benefit of all in egalitarian agricultural peace” (Plastow 1994:127). Nyerere’s concept of the nation was rooted in the African tradition of the clan or the extended family. Therefore by inventing the nation, according to Fanon (1963: 187), Nyerere “used the past with the intention of opening the future, an invitation to action and a basis for hope.” The ushering of this new ideology or manifesto was unveiled in the city of Arusha and thus it acquired the name ‘Arusha Declaration’. In this case the notion of the ‘nation’ as a family was to replace capitalism, and ‘self-reliance’ was to replace foreign aid-dependency. Evaluating this transformative change, Ackah (2003) sees this adaptation of socialism throughout Africa, as an outright rejection of the colonial masters:

Some of the leaders of the first wave of independence had also began to adopt their own variants of socialism after coming to the realization that emulation of their former colonial master was not working. Now the message was clear, anything associated with colonialism was bad. The colonialists’ main oppressive tool was capitalism, so in order for the colonialists and his tools to be defeated the opposite tools had to be employed, namely socialism.

Ackah (2003: 24)

The adaptation of *Ujamaa* resulted in various major steps directing the country's developmental policies and plans toward socialist construction. Now it was not a matter of seeking only the best tradition as advocated by

Nyerere in 1962 but more importantly seeking traditions that adhered to the socialist ideology.

Therefore with the vision of African socialism in hand, only artistic creations that were in line with the new ideology were supported. In carrying out this policy, the government established the Tanzania Film Corporation (TFC) in 1968. Besides the country's main producer of films, the TFC was to be the chief importer, distributor and exhibitor of films in Tanzania. In this way not only did the government control what was produced by the Tanzanian filmmakers but also what was screened from the outside world. To further the control and power of the state in the invention of national culture and identity through film, the state legislated a Film Act in 1976, which forbade the production of films without the approval of the state. This state control of the film industry diminished the possibility of an alternative critical cinema or a dissident cinema; and it compelled scholars such as Miller (2002: 57) to note that "the most striking omission in the art of East Africa is the art of social comment." Films and other art forms that were produced by the government contain critical analysis or social commentary; they parroted and praised government agendas in order to reinforce central state policies.

In 1974 the government established the Audio Visual Institute (AVI) to support TFC by providing facilities for training in all aspects of film production, to establish an archival library for films and to undertake the repair and maintenance of film equipment. These state apparatus were to help the state harness and control the formation of the nation and national identity. Nyerere wanted to create in Tanzania a "proud self-reliant sense of national identity before which all could feel equal" (Plastow 1994:128). But not all felt equal; and not all were treated equally: the government banned all forms of activities deemed a threat to the central state's stability, security and very existence. At this point in Tanzanian history, ethnic associations were abolished, traditional chiefs were stripped of their authority, religious organizations were advised to keep out of politics, and the one party state was declared supreme. Against this background the government was able to exercise its power and control its citizenry through the cinema as well.

The types of film produced by the government during this period consisted mostly of documentaries and newsreels. Films such as *Kilimo Bora cha Mahindi* (Modern Methods of Maize Cultivation – 1968), *Bega kwa Bega* (Shoulder to Shoulder – 1970), *AsalinaNta Bora* (Honey and the Best Wax – 1970), *Juma Abdalla; Mkulima na Mwanafunzi* (Juma Abdalla, a farmer and a student – 1973), and *Kuishi Pamoja* (Living Together – 1976) were made in order to invent an agricultural nation throughout a region where large sectors of the population were pastoral and nomadic. For example, the film *Living Together*, in proclaiming the ideology of Self-Reliance, depicted efforts made by the government to provide better living conditions to its people. The film propagated the formation of *Ujamaa* (communal) planned villages, communities that the government created by implementing its villagization programme. The government road map proposed to mobilize people to live and work together in newly constructed hamlets on the assumption that within these villages the socio-economic and political development of the people would be easier to achieve and maintain (Mwakalinga 2001:4). The film was supposed to function as an agent of nation formation, inculcating the attitudes appropriate for inhabiting these villages by literally presenting images of the grand scheme of *Ujamaa*. To further aid this government in propagating a social ideal, the TFC embarked on its first feature film in 1973, *Fimb oya Mnyonge* (A Poor Man's Salvation). As with other types of film produced in Tanzania, *Fimbo Ya Mnyonge* advocated the policy of *Ujamaa* and Self-Reliance.

Although *Ujamaa* embraced a reasoned philosophical theory for cultural development as a practice, “it [was] taken for granted that mass political involvement alone [would] shape the people's consciousness to accept and foster socialism” (Mlama 1985:11). Yet this assumption proved to be mistaken: the promotion of government agendas did not take effect without resistance. The plan was to move people to the planned villages where social service could be more feasibly provided to them by government. But in towns such as Bukoba, Dodoma, Handeni, Rufiji, individuals refused to forsake their ancestral land for a collective socialist settlement. This provoked conflict between government officials involved in the villagization resettlement scheme, and villagers who refused to move. The

process of resettlement was supposed to be a voluntary activity, but due to this unforeseen resistance the government resorted to all measures including brute force to move people to their new settlements. In transmitting the attractiveness of the villagization policy to the masses, the government produced a number of documentaries, newsreels and feature films that advocated the benefits of living and working together under the new planned village conditions. In these cinematic portrayals, resistance was hardly ever exhibited. Whenever it was dramatized, resistance was always depicted as coming from the undesirable members of society such as drunkards or misfits who are regarded as posing a hindrance to the welfare of a community in any case.

### **Government's control of film production**

The Tanzanian government also used film to create a feeling of national cohesion and cultural revivalism. As well as promoting social, economic and political development, the imagery of national unity also legitimized, safeguarded, and enhanced the government's coercive power over its citizenry. The cultural traditions that were featured in the state-sponsored arts were only those approved by the state because they were deemed beneficial to the state. Similarly, Mlama's (1985: 14-15) research reveals the government's use of other arts industries had the same intention: "[O]nly music . . . in tune with the leadership ideology [was] promoted . . . [along with] the content of . . . poetry, songs and films oriented toward praising of either government and party leaders or government policies, decrees and campaigns."

This policy gave rise to puppet art, which parrots what official leaders say, by exercising cultural influence to engineer consent. To create the impression of national unity, the government designed a cultural landscape that minimized differences in mores, customs, and beliefs, for fear of encouraging tribalism, and as part of a process intended to encourage cultural homogenization (Chachaghe 1997:79). Meena (1997: 34) also notes that "after Independence the state banned all ethnic unions and abolished native authorities . . . this . . . was done under the pretext of a nation building project." In actual fact these associations were seen as a threat to the ruling government and its agenda. The strategies employed by

the government to promote indigenous culture were actually designed to make sure everything artistic and socially approved was state-controlled. Therefore in the case of the early period of Tanzania's Independence in the 1960s and 1970s, it is quite right to postulate that officially sanctioned indigenous cultural undertakings reflected the promotion of a petty bourgeois view of traditional culture.

The utilization of film by the Tanzanian government was not only a Tanzanian phenomenon; other African governments used cinema during their national building phase as well. What seems to be a uniquely Tanzanian phenomenon, however, is the way that political elites not only controlled film production, but more strikingly, how they controlled the filmmaker. Filmmakers were in the service of the state; they were government employees and considered civil servants. This was not the case in other African countries. For example, in Senegal, although film production was in the hands of the state, filmmakers were not in the employ of their government and not considered to be a part of it. Although censorship and sometimes banning of films by the government was common, the producers were independent and free to make films about subject matter of their own choice. The financing of films in Senegal and other francophone countries was external, to a great extent, mostly generating from the French government. In Tanzania the case was different; no external funding existed, apart from revenue provided by the Tanzanian government. This financial stronghold over filmmakers working as state employees and not as independent artists curtailed the development of creative expression and a substantive film aesthetic in Tanzania.

From the above scenario, it is clear that Tanzanian and other African national governments recognized fully the influential power of cinema, since they used it to safeguard their interests by either controlling the film production process as in Tanzania, or censoring filmmaker's work, or banning their products outright as in Senegal and other African states. In analysing why African government sever support the film industry, Barlet (2002: 59) comments: "African leaders are afraid that cinema would be used by filmmakers to manipulate political situations". So the government of Tanzania insured that only "positive images of the government and of its officials [would be] recorded . . . for public consumption (Chamblikazi

1995: 12). Arguably, it can be concluded that the films produced by these governments were designed to invent and portray a bourgeoisie's ideology of a nation, a vision that suited only the ruling class and its immediate affiliates, but not the masses. The question then arises: can the cinema produced in this way and with these motivations by a government accurately be called 'national cinema', as it is defined in the standard literature?

### **Academia's analysis of 'national cinema'**

The received model of socio-historic formation and introduction of cinema to a given country or continent has been modelled on what has happened in many Western countries, where the invention of the nation preceded the invention or introduction of cinema by many generations. Whereas in Africa, the reverse happened: the introduction of cinema to domestic audiences actually preceded the formation of their national identities. This historical fact plays a crucial role in understanding how 'national cinema' as a social and cultural phenomenon has come to be defined, articulated and perceived generally, and so too in Tanzania.

Many scholars have debated the concept of the national cinema over the years (e.g. Higson, Crofts, Hayward, William, O'regan, Schlesinger, Jarvie, Rosebaum). Higson (2002: 53) points out the difficulty in defining 'national cinema' since often "the concept of a national cinema is captured in terms of what it ought to be rather than describing the actual cinematic experience of popular audiences." Higson advocates giving as much strict attention to film consumption and to film audiences, as has been paid in the past to the sites of film production. Other researchers also acknowledge the contestation surrounding this category. But, in general, 'national cinema' is defined by examining a film release from its site of production, distribution, exhibition, and, as Higson has urged, audience consumption is studied as well. Questions about where films are made, and who finances them, should be accompanied by detailed questions about their viewers. Following this prescription, national cinema has come to be defined as expressing ". . . something of the soul of the nation that it comes from – the lifestyle, the consciousness, the attitude" (Rosebaum 2002:224).

Consequently national cinema has been seen by theorists as a film genre“. . . different from Hollywood, [as it] targets a distinct, specialist market sector . . . [produced] within a wholly state-controlled and often substantially state subsidized industry” (Crofts 2006:51). But this contrast is not particularly illuminating. For even if national cinema is defined by its site of consumption, as Higdon suggests it should be, then it would appear that in many cases Hollywood, Bollywood and other popular cinemas that are internationally recognised should themselves be characterized as ‘national cinema’ as well – because, like African cinema, their constitutive products are overwhelmingly “preferred and consumed by national audiences” (Maasilta 2007: 86).

‘National cinema’ is thus basically understood as a film industry of certain specific nations. But the considerations presented here suggest that the standard criteria are inadequate for characterizing a national cinema within Africa’s social, political and historical realities. One factor that is commonly overlooked is that the control of industrial infrastructures, production, distribution and exhibition in Africa has always been in the hands of foreign companies. It has been argued correctly by some Africa scholars that in Africa, national cinemas do not exist, at least not yet. In the words of John Akomfrah (2006: 277), “African cinema was and continues to be an impossible cinema . . . in addition to the political argument, there are economic factors that militate against the possibility of a national cinema.”

With the exception of Crofts, these theorists take for granted that there exists a ‘natural’ social transition in the development of a film industry. They assume that a nation’s formation precedes cinema, so that locally produced cinema somehow reflects or should reflect that national identity. But what about national formations that occurred chronologically only after the introduction of cinema, such as African nation-states? How is the cinematic genre created by these nations to be defined? Do they fit the theoretical framework that has been propagated by the likes of Higson, Williams, Hayward and Reagan?

As much as the notion of national cinema attracts differences in definition and explanatory analysis, the majority of these scholars converge in their

understanding of the global influence of Hollywood. National cinema productions have been viewed in opposition to Hollywood, such as Third Cinema, or in appropriation of Hollywood, such as Australian or British Cinema. Where does the history of Tanzanian cinema fit into this theoretical landscape? Was it retaliating against Hollywood? Certainly it was not appropriating Hollywood. If it did neither, could it be consistently catalogued as a national cinema? If one takes Croft's second definition of national cinema, a cinema which is state controlled, it seems Tanzania could fall within that category. But scrutinizing the definition reveals that it recognizes the power of the state without countenancing the state's control over the artist or filmmaker. The standard model of national cinema depicts the government as helping filmmakers and therefore responsible for developing a local film industry. This form of state sponsorship of the arts can be found in other African countries' recent history such as Cameroon, Senegal, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and throughout Latin America. Especially in Latin America, state subsidies of the film industry were intended to revitalize the genre of 'homemade' films, thereby reducing the grip of Hollywood on both the market and the local population's imagination. In the case of Tanzania, the state constituted the entire industry. The state has never subsidized artistic film producers for there have been no such producers to subsidize. The state itself has made films for the Tanzanian people, but not in Rosenbaum's sense of producing films that come from and exhibit the lifestyle, the consciousness or the attitudes of the people. The Tanzanian government's total control of the film industry prevented any form of social criticism and individual vision exhibited through cultural creativity. So it has suppressed all aesthetic and artistic expression. Thus it cannot be said to have produced a national cinema by the standard definition, that is, a cinema created from and reflective of the consciousness or attitudes of the people.

### **Distribution and exhibition of films**

*All of the cinema houses on the continent were foreign-owned and had little interest in promoting the artful and politically conscious films of African-filmmakers.*

John McCall (2007:93)

To combat the distribution and exhibition monopoly of foreign investors, and thus to fully control the film industry, the Tanzania government vigorously worked to monopolise the distribution and exhibition circuits of the film business. This endeavour proved harder than anticipated, for the government met with harsh sanctions and blockades from foreign investors and their subsidiaries abroad. Distributors networked together and blocked the government from acquiring films abroad. The government used its Censorship Board for exercising its power, so that all films imported by the distributors had to be scrutinized by law. The government's fight with distributors was not on behalf of the masses' projecting their own images and cultures. The fight secured its own legitimacy and power over the masses. Even if the government had managed to secure all distribution and exhibition channels, the problem of disseminating films to rural and even urban sectors of the population would remain unresolved. All of the cinema houses in Tanzania were situated in urban areas where only ten percent of the population lived at that time (United Nations 2017). This ten per cent of the population was not the ideal target of government made films. Urban dwellers were bombarded with all forms of media, such as radio, newspaper, theatre, and music. Through these outlets urbanites were informed of governments' day to day activities and initiatives, and they were quickly called to action when the need arose. Secondly, all of the films made by the government, with the exception of *Fimbo Ya Mnyonge*, were shot in 16mm while most of the cinema halls were equipped with 35mm projectors. To combat the stronghold over private investors in the distribution and exhibition circuit, the government had to devise alternative means of distribution and exhibition. So it reinstated the colonialist mobile cinema system: the government bought and dispatched ten fully equipped cinema vans to all its regional headquarters. Each van had a 16mm projector, screen, generator, a microphone and torch lights. This method of distribution and exhibition enabled the government to circumvent the urban cinema halls and to reach some of its rural dwellers to disseminate information and the ideology of national identity and development.

In 1977 the Tanzanian government again embarked on a mission to nationalize the distribution and exhibition of films. This time it did so

together with nine other African countries, forming the African Association for Cinema Corporation (AACC), to “establish and develop a common front for the importation and distribution of films . . . in the member countries” (Mponguliana 1982:100). However, just as before, ultimately these governments failed; and to this day the distribution and exhibition of films in Tanzania remains the domain of private investors.

### **Whither National Cinema?**

*Irresponsible state control of the film industry has had a negative impact on the development of a relevant aesthetic and general film productive capacity.*

Eberhard Chambulikazi (1995: 9)

The Arusha Declaration of 1967 brought about the nationalization of major means of production, such as banks, insurance companies, oil, water, mineral, forest, land, and industries, where by the government became the sole controller on behalf of the workers. Film production was seized by the government. The government did not see film as an art form. More precisely, it did not want film to assume that status, seeing what other African country’s filmmakers had produced, such as Sembene’s *Borron Sarret* (The Cart Driver – 1963) in Senegal, and Med Hondo’s *Afriquesur Seine* (1955) in Mauritania. To prevent such critical depiction of the postcolonial status quo, the Tanzanian government made sure films produced by its citizens towed the party line, helping to build the impression that a better life was being delivered as promised. This was accomplished by training and sustaining filmmakers as state employees. This appropriation of filmmaking and the film industry denied Tanzanians the chance to have a viable film industry with diverse images and portrayals of reality as experienced by 120 ethnic groups with different beliefs and customs. State control of the industry meant there would be no criticism, no self-expression, no aesthetic, and thus, ultimately, no film industry.

Tanzania once did have a cinema, a government cinema, a cinema that spoke on behalf of the people, not by the people. In this regard the question still remains: was this a national cinema? As reviewed in this paper, there

is no single definition of national cinema; and the Tanzanian situation makes a universal model even more difficult to conceptualize or define.

In this sense, the national cinema question continues to be an intellectual exercise that has yet to come to terms with the diverse social, economic cultural and political experiences of distinct nations. Thus film theorists are even less capable of addressing the realities of the interconnectivity between nations that prevails today. This inadequacy in the literature highlights the need for a different conceptual framework in dealing with the national cinema question. Apart from drawing attention to this theoretical shortfall in film studies, this article has shown how the Tanzanian government, in its national building phase from the 1960s to the 1970s, used and controlled film production to legitimize its power. By doing so, it retarded the development of a viable film industry in Tanzania.

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