

Mythologising Nyerere and Recreation of a National Hero in Banyakyusa Narratives

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Abstract

This article examines the myths about Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, in Banyakyusa narratives. It uses narrative and new historicism theories to capture the recreation of Nyerere as a national hero and understand the interplay between his representation in myths and his depiction in historical and biographical documents. The myths were collected from Busokelo, Kyela, and Rungwe districts in southwest Tanzania. The Banyakyusa believe Nyerere was endowed with massive mystical powers, which helped him win against colonialists, defeat Idi Amin, and build multiparty democracy. Politicians, historians, and the media play a significant role in the recreation or whitewashing of the Nyerere myths.

Keywords:

Nyerere, heroism, myths, mystical powers, Banyakyusa, Nyerere's stick
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Introduction

Literature about the life and history of Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania (1922-1999) both inside and outside Tanzania usually perceives Nyerere as a national hero. To most historians and politicians, who have vested interest in Nyerere, he was a special person endowed with heroic traits since his birth (Mpangala & Mawazo 2015). The birth of Nyerere was accompanied by heavy rain, hence the name Kambarage (The JBHE Foundation 2017). The rain signifies a birth associated with great expectations for his community. These admirable qualities in Nyerere's childhood made his father, Chief Nyerere Burito to

foretell that he (Julius Nyerere) would become a powerful leader of Tanganyika, and this “Chief Nyerere Burito’s prophecy was manifested in the leadership of the Father of the Nation, Mwalimu J. K. Nyerere” (Mpangala & Mawazo 2015, p. 13).

Some scholars and politicians associate Nyerere’s national heroism with his role in the struggle against colonialism in Tanganyika and Africa at large. Pius Msekwa, who served as speaker of the Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania between 1994 and 2005, and worked closely with Nyerere for many years, argues that the independence of Tanganyika was attained peacefully because of Nyerere’s endowments (Msekwa, 2005). For Msekwa, Nyerere’s immense power of persuasion enabled him to gain support from the majority of Tanganyikans. Msekwa clarifies that Nyerere successfully persuaded other members of TANU to accept a tripartite vote introduced by the colonialists in Tanganyika. The tripartite vote was the greatest step towards peaceful independence of Tanganyika as it is “believed to have substantially changed the history of Tanganyika’s road to independence” (Msekwa 2005, p. 42).

The representation of Nyerere as a national hero is similarly manifested in the literature about his presidency in Tanganyika and later in Tanzania (after the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1964). Nyerere was a principled leader, consummate communicator, visionary philosopher ‘king’ and a peacemaker (Mohiddin 1999). Mohiddin specifies that these qualities make Nyerere a “unique leader” (p. 9). To other scholars, Nyerere was an endowed religious leader who successfully built peace and unity in a country of over 120 ethnic groups (Pratt 1985; Venter & Olivier 1993; Mesaki & Malipula 2011). On Nyerere being endurable religious person, Yoweri Museveni, the president of Uganda contends:

I join those who are praying for the canonisation of Mwalimu as a saint. He was not only a freedom fighter; he was also a man of God... I am a witness to Nyerere’s devotion. The Bible is clear. It says we shall know them by

their fruits not by their words. Tanzania is a country of Christians, Muslims, and animists but Mwalimu (Nyerere) was able to unite them by demonstrating that they are all children of God (Mesaki & Malipula 2011, pp. 98-99).

Despite embracing Catholicism, Nyerere cherished the beliefs of others, hence avoiding sectarianism and strengthened unity in the nation. Following the recognition of Nyerere's religious life and in support of his beatification, Uganda has declared the 1st of June a special day of prayer in remembrance of Nyerere as an integral part of the annual Uganda Martyrs celebrations. This initiative places Uganda as a nation a step ahead not only in recognising Nyerere as a saint but also as an African hero.

Apart from the praise of Nyerere in literature, his history is not free from criticism and personal weaknesses (Brennan 2015). Despite Nyerere being praised for his renown role in the liberation of Africa, he attracts criticism for allegedly violating human rights and principles of the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU)—which he pioneered—by interfering in the sovereignty of other African countries such as recognising the Nigerian breakaway state of Biafra (Mwijage 1996). Also, Nyerere's overthrow of the notorious Idi Amin and restoring his friend Milton Obote who “went on to rule Uganda even more oppressively than his forerunner, Idi Amin” amounted to abuse of Uganda's sovereignty (Mwijage 1996, p. 53). However, as Mwijage (1996) further contends, Western nations continued to support Nyerere regardless of his various shortcomings. To Mwijage, the ongoing efforts to commemorate and beatify Nyerere into a saint are perceived by his critics as deliberate attempts of Nyerere's supporters inside and outside Tanzania to whitewash his shortcomings clean and extol his virtues.

Despite a number of criticisms against Nyerere, Jonson (2000) contends that “not even his harshest critics have denied that he possessed a certain charisma” (p. 66). To many Africans, Nyerere remained a human being with

special qualities and “Baba la [sic] Taifa”, which means “Father of the Nation”, or even broader, “Father of the African Struggle” or “Father of Africa”; and, of course, “Mwalimu” - “the Teacher” (p. 66). The acknowledgement by his critics that Nyerere had special endowments sharpens our understanding of the psychology behind mythmaking about Nyerere’s heroism in various Tanzanian communities. Moreover, the significance of mythmaking about Nyerere in the East African country lies around criticism against him because myths are primarily used to purify and whitewash the image of a perceived hero (Barthes 1972; Gavrieli-nuri 2010).

The depiction of Nyerere in most of the literature reviewed in this section fits the perception that he was a mythical hero. One of the features of a mythical hero is rising from an ordinary background as non-hero to victory (Seger, 2012), hence a hero. The assessment of Nyerere’s life history by his supporters and critics alike conforms to features of a mythical hero. Nyerere came from a small ethnic group of the Wazanaki and except for being the son of a chief, he led an ordinary village boy’s life, whose highlight was the grazing of cattle and goats with other boys (Mpangala & Mawazo 2015). The major difference between Nyerere and the boys of his time was that he had an opportunity to get a formal education because he was a son of a chief. Moreover, Nyerere used his position as leader of Tanzania to spearhead the struggle for liberation of Southern African countries, as a leader of a frontline state¹, and remove Idi Amin from power in Uganda, even though his country was economically and militarily inferior to the powerful Western colonisers and to Idi Amin. This representation of Nyerere makes me argue that Nyerere’s rise from ordinary life to the status of founding father of the nation and his leading of an economically and

¹ Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and, from 1980, Zimbabwe were frontline states (FLS), which from 1975 were in the vanguard of liberating Southern Africa. FLS was disbanded in 1994 when Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa.

militarily poor country to win against powerful Western colonial masters brands him a mythical hero.

Notwithstanding the conformity of Nyerere's life to the life of mythical heroes, and in spite of the widespread mythmaking about him among Tanzanians, those particular myths have so far received limited scholarly attention. As a result, limited knowledge exists on the voices and perceptions of local Tanzanians such as the Banyakyusa, Sukuma, Haya and the Maasai about Nyerere, which play a vital role in escalating relevance Nyerere continues to receive from Tanzanians. Bearing in mind the criticisms against Nyerere, in this article, I explore the depiction of Banyakyusa beliefs, their voices and perception of Nyerere's heroism embedded in the recreation of his image in their myths.

Myths refer to narratives which "have unquestioned truth" for the members of the society in which they are told (Trubshaw 2003 p. 171). By its nature, the mythical narratives combine fiction and factual historical events (Wilson 1960; Douglas 1966; Trubshaw 2003). After all, a myth is a story "which most people believe or have believed to be an account of historical happenings" (Wilson 1960, p. 1). As such, myths about Nyerere which this article examines combines fiction and facts about Nyerere's perceived heroism among the Banyakyusa. Whereas a belief is "what people think about causes and effects" which contain "a strong element of commitment and faith" (Jervis 2006, p. 642), myths are societal beliefs in form of narratives which societies perceive as truth (Douglas, 1966). The argument here is that myths of a particular society are narratives that express what the society thinks about the causes and effects of certain phenomenon and has faith in that particular thinking. These arguments suggest an unswerving link between myths and traditional beliefs of a society where these myths are told. As such, the Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere's heroism are narratives that express their beliefs about him and his supposed heroism. The beliefs including those embedded in myths are

significant because they influence people's behaviour and perceptions (Mbiti, 1991).

In the African context, myths express culture and inner experiences of Africans (Jaja 2013). This view enriches the concept of myth as historical information embedded in the Africans community experience and culture. A myth in Africa is "not just a product of human imagination but a direct expression of reality" (Jaja 2013, p. 10). As a result, for Africans like Banyakyusa, "myths represent the African spirit and the African view of reality" (Jaja 2013, p. 13). These contentions indicate that Banyakyusa myths discussed in this article express what the Banyakyusa believe is a true reality and their society about heroism of Nyerere. Since oral literature in Africa continues to play a vital role in communication despite technological advancement (Benge, 2004), Banyakyusa myths play a significant role in conveying Banyakyusa realities.

To capture Banyakyusa cultural beliefs and perception embedded in their myths about Nyerere and scrutinising the perceptions that myths are based on facts despite being imaginary stories (Kennedy & Gioia, 1995). The study upon which this article is based had employed narrative and new historicism theories. The narrative analysis focuses on examining the narrator's voice and statements about the characters and "narrative texts, images, spectacles, events -of cultural artefacts that tells a story" (Bal 2017, p. 3). Specifically, the narrative theory facilitated the examination of the use of language and imagery in recreating Nyerere, his actions, and the implication of the narrator's voice and statements about eminent leader in his recreation as a hero and the general understanding of myth and political mythmaking in relation to the Banyakyusa's cultural traditions and beliefs.

With the perspective that myths originate from actual historical events (Wilson, 1960), this article is informed by new historicism to examine and establish arguments regarding the collaborative interplay between the

representation of Nyerere as hero in Banyakyusa myths and facts in historical and biographical documents. New historicism is an approach by which literary and non-literary texts are read in parallel by focusing on how they inform each other (Barry, 2002). New historicism looks at literature's relationship with historical, ideological and cultural contexts that produced it (Myers 1989). Hence, the article examines Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere as producer and products, and the source of Nyerere's history.

Myths about Nyerere are widespread in Tanzania. Indeed, these myths about Nyerere are found among other Tanzanian ethnic groups such as the Sukuma, Haya, Zanaki, Makonde, Pangwa, Zaramo and the Fipa (Fedeo, 2021). Political myths such as these about Nyerere are popular because they "justify and strengthen certain political ideologies and or regimes" (Svilicic & Maldini 2014, p. 729). This argument suggests a deliberate intention by politicians inside and outside Tanzania to influence mythmaking about Nyerere among local Tanzanians as a means for strengthening support for his ideas and policies throughout the nation. Although such myths are evident among different ethnic groups, this article focuses on the use of Kinyakyusa and the reflection of Banyakyusa traditions and beliefs in the Banyakyusa myths.

Banyakyusa refer to their oral narratives as *tupango* (stories) without classifying them as either legends, myths, folktales, fables or fairy tales (Fedeo, 2021). However, narrators and spectators of narratives analysed in this article repeatedly refer *utu tukatupango itolo loli tupango twanaloli tosa* (these are not just narratives, but all are true stories), signifying that the stories are believed to be truth among the Banyakyusa, which is one of the reasons that makes them conform to their classification as myths. The myths I analyse were collected through oral history interviews from Busokelo, Kyela and Rungwe districts in Tanzania. The primary intention of collecting them was to examine the perception and points of view of the Banyakyusa, as local Tanzanians, about life and political career of Nyerere as one of

factors that contribute to the escalating support of Nyerere and his ideas among local people even after his death.

Predominately, Banyakyusa live in Busokelo, Kyela, and Rungwe districts in Mbeya region in the southwest of Tanzania, and in Karonga district of Malawi. Mythmaking about community leaders is one of common practices among the Banyakyusa (Wilson, 1959). In addition to myths about their traditional leaders such as Kyala, Kyusa, and Lwembe, the Banyakyusa have a number of myths about Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (Fedeo, 2021). Despite the contribution of Tanzanians' myths about Nyerere in the escalating reverence of him and his ideas in Tanzania (Phillips, 2015), there is a limited attention that goes to the Banyakyusa myths about him. As I have already explained, these myths convey the Banyakyusa beliefs and voices about Nyerere and his ideas that influence their perception of him.

Nyerere the Hero in the Banyakyusa Myths

As politicians and historians do, Banyakyusa represent Nyerere in their mythical narratives as a hero of the nation. In particular, Banyakyusa associate Nyerere's heroism with his being endowed with immense mystical and supernatural powers. Human beliefs generally endow human heroes "with extraordinary powers from the moment of birth, or even the moment of conception" (Campbell 2004, p. 294). Similarly, the mythical narratives of the Banyakyusa present Nyerere as someone endowed with superhuman powers since his birth. In the myth *Amahala ga Nyerere* (Nyerere's Intelligence), Nyerere is portrayed having extraordinary intelligence and ability since his birth.² The myth under discussion represents Nyerere as a person who taught himself to write, read and count. In his real life, Nyerere together with other children used to graze cattle up to the age of twelve when he joined Mwisenge primary school (Mpangala

² I named all Banyakyusa myths used in this article based on their subject matter because, locally, the myths do not have official names or titles.

& Mawazo, 2015). Despite a delay in starting formal learning, the myth describes how Nyerere taught himself writing, counting, and reading (“*aliimanyishe jujo ukusimba, ukubhala nu ukusoma*”). It is general knowledge that with formal education, a child acquires skills from teachers in school. The belief that Nyerere taught himself the 3Rs (writing, reading and arithmetic) implies the perception among the Banyakyusa that Nyerere had supernatural ability which he exploited to perform what other children could not.

To the Banyakyusa, Nyerere had inborn intelligence (“...*alinamahala agakupapigwa nago*”). The Banyakyusa use this phrase to signal how Nyerere was distinctively endowed. In this regard, the myth underscores the distinctiveness of Nyerere using the context in which he supposedly taught himself numeracy and literacy. Specifically, the myth states that Nyerere was writing while grazing cows and goats. The narrator clarifies that he used stones to write. Indeed, “writing is an extremely cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously” (Durga & Rao 2018, p. 4). Implicitly, Nyerere’s ability to teach himself to write, according to the myth under discussion, denotes that he had enormous cognitive ability. The myth signifies that Nyerere had special endowments with which he successfully turned himself into his own teacher, grazing grounds became a class, and stones became his books and writing boards.

In the myth *Bao*, the Banyakyusa similarly recreate Nyerere as a person endowed with supernatural intelligence. *Bao* refers to the East Africa traditional mancala board game normally played by two players. This board game is famous in East Africa for being a tricky and, hence, needs sharp counting skills. The game is usually accompanied with jokes and laughter. The word *bao* (Kinyakyusa *ubusolo*) is a KiSwahili word derived from *ubao* (the board) with 32 holes arranged in 4 rows, each with 8 holes that two players engage in, each taking a side of two rows. There are different styles of playing *bao*. The variation in styles depend on the number of seeds or *kete* placed in the holes or arrangement of those seeds that

influence how they are played. Consequently, based on how it is played, *bao* is one of the games that demand the highest intelligence because it involves tricks and sharp counting and calculation skills. The winner is, therefore, presumably more intelligent than the opponent.

One of people close to Nyerere, Mbwimbo, one time head of Nyerere's bodyguards, confirmed that president Nyerere used to play *bao* during his resting time (Mbwimbo 2016). In this regard, mythical constructions make propositions that originate from real stories regardless of the exaggeration associated with such myths (Kennedy & Gioia 1995). The myth *Bao* recreates Nyerere as the player who continued to be the overall winner since his childhood. The narrator states that even this *bao* "we are playing came from Nyerere", who was a magician in *bao*, and there was no one in Tanzania who could play like him ("*ni ibao ili tukukina lyandile kwa Nyerere. Nyerere kwi ibao alingasi. Akinaga ibao Tanzania hamna*"). With the awareness that *Bao* is one of indigenous games in Africa that had existed since time immemorial (Kyule, 2016), the statement that the *bao* game started with Nyerere is linked to the perception that he had a great mastery of the game, hence considered the originator. The narrator states that they say that he started playing it since his childhood. When you just touch the first capital, he would say it is finished. He was born with it. He was even defeating elders ("*bikuti aliandile nalyo pabunini. Linga itolo ukolie untaji ugwakwanda itolo atigi limalike. Apapigwe nalyo. Abhafungaga naabhakusi*"). As the narrator clarifies, Nyerere won *bao* even against Englishmen when he was still young. According to the Banyakyusa, Whites/Europeans (*Abhasungu*) are more intelligent and mystically powerful than Africans (Wilson, 1959). However, I can argue that the assumption that Nyerere won *bao* against Englishmen since his childhood highlights more the belief among the Banyakyusa that Nyerere was endowed with immense superhuman abilities than the actual accomplishment.

A story becomes a myth when it has gained community acceptance (Murray 1959). This argument implies that myths have anonymous authorship as they belong to no one but the entire community. One significant feature of the Banyakyusa mythmaking about Nyerere depicted in both *Amahala ga Nyerere* (Nyerere's Intelligence) and *Bao* is the use of plural form *bikuti* (they say). For example, the narrator in the myth, *Amahala ga Nyerere*, states that "*bikuti bhati [Nyerere] asimbaga mmabwe ku ng'ombe kukuko*" (They say that he [Nyerere] was writing on stones while grazing cattle). The use of plural form "they say" indicates that the story that Nyerere was endowed with extraordinary intelligence has anonymous authorship, hence a property of the Banyakyusa community. Moreover, the use of the word *bhati* after the phrase *bikuti* (they say) which the Banyakyusa associate with the truth regarding the speaker suggests that the truth of the myths *Amahala ga Nyerere* and *Bao* is subjected to the community, which owns it. The use of *bikuti* and *bhati* in these myths signifies the community ownership of the belief that Nyerere was born with supernatural intelligence.

There are many agents that enhance the mythologisation of a societal hero including "party political speeches, broadcasts, and advertisements, campaigns by lobbies and political pressure groups or partisan newspaper editorials" (Trubshaw 2003, p. 169). In Tanzania, there is a tendency of political leaders from the ruling and opposition parties to regularly associate their thoughts and actions with Nyerere as an indication that they revere him (Phillips 2015). With reference to the preceding observations, the Banyakyusa mythmaking about Nyerere's heroism is similarly influenced by the regular tendency of associating everything with Nyerere as a way of glorifying his service to the nation. In the myth *Bao*, the act of playing *bao* serves the purpose of paying homage (*kumuenzi*) to Nyerere. Similar to other Tanzanian societies, *Bao* is a mostly for leisure game also played to refresh the mind and chat with friends after work. But, as an indicator that Nyerere was a national hero, Tanzanians tend to associate their deeds with their reverence of Nyerere, especially when they are doing what conforms to Nyerere's philosophy of putting human being first did (Kwayu, 2015).

As such, the tendency of the Banyakyusa of associating their playing of *bao* game with paying homage to Nyerere emphasises their belief that Nyerere is/was a special person in their nation.

Also, the tendency of Tanzanian politicians to associate what they do with paying homage to Nyerere underscores the deliberate intentions of politicians to influence mythmaking about Nyerere's heroism among local Tanzanians. After all, political elites engineer through the mass media and books the making of self-washing political myths to "meet practical political needs such as to enhance regime legitimacy, mobilise public support to government policies and win factional competition" (He 2018, p. 70). In relation to the preceding argument, Banyakyusa mythmaking about Nyerere signals a deliberate influence of Tanzanian politicians to the recreation of myths about Nyerere heroism among local Tanzanians. The influence speaks also for the widespread of myths about Nyerere as a hero in other Tanzanian ethnic groups. In the myth *Ikipaji* (Gifted with Instinct), the ever-increasing tendency of politicians to associate multiparty system in Tanzania with Nyerere influenced the recreation of Nyerere in the myth as a leader who was endowed with mystic ability to foresee future events and that he forecast the introduction of multipartyism in Tanzania.

The introduction of multipartyism in 1992 is associated with Nyerere's deliberate intention because Tanzanians rejected the system through Justice Nyalali's Commission, with only a minority of about 20 percent (Mpangala & Mawazo, 2015; Shivji, 2020). As a result, Tanzanian politicians have since then associated Nyerere with almost every activity related to multipartyism in Tanzania. According to Ali, the former national general secretary of Tanzania's ruling party, CCM insisted that his party would not abandon multipartyism in Tanzania despite continuous defection of opposition leaders to join CCM because Nyerere was the key architect of the system (AzamTV 2020). Ali's assertion shows the continuous tendency of Tanzanian politicians to prop up the image of Nyerere among the people, suggesting to them that many things would have not been as they are

without Nyerere. With reference to the contention that the perception that a certain leader manages everything, has the effect of building a myth of a strong leader about him/her (Brown, 2014). Hence, the recurrent tendency of showing that Nyerere orchestrated the establishment of multipartyism is intended to strengthen the mythmaking about him as a strong leader in the nation. What is often overshadowed in this mythmaking was the role Nyerere also played in strengthening the one party system following the 1967 Arusha declaration and the country's embracing of *Ujamaa*, and African brand of socialism, and *kujitegemea* (selfreliance).

The ability to foresee future events (divination) that the Banyakyusa associate Nyerere with in the myth *Ikipaji* "is most certainly a mythic activity" (Trubshaw 2003, p. 98). The talent to foretell/divine is one of the indicators that a certain human being is blessed with mystical powers, the power that comes from God (Mbiti 1991). Implicitly, the reconstruction of Nyerere as a diviner in the myth under discussion indicates that the Banyakyusa believe that Nyerere's heroism resulted from his being endowed by the Almighty God.

Nyerere's ability to divine the future is also replicated in the myths *Nabii* (a Prophet) and *Mahfoudh*. Whereas the myth *Nabii* portrays Nyerere with prophetic ability to divine events which are yet to happen, the myth *Mahfoudh* associates Tanzanian victory against Idi Amin with Nyerere's immense mystical powers to foresee the future. The myth *Mahfoudh* is about the victory of Tanzania in the 1978-1979 war against Uganda, famously known as the Kagera War that – according to the Banyakyusa – came after Nyerere correctly prophesied the future of a Tanzanian commando known as Ali Mahfoudh. The myth suggests that the victory was because Mahfoudh succeeded in kidnapping a huge Libyan warplane sent by Gaddafi to help Idi Amin. This was after Nyerere's earlier decision to waive Mahfoudh's death penalty, based on the prophecy that he would help the nation in future.

Colonel Ali Mahfoudh was a former Tanzanian commando who did venerable work in the liberation struggle, especially in Mozambique, Angola, and Zimbabwe. Mahfoudh was also among the Zanzibaris who were accused of assassinating the first president of Zanzibar Abeid Aman Karume in 1972 (Watanzania Mashuhuri 2012; Shivji 2020). As result, Mahfoudh was given a death penalty but released in 1978 after being detained since 1972.

Besides the portrayal of commando Ali Mahfoudh, the Banyakyusa in the myth depict how Nyerere's decision to exempt Mahfoudh from death penalty enabled Tanzania to win against Idi Amin. According to the myth, Mahfoudh was one of the Tanzanian commandoes who were sent to Cuba for training and returned with expertise and technology that enabled him to hack and use the national radio to insult the then president Nyerere. The myth states that with the help of Chinese, Mahfoudh and his fellows were arrested and given a death penalty. However, as the myth indicates, following Nyerere's prophecy, he commuted Mahfoudh's death penalty. After the eruption of the Kagera War between Tanzania and Uganda in 1979, Libya sent a huge warplane with eight other planes inside, lethal ammunitions and 800 mercenaries to assist Idi Amin. The story states that Nyerere told Mahfoudh to use his skills to hack into the cargo plane and direct it to Kilimanjaro airport in Tanzania instead of Kampala in Uganda, something that Mahfoudh did. The narrator indicates that Idi Amin depended so much on the assistance from Libya to continue with the war that diverting the warplane helped Tanzania to succeed and win against Idi Amin. Generally, the narrator suggests that Nyerere's prophecy saved the nation from losing the Kagera War.

Even though a number of literatures have accounted for the 1978-79 Kagera war, one of the challenges in reading the myths about Nyerere relation to his non-literary history and the war is the silence of literature on the role Colonel Ali Mahfoudh played during the war. I can associate this silence with the sensitivity of national security matters. So far with respect to Ali

Mahfoudh, the Banyakyusa myth under discussion, stands alone in providing historical information about his engagement in the Kagera War. As such, the myth about Mahfoudh makes me argue that the Banyakyusa mythmaking process about Nyerere is one of the deliberate efforts in Tanzania that continue to perpetuate what Archie Brown treats as the making of strong leader of the nation without whom everything would not materialise (Brown, 2014). This myth illustrates how the Banyakyusa believe that the victory against Idi Amin could not have materialised without Nyerere and his mystic powers.

The purification of Nyerere's image in relation to the Kagera war in the Banyakyusa myths relates to the depiction of Nyerere in the existing literature by historians and politicians. They all regard Nyerere as a Tanzanian hero who led a militarily weak country to win against Idi Amin Dada of Uganda who had more ammunitions at his disposal coupled with military assistance from Libya and Sudanese mercenaries (Acheson-Brown, 2001; Matata, 2016). Despite seeming operating from a weak and lack of outside support, Nyerere led Tanzania's troops to rescue civilians in Kagera, Tanzania and Uganda (Kiyimba 2013). Although the war occasioned the loss of many Tanzanian and Ugandan lives (Mpangala & Mawazo, 2015), Nyerere's image is purified as "the most peaceful of all men", who "had to fight a war to fight aggression" (Smith 1985 p. 35). The argument I am making based on these contentions is that the purification of Nyerere's image during the war against Idi Amin spread more insights about his endowment and commitment which inform a number of myths about heroism during the war among local Tanzanians such as the Banyakyusa.

The belief that some things in Africa could not be successful without Nyerere is also depicted in Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere with reference to the freedom of Mozambique in 1975. Looking at Nyerere's role in the decolonisation struggle in Africa, the independence of most of the Southern African countries is also largely associated with his heroism (Johnson, 2000), among others, such as Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia.

Nyerere provided unwavering support to freedom fighters in many African countries including allowing them to operate from Tanzania in addition to providing them with ammunition received from Russia and China. In fact, most of the Southern African countries, as Johnson contends, “are now free with the liberation which sprang in Dar es Salaam” (67). Even though Nyerere served as a leader of an economically and militarily inferior country, literature depicts how he heroically spearheaded the struggle for the liberation of Southern African countries, something that is also evident in the recreation as a hero in the Banyakyusa myths.

The myth *Samora Machel* states that the freedom of Mozambique was attained because Nyerere used his mystical powers against the Portuguese colonialists. The narrator in this myth states that Samora Machel, the first president of Mozambique, was a close friend of Nyerere, and that without Nyerere, Mozambique would not have acquired its independence from Portugal as Samora Machel stated in Kiswahili that “*bila Nyerere Msumbiji isingepata uhuru*” (without Nyerere Mozambique would not have attained its freedom). The perception that Nyerere played a momentous role in the struggle for independence of Mozambique account for “public heroism, in the sense that a hero places one’s strengths and other endowment at the service of others” (Okpewho 1998). The narrator also clarifies that, although Nyerere did not go to the battleground during the Mozambique liberation war, Samora and his people were using Nyerere’s powers (“*aba Samora babombelagha amaka ghake*”). Here, the myth claims that Nyerere gave Mozambican freedom fighters his powers to soldier on and defeat the Portuguese colonialists. The narrator further claims that on hearing of Nyerere’s name, the Portuguese would tremble because Nyerere was a burning piece of wood (“*alikisinga*”). *Ikisinga*, with reference to the Banyakyusa beliefs signifies immense mystical powers. Therefore, the reconstruction of Nyerere in metaphorical comparison with *ikisinga* denotes that the Portuguese dreaded Nyerere because freedom fighters were using his mystical powers.

The myth *Samora Machel* stresses on the role of political leaders play in influencing mythmaking about Nyerere's heroism among local Tanzanians, Banyakyusa in particular. Samora's statement that without Nyerere Mozambique would not have attained its freedom reflects the contention by the second president of Mozambique, Joachim Chisano that Nyerere did "enormous" work in the liberation of Mozambique (Gough 1999, p. 64). Moreover, the depiction of Samora Machel in the myth conducting public meetings throughout Tanzania to express his gratitude to Nyerere reflects the argument that political myths are "the result of (political) activity of individuals or small social groups in a certain political situation, when so created and accepted by a wide social group" (Svilicic & Maldini 2014, p. 726). The perception that Samora Machel organised public meetings in Tanzania immediately after the independence of Mozambique spread the insights that Nyerere was a specially endowed person and a hero, not only to Tanzanians but also to Mozambicans and other Africans. These insights influence local Tanzanians to create myths around the life of Nyerere as a hero to associate themselves with him.

Endowment with immense mystic/occult powers is one of the characteristics of an African hero (Mulokozi, 2002). As such, one of the obvious things in the Banyakyusa mythmaking about Nyerere is the belief that he had immense supernatural powers. To understand the essence of this re-creation of Nyerere, it is better to look first into the Banyakyusa's traditional beliefs and the nature of their traditional leadership. In fact, there is a significant connection between the Banyakyusa's perceptions of Nyerere heroism and the nature of their traditional leadership (Fedeo 2021). Traditional leaders of the Banyakyusa fall into two main groups – the chiefs (*abanyafyale*) and the headmen (*amafumu*). Notably, the Banyakyusa administrative structure comprises a number of units traditionally known as *ubunyafyale* (a chiefdom). *Abanyafyale* are primarily political leaders of the Banyakyusa who were/are chiefs of a particular chiefdom. The Banyakyusa generally believe that they possess immense mystical powers (Wilson, 1959). A chief among the Banyakyusa should be endowed with *ikingila*

(plural *ifingila*), which enabled the chief “to create *amanga*, i.e. spiritual power, and *ubusisya*, i.e. dignity, majesty, in order to make the chief fearful so that people obey him” (57). The concept of *ikingila* comes from the Banyakyusa myths about the power of lions. Banyakyusa believe that lions are almost like normal cats and that the powers they have are caused by *ikingila* which they possess. This *ikingila* is believed to be a steak-like piece of meat that lions keep inside their mouth. From that steak (*ikingila*), lions acquire their power and make people and other animals fear them. As such, the concept of *ikingila* among the Banyakyusa symbolises powerful mystical ability.

The discussion on the nature of Banyakyusa traditional leadership indicates that the Banyakyusa believe that a leader such as Nyerere should possess massive mystical powers. Nyerere’s father, Chief Nyerere Burito, was a leader of the Zanaki ethnic group (Mpangala & Mawazo, 2015). For the Banyakyusa, as depicted in the myths *Ikilingo kya Bhulongosi* (Inheriting Power), Nyerere was a crown prince of the Zanaki ethnic group who could not become a chief only because he was a leader of the whole nation. With the belief that Nyerere was the official heir of the Zanaki Chiefdom, the Banyakyusa portray him in their myths with qualities similar to those of their traditional chiefs.

In the myth *Amaka ga Nyerere* (Nyerere’s Power), Nyerere is re-constructed as a person endowed with special supernatural ability known as *ikingila*. Despite *ikingila* giving giving power to lions (“...*ingalamu amaka gosa*”), its role among humans as explained in the myth is that if a person possesses a lion’s *ikingila* you become so powerful that whatever he/she utters can be supported by the majority even when it is nonsensical (“*linga gwe mundu ulinikingila kya ngalamu kuja nsisya kangu kuja na maka agakujoba na bandu bosa bitikilege pope linga ngonyofu*”). The myth suggests that ideas from people like Nyerere who possessed *ikingila* were/are accepted, respected and adopted without being questioned even when they were trivial. With

respect to Nyerere, the narrator insists that there are very few people with *ikingila* in this world and Nyerere's *ikingila* was totally unique ("*abandu abakingila pakisu banandi fijo kangi ikya Nyerere kyali kya pasima kabisa*"). Here, the narrator stresses the belief that Nyerere's supernatural power was unique and special.

The beliefs that Nyerere had special mystical powers also feature in the myth *Inyifwila*. Similar to *ikingila*, *inyifwila* is a concept which carries mythical beliefs of the Banyakyusa. To the Banyakyusa, *inyifwila* is an invisible, huge, and powerful snake with many heads. *Inyifwila* is invisible because it lives beneath mountains and moves under rivers. When *inyifwila* moves, turns, or shakes, it causes earthquakes and terrific destructions in surrounding areas. Apart from being destructive, *inyifwila* is crucial for human life because it causes water to flow, especially rivers. The myth accords Nyerere with *inyifwila* because of his perceived immense superhuman powers. The Banyakyusa myth associates the concept of *inyifwila* with the greatest medicine or inborn supernatural ability than *ikingila* as it gives chiefs utmost mystical powers, dignity, and majesty (Wilson 1959). The phrase "*Nyerere alininyifwila*" (Nyerere had *inyifwila*) in this myth implies that Nyerere had utmost supernatural abilities.

It is a belief of the Banyakyusa that their traditional heroes, Kyala, Lwembe and Nkekete had immense mystical powers (Wilson 1959; Fedeo 2021). Similarly, the belief that Nyerere had mystical powers in form of *Ikingila* and *Inyifwila* buttresses the Banyakyusa perception that Nyerere endowment with unique powers was akin to their traditional heroes. In the myth *Amaka ga Nyerere* (Nyerere's Power), *ikingila* made Nyerere succeed in his attempts. As explained earlier, Nyerere was blessed with immense persuasive and rhetorical powers that made the then Tanganyika gain its political independence peacefully (Msekwa, 2005). Parallel to these views, this myth presents a Nyerere as a larger-than-life figure endowed with immense powers that attained everything he wanted and as he wanted. The myth uses a symbol of *amanja* (claps) whereby people clap to everything

Nyerere said during meetings (*mungomano*) to signify the acceptability of Nyerere's ideas to the majority. The myth also further highlights that even when he coughed, there was so much clap ("*pope linga akosomwile amanja gajaga ni kisa*"). The word *akosomwile* (he coughed) in the myth signifies unimportant word or idea, which shows how Nyerere's supernatural powers made people support him in everything including trivial things. In this regard, the myth shows that the Banyakyusa believe that Nyerere's successes such as in establishing of Ujamaa policy, self-reliant education, and the attainment of unity, peace, and security in Tanzania were as a result of his supernatural powers by which he was less challenged.

To strengthen the belief that Nyerere had supernatural powers similar to *inyifwila*, the myth *Inyifwila* narrates Nyerere's journey to Europe (*mbulaja*) by which his excessive supernatural powers were revealed. The myth states that when Nyerere stepped on a stage in Europe, all the people present including European leaders (*abhakulumba abhasungu*) stood up without even knowing the reason for standing up (*baliimie*). The myth illustrates how Nyerere was seen to be the highest leader ("*... abonekaga ukuti nkulumba kulibosa*"). The act of all people standing up even without knowing the reason for doing so signifies Nyerere's possession of immense supernatural powers which made all people fear and obey him. With reference to the myth *Inyifwila*, Nyerere's supernatural powers made him the most powerful, superior and respectable man in the world.

For the Banyakyusa, some of Nyerere's mystical powers which contributed to his heroism were vested in his stick. The belief that Nyerere's stick had mystical powers is widespread myths about Nyerere in Tanzania (Mbwimbo 2016; Fedeo, Kiyimba and Okot, 2020). Parallel to the preceding arguments, the Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere show that his stick was the crucial thing for Nyerere's superhuman abilities. In the myths about Nyerere's journey to America to plead for the independence of Tanganyika, it is narrated that Nyerere used his stick to save the lives of all passengers

in the aircraft after fuel exhausted while in air. In 1958, Nyerere travelled from Tanganyika to America to plead with the United Nations “for the independence of Tanganyika which was then under the ordinance of the British Trusteeship Territory” (Shayo n.d., p. 7). This myth suggests that Englishmen planned to kill Nyerere in a plane crash to prevent him from pleading for the independence of Tanganyika to the United Nations. But, as the narrator states in the myth, his stick saved all passengers on the flight (“*ingili jake jabapokile bosa mu ndege*”) by refuelling it; Nyerere survived.

Like in many other Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere, this myth repeatedly employs the phrase *bikuti* (they say). In addition to its implication on community ownership of the myths as seen earlier, the phrase *bikuti* signifies the influence of external forces on the mythmaking processes by local people. Commenting on the story about Nyerere using his stick to refuel the aircraft, the narrator states that in this story they say that he used that trick several times (“*kangi akapango aka bikuti kingi itolo Nyerere abhombile bho ulo*”). The phrase “they say” implies that it is a usual occurrence to associate Nyerere with the use of mystical powers. With reference to the subject of the myth, which centres on the political history of the nation, a pronoun “they” as used in this myth goes beyond the Banyakyusa community to signify historians, teachers or politicians inside and outside the country interested in political history of Tanzania. Arguably, the phrase *bikuti* highlights the influence of political mythmaking agents such as historians, teachers and politicians on mythmaking about Nyerere’s heroism among the Banyakyusa.

To strengthen the belief that Nyerere was a hero, the Banyakyusa mythmaking about Nyerere involves purification of his image against some of the negative criticisms. Indeed, one of the notable roles of myths is purification of the history of mythical heroes or events (Barthes 1972; Gavrieli-nuri 2010). This contention speaks also of the absence of myths critical of Nyerere because the intention of political mythmaking is to whitewash the image of a perceived hero. In the myth *Afisa Usalama*

(Security Officer), the narrator states that, in national debates, Nyerere was using the stick to decide who had to speak and who should not speak. The narrator clarifies that if he pointed the stick at a person, he was giving them the power to speak in front of him and the person would speak after such permission (“*linga akugolokisye ingili akupaga amaka agakujoba nkyeni mmyake. Akugolokesyaga ingili po gwajobaga*”). In case Nyerere did not want someone to speak, “even if you wanted to say something bad, if he put it horizontally you couldn’t be able to say anything”. The myth implies that Nyerere’s stick had the ability to enable or prevent someone from speaking.

The myth under discussion brings in the issue of freedom of expression during Nyerere’s leadership. The narrator states that Nyerere used his stick to decide who should speak and who should not (“...*Nyerere, umwene jo uju abombelagha ingili ukuti jwani ajobhe na jwani atingajobha*”). One of the criticisms against Nyerere’s regime is that Nyerere allegedly deprived the people of Tanzania of their freedom of expression (Mwijage 1996). The myth under discussion associates such deprivation of freedom of expression with Nyerere’s mystical powers through his stick. Implicitly, the stick in this myth symbolises Nyerere’s dictatorial control. However, through this myth, the Banyakyusa believe that the stick gave Nyerere the ability to know what someone wanted to express. In the phrase “*pope linga utile ujobe simo ibimbhi...*” (Even if you wanted to say something bad...), the word *ibimbhi* denotes dangerous speech. Although the myth alleges that Nyerere had power to suppress freedom of speech, it purifies his image by indicating that through his ability to know someone’s intention, the suppression of freedom of speech was intended to save the nation from dangerous and provocative speeches. The myth indicates aears to denote that Nyerere mystically knew the intention of a speech even before someone spoke despite the the means through which speeches were provocative or dangerous remain vague.

Mythmaking is largely influenced by the need to find explanations for the things which cannot be easily understood by human beings (Mbiti 1991; Svilicic & Maldini 2014). Nyerere's stick is one of the things that attracted the attention of the majority of Tanzanians (Mbwimbo 2016). Although Mbwimbo, Nyerere's bodyguard confirms that the stick was not mystical and that he himself carried it several times against the explanation of the myth that it was only touched by Nyerere. However, the tendency of Nyerere going with the stick almost everywhere could not be easily understood by local Tanzanians. Hence, myths about the stick in Tanzania associate the stick with mystical power connected with his protection and success.

Myths express a "clear presentation of the outlook of the people in communities as well as [their] objectives and permanent philosophy of life" (Udefi 2012, p. 60). In other words, myths carry people's points of view about aspects of their community and life in general. Also, myths express "the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend" (Schorer 1946, p. 29). These arguments denote that the Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere discussed in this article reflect the Banyakyusa's deepest experience of the universe which dictates their perceptions, opinions, and attitudes. As such, the representation of Nyerere as a hero endowed with immense supernatural and mystical powers in the Banyakyusa myths reflect the true the Banyakyusa views about the real life of Nyerere.

Conclusion

The recreation of Nyerere in the Banyakyusa myths suggests that they indubitably perceive him as a hero. The Banyakyusa appear to concur with politicians and historians in and outside Tanzania that Nyerere's heroism contributed to a number of successes of Tanzania and other African countries such as Uganda and Mozambique. One of the notable contributions of the Banyakyusa myths on Nyerere is how they openly

associate him with mystical powers. Whereas historians and politicians treat Nyerere a special leader or special person because he volunteered his life for his citizens and his nation, for the Banyakyusa, Nyerere was special because he was superhuman endowed with immense mystical powers. To the Banyakyusa, Nyerere's heroism resulted from his deliberate use of his endowments with mystical powers for the benefit of the nation. His mystic powers helped Tanganyika to gain its independence from Britain, helped to decolonise a large number of Southern African countries such as Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe, and helped Tanzania to win the war against Idi Amin of Uganda in 1978/79. Evidently, the Banyakyusa myths discussed in this article affirm that politicians inside and outside Tanzania have played a significant role in influencing the perception that Nyerere was a national hero. By spreading the belief that the independence of Tanganyika and that of Mozambique, the victory against Idi Amin and the multipartism in Tanzania were only attained because of Nyerere's heroism, politicians and historians influence the re-creation of myths among local Tanzanians about Nyerere as a hero with supernatural powers. The myths associate supernatural and mystical powers with Nyerere's heroism in the myths as though to answer to a complicated question that politicians and historians raise regarding why things would otherwise not have been impossible without Nyerere's intervention or presence as a leader.

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