HOW TO BUILD A NATION: LESSONS FROM TANZANIA'S JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I attempt to provide an explanation for Tanzania's seemingly unexpected relative internal political stability. Using a path dependency analysis, I argue that the Declaration constituted a critical juncture that set Tanzania on a self-reinforcing trajectory of nation-building, embedding a collective identity that delegitimised violence and ethnic mobilisation as political tools. To nuance this structural approach, I incorporate Charles Tilly's concept of trust networks, showing how the state absorbed and replaced local, ethnically based systems of solidarity, thereby preventing societal fragmentation.

Drawing on secondary scholarship, colonial-era reports, interviews with Tanzanian scholars, and speeches by Julius Nyerere, I trace the mechanisms through which this trajectory was consolidated: villagisation, Education for Self-Reliance, the adoption of Swahili as a national language, the institutionalisation of a one-party state, and the creation of a multi-ethnic army. Together, these policies produced increasing returns that reinforced national cohesion across generations.

While this path dependence secured Tanzania's avoidance of large-scale ethnic conflict, it also entrenched authoritarian practices that continue to constrain political pluralism today. The Tanzanian case thus demonstrates both the potential and the contradictions of state-led nation-building in postcolonial Africa, offering lessons for understanding how peace can be constructed and sustained in deeply diverse societies.

INTRODUCTION

Dar es Salaam does not sleep during the weekends. In the Mikocheni neighbourhood, it is New Nsimbo Bar that takes up this cause. Live music, going on until four in the morning is its method. I sat there one Friday as a defeated neighbour who had joined the party instead of attempting to fight the loud speakers, and as a result, I met a man who casually voiced a sentiment I had heard often in Tanzania: “Here almost everyone is poor, but at least we’re rich in peace”. A statement not of indifference, but of recognition: peace in Tanzania has long been an achievement that shapes the way people experience daily life.

As a matter of fact, Tanzania stands out in contrast to its East African neighbours, and broadly in Sub-Saharan Africa, due to its relatively enduring internal peace. On paper, the country seems structurally predisposed to instability. As Dr. Iffat Idris points out, conditions such as poverty, high ethnic diversity, and location within a volatile regional neighbourhood are generally reliable predictors of conflict (Idris, 2024, 2–3). Tanzania has a GDP of $78.78 billion compared to Kenya’s $124 billion and South Africa’s $400 billion, while Global Finance Magazine ranks it the 31st poorest country in the world (*GDP - Countries - List | Africa*, n.d.; Ventura, 2024). Demographically, its population is made up of more than 120 distinct ethnic groups. Geopolitically, it is surrounded by states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Mozambique, all of which have endured prolonged conflicts marked by ethnic divisions. Despite these characteristics, Tanzania has largely managed to avoid large-scale internal conflict in its post-independence history.

To understand this relative stability one must first situate the country within its broader historical and political trajectory. Formerly a German colony and later a British mandate under the League of Nations, Tanganyika inherited the legacies of ethnic fragmentation and uneven development that marked much of colonial Africa. Independence in 1961 was followed shortly thereafter by the 1964 union with Zanzibar, creating the United

Republic of Tanzania. At the head of this newly formed state was Julius Kambarage Nyerere, whose leadership and vision for nation-building shaped Tanzania's early decades. Nyerere's policies, most notably the Arusha Declaration of 1967 and its commitment to *Ujamaa* socialism, sought to construct a cohesive sense of national identity that transcended tribal, religious, and regional divisions. It is within this context of colonial legacies, postcolonial leadership, and deliberate state-led integration that Tanzania's enduring peace must be understood.

Thus, at the core of this research lies a central question: what has allowed Tanzania to maintain relative internal peace since its adoption of the Arusha Declaration in 1967? As I attempt to provide an answer, I will argue that the Tanzanian case is best analysed under a Path Dependency lens. Specifically, I claim that the adoption of the Arusha Declaration in 1967 set the country on a trajectory that embedded a strong sense of national identity in Tanzanian citizens. This constructed identity rejects violence and ethnic mobilisation as political tools, and, in this way, has become the key deterrent of large-scale internal conflict.

I will begin my argument with a review of the existing literature, with particular attention to Ilana Kessler's thesis 'What Went Right in Tanzania: How Nation Building and Political Culture Have Produced Forty-Four Years of Peace'. I will then proceed to provide some essential context on Tanzania's ethnic and class dynamics prior to the adoption of the Arusha Declaration in 1967. Building on this foundation, I will assess whether a path dependency framework adequately explains Tanzania's trajectory. I will also attempt to prove that a cohesive national identity is essential in reducing risk of conflict in a highly ethnically diverse society. Finally, I will turn to the mechanisms that consolidated a cohesive national identity: villagisation as an Ujamaa policy, Education for Self-Reliance, the adoption of Swahili as a national language, the institutionalisation of a one-party state, and the creation of a multi-ethnic army.

Methodologically, I will rely mostly on secondary sources. To compliment this foundation, I will incorporate primary sources such as interviews with Julius Nyerere, as well as administrative reports written by colonial officers in the pre-independence period. I will also include personal interviews conducted with professors of the University of Dar es Salaam that will provide additional, contemporary perspectives on nationalism, the Education for Self-Reliance program, and other key elements of Tanzania's nation building project. Ultimately, my aim is to construct a comprehensive narrative that highlights not only the role of a cohesive national identity in sustaining peace, but also the specific mechanisms through which that identity was deliberately cultivated.

In terms of scope, my study will concentrate primarily on mainland Tanzania. While the official narrative emphasises the unity of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, I recognise that this union is not uncontested. Albeit limited in strength, the persistence of a secessionist movement in Zanzibar, and episodes of political unrest such as the 2020 Zanzibar election violence, demonstrate that the notion of a long-lasting, peaceful unity is more complex than the ruling government often portrays. In light of this, I do not wish to make a generalisation that overlooks legitimate grievances in the island territory.

Ultimately, I hope to convince the reader that understanding the mechanisms through which Tanzania has achieved this internal peace is relevant because it challenges assumptions about fragility in ethnically diverse states and invites a deeper consideration of how state-led nation-building, if embedded early and thoroughly, can produce long-term political stability and social cohesion. While not without contradictions or localised tensions, the Tanzanian experience demonstrates how national identity can be actively constructed, maintained, and reproduced over time. As such, it not only enriches the understanding of path-dependent processes but also provides valuable insights into the possibilities of peaceful state formation in the postcolonial world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multiple scholars have examined Tanzania in an attempt to explain the country's seemingly unexpected peaceful internal political climate. Ilana Kessler, in her thesis *What Went Right in Tanzania: How Nation Building and Political Culture Have Produced Forty-Four Years of Peace*, argues through a path-dependency framework that the combination of redistributive economic policies, nation-building programs, and the institutionalisation of single-party rule laid the foundations for national cohesion. For Kessler, the Arusha Declaration of 1967 represents the contingent event that set Tanzania on a distinctive path toward its current climate of stability. According to her, the Tanzanian state succeeded in cultivating a national identity that emphasised being "Tanzanian" above ethnic or religious affiliations, to the extent that political violence became framed as inherently "un-Tanzanian", a powerful cultural construct that continues to shape public attitudes (Kessler, 2006, 2).

My argument aligns with Kessler's in identifying the Arusha Declaration as central to understanding Tanzania's trajectory, but it diverges in two key aspects. First, I contend that Kessler's path-dependence argument does not fully demonstrate why the Arusha Declaration qualifies as a contingent event. To strengthen this claim, I will provide a more extensive analysis of the class dynamics and ethnic associations in post-independence Tanzania that made the Declaration both contingent and path-changing. Second, I argue that Kessler's account overlooks an essential element of Tanzania's relative peace: the creation of a multi-ethnic army. This institution, I suggest, was not simply a byproduct of nation-building but a deliberate and central mechanism in consolidating loyalty to the state and deterring ethnicised violence.

Ruth Carlitz, Ameet Morjaria, Joris M. Mueller, and Philip Osafo-Kwaako, in their paper *State Building in a Diverse Society*, argue that the *Ujamaa* project under Mwalimu Julius Nyerere shaped national identity through political education implemented in the

planned villages. Their analysis also highlights the trade-offs inherent in this nation-building initiative: while it helped establish the new state as a legitimate central authority, it simultaneously reduced pressures for democratic accountability, contributing to a generational divide in attitudes toward authority, with older generations exhibiting greater deference to the state than younger ones (Carlitz et al., 2024, 28). These insights align with the broader argument of this paper, though my approach emphasises the structural mechanisms through which such nation-building policies produced long-term internal stability.

Deviating from the path dependency perspective on Tanzania, I draw on Walter Rodney's *Decolonial Marxism* essays, which adopts a Marxist analytical lens. Rodney examines Tanzania to explain why the country was able to implement the Arusha Declaration of 1967 and subsequently analyses the state's approach to building socialism. According to Rodney, the Tanzanian bourgeoisie lacked sufficient strength to mount meaningful opposition to the widely popular Declaration, thereby enabling this policy decision to take hold (Rodney, 2022, 217). While my focus is not on Tanzania's trajectory toward socialism, Rodney's insights into the country's ability to adopt such a radical policy are critical for my argument, particularly in framing the Arusha Declaration as the contingent event that set Tanzania on a path-dependent trajectory.

Finally, Benno J. Ndulu, Wilfred E. Mbowe, and Emma Hunter, in *Ethnicity, Citizenry, and Nation-Building in Tanzania*, argue for a bottom-up approach to nation-building in which the state effectively absorbed pre-existing ethnic trust networks. Their analysis, like Kessler's, adopts a path dependency perspective, but it emphasises the role of these trust networks and their interaction with the state in shaping a cohesive national identity. Unlike other scholars who treat ethnic diversity as inherently destabilising, Ndulu, Mbowe, and Hunter contend that "there is nothing inherently wrong or negative about ethnicity" (Ndulu et al., 2019, 99). They argue that Tanzania's relative internal peace is better explained not by

its particular ethnic composition, but by the path-dependent processes through which the post-independence state cultivated national unity (Ndulu et al., 2019, 99). By integrating local trust networks, the government prevented further societal fragmentation along ethnic lines (Ndulu et al., 2019, 110). I draw on this analysis to nuance Kessler's approach, recognising how pre-existing, grassroots social structures cannot be overlooked in our understanding of Tanzania's enduring stability.

METHODOLOGY

Analytically, my approach proceeds in four stages. First, I establish the necessary background knowledge by reconstructing the ethnic and class dynamics of Tanganyika (and later Tanzania) prior to the Arusha Declaration of 1967. Second, I outline the theoretical framework of path dependency and demonstrate its applicability to the Tanzanian case. Third, I provide evidence to frame national identity as a pacifying force in multi-ethnic societies. Finally, I identify and assess the mechanisms through which Tanzania was locked into a path of relative internal peace. This layered approach allows me to move from structural and historical context toward the identification of concrete institutional processes.

I employ a qualitative research design, drawing primarily on secondary sources while also incorporating a selective range of primary sources and original interviews. The use of secondary scholarship provides the foundation for contextualising Tanzania's historical trajectory and engaging with existing theoretical debates on nation-building, path dependency, and trust networks. The primary sources will help in capturing perspectives of actors in Tanzania's formative nation-building years. These include interviews and writings of Julius Nyerere, as well as administrative reports and memoranda produced during the colonial period. Such sources speak on the intentions and constraints that shaped Tanzania's policies, and provide a window into how political leaders framed their projects of national identity.

To complement this, I conducted interviews with four professors at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) and with an elder at the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation. At UDSM, I spoke with Dr. Raymond Boniface from the Department of Education, Prof. Rwekaza Mukandala from the Department of Political Science, and two professors from the Departments of Sociology and History who requested anonymity. At the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, I interviewed Mzee Sabadi. Prior to each interview, I prepared a set of written questions corresponding to the major themes of my study, which I tailored to the disciplinary expertise or personal experience of each participant. The interviews were carried out in a semi-structured, conversational setting, which allowed for both structured inquiry and the flexibility to follow unanticipated but relevant lines of thought. As I weave these discussions throughout the paper, I hope to provide contemporary reflections on the legacy of Ujamaa, the Education for Self-Reliance program, and the endurance of Tanzania's national identity project.

SCOPE

My analysis is deliberately limited to mainland Tanzania. As I mentioned previously, while the official narrative emphasises the unity of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, the dynamics of the union are distinct and warrant separate analysis. As such, events such as the 2020 Zanzibar election unrest fall outside the scope of this paper. Similarly, I give limited attention to developments such as the displacement of Maasai communities from Ngorongoro and Loliondo. These are important contemporary issues, and they reflect a potential break in this cohesive national identity as the ruling government becomes increasingly repressive. Nevertheless, a meaningful treatment of these issues would require a study of their own—particularly one that interrogates how communities like the Maasai might challenge the state's portrayal of national unity.

LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study are constricted by several limitations. First, the heavy reliance on secondary sources, while indispensable for situating Tanzania within broader scholarly debates, means that my analysis is mediated through the interpretations of other researchers. Although I sought to balance this with primary sources and interviews, the availability and accessibility of such materials restrict the diversity of perspectives included. Many archival records remain incomplete, and those that survive often reflect the priorities and biases of state actors. My reference to Edward Legget's work as I attempt to paint a picture of colonial rule in Tanzania, for instance, is undeniably tainted by his outlook as a British citizen and as a member of the British Legislative Council in East Africa.

Second, the interviews I conducted, while providing valuable contemporary reflections, were limited in number and scope. Because the conversations were note-based rather than audio-recorded, some nuances of phrasing may have been lost. Moreover, my position as a student-researcher likely shaped the dynamic of these discussions, as it is possible that participants emphasised certain narratives or framed their responses in ways that were sensitive to my perceived interests. These factors constrain the extent to which my interview data can be generalised, though they offer important insight into how Tanzania's nation-building project is remembered and debated today.

Finally, the study is temporally and geographically bounded. By focusing on mainland Tanzania and on developments primarily surrounding the Arusha Declaration and its legacy, I necessarily bracket Zanzibar's distinct political trajectory as well as more recent episodes of contestation such as the displacement of Maasai communities. While these exclusions allow for a more focused analysis of the mechanisms underlying Tanzania's relatively enduring internal peace, they also mean that my conclusions should be understood as provisional and situated rather than comprehensive.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To apply my theoretical framework effectively to the Tanzanian case, it is first necessary to establish a comprehensive understanding of the relevant historical context. With this objective in mind, I will attempt to draw an approximation of both the ethnic and class dynamics in the country prior to the adoption of the Arusha Declaration in 1967.

COLONIAL RULE

The Berlin Conference of 1885 marked the formal beginning of German colonial rule in East Africa. Unlike the British, who encouraged the settlement of their own citizens in colonial territories such as the United States, the Germans did not pursue this approach (Legget, 1922, 740). Instead, German colonies primarily functioned as sources of labor. This priority was evident in the extensive land grants awarded to German planters and planting companies (Leggett, 1922, 740). Simultaneously, the Germans adopted a different administrative approach from the British. Whereas the British relied heavily on indirect rule through local chiefs, the Germans chose, particularly along the coast, to govern districts and sub-districts through Arab or Swahili *Akidas* (Leggett, 1922, 740). As Leggett observes, this arrangement was cost-efficient and effective for the Germans' "short-sighted purpose," but it ran directly counter to the "furtherance of native progress" (Leggett, 1922, 741). Unsurprisingly, such policies paid little regard to the rights of the indigenous population, provoking significant resistance. The most notable expression of this opposition was the Maji Maji uprising of 1905–1907. German response to the Maji Maji revolt, as well as to other manifestations of dissent, was brutal, resulting in the near-total destruction of pre-existing systems of tribal organisation (Leggett, 1922, 740).

When Tanganyika transitioned from German to British control following World War I, the shift in colonial administration revealed how deeply German rule had disrupted existing systems of governance. The Germans' reliance on Arab and Swahili *Akidas* for local

administration had destroyed much of the indigenous chiefdom structure, replacing it with officials who held significant magisterial powers and tax authority under German district commissioners (Leggett, 1922, 740–741). When the British swept in after the mandate was assigned, they sought to implement indirect rule by restoring African political institutions. In doing so, they removed the German officials but found the Akidas still in place. Their local knowledge was invaluable, and while their individual authority was curtailed, most transferred allegiance to the new colonial regime (Leggett, 1922, 745). As Austen notes, indirect rule was meant to build upon African customs and institutions, but in Tanganyika, these had been too severely eroded to serve as a reliable foundation (Wheeler, 1970, 272). Ultimately, the British aim to institute indirect rule through traditional chiefs was complicated by the fact that German repression and reliance on alien administrators had already decimated tribal organisations.

The British pressed ahead regardless, attempting to impose a uniform system of chiefship, even in areas where such authority was historically weak or nonexistent (Ndulu et al., 2019, 105). Far from empowering Africans, this system often undermined chiefs' legitimacy and entrenched colonial bureaucracy's centralising tendencies (Wheeler, 1970, 272–273). By the mid-20th century, the weakness of the chiefdom model led to further reforms. In 1945, district councils were introduced, mixing elected African representatives with unelected chiefs and officials (Ndulu et. al., 2019, 105). This shift marked a move away from ethnic association in politics toward broader territorial forms of organisation. As a result, Tanganyika entered independence with a political culture in which no single ethnic group could dominate.

ETHNIC COMPOSITION AND ASSOCIATION

As is frequently noted, Tanzania is a highly ethnically diverse country, with a population made up of over 120 different tribes of varying sizes. Precise demographic breakdowns are difficult to establish, as the Tanzanian census does not collect data on

ethnicity. Nevertheless, available sources suggest that the Sukuma tribe is the largest in the country, making up for about 13-16% of the population, while no other group exceeds 5% (*East Africa Living Encyclopedia*, n.d.).

Unlike in neighbouring states where one or two dominant groups shape national politics, Tanzania's many ethnic groups are relatively small and geographically scattered. No single group has the demographic weight, geographic concentration, or educational advantage necessary to dominate the political sphere (Ndulu et al., 2019, 100–102). This dispersity has created a context in which ethnic mobilisation is less attractive to politicians, since ethnicity offers few clear avenues for mass political competition. The relatively equitable distribution of land and labor resources further limits the possibility of political movements coalescing along ethnic lines (Ndulu et al., 2019, 102). In other words, the natural demographic geography of Tanganyika has limited the potential for ethnicity to become a central organising principle of politics, even as it has shaped the forms of local association.

Colonial policy compounded these dynamics. Both German repression and British missteps in indirect rule undermined traditional institutions that might have served as vehicles for ethnic authority. By the 1920s, the collapse of tribal authority left many Africans seeking power in new arenas, shifting from localised, ethnic frameworks to more expansive territorial objectives (Wheeler, 1970, 273). This transition reshaped politics and influenced how communities organised trust and protection.

It is worth noting that before independence, trust networks were still often constructed along ethnic lines, reflecting the need for self-protection in a colonial environment that offered little political space for African agency. Ethnic and regional associations emerged as vehicles for mutual aid and defense. From the 1920s onward, self-help groups proliferated, sometimes organised along religious lines but often explicitly

ethnic in character (Ndulu et al., 2019, 111). The Kilimanjaro Chagga Citizens' Union and the Sukuma Union are just two examples of organisations that mobilised around ethnic identity, protecting communal resources and ensuring that land remained in African hands in the face of growing scarcity (Ndulu et al., 2019, 111). These associations reflected the strength of support systems built within ethnic groups: members could rely on shared identity as the foundation for solidarity, resource redistribution, and protection against external pressures.

CLASS DYNAMICS

At the moment of independence in 1961, Tanganyika had no consolidated bourgeoisie or middle class. The colonial economy had generated stratification in certain sectors, particularly in commerce and administration, but this never coalesced into a nationally dominant African capitalist class (Rodney, 2022, 197–200). The absence of such a class was crucial in shaping both Tanzania's relative political unity and the trajectory of its postcolonial socialist experiment.

The group that came closest to a bourgeoisie in colonial Tanganyika were the Indian commercial communities, whose dominance in trade and finance gave them a central role in the colony's integration into the international capitalist economy (Rodney, 2022, 199). Unsurprisingly, this community became a target of nationalist resentment and post-independence expropriation, most notably through the Acquisition of Buildings Act of 1971. African elites, by contrast, were too small in number and too dependent on the colonial state to form an autonomous class. Their power lay primarily in the civil service and other coercive apparatuses like the police and army, rather than in commerce or independent capital accumulation (Rodney, 2022, 220–221).

In rural Tanzania, the picture was similarly fragmented. While colonial agriculture did introduce cash crops and wage labour, much of the population remained only weakly integrated into capitalist markets. As late as independence, many communal forms of social

organisation were still recognisable, and Tanzania had not undergone the intense class differentiation seen in settler colonies like Kenya or in mining economies like Zambia (Rodney, 2022, 205). This limited stratification meant that the majority of Tanzanians remained peasants, cultivating subsistence plots with only marginal connections to the capitalist economy. Where inequality did emerge through land concentration or wage labour, Julius Nyerere warned that unchecked developments might transform the peasantry into a rural proletariat serving a minority landed class (Rodney, 2022, 200).

The weakness of the bourgeoisie was decisive. In many African countries, it was precisely this class (traders, professionals, and urban elites) that politicised ethnic identities in its struggle for access to state power. In Tanzania, however, the bourgeoisie was too small and too fragile to mount such a strategy (Decolonial Marxism, 217–218). Attempts by the colonial administration to cultivate a conservative African nationalist opposition to TANU, failed for lack of a viable social base (Rodney, 2022, 217). As a result, Tanganyika entered independence with an unusual degree of political unity: the absence of a strong bourgeoisie reduced the internal contradictions that might otherwise have fractured the nationalist movement.

It is important to note, however, that the absence of a middle class was not equivalent to the absence of class dynamics altogether. The years immediately after independence saw the beginnings of capitalist tendencies: civil servants and political leaders gained access to credit, invested in housing, and began hiring labor in transport or agriculture. Nyerere himself recognised this as the early emergence of an African middle class, and it was precisely these developments that the Arusha Declaration sought to halt. “Fortunately,” he later reflected, this embryonic capitalism “had not gone very far” by the late 1960s, meaning that socialist policies could still reverse the drift toward inequality (Nyerere, 1977, 6–7). Ultimately, good timing opened the door to *Ujamaa* and to a national project that redefined the relationship between class, state, and society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

PATH DEPENDENCY THEORY

As a foundation of the argument I will develop throughout this paper, I contend that a Path Dependency analysis offers an appropriate framework for understanding the Tanzanian case. To demonstrate this, I will first outline the core principles of Path Dependency Theory, drawing on the work of James Mahoney and Paul A. David, two of the most influential scholars in applying this concept to the social sciences.

Mahoney defines path dependence as historical sequences in which "contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties" (Mahoney 507). Similarly, David describes path dependence as a "dynamical process whose evolution is governed by its own history" (David 92). He further clarifies that such a process unfolds according to the system's initial conditions and an internal "law of motion" (David 93). Put simply, both scholars suggest that once a particular choice is made in a given political or institutional context, subsequent developments become "locked in," as institutions reinforce and reproduce their own patterns.

To identify a path-dependent outcome, one must trace a given institutional or political outcome back to a set of contingent historical events: events that cannot be explained solely by prior conditions and thus appear unpredictable within existing theoretical frameworks (Mahoney, 2000, 507–508; 513–514). Mahoney stresses that path-dependent analysis has three defining features: sensitivity to early events, contingency in the initial stages, and deterministic patterns of reproduction over time (Mahoney, 2000, 510–511). David similarly conceptualises path dependence as a process in which outcomes may be shaped by the magnified effects of seemingly trivial or remote occurrences (David, 2007, 92–94). Both Mahoney and David highlight the significance of "critical junctures"—moments when multiple

alternatives are available but the selection of one path forecloses others, locking a system into a trajectory that becomes increasingly difficult to reverse (Mahoney, 2000, 512–513; David, 2007 95–96). At such moments, as David notes, “the actual choice can be seen to have ‘made all the difference’” (David, 2007, 95). Together, these perspectives provide the methodological tools to assess whether an outcome is path-dependent.

PATH DEPENDENCY THEORY AS APPLIED TO THE TANZANIAN CONTEXT

Having established the theoretical framework, I will now demonstrate why the Tanzanian case fits this model, providing evidence that satisfies the conditions identified by Mahoney earlier.

First, a path-dependent outcome must demonstrate sensitivity to early events. In Tanzania, Nyerere himself highlights how the country’s trajectory in the decade following the Arusha Declaration diverged sharply from what might have occurred in its absence. He asserts, “all these evils, and many others which we are now spared would have happened in Tanzania had we not adopted the Arusha Declaration” (Nyerere 6), and emphasises that the “Arusha Resolution came in time” to prevent the formation of an African middle class (Nyerere 7). While these statements refer specifically to wealth distribution, a wide wealth gap is widely recognised as a risk factor for political instability. Similarly, Mzee Sabadi, who worked with the Tanzanian government since independence, highlights the Declaration’s role in national identity: “Tanzania is the land of the Arusha Declaration; without it, there is no identity” (Sabadi, personal communication, 2025). While these testimonies may reflect the perspectives of their authors, there is independent evidence that supports these claims. The Arusha Declaration itself explicitly identifies feudalists and capitalists as enemies of socialism (TANU, 1967, 3), and as Rodney observes, the nascent bourgeoisie had no choice but to retreat and avoid a “head-on confrontation” in response to the Declaration’s popularity among the masses (Rodney, 2022, 219). Together, these accounts illustrate how early

decisions under the Arusha Declaration shaped the country's long-term political and social trajectory, confirming its sensitivity to initial conditions.

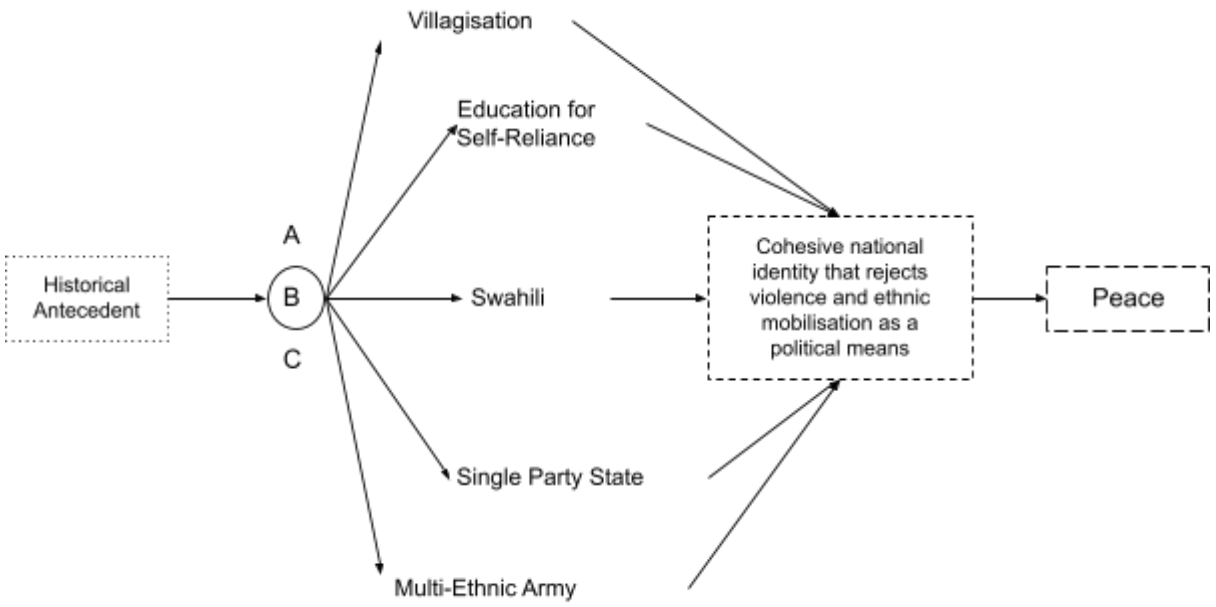
Second, and perhaps the most challenging aspect to demonstrate, is the requirement of contingency in the initial stages. For a path-dependent outcome, the events that set a trajectory in motion must be contingent, not predetermined. Importantly, contingency does not imply that these events arise from nowhere; rather, as David explains, when one examines the "critical fork in the road," there existed an open path that could have led to outcomes very different from those that ultimately occurred (David, 2007, 95). Moreover, actors at that juncture, or others who might have been in their place, "ought to have been capable of choosing either of the paths forward" (David, 2007, 95). This potential for alternative choices is what establishes the contingency necessary for a path-dependent sequence.

One might initially argue that the adoption of the Arusha Declaration was not contingent, but rather a predictable outcome of Tanzania's post-independence context. By 1967, the government faced a stagnating neo-colonial economy, growing class inequalities, and the looming threat of social unrest, suggesting that some form of interventionist policy to maintain social cohesion was inevitable. From this perspective, the Declaration could appear as a deterministic response to structural conditions rather than the product of a contingent choice.

However, closer analysis demonstrates otherwise. Prior to 1967, Tanzania's post-independence government could have pursued alternative trajectories, such as embracing foreign capital or encouraging a nascent African bourgeoisie to shape development; strategies that neighbouring states, like Kenya or Uganda, ultimately followed (Rodney, 2022, 218, 222). What made the Arusha Declaration possible was the unique configuration of class forces: the petty bourgeoisie was small, fragmented, and lacked the

power to resist the mass mobilisation behind Nyerere's vision of *Ujamaa* (Rodney, 2022, 219, 223). The overwhelming popular support for socialism and equitable development, coupled with the absence of a strong class capable of challenging the policy, meant that alternative paths were imaginable but ultimately foreclosed. As David emphasises, a contingent event occurs when actors at the critical juncture were capable of choosing multiple paths, but selected one that shaped the subsequent trajectory (David, 2007, 95). In Tanzania, the choice to institutionalise *Ujamaa* ideology, the one-party state, and policies promoting equitable resource distribution was contingent upon this alignment of class dynamics, ideology, and mass support.

Third, with path dependence, deterministic patterns of reproduction must be observable with time. Once the Arusha Declaration set *Ujamaa* and the one-party system in motion, these institutions generated self-reinforcing mechanisms that reproduced themselves far beyond the moment of adoption: the one-party framework and multi-ethnic army centralised political authority and made ethnic mobilisation structurally unlikely and unappealing (Ndulu et al., 2019, 98–99); the economic policies of villagisation and state control of resources created social expectations of equity, which continued to shape citizens' relationship with the state even after the economic model itself began to falter in the 1980s (Ndulu et al., 2019, 112–113); the education curriculum and the adoption of Swahili as a national language forged a collective identity that emphasised being Tanzanian above all else and reinforced respect for centralised authority. These institutional choices positioned Tanzania onto a trajectory where political competition was framed within a national, rather than ethnic or sectarian, framework, reinforcing low levels of political violence over time. The durability of these patterns illustrates precisely the deterministic reproduction of outcomes that path dependence theory requires. The following mechanisms section elaborates on how each of these processes became self-reinforcing



All in all, it becomes clear that the 1967 Arusha Declaration set Tanzania in a path dependent trajectory. By institutionalising *Ujamaa* policies, a multi-ethnic army, and a one-party system, the Declaration generated feedback loops that entrenched a national identity organised around equality, collectivism, and nonviolence. Crucially, these outcomes were not inevitable: alternative models of nation-building such as ethnic patronage systems or militarised authoritarianism pursued by Tanzania's neighbors were available but foreclosed. Once closed off, these alternatives became increasingly difficult to revive, as self-reinforcing institutions progressively consolidated the political culture shaped by Arusha. This dynamic explains why, even when liberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s dismantled much of Ujamaa's economic foundation, the durable imprint of Arusha endured, reproducing norms of restraint and cohesion. In this sense, Tanzania exemplifies how path dependence can lock in a nonviolent political culture, with long-term consequences that outlast the initial conditions of its creation.

TRUST NETWORKS

Another theory that becomes important in understanding the Tanzanian case is trust network theory. I argue that this is relevant in adding nuance to the highly structural lens of path dependence by highlighting the role of grassroots forms of organisation and the ways in which local networks shape the functioning of society.

Charles Tilly defines trust networks as relational structures that emerge in all societies and time periods. They are enduring and adaptive social formations organised around valued, high-risk, long-term activities that require strong commitments among members and are therefore vulnerable to betrayal. Members are bound by shared obligations, a recognisable group identity, communication channels and boundaries separating insiders from outsiders (Tilly, 2009, 43-44). For this reason, trust networks often operate in tension with rulers, as both compete for access to scarce resources such as labor, loyalty, information, and money (Tilly 2009, 110). This dynamic sets up a potentially conflictual relationship: rulers seek to extract these resources for governance, while trust networks defend them to ensure the survival and prosperity of their members. To navigate this, rulers may use varying combinations of coercion (force or threat of harm), capital (transferable resources), and commitment (shared language, religion, ethnicity, or solidarities) to either suppress, incorporate, or negotiate with trust networks (Tilly 2009, 30–31).

The relationship between rulers and trust networks can take different forms. At times, trust networks remain segregated from public politics, operating autonomously at the margins. In other cases, negotiated connections or even integration into formal systems of rule occur. For example, regimes may incorporate kinship, religious, or mercantile networks, or rulers themselves may create dynastic or patronage-based trust networks (Tilly 2009, 33–34). Conversely, from below, ordinary people adopt strategies such as concealment, bargaining, clientage, or enlistment to protect their networks from state predation (Tilly 2009,

33–34). As I have alluded to previously, in pre-Arusha Declaration Tanzania there was a presence of trust networks built along ethnic lines.

TRUST NETWORKS AS APPLIED TO THE TANZANIAN CONTEXT

Applying trust network theory to the Tanzanian context provides an insight into how localised, ethnic-based mechanisms of self-protection and conflict resolution were gradually absorbed into a national framework that enhanced trust and promoted peace. As Ndulu and colleagues emphasise, there was nothing inherently problematic about ethnicity itself in Tanzania, nor was the country's unusually high degree of ethnic fragmentation the determining factor in its avoidance of ethnicised politics (Ndulu et. al., 98–99). Rather, the explanation lies in the process of nation-building that integrated ethnic trust networks into a broader political culture, ultimately reducing the incentives for divisive political action.

From the 1920s onward, self-help associations emerged across Tanganyika, often structured along ethnic lines. By the 1940s and 1950s, organisations such as the Kilimanjaro Chagga Citizens Union and the Sukuma Union mobilised around land rights and communal protection, particularly in regions experiencing scarcity (Ndulu et. al., 2019, 111). However, these associations quickly disappeared after independence—not merely because the government legally prohibited ethnic associations, but also because the state responded to many of the underlying grievances that had motivated their formation. In other words, the government effectively absorbed the protective and mediating functions of local trust networks into national institutions, rather than allowing them to persist clandestinely or in opposition to the state as occurred elsewhere in Africa (Ndulu et. al., 111–112).

The long-term success of this approach lies in its incremental and path-dependent character. Nation-building was understood not as a one-time project but as a gradual, continually reinforced process. Over successive government phases, policies sought to incorporate citizens into both the political process and national development, ensuring that

identity formation was anchored less in ethnicity and more in occupation, class, and shared participation in the nation's economic life (Ndulu et. al., 2019, 116–118). This incorporation of local trust networks into the national framework explains why Tanzania avoided the destructive ethnic polarisation seen elsewhere, and it illustrates how bottom-up trust formations can be harmonised with top-down state-building efforts to produce enduring political stability.

NATIONAL IDENTITY FOR PEACE

The final component of my theoretical framework, and the third analytical step in my argument, is to demonstrate that the formation of a cohesive national identity significantly increases a country's capacity to sustain political stability.

National identity can be understood as the collective sense of belonging to a political community that transcends narrower attachments such as tribe, clan, or religion. It establishes the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, thus determining who belongs to the nation and who does not, and with that, who is entitled to protection, resources, and political participation (Holtung & Uslaner, 2021, 2). Weak or contested national identities create security risks, fragmenting societies and making them vulnerable to internal and external destabilisation (Holtug & Uslaner 2021, 23–24). By contrast, a strong national identity widens the radius of trust beyond narrow in-groups, facilitating cooperation, economic exchange, and political participation on a national scale (Holtug & Uslaner 2021, 24–25). In deeply pluralistic societies, this overarching identity provides the foundation for sustainable peace.

Colonial state formation in Africa created artificial administrative entities that disregarded preexisting cultural, ethnic, and communal divisions. In this process, local self-governing mechanisms were supplanted by centralised state control, transforming low-risk subsistence activities into zero-sum struggles for access to scarce resources and political power (Deng, 1997, 28). Although the departure of colonial rulers removed the

“common enemy,” this only sharpened competition over the state, aggravating ethnic conflict rather than alleviating it. As Deng notes, the attempt to safeguard unity within colonial boundaries preserved state borders but simultaneously produced deep ethnic tensions within them (Deng, 1997, 29). In the absence of frameworks to manage diversity, authoritarianism and repression often filled the vacuum, undermining human rights and leaving pluralistic states vulnerable to instability (Deng, 1997, 30). For Deng, therefore, the only sustainable unity is one built on mutual understanding and shared identification with the national community, either through a fully inclusive national identity or through pluralistic frameworks.

More recent scholarship reinforces this argument by linking national identity with social cohesion as a prerequisite for peace. Cox, Fiedler, and Mross. argue that cohesive societies exhibit high levels of both horizontal trust (trust between individuals and groups) and vertical trust (trust between citizens and state institutions). Such cohesion depends on the creation of an inclusive national identity that allows multiple ethnic, cultural, or religious identities to coexist under a unifying framework (Cox, Fiedler, and Mross 2023, 2). In conflict-affected settings especially, the absence of this inclusive identity correlates with fragmentation, distrust of political institutions, and the persistence of violence. Conversely, the promotion of national identity as a shared framework encourages civic and political participation that transcends narrow group interests and supports long-term peace (Cox, Fiedler, and Mross 2023, 1–2).

Taken together, this provides a strong argument that a cohesive national identity is not merely desirable but necessary for peace in multiethnic societies. In the African context, where colonial legacies entrenched fragmentation and competition over centralised power, national identity is the only framework that can transform diversity from a source of division into a basis for solidarity. Peace is most enduring where citizens come to see themselves not

primarily as members of competing ethnic groups, but as participants in a shared national project.

MECHANISMS

So far, I have demonstrated that a path dependence framework is well suited to the Tanzanian case. I have added nuance to this approach by highlighting the importance of trust networks in shaping social organisation, and by showing how crucial it was that the Tanzanian state successfully absorbed functions previously managed by ethnically based communities. Finally, I have established that a cohesive national identity can serve as a powerful pacifying force within a multicultural society. With this theoretical groundwork in place, I now turn to the mechanisms that generated the increasing returns which bound Tanzania to a path-dependent trajectory culminating in relative internal peace.

UJAMAA: VILLAGISATION

The villagisation program of the 1970s was one of the most radical mechanisms through which Tanzania's national identity was forged in the post-Arusha Declaration era. The speed and scope of this transformation were extraordinary. By the mid-1970s, over 80% of the rural population had been relocated into registered villages, with roughly 13 million people resettled into 7,684 communities (Nyerere, 1977, 41–42). This mass relocation was not simply about agricultural efficiency. Instead, it must be understood as a nation-building strategy, centralising authority in the hands of the state and creating the institutional and social conditions for the emergence of a shared Tanzanian identity.

Centralisation was at the heart of villagisation. Before this, most Tanzanians lived in dispersed rural homesteads. Villagisation dismantled the already weakened remaining tribal authorities by completing the abolition of chiefly power and replacing it with state bureaucrats and democratically elected village governments (Carlitz et al., 2024, 2). This administrative reorientation forced rural communities to interact with the state as the primary

locus of authority. Once embedded in the village structure, Tanzanians were more easily exposed to TANU's political education campaigns, which linked daily life to the broader socialist project (Carlitz et al., 2024, 4). In this way, villagisation created not only a new physical geography but also a new political one in which loyalty and legitimacy increasingly flowed to the state rather than to ethnic or local institutions.

Ethnic mixing was another critical byproduct of villagisation. Resettlement deliberately disrupted tribal homogeneity by forcing families from different ethnic groups to live side by side. As Nyerere argued, the goal was merely to "provide services to people"—such as schools, health care, and clean water—but this required gathering previously scattered populations into concentrated settlements (Sabadi, personal communication, June 3, 2025). The effect was that Tanzanians grew accustomed to multi-ethnic coexistence at the village level. Unlike in Kenya or Nigeria, where a more consolidated petty bourgeoisie politicised ethnic divisions in their pursuit of state power, Tanzania's villagisation policy eroded the salience of tribal identity in daily political life. Once such interethnic living patterns were established, they became self-reinforcing, laying the foundation for a political culture where ethnic mobilisation was delegitimised as a means of competition.

Of course, villagisation was not without its costs. Nyerere himself acknowledged that there were cases of maladministration and coercion: families moved from fertile land to arid zones, villages grew too large for available land, and in some cases people were forcibly rounded up without preparation (Nyerere, 1977, 42). These failures left bitterness in their wake and revealed an authoritarian undercurrent of the project. Yet the program's sheer scale makes it implausible to attribute its success solely to coercion; as Nyerere noted, "11 million people could not have been moved by force in Tanzania" given the state's limited coercive capacity (Nyerere, 1977, 42). Instead, villagisation succeeded because it was

backed by a broader, popular consensus on the goals of equality and development, combined with the weakness of a domestic bourgeoisie that might otherwise have resisted.

UJAMAA: EDUCATION

One cannot talk about Ujamaa and villagisation without mentioning the “Education for Self-Reliance” project the post colonial government embarked on. Education under *Ujamaa* was central in shaping Tanzania’s national identity after the Arusha Declaration. Nyerere recognised that schools could act as factories of citizenship, producing literate Tanzanians and also loyal nationalists who would carry forward the socialist project. In a context of immense ethnic and regional diversity, education became a tool for standardising values and instilling a shared identity. As such, Ujamaa education policies served to socialise an entire generation into the ethos of tolerance, self-reliance, discipline, and loyalty to the state, thereby positioning Tanzania onto a path where national identity consistently outweighed ethnic or tribal loyalties.

Central to this effort was the deliberate engagement of the youth. As scholars point out, the youth are often both the most volatile and the most malleable demographic in any society, making them critical for nation-building (Ndulu et al., 2019, 108). In Tanzania, schoolchildren were often moved away from their home regions to attend boarding or regional schools, disturbing tribal patterns of socialisation and exposing them to peers from other ethnic groups (Ndulu et al., 2019, 107). Generational replacement magnified this effect: over time, the younger cohorts who had been educated in *Ujamaa* schools increasingly replaced older generations whose identities were more rooted in local structures. By shaping youth into “good citizens” (those who loved their country and were willing to sacrifice for it) education served as a demographic lever through which the Tanzanian state entrenched its project of national unity.

The interplay between education and the adoption of Swahili was also crucial: the Education for Self-Reliance policy mandated Swahili as the medium of instruction in all public schools in 1967, making it the language of modernity and aspiration (Carlitz et al., 2024, 10). In this manner, Swahili became associated with upward mobility, civic participation, and national belonging, while ethnic vernaculars were relegated to the private sphere. This linguistic homogenisation cannot be overstated: it effectively created the possibility of a shared Tanzanian public sphere in which citizens could communicate across ethnic lines. Once Swahili had been institutionalised through schools, it was nearly impossible to reverse, as subsequent generations grew up identifying more strongly as Tanzanians than as members of discrete ethnic groups.

Furthermore, the curriculum itself was explicitly political. Nyerere's philosophy of Education for Self-Reliance emphasised not only practical agricultural and technical training but also ideological indoctrination. Political education was introduced across schools, colleges, and national service programs, teaching students that freedom came with responsibilities: hard work, tax payment, and loyalty to the nation (Nyerere, 1977, 22). Teachers were highly respected figures in their communities and became conduits of *Ujamaa* propaganda, reinforcing Nyerere's speeches that were disseminated through radio, magazines, and official circulars (R. Boniface, personal communication, June 2, 2025). In this way, the state successfully used schools to embed its vision of nationalism directly into the minds of the next generation, turning political loyalty into an everyday educational experience.

The content of *Ujamaa* education also directly undermined the structures of inequality and ethnic hierarchy that had defined the colonial era. In primary schools, students were no longer taught a Eurocentric curriculum designed to funnel a small elite into secondary education. Instead, the emphasis shifted to agricultural training and practical skills tailored to rural life, ensuring that education prepared citizens for productive participation in

their communities rather than upward mobility alone (Nyerere, 1977, 12–13). This curriculum was particularly important in rural areas, where practical, environment-specific training helped youth “master” local economic activities (R. Boniface, personal communication, June 2, 2025). By making education both relevant and egalitarian, the state reduced social divisions and promoted the sense that all Tanzanians were part of a single developmental mission.

The effects of this educational strategy can be seen in the political attitudes of those cohorts exposed to *Ujamaa* schooling. Studies show that these generations are more likely to respect state authority, approve of one-party rule, and trust central government institutions such as state media (Carlitz et. al., 2024, 28). These outcomes are not incidental: they reflect the success of education in legitimising the Tanzanian state and delegitimising alternative sources of identity such as ethnic politics. By building trust in the central state and inculcating values of unity, education functioned as a mechanism to embed political attitudes that self-reproduced, shaping Tanzania’s long-run stability even after Ujamaa itself waned.

SWAHILI AS A NATIONAL LANGUAGE

At independence, Tanganyika inherited a deeply fragmented linguistic landscape, with more than 120 local languages spoken across the territory. This diversity mirrored tribal divisions and presented a serious challenge to the nationalist project. Nyerere and the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) understood that independence could not be achieved without first establishing a shared linguistic medium that transcended ethnic boundaries (Sabadi, personal communication, June 3). Swahili thus became both a tool of political struggle and, later, fundamental for *Ujamaa* nation-building.

Swahili served as a bridge across tribal groups and as an instrument for centralising control and shaping the national narrative. During TANU’s nationalist campaign, Swahili was the medium of political communication that mobilised the rural and urban working classes

alike (Ndulu et. al., 2019, 106). After independence, its promotion under *Ujamaa* reinforced the authority of the one-party state, giving the government a direct channel to disseminate ideology and cultivate loyalty. By ensuring that political discourse and state communications occurred in Swahili, Nyerere and TANU reduced the space for ethnically coded mobilisation and made Swahili synonymous with national belonging.

Crucially, the choice of Swahili tied language to the moral project of *Ujamaa*. By elevating a non-Western lingua franca rather than English, Nyerere resisted the colonial legacy of linguistic exclusion and reoriented nationhood toward African rather than European cultural frameworks. Nyerere himself wrote and spoke in Swahili—despite it not being his native tongue— not only in political speeches but also in poetry and prose, signaling that the language was not a tool of administration alone but also a cultural expression of shared identity (Sabadi, personal communication, June 3, 2025). His decision to embrace Swahili reflected his broader conviction that independence was not granted “on a silver plate,” but had to be claimed collectively through unity and sacrifice. In this way, Swahili became both a symbol and substance of that struggle.

The adoption of Swahili, however, also reflects the conscious choices and trade-offs involved in nation-building. As Ndulu and colleagues note, “none of the nation-building policies was inevitably destined to promote cohesion” (Ndulu et. al., 2019, 110). In the case of Swahili, the decision to promote it as a national language raised the question of which form of Swahili should prevail. The “Arabised” variant of the coast clashed with more localized inland varieties, threatening to reproduce fault lines between coastal and interior populations (Ndulu et. al., 2019, 110). That the government nonetheless pursued Swahili shows both the difficulty and necessity of making unifying linguistic choices in a multi-ethnic society. Rather than passively reflecting existing unity, the Swahili project actively constructed it while simultaneously managing new tensions.

Analysed through a path dependency lens, Swahili's institutionalisation created self-reinforcing effects that contributed to Tanzania's long-term avoidance of ethnic conflict. Once Swahili was established as the language of politics, education, and administration, alternative bases of identity (such as tribal languages) were marginalised in national life. Over time, this reduced the viability of ethnicity as a political resource and reinforced a collective identity centered on Tanzanian-ness rather than tribal belonging. Moreover, because Swahili was closely associated with TANU's independence struggle, the language itself became imbued with legitimacy and emotional resonance, further entrenching its role in the national imagination. Thus, what began as a pragmatic choice to bridge tribes became a durable institutional feature of Tanzanian politics, one that constrained later actors from deviating from the path of linguistic and national unity.

SINGLE PARTY STATE

The establishment of a one-party state under TANU (and later CCM) was perhaps the most direct way in which the Tanzanian government centralised political authority and constrained the possibilities for ethnic mobilisation. The Arusha Declaration of 1967 entrenched party supremacy, abolishing opposition parties and giving TANU monopoly control over political life. In practice, "the ruling party became everything" (personal communication, June 6, 2025). Freedoms of association and expression were tightly contained, as the government sought to prevent alternative bases of political organisation from emerging outside of state structures. Yet this very centralisation, while limiting individual freedoms, also ensured that political competition could not fracture along tribal lines, as it did in much of Africa. By closing off avenues for ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilise alternative constituencies, Tanzania was effectively constrained to a trajectory where national identity was defined in terms of loyalty to the state and the party, rather than to ethnic groups.

Control over the media was central to this system. Radio, newspapers, and later carefully regulated television were state mouthpieces, echoing the positions of the ruling

party (Mukandala, personal communication, June 3, 2025). Professor Mukandala from the Political Science Department at the University of Dar es Salaam recalls the concept of “Tanzaphilia”, coined and defined by Ali Mazrui as the “romantic spell which Tanzania casts on so many of those who have been closely associated with her” (Mazrui, 1967, 20). Mukandala argues that such admiration was only possible because the ruling government exercised full control over its own media portrayal: Nyerere’s decision to restrict access to television during his presidency, reflected fears of foreign influence as well as a determination to maintain a centralised narrative authority (Schmid, n.d., 2). Through these state-controlled outlets, the government consistently framed nation-building as a “war on poverty, ignorance, and disease” (Ndulu et al., 2019, 113). By emphasising moral and developmental goals rather than ethnic or regional concerns, the one-party state was able to broadcast a unifying national vision to the population and abroad. In a multi-ethnic society, this was crucial: control of the media allowed the state not only to silence dissent but to continually reinforce the legitimacy of national unity and downplay the salience of ethnic difference.

The single-party framework also provided the state with the authority to oversee the massive social engineering projects such as villagisation and the expansion of national education previously discussed. Because TANU was the sole legal political vehicle, it could enforce population movements into *Ujamaa* villages and promote Swahili in schools without facing organised resistance from rival parties. These projects might have faced greater opposition in a pluralistic political context, where ethnic or regional leaders could rally discontent. Instead, the absence of legal alternatives meant that dissent was either absorbed within party structures or marginalised as illegitimate. The party-state thus reinforced path dependency by ensuring that the nation-building agenda could be implemented at scale and without serious challenge.

In the 1980s, the socialist agenda tied to party supremacy faltered as the economy stagnated and Tanzania was forced to adopt privatisation measures under structural adjustment programs. By 1991, multipartyism was cautiously reintroduced under strict conditions: new parties had to register at least 200 members in eight mainland regions as well as Zanzibar and Pemba, and all were required to use Swahili rather than vernacular languages (Ndulu et. al., 2019, 114). These requirements reveal how deeply the one-party era had entrenched Swahili and national unity as the baseline of Tanzanian politics. Even as pluralism returned, it did so within parameters designed to prevent ethnic or regional fragmentation. In this way, the one-party state functioned as a mechanism that embedded the logic of national over ethnic identity into the fabric of Tanzanian governance.

MULTI-ETHNIC ARMY

The formation of a multi-ethnic army in Tanzania has often been overlooked as another crucial mechanism through which the state embedded a path toward national identity and stability after the Arusha Declaration. Under a Path Dependency lens, it is clear that the decision to avoid constructing an army along ethnic lines fundamentally shaped the country's trajectory. In contrast to many African states that have had ethnically stacked officer corps, Tanzania's recruitment policies deliberately emphasised inclusivity. This approach mitigated the risks of factionalism within the military and ensured that the armed forces functioned as a national rather than an ethnic institution, thereby reinforcing unity and reducing the likelihood of internal conflict.

Scholars such as Kristen Harkeness have found that ethnically homogenous armies pose serious threats to political stability by increasing the risk of coups. Coups not only disrupt governance but also create conditions for insurgency by weakening central authority, eroding public trust, and ultimately escalating the likelihood of civil conflict (Harkness, 2016, 588). According to Harkness, where leaders conditioned military recruitment, promotion, and access to patronage on shared ethnic identity, they triggered cycles of ethnic coups and

countercoups, with such countries experiencing roughly four times as many coups as their more inclusive counterparts (Harkness, 2016, 588). Furthermore, in societies with ethnically stacked officer corps, democratic elections intensified instability. When elections threatened to empower leaders from groups outside the dominant ethnicity of the army, coup risk increased dramatically—from under 20 percent to nearly 90 percent—because entrenched officers feared the loss of their privilege and patronage (Harkness, 2016, 589). By contrast, multi-ethnic armies diffuse such fears, making it harder for any single group to monopolise coercive power. This prevents the emergence of what scholars call the “ethnic coup trap,” a cycle in which purges, mistrust, and repeated coups deepen ethnic antagonisms within the armed forces and, by extension, society at large (Harkness, 2016, 594, 607). In this sense, the composition of the military is not a secondary question but a central determinant of whether multiethnic societies are able to maintain peace.

At independence, Tanzania inherited the same dilemma that other African countries faced: how to ensure military loyalty without creating the conditions for ethnic capture. Across the continent, colonial officers had often relied on “martial race” doctrines that assigned combat roles to certain ethnic groups while excluding others, institutionalising ethnic cleavages within military structures (Harkness, 2016, 593). Many postcolonial leaders adopted this model by restructuring the officer corps or creating coethnic military units. By contrast, Tanzania opted for inclusivity, ensuring that the Tanzania People’s Defence Force (TPDF) reflected the country’s ethnic diversity from the outset (Ndulu et. al., 2019, 109). This decision made it far more difficult for officers to mobilise collectively along ethnic lines, tying loyalty to the state rather than to subnational identities. The contrast with other African cases is revealing: where leaders built ethnically homogeneous armies, democratisation in the 1990s often triggered coups, as officers feared losing patronage networks when leaders from different ethnic backgrounds came to power (Harkness, 2016, 589, 592). Tanzania, however, experienced a relatively peaceful transition to multiparty politics in the same period. The inclusive foundation of the TPDF ensured that no single ethnic group could claim control

over the military, thereby blunting the fears and incentives that drove coup-making elsewhere.

The 1964 army mutiny, which could have destabilised the young state, further highlights the importance of inclusive recruitment. Rather than responding by purging the army or replacing it with an ethnically loyal force as many other African leaders did, Julius Nyerere instead relied on British intervention to re-establish order and subsequently rebuilt the military along explicitly multi-ethnic lines. This turning point reflects the dynamics outlined in Path Dependency theory: by choosing inclusivity rather than exclusion at a moment of instability, the government reinforced the institutional trajectory that would later protect Tanzania from ethnic-based coups and conflicts. Once this inclusive model was institutionalised, reversing it would have been both costly and destabilising.

CONCLUSIONS

Through this paper, I sustained that Tanzania's political stability following the 1967 Arusha Declaration was not accidental but the outcome of an ambitious and sustained nation-building mission. Using a path dependency framework, I have argued that by adopting the Arusha Declaration, the post-colonial government was set on a trajectory defined by a commitment to building a cohesive national identity. In doing so, the state pursued multiple key policies: villagisation, Education for Self-Reliance, the adoption of Swahili as a national language, the consolidation of single-party rule, and the formation of a multi-ethnic army. These mechanisms became self-reinforcing in the long run, and ultimately helped establish a Tanzanian identity that rejects violence and ethnic mobilisation as a political means.

Over time, Tanzanian political elites have continued to invoke the rhetoric of national unity to garner legitimacy. John Magufuli, for example, drew upon Nyerere's legacy during his presidency, repositioning himself as a leader attentive to the needs of ordinary

Tanzanians. His inward-looking policies seemed to reflect a revival of the *Ujamaa* ideal that leaders should be responsive to the collective. Unfortunately, this appeal also masked a darker side of contemporary Tanzanian politics: the narrowing of civic space, growing intolerance for dissent, and the silencing of opposition voices.

Looking at Tanzania today, there seems to be a growing question of what Tanzanian identity should look like in the face of neoliberal reforms, widening inequality, and increasing political repression. Where the Declaration once provided coherence to what it meant to be Tanzanian: “me and you together, obligated in the building of the nation,” as Mzee Sabadi described it, now there is growing restlessness and uncertainty.

Ongoing violent attacks on opposition politicians reflect this contradiction. Tundu Lissu, one of the most prominent opposition leaders, survived an assassination attempt in 2017 after openly criticising Magufuli’s government and is now facing treason charges. In this manner, The state’s commitment to suppressing ethnic mobilisation has morphed into a broader project of suppressing all forms of mobilisation, including democratic contestation. As a result, while Tanzania has largely avoided the coup cycles and civil wars that have plagued other African states, it has done so at the cost of entrenching authoritarianism and reducing the possibilities for genuine political pluralism.

This trajectory reveals the ambivalence of Tanzania’s path dependent legacy. On one hand, the early mechanisms of nation-building have succeeded: the country has not fractured along ethnic lines, and its image as a stable polity persists. On the other hand, the very strength of this national identity project has left little room for resistance to authoritarian consolidation. Citizens who were socialised into a culture of unity and obedience now find themselves unable—or unwilling—to mount collective resistance to state violence and repression. As a senior at the University of Dar es Salaam remarked, “Some say Tanzanians

are peaceful, but we are purely indocile because we can't question the idea of democracy" (personal communication, June 2, 2025).

The big picture, then, is one of continuity and transformation. The post-1967 path has insulated Tanzania from the scourge of internal conflict, but it has also created structures that limit the capacity for democratic renewal. The national identity forged in the Ujamaa years still shapes political life, but increasingly as a disciplining force rather than a liberating one. The challenge for Tanzania now lies in renegotiating what it means to be Tanzanian in a rapidly evolving context. Unless the legacy of unity can be disentangled from the structures of authoritarian control, Tanzania risks preserving peace only at the cost of silencing its citizens.

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