JIRK
Journal of Innovation Research and Knowledge
Vol.6 No.6, Nopember 2026
https://doi.org/10.53625/jirk.v6i6.13455

The Nation In Paradox: Popular Arts, State Power, And Society In Postcolonial Tanzania, 1967–1985

Astelia Mihayo[1], Stanley Elias[2]
[1,2]Makerere Institute of Social Research, Makerere University
*Penulis Korespondensi: mihayoastelia@gmail.com

Received: 13/09/2026 | Accepted: 16/10/2026 | Publication: 05/11/2026

Abstract: *This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to reread the literary, cultural, historical, and political dimensions of popular culture in the making of postcolonial Tanzania. It examines popular arts and culture as important sites through which the contradictions and tensions of early nation-building were articulated, negotiated, and contested. In particular, the study explores how popular music and literature operated simultaneously as spaces through which Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), as the ruling party-state, sought to articulate visions of political modernization and national development, and as alternative spaces through which social actors questioned state power and imagined different possibilities for postcolonial Tanzania. Through textual analysis of Tanzanian popular arts, the study examines changing state–society relations within the historical and political processes of nation-building between 1967 and 1985. It argues that popular arts were not simply instruments of state ideology or reflections of social realities; they constituted forms of cultural agency through which Tanzania was continually shaped, negotiated, and reimagined. By foregrounding the tensions between the state and society, the study demonstrates how these negotiations were central to the making and remaking of postcolonial Tanzania and to the formation of competing visions of the nation during the early postcolonial period.*

Keywords*:* Popular Arts; Nation-Building; Ujamaa; State–Society Relations; Postcolonial Tanzania

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How to Cite: [Nama Penulis belum dicantumkan] (2026). The Nation In Paradox: Popular Arts, State Power, And Society In Postcolonial Tanzania, 1967–1985. *Journal of Innovation Research and Knowledge*, *6*(6), 3195-3206. https://doi.org/10.53625/jirk.v6i6.13455

INTRODUCTION

While Tanzania's nation-building is broad and covers different and distinct political ideological episodes, the analysis of this study endeavors to examine the popular arts to interrogate the ideals of *Ujamaa* [a variant of African socialism] and its paradoxes in the course of creating a new society in socialist Tanzania between 1961 and the 1980s. Specifically, the study attempts to examine how popular literature and music became the agency through which *Chama cha Mapinduzi* (Revolutionary Party-State party) sought to affect its ideology of the new nation. From the culture of struggle for independence, the study examines how popular literature and music embarked on creating socialist Tanzania following its independence in 1961. The study considers the proclamation of The Arusha Declaration in February 1967 as the official launching of Ujamaa in Tanzania and 1985 as the official exit of Ujamaa's ideals in Tanzania. I am aware of other debates about the ending of *Ujamaa*. However, as elsewhere in the scholarship on *Ujamaa,* the project is understood to be a personal invention of Nyerere, and it was, in many cases, understood by him and not by

others in practice. So, I regard his official leaving of the office in 1985 as also an official exit of Ujamaa ideals. On the other hand, the study examines how popular culture became an agency of the non-dominant masses (people) through which they constantly sought to challenge the state's ideology and envision not a different nation but a new egalitarian nation.

As I have pointed out in the beginning, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach through which I read the history and the political process of nation-building through postcolonial culture. I particularly trace the agency of culture from the time when the state established the Ministry of Culture and Youth in 1962, whose sole responsibility became to build a single roof of national culture as opposed to individual or tribal culture. Therefore, the ministry became an organ of controlling the production and practice of popular literature and music in order to carry out the process of nation-building. Thus, in many ways, popular literature and music were engaged in the invention of traditions in the newly established postcolonial state. I am aware of other debates about the ending of Ujamaa. However, as elsewhere in the scholarship on Ujamaa, the project is understood to be a personal invention of Nyerere, and it was, in many cases, understood by him and not by others in practice. So, I regard his official leaving of the office in 1985 as also an official exit of *Ujamaa* ideals. On the other hand, the study examines how popular culture became an agency of the non-dominant masses (people) through which they constantly sought to challenge the state's ideology and envision not a different nation but a new egalitarian nation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of popular culture and Tanzanian politics can be traced back to the 1930s during colonial Tanganyika. However, studies on popular culture and politics in colonial Tanganyika are limited. To the best of my knowledge, the first extensive research examined the relationship between popular culture and politics (Ranger 1975). He traced the beni ngoma and the development of urban politics in East Africa. Following Ranger were Martin (1980) and Graebner (1988, 1992), who acknowledged the development of popular culture and politics in urban Tanganyika, to mention a few. However, studies on the relationship between politics and popular culture in postcolonial Tanzania are numerous, including Askew (2000; 2003; 2006), Suriano (2006; 2007; 2012), and Songoyi (1990), to mention a few.

As pointed out above, the genre of music and literature has traditionally been significant in constructing nations and traditions since 1955. During this era, the British administration imposed various mechanisms for controlling art and performances (Askew and Kitime, 2006). However, these mechanisms for suppressing popular culture by Africans were not successful, as they did not prevent them from singing and writing against colonialism (Suriano, 2012). So, during this phase of anticolonial struggle, different genres of popular music styles such as dance, ngoma, and taarab, as well as poetry, began to take part in singing and writing against British colonialism (Kitogo, 2000; Askew, 2006; Suriano, 2012).

While these popular arts and culture continued to exert their influence against the colonial government, on the other hand, they embarked on popularizing the leaders of anticolonial struggles such as Julius Kambarage Nyerere. Essentially, music performances

JIRK
Journal of Innovation Research and Knowledge
Vol.6 No.6, Nopember 2026
https://doi.org/10.53625/jirk.v6i6.13455

became party activities through which anticolonial messages became dominant, as well as organizing party activities. However, as Songoyi (1990) notes, it should not be mistaken to assume that popular culture began to make political commentary after the setting up of TANU. According to Songoyi, popular culture began to articulate its opposition to social, economic, and political disillusionments since precolonial times, during German rule (1886-1918), and during British rule. For instance, as Songoyi notes, a type of ngoma known as wigaashe of Sukuma communities in the Lake Zone in Tanzania was, in many ways, characterized by criticism against the German rulers. Just like during the time of German rule, the coming of TANU witnessed an increased active role of popular music by songsters such as Kalikali Mbangule, whose songs openly protested against colonialism. From the trend, it can be learned that despite censorship from the British colonial state to restrain anticolonial messages, popular music and literature provided an alternative means for people to express and practice anticolonial sentiments. What happened after independence? How did popular culture engage with Tanzanian nation-building? Unlike previous studies whose focus was mainly on the dynamics of politics and popular music, this study anchors on the role of popular culture in the politics of nationalism and nation-building in Tanzania.

THEORISING POLITICS OF NATIONALISM AND NATION-BUILDING IN TANZANIA

The decolonization in Tanganyika, as in many other African countries, was preoccupied with issues of creating a sovereign nation and common citizenship as the basis of independence. While many other nations in Africa opted for violence as a means to justify the decolonization process, Tanganyika took a different path. Thus, the conventional understanding of the decolonization process in Tanganyika/Tanzania needs to be explained in relation to the nature of the colonial rule(s) that the nation experienced. Historically, Tanganyika was ruled by two nations, namely Germany and Britain. The two colonial masters, Germany and Britain, differed in the way they ruled Tanganyika — the former preferring direct rule and the latter opting for indirect rule. While there might be other factors that influenced the British Empire to change from direct rule to indirect rule, the colonial project of creating tribalized natives and detribalized non-natives in colonial Africa was central in order to divide and rule (Fanon, 1963a, 1963b; Mamdani, 1996). Mamdani (2012) argues that we need first to understand the nature of colonial rule and where its power was located before we begin to think of decolonization (Mamdani, 2012). Mamdani suggests that decolonization in Tanganyika was peaceful because Nyerere dismantled the structures of indirect rule. So, for him, the decolonization of Tanganyika needs to be explained in relation to Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's political achievements.

Aminzade (2013), argues that, just as elsewhere in the world, nationalism in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in the case of Tanzania, was informed by historical and political contexts. Of particular note, Aminzade argues that Tanzania's decolonization went along with the establishment of sovereignty as well as an egalitarian society under a single common political roof. Of course, in the reading of Mamdani (2001), the Tanzanian case of nationalism stands out as the best example where the colonial past could not become significant in the formation of new identities. As Kelly and Kaplan (1995) note, "decolonization was also the superimposition of something, the reconfiguration of local hierarchies into the terms of a

new, global plan for political order."Thus, nationalists have always pictured the chosen nations in glowing images and national consciousness (Smith 1991). According to Anderson and Smith, during this era of nationalism, as it was in Tanzania, nations became a construct of modern imaginations and inventions on the part of particular categories of modern societies. This means that nations, in the sense of a named human community with a shared culture, were bound to a territory (Aminzade, 2013). This also suggests that nations became a product of historical forces that led to communal loyalty ties. However, for James Brennan and Ronald Aminzade, Tanzanian national identity emerged out of ongoing tensions between inclusive and exclusive means of defining postcolonial citizenship. This is the case with Mamdani (2012), who argues that these tensions have dominated the politics of nationalism in Zanzibar and Tanganyika. The main question was: who should be a Tanzanian? Thus, TANU under Nyerere envisioned forming a single national identity inclusive of all tribes and races.

So, as Anderson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1983) argue, most people in Tanzania identified themselves and still do as belonging to one nation, even though that nation included people beyond the boundaries of a true ethnocommunity and even those who could not be known personally. Of course, according to Hall (1992), "national identities are not things we are born with, but are formed and transformed within and in relation to representation . . . national cultures construct identities by producing meanings about the nation which we can identify; these are contained in stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it" (Hall, 1992:204). Of this particular take are Smith (1991; 2013) and Hobsbawm (1993), who argue for nationalism to be a sort of invented tradition.

What appears core to the scholars is the idea that "invented tradition" means "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuities with a suitable historic past" (Hobsbawm, 1983:1). Unlike Hobsbawm, Hall is like Ranger (1993), who seems to be critical of the invented traditions. Of course, what appears to be asserted by Hobsbawm is the idea that traditions are unchanging. As Ranger (1983:135) puts it, the imagining of invented traditions framed under rigid and conservative frameworks had to offer clearly defined entry points in the new belonging in the modern state.

However, this view was very much ahistorical, as Ranger (1993) makes clear in his revised version. Just as Ranger (1993) seems to be critical of the tradition, Hall (1992:204) observes that "In fact, national identities are not things we are born with, but are formed and transformed within and in relation to representation . . . National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about the nation which we can identify; these are contained in stories that are told about it, memories that connect its present with its past, and images that are constructed of it." But for Smith, all these idealizations of national identities are remote from people's experience. Thus, there is a need to concretize them via various forms of cultural productions in order to appear real to the people.

METHODOLOGICAL SCOPE

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodological framework that integrates literary criticism, historical analysis, political theory, and cultural studies to examine the role of popular arts in shaping postcolonial Tanzania. Situated within a postcolonial context, the study investigates how popular culture—specifically literature and music—served as a discursive and performative spaces for expressing, negotiating, and contesting the tensions, aspirations, and contradictions inherent in the early stages of nation-building. Central to this methodology is a textual and contextual analysis of popular literature and music created between 1961 and 1985. This temporal scope, of course, captures the period from independence through the declaration and implementation of Ujamaa to its political exit in 1985 following Nyerere's resignation from presidency. By closely analyzing various textual materials—including song lyrics, fiction, and performance scripts—this study explores how the *Chama Cha Mapinduzi (*Revolutionary Party, CCM) deployed popular cultural production to envision and validate socialist modernity. At the same time, it investigates how these cultural expressions became platforms for subaltern voices to challenge, undermine, or reinterpret the ideological mandates of the state. As previously indicated, this study is both historical and critical in nature. It traces the institutionalization of culture through the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Youth in 1962 and the broader initiatives aimed at creating a cohesive national culture, while also considering the public reactions to such governmental interventions. The analysis incorporates archival materials and secondary historiographies to contextualize cultural texts within the larger socio-political framework of nation-building. By closely analyzing various textual materials, including songs, this study examines popular arts as both a tool of statecraft and a platform for resistance. It highlights the complex interplay between the state and society in the cultural formation of national identity. Rather than viewing popular arts solely as reflections of societal conditions, this study positions them as dynamic forces that influence political discourse and shape social imagination. This methodology offers a deeper insight into how popular arts navigated the contradictions of nationalism, modernity, socialism, and citizenship during Tanzania's early years.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Popular Music and The Singing Of *Ujamaa*

In 1962, Nyerere established the Ministry of Culture and Youth, whose responsibility was to meet the challenges and ambiguities of nation-building and national culture following the years of colonialism. Of course, among the endeavours of the government was, among others, to create a space for public innovations and national culture. Suriano (2012) says that if we look at popular music and the arts between 1961 and 1985, we may come to learn about the most dominant feature of the relationship that existed between popular culture and the state. The state, through the Ministry of Culture and Youth, controlled the production of popular music in order to carry out the process of nation-building. Thus, in many ways, popular music during this particular phase became a field of ideological contention within which the state constantly sought to reinvent and envision the new nation. This had followed the potential impact of popular arts and culture that leaders had witnessed during the

independence struggle. While it was expected that popular culture and the arts would be singing from the above without making critiques of nation-building, just as early as it was after the formation of the ministry responsible for controlling the innovations of popular arts and culture, people began to sing and write about the paradoxes of the nation-building project.

Significant to this study is the period between 1967 and 1985. As pointed out earlier, the Arusha Declaration was proclaimed in February 1967 as the official launching of Ujamaa in Tanzania, and in 1985, it is stated to be the official ending of Ujamaa in Tanzania. The Arusha Declaration was announced by Julius Nyerere on 5 February 1967, and several principles of Ujamaa were underlined. In fact, the principles from the declaration were meant to overhaul the economic system through African socialism and self-reliance. Of these policies of Ujamaa was the villagization program, implemented in 1972/73–1976. As pointed out earlier, this program sought to transform the pattern of rural settlement by congregating the rural population, which had previously been predominantly resident on dispersed family smallholdings in nucleated productive villages. The idea behind these villages was that the new villages would also become the basis for a socialist system of production (Gunderson, 2010).

Having brought significant impact during the independence struggle, popular culture became a target of the state. As Gunderson studies Sukuma Labour Songs from Western Tanzania, popular music had communicative potential for the local communities. After the Arusha Declaration, Nyerere's governmental policies turned toward the use of popular music to promote national culture. During Ujamaa, art was to be for man's sake. Ruhumbika and Mbughuni point out that art that was entertaining without teaching was of no significance. Tanzanian artists were openly directed to align their productions with TANU policies and its associated events. There was censorship of what the participants could sing. What appears to be obvious during this phase is that any oppositional popular music and other arts would not be tolerated. Just as in other African countries, popular music and art had to please the political regime in power.

At one point, one would question when censorship is differentiated from the suppression of freedom of expression. Isn't censorship used as a cover term to confiscate freedom of expression? Censorship is intended "to make sure that all songs had to do with the history of the development of political consciousness in our nation" (Gunderson, 2010). Even when Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Revolutionary Party-CCM) was formed in 1977, it continued its politics following the principles of the Arusha Declaration. Cultural events during this time involved dance performances, contests, and festivals, and many of them were government sponsored. The state encouraged and sponsored music competitions between the workers of various cooperatives for the sake of morale (Suriano, 2005; Gunderson, 2005). Along with other musicians such as Shabaan Sigda of Mwanza and the Super Vea Jazz Band, Kalikali and Mwinamila became vocal proponents of Ujamaa policies

Songs celebrated achievements made within years of independence by pointing out that bicycles, motorcycles, cars, buses, and the number of roads have increased if compared to the time when the country was under British colonialism. The government now has schools, hospitals, health centers, and dispensaries in every village. In foregrounding the

achievement of the newly independent Tanzania, songs stressed the cooperative societies and Ujamaa villages that have been established throughout the country. So, villages as pointed out in the Arusha declaration were very important productive units that the state under Ujamaa had decided to support both in terms of capital and infrastructure. So, Kalikali was aware of the Arusha declaration and wished the British to come and see the changes that the government had achieved by that time since they had parted back to Europe. For example, Kalikali, the singer, Tanzania had demonstrated significant growth under Nyerere who Kalikali describes as a Savior sent by God to save the Tanzanians. Nyerere had decreed an order for the people to live in the village. Nyerere was against the exploitative mode of production and that one was reflected in the manifesto of the Arusha Declaration. He had viewed the capitalist world as full of structural inequalities whose development is not people-centered but exploitative. Thus, for him adopting people-centered development was rebellion against those capitalist inequalities. Given the role of the agricultural sector as a basis of development, Nyerere thought of putting middle peasants at the fore in the production (Shivji, et al 2020:128). Thus, he formulated the policy of Ujamaa vijijini(Rural socialism) to bring about people-centered development.

Ujamaa *vijijini* had envisioned bringing peasant producers together in villages for cooperative production. This was not merely a communal production, but much more broadly a cooperative and imaginative way of putting a community's resources, skills, and enthusiasm at the service of the development of all people. According to Nyerere people-centered development in villages could be based on the traditional family values of mutual respect, sharing of basic goods and services held in common, and the obligation of everybody to work (Shivji et al 2020: 128). But how was living and working together 'for the good of all' in the village could guarantee high agricultural production? While Nyerere believed that no one could be forced into Ujamaa village, he later noted that villagization was progressing slowly (Shivji et al 2020: 128). The result of the policy of Ujamaa *vijijini* was the compulsory settlement of the majority of Tanzania's rural population into villages and the basic modus operandi in those villages was coercive force from the state officials. Of course, the cruelty of the operation of villagization was felt in many places in the country. State officials were anxious to get recognition and praise from top officials and this led them to implement the policy without a sense of humanity as Malenga Saidi Budelele makes the song 'Nosenagi'. The division executive officers and other local administrators demolished and burnt the houses of people to force them to go and live in the newly created villages. People together with their families were thrown into vehicles, forcibly moved from their traditional settlements, and dumped at places that had been designated to be Ujamaa villages (Gunderson, 2010). Generally, the villagization policy was chaotic and embarrassing as officials failed to execute better ways of implementing it. And in some places, it ended with people being killed. The most terrifying scenario involved the shooting of Dr. Kleruu, the then Iringa Regional Commissioner, in 1971 by Said Mwandindi, who was opposed to communal farming.

Ironical Writing of Ujamaa's Paradoxes

While popular music began to be critical of how Ujamaa policies were implemented, popular literature also began to represent the mismatch between the ideals of the Arusha Declaration and what people felt on the ground. In studies of making and remaking of gender

relations in Tanzania, Wakota (2014) partly traces the representation of Ujamaa policies in Tanzania but with focus on gender relations. In this study, I argue that while Ujamaa ideology as monoglossic in the way it is imposed on society and heteroglossic in the way it is implemented. In examining how Ujamaa ideology was responded in popular literature in Tanzania, I use Ruhumbika's Village in Uhuru Ndunguru's The Lion of Yola and Kezilahabi's Kaputula la Marx. In these literary works, I focus on the representation of Ujamaa as a socio-economic development approach adopted and its mismatch during its implementation.

As pointed out earlier in creating people-centred development the state embarked on making cooperative settlements in rural Tanzania. Thus, Village in Uhuru is framed around the existing conflict of the villagization policy as also noted in popular music. In the novel, the conflict is between Balinde, the son and the Area Commissioner who represents the government, and also, he is responsible in relocating his people from their traditional villages to the government-created village on one side. On the other side, there is Musilanga, his father, and an important villager whose status in the village appears to threaten Balinde. In the analysis of this conflict, one would presumably call it a family conflict but the author is hiding behind aesthetics to contemplate the national project using expounding tensions resulted from the policy of villagization. Of course, writing Village in Uhuru at a time when Ujamaa was being implemented, Ruhumbika adopts a relatively friendly approach to the subject, portraying Ujamaa as a perfect ideology and is critical of lower-ranking officials while leaving Nyerere unscathed; an approach which Lindfors calls the "sedative of tearful laughter" where "even the harshest subjects [such as villagization] are treated in a "mild, gentle way". According to Wakota (2014), this must have been a way of avoiding censorship at a time when Nyerere was the president and was therefore equated to Ujamaa itself and a Saviour sent by God as Kalikali sings Nyerere in one of his songs. This remains ironic as Nyerere couldn't be left out if we were to talk of the failures of the villainization policy. So, Village in Uhuru is ironical of Ujamaa. Probably what is claimed to be Uhuru has not yet been achieved. The novel appears to question where is freedom as the masses are not free but relocate forcibly. I would read the novel The Not Yet Uhuru by Jaramogi Oginga Odinga who questions '*wapi uhuru'*(where is the independence) among the masses as a call for the critical reflection of the decolonization process of Kenya but in my case Tanzania.

While Village in Uhuru is about the coercive relocation of people into the newly established Ujamaa villages which seems to defy the meaning of what is independence(*uhuru*), *The Lion of Yola* appears to narrate the establishment of Ujamaa from below as it was in the workings of the Ujamaa villages under RDA. The Yola villagers led by chairman Lihamba to establish a Ujamaa village in response to both the call of the government and the shortage of land due to the lake which is threatening to eat up most of their present land. Chairman Lihamba's proposition divides the villagers. Those in support of him agree to leave their traditional land and settle in Kindimba Juu which prospers economically. Those who object and remain in Yola are further invaded by floods and the police force is eventually used to relocate them to an already established Namatui village which, although run by the principles of Ujamaa village, is portrayed as a failure. What appears to be represented here is what happened in the history of Ujamaa though not in the names of these villages. Yet the author of the novel appears to bring the notion of freedom

that Nyerere had advocated in his understanding of people-centered development. Kihimba Juu which seems to be established democratically showed significant results and this tells probably Ujamaa villages would have been successful if only these villages could be locally and democratically controlled. It is worth arguing that freedom and voluntary engagement in the project of the people as it was in Kihimba Juu built a good spirit for cooperation and commitment on the project. But why Nyerere did not adopt this approach of Kihimba Juu? The state was the agent of socialist development and Nyerere's approach to state-constructed ujamaa villages was to bring uniformity of socialist development all over the country.

Amidst the crisis of Ujamaa policies, Euphrase Kezilahabi produced a satirical play named *Kaputula la Marx* (Marx's Shorts) to ridicule the politics of Ujamaa under the then-President Nyerere. The play was composed following the University of Dar es Salaam students' protest on 5th March 1978 which ended with the expulsion of students from the university. Being not satisfied with government actions against the students, Kezilahabi wrote such a play and it was not produced on stage instead he typed the manuscript and circulated it among the scholars and the students who received it enthusiastically. Central to the play are six prisoners who present themselves as political prisoners under the farcical government of President Kapera. These prisoners gather information about the current political situation. At the same time, president Kapera after reading Marx and others decided to change the type of politics to benefit his people. This has to be realized by putting on the oversized shorts of Marx and a Mao vest. Both the president and the ministers put on the oversized garments. It is only the president who seems to understand the direction the country is heading and the ministers are not up to it. Prisoners led by Mwangaza Africanus defy the kind of politics that President Kapera is doing and therefore he leads revolution through the government. From the play it is often understood that President Kapera stands for President Nyerere and although the play takes place in a nameless country many of the things which prisoners observe via the wall refer to Tanzania. Critical to the play is that the kind of politics that Kapera is following seems not to be understood by his cabinet and as well his people to the extent that there is a crisis everywhere in the country. It seems the socialist politics became oversized to Kapera as a leader as well as to his ministers. As to the tensions and crises that the politics have caused in the country, Kapera is overthrown.

CONCLUSION

Following the analysis of the popular music and popular literature some conclusions can be drawn about the politics of Ujamaa in Tanzania. The state had understood the power of popular culture in supporting its ideology across different people of the country. So, they ensured whatever was to be produced either in music or literature, was to be at the best of the nation. As it was understood during this era, the newly independent nation had to progress under a single common identity regardless of one's past. This however did not prevent people from singing and writing against the government's wishes. This was resulted by the monoglossic understanding of the government on the *Ujamaa* ideology and the society's heteroglossic understanding of the way *Ujamaa* was implemented. While it is obvious that there was censorship of popular music and literature during this era, the concern of popular culture to critique against the state continued. What appears to have

changed during this era is that people did not challenge Nyerere personally but his policies and other leaders by making them fault for the crisis. It is surprising that in the failure of Ujamaa policies Nyerere becomes unscathed. Probably this follows the fact that during this time Nyerere had become despotic and unchallenged and whoever challenged him would have encountered an unspeakable experience just as it was for Kalikali who did so in 1965. On the other hand, though it might not have the same weight as the former, Nyerere was at some point thought to be sent by God to save Tanzania and so was the demigod as it is still believed by many Tanzanians.

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