JULIUS NYERERE: THE INTELLECTUAL PAN-AFRICANIST AND THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN UNITY

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Julius Nyerere stands out as an epitome in whom a bold experiment was made to give content and meaning to Tanzania’s independence. His passionate conviction was that the case of pan-African freedom was the only legitimate determination of all political action by the political African elites. To him, pan-Africanism meant self-determination in all matters; economic, political, social, ideological and cultural. To demonstrate this he made a cultural choice by adopting an indigenous language, Swahili as both the national and official language. In so doing Nyerere recognized the role of language in the development of cultural authenticity and national unity. This not only facilitated national integration in an otherwise complex multilingual republic of Tanzania but also as a way of asserting independence from political economic and most importantly cultural domination.

African intellectuals and literary icons, notably, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Ali Mazrui, Okot p’Bitek, etc have made passionate pleas for a cultural re-awakening, which they see as a first step towards social political and economic growth. Otherwise globalization is not only threatening to marginalize Africa but is also throwing it into a state of confusion as it tries to blend traditional values with western traditions, which to a large extent are incompatible.

This paper proposes to draw from Nyerere’s bold experiment to make a case for the African renaissance and the quest to not only discover itself and uphold its identity but also to appreciate the inherent power enshrined in its cultural heritage. It is argued that over-reliance on imperialist colonial languages which by and large embrace and are emblazoned with western world views, cultural values and ideals is in fact neocolonial and therefore detrimental to African unity and the spirit of pan-Africanism. The specific aim will be to demonstrate the power of a common indigenous language to not only foster African unity by accommodating and managing diversity, but also to express its identity and articulate its concerns for collective action and shared solutions to achieve growth and development.