

A Pan-Africanist freedom fighter

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HASHIM MBITA is a retired Civil Servant, army officer, journalist, and politician. At different times he has worked as a regional information Officer, Government Chief Press Officer, Ambassador Press Secretary to the President, and Publicity Secretary and National Executive Secretary of TANU. He also served as Executive Secretary of the OAU Coordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa from 1974 to 1992.

Julius Kambarage Nyerere, or Mwalimu (the teacher), was one of the most respected nationalists, Pan-Africanists and freedom-fighters of his time. After returning from his studies at Edinburgh University in 1952 and while teaching in Dar es Salaam, he became involved in fighting for the independence of Tanganyika.

From the word go, he set out to develop the spirit of nationalism and to mobilise people across the country. Through his speeches Nyerere was able to instil in the minds of people his deep-rooted belief in Pan-Africanism and the need for the freedom of not only his country – Tanganyika – but for all African countries then under colonial domination. It is no wonder to find in the very first aims and principles adopted by TANU, unambiguous commitments to Pan-Africanism and collaboration with African liberation movements fighting for the independence of their respective countries.

As the political momentum developed in Tanganyika and the prospects for achieving internal self-government became clearer, Mwalimu implemented a policy of identifying the Tanganyika struggle with

those of its neighbouring countries and beyond. As a result, political movements from those countries were welcome in Tanganyika. Among the first were freedom fighters from Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Nyasaland (Malawi), Mozambique, and Kenya. These were followed by movements from South West Africa (Namibia), Angola, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), South Africa, and Comoro.

Mwalimu was also prepared to delay Tanganyika's independence to await Kenya and Uganda's so that the three countries could together accede to self-rule as a federal state. Sadly his dream has yet to be realised.

It will be recalled that soon after the independence of Tanganyika there were political upheavals in the former Belgian colonial holdings of Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda that saw thousands of their nationals pour into Tanganyika seeking asylum; and, some have stayed to this day.

Mwalimu was a staunch believer in human rights and civil liberties. When the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was founded in 1963, and with it the establishment of the Coordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa, to address the burning question of the continent's ongoing independence struggle, Mwalimu was entrusted by the young organisation with the delicate responsibility of hosting the Committee. For the first 22 years of the 31-year life of the Committee, during which Mwalimu Nyerere was President of the United Republic of Tanzania and Chairman of the grouping of countries fighting apartheid known as the Frontline States, he presided over an exciting and demanding phase of the African liberation struggle south of the equator. This was a time that witnessed the unprecedented rise of nationalism, political consciousness, resistance against foreign domination, and the escalation of the armed struggle in Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa. The Portuguese fascist colonial regimes in Africa collapsed in 1974 and the Rhodesian white minority illegal government was forced to the negotiation table at Lancaster House in London in 1979. That period demanded highly skilled and committed leadership to steer revolutionary political expansion in the right direction. As host and Chairman of the Frontline States, Mwalimu's close consultation with the leaders of the anti-colonialist liberation movements enabled him to keep abreast of the respective diplomatic, political,



Celebrating
Independence
Day in 1961


and military aspects of the struggle. As a result, he effectively articulated both the African position as well as those of individual liberation movements at bilateral and multilateral levels, as well as at international forums. His contribution to the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement against Colonialism and Apartheid is well known.

As a political strategist, Mwalimu was far-sighted and could analyse sequences of events and forecast their possible advantages or disadvantages within an unfolding situation. In the case of Southern Africa, for example, he strongly advised a step-by-step approach. While encouraging liberation movements to prepare well for armed struggle in their respective areas, he similarly called for the use of maximum fire power against the weakest adversary, defeating it before moving to the less weaker, and so on. And that was what eventually happened. The mighty Boer Apartheid regime of South Africa was the last dealt with.

The victories of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa prompted the Frontline States under Julius Nyerere to look to the future of the region and its people. Political liberation had opened up new horizons, and of necessity had to be followed by efforts towards economic emancipation and the integration of its people. This saw the birth of the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), soon after the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980.

Another of Mwalimu's qualities was his integrity and unwavering position on matters of principle. As an

adherent of non-alignment during the Cold War era, Mwalimu demonstrated Tanzania's unshakable stand when the case of relations between West Germany and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), were brought up. He categorically refused to be swayed and stated that Tanzania would not accept other countries deciding which were her friends or enemies, a stance that had serious economic and military implications to the country at the time. West Germany cancelled all assistance to Tanzania.

On African unity Mwalimu consistently advocated for a pragmatic approach. He argued strongly for it in Cairo in 1964 and continued in the same spirit 30 years later when he spoke at the valedictory summit to wind up and formally terminate the mandate of the Liberation Committee, when he said: "It is because that first objective has been achieved that I want to use this opportunity to urge Your Excellencies to give the necessary attention to the second objective of the founding fathers. The importance of the second objective is obvious from the name of our continental organisation. It is the Organisation of African Unity. Unity is our objective, our purpose, and our instrument for serving Africa effectively. Yet we have not organised ourselves for unity. All member States of the OAU – even if just by the fact of membership – recognise that unity is strength. They recognise also that only by constant movement towards unity will our continent move towards a position where it will be able to become an equal and effective participant in the world economic, political, and social community." 

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President Samora Machel of Mozambique (left), Nyerere and President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia (right)