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## Who was Nyerere? The Mythical Recreation of Nyerere the Person in Banyakyusa Narratives

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### Abstract

*Asking about who Nyerere was is obviously a surprising option in this century especially when we pay a particular attention to literatures devoted to his life and career. A number of politicians and scholars have written in length on Nyerere's individual life and his political career. However, the question remains significant on the sense that irrespective of the Nyerere we know from politicians and academicians' perspectives, little is known about him in the perceptions and beliefs of local Tanzanians. By looking at the Banyakyusa process of mythmaking about Nyerere, this qualitative study examines images and symbols associated with Nyerere's nature. The paper interrogates Banyakyusa voice, beliefs and point of views on Nyerere's personality embedded in their mythical narratives. To Banyakyusa, as the paper establishes, Nyerere was endowed with supernatural powers including immense mystical abilities by which he was able to foresee the future and to protect himself against his enemies. Also, Nyerere was blessed with inborn intelligent abilities. The abilities made him be able to train himself various skills such as reading, writing and counting. In general, the recreation of Nyerere's personality in Banyakyusa myths reflects Banyakyusa traditional beliefs on powers and abilities of their traditional leaders.*

**Keywords:** Nyerere, Banyakyusa, Myths, Mystical Powers, Tanzania.

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### 1. Introduction

What made Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (1922-1999) succeed in his struggle against colonialists? Why is he still revered in Tanzania and beyond? Questions like these have attracted the attention of several politicians and historians in and outside Tanzania. As Fouere (2015a) points out, the political prominence of Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania (in office from 1961 to 1985) influenced a number of historical and political documents devoted to his life. Fouere indicates that answers to the questions above are available, but from politicians and historians perspectives.

According to Phillips (2015), Nyerere is widely revered in Tanzania as the father of the Nation, and credited for laying a foundation for peace, unity and

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security. As a result, he has become a central character in local myths and political mythmaking in Tanzania. Yet, as indicated in Fouere's (2015a) above, perceptions of local Tanzanians which would help to understand local voices, beliefs and perceptions behind the escalating reverence for Nyerere and dominance of his ideas in contemporary Tanzania have received limited attention. Mbiti (1991) argues that "it is good to understand people's beliefs well, because it is beliefs which influence their behaviour" (28). Mbiti indicates that the belief which local Tanzanians (specifically the Banyakyusa) have on Nyerere is important because it influence their behaviour towards his ideas and directives. This paper is therefore concerned with the image of Nyerere from perceptions and beliefs of local people particularly the Banyakyusa of South West Tanzania. It aimed at examining the recreation of Nyerere the personal in the Banyakyusa mythmaking process.

The Banyakyusa are found along Tanzania and Malawi River Songwe Border. In Tanzania, Banyakyusa live in Busokelo, Kyela, and Rungwe districts of Mbeya region. And, in Malawi, they are found in Karonga district. Given the location of the Tanzanian Banyakyusa who are studied in this article, their selection for this paper is momentous. They are over 1100 kilometre from Butiama where Nyerere was born and about 1000 kilometre from Dar es Salaam where Nyerere's State House was. Therefore, the paper highlights the point that Nyerere was a highly influential leader, revered by Tanzanians, regardless of their localities.

In the eyes of academicians and politicians, Nyerere was a special endowed person since his childhood. According to Mpangala and Mawazo (2015), Nyerere's childhood was similar to that of other children in his village who involved in grazing cattle and goats. Mpangala and Mawazo point out that Nyerere had admirable qualities in his childhood, and that his behaviour made his father, Chief Burito Nyerere foretell that he (Julius Nyerere) would become a powerful leader of Tanganyika, and that his ideas will be respected and revered. Mpangala and Mawazo conclude that "utabiri wa chifu Nyerere Burito ulidhihirika katika uongozi wa Baba wa Taifa, Mwalimu J.K. Nyerere" (13) (Chief Nyerere Burito's prophecy was accomplished during the leadership of the father of the nation, Mwalimu J.K. Nyerere).

In his personal tributes to Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, the first Zambian president, observes that Nyerere's "contribution to the birth and growth of Tanganyika and, later on, to the birth and growth of Tanzania is something that needs no biased praise. It just needs correct recording of facts which speak volumes for the man's contribution to the development of mankind as a whole" (Kaunda, 1985:10). Kaunda adds that Nyerere is "a man of rare qualities, an outstanding intellectual – honest intellectual, I might add – mass mobiliser and organiser, administrator and lover of mankind all rolled into one. His humility is very appealing. An outstanding visionary, he is also a Pan Africanist and internationalist of great courage" (10-11). In Kaunda's assessment, Nyerere's actions make him a Tanzanian national hero.

Nyerere's contributions to Tanzania and Africa referred to by Kaunda above can be observed in a number of specific areas including education; and according to Nasongo and Musungu (2009), Nyerere's philosophy of education

is among the factors which led to the unity that Tanzanians enjoy. Also, in education, Nyerere contributed by making it a tool for liberation, especially the liberation of Southern African countries from their former colonisers (Mpangala and Mawazo, 2015). Nyerere opened schools at Mazimbu and Dakawa in Morogoro for ANC supporters during the struggle against the apartheid policy in South Africa. Using those special schools, Nyerere extended his philosophy of education for liberation by giving the South African's freedom fighters education, which inspired them to continue struggling against apartheid.

Also, Nyerere supported freedom fighters in many African countries by allowing them to have their headquarters in Dar es Salaam, providing to them ammunitions received from Russia and China, and offering settlements for refugees from Mozambique and South Africa. Jacob Zuma, the former president of South Africa affirms the great contribution of Nyerere to the liberation of African countries. He asserts that Nyerere "was the teacher, who taught the African continent about peace, democracy, and unity; the freedom fighter, who became one of the leading commanders of the liberation of Africa" ("Tribute", 2000:95). For Jacob Zuma, the title 'Mwalimu' (teacher) to Nyerere signifies a devoted leader towards Africans' freedom, peace, democracy, and unity. In further support of the central role of Nyerere in decolonisation, Johnson (2000:67) quoted one South African journalist's argument to the effect that almost all South African countries "are now free with the liberation sprung in Dar es Salaam". Johnson highlights the fact that Nyerere is perceived as the key initiator and leader of liberation movements in (Southern) Africa.

Nyerere is also credited with masterminding and effecting for the victory against Idi Amin Dada of Uganda during the Kagera War between Tanzania and Uganda of 1978-79, which led to the liberation of Ugandans from dictator Idi Amin Dada (Mpangala and Mawazo, 2015; Matata, 2016; Acheson-Brown, 2001). As opposed to Idi Amin whose era is associated with deterioration and collapse of organised structures in Uganda (Kiyimba, 1998), Nyerere is widely remembered as the liberator who confronted Idi Amin to rescue civilians in Kagera, Tanzania and Uganda. The victory of Tanzanians and Ugandans led by Nyerere against Idi Amin is among factors which influence the Tanzanians' reverence for Nyerere as a hero. Consequently, the outbreak and outcomes of Kagera War moulded the making of heroic myths about Nyerere among Tanzanians.

Apart from Nyerere's renowned roles in Tanzania and Africa, his history is not free from criticism and personal weaknesses. Some of his policies mostly criticised in Tanzania especially by foreigners are the Ujamaa socialism, Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar which resulted into a country known as United Republic of Tanzania, and violation of the human rights of those who disagreed with him (Brennan, 2015). In Africa, Nyerere is criticised for violation of human rights and principles of Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which he pioneered its formation by interfering sovereignty of other African countries. According to Mwijage (1994), Nyerere deprived Ugandan sovereignty by overthrowing Idi Amin and restoring his friend Milton Obote who "went on to rule Uganda even more oppressively than his forerunner, Idi Amin" (53). To Mwijage, Nyerere's support on Milton Obote went together with forced

recruitment of Ugandans to join Obote's guerrilla army and that those who objected were detained in Tanzania. Despite his deprivation of human rights and sovereignty of other countries, Mwijage argues that Nyerere continued to be supported by western nations. Mwijage's argument denotes that ongoing commemoration of Nyerere and beatification process into a saint (Mesaki & Malipula, 2011) are deliberate efforts to whitewash his image irrespective of his weaknesses.

Both Brennan's observations and Mwijage's criticisms are important to this study as they implies that although Nyerere is regarded as a political and mythical hero (demigod), there are people who view him negatively. This article, therefore, examines mythmaking about Nyerere among the Banyakyusa by looking at how his image is re-created in the myths, the negative assessments of his legacy notwithstanding.

According to Seger (2003), one of the features of a mythical hero is rising from ordinary background as non-hero to victory. In the assessment of Acheson-Brown (2001); Johnson (2000); Matata (2016) and Mpangala and Mawazo (2015), Nyerere's life history conforms to Seger's features of a mythical hero.

Nyerere came from a small tribe of Wazanaki and except for being son of a chief, he led an ordinary village boy's life, whose highlight was the grazing of cattle and goats with other boys (Mpangala and Mawazo, 2015). According to Mpangala and Mawazo's contention, the major difference between Nyerere and the boys of his time was that he had a chance to get formal education because he was son of a chief (Burito Nyerere, a chief of the Zanaki). As Seger (2003) indicates, Nyerere rise from ordinary life to the status of founding father of the nation fits the description of a mythical hero.

It is significant that Nyerere used his position as leader of Tanzania to spearhead the struggle for liberation of Southern African countries, even though his country was economically and militarily inferior to the powerful western colonizers that they were fighting (Johnson 2000). The same applies to the Kagera War. According to Acheson-Brown (2001) and Matata (2016), Idi Amin's troops had stronger ammunitions than Tanzanian troops, and Idi Amin received military assistance from Libya and Sudanese mercenaries, which made his army stronger than Nyerere's army. However, despite weak ammunitions and lack of outside support, Nyerere led Tanzanian's troops to the victory against Idi Amin. The portrayal of Nyerere rising from inferior background to ultimate victory of the liberation of Southern African countries and the Kagera War gives Nyerere's life a touch of mythical heroism.

Although Acheson-Brown (2001); Johnson (2000); Matata (2016) and Mpangala and Mawazo (2015) suggest that Nyerere's life conforms to the life of mythical heroes, the myths about Nyerere among Tanzanians have so far received very limited scholarly attention, even though many are widely known. With particular awareness of criticisms against Nyerere, this study examines the recreation of Nyerere's image in Banyakyusa myths.

Douglas (1966) defines a myth as a narrative which express the community beliefs, and that it is believed in the community of its origin as truth.

To Wilson (1960), myths are believed as account of certain historical incidents. According to her, myths “express some social reality – the needs or aspirations of some group or community” (1). Both Douglas and Wilson indicate that myths are significant tools in understanding a certain community history, beliefs and perceptions.

Jaja (2013:10) points out that, myths are “not just a product of human imagination but a direct expression of reality”, and that in Africa “myths represent the African spirit and the African view of reality” (13). In a community like the Banyakyusa and other African communities which are still dominated by oral traditions (Finnegan, 1970), Jaja’s contentions indicate that myths are among significant tools used by Africans to express their reality. Stressing on Jaja’s contentions, Mbiti (1991) argues that myths such as those on national heroes such as Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah are useful in transferring culture, experience and history of their communities from one generation to another. With reference to Jaja, Mbiti, Schorer and Malinowski, the Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere which are examined in this paper express their real beliefs and perception on him.

According to Trubshaw (2003), myths especially those which are associated with politics are significant in the contemporary society because they are persuasive and influential. Citing examples of the use of political myths by Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin in the establishment of communism in Russia, Trubshaw contends that political myths play a significant role in influencing certain ideas and in shaping images of national heroes. As a result, as He (2006) indicates, political elites influence the making of self-washing political myths through the use of books and mass media in order to win majority support of certain politicians or ideologies. He and Trubshaw indicate that myths about Nyerere such as those which are analysed in this paper play a significant role in influencing the support of his ideas and white-washing his images among Tanzanians

## **2. Method**

This qualitative study employed oral history design in collecting and analysing the data. As Kumar (2011) and Ritchie (2003) contend, oral history aims at generating information from narrator’s point of view and experience. To Kumar (2011:127), the narrator’s experience “could be based upon eye-witness evidence or information passed on from other sources such as older people, ancestors, folklore, stories”. With oral history method, this paper intended to capture – through their mythical narrations – Banyakyusa voice and perceptions on Nyerere based on their experience and point of view.

By using oral history interviews, the myths analysed in this article were collected from Busokelo, Kyela and Rungwe districts of Tanzania. And, interpreted through content analysis method whereby the content of five myths are investigated by looking at dictions, imagery language, rhetoric and the prevailing themes. The myths are Nabii (A Prophet), Ikipaji (A Talent), Amaka ga Nyerere (Nyerere’s Power), Inyifwila and Amahala ga Nyerere (Nyerere’s Intelligence).

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1. Nyerere in Banyakyusa Perspectives

The image of Nyerere as per Banyakyusa perceptions and beliefs depends on their experience, voice and point of views expressed in their mythical narratives. Starting with the myth *Nabii* (A Prophet), Banyakyusa reconstruct Nyerere as a prophet who was able to know what will face him in future. This myth was similarly narrated by a number of narrators and also its theme reflected in other myths. The narrator states that he was told by his father that Nyerere *alijonabiii* (...was a prophet). The narrator adds that “*linga ikulonda ukubuka kumo alinuuwezo gwa kumanya isi asikumwaga kula*” (He had ability to know what will face him when he visited somewhere) and that “*uketege abagile ukubuja linga injila mbibhi*” (that’s why he was not going if the journey was bad). Here, the myth indicates that Nyerere was able to prophesize incidents that could happen to him in future and as a result he was postponing his journey whenever he prophesized something bad. Apart from knowing what would face him in future, Nyerere as the myth states “*abhagile ukusibona isi asikubhagha abhasungu*” (... was able to see what will face Whites). With respect to Wilson (1959), Banyakyusa believe that Whites/Europeans (*abhasungu*) are more mystically powerful than Africans (151). Therefore, the statement that Nyerere was able to forecast even things which would happen to Whites implies that Nyerere’s mystical powers surpassed them.

Most of the things which Nyerere prophesised happened to be true because as the narrator states “*linga atie isi asikwisa amasiku mabili mwagege muredio bikutangasya*” (if he says something will happen, in two days you hear it on radio). The symbol of a radio as used in the myth *Nabii* (A Prophet) signifies that Nyerere’s predictions were real. The myth highlights more that all what Nyerere said can even be witnessed in the contemporary world including several wars in different parts of the world. The myths concludes that Nyerere was totally a different person. This indicates that he was a uniquely endowed person.

According to Nyerere’s bodyguard Peter D. M. Mbwimbo, Nyerere had ability to see future things (Mbwimbo, 2016). Similar to Mbwimbo, the Banyakyusa belief that Nyerere was able to prophesize future events as depicted in the myth under discussion is certain. The diction, imagery and rhetoric are employed in the myth to stress on the certainty of his ability to foretell the future. The use of words *bhati* and *alijonabiii* in the second sentence “*atie bhati Nyerere alijonabii*” (He said that Nyerere was a prophet) indicates that the narrator got the true story from his father. Whereas Banyakyusa use the word *bhati* to associate the truth of the information with the source, the metaphor *alijonabii* (he was a prophet) carries the certainty of the belief. With respect to Wilson (1976), oral tradition is an important method of transferring information from one generation to another among Banyakyusa. Wilson indicates that elders are the trusted source of information among Banyakyusa. Based on Wilson’s implication and the association of the source of the myth with elders (the narrator’s father) together with the use of a direct comparison (metaphor) *alijonabii* (he was a prophet), the belief that Nyerere was a prophet is unquestionable among the Banyakyusa. Moreover, Trubshaw (2003)

mentions parents being among agents of political mythmaking (169). With respect to Trubshaw, the father being the source of the narrative indicates that he influenced insights of political mythmaking about Nyerere to his child and to the society at large.

This myth *Nabii* (A Prophet) indicates that Nyerere was able to protect himself by knowing in advance and escaping from ill wishes of his enemies. We are told that Nyerere was predicting things which were going to face him especially bad things as a result “...*abagile ukubuja linga injila mbibhi*” (... he was able to postpone if the journey was bad). By postponing his journey after predicting that something bad will happen to him, the myth suggests that Nyerere was able to escape from his enemies. With respect to Mbvimbo (2016), there were several incidents which jeopardized the life of Nyerere including soldiers’ rebellion of 1964 and government overthrow attempts of 1968 and 1984 in which Nyerere and his regime survived. Despite those attempts against Nyerere, Mbvimbo contends that Nyerere did not want strong defence on the reason that he was so confident that his life was always safe. With reference to the myth *Nabii* (A Prophet), Nyerere’s confidence on his safety despite several military attempts against him and without strong defence can be associated to his superhuman ability to know in advance and escape safely evil attempts against him.

The myth *Nabii* (A Prophet) also provides opposite views towards the Nyerere’s prophets which reinforces the belief that he was able to see future events before others. From the tenth to thirteenth sentences, the myth provides opposite views from a member of the audience that Nyerere was not actually prophesising but he was telling Tanzanians the news he first watched from his television which he is alleged to have possessed before any other Tanzanian. As Sturmer (1998) observes, “until 1994, there was no single television network operating on mainland Tanzania” (191). Sturmer signifies that Tanzanians (except Zanzibaris) had no access to television during Nyerere’s regime which lasted on 1985. The lack of access to television and the occurrence of events which Nyerere prophesised generated the allegation that he had a television which enabled him to watch international news before other Tanzanians. This allegation justifies the existence of a belief that Nyerere knew about events before other Tanzanians. Hence, whether Nyerere was receiving the news before others through his hidden television or he was prophesising future events through his mystical abilities, the argument of the myths that *linga atie isi asikwisa amasiku mabili mwagege muredio bikutangasya* (if he says something will happen, in two days you hear it on radio) is authentic among the Banyakyusa.

On the other hand, the radio as used in this myth indicates the role which mass media play is building national heroes such as Nyerere and influence mythmaking about them among the locals. According to He (2006) as already reviewed above, politicians use mass media to influence mythmaking for certain political wishes. With reference to He’s argument, the narrator’s statement in the myth that whatever Nyerere prophesised was broadcasted through radio after two days indicates the role which radio stations played/play to instil

Nyerere's mystical insights to Tanzanians. As a result, the act of mythmaking about Nyerere has widely spread throughout Tanzania (Phillips, 2015).

In addition to the talent to prophesise future events, Banyakyusa believe through their myths that Nyerere was a special blessed person with immense mystical powers. In a myth *Amaka ga Nyerere* (Nyerere's Power), Nyerere is recreated being a person who was created with special supernatural ability known as *ikingila*. Before explaining this myth, it is better to clarify first the meaning of *ikingila* which is among concepts which are repeated in a number of the Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere. The concept of *ikingila* (plural *ifingila*) comes from Banyakyusa myths about the power of lions. Banyakyusa believe that lions are almost like a normal cats and that the power they have are caused by *ikingila* which they possess. This *ikingila* is believed to be a steaklike pierce of meat which lions keep inside their mouth. From that steak (*ikingila*) lions acquire power which makes people and other animals fear them.

As Wilson (1959) points out, Banyakyusa believe that public leaders must own *ikingila* in form of a special powerful medicine or as an inborn supernatural power. As a medicine, *ikingila* is made of heart of lion and a heart of leopard together with some special roots and it is used mainly by chiefs (*abanyafyale*) or headmen/spiritual leaders (*amafumu*). The function of both medicine and inborn *ifingila* "is to create *amanga*, i.e. spiritual power, and *ubusisya*, i.e. dignity, majesty, in order to make chief fearful so that people obey him" (57). With respect to the myth *Amaka ga Nyerere* (Nyerere's Power), Nyerere was endowed with *ikingila*.

In this myth, the narrator states that "... *Nyerere alilwake itolo*" (Nyerere was uniquely different) because "... *Nyerere alinikingila kangi ikingila kyake kyalikipalapala fijo*" (...Nyerere had very intricate *ikingila*). For being *kipalapala* (intricate), the myth denotes that the power of Nyerere's *ikingila* could not be easily surpassed. Despite *ikingila* giving "...*ingalamu amaka gosa*" (...giving power to lions), its role to human beings as explained in this myth is that "*linga gwe mundu ulinikingila kya ngalamu kuja nsisya kangi kuja na maka agakujoba na bandu bosa biitikilege pope linga ngonyofu*" (if you possesses lion's *ikingila*, you become powerful to the extent that what you speak can be supported by majority even when it is nonsense). Here, the myth suggests that ideas from people like Nyerere who possessed *ikingila* were/are accepted, respected, and adopted without being challenged even if they are trivial. On Nyerere, the narrator insists that "*abandu abakingila pakisu banandi fijo kangi ikya Nyerere kyali kya pasima kabisa*" (There are very few people with *ikingila* in this world and Nyerere's *ikingila* was totally unique). Here, the narrator stresses on the belief that Nyerere was special.

The uniqueness of Nyerere's power as explained in the myth is because despite his appearance, he was respected by whites, blacks, police, and soldier. As already explained, Banyakyusa believe that as a result of their success and confidence, Europeans/Whites (*abhasungu*) possess strong mystical powers (Wilson). Therefore, the depiction that people including *abhasungu* (Europeans) *basililaga* (were trembling) when Nyerere was passing whereby trembling (*ukusilila*) symbolises fear denotes that Nyerere possessed the uppermost mystical powers. The narrator stresses that "*pope linga*



*akosomwile amanja gajaga ni kisa*” (even when he coughed so many claps were heard). We are then told that for having those powers which were caused by *ikingila*, Nyerere “*Kokuja alinakyala gwake juo*” (it was like he had his own God). Here, the narrator stresses on the belief that Nyerere was uniquely different from other human beings.

The myth *Amaka ga Nyerere* (Nyerere’s Power) portrays important character of Nyerere. In this myth, Nyerere is reconstructed being a normal human being but who is endowed with unique mystical powers (*ikingila*). The myth employs a rhetorical question “*muno mukombonela bulebule nsisya?*” (The way you see him, is he scary?) on which the obvious answer from the audience is “*mma alibolulwitu itolo?*” (No. He is just simple like us). Although, Banyakyusa believe through their myths that Nyerere had excessive supernatural powers, the rhetorical question above denotes that he was by appearance a normal human being. The act of depicting Nyerere in the myth as human being despite his magnificent supernatural powers differentiates him from other creatures such as angels who as Mbiti (1991) indicates are also believed to possess supernatural powers.

According to Msekwa (N.D), Nyerere was blessed with immense powers especially the power to argue and to persuade. With the powers, Nyerere was able to make TANU delegates support his decision to participate in colonialists’ tripartite votes which paved the way to peaceful attainment of independence. Similar to Msekwa, Johnson (2000) contends that Nyerere was a very special person who even his critics do not deny that he possessed special endowments. Parallel to Msekwa and Johnson’s contentions, the myth under discussion reconstructs Nyerere with immense powers by which he was able to gain majority support on each of his ideas. The myth uses a symbol of *amanja* (claps) whereby people were clapping to everything he said to signify the acceptance of Nyerere’s ideas to the majority. The myth stresses that “*pope linga akosomwile amanja gajaga ni kisa*” (Even when he coughed so much claps were heard). The word *akosomwile* (he coughed) as used in the sentence above signifies unimportant word or idea. This denotes that Nyerere’s mystical powers made people support him in everything including trivial things. With reference to the myth, I can argue that Banyakyusa believe that Nyerere’s success such as in establishment of Ujamaa policy, self-reliant education, and attainment of unity, peace, and security in Tanzania were contributed by his supernatural powers.

On the process of political mythmaking, the myth under discussion instil more awareness of the influence of non-literary agents to the process of mythmaking about Nyerere. With reference to Nyerere’ power, we are told that people were standing along the road when Nyerere was passing. This implanted to the people the perception that he was a loved, strong and powerful hero. With the perception that Nyerere was powerful leader, as Seger (2003) and Besier (2014) indicate, the Banyakyusa built/are building myths about him as a way of associating themselves and their society with him.

The beliefs that Nyerere had special powers is also depicted in a myth *Inyifwila*. Similar to *ikingila*, *inyifwila* is a concept which carries mythical beliefs of Banyakyusa. To Banyakyusa, *inyifwila* is an invisible, very big, and powerful

snake with many heads. *Inyifwila* is invisible because it lives beneath mountains and moves under rivers. Normally, Banyakyusa believe that when *inyifwila* moves, turns, or shakes, it causes earthquakes and terrific destructions in nearby areas. Apart from being destructive, *inyifwila* is important to human life because it causes water especially rivers. Banyakyusa believe that a mountain where *inyifwila* lives becomes a source of rivers. For example, Banyakyusa associate *inyifwila* with sources of River Kiwira, Mbaka, and Lufilyo. A number of Banyakyusa mythical stories about *inyifwila* especially from the Banyakyusa who live in shore plains of Lake Nyasa (Kyela district) are associated with River Kiwira which when flooded causes more destructions in Kyela district than in Rungwe district. It is important to clarify here that not all River Kiwira's floods and destructions are associated with *inyifwila*. Most of destructions associated with *inyifwila* are those which happen during dry seasons (in summer) and so Banyakyusa believe that they are results of movement of *inyifwila* the snake from Rungwe district through River Kiwira to Lake Nyasa.

The myth *Inyifwila* relates Nyerere with *inyifwila* because of his immense supernatural powers. The narrator states that “*abanyakyusa bikuti Nyerere aliiniinyifwila*. (Banyakyusa are saying Nyerere had *inyifwila*). According to Wilson (1959), the *inyifwila* concept is associated with the greatest medicine or inborn supernatural ability than *ifingila* as it gives chiefs utmost mystical powers, dignity, and majesty. With respect to Wilson's contention, the phrase *alininyifwila* (He had *inyifwila*) as used in this myth does not mean that Nyerere possessed that snake but he had utmost supernatural abilities. To clarify the belief that Nyerere had supernatural powers similar to *inyifwila* a snake, the myth narrates about Nyerere's journey to Europe (*mbulaja*) by which his excessive supernatural powers were revealed. The myth states that when Nyerere climbed on a stage in Europe all people including white leaders stood up without even knowing the reason for their standing up. The myth stresses that Nyerere “... *abonekaga ukuti nkulumba kulibosa*” (... was seen to be the highest leader). The act of all people standing up signifies Nyerere's possession of supernatural powers which made all people fear and obey him. Hence, with reference to the myth *Inyifwila*, Nyerere's supernatural powers made him to be the most powerful, superior, and respectable man in the world.

To clarify the metaphorical comparison between Nyerere and *inyifwila*, the myth *Inyifwila* provides an example of incidents resulted from supernatural powers of *inyifwila* the snake. In the last eight sentences, the myth narrates about destruction in a street known as Ndombosya in Itope ward, Kyela district. The large part of the street especially a part which is near to River Kiwira was destroyed on what Banyakyusa believe to be caused by *inyifwila*. The myth concludes that “*inyifwila jaliendieko kula*” (*inyifwila* passed there) which means all the destructions in the street was caused by the *inyifwila*. This story as used in this myth indicates that the snake has massive powers. Similarly, with respect to the myth, Nyerere had immense supernatural powers.

The myth *Inyifwila* is built around a metaphor of Nyerere and *inyifwila*, a mythical snake. The comparison gets meaning mostly from the nature of the snake which is having utmost powers. To begin with the nature of *inyifwila*, the myth describes it as unseen snake with many heads and that it brings water.

The description of the snake denotes its mystical nature. By having many heads whereby heads symbolises power, the myth suggests that *inyifwila* is a very powerful snake. With reference to Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham (2005) a snake (serpent) in myths signifies “mystery” (187). Hence, the act of recreating Nyerere in a metaphorical comparison with *inyifwila* the snake does not only signify that Nyerere had mystical powers but also his powers were tremendous.

Moreover, the myth describes *inyifwila* as a snake “*jila jikutwala amis*” (which brings water). With respect to Frye (1957), in mythological world, water especially in apocalyptic imagery symbolises life. Apocalyptic symbols as clarified by Frye signify behaviours which human desires. According to Fouere (2015b), Nyerere is a model to majority Tanzanians. By being a model to many people, Nyerere carries a symbol of desired human behaviour in Tanzania and beyond. Therefore, a metaphorical comparison of Nyerere and *inyifwila* the snake, which brings water whereby water symbolise life, denotes that Nyerere was born with admired mystical abilities for the success of his citizens.

Stressing on the beliefs that Nyerere was a special endowed person, a myth *Amahala ga Nyerere* (Nyerere’s Intelligence) reconstructs him as a person who during his childhood trained himself to write, count, and read. The narrator states that “*bikuti Nyerere akabhile fijo ukubhuka kusukulu. Alipo itolo kumiabo atimaga ing’ombe ni mbene*” (They say that Nyerere joined school very late. He was just at their residence grazing cows and goats). As Mpangala and Mawazo (2015) elaborate, Nyerere together with other children used to graze cows, goats, and other animals up to the age of twelve when he joined Mwisenge primary school. Despite his delay to start formal learning, the narrator states that “*lelo alinamahala agakupapigwa nago. Aliimanyishe jujo ukusimba, ukubhala nu ukusoma*” (But he had inborn intelligence. He taught himself to write, count, and read). The narrator adds that “*Nyerere bhati asimbaga nu kusoma mumbugani bho ikutima ing’ombe*” (Nyerere was writing and reading in the grazing fields). The narrator indicates that Nyerere acquired important skill before joining formal education. To justify the argument that Nyerere taught himself, the narrator states that “*bhaati na amabwe aga asimbangamo galipo na ulu ni isimbo syake silipo*” (They say that the stones he used to write and his writings are still there up to now). Lastly, we are told in the myth that the reason for white men enrolling Nyerere in formal school was his ability to write, read, and count.

The myth *Amahala ga Nyerere* (Nyerere’s Intelligence), carries one among characteristics of myths. According to Friedland (1960), a myth is a story which the narrator claims to have got it from someone who also got from someone who witnessed the event. In the myth *Amahala ga Nyerere* (Nyerere’s Intelligence), a Kinyakusa word *bhati* is repeated several times and as already explained the word *bhati* is a Nyakusa adverb which associates the truth of the story with the previous teller. As Mpangala and Mawazo (2015) explain, Nyerere spent his childhood in Butiama village, 26 miles from Musoma, headquarter of Mara region. Geographically, Butiama is about 1100 kilometre from the area of Banyakusa with about four administrative regions between Mara and Mbeya regions. The geographical distance between Banyakusa and

the place where Nyerere spent his childhood makes it difficult for Banyakyusa to have witnessed his childhood. Therefore, similar to Friedland's contention, the repetition of the word *bhati* in this myth indicates that the narrator got the story from the distant source which is believed to have witnessed the events.

Moreover, the myth under discussion carries Banyakyusa beliefs on Nyerere's intelligence. It is a general knowledge that with formal education, a child acquires skills from teachers in schools. The act of Nyerere teaching himself to write, read, and count implies that he had supernatural ability by which he could perform what others could not. To Banyakyusa, Nyerere "...*alinamahala agakupapigwa nago*" (had inborn intelligence). The phrase *agakupapigwa nago* (inborn) as used by Banyakyusa indicates that Nyerere was distinctively endowed. The distinctiveness of Nyerere is emphasised in the myth through the context in which he taught himself to write, read, and count. We are told that Nyerere was writing while grazing cows and goats. We are also told that he used stones to write. The myth signifies that he had special endowments through which he successfully turned himself into his own teacher, grazing grounds became a class, and stones became his books and writing boards.

Nyerere, as Mpangala and Mawazo (2015) contend, was the brightest student in Tanganyika. Also, based on Nyerere's success to join Makerere college in Uganda and later Edinburgh university in Scotland despite high competition, Ishumi and Maliyamkono (1995) support Mpangala and Mawazo's contention that Nyerere was among the most intelligent students in Tanzania. Similar to Mpangala and Mawazo and Ishumi and Maliyamkono's arguments, the myth *Amahala ga Nyerere* (Nyerere's Intelligence) reconstructs Nyerere as a very bright person. However, contrary to the arguments from scholars above which associate Nyerere's intelligence with formal schools, the myth associates his brightness with his inborn endowments. In the last sentence, the narrator states that *abhasungu* (Whites) found Nyerere able to read, write, and count. The word *abhasungu* (Whites) as used in this myth symbolises western or formal education. Hence the myth signifies that Nyerere joined formal education when he had already acquired it through his distinctive endowments.

## 5. Conclusion

Although the primary objective of this study was to understand the voice, perceptions and beliefs of local Tanzania specifically the Banyakyusa on Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the study revealed the relationship between the voices and perceptions of local people on social, historical and political matters and their traditional beliefs and experiences. With the belief that their traditional leaders, *abanyafyale* (chiefs) and *amafumu* (spiritual leaders), should possess mystic powers to make them majestic and brave, and instil obedience from their subjects, Banyakyusa recreate Nyerere – their father of nation – in their myths with immense mystic powers. The powers are associated with his ability to escape from ill wishes of his enemies and the reverence accorded to him in and outside Tanzania. Also, their traditional beliefs provide the answer which would probably not easily be obtained from historians or politicians to why Nyerere did not want strong defence despite several attempts to overthrow him from

powers. To Banyakyusa, Nyerere's defence and security was assured by his mystical powers

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