

## **The Relevance of Nyerere's African Socialism Today: Humanness (Utu) as a Means for Bringing about Good Governance**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the lasting relevance of Nyerere's African socialism, focusing on "Utu" (humanness) as a transformative ideal in governance. While acknowledging critiques, it argues that Nyerere's ideology holds intrinsic value beyond its methods. Emphasizing "Utu" as essential for gender equality, rule of law, and accountability—rooted in Bantu traditions—the paper presents it as a foundation for a just society. It also critiques the limited success of 1980s neoliberal reforms in Africa, suggesting a need to revisit Nyerere's values to address contemporary governance challenges, including widespread corruption.

**Keywords:** Julius Nyerere, African Socialism mindset, Neoliberalism, Corruption, Utu, Good Governance.

### **Introduction**

Nyerere's African Socialism, also referred to as Ujamaa, was crafted by Julius Nyerere, the inaugural President of Tanzania, with the aim of amalgamating traditional African communal values and socialist principles to promote development and equality. While significantly influencing Tanzania's policies, scholarly works delve into the theoretical underpinnings, implementation strategies, and overall impact of Nyerere's ideology. Key themes explored in academic literature include the Ujamaa philosophy (CORNELLI, 2012), policy assessments (IBANGA 2016), critiques (MAPUNDA 2011; BRENNAN 2014; ŽÁK 2016;), and the enduring legacy of this socio-political and economic framework (KIVINGE, 2021). Building upon existing research on Nyerere's African Socialism, this study takes a novel approach by addressing the criticisms often levelled against this ideology. The author recognizes the potential influence of critiques, acknowledging that sceptics may lead some readers to dismiss the entirety of a scholarly study. Against this backdrop, this essay establishes and validates the contemporary significance of Nyerere's African socialism.

The study strategically engages with critiques, placing emphasis on the enduring principles embedded in Nyerere's philosophy. These principles include gender equality, the rule of law, social cohesion, and individual responsibility. Central to the essay's argument is the exploration of the concept of "Utu" or humanness, a pivotal element in Nyerere's political thought. The analysis links "Utu" to essential political principles, thereby establishing a robust connection between the concept of humanness and the ideals of good governance. The paper

argues that the neoliberal reforms adopted by African nations in the 1980s as a substitute for African socialism have had limited success in fostering good governance. This shortcoming highlights the need to revisit and reconsider the fundamental values within Nyerere's African socialism. The study cites the pervasive political corruption in many African countries as evidence of the continued relevance of Nyerere's African socialism as a mindset for interrogating and influencing Africa's existing social, economic, and political policies towards good governance.

The essay contends that a detailed examination of "Utu" serves as a guiding principle in Nyerere's political philosophy, positioning it not only as a historical relic but also as a relevant and contemporary instrument for fostering effective governance. By demonstrating the enduring applicability of Nyerere's ideas and their alignment with modern political principles, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of his political ideology in today's context.

The essay begins with an overview of Julius Nyerere's African Socialism, followed by a section challenging criticisms, aiming to solidify its relevance by distinguishing external factors from intrinsic values. The paper then outlines intrinsic values in Nyerere's African socialism and their connection to influencing good governance. Before concluding, the essay underscores the relevance of Nyerere's African socialism to Africa by highlighting the continent's prolonged struggle with political corruption as evidence of the need to adopt the spirit of "Utu" advocated in Nyerere's African socialism for interrogating and influencing existing social, economic, and political policies towards inclusive governance.

### **A critical Overview of Julius Nyerere's African Socialism**

The relevance of Nyerere's African socialism today fits within the broader "African Socialism" philosophy developed by leaders like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Léopold Senghor, Sékou Touré, Modibo Keita, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Ahmed Ben Bella, who sought a unique African approach to development. Nyerere's Ujamaa (meaning "familyhood" in Swahili) emphasized self-reliance and communal living as a resistance to colonial capitalist models (NYERERE 1968). Nkrumah's Consciencism in Ghana blended African communalism with Marxist ideas, advocating a unified, socialist Africa free from colonial structures. Senghor's Negritude added a cultural perspective, celebrating African identity and humanism, through his Negritude philosophy, emphasizing pride in African heritage and values. Senghor advocated a version of African Socialism that combined French socialist ideals with African humanism, focusing on dignity, communal welfare, and shared prosperity. Although Senghor's socialism was less radical than Nkrumah's, it remains relevant in post-colonial studies, where the emphasis on African identity and culture is central to nation-building and development. Toure in Guinea and Keita in Mali pursued state control and economic independence, Keita's Mali focused on public ownership and a centralized economy (SCHMIDT 2007), while Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt promoted Arab Socialism, an adaptation of African Socialism, which included land reforms, nationalization, and investment in education and infrastructure. Nasser's socialism remains a point of reference for modern leaders facing socio-economic

disparities and is often cited in discourses on state-led development in North Africa (ABDEL-MALEK 1968).

These leaders' visions of African socialism were unified by themes of anti-colonialism, self-reliance, and communal values, promoting societal organization and economic independence. They aimed to blend modern socialism with indigenous African traditions, envisioning economic autonomy through collective solidarity and unity against neo-colonial pressures (BINEY 2011). African socialism, as advocated by leaders such as Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, and Leopold Senghor, emphasizes communalism and shared responsibility, reflecting the cultural values of African societies. (SENGHOR 1963). Scientific socialism, as theorized by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, posits a class-based analysis of society, focusing on the material conditions that shape human relationships and advocating for a proletarian revolution to establish a classless society. It is rooted in a historical-materialist perspective, viewing economic forces as the primary drivers of social change. In contrast, African socialism is less focused on class struggle and more concerned with collective well-being and social harmony, which are seen as inherent to African societies. This approach attempts to synthesize the values of traditional African communities, such as communal land ownership, kinship bonds, and shared labour with the goals of socialism, like economic justice and equitable resource distribution (NYERERE, 1968).

African socialism, akin to democracy, is a mindset, according to Julius Nyerere. In a socialist society, individuals prioritize each other's well-being, irrespective of wealth (NYERERE 1987). Nyerere distinguishes a socialist mentality from access to wealth, highlighting that a millionaire may identify as a socialist, while a capitalist uses riches to dominate colleagues (NYERERE 1987). The fundamental difference between socialist and capitalist societies lies not in wealth production but in its equitable distribution (NYERERE 1987). Lutz David (2009), clarifies that African communal culture doesn't subordinate the good of the person to the group, unlike Marxist collectivism. In a true society, individuals pursue their good while contributing to the common good, without sacrificing personal well-being for others (LUTZ, 2009). Nyerere's African socialism is rooted in "Utu" or humanistic principles of solidarity, equality, and freedom. African tribal peoples and those of Bantu ancestry, originating from a tradition of "Utu," embody morality, humanity, compassion, care, understanding, and empathy. "Utu" is morally upright, emphasizing correct actions instinctively known to be right, forming the basis of life for Bantu heritage Africans. Mutsonziwa Itay's (2020) measure of African humanism focuses on three key components: humanness, interconnectedness, and compassion.

The content of Nyerere's African Socialism was founded on the principle of self-reliance, seeking to create a society where Tanzanians would rely primarily on local resources and skills rather than foreign aid. Nyerere argued that development could not be imported, famously stating, "Development brings freedom, provided it is development of the people, by the people, for the people" (NYERERE 1973, 33). Nyerere's methodology for Ujamaa emphasized participatory development, where people would collectively build their villages, guided by mutual responsibility. The "Ujamaa Villages" aimed to revitalize indigenous systems of communal living, pooling resources to meet common

needs. Though the implementation faced significant economic and logistical issues (HYDEN 2012). Nyerere's African Socialism emphasized African knowledge systems and cultural values, challenging the epistemic dominance of Western ideologies. He envisioned Ujamaa not only as a political-economic system but also as an epistemic foundation that values African perspectives and indigenous knowledge. According to Nyerere, development should stem from African ways of life and not simply import Western capitalist or socialist models: "Socialism is an attitude of mind. We have been in Africa, by tradition, socialists" (NYERERE 1968, 5).

Nyerere's African socialism, with its emphasis on communal values and Utu (humanness), has been criticized for lacking the practical foundation of a complete philosophical system. Critics argue that Nyerere's idealized vision of communalism and reliance on traditional values overlook the complexities of modern governance and human self-interest (BRENNAN 2014). Brennan James (2014), views Nyerere's assumption that people will prioritize communal welfare as "unrealistic," given the diversity of individual motivations.. While offering ethical insights, critics suggest Nyerere's ideology lacks the rigor needed to analyze power dynamics essential for governance (MAZRUI 1980). Yet, some scholars argue that African socialism provides an alternative to individualistic paradigms, offering a culturally relevant, community-oriented approach (SHIVJI 2009).

Cabral's critique further emphasizes that Nyerere's rejection of scientific socialism weakened his approach, as it lacked the "weapon of theory" necessary for addressing complex socioeconomic issues (CABRAL 1966). Cabral argued that scientific socialism's foundation in Marxist theory provided analytical tools essential for tackling class inequality, which Nyerere's model failed to address (PETER 2019). Critics suggest that without a scientifically grounded framework, African socialism may lack practical mechanisms for substantive change (MAZRUI 1980). However, supporters highlight that Nyerere's focus on Ujamaa (familyhood) and Utu aimed to create a culturally rooted alternative to Western socialism, decolonizing African governance through indigenous concepts (SHIVJI 2009;). This debate reflects the tension within African political thought between developing an indigenous system or incorporating universal, scientific elements (AGUPUSI 2021).

Nyerere's Ujamaa philosophy, critics argue, overly idealizes communalism, underestimating the role of self-interest. Ujamaa assumed precolonial societies were wholly communal, ignoring aspects like competition and class differentiation (BRENNAN 2014). Critics see Ujamaa's rejection of economic individualism as conservative, hampering productivity and growth (HYDEN, 1980). Supporters, however, contend that Ujamaa sought to redefine values in a post-colonial context, challenging colonial individualism and promoting social responsibility and shared progress (SHIVJI 2009). Despite its limitations, Ujamaa remains a significant attempt to integrate African values with socialist principles, highlighting post-colonial leaders' struggle to balance tradition with modern governance needs (AGUPUSI 2021).

### ***Challenging Criticisms of Nyerere's African Socialism***

Leading Tanzania with African socialism, Nyerere faced criticism when economic difficulties arose in the 1980s, with historians claiming his vision contributed to these struggles (BRENNAN 2014). Critics argue that Nyerere's philosophy was idealistic and epistemologically unsound, with Cabral notably suggesting that Nyerere's focus on African socialism rather than scientific socialism weakened Tanzania's progress (CABRAL 1966). Detractors further contend that Ujamaa promoted a conservative worldview doomed by its disregard for human nature's self-interest (BRENNAN 2014). This exploration addresses these critiques, evaluating the economic, philosophical, and cultural impacts of Nyerere's ideology within Tanzania.

### ***Diverse philosophical traditions argument***

The critique of Nyerere's philosophy as incoherent stems from imposing Western standards on African systems of knowledge. Scholars like Achebe, Ngũgĩ, and Césaire oppose Eurocentric portrayals of African cultures, arguing that African philosophy, personhood, and community are distinct and rational (ACHEBE 2016). As Mbiti John (1970), memorably stated, "I am because we are," underscoring the community-focused nature of African identity, which Nyerere's philosophy embodies.

### ***Continuity with oral traditions argument***

In response to the aforementioned critics, this essay contends that across Africa, events and everyday experiences have functioned as sources of information and learning. Oral traditions have also played a crucial role in transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next. This approach is deemed a fundamental aspect of the epistemological school of education rooted in African traditional ontology. Nyerere employs this approach to elucidate the philosophy of African socialism. In portraying African moral teachings within Nyerere's African socialism, he employs the traditional African school of education approach. This is evident in his emphasis on the necessity to draw upon traditional African ways of existence to identify the optimal mode of government in contemporary African politics. Nyerere's method of conveying the African traditional mindset reflected in African socialism can be likened to the African elders' practice of passing down ancient stories to their grandchildren as a means of transmitting knowledge and wisdom through storytelling techniques (DATTA 1984). In discussing the African socialism worldview with his contemporary audience, Nyerere utilizes a typical African traditional approach to transmit historical information to the next generation. He shares the attitude of the era that shaped the lifestyles of early African communities, drawing from his memories of the past and firsthand observations of the Zaanaki community in Tanzania, a Bantu society. The literature demonstrates that egalitarian lifestyles are characteristic of Bantu communities, reflecting a mentality that values a practical way of life (TERBLANCHÉ ndn., 2022). Nyerere's African socialism thus qualifies the term and elucidates its meaning, resonating with the majority of the Bantu population on the African continent.

### ***Separating the worthiness of an idea from implementation argument***

After Tanzania's independence, Nyerere's African socialism addressed colonial economic exploitation. Although later economic struggles were attributed to his policies, critics overlook that poor implementation, not the ideology itself, led to failures (CABRAL 1966). Philosophers like Masolo emphasize that applicability should not undermine a theory's validity (MASOLO 1986). Citing thinkers like Mill and Kant, this paper argues that an idea's inherent value persists even amid flawed execution (BRINK 2022).

### ***1980s external factors and economic crisis argument***

Tanzania's economic crisis in the 1980s also reflected global shifts like the Cold War's end, the fall of the Soviet Union, and pressures for market reforms. Simultaneously, Tanzania faced an economic crisis due to the war with Uganda (THOMAS 2022). As Soviet support ceased, Tanzania adopted structural adjustment programs, shifting from socialism to a free-market approach, which fostered governance issues, corruption, and challenges to the Arusha Declaration's ideals (LOFCHIE 1985).

### **“Utu” as a Catalyst for Good Governance**

"Utu" embodies the African worldview of humaneness, morality, and social responsibility, shaping both personal and communal life. In Nyerere's African socialism, "Utu" signifies governance rooted in humanity and collective solidarity, emphasizing the communal identity expressed as "I am because you are" (MENKIT 1984). This principle reflects an interconnected life, where individual and community prosperity are intertwined. As a cultural ideal across African communities, especially in Sub-Saharan regions, "Utu" upholds values of respect, care, and shared humanity (NYERERE 1968). Nyerere saw African socialism as a mindset centred on "Utu," promoting leadership that values solidarity, collective responsibility, and a focus on societal welfare over individual gain.

### ***"Utu" and Gender Equality***

Gender equality, or gender egalitarianism, advocates for equal rights and responsibilities regardless of gender. It opposes biases in social, political, and economic opportunities, seeing equality as essential to good governance (KEPING 2018). Influenced by the African concept of "Utu," Nyerere's African socialism emphasizes that all people, regardless of gender or background, share equal rights and obligations (NYERERE 1968). Before colonialism, African societies embodied this egalitarianism, valuing community over individual wealth and fostering solidarity and mutual support.

Nobody starved, either of food or human dignity, because he lacked personal wealth; he could depend on the wealth possessed by the community of which he was a member. That was socialism. That is socialism in the African traditional set-up; economic institutions were already there, such as land, hoes, stone axes, and clumb. But these institutions were there to serve not only the person in whose possession these tools belong but the whole society.

Thus, a person lives for the other person. And individual actions are simply meant to empower another fellow member. (NYERERE 1968, 5)

According to Chukwudum Okolo (1993), true African socialism does not consider one class of individuals as the enemy. Every male and female are regarded as a sibling and a part of a greater family. Nyerere championed this through inclusivity, recognizing women's essential role in national development, as seen in the independence efforts led by figures like Bibi Titi Mohamed and Sophia Kawawa.

### ***"Utu" and the Rule of Law***

The "rule of law" ensures equality before the law, guards against arbitrary power, and has been central to political philosophy since Aristotle (CHOI 2023). Montesquieu further developed it by distinguishing lawful rule from despotism, influencing Western liberalism. Recognized as key to good governance, the rule of law aligns with Nyerere's African socialism, which stresses equality, ethical governance, and "Utu," or humanity, as guiding principles (NYERERE 1987).

"We must not allow the growth of parasites here in Tanganyika. The TANU<sup>1</sup> Government must go back to the traditional African custom of landholding. That is to say, a member of society will be entitled to a piece of land on the condition that he uses it. Unconditional, or 'freehold', ownership of land (which leads to speculation and parasitism) must be abolished. We must, as I have said, regain our former attitude of mind—our traditional African socialism—and apply it to the new societies we are building today." (NYERERE 1987, 7)

Nyerere's Tanzania prioritized social justice, combatting poverty, ignorance, and disease, and emphasized ethical public administration. In 1962, TANU established ten commitments. The ten commitments emphasize unity across Africa, dedicated national service, and a personal pledge to combat poverty, ignorance, and disease. They reject bribery, highlight the responsibility of official positions, and promote self-education and collective cooperation in nation-building. The commitments also stress truthfulness, loyalty to TANU, African citizenship, and allegiance to the President of Tanzania, forming a foundation of ethical leadership and integrity in public service (BIENEN 1970).

### ***"Utu" and Accountability***

Accountability means individuals and organizations are responsible for fulfilling duties and may answer to higher authorities with power to reward or punish. In

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<sup>1</sup> TANU, or the Tanganyika African National Union, was a political party founded by Julius Nyerere in 1954 in Tanganyika (now part of Tanzania). TANU played a central role in the struggle for independence from British colonial rule and became the dominant party in the country's post-independence government. Under Nyerere's leadership, TANU was instrumental in promoting a vision of African socialism, also known as Ujamaa, which emphasized self-reliance, equality, and community-based economics. TANU merged with the Afro-Shirazi Party of Zanzibar in 1977 to form Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), which continues to be a significant political force in Tanzania today.

politics, accountability is essential for limiting corruption and private interests, contributing to good governance (COUPLAND 2001). Ali Mazrui emphasized accountability as foundational for democracy, requiring leaders to justify their actions publicly. In African socialism, the idea of accountability is tied to "Utu," which reflects human dignity as defined by Nyerere. Human dignity has three aspects: it is innate, earned through virtuous actions, and granted by one's community (SANGA 2019). Public leaders, therefore, must act with accountability and transparency to embody "Utu," or a true human person. Nyerere linked accountability with "Utu," the African concept of human dignity, stressing moral and ethical behaviour in leadership. His phrase "Uhuru na Kazi" (freedom and work) encouraged Tanzanians to work hard for self-improvement, seeing freedom as incomplete without effort. "Utu" inspires value-based leadership that prioritizes ethical values, shared decision-making, and community, suggesting African leaders embrace leadership styles aligned with "Utu" ideals.

### ***Examples of integrating "Utu" into policy-making***

Integrating African socialism into policy-making aligns governance with African socio-cultural values, emphasizing communal welfare, solidarity, and social justice. Nyerere's African socialism, rooted in Utu (humanity), proposes policies that reflect shared responsibility and collective well-being. For example, Botswana's communal management of diamond revenues has funded public welfare, reflecting the African socialist ideal of using natural resource wealth for societal benefit. Rwanda's community health insurance, Mutuelle de Santé, ensures healthcare for all and promotes social cohesion. Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy (FSHS) empowers citizens through education, echoing African socialism's belief in social justice through equal access. Senegal's Great Green Wall project fosters environmental stewardship by involving local communities in sustainable land management.

### ***Policy recommendations based on Utu for Governance in Africa***

Policy recommendations based on Utu for African governance include: (1) community-based resource monitoring for transparency; (2) equitable healthcare policies based on local partnerships; (3) community-led judicial oversight for accountability, inspired; (4) policies supporting cooperative land ownership, which empowers communities through collaborative land management; (5) universal education promoting civic engagement, and (6) local councils for environmental stewardship. These policies align governance with Utu, advancing justice and communal welfare.

### ***Neoliberal Reforms in Africa and the Decline of African Socialism Mindset in the 1980***

In the 1980s, neoliberal reforms in African countries led to public service privatization, reducing access for low-income groups and worsening social inequalities. IMF and World Bank policies in nations like Zambia, Kenya, and Tanzania limited government roles in social services, raising unemployment and poverty while weakening worker protections and increasing precarious employment. Conditions tied to foreign aid further restricted social spending,



impacting low-income communities and making essential services unaffordable (LEWIS 2007). Additionally, privatization enabled political elites in countries such as Nigeria and South Africa to exploit these reforms for personal gain, fostering corruption and eroding public trust (TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL 2023; ZONDO COMMISSION 2021). Corruption has diverted resources and compromised infrastructure, as seen in Nigeria and South Africa's "state capture" scandal during Jacob Zuma's presidency (ZONDO COMMISSION 2021). Angola's elite wealth monopolization and resource exploitation in the DRC further worsen poverty and inequality (OXFORD ANALYTICA 2020). This corruption highlights the need for governance based on ethics, communal welfare, and accountability—principles of Julius Nyerere's African socialism, particularly the concept of Utu, which emphasizes shared prosperity and ethical governance.

### ***The Menace of Corruption: Advocating for an African Socialism Mindset***

Corruption remains a major issue in African nations, with scores below 50% on international perception indices such as Afro-barometer, Transparency International, and the World Bank (TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL 2023). Corruption infringes on fundamental rights, obstructing African progress. From 2000 to 2009, impoverished countries lost \$8.44 trillion through illegal money flows—ten times the foreign aid received (UNITED NATIONS 2013). Public sector corruption hinders institutional progress, affecting contracts, project execution, and access to services like healthcare and housing. The result is reduced investment, slower economic growth, greater inequality, and heightened poverty. For instance, Angola lost \$1 billion in oil revenue in 2001, and bribery was linked to heightened devastation from the 2004 Turkey earthquake due to construction shortcuts. The World Bank Institute estimates bribes in poorer countries, largely in Africa, reach \$1 trillion annually (SVENSSON 2005).

Scholars attribute Africa's corruption to poverty, low wages, high risk factors, and ineffective judicial and legislative systems. Lack of political will and fair wealth distribution worsen the issue (HAMZA ndn., 2023). This paper argues that corruption stems from a failure to embrace the African concept of Utu, or "humanness." Nyerere's African socialism offers a solution, emphasizing humanism and ethical governance as critical for contemporary society.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Nyerere's enduring African socialism, encapsulated in the concept of "Utu" or humanity, plays a pivotal role in shaping contemporary governance. Despite potential criticisms of its practical application, the intrinsic value of Nyerere's ideology transcends specific execution strategies. This study highlights the profound importance of "Utu" in fostering gender equality, upholding the rule of law, and instilling accountability, resonating with the African worldview and promoting a collective sense of responsibility. Nyerere's vision, rooted in Bantu cultural practices, champions equality within communities. Tanzania's 1980s economic challenges are attributed to external factors, not flaws in African socialism. "Utu" emerges as a powerful catalyst for gender equality, rejecting gender-based prejudices and supporting inclusivity. Additionally, "Utu" upholds the rule of law, emphasizing just legal systems, advocates for accountability, and

promotes transparency and ethical conduct. The study argues that adopting a values-based leadership style inspired by "Utu" can nurture a culture of accountability. Nyerere's African socialism, centered on "Utu," offers a timeless framework for addressing contemporary challenges, promoting humane governance, gender equality, the rule of law, and accountability in today's intricate political landscape.

## Declarations

\*The author declares no conflict of interest or ethical issues for this work

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