5 Tanzania: the Search for Socialism and Pluralism

There is a village museum on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam which contains life-size replicas of traditional buildings from different parts of Tanzania. In front of each building is a plaque containing a synopsis of the history and culture of the area concerned. To a newly-arrived visitor from Ghana the most striking feature of the descriptions is the absence of any references to the role of chiefs in that history and culture. As the institution of the chieftaincy was abolished in 1962, the omission may be partly an Orwellian attempt to blot out inconvenient historical facts, but it may also reflect a genuine belief that chiefs had never played a major role. In a country with over a hundred small ethnic groups, in which no one of these was ever strong enough to have had pretensions about dominating the others, and none was greatly feared as a potential dominator, chiefs had been, for the most part, small fish in a big pond. All this is in contrast to Ghana, where tribes such as the Asantes and the Ewes dominate whole regions. They may see themselves as groups which can unite to maximise their collective benefits from the political system, and may be seen by others as a potential threat. It is often the Ghanaian chiefs, rather than transient politicians, who are seen as leaders of their people, and a hierarchy with paramount chiefs above and sub-chiefs below helps to maintain a stratified society. Parties of commoners such as the CPP may sometimes win power, but the social structure remains intact and egalitarian ideas have had difficulty in making any headway.

The Tanzanian culture is a more egalitarian one. Berg-Schlosser and Siegler describe a tradition of ‘egalitarian-segmented social structures’ which existed at the turn of the century. The 1905–7 rebellion against the taxation and compulsory cotton cultivation imposed by the German colonial government, although unsuccessful, helped to create a greater
sense of unity between diverse tribes (Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 1990: 67), and this continued when Tanganyika passed into British control after 1918. When the British gave immigrant Asians trading monopolies and privileges, especially over the wholesale trade in raw materials, Africans responded by establishing co-operative groups which united to form the Tanganyika African Association (TAA) in 1920. This developed as a political as well as an economic force, and Julius Nyerere, a graduate recently returned from Edinburgh University, was elected chairman in 1953. India had gained independence in 1947, Ghana did so in 1957 and most of French-speaking Africa followed in 1960. The time was ripe for a nationalist movement that could prove its ability to lead the country to independence with a solid bedrock of support, and the TAA transformed itself into a political party, the Tanganyika African National Union (Tanu), in 1954. With the advantages already mentioned of an ethnic structure of many small groups rather than a few large ones, and of the common Kiswahili language, the party quickly developed a nationwide organisation with a million members, and won all the available seats in the colonial parliament (Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 1990: 68; O’Neill in O’Neill and Mustapha 1990: 9–10). Able to exploit urban middle-class resentment at European and Asian domination, and peasant grievances over agricultural prices and marketing systems, as well as building links with trade unions, Tanu had no competitors in sight, and the only non-Tanu members elected to the pre-independence parliament were a few independents.

THE MAKING OF A SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY

Dominant parties can go in a variety of directions after leading their countries to independence. In Ghana the ruling party set about demolishing a strong, if regionally based, opposition, through a mixture of rewards for defectors and preventive detention for persistent opponents, but the party gradually disintegrated once there were no elections to contest and no coherent ideology to inspire. In Kenya the strategy fluctuated between outlawing, and attempting to absorb, the opposition, and in Zambia and parts of French-speaking Africa, ruling