NKRUMAH HALL: HERITAGE MAKING AND IDEOLOGICAL LEGITIMACY IN TANZANIA

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Abstract
This article examines the gradual making of the Nkrumah Hall into a national heritage of Tanzania by investigating the historical and social processes that converted a university infrastructure into an edifice of national importance. Through data obtained from informant interview and secondary texts, the article analyses the dynamics of ideological discourse and pan-African sentiments, and their centrality to popular image of the Nkrumah Hall. It as well examines the role of charismatic leadership in heritage production, analysing the intricate relationship between the hall and some key personalities that have been associated with it. The article also reflects on how the importance attached to the hall stressed its physical quality that is the elegance and unique architectural design. Furthermore, it argues that the iconic status of Nkrumah Hall is facilitated and entrenched by the centrality of knowledge to both the earliest and contemporary quests for ideological legitimacy in Tanzania. The article concludes by situating the heritage quest of the Nkrumah Hall in the context of the socially embedded university.

Key words: National heritage, Nkrumah Hall, Ideological legitimacy, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes in 2014, the authority of the University of Dar es

Salaam proposed to the government of Tanzania through the country's ministry of natural resources and tourism the nomination of the university's iconic Nkrumah Hall as a national heritage site.[3] Underpinning the proposal is not just the consideration of Nkrumah hall as a symbol of the university and of education but also an assumption about the benefits that will accrue to the hall in terms of maintenance and conservation. The call for nomination was further justified on other factors such as the historical and cultural functions of the building, its unique architectural design, the public recognition accorded it, and the association the building bears with Kwame Nkrumah, a foremost pan-Africanist and the first president of independent Ghana. In this article, we examine the historical processes and narratives that have shaped the Nkrumah Hall into an aspiring site of national heritage. In light of existing works on heritage making, we analyse the relationship between the hall and the intellectual exchanges it has hosted, and how regular affiliation with ideological and political discourses might have conferred on it a kind of legitimacy in terms of being a space for setting agenda and crafting new initiatives on national development. We also discuss the perceived role of charismatic figures in the making of the Nkrumah Hall into a historical landscape. Here we consider the iconic significance of the hall as derived mostly from an association borne with the personality of Julius Nyerere and his political ideology. In other words, the public representation of Nkrumah Hall, which the university aimed at, beyond being borne out of what Witcomb has described as "nostalgia and utilitarianism"[4] is regarded as embedded in the early history of Tanzania that has been more or less personified by Nyerere. We as well examine the aspect of the hall's architecture, and the ways in which the exquisiteness of the building perhaps provokes among Tanzanians a sense of accomplishment and national pride. Overall, we adopt a view of heritage as socially constructed and embodied in elites' conferment of significance to spaces that may be perceived to be 'ordinary.' This aligns well with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's view that heritage does not exist *per se* but is invented or created "through metacultural operations that extend museological values and methods (collection, documentation, preservation, presentation, evaluation and interpretation) to living persons, their

knowledge, practices, artefacts, social worlds and life styles."[5] The data reported in this article are obtained from interviews and other secondary sources.

HERITAGE AND HERITAGE-MAKING

Popular ideas of heritage include monuments, archaeological sites, historical buildings and records, ancient landscapes, artefacts and a whole range of material and non-material culture that form into what Moles describes as "landscape of memories."[6] Beyond their exoticness, sites and artefacts are widely acclaimed as means of fostering national cohesion and mediating difference based on the notion of a nation as basically propelled by the feelings of shared past. This may probably explain why Graham et al. equate heritage with a concern for the past.[7] Hence the notion of heritage as old and historic buildings, ancient landscape, and monuments has dominated the discourse of heritage anytime and anywhere. Although conventional conceptualisation of heritage acknowledges its tangible and intangible statuses, there are views of it as an abstraction and a process rather than an end in itself. As a construction in time and space, heritage may, therefore, not just be about using the past as a resource for the present as suggested by Graham et al.[8] Rather it may serve our interest better to describe it as the act of historicising both the past and the present as embodied in a medium ascribed with contemporaneous relevance. In other words, the discourse of heritage should ordinarily provoke further interests in both the concept and the making of history. For instance, it is necessary that we seek to know the starting point of history. Questions such as when the past commenced; is it yesterday, fifty years ago, or one hundred years hence become pertinent. From all intent and purpose, an inheritance, which is the core idea implicated in heritage, may have a history considered to be recent. Heritage-making is basically connected with the process of representations of cultural heritage. Earliest ideas about heritage-making are associated with elites and as well linked to the need to stem down the effect of modernisation, especially as it relates to the fast disappearance of certain cultural apparatuses and landscapes. In the opinion of Graham et al the initiative for the identification and conservation of heritage was by no

means always governmental, but was frequently triggered by the concerns of private citizens for the protection of a past legacy perceived to be disappearing under the weight of nineteenth-century urbanization and industrialization.[9] In recent years, however, the process is associated more with the conscious effort of the state to employ heritage for various objectives such as national identity, conflict management, creation of employment opportunities through tourism activities, among other rationale bordering on social and economic development. Public recognition and political significance of heritage sites have thus been influenced more by the practice of associating heritage with a past which may not just be romanticised or constituted into a resource for national identity purposes but can as well be commoditised for sheer economic purpose. Hence, the perceived importance of heritage has made more states, across the world, to engage in what Campeanu has described as recovery, discovery, and interpretation of things that have existed in the past, with the sole aim of making them available for public consumption.[10] The numerous interventions on monuments, Silva posits, "reflect the modern understanding of heritage as an accumulation of historical periods, of which the present is the latest."[11] The often subjective nature of decisions on what must be included in a list of a particular society's heritage and of actors saddled with the responsibilities of taking such decisions also prompts talks about the politics of heritage or what Weiss has termed the "politics of recognition."[12] In which case, official pronouncements on inclusion or exclusion of cultural materials as heritage are considered driven by a number of factors that may or may not connect with the idea of shared pastness. What is honoured, valorised or historicised in some cases is remote to popular consciousness. In other words, the politics of heritage depicts the contestations and tensions built around ascription of heritage status to sites thought to be imbued with historical significance. Like Richter has suggested, the more reason why interest groups are getting involved in issues of what is saved, destroyed or interpreted is due to the increasing awareness among groups and communities of the symbolic importance of being represented in local and international heritage sites.[13]

NKRUMAH HALL: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THE MAKING OF A HERITAGE

Nkrumah Hall is an infrastructure of the University of Dar es Salaam that was instituted as part of the effort of the Tanzanian government to build a reputable university during the early years of the country's independence. Mapunda describes the hall as one of the mandatory requirements for the then young college to commence operation at its permanent site.[14] The unique design further represents it as a symbol of the grandiose status of University of Dar es Salaam. The most common explanations for the hall being named after Kwame Nkrumah was related to both the image of Nkrumah as a foremost pan-Africanist and the ideological bond he shared with Julius Nyerere. Beyond the name, foreign connections with the edifice can be identified at two levels. First, the building project had received funding support from the government of the Federal Republic of Germany. A plaque acknowledging the support is placed on the wall of the building close to the entrance gate. Second, the architectural design of the hall was contracted to Norman and Dawn Architectural and Engineering Company Limited, a London based firm.[15] The rigour put into designing the building suggests a conscious effort toward creating an architectural masterpiece, a feature that is commonly associated with the university space all over the world.



Figure 1: Nkrumah Hall, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Photograph by the authors, March 2015

There is little to indicate that an objective of making a national heritage of the Nkrumah Hall was contemplated from outset. Nevertheless, the history and usage of the hall has endowed it with a representation outside its being a mere university infrastructure, a phenomenon which Kirshenbalatt-Gimblett (1998) aptly describes as a "second life as heritage."[16] The metamorphosis of the hall from just a university infrastructure to a national symbol that adorns the face of the Tanzania Five Hundred Shillings (500Tsh) note actually offers new insight into the processes of heritage-making. A wide range of actors such as the state, civil societies and international organisations like UNESCO are often thought to be involved in the making of heritage. In the case of Nkrumah Hall, an official proclamation of heritage is yet to be made although a proposal to that effect has been made to the Tanzanian government through the country's ministry of natural resources and tourism. But even when an approval is yet to be granted, the status of the hall as a heritage is already widely acclaimed and largely authenticated by Tanzanians either through official relationship borne with the hall or by the symbolic act of representing it on the national currency note. In fact, only few people were aware that the hall did not have a national heritage status yet. Nonetheless, the current journey of Nkrumah Hall to becoming a heritage is popularly

recounted in terms of at least three historical trajectories, all of which is connected to the intellectual space provided by the University of Dar es Salaam and the propagation of the socialist ideology of Julius Nyerere as advanced in his Ujamaa policy. Perhaps the most important of the factors that confer national significance on the Nkrumah Hall is its association with the iconic figure of Julius Nyerere who undoubtedly has remained the most important personality in Tanzania history. Informants were unanimous in ascribing the fame of the Hall to the intellectual thrust, which the first president of independent Tanzania provided for his socialist ideological orientation. Many of them said that Nyerere had used the hall as a platform to engage with the intellectuals in the University of Dar es Salaam about his socialist thoughts. The idea of a national image inhabiting a space resonates well in many comments about Nyerere's regular visits to the hall. Some informants were of the opinion that the first president brought Tanzania to the hall each time he came calling. Other informants just viewed the hall as one of the earliest magnificent infrastructure, which the president initiated. What we can easily suggest from the various views expressed was that the image of Julius Nyerere looms around the edifice, imbuing it with an extraordinary aura commonly associated with the "father of a nation". In other words, the hall embodies not just the ideology of the "builder" but also personifies him. The impression of Nyerere is believed to be written all over the hall and as one informant puts it "even when it is named after Kwame Nkrumah, the hall to most observers evinces the figure of Nyerere." It is also instructive to know that words such as "symbol" and "icon" that the authority of the University of Dar es Salaam or Tanzanians generally used in describing the Nkrumah Hall are key expressions employed to describe the person of Julius Nyerere by Tanzanians. During the over forty years of its existence the Nkrumah Hall has played host to key figures in African and global affairs. Such important personalities include former United Nations Secretary General, Boutros-Boutros Ghali, former Organisation of African Unity Secretary General, Salim Ahmed Salim, former South African president, Thabo Mbeki, Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, Liberian president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and the German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter

Steinmeir among other world leaders who have presented lectures at different times in the hall. The visits of these personalities to Tanzania were considered very important. Quite a number of my informants were of the opinion that the international status of these personalities has rubbed off on the hall, thus fashioning it into an arena for international discourse. What comes out clearly from the views expressed in this regard is that the hall carries the image of the country, and as well forms itself into a space for national imagining. In it, many Tanzanians see the world as being brought to their feet while the country in equal measure is exported to the rest of the world. This nationalistic feeling is further encapsulated in a view of an informant that "Tanzania is under focus each time an international figure presents a lecture at Nkrumah Hall."[17] But beyond these guests, allusions were often made to the significant role of the hall in the struggles of South African countries for independence. The Nkrumah Hall was seen as a ready platform for "freedom fighters" who had either travelled or escaped to Tanzania to disseminate information about the injustices of apartheid and colonial rule in their respective countries. According to the UDSM heritage proposal, the hall "bears significant historical appraisal of gathering people for African decolonization and development." Another informant in his account has also suggested that Nelson Mandela once made a disguised visit to Tanzania though the story didn't include his delivering a lecture at Nkrumah Hall. Nkrumah Hall is also the symbol of the University of Dar es Salaam.[18] Against this background the hall is thought to embody whatever the university stands for in the history of Tanzania, especially with regards to educational development. The proposal document for the adoption of the hall as a national heritage is quite unequivocal in its evaluation of the contribution of the University of Dar es Salaam to the emergence of modern Tanzania. The second page of the document states *inter alia*:

> The success of Tanzania in her 50 years of independence owes much to the intellectual input of UDSM - whether directly or indirectly. It is therefore high time that such a contribution is (sic) tangibly recognised. One way of doing that is for the government to adopt Nkrumah Hall (Plate 1),

the University's symbol as a national cultural heritage.[19]

The intention of the UDSM proposal is to transfer the notion of the university as a national heritage to its very symbol, which is the Nkrumah Hall. Although in the above justification the proposal also reflects the politics of heritage-making, it nonetheless encapsulates the essential role played by education in national development. Hence the university is seen as embedded not only in the image of the university as "one of the key landmarks and achievements of Tanzania's independence," as so described in the UDSM proposal but also interwoven with the overall success the university has achieved in delivering on its initial mandate of "preparing high level manpower" for the Republic of Tanzania. The university is also believed to have trained the majority of Tanzanian elites who by reason of association are proponents of Nkrumah Hall. No doubt, the legitimacy of Nkrumah Hall itself is not to be detached from the towering status of the University of Dar es Salaam as a centre of excellence and a symbol of the educational attainment of the Republic of Tanzania. The real implication of this thus, is found in the idea of the university as a space of knowledge and cultural production more so that the University of Dar es Salaam is the oldest university in the country. Another factor associated with the image of Nkrumah Hall as an aspiring national heritage is its exquisite and exceptional design. Informants have severally depicted the hall as a memorable landscape in Tanzania. An informant, Ismail, for example, was of the opinion that the usual efforts to make every visitor to UDSM see the Nkrumah Hall was not often based on any idea of its inimitable functionality or historical standing but rather on the notion of it being an outstanding architectural work. Another informant, Benedicto Bagae spoke about the practice of new students in UDSM taking personal photographs in front of Nkrumah Hall. According to him, the hall is certainly one place students use to validate their studentship in the University of Dar es Salaam. Sentiments centring on the physical structure of the hall were equally expressed in the proposal to have Nkrumah Hall conferred with heritage status. For instance, UDSM (2014) has observed that the dome shape and the lack of pillars in the interior of the building "make the

building impressive and unique not only in Dar es Salaam but also in Tanzania."[20] This description of the hall aligns well with Mapunda (2008) suggestion that the building constitutes one of the features of the university that succeeded in capturing public attention.[21] It was this aspect of the building according to Mapunda that has transformed the Nkrumah Hall into symbol of the university.

SPEAKING TO TANZANIANS: NKRUMAH HALL AND IDEOLOGICAL LEGITIMACY

Existing studies on heritage have emphasised its functional dimension by examining the different forms in which it is deployed, especially in recent times. However, Asworth's view of heritage as "a medium of communication, a means of transmission of ideas and values and a knowledge that includes the material, the intangible and the virtual"[22] has been quite instructive. This perspective departs from a conventional notion of heritage as a product and as well imbues monuments and other heritage sites with life and capacity that enable them to initiate communication and influence messages. All of this aspect is thought to be built into the Nkrumah Hall. Although it is widely regarded as a platform of intellectual and political debates, the hall's importance tends not to be limited to the space it offers for national and international events but also extends to the legitimacy so conferred on discourse. In the first instance, an association borne with Julius Nyerere has in a way suggested the hall as a likely space for ideological propagation, especially the version of African socialism advocated by the first president of independent Tanzania. In this regard, names of scholars like Professor Walter Rodney who taught at the University of Dar es Salaam have also featured prominently in historical narratives constructed around the Nkrumah Hall and socialist discourse in the university. Many of these narratives also emphasise the status of the hall as a symbol of credibility and unlimited academic freedom. Perhaps, the University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Association (UDASA) has aimed at building on the rich history of the hall as an arena for intellectual exchanges through the series of debates on national issues it has organised in the hall. The most recent of such debates was on the proposed

amendment to the national constitution to guarantee a three-tier federalism. While the subject of the last debate was very important to an average Tanzanian, the venue of the debate appeared not to be of less significance. Wherever the debate was mentioned, the name Nkrumah Hall was not left out. The legitimacy in Nkrumah Hall is believed to be contained in popular acknowledgment of it as a neutral and non-partisan space to express nationalistic sentiments. According to an informant, "when you speak in Nkrumah Hall, you see yourself as speaking to Tanzanians, and whatever opinion you express is taken as sincere even when they may not necessarily be accepted".[23] No doubt, this informant could have overstated the link between the hall and Tanzanians or the nature of truth embodied in the space. However, going by the preponderance of opinions, it is very clear that many Tanzanians see the hall as capable of authenticating discourse and as such have taken issues discussed there seriously. Sentiments about Nkrumah Hall, many explain, are widely understood by the Tanzanian government who also take interest in whatever debates that have been staged in the hall. Nkrumah Hall was also considered as constituting a media in itself during the early years of Tanzania independence. In the absence of formal means of communication such as newspapers and television, the hall was thought to have served as a space for disseminating important news particularly popular reactions to official and other forms of hegemonic communications. It was further understood that Tanzanian elites, especially those residing in Dar es Salaam had since the early years of the hall perceived it as a place to obtain objective dissection of issues of national importance and would therefore ensure to attend every event hosted by the hall. The Tanzanian government, we were also told, accord high regard to discourses in Nkrumah Hall due to the quality of audience it attracts. As a media, the hall, perhaps functioning within the framework of the traditional court, evinces authority and extensively arrests the minds of its audience by virtue of what can be termed believability by association. In all of this, the notion of contextual legitimacy is implicated and the validity of discourses in the hall is thought to be taken well beyond both their contents and the credibility of a discussant. There are, however, views about the elitist nature of communication, which emanate from the

Nkrumah Hall. In this regard, a number of informants have posited that whatever we consider the high point of the hall is relevant only to a limited section of Tanzanians, especially those that are lucky enough to have passed through the University of Dar es Salaam and other elites living in the city. People in the remote villages, these informants have argued, are detached from the reality constructed about Nkrumah Hall. Meanwhile, those who intend to strip Nkrumah Hall of any claim to being a sacred intellectual space, also make reference to social events such as wedding receptions that the hall regularly hosted. This reality they claim has not appropriately differentiated Nkrumah Hall from any other commercial hall or event centre. A sort of ambivalence suggested here is however true about most examples of heritages, which existence, especially in their commoditise forms, are extricated from local meanings and ideas. In other words, the notion of Nkrumah hall as an aspiring heritage is contested by a class of Tanzanians whose views may as well have been structured by socio-demographic dynamics that tend to define the category of people involved in the making and consumption of heritage.

CONCLUSION: ON THE SOCIALLY ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

The idea of heritage we have presented in this article is driven by two important concerns. First is the need to address the contentious issue of what qualifies as a heritage or how heritage may be produced. Researches on the politics of heritage appear to have been more about how community identity is implicated in the process of heritage recognition.[24] But beyond identity as a contrastive medium there is always the aspect of societal values expressed by objects, collections, and buildings that are given recognition as heritage.[25] It is in this particular dimension that the status of Nkrumah Hall can be further evaluated. Thinking about societal values here, it is important that consideration be accorded the prominence placed on knowledge and on the university as a space for knowledge production. This article has so far highlighted how the identity of Nkrumah Hall is etched in the university's and embodied in a kind of functional intellectualism that is associated with only the University of Dar es Salaam in the whole of Tanzania. People who see the hall as a heritage are those

who clearly represent the development of Tanzania in terms of capacity building engendered by University of Dar es Salaam. What this perspective on heritage has done is to encourage deeper reflection on the process of corporate heritage making, in addition to unpacking heritage of the notion of pastness on which it for the most times rests. The second concern has to do with the mode of engagement the university should adopt in dealing with the society. This latter stance is meant to address an unchallenged assumption about the university being disconnected from the outside world and thus being unresponsive in any way to lived realities.[26] Without delving into the nitty-gritty of the arguments, the notion of a socially engaged university underscores a radical transformation in the design of teaching and learning, and sensitivity toward societal needs. However, analysing the popular representation of Nkrumah Hall in terms of social embeddedness of the university entails establishing a nexus between the hall and the larger Tanzania society, especially with regards to addressing core areas of needs and aspiration. Here, we have taken such expectation beyond the realm of curriculum and cognitive orientation to represent social engagement as whatever contribution that is made to open the university gate to the entire society as a way of creating shared experiences. We see the Nkrumah Hall to a very large extent as having performed this role.

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NOTES

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