

CHRISTOPHER MTIKILA INTERVIEW

In this interview, Christopher Mtikila discusses the failures of socialism in Tanzania under the leadership of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. He recounts his days of being jailed for his opposition to the government and recalls how the concept of “ujama” or national unity was forced upon his countrymen in violent and destructive ways.

What is your current position?

I'm Reverend Christopher Mtikila. I'm pastor of Full Salvation Church, that's why I'm Reverend but I'm also a national chairman of Democratic Party.

Is the Democratic Party an opposition party?

Precisely. It is the first opposition party in Tanzania but was denied registration for ten years. We just registered on the seventh of June, last year.

Have you ever been arrested?

Well, I have been arrested about twenty-five times since then.

When was the first time that you were arrested?

The first time I was arrested was in 1989 when I had addressed the students at the University of Dar es Salaam. This was the first time for a strike, they called it strife, but I remember they were demanding multi-party democracy and human rights. So I was arrested for sedition.

When did you first become involved in opposition work?

I first got into trouble when I was a student in secondary school because our first African headmaster Mr. Alexander Thomas Mabelli who had been secretary general of Tanganyika African National Union and Mr. Julius Nyerere. So when he came to replace the outgoing British headmaster, he compelled every student to be a member of the TANU youth league, the youth wing of the ruling party. Now, because I was opposed to the ideologies of Mr. Nyerere and because I knew the truth, I refused. Although I was secretary to the school council, I rejected to be part of that political compulsion because if I wanted to join the party or the youth wing I would have done so at home. I would not need to go to school at all, so I refused. And because I refused, I was required to receive six canes before the school assembly and I felt that was unjustified so I was dismissed from school. That was my first problem with the ruling party.

Well, my late father had to come and besiege the headmaster to allow me to sit for the Cambridge examination, which they accepted. And I sat for the Cambridge examination but I had already lost the qualifications on disciplinary grounds to go to form-five. Well I thought I had protected my principle and my dignity. So, I went for the judiciary for sometime and then went to East African airways. Then I went into business. Then I was born again in 1982. I decided to preach the gospel but in doing that, I felt I was a hypocrite because even the Lord spoke to me that people were suffering. The administration of the country

was terrible. Even those who we called imperialists now were angels if we compared and the treatment of the colonialists and these domestic colonialists. They were severe. They were more brutal, more inhumane. So because the Bible compelled me and the Lord told me to read Psalm 82, Verse 224 and Proverbs, Chapter 31, Verse 8 to 9 which requires us, compels us that we must open up our mouth and speak for the helpless, the retched, the hopeless. So, I started speaking for them and there was need for us to observe human rights and even enshrine them in the constitution. I mean we required everybody to embrace the sanctity of human life and dignity. Now this was against the constitution then because the constitution in the country was the wishes of Mr. Nyerere. So, I got into trouble.

I remember the first time. It was in 1987 when I had to distribute papers at the ruling party's general assembly or general meeting. It was the first time that a person had boldly distributed such papers at that meeting. But I escaped arrest. I was arrested briefly in 1988. I didn't count it as arrest because I was interrogated for twenty-four hours and because I was allowed to go home so I didn't count that as arrest. The following year is when I was arrested for the first time seriously and I had to spend a week behind bars.

So, you've been getting into trouble since those early days?

Well one of the reasons that I had to refuse, I mean to join the youth wing is that from middle school which is what they now call primary school, then it was middle school. We had primary, middle and secondary school. We were westernized where we were taught civics education at school, you see. You can imagine from all that education, orientation in human rights and democracy and all the teachers were from the west and they taught us the sanctity of human life and dignity and all these things. Then all of a sudden we were told that those people who were told to call us our brothers because they love democracy, human rights, now we should call them imperialists and all these things. I was confused. I had to sit back and think so, I refused. I got into trouble with administration with the school and the government. But they accepted when my father pleaded with them that I should only sit for the examination so that I had some paper to support me to get a living somewhere thereafter.

Well, we went ahead. I was very unhappy about what happened, even in my own village. There were so many things, unusual things that I had been reading about but now they came true.

There was the villagization. There was this culture of people right in the villages, in the name of maintaining security, in the name of Ujama and there was too much brainwashing, terror campaign. And all these things, I didn't like them. Well, I thank God. I did not know how to mince words. I always called a spade a spade. So I was at loggerheads with the system. And then because I was not directly involved with politics, time was yet to come. When after business, after everything I started preaching. Then when preaching, I realized that we were all wrong and the system was wrong and everything had been wrong. We were not told the truth and I know the short history of Tanganyika, all of them were burnt away. These are the history books that we read from school from middle school,

to secondary school. All of them were burnt out. New ones were published so the nation has been built on the foundation of lies. There's no truth.

Now the brainwashing was successful because the media was nationalized. And only one person was allowed to use the media for himself. And that's why we came to this worship, that long live the thoughts of one person who would think correctly and all others were wrong. So that was the case, so when he got wrong, all of us, he ditched us, all of us. Those are the scars which shall not heal -- the scars of the ideology of Ujama. They'll never heal because they'll drown us at a level in a bottomless pit where we can never come out. We have failed for all these days unless we change completely, we have a new thinking...that is when we can succeed.

And you continued to be arrested?

I first landed in trouble in 1967. Now this was a prelude for twenty-five incarcerations thereafter with two imprisonments for sedition and using language which is likely to cause a breach of peace.

What was life like in 1967?

Life was so fine when I was at school. Then we had bread and butter, Margarine. We had very, very good food. Oh and the quality of education was international. We sat for the same examinations that other people sit in all other countries. We had teachers from America and UK and Canada and Australia and New Zealand. So, we had the same quality of education everywhere. The medium of instruction was English, like in other places. And all this was watered down. It was replaced by what was called national education.

What was national education?

National education was the liberation of our minds from imperialist education as it was called. It was a change because all subjects that we were learning which were international, they were termed as imperialists. So we remained with the C.S.R. or political ideology, Swahili and cultural science. It was the same from primary to secondary schools. Practical education in science, physics, chemistry and biology ceased. Even the oral one, the theoretical one went away. They say this is now triumph -- the cultural triumph. The big ones, the big shots, sent their children overseas to prepare them to come and take over when they retired. But as for us, it was the end of everything.

Did people live in fear during the Nyerere era?

We experienced a very strange way of living because of the terror campaign with the security officers trained in the communist block. It was terrible. People did not trust anyone, even in the families. Wives would not trust their husbands and vice versa because it was a very severe terror campaign. People would disappear silently and no one would be allowed to think about them because if you are suspected to be thinking treason, then you also disappear. We lived under that repressive regime, I mean, all these years until this guy retired after the failure of Ujama, because we did not achieve all these

things. We were made to think about things which were not there and believe they are there. To say otherwise was to say treason. This is the terror campaign which subdued us to the level of livestock, which always live in fear of slaughter anytime.

Did you distrust your wife at all?

Not only me, everybody who had a wife. We would even talk about it in streets, in the buses and elsewhere, that you never trust anybody. So we stopped talking about anything about our lives, about the social economic and political fate of our people and our country. We were afraid because we felt, we feared that even the bedmate, the wife or husband, was an agent against the other. All over the country that was the case. Even at school. School children, boys and girls would not talk about anything else. So, the easiest thing which the minds would adjust to, would hide in, was only talking about two football clubs in the country -- Simba and Yanga. Even the most intelligent people did not talk about issues. Never. They talked about these two football clubs everywhere. And also they feared to be infiltrated even in the sports clubs. So they would laugh foolishly, talk foolishly, things which would not make anybody suspect us to be thinking politics against the regime. That is the tougher side of life where we lived as prisoners -- myself in particular.

What did you think of the Arusha Declaration?

I think the science behind the Arusha Declaration, which was a one-man affair, it was not decided by meeting. Not even by the party. Records show that it was at the general meeting of the party again at Arusha when Nyerere just pierced his two fingers into his shirt breast pocket and took out a paper which was folded. He unfolded it there and preached about socialism, about nationalizations and all these things ending up into the declaration. It was a one-man play.

Now the idea behind it, as we learned later, was that they were trying to create an environment whereby people were going to expect not even work, because there was someone, not even God, some authority somewhere which was going to provide everything for the people. And people were proud of everything that it belongs to them. Even if they did not sleep in the flats in the city of Dar es Salaam, people would be very happy if they belonged to us. They would not even work. And we were so fooled, we were so blinded because of this Arusha Declaration all of the media that we have in the country for brainwashing. People were made to feel very happy about the expropriation of the business enterprises that actually performed so well economically. Our country was so well placed. They're paying their taxes, employing the citizens what have you.

That died away with the nationalizations and then we did not even start feeling the poverty, the pinches of poverty. We are not allowed even to feel it. We were compelled to say it is good. In all of the tribal dances we were compelled to sing good about the sufferings, and they said something like "tightening their belts". *Ufungu mikanda*. Whenever we complained that the

suffering is too bitter, Nyerere would appear on the radio and tell the nation that we must tighten the belts. Not be given food to eat because we are hungry. So, because we are hungry we should tighten the belts then the hunger would not be felt because the stomach has been made small. That is it. And we would celebrate that because the father of the nation has said that. So we were, all of us, going to die. We thank the Nordic countries and other people that started speaking about the fate of the people. We were changing from the day that we obtained independence and now that we are independent, the situation was terrible. It is when Julius Nyerere had started to soften a little bit, in some areas.

What was the purpose of the Ujama villages?

The objective of villagization, or operation VIGIGI as it was called, was to bring the people together so that Nyerere has direct control of the lives of every human being and that went alongside establishing the ten-cell leadership. All the homes in the country, in the villages, were grouped in groups of ten each. And then from the ten-cell leaders he would know who ate what, who has bought new clothes and they were made to explain where they got the money too because they were not allowed even to buy a bicycle. Whoever bought a bicycle would be noticeable to the headquarters of the government through the leadership, the strict, terrible leadership which was very suppressive in the villages. So the aim was not to bring development. Because with villagization, they were removed from their traditional homes where they had sufficient food for themselves, even for cash crops for earning their living, for educating their children. But they were removed from there by lashes and thrown into trucks; their homes set on fire, even the fields, so that there is nothing to attract them back again -- to go back. So it wasn't because of development that they were moved away from development to the wilderness, but so they would be grouped together for his direct control and oppression.

What was life like during the socialist experiment?

The economy had collapsed. We were the biggest exporters of sisal and it had collapsed. All the agricultural enterprises that had lifted the country and supported the living of the people had collapsed. He would beg no more because even the remaining donor countries, the Nordic countries, felt it was unfair for their taxpayers to keep on pouring donations in this country. When they arrived here, they were used for politics again to fill the gap before the international community -- the gap that Ujama is just as good or it is achieving the objectives of economic and social development of the people. It was a lie. So, they would cover up the collapse of the economy and everything by the donor -- the money and finances from the donor countries. They failed and the easiest way Nyerere could exit from this shame was to start brainwashing the people about the word he used was "*kungatuka*." That is, we have a duty to retire from leadership at this age and give way to the younger generation. But actually, it is because he had failed. Everything he tried to do had collapsed and failed.

Was there a big famine at that time?

There was a terrible famine from the time that people were forced away from their traditional homes, where they grew sufficient food for themselves and even for export. That is when he opened the gates to the famine which has refused to get out of our society.

Do people today still have difficulty discussing the truth about the Nyerere era?

Yes. In my country people are afraid of speaking the truth. We have a saying which is true anyway about the African chicken. We always tie their legs when we travel with them, or transfer them from one place to another. But their behavior is that of cowardice. Even when you untie their legs and set them free they will start hopping, they will not walk in the normal way. They will still believe that they are still in chains, so they will jump like that until you push them a little bit. Then they start walking properly.

So our people have just started walking properly now. But for all these years they feared they were still in the bonds, they were still tied up. They could not walk because it has always been treason. You must speak what Nyerere wants you to speak. What he wanted the people to speak is what they should be heard speaking. Speaking, or resenting his opinion that was the opinion of the party and the government, was treason, or treated like treason. Any view, however useful it would be to the society, even to our home, if it conflicted with the wishes of the father of the nation, it would be criminalized. That's why the prisons have always been full and there has always been terrible torture in the prisons, probably more than the Nyayo house in Kenya.

Now when people explained these whispers in the darkness when they were released, it sent tremors all over the fabric of the society. So to date, people do not speak. They appreciate people who speak the truth about their fate, but they can never tolerate standing there for some time for fear that they will be arrested and criminalized. So they are cowards, to date. You can see it even from the religious leaders. Not only the Christians, even the Muslims. They are ready to speak something about congratulating the leaders of the country for the evils they have done, but they would label them in very good colors. For their own safety, they never speak the truth. And probably, I have been the cause of many of them not speaking the truth because every time I've spoken the truth I've always anticipated that I will pay a little price for the word I have spoken. But all the same, I would have fulfilled my duty as a citizen and as a leader. So people are still cowards to date, but they're still waking up. They are using the media and the radio bombardment, and news commentaries after the news to warn everybody in the country never to emulate what so and so the troublemaker has said. So they are still using this propaganda to cow down the people. The people are so timid because of that, to date.

But do people know the truth at this point?

Yes. People know the truth. They know everything. And they've changed. Even the political anesthesia they had administered into the brains of

the academicians and the intellectuals, it has already faded. People have now woken up already to their realities. But they are not very bold enough. But I'm sure they are growing. Boldness is growing in the people. Even now as I'm speaking, I know what is taking place all over our country. People are expressing themselves that they're now fed up. Because we are compelled to believe we are socialists, constitutionally. But again there are conflicting laws which have been passed against socialism. But it is still criminal to point a finger to them that they are cheating, that they are not socialists. They're not even capitalist but thieves.

How did socialism affect the spirit of Tanzanians?

There is something in the socialist ideology and its propagation and the means for its propagation which subdues the people's thinking down to the level of livestock and they feel proud. They feel it is their right to be downtrodden, to be helpless, voiceless. They do believe it is obedience and if they turn to religion it is holiness. They have succeeded in that to a large extent.

Are people regaining their spirit?

Oh, we are happy, we are rejoicing now that the price that we've paid has earned us something. People are waking up now, really. They have been transformed.

Was it the system of socialism that failed or was it Nyerere's leadership that failed?

In socialism, it is always not a system. We would be shying away from truth. It is always a man. If we talk about socialism or communism in the Soviet Union, we are talking about Marx and Jews and Lenin. If we talk about the system in China, we're talking Mao Tse-Tung. In our country, it was Julius Nyerere. He was the mentor of all the policies, the socialist policies. No other person did it – only himself. So, those people who say you are separating from all those pitfalls are wrong. They are victims of the anesthesia and the worship, the idolation of that person. Because in this country, out of socialism, we had five ranks. The first rank, the highest rank of Gods was Nyerere. Then came witchcraft, then the oppressive machinery that he used for the terror campaign. Then came money. Jesus Christ was fifth or Mohammad was fifth in a ladder. So, these people who say you separate Nyerere from the failures of socialism, they are afraid of saying, I mean, the ghost is haunting them probably. They cannot even see that he was not a socialist himself. Was only using socialism for his own objectives, selfish objectives. He wasn't a socialist at all.

Was there anything positive about Nyerere?

If there were any I would say. But throughout the forty-one years of his rule, I never saw one. But that was a little masquerading, was a little pretense and pretense can only work before people who would not think and see. He supported me before his death. He said, "We realized we made mistakes." So, in everything that he did and under the cover of socialism, it failed and he

knew it was going to fail. But he would push some time while he achieves his objectives. Then when the world saw the truth he admitted. He said, "It is true, we made mistakes." I'm always surprised by people who separated him from his admissions. He has admitted and because I'm a preacher of the gospel, we forgave him because he repented.

Was Nyerere moving Tanzania toward a dictatorship?

He was not pushing towards dictatorship. Nyerere was a dictator through and through. From when he resigned as Prime Minister, up to how he maneuvered to become president in 1962. He's always been a dictator. Because he saw the tricks he had played and the corruption that was going to throw him out of power before which he preempted by resigning from premiership. He looked at all those people who had pointed their finger at him. They were the first to get axed after becoming president. And then because it was going to be opposed to him, he imposed the monolithic system so that he reigns forever. I mean that is what takes place only in the precincts of dictatorship. So to say he was pushing towards dictatorship was wrong. It was the dictatorship itself, he was only pushing to something severer or worse than dictatorship.