

Preface

This memoir is presented in two parts. Part one deals with my campaign for the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) from 1970 to 2003, a period of thirty-three years. Part two deals with the 1981 campaign by the former Tanzania foreign minister, Salim Ahmed Salim, for the post of secretary-general of the United Nations. This part also contains brief comments on the failure to have Mwalimu J. K. Nyerere, the president of Tanzania, elected chairman of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) commemorative session in 1973, his embarrassment about this incident, and his views on the appointment of the OAU secretary-general in 1974.

In the context of the United Nations, my ACABQ campaigns were different from those one is accustomed to at national levels. For example, there were no public rallies and speeches with soaring rhetoric about who was more qualified to be appointed to the advisory committee. There were no public promises of what one candidate would do better than the other candidate. In fact, loud public claims of personal qualification were unacceptable diplomatic behaviour. One dared not assert publicly that a delegate from another country was less qualified.

The prevailing UN doctrine of sovereign equality of states percolated the concept of intellectual equality of all UN delegates. No matter how a delegate behaved like a hapless ignoramus,

the delegate was distinguished, and therefore endowed with expertise to sit on any United Nations entity. There were exceptions, like candidates for judicial bodies that required the candidate to be at least technically qualified. For example, one had to be an eminent jurist or a renowned expert in international law to be a candidate for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or the International Law Commission (ILC)—the ILC sometimes acting like a training seminar for the much-coveted ICJ career. To be diplomatically distinguished—this is different from being distinguished as an expert—was not personal, but derivative of being a representative of a sovereign government.

I joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tanzania in 1964 directly from university academia, followed two years later, in 1966, by assignment to United Nations work. Because of my immediate academic life, I had naïve expectations that I would deal with individuals of great competence, impeccable performance, understanding, and intellect, individuals with whom one could argue rationally as we did in debating societies at school and college, where arguments would be acceptable because of their reasonableness and relevance.

It never panned out that way. For one thing, I was soon baffled by the spectacle of the willingness of sovereign governments to be represented by individuals with meagre intellectual capacity and little ability to discharge representative functions. It was revealing to sit with diplomats of all ranks who just muddled through, and in one instance I watched an embarrassed diplomat, assistant to an ambassador, trying to educate his boss about what to say. No doubt, over the years I met many brilliant representatives, some referred to in my memoirs. However, the many below-the-par inexperienced individuals I encountered in my field led me to conclude very early that it was the prerogative of sovereign states to designate whichever representatives the

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states wanted, whether intelligent, foolish, ignorant, deceptive, or even corrupt—all were distinguished, and many were “extraordinary with full powers.”

As the years went by, the state of campaigning for office in my field, and the search for UN positions elsewhere in United Nations forums and secretariat structures, increasingly reflected the shortcomings in the rest of the world. Of late, in the twenty-first century, high-stake United Nations campaigns—for example, for Security Council seats and for the office of secretary-general—are slowly emulating national campaigns by including threats, bribery and outlandish media spin.¹ And I am afraid, when executives from the corporate world start vying for United Nations system positions, they will bring with them the worst of the political and financial corruption so familiar in national and business politics. It is just a matter of time.

Nothing in these writings should be taken as a deliberate derogation of the dignity of United Nations member states or the respect for their citizens mentioned in these pages. As years go by, activities recorded here become worth remembering. United Nations experience is like being thrown into a cauldron of mass culture, not of one nation, but of the globe. When embroiled in daily skirmishes with delegates from all over the world, the wickedness of yesteryear is pushed to the back of one’s subconscious. The endless interaction with United Nations individuals from all over the world has a cathartic and sobering effect. You finally accept to work with representatives from countries whose ancestors enslaved, humiliated, tortured, and tormented your ancestors.

1 See, for example, the statement by Italy on corruption, bribery, threats, and financial blackmail during the debate on Security Council reform, as reflected in the record of the General Assembly in document A/59/PV.115, of 26 July 2005.

In my first memoir, *The Anatomy of Decay*, I wrote about my role as chair and the state of the ACABQ. In this memoir, I explain the campaign for getting appointed, and the related group-politics—mainly, the African Group—of getting to the advisory committee.

You will read in this memoir the principled stand of states on matters of geographical representation and rotation on the entities dealt with herein, of the personal yearnings of their representatives, and of the unwelcome actions of a few oddities—whether in capitals or on foreign assignments—whose conduct is not fully in keeping with the dignified behaviour expected of them as representatives of sovereign states.

The campaign by Salim Ahmed Salim to be secretary-general of the United Nations was historic for himself, for Tanzania, and for the African continent. As a Tanzanian chairing the ACABQ, I was deeply interested in what was going on. The account in part two, is based on my knowledge of the environment affecting Salim's candidacy, on my own personal observations and recollections, on my interaction with anyone of interest in this subject, and on my conversations with Tanzanians, including the candidate himself, during the campaign. The failure to elect Mwalimu as chairman of the OAU commemorative session in 1973—also dealt with in part two—was a shock to me even at that early stage of my career. The failure indicated how the mishandling of a well-meaning intention can become a national embarrassment.

Some changes have since taken place. For example, instead of the OAU, and its UN Observer Mission, referred to extensively in this memoir, we now have an African Union with an office of a permanent observer to the United Nations. The information in this memoir is based on my experience during the period covered and does not try to evaluate procedures, if any, that

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may have been introduced after my departure from the United Nations. However, I am not aware of any significant changes that have been introduced to deal with the issues of candidate selection raised in this memoir. The information in my memoir should therefore assist those who are interested in reforming the practices and operations narrated herein. Knowledge of the past, properly handled, is always a useful torch for the future. Ignore the past, and you are likely to blunder your way through problems that could be avoided.

Finally, for readers who are not familiar with the system of classifying posts for individuals employed to work in the United Nations Secretariat, terms like P-1, P-5, D-1, and G-3, referred to in this memoir, can confuse the reader. During my time, posts in the professional category were classified as P-1 to P-5, and D-1 to D-2. The “D” classification comprised posts above the P-5 level; the “D” posts were normally reserved for directors.

UN officials who were appointed to posts above the D-2 level occupied ungraded posts that were not subject to the normal process of classification. These officials served as political appointees of the secretary-general (SG). In ascending order, they were assistant secretary-general (ASG), undersecretary-general (USG), and the deputy secretary-general (DSG). Posts for the general service category—the level below the professional category—were classified as G-1 to G-7. There were other classifications, such as security posts (S), field service posts (FS), and local service posts (L), but these are not referred to in this memoir.

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