

BOOK REVIEW

George Roberts. *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 352 pp. Maps. Bibliography. Index. \$28.98. Paper. ISBN: 9781009281652.

In *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam*, George Roberts uses the urban space of the Tanzanian capital as a window to explore the interplay of local and global factors shaping postcolonial statecraft and national development in the first decades after independence. This dialectic relationship between local and external forces, he argues, led to the constricting of political dissent and the turn toward authoritarianism by the government of Julius Nyerere. The tensions between a self-consciously liberatory foreign policy, a localized vision of socialist development, and an increasingly restrictive national political space form the narrative arc of the book, with each chapter carefully delineating how these tensions unfolded across multiple fields, from the media (Chapter Six) to universities (Chapter Five) to the arena of high party politics (Chapters Two, Seven).

Archival research conducted in fifteen countries provides a breadth of perspectives and a more nuanced context for the events and debates occurring within Dar es Salaam. Indeed, one of the more satisfying elements of the book is its ability to seamlessly weave together urban and international history, detailing how international relations influenced, and was influenced by, the built environment of the city. In this telling, the city itself becomes a protagonist in the forging—and breaking—of relationships between Tanzanian elites and their international contacts. The city is portrayed not only as the seat of state power but also as a site of gossip, rumors, and jockeying for position by local and international actors. The active role of the city distinguishes Roberts's work from histories of anti-colonial activism that prioritize networks and mobility but relegate urban spaces to transitory nodes in these broader systems of circulation. These works, while valuable contributions to the historiography of anti-colonial internationalism, can suffer from “teleological dangers in following individuals and ideas across the globe while disconnecting them from the physical spaces which they occupied along the way” (3). In contrast, Roberts anchors these relationships in specific physical spaces like bars, hotels, and bookshops, settings he evocatively refers to as “grey diplomatic spaces” (7). In so doing, he provides compelling evidence to support his argument that “revolutionary cities” like Dar es Salaam were not only facilitating mobility, but also generative of ideologies, relationships, and solidarities.


Central to Dar es Salaam's characterization as a “revolutionary” city was its hosting of African liberation movements from surrounding territories, members of which are some of the primary protagonists of Roberts's work. Providing material support for these movements has cemented Tanzania's role in historiography and

the popular imagination as a beacon of Pan-African solidarity. Roberts problematizes this image, showing how these movements were in fact liabilities that often frustrated the political priorities of Julius Nyerere's government. This dynamic comes out most directly in Chapter Four where Roberts uses the assassination of Mozambican nationalist leader Eduardo Mondlane to complicate rosier views of anti-colonial solidarity, instead highlighting the "whirlpool of entangled relationships which brought global geopolitics into the same space as personal and ethnic rivalries" (136). This approach—showing the intricate yet contingent enmeshment of domestic and international politics and actors—is consistent throughout the book and is in many ways its main conceptual contribution.

Roberts's depiction of revolutionary Dar es Salaam is dominated by the words and actions of (almost exclusively male) political elites, a group expanded to include bureaucrats, journalists, and economists in addition to party leaders and parliamentarians. This expansion is a welcome addition to political histories of decolonization, but what gets lost in this approach are the views, actions, and words of nonelite subjects. While Roberts does well to expand our knowledge of the thinking of hitherto understudied Tanzanian elites, we end up knowing less about the thoughts and actions of the average Tanzanian citizen, African guerrilla, or international expert. This focus is likely the result of the book's reliance on the diplomatic archive as its primary source base. While this source base is impressively broad, and Roberts leavens his writing with skillful uses of contemporary newspaper and other media reports, personal papers, and oral history interviews, the grounding in diplomatic papers nevertheless reinforces the book's elite-centric focus.

Similarly, while Roberts evokes the urban geography of Dar es Salaam throughout the book, I could not help but yearn for more thick description of the spaces in which he anchors political debate and relationship building. For example, we know that the bars and hotels of upmarket neighborhoods of the city were important sites for politicking and information gathering (53, *passim*), but we don't know what these spaces looked or sounded like nor what kinds of socializing occurred within them. Without such sensory details, these spaces read somewhat flat, as if they existed solely to host political intrigue. This omission is minor, but readers familiar with other recent works blending urban and international history may miss the kind of granular and sensory description of these spaces and a closer portrayal of the social interactions they harbored.

Ultimately, *Revolutionary State-Making* is an important contribution to the ongoing process of Africanizing Cold War historiography and a persuasive example of the utility of blending urban and international history. Engagingly written and diligently argued, the book is a rewarding read for those interested in histories of the state in modern Africa, the global Cold War, and broader histories of anti-colonial internationalism.

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