

BOOK REVIEW

Issa G. Shivji, Saida Yahya-Othman, and Ng'wanza Kamata. *Development as Rebellion: Julius Nyerere—A Biography*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2020. Distributed by African Books Collective. 3 volumes. xxii + 1,054 pp. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$110.00. Cloth. ISBN: 9789987084111.

This book represents a monumental achievement. Over two decades after his passing in 1999, the figure of Julius Nyerere continues to dominate the political landscape of Tanzania. His photograph hangs alongside those of current presidents in offices, restaurants, and bars. Politicians invoke his memory and words in support of their own actions and agendas. Nyerere is no longer just *Mwalimu*, the “teacher,” but also *Baba wa Taifa*, the “father of the nation.” We are certainly not short of accounts of his life, which range from the sketches of foreign sympathizers during the heyday of *ujamaa* to the histories which are routinely told and retold in the contemporary Tanzanian press. However, there has hitherto been no full biography. Nyerere himself was resistant to such an initiative during his lifetime.

The publication of *Development as Rebellion* is therefore a landmark event. This boxed set comprises three individual volumes. Each is written by a “lead author,” but represents the product of collaborative work. Although the volumes proceed in a roughly chronological order, they prioritize analytical treatment of key themes in Nyerere’s life trajectory rather than offering the sort of blow-by-blow account often associated with the genre of biography. All three authors are openly sympathetic toward Nyerere but maintain a critical perspective. Based on a synthesis of secondary literature, extensive archival research in Tanzania and the United Kingdom, and interviews with eyewitness participants, *Development as Rebellion* is certainly no hagiography.

Book One, *The Making of a Philosopher-Ruler*, authored by Saida Yahya-Othman, begins with Nyerere’s upbringing in Butiama, in northern Tanganyika. It traces the young Nyerere’s journey through various tiers of education: primary school in Mwisenga, secondary school at the prestigious Tabora Boys, then university studies abroad at first Makerere and then Edinburgh. Yahya-Othman punctuates this story with reflections on Nyerere’s evolving worldview—for example, in a discussion of his views about the place of women in society and the question of bridewealth. The volume then breaks away from

this narrative to consider Nyerere's relationships with family and friends. This includes an assessment of the role of his personal assistant, Joan Wicken, who emerges as a loyal yet powerful gatekeeper figure at State House. The remainder of the book addresses Nyerere's intellectual life, such as his role in promoting Swahili as a national language and his often uneasy relationship with campus politics at the University of Dar es Salaam.

Becoming Nationalist, Ng'wanza Kamata's second volume, follows Nyerere's rise in anticolonial politics through the African Association and then the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). Kamata emphasizes Nyerere's preference for a gradual transition from colonial rule in order to build confidence in his leadership among the British authorities and to avert the possibility of violence. Kamata shows how Nyerere's political acumen and rhetorical skills played a crucial role in navigating TANU through contentious issues surrounding party policy. Nyerere's leadership comes to the fore through in-depth discussion of major points of dissension, such as the controversial decision taken at the 1958 Tabora Conference to participate in multiracial elections, or the debates about citizenship on the eve of independence. The remainder of the volume offers an account of the army mutiny of January 1964, then deals adroitly with the Zanzibar Revolution and the subsequent union with the mainland that created the state of Tanzania. Kamata presents independence not as a moment of triumph, but rather as a time of uncertainty. Indeed, he is critical of Nyerere's "ideological deficiency" in failing to grasp the full implications of colonial domination and exploitation (78–79).

It is Nyerere's attempts to deal with the challenges of post-colonial development which form the central theme of Issa G. Shivji's concluding book, *Rebellion without Rebels*. Shivji begins by stepping back from the narrative to analyze the evolution of Nyerere's political thought, especially its relationship with religion and Marxism. This forms the backdrop for an in-depth explanation of the rise and fall of *ujamaa*, from the genesis of the Arusha Declaration to the abandonment of socialism amid the economic crisis of the 1980s. The volume's narrative arc also incorporates the 1978–79 "patriotic war" with Uganda, which brought down Idi Amin. It argues that Nyerere's controversial decision to launch a full counter-invasion of Uganda, rather than solely push Amin's occupying army off Tanzanian territory, was taken on the advice of his generals. The book concludes with an account of Tanzanian affairs between Nyerere's departure from the presidency in 1985 and his death, during which time he continued to exercise a strong influence over the country's politics.

Shivji's book is not only the longest of the three volumes, but also the most analytical and critical of Nyerere. It therefore demands greater attention in this review. Shivji emerged as one of Tanzania's staunchest critics of *ujamaa* in the 1970s, when he argued that the Arusha Declaration had failed to deliver on its intentions. He held that socialism had instead created a "bureaucratic bourgeoisie," which reaped the benefits of nationalization while oppressing the peasantry and suppressing workers' demands for

greater control over their political and economic life. Shivji recapitulates these arguments here, infusing the framework of class struggle with fresh archival evidence. In this interpretation, Nyerere appears as a tragic figure, whose ethical vision of a socialist future was undermined by self-serving party leaders. These politicians, identified as a class rather than as individuals, then deserted Nyerere as *ujamaa* hit the rocks and jumped ship to profit from the new business opportunities created by structural adjustment reforms. These contemporary developments have not previously been as well understood as earlier periods, since historians have focused mostly on the anticolonial struggle and the unfurling of *ujamaa*. Indeed, some of the most arresting parts of the whole biography concern the demise of socialism in the 1980s, the fights inside the party and with international financiers over structural adjustment, and the turbulence surrounding Nyerere's own departure and the unresolved question of the union with Zanzibar.

The biography is aimed as much at the general public as at an academic audience. To the authors' credit, their account blends an accessible, smooth style with scholarly insights. The book has attracted widespread interest in Tanzania—testament not only to the enduring popularity of Nyerere and his ideas, but also to the book's clarity. Specialists who are familiar with Nyerere's story will benefit most from the rich array of fresh source material which peppers the text. The internal politics of TANU and its successor, the Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), are illuminated by revelations from minutes of party meetings and unpublished speeches. These are supplemented by papers from several leading statesmen, especially the diaries of Salim Ahmed Salim, and a host of interviews with politicians, party cadres, and bureaucrats. For example, Shivji draws upon this material to present a gripping account of the controversial behind-the-scenes struggles within the party in the making of the Arusha Declaration. Records from State House, now held by the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, offer candid insights into Nyerere's life beyond the sphere of frontline politics. Yahya-Othman uses this correspondence to paint a portrait of a complex character, whose public charisma masked a private wariness of those around him. Nyerere was a strident nationalist, yet he found friendship with foreigners more often than with Tanzanians.

By their nature, biographies tend to defy overarching interpretations. Human individuals are complicated, even contradictory subjects. We should not be surprised that their actions are contingent on evolving circumstances and often diverge from their own ideological thinking. Nonetheless, this book advances one major claim: that Nyerere was a nationalist first, and a socialist second. "Nyerere's explicit project was nation-building," state the authors in their preface, arguing that socialism ultimately served as a means to this end (xvii), rather than vice versa. However, if *Development as Rebellion* has one significant shortcoming, it is that it operates through the same lens of the Tanzanian nation. At times it reads less as a biography of Nyerere than as a history of decolonization and its aftermath in Tanzania. In places, Nyerere disappears from view entirely. While it might be necessary to sketch out the

broader political context, the result is that the biography risks conflating the story of Nyerere with that of the nation.

Yet some of the most striking archival revelations hint at the interplay between national, continental, and global developments in shaping this history. For example, Shivji uses Tanzanian responses to *perestroika* in the Soviet Union and the Tiananmen Square crackdown in China as a window for tracing Nyerere's and CCM's evolving thinking on multiparty democracy in a world in transition. Readers will therefore look especially forward to a fourth biographical volume, currently under preparation, on Nyerere's role as a global statesman and his contribution to Africa's liberation struggles. If it matches the insights provided by the first three books, it, too, will be essential reading for historians of Africa.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Fouéré, Marie-Aude. 2014. "Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa, and Political Morality in Contemporary Tanzania." *African Studies Review* 57 (1): 1–24. doi:[10.1017/asr.2014.3](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2014.3).
- Geiger, Susan. 1982. "Umoja Wa Wanawake Wa Tanzania and the Needs of the Rural Poor." *African Studies Review* 25 (2–3): 45–65. doi:[10.2307/524210](https://doi.org/10.2307/524210).