

Rezension

ROBERTS, George. 2021. Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam. African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 329 pages. ISBN 978-1-108-84573-1

rezensiert von

Eric Burton*

In the past decade, Tanzania’s global relevance and connectedness in the 1960s and 1970s has become a prominent theme in transnational histories of socialism, decolonization, and the Cold War. [1] *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam* by historian George Roberts marks a milestone achievement in this vibrant field, showing how state-sponsored Pan-Africanism, liberation struggles, Cold War rivalries and socialist state-building became enmeshed in the city and influenced each other. For the Tanzanian state, this came with both opportunities and risks. With time, efforts by the Tanzanian political elite to control these transnational connections contributed to the authoritarian “inward turn” (p. 283) taken by the state in the 1970s.

Revolutionary State-Making covers the first fifteen years of independence, from 1961 to 1974, when Dar es Salaam was the capital of a newly sovereign nation that gradually came to experiment with a non-orthodox brand of African Socialism (*Ujamaa*). From the early 1960s onwards, many liberation movements fighting against colonial and white minority rule flocked to the city, opened offices in the capital and ran training and refugee camps in various parts of the country. A key contribution of the book is its bringing together of these various dimensions, usually treated separately, in a broad framework of analysis. While the country’s preeminent leader Julius Nyerere remains a major actor

* Eric Burton, University of Innsbruck; contact: eric.burton@uibk.ac.at.

throughout the book, Roberts introduces a plethora of more or less well-known politicians (e.g. Amir Jamal and Stephan Mhando), journalists, student activists, and liberation fighters in exile – a group analytically categorized as “elites” – who have shaped discourses and activities in Dar es Salaam. In several of the book’s seven chapters, Roberts takes us through central events of Tanzania’s political history, rereading them through the lens of transnational connections. This most notably includes the 1967 Arusha Declaration, the touchstone of *Ujamaa* as party-cum-government policy (chapter 2), and the 1971 party guidelines (*Mwongozo*, chapter 7), which constituted a significant turn to the left. Both brought about splits within the political elite, ruptures that were also connected to rivalling visions of appropriate transnational connections.

Chapters 4 to 6 make a compelling case for the argument that “liberation politics were engrained in local Tanzanian affairs and their transnational connections” – and vice versa (p. 140). This might be seen as a classic example of entangled history, even if Roberts does not use this term. The spatial focus on Dar es Salaam grounds both transnational liberation struggles and the Cold War in the city, showing how these played out in local politics in (sometimes surprising) ways that tell us much not only about the impact of these global processes on Tanzania (and vice versa) but also about the interpretive limits of these terms when it comes to historiography (recalling Matthew Connelly’s classic article “Taking Off the Cold War Lens”[2]).

Perhaps the best example of this – one of Roberts’s very well-chosen case studies – is the comparison of three youth protests in the streets of Dar es Salaam in “Tanzania’s 1968” (chapter 5). The first of these, in July 1968, involved around 100-150 youths protesting against the US invasion of Vietnam. It was followed by the mobilization of approximately 2,000 people in protests against the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August and a rally connected to a border dispute with Malawi in September, which mobilized more than 5,000 protesters, including representatives of liberation movements based in Dar es Salaam. The shared language of these protests was anti-imperialism rather than Cold War rhetoric. State and party institutions were involved in these protests in various ways, leading Roberts to the conclusion that the youth activists of Tanzania’s 1968 were often constrained by and in line with the authorities. Of particular note is the testimony of Juma Mwapachu, one of the student organizers of the July 1968 demonstration, who claimed that his initiative had resulted from a telephone call by Nyerere himself. Young activists were thus able to express protest in ways that the non-aligned government could not via traditional diplomatic channels.

In the chapter on the assassination of Eduardo Mondlane, the leader of the Mozambican liberation movement FRELIMO (chapter 5), Roberts considers the extent to which the Dar es Salaam scene mattered to the events and their interpretation. While the Tanzanian authorities blamed the Portuguese for the murder, this also took place against the backdrop of widespread criticism against Mondlane from both FRELIMO's rank and file and the Tanzanian media. Just like the realm of politics, Dar es Salaam's media landscape (examined in chapter 6, with a focus on newspapers) was shaped through the imperatives of national sovereignty, socialist nation-building, Cold War struggles, and non-aligned anti-imperialism. For journalists, too, the political space narrowed; as Roberts argues, however, this was not a straight line from a free to a muzzled media but a much more complex trajectory.

The range of archives used is nothing short of impressive. The account is built on documents – mostly of diplomatic provenance – from the United Kingdom, the United States, West and East Germany, France, Poland, and Portugal, with less comprehensive contributions also from Australia, Belgium, Ethiopia, India and South Africa. While Roberts admits in the introduction that much of the material in the Tanzanian archives remains inaccessible, his study nonetheless draws on a good number of documents and on interviews with key Tanzanian political figures, such as the party's main ideologue, Kingunge Ngombale-Mwiru. Newspaper articles, memoirs and travelogues complement these sources, the broad range of which allows for a rare glimpse into Dar's rumour-filled rooftop bars, Chinese restaurants and media offices, bringing the cosmopolitan scene to life. Rather than being bogged down by these details, Roberts inserts them carefully in his fine-grained analytical grid, balancing "internal" and "external" views and teasing out the differences between public discourses and confidential conversations. This brings the complexity of these encounters to life.

One of the book's central arguments is that feelings of insecurity, rumours and a culture of secrecy became central characteristics of Dar's cosmopolitan elite scene, spurring an authoritarian turn. Historians of Tanzania might ask how Roberts's argument can be situated alongside the existing literature on the authoritarian turn in Tanzanian politics.[3] The analytical focus on urban elites – which Roberts transparently acknowledges in the introduction – means that many important threads of this turn, which had a big impact on Tanzania's political and social history (such as the end of multi-party democracy, the co-optation of trade unions in 1964, and the forced resettlement programme between 1969 and 1975), remain in the background. The 1971 party guidelines (*Mwongozo*), for instance, are stripped of their worker component. If anything, this is likely another sign that the postcolonial state cannot be seen as driven by

any single principle or dynamic; nor can its transformations be explained through any single set of causal relations. In theoretical terms, Roberts fittingly sees the state as more than a colonial imposition taken over by successful nationalist movements and determining much of the postcolonial period (à la Mahmood Mamdani) (p. 11). Instead, he chooses to follow scholars such as Frederick Cooper and Jean-François Bayart, who emphasize contingency and the many opportunities in the early independence period for brokering relationships with the outside world (p. 12).

The result is not a celebratory account of state-sponsored Third-Worldism. Quite the contrary. The sober – and sobering – tone of the book makes for a nuanced argument regarding the forms and unintended repercussions of Tanzanian support for liberation movements, with illuminating broader conclusions the relevance of which goes well beyond the case studies. In a chapter on the rivalry between East and West Germany and how it played out in Tanzania, Roberts argues against the common yet over-simplistic trope that non-alignment gave actors in the global South the capacity to play competing Cold War actors off against each other to maximize their own benefits (p. 133). While liberation movements “could use inter-socialist competition as leverage” (p. 141), Cold War fault lines always remained a constraint for the non-aligned politics of the Tanzanian government. Sticking to the principles of non-alignment and anti-colonialism was an uphill battle that came with many sacrifices and sometimes “required a public calibration that did not necessarily map onto its underlying political dynamics” (p. 133).

Similarly, historians of decolonization who take a transnational approach might ask whether the argument that state-sponsored anti-colonialism acted as a catalyst (and justification) for authoritarian tendencies is similarly applicable to other nodes of anti-colonialism. Jeffrey Byrne suggested as much in the case of Algiers, similarly identifying a rise and fall of internationalism that gave way to narrower concerns.[4] If Dar es Salaam “took its place in a long genealogy of globally connected revolutionary cities” (p. 3) in the 1960s and 1970s, more also remains to be learned about its interconnections with other evolving hubs such as Conakry, Accra, and Cairo – and why these cities experienced a similar “rise and fall.”[5] A further line of enquiry, building on Roberts’s work, could involve investigating how and to what extent state-sponsored solidarity was culturally anchored in various societies and how these measures were embraced or contested beyond the circle of militant anti-imperialists.

The book is an excellent read. It moves effortlessly from granular detail and surprising anecdotes – which convey a vivid image of Dar es Salaam’s political

scene, stretching from government offices, to nightclubs, to the back room of a Chinese restaurant – to convincing analytical discussions of the relations between Tanzanian politics, the Cold War, and decolonization. Among the many groundbreaking publications in the past years on anticolonial liberation movements and postcolonial politics, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam* is among the very best. Individual chapters provide excellent reappraisals of key political events and topics such as the media, while the book as a whole succeeds in interpreting Tanzania’s overlapping projects of socialism, non-alignment, and anti-colonialism in a framework that convincingly connects the local and the global.

[1] See, for instance, Arnold J. Temu, Neville Z. Reuben, Sarah N. Seme: Tanzania and the Liberation Struggle of Southern Africa, 1961-1994. In: Arnold J. Temu and Joel das Neves Tembe (eds.): Southern African Liberation Struggles. Contemporaneous Documents 1960-1994. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2014, 1–78; Andrew M. Ivaska, “Movement Youth in a Global Sixties Hub: The Everyday Lives of Transnational Activists in Postcolonial Dar es Salaam.” In: Richard I. Jobs and David M. Pomfret (eds.), Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century. (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 188–210; Priya Lal, African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania. Between the Village and the World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Monique Bedasse, Jah Kingdom: Rastafarians, Tanzania, and Pan-Africanism in the Age of Decolonization (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Eric Burton: In Diensten des Afrikanischen Sozialismus. Tansania und die globale Entwicklungsarbeit der beiden deutschen Staaten, 1961-1990. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021; Jeremy Friedman, Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2021.

[2] Matthew Connelly, Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict During the Algerian War for Independence. In: The American Historical Review 105/3 (2000), 739–769.

[3] Most notably, Leander Schneider: Government of Development. Peasants and Politicians in Postcolonial Tanzania. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

[4] Jeffrey J. Byrne: *Mecca of Revolution. Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. See also the book review by Ismay Milford, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974*. In: *Cold War History* 22/3 (2022), 380–382.

[5] Matteo Grilli, *Nkrumaism and African Nationalism. Ghana's Pan-African Foreign Policy in the Age of Decolonization*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Reem Abou-El-Fadl: *Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub: Infrastructures of Solidarity and the 1957 Cairo Conference*. In: *Journal of World History* 30/1-2 (2019), 157–192; Eric Burton: *Hubs of Decolonization. African Liberation Movements and Eastern Connections in Cairo, Accra and Dar es Salaam*. In: Dallywater, Lena/Fonseca, Helder A./Saunders, Chris (eds.): *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War "East". Transnational Activism 1960-1990*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019, 25–56.