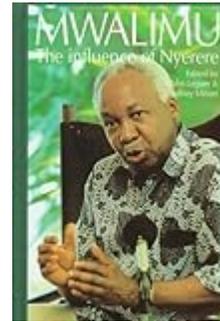


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Colin Legum, Geoffrey Mmari, eds.** *Mwalimu: The Influence of Nyerere*. Lawrenceville: Africa World Press, 1995. vi + 195 pp. \$16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-86543-478-3.



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*Mwalimu: The Influence of Nyerere* is worth reading. Julius Nyerere was Tanzania's head of state from independence in 1961 until his voluntary retirement in 1985. During this period, the country went from a naive hope that foreign investment would launch it into "sustainable economic development," through perhaps the most innovative, participatory and democratic effort to build socialism (which he called *ujamaa*) the world has ever seen; to its current state of "adjusting" to the pressures of the World Bank/IMF, western donors, the new economic order, and the introduction to multi-parties. The reader will find in Tanzania's story much that the past thirty-five years has visited upon the Third World. Those who are unaware of, or only partially familiar with, Tanzania's efforts to transform itself into a socialist society will find an enormous amount of well-constructed, easy-to-understand information.

President Julius Nyerere, the central character in this story, will be recognized by the readers as an enormously creative conceptualizer, a far-sighted pioneer, a selfless role model, an almost dangerously courageous champion of righteous campaigns in Africa and the Third World as a whole, a fearless confronter of nations and institutions that tried to interfere with Tanzania's self-determination, a unifier of a vast and diverse economy and people, and a man of the people. Even the critical authors (Read and to

a lesser extent Legum) pay homage to Nyerere's talents and accomplishments. Showing a restraint that will hold their credibility with readers, the contributors can only leave us with the notion that here we are dealing with a giant, not just of African but also of modern, history. A volume such as this necessarily falls far short of fully conveying the dimensions and import of such a person.

Having spent five years working in Tanzania, having edited one book and written another on the efforts to build socialism there, I nevertheless found myself thinking many times as I read: "I didn't know that." The book contains much that is new or not easily available even to the knowledgeable reader, especially in the Green and Svendsen articles. The essays lay out the main policies and programs that made up Nyerere's campaign to change his nation, and point to the many miscalculations, misconceptions, and errors that led to many failures. They also provide a rich sampling of Mwalimu's thinking, his vision, and his arguments.

All too few of the authors (Komba, Green, and Legum) detail the extraordinary list of accomplishments that set Tanzania apart from the rest of Africa. For example, free and open elections were held every five years without a miss. For the most part freedom of speech was protected. Ninety-five percent of children receive a full primary education. Fresh water is piped into vil-

lages where nearly all rural people live. Tanzania's long-term economic growth record is above the sub-Saharan African average, and it has a relatively equitable distribution of income.

Yet Tanzania suffered drought and flood, has remained one of the poorest countries in the world with no major metal or mineral deposits, and has a population scattered like a shotgun blast over its 365,000 square miles. It started independence with a low stock of skilled people, and suffered greatly (along with other poor countries) from the crises in world capitalism of the late 1970s and 1980s (oil price inflation and world recession and restructuring). And it is too often forgotten that Tanzania fought a successful war (costing \$500 million) to rid Uganda of Idi Amin.

Still, for the most part I found the book a disappointment. Why do we hear from only one woman, Irene Brown? How was it possible not to give us at least one Marxist view, when so much of what has been written about Tanzania has come from the Left? And where are the voices of the peasants—more than 90 percent of the population—whom Nyerere devoted his life to leading out of “poverty, ignorance and disease”?

Roger Carter in the Preface writes that the contributors were asked “to draw attention to those aspects of permanent value, which constitute Nyerere's legacy to mankind” (p. viii). Only Green and to a lesser extent Ramphal and Mmari do this. Maliyamkono offers a peculiarly African assessment in his section: “The Legacy of Mwalimu Nyerere”: “A random selection of examples illustrating Mwalimu's influence would include the number of children bearing [his] names....His name is permanently linked to many municipal stadiums and to some of the surviving *ujamaa* villages....many individuals have modelled themselves on Nyerere...” (p. 57.) The others either catalogue policies and ideas without much analysis (the Browns, Omari, Komba, and Kweka) or criticize without a deeper and historical framework within which to evaluate (Read), or offer somewhat shallow reasoning based on personal conversations with Nyerere (Legum).

Although the book gives us much detail about the main pillars of Nyerere's thinking, policies, and programs, with the exception of Reginold Green's contribution, it provides little insight and not much that is new. Green analyzes the tensions and contradictions between Nyerere's objectives and those charged with fleshing them out and implementing them. On the other hand, Read discusses the “draconian” (p. 138) Preventive Detention Act, and quotes “a sympathetic commentator[’s]”

view that Nyerere's defense of it “can easily conceal an oligarch's determination to hold onto power” (p. 139). Readers would have been better served with a contextual analysis than with moral assertions.

For instance, Read notes that the majority of those detained under the act were suspected criminals whose crimes most likely could not be sufficiently documented to bring them to trial (p. 139). Why did Professor Read not tell us about the state of crime and punishment in Tanzania, or about the total absence of adequately trained police investigators (Green, p. 95)?

We are told that area and regional commissioners and other officials throughout the countryside abused their power under the protection of TANU, the one-party state, and various laws, such as the Preventive Detention Act (Kweka, p. 69). Not much democracy there, we think; little respect for Nyerere's commitment to human dignity and freedom, we conclude. But these were Tanzania's realities, these were the mindsets of those with power: this contradiction characterized the divergence between Nyerere's aims of participatory democracy and development and the fabric of Tanzanian society. What should he have done? What could he have done? How did these contradictions arise, what efforts were made (and by whom) to resolve them, and why were they not successful? A more accurate and thoughtful analysis would have given us insights into what Nyerere faced and the broader problems of transforming societies emerging from three hundred years of slave trade and colonialism, locked into an imperialist system of trade and aid. And we fail to learn about Nyerere's own authoritarianism; his acceptance of the notion that those with authority—from the family right through to State house—had the right to use that power to defend their positions against those who challenged them.

The goals Nyerere set for his nation in 1967 with the Arusha Declaration and supporting policy papers implicitly depended on a particular form of popular response for their success: spontaneous actions by peasants, rural families, villages, cooperatives, and urban workers toward the goals of socialism and self-reliance. Popular participation, democratic decisions at all levels, creativity, and innovation were expected to be the engines of transforming Tanzania. The party would pave the way and provide support, and the government would introduce ideas, technology, and some resources into the process; both would take care of the larger issues.

Many villages heeded the call, more than a few workers acted, and even progressive bureaucrats at various

points along the line responded. But when they did, there was an inevitable conflict with those whose interests were lodged in the old system—to achieve and maintain material gains or power. Those with power defended and counterattacked. At these pregnant moments, neither Nyerere, nor TANU, nor the government stepped onto the side of the peasants and workers and bureaucrats, to use the power of the state and the party to resolve contradictions in favor of progressives. None of the authors gives us any way of thinking about or understanding of Nyerere's failure here.

The essays disappoint at another level. Nyerere himself had certain blind spots that produced disastrous results at the implementation level. For instance, he was hopelessly enamored of foreign experts. Thus, he turned to McKinsey & Co., a management consulting firm, for the task of designing a top-to-bottom system for the State Trading Corporation (STC), which was to be responsible for nearly all of the country's internal trade and imports. The STC had been doing pretty well—a small miracle compared to other Third World state trading companies, in India for example. McKinsey's solution burdened it with crippling expenses and systems that were, at best, suitable for a large, wholesale drygoods company in Ohio. The STC collapsed within two years.

McKinsey's "coup de grace" was the design of Tanzania's decentralization machinery. Supposed to promote "*ujamaa vijijini*," rural development and participation, it produced chaos instead and was abandoned in the 1970s. Unfortunately, these examples of consultants' poison were repeated for health, education, small-scale industry, the government's purchasing system and more.

Nyerere seems to have had little faith in the creativeness of his own people, and he had many compatriots who were ready and capable of restructuring most of the country's institutions and planning the transition. Certainly this was in fundamental contradiction to his belief that Africa had much to contribute to the world.

Had Nyerere not relied on foreign experts and had he used national power to support progressives, would Tanzania's political and economic history have turned out differently? Probably not. There were too many other variables, mostly external or beyond anyone's control, such as floods, drought, the oil crisis, and the like, for such a poor country to overcome by itself. But the political and intellectual heritage that led to such contradictions in Nyerere/Tanzania are important to understand.

Yet no one addresses the question of where the polit-

ical force was to come from for totally restructuring the Tanzanian society in the absence of revolution (Cuba), a highly politicized mass party (China), or even a vanguard party. We are left staring at the contradiction of Mwalimu teaching leaders and the people what was to be done. How were leaders to change the attitudes and dreams they had acquired from their colonial educations and positions? How were the 95 percent of Tanzania's people living in rural areas going to throw off the centuries of ideas and practices that had hidden them from the slave traders and protected them from the unwarranted risks the colonial and post-independent technocrats wanted them to take?

Is it possible to have a socialist revolution "from a standing start," as John Saul used to ask? Nyerere himself told a gathering of the faculty at the University of Dar es Salaam that he wished "we had had a revolution like Zanzibar. Then I could have gotten rid of all the dead wood. As it is, I have to wait 'til they retire or die."

How does any society trying to build socialism avoid the formation of strata and classes whose interests become opposed to those of the bulk of the people? What was missing? What would it have taken to have made the socialist transformation successful? Was Nyerere wrong, incomplete, or unlucky? Was his shock approach to keeping the momentum of the revolution going fundamentally flawed? How? Why? Can a peasantry become the leading wedge of socialist transformation without a consciousness of its power as producers of surplus, its importance as the economic engine of production and accumulation? The authors offer us no clue to the answers.

A few comments on individual essays are in order. Svendsen's "Development Strategy and Crisis Management" is the best overview of Tanzania's economic rise and fall I have read. It is full of information and some useful insights. However, it is the only essay that does not deal with Nyerere directly or his influence on the events Svendsen discusses. Furthermore, considering that Svendsen was the first chair of the Department of Economics at the University of Dar es Salaam (1964-68) and President Nyerere's personal economics adviser from 1970-72, thereby deeply involved in the socialist reconstruction efforts and the teacher of many of the economists in the public sector in following years, it is a little hard to swallow such patronizing judgments as, "In this period [circa 1983]....The policy-makers, or some of them, were learning about how the economy actually functioned" (p. 120).

I was deeply disappointed with Irene and Roland

Brown's piece. It seems curious that they were asked to write about Nyerere's "Approach to Rural Mass Poverty," when Irene Brown was Senior Lecturer of Political Science at the University of Dar es Salaam, and Roland Brown was independent Tanganyika's first Attorney General. It is difficult to think of two living Europeans who knew Nyerere—from the 1950s onward—more intimately. They tell us nothing that is not also found in several other essays and offer no useful insights. It is a mystery how the editors could have failed to have asked the Browns to share with us everything germane and publishable about Nyerere that has never before been written.

For they know about Nyerere's agony at having to ask British troops to return in 1964 to put down an army uprising; about his personal battles with Britain's Prime Minister Edward Heath and the effect they had on key British Africa policies; about meetings at midnight with McKinsey & Co. directors who convinced Nyerere to turn over sectors of the bureaucracy to them for redesign; about his fury over the students' threat in 1967 to "go slow" on their government jobs if they were forced to enter the National Service; and more and more.

Msabaha's essay on Nyerere's "Contribution to International Relations" is not worth reading. It says nothing about the topic. Fortunately, some of Nyerere's important contributions in this area are dealt with by Sir Shridath Ramphal, Geoffrey Mmari, Reginold Green, and Colin Legum.

Green's piece is far and above the others in the depth of its analysis, the sweep of its coverage, and the complexities of reflection into which he invites us. I recommend that it either be read first, to set a tone, or last, as the most stimulating and comprehensive.

How do we evaluate a person's "legacy to mankind"? Surely their thoughts, writing, deeds, and impact on communities large and small count a lot. Comparisons with others in similar positions, and the depth and relative permanence of changes they effected on institutions might be useful. Quantitative measures of performance are always tempting.

I would not like to have been asked to measure Julius Nyerere, for it would have been a task from which I

would have "shrunk, not to say recoiled—the task of making the entire, tremendous cosmos [of Mwalimu Nyerere's] works the object of [my] consideration and discussion," as Thomas Mann wrote about his failure to write about Dostoevsky. I would only have been able to say that I would have preferred him to any president of my country, the United States, who served during my lifetime. And I would have told the following story:

At a meeting in a *ujamaa* village in 1972 the people gathered to discuss the role of the agricultural extension officer, a man with a primary school education and two years of training. A woman complained that the man simply ordered them around. The man replied:

These people! These people are ignorant. They do not understand. I am an educated man. I was sent here by the government to teach them things they do not know. I was not sent here to do their work for them. They do not understand. They are very ignorant.

A second woman jumped up and said:

See? That's what we mean! He does not understand "ujamaa." That is not "ujamaa"! Now, the president [Nyerere], he understands "ujamaa." He has come to this village three times. When he comes he sees that we are very busy, that we have no time to talk. So he comes into the fields and picks up a "jembe" [hoe] and works beside us so we can talk. That's "ujamaa."

Mwalimu was a man who understood socialism.

This is a time when devastating condemnations of Africa are in vogue. Certainly there is much to criticize and, though we may not hold Africans fully responsible for what has befallen the continent, they too must be held accountable. However, Africa mirrors much of the world, though as usual in harsh relief. In this time of world chaos people everywhere are rejecting the old and the new order, tearing them away, at great human and material cost, clawing their way to a world they have not defined, but one in which the people as a whole will forge and control their own destinies.

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