

## 6 Maoism in Tanzania

### Material connections and shared imaginaries

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*Priya Lal*

We stand for self-reliance. We hope for foreign aid but cannot be dependent on it; we depend on our own efforts, on the creative power of the whole army and the entire people.

Self-Reliance and Arduous Struggle

In December 1966, President Julius Nyerere embarked on a six-week tour of half of the regions in the newly independent East African country of Tanzania, which the national press enthusiastically dubbed his “Long March.”<sup>1</sup> During this journey to both major regional centers and remote rural outposts, Nyerere called upon Tanzanians across the countryside to unite in pursuit of the country’s new developmental imperatives: self-reliance and socialism. In a pamphlet published several years earlier, Nyerere had already begun to outline these political principles, introducing the concept of *ujamaa*, or “familyhood,” into national discourse as the foundation for a proposed program of African socialism.<sup>2</sup> It was not until the conclusion of his “Long March,” however, that Nyerere officially inaugurated the policy of *ujamaa* that would structure life in Tanzania over the next decade. On February 5, 1967, in a widely publicized manifesto issued in the northern town of Arusha, President Nyerere – popularly known as Mwalimu (Teacher) – announced the ideological contours of a radical approach to national development based upon collective hard work, popular agrarian transformation, and a resolutely anti-colonial stance.

Though in theory the *ujamaa* project elaborated in the Arusha Declaration sought to recuperate a lost ideal of traditional African socialism, it was very much the product of the global circumstances of the 1960s. As the Tanzanian initiative evolved, it borrowed from the Chinese developmental model symbolically and ideologically – invoking Chinese historical milestones such as the Long March and the Cultural Revolution, and drawing

<sup>1</sup> Nsa Kaisi, “Mwalimu’s Long March,” *The Nationalist* (February 4, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> Julius Nyerere, “*Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism*,” in *Freedom and Unity: A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1952–65* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1966).

upon key themes of Maoism such as self-reliance, mass politics, and peasant primacy. The discursive circulation of Maoist idioms and concepts among state officials and broader publics in Tanzania during the early postcolonial era was accompanied and enabled by the simultaneous material circulation of Chinese cultural, political, and economic resources throughout the country. Mao's Little Red Book was one such resource; in the late 1960s, English and Swahili translations of the text were advertised for sale (for the highly affordable price of one shilling) in major Tanzanian newspapers such as *The Nationalist*,<sup>3</sup> and copies of the *Quotations* were stocked at the National Central Library, opened in December 1967.<sup>4</sup> The contents of Mao's Little Red Book embodied China's innovative, unorthodox approach to socialism – an approach that resonated with officials of Tanzania's ruling political party, TANU, but also captured the attention of young people and intellectuals in cities such as Dar es Salaam.

Given low literacy rates and the poor condition of transportation infrastructure in the countryside, the book itself, as a physical object, was not always – or even often – the vehicle for the spread of Maoist ideas and symbols throughout Tanzania. Instead, the *Quotations* traveled across radio airwaves to reach rural communities and illiterate urban publics across the country in oral form. Most importantly, the influence of the Chinese socialist model on *ujamaa*-era Tanzania was entrenched through, and manifested itself in, the circulation of a wide range of people and resources between China and Tanzania from 1964 to 1975. The Chinese–Tanzanian relationship was, importantly, an asymmetrical one; though Tanzanian diplomatic missions and student groups paid multiple visits to the PRC during this period, China flooded Tanzania with teachers, doctors, technological support, monetary aid, cultural productions, and a range of other collaborative and unilateral assistance. Rather than passively absorbing this aid, cultivating a position of economic and ideological dependency on China, Tanzanian actors imported, incorporated, and transformed these Chinese elements to forge their own project of African socialism.

### Background

The United Republic of Tanzania was born in 1964, three years after the former British colony of Tanganyika became a sovereign country, and

<sup>3</sup> *The Nationalist*, the primary newspaper referenced here, was one of four daily newspapers in Tanzania until the press was fully nationalized in 1972. *The Nationalist*, along with *Uhuru*, its Swahili-language counterpart, was owned and operated by TANU, the ruling party at the time.

<sup>4</sup> “No Censorship of Books in Tanzania,” *The Nationalist* (December 12, 1967).

several months after the island territory of Zanzibar also gained independence from British rule. Though mainland Tanganyika's transition to independence in 1961 was a fairly smooth and peaceful affair, in Zanzibar decolonization was accompanied by a tumultuous, violent leftist revolution – with racial overtones – against the ruling elite and landed classes on the island. In the context of political turbulence, ongoing civil war, and foreign involvement in the neighboring country of the Congo, as well as the escalation of liberation struggles against Portuguese imperialism and apartheid-style governance immediately to the south of Tanzania, the Zanzibar revolution drew new international attention to East Africa. Nyerere and other TANU officials, like their counterparts across the African continent, felt the pressures of the Cold War quite acutely, and pursued a platform of global engagement that would preserve the geopolitical and ideological autonomy of their young country. At the same time, the Tanzanian leadership sought to formulate an agenda for domestic development that accorded to the ideals informing their foreign policy (an emphasis on self-reliance combined with an idealization of community) but remained compatible with the on-the-ground realities of a poor, largely rural, society.

By 1967, *ujamaa* had emerged as the philosophy and strategy that TANU leaders felt would best respond to the opportunities and constraints of the early postcolonial period. *Ujamaa* simultaneously drew upon standard socialist themes – by rejecting exploitation and inequality in favor of collective effort and welfare – and departed from the conventional global repertoire of development policy – by proposing a decentralized, pastoral version of socialist democracy. Tanzanian political elites styled *ujamaa* as a flexible, improvisational utopian project driven by a shifting dialectic between state-directed policy and popular subjective transformation, rather than proclaiming it a fixed blueprint for revolutionary change. Immediately following the Arusha Declaration, the implementation of *ujamaa* began with the one-party state's nationalization of banks, major industries, and natural resources. The centerpiece of the *ujamaa* initiative, however, was the longer-term undertaking of reorganizing the Tanzanian countryside into socialist villages. The *ujamaa* village was to be defined by collective ownership of property and communal organization of agriculture; the hard work and unified dedication of *ujamaa* villagers would fuel national development.

Whereas villagization began as an experimental and voluntary effort, it morphed into a compulsory drive (known as Operation Vijiji [Villages]) between 1973 and 1975 in which millions of peasants were forcefully resettled. By the end of Operation Vijiji, the Tanzanian rural landscape had been superficially transformed, but substantive *ujamaa* had not been

achieved, since TANU had exchanged the original goal of establishing functional socialist villages for the objective of achieving a mere spatial reconfiguration of the countryside. The fate of the individual *ujamaa* village paralleled that of the Tanzanian nation-state at large. By the mid 1970s Tanzania, like many other newly independent states in sub-Saharan Africa, had lost its developmental momentum largely due to a number of structural, institutional, and ideological constraints – all of which reflected local factors but were deeply connected to the increasing unevenness of the world economy and the restrictiveness of global geopolitics.

### Shared imaginaries

Before the disappointments and closures of the 1970s, however, Tanzanian politics were marked by a spirit of experimentation and possibility. Without reproducing Mao's vision wholesale, Nyerere transposed a number of key themes of Chinese socialism onto Tanzanian soil, combining them with popular local idioms, colonial practices, and other borrowed developmental ideologies into the distinctive *ujamaa* imaginary. Moreover, as the *ujamaa* project was translated into practice, the state officials and youth militants who interpreted and implemented official development policy further injected a Maoist flavor into their endeavors, demonstrating the broad reach of the Chinese socialist model among Tanzanian populations. In many ways, the Tanzanian *ujamaa* experiment mirrored and overlapped with other African Socialist projects in countries such as Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Zambia – which all drew upon a common continental repertoire in which Maoist ideology and symbolic citations figured prominently. Yet *ujamaa* was easily the most ambitious and sustained version of African Socialism, and featured an especially striking affinity with the Chinese configuration at multiple levels.

Equally committed to the task of forging an “alternative” path to socialist development, Tanzania and China shared a political language of anti-colonialism and self-reliance, and their domestic agendas both valorized the countryside as the primary site of economic and ideological transformation. Like Mao, Nyerere realized the unsuitability of Soviet strategies in a predominantly agrarian society, and refused to countenance the intensification of urban–rural discrepancies, class tensions, and general hardship for the average citizen that a straightforward policy of industrialization and proletarianization would produce. Rather than deferring the establishment of socialist forms of social organization until the reconfiguration of productive forces had been achieved, both

Mao and Nyerere insisted that the cultivation of socialist subjectivities could itself be a lever of economic development. “In a socialist society it is the socialist attitude of mind, and not the rigid adherence to a standard political pattern, which is needed,”<sup>5</sup> Nyerere insisted, echoing Mao’s position that “the people, and the people alone” – rather than abstract historical logic, or technological capacity – “are the motive force in the making of world history.”<sup>6</sup> *Ujamaa* and Maoism alike held that the historical “backwardness” of their countries – their largely unindustrialized character – actually represented circumstances particularly favorable to socialist revolution. Though Mao urged the abolition of any traces of outdated Confucian beliefs and traditional practices among the mostly “poor and blank” Chinese peasantry, Nyerere maintained that an African heritage of “tribal socialism” dating to the precolonial era could underpin a modern developmental program that was simultaneously restorative and transformative.

Despite this difference, however, TANU officials during the *ujamaa* era and their Chinese counterparts during and after the Great Leap Forward both promoted popular dedication and discipline as an inherently rural ethos to be generalized as a national imperative. By relying upon themselves and working hard, Tanzanian and Chinese citizens would, in theory, be able to secure the self-reliance of their countries in a 1960s world marked by the rise of new threats to national sovereignty, the deepening of capitalist-fueled global inequalities, and geopolitical turbulence (apparent in dynamics such as the Sino-Soviet split). Of course, Mao and Nyerere carried this logic to different extremes; while Mao urged modified rural and urban industrialization to allow the Chinese to “catch up” to the West, Nyerere felt that hard work and a dedicated socialist ethos alone were sufficient ingredients for longer-term economic progress. At times, the urgency of these developmental missions, and the tense regional and global circumstances in which they unfolded, lent a militaristic character to official campaigns for increased agricultural production or cultural reform in both China and Tanzania.

However, this militarism was hardly managed and applied by a centralized state apparatus. The aggression and energy of young Chinese student activists during the Cultural Revolution, and of members of TANU’s Youth League during villagization, exposed the limits of state control over revolutionary activity in both countries. Indeed, both the Maoist and Tanzanian political imaginaries privileged revolutionary spontaneity; the philosophy of the mass line elaborated in Mao’s

<sup>5</sup> Nyerere, “*Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism.*”

<sup>6</sup> Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch11.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch11.htm).

*Quotations* was mirrored in Nyerere's faith in peasant initiative and suspicion of bureaucratic elitism. Both Maoism and *ujamaa* were, at heart, utopian formulations; as such, they ended up exhibiting a number of similar contradictions – between a tendency toward decentralized openness and an impulse toward the centralization and top-down application of power, for instance. Ultimately, both the Chinese and Tanzanian socialist projects assumed a thoroughly hybrid form, blending unwieldy state planning and a strong party apparatus with an idealization of popular creativity and improvisation.

### Material connections

The particularly close Tanzania–China relationship of the 1960s manifested and produced these overlapping approaches to socialism and national development. The Chinese link with Tanzania was the deepest of its numerous relationships with African countries at this time;<sup>7</sup> in 1964 alone, China provided \$45.5 million in aid to Tanzania, comprising nearly half of its total annual aid on the African continent.<sup>8</sup> In 1965, Nyerere and Zhou Enlai signed a ten-year friendship treaty that would solidify Tanzania's status as the largest African recipient of Chinese economic assistance, and China's as the most significant donor to Tanzania, over the course of the *ujamaa* era. In subsequent years this support arrived in a variety of forms: as donations ranging from books and broadcasting equipment to services such as visiting rural medical teams; interest-free loans and investment in a labor-intensive textile mill; a joint shipping line and state farms; and the Chinese design and construction of a major regional railway. Diplomatic and cultural exchanges between the two countries demonstrated that this relationship was more than one of mere financial dependence, however. Between 1964 and 1967, a number of visits between Tanzania and China established and deepened these material and ideological connections. During these meetings, TANU leaders often referred to the parallel, intertwined histories and common challenges faced by the two countries – a narrative also cultivated by Chinese officials to substantiate Mao's Three Worlds theory in the wake of the Soviet-Sino split. In 1964, Second Vice-President Rashidi Kawawa greeted Premier Zhou Enlai in Dar es Salaam, proclaiming that “your great and famous country throughout

<sup>7</sup> Jamie Monson, *Africa's Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Tareq Y. Ismael, “The People's Republic of China and Africa,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 9.4 (1971), pp. 507–29 at p. 515.



Fig. 6. Chinese dancers welcome Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere to Beijing. Banner reads, "Welcome, Tanzanian brothers!"  
 Source: *Daily News* (Tanzania), February 17, 1965.

world history has had cordial relations with both Tanganyika and Zanzibar for over a thousand years." He concluded that since "this relation was disrupted by imperialists and colonialists," it was a "sacred duty" for "we peoples of Asia and Africa in this century to restore our former friendly relationship."<sup>9</sup> In 1965, on a visit by Nyerere and other TANU officials to Beijing, Zhou remarked of China and Tanzania that "we have similar past experience, face common fighting tasks, and so can most easily understand and trust each other."<sup>10</sup> Nyerere agreed, noting that "China is the biggest and the most powerful of the developing countries – indeed, it is the only developing country which can challenge imperialism on equal terms" and that "China is undergoing the greatest ideological revolution the world has ever seen, with anti-imperialism as its core."<sup>11</sup>

By 1967, TANU leaders sought to reinforce their new calls for rural sacrifice and self-reliance in the name of *ujamaa* by repeatedly pointing to

<sup>9</sup> Rashidi M. Kawawa and Chou En-Lai, *Hotuba Zilizotolewa Wakati wa Matembezi ya Bwana Kawawa Katika China* [Speeches made during the visit of Mr. Kawawa to China] (Dar es Salaam: TANU pamphlet, 1964).

<sup>10</sup> "US Imperialism Sure to Fail: Chou Tells Isle Rally," *The Nationalist* (June 7, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> Pressman's Commentary: "The Cold War Politics," *The Nationalist* (August 25, 1967).



China as both a model of the correct path of self-reliance and an illustration of the concrete benefits of pursuing such a developmental path. After visiting Beijing and touring southern China as part of a TANU friendship delegation in 1967, Executive Party Secretary P. Msekwa proclaimed that “China has set an excellent example for us in taking the road of self-reliance . . . Tanzania must take this road too. It’s the only road to make our country strong and prosperous.”<sup>12</sup> After his 1965 visit, Nyerere contrasted a Chinese ethos of discipline and austerity with the “list of needs and requests for assistance” he encountered in Tanzanian rural settlement schemes, commenting that the Chinese

are a frugal people; they husband their resources very carefully indeed, and only spend money on things which are absolutely essential. Workers who do not need to spend all their money on food, clothing and housing do not buy a lot of unnecessary things just because they would be nice to have or because someone else has one; they lend their money to the Government instead so that more investment, more education, and more health facilities can be provided.<sup>13</sup>

“This attitude we have to adopt too,” he continued, explaining that “the only way to defeat our present poverty is to accept the fact that it exists, to live as poor people.”<sup>14</sup>

Nyerere’s admiration of “the conscious and deliberate frugality”<sup>15</sup> he witnessed in China extended to the attitude of the political leaders he encountered; his observations that Chinese government elites “were never richly dressed and were not luxuriously spending on cars”<sup>16</sup> prefigured the Arusha Declaration’s stipulation that every TANU and government leader hold limited property, earn a single salary, and “be either a peasant or a worker.” During the early years of *ujamaa*, public and official critiques of the conspicuous consumption of wealthy TANU members – known derisively as *wabenzi* for the flashy Mercedes-Benz vehicles they drove – escalated, culminating in the release of a 1971 set of Party Guidelines known as the *Mwongozo*, which provided further sanction against the “arrogant, extravagant, contemptuous, and oppressive” behavior of these officials, and urged the latter to practice self-reliance rather than “exploitation” in their personal lives. The decadent lifestyle of the *wabenzi* appeared particularly egregious when held up against the public displays of rugged self-sufficiency by Nyerere, members of

<sup>12</sup> “TANU Team Flies to S. China,” *The Nationalist* (December 22, 1967).

<sup>13</sup> “Union Being Cemented, Says Mwalimu: Union Making Great Progress,” *The Nationalist* (April 27, 1965).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> “We Admire People of Tanzania – Chou,” *The Nationalist* (June 5, 1965).

<sup>16</sup> “Invest your Cash Here: President Call to Tanzanians,” *The Nationalist* (March 9, 1965).



TANU's Youth League (TYL), students, and rural people across the country in the wake of the President's "Long March" leading up to the Arusha Declaration in 1967. Later that year, these Tanzanians embarked upon a series of long-distance walks in support of the new *ujamaa* program, culminating in Nyerere's seven-day trek from his birthplace in Butiama to the northern city of Mwanza over 130 miles away. The editors and staff of *The Nationalist* – TANU members including Nyerere's successor, Benjamin Mkapa, and his future advisor, Nsa Kaisi – celebrated these "heroic" marches in their typically militant language, noting that the people's "leader believes in hard work and struggle and is himself in the forefront of this hard work and struggle."<sup>17</sup> The symbolism was clear: in *ujamaa*'s "war on poverty," the Chinese revolutionary spirit of self-reliance, exemplified by the physical endurance evident in "the Long March which the beleaguered Red Army undertook in 1934/5,"<sup>18</sup> would comprise the most effective weapon in the Tanzanian arsenal.

Despite China and Tanzania's mutual commitment to self-reliance as a developmental strategy for their rural populations, their very relationship was premised upon a recognition that national self-reliance could only realistically comprise a developmental goal for a poor country such as Tanzania. During the 1960s, Chinese aid to Tanzania arrived in many forms. In Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar, Chinese money built factories such as the Urafiki (Friendship) Textile Mill, whose operations were organized and guided by Chinese managers and technical experts. A large state farm (Ruvu) just outside Dar es Salaam – one of several exceptions to Nyerere's policy of small-scale, village-level agriculture – relied upon Chinese tractors and other equipment, as well as the labor of Chinese agricultural advisors and workers. Chinese medical missions extended aid into remote areas of the countryside, resulting in the circulation of over thirty doctors, six nurses, and five interpreters throughout the regions of Mara, Dodoma, and Mtwara.<sup>19</sup> These highly visible forms of aid were accompanied by regular donations of more mundane, but hardly less significant, materials such as books and radio equipment.

A number of cooperative ventures between China and Tanzania emphasized the commitment to symbolic and substantive solidarity between the two countries. A joint shipping line, whose vessels were given names such as the *Asia/Africa*, was one such undertaking; more

<sup>17</sup> Editorial: "On the March," *The Nationalist* (October 4, 1967).

<sup>18</sup> "We Admire People of Tanzania – Chou," *The Nationalist* (June 5, 1965).

<sup>19</sup> "Chinese Doctors Call on Shaba," *The Nationalist* (April 18, 1968).

notable was the construction of what came to be known as the Uhuru (Freedom) Railway. Although the public marches of 1967 foregrounded an almost anti-modern strand of *ujamaa* ideology, which echoed Gandhi's ascetic traditionalism by rejecting "dependency" on transportation infrastructure and machinery, they were staged at precisely the moment at which Tanzania signed a pact with China and Zambia to develop the longest rail link in the country – the Tan–Zam (or TAZARA) railway from Dar es Salaam to Lusaka. Preliminary discussions of Chinese financing of the proposed TAZARA railway began in 1965. After the World Bank and other potential donors rejected Tanzanian and Zambian requests for investment, the Chinese deal was formalized, and the railway was built between 1969 and 1974.

The TAZARA railway embodied the complexity and depth of the Sino-Tanzanian relationship during this period. The project – like the relationship more broadly – participated in and helped constitute the ideas and initiatives of the Third World in its "second chapter,"<sup>20</sup> marked by its members' shared preoccupation with attaining and preserving national sovereignty, yet materialized through their commitment to transnational engagement and internationalism. In this spirit, TANU promoted regionalism – a building-block of pan-Africanism – as an economic tool in both the larger pursuit of geopolitical and ideological autonomy from Cold War bipolarities and the ongoing struggle against imperialist formations on the African continent. In particular, the work of combating formal colonialism and apartheid in southern Africa was inextricable from the project of strengthening regional economic ties with neighboring states, such as Zambia, that would otherwise be dependent on trade with Rhodesia and South Africa. TAZARA was a key element of the effort to bring down the Rhodesian and South African regimes, offering a route of access for imports and exports to and from Zambia that bypassed southern Africa, and thus promised to whittle down the latter's economic base. The Chinese support for this initiative – via money, technology, technicians, and laborers – thus benefited the Tanzanian and Zambian economies, aided southern African liberation struggles, and bolstered China's anti-colonial credentials.

These credentials had been secured earlier, in more covert and direct ways. Since its independence, Tanganyika had been a leader in regional and later continental efforts to aid liberation struggles in southern Africa,

<sup>20</sup> For this periodization see Mark Berger, "After the Third World? History, Destiny and the Fate of Third Worldism," *Third World Quarterly* 25.1 (2004), pp. 9–39; Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

spearheading the Pan African Freedom Movement of East, Central, and Southern Africa (PAFMECSA) and hosting the Liberation Committee of the Organization of African Unity in Dar es Salaam from 1963 onward. Tanzania served as a base for anti-colonial and anti-apartheid movements from South Africa, Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, housing their operational headquarters and facilitating their militarization by running training-camps as well as acting as a conduit for arms and supplies provided by a range of radical foreign sources.<sup>21</sup> Chinese aid was particularly substantial among the latter. In 1964, China began training soldiers of the Zanzibar Island's People's Liberation Army and the Tanzania People's Defence Forces (many of whom would later go on to secure Tanzania's southern border with Mozambique and train freedom fighters in refugee camps) as well as providing instruction to southern African guerrillas at the mainland Moshi Police College and in training-camps in sites such as Kongwa.<sup>22</sup> By 1970, the Chinese had become the largest contributor of weapons and training to Tanzania-based freedom fighters.<sup>23</sup> They had also entirely replaced Canadian aid, previously the primary source of military assistance in mainland Tanzania, to hold "a monopoly in field training and the supply of sophisticated military equipment for the armed forces,"<sup>24</sup> and also worked to provide coastal patrol boats and jet fighters to the Tanzanian forces.

This military aid raised eyebrows among American and British officials, particularly when it was covertly channeled through Tanzania toward groups such as the Simba rebels from the Eastern Congo. Nyerere and other Tanzanian officials remained alert to the lessons of the recent Congo crisis, which starkly illustrated the potential perils of inviting anti-communist intervention from the West.<sup>25</sup> Within Tanzanian borders, TANU leaders maintained that the TAZARA deal,

<sup>21</sup> See Shubi L. Ishemo, "'A Symbol that Cannot be Substituted': The Role of Mwalimu J. K. Nyerere in the Liberation of Southern Africa, 1955–1990," *Review of African Political Economy* 27.83 (2000), pp. 81–94; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa: 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Paul Bjerk, "Postcolonial Realism: Tanganyika's Foreign Policy under Nyerere, 1960–1963," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 44.2 (2011), pp. 215–47.

<sup>22</sup> "Russians and Chinese use Tanzania as Arms Centre," *Sunday Telegraph* (March 21, 1965).

<sup>23</sup> UK National Archives. Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 31/690. "Anglo-US Talks on China. The Chinese in Tanzania." East African department, November 1970. Background Notes.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Speaking Notes.

<sup>25</sup> Ludo deWitte, *The Assassination of Lumumba* (New York: Verso, 2003).

along with the proliferation of other material ties to China, did not compromise the country's position of self-reliance, commitment to ideological sovereignty, and policy of non-alignment. Responding to perceived alarm and anticipated pressure by the USA in the wake of the TAZARA agreement, Nyerere maintained, repeatedly and insistently, that "a railway was a railway whether it was built by Chinese or Italians and it was not necessarily 'Red'."<sup>26</sup> In the context of such debates about China's influence on Tanzania, the cultural and political symbolism associated with *ujamaa* took on a particular importance. In 1965, Nyerere remarked that "large sections of the Western Press and some Western politicians have been examining us through microscopes"; he laughed off scrutiny of his penchant for Mao-style suits, scoffing that "I gather that even the suits I wear have been adduced as evidence of pernicious Chinese influence."<sup>27</sup> Yet, given the politicization of dress across sub-Saharan Africa and within Tanzanian borders throughout the 1960s,<sup>28</sup> Nyerere's sartorial choices spoke through a fairly clear visual language to express an ideological affinity for the evolving Maoist developmental model.<sup>29</sup>

### Culture and revolution

The popularity of Mao suits was hardly the only evidence of Chinese cultural and political influence in 1960s Tanzania. China's revolution reached Tanzanians more concretely through the distribution of books and other media, especially radio and film. The Chinese operated the radical Tanganyika Bookshop in Dar es Salaam and the Mapinduzi (Revolution) Bookshop in Zanzibar, which sold "Chinese publications of a wide and useful variety in both Swahili and English," ranging from technical manuals to *China Pictorial* magazine.<sup>30</sup> Chief among these publications was Mao's *Quotations*, which was also sold in smaller towns throughout Tanzania, and remained widely available by mail order in Swahili and English. Though such a text would have been irrelevant to many illiterate Tanzanians, a number of young intellectuals and activists

<sup>26</sup> "Tan-Zam Railway is Not 'Red' Says Nyerere," *The Nationalist* (October 20, 1968).

<sup>27</sup> "President Nyerere Speaks out on Remaining Colonies: Bloodshed? It's up to West," *The Nationalist* (June 24, 1965).

<sup>28</sup> Jean Allman, ed., *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> The "Kaunda suit," popularized by Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, was another popular sartorial choice for male officials at the time.

<sup>30</sup> UK National Archives. Dominion Office (DO) 213/100. "Tanzania: Chinese Influence in Tanzania." British High Commissioner in Tanzania to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, March 19, 1965.

in urban centers avidly read the Little Red Book, with students at the University of Dar es Salaam gathering outside of the classroom to discuss related texts such as Mao's "On Contradiction" in weekend study groups.<sup>31</sup> The Little Red Book also inspired African imitations. In the autumn of 1967, the State Publishing Corporation released a Swahili pamphlet prepared by the Political Department of the Zanzibar Contingent of the Tanzanian People's Defence Forces, entitled *Mateuo ya Rais Karume* (Quotations from President Karume). Consisting of fifty pages of quotations from speeches given by Tanzania's First Vice-President and Zanzibar's leader Abeid Karume in 1965, the pamphlet measured six inches by four and one-half inches, and was known informally as the "little blue book."<sup>32</sup> Across the continent in Ghana, a pamphlet entitled the *Axioms of Kwame Nkrumah*, containing eighty-five quotations from Nkrumah's writings grouped under headings such as "African Revolution" and "African Unity," was published at roughly the same time. The layout and content of these texts unquestionably invoked Mao's *Quotations*.<sup>33</sup>

On the whole, radio was a more effective medium than text for reaching large segments of the Tanzanian population, and the Chinese were active in this sector as well. Broadcasts in Swahili from Beijing began in September 1961. By 1967, Radio Peking was transmitting twenty-one hours weekly in English to East Africa, with transmissions occurring every day between the hours of six and nine in the evening, and programming consisting of news and commentary interspersed with intervals of recorded music. The impact of Radio Peking was circumscribed by the fact that in rural areas radio ownership remained a relative luxury, and qualified by the popularity of other foreign radio stations, including the BBC and Radio Cairo.<sup>34</sup> Yet the Chinese also played a role in Tanzania's domestic radio operations, assisting with the reconfiguration of the colonial-era Tanganyika Broadcasting Corporation as Radio Tanzania, donating radio equipment, and even supplying technical training to radio

<sup>31</sup> Karim Hirji, ed., *Cheche: Reminiscences of a Radical Magazine* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> US National Archives and Records Administration, College Park. State Department records. Box 2513, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967–69, Political and Defense. "Blue Book' of Karume Sayings Issued." October 12, 1967: American Embassy Dar es Salaam.

<sup>33</sup> FCO 31/155. "Socialist Concepts in Zambia, East Africa, and Ghana." African Section, Joint Research Department, June 21, 1967.

<sup>34</sup> George Yu, "Dragon in the Bush: Peking's Presence in Africa," *Asian Survey* 8.12 (1968), pp. 1018–26; James Brennan, "Radio Cairo and the Decolonization of East Africa, 1953–1964," in Christopher Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

staff. Additionally, though television access was minimal in Tanzania, the Chinese used film to advertise the depths of the Sino-African relationship and extol the benefits of Maoism. The Chinese embassy in Dar es Salaam applied for permission to build a cinema adjoining their ambassador's house, but this request was refused. Nonetheless, Chinese and Chinese-themed films were screened in Dar es Salaam cinemas alongside Bollywood movies and select Western features; these included a 1965 color documentary of Nyerere's visit to China (dubbed in Swahili), a Chinese feature film entitled *Youth in the Flames of War*, and propaganda shorts praising China's doctors, such as *The Reattachment of a Completely Severed Hand*.<sup>35</sup> Outside of the cinema, theater, dance, and musical events captured the attention of urban elites. In 1967, for instance, Chinese cultural troupes performed *The East is Red* to audiences composed of members of the public and TANU leaders.

The image of Mao himself also became a charged symbol of Tanzania's radical inclinations. In a bit of political theater in late 1967, officials in neighboring Kenya "called for the immediate closure of the Chinese Embassy in Nairobi," charging that Chinese officials "had been trying to persuade Kenyans to 'study the thoughts of Mao Tse-tung'" and "engag[ing] in 'gross interference in Kenya's internal affairs'."<sup>36</sup> At the same moment, TANU leaders staged their own counter-theater by speaking out in favor of the distribution of badges emblazoned with Mao's portrait in Tanzanian secondary schools; Nyerere announced that "the Government will not tolerate attempts by any foreign country to try and influence the policies of the United Republic but it will not draw iron curtains around Tanzania to stop foreign propaganda."<sup>37</sup> *The Nationalist* issued a response to the Ministry of Education's reported attempt to prohibit the wearing of foreign badges by Tanzanian schoolchildren, asking, "how does a whole Ministry of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania panic over badges of Mao Tse Tung when there is not a single Chinese teacher in Tanzania as compared to . . . hundreds of American Peace Corps teachers and others from foreign countries?"<sup>38</sup> Letters to the editor, similarly, questioned the assumption that "to refrain from wearing a foreign badge proves loyalty to Tanzania and vice versa," asking, "what about those thousands of Christians who wear

<sup>35</sup> DO 213/100. Extract from "Communist Activities in Africa." December 1965.

<sup>36</sup> "Close Down Chinese Embassy – Mboya," *The Nationalist* (September 1, 1967).

<sup>37</sup> "Mwalimu Warns Against Foreign Influence . . . but Assures: No Iron Curtains Around Tanzania," *The Nationalist* (August 22, 1967).

<sup>38</sup> Editorial: "Foreign Badges," *The Nationalist* (September 21, 1967).

badges – medals if you like – bearing the heads of Jesus Christ (a foreigner), Virgin Mary (a foreigner) – are they disloyal to Tanzania?”<sup>39</sup>

That Tanzanian schoolchildren were wearing badges featuring Mao’s image is hardly surprising given the range of Chinese cultural and political resources in circulation in Dar es Salaam in the late 1960s. Moreover, debates over Maoist adornment reflected the emergent politicization of dress in Tanzania more generally, as TYL militants embarked upon a number of cultural policing campaigns that became known in some circles as Tanzania’s own “cultural revolution.” TANU launched Operation Vijana (Youth) in late 1968 to eradicate symbols of “cultural enslavement” among Dar es Salaam residents; the operation particularly targeted items of female adornment including miniskirts, wigs, tight pants, and cosmetics, but ostensibly condemned all signs of “imperialist” behavior, comportment, and dress. While the focus of these campaigns in Tanzania, unlike in China, was the revival and restoration of traditional African cultural practices, the Tanzanian “cultural revolution” was also accompanied by initiatives to purge national culture of indigenous elements deemed insufficiently compatible with socialist modernity – such as Operation Dress-Up, which forced Maasai citizens to wear “proper” clothing.<sup>40</sup> Officials and press reports referred to the TYL policers as “Green Guards”; just as the Chinese Communist Party struggled to regain control over the students, workers, and activists emboldened and authorized by Mao’s call for Cultural Revolution, the senior TANU leadership began to express anxiety about the increasing numbers of unsanctioned beatings and arrests staged by Youth Leaguers in the name of Operation Vijana.<sup>41</sup>

### Tensions and translations

While *ujamaa* and Maoism overlapped ideologically, they also generated similar patterns and contradictions as they unfolded in practice. The tension between inciting and managing popular activism in the name of cultural reform and agrarian reorganization was a recurring theme in

<sup>39</sup> Mwana-wa-Mkulima, Dar es Salaam, letter to the editor, “Ban on Foreign Badges,” *The Nationalist* (September 29, 1967).

<sup>40</sup> Leander Schneider, “The Maasai’s New Clothes: A Developmentalist Modernity and its Exclusions,” *Africa Today* 53.1 (2006), pp. 100–31.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); James Brennan, “Youth, the TANU Youth League, and Managed Vigilantism in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania 1925–1973,” *Africa: Journal of the International Africa Institute* 76.2 (2006), pp. 221–46.



both national contexts, and manifested itself especially clearly in Operation Vijana and Operation Vijiji (the latter also entrusted TYL militants with its implementation). In both China and Tanzania, concern over cultural policing campaigns in cities bled into broader official anxieties about urban unemployment. TANU officials, drawing in part upon older colonial “repatriation” policies, urged young urban-dwellers without formal employment to “return” to the countryside throughout the 1960s; this strategy was designed not only to emphasize the rural orientation of Tanzanian socialism – to “counteract” the likelihood “that the towns might attract more people from rural areas and thus discourage effort in nation-building”<sup>42</sup> – but also offered party leaders an effective means of defusing unrest in cities. In this respect periodic urban removal campaigns in *ujamaa*-era Tanzania mirrored the “sent-down” (*xia fang*) rustication movements in Mao’s China. TANU also adopted a national service program designed to introduce young people to military training and require them to spend time farming in *ujamaa* villages. After growing accusations of elitism among students at the University of Dar es Salaam (paralleling Mao’s concerns about the cultivation of “bourgeois” mentalities among Chinese intellectuals) the party made national service compulsory for all secondary school graduates. These policies targeted young women as well as men; however, as in China, national policy toward matters of gender and family remained ambiguous and often paradoxical during the 1960s. The concept of *ujamaa* itself – like the Maoist vision of socialist egalitarianism – theoretically called for the socialization of household functions; however, both Tanzanian and Chinese policies continued to preserve the centrality of the nuclear family structure and assign women the double burden of fulfilling reproductive (or domestic) and productive duties.<sup>43</sup>

Some Tanzanians pointed out these contradictions of official policy to criticize Nyerere’s regime, leading to presidential mandates to ban or detain opposition groups or activists such as the University Students’ African Revolutionary Front and Oscar Kambona. Similarly, the Sino-Tanzanian relationship, like the project of Afro-Asian solidarity more broadly, was punctuated by points of friction and acts of dissent. Reports

<sup>42</sup> Tanzania National Archives, Prime Minister’s Office, Dodoma. RARD/UV/U24. “TANU National Conference 1969. May 30, 1969.”

<sup>43</sup> Priya Lal, “Militants, Mothers, and the National Family: *Ujamaa*, Gender, and Rural Development in Postcolonial Tanzania,” *Journal of African History* 51.1 (2010), pp. 1–20.; Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China’s Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

of labor trouble at the Friendship Mill began as early as 1965, consisting of a range of “complaints about unfairness and discrimination in Mill personnel policies.”<sup>44</sup> Other rumors pointed to popular disillusionment concerning the terms and conditions of Chinese aid, ranging from disappointment at the quality of donated machinery to frustration with the importation and conduct of Chinese laborers. Some Tanzanians bristled at what they saw as unwelcome Chinese propaganda. “Only recently I listened to the Kiswahili Service of Radio Peking about the work which was being done by the Chinese doctors here in Tanzania,” one Dar es Salaam resident wrote in a letter to the editor of *Ngurumo*, a popular Swahili newspaper. “Perhaps Radio Peking forgot that in our country we have our own President and our own Party.” The author claimed that Chinese doctors “inject the sick people and present them with the gift of small red books,” although Tanzanians “do not want any propaganda,” noting that “it will be better if they sincerely treat the sick people and not mix their medical profession with Chinese politics.”<sup>45</sup> A number of residents of the mainland, like this angry letter-writer, also expressed dismay over Zanzibar’s seemingly immoderate embrace of brash revolutionary rhetoric and policy, often manifested in what appeared to many to be an excessive tilt toward China.

This wariness could be compounded by logistical challenges hindering Sino-Tanzanian communication and expressions of solidarity. Despite the work of interpreters and language-exchange programs among Chinese and Tanzanian students, linguistic differences created a social barrier between citizens of the two countries, and could easily lead to instances of confusion or misunderstanding. In May 1967, the American embassy in Dar es Salaam reported a benign case of mistranslation that nonetheless hinted at the potential for larger problems in communication. Describing “a big-character banner draped on the front of the Chinese Communist Embassy,” the memo wryly noted that “since there are no tigers in East Africa, and thus no word for ‘tiger’ in Swahili, the translation appearing below the Chinese ideographs solemnly declares that ‘Imperialism and all enemies of progress are paper leopards’.”<sup>46</sup> In this case, the essential meaning of Mao’s maxim had been preserved though its referents had been modified; in other instances, however,

<sup>44</sup> DO 213/100. Telegram 1242, August 9, 1965, from Dar es Salaam to Commonwealth Relations Office.

<sup>45</sup> Idi Yusufu, Dar es Salaam, letter to the editor, “Wageni Wangu” [Our Guests], *Ngurumo* (June 10, 1969).

<sup>46</sup> NARA: Box 2513, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967–69, Political and Defense. “This Week in Tanzania, May 29–June 4, 1967,” American Embassy Dar es Salaam. A-310.

the act of linguistic translation paralleled the conversion – both intentional and inadvertent – of Chinese ideology as it entered the cultural and political framework of *ujamaa*-era Tanzania.

### Afterlives

Though Maoism comprised but one of a whole range of ideological models available to Tanzanian leaders and publics during the early postcolonial period, the influence of Chinese socialism on the political imaginary of *ujamaa* proved singularly unmistakable. A particularly close material relationship between the two countries throughout the 1960s and early 1970s enabled and deepened the conceptual, discursive, and symbolic impact of Maoism on politics and everyday life in Tanzania. Yet Tanzanian socialism was hardly a wholesale reproduction or crude derivative of Maoism. Just as officials, intellectuals, and activists in Dar es Salaam translated Mao's *Quotations* into Swahili, and converted the book into an oral text, TANU leaders and Tanzanian citizens modified and adapted elements of the rich and varied ideological field of Maoism as they incorporated them into the evolving *ujamaa* project. Blending Chinese concepts such as self-reliance, mass politics, and cultural revolution with local discourses of parasitism, colonial strategies of resettlement, Gandhian village republicanism, Soviet-style planning, and multiple elements of other African Socialist projects, Tanzanians remade Maoist ideas and symbols in the process of adopting them.

The heyday of the Sino-Tanzanian relationship – the mid 1960s until the early 1970s – coincided with the apex and subsequent rapid decline of Maoism and *ujamaa* socialism as dominant political discourses and actual policies in each country. Nyerere's 1967 Arusha Declaration inaugurated the *ujamaa* project at the height of the Cultural Revolution in China; while Chinese officials and publics turned away from the ambitious ideals and succinct imperatives contained in Little Red Book during the early 1970s, the *ujamaa* villagization initiative simultaneously mutated from a utopian vision of agrarian socialism into a compulsory resettlement drive focused solely on the superficial spatial reordering of the countryside. After 1975, which marked the conclusion of Operation Vijiji, Tanzanian politics preserved much of the earlier language of *ujamaa* but evacuated it of meaningful content. Though liberation struggles in southern Africa persisted and even escalated through the 1970s, rendering the TAZARA project more critical than ever, during the second half of the decade *ujamaa* appeared increasingly irrelevant as Tanzania followed the course of many of its independent African

counterparts, falling into a condition of economic decline and deepening indebtedness to foreign donors.

In the 1980s, Tanzania (under the leadership of Nyerere's successor, Benjamin Mkapa) succumbed to these pressures by submitting to the austerity measures and liberalization regimen prescribed by IMF and World Bank-imposed structural adjustment policies. Meanwhile, the Chinese rejection of substantive socialism during the 1980s and 1990s so thoroughly transformed the country's political and economic position that by the late 1990s the Chinese "return to Africa"<sup>47</sup> had completely reversed the ideological and material terms of the Sino-Tanzanian relationship during the 1960s era of Third World anti-imperialist solidarity. Whereas earlier Chinese aid built factories such as the Friendship Textile Mill to strengthen Tanzanian manufacturing capacities for Tanzanian gain, and railroads such as the TAZARA for the purpose of pan-African integration, Chinese capital now employs casualized Tanzanian labor in enclaves of industrial production, resource extraction, and infrastructure construction on unfavorable terms that conform precisely to *ujamaa* conceptions of capitalist exploitation.

The breadth and depth of the earlier connection between the two countries, however, is evidenced in the durability of popular memories of Mao's example and *ujamaa*-era Chinese aid – which hold continued appeal among Tanzanians as varied as former national officials in Dar es Salaam and elderly villagers in the peripheral region of Mtwara. Popular experiences of neoliberalism over the past few decades have produced a growing nostalgia among many Tanzanians about the utopian promise of the *ujamaa* period; even while sentiments of fear and resentment toward contemporary Chinese managers and workers spread among rural and urban publics, a widespread appreciation of previous Chinese aid and the Maoist developmental model persists. In contemporary Tanzania, thus, resurgent socialist idioms of self-reliance, hard work, and exploitation can have paradoxical connotations and uses – ranging from invoking a sense of continuity and solidarity in Chinese–African relations to critiquing policies of privatization and labor casualization at the hands of foreign capitalists.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "Raw Encounters: Chinese Managers, African Workers and the Politics of Casualization in Africa's Chinese Enclaves," *The China Quarterly* 199 (2009), pp. 647–66 at p. 647.

<sup>48</sup> Priya Lal, "Self-Reliance and the State: The Multiple Meanings of Development in Early Post-Colonial Tanzania," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 82.2 (2012), pp. 212–34.

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