

EDUCATION

Frances Vavrus. *Desire and Decline: Schooling amid Crisis in Tanzania*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003. xv + 168 pp. Maps. Photographs. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$24.95. Paper.

This monograph is the thirteenth in the series *Society and Politics in Africa*, edited by Yakubu Saaka. Ostensibly about Tanzania as a whole, the book actually focuses on schooling in Kilimanjaro Region, and more precisely on schooling among the Chagga of Old Moshi. Schooling is not discussed systematically for the other groups such as Pare and Maasai who live in Kilimanjaro Region, or for other Tanzanians whose country is the size of Texas and New Mexico combined. That said, the book is a solid case study that adds to the literature on education among the Chagga and to critical discussions about schooling, development policy, and international actors in East Africa and beyond.

The work derives from research conducted from 1996 to 2004 and cogently analyzes the interrelationships of schooling with fertility and health, HIV/AIDS, and environmental conservation during a time of enormous political, economic, and social change. Liberalizing the economy clearly produced multiple ironies, not least of which is the influx of commodities from South Africa (Tanzania was the ANC's second home) that most locals simply cannot afford to buy. Vavrus underscores the debilitating power of discourses of development that champion education as universally transformative, empowering, and the hallmark of modernity. The painful truth is that education all too often prepares youth for unattainable futures and drives wedges between the haves and the have-nots within a community and beyond. Nonetheless, Vavrus invokes Arjun Appadurai to argue that education, like imagination, can be "a staging ground for action, and not only for escape" (19). Thus the book has a hopeful tone and never underestimates people's power to transform their own lives in ways that permit pursuit and protection of what they hold near and dear.

A professor of education with expertise in curriculum and instruction, Vavrus casts schooling in terms of "desire" and "decline." A strong desire for "the life of an 'educated person'" (19) persists among the Chagga despite *maisha magumu* (a difficult life) characterized by real economic decline. They have had more than one hundred years of missionary schooling in their communities, frequent interaction with international development agencies and agendas, and enough collective experience with education's rewards as manifested in successful businesses and salaried employment to fuel desire despite economic hardship at the national level. But "decline" frames the larger context of postcolonial, neoliberal Tanzania in which "only 6% of a population of 35 million attend secondary school" (3). International development agencies active in Kilimanjaro promote development through education but continue to conceptualize education as

universally ameliorative (education as panacea), regardless of the specificities of context, leading Vavrus to argue that while schooling has the potential to effect equality, “in the absence of a concomitant restructuring of national and international development priorities, schooling can transform very few lives” (5).

The introductory chapter discusses education in Tanzania’s postcolonial context, while chapter 1 examines education from the combined perspective of international development and the “feminist modern”—the premise that socioeconomic change can be best realized by focusing on the female. Chapter 2 tackles Tanzanian social policy as it relates to schooling-as-a-cure, using a chronological approach. Chapter 3 presents current data that demonstrate the contestation between locals and internationals over fertility and culture, health curricula, and family planning agendas. Education’s well-documented link to fertility decline is often thwarted by the everyday material challenges presented by *maisha magumu*. Vavrus follows the lives of the secondary school graduates portrayed in chapter 3, who are among the most knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS, to show in chapter 4 that many who experience postgraduation inertia because they cannot find employment engage in high-risk sexual activities with “sponsors” who are willing to pay for their schooling. The graduates say that the risk of “getting AIDS is like having a car accident: It’s common, it’s painful, it can kill you outright, but no one is going to start walking to town, especially not secondary school graduates” (106).

Chapter 5 explores contradictions and ironies in the educational process by examining efforts by government and NGO actors to commodify the Chagga environment, particularly water. This seemingly unusual connection aptly illustrates how rooted are Chagga parental views on education, fertility, health, and environment, which are informed in turn by incisive understanding of how the ability to make a living off the land is constrained in the contemporary period by political, economic, and development policies. The chapter provides a fine segue between schooling and related development agendas, illustrating the intractability of Tanzania’s economic problems, locals’ hopefulness for the future, and the powerful effect of international development precepts and policies on people’s lives—often well intentioned but conceptually limited. The final chapter examines four local NGO projects, each intimately and unabashedly connected to foreign experts and international donors. Though the problems are local, the solutions require national and international action over time in conjunction with local efforts. Desire for development persists despite decline, underscoring how schooling’s ideational value continues to far outweigh its instrumental value.

As part of a series dedicated to the study of contemporary African societies with especial significance for public policy design and implementation, this book makes a genuine contribution. It is clearly, engagingly, and sensitively written, rich with vignettes and emic insights that make it an

excellent choice for undergraduate courses in education, anthropology, African studies, and development. Students will relate to this book and come to understand their near-age counterparts in modern Africa from a new perspective. For the specialist, too, Vavrus offers valuable ethnographic data as grist for the theoretical mill.

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Carol Sicherman. *Becoming an African University: Makerere 1922–2000*. Trenton N.J.: Africa World Press, 2005. xxii + 416 pp. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. \$34.95. Paper.

When I first came to Makerere as external examiner in late 1986, the Department of Music, Dance and Drama (MDD) was in shambles. The grand piano rested on empty crates—the legs had been put to better use on wheelbarrows; the lamps, the sockets, the electric wiring had completely disappeared, windows and doors were missing, the floor in the dance rehearsal room was gone. I had brought ribbons for the only mechanical typewriter in the department because the old one had run out of ink long ago and only the carbon copies were legible (I also brought carbon paper). But at the same time, when the structures and the buildings had apparently collapsed completely, the MDD head of department, Rose Mbowa, staged *Mother Uganda and Her Children* in the Main Hall, the most important theater performance in the country up to the present time.

It is exactly this situation, this atmosphere of structural decay and the revival of the Makerere spirit, that provide the central point of reference of Carol Sicherman's history. Her account is rich in detail, based on a myriad of source materials both archival and oral. Since gross violations of human rights—murders, disappearances, detention, harassment and intimidation, mass rape in students' hostels—are all part of the dramatic experiences on Makerere Hill (and missing, of course, from the official documents), the information given by survivors is essential to fill in the picture of all that Makerere and Makerereans have gone through. Their testimonials counterbalance the colonial unbalance in the recorded history, found primarily in the Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie archives or in the Public Record Office, the British Library, SOAS, and LSE. The Makerere archive, systematized in the 1990s by a Fulbright scholar, was of minor importance.

Sicherman's account reflects the unique historical development of Makerere University: the rise of the colonial college to an institution of international renown in the 1960s, the decay and ultimate collapse in the Obote I and II and the Amin regimes from 1970 to 1986, and finally the almost miraculous resurrection of the university since the 1990s. At the same time, it is a long overdue study of the politics and philosophies of