

BOOK REVIEW

Emily Callaci. *Street Archives and City Life: Popular Intellectuals in Postcolonial Tanzania*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017. x + 286 pp. 16 black and white illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$94.95. Cloth. ISBN 978-08223-6984-4. \$25.95. Paper. ISBN 978-0-8223-6991-2. \$25.95. E-book. ISBN 978-0-8223-7232-5.

Attempting a cultural history of a city as large and as cosmopolitan as Dar es Salaam requires audacity and ingenuity. Emily Callaci used both when writing this lively and perceptive study of Tanzania's primary city. She avoids what surely would have been a fruitless effort to account for the vast variety of cultural impulses generated by Dar's diversity and rapid growth (its population was 400,000 in 1970 and probably exceeds six million now). Instead, borrowing from Nancy Rose Hunt's work on a "colonial lexicon," Callaci takes cues from Dar's urban lexicon, showing how this "open-ended and shifting vocabulary...is produced and negotiated collectively" (190). Callaci makes ingenious use of unusual sources, including two widely-read genres published in Kiswahili during the 1960s and 1970s: advice literature for the city's young, single women, and pulp fiction for its young men. The book's concentration on the writing, singing, and talking that shift lexical meanings, together with Callaci's vivid sense of place and time, make palpable a subject—the culture of a major city—that in less skilled hands might have remained amorphous.

Callaci devotes several chapters to Dar es Salaam during Tanzania's socialist period from the mid-1960s through the early 1980s. Music and publications of the period debated the responsibilities of respectable urban citizens in a socialist nation. The lexicon which Callaci taps into here involves movement, space (from residences to night clubs), and money. All of these provoked contestation, for all were understood to be sources of both opportunity and moral danger. To take only one example that at first sight might seem utterly mundane: home furnishings acquired contradictory meanings when they came into the possession of young, single women. Couches, tables, and beds could be seen as evidence that young working women were achieving respectable urban domesticity. In the view of some observers, however, they represented the corruption

of unmarried women by the city's predators, the "sugar daddies" who were assumed to be paying for their furniture.

Callaci believes that urban culture faced increased hostility from Julius Nyerere's government and ruling party from the mid-1970s, when attempts were made to force the unemployed to return to their rural homes, and urbanites were condemned for their moral dissipation and lack of socialist discipline. This argument spotlights a problem that extends far beyond the scope of this book. For no less persuasive than Callaci's portrayal of Dar es Salaam is Michael Lofchie's recent *The Political Decline of Tanzania: Decline and Recovery*, an account of rural Tanzania in the same period. Lofchie argues that *ujamaa* socialism compelled the systematic transfer of surplus from rural society to the cities. Thus the problem is to square the evident hostility of Nyerere's government toward urbanity with the political economy of *ujamaa* socialism. Quite likely the answer is that *ujamaa* subsidized the very urban society that it labelled parasitic. Nyerere tried to reduce the burden of supporting Dar es Salaam by imposing austerity and roundups of the unemployed, but probably did so less because he disliked the city than because disruptive *ujamaa* villagization diminished the transfer of surplus from the agrarian economy.

Callaci concludes by tracing Dar es Salaam's passage from socialism to its neoliberal, dog-eat-dog present. She begins with the pulp fiction of the 1970s. These novellas are populated by young male protagonists for whom scarcity and collapse of urban income make it "literally impossible to live one's life according to the [socialist] rules" (199). Neither money nor basic commodities are available in the official economy. The fictional heroes who emerge at this juncture are wiry, quick on their feet, and even more quick-witted. They are described by their pulp fiction creators with the same tropes found in the earlier literature of socialist respectability, such as movement and wealth. But unlike the "sugar daddies" who prowl around town in the socialist imaginary, now the pulp fiction heroes who glide through the city's streets and bars are looking to cadge a beer and pocket some cash. Fittingly, in a period where ideology is ubiquitous, compulsory, and yet contradicted by daily reality, their attitude remains detached, wry, and increasingly cynical. They see beneath the surface of city life.

The pulp fiction heroes are transitional figures, inhabiting a socialist urbanity yet presaging the urban future. That future, Callaci explains, is modern-day "Bongoland or 'brain-land'" (180), as both Dar es Salaam and Tanzania are known colloquially to their residents. In Bongoland, city life is now shaped less by scarcity than by utter unpredictability, disasters big and small, and unequal access to money and resources. Lacking support from either state or formal economy, young city residents have only their wits to pit against perpetual insecurity. In her treatment of the passage from *ujamaa* to Bongo, the contested themes that Callaci has traced back to the socialist period, including movement, intelligence, and money, now become the foundations of Bongo identity. In current-day Dar, young people take

great pride in their mental and physical agility, pragmatism, and adaptability. They work hard to widen their awareness of the nooks and crannies of the urban economy, and prize nimbleness in pursuit of opportunity. We have Emily Callaci to thank for reminding us that the pulp fiction heroes of the 1970s would like them.

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For more reading on this subject, see:

- Fouéré, Marie-Aude. 2014. "Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa, and Political Morality in Contemporary Tanzania." *African Studies Review* 57 (1): 1–24. doi:10.1017/asr.2014.3.
- Hunter, Emma. 2015. "Voluntarism, Virtuous Citizenship, and Nation-Building in Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial Tanzania." *African Studies Review* 58 (2): 43–61. doi:10.1017/asr.2015.37.
- Simone, AbdouMaliq. 2008. "Some Reflections on Making Popular Culture in Urban Africa." *African Studies Review* 51 (3): 75–89. doi:10.1353/arw.0.0085.