

Preface: The Hard Road from Arusha

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The Slipway Hotel is located on the Msasani Peninsula in Dar es Salaam, eight or so kilometers from the center of the city. Each morning since my arrival here I've sat on a bench facing the water of the protected harbor and watched fishermen patiently, silently, at work, untangling their nets and preparing their boats for the day's labors. Crows, a truly irrepressible nation of birds, keep up an endless, swooping screech. The Indian Ocean has its special tidal rhythms that feel obscure to my Atlantic-Caribbean imagination. The waters recede, return. But perhaps it's the constancy that matters, the permanent repetition of this circular motion, with all the familiar indifference of the sea anywhere. This sea too is history, I assume.¹ I've long wanted to visit Dar es Salaam, and now here I am.²

In September 1974, Julius K. Nyerere, then president of Tanzania, paid a four-day official state visit to Jamaica at the invitation of the prime minister, Michael Manley. I was a secondary school student at Jamaica College at the time, unsteadily trying to find my way in Marxist debates about socialist transition and discussions about the African liberation movements (many of which had camps in Tanzania). Nyerere, of course, was well known throughout the Third World as a socialist and a Pan-Africanist who in 1961 had led his country to a negotiated independence from the British

1 As I sat facing the sea, I found myself thinking about Derek Walcott. "Nation of birds" is of course an allusion to his poem "The Fortunate Traveller" in the collection *The Fortunate Traveller* (New York: FSG, 1981), and the sea as history references his poem "The Sea Is History" in *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (New York: FSG, 1979).

2 I am eternally grateful to Natasha Shivji for facilitating my visit to Dar es Salaam between 17–24 June 2023, and to Professor Christine Noe, principal of the College of Social Sciences at the University of Dar es Salaam, for inviting me to present a seminar on 21 June 2023.

Empire. He appeared to us a man of distinguished bearing and unpretentious countenance, a leader with an almost stern sense of purpose and a serene air of philosophic orientation. He arrived in Jamaica to a hearty welcome from the crowds gathered at the Norman Manley International Airport and that lined the streets waiting to greet his passing motorcade. And in spite of the fact that the visit was inane boycotted by the opposition Jamaica Labour Party, now led by Edward Seaga, Nyerere was involved in an intense schedule of events in Kingston: he addressed a joint session of both Houses of Parliament; he delivered a speech at the University of the West Indies, where he also received an honorary doctor of letters; he attended service at the Holy Trinity Cathedral, taking Holy Communion from the archbishop, the Most Reverend Samuel Carter; and he held discussions with Manley's cabinet and, before departing, signed a bilateral agreement on cultural and technical exchange between Tanzania and Jamaica. It was a memorable occasion, charged with enormous cultural-political significance.

Michael Manley, whose People's National Party had come to power in February 1972 on a promise of delivering progressive social change ("Better Must Come" was the famous campaign slogan), was a warm admirer of Nyerere. Perhaps not surprisingly. In 1967, Nyerere's party, the Tanganyika African National Union, had issued the Arusha Declaration, which sought to provide a wide framework for the moral and political transformation of postcolonial Tanzania.³ Announcing itself as a policy commitment to socialism and self-reliance, even today the language of the Arusha Declaration sounds remarkably novel and courageous. It proclaimed the right of all citizens to equality, to respect and dignity, to full political participation at all levels of government, to a just compensation for work, and to basic civic freedoms. It stipulated the fundamental responsibility of the state to control the principal means of production in the interests of economic justice. It defined the project of socialism as an absence of exploitation, the control of the economy by workers and peasants, the existence of democracy, and above all the moral commitment to live a socialist way of life. The Arusha Declaration offered a picture of a postcolonial society at war against poverty and domination and dependence: "We have been oppressed a great deal, we have been exploited a great deal and we have been disregarded a great deal. It is our weakness that has led to our being oppressed, exploited and disregarded. Now we want a revolution—a revolution which brings an end to our weakness, so that we are never again exploited, oppressed, or humiliated."

Manley had some reservations about Nyerere's project. Principally, as he outlined in his first book, *The Politics of Change*, published, notably, in 1974, he was doubtful about the one-party-state model pursued in Tanzania, believing that it was not viable among so disputatious a population as Jamaicans are. To be sure, Manley recognized the potential virtue of a convergence between the party and the state for trying to keep a coherent, continuous focus on the economic planning necessary for serious development initiatives, but he held that this was not the modern political tradition he had inherited from the founding two-party system of the Jamaican 1940s.⁴ Still, he

³ For the text of the Arusha Declaration, see www.marxists.org/subject/africa/nyerere/1967/arusha-declaration.htm.

⁴ Michael Manley, *The Politics of Change: A Testament* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974). I discuss this book in David Scott, "The Word Is Love: Michael Manley's Styles of Radical Will," *Small Axe*, no. 58 (March 2019): 169–86.

honored Nyerere's search for a political and economic path of nonaligned self-determination and self-reliance. This, Manley believed, was his quest too.

2

One of the books that had a large impact on me when I was a student in the Department of Government at the University of the West Indies, Mona, was Issa Shivji's *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, published in 1975.⁵ I do not now remember how this book came to my attention. I assume that I must have heard about it from my teacher, Rupert Lewis. I had no notion of the specific context of debate out of which the book had emerged, let alone the wider tradition of historiographic critique—the “Dar es Salaam school”—to which it was connected.⁶ I do not think I would even have known that the book was related in any way to discussions in which Walter Rodney was involved. What I do remember, though, is its presentation of an argument about class and class consciousness that was novel and provocative to me in the ideological context of Marxism-Leninism in Jamaica—namely, that class is not simply an economic relation but also a *political* one and that, therefore, class consciousness is not merely a passive effect of a structural location but the product of concerted political work.

Understandably, one of my objectives in Dar es Salaam was to meet and talk to Issa Shivji. I wanted to grasp something of how *Class Struggles in Tanzania* had been conceived and written. Part of the story that he told me, when we met, was of the rise of the radical student movement in the late 1960s. As he explained to me, he was a member of the first generation of undergraduates to enter the University of Dar es Salaam in the wake of the 1967 Arusha Declaration. They were at the same time its beneficiaries and its critics. The University Students African Revolutionary Front and its radical magazine *Cheche* (“Spark” in Swahili, in honor of *Iskra*, the magazine of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party founded by Lenin and others) was the leading edge of the struggle. *Cheche*, as its historian Karim Hirji has written, was “the first anti-imperialist, socialist magazine originating from East Africa.”⁷ It was in a special issue of *Cheche*, in August 1970, that Shivji first published “The Silent Class Struggle,” the essay he had previously produced as a cyclostyled pamphlet. It was a catalytic moment for the development of a postcolonial Marxism in the country. As he described it, he and his fellow students were frustrated with the state of the socialist debate, the absence especially of a serious Marxist critique of the Nyerere project. The essay aimed to dispel the complacent image of class harmony and progressive socialist transformation that was projected by the idiom of the Arusha Declaration. In the months after its publication, Shivji's intervention was the object of significant comradely critique. And it was in his attempt to respond to these, and to elaborate and expand his argument, that what became *Class Struggles in Tanzania* was worked out.

5 Issa G. Shivji, *Class Struggles in Tanzania* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing, 1975).

6 On the Dar es Salaam School, see Horace Campbell, “The Impact of Walter Rodney and Progressive Scholars on the Dar es Salaam School,” *Social and Economic Studies* 40, no. 2 (1991): 99–135.

7 See Karim F. Hirji, preface to Karim F. Hirji, ed., *Cheche: Reminiscences of a Radical Magazine* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2010), vi.

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In Dar es Salaam, I also wanted to meet the legendary publisher Walter Bgoya. And luckily for me he was in the country at the time. Bgoya is a man of large-minded generosity with a strong political commitment to social transformation and in particular the role of book publishing—the production and circulation of knowledge in printed form—in that process. Memorably, it was Bgoya who, almost as soon as he took the reins of the Tanzania Publishing House (TPH), facilitated the publication of Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) and Issa Shivji’s “Tanzania: The Silent Class Struggle” in *The Silent Class Struggle* (1973).⁸ Indeed, the publication of the latter was not without controversy. As I have suggested, when it first appeared in 1970, Shivji’s pamphlet hit a certain nerve for its willingness to challenge the shibboleths of Nyerere’s *ujamaa*. As the story goes, the chairman of the TPH board sought to block the publication on the grounds that it did damage to the regime. This was a make-or-break situation for Bgoya; he was not prepared to submit to this sort of interference. But when the matter was put before Nyerere himself, the philosophical president reminded the board chairman that it was the *president’s* business to run the country; the TPH’s was to publish books. Nyerere therefore would not stand in the way of Shivji’s book. To my mind, this is as much a story of Nyerere’s principles as Bgoya’s. Over the years since then Bgoya has weathered many battering storms in the complex business of book publishing. In 1991 he founded the independent publishing house Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, which continues to sustain his radical vision of intellectual autonomy. For me, visiting the TPH bookshop on Samora Avenue in the middle of the city was to be embraced by Bgoya’s remarkable story.

Intellectuals like Issa Shivji and Walter Bgoya are part of a great unfinished history of the aftermaths of colonialism from which we have a lot to learn—the history of the journey to, through, and from the remarkable cultural-political experiment of Arusha. It is of course *their* inheritance in a distinctive way, and theirs therefore to choose and challenge and transform. But perhaps not in a closed or exclusive way? For through the Caribbean intellectuals who have spent time with them in their alluring city, and in particular at the University of Dar es Salaam—Walter Rodney first among them—it may also be an inheritance for a wider Third World and Pan-African history of solidarities. It is a privilege to have met Shivji and Bgoya, to have listened to them, to have shared their company.

Dar es Salaam—Berlin

June 2023

⁸ On Walter Bgoya, see Maria Suriano, “Dreams and Constraints of an African Publisher: Walter Bgoya, Tanzania Publishing House, Mkuki na Nyota, 1972–2020,” *Africa* 91, no. 4 (2021): 575–601. *The Silent Class Struggle* includes Shivji’s essay (1–60) followed by five response essays, the first of which is by Walter Rodney.