

# BOOK REVIEW

**Seth M. Markle. *A Motorcycle on Hell Run: Tanzania, Black Power, and the Uncertain Future of Pan-Africanism, 1964–1974*.** East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017. xv + 265 pp. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$39.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781611862522

Seth Markle's book *A Motorcycle on Hell Run: Tanzania, Black Power, and the Uncertain Future of Pan-Africanism, 1964–1974* examines a pivotal time for both black radical activists in the West and the leadership of newly independent Tanzania. He shows how encounters between these two sets of actors shaped the ideas and strategies of their respective struggles, illustrating the challenges of trying to upend longstanding power structures while implementing new visions of liberation and solidarity.

The book is a chronological account, beginning with the encounter between Malcom X and Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu, the Zanzibari anti-colonial activist. In tracing the two men's individual development as activists and the ways in which their paths intersect, Markle showcases both ideological divides within the U.S. black freedom movement (including African-Americans living in Tanzania) and the emerging contours of the Tanzanian one-party state, themes that recur throughout the book. One of the greatest strengths of this section is its presentation of Tanzania's charismatic first President Julius K. Nyerere as a statesman on the world stage, grappling with the task of building a new nation while also fending off international pressures related to the Cold War. While clearly demonstrating Nyerere's appeal to diaspora activists, Markle does not idealize the leader, as many others have done. Rather, we meet a Nyerere who sanctions British military intervention in response to mutinous African soldiers and clashes with Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah over the correct approach to African unity, but who also transforms Tanzania into a rear base for the military operations of liberation movements in the region.

By 1968, Markle tells us that Tanzania has become "the epicenter of the pan-Africanism movement" (75), thanks to the passage of the Arusha Declaration, which outlined the principles of African Socialism and an economic order based on self-reliance. We learn about the involvement of diaspora actors through their participation in two forms of knowledge production: university education and book publishing. Diaspora intellectuals and activists such as the Caribbean Marxist historian Walter Rodney found kinship with progressive students and faculty on "the Hill," as the University

of Dar es Salaam's main campus was affectionately known. At the same time, the actions of student radicals and their sympathizers frequently came into conflict with the one-party government, which decried their reliance on "foreign ideologies" (89). Such conflicts culminated in a ban against the University Students' African Revolutionary Front, the most prominent radical student organization on campus, which included Tanzanians of all ethnicities among its members, as well as nationals of other African countries. This ban served not only to marginalize non-Tanzanian students, but also to delineate the boundaries within which diaspora activists could operate. The authoritarian character of the Tanzanian state would be further revealed through actions such as an interdiction on soul music and a campaign against miniskirts and other forms of "indecent" and "decadent" clothing (125). While Markle argues that such actions were in line with a socialist ethos that had "an acute awareness of how African-American culture was easily subjected to corporate co-optation" (125), he also explains that black radical expatriates living in Tanzania were disheartened by what they saw as parallels with U.S. state repression. Close observers of contemporary Tanzanian politics will also recognize a government with limited tolerance of dissent and suspicion of foreign influence.

The book concludes with the leadup to and implementation of the Sixth Pan-African Congress, once again highlighting the challenges of unity within both African liberation movements and the African-American struggle for freedom, as well as diverging visions between the two. One of the most important insights of this final section is the way in which the concept and political realities of the nation-state complicate the achievement of transnational unity.

Overall, scholars of diaspora movements as well as of contemporary African state politics can find much to like and learn from this volume. Markle's writing is remarkably clear and free of disciplinary jargon. Some sections of the book are not as coherently organized as others: Chapter Four on the cultural politics of book publishing strays a bit from its stated theme and does not fit as clearly into the overall narrative as the other chapters. In addition, though he provides important insights into the origins of modern-day state repression in Tanzania, Markle does not grapple with contemporary Tanzanian politics, choosing to conclude with somewhat romantic examples of how today's Tanzanians have memorialized the Black Power movement through popular music and socially conscious tourism. To be fair, however, explaining contemporary politics is not Markle's project, and he largely succeeds in finding a balance between depth and breadth on his chosen subject—painting nuanced portraits of complicated and at times flawed individuals, while also showing how they fit into a bigger picture of national and universal struggles for liberation and belonging.

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**For more reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:**

- Bjerk, Paul K. 2010. "Sovereignty and Socialism in Tanzania: The Historiography of an African State." *History in Africa* 37: 275–319. doi:10.1353/hia.2010.0033.
- 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.