

Leander Schneider (2014), *Government of Development: Peasants and Politicians in Postcolonial Tanzania*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, ISBN: 9780253013996, 246 pp.

This book tells the story of the rise and fall of the Ruvuma Development Association, a grassroots initiative founded in the early 1960s to practise communal living and farming in southwestern Tanzania. Its leaders were a local grassroots enthusiast and a group of volunteers affiliated to Oxfam, the British development NGO. The RDA came to serve as a model for the country's *ujamaa* villages once President Nyerere realised the extent to which this spontaneous initiative was capable of improving human welfare. Its exposure as a success, however, also made it a thorn in the side of the Tanzanian party and government officials, who in the early days of independence saw themselves as the chosen bearers of authority for bringing about development in the new nation. The empirical core of the study is the drama that surrounded the demise of the RDA, at the end of which Nyerere proved unwilling to protect the RDA's ideals in the face of consistent efforts by these officials to undo the initiative and replace it with a nationwide *ujamaa* strategy that would be possible only in a top-down, authoritarian approach to development.

The rest of the book highlights other interventions made by the government to reinforce its developmentalist authority. In covering what unfolded in the West Lake Region and the districts of Handeni and Rufiji, the author draws on previous studies of what happened in those places. He also cites statements and editorials published in the two main English-media newspapers at the time, *The Daily News* and *The Nationalist*. Especially illuminating and well covered is the story of how the sanctity of planning gave officials undisputed authority over the lives of peasants. The many plans that were produced to justify rural development placed the officials on the side of modernity, juxtaposing their position with that of the peasants, who were seen as living in the past.

Schneider rightly treats the RDA story as a milestone event in post-colonial Tanzania that signalled the end of the Fabian socialist influence on Tanzanian politics, even if not on Nyerere's own mind. The book raises questions about the extent to which Nyerere's own ideas as expressed in public speeches and written documents throughout the 1960s and 1970s really were meant to provide policy guidance, as opposed to them being primarily academic and/or designed to attract donor support in Europe and North America. By demonstrating what happened to the RDA and by providing additional accounts of how officials in other regions of Tanzania seized control of the emerging socialist policy agenda,

the book offers a convincing account of the limits to bottom-up initiatives in a context where government officials perceive themselves as having a monopoly of ideas about how to do development. Particularly striking is how their approach was grounded in the notion that development had to be a national undertaking. Local initiatives such as the RDA were largely a diversion of human and financial resources that should have been mobilised and managed from a central point by the government – hence the title of the book.

*Government of Development* differs from previous attempts to analyse Tanzania's experiment with *ujamaa* villages which have adopted a political economy approach – some from a neo-Marxist perspective (e.g. von Freyhold and Coulson) and others (e.g. Bates and Lofchie) from a neo-liberal one. Instead, Schneider locates his analysis in discursive practices: the idea that human agency is shaped by acceptable statements and utterances that people encounter on a daily basis. In the Tanzanian case, as he argues, the discourse of development takes on a life of its own and emerges as a structuralist cause of how these officials practise development. In his use of this approach, however, he also discards the notion that discursive practices have to be treated only in structuralist terms. Borrowing from Foucault, who noted that any moment of discourse is an event, Schneider, like Migdal, is more interested in how discourses are constituted in particular contexts than in seeing them as deterministic, causal variables. In this agential approach, structure and agency are not opposed to each other but mutually constitutive. This approach allows him to identify key events, like the controversy surrounding the RDA, as formative for what happened in Tanzanian politics rather than viewing the discourse as a mere structural constraint.

Schneider is highly sceptical of the materialist-utilitarian perspective associated with rational choice theory. Officials operate in a thick world where contingency and context specificity shape behaviour and choice, not just interest maximisation. A given policy outcome cannot be convincingly inferred from the interests that are said to lie behind it. The policy world does not lend itself to a parsimonious explanation.

While the author brings something new to the analysis of the Tanzanian policy scene, the question is still how discourse analysis alone can do justice to what happened. Confining the study to how ideas are constituted and institutionalised in discursive practice is interesting in itself, but it leaves out the question of the roots of these ideas. For example, in societies where a liberal tradition is absent or rejected (as it was at the time of independence in Tanzania), the only way to hold a nation together in a politically feasible manner is to foster a strong leadership that

unites the many groups – in Tanzania, mostly ethnic – that constitute the principal social structure of the country. The political discourse reflected this reality. In short, there is a layer missing from Schneider's analysis. Adding it would, for example, facilitate readers' understanding of how and why Nyerere let go of his idealist notions in favour of a more realist perspective on how to govern and develop his country.

Schneider's book is a welcome addition to the study of politics and development in Tanzania. It is empirically rich and well researched, along with being a joy to read. It is a meaningful follow-up to James Scott's *Seeing Like a State*, which discusses, among other things, how the Tanzanian state in the 1970s planned and implemented the *ujamaa* programme without consideration of cost or contextual variations.

■ Goran Hyden