

# Rereading Ujamaa, Rethinking Freedom

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the compatibility of Ujamaa's conceptualization of freedom with the limits of the sovereign state. This is done by examining popular enactments of Ujamaa in Tanzania in the 1960s, which resulted in what, for a moment, was a quasi-utopian realization of post-colonial freedom. It analyses the ways in which Julius Nyerere, in turn, was inspired by these popular practices and attempted to codify and advance their spread. Viewing this back-and-forth communication as a multidirectional means of theorizing the ideals of Ujamaa, including its radical conceptions of freedom, the article examines how such imaginations were eventually interfered with and restricted by the state, and how they might be revisited today.

## INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, the end of the colonial period was expected to herald new kinds of freedoms that would enable the realization of the dignity denied by colonial regimes. While some, including independence leaders themselves, warned that achieving independence need not, in and of itself, mean a substantively free state (e.g. Nkrumah, 1965), there was nonetheless a widespread faith that whatever freedom the post-colonial state *could* garner, would be used in the service of its people. It is arguably this assumption, and the consequences of an international relations regime in thrall to the state,<sup>1</sup>

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1. At the time that independence emerged as a concrete possibility, there was only one legal vehicle in existence for post-colonial freedom — the state. According to Principle VI of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1541, December 1960, non-self-governing territories could only be considered to have reached a full measure of self-government by emergence as sovereign independent states, or by free association with independent states or

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that allowed the state to get away with literal murder. Too often, the most impressive post-independence gains, such as the ones I examine here, have been realized at a decisive distance from the state, raising questions about the role of the state in post-colonial contexts.

In this essay, I focus on Tanzania in the 1960s, when a particular political project, Ujamaa, held promise for achieving new freedoms, particularly because of its distance from the state, and examine how the Tanzanian state worked to narrow this distance. I revisit Ujamaa philosophy and practice and, specifically, focus on the practice of Ujamaa as exemplified by the Ruvuma Development Association (RDA), a group of communes founded by ordinary citizens to enact the ideals of Ujamaa. I argue that the terms under which the RDA brought about economic, social and political non-domination — the basis of freedom and anti-colonial dignity — were only possible because of the RDA's relative detachment from the state. Once the state encroached on this space, these achievements were undone. I also argue that whatever gains the RDA did secure would inevitably be compromised by the fundamentally statist framework in which it was institutionally and ideologically mired.<sup>2</sup> It is on this basis that I argue that the conceptions of freedom espoused by Ujamaa were so radical that they may be incompatible with the idea of the sovereign state, if interpreted to their fullest extents, as was attempted by the RDA villagers. This argument goes against the grain of Ujamaa scholarship, as discourse on Ujamaa has so often assumed the necessity of the state, or at least its presence. Using the published speeches of Nyerere and works produced by those who lived in the spontaneous communal settlements of the 1960s, whose intent was to apply the principles of Ujamaa, I argue that Ujamaa and its praxis should in fact lead us to question this assumed necessity of the state — both ideologically and institutionally.

I begin by defining the kinds of freedom Ujamaa entails, key among which, I will argue, is anarchic freedom. I will work through what it means to bring Ujamaa into conversation with anarchism and show how the core practices of Ujamaa (and, not coincidentally, the practices that most closely adhered to the values of Ujamaa) were fundamentally anarchic. Given the egregious record of the state in East Africa, what those villagers in the 1960s

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integration with independent states. The shadow of the state thus loomed (and still looms) large over independence projects.

2. In this article, I define the state as that institution in and by which the sovereignty of nations is expressed, with such sovereignty being the crucial distinction that sets it apart from other institutions. It is the institutional expression of a country's independence. Sovereignty was the key trophy of the independence war, and it was a trophy that only the state could express within the international relations regime. It is therefore the *sovereign* state's undue limitations on freedom that I explore. Whatever form of polity we occupy will limit our freedoms in some way, but I question what trade-offs we are comfortable making, when there may be more promising possibilities. In sum, the good (and this may be the best-case scenario for the state — that it is merely good) may be the enemy of the great.

were able to accomplish should enable us to reflect on what may be possible at a distance from the state today.

## MAPPING UJAMAA AND FREEDOM IN THE LITERATURE

We start with some definitions. Ujamaa was fundamentally and primarily a socialist philosophy, which effectively became the philosophical basis of Tanzanian post-independence freedom under Nyerere. In this section, I will examine the forms of freedom most frequently invoked by Nyerere as well as those most often analysed as part of — or in conflict with — Ujamaa (broadly construed).

According to Ujamaa, freedom was to come in the form of socialist self-reliance. It was a socialist ‘attitude of mind, and not the rigid adherence to a standard political pattern’ that would underwrite this freedom-as-self-reliance, ensuring that ‘people care for each other’s welfare’ (Nyerere, 1968: 1), with each doing what they can to enable development. There was to be no ‘parasitism’ (ibid.: 2). The key influence was to come from ‘traditional African society’, in which everybody was a worker; in this context, the term ‘worker’ was used as distinct not only from ‘employer’ but also from ‘loiterer’ or ‘idler’ (ibid.: 5).

As well as this duty of care that was to work alongside self-reliance, freedom was also to comprise non-domination. Nyerere was wont to paint ‘traditional African society’ in broad brush strokes, writing that ‘the African had never aspired to the possession of personal wealth for the purpose of dominating any of his fellows’ (ibid.: 6). It was not wrong to want wealth, but to want wealth in order to ‘dominate somebody else’ was the problem (ibid.). For Nyerere, domination was a capitalist attitude of mind, and both domination and capitalism had to be rejected. This was to have wide-ranging effects, including on the kinds of land tenure that would be made possible after independence: ‘unconditional, or “freehold”, ownership of land’ would be ‘abolished’ (ibid.: 8). Both the millionaire and the feudal monarch were ‘users, exploiters, of the abilities and enterprise of other people’ (ibid.: 2). The hoarding of wealth was indicative of the failure of the social system: the ideal society would ensure that no one need fear for the future, because such a society would take care of its individuals, its widows, its orphans (ibid.: 3). Ujamaa entailed socialism, and socialism was ‘essentially distributive’ (ibid.: 4).

These notions of freedom and development in Ujamaa may have influenced later work in the social sciences, such as Amartya Sen’s *Development as Freedom* (2001). As Leander Schneider put it, ‘Sen’s positions on the nexus of local empowerment, capacity-building, and development, and even the title of his book, are reminiscent of Nyerere’s statements in his 1967 paper “Freedom and Development”’ (Schneider, 2004: 345). Nyerere writes that ‘[f]reedom and development are completely linked’; ‘without freedom

you get no development, and without development you very soon lose your freedom' (Nyerere, 2009: 1). Development would only bring freedom if it was the 'development of *people*' (ibid.: 2, emphasis in original), but people could not be 'developed; they can only develop themselves'. Such development occurs through an individual's actions and decisions: 'a man [*sic*] develops himself by ... increasing his understanding of what he is doing and why; by increasing his own knowledge and ability, and by his own full participation — as an equal — in the life of the community he lives in' (ibid.: 2). Likewise, for Sen (2001: 3), development is 'a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy'. According to Sen (ibid.), development requires a number of conditions, including 'the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive state'. Many of these were precisely the conditions that Nyerere was trying to achieve; the degree to which he succeeded is, of course, a matter of debate.

It is also in this development–freedom nexus that one teases out Fabian influences on Nyerere's ideas of freedom. Indeed, the state's villagization schemes, anchored in Ujamaa philosophy (discussed below), engaged Fabian advisors (Piachaud, 2011). With regard to 'collective guardianship', some argue that Nyerere, studying in Edinburgh towards the middle of the 20th century, was influenced by Beatrice and Sidney Webb's ideas about duties towards 'non-adult races' (Piachaud, 2011: 141). Although this may well be so, it is a post-war, Leonard Woolf-type anti-imperial genre of Fabian gradualism that is more discernible in Nyerere's ideas (Leventhal and Stansky, 2019; Piachaud, 2011). It was, after all, the post-war Fabian Colonial Bureau that got in touch with Nyerere as part of its growing agenda 'to encourage demands within the home government for the dissolution of the Empire' (Molony, 2014: 95). This also chimes with Nyerere's belief in a free, multiracial society, rather than one in which Black people would have 'the lion's share of political representation' (ibid.: 129). In 1952 the editors of the Fabian Colonial Bureau's journal 'declared that they did "not consider that it is in the interests of any one community to strive for a dominant political position, as this could not fail in the long run to react to its own disadvantage"' (quoted in Molony, 2014: 129). It was to the Bureau's journal that Nyerere submitted his thoughts on what the ideal, multiracial Tanganyika could look like 'for "criticism and suggestion"' (ibid.: 144). However, the influence that Fabianism had on the development of Nyerere's ideas should not be overstated.<sup>3</sup> As Thomas Molony, who has written a biography of Nyerere, reminds us, Nyerere was based in Edinburgh but 'the minutes of the Edinburgh Fabian Society make no mention of [him]', and

3. Nyerere's personal assistant and speechwriter was a member of the Fabian Society, but her detailed records on their interactions will only be available to researchers circa 2030 (they are currently sealed).

while he ‘read the organisation’s publications for many years’, and ‘occasionally wrote for them’, they may have been no more than a ‘sounding board’ — and a ‘quite patronising’ one at that (ibid.: 145).

Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey (1997) offer a different take on Ujamaa’s conception of freedom, describing it as entailing anarchic freedom. Anarchic freedom may take various forms, including that envisioned by ‘anarcho-capitalists’ — ‘anarchists of the right’, or those who take ‘free market ideas to the most extreme conclusions’ (van der Walt and Schmidt, 2009: 33). As some argue, one may only see anarcho-capitalists as taking part in anarchic discourse if one hinges the definition of anarchism merely on an essential opposition to the state. By contrast, Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt argue that, rather than take a position based on ‘the lowest common denominator’ available among those who are seen as anarchists (ibid.: 39), one should seek the essence of the anarchist movement in its historical provenance, as coming out of the First International, embodying an explicitly anti-capitalist stance. While acknowledging the complexities of this debate, I take anarchic freedom to be anchored in the notion and context of ‘a stateless, self-managed and planned economy in which the means of production [are] controlled’ by the people (ibid.: 47). This would predicate the fullest attainment of individual freedom on harmonization of such freedom ‘with communal obligations through co-operation, democratic decision-making, and social and economic equality’ (ibid.: 33). For many anarchists, freedom can ‘only exist, and be exercised, in society’ (ibid.: 47). In the words of Bakunin, anarchic freedom is ‘above all, eminently social, because it can be realized only in society and by the strictest equality and solidarity among all men’ (Dolgoft, 1971: 149).

It is a kindred conception of freedom that Mbah and Igariwey find in Ujamaa: it is ‘ultimately in the seminal thoughts of Julius Nyerere that we glean an organized, systematic body of doctrine on socialism that is indisputably anarchistic in its logic and content’ (Mbah and Igariwey, 1997: 49). Although they do not elaborate how Nyerere’s thought is not merely socialist but also anarchic, it is this thread that I pick up, to argue that Ujamaa asserted a genre of freedom so radical as to not only claim all the characteristics mentioned above — non-domination, self-reliance, care, development, gradualism — but also to be decidedly anarchic. Indeed, in this essay I go further than Mbah and Igariwey by showing it is not mere anarchic potentiality one finds in Ujamaa, but also a realization of such anarchic ideals. I do this through a rereading what was happening in the RDA, a group of communes spontaneously founded by ordinary people who were inspired by Nyerere’s thoughts on Ujamaa, and who in turn inspired Nyerere to develop his state-led Ujamaa villagization. There are several excellent analyses of the RDA, including those by Daniel Mann (2017), Andrew Coulson (2013), Ralph Ibott (2010) and Leander Schneider (2004), all of which I am guided by, but as much as they chronicle the contestations between state and citizen in these communes, they do not go quite as far as I do in this essay, arguing

that the RDA represented a fundamentally anarchic set of communes, and that the fullest interpretation or realization of Ujamaa's conceptions of freedom may require the undoing of the state.

## WRITING ABOUT ANARCHISM IN AFRICA

Before moving on, it is important to address the problems that applying anarchism within African contexts may pose. Those who question the applicability of anarchism in African contexts raise the concern that there is something epistemically dubious about transplanting anarchism, with its particular historical provenance, to a different location which has its own categories — categories that may be more fruitfully applied or extended to the same body of facts. This applies especially in African contexts, given the history of displacement of their knowledge systems. This is the worry that the idea of 'coloniality of knowledge' (Hoagland, 2020) tries to capture.

In approaching anarchism, I duly acknowledge the challenges that have been rightly highlighted, especially by those Africana writers who still want to work as and alongside anarchists — those who perform an immanent critique of it (Tenorio, 2024). I also reject what the late Beninois philosopher Paulin Hountondji termed 'intellectual self-imprisonment' (Hountondji, 1996, vii–viii). Like Hountondji, I insist instead on 'the right to the universal, and its assertion that all cultures, based on their own preoccupations and concerns, have a vocation to invent not only locally viable solutions but also concepts whose validity transcends local boundaries', and in turn, to receive and innovate upon just such concepts when they come into local boundaries (ibid.: viii).

To reject anarchism merely because it is a systematized activity and, as an intellectual discipline, was most comprehensively developed in Europe, runs the risk of being unjustifiably nativist. The questions one might fruitfully ask instead include: to what extent does anarchism as a concept help us make sense of tendencies within Africa, such as those that I am concerned with in this essay? To what extent does (or doesn't) anarchism, as currently conceived, uncover the entirety of the meanings of the tendencies in Africa with which we are concerned? Additionally, to what extent do African experiences help make sense of anarchism? Even further, in what ways have anarchist ideas *always been* at work in Africa?

In asking in what ways anarchist ideas have *always been* at work in Africa, I invoke the work of the historian of political thought, Leigh Jenco, on China's reception of ostensibly foreign ideas (Jenco, 2014). In the 1860s Chinese reformers keen to introduce mathematics, engineering and natural science to the Confucian civil service curriculum claimed that 'such novel Western practices actually developed from ancient Chinese precedents' (ibid.: 659). Jenco argues that, in so doing, they were not 'making a historical claim about actual origins' or trying to 'entrench allegiance to existing

Chinese thought', but were instead making 'a political claim intended to endow foreign knowledge with recognized "membership" in some existing practice' (ibid.). The political claim was supposed to 'establish continuity with a knowledge community' (ibid.: 668). It is just such a political claim that I make here about anarchism and systematically anarchist practices: that they can be endowed with membership in African practices of polity making, not only because there are actual African precedents that cohere with anarchism, but also because such a move may enrich the analysis of such practices by placing them within a wider body of thought that may refine the analysis, and be refined by it, without bastardizing or necessarily displacing it. Such cross-cultural communication could help make sense of tendencies that result in similar outcomes, making otherwise hidden patterns visible. It is an embrace from the inside out, rather than one that forcefully plunges in. Of course this is an embrace that needs to be considered, because the threat of displacement always lurks (ibid.: 660). Indeed, sometimes displacement may be welcome, but must not be forced.

Accepting 'Western' knowledge into African epistemic membership means accepting that it may unmoor existing understandings, but not necessarily in the violent manner of the colonial endeavour. To borrow from Chris Goto-Jones, if we 'can concede that political thinkers from the [African] past may have relevance to our present, we must logically concede that the same might be true of figures from non-African pasts; all these pasts are equally foreign countries' (Goto-Jones, 2009: 27–28). While perhaps not all of these countries are as foreign as each other — and indeed it is the (albeit necessarily limited) *likeness* of the foreign and its continuities with our present (Jenco, 2014) that makes us engage it in conversation — the point broadly stands. Like Hountondji, once again, I attempt to 'free the horizon, reject any definition of an African that would, by implication, restrict or confine [them] in a conceptual, ideological, religious, or political stranglehold and reinforce the illusory belief that some inexorable fate weighs [them] down forever' (Hountondji, 1996: x). Why should we, as he asks, 'forbid Africans to appropriate [the works of Western philosophers] while Westerners still have a right to extend their curiosity to all continents and cultures without renouncing or losing their identity?' (ibid.: xi). Such appropriation claims membership for the ostensibly foreign in the local in a critical embrace.

Julius Nyerere himself 'rejected Africanization', 'among other reasons because he was determined that people should have access to the skills and expertise of non-Africans ... who had come to help rather than to dominate or profit' (James, 2014: 30). Indeed, he hoped that 'socialists who had little scope in their capitalist countries could put their commitment and skills to work in Tanzania' (ibid.: 30). While one must be cognisant of the various ways that African contexts have been on the receiving end of different kinds of epistemic injustice due to the pressure, through colonial and other experiences, to adopt dominant knowledge frameworks, one must also be careful not to advocate for insularity, as insularity, too, assumes a certain kind of

ineptitude and immaturity of thought. Indeed, if African political theorists are 'not to be ethnographers when engaging foreign thought', a good case can be made that 'they *must* register foreign thought as a source of learning' (Jenco, 2014: 675).

The type of intellectual interaction we must reject is that which deadens what it comes into contact with. My aim, in looking at Ujamaa through an anarchist lens and in looking at anarchism through the lens of Ujamaa, is to bring to life the aspects of Ujamaa that otherwise remain in the shadows as a result of the intellectual tools that have been used to examine it thus far, and also to provide the basis for a new conceptualization of anarchism. Ujamaa and anarchy, as I will show in this analysis, are continuous with but not irreducible to each other. They are neither 'completely unrelated' nor 'merely equivalent' to each other (Jenco, 2014: 676).

With this in mind, in the rest of this essay I will deepen and broaden existing analyses of Ujamaa and anarchism, rather than trying to trap and contain those analyses within my own. My work then, is to locate the mutual intelligibility as well as the distances between Ujamaa and the anarchic framework I suggest for it. Not all these distances can currently be accounted for: these must await further research and potential new findings. For now, I move on to a more extensive definition of Ujamaa.

## THE MEANINGS OF UJAMAA AND THEIR ASSOCIATED FREEDOMS

There are various ways in which Ujamaa may be inflected. Ujamaa literally means 'familyhood' in Swahili, but I will explore three salient genres of Ujamaa to more fully define it, and to provide greater context for the kinds of freedom espoused by each meaning. This section examines Ujamaa first as a philosophy, then as a discourse; the following section turns to Ujamaa as a state project.

### Ujamaa as a Philosophy

Nyerere described Ujamaa as the basis of African socialism. Such a basis was primarily 'an attitude of mind' (Nyerere, 1968: 1). This attitude of mind is what makes the distinction between socialists and non-socialists, according to Nyerere:

It has nothing to do with the possession or non-possession of wealth. Destitute people can be potential capitalists — exploiters of their fellow human beings. A millionaire can equally well be socialist; he may value his wealth only because it can be used in the service of his fellow men. But the man who uses wealth for the purpose of dominating any of his fellows is a capitalist. So is the man who would if he could! (ibid.: 2)



One may or may not agree with this, but what is to be underscored is that, to Nyerere, Ujamaa was fundamentally a matter of disposition, and the core of that disposition had to be rooted in the service of fellow humans. Whatever society one might find oneself inhabiting, there is good reason to believe that the disposition of Ujamaa could find a place in its people.<sup>4</sup>

The notion of Ujamaa sprang from what Nyerere deemed the necessary particularity of socialist practice within (East) African contexts. He juxtaposed European with African socialism, arguing that unlike European socialism, born of class conflict arising from the agrarian and industrial revolutions, African socialism was not based on class conflict or on any conflict at all. As Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò puts it, '[i]nsofar as *all* were workers, their entitlement to a share of the social production could not be questioned' and 'they could not be denied access to the means of production, mainly land' (Táíwò, 2006: 256, emphasis in original). Rather, Ujamaa was based on the idea of extended family. Nyerere argued that those who have the right socialist disposition see everyone as part of their extended, and ever extending, family (Nyerere, 1968: 12). Such a conception of family was not bound by the state:

For no true African socialist can look at a line drawn on a map and say, 'The people on this side of that line are my brothers, but those who happen to live on the other side of it can have no claim on me'; every individual on this continent is his brother ... Our recognition of the family to which we all belong must be extended yet further — beyond the tribe, the community, the nation, or even the continent — to embrace the whole society of mankind. (ibid.)

Through relations of radical equality, with each contributing their own share to communal development (education, agriculture, childcare, etc.) while ensuring that all are taken care of, especially in times of difficulty, this society of workers was to realize the freedom of all. Such familyhood and self-reliance were to work hand in hand: the former engendered regard for each other, the latter safeguarded one from exploitation by the other, and regulations regarding ownership of property (including land), as mentioned earlier, were a constitutional buffer. To resist domination both psychologically and materially, both individuals and the collective would need to be able to count on themselves for their sustenance in a way that also ensured regard for the other.

Such an expansive notion of familyhood and its political implications, including its territorial unboundedness, leads me to believe that if one focuses on Ujamaa as a disposition,<sup>5</sup> it lends itself to many more

4. Nyerere did concede that there would clearly be other enabling societies to such a disposition.

5. Such a disposition is certainly corruptible by material inequality. Thus, while the same disposition may be found in various societies, some may be more hostile to it than others. It is not self-sustaining and must constantly be sought and reinforced.

configurations than one might expect Nyerere's infamous statist disposition to allow. Indeed, this was the case in practice, as I will discuss below.

### **Ujamaa as a Discourse**

Ujamaa as an everyday discourse preceded, grew with and outlived its more state-centred deployment, which was in turn influenced by its philosophical import (Hunter, 2015). An 'unofficial vocabulary from below' grew alongside the nationalist discourse (Hunter, 2008: 471), with terms from that vocabulary cropping up anywhere from letters printed in newspapers to debates in local markets and households.

After and alongside Nyerere's use of the term in his philosophy and his state projects, one sees Ujamaa emerge, especially in the letters sections of newspapers, as a kind of conceptual tool that provides a 'language for talking about the divisions in Tanzanian society within a discourse of nation-building', including, more clandestinely, providing 'a way of talking about race without explicitly mentioning it', in a context in which debate was increasingly restricted (Hunter, 2015: 211). Racism and exploitation were coded as contrary to Ujamaa. Ujamaa, a largely rural ideal in such discourses, was also used as the basis for critique of urban excesses. It is difficult to distinguish the ways in which 'folk' discussions on Ujamaa were separate from statist, Nyerere-led discussions of Ujamaa but, among ordinary people, it became what they made it, with the 'bare minimum' content of solidarity and familyhood. Ujamaa was as conservative as it was a radical discourse.

Indeed, one way to undertake the analysis of the RDA is to conceive of it as a popular enactment of Ujamaa, driven from the grassroots upwards, defining via its constitutions and rules what freedom and development would look like. It was an expansive theorization of Ujamaa, the content of which began with Nyerere but was filled out by the people, as we will see shortly. This is perhaps the most fluid, democratic and enduring embodiment of Ujamaa.

### **STATE-LED UJAMAA**

I divide my discussion on the state-led version of Ujamaa into two parts: the first looks at what I call the mainstream story of Ujamaa, which is something of an oversimplification, as this is also a complex story that is continually revelatory, but it is certainly the story of Ujamaa that is more widely engaged in the literature. The second part presents the story of an alternative Ujamaa that has always lived in the mainstream stories of Ujamaa in the literature, and which, I argue, points us to much fuller, more radical understandings of Ujamaa.

## The Mainstream Story of State-led Ujamaa

State-led Ujamaa came about with the Arusha Declaration of 1967 (see Nyerere, 1967a). The Declaration made Ujamaa philosophy government policy. Ujamaa was to be formally realized through settlement schemes for which people could initially volunteer; this soon turned into compulsory villagization, although with much less violence than one might find in similar Soviet schemes (Molony, 2014; Scott, 1999). There was plenty of experimentation in this era, largely in a bid to make difficult terrain legible for developmental intervention by the government (Scott, 1999), essentially by schematizing the geography of the country.

One of the key experiments that provided a precedent for post-1967 schemes was the Village Settlement Scheme of the early 1960s, a ‘costly financial and political failure’ (Jennings, 2007: 150). It was a ‘government-run program of resettlement based on a high-capital investment and individual capitalist production’ (ibid.: 150–51).<sup>6</sup> Failures were chalked down to ‘individual mismanagement and incompetence; administrative failings; and, most important, poor policy’ (ibid.: 151). Crucially, part of the fundamental policy problem was that ‘there was no concept of establishing democratic communities, creating real paths for participation, and no effort to make the settlements self-reliant in any way’; it was also ‘overcapitalized, focused on purely economic objectives (rather than social indicators), and relied too heavily on mechanization and modernization’ (ibid.: 152).

Another key precedent, the Tanganyika Groundnut Scheme, was an older project that began in 1947 and ended abruptly in 1951 (Museum of English Rural Life, 2023). It, too, was a top-down approach to agricultural development, this time by the colonial government.<sup>7</sup> The project was intended to meet food supply needs, helping the ‘[British] Labour Government ... alleviate a shortage of fats, to produce required oil seeds, and to contribute to both the African and British economies’ (ibid.). It was created at around the same time as Britain’s National Health Service (Westcott, 2020: 1). These two post-war Labour government schemes took very divergent paths, the colossal failure of the former contributing to the defeat of the party by the Conservatives in the 1951 general election. The Groundnut Scheme was a ‘development and financial disaster and a political scandal’, even though — or because — it was ‘the most ambitious development project

6. It was only after the Arusha Declaration that the government properly set out its decidedly socialist position.

7. Nicholas Westcott writes: ‘The Groundnut Scheme marked a new departure for colonial development in putting its faith neither in African peasants nor in European settlers, but in the colonial state; and not even the local colonial state, but the metropolitan imperial power, acting directly in territory under British control’, ‘driven entirely by British domestic priorities’ (Westcott, 2020: 13). It was a stark departure from cherished indirect rule. Other empires, such as the Portuguese and French Empires, also undertook similar projects in this era.

ever undertaken by the British Government in any of its colonies' (Westcott, 2020: 1).<sup>8</sup> Various reasons for the failure of the project have been proffered, including the lack of local input. It had been presented as a means of essentially civilizing African agriculture under the guise of colonial developmentalism. The scheme was, in classic colonial pompousness, to bring an obvious improvement (Museum of English Rural Life, 2023).<sup>9</sup> The colonial core of the settlement scheme as developmental path would continue to haunt its post-1967 heir, especially at its most violent, most coercive points. Although one of the key lessons from these earlier settlement schemes was the need to democratize development, this would remain in unresolved tension with government interests.

Such settlements were momentarily abandoned in 1966, partly due to a shortage of staff. There was also a lack of morale among the farmers recruited, and the 'meagre outputs' that proceeded from the schemes could not justify the 'heavy expenditure on infrastructure, buildings, salaries and machinery' (Schneider, 2004: 348). Nonetheless, these settlement schemes were the clearest predecessors for the 1970s Ujamaa villages, and the material foil against which they were developed (Schneider, 2004). In fact, many of these post-1967 settlements grew out of colonial projects, rather than starting as new, original projects (Schneider, 2004).

Beyond the government-led settlement schemes, there were also spontaneous schemes which informed the eventual development of state-led Ujamaa. Among these were the villages of the RDA, discussed below. Unlike the top-down implementation of the Village Settlement and Groundnut Schemes, these were established by ordinary people who were inspired by Nyerere's Ujamaa, and wanted to bring it to life. Nyerere both supported and learned from such schemes, producing pamphlets and eventually designing the Ujamaa schemes based on them.

Thus, in 1967, Ujamaa as philosophy entered the state framework in earnest. The Arusha Declaration put Ujamaa at the centre of this new approach to rural development (Nyerere, 1967a; Schneider, 2004). At this point, the notion of self-reliance (or *kujitegemea*) came to the fore in Ujamaa-based

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8. This was an especially 'British' crisis as the money came from financial provision from London, rather than from the colony itself, despite typical British insistence that colonies be self-sufficient — a position which became untenable post-Depression. The introduction of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, adopted in July 1940, and the subsequently revised Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945, marked an ideological shift geared towards preserving the colonies: if Britain was to have any hope of keeping them, they had to do something at least 'fairly good' for the colonies, and try to ensure a certain standard of living that would quell some of the precarity of the position of the colonial power (Westcott, 2020: 8–9).

9. There was a total dismissal of local knowledge: after the scheme was cancelled, 'in the Southern Province, the clay content of the soil was over 20%, which baked hard in the sun and was impossible to move. Once the Scheme was cancelled, the land was utilized by locals to successfully ranch cattle' (Museum of English Rural Life, 2023).

development projects in a way that had not happened in the predecessor settlement scheme. The country's development strategy 'would have to rely on its own resources, land, and people' (Schneider, 2004: 348). The concrete vision was laid out in 'Ujamaa Vijijini', or 'Ujamaa in the Villages', the title of Nyerere's 1967 policy paper for the attainment of rural development (Nyerere, 1967b).

'Ujamaa Vijijini' was shot through with all the meanings of Ujamaa discussed above. It took its lead from original formulations of Ujamaa, which Nyerere wrote was anchored on three principles: loving each other or brotherly respect,<sup>10</sup> communal ownership and use of all property deemed essential to life,<sup>11</sup> and the duty of all to work.<sup>12</sup> These principles were to guide the 'new' Ujamaa. Nyerere spoke of two key things that needed to be reversed: firstly, the inequality of women, including the inordinate amount of labour they were expected to take on; secondly, in as much as there was broad equality in the old Ujamaa dispensation, it was an equality in poverty, and this needed to be undone.

Additionally, Nyerere wrote that the fact that the colonial government was gone did not mean that the colonial mindset was gone. Part of what needed to be countered was capitalist individualism. There was thus a suspicion of the dynamic between landowners and paid labourers, and how this gave way to relations of exploitation and domination. What Nyerere favoured, instead, was cooperative villages (or communes) — cooperatives not based on capitalist principles but on the three aforementioned principles of Ujamaa, as only then could cooperatives be truly liberatory. The various development experiments thus produced a sharper conception of the kind of freedom that Ujamaa was to realize: freedom that entailed non-domination, socialism, self-reliance, equality and familial care.

These communes, all internally led and driven, would nonetheless need to be in the service of the entirety of Tanzania. Nyerere wrote that people need not wait for the state to set up the villages and provide guidance, noting that many people had already established such villages, and were the real guiding forces. Rules could not be made from Dar es Salaam for all of Tanzania.<sup>13</sup> This radically democratic vision codified in 'Ujamaa Vijijini' was near-utopian in its tone. Michael Jennings (2009) has referred to the type of development envisioned, especially in the tension it inevitably

10. This is my translation of 'kupendana au kuheshimiana kidugu' (Nyerere, 1967b: 1–2).

11. This is my translation of 'mali yote ya lazima ilikuwa ni mali ya shirika na jamaa wote' (Nyerere, 1967b: 2).

12. This is my translation of 'kila mtu alikuwa na wajibu wa kufanya kazi' (Nyerere, 1967b: 2). This duty completed the notion of self-reliance; for the community to be self-reliant there could not be, as Nyerere put in, any parasites.

13. Here, I paraphrase the quote 'Kwa ajili hiyo haiwezekani mtu kukaa Dar es Salaam na kuandika msahafu wa jinsi ya kuishi na kufanya kazi katika kila kijiji na kitungo cha Tanzania' (Nyerere, 1967b: 13).

entailed between the centre and the periphery, as coercive utopia, following Brzezinski (1996). The villages were to be internally defined but the directive for such internal definition was given by the government, and it is this tension that would prove fatal for the project as government directives grew more and more authoritarian in tenor.

The 'Ujamaa Vijijini' described villages that would be run by committees that would both report to and be selected by the villagers. Where the village needed a 'nursery' or a 'carpenter', 'the committee would work out proposals as to how these would be organised and run by a member for the common benefit ... and in cooperation with other nearby villages of the same kind' (Schneider, 2004: 350). Nyerere later described an Ujamaa village as 'a voluntary association of people who decide of their own free will to live together and to work together for their common good', saying 'they cannot be created from outside, nor governed from outside' (Nyerere, 1973: 67). Indeed, 'if an outsider gives such instructions and enforces them — then it will no longer be an Ujamaa village' (ibid.). However, compulsory villagization would soon be implemented, and the run-up to that moment is important to interrogate, because the power struggles that played out show the insecurity of the state in the face of promising alternatives to it. I will use the case of the RDA to illustrate just what such insecurity looks like.

### **An Alternative Story of Ujamaa**

The RDA provides a compelling case study because of the ways it both proceeds from and (for a time) overcomes a statist framework. It is also the exemplar of the spontaneous Ujamaa mentioned above, active in the 1960s.

Who, then, were the members of the RDA? In Ruvuma, Tanzania, a group of people inspired by Nyerere's Ujamaa, including at least one member of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) Youth League — 21-year-old Ntimbanjayo Millinga — decided to set up their own Ujamaa village. They eventually developed the RDA, bringing together 16 self-governing villages (Ibbott, 2010). Registering under the Societies Ordinance enabled the community to be self-governing through the establishment of a constitution providing for a management committee that originally included TANU party officials, civil servants, and representatives from each village. Nyerere would later approve another constitution that made the Association a cooperative body, 'owned and controlled by its members, the villages' (Coulson, 2013: 311). Nyerere also approved the development of an experimental education system in the RDA, allowing for the creation of syllabuses suited to the needs of the villages. Nyerere's support here is congruent with the Fabian influences that some tease out in his work; this iterative evolution of the Ujamaa project was consistent with Fabian gradualism.

The RDA resisted outside planning, with their advisor and co-resident Ralph Ibbott<sup>14</sup> writing in 1966 that ‘such groups of people in order to build a successful community cannot be “planned” from the outside’ (Ibbott, 1966: 7). Ibbott reported that other self-started settlement groups that came about in the 1960s had almost all petered out by the time of his writing, attributing this to the form of leadership: ‘[w]e believe that this is mainly because authoritarianism was the rule and people were not willing to submit the whole of their lives to this type of rule’ (ibid.: 8). The RDA did believe that there must be strong leadership, but that such leadership would be communal via committees.<sup>15</sup> This is the kind of leadership Nyerere would recommend in ‘Ujamaa Vijijini’.

More villages were, through the course of the 1960s, progressively welcomed into the fold, each comprising fewer than 40 families (Coulson, 2013). Joining the RDA meant having a general ‘discipline and coherence’ (Coulson, 2013: 311). Ibbott wrote that each village ‘has its own history and started from different beginnings, but it is interesting to note how ... as time has gone on the tendency has been for the newly starting ones to begin working right from the start more completely communally than the first ones, which worked towards a communal farm by stages’ (Ibbott, 1966: 14–15). There was clearly a formula for success that was noted by incoming villages, regarding the virtues of a communal rather than a more strictly hierarchical social architecture. Crucially, Ibbott notes that the *feeling* mattered: ‘[t]he spirit of feeling that they belong to a movement and more important that they are a vital part of and control it, is most important’ (ibid.: 17). Relations between all parts of the community had to be kept in just the right balance in order to engender and preserve such a feeling.<sup>16</sup> The number of members in a village was also an important consideration, with around 400 considered a maximum, as more than that ‘could prevent every individual’s

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14. Ralph Ibbott had previously worked on a ‘multiracial co-operative farm at St Faith’s in apartheid Southern Rhodesia ... with Guy Clutton-Brock, a dedicated, highly regarded anti-apartheid campaigner’, but was pushed out through the machinations of a new, more hostile priest. When Ntumbanjayo Millinga met Ibbott at Kivukoni College, where Ibbott had been invited to speak and Millinga was doing a short course, he invited him to their village at Litowa ‘to advise them on improving agricultural methods’ (James, 2014: 26–27).
  15. There was also a group of people who could assist in communal village development by going around the villages helping people based on their particular needs. This body, requiring devotion akin to ‘duty expected in an army’, called themselves the Social and Economic Revolutionary Army (SERA). They saw themselves as ‘part of bringing in the social and economic Revolution which was being called for by the President [Nyerere]’ (Ibbott, 1966: 15). The constitution of the RDA stated that its governing body comprised both members of the SERA and members of the villages, and the number of SERA members could not exceed those from the villages.
  16. Indeed, Ralph Ibbott and his wife, Noreen Ibbott, ‘never attended communal decision-making meetings’, because they, ‘at least as much as others’ were ‘determined to uphold the principle that it had to be the villagers who ‘made and saw themselves making all decisions’ (James, 2014: 29).

participation' (James, 2014: 30). Through their constitution, including the provision for regular and various checks on those undertaking diverse tasks for the community, a delicate balance of freedom, empowerment and delegation was struck.

Nyerere himself gradually became involved in the RDA's development, learning from it how his vision could be actualized. Here we see a kind of multidirectional means of theorizing and enacting the ideal polity: people inspired by Nyerere went ahead and practised it on their own terms, and Nyerere in turn learned from them and tried to fashion state-led Ujamaa villages based on their practices. As Selma James points out (2012), Nyerere, known as Mwalimu,<sup>17</sup> learned from the grassroots as much as he taught. He wrote booklets to encourage similar spontaneous projects in other parts of the country, with titles such as 'Education for Self-Reliance' and 'Freedom and Development'.<sup>18</sup>

However, unease within his government about these autonomous villages continued to grow in direct proportion to his proselytization of this form of Ujamaa. Here we find the roots of the alternative story. Due to the threat that such collective autonomy evidently posed, a decision was eventually made by the government to disband the RDA, in which Nyerere was outvoted: 21 out of 24 members of the Central Committee voted to disband it (Coulson, 2013). In Ibbott's words, Nyerere lost out to the 'self-seekers' (Ibbott, 2010: 56). This fear of state officials that the RDA undermined their power, including by not needing 'a strong central party' (Coulson, 2013: 318), tells us something not only about the potential of Ujamaa beyond the state, but also about what the state (in practice) requires, if it cannot countenance such kinds of self-reliance or finds them threatening. But these officials got their way: Ujamaa ended up looking very different from the grassroots RDA-type of initiatives, and thus began the quick descent into state-directed compulsory villagization. The changes that were made in order to uphold the state have been made clear by writers such as Coulson:

If RDA organizations became the norm nationally the professional politicians would be in a much weaker position. Moreover, by mid-1969 another model was available, much more attractive to them: good reports were coming in from the Rufiji valley, the first large-scale movement of all the people [by the government] in an area into planned villages. This was organized by party officials (rather than by any grass-roots organization of the peasants) and gave the officials an obvious sense of achievement. It was soon to become the policy nationally, and it was entirely incompatible with the existence of groups of independent, politicized peasants, such as those of the RDA villages, which would be small, voluntary, and might well oppose central direction. (Coulson, 2013: 318)

17. *Mwalimu* means teacher in Swahili. He was known as Mwalimu Julius Nyerere not only because he was trained and worked as a teacher, but also because of the ways he engaged with the people as a kind of teacher.

18. These and other resources can be accessed by following the following links: [www.juliusnyerere.org/resources/view/education\\_for\\_self\\_reliance](http://www.juliusnyerere.org/resources/view/education_for_self_reliance) and [www.juliusnyerere.org/resources/view/freedom\\_and\\_development](http://www.juliusnyerere.org/resources/view/freedom_and_development)



Schneider has written of the ways in which Ujamaa is liberatory in Nyerere's voice, but in the hands of anonymous 'officials', turns repressively coercive. Schneider wants to reinsert Nyerere into the picture of the failures of state-led Ujamaa so that he is not merely painted as a 'tragically failing hero whose attractive and hopeful visions for rural development were derailed or subverted in implementation' (Schneider, 2004: 346). In showing how Nyerere was central to the subversion of otherwise liberatory praxis, Schneider hopes to show that 'Nyerere's (and our own?) attractive ideals of participation, democracy, and empowerment in development do not necessarily recognise the fact that these ideals stand in tension with countervailing claims' (ibid.: 347). In doing so, he highlights a tension between 'the claims of democratic (participatory) ideals and the claims of the development authority that is vested in state officials — "experts" and outside development agents' (ibid.: 347). In the long run in Tanzania, this tension was resolved in favour of state authority.

That state authority can be so at odds with the participatory ideals that undergird freedom as self-reliance is noteworthy and could indicate that the fullest realization of Ujamaa may require something other than the state structure. The structural form of such an alternative is a matter of debate — a debate that may involve multiple viable options, but a debate that needs to be had, nevertheless. For instance, it is perfectly feasible to argue that what is called for is a smaller commune in the anarchist sense, or libertarian municipalities in the Communalist sense (Bookchin, 2007), or something larger than the state (but less monopolizing), such as some forms of cosmopolitanism. This is not to say that freedom as self-reliance should not come up against any constraints, but if there are configurations that might achieve its goals while imposing fewer restraints, it could be worth examining those in greater depth.

Nonetheless, Ralph Ibbott is overt in his praise for Nyerere's role in the life of the RDA. On the very first page of his book *Ujamaa: The Hidden Story of Tanzania's Socialist Villages*, he writes that the villagization that followed Nyerere's 'defeat' by his party — villagization that had 'rural people ... moved by diktat' — was the 'opposite' of Ujamaa (Ibbott, 2014: 1, emphasis added). Later, however, he casts some doubt: 'it seems strange that a man who had shown so much understanding for the need for slow, steady growth should have handed over his policy to party and government officials on a national scale when he had so much experience of how these people operated' (ibid.: 284–95). Nyerere knew that there were people bent on crushing the RDA but did not meaningfully intervene (ibid.: 296). However, Ibbott concedes, it was only with his blessing that the RDA could exist at all: Nyerere might arguably have been looking to go in another direction when the RDA was decimated (ibid.: 301).

Issa Shivji, too, noted this fundamental clash between the 'freedom of the people to organise themselves from below and the control of the state from above', in relation to the RDA (Shivji, 2020: 171). This is where Ujamaa

as philosophy and Ujamaa as political practice collide. Shivji writes: ‘the RDA story exemplifies the dilemmas and contradictions in Nyerere’s socialist practice, between a philosopher-ruler who called for people’s initiative from below and a pragmatic politician who enforced centralisation from above’ (ibid.).

Even so, one must complicate the picture still further. The RDA received plenty of funding from foreign charitable organizations such as Oxfam, and Ibbott himself received a stipend from Oxfam (Shivji, 2020). The antagonism of Nyerere’s ministers to the RDA thus contained an additional layer: the concern that it was foreign intervention that was bringing about development. Although only a partial concern, this is important to note. Here, the content of self-reliance had two aspects: the kind of self-reliance the RDA won for itself against the state because it had alternative sources of funding; and the delicate balance it had to strike to preserve its self-reliance — it had to be able to take foreign money without relying on it.

The vehement government opposition that the RDA faced hints at the notion that the best way for an organization like the RDA, which seeks full collective autonomy, to flourish, is to follow the path of non-state polity, if only because of the very minimal degree to which the state has, in practice, been willing to devolve sovereignty. An organization like the RDA could certainly exist within the statist framework, but its liberatory potential would necessarily be capped. I would argue that such a cap may be imposed too quickly within a statist framework, in ways that unduly compromise any liberatory potential. In the practices of this short-lived association, one begins to see the outline of a different structural context within which post-colonial freedom, entailing non-domination, self-reliance, familial care, development, equality and their correlates, might be more fully realizable. The contours of that structure must be thoroughly explored.

## IS UJAMAA ANARCHIC?

Mbah and Igariwey (1997) already raised our suspicions that there might be more to the story of Ujamaa, even though these suspicions were not firm enough to make a full-fledged claim for Ujamaa’s anarchic nature. I follow their lead in exploring these anarchic elements, particularly as exemplified by the RDA.

Here I focus on political rather than philosophical anarchism — that is, ‘the claim that anarchism is a better alternative to the state’, rather than ‘the claim that the state does not have legitimate authority’ (Leipold, 2015: 310). Such anarchism ‘aims at the liberation of peoples from political domination and economic exploitation by the encouragement of direct or non-governmental action’ (Kinna, 2012: 3). It is the latent but direct opposition to the state embodied by the RDA that leads me to this framework. Such a rereading requires us to go beyond mere cooperativism towards an even

more radical framework. Yes, the communes functioned much like cooperatives, but the suggestion here is that something much more demanding was afoot. As James Scott has put it, ‘if you put on anarchist glasses and look at the history of popular movements, revolutions, ordinary politics, and the state from that angle, certain insights will appear that are obscured from almost any other angle’ (Scott, 2014: xii). It is just this ‘anarchist squint’ that I ask the reader to employ. By so doing, one might find that ‘anarchist principles are active in the aspirations and political action of people who have never heard of anarchism or anarchist philosophy’ in those specific terms (ibid.: xii).

Indeed, if one compares the ways that Nyerere wrote about Ujamaa with the ways that Murray Bookchin (1991) writes about libertarian municipalism, one may be forgiven for believing they share the same assumptions about the state. For Bookchin, libertarian municipalism entailed ‘a historically fundamental project, to render politics ethical in character and grass-roots in organisation’ (Bookchin, 1991: 3). It sought to ‘reclaim the public sphere for the exercise of authentic citizenship’ (ibid.), working from ‘latent or incipient democratic possibilities toward a radically new configuration of society itself — a communitarian society oriented toward meeting human needs, responding to ecological imperatives, and developing a new ethics based on sharing and cooperation’ (ibid.: 4). Such an ethics has much in common with Nyerere’s assertion of a duty towards each other, as in a family, within communitarian projects. While both Bookchin and Nyerere draw from ‘precapitalist democratic communities’ (Bookchin, 1991: 4), the site of realization of their ideals differed significantly. While Bookchin was clear that this required more than (or even the antithesis of) a statist framework, Nyerere attempted to achieve his objective through the state, even though he conceded that the vision he had for such communes could not be directed from without.

The state, for Bookchin (1991: 4), was ‘a completely alien formation, a thorn in the side of human development, an exogenous entity that has incessantly encroached on the social and political realms’. The municipal citizens’ assemblies he was proposing, then, would work best within confederations of municipalities rather than nation states. Policy would be made by neighbourhoods and administrative duties would be carried out by ‘mandated, recallable deputies of wards, towns, and villages’ (ibid.: 6). The overlaps between Ujamaa villages and Bookchin’s libertarian municipalities are clear. These two thinkers, one from a statist and the other from a decidedly anti-statist provenance, suggest remarkably similar structures for the ideal society. This should give us pause.

The RDA lasted for several years; it was crushed because it was cast as a threat to the state. One might ask here, once again challenging the imposition of the state on Ujamaa (or vice versa): if a successful, self-reliant community meets the needs of its people in such a way that they become materially autonomous, and the state sees this as antagonistic to itself, what does

the state stand for? The state is a jealous guardian of sovereignty, and a self-sustaining, self-ruling commune can be dangerous in the long run. The state's claim to overriding, if not monopoly, power may stand in the way of invaluable opportunities to realize real-terms freedom in ways the state itself has not been able to secure. The existence of the RDA is thus a boon to anarchist thought (or at the very least, to state-sceptic theory).

A concern that might be raised here is that, while a rereading of events may be in order, applying a lens as decidedly foreign as anarchist theory would be inappropriate. Mbah and Igariwey would suggest otherwise. They have argued that while one may root prevailing abstractions of anarchism outside the continent, anarchism has always been among us in various parts of Africa, despite the lack of a 'systemic body of anarchist thought ... peculiarly African in origin' (Mbah and Igariwey, 1997: 28). While many take it as a settled fact that the anarchist movement began in earnest with the First International (van der Walt and Schmidt, 2009), it is entirely conceivable that anarchic ideas both preceded and grew apart from the First International. Many of the indigenous antecedents of African anarchism are found in its forms of communalism, much like the situation that Nyerere refers to as 'traditional African society', which is precisely the template for his Ujamaa. These forms of communalism entailed a 'palpable absence of hierarchical structures, governmental apparatuses, and the commodification of labour'; in 'positive terms', 'communal societies were (and are) largely self-managing, equalitarian and republican in nature' (Mbah and Igariwey, 1997: 33). The template from which Nyerere drew would require engagement with the state as a foreign object whose imposition would need to be justified. By this I mean, it may be a fundamentally harder task to argue that Ujamaa *requires* the state, given its provenance — a provenance Nyerere explicitly invokes — than to argue that it does not. However, because much of the literature on Ujamaa *assumes* the state, this quirk is glossed over. Perhaps, given the legal and political exigencies of the time, one could not help but assume the state's necessity, but it should not be forgotten that the template existed in a context that was not organized within a statist framework, and its potential for success within such a framework should have been justified or understood as a matter of contention.

Nonetheless, the RDA provides us with a template for what may be done in the shadow of, or at a distance from, the state to realize urgent goals *now* — those goals that the state has categorically not been able to achieve. Within these small communities, through the provision of mutual aid and communal care, people can begin to work out what it may mean to live in more dignifying ways. Working out the terms of a better life at local level may, at the very least, enable a more thoroughgoing critique of the state.

I cannot, within the space of this essay, exhaustively analyse the superiority of an anarchic structure vis-à-vis the disappointments of the state in East Africa, but I hope to have provided a starting point to take anarchic and other imaginaries of freedom seriously, not least because there is evidence

of their promise. My analysis and the experiences of the RDA are not to be conceived as (and do not aspire to be) a ready-to-implement manifesto or plan of action, but rather form part of a long-term project towards freedom, one requiring reflection and iterative processes; I am a utopian of the kind that Kwasi Wiredu refers to when he writes: ‘a utopian is not necessarily an optimist; or let me put it this way; the optimism inherent in utopianism must be an extremely long-term optimism’ (Wiredu, 1980: 98).

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that Ujamaa, if interpreted to its fullest extent, requires a kind of freedom that the state may be hard pressed to procure, even though Ujamaa has most often been read in statist terms. The popular practices of Ujamaa, at a distance from the state, were able to achieve the kind of dignifying living that the state simply has not been able to; this should push us to think more critically about just what our states *do* offer us.

Bruno Leipold (2015: 327) has argued that ‘when judging the authority of states we should ... look more closely at their “actual functioning” rather than their “ideal” functioning’ in order to assess whether political anarchism does not, in fact, offer a more promising alternative. The RDA represents such a moment. Historicizing the state allows us to view its contingency more clearly, and employing an ‘anarchist squint’ helps shed light on possibilities that lurk(ed) in plain sight. There is an opportunity here to begin to earnestly rethink the state, to dare to be unmoored, and to open ourselves up to the notion that political institutions do not exist for their own sake but for real humans who deserve, as W.E.B. Du Bois (1926) put it, ‘to love and enjoy’.

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