

BOOK REVIEW

Open Access



Review of *The collapse of a pastoral economy: The Datoga of central and northern Tanzania from the 1830s to the 2000s* by Samwel Shanga Mhajida: Gottingen University Press 2019

J. Terrence McCabe

Book details

Samwel Shanga Mhajida, 2019. *The collapse of a pastoral economy: The Datoga of central and northern Tanzania from the 1830s to the 2000s*. Gottingen University Press. Pp. 262. ISBN: 978-3-86395-401-7, doi: <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2019-1143>.

In this book, Dr. Mhajida presents a highly detailed historical account of the Datoga people over the last two centuries, coupled with his personal recollections of growing up as a member of a Datoga household. As a Datoga himself, Dr. Mhajida offers insights into life as a pastoralist, the interactions that he and his family had with other ethnic groups, and the challenges his family faced during the colonial period and into the modern post-colonial world. Although I have been studying East African pastoral people for more than 40 years, I assumed that Datoga and Barabaig were different names for the same people. However, Dr. Mhajida describes the complexity of the Datoga people and that the Barabaig are the most well-known, but only one of many sub-groups of the Datoga. The book is based on Dr. Mhajida's doctoral dissertation and is primarily a highly detailed historical account and written primarily for a specialist audience. There are many place names and geographical descriptions that would be unfamiliar to those without a deep understanding of Tanzania's history and, in particular, the geography of central Tanzania. Nevertheless, the book offers insights into the

mobility of people, ethnic tensions and alliances that existed prior to the colonial era, and how these articulated with the German and British colonial governments, as well as with the independent governments of the modern Tanzanian state.

According to Dr. Mhajida, "this research unravels the economic collapse of the Datoga pastoralists of central and northern Tanzania from the 1830s to the beginning of the 20th century. The research builds on the broader literature on continental pastoralism during the past two centuries. Overall, the literature suggests that African pastoralism is collapsing due to changing political and environmental factors". I am not sure that I would agree that pastoralism is collapsing but is certainly changing and adapting. Dr. Mhajadi goes on to say that two main questions have guided this research: (1) "How is ethnic space defined by the Datoga and their neighbours across different historical times?" and (2) "What are the origins of the conflicts and violence, and how have they been narrated by the state throughout history?"

The book begins with an overview of the literature on African pastoralism and of the Datoga in particular. Dr. Mhajida stresses how the Datoge were viewed as backward and violent and challenges this description made by both colonial governments and other ethnic groups.

Correspondence: tmccabe@colorado.edu
Department of Anthropology, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO, USA



© The Author(s). 2021 **Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

He points out that there are nine sub-groups of the Datoga, and in this book, his focus is on the Barabaig, Bianjid/Taturu, Brediga, and Gisamjeng. One of the main points in the introductory chapter is how the British favoured the Iraqw, how the Datoga lost significant amounts of land to the Iraqw during the period between 1918 and 1927, and how the view of the Datoga as violent and undeveloped continued in the post-independence period. He also discusses the challenges of archival research and that of collecting oral histories of the Datoga.

The second chapter examines Datoga's history from the 1830s to the 1910s. The work here is detailed and well documented. The one critique I would have is that Dr. Mhajida sets up the chapter by saying that he shows how "a romanticized understanding of pastoralists as simple, non-territorialist, and non-expansionist is ahistorical". I doubt that many scholars of East African pastoralists would agree with this view. The focus of this chapter is how the Datoga viewed their geographical homeland, their *nichi*, and how their perceptions of the homeland were formed through the interaction with other ethnic groups, particularly the Massai and the Datoga's loss of the Serengeti plains and Ngorongoro highlands. Dr. Mhajida also discusses the development of the ritual mastery of rainmaking and healing. Dr. Mhajida documents the movements of the different Datoga sub-groups as a result of conflict with other ethnic groups and concludes with a discussion of Datoga's relationships with the German colonial government and how this set in motion the challenging relationship between the Datoga and the state.

In chapter 3, Dr. Mhajida considers the period between 1918 and the 1950s largely concentrating on the relationship of the British colonial state and the Datoga. Much of the chapter attempts to reconsider what Dr. Mhajida feels have been misinterpretations of both oral history and the written record. The chapter details how the perception of violence and in particular "murders" were falsely attributed to the Datoga and how these interpretations led to the alienation of resources and the loss of land to adjacent communities. This includes the imposition of indirect rule, the replacement of Datoga chiefs with government chiefs, and the loss of land for the commercial development of large-scale wheat farming. The chapter also discusses the effect that disease, in particular, rinderpest and trypanosomiasis, had on the pastoral economy and the shrinking of grazing areas available to the Datoga.

Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate how the perception of the Datoga as violent and backward continued in post-colonial independent Tanzania. The villagization programme, which was implemented throughout Tanzania, had devastating impacts on the pastoral economy of the Datoga. During this

period, the Datoga were considered "enemies" and settled into agricultural communities. Dr. Mhajida again argues that the events that lead to the state's perception of the Datoga as Mang'ati (the Maasai word for enemy) were based on a misinterpretation of historical events and led to the severe impoverishment of the Datoga. In chapter 5, Dr. Mhajida considers the impact of the transition from the socialist policies of the state in the Nyerere years to the more neo-liberal economic policies of the post-1984 government. During this period, the Datoga engaged in large-scale migrations, while ethnic conflict continued and escalated. The Datoga diversified their pastoral economy and eventually came to a more cooperative relationship with adjacent communities.

In chapter 6, Dr. Mhajida reflects on his own life growing up in a Datoga community and household. The focus here is on two households and their historical development from the early 1900s to their current situation. Much of the research here was based on both oral history and individual interviews. It brings to life many of the accounts mentioned previously in the book. It is also a personal reflection on urbanization, a decline of pastoral livelihoods, and his own journey from a herd boy to now a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam.

Although I said at the beginning of this review that the audience for this book will primarily be for the community of pastoral scholars, it is a moving account for anyone interested in Tanzania's history. It is also a demonstration of how recorded events can be misinterpreted and how they can be corrected through meticulous archival research, collection of oral histories, and individual interviews. This is an impressive book and a valuable contribution to the pastoral literature and the history of northern and central Tanzania.

Author's contributions

The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The author declare that they have no competing interests.

Received: 21 May 2021 Accepted: 23 May 2021

Published online: 10 August 2021

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.