

Post-colonial Readings of the Bible in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This article particularly examines the *Roho* and *ujamaa* readings of the bible in the post-colonial context of Tanzania, from 1960 to the seventies, and their implications beyond this period. Because what are considered post-colonial readings of the bible do not simply emerge after a country obtains independence but, rather, have roots in the early Christianisation attempts and encounters with the bible during the colonial period, this article also depicts early anti-colonial readings of the bible through the *soma* Christianity which, in time, became a hermeneutical foundation of the *Roho* and *ujamaa* readings of the bible in central Tanzania. For what people do with the bible in a post-colonial context is based on how the bible was initially received and appropriated during the colonial period.

This article first discusses early African political readings of the bible through *soma* Christianity from 1907 to the sixties. It then deals with the *Roho* biblical readings during the fifties, sixties and seventies of the same century. The third and final section explores *ujamaa* readings during the two decades beginning from 1960 and focusing mainly on Nyerere's reading of the bible and its political implications in the post-colonial context of central Tanzania and beyond.¹ An analysis of early encounters with the bible in *soma* Christianity and the *Roho* biblical readings in this article focuses mainly on the Anglican Church in the Gogo region, with some references to other churches in Tanzania and beyond. In this analysis, missionary sources are critically engaged concurrently with empirical research material as there are dimensions of African readings of the bible for which missionary sources cannot account.

1 *Soma* is a Swahili verb meaning 'read' while *Roho*, also Swahili, means 'spirit'. The word *ujamaa* derives from the Swahili word *jamaa*, meaning 'family'. Thus, *u-jamaa* means 'familyhood' and, in a broader sense, *jamaa* means community, which is based on social cooperation (J. K. Nyerere. *Ujamaa – Essays on Socialism*. [Nairobi: OUP, 1968], 3-4.)