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Governance, Local Politics and ‘Districtization’ in Tanzania: the 1998 Arumeru Tax Revolt

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In 1998 Arumeru District, NE Tanzania, erupted in a revolt over taxation. In one of the most remarkable instances of rural political mobilisation since Independence, almost the entire population of the District refused to pay Local Government Development Levy. Consistent with supporters of a donor-inspired ‘Governance Agenda’, some commentators in Tanzania lauded the revolt as evidence that multi-party democracy was finally leading to a new era of transparency and democratic accountability in development administration. The present paper provides an account of the revolt and argues that such an interpretation is premature: popular mobilisation was the outcome of a contingent conjuncture in which acute economic hardship coincided with elite interests of a factional nature; the revolt does not demonstrate the ability of peasants to hold leaders accountable on a regularised basis. More generally, the revolt is symptomatic of a process of class de-structuring under which Tanzania’s middle class now secures its reproduction not through national organs of the state but through struggle for control of local institutions. This process, dubbed ‘districtization’, has important implications for political stability and accountability in Tanzania.

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GOVERNANCE, LOCAL POLITICS AND DISTRICTIZATION¹ IN TANZANIA: THE 1998 ARUMERU TAX REVOLT

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The subject of this paper is a tax revolt which centred in the West of Arumeru District, North-East Tanzania, in the first half of 1998. The most dramatic events in the dispute included the refusal of almost the entire District population to pay development levy, the beating up of Council tax collectors, the burning of the Council Chairman's house and his subsequent resignation, a march by as many as 15,000 people on the Regional Headquarters in Arusha, the intervention of the Prime Minister, the spread of the dispute to other Districts² and a subsequent tour of Arumeru by President Mkapa, who urged among other things, a more speedy re-distribution of estate land to villagers.³

Continently, this scale of political action is not especially dramatic, yet in Tanzania it is quite startling. A key feature of post-Independence politics in that country has been a striking absence of rural political mobilization.⁴ This is in spite of the fact that the state is widely agreed to have taken policy measures extremely detrimental to rural interests: in 1972 it abolished district councils; in 1975 it abolished primary Cooperative societies; between 1973 and 1975 it forced the movement of around five million people into nucleated villages; throughout the 1970s it presided over the crippling erosion of producer prices for export crops.⁵ None of these measures was popular, and yet they were implemented without any strong frontal challenges by peasants to the state. Against this background, the Arumeru tax revolt is arguably the most dramatic instance of specifically political mobilization in rural Tanzania since Independence.

This paper draws on newspaper cuttings, official reports and a series of interviews conducted at elite and popular levels by my former research assistant in the aftermath of the revolt in 1999. Interview sources are not referenced in the interests of protecting informants. I am grateful to Bruce Heilman for first alerting me to the occurrence of a tax revolt in Arumeru. I thank my contacts in the District for sending me data relevant to this paper. I am grateful to Peter Gibbon for discussions surrounding the phenomenon of 'districtization'. Views expressed are of course my own.

¹ The term 'districtization', which describes processes of elite re-configuration at a local level in Tanzania, I owe to Peter Gibbon. See Peter Gibbon, 'Limping towards a ditch without a crutch: the brave new world of Tanzanian cotton marketing Cooperatives' Working Paper Subseries no.iii (Centre for Development Research, Copenhagen, 1998).

² The Chair of Sumbawanga District Council was also removed for misuse of funds, The Guardian (Dar es Salaam) 29 June 1998 (I thank Bruce Heilman for alerting me to this); opposition activists in Mbeya urged residents not to pay tax, Nipashe (Dar es Salaam) 14 December 1998.

³ Daily News (Dar es Salaam) 14 December 1998.

⁴ Mawhood reports a successful tax boycott in Kasulu District in 1962 - Philip Mawhood, 'The search for participation in Tanzania', in Philip Mawhood (ed), Local Government in the Third World - experience of decentralization in Tropical Africa, Second Edition, (Africa Institute of South Africa, 1993), p. 80.

⁵ See among many others: Andrew Coulson, Tanzania - a political economy (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982); Goran Hyden, Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania - underdevelopment and an uncaptured peasantry (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980); Dean E. Mc. Henry, Limited Choices - the political struggle for socialism in Tanzania (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1994); Phil Raikes, 'Eating the carrot and wielding the stick', in J. Boesen, K.J. Havnevik, J. Koponen and R. Odgaard (eds), Tanzania - crisis and struggle for survival (Scandinavia Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1986).

Significantly, this mobilization has coincided with the introduction of multi-party democracy to Tanzania, together with the promotion by donors of what is known as the 'Governance Agenda'. That agenda rests in part on the belief that a key cause of the relative failure of post-Independence development policy was its top-down, unrepresentative and unaccountable character. Governance aims to improve the accountability and implementation of development policy through politically empowering the population.⁶ To this end have been encouraged a number of measures including multi-party elections, a relatively free press, the separation of party and state, and an increased space for NGOs. In the immediate aftermath of the Arumeru tax revolt, a number of commentators lauded it as a triumph for popular participation, transparency and accountability, thereby suggesting that Governance was bearing fruit.⁷

The aim of the present paper is to suggest that the revolt was rather more complicated than this interpretation allows, and that its implications for the future course of democracy and development in Tanzania are less clear cut than Governance proponents might infer. It will attempt this first by providing a description of the District and an account of the revolt; second by outlining the reasons for rural political stability in post-Independence Tanzania; and third, by situating the revolt in the context of recent developments in Tanzanian politics and society.

Arumeru West

The tax revolt began in the parliamentary constituency of Arumeru West, Arumeru District, Arusha Region. The constituency is dominated by ethnic Arusha, a Maa-speaking people who migrated from the Maasai steppe to the Western slopes of Mount Meru in the mid-nineteenth century, adapting the Maasai age-set structure to farming.⁸ Colonial rule brought Christianity and coffee farming, it alienated an 'iron ring' of land for settler farming around the base of Mount Meru, and enclosed the upper slopes of the mountain in a forest reserve. Annexations on the Eastern slopes of the mountain led to the famous Meru Land Case.⁹ In the 1950s elite Arusha protested colonial plans for a new Tribal Constitution. They evaded marketing regulations, kept up a barrage of meetings and complaints and deployed a discourse of 'no taxation without representation'. By 1957 they had secured the principle of popular election in the choosing of Tribal Council members.¹⁰

On the instruction of the central government Arusha and Meru were united after Independence in the Arumeru District Council. The coffee Cooperative societies of the two peoples were subsumed under the Arusha Cooperative Union. In 1970 Arumeru was divided into two parliamentary constituencies, the West becoming coextensive with areas of Arusha settlement.¹¹

⁶ See for example, World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa - from crisis to sustainable growth* (World Bank, Washington DC, 1989); Goran Hyden, 'Governance and the study of politics', in Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton (eds), *Governance and Politics in Africa* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder and London, 1992). For critiques, see 'Good government?', *IDS Bulletin Special Issue*, 24, 1 (1993); David Williams and Tom Young, 'Governance, the World Bank and liberal theory', *Political Studies*, XLII (1994), pp. 84-100.

⁷ Bruce Heilman, personal communication.

⁸ Thomas Spear, *Mountain Farmers - moral economies of land and agricultural development in Arusha and Meru* (James Currey, Oxford, 1997); Philip H. Gulliver, *Social Control in an African Society - a study of the Arusha agricultural Masai of Northern Tanganyika* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1963).

⁹ Spear, *Mountain Farmers*; Kirilo Japhet and Earle Seaton, *The Meru Land Case* (East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1967).

¹⁰ Spear, *Mountain Farmers*.

¹¹ Lionel Cliffe and Paul Purrit, 'Arusha: mixed urban and rural communities', in L. Cliffe (ed), *One Party Democracy* (East African Publishing House, Nairobi); Ismael R. Mbise and Jon R. Moris, 'A study in

In recent years, the most fundamental changes to affect the economy of the area have been the declining value of coffee, increasing population pressure, and land degradation. In all instances this has led to diversification into non-traditional crops and non-agricultural pursuits. A result is that most Arusha have experienced an increase in the length of the working day. A key political change has been the introduction of multi-party democracy. In 1994 there were multi-party elections for the District Council.¹² CCM won all 47 seats.¹³ In the parliamentary election in 1995, Arumeru East constituency elected an opposition MP. He now sits on the Council *ex officio*. Arumeru West remained loyal to CCM.

Background to the Revolt

To understand the reasons for the Arumeru tax revolt we need to inquire into the working of its Council. Arumeru District Council is composed of 47 elected Ward representatives (*diwani*), who elect a Chairman. Councillors are assisted by local government officers, headed by a District Executive Director, all of whom are employees of central government. The Council levies a variety of local taxes on business and markets, collects Development Levy from villagers, collects contributions from parents for primary school children, and receives subventions from central government. Village development plans are supposed to flow up a hierarchy of development committees, through the full council and up to Regional and Central Government levels; resources are supposed to flow back down.¹⁴ However, in 1997 this formal structure of development administration was not functioning smoothly for two reasons: economic scarcity, and political subversion. With regard to the former, the value of government subventions to the council was low, with the result that the Planning Office had a shopping list of projects for which it hoped to attract non-governmental donors. With regard to the latter, a set of requests might be made by the District based on plans submitted by villages and Wards, and after passing through the Regional Committee, and central ministries, monies or materials might eventually be delivered to the Council. But at this stage there was ample opportunity for leakage. Funds or materials were frequently transferred to other areas, projects, or accounts. The Council Chair was said to be at the centre of most of these dubious transactions.¹⁵

By means of this process, the scarce resources of Arumeru District were unevenly distributed, with some Councillors able to play the system better than others. Developmentally, four Wards were said to do consistently better than the rest, owing to the effectiveness of their *diwani*: Ilkidiya (the Council Chair's seat), Moshono (where World Vision had a project), Kingori (the

contrasts: The election in Arusha and Meru', in Election Study Committee, *Socialism and Participation - Tanzania's 1970 national elections* (Tanzania Publishing House, Dar es Salaam, 1974).

¹² For a review of the 1994 local elections in Tanzania, see *The African Review* **21**, 1&2.

¹³ CCM: *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (Party of the Revolution), the ruling party in Tanzania, was formed in 1977 when the Tanzania African National Union which had governed the mainland since Independence in 1961, formally merged with the ruling party in Zanzibar, the Afro-Shirazi Party.

¹⁴ For discussions of local administration in Tanzania see Mawhood, 'The search'; J.A.O. Max, *The Development of Local Government in Tanzania* (Educational Publishers and Distributors Limited, Dar es Salaam, 1991); Joseph Semboja and Ole Therkildsen, 'Short-term resource mobilization for recurrent financing of rural local governments in Tanzania', *World Development*, **20**, 8, (1992) pp. 1101-1113; Lucy Gilson, Peter Kilima and Marcel Tanner, 'Local government decentralization and the health sector in Tanzania', *Public Administration and Development*, **14** (1994), pp. 451-477.

¹⁵ It should be noted that council functioning had also been disrupted somewhat by the prospect of a decentralization reform recently legislated by Parliament. At the time of fieldwork informants in the Regional and District Offices were still unsure as to what the exact implications of the reform would be, although it was known to involve the devolution of regional staff to district level.

Vice-Chairman's seat), and Nkoaranga. All were Wards where the roads were purported to be comparatively good, where water systems functioned and where schools were properly roofed. The diwani for Nkoaranga was in many ways the consummate local politician. At the time of fieldwork he held high positions on the Council, in the Cooperative, in an independent Meru church and formerly in a prominent local NGO. Indeed, he was described to me as, 'mlevi wa madaraka' (addicted to power).¹⁶ He was successful in mobilising people for local development, and in using his position for his own economic advancement. He owned a largish house and farm on the mountain, a tractor and land in the lowlands, and was certainly one of the wealthiest people in his village.¹⁷ During fieldwork he was under investigation by the police for removing without explanation iron sheets from a local Cooperative Society, and for replacing steel pipes for an NGO water project with plastic ones of narrower gauge.

At the time of fieldwork in 1996 and 1997, dissatisfaction with Arumeru District Council was high. People resented paying its development levy because they claimed to see no benefit from it.¹⁸ They suspected that Councillors and Council officers simply 'ate' this money, with nobody making a proper follow-up of Council expenditures. This issue increased in significance in the context of a deteriorating economic situation in 1997. The period was scene to one of the most severe droughts in memory. Irrigation from mountain streams cushioned the impact on the slopes of Mount Meru, but it was still necessary to distribute famine relief. Poor harvests were compounded in 1998, as the El Nino phenomenon brought torrential rain and a plague of vermin. Failing crops meant more demand for cash, and failing health meant increased cash outlays on 'cost-sharing' medical services. Throughout this period the Council was cranking up an unpopular conservation campaign to stop people cultivating maize and beans around water sources.

At the same time, the Council itself was indulging in comparatively lavish expenditures. It was well known for instance that all the Councillors (bar the NCCR-*Mageuzi*¹⁹ MP), and the top officers, had ordered themselves expensive green or blue suits. The Council Chair had held a circumcision ceremony for his sons which was one of the most sumptuous anyone could remember. The Council had been criticised for purchasing two luxury Toyota Prados at a cost of more than Tshs 100 million. When one of the vehicles was subsequently 'car-jacked', suspicion centered on the Council Chairman himself. The latter was already under suspicion of corruption in the allocation of building plots at Ngaramtoni in Kimunyak Ward. The plots were sited on abandoned estate land. In 1995, the land was promised to the inhabitants (wananchi),²⁰ but in 1997 it emerged that plot redistribution had been biased. The Chairman, together with the MP for Arumeru West had allegedly allocated themselves large numbers of plots. They had used widows, children, deceased persons and prostitutes as proxies. People had complained about these allocations, and at a public meeting the Chairman and the MP were called 'thieves' and 'hungry dogs'. The Regional Commissioner agreed to initiate a probe into the matter. At the time of the tax revolt, its report had yet to be made public, and the delay was a source of discontent. It was against this inpropitious background that the

¹⁶ Literally, 'drunk on offices'.

¹⁷ Although he would not be regarded as wealthy by Western standards.

¹⁸ Fieldwork concentrated on Akeri and Moshono Wards. The District Executive Director has claimed that perceptions notwithstanding, the Council was one of the more successful in the country, one indication being the increase in the number of secondary schools in the District from nine to 24 in the past five years. (District Executive Director, interview, April 1999).

¹⁹ NCCR-*Mageuzi*: National Convention for Construction and Reform (*Mageuzi* can be roughly translated as 'reform'), an opposition party which formed on liberalisation of the political system in 1992, constituted the main challenge to CCM on the Tanzanian mainland.

²⁰ 'Wananchi' is commonly used to refer to the 'popular classes'.

Council decided, without public consultation, to increase development levy by 150 percent - from Tshs 2,000 to Tshs 5,000.

Popular Dimensions of the Tax Revolt

The tax increase rapidly became a topic of discussion along roadsides, at celebrations, in communal labour groups, and in age-sets. One elderly informant put it this way,

I am building a school with my own hands, and contributing money. The hospital was built by my hands and with my money, yet if I go to the hospital I am asked to buy an exercise book which is turned into a hospital file. I also buy a syringe and its needle; and if I go to the regional hospital the doctor shows me a shop to buy medicine. I do all these things and I don't have enough land to cultivate - where do you expect me to get money from? We use the land which belonged to our grandfathers and we have multiplied. Our government has several acres of land; they don't want to give it to us; still they beg for more money. All these things forced me to inquire into the use of my tax.²¹

Residents of Kimunyak Ward called for a meeting to discuss the issue. Party leaders failed to respond so instead they organized themselves. A group of around 800 people gathered at Emahoi, Kimunyak Ward, on 28 January 1998. They elected a committee of 40 people chaired by one Israel P. Mollel, an age-set leader. Its remit was to collect data on Council projects, and to collect sensitive data concerning corruption, embezzlement and misuse of funds by Councillors. It was told to direct its findings to the District or Regional Office. In this way, popular discontent found expression through a discourse of democratic legal universalism familiar from colonial struggles against maladministration by chiefs.²²

On 7 March a group of over 3,000 people ignored a ban imposed by the District Commissioner and assembled at Emahoi Primary School playground. Mollel told the District Commissioner and 20 policemen that, 'We are fed up with the existing horse rider relationship in which we play the role of the horse. We want to be informed of how development levy is being spent'.²³ Another demonstrator asked, 'Parents are paying for education, we attend private hospitals, TPRI provides us with piped borne water, and no public toilets. Just tell me, what is this Council doing! (sic)'.²⁴ Throughout this period the Council was unable to collect tax in Arumeru West and collection was also low in the East. Arusha murrar²⁵ organized to protect women market traders from the attention of tax collectors. Some collectors were beaten up; others chased away. With frustrations mounting, an armed crowd of 10,000 gathered again at Emahoi, and were met by riot police. The District Police Commander pleaded through a loudhailer for demonstrators to disperse, or to hold their meeting in an adjacent field. Instead, elements among the crowd vowed to burn the houses of Council members. They ransacked a house of the Chairman, burned possessions and smashed windows, before burning the house itself. Four people were arrested and the crowd dispersed by police. As many as 15,000 protestors then converged on the Regional Office, seeking the detainees' release. One account describes this as a peaceful and orderly protest policed by 'security guards' carrying white flags. Another report suggests that protesters warned the Regional Commissioner that if the accused were not released they would continue their burning campaign. The

²¹ Interview conducted by research assistant.

²² Compare Spear, Mountain Farmers.

²³ Arusha Times, March 16-31, 1998. TPRI probably refers to TIP (Traditional Irrigation Project), a project to rehabilitate water systems organised by SNV, a Dutch government-funded NGO.

²⁴ Arusha Times, March 16-31, 1998.

²⁵ A Maasai age-set, often but somewhat inaccurately described as the 'warrior' age-set. See Gulliver, Social Control.

Commissioner arranged for their release. A third meeting was held at which the Regional Commissioner, District Commissioner and District Executive Director attended. The Regional Commissioner instituted a Commission to probe allegations of corruption and causes of political unrest in the District.

The Commission's report, when it was completed, painted a damning picture of patrimonial rule and rampant corruption.²⁶ Among other accusations, it aired allegations that the Council Chairman presided over a haphazard committee system in which he or key allies chaired all the committees and which ate up Council revenue. The Finance Committee, for example, had met four times in February 1995, at a cost of Tshs 603,330. The Chairman also made improper claims for travel expenses and other imprests. Officers who opposed him were transferred to other areas, and where a field officer became too popular with his or her constituency, s/he was moved and replaced by one of the Chairman's place-men. It recorded detailed allegations that the Chairman was in the habit of appropriating Council assets as private property and allowing other Councillors and officers to do likewise. With personal and Council resources he was alleged to buy the support of lower level leaders in the District as well as leaders at national level. For example, a welcoming party in 1993 for the Ministers for Local Government cost Tshs 753,300, and gifts for the Ministers came to Tshs 1,476,000. The implication was that this support shielded the Council from allegations of misrule.

The Commissioners recommended that the allegations should be thoroughly investigated and an external audit conducted. It advised that the Chairman should resign, as should the Councillors, who were all guilty of failing to supervise both him and the executive. In the event of their refusal, it argued that the Council should be broken and replaced by an appointed body. 'Nchi yetu inaangamia kwa kukosa viongozi waadilifu', it proclaimed (Tanzania is being ruined for want of righteous leaders).

The Councillors did refuse to resign, and in response the Prime Minister visited the District on 6 June. He faced a mass meeting at Ngaramtoni at which he was told that citizens would not pay levy until all the Councillors resigned. The Chairman of the 'People's Committee' declared that, 'Dying from a bullet is equal to dying in one's sleep and we in Arumeru will not pay tax because it is of no use to us'.²⁷ The Prime Minister explained that he had not come to give a show of force; that it might be possible to remove the Chair and a few officers, but breaking the Council had no basis in law. Apparently the crowd then became furious and began to disperse chanting, 'We don't like it and we don't agree!'. Some were called back by their leader and by the CCM Chairman for Simanjiro, who told them, 'We Maasai have been taught to respect our leaders. Therefore we have to be patient and hear what the PM is telling us before we explain to him what is in our heart with respect and without making a noise or leaving'.²⁸

Later the Prime Minister addressed a calmer crowd at Usa River in Arumeru East, promising a resolution to the conflict by the end of July. On 8 July he met with all District Councillors at the District office, and told them to remove the Chairman, otherwise he would break the Council. 26 Councillors voted to remove him, with 4 voting against and 6 abstaining. By contrast they passed a motion in support of the District Executive Director.²⁹ The Chairman himself was on official business in the UK at this time, and the Tanzania Association of Local

²⁶ Commission's Report on the Causes of Political Unrest in Arumeru District (Kiswahili) (Office of the Arusha Regional Commissioner, Mimeo, circa May 1998).

²⁷ Majira (Dar es Salaam), 7 June, 1998.

²⁸ Majira (Dar es Salaam), 7 June 1998.

²⁹ Majira (Dar es Salaam), 9 June 1998.

Government intervened in his defence. The issue was discussed in full Council and 43 out of 45 Councillors voted to re-instate him. Restored to his former glory, the Chairman was visited by numerous CCM dignitaries who urged him to stand down. On 22 July he proffered his resignation, and on 28 July, the full Council elected the Ward Councillor for Nkoaranga as the new Chair of Arumeru District Council.

A question arises as to how far these events were attributable to the introduction of a multi-party system. A common opinion among respondents was that the comparative openness of the multi-party era had made it easier for people to challenge leaders and ask them questions. In addition, increased media freedom was considered significant. Multi-partyism had also raised their awareness of the importance of transparency and accountability in government, and the resignation at national level of a Minister for Finance had proved to them that leaders could be unseated. It was also mentioned that retrenchment exercises have seen the return to the village of many educated people, who have the confidence to interrogate the leadership. In addition, the original demonstrators at Kimunyak threatened to join opposition parties should CCM use force against them. However, the protestors took care not to associate themselves with an opposition party, and refused their overtures:

No, we didn't allow opposition parties to involve themselves with the tax saga because our demands were clearly understood and it was the task of the government to solve that problem and not opposition parties. We knew that by involving the opposition they will double the problem as they are starting to show who is better and who is not.³⁰

The Arumeru East MP played a marginal role in the dispute, although he did appear in court on charges of slandering the Regional Commissioner. Governance theorists envisage NGOs playing a key role in mobilising civil society to enforce political accountability. Only a couple of respondents mentioned that NGOs had contributed to heightening awareness in the District, and they failed to mention the ones they thought influential. It is perhaps possible that civic awareness campaigns conducted by the Lutheran Church during the 1995 General Election had filtered through to people's consciousness.

Respondents were extremely enthusiastic about the outcome of the revolt. They believed that it had demonstrated to leaders that they could no longer keep the people ignorant by protecting each other. In the future they would choose open leaders, and they would ensure that government remained transparent and accountable. There would be high attendance at government meetings they thought, and politicians would no longer have the opportunity to bamboozle them. As a first indication of this, there is now a register of current revenue and expenditure available for public scrutiny at the Council offices. It is possible that the revolt will continue to inform the collective memory of Arumeru, and that as such it will have a lasting impact on subjectivity and political culture in the District.

Elite Dimensions

Before hailing the tax revolt as a popular triumph however, it is essential to examine the elite dimensions of this conflict: at every stage popular dissatisfaction was intersected by the machinations of the political leadership. This side of the story centres on a set of personal and political animosities between the Council Chairman and a former CCM District Party Chairman in Arumeru District (hereafter referred to as the Party Boss). Both are ethnic Arusha and hail from adjacent areas; the latter from Kimunyak Ward. Informants allege that their quarrel had begun years previously when the Party Boss excluded the Council Chair from a share-out of land plots at CCM District Headquarters. The Council Chair subsequently

³⁰ Interview.

'befriended' a mistress of the Party Boss, herself a CCM apparatchik. Next, the Council Chair had used money and spread false rumours to prevent the Party Boss from winning the Regional Chairmanship of CCM. The Party Boss was further incensed when he lost out on plot allocation in the aforementioned Ngaramtoni case. Apparently it was he who encouraged ordinary people to lodge the original complaint about plot allocation, and it was he who first challenged the Chairman at the Ngaramtoni public meeting. His involvement in the data-collecting committee in Kimunyak is unclear, as is his role in the meetings at Emahoi which culminated in the torching of the Chairman's house. However, in one version, it was he who orchestrated these protests by both funding and organising murran.

The Council Chairman is regarded as a kingmaker in Arumeru West. His support is thought crucial to winning political office in the District. Here the role of the Arusha Regional Commissioner, another native Arusha, comes into focus. The Commissioner is said to be close to Prime Minister Frederick Sumaye, and to President Benjamin Mkapa (he was editor of party newspaper Uhuru when Mkapa was Minister for Communications). He is tipped to gain a Cabinet position. However, under Tanzania's multi-party constitution, only constituency MPs may sit in Cabinet. Consequently, the Commissioner was looking for a seat to contest, and it has been alleged that for a time he attempted to court the Chairman. However, at some point during the course of the Ngaramtoni scandal he turned against the Chair and presided over the re-allocation of his plots. The Chairman struck back by using his influence among Arumeru CCM delegates to block the election of the Commissioner to the National Executive Committee of CCM. The Commissioner secured a 'national' seat, but not without loss of face. Clearly, both he and the Party Boss had an interest in unseating the Chair; indeed in disbanding the Council altogether in order that they might carve out a new political base. The deteriorating economic situation in Arumeru, the Chairman's recent excesses and the tax increase gave them an opportunity to act.

It should be stressed that there is no direct evidence of a conspiracy between the Commissioner and the Boss. However, it is highly unlikely that the former would not have heard accusations that the latter was the orchestrator of disturbances. In normal circumstances this would have led to the Boss's interrogation and reprimand, if not detention; but this did not occur. Did the Commissioner turn a partially blind eye to the mobilizations, aware that he might make political capital from them? His team's report into the causes of the disturbances in Arumeru District was not without bias. The District Executive Director produced a point by point response to the charges of the Commission, defending the record of the Council, the Chairman, the Councillors and the Executive.³¹ Some of this was sophistic, and seemed to represent a case of special pleading on behalf of the Chairman. But none of the points made was entirely implausible, and some were convincing. In light of this, it appears that the Commission gave credence to every piece of rumour and hearsay which was offered up, much of which we may assume originated with the Party Boss. A plausible interpretation is

³¹ Majibu ya Hoja ya Tume ya Uchunguzi wa Wilaya ya Arumeru (Arumeru District Council, Mimeo, circa May 1998). Having studied both the Commission's Report and the Council's response, I am still unable to make a proper judgement as to the extent of financial mismanagement on the Council. This points up the difficulty experienced by ordinary peasants in holding their leaders 'accountable'. Probably it would require a trained accountant to settle these issues, but since accountants can be bribed, the problems in establishing the facticity of corruption allegations are immense. Perhaps the language of 'moral ethnicity', of which the Council was clearly in breach, would be a more appropriate means of enforcing accountability than the narrowly legalistic language of the World Bank's Governance Agenda. Compare John Lonsdale, 'Wealth, Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought', in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, Unhappy Valley - conflict in Kenya and Africa - Book Two: violence and ethnicity (James Currey, London, 1992).

that the probe's aim was not so much to assess critically the extent of misuse of funds in the Council, as to use the issue of corruption as a political weapon with which to unseat an obstacle to the Commissioner's political ambition. The Prime Minister accepted the recommendations, and was subsequently instrumental in persuading the Chair to step down.

Even if we imagine that the Commissioner and the Prime Minister were single-mindedly pursuing the ultimate goal of transparent and accountable government, we find that the Commissioner has become entangled in the earthy world of District politics, aligning himself with old-style politicians (notably the Party Boss) in order to secure an outcome which is by no means guaranteed to improve Governance in the District. At the time it was rumoured that even the Chairman would live to fight another day, the PM promising him 'something equivalent' in government. He has subsequently been appointed District Commissioner for Ngorongoro. The fight against corruption then is a complex politics of tactical manoeuvre, something which is hardly recognised by Governance theorists, who envisage a relatively unproblematic translation of majority preference or public opinion into policy outcomes.³² Moreover, these are dangerous games to play: the outcome of such struggles is unpredictable; collective action is as likely to surge into 'neo-traditional' ethnic and religious channels as into 'liberal universalistic' ones.

The revolt has not been without some ethnic fallout. All the major leaders in the District, together with the Regional Party Chairman, are now Meru. This imbalance is likely to worry Arusha, and it is clear that an easy way for the Boss to try and regain a power base will be through ethnic appeals. The MP for Arumeru East meanwhile alleged that the revolt and subsequent investigation had confirmed what Meru people had long suspected: that development expenditure was biased toward Arumeru West. He argued that money from the two halves of the District should no longer be pooled, and that 'his people' were entitled to a proper return from their tax contributions.³³ The new Council Chairman is the Councillor for Nkoaranga, a controversial figure and political player of the old school. Whether he and his Councillors will survive the elections in 2,000 remains to be seen. However, there has been a surge of enthusiasm for the Council and tax contributions are at record levels.³⁴ Politicians are presently gearing up for these elections, and reports from the District Council suggest that the process involves the familiar attempt to secure unbudgeted Council monies, through manipulation and intimidation of Council officers.

Weighing the evidence, it seems some grassroots acts of organization were rapidly coopted and then partially directed by elite forces. The scale of political mobilization in this instance does not reflect a proportionate capacity for popular organization; rather, it reflects an atypical, overdetermined conjuncture in which a gross miscalculation on the part of the Council in a context of acute economic hardship coincided with an elite interest in popular mobilization. In consequence, optimistic readings of the revolt as evidence of Tanzania's entrance to a new era of effective democracy and accountability are premature. Indeed, as the wider historical-sociological literature on social movements and on democratization would imply, political

³² For the logic of this vision, see Robert Bates, 'The Politics of Agricultural Markets - an African case study', in Robert Bates (ed), Toward a Political Economy of Development - a rational choice perspective (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989), p. 350.

³³ Samwel Kisanga, 'My view point on the Arumeru conflict' (Letter to Prime Minister Frederick Sumaye, 10 July 1998). A copy of this letter was passed to me by its author, Samwel Kisanga, NCCR MP for the Arumeru East.

³⁴ The rate has been reduced from Tshs 5000 to Tshs 4000.

change often occurs when elite dissensus makes possible political openings.³⁵ Even where pressure for change issues entirely from outside the established system - which was not the case in Arumeru - popular movements are not perfectly democratic, and their decision-making structures often become increasingly oligarchic as they win concessions and engage with formal structures of government. If a strong popular capacity to enforce continuous accountability is absent, the dispositions and orientations of leaders are crucial to long-term political outcomes. The critical point to note is that in the Arumeru case at least, there is little evidence that the elite has internalised the aspirations of the Governance Agenda, and so equally little reason to suppose that the effects of the tax revolt will be consistent with its demands.

These observations notwithstanding, there are reasons for thinking that such mobilizations will become more frequent in Tanzania in coming years. It is no coincidence that this episode should have occurred just a couple of years after the Eastern side of the District erupted into violence over the issue of secession from the Lutheran Church.³⁶ Nor is it a surprise that there is currently a struggle over secession in nearby Mwanza District in which a former Prime Minister's name has been mentioned.³⁷ These phenomena are part of a process which has been referred to as 'Districtization',³⁸ a process to which there are three interrelated features, and which must be understood against a previous background of remarkable rural stability.

Rural Political Stability

Schematically, political stability in the Tanzanian countryside can be explained by reference to a set of 'presences', and a set of 'absences'.³⁹ Beginning with the presences, it is widely agreed that Tanzanians have evinced a positive sense of nationhood. That sense relates to the legitimacy acquired by TANU⁴⁰ during the Independence struggle, to the conscious promotion of Kiswahili as a national language, and to what Susan Geiger has referred to as the 'performative' aspect of nationalism: people's participation in and engagement with a set of symbols and cultural markers inscribed in TANU's Youth League, choirs, dance groups, and, we can add, the party ten-cell. Such symbols have elicited a positive affective response and endowed the party-state with a certain legitimacy.⁴¹ Cognitively, I hazard, the institutions of

³⁵ See for example, Dankwart A. Rustow, 'Transitions to democracy - toward a dynamic model', *Comparative Politics*, 2, (1970), pp. 337-363; Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (eds), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: prospects for democracy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement - social movements and contentious politics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998); Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes - collective action in the information age* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996); see also Christopher Clapham, 'Introduction: analysing African insurgencies', in Christopher Clapham (ed), *African Guerrillas* (James Currey, Oxford, 1998).

³⁶ See Catherine Baroin, 'Religious conflict in 1990-1993 among the Rwa: secession in a Lutheran diocese in Northern Tanzania', *African Affairs*, 95, (1996) pp. 529-554; Tim Kelsall, 'Christianity, conflict and land in North-Eastern Tanzania', a paper presented to the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom Biennial Conference, SOAS, September 1998.

³⁷ *Sunday Observer Online*, 20 June 1999 (<http://www.ippmedia.com>).

³⁸ See Gibbon, 'Limping towards a ditch'.

³⁹ This schema is a response to Susan Geiger, *TANU Women - gender and culture in the making of Tanganyikan nationalism* (James Currey, Oxford, 1997), who criticises 'lacks and absences' theories of Tanganyikan nationalism.

⁴⁰ TANU: Tanganyika African National Union; later, on creation of the Republic of Tanzania in 1964, Tanzania African National Union.

⁴¹ Geiger, *TANU Women*.

state have enjoyed a much lower level of legitimacy.⁴² While there has been some support for the egalitarianism embodied in ujamaa ideology, and for the promise of state provision of welfare services, this has been offset by strong individualistic tendencies and a concern to preserve household autonomy: directives emanating from the state which infringe perceived interests have not been regarded as moral imperatives.⁴³

The second presence, interrelated with the first, was the charismatic authority of Julius Nyerere. Throughout his tenure he displayed a capacity to respond creatively to political challenges - he resigned as Prime Minister in 1962 in order to cultivate the party at the grassroots, he introduced a one-party state in 1964-5, he tried to transcend narrow economic interests through the Arusha Declaration in 1967, and disciplined over-zealous rural officials in Shinyanga in 1975. He shared in the blame for some of the worst follies of the post-Independence period, yet in almost all regions Nyerere remained immensely popular.⁴⁴

Third, Regional Commissioners have been armed with a wide range of powers, most notably the Preventive Detention Act, which has allowed them to act swiftly to pick off potential trouble makers, place them in detention, or else rusticate them to other areas of the country. They have been aided in this by the Field Force Unit, a rapid response paramilitary force, which has been used against civilians on a number of occasions, most notably in 1983 when it opened fire on demonstrators at the Kilombero sugar factory in Morogoro, killing six.⁴⁵ Fourth, the rural areas are permeated, or at least there is a perception that they are permeated, by a network of informers, reporting to the Idara ya Usalama - Tanzania's secret police. Generally the latter will report to Regional Commissioners and Regional Police Commanders, alerting them to potential disturbances in order that they might quickly be neutralised.⁴⁶

There is also a set of absences. To begin with, Tanzania at Independence did not have an ethnic topography conducive to sectionalist politics. It included some 127 ethnic groups, with none easily capable of dominating the others. The Sukuma-Nyamwezi language bloc, with around 20 percent of the country's population, had perhaps the best chance; but the Sukuma lived in dispersed chiefdoms and had neither suffered nor benefited disproportionately from colonial rule. Building an ethnic bloc capable of capturing national power - either around or in opposition to them - would have been extremely laborious.⁴⁷

⁴² I use 'cognition' and 'affect' here in an ideal-typical way.

⁴³ This is more or less explicit in the analyses of, among others, Michaela von Freyhold, Ujamaa Villages in Tanzania - analysis of a social experiment (Heinemann, London, 1979); Gavin Williams, 'Taking the part of peasants: rural development in Nigeria and Tanzania', in Peter Gutkind and Emmanuel Wallerstein, The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa, 2nd Edition (Sage Publications, Beverley Hills, 1985); I. Shivji, 'The politics of liberalization in Tanzania: the crisis of ideological hegemony', in Horace Campbell and Howard Stein (eds), Tanzania and the IMF - the dynamics of liberalization (Westview Press, Oxford, 1992); Hyden, Beyond Ujamaa.

⁴⁴ See for example Cranford Pratt, The Critical Phase in Tanzania 1945-1968 - Nyerere and the emergence of a socialist strategy (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976); Contemporary Record (1975), p. B317.

⁴⁵ Michael Okema, Political Culture in Tanzania (The Edwin Mellen Press, Lampeter, 1996); Horace Campbell, 'The politics of demobilization in Tanzania: beyond nationalism', in Campbell and Stein, Tanzania and the IMF.

⁴⁶ Clyde Ingle, From Village to State in Tanzania - the politics of rural development (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1972); Freyhold, Ujamaa Villages, p. 189; Coulson, Tanzania, p. 235; Okema, Political Culture; Geiger TANU Women, p. 87, n. 42.

⁴⁷ H. Glickman, 'Traditional pluralism and democratic processes in mainland Tanzania', in Lionel Cliffe and John Saul (eds), Socialism in Tanzania - an interdisciplinary reader, Volume One (East African Publishing House, Dar es Salaam, 1973).

The muted status of ethnic politics was reinforced by another feature of the political system - an absence of national leaders with strong local followings.⁴⁸ Briefly, we can identify national leaders, whose position tended to depend upon education and loyalty to the centre, and local leaders.⁴⁹ Promotion to national office or high office at Regional level in both party and government was strongly conditioned by loyalty to Nyerere, fluency in the ideological language of ujamaa, and administrative competence. In addition to their official salaries, politicians and civil servants either ran or sat on the boards of parastatal enterprises, securing allowances and of course some opportunity for speculation. In this way the most educated stratum in Tanzanian society, which tended to be distinguished also by a more or less thoroughgoing internalisation of modernization ideology, invested its loyalties in the centre. Members saw their role as mobilising the backward rural areas in the interests of national development, and since their positions depended upon their ability to do this, they were hardly likely to lead rural areas in opposition to the centre.⁵⁰

Below this stratum was a set of rural leaders more dependent on a popular local base. They have been variously called elites, kulaks, 'peasant intellectuals': farmers and farmer-traders with a broader worldview than the mass of the peasantry who played a key role in the nationalist struggle. After Independence, lack of education effectively marginalised such characters from national power. Nonetheless, some had opportunities for self-advancement through positions in the local Cooperative movement and on District Councils. Many prospered in the 1960s, and tended to have a strong emotional attachment to Nyerere and to TANU, even if their actions were often antithetical to the spirit of ujamaa. Indeed, some of the literature of the late 1960s describes the frustration of central plans by the intransigence or simple lack of dynamism of local TANU branches. In sum, this group was able to secure some of the resources of TANU in order to pursue its own interests, while eluding those directives which would damage them.⁵¹

By the late 1960s, Nyerere was concerned that at a local level TANU and the Cooperatives appeared to be vehicles not for achieving socialism but for pursuing personal gain.⁵² Rural elites were more overtly stigmatised as 'kulaks', 'ticks' and 'bloodsuckers'.⁵³ The abolition of

⁴⁸ This is a point made by Jan Kees Van Donge and Athumani Liviga, 'Tanzanian political culture and the Cabinet', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24, 4 (1986), pp. 619-639.

⁴⁹ In practice it is not always easy to draw a line around these categories. District Party Chairmen for example, were subject to national scrutiny but also close to the grass-roots.

⁵⁰ For the background to these points see, Goran Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress - African development management in perspective* (Heinemann, London, 1983); Philip Raikes, 'Rural differentiation and class formation in Tanzania', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 5, 3 (1978), pp. 285-325; Peter Gibbon, "'Civil society" in rural Tanzania: a forty year perspective', *Mimeo* (Centre for Development Research, Copenhagen, 1999).

⁵¹ For the background to this paragraph see Andrew Maguire, *Toward 'Uhuru' in Tanzania - the politics of participation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969), especially pp. 222-223; S.E. Migot-Adholla, 'The politics of a growers' Cooperative Union', in L. Cliffe, P. Lawrence, W. Luttrell, S.E. Migot-Adholla and John Saul, *Rural Cooperation in Tanzania* (Tanzania Publishing House, Dar es Salaam, 1975); H.U.E. Thoden van Velzen, 'Staff, kulaks and peasants: a study of a political field' and John Saul, 'Marketing cooperatives in a developing country: the Tanzanian case', in Cliffe and Saul, *Socialism*; Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals - anthropology and history in Tanzania* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1990).

⁵² Pratt, *The Critical Phase*.

⁵³ Rwekaza S. Mukandala, 'Whither Ujamaa? Ideological Premises of the 1990 Elections', in Rwekaza S. Mukandala and Haroub Othman (eds), *Liberalization and Politics - the 1990 election in Tanzania* (Dar es Salaam University Press, Dar es Salaam, 1994).

District Councils, villagisation and the abolition of local Cooperatives can all be read as attempts by the centre to bypass this group, and to 'get at' the peasants directly.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, rural elites were frequently able to protect their interests during villagisation: they were often chosen by villagers to continue mediating with external agencies of the state; bureaucrats preferred their company to poor peasants and displayed favouritism toward them. The implication is that there was little incentive for these local leaders to mobilize a frontal challenge to state rule.⁵⁵

Accommodation at the interface between rural elites and party bureaucrats blurred the lines between peasantry and state and helped impede the crystallisation of distinct oppositional identities. Peasant homogeneity was further fractured by village, clan, generation, gender, education, religion and income.⁵⁶ In addition, although having at its disposal organs capable of averting peasant unrest, the Tanzanian state lacked the bureaucratic capacity to exert a minute disciplinary surveillance over peasants. Thus peasants were able to evade the state, using their 'exit' rather than their 'voice' option. They could shift - both socially and geographically - into new economic activities.⁵⁷ This was a further factor offsetting the emergence of strong local identities and the formation of collective subjects through which opposition to or engagement with the state might be channelled.⁵⁸ This tended to impede accountability at all levels of government. Over the past two decades, however, the conditions for this rural stability have been slowly eroding owing to a process which has been referred to as 'districtization'.

Districtization

The first aspect of districtization is associated with a 'de-classing' of Tanzania's nationally-oriented elite. Since the 1980s, the state has been in retreat. There have been redundancies in the parastatal sector, the professional wage has sunk to below subsistence levels, and there has been a general informalisation and liberalisation of the economy. According to Gibbon:

As the middle class has ceased to be able to reproduce itself economically through the state, so its members have been obliged to mobilize resources (private and public) from ethnic, sub-ethnic and clan sources. For the middle classes remaining 'at home' this means a closer economic relation to those in the [urban] diaspora, while for those in the diaspora it implies an increased dependence on certain resources from home. The consequence is that the middle class ceases to be reproduced as a socio-economic category on the national plane, but becomes vertically fragmented through a process of 'balkanisation'.⁵⁹

The search for new sources of wealth is manifested in struggles for control of local non-state institutions which have access to comparatively large resources. Such struggles mobilize the support of popular forces and are commonly couched in an ethnic and religious idiom. This was certainly the case with the struggle for the control of the Lutheran Church in Meru. Currently there is an intense competition for control of Cooperative Unions in the Lake

⁵⁴ Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa*.

⁵⁵ Von Freyhold, *Ujamaa Villages*.

⁵⁶ See for example Norman Long, 'Cooperatives in Tanzania', pp. 312-314, in Raymond Apthorpe (ed), *Rural Cooperatives and Planned Change in Africa* (UNRISD, Geneva, 1970); Freyhold, *Ujamaa Villages*, pp. 67-72.

⁵⁷ Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa*; Kjell J. Havnevik, *Tanzania - the limits to development from above* (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1993).

⁵⁸ For the theoretical underpinning of this point, see Kathryn Dean, 'Introduction: politics and the ends of identity', in Kathryn Dean (ed), *Politics and the Ends of Identity* (Avebury, Aldershot, 1997).

⁵⁹ Gibbon, 'Limping', p. 48.

Region.⁶⁰ Instead then of an elite coopted to the secular, modernizing ideology of the centre, we see them increasingly as articulators of an invigorated ethnic identity.

The second noticeable feature of districtization relates to educational provision. Previously, the principal vehicle of elite reproduction in Tanzania was state education; for peasants it was land inheritance. The state's capacity to provide secondary education has been in decline, while in heavily populated areas younger generations can no longer expect to make a living from the land. Ethnic 'trust-funds' - NGOs after a fashion - have emerged to fill the gap and satisfy the increased demand from all classes for private education. The Trusts tend to be dominated by local elites with links to nationally influential kin and in some cases foreign donors. They are sources of money, influence, and politicking. In the Meru case, the Trust was directly involved in the struggle for the Church.⁶¹

The third aspect of districtization relates to multi-party politics. Generally speaking, competition has meant an added incentive for local politicians to build strong bases of popular support. Reports suggest that money played a bigger role in 1995 than in any previous election. More particularly, multi-partyism has brought a constitutional change, the significance of which emerges strongly from this study. Under the one-party state, a substantial minority of MPs gained access to Parliament either on tickets of the mass organizations of the party - Cooperatives, Youth, Women - or as appointees of the President. It was not uncommon for high-ranking politicians to lose local constituency elections but retain their cabinet positions through Presidential appointment. While there are still reserved seats for Women, seats for Presidential appointees and Youth have been abolished. Consequently aspiring national leaders now need a local base: in the case here, and in the alleged role in the Meru religious conflict of a former Minister for Lands, this has led them to become embroiled in local disputes.⁶² Again, the tendency is for a closer linking of the national and local levels, and the increasing salience of local concerns to national policy. Developments continue to favour districtization: in 1997 MPs forced significant changes to the Government's Regional Administration bill, extending the control of District Councils over divisional officers.

Together, these trends imply that one of the absences which has contributed to political stability in Tanzania - that of leaders with strong local followings - is being reversed. It might also be that one of the presences of the political system is disappearing inasmuch as nationally-oriented leaders see political advantage in allowing the structures of repression at a local level to loosen up, at least temporarily. A possible outcome is a greater accountability of the centre to the locality - an increasing amount of purchase between state and society. Equally probable is that Tanzanian politics becomes substantially more turbulent than in the past, and that sectionalism and clientelism - the very features which Governance seeks to eliminate - increase.⁶³ The Government meanwhile appears worried by such trends. Proposals for a

⁶⁰ Gibbon, 'Limping'.

⁶¹ On Trust Funds see Andrew Kiondo, 'When the state withdraws: local development, politics and liberalisation in Tanzania', and Peter Gibbon, 'Merchantisation of production and privatisation of development in post-ujamaa Tanzania', both in P. Gibbon (ed), Liberalized Development in Tanzania (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1995). See also Gibbon, 'Civil Society'; Sally Falk Moore, 'Post-socialist micro-politics: Kilimanjaro 1993', Africa, 66, 4, pp. 587-606; Baroin, 'Religious conflict'; Kelsall, 'Christianity'.

⁶² Kelsall, 'Christianity'.

⁶³ It is also worth noting that another presence - Tanzanians' positive sense of nationhood is already under strain owing to economic liberalisation. See Paul Kaiser, 'Structural Adjustment and the fragile nation: the demise of social unity in Tanzania', The Journal of Modern African Studies, 34, 2 (1996), pp. 222-237. More than this, Baba wa Taifa (Father of the Nation) Julius Nyerere, died last year.

proportional electoral system based on a national list have been mooted, and Parliament recently restored to the President power to appoint ten MPs.