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Contentious Politics, Local Governance and the Self
A Tanzanian Case Study

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Contents

Dramatis Personae	5
Introduction	7
The research process and the field site	8
Background to the District	12
CHAPTER 1	
Contentious Politics and ‘Civil’ Society	15
Land and Freedom in Meru	16
Reformation and Riot in Meru	19
Institutions and Elites	22
Representation and Taxation	23
Explaining Contentious Politics in Arumeru	26
Civility and Incivility	29
Conclusions	31
CHAPTER 2	
Elections and Local Politics	34
Village Democracy	35
Council Democracy	39
Parliamentary Democracy	44
Power, Politicians and Civil Society	49
Conclusions	53
CHAPTER 3	
Thinking About Local Governance: Institutions, Economic Diversification, Identity	56
Institutions, Transparency, and Democracy	57
Democracy, Economic Diversification and Time	60
Diversification and Identity	63
History, Subjectivity, Accountability	66
Conclusions	70
References	73

Dramatis Personae

Jackson Kaaya: CCM Regional Party Chairman, c1970–1990; a confidant of Julius Nyerere; executive committee member of the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church; chair of the Meru Social Development Trust Fund c1990–2000.

Samwel Urasa: a former extension officer; CCM councillor; executive committee member of the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church; Treasurer of the Meru Social Development Trust Fund; chair of Arumeru District Council (2000–).

Kirilo Japhet: former Member of Parliament for Arumeru; executive committee member of Meru Social Development Trust Fund.

Sangito Kaaya: former secretary of the Meru Native Growers' Association; chair of Arusha Region Co-operative Union; chair of Co-operative Union of Tanzania; former executive committee member of Meru Social Development Trust Fund.

Major Ndosì: retired army officer; Dar es Salaam businessman; executive committee member Meru Social Development Trust Fund; unsuccessful parliamentary candidate for CCM in 1995.

Samwel Kisanga: a lecturer in education; Member of Parliament for Arumeru East (NCCR), 1995–2000.

Talala Mbise: Professor of Management and Economics; Member of Parliament for Arumeru East (CCM) 2000–.

Pennel Issangya: a former chairman of Tanzania Breweries Limited; ward councillor for Akeri 2000–.

Yona Nnko: CCM Regional Party Chairman 1990–.

Daniel ole Njoolay: the Arusha Regional Commissioner; a confidante of the President.

Mark Maffa: Arumeru District Commissioner 1995–2000.

Thomas ole Sabaya: a CCM councillor; chair of Arumeru District Council 1984–1998.

Emmanuel Munga: former accountant at Arusha Region Co-operative Union; a born-again Christian; ward councillor for Moshono 1984–.

Abel ole Sirikwa: CCM District Party Chairman c1980–1995.

Elisa Mollel: former director of the National Milling Corporation; Member of Parliament for Arumeru West (CCM) 1995–.

Askofu Mollel: a Tanzanite miner and businessman; ward councillor for Mbuguni (2000–).

Edward Lowassa: Minister for Lands 1990–1995.

Erasto Kweka: Bishop of the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church.

Introduction

The Governance Agenda is the framework that currently organizes the West's relations with Africa. It encompasses measures to liberalise the economy, to democratise the polity, to strengthen civil society and to reform state administration. The present work is an attempt to think about the Governance Agenda in Africa through the lens of a contemporary, local history. The narrative was constructed with the aid of a variety of primary and secondary sources, a clutch of Rapid Rural Appraisal techniques, fieldwork interviews, interviews conducted by a research assistant, and four visits to the field. This was combined with periods of reflection, which made use of a mixed bag of theoretical tools.

The argument of the report is that current approaches to the study of Governance overlook an essential ingredient for its potential success: namely, the sociological conditions in which forms of collective action conducive to improved political accountability become possible at a grassroots level.

The analysis aims to show that economic diversification and multiple livelihoods give rise to a reticular social structure in which individuals find it difficult to combine to hold their leaders to account. Difficulties are compounded by overlaid and sometimes contradictory social identities. This finding sheds new light on problems of democracy at local level, adding a different dimension to earlier approaches, for example those of Göran Hydén (which focused on democracy in the cooperative movement, but with broader implications), Mahmood Mamdani (which seems to be currently influential), and the ongoing efforts to restructure administration organized under Tanzania's Local Government Reform Programme (Hydén 1972; Mamdani 1996).

The study also presents evidence of a new pattern of engagement between local and national elites in Tanzania; a pattern that has potentially important implications for the country's future political stability. In addition, it offers a variety of insights into the nature of civil society, the character of political action, and the usefulness of the concept of social capital in explaining local politics.

The remainder of this introduction sets the scene with a brief, reflexive account of the research problem and the field site (Arumeru District). Chapter One provides an account and an analysis of contentious politics in Arumeru, namely, an historical land conflict, a religious conflict and a tax revolt. Chapter Two describes and analyses institutionalised politics; more precisely, the politics of Akeri village, Arumeru District Council and parliamentary elections for the District's two constituencies. Chapter Three reflects on issues of legality, transparency, leisure, and social identity in making local democracy work.

The research process and the field site

As an aspiring researcher intending to study civil society in rural Tanzania, I was faced, in 1996, with an immediate problem: there hardly seemed to be any. Leafing through the pages of the government's NGO directory, I was hard pressed to find any organisations that looked like plausible contenders for the sort of associational life donors wished to see implanted in Africa. 'Would you call a football club an NGO?' one director of an international NGO asked scornfully, 'Because I wouldn't'. More historically informed commentators might have pointed out that in the era immediately prior to the nationalist struggle, a variety of different organisations, football clubs included, became prototypical bases of political mobilisation. But my informant was right in one respect: the vitality of these civic associations was rapidly co-opted after independence by the state, and it has seldom reasserted itself. What is most interesting about rural Tanzania in the independence period is not its degree of politicization; it is its passivity.¹

Donor efforts to rectify this state of affairs were in their infancy. The Finns were self-consciously employing participatory methodologies in the south. The Danes had a training centre in Arusha that specialised in teaching development workers empowerment approaches. Institutions such as the Catholic and Lutheran churches and World Vision all claimed to be employing similar methodologies. But in 1996, few of the big players had sufficiently robust programmes (World Vision excepted) to welcome a researcher poking his nose around. The more open NGOs, such as Coopibo and Norwegian People's Aid, claimed some successes in their operations, but also admitted to serious problems. I knew from a friend that a potential example of flourishing indigenous civil society – a pastoralist NGO umbrella group – was rapidly becoming a disaster story. My early endeavours to locate civil society in rural Tanzania then, or even civil-society-in-the-making, drew almost a blank.

The same could be said about rural democracy. In 1994, opposition parties won only 4 per cent of the vote nationally, and controlled only one local council. Only 16 rural seats on the mainland went to the opposition in the 1995 general election. Early attempts on my part to make contacts in Bariadi District, home to the opposition council, were disappointing. It was difficult to see where I would be able to observe local multi-party democracy – governance policies, as it were, in action. Fortunately one district in Tanzania stood out as a potentially interesting field site. It had a history of civic action, it had recently been the scene of an intense struggle for

1. This is not to say that there are not grassroots organisations in Tanzania, or that there are not quasi-autonomous democratic institutions; there are. The most famous example, perhaps, is that of the sungusungu self-defence organisations that originated in Shinyanga in the 1980s. But these have rarely opposed the state in its 'hegemonic ambitions' – as opposed to filling in for its absences – nor have they enunciated society's voice to the state in a particularly effective way. In a world in which images of African political disorder predominate, it is worth noting that Tanzania, since independence, has been considerably more stable than most Western European democracies.

the control of the assets of the Lutheran church, it had more registered NGOs than most districts, and it had an opposition Member of Parliament. The district was Arumeru.

Arumeru district, unlike many others in Tanzania, has a long history of political volatility. In 1897, the first missionaries in the area were speared to death by Arusha and Meru tribesmen. In 1952 a land conflict in the district engendered the first ever petition by an African people to the United Nations Trusteeship Council in New York. In the early 1990s Arumeru witnessed an outbreak of religious-inspired violence which involved large-scale destruction of property and some loss of life. At the end of the decade the district rose up on the issue of taxation and local government corruption. Three years later the district council, still embattled, was under investigation by the Prevention of Corruption Bureau. In the opinion of colonial officials it was practically ungovernable, administrators nowadays describe Arumeru as a 'hot' place in which to work, and the careers of central appointees are typically short-lived. 'You will not last six months', one high-placed official, standing at the centre of a recent political maelstrom, was told by colleagues upon taking up the post.

I arrived in the district in August 1996 and stayed until June 1997. I lived, during that time, at Usa River and in Akeri village. It was a period of comparative calm throughout. The violence of the church conflict had been suffocated, the excitement of the election had dissipated; the tax revolt was yet to explode. I was confronted by political immobility. Yet this was not an indication of people's contentment with or approbation of the political system. People grumbled about the poor quality of governance they received, about their perception that they received nothing from the state and about their suspicion that its local leaders were corrupt. My major problem, therefore, was how to explain this conundrum: local people were dissatisfied with the way in which they were governed yet seemed unable or unwilling to do anything about it.

A few theories, familiar to anyone who studies governance issues, immediately suggested themselves. The first was the idea that people were dissatisfied with their leaders, but were unable openly to voice this dissatisfaction since they were in thrall to them. This is the idea that politics was dominated by powerful 'big men' or patrons who could secure the support of a rural clientele by virtue of the favours they could bestow or the benefits they could withhold.¹ That is, a political class amongst whom resources were so concentrated that other classes or groups were in their power – so much so, in fact, that they could govern poorly with virtual impunity. However, this was not the situation I found in Arumeru. Land and water are

1. Amongst the authors who have discussed something of this type with regard to the politics of cooperatives are Goran Hydén and S.E. Migot-Adholla (Migot-Adholla 1975; Hydén 1972). Meanwhile the phenomenon of the 'big man' in Africa has been well described by Bruce Berman (Berman 1998), while a general discussion of clientelism is provided by Powell (Powell 1970).

the major resources in this area, but their control is not sufficiently concentrated as to make the majority dependent on or subservient to an elite. As we shall see, its unequal distribution affords some actors greater social leverage than others, but this does not take the form of village or district big men presiding over vertical networks of clientage; Tanzania is not Latin America.

Another theory popular in the literature was that local people were ill-suited to democracy, it being culturally inappropriate for them. This position relates in part to ideas about 'African' democracy and ideas about a 'communal' self. The basic argument, which has been made in a variety of forms, is that the atomistic, rational, self-maximising self that underpins the classic defences of democracy, be it fact or fable, is a western phenomenon (Ake 1993; Chabal 1998; Parekh 1993; Piot 1999). In Africa, by contrast, people are more disposed to think of themselves as just one stitch in the social fabric; hardly able, in fact, to think of themselves as individuals at all. In such circumstances, institutions such as liberal democracy, which depend ideally on citizens making individual judgements based on rational criteria, and then expressing these judgements via the ballot box, experience problems. Difficulties arise, for instance, when people act not as free-choosing individuals but as social dupes, voting for a candidate because he or she resembles them in some way; the idea that a voter might choose a candidate not because of what they do, but because of what they are (Chabal and Daloz 1999). But my experience in Arumeru, and in Tanzania generally, suggested that most people had a keenly individualistic streak within them, and that they did not vote gladly for fools. Granted, 'identity' issues did influence the vote, but it seemed that the distinction between the 'African' self and the 'European' one had been too sharply drawn.

A further, related, idea is the notion that people in Africa are untutored in democracy, unpractised, culturally naïve. It is for this reason that donors, and quite a few NGOs, believe that NGOs, conscientizers and change agents are needed to build a culture of democracy at local level. The idea is that by involving people in non-governmental organisations, people will become accustomed to discussing, planning, and voting on issues – NGOs would act as 'large free schools of democracy' (Diamond 1994; Hydén 1983, 1997). The presumption, made evident in Tanzania's Nyalali Report, is that people need, 'to be taught the art of disagreeing without recourse to fighting' (Tanzania 1992). Yet this presumption cannot be taken to apply unproblematically to Arumeru. The area appears relatively well-endowed with institutions in which meeting, minute-keeping and vote-taking are the norm. The church, the cooperative society, the clan, the age-group, the district council itself, revolving credit societies, even dance groups and wedding committees – all operate according to democratic or quasi-democratic principles. Granted, they are a long way from ideal-typical liberal democracy, but it is not abundantly clear that their shortcomings are to be explained by the fact that no-one has taught local people how to behave. Indeed in current donor discourse these organisations would be

construed as appropriate vehicles of civil society, and the experience of participating in them a fund of social capital on which local people could draw.

Another potential explanation for acquiescence in misrule is that the population is cowed into submission by the heavy hand of an authoritarian state. This idea appears to inform Mahmood Mamdani's idea that since independence African states have been subject to only a partial democratization; that they have remained, at a local level, despotic. In the Tanzanian case, the key culprits are the District and Regional Commissioners, who are political appointees with overall responsibility for the maintenance of local law and order. They are armed with a range of illiberal powers that allow them to act against dissenters, placing them in preventive detention or rusticing them to other parts of the country. As we shall see, these powers sometimes proved effective in quelling popular protest and, arguably, in deterring free expression. Yet, in my experience, it was not the case that on a day to day level the repressive arm of the state posed a credible threat to democratic politics. People did not routinely fear being imprisoned by the district authorities. And if individuals were sometimes vulnerable to victimization, the state lacked the power to suppress large-scale organized protest. The latter, as we shall see, was largely dealt with by way of a politics of compromise.

If none of the above explanations for political passivity seemed really to fit, a claim that I shall enlarge upon in the following chapters, I needed some other explanation. The situation, admittedly, was a perplexing one. Why were these people, who had arguably outstripped all other Tanganyikans in their contribution to the nationalist movement, now so supine? It was a question to which I was unable to find a satisfactory answer whilst in the field. However, upon returning home I began to engage with a body of theory that laid bare the micro and macro-sociological conditions in which the 'ideal-typical' liberal citizen was fabricated. More or less explicit in this work was a theory about the way in which certain sorts of selves with certain sorts of tastes, beliefs, capacities and desires were constructed in certain sorts of social relations (Dean 1997, 1998; Habermas 1992). Turning to Arumeru, I could see that some of the relations were there, whilst others were not. Having come to the conclusion that local people in Tanzania did not fit the ideal model of the liberal citizen (scarcely earth-shattering since they hardly fitted it anywhere), I turned my attention to trying to build, from the materials I had to hand, a picture of what people in Arumeru were actually like, and the probable implications for politics.

Historical events, however, conspired to unsettle this absorbing project: the state of passivity in Arumeru was rudely ruptured in 1998 by a revolt over the issue of taxation. Back in the UK, I wondered whether my theorising was misplaced; whether I had simply read the situation wrongly. Fortunately for the project, if rather less fortunately for local people, further analysis of the revolt suggested that the forms of political action it incorporated evidenced severe limitations in achieving intended objectives. An analysis of the social relations in which local people

were fashioned, I shall try to show, helps to explain some of those limitations, and indeed the problems that might be expected in any future forms of popular action. Donors currently explain such shortcomings by reference to phenomena such as ‘poor transparency’ or ‘inadequate institutional capacity’. Following Ferguson, we can say that such explanations are useful to donors since they provide a point at which development agencies can plug themselves into local government, armed with programmes to ‘build capacity’ and to devise arrangements that ‘improve transparency’ (Ferguson 1990). In this way they are seen to be doing something useful.¹ Lest I be misunderstood, I am not saying that transparency and institutional capacity are of no import; on the contrary, they are very significant. But they do not tell the whole story of why people in Arumeru experience difficulties in holding their leaders to account. Nor do they provide a sort of ‘magic bullet’ to solve the problem, such as it is construed, of local democracy. The story that I shall tell points instead to the existence of what I call a ‘contradictorily constituted subjectivity’ in the district, a state of selfhood whose recognition is a crucial ingredient, I shall suggest, in any encompassing explanation of political dynamics.

Background to the District

Before embarking on a long and hopefully illuminating theoretical excursus – the moral of this story, as it were – it is necessary to set our scene. Mount Meru, the summit of which rises to 14,000 feet above sea level is a dormant volcano whose verdant slopes dominate the topography of Arumeru District. Its temperate climate and rich volcanic soils, irrigated by innumerable streams and rivers, support maize, beans, bananas, pyrethrum, legumes, and most importantly, coffee; all of which thrive in the different microclimates of the mountain. The mountain slopes level out onto a semi-arid plain: the beginning of the Maasai steppe, which forms the southern portion of the District. The plain supports livestock, maize, beans, finger millet, sunflower and mango, and, where there is water for irrigation, legumes and flowers are grown (often on foreign-owned estates). There are some disused sisal estates, and even an ostrich farm.

The District is home to a population of around 400,000. Arumeru encircles Arusha municipality, a burgeoning, ethnically mixed urban centre that has its own local government. This makes the mountain villages peri-urban areas, with a ‘rurban’ population density. Arusha town, located exactly mid-way between Cape Town and Cairo, was a centre of colonial administration and later, after independence, the site of small experiments in import-substitution-industrialisation, such as in textiles and rubber tyres. While the latter industries hobble on, the engines of the Arusha economy are nowadays to be found in the safari industry, gemstone dealing, and

1. In much the same way as analyses such as Ferguson’s, and hopefully the current one, are useful to the academia!

diplomacy. Arusha is the communications hub from where foreign tourists depart for Serengeti and the Ngorongoro Crater, it is a conduit for the lucrative trade in the precious stone Tanzanite, and it is home to the Headquarters of the East African Cooperation, as well as the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda. Bill Clinton recently applied to it the sobriquet, 'Geneva of Africa'. Villages in Arumeru supply milk, bananas, maize and vegetables to Arusha and further afield (Larsson 2001).

In the south of the District lies Mbuguni-Mererani mining area, where semi-precious gem-stones are found. Mererani is the only place in the world where Tanzanite, a purple-bluish precious stone is mined. The site is divided up between thousands of small artisanal miners and a transnational corporation, AFGEM. The mine supports a town estimated at 50,000 people: it has churches, mosques, bars, video shops, a local Kiswahili newspaper, and a reputation for lawlessness. Its population feeds on the agricultural output of Arumeru's villages. In addition, many young Arusha and Meru men journey to Mererani to seek their fortunes, and a few of them succeed. The most lucrative small mines are owned by local people, and their wealth, as we shall see, has made them a force to be reckoned with in local politics.

The growth of Arusha town and Mererani mining area has opened markets that have provided powerful incentives to the restructuring of Arumeru's economy. Coffee, once the District's economic lifeblood, has been in long term decline, and farmers have diversified the crops they grow in response, as well as expanding their production of dairy products. As we shall see in a later chapter, the political effects of these changes in social relations are significant. Alongside the secular decline in coffee, population growth is the major structural change pressing upon the District. Urban growth, employment and trade have served to relieve some of this pressure, though it is still arguably of crisis proportions. Land-use intensification, zero-grazing, economic diversification and increased aspirations, tend to mean that people in Arumeru work long hours. Rich and poor both give the impression of being pushed for time.

Ethnically, Arumeru District is mixed. Arusha, a Maa-speaking agricultural people are the largest group and dominate the Western part of the District. In the 19th century they migrated to the mountain and pushed the second largest group, the Meru onto its Eastern slopes. Meru, who today number some 150,000 and speak a dialect of Chagga, probably migrated from Kilimanjaro around the seventeenth century (Gulliver 1963; Spear 1997). Contemporary Chagga people from Kilimanjaro Region have settled in some of the villages and small roadside towns, while villages situated on former estates tend to be multiethnic, their original workforce being drawn from across Tanzania. Arusha and Meru relations to this day are characterised by occasional rivalry, distrust and jealousy. This relates to their turbulent ethno-genesis, when each defined themselves, at least in part, in opposition to an alien Other. Given these origins, it is perhaps surprising how mild relations actually are.

Two explanations suggest themselves: the first relates to the fact that each has assimilated traditions of the other, the second to the policies of national integration associated with the late President Julius Nyerere.

The picture of Arumeru District that I will paint in forthcoming chapters, is of a piece with an African studies literature organized around the increasingly popular trope of hybridity. A variety of authors have pointed to the syncretic, hybrid nature of African culture, African lives, African selves (Geschiere and Gugler 1998; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Hannerz 1997; Barber 1997; Piot 1999). As Thomas Spear has argued persuasively, the encounter of Arusha and Meru with colonial institutions, led to an overlaying of identities, as different cultural forms sedimented, one on top of the other (Spear 1997). The post-colonial encounter, I shall argue, has only served to amplify this process. The hybridity of Arusha and Meru subjects will be a key refrain of the next chapter, when we turn to the themes of contentious politics, social movements and civil society at a local level. Chapter Two, by contrast, will focus on institutionalised politics. In Chapter Three, aspects of Meru history will be presented in order to explain this hybridity, and its corresponding forms of expression in political action.

CHAPTER 1

Contentious Politics and 'Civil' Society

According to Jeff Haynes, the developing world has recently witnessed an organisational explosion fuelled by escalating demands 'from below' (Haynes 1997:5). This escalation is constitutively associated with Democracy's Third Wave, a progressive political liberalisation which, according to Samuel Huntington, has swept the globe since the mid-1970s. Haynes terms the diverse organizational phenomena responsible for these demands, 'action groups'. Action groups are, 'characterized by a desire to achieve goals through their own activities and deeds', in which, 'members see themselves as part of a *group* because they are related in some palpable way – by poverty, gender, religious beliefs, ethnicity or whatever', and which often, 'consciously link their personal struggles to the creation of a more democratic and just society' (Haynes 1997:4–5).

The aim of this chapter is to describe three historical periods in Arumeru District, which were witness to 'escalating demands from below' and which were characterised by an atypically contentious form of politics. The vehicles of protest in each case, it will be argued, conform to the above definition of 'action groups'. What is less clear, I shall argue, is that these groups could or can be construed as, 'Constituent elements in emerging civil societies', which are 'contributing to the slow emergence of the democratic process by strengthening and enlarging civil society' (Haynes 1997:15). The teleological simplicity of this prediction, I shall argue, requires significant qualification.

I make this claim because the historical story I am about to unfurl is a distinctly paradoxical one. It narrates the tale of an African people that in the late stages of colonial rule evinced an unusual degree of political consciousness. A people, or tribe, that united in the face of colonial occupation to demand in an international forum the restitution of their rights to land. The eviction of Meru people from Engare Nanyuki, a process that gave rise to the Meru Land Case, is acknowledged to be one of the pivotal points in Tanzanian colonial history; one of the events that ignited the nationalist movement. In the words of Kirilo Japhet, who took the case of the Meru to the United Nations in New York, 'The eviction woke our people up to the indignity of being ruled by foreigners. Now we nationalists are going to wake up all Tanganyika' (Nelson 1967:73).

Commentators of the time expected that Meru would be in the forefront of the modernising endeavour to build a new nation. True to this prediction, along economic and social indices, Meru is one of the most developed, most 'modern' areas

of Tanzania. Yet it is also true that politically it is one of the most troublesome. To give an example, in the early 1990s, it erupted in a violent religious conflict, stigmatised by many participants as an atavistic attempt to return to pre-modern 'tradition' (Baroin 1996). If the Land Case spurred Tanganyika to independence, the religious conflict looks like a familiar case of African self-government gone wrong. In contrast to the Land Case, in which civic mobilisation suggested commitment to a democratic culture, the consequences of the religious struggle, and its methods of solving political disagreement, are not auspicious indicators of democracy. But the case, as I hope to show, is more ambivalent than that.

A similarly equivocal case is provided by a revolt over taxation in the west of the District in 1998. At first glance a popular triumph in harmony with the aspirations of good governance, a closer inspection reveals the revolt to have been heavily conditioned by elite interests. In point of fact, the Meru religious conflict also embodied popular and elite dimensions, with ordinary people often manipulated and misguided by the ambitions of elites. In sum, the case studies point to the achievements, but more clearly to the limitations of popular collective action; they point to the plural, hybrid character of politics; and they point to the faltering democratic credentials of so-called civil society organisations. They provide pointers to the magnitude of the task facing those who wish to build a substantive form of democracy in rural Africa.

The cases also open a remarkable window onto the conduct of politics in Tanzania. They point to the importance of the church in the fabric of everyday life and to the interpenetration of state and non-state institutions at a local level. They provide an insight into the way in which political stability is effected at local level, and they give indications of the way in which the conditions for this achievement are gradually beginning to unravel. While, in the post-independence period, national and local politics often gave the appearance of being disconnected, like an idling automobile engine and its wheels, a new dynamism is being injected into this situation, by an elite class that is gearing national and local levels towards a state of engagement.¹

Land and Freedom in Meru

The Meru Land Case was a protest by Meru people, living in the Eastern part of what is now Arumeru District, against the allocation of their land to Europeans for development purposes. It can be read both as an assertion of ethnic entitlements to ancestral resources, and as a challenge to the unaccountability of the colonial developmental state. It was the culmination of fifty years of encroachment by settlers on Meru land. From the beginning of this century, Europeans have been attracted to the rich soils, arresting scenery and temperate climate of Mount Meru. In the early

1. I owe this image to Christopher Clapham, who in homage to J.F. Bayart, used it in a different context to refer to the relation between domestic African politics and international forces.

years of the German administration they came to Meru to farm, settling a band of fertile land around the lower slopes of the mountain. Thus ensued a process of competition and collision between European immigrants and Africans that exists in attenuated form to this day (Japhet and Seaton 1967; Kelsall 2000; Spear 1997).

In order to turn a profit whites needed Africans to work their farms for them, for very little remuneration. This was a job that most Arusha and Meru were understandably reluctant to do. Work, in the Arusha and Meru worldview, activated and actualised a complex set of personal and ethical relations which have been termed by Spear a 'moral economy'. The performance of alienated labour for a wage was offensive to them. In the early years of the century, local people had to be forced into work for settlers through *corvée* or other modes of prestation. In face of this reluctance, Europeans began to prefer migrant labour from drier, more remote districts such as Singida. Arusha and Meru preferred to grow their own coffee, to which they had been introduced by Christian missionaries, and to sell surplus produce to workers on settler farms (Spear 1997).

In time, colonial occupation caused the closing of the land frontier on Meru. Alienation of land to settlers, together with alienations for the expansion of Arusha town, created an 'iron ring' of land around the base of the mountain. At higher altitudes, the colonial government mandated the creation of a 'forest reserve'. The natural expansion of the two tribes was in this way checked. Previously, young men would leave the homesteads of their fathers and strike out onto virgin land either up or down slope. With this prohibited, Arusha and Meru were squashed into a band of land around the middle of the mountain. They were penned in. Population growth, without a vent for expansion, posed an acute threat to social harmony. The Meru solution was to cultivate their homesteads more intensively, and to graze cattle on the plain south of the settler farms. However, the continual trafficking of herds across settler land, and the use of European water sources, repeatedly brought Africans into conflict with settlers. Their relations were characterised by a seething animosity (Spear 1997).

Land famine in Meru was exacerbated after World War II. During a period that Linseed and Barmen have referred to as 'the second colonial occupation', the colonial office sought means of rapidly expanding production in the colonies to the end of boosting the economy of the metropole. One site thought fit for development was Meru. Specifically, an area of land on the North Eastern slopes of the mountain, known to local people as Engare Nanyuki, was singled out as suitable for modernized, European cattle ranching. The area was currently farmed by a number of Meru families, as well as being used by others for grazing their own surplus herds and for gathering salt. On 17 November 1951, the inhabitants of Engare Nanyuki were forcibly evicted and deposited in the lowlands of the parish. Their homes and the local church were razed. This violent action gave rise to a narrowly defeated petition

at the United Nations in New York (Japhet and Seaton 1967; Nelson 1967; Spear 1997).

Prior to this eviction and in its aftermath, the Meru had staged a concerted protest against the scheme. They had written letters to the District Commissioner, to the Legislative Council, and they had aired complaints at *barazas*. They made depositions to the United Nations Trusteeship Council Visiting Mission. A record was made of all property at Engare Nanyuki. Earl Seaton, a West Indian lawyer resident in Moshi was employed to represent the Meru. Following the evictions, a campaign was launched to raise money to send Kirilo Japhet and Earl Seaton to New York to protest the action.

The petition, which had massive popular support, was organized by a Committee of the Meru Citizens' Union under the leadership of one Rafael Mbise. The MCU was founded by a group of prosperous, 'progressive' farmers. Among them were the first converts to Christianity in Meru, who were the first people to receive a western style of education. These men were also the first coffee farmers and founders of the Arusha and Meru Native Coffee Planters' Association, later to become the Meru Growers' Cooperative. They were simultaneously a class of petty accumulators, buying up the land of their poorer neighbours and relatives, and traditional patriarchs, providing succour to less fortunate members of the clan (Spear 1997). As we shall see, the offspring of this elite are still among the most influential actors in Meru today.

The Land Case was instrumental in unleashing a surge of creative energy in Meru at a time when the international price of coffee soared, coffee planting multiplied, contributions in cash and in labour to the MCU and the tribal council flowed in, and Meru witnessed the building of roads, bridges and secondary schools, as well as the sending of some of its brightest sons to universities in America. The land annexed at Engare Nanyuki was bought back from the Government with MCU funds (Nelson 1967).

The Land Case, however, was not an unqualified success. The petition itself was defeated and the land at Engare Nanyuki remained, initially, in the hands of the administration. Kirilo Japhet remained in America to study, and when he returned he was accused by some of embezzling Citizens' Union donations. Curiously the farms that made up the iron ring of settler land at the base of the mountain, the source of such bitterness, were among the only farms not nationalised and returned to the people following the Arusha Declaration (Spear 1997). Land and its shortage continue to be a cause of political tension to this day. The Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Land Issues ('The Shivji Report'), for instance, states that as of 1992, twelve under-used farms were earmarked by the District leadership for redistribution to smallholders, but in most cases problems over compensation, the desire of absent owners to return, or else the surreptitious reallocation of farms to powerful

individuals or foreign companies have prevented this.¹ Some of the land is now squatted on, and attempts to clear squatters have provoked increased conflict. In general land redistribution has lacked transparency and been fraught with legal confusion and irregularities.²

In the late colonial period, the most influential members of the Meru elite straddled a constellation of development institutions. Together they constituted what we might call a civil society: the Citizens' Union (later dissolved into TANU), the Native Authority (later merged and reconstituted as the Arumeru District Council), the Meru Growers' Cooperative (later merged into the Arusha Regional Cooperative Union – ARCU) and the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church. Prominent among such men was Sangito Luka Kaaya – son of Luka Kaaya, Meru's first evangelist – church elder, first secretary and first African manager of the Meru Growers' Cooperative, later to sit *ex officio* as Cooperative Union of Tanzania representative on the NEC of TANU. Another one was Jackson Kaaya: schoolteacher, coffee farmer, church elder and first Meru chairman of the Arumeru District Council; later to become a confidant of Julius Nyerere and Regional Chairman of CCM.

These men met on a church committee in the 1960s and early 1970s and used their influence and their organisations for social development. In particular, they used the power of local government to organize a cess on the Cooperative's coffee crop, which they used to build schools and a hospital for the church. Also involved in this committee were Kirilo Japhet, who won the parliamentary seat for Arusha rural in Tanzania's first single party election, and Samwel Urasa, an employee of ARCU, who was later to be in charge of the distribution of farm inputs for the whole of Arumeru, a position which brought him into contact with an extensive network of local farmers and political leaders. As we shall see in the next section, this committee, reconstituted as an NGO, was later to play a key role in one of Tanzania's most violent post-colonial conflicts.

Reformation and Riot in Meru

By the early 1990s, the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church had, arguably, become the most important developmental actor in Meru. Raising money from parishioners and also, internationally, from the Lutheran Coordination Service, its development wing presided over a hospital, a technical college, a vocational training centre for the disabled, an orphanage, water projects, an improved dairy cows

1. Land which has been returned recently are Farms No. 4 and 8, Oljoro, to Oljoro village, and part of farm No. 190/91/92, for urban expansion at Ngaramtoni urban area. (Lands Office, Arumeru District Council.) 16 portions of farms were currently under consideration for reallocation; (DC.) One farm – Valeska – was apparently promised to villagers but was then divided up among the former District Commissioner, Member of Parliament, District Executive Director and some Arumeru councillors; (United Republic of Tanzania (1994), Volume Two, 10.)

2. URT (1992).

project, a fish ponds project, and a 60 acre farm. It owned tractors, motorbikes and other vehicles. It was a lucrative source of employment. At parish level its churches owned buildings, land and coffee plantations. Its local groups were involved in carpentry, tailoring, dairying, and small shops and hotels. The ELCT also owned the Makumira Theological College complex in Arumeru, an institution which has subsequently acquired university status. In the conflict I am about to narrate, the assets of the church became the spoils of 'war'.¹

The conflict, or war, can be traced to the existence of religious schisms in Meru that date from the initial intrusion of Christianity. The first missionaries in the area were killed, and the first Christian converts shunned and stigmatised as 'dogs' and 'already dead'. As these people prospered through coffee and began to proselytise, however, the Church began to grow in popularity (Spear 1997). By the time of independence, around half of all Meru had been baptised within the Lutheran Church. By and large Christian converts were wealthier and better educated than their non-Christian kinsmen. Puritt reports that they stigmatised their animist neighbours as poor, ignorant and lazy (Puritt 1970). By the 1990s, almost 100 per cent of Meru had been welcomed into the Christian fold.

As acceptance of Christianity grew, the old division between believer and non-believer began to be reinscribed within the Christian community itself. In 1969 Pentecostal and Baptist churches entered the area. Their followers were much disposed to speaking in tongues, witnessing to Christ and excoriating their fellow Meru for drinking alcohol, taking multiple wives and drinking the blood of animals. The new believers were not universally popular and even suffered occasional physical assault. Nevertheless, their message resonated with some, and in 1978 there began a revival movement internal to the Lutheran Church itself. Its followers renounced alcohol and polygamy and proclaimed themselves 'saved' or 'born again in Christ'. They were critical and disdainful of Lutherans who persisted with these practices, regarding them as hangovers from a pagan past (Nnko 1980). Such people became increasingly influential within the Meru Diocese of the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church. Part of this was attributable to the power of Erasto Kweka, the local Bishop.

Bishop Erasto Kweka, leader of the Lutheran Church's Northern Diocese, offended many Meru in two ways. To begin with, he was himself 'saved' and was vocal in denouncing the use of alcohol, the practice of polygamy, and other traditional practices. His attempt to purify the Church went against the grain of previous evangelism, which, since the time of Bruno Gutmann, had steered it in a more tolerant, syncretic direction (Fiedler 1996). In particular, the crusade against alcohol was an affront to an institution – the drinking of banana beer, often accompanied by the eating of copious quantities of meat – that lay at the heart of male Meru being. Meru

1. Local people sometimes use the term war (*vita*) to refer to the conflict.

found it discomfiting to be told that they would burn in hell for practising one of their more enjoyable rituals. Secondly, Bishop Kweka was a Chagga from Kilimanjaro Region. The Meru have a long history of rivalry with the Chagga, which dates from the time that the Germans employed Chagga warriors to punish Meru for murdering Lutheran missionaries in the nineteenth century. The Chagga have always been slightly more prosperous and politically more successful than the Meru: another source of envy. In particular, the Northern Diocese was dominated by Chagga. Chagga clergy ministered to Meru, and it was believed that Meru contributions funded church projects in Kilimanjaro, while Chagga children were favoured in scholarship competitions. Chagga, it was said, were allowed by their pastors to drink beer. Meru felt that they, 'were being treated like Chagga children'. Bishop Kweka, for many Meru, became an icon of ethnic arrogance and religious intolerance.

In the early 1990s, these tensions tore through society, issuing in a movement to secede from the Northern Diocese. What most people remember about the conflict is violence. The community was sundered: into a camp of rebels supporting secession, and a camp of loyalists who wished to stay put. In the course of the conflict pastors were turned out of their churches and loyalist congregations were stoned. Houses were burned, crops and livestock destroyed. The hospital and theological college were occupied by secessionists. Loyalists organized attacks out of the Vocational Training Centre in Usa River, which became a kind of barracks. In one of the largest confrontations of the conflict, rebels fought pitched battles with the army and Field Force Unit, attempting to block the investiture of a new Bishop. By the time the Meru religious conflict had been quelled, around Tshs70 million of property had been destroyed, over six hundred people had been imprisoned, and at least seven people were dead (Baroin 1996). The conflict inflicted wounds that have yet to heal.

The sociology of the confrontations is a complex one. The battle-lines did not appear to trace any consistent sociological demarcation (though no systematic research has been conducted on this). Perhaps one of the most striking observations to be made is that the conflict frequently turned neighbour against neighbour and often divided entire families. The most likely explanation is that the struggle gave form to an inchoate bitterness that festered below the surface of Meru community: a result of land crisis. There is hardly a family on the mountain that has not been involved at some time in a boundary or inheritance dispute. Sons fight fathers for land, brothers quarrel amongst themselves, brothers fight over the claims of sisters (Larsson 2001). It is useful at this stage to recall Spear's remark, anticipating the sort of social anxiety occasioned by the impending closure of the land frontier:

If sufficient access to *kibamba/engisaka* were not available "to meet the needs of future generations", sons would fight fathers, brothers and age-mates would fall out among themselves,

and wives would leave their husbands. Individuals would starve and the social order would disintegrate (Spear 1997:192).

Institutions and Elites

If the religious war was conditioned by long-term structural and cultural pressures that impinged upon the mass of the population, and if it was a struggle in which virtually all were implicated, it would nevertheless be a mistake to see it as a spontaneous movement. The secession was triggered and led by three members of the Meru political elite: Jackson Kaaya, former CCM Regional Chairman, Samwel Urasa, MESODET Treasurer (see below), and Kirilo Japhet, former nationalist hero and Member of Parliament. Both Jackson and Urasa bore a personal grudge against the Northern Diocese. They had formerly been members of its District Executive Committee, but had been warned and subsequently removed for unbecoming behaviour. (Jackson's son's wedding, at which Urasa was Master of Ceremonies, had witnessed the consumption of large quantities of alcohol and meat.) Days after their dismissal, on October 29 1991, Jackson, Urasa and Kirilo convened a meeting at Makumira and declared their intention to register a new 'Mount Meru' Diocese of the Lutheran Church in Tanzania, effective from January 1st. The announcement was met with rejoicing.

The struggle for the Church was financed and organized out of a prominent local Non-Governmental Organisation. In the 1990s the informal church committee composed of local notables, mentioned above, was re-born (or re-labelled) as an NGO. In this guise it came to play a key role in the most destructive period of Meru's post-war history. In the late 1970s the committee lay dormant. The abolition of Cooperative Unions had removed an important source of funding from local hands. However, with the restoration of Cooperatives in the 1980s, the committee reconstituted itself, and began to plan again for development in Meru. In 1989, the committee registered itself as a tribal trust fund, or NGO: The Meru Social Development and Education Trust (MESODET). Its committee sounded like a roll call of the great and the good in Meru. Its stated aim was to advance social development in Meru and it began to raise money to this end.

The registration of MESODET spoke to a pressing popular demand for secondary education. The land crisis in Meru, together with population growth, meant that even when using ingeniously intensive farming methods, most Meru could not pass on economic parcels of land to their sons. Increasingly, education was regarded as the best means of investing in their future. In a context of economic crisis and Structural Adjustment, state funding for education was nugatory. Private initiatives, which had always been of some importance in the area, acquired a new urgency. The intention of MESODET was to reach out with Meru and tap sources of non-state funds in the national and international diaspora, in addition to attracting potential donors from abroad. It continued to maintain close links with the Lutheran Church.

But in the course of the religious conflict, MESODET became a rostrum from which members of the Meru elite could orchestrate rebellion. To give an example, it was at an ostensible MESODET meeting that the decision to secede from the church was announced. MESODET enjoyed the support of clan elders, and in this way it was able to link its struggle for religious self-determination with an icon of Meru authority and tradition. But most importantly it has been alleged that MESODET resources were improperly put at the disposal of rebels. In April 1993 Jackson, Kirilo and Urasa were arrested on suspicion of embezzling Tshs 12 million (Baroin 1996). As we shall see, the association of MESODET with religious struggle, later came to contaminate development efforts in Meru. Shortly after this, the Meru rebellion was crushed. Local people gave up their dream of having their own Mount Meru Diocese, and formed instead the African Mission Evangelical Church, or AMEC.

Representation and Taxation

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.¹

True to its reputation for political volatility, Arumeru again exploded into action in the first half of 1998. In what was arguably the most significant example of rural political mobilisation since independence, Arusha citizens from the West of the District refused to pay Development Levy, beat up council tax collectors, torched the Council Chairman's house and marched in their thousands on the Regional Headquarters. The dispute lasted several months and spread, in a copycat fashion, to other Districts. A situation of normalcy was restored only after the intervention of the Prime Minister. Subsequently, President Mkapa visited the District and promised to accelerate the process of land reform in the area.²

The revolt over taxation came at a time of acute economic hardship in Arumeru District. It condensed a set of grievances over land shortage, Structural Adjustment-inspired cost-sharing policies, and corrupt, inefficient, heavy-handed, unaccountable local government, into a single-issue movement to stop the increase in development levy. It occurred shortly after one of the worst droughts in living memory, short rains having failed in 1997 with long rains late and insufficient. Even though irrigation on the mountain ameliorated the effects, it was necessary to distribute

1. Interview conducted by research assistant.

2. *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), 14 December 1998.

famine relief in the lowlands and even in villages that straddled the Arusha-Moshi road. Coffee shrivelled and weakened banana stands were blown over in the wind. Exacerbating the situation, the drought gave way to torrential rain and plagues of vermin, a result of the El Niño effect. Weakened by hunger, the health of the most vulnerable began to fail. The sick were faced with having to pay user charges for health care, at a time when income was short because of crop failure. Some people were also being prevented from growing crops by a council-run conservation scheme, enforced with the muscle of the District Commissioner.

At the same time as Arumeru's citizenry was suffering virtually unprecedented hardships, the Council itself was indulging in comparatively lavish expenditures. It was well known for instance that all the councillors (bar the NCCR-*Magenzi*¹ Member of Parliament), and the top officers, had ordered themselves expensive green or blue suits. The Council chair, Thomas ole Sabaya, had held a circumcision ceremony for his sons which was said to have been one of the most sumptuous anyone could remember. The Council had been criticized for purchasing two luxury Toyota Prados at a cost of more than Tshs 100 million. These excesses were quite widely known. Other people were also aware that council officers had mobile phones, that councillors awarded themselves large allowances, and indulged themselves in a variety of other perquisites of office.

The Council was also under scrutiny because of issues relating to land. A number of underused estates and Government-owned land holdings in the District were earmarked for redistribution. However, in all the cases, the council machinery moved at a glacial pace. In one instance, involving abandoned estate land at Ngaramtoni designated for redistribution as building plots, there were strong suspicions of corruption. In 1995, the land was promised to the inhabitants (*wananchi*),² but in 1997 it emerged that plot redistribution had been biased. The Chairman, together with the Member of Parliament for Arumeru West had allegedly allocated large numbers of plots to themselves. 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 Member of Parliament were called 'thieves' and 'hungry dogs'. The Regional Commissioner agreed to initiate a probe into the matter. In February 1998, its report had yet to be made public, and the delay was a source of discontent. The dissatisfaction built upon a general feeling that the council did little constructive with the resources that flowed into it. Notwithstanding the fact that the number of secondary schools in the District had increased dramatically in recent years, people believed that councillors simply 'ate' council money. It was

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

2. '*Wananchi*' is commonly used to refer to the 'popular classes'.

against this unpropitious background of acute economic hardship, chronic land-shortage and long-standing discontent with local government that the Council decided, without public consultation, to increase development levy by 150 per cent – from Tshs 2,000 to Tshs 5,000.

The tax increase acted as stimulus to a wave of popular collective action in the West of the District, such as had not been seen since independence. The epicentre of the action was Kimunyak Ward. Kimunyak contained Ngaramtoni, the site of the divided estate land subject to suspicion of corruption, a place where anti-council sentiments were running particularly high. Over the next five months a number of mass meetings and demonstrations issued out of this area, a sequence of events that ended with the resignation of the Council chair. The first meeting took place in January 1998. On this occasion a 'People's Committee' of forty members was elected. Then in March, 3,000 people confronted the District Commissioner in a mass meeting at Emahoi in Kimunyak. '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', the chair of the People's Committee told the DC.¹ A subsequent meeting, at which 10,000 people were present, was broken up by riot police, with four arrests. This led to a march by as many as 15,000 people on the Regional Office, demanding the prisoners' release. In June the state of unrest in the District led to a visit by the Prime Minister, who was met by an angry crowd: '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', he was told by the Committee chair.² Protestors demanded the resignation of the entire council. After another mass meeting in the East of Arumeru, the Prime Minister persuaded councillors to remove the Council chair. Later, after the intervention of the Tanzania Association of Local Government, they changed their minds. Eventually, on July 28, the chair proffered his resignation following a series of visits by CCM dignitaries. He was replaced by the ward councillor for Nkoaranga: one Samwel Urasa, of MESODET fame.

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.

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

1. *Arusha Times*, March 16–31, 1998. TPRI refers to Tropical Pesticides Research Institute, a government parastatal.

2. *Majira* (Dar es Salaam), 7 June, 1998.

centers on a set of personal and political animosities between the Council Chairman and a former CCM District Party Chairman in Arumeru District, Abel ole Sirikwa. Both are ethnic Arusha and hail from adjacent areas; the latter from Kimunyak Ward. Informants allege that their quarrel was a long-standing one encompassing women, political positions, and land. In particular, Sirikwa is alleged to have been aggrieved at not being allotted a plot at Ngaramtoni, and was subsequently instrumental in igniting popular grievances. According to his opponents, he orchestrated popular violence by both funding and organising Arusha youth.

The other key players were the Council Chairman himself – Thomas ole Sabaya – and the Arusha Regional Commissioner. The former was regarded as a kingmaker in Arumeru West. His support was thought crucial to winning political office in the District. Here, in the view of the faction loyal to the Chairman, and indeed some more disinterested observers, the role of the Arusha Regional Commissioner, another native Arusha, comes into focus. The Commissioner, according to these informants, was close to Prime Minister Frederick Sumaye, and to President Benjamin Mkapa (he was editor of the party newspaper *Uhuru* when Mkapa was Minister for Communications). He was tipped to gain a Cabinet position. However, in 1998, under Tanzania's multi-party constitution, only constituency MPs could 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 occasion to act.

Explaining Contentious Politics in Arumeru

Two observations can be made about the origins, course and consequences of these accounts of local political struggle. To begin with, it seems clear that popular grievances, which were genuine enough, were to a significant degree steered and manipulated by political elites. Following on from this observation, we might say that popular grievance was only allowed its full expression in the context of internal elite disagreement. This observation is in accord with the wider historical-sociological

literature on social movements and on democratization.¹ The timing of the conflicts can be explained, among other things, by the changing field of opportunities and constraints confronting local actors (Tarrow 1998). The religious conflict, for instance, was only able to develop to the extent that it did because of a split between church and state, and because of a split within the state. As one informant said to me, 'In Nyerere's day he would have just picked off the ringleaders, placed them in detention, and that would have been the end of it'. However, in 1991, with President Mwinyi in power, things were different. What happened in Meru was that a group of political leaders, associated with a retired faction of CCM, attempted to seize control of the church. Previously church and state had intertwined relatively harmoniously in the area. This was because key individuals straddled both institutions, and because the centre did not seriously interfere (compare Samoff, 1974). However, with the rise in Meru of Christian fundamentalism, this relationship became strained. When it reached breaking point, the CCM enlisted support at the centre to start a new diocese, sidelining revivalism's 'troublesome priests'. What the CCM group did not plan for was resolute resistance from the established church. The Northern Diocese stood up to the political old guard, and mobilised legal and practical support in its own defence. Both the CCM and the Church sent high level delegations to the area in an attempt to persuade the two groups to come to a compromise, but none was forthcoming. Meanwhile, as the President wavered, the conflict escalated. However, it is likely that the Church would have lost the struggle, had it not been for the emergence of a split, and then a shift, within the state. President Mwinyi, it is alleged, lost faith in the ability of Prime Minister John Malecela to manage the situation, and entrusted it instead to Home Affairs Minister Augustine Mrema. Mrema, who is a kinsman of Bishop Kweka, used the full force of the state to squash the rebellion.

Splits may also be the cause of escalation in the case of the tax revolt. There was clearly a fracturing of the elite insofar as the Party Boss wished to unseat the Council chair. Then there was a further split which involved the Regional Commissioner changing sides in the dispute. There may also have been a split at the level of the central state. The Chairman is rumoured to have political friends in high places, perhaps with CCM Deputy Chairman John Malecela. It is conceivable that such figures could have been more swiftly disciplined were it not for the support of influential

1. 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).

patrons at the centre. Meanwhile, a number of attempts were made to mediate. A CCM Commission was appointed to look into the causes of the dispute, and subsequently the regional Commissioner appointed his own commission. The Prime Minister visited the District in an attempt to calm troubled waters. Then, when the Council Chairman refused to resign, more delegations were sent to try and persuade him to go. Finally, the Chairman was offered 'something equivalent in Government' to encourage him to step down. He is now District Commissioner for Serengeti. The Regional Commissioner wanted the Chairman out; other people in CCM were concerned to protect him. A space opened and mass demonstrations rushed in.

Let us turn now to the question of local and national links. I have argued that in the past, high-level leaders in Tanzania have lacked strong local bases (Kelsall 2000). Jackson Kaaya is a good example: although rising to the position of Regional Party Chairman, he was not an especially popular figure in Meru. He had failed on previous occasions to be nominated as a Member of Parliament, he had attempted at one time to market his coffee outside of Cooperative channels, had presided over the dissolution of the District Council, and had a general reputation for selfishness. His power lay in his proximity to Julius Nyerere. He was a local figure, but his strength came from the top down. As an indication of this closeness, Jackson's Land Rover was rumoured to be a gift from the former President. Arguably, people aligned themselves with Jackson in the church conflict not just because they agreed with the move, but because they believed that, with links to the centre, the secession was likely to succeed.

A relevant figure in this regard was Minister for Lands and rising star, Edward Lowassa. Lowassa, born in Meru, cut his political teeth under Jackson. He was referred to to me as, 'Jackson's child'. He is rumoured to have been responsible for briefing Prime Minister John Malecela, who was charged by President Mwinyi with handling the conflict. Lowassa was a Member of Parliament on a youth ticket, a seat he could not retain indefinitely. In the opinion of some informants, he was looking for a local constituency to cultivate, and supporting the Mount Meru Diocese was a part of this plan. Put differently, Lowassa was attempting to consolidate his national position by building a local power base, a feat which few Tanzanian politicians have achieved.¹

Now, with regard to the tax revolt, we can re-introduce the Regional Commissioner. If the allegations of the Chairman's team are true, the Regional Commissioner presided over the escalation of the tax revolt because he wished to curry favour with local people and take the parliamentary seat for himself. In the language of social movement theory, the constraints on the situation were loosened, since the

1. Malecela himself is unusual amongst national political figures for the degree of local popularity he has among party leaders throughout the country. Part of this popularity stems from the tireless cultivation of personal relations.

Regional Commissioner had an interest in letting the conflict develop. Assuming that he was then appointed to Cabinet, he would be a national leader with a strong local following. Moreover, he would be a person not averse to using local dissent for his own aims.

Civility and Incivility

Certain authors have suggested that politics in Africa is typically conducted in a dual register (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). True to this analysis, the above account has described two very different sorts of action. The Land Case, we might say, involved civic action in a liberal idiom: petitions, peaceful demonstrations, peaceful non-compliance, enumeration of property destroyed by the state, voluntary organized donations, letters of complaint. The church rebellion meanwhile witnessed violent conflict in a religious, communal idiom. The Land Case united Meru against an external oppressor; the religious conflict was a civil war which lacerated the community. This looks like a deterioration. But things were not quite as simple as that. The Land Case was accompanied by some reports of incivility. The DC claimed not to be able to patrol the area without being spat at, for example, and Major S.E. Du Toit, settler representative to the Legislative Council, later died in mysterious circumstances (Spear 1997). Livestock were purposely turned onto settler land, estates were squatted on, and, in the wake of the evictions, the MCU narrowly averted action by armed warriors (Nelson 1967). In the religious conflict, meanwhile, the struggle was conducted along a variety of fronts, including letters to church and national newspapers, petitions, court action, leaflets, cartoons, and so on (Baroin 1996). So while the lasting impression is that one conflict was civil and the other was violent, Meru demonstrated that they could take action in two idioms at the same time. In a later chapter we will explain this phenomenon further: the hybridity of action in Meru will be explained as an effect of the way in which Meru people's subjectivity is contradictorily constituted in heterogeneous social relations.

The movement to unseat the Council engaged a broad repertoire of action. The People's Committee was an elected body that collected information in a rational fashion. The Commissioner's probe also heard and collected evidence in a legalistic mode. The majority of the demonstrators in a series of meetings were peaceable. Indeed, at one point a Maasai elder urged frustrated youth back to a meeting with the Prime Minister, urging, '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.'¹ Such idioms of action arguably bode well for a form of democratic politics rendered stable by 'civility'. Other forms were more agonistic. For instance, Devel-

1. *Majira* (Dar es Salaam), 7 June 1998.

opment Levy was boycotted entirely in the West of the District and largely in the East. When tax collectors attempted to collect tax from women in local markets, they were beaten up. Following the mass meeting in which crowds were dispersed by riot police, elements among the crowd ransacked the Council Chairman's house, before burning the contents and then torching the house itself. They vowed to burn the house of every District councillor. Protestors came to the meeting armed.

The democratic method was seen not to be working, and people were prepared to take the law into their own hands. A sustainable liberal democracy treads in practice a line between civil obedience – viz. respect for the outputs of the democratic process – and civil disobedience – disruption of it. If disobedience becomes too frequent, or too violent, the democratic system itself comes under threat. The readiness of some participants in the Arumeru case to shift from one mode into another, suggests that the line Tanzania treads, without wanting to sound alarmist, is quite a fine one.

The Meru Land Case represented a flourishing of local institutions, namely Church, Coffee Planters' Association and Citizens' Union. In mainstream writing on Governance these institutions would today be portrayed as organs of 'civil society', voluntary associations through which ordinary men and women expressed their views, and which represented the united face of Meru to the outside world. In the 1990s, in a struggle for resources, these institutions were being torn apart. Meru's 'social capital', to use a popular term, was being destroyed from within.

It is interesting in this respect to note that the Lutheran church has a relatively democratic decision-making structure. However, during the conflict, this was eschewed in a rush to join up with personalities whom Meru thought would deliver a diocese in the shortest possible time. The constitutional procedure for registering a new diocese within the ELCT is straightforward. The basic unit of the church is the parish, where money is collected and decisions taken by a pastor in conjunction with church elders. Above that is the District, which has an Executive Council that meets twice a year, and an Executive Committee, which meets more regularly. Every two years the District holds a Biennial General Meeting composed of a pastor from each parish together with lay representatives. Above the District is the Diocese, where this structure is replicated. A District which wishes to form its own Diocese should submit a request through the District Executive Committee to the District Biennial General Meeting. If supported, the request will be transmitted upwards to the Diocesan Executive Council. If passed here, the ELCT should be informed and the District told to prepare itself. In 1972, Arusha District was successful in seceding from the Northern Diocese and starting a new one. If all goes smoothly, a District wanting to secede could have its own Diocese in a little over two years. However, Jackson and Urusa preferred not to take the constitutional route; they announced that a new Diocese would come into being on 1 January, 1992.

The fact that the declaration of independence from the Northern Diocese was unconstitutional, flouting a reasonably democratic procedure, was either not cared about or not known by many Meru. They just wanted their own church. Many believed that their Chagga neighbours wished to keep them in tutelage, and would not allow them to secede. It was rumoured that Erasto Kweka had sworn that as long as he was Bishop, the Meru would never be given their own Diocese. Indeed, much of the struggle that followed was characterised by rumour and misinformation. Kweka is rumoured to have referred to Wameru as poor, and less intelligent than Chagga. There were rumours that Kweka had forced all pastors to swear an oath of allegiance to him, that Kweka poisoned communion wine, that he was going to fill 75 per cent of Meru school places with Chagga children, that he kept 25 per cent of MESODET funds for his personal use, and many more. Such rumours added to the outrage of the secessionists, shook their faith in church democracy, and made the unconstitutional route appear to be the most favourable alternative.

Where constitutional procedures are not well publicized or where they are poorly understood, or where citizens have little faith in procedures' ability to constrain powerful individuals (such as Bishop Kweka), democracy does not take its classical form, but operates in a highly imperfect way. In particular, ordinary people become extremely vulnerable to rumour-mongering and to manipulation by political elites.

Conclusions

I want to draw out three themes from this chapter. The first concerns evidence of increasing links between national and local elites in Tanzania. The second is to do with the status of collective action. Are the historical episodes I have recounted examples of contentious, action group politics? Are they examples of social movements? Or are they evidence of associations in civil society coming to maturity and acting as a foundation for democracy? The third, and related theme, concerns the implications for democracy of hybrid forms of action.

Elsewhere I have presented the hypothesis that economic and political liberalisation in Tanzania is leading to a situation in which national elites are becoming increasingly entangled in struggles for resources and for political office at local level, and have used the term 'Districtization' to refer to this trend (Kelsall 2002). The original thesis derives from Peter Gibbon, who explains it thus:

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 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 horizontally fragmented through a process of 'balkanization' (Gibbon 2001:436).

Gibbon, drawing on the work of Kiondo and Baroin, regards District Development Trust Funds as the armature of these vertical links. I have added to this thesis by pointing to the fact that the national Parliament is increasingly characterised by the presence of regional blocs within the CCM, as national politicians organize themselves regionally for the purpose of securing resources, winning elections and being admitted to power. The case study here provides two or three examples of such a trend. The first relates to the need for politicians with ministerial aspirations to secure local constituencies. John Malecela and Edward Lowassa, men of high political ambition, were both associated with the rebel faction of the Lutheran church. Subsequently, Augustine Mrema became a favourite of the Northern Diocese; Kilimanjaro was later to become his political stronghold. Then, in the tax revolt, the Regional Commissioner, instead of acting as an instrument of central repression, is alleged to have courted local popularity by dealing leniently with Arusha protestors. These struggles, and others like them, signal a growing interdependence between national and local politicians, and a growing willingness on the part of the political class to make occasional use of popular participation. If, as I have argued, the signature of Tanzanian post-colonial politics has been its relative tranquillity, these changes promise to make it rather more turbulent.

Tarrow claims that collective action can be described as ‘contentious’ when, ‘it is used by people who lack regular access to institutions, who act in the name of new or unaccepted claims, and who behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others or authorities’ (Tarrow 1998:3). And Aminzade et al. describe contentious politics as ‘public, collective, episodic interactions’ (Aminzade et al. 2001:7). Contentious action becomes a ‘social movement’ when it leads to ‘sustained interaction with opponents’, being, ‘backed by dense social networks and galvanized by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols’ (Tarrow 1998:2). It is a, ‘particularly crystallized, sustained set of interactions between challengers and authorities around long-standing claims and identities’ (Aminzade et al. 2001:7). When opponents come to accept a social movement and its methods as quasi-legitimate, then it becomes institutionalized and part of ordinary politics (Tarrow 1998:5). The precise relation between social movements and ‘civil society organisations’ is a tricky one. It is probably the case that most social movements are composed of a network of civil society organisations. Conversely, it is quite possible to be a CSO and not be part of a social movement.

Of the three episodes of contentious politics we have studied here, only the first, the Meru Land case, is entitled to be called a ‘social movement’. The others are better described by Jeff Haynes’s notion of ‘action groups’, given at the beginning of this chapter. The Land Case and the church revolt mobilised some CSOs, indeed in the latter case control over CSOs was the object of struggle. In the tax revolt, it is hard, I think, to identify any CSO involvement. The vehicles of struggle were an action group – the People’s Committee – and bodies which, at a push, might be

called Community Based Organisations: that is, localized age-sets. What is interesting is that in the aftermath of the revolt, the action group more or less dissolved. In 2001 the People's Committee was not really functioning, and its leader had little insight into current malfeasance on the council. The business of politics was returned, more or less unaltered, to a factionalized political elite. The Party Boss explained this type of inaction by referring to his kinsmen as 'cowards', but, as I hope to explain in a later chapter, I think it is more complicated than that. It is sufficient at this juncture to restate the fact that the rural population in Tanzania has been remarkably quiescent, and that while a new dynamism may be emerging, there is as yet little sign that it will be expressed in an institutionalised form.

The chapter has provided a number of examples of the hybridity of action, which I shall explain in a later chapter by reference to the hybrid constitution of people's subjectivity. What I think it is important to recognize is that some of the repertoires of action employed by dissenters: rioting, fighting, burning houses, sit uneasily with 'civil' forms of democratic politics. Most democracies occasionally witness such events, but they are not the norm. In many African countries meanwhile, such explosions often acquire a communal colouring and are the occasion for much greater loss of life than was witnessed here. In light of these considerations, it is useful to express caution over Haynes's expectation that action groups are prototypical organs of democracy. They might be; but they might also be nascent vehicles of communal hatred and violence. The tax revolt, for example, was not without ethnic fallout. The Member of Parliament for Arumeru East 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.¹

A further observation is that democratic institutions, insofar as they existed, were not functioning very democratically. Both the church and the council had institutionalised procedures for accommodating change and dissent. But aggrieved parties chose to act outside of these channels. Though imperfect, as we shall see in a later chapter, it was not the design of the institutions, I suggest, that was the main reason that politics became contentious. It was that a set of sociological conditions existed to prevent institutional democracy from working.

1. 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 on to me by its author, Samwel Kisanga, NCCR Member of Parliament for the Arumeru East.

CHAPTER 2

Elections and Local Politics

The previous chapter explored some of the difficulties that ordinary people experienced in scrutinising their leaders and holding them accountable in a variety of fora, both during and after periods of contentious politics. However, liberal democracies also embody other, more indirect and institutionalised means of holding leaders to account. These require less organisational ability, and fewer ‘shoe leather’ costs, than does direct collective action. The principal instrument of liberal democracies in this respect is elections (Crook and Manor 1998:11). In Arumeru District multiparty elections were held at village level in 1993, at District council level in 1994 and 2000, and at parliamentary level in 1995 and 2000. The aim of this chapter is to narrate the story of these elections and assess their significance.

Contemporary governance theory places a high degree of importance on decentralisation and local democracy. In an influential study, Crook and Manor explain this degree of interest when they write:

Economists who had been influenced by neo-liberal ideas saw it as a way of shifting power away from the centralised state...Advocates of pluralist, competitive politics regarded it as a device for prying open closed systems...Democratic politicians in less-developed countries regarded it as a way to make government more responsive to local needs and preferences (Crook and Manor 1998:1).

In a context where the central state was widely regarded as a problem, the urge to decentralise, they argue, appeared irresistible:

It was not hard to believe that decentralisation combined with democratisation (usually in its electoral, representative form) might provide greater transparency, accountability, responsiveness, probity, frugality, efficiency, equity, and opportunities for mass participation (Crook and Manor 1998:2).

In the words of a recent consultancy on local government reform in Tanzania, ‘There is a recognition in government and among the donor community that decentralization is not only vital, but inevitable’ (Watson and Baek 2001). Local democracy is thus believed key to improving the development administration and social acceptance of the African state.

The present chapter provides examples from research at village, council and parliamentary constituency level with a view to commenting on these beliefs. It aims to show that a multi-party democracy has been introduced to the area without having a very noticeable impact upon the quality of Governance or upon political stability. Insofar as democracy exists, it would probably best be described as pseudo-democ-

racy or 'liberalised authoritarianism'. It is certainly not functioning in its ideal or classical form. Neither does it approximate to substantive or popular notions of what a democracy should be. The reasons for this, I will suggest in the next chapter, are rooted deep in social relations, not just in flawed political institutions. Thus although more institutional reforms were on their way in Arumeru – a result of the Local Government Reform Programme – these will need to go beyond technocratic quick fixes, if they are to have a significant effect.

Village Democracy

A majority of Tanzania's population live in villages, and the village assembly represents the foundation of its political democracy. The assembly is composed of all the adult members of a village, it is the forum from which decisions are intended to emanate, and it elects a village council and a village chairman to execute its wishes. Section 141 of the 1982 Local Government (District Authorities) Act, describes the Village Assembly as:

- a) the supreme authority on all matters of general policy making in relation to the affairs of the village; and
- b) responsible for the election of the Village Council; and
- c) responsible for the removal of the council or any or all of the members of the council (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000:55).

In this respect it is an organ of direct democracy providing a potential for people-power that is unknown, for example, in the United Kingdom. However, research has shown that in Tanzania these legal provisions are rarely translated into practice (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000:55). The results of my own fieldwork in a village in Arumeru, as we shall see, were in substantial agreement with this finding.

Fieldwork for this study centered on Akeri village, where I worked and lived in 1996 and 1997, making three follow up trips between 2001 and 2002. Fieldwork took me to several other villages in Arumeru as well, with significant amounts of time being spent in Nguruma and Moivaro.

Akeri village is in the heartland of Meru, the original centre of Kaaya (the royal clan) settlement, and the site of the murder of Lutheran missionaries in the nineteenth century. The latter's graves still stand in the churchyard today. The village had a road built through it in 1955; in 1962 the school was extended; and in 1977, electricity was installed. It is located about a mile north of the Arusha-Moshi road. Our census recorded 348 households. Across the main road is Tengeru market, to the south of that Lake Duluti, and to the south east Tengeru Agricultural Institute (LITI-Tengeru). Akeri is located in Mount Meru's densely populated coffee-banana belt and households farm small, irrigated plots of land adjacent to their homesteads.

Maize is also grown by some households, especially on an escarpment to the north of the village.

The major political and developmental issues in Akeri village in 1996 and 1997, as identified in numerous interviews and focus group discussions, were: land shortage; the poor price of coffee and the high price of agricultural inputs; a malfunctioning village water project; a virtually impassable village road; a stalled technical school project; and continuing friction between different religious denominations.

In respect of land shortage, Akeri residents felt they had some claim to land earmarked for redistribution on a coffee estate which lay to the south of the village; indeed a few were already squatting it (Larsson 2001:263). However, plans for redistribution had been bogged down for years. Informants also mentioned various promises of land redistribution which had been made at one time or another by national figures or regional authorities; promises which had come to naught. It was interesting that there was no mass movement to pressurise government into acknowledging the land problem, as had occurred in the 1950s. Most people were aware that requests had been made to government, at all levels, for acquisition of certain estates. In most cases people stated vaguely that there had been no concrete reply to their requests for land, that they were still waiting for a reply, or that the officials concerned had not made a proper follow up; other villagers said they were waiting for the President to visit the area so that they could raise the issue with him.

Poor prices for coffee and the high price of coffee inputs were a result of prevailing world market conditions and structural adjustment-induced changes to the structure of coffee marketing in Tanzania. Specifically, the monopsony of primary co-operative societies over purchase of the peasant crop had been removed, regional co-operative unions had begun to be denied access to cheap bank credit to provide farmers advance payments for crops, and subsidies on agricultural inputs had been removed. In consequence, the old situation under which co-operatives paid farmers an advance on their crop, which was used to purchase subsidised inputs with which to husband coffee, was gone. Instead, most farmers failed to buy inputs and then produced poor quality coffee which they sold to private traders for a low price at harvest time. It was interesting that few farmers really had a grasp of the international or national developments that had brought about this state of affairs. The least parochial institution of which most farmers had knowledge was the Arusha Co-operative Union. This was failing to provide farmers with satisfactory answers for the collapse in the value of their crop. Its explanations were perhaps held in doubt because of a widespread perception that the Union had been plundered by its employees throughout the 1980s. By 2001, ACU's debts far outstripped its assets, and it was unable to purchase coffee let alone plan meaningfully for the development of the crop. Most primary cooperatives, and their employees, were now acting as agents for private buyers. That things had reached such a point, spoke volumes about the effectiveness of democratic procedures within the Co-op.

Another cause for complaint in the village was the lack of progress over the building of a technical school. Prior to the religious conflict, the Meru Social Development Trust Fund (MESODET) (see previous chapter) had raised money for the purpose of building a technical school, to be run by the church, in Akeri Village. It was to be sited on church land. However, the money for the proposed school had gone missing during the religious conflict, and the church was unwilling to allow any development on its land in which MESODET was involved. At the same time, many Meru were unwilling to contribute to a project associated with the Lutheran Church. As a result, the land lay idle, as did two half-completed teachers' houses, the shells of which stood as a monument to developmental sclerosis in the area.

While certain of the hardships people endured were beyond the scope of their control, the same could not be said about the parlous state of the Akeri road, and about the defects to the water system. Blame for these problems was generally laid at the door of the Village Chairman. Informants were virtually unanimous in condemning this individual as a poor leader who did not care for the people, was unable to mobilise them, and who misused villagers' money. One informant, for example, claimed that:

The leaders in Akeri are very bad. The Village Chairman doesn't like to speak the truth. He is corrupted, he doesn't like development, he can reveal office secrets in a bar, he can gossip about people's affairs in public. But he doesn't like to call meetings where people can question him.

As a result, he was unable to galvanize the village council committees responsible for roads and water. He seemed impervious to criticism, and evaded more concerted action by failing to hold village meetings or postponing those that he scheduled. Certain individuals had complained about the chairman, first to the ward executive officer, and then to the District Commissioner. Both had promised action but had then failed to act decisively. In 1996 and 1997, there was no other consistent, organized effort to hold the chair to account. Indeed, local government was being partially privatised, with a wealthy resident eventually using his own money to rehabilitate the water source.¹

The inability to hold the chair to account was not a result of the absence of a 'culture' of democracy'. Ideas about political leadership showed a marked consistency with earlier Meru traditions, continued in clan structures today, and with the attitudes conveyed to Puritt in his 1960s study (Puritt 1970). Informants expected their leaders to have education, to listen to the people, and love them; to be humble, to not humiliate others, to be calm and cool-headed, with wisdom, and to speak the

1. In a similar case, Seppälä records in a village study in southern Tanzania that villagers found it difficult to come together to hold an inactive village chairman to account, 'only about twenty villagers (all men excluding the ward secretary) showed keen interest in politics. The other villagers at the market place, many of them young traders, had to be forced to the meeting' (Seppälä 1998:129).

truth.¹ Everyone believed that it was right for a leader to be questioned by the people. I was told that Meru people were very critical: “They will tell you how much you have got and where you have got it from”.² Many said that in the event of poor leadership (such as corruption, incompetence, poor-decision making, unresolved problems or aloofness), it would be desirable and should be possible to ask questions or make complaints at village, ward or district levels, either in meetings or face to face.³ It was puzzling to me that time and again interviews in Meru revealed the conjunction of a belief in the rightness of holding leaders accountable with an inability or unwillingness to put these beliefs into practice.

What is also interesting is that multi-party democracy had failed to facilitate democratic action in a significant way. Akeri had only 14 registered members of the opposition, a mixture of party founders and Saved Christians (see below). They had sent a delegation to the chair to complain about the quality of his leadership, but this had had little effect. Interestingly, the opposition members stated that they had visited the chairman in their capacity as individuals, not as party members. The UNDP Report into sub-District democracy observes that throughout Tanzania, opposition parties have made little impact at village level, and where they have, it has been unwelcome (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000).

During the 1998 tax revolt, however, village politics became invigorated. Details of the chairman’s venality, which had previously been vague, became concretely and generally known for the first time. For example, in 1996 the Akeri Village Executive Officer had been in the habit of not attending work, and it emerged that in his absence the chair had taken the village stamp and other materials from the office to his own house. At the time Arumeru was being patronized by private coffee buyers, and a village by-law states that any interested buyer must host a village meeting and provide Tshs 50,000 for sitting allowances. In addition, the village administers a levy on all coffee sold to the buyer. Using the office stamp, the Chairman pocketed sitting allowances and levies from a number of different companies. It also emerged that, for a fee, the Chairman had been allowing individual households and vegetable growers in a neighbouring village to draw water lines from Akeri’s pipeline. This was one explanation for the village’s water problems. He had also been involved in a

1. Interview, elite and poor households, 1996–1997.

2. Elite interview.

3. Interviews, elite and poor households. However, it was clear that some of these people were speaking hypothetically only; moreover, freedom to complain did not entail a satisfactory response. Others felt that it was possible to pursue these matters at a village level, but it was very difficult for an “ordinary person” to do so in the district.

Some thought there was no possibility of doing anything about poor leadership and governance. A single mother stated that it was difficult for poor people to speak at meetings, “Even if the chair gives me a chance to speak, people will tell me to sit down ... You may want to ask a question but it takes so long for you to be chosen and you have to think very hard so that you don’t forget what you want to say, that you are just trembling”. This, however, was not a common sentiment. Akeri Village – interviews, rich and poor households.

land sale which went against clan wishes. Villagers took their complaints to the police and the DC. The latter then informed the villagers of the procedure for removing a Village chair. The council was told to convene a meeting of the Village Assembly. Each council member was asked to make five complaints against the Chairman, and then the Assembly was told to vote on the question of whether or not to remove him. Although the constitutionality of this procedure is open to question, it did lead to the removal of the Village chair (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000).

The tax revolt and the removal of the Chairman were the occasion for a resurgence of community development activity in Akeri. Contributions to collective works increased and road maintenance improved. The village elected its own VEO, previously an appointment from above. Akeri Technical School was built using contributions from several villages on land formerly belonging to the Akeri cooperative society. President Mkapa himself opened the Technical School on October 7, 1998. In a subsequent speech at Usa River he instructed council officers to redouble their efforts to distribute unused estate land to the people, and issued them with a deadline in which to do so: 'I'm extremely serious on the issue and the problem has to be resolved as early as possible'. The rally responded, apparently, with 'thunderous' cheers.¹

But by 2001 Akeri was in the doldrums once again. The new chairman, a young man who coached the school football team, was universally criticized as someone who was unwilling to take advice and incapable of mobilising people. The newly elected ward councillor (see below) had only been able to make temporary improvements to the road. The price of coffee, of course, remained low, and there was little progress on the issue of land reform.

In sum, Akeri revealed an inconsistent picture of quiet and storm. In addition, there was a marked disjuncture between my informants' belief in the rightness of holding leaders to account, and their desire or capacity to do so. This was only partially to be explained, I thought, by the still simmering religious divide. A lengthier discussion of the possible reasons for this puzzling pattern of behaviour will be provided in the next chapter.

Council Democracy

A part of the developmental inertia in Akeri village, and in other villages across Arumeru, could be attributed to the conduct of District administration. This section will therefore provide an analysis of politics on the local council.

Arumeru District Council is composed of 47 councillors (*divani*) 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. In this

1. *Daily News*, 7 October 1998.

respect, the local authority represents a 'fused' form of local administration: central employment of staff is combined with ostensible local control. Decentralization measures currently underway are intended to strengthen the local control component.

Presently, 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.¹ However, in 1997, prior to the tax revolt, this formal structure of development administration was not functioning smoothly for two reasons: lack of financing, 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. Subventions from the council to village government were in turn nugatory. To give an example, in 1996, Nguruma Village, with over 400 households, received a subvention of Tshs 28,000 – just over £30.

In respect of political subversion, 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. At the time of my initial fieldwork in 1996 and 1997, I was told that the Council chair was at the centre of most of these dubious transactions.

In the context of the tax revolt in Arumeru (described in the previous chapter), the Regional Commissioner established a probe commission to investigate allegations of maladministration and to determine the reasons for political unrest in the District. The Commission, when it reported, gave substance to this allegation and revealed a great deal about political management in the District, painting a damning picture of patrimonial rule and rampant corruption.² 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

1. For discussions of local administration in Tanzania see P. Mahwood "The search for participation in Tanzania", in P. Mahwood, *Local Government in the Third World: the experiences of Tropical Africa* (John Wiley and Sons, Chichester, 1983); 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.

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

revenue. 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. The implication was that this support shielded the Council from allegations of misrule. Some of these allegations were probably exaggerated. The DED, for instance, issued a point by point rebuttal, some of which was convincing. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to think that all the allegations were without substance, and that the council ran impeccably along legal-rational lines.

The tax conflict and eventual resignation of the Chairman generated high expectations for improved governance in the District. Unfortunately, the following account of post-revolt politics suggests that these expectations have yet to be fulfilled, with bottom-up accountability still weak.

In the aftermath of the tax revolt the politics of Arumeru District council was characterised by factional competition between two groups. One of the groups was centered on the Council chair, Samwel Urasa (former MESODET Treasurer and prominent church rebel). He gained the chair following the post-tax-revolt resignation of the former Chairman, of whom he was a close ally. He was subsequently re-elected as chair, by the councillors, after the 2000 local elections. His opponent in that competition was the leader of the council's other most prominent faction (at least as of 2001). A born-again Christian from Moshono village, Emmanuel Munga was a long-serving *diwani* and a representative on the Moshono ADP, an integrated development project sponsored by World Vision. He styled himself as a councillor committed to truth and probity in politics, and had long been a rival of the *former* chairman, Thomas ole Sabaya. Ironically, the faction leader had previously worked as an accountant for the Arusha Regional Cooperative Union, which was widely regarded in the district as a hopelessly corrupt institution. 'All those people who worked for ARCU ate its money and then became Saved. After they had eaten they could afford to be born again' quipped a local cynic.

In the election the born-again Christian had a 'natural' advantage since he was an ethnic Arusha; Arusha have been known to act in solidarity on the council, and they hold a majority of its seats. However, this primary ethnic fault line is easily destabilised by other factors. In the 2000 election, Urasa was successful in capturing not only the votes of all the Meru councillors, but also a sizeable chunk of the Arusha councillors, and the support of most of the female appointees. As we have mentioned before, he is a skilled politician, and his demeanour is doubtless more congenial to many councillors than that of the self-righteous faction leader. In addition, he remained close to the former chairman, who, it was said, remained influential

among some of the Arusha councillors. It is interesting then, that even after the tax revolt, the council remained in the control of the group whose misrule was responsible for the unrest. The opposing faction leader subsequently lodged a complaint through CCM party structures, alleging that Urasa and the DED had used council funds to run Urasa's campaign, and that they had used illegal tactics such as oathing and cursing. The other interesting point is that opposition *parties* failed, once again, to win a single seat.

It is significant that Abel Sirikwa, the ex-party Boss and nemesis of the former Chairman at the time of the tax revolt, failed even to win a seat in the Council election. In his version of events, the other district leaders feared him because of his commitment to transparency, and for this reason they conspired to stop him from winning. An opposition leader gleefully told me the story of how the Boss, who lacked funds, approached the Member of Parliament for Arumeru west (who is his nephew) for help in fighting the election. The Member of Parliament agreed to help the Boss, and told him to send him a letter detailing how much money he needed and what it was intended for. Once in receipt of the letter, the Member of Parliament is said to have made photocopies and distributed them in the local market and at bus-stands. Later, in a public meeting, the Boss's opponent produced this letter and derided the former's poverty. 'You say you are going to feed your people. How are you going to feed them when you cannot even feed yourself?' The Party Boss has now retired from politics.

Subsequent to the election, the born-again Christian continued to lead a group of six or seven councillors which acted as a kind of internal opposition within CCM. Aside from its desire to acquire power on the council for itself, it had a number of grievances. One: membership of the powerful Finance Committee, which should have been revolving, was static and under the control of the chair. Two: European stabex funds intended for resurfacing the district's roads and repairing culverts was being used to finance shoddy workmanship, resulting in washed away roads and suspicion of over-invoicing. Three: Council income flowed into the coffers of a few key departments, while other departments were starved of resources, leading to suspicion of misuse of funds. Four: the audited accounts of the Council had not been made available to the councillors.

Following the tax revolt the Council undertook to introduce new measures to improve its transparency and accountability, namely, a register of council income and expenditure on council projects and public advertising of tenders. A new system had been introduced to return a fixed percentage of Development Levy collected in each village, to the village. The District Executive Director claimed that she and elected representatives were in the habit of touring council wards, explaining to taxpayers what their money was being used for. Unfortunately, the actual datasheet used to publicize this information had two major shortcomings. To begin with, it was rather technical in appearance, and ordinary peasants would most likely have

difficulty in interpreting it. Second, it was insufficiently detailed to give evidence of misuse of council funds, of which, as we shall see later, there was a great deal going on. Both too technical and not technical enough, the register comprised little more than a public relations exercise. Even in this respect it was deficient: in 2001 the chair of the erstwhile 'People's Committee' (see previous chapter) was not aware of it, and was planning to write to the Prime Minister in complaint.

The faction leader's group deployed two main tactics in their challenge to the leadership of Urasa and the District Executive Director. Firstly, they asked critical questions in council meetings and on council committees. The leadership portrayed these tactics as an attempt to disrupt the normal functioning of the council. Secondly, they enlisted the support of higher authorities. One of the group travelled to Dodoma to seek an audience with the Prime Minister. Though it is difficult to prove a connection, the Prevention of Corruption Bureau began an investigation into the Council shortly after this meeting.

The council leadership, for their part, responded to these challenges with two tactics of their own: they disparaged, ignored and evaded the dissenters; and, on occasion, they intimidated them. To give an example of the latter tactic, one member of the dissenting faction was a newly elected, well-educated councillor from the Meru side of the District. He claimed that during his election campaign Urasa used money and personal influence in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent his election. Subsequent to his election, the councillor was arrested for allegedly trespassing on a neighbour's farm. The arrest was interpreted as a ruse to stop him asking sensitive questions of the leadership. The case was eventually dropped, but while the councillor was on bail, he was refused permission to participate on the council. By 2002 he was back, and he believed that though the council remained mired in problems, democracy was nevertheless functioning better thanks to the election of several educated councillors – himself included – with the desire and the data to ask discomfiting questions of the leadership.

In July 2001, the Prevention of Corruption Bureau arrived in Arumeru to investigate financial irregularities brought to light by an audit of its District Council. The auditor deemed the council's accounts to be unsatisfactory, and raised a number of issues of concern. Large numbers of tax-collection receipt books were missing. A number of sizeable cheques paid to the council had never been banked. Pension contributions for council employees had not been paid for several years. Each of these irregularities gave rise to a suspicion of embezzlement. The report urged action on the above matters, and identified lesser issues also. Two minor Treasury officials were arrested and charged, and the Council Treasurer was transferred. The PCB, when it arrived, interrogated the DED and the Council chair. However, at the time of writing, it appeared that the DED, in spite of having overall authority for managing the finances of the council, and the Chairman, were in the clear. 'I even

gave them some recommendations as to how they could improve their operations, and they were very grateful', the former confided to me.

An interesting facet of the PCB investigation was that it was conducted in some secrecy. In spite of the high degree of political awareness which one might expect in a district subject just three years previously to a historic tax revolt, in 2001 it was only the political elite, by which I mean the councillors and staff, who knew about the current state of malaise. Ordinary people were not well informed about the way in which the council worked, in spite of the fact that council action or inaction in fields such as taxation or road maintenance, had a very visible impact on their personal well-being. However, economic conditions had been reasonably good in the previous three years and tax collection had not been overbearing. Vital elements of the conjuncture that resulted in tax revolt – drought, a rapid rise in the rate of tax – were absent. It is perhaps for this reason that the group challenging the Council chair chose to pursue their struggle by enrolling national figures and institutions, rather than by making appeals to the public. It may also signal other differences in the situation: that the Party Boss, for instance, who was without a formal post at the time of the tax revolt, was 'closer to the people' than the group around the born-again Christian. Or that the political elite tends to prefer to conduct its struggles amongst itself, without the unpredictability of popular involvement. Or that politicians seen to be stirring up trouble face heavy penalties, if their attempts are unsuccessful. All of these are probably true to some degree. The striking if unsurprising point to take from this account, though, is that ordinary peasants, the *wananchi* of Arumeru District, are poorly positioned, on a day to day basis, to enforce bottom-up good governance criteria.

Parliamentary Democracy

Other important players in local politics were the District's two MPs. Broadly speaking, local constituency MPs are, in liberal democratic theory, supposed to represent the interests of all their constituents at the centre, as well as working to implement a party manifesto on which they have been elected; two roles that are not always compatible. If the Member of Parliament is a member of the opposition, the imperative is not so much to try and implement one's manifesto, as to scrutinize and challenge the government, and to present to the public an alternative political agenda. In Tanzania, MPs also sit ex-officio on local councils. I discuss first some of the opinions on democracy and the 1995 election conveyed to me by informants. I then move on to a discussion of the two elections themselves, and a brief appraisal of the intervening period.

In 1996 and 1997, I conducted semi-structured interviews with villagers on 'attitudes to democracy', focusing on Akeri, Nguruma and Moivaro villages. Some of these interviews were targeted at recipients of services provided by two local

NGOs. Others were intended to generate a stratified sample of opinion, for which the foundation was a wealth-ranking exercise. I also gained insight from informal conversations. Quizzed on the reasons for the introduction of multi-partyism, most informants repeated some variation on the theme that multi-partyism was introduced in order to challenge the ruling party in order to make it perform better and drive development; if one party was sleeping, the other would 'wake it up'; so that a proper follow-up of expenditures could be made, and so that people would have freedom to express themselves and criticize government.¹

However, knowledge of the policies (or even in some cases the names) of the parties contesting the election was much thinner. Most people admitted to not knowing the policies of the various parties, nor to having much idea of what they stood for. The better informed of this group identified CCM as the party of *ujamaa*, by which they understood variations on the theme of 'planning and working together for development'. Other people mentioned that one or other of the parties stood for 'human rights', which they tended to explain – interestingly – as equality of access to government services, regardless of income and without having to pay bribes. Several informants mentioned that the parties were against corruption. Some recognized no difference between them. A minority was better informed, and could state for example that NCCR believed in helping the indigenous people, had a policy to help artisanal miners, or were committed to free health care. Many informants stated that they voted for the candidate they liked and not for the party. Quite a few voters split their tickets, voting for an NCCR Member of Parliament and CCM President.

I was told of various unrealistic promises made by parties during the campaign. For example, Mrema (or Mrema's supporters), was said to have promised that one would be able to buy meat for Tshs 5 a kilo, or that everything in hospitals would be free. In addition, it is claimed that NCCR workers were promised high offices in regional government in the event of victory. Various slogans were used during the campaign. The CCM candidate, Major Ndosi, was dubbed, '*dume la mbegu*' (the seed of the bull), implying his virility and fecundity, which NCCR campaigners turned around by asking, 'Do you want a man or a bull as MP?'² It appears that some voters thought Ndosi proud and boastful. NCCR supporters told people that CCM were like broilers – 'you can go away and leave them for a long time, but when you return they will still be in the same position!' They also compared voters to chickens transported in large crates – 'even when the container is opened they do not feel their

1. The formulaic nature of some of the responses suggested that informants were speaking from a script inscribed on their minds by a successful party education campaign.

2. Akeri Village – interviews, rich and poor households.

freedom!¹ Another slogan was, *'Mpigie mtu kutoka eneo la nyumbani'* – vote for the man from your home area.

But outweighing all of these factors was the role of the church. Although the violence was largely over by 1992, the religious schism continued to dominate local politics. So much so that voting in the multi-party election in 1995 had very little to do with the policies of the candidates' ostensible parties, and a great deal to do with their religious affiliations. The Member of Parliament who was elected in this contest was to find his democratic ideals stranded in the communal fissures of a divided society.

Samwel Kisanga Akyoo, a lecturer in Education at the University of Dar es Salaam, was one of the young and idealistic intellectuals present at the birth of NCCR. In 1995 he was chosen to stand as NCCR candidate in Arumeru East, the area from which he hailed. Augustine Mrema, meanwhile, had defected from the CCM to become NCCR's presidential candidate. Mrema, it will be recalled, was instrumental in squashing the religious secession in Meru in the early 1990s. His defection therefore made NCCR a natural choice for the Lutheran Church. Also significant was the fact that the new Bishop of the Meru Diocese was Samwel's brother. The CCM candidate meanwhile, Major Ndosi, was an AMEC devotee and MESODET board member. The moral and financial influence of the Lutheran Church was subsequently instrumental in securing Samwel's victory.²

A year after his election, the victorious Member of Parliament was embroiled in a dispute with MESODET. The NGO was aiming to galvanize development in the district by once again levying a cess on the local coffee crop. The idea was not an especially viable one, since a large percentage of the district's coffee was now sold through private traders. Nevertheless the organisation was still capable of drawing crowds of several hundred people. The Lutheran Church, meanwhile, seemed intent on undermining it. The Member of Parliament, perhaps because of his family connections, perhaps because of astute judgement, regarded MESODET as a force for disorder in the District. He saw it as his duty to ensure that the rule of law was upheld, and on a number of occasions this led to MESODET meetings being outlawed by the District Commissioner, on the pretext that they had not followed proper procedures in obtaining permits. At a public meeting at Mringaranga, one of the sacred sites of the Meru, which several hundred people attended, MESODET Chairman Jackson Kaaya accused the Member of Parliament and the Church of trying to 'kill' MESODET.

1. Akeri Village – interviews, rich and poor households.

2. In the ensuing contest, both churches used their influence to try and affect the election result, though it was doubtless conditioned by other factors also; for example a long-standing East-West divide within Meru, and disaffection of small miners in the south of the District with the ruling party.

The Member of Parliament, who was not a religious zealot, in this way became identified as a religious partisan. Throughout his term he experienced much animosity, and had difficulty mobilising development in the constituency. Though he may be credited with some success in keeping the peace in Meru, it was an emotionally and financially trying time for him.¹ At a national level meanwhile, his party was in disarray, and in 2000 he stepped down. In this way, one of the opposition's few rural seats outside of Kilimanjaro Region was left vacant for the ruling party.

The real contest in the 2000 election took place within CCM. The contest was a serious one, since in spite of being conducted within the party that has governed Tanzania since independence, it witnessed the victory of a complete outsider to the established system of power. The election in the West, by contrast, was comparatively uneventful, its major interest being to underline the importance of money in Tanzanian elections.

The two candidates in the run-off to decide who would contest the Parliamentary seat for CCM were J. Nnko and Talala Mbise. Nnko had already been Member of Parliament for the constituency once before, between 1990 and 1995. He was rumoured to have extensive private means, and also to have powerful backers in the District; for instance, the Regional CCM Chairman, who is his kinsman, and Samwel Urasa, the Council Chairman. If Nnko was a CCM old-hand, Talala Mbise was a political novice. In his late fifties, he was a Professor of Economics and the Principal of the Eastern and Southern African Management Institute, the multi-storey tower of which dominates the skyline of Arusha's wealthier suburbs. He claims to have had no real interest in politics and certainly no interest in the constituency seat, until he was visited one day at his home by five age-set leaders who encouraged him to stand. The leaders were from Mbuguni. The latter is an area rich in minerals but poor in development. On the southern borders of the District, it has long been isolated from Arumeru's political heartlands, which are on the mountain. The age-sets, organized through their leaders, became Talala's campaign activists. In time, another prominent individual from Mbuguni threw his weight behind the campaign.

Askofu Mollel was one of the earliest and remains one of the most successful of the small miners at Mererani. He owns several pits, the annual profits from which run, at an estimate, to hundreds of millions of shillings. He has invested in a hotel, a bus company, a football team, and in real estate. He lives in a large house in Mbuguni, furnished with opulent leather furniture and expensive-looking electrical appliances. Arusha by birth, a former rastafarian, he now inhabits the robes of a Maasai elder. He has said that he wants to stop the flow of wealth from Mbuguni, and to use his influence to develop the area. In 1995 he stood for election to the District Council as a representative for NCCR but was defeated by the CCM candi-

1. One thing that the seat brought him, however, was a plot of land at Ngaramtoni.

date. In 2000 he challenged the CCM establishment from within and won at Mbuguni. He also threw his weight behind Talala Mbise.

Nnko therefore had financial might and the backing of the party machinery; Mbise had freshness of approach and the backing of the District's new money. There were also other important factors relating to geography, clan and religion. The CCM establishment, meanwhile, sought to win by fair means or foul. Perhaps the most brazen attempt to tilt the field in their favour involved, on election day, relocating Mbuguni polling stations to Arumeru District Council Headquarters. To reach the polling station from Mbuguni would require a full day's journey on foot, an obvious deterrent to all but the keenest of supporters. Fortunately for Talala, Askofu and another rich miner were able to provide buses for supporters, thereby salvaging the election result.

Victorious in the CCM primary, and with a weak opposition presence, Mbise looked certain to win the seat. In fact, his victory was put beyond doubt when CCM heavyweights visited the opposition candidate (Chadema) and "persuaded" him to step down. In spite of the fierce battle fought in the primary, this in some respects was the least competitive election Meru had witnessed since independence. Only CCM members voted in the preliminary elections, and then on polling day proper the mass electorate was provided no choice. Interestingly, it was precisely to prevent this state of affairs that Julius Nyerere proposed introducing a single-party state, back in 1964.

In the aftermath of the election, the Member of Parliament was having difficulty in living up to expectations. At a parliamentary level, he was trying to prevent the expansion of a Japanese development project in Kilimanjaro Region which would entail the diversion of water from villages in Arumeru. At a local level, the District was scene to numerous localised disputes over land and water rights, to which he would invariably be called to act as a mediator. In addition, the people of Mbuguni and Mererani expected that he would act to improve the socio-economic situation of their area. He was also expected to attend and contribute to numerous *harambee* functions. In his home he sometimes felt under siege from the number of visitors requesting his intervention to solve a specific problem or to help financially with some hardship or other. Meanwhile he found his time being eaten up by an endless round of party and council meetings.

In the West the incumbent Member of Parliament won a comfortable victory. He was alleged by opponents to have handed out money and beer, to have enticed local clan elders into taking oaths in his support, of slaughtering a bull every day during the campaign, of paying local youths to intimidate opposition, of bribing polling officials. All of these rumours are difficult to verify, but it seems certain that the Member's of Parliament financial muscle was an asset to him. Once Managing Director of Tanzania's biggest and most notoriously profligate parastatal, the National Milling Corporation, his opponents alleged that he needed the seat as pro-

tection. Parliamentarians, they argued, were the least likely of all people to have their assets investigated by Mkapa's corruption-busting Government. Unlike Mbise, the Member of Parliament for the West was rarely to be found in the constituency, dividing his time between Dodoma, Dar es Salaam, and London, where he was rumoured to own property.

In Arumeru, it is fair to say that since the onset of multi-party democracy, and since probably before that date, MPs have found themselves swamped by local issues. The introduction of a new system has not, to date, led Arusha and Meru to re-imagine their interests on a national plane, and to vote for parties accordingly. Because of this fact, the party affiliation, or party manifesto of a Member of Parliament was of secondary importance to other, more locally defined issues and marks of identity.

Power, Politicians and Civil Society

The case study presented in the previous two chapters reveals Arumeru to be a complexly structured political field. This finding is in partial accord with Samoff's 1960s Kilimanjaro study, which found that 'there is no small elite with a monopoly of power in the local setting, able to influence outcomes in a wide range of issues' (Samoff 1974:124). Samoff, in his study, identified three major factions and a number of less permanent factions, occupying different institutional fields and centres of power. All, he cautioned, were characterised by fluidity and impermanence. The story I have told of Arumeru discloses a similar fluidity. As the opposition Member of Parliament for the East informed me, 'I didn't associate myself with any faction because what I found was that the factions were always changing'.

That fact granted, it is still possible to sketch some areas of political cohesion. The key axis of power in the District, for example, joined the District Executive Director, the Council Chairman (both pre- and post-tax revolt) and the District Chairman for CCM. The DED had knowledge of and authority over council resources and staff. The Chairman had substantial control over council meetings and agenda, and had a strong base in his local constituency. The District chair had a political base in the Eastern lowlands, and controlled, for what it was worth, the party machinery. Also associated with this faction was the CCM Regional chair, though he was not a critical player in politics at a District level. The Chairman's faction was able to control to a large extent the uses to which council resources were put. Another faction, whose loyalty was currently associated with the cause of the Chairman, was headed by the leader of the appointed female representatives. The main opposing faction was grouped around the councillor for Moshono. This group was fairly successful in winning resources for deployment in its respective wards, but was for the most part marginalised from decision-making. Its relationship to the Member of Parliament for the West was ambiguous. The Member of Parliament for

Arumeru West was another centre of power in the District. His influence was largely financial and of some importance to the District level party. However, he was an intermittent actor at a local level, and his patronage was highly portable. Another group, now in eclipse, centered on the ex-CCM District Chairman: the Party Boss. Another centered on Jackson Kaaya, the ex-Regional Chairman and present chair of MESODET. A growing force, meanwhile, was Askofu Mollel, who represented the small miners in the south, and was in temporary alliance with the Member of Parliament for the East.

The Regional Commissioner, meanwhile, was arguably the most powerful actor in the District, since he had a virtual monopoly over the forces of coercion as well as unparalleled access to national political figures. The choice of whether or not to deploy force in dispute resolution had a potentially decisive influence on the course and outcome of local conflicts. However, his interventions in District power struggles were infrequent, and when he did intervene it was with a relatively light touch. Persuasion was the preferred method of intervention, as indicated by the climax of the tax-revolt, in which the Chairman was persuaded to resign, in return for an equivalent post. *Pace* Mamdani, it is simply not the case that the power of the Regional Commissioner was wielded like a clenched fist, smashing local democracy to bits (Mamdani 1996).

In what way do these factions relate to or map onto socio-economic groupings in the District? The answer, I suggest, is very imperfectly. Society in Arumeru District is stratified into a number of different groups, distinguishable by wealth. In Akeri and Nguruma villages, for instance, a participatory wealth ranking exercise, which utilised ordinary people's subjective perceptions of wealth, distinguished five different groups (Kelsall 2000). These formed a continuum, rather than sharply demarcated strata, as indicated by the fact that there was often considerable debate as to whether a household should be ranked in Group Two or Group Three, Group Three or Group Four, and so on. They also formed a continuum inasmuch as the groups did not conform to different occupational categories, or to class categories in a Marxian sense. They bore no monological relation to ownership or control over the means of production: land, water, capital, or draught power, for instance. Households could also be expected to move up and down the continuum (though not from top to bottom) in the course of their life-cycle (Larsson 2001).

That said, it was certainly the case that no-one could mistake a Class One for a Class Five household. Class Five households were likely to be practically landless, with less than an acre of land and often little more than a houseplot. They would be unlikely to possess an improved dairy cow. They would have to supplement their meagre income from farming with casual labour, outmigration or petty trade. They would be unlikely to eat meat more than a couple of times a month and would struggle to send their children to primary school. Class One households, by contrast, would typically own several acres of land on the mountain, large farms in the low-

lands, have several dairy cows, and be employed with a salary. In addition, or alternatively, they might have purchased motorised transport and be engaged in crop trade, or they might own shops, or bars, hotels or buses; they might be involved in gemstone dealing or in mining itself. They would typically eat meat every day, and be able to provide secondary education for their children. It was more difficult to describe the differences between Groups Two to Four, and research gave the impression that there was considerable movement between categories. Typically, such households would own a few acres of land on the mountain as well as some in the lowlands; they would own between one and four cows; they might engage in some petty trade; they might hire casual labour, and one or more members of the family might also do casual labour themselves. They would eat meat once or twice a week, and they would hope, though they would not be guaranteed, to be able to put their children through secondary school.

Given the fluidity of the middle groups, it might be simpler and more appropriate analytically to distinguish just three categories: rich, poor and middle income households. Whether or not any of the people in these groups are entitled to the term 'peasants' is the subject of some debate, and I will try to avoid that terminology here (though I will note in passing that it applies best, if at all, to the middle group). In fact, the Kiswahili terms, *maskini* (the poor), *tajiri* (rich), and *wastani* (ordinary), are perhaps sufficient, though imperfect, indicators of economic status. Another term I shall employ is *wananchi*, which incorporates both *maskini* and *wastani* and can be roughly taken to mean, 'the popular classes'. Status in Arumeru, it should be noted, is not only a function of economics. Also influential are people endowed with education, or with religious, 'traditional' or political authority (which, it must be stressed, are not mutually exclusive types). In past studies of local Tanzanian politics such people have been termed, 'opinion leaders'. As such, they are entitled to inclusion within what I shall call the 'elite' of Arumeru. These are people distinguished from the mass of the population by wealth, by education or by authority. Education, and to a lesser extent authority, often go hand in hand with wealth in Meru society; but the relation does not always hold. Traditional leaders, in particular, are more likely to come from poor or middle households, and to fail to hold multiple positions of authority.

I return now to my original question of the relationship of political factions to broader socio-economic groupings in Arumeru society. The point to note is that both the elite and the *wananchi* are internally fractured. For instance, the *wananchi* are differentiated by an ethnic cleavage between Arusha and Meru. Within Meru areas, there is a religious cleavage between Lutherans and AMEC supporters. There is also a rivalry between Eastern and Western divisions. In the Arusha areas, there is a rivalry between Ngaramtoni and Ilboru. In every village, meanwhile, there are cleavages based upon clan and age-set affiliation. The elite is subject to all the above cleavages, as well as, in some cases, to occupational cleavages. For instance: divisions

between the political and the non-political elite, or between traditional and religious authority, or between the educated and the uneducated. These divisions of a geographical, filial, religious and generational nature, fragment the elite and the popular class. It is conjuncture, or circumstance, that determines which one or which combination of these identity sets, if any, will issue in organized groupings at any particular time. This fragmentation, as I shall argue in the next chapter, is seldom compensated for by the fact that individuals can incorporate different identities and positions of authority within themselves.

This heterogeneity means that society is not the site of large organized groups that can challenge politicians and council officers. Insofar as the popular classes have leaders, or spokespeople, drawn from within their ranks, they tend to be endowed with some variety of traditional authority: either of the clan or of the age-set. These leaders are typically courted by the political class, especially during elections, at which time the flow of food, drink and money from political contestants to potential voters has the effect of blurring any consciousness of a distinct identity contrapuntal to that of their immediate benefactors. The educated component of the elite may also act as spokespeople for the popular classes, since they are better equipped to ask questions of the political elite. However, they are often closer socially to the politicians than they are to their poorer brethren, some aspire to political posts themselves, and they are not reliable defenders of the interests of the masses. Many are busily engaged in business, farming or salaried employment. The time they can devote to critical politics, unless they are retired, is therefore limited.

The fluidity of Arumeru's social foundation has implications for the way in which we think about local governance. African politics has sometimes been presented as a process in which patriarchal leaders stand atop pyramidal patronage networks, down which flow political favours and resources, and up which travel political support and resources. Arumeru, I hope to have shown, fails to present such a stable and hierarchical picture. It is perhaps better to think of politicians, arranged in horizontal factional networks, like a slick of oil on the sea of society's surface. In calm conditions, there is very little mixing of the slick with the water; coloured patterns on the oil's surface change, as deals are struck and factions evolve; yet the slick ultimately holds together. It is only in periods of storm that the surface is roiled, and that politicians and the popular classes become temporarily stirred up and engaged with one another. So, it is not as simple, as some of the Africanist literature suggests, as peasants or society confronting the state. Nor is it the case, I suggest, that society is so interpenetrated by patronage networks that we cannot distinguish the two. Rather, there is a political class that is distinguishable from the popular class and that is, to some extent, parasitic on it. But they rarely oppose each other, and only on occasion do they politically mix. The occasions for mixing, however, may become more frequent in the future, because of the increased incidence of national politicians engaging with local politics.

Conclusions

The above account of people's experience of democratic change in Arumeru, at three different levels of government, gives support to the idea that more far-reaching reforms will be needed in order to make multi-party democracy a meaningful institution. Accountability, in terms of financial management, political responsibility and political responsiveness, was poor. The reasons for this can be grouped under three headings: 1) the absence of transparency and bureaucratic hygiene in the conduct of administration, 2) the absence, in the words of Crook and Manor, of 'a legitimate and respected political class genuinely rooted in the society and capable of exercising a disciplined control over the administration' (Crook and Manor 1998: 11), and 3) the absence of strong organized groups or other collective actors with the ability to force political representatives to fulfil their responsibilities vis à vis the electorate.

In respect of the first, corruption, sometimes on a significant scale, was a common phenomenon in villages and on the District council. The internal accounting mechanisms of the village and District governments were derelict in their duty of keeping a check on the way in which government revenue was used. External bodies were better placed to hold the authority to account, but an unfavourable external audit did not necessarily entail political or legal action against those most culpable. Meanwhile, the ability of the public to hold their leaders to account was severely constrained by the shortage of available information. People had suspicions that everything was not well with government, but they rarely had proof. Modern accounting mechanisms were beyond the ken of most ordinary peasants, and were as much a force for opacity as for transparency. Accounts were widely distrusted anyway, since it was commonly felt that accountants could be and commonly were bribed. Even in the aftermath of the tax revolt, when the lid was temporarily lifted on the inner machinery of the council, it was difficult to know just how much corruption and maladministration there was, who exactly was to blame, and to what extent inefficiencies were the result of resource poverty. Accusations of corruption and wrongdoing normally came from someone within the political establishment, that is, from someone with an agenda of their own. Notable was the absence of a local newspaper in whose pages the actions of the council could be held up to scrutiny and debate. Articles were sometimes published in *Mererani*, as well as letters of complaint. The latter, to illustrate my point, were said to originate from a member of the political faction opposed to the rule of the current Chairman.

The political class in Arumeru, by which I mean politicians and administrative officers, was widely distrusted. People in general were cynical about the motivations of politicians, and set greater store by what politicians did than by what they said. A good example of this is the attitude towards the ex-council chairman. Although a majority of the District's voters called for his head in 1998, when I visited his own

ward in 2001, he remained a popular figure. People could see the material benefits that he had brought to the village, they remembered him as a good developmental mobiliser, and they did not worry too much about the accusations levelled against him from other quarters. Several informants told me that they would love to see him stand again for the seat. To give another example, the chairman who succeeded Sabaya was also the subject of rumour regarding graft, yet he was popular in his home village, because he got things done. People appreciated a forceful personality who could mobilise people for self-help activities and then secure government resources, by whatever means, to finish the job. In recent years a faction has emerged that challenges this style of politics by deploying a discourse of good governance, and by pointing to possible instances of corruption. It is too early to say whether this discourse is genuinely believed in by its enunciators, or whether it is being used instrumentally in an attempt to lever the present incumbents out of office. In support of the latter interpretation, the incumbent group was perfectly capable of casting aspersions at the integrity of its opponents.

'Civil society', meanwhile, was not organized in such a way as to be able to exercise an ongoing surveillance over the activities of the political class. In spite of being a relatively prosperous agricultural area, the political dynamism that Crook identifies, for example, in cocoa areas in Ghana was largely absent (Crook and Manor 1998). Those 'grassroots' organisations that existed – the church, the co-operative, MESODET – were themselves either compromised by corruption, or too politically divisive to be able to play a watchdog role. Other organisations such as credit societies and small income-generating groups, especially those run by women, showed little inclination to shoulder a political role. At the time of the general election the Lutheran church, through its national arm, had launched a civic awareness campaign that advised people not to vote for politicians that offered them money during elections. This did not prevent money playing a significant role in the election in the west of the District, nor did it prevent the local diocese of the Lutheran church itself breaking electoral regulations in its campaign for the successful candidate. Other NGOs with a large developmental presence in the area, notably World Vision, had not yet succeeded in empowering their target communities to hold their leaders to account, though this was an expressed aim of their projects (Kelsall 2000).

These themes will be picked up in the next chapter where I provide a more extended analytical discussion of the causes of low accountability at local level.

Another interesting feature of this case is that the opposition, which in 1995 won a parliamentary seat in the District, had, by 2000, been completely eclipsed. NCCR was a spent force, with many of its activists following Augustine Mrema into the TLP. But neither the latter party, nor CHADEMA, had managed to mount a serious challenge to the CCM. Some of their leading figures were being tempted to rejoin the CCM fold. In this sense one could say that multi-party politics has been fairly painlessly domesticated in this area of Tanzania; the cost being its emasculation.

While the District has been volatile, and will doubtless remain so, this is the result of a diverse bundle of structural changes, some of which are bound up with 'Governance' reforms, but few of which are directly attributable to the introduction of new political parties.

CHAPTER 3

Thinking About Local Governance: Institutions, Economic Diversification, Identity

The previous two chapters told a dispiriting story about the lack of accountability of politicians to the public at large. Even in the cases we have identified in which action from below shattered the surface of quotidian high politics, the political elite managed rapidly to re-establish control. The current chapter takes a step back from the detailed political histories of Arumeru, and attempts to think about problems of local accountability in a larger Tanzanian and comparative perspective. This will entail reflection on the impact of institutions, economics and social identity on accountability.

It is useful, at the outset, to consider the conditions that must obtain in order that politicians and officials be held accountable for their actions by the public, or a majority of the public. Firstly (or lastly, depending on one's point of view) the system must provide for the sanctioning of unpopular or unresponsive officials by the public. In a constitutional system these provisions take the form of laws. Secondly, the public must have access to enough information to allow it to make a judgement as to whether or not officials ought to be sanctioned. These two – legality and transparency – might be considered necessary but not sufficient conditions for accountability. It is one thing to be in possession of knowledge; it is quite another to use it.

Constitutional reform and increased transparency are not enough, in and of themselves, to render democracy meaningful. If ordinary citizens are to force their representatives to supervise council officers and to utilise council resources efficiently in accordance with popular demands, they must act: to elicit information from politicians, to convey information to them, to vote the right way in elections, and to peacefully protest initiatives that go against their interests. In other words, people must have political commitment and they must have solidarity. Without citizen activism, constitutional reforms are liable to end in 'pseudo-democracy'. Crucial to commitment and solidarity are time, and social identity. Whether or not individuals will invest time in political organisation will depend, then, on a variety of factors ranging from the opportunity costs of political action, to competing spheres of self-realization, to the emotional tug of a cause or a collective.

The chapter will discuss these desiderata in order. Firstly, it will examine issues of legality and transparency by looking at the analysis of local governance which has been articulated as part of the Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP). It will also consider a sympathetic critique of the programme that has been made in a UNDP consultancy document. Next it will look at the issue of time in relation to

accountability. Finally, it will discuss social and collective identity. The argument of the latter part of the chapter is that economic liberalisation, with which Governance is bound up, is, paradoxically, unleashing forces that make the political ambitions of the Governance Agenda more difficult to achieve.

Institutions, Transparency and Democracy

In interviews in 2001 I asked informants in Akeri Village what the single most significant obstacle to holding Government leaders to account was. 'Lack of information' was the most common response. Governance experts are aware of this: they recognize that local government in Tanzania is presently characterised by low levels of transparency, a fact they are trying to rectify. To date, the focus of donor programmes has been on internal administrative procedures, and on making these procedures transparent to politicians and the wider public. In 2001 a major report on the progress of the LGRP stressed the importance to good governance of strong internal accounting mechanisms, noticing that:

The internal audit function in most LGAs is very weak. There is usually one or no appropriately qualified internal auditor ... internal audit reports are not regularly produced. If, and when, produced their quality is very poor, which is a reflection of weak capacity (Watson and Baek 2001:48)

This would certainly be a fair description of financial control on Arumeru District Council. The Report further stressed that the purpose of internal audit was to ensure that authorities adhered to financial regulations in conformity with, 'generally accepted accounting principles', adding that audit was designed to uncover any breaches and irregularities (Watson and Baek 2001). It was essential, it argued, that, 'regular, internal reports are prepared and presented to the management and policy makers in LGAs. Councillors should demand regular internal audit reports in order to hold management accountable for the management of public resources' (Watson and Baek 2001:48).

More generally, the Report observed that qualified personnel in local councils were generally concentrated in the top key positions in the finance department, but lower down, accounts technicians had little training. At best they held diplomas or certificates; in some cases the staff who had been assigned these roles had no formal training in financial management at all (Watson and Baek 2001:44). In the Arumeru case it is interesting to note that while it was the Treasurer who was the most obvious suspect in large-scale corruption, it was his junior staff who looked as if they would carry the can. He himself was transferred; and, it is rumoured, rapidly began to steal money from another council.

In light of the poor internal auditing situation, external audits, the Report argued, were the most effective barometer of financial accountability in councils. Unfortunately, the frequency of adverse audits appeared to be increasing, though it

is unclear whether this was because of improvements in the auditing process, or because of an actual deterioration in financial management. As of 1999, a massive 90 per cent of District councils in Tanzania had qualified for adverse reports. However, there was no evidence at all of punitive measures being taken against such councils. After the meeting of the Local Authority Accounts Committee in the National Assembly, the cases, observed the Report, simply 'went cold' (Watson and Baek 2001:49).

Donors had plans to strengthen financial accountability in local government by extending the IFMS (Platinum) package, which would track expenditure, to councils. However, the Report cautioned that this could not be expected to show rapid results. IT capacity in local councils, in both hardware and human resources, was low. In addition, many councillors were not computer literate, and it was doubted whether many of them would have the necessary skills to interpret the complex statistical information produced by Platinum. The recognition of this skills gap was the point of entry for an ongoing capacity building programme (Watson and Baek 2001: 45).

In general, the Report recognized that there was an emphasis in councils on upward, not downward accountability. For instance, even in those councils where internal audits were conducted, the results were not communicated downwards to the general public. They were transmitted to regional administrative secretaries and the ministry, at whose discretion it was to act. If downward accountability was to be made a reality, there was also a need to make accounts information more accessible: 'Financial reports are usually a mass of figures that have not been structured to give useful information for various users'. The Report suggested that this information could be translated into simplified formats, such as charts and graphs, interpretable by, 'the non-technical target groups' (Watson and Baek 2001:48). It also urged that Kiswahili translations of financial reports should be transmitted to ward and village councillors, if necessary, in verbal form (Watson and Baek 2001:49).

Many of these issues about downward accountability are taken up in a thorough critique of the LGRP, commissioned by the UNDP and written by two professors at the University of Dar es Salaam (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000). Their report, which is premised on the idea that the village is the foundation of democracy in the country, argues that, 'the consultants got a clear impression that there was little in the work of the LGRP team so far to demonstrate that the reform of village governance received much attention' (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000). In order to rectify this state of affairs, the authors provided 54 institutional and legal recommendations with the aim of improving governance at sub-District level. Their analysis, and proposed reforms, are pertinent to the situation I have described in Akeri village. I shall concentrate on just a few of them.

The proposals, for the most part, center on the idea that the village assembly, legally, and practically, lacks the powers to raise revenue, to hold executive officers

to account, and to make laws. In this context, the ideal of democracy cannot be actualised. For example, the bulk of revenue raising powers at sub-District level actually belong to the District. Most of the money collected at sub-District level is delivered to the local council, and village officers often play the role of tax collectors for the local authority. In other words, they are agents of top-down extraction, not bottom-up democracy. The report recommends, among other things, that the range of village revenue raising powers be expanded, and that a statutory percentage of revenue raised by District authorities at village level, should be returned to the village (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000).

Because of low revenue, the consultants noticed, villages were rarely able to employ executive officers. Councils were supposed to pay the salaries of the latter, but since frequently they could not afford to do so, villages often lacked executive staff. The consultants hoped that with additional revenue raising powers, villages would be able to pay salaries. They also hoped that this development would make executive officers responsive to the village, rather than to higher authorities. In addition, the report recognized the shortage of skills among both employed and elected executive staff. It therefore recommended a programme of skills training in villages (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000:109).

On the subject of accountability of officers to ordinary villagers, the report recognized the anomaly whereby the village chair was elected by villagers, but could not be removed by them. That is, there was no direct right of recall. Instead it was indirect, inasmuch as members of the village council, elected by the village assembly, could remove the chair through a two-thirds vote of 'no-confidence'. This opened the possibility of rule by oligarchy, providing the chair could keep the confidence of the council. The consultants recommended that the chair and the council be made subject to popular recall. They also argued that technical staff stationed at sub-District level, such as extension officers, should be obliged to submit reports to the village council, as well as to higher authorities (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000).

The report noticed that the real legislative power at a sub-District level lay not with the village, but with the local authority and with central government. This was related to a number of other features that marked out local institutions as organs of top-down mobilisation or extraction. For instance, there was a fusion of powers in the person of the District Secretary, who was an executive officer but also exercised judicial functions, such as imprisoning people for non-payment of taxation. The village council was the executive arm of the village assembly, but could also make by-laws without reference to them. The report advocated a more thorough separation of powers at sub-District level, and provided suggestions for how the legislative powers of village assemblies should be increased. The result, again, would be a more popular system of government. These findings are in substantial accord with Mamdani's thesis that the main obstacles to democratisation at local level are of a legal and institutional nature (Mamdani 1996).

The Report also stressed the importance of informational, and, shall we say, cultural factors. It was argued that ordinary people had no hope of holding their leaders to account in the absence of proper transparency. It therefore advocated a statutory provision under which local authority and village accounts be publicised, and details of village meetings be advertised, by means of posters at strategic places in villages. It recommended that local laws need not be drafted in abstruse legal language. Finally, it noted that current knowledge of the law relating to local government was presently thin. It criticised ongoing efforts at civic education, which it accused of being another top-down approach, and advocated instead a much more comprehensive programme (Shivji and Maina Peter 2000).

In sum, the Report provides an exceptionally powerful critique of the institutional constraints on local democracy, and a raft of useful, one might say crucial, suggestions for reform. However, the Report has virtually nothing to say about the sociological conditions for democracy, a lacuna that this chapter will subsequently attempt to fill.

Democracy, Economic Diversification and Time

Another common response to the question of why ordinary people in Akeri found it difficult to organize to check up on politicians was the following: 'lack of time'. Meru experience a number of different demands on their time, some of a social, some of an economic nature (though these distinctions are not absolute). Let us take a quick look at just some of the demands experienced by Meru male household heads, and the means of satisfying them. The first and most pressing is likely to be the need to gain access to subsistence for himself and the household; beyond this to secure an inheritance for offspring and, after that, to fulfil the traditional male prerogative of drinking beer and socialising in the late afternoon and evening. In addition, and similarly related, there will be a set of what we may more properly call moral demands on action. A male household head will be a member of an age-set, and a clan, and attendance at certain meetings and rituals will be expected, as will certain standards of behaviour. In particular, the individual will be expected to not be selfish and to give up time and resources to help other less fortunate clan members. (The same is true, only with more immediate force, in the case of the *boma* – all the people sharing a common grandfather.) Another example of clan acquired obligations/opportunities occurs when a man is appointed as guardian to the wife of a deceased brother. This will usually entail a sexual relationship. Indeed, it is not uncommon for Meru men who have the means, to support economically one or more extra-marital partners. At the same time as this, he is likely to be a member of a Christian church, which imposes a set of contradictory demands.

In addition, most Meru men (and women) will wish to acquire the outward trappings of modernity and prosperity: to eat meat every day, build a block house, pos-

sess a range of imported consumer goods, even own a car. This is likely also to involve amassing the income to host neo-traditional demonstrations of hospitality such as beer parties and the provision of large quantities of meat. Managing these demands will involve a combination of individualistic striving in the market place and the nurturing of social, communal relations; a dual and not necessarily harmonious strategy. On the individualistic, market-oriented side, a typical Meru household in the coffee belt may work a plot of land on the mountain, and have another plot for maize in the lowlands. Some of the produce will be consumed, some sold; for both the household head will need cash to purchase inputs. If he has a dairy cow, inputs will have to be purchased to husband the cow; he, or more likely his wife and children, will spend long periods collecting fodder and husbanding the animal, and arrangements will have to be made to market surplus milk. He may also hire casual labour, and/or do casual labour himself; or a member of his household might. He or a member of the household may do some small business: transporting or selling milk, maize, fodder crops or vegetables to local markets or as far as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam; he may mine or trade gemstones; he may own or work in a bar or shop. A household member may have salaried employment, and may use it to open avenues for the pursuit of other economic activities.

Out of this range of different demands, some can be tied into a wider literature on economic liberalisation, rural diversification and 'de-peasantization'. A number of studies of economic liberalisation in Tanzania have noted that one of its principal effects in agriculture has been to encourage, or enforce, diversification. The latter refers to diverse activities both within and outside farming (Larsson 2001:153). Pekka Seppälä, for instance, claims that it is easy to identify 50–100 economic activities in villages in southern Tanzania (Seppälä 1998:12). Ponte records that by 1994–5, 95 per cent of households in the Morogoro village he studied were engaged in some non-farm activities (Ponte 2001:90). Larsson found around half of all households in Meru to be engaged in some form or other of off-farm income generation (Larsson 2001). My own observations suggest that in addition to this, almost all Meru households have diversified their activities within agriculture.

In the academic literature opinions differ on the subject of whether or not diversification is improving peasant livelihoods, and thus whether it is to be applauded. Bryceson (2002), for instance, paints a pessimistic picture of the peasantry in economic and cultural crisis. Ellis, Ponte and Seppälä are more sanguine, pointing to the opportunities for increased security and increased income that diversification can bring. In a large research project, Ponte, for instance, found that while *farm* incomes were generally falling, *rural* incomes were increasing in areas with good market connections, thanks to diversification (Ponte 2001:94). Larsson, whose research centered on Meru steers a middle course. He points to the increased income made possible for some by diversification, but worries about the fact that

material aspirations outpace economic abilities. The tension is particularly acute for the youth (Larsson 2001).

In my own research in Arumeru, I found a paradoxical situation: many households displayed signs of improving quality of life – block houses, comfortable furniture, assorted chintz – and admitted that a decade earlier fewer people had possessed these things. At the same time, most informants claimed to be worse off now than 10, 20 or 30 years ago. A possible explanation for this is that land pressure combined with marketisation has improved people's incomes, while eating into their leisure time and making them feel more insecure. 'Everything these days demands money' was a familiar lament. More generally, research that studies perceptions of poverty in Tanzania has generated mixed results, with there being no clear pattern emerging on the issue of whether people have become better or worse off over the past two decades (Ponte 2001:93–94).

In 2002 I asked members of a ten-cell in Akeri Village (actually 13 households) to fill out time sheets at various points in the year as a means of gaining an impression of how people divided their time. The results suggested that each household member did an average of 5.17 social and economic activities per week.¹ The lowest number of activities recorded by any individual was 3, the highest, 10. Most individuals combined farming with at least one other economic pursuit, and sometimes with several. For instance, one youth conducted a total of seven activities in the two weeks for which records were kept: working on a village farm, a lowland farm, travelling, visiting or receiving people, attending meetings, paid employment and casual labour. Note however that this figure disguises significant diversity, since 'casual labour' was itself comprised of making fence poles, cutting firewood, cutting fodder and making bricks. The only people for whom farming was the only economic activity were retirees (2 from a sample of 30 individuals) or live-in farm labourers ('shamba boys') (2 from 30). One individual spent one of the recording weeks engaged in only one activity (gemstone dealing) but the other engaged in 7.

In the 1960s political scientists from the modernization school commonly noted that chances for democracy increased with the growth of the middle classes. The middle class, it was argued, had time on its hands: time to read, time to join associations, time to participate in politics (Lipset 1960). Jurgen Habermas, in his classic study of the growth of civil society in early modern Europe, pointed to the time which a nascent bourgeoisie had for the discussion of politics and literature, in the coffee shops of London and the salons of Paris (Habermas 1992). It has also been argued that the advent of political democracy is closely associated with the freeing of markets and the rise of a bourgeoisie (Moore 1966). In an African context, Larry

1. The different activities comprised: working one's village farm, working one's lowland farm, working another person's farm, business inside/outside the village; salaried employment; casual labour; travel; caring for children; socialising; attending meetings.

Diamond, among others, has expressed the view that the state must be divested of its economic encumbrances if a 'civil' politics is to emerge (Diamond 1988). There appears to be a relationship being postulated between democracy, the market, the middle class, and leisure time. The same insight, which basically bears on people's capacities for collective action, applies equally to the 'popular classes': time is a pre-requisite of organisation.

Presently, economic liberalization in Africa does not appear to be strengthening this virtuous circle of increased wealth, leisure, and democracy. Many members of the private middle class appear exceptionally pressed for time. This has been noted, for example, by Sara Berry (Berry 1985). Meanwhile the 'popular classes', some sections of which are increasingly impoverished, also have to work exceptionally long hours just in order to survive (although entropy and underemployment are part and parcel of this). Mamdani, among others, has cautioned Africanists against analysis by analogy, arguing that scholars must recognize the distinctiveness of Africa (Mamdani 1995, 1996). It is too early to say whether this poverty of time is an example of Africa's exceptionalism, or whether it is a product of the early stage at which liberal reforms currently stand. Either way, the point remains: it is presently difficult for people to find time to organize politically. This leaves the field open to the domination of semi-professional politicians.

It is possible that a proponent of liberalisation would respond to this observation by stating that if people choose increased income over increased political organisation, that is a free choice that ought not to be criticised. Be that as it may, it is important to highlight this trade-off, since in contemporary donor discourse democracy and economic growth are seen as mutually reinforcing, not as mutually exclusive.

Diversification and Identity

If one of the effects of economic liberalisation and rural diversification is a diminution of the time available for political organisation, another potential effect operates via the desire for organisation; this is because of the effect of diversification on social identity. In order to understand the nature of this effect we need to return to the history of the last century. A striking feature of the middle decades of the 20th century in Tanzania, as recorded by John Iliffe, was the emergence of peasant societies. 'Peasantization' was accompanied by an increased awareness by farmers of their antagonistic relation to traders and the state, and a consequent upsurge in rural institution-building and peasant political action. It seems not inappropriate to speak of the emergence of peasant identities. In Arumeru, for example, farmers gradually began to develop a consciousness of themselves as coffee farmers, insofar as they grew coffee, and as peasants, inasmuch as they developed institutions such as the

Meru Growers' Co-operative in order to avoid exploitation by outsiders. Gibbon notes a similar process in the Lake Zone (Gibbon 2001).

An equally striking feature of the late twentieth century has been the erosion of peasant lifestyles and the more gradual erosion of peasant identities. The trend began in the 1970s when adverse international conditions combined with unfortunate state policies to cripple export agriculture, with many farmers beginning to diversify their economic activities in order to survive. Diversification has been accelerated, as has been discussed above, in the current period of economic liberalisation. Peasant societies were typically regarded as homogeneous, now heterogeneity is the norm, with an increased diversity of livelihood strategies and cultural aspirations. The fluidity found by Seppälä in a specific village in southern Tanzania, appears to be part of a more general trend. Bryceson has spoken of de-agrarianisation in Africa, as the typical peasant livelihood is eroded by economic and cultural change (Bryceson 2002). Kearney prefers the term 'polybians' to 'peasants', since today's flexible peasants:

... adapt their being to different modes of existence as they opportunistically move in and out of different life spaces ... and display a corresponding spectrum of contextual roles and identities that blur the distinction between rural and urban, traditional and modern, and so on (Larsson 2001:163).

Liberalisation and diversification, as noted above, may bring certain benefits to rural society. But it is worth noting that they act as a constraint on political commitment and organisation. Concerted collective action (by which I mean action or organisation that persists over time), it seems plausible to say, requires strong collective identity. Actors must recognize themselves as part of a group, with a distinct identity and interests or objectives that persist over time. Otherwise their commitment to groups will be intermittent or ephemeral (Dean 1997). A relatively static, homogenous peasant society, would, other things being equal, be more disposed to take collective action in pursuit of its interests than a fragmented one. While Seppälä appears to welcome diversification, he notes that, 'the diffuseness of the cultural sphere in some respects mediates the villagers' resistance to external domination and in others makes them more vulnerable' (Seppälä 1998:132). Insights into the peasants' capacity to act collectively 'as peasants' apply with similar force to rural people's ability to form an effective 'civil society'. Haynes, for instance, states that one of the determinants of civil society's effectiveness is its 'cohesiveness' (Haynes 1997:18). It has also been noticed, in the Indian case, that fragmented identity can impede good governance and economic development at village level (Lanjouw and Stern 1998).

An examination of social relations in which people are ensnared in Meru, lends some support to the idea of a fluid 'polybian' identity. Meru is not a monolithic society of toiling peasants, differentiated only by the vertical networks that link them, as clients, to patrons. Rather it has a reticular structure: people are engaged in crosscut-

ting networks of both a horizontal and vertical variety. People have a diverse portfolio of responsibilities and commitments of both an economic and social nature. This involves cultivating good relations with a range of different people. For example, in order to acquire more land, or to offset challenges of others to one's own land, it is useful to remain in favour with clan elders. In order to employ casual labour, or be employed, it is sensible to remain on good terms with an extended network of kin. People who are engaged in business, need to maintain a range of contacts, some of them far afield, both up and down the supply line, and to also stay on good terms with local politicians, police and bureaucrats. Retaining a salaried position – which can also be a gateway to other economic opportunities – involves staying in favour with superiors. Until recently the co-operative was another forum in which it was important to maintain a good standing. The church was also a source of direct economic benefits, such as improved dairy cows.

This reticular structure means that a person may fail to take concerted action against, for instance, a village chairman, not out of fear of direct reprisals, but out of a fear that by offending the chair one may indirectly offend someone in the chair's network, who is also in one's own network. Meru does not have the form of a traditional community, characterised by an economy of affection or mechanical solidarity. Rather, the ties that bind people are diffuse, organic, or, if one prefers that term, rhizomatic. The reticularity of Meru society has a discernible effect on subjectivity, specifically, a desire not to close down options by giving too great offence to others. In another context, this openness to eventuality has been termed by Susan Reynolds White, 'subjunctivity' (Reynolds Whyte 2002). It can also encourage another behavioural trait, dissimulation.¹ This fear of giving offence, acts, I argue as another deterrent to organized political action.

De-peasantization, then, by making rural society more heterogeneous, also impedes the potential for accountability. It is arguable, of course, that African peasants have never fitted the stereotypical corporate image. In the 1960s, for instance, Long found Meru to be a not very cohesive place: an analysis of Co-operative politics revealed it to be variably divided by religion, education, wealth, clan and village (Long 1970:304–316). Allen Isaacman and Göran Hydén have both noted that peasants in Africa have been more inclined to use their 'exit' than their 'voice' option (Hydén 1980; Isaacman 1993). Even Gibbon notes of the Lake Zone, that the antagonism to private trade was 'not structural but conjuncturally determined by the racial identities of peasants and traders' (Gibbon 2001:434). But whether or not peasant society was ever characterised by an immanent disposition to collective action, it is not now, and liberalisation and diversification make that solidarity ever more difficult, I suggest, to attain in the future.

1. Which has been noted recently in (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999).

A re-invigoration of rural associational life arguably awaits two developments: 1) an increase in economic growth to the point at which the amount of leisure time available for organisation increases, and/or 2) the gradual erasure of 'polybian' identities and their replacement by new identities, which generate new forms of association. To give an example, a very small number of people from Arumeru began mining gemstones at Mererani in the 1960s and 1970s. Today they have abandoned farming, they own small pits and they are comparatively wealthy. They have their own organisation – Arusha Region Small Miners' Association (AREMA) – which regularly uses the courts, the press and the political process to their advantage. This is not to imply that the present author desires to see polybian identities 'rubbed out'; far from it. It is simply to observe that the current constitution of identities sits ill with the aspirations of governance programmes.

History, Subjectivity, Accountability

The last section spoke of de-peasantization and de-agrarianization. What I want to discuss in this section, is *de-centering*. My attention to the phenomenon of de-centering, it will be recalled, arose out of my perplexity over the lack of fit between people's general idea that they had a right and a responsibility to hold leaders to account, an idea that had a long historical lineage, and their actual unwillingness or inability to do so. It also arose out of an appreciation of the fits and starts, peaks and troughs, and hybrid character of action. The last chapter, and the last section, provided discussions of the ways in which social fragmentation can impede collective action and political accountability. Those discussions, in typical political science tradition, have focussed primarily on fragmentation on the societal plane. The idea is that the majority finds it difficult to impose its will on the political elite, whenever it is divided into small segments. While agreeing with this observation, what I intend to do in the rest of this chapter is to add an extra dimension to it. What I want to argue is that fragmentation is a phenomenon that is also immanent within the individual.

By itself, this claim is not especially radical: for some years, post-structuralists, post-modernists and post-colonialists have been stressing fragmentation and hybridity. The idea is that the individual self is not a unitary, self-authoring, hermetically sealed entity, with a distinct identity. It is not, to borrow an image John Lonsdale has used in another context, rolling around society like a coloured ball on a billiard table (Lonsdale 1994). Rather, it is strung out in social relations; it is permeable, plurivocal, authored in its interactions with others. Returning to Lonsdale's metaphor, it is itself formed from many shifting segments, like the shards of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope. To put the matter simply, each individual is made up of a plurality of different identities: religious, ethnic, geographical, economic, occupational, aspirational.

In the following paragraphs I will provide a sketch of the main historical genealogies that compose people in Meru, with the aim of showing how this can make accountability difficult. The idea that people are ‘made up’ in this way points to the idea that people are constructed in social relations of an economic, cultural and institutional nature. In this respect the approach I employ accords with Karl Marx’s dictum that, ‘The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality it is the ensemble of the social relations’ (Marx 1977:157). It is also close to Michel Foucault’s accounts of the way in which the subject, and subjectivity, is constructed in discourse. The preceding discussion of diversification and networks has already addressed social relations and the effect they exert on how people conceive of themselves and their behaviour. But that discussion has been largely synchronic. There is also a diachronic dimension to be discerned.

Thinking about the key historical forces and social relations that fashioned Meru subjectivity, I identified five surfaces, or strata, of historical experience that seemed most relevant to the construction of people’s subjectivity; that is, to the bundle of beliefs, dispositions, capacities and desires that made them up. The identification of these surfaces, as well as drawing on my own experience, borrows heavily from Thomas Spear’s history of the area (Spear 1997). The first stratum I call moral economy; the second, Christian individualism; the third, market individualism, the fourth, popular accountability, and the fifth, relational ethnic identity.

Firstly, let us begin with moral economy: this surface refers to a set of endowments, ideals and orientations which relate to the productive and social system of the first settlers on Mount Meru. Adumbrated by Spear, it consisted of individual household heads directing family labour on family plots but dependent on close kin and other lineage members for certain collective and ritual functions. It embodied a “moral economy of land” under which each person was entitled to as much land as was required for subsistence, and under which hard work and effort were rewarded, laziness and shirking stigmatised. The individual was partially subordinate to the collective in this society. Harjula, for instance, records 29 different Meru proverbs which concern the collective dimensions of the good life. Yet the proverbs also imply that for social harmony to obtain, individuals and families require space in which to determine their own lives.¹ Traditions of moral economy survive in Meru today in terms of the obligations that richer members of society have toward poorer members, in terms of the emotional value still placed on land, in terms of the continuing authority of clan elders in land affairs, and in terms of the continuing (though declining) importance of a variety of clan rituals.

The moral economy was also a moral polity, that embodied a strong element of popular accountability. For example, within a given geographical area, all the male household heads that traced their fictive descent to a common ancestor and had the

1. Harjula (1997):13, 23.

responsibility of choosing a clan elder or leader (*nshili*) to adjudicate in certain disputes and to liaise with the vashili of other clans. The collective of clan leaders chose a chief (*mangi*) from among the Kaaya, which was the royal clan. The popular nature of political accountability was reflected in the *mangi's* investiture ritual. In front of a large audience, the *mangi* would be presented with various gifts, one of the leaders would face him, hold him by the shoulders and say, 'We have given you this "throne," sit on it, and rule over us'.¹ Generally speaking an office for life, chiefs and clan elders could nevertheless be removed if they failed to use their wisdom and power for the benefit of the whole society. Yet a chief could be stern, and he expected tribute from commoners. Meanwhile the segmentary, clan structure was and is counterposed by a horizontal age-set structure crystallised into localised age-groups, an institution that Meru copied from the Arusha in the late nineteenth century in the interests of self-defence. Today every Meru is initiated into an age-set and progresses through a series of age grades in the course of his or her life. Its influence is less pervasive than that of the clan, yet this unit, as we saw in the case of the religious conflict and the tax revolt, continues to be an intermittent template for social action. Clan and age-set elections continue to this day.

The next historical genealogy, or discursive surface I am going to discuss, is in partial conflict with aspects of the above stratum. It is a sort of subjectivity introduced by Christianity. Early missionaries demanded a sober self-discipline from their converts, and prohibited traditional dancing and drinking, worship of ancestors and practice of witchcraft. They encouraged edifying labour for wages, education, self-development and evangelism. These strictures were relaxed somewhat when German missionaries were deported following World War 1. The church became more popular, and more integrated into the community.² However, as we have seen, ascetic Christianity has been revived recently.

If the balance of collectivism and individualism of the moral economy was tilted toward individualism by Christianity, it has been tilted still further by market individualism. This is our third historical surface. Early Christians were the first coffee growers and Meru have participated in the market in order to pay taxes and purchase a range of consumer goods. The 1950s and 1960s were a period of increasing economic differentiation (although land and labour were still not fully commodified). To some extent the Arusha Declaration put a lid on these processes, and reinforced tendencies to collective co-operation extant in Meru culture. This has changed recently. Economic liberalisation creates new wants, while shortage of land makes them more difficult to fulfil. Most families have abandoned the idea that they can pass economic plots of land to sons. Instead they prefer to give them house-plots, and education to equip them for a life in business.

1. Puritt (1970):111.

2. Spear (1997).

The moral economy, I have suggested, contained strong elements of political accountability. These were given a more modern expression when literate Christians availed themselves of the language of rights and democracy: our fourth surface. They established a Planters' Association in the 1930s, a Citizens' Union in the 1950s, in 1953 they won democratic local government, and subjected the chief to election. They also established a coffee co-operative.¹ Since independence, a variety of party and government structures have been experimented with, and most have contained some significant provisions for competition and voting, (even if of the single-party variety).² In 1992 multi-partyism was introduced, with parliamentary elections held in 1995.³

Finally there is the relational identity forged in opposition to Chagga and Arusha, which has been touched upon in previous chapters. What I want to argue is that there is a contradiction, or lack of fit, between these different historical experiences. It is not quite correct to think, as Spear appears to do, that these different effects have merely piled up, one on top of the other, like sedimented strata of rock. Rather, they jostle together, like ill-fitting tectonic plates. There has not been a gentle assimilation of new traditions, rather, the traditions struggle with each other for position. Sometimes the fight ends in a kind of deadlock. Take for example the paradox I found in the disjuncture between ideas about accountability and their actual practice. This can be explained, I want to argue, by reference to the fact that ideas about popular accountability reflect just two of the discursive surfaces present within ordinary Meru. They have to compete, and often unsuccessfully, with the demands and desires of the market as well as with other, collective obligations, that are inscribed on the surface of alternative historical traditions. At other times, this stasis is ruptured, as the plates collide and the surface is shattered by eruptions of heterogeneous contentious action.

1. Nelson (1967), Spear (1997).

2. Puritt (1970, 1977), Cliffe and Puritt (1967), Mbise and Moris (1974).

3. The result of the election at national level was that the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution) comfortably beat the main challenger NCCR (National Convention for Construction and Reform). But in Arumeru East constituency, the site of fieldwork, Samwel Kisanga of NCCR beat Moses Ndosoi of CCM.

Conclusions

The preceding chapters have narrated a history of political contention and quiescence in Arumeru. Its leitmotif has been that poor people have had difficulty in imposing their will on the District's leaders. The analysis has argued that this is the result of a variety of factors, including lack of information, lack of time, lack of a clear legal situation, and also, importantly, lack of clear, or homogenous, individual and collective social identities.

Good governance theorists currently concentrate attention and resources on the legal and institutional provisions that thwart democracy. Legal reform, institutional restructuring, increased transparency, and improved civic education, are all expected to increase the possibility of vibrant local governance. However, the analysis presented here has also identified two other phenomena that make democracy difficult to realize, that are less amenable to quick fix institutional reform, and which in some respects are bound up with the whole thrust of donor policy in Africa.

The first is the decreasing amount of time available for people for political organisation in a context of economic liberalisation. People are working long hours, for a number of different reasons: one reason is the decline of traditional crops such as coffee and their replacement by activities which require increased amounts of labour; another reason is the desires generated by a consumer society for a range of new goods and lifestyles; another, probably less important, is competition.

The second major factor is that as the economy diversifies, economic identity becomes more fragmented. People find it more difficult to think of themselves as peasants, or coffee farmers. The internal and external forces that threaten their interests are more diffuse and difficult to identify too. Moreover, people are increasingly decentered by the contradictory cultural and economic processes in which they are constructed. Scattered among a multitude of subject positions, it is sometimes difficult for people to know how to act, and even more difficult to sustain a commitment to a particular course of collective action over time. A similar phenomenon has been noticed by Durham in her study of the 'intercalary subject' in Botswana (Durham 2002).

The case we have examined here is also significant for what it tells us about social capital. Donors and some scholars see the presence or absence of social capital as a convenient way of explaining why some communities are better at co-operating, better at developing, and better at being democratic than others. A rather nebulous concept, social capital is usually described as 'traditions of co-operation', or as 'organisations and associations', which are construed as tokens of the aforementioned traditions. From the observation that societies with lots of associations

tend to do better developmentally and democratically, 'social capital' is then reified, and presented as a 'thing' that development agencies can inject into communities, by means of capacity building programmes, civic education and so on. The Arumeru case study presented here suggests that the social capital discourse is not very sensitive to the vagaries of historical process. It seems to be assumed that social capital can be treated as a stock, which can appreciate or depreciate, but which does so fairly gradually and predictably. This fits in well with planners' desire to manage and control change. But the Arumeru case suggests that social capital can go through booms and busts; that the same social and organisational raw material can give rise to periods of enthusiastic civic activity, intense agonistic struggle, and disconsolate inertia. Switching metaphors, since I am uneasy with the ideological currency of 'capital', our notion of overdetermination suggests that energy does not flow through society at a constant rate; rather, at certain historical torque points, what we have called conjunctures, it gets stepped up, rather like the electrical current in a transformer. Then it flows through the circuits of society at a much higher voltage, with a level of energy that can have either a positive or negative charge.

This analysis of contradictorily constituted subjectivity has other implications. One of them applies to how we think about social action. With individuals comprised of a variety of mutually contesting parts, it is hardly surprising that the registers of action are diverse – sometimes 'civil', sometimes violent, and that they engage a variety of repertoires encompassing the 'traditional' and the 'modern'. It also helps to account for the sinusoidal character of action – its peaks and troughs. It is arguably the case that action is not really within people's control. In examples such as the religious conflict, when there is a surfeit of activity, this is easy to deduce. But it is also the case on a day to day basis, when there is a virtual absence of action of a collective type. One way of explaining this is to say that action, in all these instances, is overdetermined. That is, it is not authored by 'the Meru', or 'the poor', or any other such group. This is because the former are not constituted as a collective subject. The importance of this point for governance theorists is made clear in the following statement of Eric Hobsbawm:

"The poor," or indeed any subaltern group, become a subject rather than an object of history only through formalized collectivities, however structured. Everybody always has families, social relations, attitudes towards sexuality, childhood and death, all the other things that keep social historians usefully employed. But, until the past two centuries, as traditional historiography shows, "the poor" could be neglected most of the time by their "betters", and therefore remain largely invisible to them, precisely because their impact on events was occasional, scattered, and impermanent. If this has not been so since the end of the eighteenth century, it is because they have become an institutionally organized force. Even the most dictatorial regimes today learn sooner or later what ancient rulers knew, how to make concessions to unorganized and spontaneous pressure from the masses, if necessary underlining their authority by face-saving punishment for the "agitators". It is organized popular action they seek to prevent (Calhoun 1982:67).

Debunking the myth of the individual self as a coherent, self-authoring entity (influential on the right), or of the poor as a collective subject (popular on the left), are essential to thinking more critically about governance and democracy at local level.

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