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Building democracy from below: a case from rural Tanzania

KATHERINE A. SNYDER*

Queens College, City University of New York, 65-30 Kissena Blvd., Flushing, NY 11367, USA

Email: Snyder.Katherine@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Focusing on events in a rural village in Tanzania during 2001–02, this paper examines the changing nature of state/society relations in Tanzania. Drawing on experience from previous years of fieldwork in the early 1990s, it becomes apparent that villagers are beginning to change the way they engage with the state. These new approaches are framed in part by the discourse of democracy, with which Tanzanians have become familiar since the economic and political liberalisation policies of the 1990s. These events reveal a new sense of the right to participate in decision-making on how to use key development resources. They also illustrate how local elites can threaten to capture benefits for their own gain. As Tanzanians begin to demand more rights to participate in the public sphere, their achievements enlarge our understanding of what might constitute civil society.

INTRODUCTION

We have democracy now. It is our decision where classrooms should be built! (Resident at a village government meeting in 2002)

At the end of 2001 and through the first few months of 2002, in a village in Mbulu District in northern Tanzania, debate raged over the building of a primary school classroom. Months earlier, the outgoing World Bank representative had praised Tanzania's economic development, but

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admonished the government on the decline of the state of education in the country.[1] In an attempt to improve the situation, the government of Tanzania in 2002 instituted a Primary Education Development Programme, financed in part by a World Bank loan as well as by grants from European Union countries, to improve primary schools throughout the country. The first stage of the programme was to build primary school classrooms. When the programme was announced, it led to a flurry of frantic building throughout the country. The guidelines decreed that in each village citizens would construct at least one classroom from the ground to the completion of the four walls. Then, the donor money, which was funnelled through and managed by the District Councils (conforming to 'good governance' decentralisation guidelines), would put on the roof, and contribute cement and the other finishing touches to complete the classroom. From the late 1980s, with the adoption of structural adjustment reforms, the government had been putting less and less money into social services, and the quality of education, together with the infrastructure to handle the increase in students, suffered. School enrolments continued to drop and, 40 years after independence 'fewer than half the school age population were attending primary school' (Davidson 2004). The funding for classroom building was seen as a first and essential step in the effort to re-build education in Tanzania.

While the Ministry of Local Government may have had specific guidelines about how many classrooms could be built and how much money would be allocated, it did not clearly communicate these outside the Ministry, and thus considerable confusion ensued. Once the news reached the ward level, information tended to get interpreted in a variety of interesting ways. In Kainam ward of Mbulu District, where I attended meetings about classroom building, head teachers and local government officials followed a strategy of constructing more than one classroom, thinking they would take what seemed a very generous amount for one classroom (3·6 million Tanzanian shillings, Tshs.), and spend it instead on as many as three. The promise of donor funding resulted in people scrambling to take advantage of the promised wealth. This scramble is reminiscent of Jennings' (2003) reports on self-help activities in the 1960s, when communities turned out to build schools, roads and dispensaries in an effort to mobilise central government funding and support.

The classroom building project, and the meetings it prompted between villagers and local and district government, provide an intriguing glimpse into development, democracy and the workings of the state in rural Tanzania. The project divided the village, and resulted in the dismissal and replacement of local government officials. Meeting after meeting took

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place to iron out disagreements, communicate state policy and organise villagers to vote on classroom location and the appointment of new local government representatives. Before I turn to the specifics of this case, however, I will place it in the context of political change in Tanzania over the last two decades. Structural reforms, the introduction of *demokrasia* as a buzzword in national politics and donor-funded 'good governance', have contributed to altering villagers' negotiations with the state throughout the country, and this school building project exemplifies this shift. Events in Mbulu District have taken place in the environment of political reforms, which seek to re-mould the state's role in rural society and, in theory, give more voice to citizens. As Boone (1998) has emphasised, localised studies are important for contributing to an analysis of the links between the African state and the countryside. This case study shows the importance of examining political conflicts within rural society, and how they shape the state's actions. It also contributes to our understanding of the relationship of state and society, democracy and political change, and explores whether civil society, as it is perhaps commonly understood, is a necessary pre-condition for democracy, an assumption deeply embedded in the donor community and in academic studies.

POLITICAL REFORM IN TANZANIA

Tanzania, famous for its failed experiment in socialism based on rather inventive notions of African familyhood (*ujamaa*), was a one-party state until the government approved the introduction of multiparty politics in 1992. During the long period of *ujamaa* and its aftermath, Tanzanian citizens endured a top-down system of governance, in which they were given little chance to participate in decision-making.[2] In spite of political and economic policies that were often quite detrimental to people's freedoms and livelihoods, Tanzania has always remained remarkably peaceful. Kelsall (2000: 534) notes that a 'key feature in post-Independence politics in that country has been a striking absence of rural political mobilization'. With the economic decline brought on in part by the country's economic and political policies, Tanzania agreed in 1986 to accept an IMF structural adjustment programme. Tripp (1997: 75) states that 'had Tanzania failed to reach this agreement, it would have faced drastic cuts in aid from the Nordic countries and other Western donors'.

Following on the heels of economic reform, a Presidential Commission headed by Chief Justice Francis Nyalali was dispatched in 1991 to survey the opinions of the citizens of Tanzania about adopting a multiparty system. While the commission found that 80% of those surveyed preferred

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the continuation of a single-party system, the commission recommended that a multiparty system be adopted nonetheless. Baregu (1994) asserts that this response by Tanzanians was hardly surprising, given that most Tanzanians knew no other form of politics. Many Tanzanians were genuinely worried that an opposition party would increase their troubles: 'if one CCM has brought us such misery, many CCMs will finish us off' (Baregu 2000: 20).[3]

In its extensive interviews around the country, the Nyalali Commission discovered that, although uneasy about the introduction of a multiparty system, Tanzanians did want serious reforms of the existing political system. In particular, they had grown weary of a one-party state that had begun 'to resemble a racket for the protection of corrupt and acquisitive public officials' (Kelsall 2003: 56). Mmuya and Chaligha (1992: 16–17) note that *Chama cha Mapinduzi* (Revolutionary Party) had been nicknamed:

> 'Chukua Chako Mapema' (pocket what is at your disposal quickly). This was in reference to what the society perceived the leadership to be doing. Once they got a position in CCM, society perceived them as using the office to enrich themselves through appropriation of public funds.

The decision to adopt a multiparty system again reflected both external donor pressure and attempts to address internal demands, particularly those that grew louder in protest over corruption. Nyerere, Tanzania's founding father and the architect of *ujamaa*, had been firmly committed to a one-party state throughout his tenure in office, but came out in favour of a multiparty system in 1990, claiming 'that the party leaders were closer to their offices and desks than to the people' (Tripp 1997: 196). While the government has been rhetorically committed to a multiparty system, in practice it has not done all it can to create an environment conducive to free and fair elections. A Tanzania Electoral Monitoring Committee (TEMCO) report (quoted in Kelsall 2003: 61) stated that the 2000 elections 'on the Mainland were *free* but *not fair* [emphasis in the original]. The unfairness comes from the big state bias in favour of the ruling party.' In addition, civil society organisations are pressing for constitutional reform, which they feel critical to establishing a real democracy in Tanzania. While the transition to a multiparty democracy was to bring with it the disentanglement of the party from the government, this process has been slow to occur, and is often not well understood at the local level. The conflation of CCM with the government was a feature in the politicking leading up to the 1995 elections. At local meetings, local and district government officials were wearing CCM tee-shirts and starting and ending proceedings with CCM chants (Snyder 2001).

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After the introduction of multiparty politics, many Tanzanians remain sceptical of the benefits of the new system. Before the elections in 1995, many people in Mbulu District expressed their concern that if opposition politicians were elected, it might take a long time for them to 'grow full' from eating the wealth of the people.[4] In 2000, Mbulu residents, while less concerned about the multiparty system bringing an end to Tanzania's peacefulness, nonetheless remained committed to the governing CCM. In neighbouring Karatu District, however, CCM had been thoroughly beaten, and the MP and 80% of the elected ward councillors came from the opposition party, *Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo* (Party for Democracy and Development, or CHADEMA). A full discussion of these events is beyond the scope of this article, but their occurrence had an impact on events in Mbulu, and influenced people's actions there in ways that will become apparent below. In the 2005 Mbulu district elections, six councillors were elected from CHADEMA and ten from CCM. While CCM still dominates, this is an important change in district politics.

In this new era of political reform, donors have placed considerable emphasis on transforming the top-down nature of Tanzania's style of governance, to 'improve the accountability and implementation of development policy by politically empowering the population' (Kelsall 2000: 534). One of the ways in which the government is attempting to aid empowerment is through decentralisation. This move is not unique to Tanzania, but has been a part of political reform throughout the continent, and has been viewed by donors, academics and civil society as an important corrective to pervasive top-down, autocratic regimes. In 1996, the government of Tanzania initiated the Local Government Reform Programme, by which local District Councils have been given more responsibility and financial resources for guiding district development and operating with greater autonomy from central government.[5] Efforts have also been made to separate the state from the party in the jobs of key appointed officials. For example, after 1992 the *katibu kata* (ward secretary), who was both a party and state official, became the *afisa mtendaji*, or ward executive officer, a state-appointed official. Yet, as one such official admitted to me: 'We have different titles today but the job is the same.' Village development committees are supposed to come up with requests and plans for development projects in their communities. However, as Green (n.d.) has observed, there is still little change in how government business is conducted on the ground. Cooksey and Kikula (2005: 25) point out that 'most of the funds that LGAs (local government authorities) receive and spend are the result of national level prioritizing, with donor aid a key component'.

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Certainly, this top-down approach was still in evidence over the decision to increase the number of primary school classrooms throughout the country. Other development initiatives in Mbulu were similarly top-down in their approach. For example, in 2002, the district commissioner of Mbulu visited villages in the highlands, proclaiming that each household must plant one-quarter acre in coffee and one-quarter acre in pyrethrum to meet the nation's need for cash crops. This directive was made nationwide in highland areas. While it seems unlikely that it will be rigorously enforced, it certainly fails to recognise the views of farmers, many of whom have been uprooting these crops because they have lost money year after year trying to sell them in volatile world markets. While this example seems to indicate that the culture of governance in Tanzania is slow to change, the events surrounding the building of school classrooms suggest that villagers are beginning to demand more accountability and decision-making responsibilities from the government.

THE SCRAMBLE OVER CLASSROOM BUILDING

The Primary Education Development Programme includes the building of classroom buildings, teachers' houses and latrines, as well as teacher training and textbook provision. It aims to increase enrolment rates and generally improve primary education in the country. *HakiElimu* (2007) reports that between 2000 and 2006, 'the net enrolment rate climbed from 56% to 96%'. According to Dr Wilbrod Slaa, Karatu member of parliament (CHADEMA) and former shadow minister for the Parliament, 65 billion Tshs. were set aside for classroom building in 2003, while 45 billion Tshs. were allocated for 2002, and 41 billion Tshs. the previous year (Slaa 2004: email communication). President Benjamin Mkapa delivered information about the project to the citizens of Tanzania through speeches on radio and television, and explained that citizens should monitor the work through local School Education Committees. As the project developed, however, it was decided that citizens should construct the classrooms themselves up to the lintel, and the government would then take over and complete them. Each classroom was estimated to cost 3·6 million Tshs. (roughly $3,600) to complete. In Mbulu District, many wards (which incorporate three or more villages and are the most significant unit of political organisation at the local level) decided that with 3·6 million Tshs. they could complete more than one classroom per school. However, the resulting rush to build meant that many classrooms have gone unfinished, because not enough funds have been allocated to

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complete them all.[6] In Karatu District, 172 classrooms were built up to the lintel but funds for only 36 classrooms reached the district, so many remain unfinished.[7]

In Kainam ward, classrooms were built in each village, and in new schools (consisting of one building) that had been built recently to serve lower grades. In Hareabi village, the community was divided over where to build a second classroom. It was agreed that the main primary school should put up one new classroom, but that an additional classroom should be built to begin a school in a new section of the village, to reduce overcrowding in the main primary school and to serve students living at a great distance from the existing school. Talk of a new school immediately led to disagreement and fighting, and a variety of people, in particular local elites, jostled to take advantage of possible new opportunities. One faction proposed that the classroom be built about 5 km away from the main school, in Aya Guuma neighbourhood. This faction consisted, not surprisingly, of residents of this area. One of the most vocal proponents of this location was a schoolteacher from the main school, who lived near the proposed new location and, it was rumoured, hoped to become the head of the new school. The other advocate was a local contractor who had his eye on the building contract. These two men are successful figures in this village and, each in his different way, quite influential. The vast majority of village residents are farmers who produce primarily for subsistence, and do not have sources of off-farm income. Though often on the opposite side in local affairs, these two men were both rumoured to have something to gain from working together to sway public opinion in favour of their preferred location. The argument in favour of this location, elaborated in all the public government meetings on this affair, reasoned that there was a much larger number of students who could be serviced by a school in this site than in the other proposed, more remote, area. The other faction consisted of families who lived at the greatest distance from the main school in the Tsaayo Qwalach neighbourhood, some as far as 11 kilometres away. They argued that their children had to set out in the dark and walk for hours to get to school, and back again in the evening. This trek was a considerable hardship for these children and their families. Many parents, fearful of hyenas and other dangers of walking in the dark, had to forgo work on their farms for hours, as they accompanied their small children to what they felt was a safe distance from the main school.

A delegation from the Tsaayo Qwalach neighbourhood travelled to the DC's office in Mbulu town, to demand that the school be built in their area because of what they reasoned was a far greater need. To resolve this

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matter, the ward executive officer (*afisa mtendaji kata*) called a village meeting, having been pressured by the district commissioner to bring the issue to a close.

At the meeting, after much deliberation and arguing, the ward executive officer told those assembled to form two lines, one line for those who wanted the school built at the nearer location, and the other for the distant neighbourhood. At this directive, the CCM branch secretary, two schoolteachers and a small contingent from Aya Guuma led by the Hareabi village chairman left the meeting in protest. Those who remained, voted (by standing in their respective lines), and after the count was taken, it was determined that Tsaayo Qwalach had more votes, and the ward executive officer declared that the school should be built there.

The matter did not end there however. Officials called a ward meeting in January 2002 to discuss the results of this village meeting, as well as the behaviour of those who had walked out of it. Pressure was brought to bear on the local officials and the schoolteachers to resign, and soon thereafter two schoolteachers and the CCM secretary submitted letters of resignation.[8] Yet, after resolving where the school should be built, no progress was made on actually mobilising people and resources to start the construction. The district commissioner, himself under pressure from central government, got word that no work was being done, and had the village chairman, the sub-village chairman of Ayaguuma and the village officer put in the district lock-up, because they were 'obstructing the development of the people' (DC 2002 int.).

The division secretary (who is above the ward executive officer and under the DC) came to Hareabi to oversee the election of temporary officials to serve in place of those dismissed, and these new local government officials then called a meeting to again solicit the views of the people on the classroom building problem. At this point, those who gathered for the meeting suggested that to resolve matters with the least bitterness, two classrooms should be built, one in Ayaguuma and one in Tsaayo Qwalach. In late February, a village meeting was called again, and the ward education officer announced the order from the District Department of Education that the school must be built in Tsaayo Qwalach, as plans had been made and officials from the department had drawn up blueprints for the classroom. This announcement resulted in an outcry by some Hareabi villagers, who began arguing again about the classroom location. The ward executive officer intervened, and suggested that a vote again be taken on the matter. He asked those who wanted two schools to form one line, and those who wanted one classroom built in Tsaayo

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Qwalach first and then later in Ayaguuma to form another line. At this point community members became exasperated, and the meeting dissolved into disorder with everyone refusing to form lines and register their vote.

It had become apparent that no action would be taken in the current climate of chaos in Hareabi, so a final meeting was called in which the district commissioner, the ward executive officer, the division secretary, the temporary village government officials, and both ward and district education officials came to Hareabi to discuss the matter with villagers. At this meeting, both the schoolteacher and the local building contractor were vocal in their criticism of how the matter had been handled. The contractor complained that 'We have democracy now. We should be able to decide our affairs ourselves without district and ward government officials intervening!' This view was supported by a few in the crowd. In several interviews with residents of Ayaguuma, they felt that the decision to build a school in Tsaayo Qwalach was being forced on them from above by ward and district officials, and that 'These days, with democracy, things are supposed to be different.' Yet this view did not reflect all of those interviewed from Ayaguuma. Indeed, several people supported Tsaayo Qwalach's demand for the classroom to be built there, saying they sympathised with the children and their parents who had to trek the long distance to the main Hareabi school. Some suggested that it was just the selfishness of a few individuals who stood to gain personally from the school's location in Ayaguuma, who had managed to push others to support them.

In an interview with the ward executive officer (2002 int.), he stated:

> I think it is better to build the school in Tsaayo Qwalach because these families have the greatest need. Concerning building two schools, I think this idea will not work because the people of Hareabi have not even managed to finish their Secondary School classrooms and teachers' houses, a project that was begun years previously.

'How', he asked, 'would they now manage to organise themselves to build two classrooms in separate locations, costing money and time?' He suggested that all this divisiveness was due to only a few selfish people. 'However', he was careful to add, 'it is not my decision. It is the villagers of Hareabi who must decide what to do.'

The temporary village chairman explained that when he was appointed, he went around to village elders and various residents to ask what they thought about this situation, and sought advice on what to do. When people expressed the desire for two classrooms in two locations to be built, he felt that local government should support their decision 'in the name of

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democracy'. In his own view, he stated, 'I think that the first school to be built should be that of Tsaayo Qwalach' (Village Chairman 2002 int.). He was disappointed that the ward executive officer called another meeting to review the matter, as he had hoped that the friction could be ended with the decision to build two schools.

One man interviewed from Tsaayo Qwalach was saddened by the news that people wanted to build two schools, because 'People do not have the money to send their children to secondary school and they have not even finished building the secondary school. How are they going to manage to build two schools?' (Tsaayo Qwalach resident 2002 int.). A woman from Ayaguuma supported the request of the families living farthest away to build a school there. She said, 'Those people who want to build the school closer, in my own neighbourhood, are just seeking their own advantage. They have something specific to gain. Also, they just want to win at this point, for its own sake' (Ayaguuma resident 2002 int.). As one man said during a village meeting, 'There are families who can't afford to educate their children. There are families who don't even have enough to eat. How are people like these going to build two schools?'

In the end, these deliberations resulted in the decision to build the school in Tsaayo Qwalach first and then, later, if funds became available, to build a classroom in Ayaguuma. Many villagers felt that indeed democracy had been upheld in this case, while others argued that the state had simply proceeded as usual to ignore citizens' demands. Many Hareabi residents pointed out that the state had removed their elected officials without their consent on the grounds that these officials were obstructing development. However, when I delved deeper into why Hareabi residents had voted these officials into office, when they had a reputation for not doing much work and spending all their time in the local beer halls, one man stated 'That is why we voted them into office. We don't want government officials bothering us with their development projects, taking our money and never doing anything. We knew these men would not bother us with that' (Hareabi resident 2002 int.).[9] His views were affirmed by many people I interviewed.

The political manoeuvres over the classroom building project surfaced again in local elections in 2004. The contractor who had pushed for the Aya Guuma location ran for the village chairman position on the CCM ticket.[10] He seemed likely to win until another Hareabi resident put himself forward on the CHADEMA ticket, the opposition party that has come to dominate politics in neighbouring Karatu District. This candidate won by a large margin, and now Kainam residents are talking about the possible decline of CCM in Mbulu District.

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DISCUSSION

The meetings I attended in Hareabi, as well as other events around the District in 2001–02, indicate a changing relationship between citizens and the state in Tanzania. It is far too early to predict whether these small changes will be sustained, or result in deeper, long-term transformations, but the differences are noticeable from my earlier fieldwork. I have attended government meetings since I began conducting research in Tanzania in 1990, and have described them previously as being held in a manner very similar to the colonial *baraza* from which they are derived (Snyder 2001). In the earlier meetings I attended, villagers were often kept waiting for hours in the hot sun for district government officials to show up. When officials arrived, they were ushered to shaded shelters, from which they issued directives and communicated government policy on such topics as education or land use. Villagers rarely asked questions, and when they did, these questions were often dismissed or the questioner denigrated. The lack of participation or passivity on the part of villagers did not however mean that they followed all the government directives; rather they saw little point in openly contesting officials. The meetings I attended in 2001/2 had a markedly different tenor, and villagers began using the rhetoric of *demokrasia* to challenge government officials openly.

As various scholars have noted (Mitchell 1991; Munro 1996), the boundary between state and society in Tanzania can often be difficult to discern. While the state has largely been autocratic in its approach to governance, it is also the largest employer in Tanzania, and many households have members who work for the state in some capacity. Also, Tanzania, until the introduction of multiparty politics, had government representatives at the level of every ten households (*balozi*). These *balozi*, who are now strictly CCM representatives, still exist in CCM areas. At government meetings and at village, ward and district events such as school graduations, orchestrated and structured performances make clear the boundaries of the state, by demarcating space for state officials and areas for the public. It is in these public events that we see most clearly the ways in which 'state verticality is made effective and authoritative' (Ferguson & Gupta 2002: 983). Who speaks and how is also largely scripted. During the meetings in 2001–02, villagers often ignored the script by interrupting, challenging officials and presenting their own ideas.

The rhetoric of democracy has been circulating in Tanzania since its first multiparty elections in 1995. In the last few years, villagers in various parts of the country have begun to challenge local authorities in new ways.

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In a village in the southwest of Mbulu District, villagers demanded that the district commissioner remove local officials who had pocketed village development funds. The DC launched an investigation and found the officials guilty, and removed them from office and sentenced them to time in jail. Retrieving the funds proved more difficult. In Tanzania there is a saying that 'no one eats alone', meaning that when public funds are stolen, many people are 'eating' those funds along the chain of command, and thus it difficult to bring the case to light as too many individuals have an interest in keeping it hidden. In 1998, the majority of the population of Arumeru district refused to pay the development levy, citizens beat the Council tax collectors and burned the Council chairman's house, and 15,000 people marched to the regional headquarters in Arusha (Kelsall 2000). The press reported on these cases and others throughout the country. Knowledge of other villages' success in challenging state officials may have emboldened residents of Hareabi to confront the government. Yet, we must also remember that in the schoolroom case, it was local officials who were evading District officials' orders to get the schoolroom built. Was their evasion an example of resistance within 'the organizational terrain we call the state' (Mitchell 1991: 93), or simply laziness, a laziness for which they had in fact been elected?

An interesting feature of this case was the rhetoric of democracy deployed by various villagers, in particular those individuals who, it was widely held, were interested primarily in their own gain rather than in the larger interests of the community. It was mainly these individuals who confronted the state in public meetings, rather than less-well-connected residents whose livelihoods were based on small-scale agriculture, not wage or salaried labour. Yet the less-well-informed villagers quickly picked up the rhetoric of *demokrasia* presented by local elites, and used it in forming their views and demands. While the parents of Tsaayo Qwalach objected to the state's handling of the affair, they also felt that both local and district officials were taking their interests under serious consideration. When their interests were not being met through public village meetings, they selected a delegation to solicit the help of the DC.

In Arumeru, Kelsall (2000: 545) cautions against 'optimistic readings of the revolt as evidence of Tanzania's entry into a new era of effective democracy and accountability'. While appearing to be a grassroots initiative, Kelsall shows that the movement was 'co-opted and partially directed by elite forces' (*ibid.*). Igoe (2003) presents similar evidence from Maasai communities. Yet the Arumeru case, together with evidence from Senegal (Beck 2001), as well as the Hareabi example, suggest that some populations in different parts of the continent are beginning to demand

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state accountability, as well as question the state's ultimate authority. Beck (*ibid.*: 606) argues that 'political opposition is growing in the rural bastions of the ruling parties, due … to the presence of competing discourses of citizen rights, political representation and accountability'. In Hareabi, the building of the school in the more distant village did not favour local elites, and yet it was what government officials clearly preferred. I agree with Kelsall that grassroots mobilisations can all too easily get hijacked or co-opted by elites, but argue nonetheless that in the Hareabi case, it was significant that a group of villagers mobilised and persistently pressed for their concerns to be addressed by the state, and were rewarded with a school. The fact that they mobilised is important, and perhaps heralds a new era in which, as examples from Arumeru and across the country are made public, citizens feel more empowered to make demands on the government, rather than be passive targets of government objectives.

In studies of democracy, there is the argument that true democracy cannot exist without a vibrant civil society. Mandel (2002) and Sampson (1996) both point to donors' emphasis on civil society, and particularly an increase in NGOs, as critical for achieving democracy: 'Few NGOs meant less democracy and more NGOs meant more democracy' (Sampson 1996: 128). Yet Markovitz (2002: 117) questions donors' and social scientists' emphasis on civil society, noting that their views have 'provided justification for politicians demanding from African nations "'civil societies'" compatible with their own neoliberal agendas'. The number of NGOs increases daily in Tanzania, though their presence in rural areas such as Kainam ward is rare. Mercer (2003: 759) argues that international NGOs and donors 'cherry-picked a handful of elite NGOs', and excluded those organisations which 'deviate from the main script' of the donors' agenda. Even when present in rural areas, NGOs do not necessarily always represent the interests or views of local people, but rather a handful of local elites (cf. Mercer 2002, 2003). Igoe (2003) demonstrates further that in seeking to maintain support from donors, NGOS can become removed from the concerns of their constituents. These findings obviously bring into question the emphasis on formal civil society organisations for furthering democracy.[11] The shift in behaviour by rural Tanzanians described above seems to have less to do with the presence of official civil society organisations, and more to do with the expanding ideology of democracy that has reached the rural areas through the government, and the media's reports on work done by civil society organisations both nationally and globally.

In addition to debating what constitutes democracy, the definition of civil society has also been widely argued (cf. Harbeson *et al.* 1994).[12]

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The question remains whether the actions of Hareabi or Arumeru villagers qualify as 'civil society'. Can civil society be said to be the groupings of Hareabi parents who banded together around this issue and made their interests heard? Or do these actions which lack a clear organisation and a longer-term objective bar them from meeting the criteria of what is seen as authentically civil society? Certainly, such *ad hoc* and non-permanent groups are not generally what many theorists of civil society normally include in their definitions. They are certainly social networks that act as a 'countervailing force to the state' (Buchowski 1996: 82), and thus may fit anthropologists' looser definition of what civil society is: 'For them, the rudiments of civil society lie in the fact that individuals form common-interest groups that are not necessarily overtly political' (*ibid.*: 81).

What constitutes civil society is often vague and ephemeral (Bayart 1986; Comaroff & Comaroff 1999). Defining what civil society is, however, particularly in the context of donor aid, has concrete effects, and Arens and Karp's (1989: xii) suggestion about defining power in Africa holds true for civil society as well: 'The act of definition implies a particular view of the nature of society, political institutions, the goals of action, and the means used to achieve them.'[13] Defining and creating civil society are forces both external and internal to countries in Africa. Donor aid, diplomatic missions, the media, and social, political and economic groups within these countries, work to promote and support the growth of civil society in Africa, and its role in the democratisation process. These influences remind us that donor power is best viewed not as a force external to the state, but rather as '*part of the state*' (Harrison 2001: 669, emphasis in the original), as donors are at the centre of policy-making.

The Hareabi case focuses on actions in the public sphere, and engages with 'theories of the public sphere' which 'demand a return to the practice of politics, not as an elite occupation in which the public takes part once every four or five years through elections, but as an ongoing process though which "active" citizens can help to shape both the ends and means of the good society' (Edwards 2004: 59). In this sense of civil society then, the events in Hareabi could be seen as genuinely qualifying. The events I witnessed in rural Tanzania in 2001–02 suggest that citizens are beginning to reclaim participation in the public sphere, a sphere from which they have been excluded by colonial and post-colonial governments.[14]

In examining the colonial state's impact on political life, various divisions were created which had an impact on how people participated in public life (cf. Ekeh 1975; Mamdani 1996). Separation of the public from

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the domestic sphere was not a feature characteristic of most pre-colonial African societies (Snyder 2006), and its creation in African societies, Tripp (1994) argues, has contributed in part to the exclusion of women from civil society in both discourse and in practice. The rifts between the urban and rural that Mamdani (1996) analyses were inherited and inevitably perpetuated by independent post-colonial states. In making demands on government, villagers in Tanzania are bridging, if temporarily, these separations. The divisions created in the colonial era and perpetuated in the post-colonial one may indeed be fraying at the edges. In Hareabi, women were active participants in the public questioning of the school's location, and their voice as mothers was given a special credence.[15]

Ake (1993) has argued that ultimately, in Africa, the desire for political reform, amongst ordinary Africans, is driven by the need for economic improvement. Ordinary people want to start seeing the benefits of development (see also Schaffer 1997). Indeed, in Hareabi, and throughout Mbulu District, schools are seen as important steps on the road to development. Ake (1993: 243) further argues that the African notion of participation in the public sphere is 'quite unlike the Western notion of the occasional opportunity to choose, affirm or dissent. It is rather the active involvement in a process, that of setting goals and making decisions.' In Hareabi, if only for a short while, villagers were demanding the right to make decisions about a critical resource for their community.

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Boone (1998: 2) argues that 'state-centred political science' has often treated rural society as a 'residual factor' in its analyses. Recent work (cf. Haugerud 1995; Igoe 2003; Kelsall 2000; Mercer 2002; Migdal 1994) has addressed this weakness. This case study in Hareabi village shows the workings of political reform outside the urban centres and the donor-recognised institutions of civil society. It attempts to widen the study of democratisation to the more remote arenas in which the state operates, rather than concentrating only on the higher levels of state organisation and the negotiations for power in the capital.

The bifurcation of Tanzania society between urban and rural appears in many forms, and is evidenced by the presence of more formal civil society organisations clustering in the urban areas. Yet the social networks in rural areas which are now challenging the state on a variety of policies and issues may also be considered civil society, if we take a more Gramscian view 'which deploys the concept of civil society to explore contested political space in which different groups, organizations and

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individuals seek to influence public policy' (Lewis 2002: 582). These networks are influenced by urban events and the work of some civil society organisations in these centres. As can also be seen by the classroom building example, powerful interests are always ready to take advantage of opportunities which promise to further their aims. In Hareabi, a small faction drew on the rhetoric of *demokrasia* in public village meetings to serve their own interests rather than the wider community. They failed in their attempt, but their actions remind us, as Markovitz (2002: 120) does, that 'civil society is not always benign' and that it, 'like democracy, capitalism, and pluralism, is not an unmixed blessing' (*ibid.*: 142). Tanzanians continue to struggle for the right to participate in decision-making over their resources. They have a long road ahead of them, however, as school buildings still do not get finished, village funds go astray and national policies are passed without consultation by central government. In 2005, it appeared that interest in multiparty politics was low, as CCM's Jakaya Kikwete was voted into office with an overwhelming majority (80%), and CCM took most of the parliamentary seats (70%). However, not two years into his term, Tanzanians have begun to grow dissatisfied as they see little positive changes in their livelihoods and few opportunities to determine the policies that affect their lives. This dissatisfaction grows increasingly vocal and is covered in the media. The direction of democracy in Tanzania remains unclear at present, but the Tanzanian population is becoming increasingly restless for change.

NOTES

1. The outgoing Representative did not mention that the decline in education and other social services came in part as a result of Structural Adjustment policies administered by the World Bank and IMF.

2. This top-down approach was not President Nyerere's stated intention, but flowed quite naturally from the colonial system of governance. The failure of *ujamaa* to represent or consider the interests of Tanzanian citizens has been well documented (cf. Coulson 1982; McHenry 1994).

3. Translated from Kiswahili: '*Kama CCM moja imetupa shida kisasi hiki, CCM nyingi si zitatumaliza?*'

4. See Snyder (2001) for a more detailed discussion of these views.

5. This push for decentralisation is not new in Tanzania, having been instituted before, albeit in a rather different form, by Nyerere's government in the 1970s.

6. *HakiElimu* (2007: 1) reports that between 2002 and 2006, 'more than 40,000 new classrooms were built'.

7. Dr Wilbrod Slaa, member of parliament for Karatu, personal communication via email, October 2003.

8. The resignation of the schoolteachers seemed to have been ignored when I was resident in the area, as they remained at work.

9. Indeed much of the reluctance to build classrooms in Kainam ward stemmed from the history of giving *michango* (contributions) for village projects and rarely seeing them completed.

10. In 2007, I ran into this man in Mbulu, and he said he had begun an NGO to bring HIV/AIDS awareness to the youth of Kainam.

11. However, NGOs are as varied as rural communities, and some recognised and perhaps elite NGOs are doing significant work in raising awareness of human rights: for example *Hakielimu*, the

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Legal and Human Rights Centre, *HakiKazi* Catalyst, the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme, to name but a few.

12. As Jeremy Benthall (2000:3) puts it so well, 'Debating civil society is like trying to swim in the Dead Sea: the viscosity of the element soon brings one to a halt.'

13. Mamdani (1996) has specified the political ramifications of defining civil society in the colonial state.

14. For more discussion of public sphere in a pre-colonial setting see Snyder 2006.

15. See Snyder (2006) for more on how mothers are reclaiming a right to participate in the public sphere.

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