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### The bureaucratic performance of development in colonial and post-colonial Tanzania

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## The bureaucratic performance of development in colonial and post-colonial Tanzania

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**ABSTRACT** This article examines change and continuity in development measures concerning cassava in a poor Tanzanian region over a period of 80 years. It shows ambivalent and dubious ways of reasoning about the causes of and solutions to poverty related to these measures, and argues that the persistence of such problematic arguments is understandable if one considers their political usefulness. Local officials have always had to safeguard their own viability in the eyes of their superiors in the administration, as well as those of local audiences. For them, “development” has become a focus of political performances that serve to reinforce their legitimacy.

**RÉSUMÉ** Cet article se penche sur les variations dans les mesures du développement de la culture du manioc dans une région pauvre de la Tanzanie sur une période de 80 ans. L'étude met en relief les raisonnements ambigus et douteux sur les causes de la pauvreté, et sur les solutions à y apporter, qui sont sous-jacents à ces données. Ces raisonnements s'expliquent toutefois si on en examine l'utilité politique. Les fonctionnaires locaux ont toujours dû protéger leurs arrières face à leurs supérieurs, tout en maintenant une apparence d'indépendance face aux populations locales. Pour eux, le développement est une arène où les jeux politiques servent à renforcer leur légitimité.

**Keywords:** rural politics; rural development; cassava; political performance; Tanzania

### Introduction

The present article examines the connection between development planning and assessment on the one hand and Tanzanian local politics on the other. It seeks to explain the recurrence of questionable and often poorly argued for assertions, especially when it comes to the conditions of increasing agricultural production among officials and experts concerned with development. Its main argument is that these ways of reasoning would make more sense if we think of them as political rhetoric – an element of what could be called political theatre – rather than the economic, agricultural or technical assessments they claim to be.

The study is set in the Lindi and Mtwara regions in Tanzania's south-eastern region. This area is best known for two large-scale interventions, namely the “Groundnut Scheme” in the late 1940s and 1950s, and the villagisation campaign of the 1970s (Hogendorn and Scott 1981; and, on groundnuts and villagisation, Lal 2011). Both are typically described as clear failures in function to their developmental aims, although they are wrought with unintended consequences. The present article, however, focuses instead on recurring, small scale projects which have taken

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place since the 1920s and is concerned with a crop that is rarely ascribed much developmental potential: the cassava root. These ongoing and modest efforts provide an alternative perspective to the history of development that is less dominated by top-down intervention from the centre. Arguably, they also provide some insight into why the ambitious top-down models seemed so attractive at times.

The discussion covers both the colonial and the postcolonial period, and the assertion that the forms of “political theatre” which occurred in both inevitably demonstrates continuity between the two. This continuity is real, but should not be overstated. In both the colonial and postcolonial periods, the dynamics of political theatre, as understood here, were driven by local officials’ efforts to manage conflicting expectations: those of their superiors at the political centre on one hand, and of their local subjects or citizens on the other. But as administrative and political structures and the sources of political legitimacy changed greatly with the transition to independence (Iliffe 1979; Mamdani 1996), so did the character of the political performances they helped frame. One could say that they moved from the stage of “studio theatre” during the colonial period to the “big stage” in the following period.

The relationship between development and the politics of so-called developing nations has engendered lively discussion in Africa and beyond. One important strand of this discussion concerns the way development, according to some, sustains dysfunctional political regimes, especially by financing their patronage networks (van de Walle 2001). The present article acknowledges that development projects can adopt a character of patronage when undertaken by officials. It does not, however, share the assumption that the political structures within which these officials work are inherently dysfunctional or illegitimate. Moreover, the political theatre with which I am concerned here is not merely an accompaniment to the doling out of patronage, but one that sustains and, at times, supplants patronage.

My main interest is in the way the invocation of development has helped, over time, to sustain a severely under-resourced local state and how this has shaped the way development is understood or conceptualised. This line of enquiry has to be related also to accounts of development as a way to expand the presence of the state – to constitute “governmentalities”, to use Foucault’s (1991) term, while “whisking political realities out of sight”, in James Ferguson’s evocative phrase (Ferguson 1994, xv). The ability of technocratic language of development to obscure the political character and implications of so-called development projects has been ably demonstrated by other authors besides Ferguson, including Li (2007) and Mitchell (2002).

I lack space here to do justice to the diverse ways in which these authors characterise the relationship between development and state power, but I can at least highlight the importance of another of Ferguson’s observations: namely, that the “state” in this context cannot be taken as a unitary agency with unitary goals (Ferguson 1994, 273–277). Rather, development enables “a knotting or a coagulation of power” (Ferguson 1994, 274) in which different agents participate in pursuit of different aims. The ultimate effects of the particular processes initiated may not conform to the aims of any one of these actors. Thus, “governmentality” here does not denote a rationalisation of aims and powers, but rather an understanding of the way in which the powers of state and non-state actors combine to remain both effective and diffuse.

The present article, then, seeks to enrich analyses of the “anti-political” effects of development by tracing how a developmental discourse with ostensibly apolitical content is made to do obvious political work. It presents yet another configuration of developmental expertise and politics. In the present case, there is no South African Leviathan in the background as there was for Ferguson, less concentrated imperial interests as there were in Mitchell’s Egypt, and no oppressive anti-communist discourse as there was for Li. The focus here is on administrative officials for whom development was a pursuit among many, and who sought to make the most of their inevitable involvement with it. For them, the discourse of development could do political

work even if it appeared to deny the political character of the social and policy processes to which it referred.

In other words, similar to the situations examined by the authors mentioned above, planning documents are just as interesting for what they leave out as for what they contain, for what they obscure as for what they highlight. As elsewhere, experts' language fails to acknowledge the political character of social intervention in the name of development. But I will argue that the invocation of development by administrative officials, especially in public, is widely understood as a political act; as part of what I call political theatre. The depoliticisation of development by technocratic language does not preclude its deployment in contexts whose political character is hard to deny, and quietly recognised by participants.

This state of affairs need not even be seen as contradictory. As observers from Weber (1988) to Orwell (1949) and Cooper (2005) have reminded us, the content of a concept can be very different from the work it does. Arguably, the configuration of developmental rhetoric and political practice examined here is just one of many possibilities in the encounter of developmental aims and organisations with African states. Catherine Boone (2003) has made clear that one African state may use a variety of different stratagems to maintain its presence in its rural peripheries. Following her, what I am about to describe can be seen as one register among others of African politics.

### **Location and institutional context of the study**

The area discussed here, the colonial "Southern Province", the Lindi and Mtwara regions of Tanzania, followed the trajectory of many parts of Africa that lacked either mineral deposits or a profitable cash crop during the colonial period characterised by economic stagnations and an increase in exported labour. Relatively low-lying, the climate is hot and fairly dry; the presence of tsetse flies interferes with cattle keeping. In parts of the area surface water is scarce; soils are often either sandy or excessively clayey and the population is unevenly distributed and often scarce (Land Resources Development Centre [LRDC] 1979). Localised famine early in the British period necessitated relief and established the region as an unproductive drain of financial resources according to officials at the Centre. By the late colonial period, the area had become a "Cinderella region" (Iliffe 1979). The incoming independent government proposed special measures to change this, but did not succeed in breaking the vicious circle of isolation, lack of profitable exports and lack of investment.

The possibility of this region expressing developmental interest in a crop as marginal to agricultural commodity markets as cassava is itself partly a reflection of the difficulty of establishing and maintaining attractive alternatives. Cassava was tried for want of options. But the rationales for seeking to change cassava production changed greatly over time, keeping partly with administrative concerns and partly with current trends in development. The changing agendas attached to cassava – which will be considered in greater detail below – included famine prevention, soil and forest conservation, income generation and participatory development.

All of these strategies were presented as ways to address the poverty of this region, yet, as I hope to show, they were based on divergent accounts of the causation of this poverty, and hence differ in ways to address it. In particular, the aetiologies of poverty used were deeply ambivalent about the role of rural producers in the causation of poverty. At times, rural people are presented as part of the problem: they are "thrifless" in the language of colonial officials or passive or traditionalist in that of postcolonial officials (Ellis and Biggs 2001). In other cases, they are discussed rather as victims of a situation beyond their control, while the problems lie with infrastructure, climate, soils and markets. Elements of both can combine in the same planning document. Similarly, the solutions that were proposed combined elements of approaches that would contradict one another if stated together. Some suggestions focus on inputs, on technical

solutions such as new crops or ways of processing. Others are educationalist, focused on changing rural people and in particular their agricultural practices.

Such forms of contradictory reasoning, which combine arguments with a good deal of tension between them, are not all that unusual in political discourse. It is worth emphasising that their occurrence does not indicate an unusual degree of hypocrisy among the actors involved, nor does it betray grand conspiracies. Nevertheless, this jumbling together of disparate rationales is useful to officials and experts in a pragmatic or improvised sort of way. As readers of development planning documents will have noted, these documents tend to foreground a single or a small number of issues as the crucial ones through which a problematic can be addressed. The juxtaposition of different analyses and strategies then facilitates shifts between different core issues, and thereby between development projects.

The possibility of making such shifts in turn was important to officials who had reason to worry about their viability within the political system of which they formed part. In the interwar period, they had to demonstrate a commitment to the often conflicting goals of public order, efficient tax collection and fiscal prudence to their paymasters in the colonial capital (Gardner 2012 on taxation; Berman and Lonsdale 1992 on the conflicting aims of “men on the spot”). Since the postwar period, they have been under pressure to demonstrate their commitment and effectiveness as agents of development (Schneider 2003).

Switches between different accounts of poverty and development helped officials manage expectations, explain failures, and sustain ambitions by reformulating them. Different intellectual fashions adopted by experts, who faced their own legitimacy issues, helped keep development discourse fresh. The following section will explore the way successive agendas attached to cassava cultivation helped local officials and experts manage their relations with the political centre. A last section will then examine the way the development discourse has helped them manage relations with local audiences.

### **Cassava, agricultural intervention, local officials and institutional change**

A New World crop, cassava probably entered the region under discussion from the Portuguese-influenced areas south of Tanzania. When colonialism was established, the crop was common in parts of the area under discussion, while grains formed the staple food elsewhere (Fuchs 1905). From the late 1920s, administrators took an interest in it as a “famine safety” measure, trying to enforce the cultivation of minimum acreages with the help of “Native Authorities”. This use of cassava was widespread in British Africa at the time (Hodge 2007 for Tanganyika, in particular; Maddox 1986).

Intermittent food shortages nevertheless persisted. Occasionally, local officials explicitly blamed “thrifless” or “idle” Native Authorities for failing to enforce cassava cultivation. In the words of an official report: “this area ... has been subject to famine before and is inhabited by a thrifless people who in spite of repeated warnings are content to live from hand to mouth and have little, if any, reserves of cassava”.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the part of the province that depended most heavily on cassava for sustenance, the Makonde Plateau, was actually less prone to food shortages than other regions, and was often a destination for those seeking food. Yet the blame-mongering officials failed to take into account the actual reasons why cassava was not a panacea for food shortages. Propagated through fresh cuttings, this root is harder to disseminate than its grains. Moreover, it thrives only in light, sandy and not too wet soils, which were uncommon in the region discussed (LRDC 1979). Some of the areas affected by recurrent shortage were clearly not suited to it.

Yet, for local officials, focusing on cassava planting campaigns – and Africans’ failure to engage in them – had advantages. Food shortage caused a great deal of embarrassment to

the officials in whose districts it occurred and endangered their career prospects (Perham 1976; Lumley 1976). Cassava cultivation was a concrete and apparently simple counter measure. Further, a focus on cassava distracted from the dilemma officials faced between ensuring tax collection and preventing famine. Most villagers in this region paid their taxes by selling grain in the absence of other cash crops. This meant that they made themselves more vulnerable to food shortage by serving their tax obligations. As efficiency in tax collection was no less important to a district officer's good standing than reduction of famine; they faced conflicting goals.

In the early 1930s, an agricultural officer tried to address the problem directly by experimenting with alternative, non-grain cash crops.<sup>2</sup> But he found that these experiments were difficult to finance, as the Centre was reluctant to spend money on a region that had already cost so much in famine relief and delivered such low returns in tax. Moreover, every cash crop faced the same difficulty with market access due to poor transport infrastructure, and again funding to improve this infrastructure was not forthcoming from the Centre.<sup>3</sup> Emphasising the need for peasant effort in cassava cultivation was a much safer way to frame food security problems than examining these political constraints.

Somewhat ironically, it appears that cassava nevertheless came to contribute to food security not through locally enforced cultivation, but by entering the regional food market. Cassava flour mills came into wider use during the Second World War, when food security was at a political premium. Cassava flour, more easily transportable than the whole root, could then plug holes in the food supply caused by the exportation of more sought-after grains to politically or strategically more important parts of the colony or empire.<sup>4</sup> During the boom in demand for foodstuffs that followed the war, cassava finally became a cash earner. In 1948, the district officer in Newala on the Makonde plateau, the district most geared towards cassava cultivation, reported that cultivators "were able to market over 3000 tons of this crop which in the past was, save in times of famine, well-nigh unmarketable".<sup>5</sup> In other words, the official policy of cassava cultivation as a food security measure never appeared to have made much difference to a crop whose uses were shaped by the vagaries of soils, climate, markets and taxation. Nevertheless, for local officials there were at times advantages to invoking this policy.

### *Urgency and optimism: the independence period*

Here, as elsewhere in Tanzania, the years between the foundation of the Tanganyika African National Union in 1954 and independence in 1961, were marked by an expectation that things could only get better. The technocratic optimism of this period has been much remarked on (Cooper 1996). In the region under discussion, the greatest economic change was the rise of a cash crop more profitable than grain; that is, the cashew nut. It added to the general optimism. Instead of specific aims such as famine prevention and tax collection, there was a general sense that "more is better"; production increases were routinely expected and implicitly taken as a good thing.

This optimism, though, also created new pressures on provincial officials. They had to demonstrate commitment and success, and arguably could expect less understanding from superiors who were less willing to accept "natives" shortcomings as an explanation for failure. In this spirit, in 1961 an agricultural officer deployed to this area transmitted to Dar es Salaam the "production targets" he had set for the province. Referring to one district, Lindi, he stated that:

minimum acreages to be cultivated by each family have been laid down as a result of which it has been found possible to set the following district production targets for the next five years:



present	average	estimated 1962	1967 (tons)
Pulses	700	450	1500
Cassava	100	150	2000
Sesame	2500	4500	7000

(Tanzania National Archive [TNA] Acc 498/D30/23 3-year development plan, 1961/62–1963/64, 8–9)

These increases (twenty-fold over six years in the case of cassava) were supposed to be achieved by increasing acreage, better “crop husbandry”, new seeds and some limited use of new technology. Implicitly, the plan presupposed peasants’ ability to significantly increase labour input, and heavily relied on it to meet its aims.

The plan also stated the need for investment in transport so as to ease marketing, in keeping with demands made since the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> Here, the discussion acknowledges that cultivators faced difficulties beyond their ability to affect change: poor access to markets threatened to make their bulky, low-value trade goods unviable. The report does not, however, acknowledge that marketing problems could form a real disincentive to increase production. Rather, the acknowledgment of marketing problems coexists with a heavy emphasis on cultivators’ increased effort. The author claims that extended circumcision ceremonies and “absentee landownership” limited production in Lindi district. He states that “an approach has been made” to the District Council to “change” these practices, without acknowledging that “unused” land was an integral part of the fallow system universal in local agriculture. Similarly, when writing on the neighbouring district of Mtwara, he announced his intention:

To arrive at a standard minimum acreage for every cultivator to aim at and to try to get him to cultivate this area by the use of TANU and the TANU Youth League who will be taught to step out acres, and who will try to cajole more effort out of farmers by making public examples of those who do not try and models of those who do.<sup>7</sup>

Again, the emphasis is on extracting “effort” from cultivators. The “forecast” given above thus seems like an ambitious statement of intent rather than a reasoned assessment of what is possible. As in the colonial period, one senses the writer’s eagerness to make a good impression on the addressees of the report. What has changed is the writer’s notion of what constitutes a good impression: it is not about demonstrating compliance with famine safety measures or deflecting blame for failure to do so; instead, there is a general emphasis on growth and on improvement.

Yet the limiting factors unresponsive to peasants’ efforts became very evident later in the decade. Cassava flour had quietly established itself as a minor export earner – in 1963, Newala district was selling it to Poland and (presumably East) Germany.<sup>8</sup> A “bumper” harvest in 1966, however, showed up the limits of the market for this crop. In the words of Newala’s agricultural administrator:

Generally, in crop production and taking cassava crop in particular, the year 1966 was the most favourable crop season ever had before. Total production of this crop, is without doubt, the highest on record. ... For a marketing period of 2 months only [...] saleable tonnage had gone up to 23,000 and this was probably a third of the total produce expected for the year [...] The co-operative societies were faced with a trouble of how they could get rid of such a surplus harvest. ... it was then ruled by the Government that the only solution of such surplus production, was to reduce the price per kg. Of dried cassava from -/19 to -/12. This ruling, of course did not meet favourable welcome in the hearts of district’s farmers and it was unanimously and adversely agreed by the farmers not to offer



any more of this crop for marketing. At this date, a good lot of cassava is commonly found here and there with no economic value. The state has arisen ill feelings in the hearts of most individual farmers and has come out like a common song sung by many that the agricultural staff encourage the expansion of acreages for increased production but cannot find market for the produce. It is indeed a very serious affair, and it speedily leads to a draw back by some farmers ...<sup>9</sup>

One senses how official optimism collides with the realities of infrastructure and of the market.

Compared to the colonial period, though, there is also a change: the writer appears anguished about his standing *vis-à-vis* his local audience: the cultivators. He comes close to pleading with his superiors on their behalf. In this regard, the report indicates the changed political dynamic of the postcolonial period. In the postcolonial dispensation, officials were under increased pressure to demonstrate or promise developmental success to their local audiences. Yet, in an ongoing process of parallel reasoning, assertions that cultivators had to increase effort, exculpating local officials at the centre, also persisted. This juxtaposition of different lines of reasoning is further traceable in discussions of the relationship between cassava cultivation and conservation.

### *Cassava cultivation, conservation and participation*

In the run-up to independence, cassava became caught up in a then widespread strand of development rhetoric: soil conservation. Tilley (2011) and Hodge (2007) have shown how a concern for soil conservation arose from imperial debates on the productivity and fragility of tropical environments and populations. On the ground in east Africa, the policies arising from these concerns had major political repercussions. Labour-intensive measures such as ridging caused rural discontent, which added to the support for demands for independence (Anderson 2002; Giblin and Maddox 1996).

In the region under discussion, soil conservation became the subject of a flurry of bylaws in the 1950s, part of a broader “drive” for improvement in a region by then recognised as disadvantaged (Liebenow 1971). At first, conservation intervention took the form of simply prohibiting cultivation. Making the Makonde escarpment a forest reserve was first mooted in 1954, in connection with a large scale scheme to improve water provision on the plateau (Liebenow 1971). In 1963, the then agricultural officer for Mtwara, J.A. Whitehead, had written about the Makonde Plateau that:

[S]oil conservation ... is practically unknown. ... protecting steeper slopes by not cultivating them meets with strong opposition. ... the position in Newala in some parts gives cause for serious concern ... tons of top soil will be lost ... if the people do not become alive to the dangers of cultivating the escarpment soon.<sup>10</sup>

Four years later, another agricultural officer, who signed himself Hilalo, stated that the “evil custom” of cultivating on the slopes continued, and suggested making a bylaw against it.<sup>11</sup>

Suggestions to protect the Makonde escarpment by removing cultivation lingered in the 1970s and 1980s, alongside afforestation projects and attempts to expand cassava production for the market without regard to conservation. Yet, when the regional government in Mtwara re-examined the problem in 1991, they presented the relationship between cassava cultivation and conservation as mutually beneficial rather than antagonistic. In a document entitled “Soil and Water conservation project in Makonde Plateau”, produced by the Regional Commissioner’s Office in Mtwara in November 1991, planners projected that *thanks to* conservation efforts, dried cassava production would triple from 1 tonne/hectare to 3 tonnes/hectare in five years, through “improved management”.<sup>12</sup> The price of such flour would, it was claimed, rise from 10 to 25 TZS per kg.

The measures proposed to achieve this consisted in the “reservation” – that is, removal from agricultural use – of land around a dozen wells on the plateau, afforestation especially in so-called “shelter belts” and general “coordination of services”.<sup>13</sup> Why they would have such a dramatic effect on cassava production, in an area where land was reported to be under stress from overuse, is not explained. But the references to improved management and integration of services (presumably referring to the agricultural extension services used by cultivators) suggest that once again a combination of new inputs and farmers’ effort is supposed to be the cause of change. Thirty eventful years apart, then, we find a similar mixture of technocratic optimism and voluntarist reliance on peasant effort in this 1991 planning document as in the future production estimates from 1961. In both cases, the planning documents make more sense as pieces of political rhetoric than as assessments of economic state and potential.

Nevertheless, in some ways the 1991 document contrasts with the earlier ones. In particular, it invokes “participatory” planning and implementation. To understand the antecedents of this feature of the 1990s view, it is helpful to remember the policy transitions that occurred between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s. While villagisation in the 1970s constituted an extremely top-down approach to development (Hyden 1981; Scott 1999), its economic failure created openings for international development agencies that emphasised a more consultative approach (Jennings 2002).

In the region under discussion, this new influence took the form of a Finnish-funded agency known as Rural Integrated Programme Support (RIPS; Government of Finland and Government of the United Republic of Tanzania 1998, a title closely aligned with the integrated rural development then pushed by the World Bank). Until the mid-2000s, RIPS would be the dominant international development presence in this region. Influenced by the “farming systems” approach, it had a programmatic orientation towards aiming for close integration into the social contexts where it worked, and towards supporting small scale projects thought to be in accordance with the priorities of villagers. Thus, when the 1991 report states that “the project is participatory and heavily relies on successful involvement of the target groups in decision making and project implementation”,<sup>14</sup> the Regional Commissioner’s office is both integrating conceptual developments in the field and talking the talk of its main sponsor.

The paragraphs following this statement, nevertheless, specify that every cultivator involved in the project would be obliged to plant trees and follow new bylaws on soil and water conservation. These measures were to be accompanied by demonstration plots, training, seminars, field days and the use of cinema, posters and pamphlets. In other words, traditional top-down elements, some in use since the 1930s, have not actually gone away. The participatory elements represent the newest “layer” in plans that bear traces of decades of development thinking. They enabled the project to pass as new, thus promising, in 1991. But the insistence on peasant effort was unchanged since the 1960s. The main innovation by RIPS lies with the way in which consultation was formalised and recorded: the elaborate protocols for soliciting and recording villagers’ input through transect walks and chapatti diagrams, and the insistence on repeating such assessments in the course of a project.

Overall, it is hard to tell what influence, if any, policy interventions had on the development of cassava cultivation. Such figures as are available do suggest that over the long term, since the 1930s, production has increased significantly. This is hardly surprising considering that the number of cultivators who depended on it for sustenance also greatly increased in these decades. We know that marketing measures did influence farmers’ planting choices, as the events of 1966 show. Yet reports from the villagisation period suggest that the “closer planting” of cassava then pushed by agricultural advisors had adverse effects, as it eased the spread of disease. The 1977 land use study also clearly started the persistence of marketing constraints, in terms of processing facilities, transport and international prices. Either way, neither the

insistence on peasant effort nor the association between conservation and expansion of cassava cultivation that officials proposed ever becomes very plausible.

We have seen, then, how cassava has repeatedly become the focus of interest for development experts, their colonial forerunners and local officials. This recurrent interest was shaped partly by policy fashions emanating from the centre: food security; conservation; and participation. But it was also driven by the institutional dynamics that local officials had to manage, in particular, their need to legitimate themselves to the centre and to donors. In this context, measurements and planning documents do not so much reflect real outcomes and possibilities as the efforts of provincial officials at favourable self-representation. Yet to understand why the conflicted agendas and dubious claims around cassava as an object of development persisted, we also have to examine the legitimating role of invocations of development in interactions between local officials and rural populations.

### The rhetoric of development and postcolonial politics in rural Tanzania: development as political performance

That there is a theatrical, performative element to postcolonial African politics is almost a journalistic cliché: it is only too evident in such larger-than-life characters as Mobutu or Idi Amin. In some ways, this is due to the weight of history, as performative politics clearly predated colonialism (Haugerud 1997; Glassman 1996). But it also draws strength from aspects of the present (Haugerud 1997). For Tanzania especially, performative elements in the independence campaign and in postcolonial protest movements have been recognised (Geiger 1997; Tripp 1997), as has the political subtext of performances not explicitly political (Askew 2002).

Yet it should be clear that these performative elements do not hark back simply to an “African” political culture. Rather, they have distinctly colonial roots. The famous thesis of the “invention of tradition” in colonial Africa (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) was originally demonstrated with reference to theatrical practices celebrating the British Empire in Africa (Ranger 1983). Nevertheless, one source of strength for performative politics lies in the pervasiveness of performative aspects in everyday life, especially in a context where privacy is hard to come by. The practice of conveying additional meaning to verbal content through tone, accompanying gesture or facial expression serves to compensate for the difficulty of making openly evaluative comments on others in the absence of secure privacy. The political performer thus has a highly perceptive audience to work with.

The political performances that I have in mind are mostly quite low key affairs, worlds away from either “Empire Day” celebrations of yore or Mobutuesque splendour. They occur in the regular pursuit of governance in the Tanzanian countryside and very often take the form of public meetings, typically prompted by the arrival of a visitor: a high level official; a vaccination team; a foreign expert; or even a researcher. While low-key, they are nevertheless quite choreographed, with seating and speaking orders, specific gestures of respect and the use of elevated language. Reference to *maendeleo*, progress, is an inescapable part of these occasions. Occurrences as mundane and, arguably, retrograde as the work of street food traders or a small-town beauty contest may be glossed as signs of “progress” in this context. More often, though, reference is made to developmental aims and projects, such as the ones discussed above.

These occasions can be read as political performance not only because they have precedents in the performative politics of the independence era and the public displays of power that were official visits in the colonial period (Ranger 1983; Deutsch 2002). The main point is that rather than facilitating concrete developmental measures, they elaborate, embellish and at times even replace them, and in the process help reaffirm a commonality of purpose (the purpose being *maendeleo*) between officials and audiences.

Much of the literature on rural politics in Africa at large and Tanzania in particular could make the reader wonder why such reaffirmation should even be needed. With the exception of the villagisation period (Hyden 1981) and spasmodic rural protest often concentrated in relatively wealthy or well-connected locations (Kelsall 2000) rural politics here tend to be seen as fairly quiescent. After several rounds of multiparty elections, voter support for the ruling party has held up well outside Zanzibar. An explanation for this quiescence is also easily available in the continuing dominance of the ruling party in terms of resources to disburse, hence rural patronage, and the density of its grassroots organisation, going back to the single-party period (on grassroots organisation, see Bryceson 1993, 11–22; Tripp 1997).

There seems to be little reason, then, for government to make an effort to keep rural voters on-side beyond election period patronage. But this picture of rural quiescence is misleading, for at least three reasons. Firstly, despite the predictability of national elections, the local elections instituted under the villagisation era village constitutions were more competitive and matter locally. Secondly, electoral dominance did not translate into smooth compliance between elections; technocrats' complaints of villagers' foot dragging are not purely rhetorical. Thirdly, and following from that, patronage is no panacea for dealing with rural audiences; officials here actually have *persuading* to do. For this purpose, political rhetoric and performance play a crucial part, and "development" is a core trope in it.

The legacy of villagisation in village politics is quite contrary to the authoritarian character of the campaign itself, as it entailed the entrenchment of an elective element in rural administration. Villages and village wards elected their executive authorities and these elected officials liaise with the appointed ones. Village elections, moreover, were more likely to be genuinely competitive than those for parliament. Personality could beat party loyalty at this local scale, and parties poorly represented in parliament may still gain a smattering of village council seats (Vaughan Hassett 1984; Seppaelae 1998; and from personal communications: Omari Bakari Chanyunya, [Rwangwa-Nachingwea, then chairman of Nachingwea sub-village, interviewed 12 October 2003]; I. Makota [Rwangwa-Nachingwea, chairman of opposition party Chadema, interviewed 14 October]; Ali Sefu Marongora [Rwangwa-Kilimahewa, former village chairman, interviewed 9 October]; and I.B. Namachi [Rwangwa-Dodoma, sub-village chairman, interviewed 10 October]). This situation makes the local officials attentive to their electorate. By extension, the appointees working with them have to reckon with the sensibilities of the electorate if they want to support (or undermine) local notables.

Moreover, these local electoral politics tie the working of village administration very visibly into the sphere of life that Goran Hyden (1981, *passim*) termed the "economy of affection": the informal networks of support and control; of patronage; patriarchy; but also of competition that could make and unmake candidates in such elections (Falk Moore 1996; Seppaelae 1998). The balance of power between these and the local arms of the state, their mutual dependence or independence, are a crucial aspect of the postcolonial order, and were very fluid (Boone 2003). One of the spaces in which they have conducted their relationship is that of political performance (see Geiger 1997; Iliffe 1979 for the mid-twentieth century).

Next, we need to consider the issue of everyday compliance. Even if rural officials did not have to worry about the way villagers voted, they still needed them to turn up for vaccination campaigns, to deliver their cash crops at the prices available, to come out to greet visitors from on high and prettify the village beforehand, and so on. Non-compliance was widespread in the early 2000s concerning the so-called "development levy" (Tripp 1997; Becker 2013); producers do seek to withhold crops from the market if prices are disappointing (Chachage and Nyoni 2001); public standoffs occur around the activities of healers, with authorities alternating between heavy-handed interference and reluctance to intervene even where a healer threatens life (Langwick

2001). The invocation of “peasant conservatism” only goes so far in providing excuses to officials embarrassed by such occurrences.

Officials’ need to deal with such events brings us to the limits of political patronage: it is too elaborate and expensive a tool to deal with all these issues. Doling out resources is undeniably a crucial task of the local state; up to a point the notion of the state and ruling party buying consent is appropriate. In emergencies, it has been since the colonial period, as the history of famine relief shows.<sup>15</sup> It became routinised in the late-colonial period, already in the name of development (Liebenow 1971), and while definitions of and prescribed paths towards development have changed, in one guise or another the expectation of resources for the purpose has stayed in place. But a local official cannot bring out a promise of resources, let alone material goods, every time he (or occasionally she) needs to call a meeting or find volunteers.

It is in this context that public invocations of shared development goals and its celebratory performances become important. In a way not totally unfamiliar to people working in cash-strapped public institutions in Europe, the relative shortage of resources to hand out tends to make the ceremony surrounding the handover more, not less, elaborate. Public meetings to explain the nature of new development measures need particular care if the measures themselves are disappointing.

In fact, public meetings and invocations of development take place even where there is nothing to actually dole out. They serve to publicly and collectively affirm the aim shared between officials and villagers (see Haugerud 1997 for an analysis of equivalent processes in Kenya). The doling out, the invocation of development and political performance come together in a particular kind of rhetorical political practice, in which the relationship between villagers and local officialdom is one of mutual dependency. The invocation of the shared aim of “development” helps both sides stake their claims on the other side and justify their accession to the other side’s demands.

None of the above is particularly surprising as long as we accept that discursive, combative, ideologically influenced and popular politics have a place in rural Africa: that officials and politicians at times have to *persuade* rather than buy consensus with hand outs. If this proposition sounds exotic, this is partly because of the sort of portrayal of rural dwellers, as unenlightened bumpkins who sometimes “make an effort” but much too often don’t, that is so evident in some of the planning documents above. It is in itself an ideological heritage from the late colonial period, when African cities became defined as the sites of progress and the countryside, by contrast, as the realm of stagnant subsistence (Cooper 1996, 202–216).

There is no need, therefore, to think of bureaucratic practice as somehow “perverted” by performance. In a way, every visa or welfare office is a stage dedicated to a performance that is about power (the right to ask questions) and compliance (the obligation to answer). But in rural Tanzania, performance also serves to manage the persisting incapacities, the sheer poverty, of the rural state. Officials may find themselves working out of thatched mud huts. Cars, petrol, paper, pens and stamps are often in short supply. The expanding mobile phone network, while compensating for the dearth of landlines in the countryside, burns a hole into budgets. Reporting and record-keeping, while at times elaborate, are not necessarily rewarded with resources from on high. If, then, the term “development” once was grounds for mobilisation to improve lives and show the world what Africans could do, it has become a common denominator that helps villagers and their administrators keep interactions civil in the face of a long history of mutual demands and frustrations.

## Conclusion

Taking a long view, then, we find a great deal of continuity in the nature of poverty in this region, and in the way officials sought to counter and account for it. The lack of high-value export crops



and reliable transport, and the fickleness of international markets with regard to the available cash crops, remain a problem throughout. In the accounts of poverty and recommendations for development, meanwhile, the most palpable continuity is the tendency to fall back on ideas of rural peoples' shortcomings, their lack of effort or understanding, and the need to extract effort from them. Yet, throughout the decades, references to such ideas also coexist uneasily with analyses of the structural constraints rural producers faced.

There is, however, also always something new. The focus of attempts to counter the persistent problems moves between innovation in crops and other inputs, infrastructure investment, education, conservation and more. Ways of describing the same problem change. The result is a peculiar mixture of the old and the new, and of institutional memory (returning, for instance, to the idea of protecting the Makonde escarpment) with official amnesia (the latter evident, for example, in failure to acknowledge the reasons why past attempts at protecting the escarpment came to nothing).

These ambivalences make sense if we take into account the institutional and political pressures that local officials faced. They had to propose feasible interventions and promise success while also allowing for possible and actual failure. They had to propose alternatives to promising but financially unfeasible interventions such as road-building. In this context, measurement and planning were intimately connected, and at times subservient, to political rhetoric and performance.

The character of these political performances, though, changed significantly from the colonial to the postcolonial period. As Achille Mbembe (2001) reminds us, the colonial state's sovereignty was based on conquest, thus not answerable to the populations over which it was exerted. Concomitantly, before independence the rhetoric of development is shaped predominantly by local officials' need to explain themselves to the colonial centre; in the present case, Dar es Salaam. After independence, this need does not go away, but it now competes with the need to convincingly address local audiences. Local officials now had to actively project power and to persuade, rather than fall back on the sovereignty of conquest. Ultimately, then, the "poor numbers" used by local planners are not only the outcome of the lack of resources so vividly described by Jerven (2013). Rather, the exactitude of their figures is of less concern to them than these figures' political usefulness.

It is worth stressing again that stating this does not imply blatant deception of the part of the people who make or use these figures. Nor do I mean to imply that local officials pursue development goals to simply legitimise their positions. Rather, its uses in local politics constitute but one level at which the practice of development functions; a welcome side effect as much as a planned intervention. To characterise this kind of effect, we can draw on Ferguson's characterisation of development practices as "knots" in webs of power relations: they encompass many interested parties and their intentions, from agricultural producers to officials to experts to buyers to national politicians, but they are not directed by any one of these parties. "Governmentality" here manifests less as the active pursuit of "a whole series of specific finalities" (Foucault 1991, 100; see Li, 2007) than as government letting a local political practice emerge from the efforts of provincial planners and their audiences.

Our case study therefore also has implications for understanding the role of provincial peripheries in the grand-scale practice of development. Historians and critics of developmental practice have traced the emergence of developmental concepts from the interaction of a set of institutions at the imperial and colonial centres (Hodge 2007; Tilley 2011). "Think tanks" and government departments in London and the British "home counties" communicated with imperial research institutions such as the agricultural school in Trinidad to put concepts such as "soil conservation" into circulation. After the Second World War UN institutions took on a similar function (Arndt 1987; Escobar 1994). Yet, while it is true that notions such as this arrived in places such as

Lindi and Mtwara fully formed and had to be integrated into local planning, the evidence examined above shows that local officials deployed these concepts in ways that suited them: according to both the constraints they faced and the ambitions they pursued.

Perhaps the tendency of developmental concepts and practices to take on lives of their own out in the provinces helps understand intermittent attempts at grand-scale intervention. Both the groundnut project and villagisation can, in a way, be understood as attempts to break the cycle of smaller-scale development projects becoming “sucked into” the everyday world of practical and political constraints on one hand, and alternative uses of development practice on the other. On these occasions, the centre sought to reassert control – and failed.

That “development” and related concepts escape the control of their planners and take on a life of their own among the target populations has been demonstrated very clearly (Ferguson 1999; Howard Smith 2008). The present study has focused on the role of official local “intermediaries” in the development process. Putting them into the picture makes visible an additional “layer” to the relations between development and politics. In the present case, as in those described by Ferguson (1994) and Li (2007), the explicit content of the development process, the social and technical processes involved become depoliticised. The rhetoric employed strips them of their power dimensions and reduces them to purely technical and practical problems. Yet, at the same time, the performative deployment of this rhetoric has recognisably political overtones and uses. Not only are the powers that be openly present and invoked at these choreographed public invocations of development; mutual consent and reaffirmation is palpably at stake. The politics is negotiated rather than confrontational, but it is there.

The observer may be tempted to consider the kind of political performance posited above as part of a “Tanzanian exceptionalism”. The peaceful stability and pronouncedly “pro-poor” orientation of Tanzania’s postcolonial regime, especially in its initial period under Nyerere, has often been noted. It has also, rightly, been questioned. Recently the authoritarian tendencies of the regime have at times been very evident, especially but not only in Zanzibar (Becker 2013). The discursive, negotiated character of the political performances built around development can coexist with authoritarian enforcement and violence. The performative politics examined here is one of a number of options available for a weakly institutionalised and under-resourced rural state. As such, it can be found, *mutatis mutandis*, also elsewhere in Africa (Boone 2003; Haugerud 1997).

### Biographical note

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### Notes

1. Tanzania National Archives (TNA) 19365 vol. II no. 148: Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province to Chief Secretary, Dar es Salaam, 11 April 1938.
2. On these plans, see TNA 21695: report on a meeting between the Secretary for Native Affairs, Director of Agriculture, Provincial Commissioner, Senior Agricultural Officer Southeastern Circle, and the Assistant District Officers for Masasi and Newala, Lindi, September 25 1933.
3. TNA Acc 16/15/29: Report on agricultural schemes by Senior Agricultural Officer Latham to Provincial Commissioner, Lindi, 4 May 1936.



4. On the replacement of rice destined for export with cassava flour in the local diet, see TNA Acc. 491, A 3/3/1, Food supplies and famine reports p. 29: Provincial produce officer, Southern Province, to Tunduru District Commissioner, 25 August 1952.
5. TNA Acc. 16/11/260: Mikindani district, annual report 1948, p. 113.
6. E.g. TNA 19365, p. 78: Provincial Commissioner, Lindi to Secretariat, Dar es Salaam, March 1934.
7. TNA Acc 498/D30/23: 3 year development plan, 1961/62–1963/64, appendix b.
8. TNA Acc 494 A/AR/D/new, p. 37: Annual Report to Ministry of Agriculture, Mtwara Region, 1963, by J.A. Whitehead.
9. TNA Acc 494 A/AR/D/new: Annual Report for 1967, Newala district, agricultural division. 6 January 1968.
10. TNA Acc 494 A/AR/D/new, p. 37: Annual Report to Minister of Agriculture, Mtwara Region, 1963, J. A. Whitehead
11. TNA 494 A/AR/D/new: Annual Report for 1967 in Newala district, agricultural division. 6 January 1968.
12. “Soil and Water conservation project in Makonde Plateau”, Regional Commissioner’s Office, Mtwara, November 1991, annex 2. RIPS library, Mtwara.
13. “Soil and Water conservation project in Makonde Plateau”, Regional Commissioner’s Office, Mtwara, November 1991, annex 2. RIPS library, Mtwara, p. 9.
14. “Soil and Water conservation project in Makonde Plateau”, Regional Commissioner’s Office, Mtwara, November 1991, annex 2. RIPS library, Mtwara, p. 17–18.
15. See TNA file nr. 19365 “famine relief”, on famines in the “Southern Province” in the 1930s; especially Provincial Commissioner Southern Province (Mr Hallier) to Chief Secretary, Dar es Salaam: Report on famine in Tunduru district, Lindi, 19 March, 1931, which details famine relief expenses for this famine episode.

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