

RESEARCH

Ideology, Policy and the Political Development of Research on Tanzania

by Paul Collins*

Academic 'development' research on Tanzania has boomed in recent years, particularly since the 1967 Arusha Declaration, which committed TANU (Tanzania's ruling party) to a policy of 'Socialism and Self-Reliance'. A striking feature of this research work has been a general willingness on the part of those engaged in it to be of assistance to a government committed to a particular path of development. Thus the attention of many students of social change in Tanzania has been substantially directed towards the requirements set out quite explicitly in President Nyerere's writings and the challenging policies and programmes that have been evolved. For example, early in 1968 a Rural Development Research Committee was set up at University College Dar es Salaam to sponsor and coordinate local research designed to further the implementation of rural socialism. Its activities have been genuinely inter-disciplinary, and the integration of students into field activities has performed a useful training function for those who are themselves likely to become the 'cadres' on graduation. Also, there was a notable departure from the tone and emphasis of previous years when the East Africa Universities Social Science Conference was held in Dar es Salaam in December 1970. For example, a series of papers on 'Socialism' was keenly attended. This commenced with stimulating sessions on "Underdevelopment as a Historical Process", in which Dr. Walter Rodney, Dar es Salaam's militant historian from the Caribbean, took part, and on "The Historical Roots of African Underdevelopment", and culminated in the final conference session on "Socialism: the Middle Class and

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Tanzanian Development".¹ Other papers in history, economics and political science had similar concerns, showing a definite commitment by a number of scholars to a more value-oriented social science - one attentive to the aspirations of the underdeveloped country of which they are part, but also critical in its attempts to understand the problems of achieving socialism under particular East African conditions.

Throughout these developments, President Nyerere has resisted pressures to close the door on sympathetic research by non-citizens. Thus in a speech to the 1968 TANU National Conference he stated:

"I hope we shall abandon the idea that research is the same as spying, or that the researcher is really a person who is contributing nothing to our economy. Properly directed, research can ensure that our money is properly spent and that our plans are being carried out, and that we get the maximum benefits from the efforts we make and policies we pursue".

In 1969, in the Introduction to his collected speeches, Nyerere also wrote:

"We in Tanzania are part of mankind. We have to take our place in the world. We would be stupid to reject everything or everyone coming out of the West because it is the home of capitalism; we would be stupid to reject everything the communists do. We are trying to build ujamaa-socialism, which is neither of these things. We can learn from both - and from other political systems - without trying to copy or seek their approval. Our task is to look at our own position and our own needs, and then to consider other experience

¹ The latter had its origins in debates earlier in the year in Dar es Salaam over S. Shivji's "Tanzania: The Silent Class Struggle", a radical monograph put out by the now banned Students' Revolutionary Front. Shivji's paper had raised 'embarassing' questions about the socio-economic realities of post-Arusha Declaration Tanzania, pointing particularly to the contradictions in the existence of the (little discussed) privileged minority running Tanzania's newly nationalised enterprises and their continued dependence on, and compromises with, international capitalism.

in the light of our requirements".¹

He continued:

"Unfortunately some of our people - often the ones who were most insistent that we should not copy the democracy of the West - are now judging our socialist policies and progress we have by what Moscow or Peking have done, and are demanding that we do something because it has proved useful in one of these places..... Tanzania does not need a certificate of approval about its internal policies from any outside group".²

With one or two exceptions, relations between academic research and debate and government have been fairly good. A considerable body of literature has emerged which is concerned with Tanzanian strategy in general and with documenting its practical application through case studies of operating policy instruments. One category of writing on Tanzania has been preoccupied with the rationale behind Tanzanian socialism. In a sense, contributions of this sort are highly relevant. Tanzania's attempt to disengage itself from the structures of 'international capitalism' and to avoid the pitfalls of 'false decolonisation' is of great strategic interest to the less developed world. The nuances and implications of Tanzanian strategy deserve the attention they have received. However, a lot of this has been achieved at the expense of ignoring the issue of what social relations actually exist in Tanzania. That is to say, our thinking about Tanzania has now reached a fair level of theoretical sophistication in terms of 'kulaks', 'labour aristocracies', 'cadres', 'bureaucratic bourgeoisies' etc. -- concepts which are certainly central to some of the Tanzanian leadership's own formulations. However, one is still not quite clear about those characteristics of Tanzanian society which stand in need of change, or whose present paths of change need arresting and redirecting, and still less clear about the relation between that society and the polity whose ruling group talks about changing it. Overconcentration, if not distortion, can arise where analysts unreservedly take their cue from the interpretations and aspirations of the elite rather than from actual social

¹ J.K.Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism/Uhuru na Ujamaa: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1965-67*. Oxford University Press, 1968, p.22.

² *Ibid* p. 20 - 21

relations, and thus run the risk of falling prey to nationalist mythology.¹

In terms of my own discipline (Political Science) the two major contributions on Tanzania to date have focussed on the working of the party² (TANU) and on the electoral system.³ Political Science asks questions about the power structure: Who controls resources in society? What are the determinants of public policy decisions? What are the relations between the leadership and the citizenry? In these terms, to focus exclusively on parties and elections in Tanzania is to divert attention away from the crucial area of Government administration, particularly in relation to the control and allocation of resources, questions of 'access' and the interaction of leadership and citizens at all levels of the state apparatus. These are precisely the focus for much of the ongoing and proposed research in one of the four Problem Area Groups at IDS. In this connexion, it is worth noting that the overconcentration of political research in Africa on parties and elections has been much discussed in recent years.

The socio-political reality of institutions in Tanzania is the dominance of 'government' as opposed to 'party' at all levels. The 'top' leadership and the 'mass' of the citizenry do not enjoy the intimate relations suggested by current rhetoric. The principal channels are bureaucratic ones: a hierarchy of functionaries and government institutions at Divisional, District and Regional levels to which party and popular organs are subordinated. Elections, in parallel to these intervening bureaucratic structures, serve further to fragment and compartmentalise the political environment.

Against this background, my own research project was an evaluation of the working of Tanzania's Regional

¹ See P.D. Collins, "'Uhuru na Ujamaa': Recent Studies in the History and Politics of Tanzania", forthcoming in the *Canadian Journal of African Studies*.

² H. Bienen, *Tanzania: Party Transformation and Economic Development*, Princeton, 1969, (revised paperback edition).

³ L. Cliffe (ed.), *One Party Democracy: The 1965 Tanzanian General Election*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi 1968.

Development Fund¹ which was set up as part of a general trend towards decentralization in rural Tanzania. The project covered a 27 month period from 1967 to 1969 and was financed by the University College Dar es Salaam as a staff post. During this period I was involved in extensive contacts with Government officials and institutions at all levels, and with directing research assistants at the local level. A confidential report was finally submitted to the Ministry of Regional Administration and Rural Development in Dar es Salaam in May 1970 and this was followed up on a recent trip to Tanzania (November 1970 to January 1971) when I discussed some of the recommendations with Ministry officials. The research investigated, in selected districts, the local machinery for administering the Regional Development Fund and the working of specific projects - their planning, implementation, working and benefits. Thus a major short-term aim of the research was to find ways of enhancing local initiative and participation, improving vertical communication between levels of government and coordination between agencies at key levels, as well as strengthening the local means available for project identification and selection. Since I left Tanzania in December 1969 I have been engaged on a broader and more considered piece of research on the Tanzanian experience, whose theme and scope is summed up in the provisional title: "Politics, Policies and Local Administration for Development in Tanzania: the Case of the Regional Development Fund".

For the remainder of this article, however, I would like to reflect on some of the problems and dilemmas in handling a case like Tanzania, particularly when one moves away from rather 'practical' policy-oriented research towards a more 'academic' viewpoint. The dilemma posed for the political analyst by Tanzania is the prominence of ideology. In research terms, a major difficulty lies in devising 'system indicators'. This is

¹ See P.D.Collins, "The Working of Tanzania's Rural Development Fund: A Problem in Decentralisation". *IDS Communication* No. 62, July, 1971.

Also P.D.Collins, "The Working of Tanzania's Rural Development Fund: Its Implications for Policy-making, Planning and Local Administration for Development". Paper for Conference on Comparative Administration in East Africa, Arusha, Tanzania, 25th - 28th September, 1971.

particularly so in evaluating the working of the Regional Development Fund as a set of operating policies, since the stated policies in this case contain a number of distinct ideological premises. Briefly, these comprise an appeal to three 'normative imperatives': 'development from below', 'ujamaa vijijini' (rural socialism) and 'self-reliance'. Both Presidential and Government Circulars and public policy statements *a propos* the Regional Development Fund stress the importance of peasant participation in both the planning and implementation of rural development, and encourage its use in cooperative and collective enterprises. Thus it can be interpreted to represent a conscious attempt to approach in new ways the administration and organisation of development at the local level. In these terms it may be 'evaluated' as an instrument of 'socialist' development, rather than as an administrative framework for allocating funds according to 'rational planning' criteria.¹ In Tanzania, there is every reason for taking seriously the stated intentions of the top leadership, both in this policy area and in others, although in doing so --

¹ Alternative interpretations raise questions about either the conceptual basis of the policy preoccupations or their political function. For example, a dominant strand of public rationales of decentralisation embodies a notion of 'populism'. Development is seen as emanating 'from below' through the 'voluntary' participation and cooperation of the 'people'. This formulation is akin to some of Nyerere's thinking, which ignores the realities of peasant consciousness as well as the local power structure which mediates between himself and the 'peasant'. As regards 'self-reliance' it might also be argued that official rhetoric can serve to mask some of the 'basic' features of political life. The heavy stress of 'self-reliance' in Tanzanian ideology can be seen as a political tactic to pre-empt or disarm would be claimants on the 'national cake'. That is to say, ideology can be manipulated by the elite as a weapon in the competition for scarce resources. In the effort to divert popular attention away from the 'centre', rhetoric plays an important role. Thus, political speeches and the mass media are dominated by appeals to work harder, by warnings about the dangers of tribalism and national disintegration, and by denunciations of various groups depicted as subverting the national interest. Such an interpretation, however, is open to debate.

and particularly when assessing policy outcomes -- it is also important to bear in mind the realities of the Tanzanian polity and of Tanzanian society. In an underdeveloped society like Tanzania, that reality is that scarce resources are controlled and allocated by the state, now in the hands of the ruling nationalist group. Historically the Tanzanian state represents the interests of the politico-administrative elite and a party based upon a class of indigenous businessmen, traders and small scale capitalists. It would be unrealistic to deny that one of the purposes of political control in Tanzania is to guarantee that particular classes, groups and individuals remain in power, although in this case the ruling group has demonstrated that it is willing to share resources with others. Moreover, in the 'transitional' socio-political situation of rural Tanzania where the populace exhibits apathy and parochialism, control and direction from above -- say in the implementation of 'rural transformation' policies -- is to some degree inevitable. On the other hand, there is evidence in Tanzania that the retention of power (and the privileges that go with it) is not entirely an end in itself. Various self-denying ordinances -- the most important of which is the Arusha Declaration -- indicate that the Tanzanian leadership is a benevolent rather than a self-interested one. It has a distinct policy concern with the structure of society, as well with the more orthodox ends of achieving certain rates of growth of output and income. It has attempted to define what kinds of development should be given priority, and how the benefits of the changes taking place should be distributed.

Finally the context of writing on the Tanzanian case presents additional dilemmas for the committed political analyst. In the context of local circles, a critical analysis of Tanzanian practice is, in the long run, the only helpful one. If this is to assist the attempt to transform peasant consciousness and rural society, it can only be done through a grasp of social realities, which are the starting point for analysis. Inevitably, where research takes seriously the aspirations of the leadership, the emergent picture tends to point to the discontinuities between aspirations and reality. Unfortunately, outside interests are only too quick to seize upon such conclusions, which, when taken out of context, may be used to diminish the

significance of the Tanzanian experience.¹ The point here is not to deny that, potentially, Tanzania has some of the features of the post-independence state seen elsewhere in tropical Africa, or even that contradictions still exist in some of its policies. Rather it is to counteract the current configuration of hostile forces in Tanzania's international environment. The argument of this article is that this can best be done, not as it has been done in the past by a romanticisation of Tanzanian strategy and practice which glosses over the actual historical and material conditions, but by a frank yet committed account of what is actually happening and what the obstacles are.

¹ See Colin Leys, "Tanzaphilia and all that"; *Transition*, Kampala, Dec./January 1968, (Vol. 7 (iii)).