

# Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Norms of Participation in Tanzania: Working against the Grain

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**Abstract:** The “institutional turn” in contemporary development theory has emphasized the importance of facilitating the emergence of institutions that will improve citizens’ abilities to make choices. More important, it has suggested that the effectiveness of these institutions depends upon their ability to “work with the grain” of the local sociocultural environment. This article argues that community-based organizations (CBOs), as one prominent embodiment of institutional blueprints guiding relationships between state and nonstate actors in development efforts, are a poor fit in the context of contemporary urban Tanzania. This is because they are not consonant with the norms that have long governed popular participation in either the development process or associational life. Although the specific conclusions are limited to Dar es Salaam, the study calls for a method of interrogation that is not only historically and sociologically grounded, but also broadly applicable to other development issues.

**Résumé:** Le “tournant institutionnel” dans la théorie du développement contemporain a mis l’emphase sur l’importance de faciliter l’émergence d’institutions qui amélioreront la capacité des citoyens à faire des choix. En outre, il a été suggéré que l’efficacité de ces institutions dépendent de leur habilité à travailler “dans la veine” de l’environnement local socioculturel. Cet article propose que les organisations communautaires (CBOs), posées comme modèle pour guider les relations entre les acteurs du développement relevant ou non du gouvernement, ne sont pas un guide approprié dans le contexte de la Tanzanie urbaine moderne. Ceci vient du fait qu’elles ne fonctionnent pas en accord avec les normes régissant la participation du peuple que ce soit dans le processus de développement ou la vie associative. Bien que mes conclusions soient spécifiques à la situation de Dar El Salaam, cette étude pose les bases d’une méthode de questionnement qui est non seulement fon-

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dée de manière historique et sociologique, mais aussi applicable de façon générale à d'autres questions de développement.

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The challenge is to harness the cultures of Africa to find such workable hybrids for the rest of the continent. The overall lesson is that outside prescriptions only succeed where they work with the grain of African ways of doing things. They fail where they ignore the cultural suppositions of the people they seek to address.

— *Commission for Africa (2005)*

In the 2007 film “Bongoland II” (Kibira Films International), the lead character, Juma, struggles to make sense of the poverty that confronts him upon his return to his native Bongoland (a.k.a. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania). He is particularly struck by a glaring paradox: lavish and expensive weddings have become commonplace in this city of 2.5 million residents, the majority of whom struggle to eke out their livings in the informal economy. How is it, he wonders, that couples, via voluntary wedding committees, can raise and spend 20 million shillings (approximately US\$20,000) for the wedding ceremony, only to return to a rented shack in an “unplanned” settlement lacking basic services?

This concern for what appears to be a perplexing (mis)use of wealth is not simply the stuff of fiction. Over the past two decades, weddings in Dar es Salaam have become increasingly opulent and costly as people seek to exhibit both their modernity and their prosperity. This is not without historical precedent, as weddings on the Swahili coast have long been important public rituals for the affirmation of social position, key events that facilitate social differentiation and integration (see Sherrington 2006). What has changed, however, is the extent to which a “successful” event is contingent upon the ability of the ad hoc wedding committee to mobilize considerable financial resources through its members’ social networks. This practice has been bemoaned in various venues, including the pages of Tanzania’s main independent English-language newspaper:

Some four decades ago, to be precise, here in Tanzania, marriage ceremonies and/or weddings, were modest, cheap and simple and were mostly conducted on traditional or customary manners. . . . All of a sudden, things have greatly changed not for the better but for the worse. Right now weddings depend on contributions from friends and well wishers. . . . [W]hat has gone wrong in our society? How come people are willing to contribute millions of shillings towards weddings and not education? (*The Sunday Observer*, Sept. 3, 2006)

The enormous success of wedding committees in mobilizing funds for these one-off events is particularly striking when contrasted with the limited achievements of another prevalent form of voluntary association in contemporary Dar es Salaam: the community-based organization (CBO). Typically formed by and for individuals residing in a geographically bounded and administratively defined area, usually a municipal subward, CBOs, which sit at the nexus between urban neighborhoods and a wide range of local, national, and transnational development actors, have become the primary vehicles for popular participation in development efforts (see Kyessi 2002; Meshack & Sheuya 2001). The proliferation of these organizations has been nothing short of phenomenal; the handful of CBOs observed in the early 1990s has mushroomed into well over one hundred today. That is, more than half of Dar es Salaam's subwards now have some sort of community organization concerned with improving infrastructure, delivering basic services, and/or producing other collective goods.<sup>1</sup>

The growth of CBOs has been a function of both necessity and opportunity. Tanzania's abandonment, under pressure from creditors, of a centrally planned economy in favor of a market-based alternative has led to state withdrawal from a variety of activities, thereby shifting the onus of service provision to the local level. The subsequent adoption of a multiparty political system and the introduction of decentralization have opened new spaces for popular participation, affording citizens greater opportunities to organize and make demands on the state or to pursue other collective goals. An increase of aid, both actual and perceived, from the transnational development community has also fueled the expansion of the CBO sector.

The prevalence of CBOs is a poor indicator of their accomplishments, however. Unlike their wedding counterparts, these organizations have a disappointing track record not only when it comes to mobilizing local resources for development projects, but also in facilitating the participation of the broader community. CBOs, by definition, are membership organizations. While their activities often produce public goods or otherwise benefit residents of the community in which they operate, they are structured in such a way that only dues-paying members are eligible to vote for or to become officeholders. In theory, membership is open to all residents of the physical community. In reality, many associations identifying themselves as CBOs place limits on who can join. Some, for example, are created to serve the interests of the youth in the community, providing them with counseling and/or training in basic skills. Other associations are focused on women only. Resource needs further restrict membership; a CBO requires consistent financial resources not only to facilitate the continued operation of the organization, but also to pursue its development-oriented objectives.

Most CBOs sustain themselves through the collection of membership and annual fees. Deciding on the appropriate amount of these fees can be challenging, in that leaders must strike a balance between what is necessary to ensure organizational survival and what community residents (i.e.,

members and potential members) can reasonably be expected to pay. Most organizations tend to err on the side of the latter. As a result, they assess fees that often fall short of enabling the organization to remain in existence, let alone undertake its primary tasks. In spite of this concession, membership remains very low, relative to the size of urban communities. A recent survey of fifty-one CBOs in Dar es Salaam found that they had an average of eighty-one members, whereas the city's subwards have approximately ten thousand residents.

To date, only a handful of these organizations can point to tangible and sustainable improvements in the neighborhoods they purport to represent. With respect to what is arguably Dar es Salaam's most pressing issue—water provision—the operation of functional and profitable local water supply systems has largely been limited to the city's three seminal CBOs.<sup>2</sup> More important, their success, like the few others thus far able to improve infrastructure or provide services, has been predicated on their ability to channel external resources and/or serve as partners or subcontractors for projects initiated elsewhere. While playing the role of developmental intermediary is not entirely at odds with either the initial conceptualization of CBOs or the (local and national) government's expectations for community participation, it does bump up against a fundamental assumption that has made these organizations attractive to development actors operating at multiple scales: namely, that CBOs are well positioned to co-produce public goods by mobilizing an untapped pool of local human, financial, and material resources. By virtue of their being rooted in the "local," CBOs are expected not only to attract finances not easily captured by a weak tax collection system, but also to inspire communal physical labor not sufficiently marshaled in an era of neoliberal multiparty politics (see Dongier et al. 2003).

At first glance, the limited success of this approach to community-driven development is somewhat puzzling in the Tanzanian context, given longstanding efforts to inculcate a norm of popular participation in the development process and a vibrant associational life shaped by locally embedded informal rules and norms of self-help in urban areas. The commitment of the postcolonial government to involve people in decisions that affect their lives was reiterated publicly on numerous occasions by various highly placed political actors, including President Nyerere, and enshrined early on in official documents, such as the ruling party's 1971 guidelines (Tanganyika African National Union 1971).<sup>3</sup>

For a people who have been slaves or have been oppressed, exploited, and humiliated by colonialism or capitalism, "development" means "liberation." Any action that gives them more control over their own affairs is an action for development, even if it does not offer them better health or more bread. Any action that reduces their say in determining their own affairs or running their own lives is not development and retards them even if the action brings them a little better health and a little more bread. . . .

If development is to benefit the people, the people must participate in considering, planning, and implementing their development plans.

In addition, the dynamic associational life that has been a dominant feature of (urban) life in Tanzania from the colonial era to the present has been richly documented and analyzed by scholars of different generations and disciplines.<sup>4</sup> A common finding of this extensive body of research is that associations of various stripes and degrees of formality have played important social, welfare, and political functions.

How, then, can we account for the limited success of CBOs? Why is it that these new institutional organizations, which seem to correspond with two ostensibly dominant Tanzanian norms—i.e., popular participation in the development process and a predilection for associational life and self-help—pale when compared to wedding committees in their capacity to mobilize resources to achieve a desired collective goal?

This article will consider CBOs in Dar es Salaam as a lens through which to pursue a broader argument that has been laid out recently by scholars and development practitioners interested in the nexus of institutions, culture, and development.<sup>5</sup> Building from the work of development economists, researchers contributing to this literature have begun to explore two aspects of the question of why institutions matter for development. First, they have sought to explain theoretically and demonstrate empirically why the effectiveness of imposed institutions depends upon a “fit” with the local sociocultural environment. Second, they have developed the argument that the nature of this “fit” is not static, but subject to ongoing processes of change and innovation. “Fit” is not simply found but actively created: “From a developmental point of view, what matters is the *kind* of articulation between formal rules and administrative hierarchies and the informal rules, habits, and cultural values that emerges out of processes of institutional imposition and local adaptation” (Galvan 2004:216, emphasis in original).

Institutions are generally interpreted to be “any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape human interaction” (North 1990:3). But this definition is too broad if the aim is to understand the success of efforts to inculcate new institutions in so-called developing countries. Galvan’s (2004) disaggregation of institutions into superstructure (administrative structures and formal rules) and infrastructure (informal rules, habits, norms, and values) is instructive, insofar as it draws attention to the inescapably partial nature of development practice. Transnational development actors can never hope to refashion both levels of institutional structure simultaneously. For the most part, their ability to affect change has been limited to the extent to which their imposition of exogenously derived administrative structures and formal rules has complemented and/or articulated with existing societal norms. As suggested in the epigraph, success in Africa is to be found where development prescriptions “work with the grain.”<sup>6</sup>

This article will argue that CBOs, as the embodiment of institutional blueprints guiding relationships between state and nonstate actors in development efforts, are a poor fit in the context of contemporary urban Tanzania. The argument has two components. First, CBOs are not consonant with the dominant norms that have long governed the relationship between the state and society, specifically with regard to mobilization and participation for development. Second, the norms that motivate participation and constrain behavior in a broad array of voluntary associations do not match the expectations that national and transnational development actors have of CBOs: namely, that they will pursue the production of public goods that ultimately will benefit a community that extends beyond the membership of the association itself.

The argument will proceed in four sections. First, I will introduce the “institutional turn” in development theory and discuss the more recent and related contention that “successful societies” are to be found where there is a productive relationship between institutional practices and cultural repertoires (Evans 2004; Hall & Lamont 2009). The second section will present recurring themes from Tanzania’s colonial and postcolonial history to suggest that the articulation of formal rules and informal norms has served to fetter rather than facilitate the exercise of local initiative in the development process. I will look at the vibrant history of associational life in Dar es Salaam in the third section, highlighting the tendency of groups not only to emerge for purposes of socialization and self-help—causes which are typically exclusionary—but also to remain informal and thus outside the purview of state control. The paper concludes by reviewing the broader argument, questioning how we determine which norms prevail in a society, and pondering the potential for forging new institutional frameworks: that is, those resulting from a deliberate and coherent recombination of imposed institutional blueprints and dominant local norms.

### **Institutions, Development, and the Issue of “Fitness”**

A longstanding objective of development discourse and practice has been to satisfy people’s basic needs and to recognize their legitimate aspirations for an improved quality of life.<sup>7</sup> The means of attaining this objective, and the relevant indicators of success or failure, have been subject to considerable debate, controversy, and transformation, particularly in recent years as scholars and practitioners have sought to craft a coherent philosophy that maintains a commitment to modernization and yet incorporates trenchant postdevelopment critiques.

Proponents of “multiple modernities” (Woolcock 2009), “critical modernism” (Peet & Hartwick 2009), or other contemporary synthetic approaches with similar monikers remain steadfast in their embrace of the rational scientific approach toward the world that is central to modernization theory. Emblematic of this position is the suggestion that “the scien-

tific and technical power of economic growth to underwrite development must always be maintained” (Peet & Hartwick 2009:291). There are sound reasons for this commitment, to be sure: across the global South, life expectancy at birth has increased, literacy rates have risen, and fewer mothers and children die from preventable causes as a direct result of the application of “modern” scientific techniques over the past six decades. And yet those now pursuing “modernization without modernization theory” also recognize that the exigencies of managerialist and growth-oriented development have had adverse impacts on individuals, communities, and cultures (Woolcock 2009). Rather than witness an increase in their standard of living, citizens of African (and other “developing”) countries who have been the intended beneficiaries of development projects and prescriptions grounded in modernization theory have often confronted stagnant or negative GDP growth rates, compromised service delivery, increased inequality, and unanticipated environmental degradation.

Postdevelopment critics have made a convincing case that these deleterious consequences can be traced to the disempowering consequences of modernization theory’s universalist discourse, which ignores other possibilities for change and precludes interpretations and understandings that are context specific, informed by multiple aspirations, and produced by local people instead of the “experts” (Escobar 1995; Friedmann 1992; Rahnema & Bawtree 1997). The new consensus in development studies, therefore, incorporates many postdevelopment critiques—not only in policy prescriptions that insist on the participation of local communities and the integration of local knowledge in development planning and implementation, but also in an approach to development that “is far more agnostic as to what the final institutional end state will ‘look like’” (Woolcock 2009:6). Rather than focus narrowly on building institutions that support market development (see World Bank 2001), concern has shifted toward facilitating the emergence of governance institutions that will improve the ability of citizens to make choices. In contrast to the implicit assumption of modernization theory that there is one institutional blueprint that is conducive to development, there is now a recognition that a change in formal rules does not necessarily entail a corresponding adjustment in informal rules and values, and that more should be done to ensure a “fit” between imposed institutions and the norms and values of local cultures (see Cornell & Kalt 1992).

In this vein, the “institutional turn” has arguably become the most important idiom in contemporary development theory (see Evans 2005), and indeed its impetus comes from development economics. The model of economic growth that emerged in the 1980s centers on ideas rather than savings rates and capital investments. The thesis has two basic components. The first is that technological change, which is a result of new productive ideas, accounts for most growth. Whereas physical capital is subject to diminishing returns, the returns on productive ideas, such as an organizational model or a method for accounting, are unlimited: “Once a useful

idea or piece of knowledge has been created—the proverbial design for a better mousetrap—the cost of using it again is essentially zero” (Evans 2005:92). The second component is that the ideas that lead to technological change and economic growth are shaped by institutional contexts that “actually lead to desired behavior” (World Bank 2001:6) and that individuals must therefore be brought into the development process. This goal requires more than the creation of organizations that are parallel and/or subordinate to the state, as often countenanced by mainstream development actors. Rather, “figuring out concrete institutional mechanisms for instantiating ‘open and public discussion’ becomes the central problem of development” (Evans 2005:97).

Inherent in the “institutional turn,” then, is the role of individuals who make up those institutions and, more important, whose needs are served by them. Amartya Sen (1999) has argued persuasively that development goals themselves need to be reconceptualized; rather than focusing on indicators such as GDP, infant mortality, life expectancy, and adult literacy, development should be defined as “the expansion of the ‘capabilities’ of people to lead the kind of lives they value—and have reason to value” (1999:18). This shift toward individual “capabilities” or “freedoms” will require creative strategies that improve on traditional development efforts to increase incomes, grow employment, or provide for basic needs. Of course, “leading valuable lives” is rarely something that individuals can accomplish on their own; Sen agrees that “individuals live and operate in a world of institution and that our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function (1999:142). But the emphasis on the individual’s welfare implies that ordinary citizens, rather than transnational technocrats or faceless bureaucrats, must be empowered to determine what they value and how they want to accomplish their goals. According to Peter Evans, this “implies that choices about those allocations and growth strategies must be ‘democratic,’ not in just the ‘thin’ sense of having leadership succession determined by a regular electoral process, but in the ‘thick’ sense of messy and continuous involvement of the citizenry in the setting of economic priorities” (2002:55). In other words, the best way to arrive at the new productive ideas that will lead to progressive social change is through an open and ongoing public discussion.

Unfortunately, so far the dominant approach to creating such inclusive and participatory institutions has been to graft uniform institutional blueprints created in the global North onto the global South. Evans (2004:33) refers pejoratively to this practice as “institutional monocropping,” arguing that it

rests on both the general premise that institutional effectiveness does not depend on fit with the local sociocultural environment, and the more specific premise that idealized versions of Anglo-American institutions are optimal developmental instruments, regardless of level of development or

position in the global economy. International organizations, local policy makers, and private consultants combine to enforce the presumption that the most advanced countries have already discovered the one best institutional blueprint for development and that its applicability transcends national cultures and circumstances.

The explicit reference in Evans's comment to the Western origins of institutional "best practices" ties the notion of monocropping to the debilitating effects of a universalist development discourse that is directed to the world's poorest countries but has "been shaped by certain interests and implicates certain relations of power" (Ziai 2004:1047). But the issue of power is relevant beyond the disparities that exist between the sending and receiving societies of institutional blueprints. Grafting faces potential opposition not only because the exported institutions "often clash with the material interests of those in positions of power" (Portes 2006:243), but also because there often is an uneasy fit between exogenously derived institutional blueprints and the norms and values of recipient cultures. Nearly two decades ago, the idea "that culture and the institutions of governance are a crucial pair of factors in development" was introduced in the context of Native American reservations (Cornell & Kalt 1992:8). Since then the argument has reemerged and been applied to developing societies more broadly (see Hall & Lamont 2009). "Because institutions interact with local cultures," Hall and Lamont conclude, "we are skeptical about proposals to identify 'best practices' that can readily be transferred from one society to another" (2009:2).

What, then, are the "best practices" or "institutional blueprints" that concern us here? As noted above, CBOs, shepherded by various local, national, and transnational development actors, entered the development scene in Dar es Salaam in the 1990s largely because of their presumed ability to represent and advance the interests of a particular target community. Given the profound gap between the supply and demand of basic infrastructure and services in Dar es Salaam's residential areas, the communities of interest often corresponded with the smallest administrative units of the municipal government: the subward (*mtaa*). Although a couple of CBOs had operated in the city before 1992, the institutionalization of this approach to development began in that year, when municipal authorities cooperated with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to improve roads, drainage, and water supply in Hanna Nassif.<sup>8</sup> While the logic of creating CBOs to serve as intermediaries between national and transnational development actors and community residents was certainly functionalist (driven by the desire for efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability), their continued support derives from the deeper influence of new growth theory. CBOs are viewed as generating, aggregating, and disseminating the new ideas critical to development, as well as mobilizing the resources for their enactment.

Nearly two decades later, CBOs remain a crucial embodiment of the institutional blueprints that were introduced to coordinate the interactions between state and nonstate actors in development efforts. CBOs have been written into state programs and policies—notably the National Water Policy—and their merits have been articulated by political actors ranging from the ward to the ministerial level. According to the director of the Ministry of Community Development, Women’s Affairs and Children,

The government thinks that NGOs and CBOs primarily will get the resources for development activities by mobilizing local resources. We have in this country a rich experience of self-help, people doing their own things. . . . The government’s thinking is that most of the resources for development are within the communities. Therefore [these] community-based organizations will endeavor to make sure that those resources are properly tapped, utilized, mainstreamed into the development process. This is what we expect. (Interview, Dec. 15, 2003)

Although proponents of community-based development have been resoundingly criticized for proffering an idealized and homogeneous view of community, and failing to interrogate the structures of power which tend to exacerbate rather than ameliorate exclusion (Guijit & Shah 1998; Mohan & Stokke 2000; Mosse 2001), they have not been seriously taken to task, either for imposing institutions that exhibit an inability to “work with the grain” of the recipient culture, or for neglecting to consider the new configurations that emerge from the articulation between imposed institutions and local norms. It is to these objectives that the article now turns.

### **The Development of Authoritarianism and Authoritarian Development**

Close observers of Tanzania’s socialist project often remarked that popular participation in national and local institutions was a central plank in the development plans of the postcolonial state (Cliffe & Saul 1972; Pratt 1976, 1979; Samoff 1974). A common explanation of this approach, although it was not one shared by doctrinaire Marxists, was that participatory mass institutions were deemed necessary not only to place a check on centralized political power, but also to facilitate the development of socialist values and foster widespread identification with the new nation, its goals, and its leadership.<sup>9</sup> The consensus that emerged about the result of these efforts was that they were not successful and that they did not bring about a significant increase in the participation of ordinary citizens in government institutions. Indeed, the prevailing feature of Tanzanian politics by the late 1970s was a culture of authoritarianism and oligarchy. Although ordinary citizens never lost their status as both the subject and object of development, particularly during the socialist period, their experience with mass institutions did little

to sustain their initial enthusiasm and efforts to participate in development activities, nor did it instill in them a norm of initiating local projects without official sanction.

Less than two decades after Tanzania's independence, it was observed that "there is very little independent association of people, either . . . within or outside the party, to pursue common political objectives" (Pratt 1979:211). Indeed, the culture of authoritarianism that was sown during colonial rule and evolved during the postcolonial era has yielded a particularly inhospitable environment upon which to graft institutional blueprints developed in the global North, and the gradual replacement of populist and democratic ambitions with oligarchic and authoritarian tendencies has come to place significant constraints on the developmental potential of community-based organizations.<sup>10</sup> There is, in short, a notable lack of "fit" between the domestic norms that constrain popular participation in the development process and the imported institutional superstructure—i.e., CBOs and the formal rules and laws regulating them—that is intended to facilitate it.

I will focus on two points that are central to the broader argument about the emergence of a political culture that impedes contemporary participatory institutions: first, the development of an oligarchic and authoritarian bias among Tanzania's leadership; and second, the tendency toward obedience and quiescence that has been encouraged and institutionalized by the nation's leaders.

### *Colonial Continuities and the Rise of the Developmental State*

The centralizing tendencies of both the colonial and postcolonial state in Tanzania were impelled by similar concerns. Both were under pressure, for example, to stimulate economic growth by expanding the production of export commodities, and they sought to do so through the application of "high modern" rational planning and scientific methods emanating from the center (see Scott 1998). Both were also concerned with political stability, though in very different ways. After World War II the British confronted restive populations in their colonies eager to change the status quo. The creation of representative local government authorities—which in Tanzania were somewhat incongruous structures that ran parallel to those of the "native chiefs"—were meant to relieve some of the pressure and serve as "a channel of expression for Western-educated young men in the districts . . ." (Eckert 2007:102); they also served to draw local government closer to the central state (Schneider 2006:100). The postcolonial state acted quickly to extend the ambit of these local political institutions, depriving the traditional authorities of their formal status within a year of independence and thereby removing a potential impediment to the ruling party's monopoly of political life (Cliffe & Saul 1972:303).

Notwithstanding the similarities between the participatory practices

and centralizing tendencies of both the colonial and postcolonial state, a tangible sense of fragility and a corresponding need for stability and legitimacy on the part of the latter should not be underestimated. Postcolonial leaders understood fully the tenuousness of their situation. Recent scholarship, for example, has argued that the ethnic and racial divisions that colonial authorities had established and sought to institutionalize were, in fact, a key obstacle confronting nationalists in their postindependence effort to build a unified nation (see Aminzade 2010). The basis of legitimacy also differed for colonial and postcolonial authorities. The former were accountable to the British government, and their legitimacy rested on their ability to extract resources and maintain order. The postcolonial state, in contrast, was accountable to its freshly minted citizens, and its legitimacy hinged on its ability not only to provide the services and quality of life promised by nationalist political leaders, but also to forge a unified nation out of a highly diverse population divided by ethnicity, race, and religion.<sup>11</sup> It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the postcolonial state sought to occupy all of the economic, political, and social space in order to direct development.

### *Political and Ideological Consolidation and the Instruments of Authority*

While the colonial antecedents and the stability imperatives of the postcolonial state's centralizing tendencies were important, these factors alone do not account for the oligarchic and authoritarian bias in Tanzania's political culture that constrains the introduction of contemporary participatory institutions. The norms that inhibit local initiative and participation are tied more directly to the emergence of the single-party state, the corollary debate over Africanization, and the various instruments developed and deployed by the state to ensure its complete control over the development process and widespread obedience to authority.

Tanzania was not unique in its shift to a single-party system. It was not long after independence that the Western democratic model, based on multiparty competitive elections and hastily bequeathed by the departing colonial powers, ceased to be followed in many parts of Africa. By 1965, for example, the continent had already experienced the emergence of sixteen single-party regimes (Collier 1982:95). In the majority of cases, the elimination of competition was precipitated either by the overwhelming electoral victory of a single party or, as in the Tanzanian case, the merger of two parties into one. The constitutional reforms of 1965 that brought about single-party rule were driven largely by the view that, given the broad base of support for TANU both during and after the struggle for liberation, the country already had a *de facto* single-party system. Those favoring the elimination of competitive party politics argued further that TANU was uniquely well positioned to integrate the nascent and fragile nation, particularly in the context of divisive debates and unrest over the subject of Africanization.

Arguably the issue of Africanization is of critical importance to the emergence and development of an authoritarian political culture in post-colonial Tanzania. Nyerere's efforts to contain the vociferous demands that black citizens, as opposed to those from the Asian and white minorities, be given preference in appointments and promotions were opposed by many members of TANU, the African National Congress (which was the main opposition party), trade unions, and the army. The army mutiny on January 20, 1964, which was particularly dangerous to the government, was brought to an end five days later only with the assistance of British troops (see Parsons 2003). Although this reliance upon the former colonial master to resolve an internal dispute was cause for considerable embarrassment, it strengthened the hand of those opposed to Africanization and set in motion a series of efforts to eliminate the remaining vestiges of independent power structures and thereby establish state dominance over all aspects of development.

Just as the so-called native chiefs were replaced by local government authorities shortly after independence, the latitude of these authorities was curtailed almost as quickly. For although the creation of local government showed that the state was eager to distance itself from structures associated with the colonial order and to prevent ethnic loyalties from finding space in the political arena, subsequent actions revealed that Tanzania's leaders were concerned that parochial interests would conflict with national goals. The enactment and implementation of laws and policies that placed extreme limits on local government, trade unions, and cooperatives were a clear indication not only of "opposition to independent structures. . . , [but also of] an oligarchic hostility to any serious challenge" (Pratt 1979:211). For example, the creation of Regional and Area Commissioners, a new cadre of political appointees drawn from the ranks of the party, relegated local participation to the implementation rather than the creation of development policies and plans. Local actors were further weakened by the Ward Development Committees Act of 1969, which granted the government the power to make participation compulsory (Jennings 2007:91).

While these and other laws ensured that the central state was structurally in control of the local development process, the political leadership took numerous other steps to reinforce its dominance, mute criticism of its policies, and constrain popular participation. To be fair, the magnitude of the developmental tasks confronting the postcolonial state helped justify its use of seemingly harsh nationalist language. However, Nyerere's portrayal of Tanzania's struggle to develop as "a very real war" (Nyerere 1967) provided cover to political leaders who employed draconian measures to curb dissent. In several instances, for example, the state relied upon powers enacted during colonial rule to restrict critics to remote parts of the country (Pratt 1976:187). The Preventative Detention Act of 1962, which allowed the president to detain anyone deemed to be a risk to the peace and security of the country, was employed in the wake of the army mutiny to arrest

more than two hundred trade union leaders because it was assumed that several of them sought to turn the mutiny into a coup d'état (see Aminzade 2010:chap. 3).

In addition to controlling popular participation in local and national institutions and curbing any appearance of dissent, the postcolonial state took steps to eviscerate groups deemed to be too independent of state oversight. Any organized group that could serve as a competing center of power and thereby interfere with national development goals was viewed with suspicion (see Samoff 1974). This was evidenced as early as 1964, when independent trade unions were brought under the direct control of the national political leadership. The dissolution of the Tanganyikan Federation of Labor (TFL) and its replacement with the TANU-controlled National Union of Tanganyika Workers (NUTA) stemmed from its position on Africanization and the concern that union leaders had ambitions to use the army mutiny as a catalyst for further political change. Similarly, the Ruvuma Development Association (RDA), a grassroots organization committed to socialist principles, was banned in 1969 for promoting a form of socialism that did not depend on a strong central party (see Coulson 1979; Scott 1998).<sup>12</sup> The fate of the RDA was a harbinger of things to come for cooperatives. Although it sought to maintain its role in rural development, the cooperative movement was eventually dissolved by the state in 1975–76 (van Cranenburgh 1990:17). This act “completed a trend in official policy that saw the successive elimination of all autonomous organs of self-administration in the hands of the rural ‘middle class.’ The central state was now omnipresent” (Eckert 2007:117).

More could certainly be said about the underlying assumptions and ambitions driving the oligarchic and authoritarian bias of Tanzania's postcolonial political culture. A genuine desire on the part of the political leadership to direct and accelerate national development, largely understood as economic growth, could be seen as understandable and laudable, given the circumstances. Promises made at independence to satisfy people's basic needs and the legitimacy of their aspirations for an improved quality of life undoubtedly pushed leaders to resolve the contradiction “between the need for greater participation and the need for greater production” (Pratt 1979:231). And yet it is important to emphasize that the net result of the myriad efforts to institutionalize norms of popular obedience and quiescence was a citizenry deprived of both its capacity and willingness to undertake local development projects. The impact of the systematic suppression of local organizational initiative was pronounced and almost immediate. Whereas during “the first half-decade of independence, the call from the government for popular participation in development activities was met with a massive outpouring of effort and striking enthusiasm” (Jennings 2007:73), the balance of the socialist era witnessed widespread apathy and a reluctance to do so. This is the legacy that proponents of contemporary approaches to community-based participation must reckon with.

## Associational Life and the Culture of Self-Help

In striking contrast to this government-promoted quiescence is the enduring role that voluntary associations have always played in the history of Dar es Salaam. Regardless of whether associational life has manifested itself as tribal associations tasked with burying their dead (Leslie 1963), women's groups formed to pool money and other resources (Tripp 1992), or wedding committees assembled to tap social networks and norms of reciprocity (Sherrington 2006), residents of Tanzania's largest city and de facto capital have long exhibited a predilection for participation in a variety of voluntary groups. Although the associational life of the colonial era waned during the period of postcolonial nation-building, informal groups reemerged energetically as economic conditions declined both prior to and in the wake of structural adjustment. The rapid proliferation of CBOs in the 1990s can certainly be viewed as a continuation of this vibrant tradition of voluntarism. Nevertheless, the limited success of these local "development" actors in advancing the interests of their urban communities draws attention to the risks associated with grafting uniform institutional blueprints created in the global North onto societies in the global South. More important, it reinforces the notion that normative expectations vary across cultures; that is, the role of a CBO member may embody different behavioral blueprints in Tanzania than it does elsewhere in spite of having the same label (Portes 2006:238).

### *Associations and the Norm of Exclusion*

From the colonial period to the present, members of voluntary associations have been subject to the constraints and incentives of two distinct norms, each of which has profound implications for the contemporary approach to community-based development. First, a norm of exclusion has been a prominent feature of associational life in Dar es Salaam. As with many, if not most, voluntary groups around the world, members put their efforts into ensuring the welfare of other members and reaffirming the cultural practices that set them apart from the broader society. The "community" being served by such groups has often been defined by ethnicity, shared interests such as entertainment or recreation, and the need for mutual aid. During colonial rule residents participated in a wide range of associations in an effort to enhance their status and meet their various material, social, and cultural needs in a rapidly changing environment. The growth of Dar es Salaam, which was a direct result of European settlement, catalyzed both the widespread need for and the voluntary provision of services that neither families, so-called tribes, nor colonial governments were able or willing to offer. Throughout the continent newly formed urban associations facilitated the entry of migrants from rural communities, provided them with loans and job information, and helped mobilize the transfer of resources

between urban and rural areas (see Barkan et al. 1991; Iliffe 1979). The norm of exclusion was reflected in the composition of the membership, which tended to be ethnically, religiously, or professionally homogenous. In Dar es Salaam these groups were primarily ethnically based at first. According to Tripp (1992:224), the earliest such organization was formed in 1912; by 1954, more than fifty had registered with the authorities.

Many of the first so-called “tribal” associations emerged as a direct result of policies promoted by the German colonial authorities. Not only did the colonial government recognize the first immigrants as representatives of their ethnic group, but they also insisted that each tribe take responsibility for reporting and burying its dead (Leslie 1963:37). Explicitly ethnic or “tribal” associations were further encouraged and tolerated by the authorities because in the colonial imagination they served as a means to bridge the rural–urban divide. Concerned that urban Africans had become “detrIALIZED,” and thus unrooted and potentially destabilizing, the colonial state countenanced home associations with the hope that they would provide the stability offered by the traditions of the rural areas to the unemployed underclass of migrants referred to as the *wahuni* (Burton 2005).

Over time, however, many such groups existed in little more than name. Younger immigrants had less interest or need to maintain their ties to this particular manifestation of community. Not only did it have nothing practical to offer, particularly in terms of material gain, but it was also likely to be viewed by a reluctant member “as a steady drain on his purse in the debt side if he [did] take part in their activities, attending funerals and collections for repatriation or the payment of fines” (Leslie 1963:39). Indeed, historians have long argued that it was the dance, or *ngoma*, societies, which spread and evolved over time along the East African coast, that became the most vital associations in urban areas during this period (Brennan 2002; Ranger 1975). While *ngoma* societies were viewed by colonial authorities as both “tribal” and “traditional,” the relationship between *ngoma* and ethnicity was flexible, just as the performances and repertoires of these associations proved to be truly adaptive, often “substituting European band instruments and modes of attire for those of indigenes” (Anthony 1983:107). Combined with mutual aid societies, burial societies, musical clubs, football teams, and home associations, these organized groups were “the repositories of the mass culture of Dar es Salaam” (Anthony 1983:106).

The exclusionary character of associational life changed in practice, though not in intention, during the socialist era, when ethnic associations were banned out of fear that they would make “tribalistic” demands and thereby threaten national unity (Tripp 1992:227). In response, groups that continued to exist adopted a lower profile and focused on much needed mutual aid. As the 1980s began to unfold, Tanzania, like most countries on the African continent, had struggled for more than a decade to stave off severe economic crises, and this situation reinvigorated associational life at the local level (see Gibbon 1995; Kiondo 1993, 1994; Mercer 1999). Accord-

ing to Tripp (1992:221), local voluntary associations became an important means to provide alternatives to limited state resources, emerging “where the state’s ability to guarantee security, adequate incomes, and various social and public services declined.” Kiondo (1994:65) uses the term “community development activities” (CDAs) to characterize the wide range of efforts made by people at this time to meet their basic needs: “CDAs in Tanzania encompass[ed] all collective activities carried out by community groups, as opposed to private companies or individuals. Thus they include[d] business ventures undertaken on a community (meaning, in practice, cooperative) basis.” In Dar es Salaam most of these groups, according to Kiondo, were organized by and for women who were engaged in activities such as the sale of charcoal and foodstuffs, in dressmaking, or in other income-generating activities. A similar claim is made by Tripp (1992:232), who notes that during the late 1980s one of the most popular local organizations among urban women were the *upatu*—rotating credit societies formed to pool money and other resources.

Despite the variety of these groups’ activities, it is important to note here that the description of Kiondo and others of such “community development activities” contradicts a fundamental assumption of most proponents of community-based development: that community corresponds with the administrative units of the *municipal* government. Indeed, there is no sound historical evidence suggesting that the state’s definition of an urban community as either a site or an agent of development is appropriate in this context. In fact, nearly a half-century ago J. A. K. Leslie (1963:62) noticed the opposite—the conspicuous absence of this sort of community spirit in Dar es Salaam—remarking that “these [municipal] wards are . . . artificial groupings for administrative convenience.”

### *Associations and the Norm of Informality*

Along with the norm of exclusion, a second constraint to community-based development has been a norm of informality, or a tendency of voluntary associations, since the emergence of the single-party socialist state, to remain outside of the purview of state oversight and control. These associations, to be sure, are formalized groupings from the point of view of their members, but they are informal insofar as they are unregulated by the institutions of society. That is, they have an “off the books” existence in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated. In this sense, “informality” denotes a condition analogous to that of the economic agents that operate in the informal economy (see Centeno & Portes 2006; Castells & Portes 1989), although it is also distinct from this broader concept, insofar as there are few, if any, linkages between informal groups and the broader sphere of “certified” associations.

The norm of informality cannot be attributed to any essential quality of voluntary associations in Dar es Salaam, but rather to the dominance

and authoritarianism of the centralized postcolonial state. Although colonial administrators both encouraged and tolerated associational life in Dar es Salaam, they were also keenly interested in controlling the associations present in the territories under their command. Another continuity with the colonial era, therefore, is the contemporary state's continued use of inherited laws to regulate a wide range of voluntary associations. In addition to controlling those organizations (i.e., trade unions and cooperatives) that had profound implications for the economic development of the nation, political leaders sought to incorporate all interest groups and citizens into a mass party that would serve as the institutional basis for the pursuit of national goals. The corollary to this is that they also actively proscribed those associations whose composition or activities were deemed antithetical to or critical of the nation-building project.

The registration procedures dictated by the Societies Ordinance of 1961, which gave the authorities the power to regulate and monitor all associations, were still being employed less than a decade ago, when they were ostensibly replaced by the NGO Act 2002 (United Republic of Tanzania 2002). This Act has since been deemed unconstitutional by a Presidential Commission appointed to investigate, among other things, contradictions between the constitution and ordinary law (see Lissu 2005), and it is unclear whether it applies to those seeking to formalize a community-based organization. Regardless of which specific law eventually emerges as the one to regulate CBOs, the intention of both is the same: to place limits on who can form associations that are autonomous and yet legitimate in the eyes of the state.

While many associations make the decision deliberately to remain informal and therefore beyond the state's control, those who seek to formalize themselves are constrained by the actual requirements of registration. The process through which associations are certified or registered is onerous and costly, demanding financial and human resources that are beyond the reach of most ordinary citizens. In this context, those with the most to gain personally from participation in the development process are the least likely to do so, and lofty goals such as the creation of inclusive, empowering, and transformative institutions and processes are likely to remain unrealized. As a direct consequence of the requirements of formalization, in other words, those with the greatest needs may have the least ability to communicate them via nonstate channels and thereby have an impact on decision making. More important, even those who have successfully navigated the rigors of registration understand that they are not necessarily able to speak freely.

Indeed, the combination of the state's oligarchic and authoritarian legacy and the legal mechanisms at its disposal help account for the trepidation experienced by voluntary associations when it comes to raising their voices, expressing their interests, or making claims. As Shivji has documented (2006:271–72), even a trifling foray into the public sphere runs risk of

being deemed political and thus inappropriate by state actors:

NGOs have once again come under fire. This time around, the fire comes from a highly placed Cabinet member. They are charged with indulging in politics, which, supposedly, is not their domain. NGOs are supposed to educate people, make them aware and provide services—not indulge in politics. All this is said and made to sound so obvious that it does not require any interrogation or argument. It is considered a self-evident truth. . . . The central issue is: Is the freedom of association limited to forming only non-political NGOs? The answer, constitutionally speaking, is ‘No’. And any attempt to restrict the right to organise in this fashion would be, and should be, condemned as unconstitutional.

Shivji is one of very few to give voice to what appears to be an unassailable reading of the law. Those who have struggled to get their CBOs registered, and who seek to derive tangible benefits from their legal status, do not dare to speak publicly about such issues or make claims that are likely to raise the ire and scrutiny of the state. Their tendency, instead, is to pursue or implement seemingly innocuous “development” activities that have state support.

The norm of informality, then, both motivates voluntary associations to remain invisible to the state, and also constrains or deters associational actors from making direct claims on the state, lest they invite state reprisals. This combination runs counter to the main point being emphasized by proponents of the “institutional turn” in development theory: the importance of bringing more people into the development process.

## Conclusion

The “institutional turn” in contemporary development theory directs our attention to the importance of making popular participation a central component of the development process. The underlying assumption is that new ideas need to be brought to bear on the means and ends of development. This requires, first and foremost, that the people who have long been on the receiving end of development plans and projects be granted the opportunity to exercise more influence and control over the efforts taken to satisfy their basic needs and improve their quality of life. The proposition that follows logically is that it is imperative to facilitate the emergence of institutions that will improve citizens’ ability to make choices. Mainstream development actors appear to have gotten the message. Much of the current discourse and practice of international development rests on the premise that it is important to bring more people into development projects and processes. Popular participation is now viewed as a necessary condition to foster sustainable livelihoods, promote “good governance,” and alleviate poverty across the global South.

The rise of CBOs is but one manifestation of this broader trend. These entities are preeminently grassroots, and thus are thought to be well positioned to integrate local knowledge, preferences, and resources into development planning and implementation. They are formally distinct from state institutions, which in theory grant them the autonomy to demand transparency and accountability, constitutive elements of the “good governance” agenda. And they are assumed to represent and advance the interests of a particular community, granting them license to make claims on target audiences, namely national and transnational development actors.

For all of their supposed advantages, however, Tanzanian CBOs have fallen far short of the lofty expectations imposed upon them, largely because there is a poor fit between the exogenously derived institutional blueprints that delineate and regulate CBOs and the dominant norms of the recipient society. Unlike wedding committees, another type of voluntary association committed to performing social functions, accomplishing specific goals, and creating a sense of togetherness and understanding among members, CBOs cannot claim that contributions stem from and reinforce interpersonal ties or produce reciprocal relationships. As a result, they have a difficult time filling their coffers with anything other than the revenues derived from membership and annual fees, amounts which are insufficient to meet the development needs of Dar es Salaam’s residential areas. Thus, in spite of the best intentions and high hopes of national and transnational development actors, CBOs do not appear to “work with the grain” of local ways of doing things.

This is not to suggest that the limited ability of CBOs in Dar es Salaam to foster broad-based commitment and support is an ineluctable property of all similarly constituted local development organizations. On the contrary, the struggle to encourage participation and mobilize local resources for development projects may be largely context specific. In Tanzania the culture of authoritarianism that was sown during colonial rule and evolved during the postcolonial era has created a particularly unfavorable environment for efforts to impose the institutional superstructure of community-based development. While there certainly are notable exceptions, Dar es Salaam’s residents have, as a result of Tanzania’s political leaders monopolizing the sphere of development for decades, internalized the norms of popular obedience and quiescence.

But although the conclusions of this article may be limited to contemporary Dar es Salaam, the method of interrogation employed herein is broadly applicable. Development scholars and practitioners would be well advised to examine both the historical roots of the problems they wish to ameliorate and the institutional infrastructure they endeavor to articulate with in order to ensure complementarity between desired institutions and existing social norms. It is important both to identify these norms and to determine how malleable they are in the present. Certainly in Dar es Salaam the emergence of a new norm—for example, a norm of formality and

political activity—or a deliberate and coherent recombination of imposed institutional blueprints and local norms that would motivate associations to register and thereby be viewed as legitimate interlocutors of the state is likely to be a very gradual process. As suggested by Hyden (1995:45-46), the legacy of state control will not be overcome quickly, and

it is probably correct to assume that the country starts from a less favourable position than that of many other African countries where civil society has been allowed to exist at least in the shadow of the state. Because the hegemony of the party-state was particularly strong in Tanzania, and is likely to take time to undo, expectations of what the voluntary sector can achieve must be modest.

In addition, because citizens' groups have limited experience with the steps required to become formalized, the process, at least in the short term, is likely to advance the interests of the more privileged members of the community. Although national and transnational development actors continue to induce and promote CBOs as a means to empower citizens vis-à-vis development, these ostensibly "local" organizations have thus far exhibited the tendency to reinforce the exclusion of Dar es Salaam's most vulnerable and marginalized residents.

Scholars who have done the most to advance the argument about the interaction between institutions, culture, and development do maintain that change is possible (see Galvan 2004; Hall & Lamont 2009) and that effective matches between exogenous institutional blueprints and local norms, while not easy to find, can be actively forged (Swidler 2009). But it is neither a minor nor simply a technical task to alter the configuration of imposed institutions and deeply rooted normative frameworks. The administrative structures and formal rules that constitute the state are largely propelled by inertia, and it is no small undertaking to push them in a new direction (see Mahoney & Thelen 2009; Pierson 2004). Engineering fundamental social change is particularly difficult when the proposed reforms threaten vested interests. Those with power may be disinclined to alter either formal institutions or their normatively embedded practices if such a change will come at their expense, even if "development" more broadly conceived is expected to flourish. Such an expectation remains as valid today as it was during era of the postcolonial developmental state.

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## Notes

1. For a fuller discussion of the phenomenon of wedding committees and other voluntary associations in Dar es Salaam, see Dill (2009).
2. The three organizations are the Hanna Nassif Community Development Association (HNCDA), the Tabata Development Fund (TDF), and the Kijitonyama Community Organization (KIJICO). They have been the subject of considerable attention from scholars and development professionals. For example, see Lupala (1995); Lupala et al. (1997); Meshack and Sheuya (2001); Mulengeki (2002); Ngware (2001); Kyessi (2002).
3. The TANU guidelines can be found in Coulson (1979:40–41).
4. See Anthony (1983); Iliffe (1979); Kiondo (1993, 1994); Leslie (1963); Mercer et al. (2008); Ranger (1975); Tripp (1992, 1997).
5. See Evans (2004, 2005); Galvan (2004); Hall and Lamont (2009); Hyden (2008); Kelsall (2008); Sheridan (2009); Swidler and Watkins (2009).
6. The Commission for Africa (a.k.a. the Blair Commission for Africa) was established by the British government in 2004 to examine the challenges facing Africa and to provide recommendations on the types of support that would facilitate development and reduce poverty. See Commission for Africa (2005). See Kelsall (2008) for a thorough discussion of what "working with the grain" might entail for policymakers in the African context.
7. This is, for example, stated explicitly in *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987).
8. The ILO program was called "Employment Generation through the Efficient Use of Local Resources."
9. For a discussion of the differences between the "Marxist socialist" and the "democratic socialist" positions, see Pratt (1979).
10. Particularly significant in this imposition of templates from the global North is the structural adjustment agreement that the Tanzanian government was forced to sign with the International Monetary Fund in 1986. For a general discussion of the transition from "development" to "globalization," see McMichael (2008).
11. See Aminzade (2000, 2003, 2010) and Larson and Aminzade (2008) for analysis of the intersection of race, nationalism, and citizenship in postcolonial Tanzania.
12. In another high-profile incident nearly thirty years later, the government canceled the registration of an autonomous nongovernmental organization (NGO) called Baraza la Wanawake wa Tanzania (BAWATA) (Women's Council of Tanzania) because it did not approve of the comprehensive document the organization had prepared prior to the first multiparty elections in 1995 concerning candidate and party positions vis-à-vis women's interests.