The Village in Mwalimu's Thought and Political Practice

By

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I. Village as a site of development

The village was dear to Mwalimu's heart but not in any romantic sense, as his Western admirers would want to present it. 'Small-is-beautiful' or 'tradition-is-sacrosanct' were not part of Mwalimu's political practice, although one could find some isolated passages in his writings coming close to it. I want to suggest that Mwalimu's attitude to the village was, as a matter of fact, very pragmatic. He saw Tanzania essentially as a nation of village communities and was likely to be so for the foreseeable future. Very often, he rationalised and justified villagisation as a means of accelerating development and facilitating provision of health, education, water and other social services. But as is usually the case, the outcomes of history are not what the actors intended. In reality, the various villagisation programmes since independence became top-down centrist projects allowing more intense exploitation and siphoning off of surplus generated in the agrarian sector.

There are three broad phases in Mwalimu's attitude/thought to the village. The basis of the first was the transformation approach recommended by the World Bank (Nyerere 1967, 183). This was the experiment in creating model farmers who would be settled in a village and provided with technology and managerial cadre. In his inaugural address as the first elected president of Tanganyika, Nyerere said that for the next few years his government would concentrate on bringing people together to live in villages. He continued:

> And if you ask me why the Government wants us to live in villages, the answer is just as simple: unless we do we shall not be able to provide ourselves with the things we need to develop our land and to raise our standard of living. We shall not be able to use tractors; we shall not be able to provide schools for our children; we shall not be able to build hospitals, or have clean drinking water, it will be quite impossible to start small village industries, and instead we shall have to go on depending on the town for all our requirements; and even if we had a plentiful supply of electric power we should never be able to connect it up to each isolated homestead. (ibid.: 184)

Mwalimu was adept at translating the advice of the “experts”, in this case the consultants of the World Bank who drew up the first Three Year Development Plan, into a simple language and communicate to his people. The heart of the World Bank villagisation programme was the modernisation theory which was rampant at the time.

Traditional peasants had to be pulled into and integrated in the international commodity circuits. The programme was based on the so-called transformation and improvement approach. Model farmers would be settled in villages, given modern technology and they would do farming under the supervision of managers. Others, outside the village settlement schemes, would learn from these model farmers by example. This model did not challenge the basic structures of the colonial economy which was integrated vertically into metropolitan economies supplying raw materials while importing manufactured goods. Nor did it question the accumulation model at the heart of the colonial economy. This was based on the peasant as the reservoir of cheap labour who exerted super-human labour to enable plantation monopoly capital to report super-profits.

For various reasons, the village settlement programme was a huge failure (Cliffe & Cunningham 1968). The relationship between the managers and the settlers was one of antagonism. Settler farmers had no motivation to work. Heavy machinery that had been bought with scarce foreign exchange could not be maintained and productively used. In any case, it was too expensive – since it was imported – to be affordable. The transformation and improvement approach was soon given up and village settlements abandoned. It is interesting to note that Mwalimu's rationalisation of the village settlement lay much more on the provision of basic social services than any economic model of development. While Nyerere had a broad vision of social development and while he was extremely articulate in communicating it *politically* to his people, Mwalimu never understood the underlying political economy of a peripheral underdeveloped economy in the international capitalist system.

The next round of villagisation came after the Arusha Declaration of 1967 when the ruling party TANU and its government deliberately adopted the policy of socialism and self-reliance. While Mwalimu had talked about socialism – or *ujamaa* – long before, it was always a kind of faith (*ujamaa ni imani*), rather than a political programme. The Arusha Declaration took a big leap forward. It explicitly referred to the incipient growth of classes in the Tanzanian society and that if this was allowed to continue, the country would move away from its goal of creating a society of equals. It took concrete measures to forbid what it called exploitative tendencies by nationalising the commanding heights of the economy and prohibiting political leaders at the helm of the party and the state from indulging in private accumulation.

Once again, its rural development model was based on small peasants coming together in villages to produce communally and share the fruits of their labour equally. This is what led to the creation of *ujamaa* villages.

But soon the government found that the small peasant was least interested in communal production. Ultimately, therefore, the government adopted the policy of 'development villages' and ordered that peasants had to live in villages. This was called *operation vijiji*. *Operation vijiji* has come to have negative connotations because movement into villages was no longer voluntary; it was forced and there was considerable use of paramilitary force to move some 9 million people into villages within a period of 4-5 years.

There is no doubt that, while recognising some of the excesses of villagisation, Mwalimu considered villagisation as one of the important successes of the Arusha Declaration. In *The Arusha Declaration Ten Years After*, Mwalimu said:

> In my Report to the 1973 TANU Conference I was able to say that 2, 2028,164 people were living in villages. Two years later, in June, 1975, I reported to the next TANU Conference that approximately 9,100,000 people living together in 7,684 villages. This is a tremendous achievement. It is an achievement of TANU and Government leaders in co-operation with the people of Tanzania. It means that something like 70 per cent of our people moved their homes in the space of about three years! All these people now have a new opportunity to organise themselves for local democratic government, and to work with the Regional, District, and Central administrations to hasten the provision of basic educational, health, and the other public services, which are necessary for a life in dignity. Results are already becoming apparent. Universal Primary Education by the end of 1977, for example, would have been out of the question had the people not been living in village communities by now. As it is, we stand a good chance of achieving that objective. (Nyerere 1977 in Coulson 1979, 65).

In many respects, Mwalimu's thought, and in particular his political practice, on the village complemented the conceptualisation of the village as a site of development, which I will discuss later. However, there are seeds of the conception of the village as a site of governance (such as, for example, the use of the phrase 'local democratic government' in the above quote) but these are fleeting references and, certainly, there is no evidence that he advocated any consistent, political programme to evolve village

governance. The tendency of top-down state benevolence towards the peasant was strong in Mwalimu. No doubt he was sincere about it. His sincerity and personal devotion to uplift the life of village community accounts for the better standard of health, education, water etc. in the villages during the period of the Arusha Declaration.

There is another interesting gap in Mwalimu's thought towards the village. This is the virtual absence of theorising village development as charting out a new path of development. In fact, there is an interesting consistency in Mwalimu's thought on one issue: He not only saw Tanzania as a country of village communities, but also, wanted them to be virtually undifferentiated communities. In other words, his vision of the rural Tanzania was essentially that of a middle peasantry. His hostility to the rich peasant was quite explicit. The Arusha Declaration, for example, describes the rich peasant as a feudal, *(kabaila)*. We know that the rising rich peasantry in Ismani and Basotu, Hanang, was decimated. In the case of Ismani, the rich peasantry was ousted by force and instead *ujamaa* villages created in their place. There was considerable resistance resulting in the assassination of Dr. Klerru by a rich peasant. Dr. Klerru was the then regional commissioner of Iringa and a leading party cadre in the forefront of implementing rural socialism (*ujamaa vijijini*). The rich peasantry in Basotu, which was successfully growing wheat, was dispossessed by their land being allocated to a giant parastatal company, NAFCO (National Agriculture and Food Corporation). In that case the resistance of the peasants took the form of court cases, some of which remain unsettled to this day.

The Hanang wheat project under NAFCO was implemented with assistance from the Canadian CIDA (Canadian International Development Association) which also provided capital, machinery and the management. Ultimately, the project was a huge failure but meanwhile did considerable damage to the environment and the livelihoods of the peasantry. The NAFCO project ran counter to Nyerere’s philosophy of rural socialism. Nyerere constantly emphasised the development of the small peasant and was known to be against big parastatal projects, yet NAFCO was precisely that.

Nyerere did not see NAFCO as a harbinger of capitalism, while the rich peasant was. Generally, Nyerere did not make a distinction between national capitalism and

comprador capitalism on the one hand, and private capitalism and state capitalism, on the other.

There are some very interesting shifts in Mwalimu's thought on the village after he stepped down from presidency. Unfortunately these were not developed to the full, nor have they been a subject of much discussion. I can therefore cite only one speech and one personal anecdote to illustrate this shift and hope that our intellectuals will revisit this period of Mwalimu's intellectual itinerary.

Sometime around 1990, Mwalimu as a chair of the meeting of top government and parastatal executives, made an *ex tempore* closing speech. One part of that speech dwelt with an analysis of ujamaa ideology as a legitimising ideology. I have dealt with this part elsewhere (Shivji 1995). For the present purpose, it is the other section, which is profoundly interesting, that concerns us. I quote the original Kiswahili without translation:

> Kwa Coca-cola kwa sababu Marekani wao wana nguvu sana kwa Coca-Cola.Marekani sasa anataka wote tuwe ni wanywa Coca-Cola.
>
> Ndugu Mengi mkipenda msipende mtatuuzia tu Coca-Cola basi Coca-Cola inauzwa tu. Sasa uchumi wetu basi ni uchumi tegemezi. Uchumi wa nchi zetu hizi zote una sifa hizo mbili. Hili tatizo letu kubwa la msingi. Uchumi wetu ni uchumi duni, lakini uduni peke yake si kitu sana lakini tatizo kubwa kabisa kabisa ni uchumi tegemezi.
>
> Kwa hiyo tunajivunia ule ugonjwa … tuna jivunia ule ugonjwa wala hatuuonei haya … unaparedi silaha za wakubwa, unaparedi madege ya wakubwa, unaparedi bidhaa za wakubwa, unaparedi Macoca cola ya wakubwa na unajivunia tu unasema sisi tumeendelea. Ukimwambia umeendelea kwanini, anakuwambia njoo uone barabara yetu.
>
> …
>
> Tunao uchumi tunaweza kuuita wa kisasa, na uchumi wa kisasa ni ule uchumi ulio chuma. Uchumi wa kisasa katika nchi hizi ni wa kigeni. Kwa hiyo ni Coca-Cola chombo cha kigeni ni mtambo unapokea tu pale
>
> ….
>
> Eh! Yuko mhindi mmoja Kiswahili chake kilikuwa kizuri sana kuliko cha Babu Patel. Aliniambia "Mwalimu e wewe sema nakwishakata mirija lakini bomba je kwisha kata? Sasa mabomba … sasa uchumi wetu ule wa kisasa ni wa mabomba mwanzo wake huko nje. *(Mzalendo, date misplaced)*

In this, it seems to me, Mwalimu is distinguishing very graphically between a national capitalist and a comprador capitalist (or, what I later call, not quite exactly, 'accumulation from below' and 'accumulation from above').

Another, more relevant to our present discussion, is an anecdote. When we had completed our draft Land Commission Report, the Commissioners paid a visit to Mwalimu. This was sometime in 1991. I first explained to Mwalimu, in outline, the major recommendations of the Commission. As I explain later, our recommendation on the reform of the land tenure system were based on the model of 'accumulation from below'. I don't know if that is how Mwalimu understood it. But I remember his reaction, which I can only paraphrase in translation. [These are not his exact words]

> Yes, chairman [referring to Shivji], tell them [meaning Government] …. Tell them. I know, they won't listen. But tell them…I have been telling them. Now you want 'commercial farmers' [in English] and you go to look for them in London.[1] Why? Who is a commercial farmer? For me a commercial farmer is that blessed fellow who cultivates his land with an oxen-plough, produces food for his family and sales the surplus on the market. We have such commercial farmers … Look for them .. They are there; you don't have to go to London to find them …

I found this observation quite interesting, both in the light of what the Land Commission said it was going to recommend, and the Arusha attitude of Mwalimu to rich peasantry. As I already said, Mwalimu's earlier attitude to rich peasant was hostile while in this quote he is obviously advocating for the rich peasant.

It is, however, the political or governance side of the villagisation process, which was least developed in Mwalimu's thought, yet, his political practice left behind important village institutions, that I wish to reflect on in this paper.

II. Village as a site of governance

During the period of the Arusha Declaration, in the mainstream conceptualisation and policy-making the village was seen as a 'site of development', not as a site of governance. Villagers, therefore, were recipients of development which, translated into bureaucratic terms meant, receivers of directives, resolutions and orders from the top (*maagizo na maazimio*), not decision-makers, much less self-governing units. Development was supposed to be directed by directors of development - that is what

[1] At the time the then Prime Minister was holding a meeting with investors in London.

they were called, DDDs (District Development Directors) and RDDs. (Regional Development Directors). Politically, villagers were supposed to be *mobilised* for development. The whole structure of governance was top-down, commandist, albeit politically populist.

As we know, the decentralisation programme of the early 1970s, planned and implemented at the behest of an American consultancy firm, MacKinsey (Coulson 1979, 12), which abolished local government, was a failure of no mean proportions. Decentralisation was in effect decentralisation of the central bureaucracy to lower levels. One of the dubious achievements of the decentralised bureaucracy was the implementation of the forced villagisation of the 70s, *Operation Vijiji*. One of the decentralised civil servants linked decentralisation with operation vijiji. Explaining why the move was undertaken in 1973, a year after decentralisation, Juma Mwapachu said,

> The answer is linked to the TANU and government decision in June 1972 to overhaul the Governmental administrative structure. In particular, the regional administration was to move from its original law and order and revenue collection function into a more development-based management function with the people thoroughly involved at the grass-roots level in planning and implementation of development projects ….
>
> Therefore, one year after the decentralisation programme was effected, TANU and Government saw the need to reinforce the participatory development institution by creating a firmly established, participating institution - planned villages (Mwapachu 1976, 116)

Populist rhetoric notwithstanding, there is substantial evidence that villages were anything but participatory. Yet, a potentially progressive institutional structure was created at the end of the villagisation period. The Villages and Ujamaa Villages (Registration, Designation, and Administration) Act of 1975 created two important organs, the village assembly (VA) and an elected body, the village council (VC). When the local government was reintroduced in 1982, these two bodies were incorporated in the local government structure. Thus villagisation established an irreversible structure, the village structure. Some fifteen years later, the Land Commission found that, by and large, the village as established through villagisation, was accepted and has become part of the administrative structure, albeit conceived by

the state bureaucracy more as on the receiving end of the central and local government machinery, rather than the primary basis of democratic governance.

The conception and rhetoric of the donor-funded on-going Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP), which was launched in 1998, revolves around efficient provision of social services. Although, it deploys the rhetoric of devolution of power, transparency, accountability etc., the legal and institutional structure envisaged has little relationship with the rhetoric. As a matter of fact, typically, local government stops at the district level. In bureaucratic outlook, village is once again not a site of governance. If during the Arusha period it was the site of development, under the LGRP it is the site of delivery of social services and instead of political mobilisation, we have the apparently apolitical awareness raising and capacity-building of "ignorant" peasants by partners, meaning erstwhile NGOs and the so-called "development practitioners".

III. Summing up positive achievements

The wisdom of hindsight, I believe, allows us to better identify certain positive and potentially progressive outcomes of the process of villagisation during the Arusha period.

Firstly, the ideological context of the process was *Ujamaa*, a vision of constructing a society based on human equality and dignity. Such a vision integrated the Tanzanian society in the larger human project of social emancipation on the one hand, and provided a collective perspective on global and local contestations of power and wealth, on the other. This stands in sharp contrast to the current ambitions of becoming part of a globalised world, no matter if our humanity, equality and dignity are sacrificed in the process.

Secondly, the process was firmly rooted in a developmentalist discourse. However, economistic it turned at times, yet it could not easily be reduced to empiricism. It created a terrain to raise and interrogate larger and broader trends in society and the direction of its movement. Nothing of this level of discourse is possible, or even attempted, within the current *policy-dialogue*, to use the obtuse jargon of modern-day consultants of "poverty reduction". Any one who has attended one of those "stakeholder workshops" knows the amount of intellectual and material energy foolishly spent on identifying, quantifying, tabulating, etc. the most vulnerable, and

the poorest among the poor for the purposes of being "targeted" for “poverty alleviation”.

Thirdly, the populist rhetoric of mass mobilisation, of necessity, had to be located on a political terrain and, therefore, inevitably brought in the contestation of power between vested interests in support of the *status quo* on the one hand, and agencies of change, on the other. The language of stakeholders, rapid rural appraisals, awareness-creating, capacity-building, and all that, pretend to be politically-free "dialogue" and "consultation" among, ostensibly, equal "partners" and "stake-holders"!

Fourthly, institutionally, the village assembly and the elected village council, have a great potential as a site of democratic governance enabling organic contestations within village communities. This is the potential which was ironically suppressed by developmentalist and populist rhetoric of the *Ujamaa* period.

As will be recalled, the Land Commission pegged its recommendations on land tenure reform around these organs and, in particular, its recommendation that village land be vested in the village assembly. I believe, the land tenure structure woven around village organs demonstrates the interesting and progressive potential in the village assembly to create a whole new vision and terrain of political and economic contestation under the present circumstances. In the next section, I briefly summarise how the reform of village governance, as part of the local government reform programme, could be structured around village organs.

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In a study done with a colleague on 'village democracy', we placed the restructuring of village governance on the centre stage. Our argument proceeded from the conceptual shift in the village as a site of development or delivery of social services to the village as a site of governance.

Secondly, we argued, as a site of governance, the village constitutes the primary level or the third tier governance structure, the other two being the district and the national. It is at these three levels only that the elected organs of the people with legislative and executive powers and functions are to be found. In bureaucratic, and even popular consciousness and practice, the region, which is only the site of administration, not governance, has greater weight and power in relation to the district. Similarly, the ward (for example, Ward Development Committee), which is a co-ordinating level of

administration, is more powerful than the village government, which is an elected body.

Thirdly, we argued that the relationship between different tiers of governance should be based on law and not administrative fiat. Thus the jurisdictions of district council and village council should be clearly demarcated in law.

Fourthly, village governance should be based on *rule of law* and *separation of power*. Thus the venerable constitutional principles are applied at the village level with the VA as a legislative body and the VC as an executive body. This is diagrammatically represented on the next page.

I have no doubt I my mind that some reform of this kind in which the village was the centre of political governance would have fitted well in Mwalimu's philosophy and political practice.

IV. Conclusion: The Political Economy of Village Governance Reform

What is the basis in political economy of village governance reform we are advocating? In other words, what development trajectory is envisaged by this reform? In this paper, I cannot go into great details but would like to suggest tentatively the following theses for further investigation and reflection.

First, Tanzania is and will continue to be in the foreseeable future a country of smallholder peasant and pastoral production. In other words, it is the agrarian and pastoral sector which will continue to provide the surplus and which constitutes the potential source of accumulation.

Second, the feasible and sustainable path of development for the country is towards an integrated national economy producing largely for the national market. The key link in developing the economy in that direction is the agrarian (which includes pastoral) sector and within this the key link is the production of food for the national market and possible export of the surplus.

In other words, what needs to be done is to create enabling conditions for not only production of surplus in the agrarian sector but accumulation in that sector. This is what I call 'accumulation from below.' Hitherto the colonial and post-colonial, including the current liberalised policies, are based on accumulation from above. Which means that although the agrarian sector generates surplus, this is siphoned off

through various mechanisms and agencies, chiefly some or the other form of merchant capital (whether the state as under Arusha, or private, as under liberalisation). As a matter of fact, under the so-called liberalised/globalised economy and new land tenure system, there is a trend towards a new form of "primitive accumulation", that is, pillage of natural resources, including genetic resources, mainly by foreign, in our case, South African, capital. This trend, in my view, is already happening and is groping for a stable political expression. One of the major effects of accumulation from above or merchant capital on the village community is to suppress and pervert internal differentiation.

Thirdly, the governance suggested here is to create enabling political conditions for internal differentiation and ward off the predatory outside capital. Of course, this assumes complementary reforms in other sectors, including the state itself. But it is suggested that the key link in the restructuring of the state is the village.

An interesting question that arises is on the social – class character – of such a state. Space does not allow us to go into the details of this. Suffice to say that what is envisaged some kind of a national democratic state based on working people.

Mwalimu's thought did not capture the political economy aspect of his central emphasis on the village. I would dare suggest that this is because Mwalimu, unlike, for example, Nkrumah, did not fully understand or appreciate the *political economy of imperialism*. And, as it is well-known, he never accepted that building socialism was a process of class struggle. He did not therefore accept that the state he was the leader of had class character. He believed that the state could carry out the reforms he genuinely believed in so long as you had a self-less, committed leadership.

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