

Communal Property and Degradation Narratives

Debating the Sukuma immigration into Rukwa Region, Tanzania

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Abstract

The migration of Sukuma agro-pastoralists from northern to southern Tanzania is arousing widespread concern at all levels of government. There is a widespread perception that the migrants are fleeing environmental degradation which they caused. Misuse of resources by immigrant herders in the south is thought to fuel persistent conflict between immigrants and residents. This paper reports on research into the migration in Rukwa region in southern Tanzania. It shows that there were considerable tensions between cultivators and herders, particularly over crop damage. These are fuelled principally by inept and bankrupt local government whose officers are unable to resist the bribes paid by herders facing compensation claims from wronged herders. The paper examines the applicability of ideas of moral ecologies of resource management to the situation in southern Tanzania and looks at the use of the rhetoric of environmental degradation by villagers to manipulate the state to serve their needs.

Introduction

For many decades Sukuma and Nyamwezi agro-pastoralists have been moving into southern Tanzania from the north. The current migration dates from the expansion of population and the reclamation of land lost to the tsetse, and has many causes¹. This paper addresses changes resulting in recipient areas. There

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¹ Brandstrom, 1990. Sanders (forthcoming) presents an excellent discussion to the background of the migration and its consequences.

is much anxiety all over the country about the consequences of the migration, particularly on the environment. However, one does not always hear what residents and locals think. There is no guarantee that the rhetoric of Members of Parliament (MPs) and Regional Officials matches what is said at the village level.

I explore here some of the ways in which people respond and cope with the changes the migration brings. I present it as a story about the functioning of village administration, of what the state looks like at the local level in Tanzania. This is often only opaquely detailed and surprisingly rarely mentioned in current research. To do so I first explain how I came to pursue this work. I tell it as a story of ‘discovery’, of coming to realise how things worked. While this is not the best way of presenting findings, it suffices to report recent field work.

Approaching the problem

My first research in Tanzania was around the Mkomazi Game Reserve, in the northern part of the country, between 1995–6. I examined the impact the recent eviction of herders from the Reserve had on pastoralists’ society and economy. There were records of immigration of livestock which had flooded into the west of the Reserve in the early 1970s, and about which there were many complaints from locals. A major grievance was that the immigrants had overgrazed the pastures set aside for stock in the dry season². The local mechanisms for managing pasture had broken down. Was it because they were inherently weak, or were the records of complaint an indication of the system and controls functioning? To find out what the dynamics of local resource management were like, I would have to examine the existing systems, and current pressures.

The obvious thing to do was to go to the south of Tanzania to where Sukuma, Maasai and Barabaig herders, among others, had moved to³. After a brief survey of the three Districts in Rukwa, I settled in a village called Mtowisa. My aim was to identify what local controls existed over the management of resources. I wanted to observe how these were contested by different groups of locals, how immigrants were excluded or included by these laws and how environmental narratives surrounding the immigration differed from the Tanzanian officials’ point of view to the villagers’. I suspected that the villagers would not share the stories of doom that I had heard in government circles.

² Brockington, forthcoming.

³ Charnley, 1994; Niamire-Fuller *et al* 1994; Galaty, 1988

With these expectations formed I encountered my first problems. The greatest was that at first I could find no local controls in place which regulated the use of resources. People did not know what calf pastures were. Anyone from the village could put stock anywhere in the village. There were no designated farming or grazing areas, and the cows seemed to particularly flourish on the abundant weeds and grasses that grew on abandoned farms or (much to farmers' chagrin) on the crops themselves. There were restrictions on inter-village movement regulated by the village chairman, tax collector and village council. However, my interest at the time was in associations of herders who agreed to the use of their range. There were none.

The Sukuma recognised the types of institution that I was looking for. They call them *ngiteli*. But the *ngiteli* were not found further south to Tabora Region, let alone Rukwa. They informed me that they were to be found far up in Shinyanga District to the north, where the aridity of the climate and the poverty of the soil made restrictions on pastureland necessary. Indeed, the Sukuma had not even herded their cattle here in the dry season until the mid-1970s. They were just left out in the pastures to calve and fend for themselves. Since pasture management presupposes more active herding than had been the case until recently, it would be surprising to find calf pastures now.

The problem appeared to be the abundance of resources. There was copious grass, a vast lake and abundant streams draining the escarpment for watering stock. In essence, there was nothing to induce regulation and frugal use. Even irrigation water for the rapidly expanding rice fields was not shared out by agreement, although there were some efforts to get these installed. For example, in February 1999, water shortages after the poor rainfall led to disputes and complaints about the distribution of water. A meeting was planned to try and come to an arrangement, hopefully a communal resource management institution evolving on the spot. Unfortunately a few days before the meeting was due, it rained heavily. There was thus no longer a shortage, and as a result, no meeting was held.

I placed local communal resource management institutions on hold and turned my attention to the environment. How did the upper echelons of the Tanzanian State misrepresent the opinions of the peasants? Where was the evidence of thriving environments in direct contradiction to imposed narratives *à la* Leach and Fairhead⁴? I spoke to the local residents—the Fipa—about what they thought of the immigrants and was left in no doubt that immigration was a bad thing⁵. The immigrants had tricked their way in. They

⁴ Fairhead and Leach, 1996a; 1996b.

⁵ Willis, 1966.

had initially arrived with a few cows, and then rapidly brought in hundreds, as well as a large number of relatives (and herds of cattle). These animals consumed all the thatching grass; they trampled and degraded the soil, and destroyed crops. This migration only brought loss, injury and insult. The only people to benefit in any way were the herd owners. Even those who worked for them as herders tended to be children who had shunned school and who often did not get paid for the work that they did. There was therefore great bitterness when these issues were aired.

I tried to test for dissenting views, and, looking hard, found them. Some people spoke positively about the upturn in the economy of the valley since these industrious and wealthy cattlemen had arrived. A number of Fipa youths had formed friendships and business partnerships with the Sukuma trading cattle and receiving gifts of oxen. There was intermarriage, mainly Sukuma men taking local girls, but some cases of Fipa men paying the bridewealth (up to 50 cows) for Sukuma wives. Many did admit that the abundance of oxen since the herders had arrived had brought benefits. But the significance of these views was their rarity. The consensus that the Sukuma were a bad thing, and that the Fipa would be better off if the Sukuma were out of the area, was remarkable for its strength and consistency in all walks of village society.

Initially I thought that the hostility was based on jealousy. Some of the Sukuma were incredibly wealthy. They owned thousands of stocks of cattle and ploughs; they owned bicycles, motorcycles, cars, lorries and guesthouses. They drank the bottled Safari beer at TSh650/- a bottle, when TSh1300/- would buy an 8-gallon bucket of the local beer '*komoni*'.⁶ It was quite common for a Sukuma man to spend, in an evening, enough to satisfy 20 thirsty farmers, and then weave off into the night on his motorcycle. Visits to Sukuma households were characterised by abundant food served off new crockery. It merely made their poorer neighbours green with envy.

There were two somewhat contradictory complaints made against such conspicuous consumption. First that it was selfish and did not benefit the village in any way. It may be a good thing for the wealthy person to have a pleasant home, a vehicle and an ostentatious lifestyle but not their neighbours. The second was directed towards the more traditional cattlemen, who did not sell their stock to invest in modern amenities. Why didn't they do anything with their wealth? How could they just keep it and not spend it? Why did they not get themselves a good home and a vehicle instead of living in a brick hut, surrounded by cows?

⁶ The currency is in Tanzanian shillings. At the time of the research US\$ 1 was worth about TSh 800/-.

But it was not only jealousy. The wealth and power of the herders was constantly aggressively and malevolently displayed by what their large herds of cattle did to farms and crops. The poor relationship between the two groups was rooted in the problems caused by stock damage to farms and by the contrasting approaches to farming between Fipa and Sukuma practices.

The two different groups can be loosely distinguished thus—the farms without livestock conserve energy; those with stock expend effort. Stockless and stock-poor farmers (mostly Fipa) tended to clear small areas of land no more than four acres, where they grew maize and finger millet, and sometimes cassava⁷. Their farming practices were orientated towards conserving the fertility of the soil. When their land became infertile they had to clear a new patch on their farm or borrow land while their own recovered. They liked to keep waste matter on the farm and leave it to rot for the next year's fertility. They wanted their soil light and aerated. They farmed by hand and tended to use their own labour or communal parties. They did not always have ploughs or access to farming implements. Conserving labour was vital because they did the work themselves without the benefit of animals or employees. Therefore, they understandably resented stock encroaching onto their farms, even after the harvest, because these animals consumed the residues which would have formed humus, trampled the soil and hardened it, making it difficult to hoe. Cattle also spread a type of grass, locally called *Kasangani* (*Cynodon dactylon*), which spread rapidly and was hard to weed⁸. Fipa farmers resented the decline in fertility on their farms, which they attributed to cattle invasion.

In contrast to this the cattle-wealthy, who were mostly Sukuma, could be described as expending effort⁹. They cleared large areas of ground of 10–20 acres that they ploughed and weeded with communal drumming parties, and paid labourers. They relied considerably on sweet potatoes in their diet and to enhance soil fertility. They tended to move their livestock around rather than leave land fallow to restore its fertility. *Kasangani* afflicted their farms, especially since it grows most on old kraals. However, this did not create a problem to the wealthy as they had the resources to pay labourers to clear it.

The groups were distinct in their approaches to farming and utterly divided by their attitudes towards crop damage by herds. Stock keepers knew that their animals could easily graze on someone else's farm so it was unwise to demand payment if their own farm was damaged. The attitude was “we just get on with it”, it was a ‘normal’ occurrence, an acceptable part of life. To the (stock poor)

⁷ Willis, 1966.

⁸ English gardeners would understand if I said it was like couch grass.

⁹ Brandstrom, 1990. See also Abrahams, 1967.

Fipa, however, it was not. They saw their hard work consumed by another person's animal, and the soil fertility trodden out of the ground. They demanded compensation.

Crop damage was a continual background noise in villages like Mtowisa. It varied from goats snatching leaves from crops around houses, pigs digging up cassava roots, to big herds of cattle making off with all the crop a week before harvest. It was always going on somewhere, and threatening to happen everywhere. Severe incidents were rare; it was not often that one could identify an incident where compensation was sought within the last 15 years.

Stock damage was potentially devastating and generated great tension. Farming could be a backbreaking, thankless and boring task. There were often more interesting things to be done. There are farmers who love to work and spend ages on their farms, but they stand out for their rarity¹⁰. Cultivation is a performance¹¹, but part of that performance is marshalling the resources of the whole village¹². When the proceeds from one's labour ended up in the stomach of another's cow, the frustration was almost unbearable. The poor farmer now had nothing to eat, or much less money to buy new clothes, a new ox or the plough that he had been saving up for. They had to go out to do *kibarua* (piece) work for appalling wages, often for the very person whose stock ate their crops. The scorn and contempt were hard to bear. People told me of being consumed with rage and murderous hate when it happens.

To make matters worse the herd boys themselves were often extremely aggressive. They were often paid labourers too and they stood to lose their income if the herd owner was fined for their negligence. They made every effort to prevent stock caught on farms from being impounded, and were often violent. Everyone could tell of the people who have been beaten up while trying to move stock off their farms, or impound stock. This added injury to insult.

Repeatedly as I listened to these stories and complaints the same refrain came out. There was no justice, no recompense for this damage. One could not get compensation because the herders had the means to bribe the officials who were meant to be guarding villagers' rights. As I listened to these tales and complaints about Sukuma behaviour, their wealth and their presence in the village took on a new significance. People were not just complaining out of jealousy—they were complaining because of the power the Sukuma had over

¹⁰ The very existence of energetic indigenous innovators implies the existence of many others who are not.

¹¹ Richards, 1993.

¹² Prices for rice and maize here were the lowest in Tanzania.

them. Sukuma who were liable for crop damages and loss could bribe the agricultural officer who came to assess the damage, bribe the *baraza la wazee* (elders' meeting) who might arbitrate the dispute, bribe the police dealing with the assault or the judge if it went to the primary court, and the District court judge if it went to appeal. Their wealth gave them licence over the Fipa rights. It allowed them to cope with the failures of the Tanzanian state. And it allowed them to do so while trampling over the rights of their neighbours. If you have money here, I was told you, have rights. The poor are nothing.

And so I began to look again and more carefully at the functioning of the Tanzanian state - how village administration worked or failed to work. For these were the local level evolving institutions that managed communal resources that I had come to study¹³. The dynamics of resource use and management in Tanzania was a study of local level governance, the functioning of the local state¹⁴.

My research then focused on a number of aspects of the local state's functioning and failure which I outline below. They do not fit together in a coherent way. I am not yet able to offer a theory for what makes the state work in some circumstances and fail in others. They are about diverse issues of public interest - stock theft, the construction of a secondary school, the repair of water pipes and the regulation of stock movement and stock damage. They are not all about common property *per se*, but they are about the institutions by which common property would be managed. I offer them in chronological order because that allows me to finish with the most apposite case study of all - the grazing regulations of the Mtowisa Accord.

Stock theft

Until the early 1970s, Fipa cattle owners would not herd their cattle in the dry season. After the harvest, they would drive the stock out into the plains bordering the lake and leave them there to breed and to feed until the beginning of the wet season. The large number of cattle wandering about struck Sukuma immigrants arriving in the Rukwa valley from the beginning of the 1970s unattended. They were large-boned stock, whose health and size had attracted the Sukuma there in the first place. They stole them.

Locals reported that first individual beasts began to disappear, then groups and herds. Eventually, whole kraals were raided at night. The animals were sent to Tabora and Shinyanga region for sale. The thieves then bought

¹³ And which some far-sighted advisors had predicted I would be studying from the start - Dr Abrahams in particular.

¹⁴ Cf Kikula, 1999; Maganga 1999.

Sukuma stock with the proceeds and took them back to Rukwa in a sort of regional scale cattle laundering operation.

The Fipa were incensed and the regional authorities feared a repeat of inter-ethnic violence that had erupted on the plateau between Fipa and Nyakusa immigrants after the latter had begun to steal cattle. In the early 1980s, plans commenced to move the Sukuma on. But the Sukuma got wind of the scheme and asked for a grace period to sort out their affairs. This was during the formation of the *Sungusungu* anti-rustling vigilante groups. The local Sukuma sent representatives up to Tabora Region to find out how to set up and run *Sungusungu*¹⁵. They established a group in the valley with both Sukuma and Fipa members and leaders. Then they embarked on recovering the stolen stock.

Suspected cattle thieves were called in and interviewed, probably under duress, and asked to explain how their cattle herds had grown so quickly and from whom they had stolen stock. As soon as a confession was extracted, the thief was taken to the offices of the CCM (*Chama cha Mapinduzi* the ruling party of Tanzania) where he signed a confession. The number of animals stolen was then reimbursed to the original owner from the thief's kraal.

But the thieves reacted. They formed an alliance with District and Regional lawyer, police, and judges and complained that they had been robbed of their livestock by local thugs. Proof of this was that animals with the thief's brand were found in the local people's kraal. The authorities obliged them by providing units of the aggressive Field Force Unit (Tanzanian riot police) to repossess the thieves' animals. At the same time they arrested the leaders of the *Sungusungu*. In one case, a skeleton of a man alleged to have been killed by *Sungusungu* soldiers was discovered, and murder investigations were carried out.

At this point the other cattle owners were in despair. It seemed that the thieves and the upper echelons of the Tanzanian judiciary had formed an allegiance. I was told that they were all part of a group called 'KIKUMI - Kikundi cha kuiba mifugo nchini' - which means something like the national society for the theft of cattle. In response in 1986 a committee was formed and representatives sent to see the chairman of the CCM party and retired president of the nation, Mw. Julius Nyerere.

Nyerere sent an investigative officer to Rukwa for three months to assess the situation before he himself arrived. There was a daylong meeting at Sumbawanga in which both sides presented their side of the case. The peasants and the party on one side (the CCM offices had been used to sign confessions and stock from a government ranch were among those stolen),

¹⁵ For a useful introduction to *Sungusungu* see Abrahams, 1998. More detailed sources are: Abrahams, 1987, 1989; Burukura, 1994, 1995; Abrahams & Burukura, 1993; Masanja, 1992.

the lawyers, police and judges on the other. Mw. Nyerere sided with the peasants. He publicly castigated the authorities in question for their corruption. He said that it did not matter that the thieves had had to return cattle with a different brand on it. A cow was a cow; and if a different cow had to be returned in compensation for the theft for another then that was the thief's problem. Then, if one account is to be believed, everyone in the meeting was placed under house arrest for 12 hours, not allowed to leave the meeting place but fed and watered while all the thieves implicated were rounded up and caught. There followed another public meeting where the thieves were informed that the stock that they had had returned to them would be taken off them again by a new set of Field Force Units and returned to those who had originally been robbed.

If this was truly the situation, then it is an example of local people sorting out a problem through their own internal policing, and then appealing to an even higher, more respected authority.

The Vuma Secondary School

This is a story of breakdown and failure. The villagers planned to lobby for the construction of a secondary school in the valley, as there was none. The plan was that the buildings and the salaries of the teachers were to be paid for by the locals. A fund was established where everyone was to contribute. At a time when the District Development Tax was less than TSh2000/- a year, some herders contributed up to TSh24000/- (approx. US\$60).

The beginning looked promising. After classrooms and teachers' houses were built, a dining hall and dormitories were also begun and laboratory walls erected. Over one hundred pupils attended the first form when the school first opened. Unfortunately this rapidly declined when the pupils were required to pay fees. Soon there were only 16 pupils in the first 4 years. The construction and running of the school was characterised by massive mismanagement. Collections for the secondary school fund were either un-receipted or improperly done; tax collectors absconded with the money; there was no transparency about its expenditure. Buildings were not completed. Confidence in the project plummeted and people stopped contributing.

The school fees and building fund could not support the staff; the school was more expensive to run than the villagers imagined. This drain on resources combined with financial mismanagement led to the school's handing over to the Department of Education. The Department undertook to provide and pay for the teachers; the parent's secondary school thus became a government secondary school.

The school had begun to improve under the new management. There were nearly 80 students in the first two years. However, there was still conflict surrounding its resources. The local divisional secretary re-launched the fund in order to raise money to build proper teachers' housing in an attempt to compel staff to stay in the valley. It was not a popular area as it was an undeveloped backwater and most staff refused to work there. But a year previously, the headmaster's house had been built under the supervision of the ward executive officer for the cost of TSh 1,400,000/-. The cement and aluminium roofing had all been provided free of charge by District notables. Paradoxically, a similar-sized house in the village cost less than TSh 500,000/- to construct—and that includes the cement and aluminium.

Needless to say, this aroused suspicion among the locals. The Sumbawanga Development Corporation Farm at Mtowisa had collapsed due to gross mismanagement by the same party officials¹⁶. But by the time of my fieldwork, villagers were unwilling to pay for the construction of a school if it was so corruptly or inefficiently done. The expectations of integrity of state officials was extraordinarily low. I was told that anyone in charge of construction must automatically make sure that they benefit personally from the scheme, and that of the taxes and money raised at least 90% would be siphoned off into illicit causes. This is a case of the leadership of a local movement was so inefficient and corrupt that it foundered.

The water pipes

The water supply of Mtowisa and its neighbouring villages was constructed in the early 1970s. It consists of a number of large pipes drawing water from a central intake and distributing it to three villages downstream. The water supply is abundant, but the pipes have broken or cracked over the years and remained unrepaired.

In early 1999, there had been a cholera epidemic and the entire area was placed under quarantine. This coincided a poor agricultural harvest, as it was just after the El Niño rains. There was little food in the village, and because of the quarantine, no means of getting more from anywhere else. Many people went hungry. Fear of infection meant there was no socialising. There was no water in the hospital because its water pipes were broken. Cholera causes the body to lose fluid through vomit and diarrhoea. It requires rapid re-hydration as well as cleaning and sterilising the soiled sheets and equipment. The patients had to rely on people outside the hospital bringing in water.

¹⁶ Mbele, 1980: 26.

A few weeks after I arrived in the village in November 1999, multi-party elections for the village council and the village chairman were held. At his first public meeting, the village chairman undertook to repair the pipes within a period of three weeks. The job was relatively simple. It required plastic and rubber bungees, which are cut from old tires. The broken pipes were unearthed using (compulsory) communal labour and the pipes were repaired.

A water committee was set up to ensure that the pipes were repaired promptly and maintained in good working order, with each village taking turns for repair work. The maintenance continued during the nine months of the study. In this case, the local state responded to public pressure and effected change.

The Mtowisa Accord

Conflict between the herders and farmers accentuated in the late 1990s, reaching a crescendo in 1997 and 1998. The new Regional Commissioner for Rukwa, who took office in January 1998 encountered complaints and letters of disputes. Delegations of farmers and herders came to him separately, each group complaining about the actions of the other. An investigation into the cause of the problem was launched and the findings presented to the farmers and herders at a large public meeting.

The meeting was well attended, with more than 1000 peasants, farmers and herders gathered before the upper echelons of District and Regional Government. Accusations and tempers flew high. It took about 10 hours for the stakeholders to express their views. The essential findings of the Regional Commissioner's investigations and complaints of the villagers were¹⁷:

1. Failure to administer and carry out laws governing the movement and transport of livestock, the use of land and roads and other by-laws of the District Council.
2. The District Council does not perform its duties to its tasks concerning providing information on tax collection, establishing efficient tax collection procedure, and providing adequate services based to the herders and farmers from whom taxes are collected. Indeed if one takes the published figures for district revenue and spending it is quite clear that very little of what is raised is spent on village services.

¹⁷ Mwambi, 1998.

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4. lists the three taxes which are most likely to affect the rural population and shows the size of their contribution to the District Council's revenue. This is juxtaposed to spending on agricultural services (potentially so important for rural livelihoods) and the running costs of the council, i.e. what it spends on itself. Much is extracted and little returned. As the universal perception is that much more is raised than is reported (it is diverted to officials' pockets), and much less is spent than is claimed (it goes the same way) one can begin to see the rural peoples' concerns¹⁸.
5. The village leadership concerned with giving permission for the herders to enter the village does not involve the village residents on any decision made.
6. Some villages have not been surveyed or granted village status, and even those areas that have been surveyed and certified find that this does not count in government administration.
7. The legal authorities are not concerned about the rights of herders and farmers. Compensation cases are rarely attended to, giving rise to suspicion of corruption.

In short, there were neither laws nor enforcement of laws. Where breaches of the law came to court, there was no justice. To counter this situation, the environmental committee was established. Its job was to ensure that stock routes were set up and labelled, grazing areas delineated and disputes over crop damage settled fairly. The committees were to be composed of men, women, herders and farmers. They had the power to report to the District Commissioner on any troublemakers.

The meeting also ensured that cattle tax in the region was raised and standardised across all Districts. A staggered rate was introduced such that herders with less than 30 cows paid 500/- per head and those with more than 30 paid 1,500/- per head on all their cattle. The District Council also set up a Crops and Livestock Development Fund which is required to spend between 5 and 10% of district taxes on the development projects in the agricultural sector.

¹⁸ Bayart, 1993, and Chabal and Daloz, 1999 and develop thinking about relationships between African elites to the rural poor more generally.

Table 1: District Council revenue and expenditure

District	Year	Income from local taxes				Expenditure of local taxes				
		Livestock	Crops	Head tax	Sub total	Total tax	% of total	Agriculture & Livestock	Administration & Treasury	Total
Mpanda	1998	30,538,163	88,708,337	37,089,350	156,335,850	278,040,053	56.2%	nil	202,728,125	259,959,115
	1999	37,680,969	79,335,789	49,602,988	166,619,746	344,193,317	48.4%	nil	283,268,402	469,210,680
Sumbawanga	1988	122,147,890	13,971,148	39,347,098	175,466,136	234,884,792	74.7%	nil	218,331,691	226,304,900
	1999	101,386,035	21,601,310	48,007,630	175,994,975	228,900,273	74.7%	945,500	258,142,668	no data
Mbarali	1998	191,576,435	42,048,400	130,685,000	364,309,835	467,680,413	77.9%	1,049,735	253,295,283	333,333,094
	1999	201,616,310	21,583,885	97,315,000	320,515,195	389,387,401	82.3%	6,130,333	264,893,800	362,418,640

All figures are in Tanzanian Shillings. At the time of the research, US\$ 1 was worth approximately 800 shillings.

Sources: District Financial Records.

The Regional Commissioner stated that he would return the next year to assess these measures, which were collectively known as the '*Tamko la Mtowisa*' or Mtowisa Accord. The second meeting was more low-key. Interest was focused on the construction of a road between Mtowisa and Sumbawanga than on quarrels between herders and farmers. This indicated that the tensions of the previous year had been defused.

Why did the Accord work? It was not entirely clear. That it had was not really doubted. Although there was a rhetoric of antagonism, and although there were many incidences of crop damage and frustration, and still fights on farms, the general consensus was that things between herders and farmers were better. But there was no general consensus as to why that was the case. It was probably a collection of reasons.

First, the Regional Commissioner had publicly castigated one farm extension officer for demanding payments before he assessed crop damage. The officer was warned that if there were further reports of this then he would lose his job. Fear of such action at subsequent meetings of the Accord may have served to curb some of the local corruption.

Second, the Environmental Committees offered a forum for locals to solve disputes and express their problems that by-passed the normal tiers of authority. The problem is that the Committees did not meet frequently and were rarely well attended, sometimes there was poor communication between the herders and farmers on the committee. Often there was competition and overlap between the environmental committees and the elected village committees. Moreover when it came to solving cases of farm damage sometimes the farmer would report the incident to the chairman or clerk of the committee and to the herd owner but have the case sorted out before the committee dealt with it. Indeed an initial report was all that some farmers expected to tell the committee. With that lodged, they often preferred to seek their own solutions. The Environmental Committees added something, but it was a *je ne sais quoi* which varied according to the politics of each village and strength of each committee within its local scene. There was no regularity in meetings or procedure that allows its effect to be codified or measured.

Third, the cattle taxes have helped to lower the number of stock in the area. They encouraged a number of herders to move on and to sell up stock and invest in houses and other attributes of development which aroused so much jealousy in their neighbours. There were simply fewer stock around to cause damage.

The third meeting of the Accord was my final day in the village. It was still as large a meeting as ever. It still dealt with the problems that arose from the fights and discord that are daily events on people's farms. The meeting was

clearly valued as a chance to bring before really important people problems that otherwise might get dealt with only slowly and inadequately by lesser staff.

But the meeting was also important for what was not said. In particular there had not been any substantial change in the way village lands were divided up and managed. There were no herding and grazing areas set aside. And although one local official claimed that there were, he was mistaken, but everyone stayed silent. There was possibly a sense that this was an issue that was too complex to be opened up here. Setting up farming areas where no cattle were allowed was one thing, but herding areas where people would be prevented from farming was quite another. Who would have to give up their farms? Where would the grazing lands be placed? This was something that the people of Mtowisa probably did not want to bring to the attention of the powerful figures of the Region and District. They would rather just muddle on as before.

Discussion

This preliminary review of field results is relevant to debates on common property dynamics and environmental narratives. It has been convincingly argued that models of institutional evolution of common property regimes are excessively based on the rationality of subsistence and economic needs¹⁹. The broader social system and complexity of moral norms, social duties, beliefs and diverse structures of authority in which common property practices operate must be considered. I have found this apposite line of analysis when applied to the Mtowisa accord. Differences between our study sites suggest some modifications to the argument.

Although jealousy was an obvious aspect of Fipa-Sukuma relations from the earliest stages of the research, it was easier to understand the nature of relations between the two groups after a comprehension of the economic importance of crop damage and threat of crop damage. Jealousy is not merely in the marginal set of 'social factors' which colour 'economic realities' of crop loss. This is precisely what Cleaver warns against, reporting Granovetter's suggestion that '*we could see economic life as a sub-sector of social life rather than vice versa*'²⁰. Why should jealousy not be equally as important in shaping relations? It was a weakness of the research design and my methodology that I did not have an adequate framework to conceptualise the importance of jealousy in shaping relations between the two groups.

¹⁹ Cleaver, 2000. She was criticising the functionalism of Ostrom, 1992 and Bromely & Cernea, 1989.

²⁰ Cleaver, 2000: 363; Granovetter, 1992.

The debate between the ‘social’ and the ‘economic’, however, is not just discussed amongst observers. It was an integral part of village discussions. Fipa farmers always voiced their complaints either in economic terms of the amount of damage done and the inconvenience of having to guard crops all the time, or in moral terms which buttressed their economic arguments. These included the contravention of rights to control use of their farms and not to be injured or abused while sending away cattle from their land. On the other hand, the Sukuma were quick to dismiss these complaints as mere bad spirits and jealousy. They pushed the discontent into a broader category of displeasure about the way things are, rather than treating it as a response to specific grievances. In short, the Fipa sought to legitimate their concerns by showing their clear economic or moral relevance, whereas the Sukuma trivialised them by dismissing them as a form of social rivalry. The appropriate sectors—social, economic and moral—are hotly debated by those involved in the establishment and contestation of resource management regimes. In this particular case, both sides appear to consider economic and moral domains to be legitimate.

In some ways the debate was really a contest over the moral ground of what it was reasonable to complain about. There was no ‘collective ethos of the right way of doing things’ as Cleaver found in Nkayi, Zimbabwe²¹. Stock owners asserted that crop damage by cattle was pardonable, farmers see it as a wrong which should be prevented. In such a context meetings over resource management need to be understood in a different way. Cleaver found that twelve hour village meetings allowed conscious forging of a common base of understanding’ and lessened ‘the subsequent need for monitoring and sanctions’. At Mtowisa, the long meetings took place in the presence of a powerful third party, the Regional Commissioner. All the accounts of why conflict has reduced suggest that the enhanced monitoring and sanctions set up by the Districts and Region are responsible for an improvement of the situation. It is perhaps better understood as conflict solving through means of referral to a third party. Disputes were solved not by consensual understanding but by a distant arbiter whose authority both sides recognised or were forced to recognise, forcibly or otherwise²².

Finally, the development of the arrangements at Mtowisa endorse Cleaver’s observation that institutions are as much the outcome of chance and circumstance as they are of intention²³. There are many actors shaping the

²¹ Cleaver, 2000: 380.

²² My thanks to Tony Waters for this comment. cf. Cooney, 1997.

²³ Cleaver, 2000: 366.

‘development’ of grazing controls at Mtowisa, and the consequences of their reasoning are several. Farmers and herders will maintain silence on the zoning in a village if they fear that the zoning will produce too much disruption. Petty officials are keen to use disputes over herding and the location of herds as a source of rent. As Cleaver observes, opacity is absolutely necessary for these arrangements to work²⁴. But a note of caution is appropriate here. Given that most power relations in Tanzanian villages tend to work to the disadvantage of the weak and poor, it is likely that opacity will conceal abuses against these groups. Few of the villagers §I spoke to wanted less transparency over government spending, court cases and cattle tax collection. Opacity may be a *sine qua non*, but it is sometimes useful to know what is being concealed.

The second issue is the environmental narratives. I would like to consider more carefully what different people were complaining about the environment. Nationally, the immigration is blamed for causing degradation and desertification²⁵. The immigrants clear the bush and forests to make way for their farms and herds. This deforestation reduces rainfall, for it is commonly thought in government circles that trees cause rain. The damage done, the immigrants then move on, leaving behind a vast treeless, dry wasteland. The herds cause overgrazing, eliminating the land cover and exposing it to wind and water erosion. An ecological catastrophe in the making, necessitating destocking or re-locating to transfer their problems to another district.

Locals complain about slightly different issues. Their complaints were that the cattle ate all the thatching grass, they trampled farms, they brought in a resistant weed species and they caused crop damage for which justice was not available. They recognised that the herders did not experience these problems because they had cattle, that cattle were the cure as well as the cause of the problem. If you asked why herders whose stock grazed on their own farms did not complain of the same problems that their stockless neighbours voiced, then the answer was immediate—they have cows, and with cows you can overcome the problems that cows bring.

Thus there are differences between what precisely is said. The upper level rhetoric is general. The problem identified needs to be dealt with some sort of general education programme encouraging people to limit their herds, or forcing them to move. The local is specific, it is concerned with the administration and control of cattle herds at the village level, and the honouring of rights. Locals are in effect concerned with the functioning, or

²⁴ Cleaver, 2000: 382.

²⁵ Cf Charnley, 1994; 1995;

rather mal-function of village, ward and district administration. Their problems point to changes in the way officials govern. Officials' complaints point to a rather less demanding and less specific general environmental demise.

This hints at there being an apolitical environmental discourse in Tanzania, just as Ferguson found an apolitical development discourse in Lesotho²⁶. The environment in Tanzania becomes a useful peg on which to hang all sorts of problems which might, if analysed and thought of a different way prove rather uncomfortable to those who had to deal with them.

We can speculate too about the way that villagers use this discourse. The Regional Commissioner, when he first came to Rukwa, made it very clear to everyone that he was appalled by the extent of burning and deforestation. He set up the PAMIRU campaign (*PAnda Miti Rukwa*—plant trees in Rukwa) which required schools, households and villages to a certain number of trees and placed strict regulations on use of firewood. Shortly afterwards, the commissioner received delegations from farmers and villagers who each complained that the other was causing environmental destruction. Local staff in Mtowisa were in no doubt that this tactic was used as a way of getting the Regional Commissioner's ear. It is another example of peasants manipulating official perceptions to their own ends.

Conclusion

For decades, the rural poor have had to deal with the policies of central government, and its corruption. What central trends will influence events in the foreseeable future? I suggest there are two. First, in the Rukwa valley there is still a surplus of land in many places. Few people have no farmland. But this is likely to change soon. The pressure of population and unequal land holdings will encourage more intensive use of existing resources and will enhance the costs of exclusion from access to a resource which communal management, when it works, so often entails. Second, herders are likely to become increasingly valuable to village and district governments because of the volume of tax revenue they generate. At a time when controls on central government of funding are becoming tighter, they are useful people to have around. I frequently came across positive opinions of the migration that cited the revenue they brought in as a positive contribution to the District. The challenge facing administrators now is how to balance this contribution with equivalent expenditure on the agricultural sector on a tiny budget. The challenge facing peasants is how to persuade and lobby officials in whom they

²⁶ Ferguson, 1990.

have so little faith to spend more money on the rural economy and less on themselves.

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