

Mhola – The Utopia of Peace

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Mhola – The Utopia of Peace

An Ethnographic Exploration of the
Sungusungu Movement in Tanzania



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Uppsala, January 2021
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Preamble – Serendipity

It was late evening, according to my field notes around 9 pm or so, 1st of June 1984. I had my evening meal with Nshimba Lubasha in his home, *ugali* it was, the common type of stiff porridge prepared on coarse ground maize meal, this evening with some kind of vegetable stew. There were only the two of us around the pots of *ugali* and the stew. We were chatting, relaxed but rather exhausted after four days together in the Mambali area, some forty kilometres from our Itanana village, following herders who had moved to that area, still forested and sparsely populated, in search of pasture for their large herds of cattle, sheep and goats. We discussed our experiences during our days in Mambali and from there we jumped from topic to topic, from the present to the past. Nshimba and I had many memories to share. We became friends as young boys back in the 1950s. I was the son of the missionary couple of the Swedish Free Mission station at Itanana, now a sub-village of the larger Uduka village, which was formed during the villagization campaign in the mid-1970s. Nshimba and I were both part of the same *elika lya basumba*, the generational group of youth, of the close neighbourhood. We thus knew each other well. We had together with other young people roved the surroundings in all directions, made acquaintances in hamlets and homesteads in the area and engaged in common youthful activities like the Sukuma-Nyamwezi kind of stick fighting and wrestling and also sports like high jump and running. When I left Itanana in my late teens Nshimba continued his life working for the mission and cultivating his fields mainly of maize, cassava and paddy as most other people around. He later got some basic medical training and was employed at the mission dispensary, where my mother in those days was sister in charge and where Nshimba then worked for many years. When a mature man, he married and, as time went by, had many children and, later on in life, was elected chairman of the larger village of Uduka of which Itanana made part. This task of chairmanship of the village was now Nshimba's main preoccupation when I was there in 1984 for anthropological field studies.

During my first field studies, that was in the early 1970s, I had refrained from staying close to the mission. I was simply too well-known in

the area and as the son of the old missionary of Itanana I could not avoid being closely associated with the mission and people more or less took it for granted that I, as the only son of my father, would follow in his footsteps. I was afraid that this fact would prejudice my interlocutors while doing anthropological fieldwork. But now many years had passed and people knew that I was not a missionary-to-be but somebody who was interested in their *utamaduni*, culture, their way of life and struggles for life. In addition, at this particular period of time there were no Swedish missionaries at Itanana. I could therefore stay in the old mission house, still with a thatched roof, which was once my family home, while I had my meals in Nshimba's home.

Suddenly, when we were seated around our pots of food, Nshimba was startled and rose up. "We must go", he said. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Don't you hear the *ndulilu*?" he asked. I listened and, yes, there was the sound of *ndulilu*, a kind of gourd-stem whistle, "dululu, dululu, dululu", the alarm signal of *Sungusungu*. Nshimba took his bow and his quiver with poisoned arrows.¹ "What could I take?", I asked. He grabbed a herder's stick placed in one corner of the room, handed it to me and off we went.

In a great hurry we walked in the direction of the sound. "It's coming from Kabanga", Nshimba said, a neighbouring village a few kilometres from Itanana. When we reached the feeder road toward Kabanga people were joining up from all directions, the majority of them young men, war-like in appearance, highly exalted, bare-chested, with feathers in their hair and all armed with bows and poisoned arrows. But there were also mature men like Nshimba and me, also exalted but more composed in manner and appearance. As more and more people joined in we were forming a kind of army walking briskly in the direction of the *ndulilu* sound.

Then, all of a sudden, people started to turn back. I followed behind Nshimba, totally confused. "What's the matter?" I asked. "False alarm", was his answer. "Where are we going?" I asked, but he just kept walking until we reached a big mango tree in the very centre of Itanana under and around which people were now gathering. In the centre of the gathering stood the *Sungusungu* leaders, the *ntemi*, the 'king', and his *kamanda*, 'commanders'. They were trying their very best to cool down the enraged young men who were prepared to hurry to Kabanga to get hold of the guy who, as it had come to be understood, had blown the *ndulilu* just out of mischief and on the spot immediately settle accounts with him. The lead-

¹ The very designation of the movement derives from the Sukuma-Nyamwezi word for poison, *busungu*.

ers knew only too well that the offender would hardly be alive if confronted with the enraged young, so now, one after the other, they were giving speeches, to settle the tensions.

There is a specific mode of addressing any *Sungusungu* meeting or gathering. Every speech has to start with the exhortation, *Kwili basalama*, which means, ‘May the people of peace multiply’, and the audience will always respond with a strong ‘Hii!’ deep from the throat. The initial exhortation is then followed by a series of statements about the good deeds and the duties of *Sungusungu*. This is the formalized preamble, called *kulamija*, to any speech given in the *Sungusungu* context. Anybody, *Sungusungu* member or not, giving a speech to a *Sungusungu* gathering must honour and employ this mode of address in order to be considered a person worth listening to.

This was what the *Sungusungu* leaders did now, one after the other:

Speaker		Audience
<i>Kwili Basalama</i>	May the people of peace multiply	Hii!
<i>Bashosha ng’ombe</i>	Those who recover stolen cattle	Hii!
<i>Bashosha mbuli</i>	Those who recover stolen goats	Hii!
<i>Balinda busiga</i>	Those who protect the millet	Hii!
<i>Balinda banhu</i>	Those who protect people	Hii!
<i>Bakuniguna</i>	Those who help me	Hii!
<i>ulu nahinjaga</i>	when I am in trouble	Hii!
<i>Kwili kabili</i>	May they multiply twofold	Hii!

I was sitting in the outer circle of participants with Nshimba on my right-hand side and old Gwambassa, a retired primary school teacher, on my left, Nshimba with his bow and quiver beside him, I with my stick and old Gwambassa with his shotgun. Gwambassa shook his head, looked at me and smiled as if saying, “Odd fellows, aren’t we?” I noticed that Nshimba was under great stress and very focused. If the furious young men could not be calmed down and things got out of hand, he as the chairman of the village would be answerable to the district authorities for whatever happened which contravened the laws.

When the *Sungusungu* leaders had finished their exhortations, it was the village chairman’s turn to say his words. Nshimba stood up and addressed the audience as all other speakers before him with the common preamble, *Kwili basalama*, *bashosha ng’ombe* etc., and then gave his speech. He praised *Sungusungu* for all their good work and above all for bringing peace to the village. He reminded the listeners of the plight of the villagers during the times before *Sungusungu* was formed, how things got

worse and worse. There was no *mhola*, no peace, organized gangs of thieves and armed cattle rustlers could ravage freely and with indemnity, nobody would stop them. Cattle carol after cattle carol was emptied in the village, the cattle never to be retrieved, and violent theft of personal belongings and foodstuff was rampant. Peaceful and law-abiding villagers were totally at the mercy of the merciless thugs. In their plight they ultimately realized that nobody else would come to their rescue. They had to rely on themselves and find solutions among themselves. This was when peace-loving villagers joined together and formed self-defence groups and in a short span of time peace had been restored, thanks to the initiative and the work of the villagers themselves.

Rhetorical skills are a highly appreciated art. The art of speaking well is cultivated both among men and women. You should be skilful in catching the listeners' attention and carry them along with you in what your particular message is as speaker. In this gathering the *Sungusungu* leaders had done their part and now the village chairman did his part. Speech after speech had gradually reduced the heat among the young men and now, ultimately, the village chairman could propose a solution to the problem of the false alarm and how to deal with the perpetrator.

Nshimba's position as village chairman was a most tricky one. Elected by the village assembly, he had to meet both the expectations of the villagers who had chosen him, and the expectations of the party and the government he represented. Nshimba had thus to strike a balance between these two not always coinciding fields of expectations.

A false *Sungusungu* alarm is considered a serious offence and indeed it is. The *ndululu* blown in the direction of Kabanga down the valley not only mobilized the *Sungusungu* of Itanana in the dark of the late evening but also hundreds of *Sungusungu* in other surrounding villages. The dilemma here of the chairman was, on the one hand, that the perpetrator had to be dealt with in a way which reasonably well matched and satisfied the villagers and their concept of justice and, on the other hand, ensure that the laws of the country were not seriously contravened when meting out and executing the punishment.

Nshimba's proposal was brief and succinct. He, as the village chairman, would ensure that the perpetrator appeared in the village office early next morning and that the case then would be dealt with in an orderly way and to the satisfaction of all parties.

When Nshimba had finished his speech and was seated again in the outer circle of the gathering, the *Sungusungu ntemi* rose to conclude the meeting. He said that as the village *ntemi* of *Sungusungu*, he accepted the proposal of the chairman, but – a 'but' that contained a strong threat – if

the perpetrator did not appear in the village office early next morning and if he was not dealt with according to the promise given, the chairman would be considered at fault and would have to face the consequences.

Though there was still some murmuring of dissatisfaction among the young men, the gathering dispersed after the *ntemi*'s concluding words. Every speaker in the meeting had taken his time, so it was pretty late now when the participants left in various directions for their homes.

Nshimba and I left the meeting after a few words of well wishes for the night with the *ntemi* and his *kamanda* and then Nshimba accompanied me to the house where I was staying. He didn't say much. He was relaxed but at the same time still worried. He had navigated well between his role as a villager, and as such also a member of *Sungusungu*, and his role as village chairman, and as such a representative of the ruling party and the government. On the one hand, he was certainly satisfied with the fact that the enraged young men had been contained from tracking and taking violent action against the guy whose irresponsible blowing of the *ndulilu* had caused them trouble and made ridicule of the very cause of *Sungusungu*. On the other hand, the case was not yet closed. As village chairman, there was still a need for much skilful navigation between various positions and opinions the day or the days to come, before the case would be ultimately settled.

At this point, there was no more for us to do but to wish each other a peaceful night with the hope of *kwiangalucha ntondo*, that is, to be alive and well to greet each other the following morning.

I did not come to Tanzania this time with the intention of studying the *Sungusungu* movement, not at all. I was there to study agro-pastoral livelihood as practised particularly among the Sukuma and the Nyamwezi. However, I happened to arrive in the area at a time when the *Sungusungu* movement was at its prime. The movement had started only a few years earlier, sometime in 1981, in an area only some fifty kilometres north-east of the village where I now stayed and it had reached this very village area in early 1982. In the initial phases, the movement had not been well received by the government authorities and several of the early *Sungusungu* leaders were harassed by the police and even imprisoned. But later on the higher echelons of the ruling party and the government administration declared their support for the movement. This created a feeling among people that they were free to organize themselves without interference from the authorities.

In the village where I now found myself, there was much effervescence and enthusiasm among the villagers. *Sungusungu* was an everyday topic among people. Stories were told: “Look, before *Sungusungu* it was like this and now with *Sungusungu* it has all changed and become like this. We were exposed and defenceless victims of powers we could not control but we joined together, just we the common villagers, and resumed control over our lives.”

When I arrived in the district, my first obligation as a researcher was to go to the district office and introduce myself to the authorities by informing them about my project and showing my official research permit. There I was warned about *Sungusungu*. They are violent people, I was told. I was advised to take care. But when I arrived in the village I did not feel insecure at all. I received a friendly welcome and I was told by the *Sungusungu ntemi* that if anybody happened to mistreat me I should immediately report to *Sungusungu* and the person who had misbehaved toward the visitor to their village would promptly be fined a goat.

Staying in the village at this particular time meant that you could not avoid being drawn into *Sungusungu* activities time and again. At this early stage of development of the movement and in this village, *Sungusungu* was not only an organization for self-defence against cattle rustlers and other forms of theft and brigandage, rampant in the area at that time. It was a movement that involved the whole village, men and women, old and young. *Sungusungu* was the mobilizing force for a whole array of village activities and concerns. The collective farm of the village was now cultivated by *Sungusungu*. In those days of one-party system and *ujamaa* policy, it was mandatory for all villages to have a large, collective farm, the produce of which was supposed to strengthen the village development fund. The cultivation of the collective farm had never been popular with the villagers but now with *Sungusungu*, people came out in great numbers with their hand hoes on their shoulders, cheering and singing while working. The maintenance of the two feeder roads leading from the village to the main road down in the valley had long been neglected. The roads were now in such bad condition that they were hardly passable by car during the rainy season. *Sungusungu* mobilized a workforce, big enough to do the repair only in a few days time. Because of prolonged conflicts within the church congregation there and between the church congregation and various interest factions in the village, the mission had been forced to close down its health services consisting of a dispensary, a maternity clinic and a mother and child healthcare centre. With the strong support and involvement of *Sungusungu*, the village chairman started a process of reconciliation between the warring parties to bring about peace in the

village so that the mission would change its opinion and reopen its services. Apart from this, *Sungusungu* was fervently involved in many other activities in the village.

As somebody staying in the village it was taken for granted that I, as all other people being there, should participate in the various collective activities organized by *Sungusungu*. It did not mean that one necessarily had to spend the whole workday in the sun digging roads or cultivating the collective farm and the like. It was enough, if there were other duties calling, to show your solidarity by participating in the work an hour or so and then excuse yourself. But anybody shunning away altogether from the collective activities without any good and acceptable reason would be fined one or a few goats, later to be slaughtered and consumed in a collective meal of reconciliation.

Before my visit to the village this time, the most I had heard about the organized village groups for self-defence, called *Sungusungu* was about their ruthless and violent dealings with thieves and criminal suspects. They were people who took the law in their own hands and sought redress according to their ideas of justice, falling short of the governments conception of justice through due process. For the outside observers, apparently, the martial aspect of the movement was the most conspicuous feature. Viewed from the inside, however, and from the perspective of everyday village activities, this aspect was only a fraction of what *Sungusungu* actually was and did. In the late evening, described above, when the *ndulilu* flute was blown in false alarm, it is true that the martial aspect conspicuously came to the fore. But this was the only case of martial mobilization during my four-months stay in the village this time. During all other days, the overwhelming majority of *Sungusungu* activities in the village was about mundane community affairs.

During my last field visit, spending a month in the village, six years earlier and well before the emergence of *Sungusungu*, the village was a community in certain disarray. It was soon after the villagization process, the compulsory resettlement of people into designated villages carried out nation-wide in the mid-1970s. Particularly in the agro-pastoral regions with dispersed settlement patterns, it was an arduous and often traumatic experience for the people to demolish their houses, move away from the vicinity of their fields and pasture areas and rebuild their dwellings aligned in a quadratic pattern or along village roads. People who previously were used to have space between each other were now forced to stay close together. The compulsory villagization meant a re-adaptation for people in many respects. Beside this fact, the economic crisis of the country at that time, the Uganda war 1978–1979, and the spread of illegal

weapons in the countryside and a subsequent increase in petty criminality as well as violent brigandage, all made for a situation characterized by uncertainty, suspicion and conflict among the villagers.

Now, in 1984, according to my immediate experience, the situation was radically different. The *Sungusungu* movement had most visibly meant a revitalization of community spirit. In the language of the villagers, the time before *Sungusungu* was an era of war but now there was peace. It was as if the people's dream of *mhola*, the utopia of peace, at least for a while, had come true.

Truly, I didn't come to the field this time with any intention to study the *Sungusungu* movement, but I was taken in by what now was unfolding in the village. This was in sharp contrast both to my previous personal experience of people in the area, stretching as far back as to the late 1940s, and also to the historical documentation of the Sukuma and Nyamwezi people. Neither the colonial nor the post-colonial history of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi peasantry has been a history of repeated outbreaks of various forms of organized resistance or protest against the ruling powers. Rather, their option has been the classical one for the subordinated classes, that is, working the system to its minimum disadvantage while refraining from violent action. Now, to this picture of compliance and non-violence, *Sungusungu*, with its various locally initiated, peaceful village activities and, as in the case described in the foregoing, with an army of warlike young men with feathers in their hair, all armed with bows and poisoned arrows, made a dramatic contrast.

What I saw and experienced in the village made me ponder and has continued to do so throughout elapsing years.

1. What can we know and how to interpret?

The variables of anthropology [...] must be met with sooner or later on the level at which phenomena have an immediate human significance. — Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964: 119)

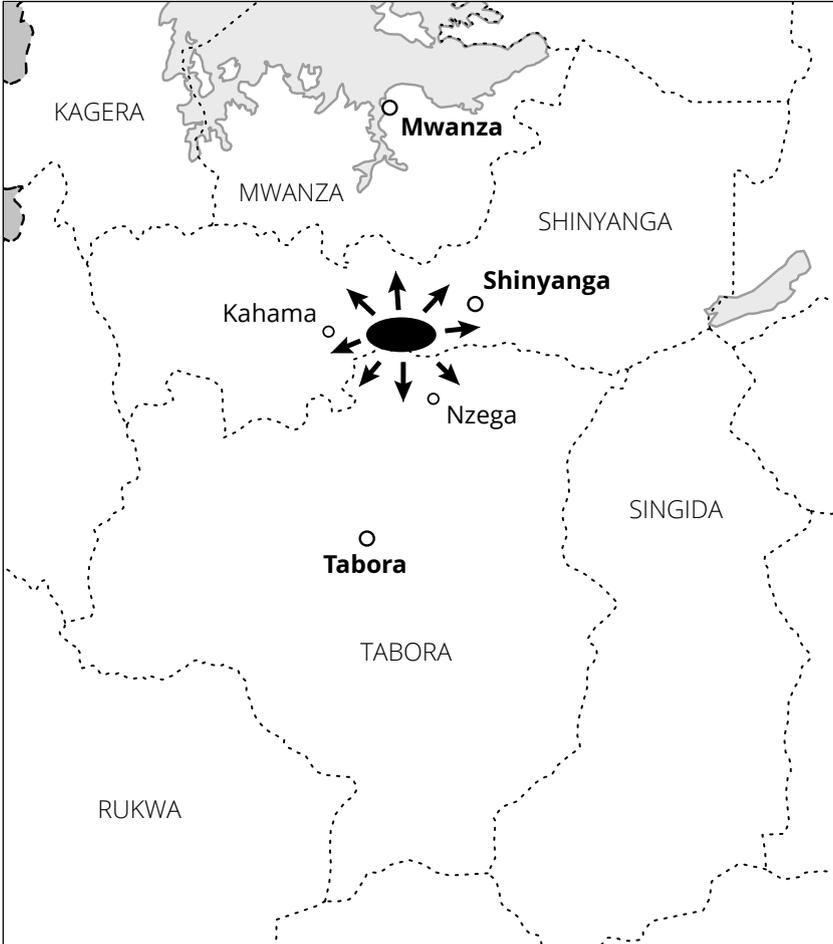
What must be rejected here, as in the rest of African historiography, are hasty projections, familiar images that reduce specific situations to known models. — Jean-Pierre Chrétien (2006: 12)

Emergence of a peasant movement

It was in the early 1980s that the popular movement, which publicly became known as *Sungusungu*, arose in western Tanzania, more specifically, among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi people inhabiting Mwanza, Shinyanga and Tabora Regions south of Lake Victoria.² In the wake of the international oil crisis in the 1970s, aggravated by the costly war with Uganda that led to the demise of Idi Amin's regime in 1979, the country experienced a period of deep economic and social crisis with inflation, collapsing markets, shortage of basic commodities and a breakdown of law and order, characterized by increased levels of violent crime, such as organized cattle theft and banditry in the rural areas. It was against this backdrop that people began to organize and arm themselves to cope with the disintegrating and malevolent forces they were experiencing, not only as an existential threat to their daily lives but to their society at large. The movement formed swept like a bush-fire from village to village over the large Sukuma-Nyamwezi area and beyond. Although lacking any form of overall leadership and identified founding heroes, the movement spread from village to village, replicating itself organizational-wise in great uniformity. Within only a couple of years several million people were involved in the

² Today Mwanza Region is subdivided into Mwanza Region and Geita Region and Shinyanga Region into Shinyanga Region and Simiyu Region. In my exposition I refer to the regional and district divisions as they were when the *Sungusungu* movement emerged.

movement or affected by it. Indeed, with respect to the rapidity of its spreading and the degree of popular involvement the *Sungusungu* movement appears remarkable in recent African history.



Map 1. Area of emergence and early spread of *Sungusungu*. (Prepared by Jonatan Alvarsson.)

The mainly agro-pastoral Sukuma-Nyamwezi of west-central Tanzania, among whom the movement arose, constitute together the largest ethnic group in the country.³ It was more particularly in the boarder area between

³ In the National Census of 1967, the last one in which ethnic groups were distinguished, the Sukuma numbered some 1.5 million and the Nyamwezi 400,000. Taking the national annual growth rate into account, the number of the Sukuma and the

the Shinyanga and Kahama Districts of Shinyanga Region and the Nzega District of Tabora Region that people first started to organize self-defence groups and from where the name and the concept of *Sungusungu* rapidly spread over a large area (Map 1).

It is no wonder that a dynamic grassroots movement like *Sungusungu* attracted the interest of many researchers, who have studied this movement from various perspectives and offered their interpretations. *Sungusungu* has been described as a popular social movement, a movement of the weak and the powerless, *wanyonge*, for social justice (Masanja 1992), as a telling case of vigilantism (e.g. Abrahams 1987; Fleisher 2000a), as a form of popular resistance against the state (Campbell 1989), as a recapture of village-level organization by the villagers themselves in the face of increased state influence and control (Abrahams 1987, 1989), as an interesting example of the formation of community-interest organizations (Bukurura 1994a), as an instance of local participatory democracy and the development of civil society (Heald 2002) and as a recapture of local judicial competence from postcolonial institutions (Gotsbachner 1993). Finally, other observers have focused their attention on *Sungusungu* as a potentially dangerous development toward mobocracy in the wake of weakened power of the state and the inability of the state to maintain its monopoly over violence (e.g. Mwaikusa 1995; Peter 1992).

Indeed, *Sungusungu*, as any other complex social phenomenon we make the topic for our inquiries, “remains a many-faceted reality amenable to more than one interpretation” (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 118). Various interpretative perspectives can only offer partial truths. It is not that one interpretative effort necessarily contradicts the other. Depending on our personal dispositions and predilections, we focus our attention on particular aspects to the detriment of others and by necessity it must be so. As the Sukuma-Nyamwezi saying goes: *Wa kumala nze atiho*, that is, ‘Nobody can cover the whole world’.

My interest in the present work is not to question the partial truths contained in the various interpretations previously given on *Sungusungu* but to add to the interpretative work, while reflecting on aspects, which I find important in relation to the interpretative quest of anthropology as such, and in relation to the theme of the present inquiry, that is, the theme of peace, *mhola* as culturally understood, in a world where peace is never fully attainable.

Nyamwezi combined may well exceed 10 million today. The Sukuma and the Nyamwezi are culturally and linguistically closely related. The similarities are such that for the present analysis there are good reasons for considering them as one people.

However, before proceeding with my ethnographic exploration in the subsequent chapters, I believe it is proper to consider previous studies, their tenets and interpretations, in order to position the present study in relation to these. First, there are some definitional issues and, second, there are some of the previous interpretations to comment upon.

Social movements

How are we to capture in more general terms a social phenomenon like that of *Sungusungu*? What name should we give to it? Where are we to place it on our conceptual maps? There is always the question of demarcating, classifying and characterizing the piece of social reality we make the object of our studies.

Patrick Masanja, one of the earliest commentators – he presented a paper on *Sungusungu* at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1984 (1984), later published in 1992 (1992) – describes *Sungusungu* as a social movement. Ray Abrahams, the first scholar to publish on the *Sungusungu* internationally, is more wary about a designation (1987). He agrees with Masanja, who refers to Thomas Bottomore’s definition of social movement, that *Sungusungu*, when it emerged, was “a collective endeavour to promote or resist change in the society of which it forms part” (Bottomore 1979: 41, quoted in Masanja 1992: 204) and a truly grassroots development that, at this stage, could aptly be described as a social movement. It was indeed, Abraham writes, “a mass reaction on an unprecedented scale to the problems of order in the area, and ... as such, a new phenomenon, despite its roots in earlier organizational forms” (1987: 195). In its later developments, however, Abrahams is less inclined to call *Sungusungu* a social movement, that is when *Sungusungu* later on gained some acceptance from the political and the administrative authorities and was incorporated in the structure of the village government (1987: 195).

In the present study, my own stand in relation to this definitional issue is to approach *Sungusungu* as a popular social movement. This is so, partly because my interest is mainly focused on the movement in its earlier developments in the cultural and ethnic area where it emerged and partly because I first met it as such, as a kind of social revitalization movement, during my fieldwork in 1984, when *Sungusungu* was still in a formative stage of development and not in the shape of an already routinized system or structure. There was effervescence and engagement, discussion and debate and there was a determination among people to do something together they never had ventured to do before. But I do agree with Abra-

hams, that in its later developments (a process I also will consider in my exposition), when the concept of *Sungusungu* spread beyond its area of emergence and particularly, later on, when the ruling party and the government authorities, for local security reasons, promoted the formation of *Sungusungu* groups widely over the country, the character of *Sungusungu* as a social movement changed more and more into an institutionalized system solely for community policing.

Vigilantes and vigilantism

Many writers and commentators on *Sungusungu* have chosen to view this movement as an instance of vigilantism that interpretatively can be placed within a broader comparative context of the study of popular movements displaying similar features in other African countries and, for that matter, in other parts of the world, particularly with a focus on the relation between the state and movements of this kind. Indeed one could say that there has been an upsurge of studies with this focal point with titles like *Vigilant Citizen: Vigilantism and the State* (Abrahams 1998), *Domesticating Vigilantism in Africa* (Kirsch and Grätz 2010), and *Global Vigilantes* (Pratten and Sen 2008).

Now, one could argue, there is a problem with our classificatory zeal to place what we see and observe in a Linnaean order. Mahmoud Mamdani, discussing the issue of “history by analogy” in interpreting African experiences, exclaims that the “Africanist is akin to those learning a foreign language who must translate every new word back into their mother tongue, in the process missing precisely what is new in a new experience” (1996: 12, emphasis in original), adding that from “such a standpoint, the most intense controversies dwell on what is indeed the most appropriate translation, the most adequate fit, the most appropriate analogy that will capture the meaning of the phenomenon under observation”. This is the interpretative dilemma we always as researchers constantly are exposed to. Our craft is “replete with categories”, James Fernandez writes, “with which we have often been obsessively concerned, that is, categories which have been of greater reality to the researchers than to their former interlocutors about whom they write” (1985: 20-21). And he continues: “Many, perhaps all, of these categories, one suspects, are not only self-referential but self-serving and self-replicating”. “History by analogy” or understanding “the other” through any of our Eurocentric categories of self-understanding may, rather than enhance our understanding of the phenomena under observation, cement our preconceived ideas about the

world. Indeed, the issue of “commensurability of cultures”, in the sense for example Stanley Tambiah put it (1990: Chapter 6), is invariably at the very heart of the interpretative task.

We may take Abrahams’ and Michael Fleischer’ classifications of *Sungusungu* as an instance of vigilantism as illustrative examples (Abrahams 1987, 1998; Fleisher 2000a, 2000b)⁴. Abrahams, who had conducted research with a focus on the Nyamwezi people and society since the late 1950s and who now met *Sungusungu* in an ethnographic setting, which was well-known to him, seems to have been inspired by his experience to make vigilantism in contemporary world a special topic of study. In his book on vigilantism, referred to above (1998), he sets out for a broad, comparative analysis of this particular kind of social phenomenon. For comparative purpose, he struggles with the definitional issue to avoid making apples of pears only simply because both are well-tasting fruits. Through historical analogies and cross-cultural comparison the phenomenon under observation is classified according to certain family resemblances between various chosen examples in time and space. Carolina Regulators and Montana Vigilantes of 19th century United States, examples from imperial China alongside home-guards and neighbourhood watch groups in contemporary Britain and South Africa, all provide material for a classification fitting even the particular Tanzanian case of today. Irrespective of differing historical circumstances and varying social, political and cultural contexts, similarities are identified, such that a classification can be made which is meant to encompass different sets of social phenomena under one analytical category. As to the question of what types of social phenomena are to be considered as vigilantism, Abrahams argues that “any delineation of their general characteristics must be treated as an ‘ideal type’ which the phenomena one investigates may interestingly approximate to, or is likely not to depart from, to varying degrees” (1998: 7). In other words, the definitional issue here is to try and find family resemblances between one type of social phenomenon and the other. Abrahams refers to Richard Maxwell Brown and his studies of the Montana regulators and other instances of American vigilantism (Brown 1975, 1963) and to Les Johnston for further general characterizations (Johnston 1992, 1996). From Brown he takes the description of vigilante groups as “organized extra-legal movements the members of which take the law into their own hands” and, moreover, “associations in which citizens have joined together for self-protection

⁴ Abrahams has been a prolific writer about *Sungusungu*. In addition to references made in the foregoing one could mention several others (e.g. 1996, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2010).

under conditions of disorder” (Brown, quoted in Abrahams 1998: 7). In Johnston’s work, Abrahams finds the concept of “autonomous citizens” particular useful for the analysis because, he argues, vigilantism presupposes the existence of the state. Abrahams ultimately arrives at the following delimitating description of the type of social phenomenon we may call vigilantism: “It is a form of self-help, with varying degrees of violence which is activated instead of such machinery [of the state], against criminals and others whom the actors perceive as undesirables, deviants and ‘public enemies’” (1998: 8).

Fleisher, in his studies of the government-supported *Sungusungu* groups among the Kuria in Tanzania, follows a similar line of classificatory reasoning. Like Abrahams he draws theoretical inspiration from scholars who have studied the phenomenon of vigilantism in other corners of the world (Fleisher 2000a, 2000b). However, in distinction to Abrahams more soft and inclusive definition, Fleisher falls back on Jon Rosenbaum’s and Peter Sederberg’s more stunt and exclusive definition where vigilantism is understood as “establishment violence” perpetrated in furtherance of “conservative” ends, and “designated to create, maintain, or recreate an established socio-political order” (Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1976: 4, quoted in Fleisher 2000a: 209).

This kind of classificatory zeal and “history by analogy”, that is to find what is old in a new experience, run counter to Mamdani’s warning, quoted above, about the risk of “missing precisely what is new in a new experience” in the analytical process (1996: 12). From a statist perspective Abrahams’ definition could be useful in understanding certain forms of group activity that do not fit into the established legal and political machinery of the state. However, besides the fact that similarity in form does not invariably imply similarity in meaning, the problem with this definition is that it is so wide as to have only a rather limited analytical value. Structural similarities may blind us from significant differences in content. There might well be certain structural similarities between Carolina Regulators and Montana Vigilantes in a young capitalist state like that of the United States of the 19th century, vigorously expanding and laying claim to the lands of the indigenous peoples encountered in the expansive drive, and Sukuma and Nyamwezi peasants, living on their forefathers’ land but in the past colonized by the Germans and ruled by the British, who, though politically weak and economically marginalized, in the late 20th century formed self-defence groups called *Sungusungu*. But the apparent differences in contexts between here and there – historical, political, economic and cultural – makes it questionable whether this provides an “ap-

propriate analogy that will capture the meaning of the phenomenon under observation” (Mamdani 1996: 12).

Whereas Abrahams in his ethnographic analysis is most sensitive to the actors’ perspectives, cultural factors and the colonial history and its implications,⁵ Fleisher, in his leaning on Rosenbaum’s and Sederberg’s definition, shows a certain lack of this kind of analytical sensitivity. There are reasons to ask why and how it can be motivated to classify the self-defence of exposed peasants as “establishment violence”, perpetrated in furtherance of “conservative” ends, and “designed to create, maintain, or recreate an established socio-political order” (2000a: 209). This particular definition could in a case like that of *Sungusungu* and its emergence rather be turned up side down: *Sungusungu*, when it emerged, was a movement against the ‘establishment’, for ‘progressive’ ends and for the creation of a new socio-political order.

Because, this was a peasantry that suffered from what they experienced as “establishment violence”, namely from the armed, well-organized and resourceful gangs that harassed them and with whom the state machinery, which nominally was there to safeguard their interests, was even seen in collusion with. To label the movement “conservative” is thus rather misplaced. The aim was not a *status quo* or to revert to a former order of things but to establish a new order, an order of *mhola*, the word and concept for peace in Sukuma-Nyamwezi, where ‘development’, *maendeleo*, was not only for *wala nchi*, ‘those who eat the country’, but also for *wanyonge*, ‘the weak and powerless’, that is, the ultimate aim was rather the creation of a new socio-political order.

Important as the definitional issue may be for comparative purposes, I believe, one should be wary about too much of Linnaean classificatory predilection or, as Edmund Leach in a more challenging manner once called “butterfly collecting” (1961: 5). Preconceived analytical categories may blind us from a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon under study.

Regarding the case of *Sungusungu*, I do, however, agree that this movement possesses most of the characteristics pinpointed by Abrahams and can therefore in this particular respect be viewed and studied as an example of contemporary vigilantism, that is in brief, according to the definitional discussion above, a kind of community policing outside or in collision with the legal framework of the state. However, as one with good

⁵ This might be a reason why he makes his definition of vigilantism so wide. Abrahams, in fact, takes great pain in his work to rid the concept of its ideological connotations (1987, 1998).

reasons could argue, *Sungusungu* as a social movement was quite more than only this.

What the definitional issue ultimately boils down to is the question of alternative local solutions that people resort to in times of deep social crisis within the framework of the state. As James Scott, in his thorough studies of peasant resistance (1985, 1990) has distinctively shown, throughout most of history the subordinate classes have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity or protest. Instead of open revolt, the strategy of the peasantry has rather been to “‘working the system’ ... to its minimum disadvantage” (Hobsbawm 1973: 13) and to resist encroachment from the outside through various forms of non-compliance. Various forms of structural violence (see Galtung 1968, 1985), such as poverty, malnutrition and disease caused by economic and social inequity, have simply forced the peasantry, for self-preservation, to assume non-violent strategies of resistance. However, as Crummey reminds us about the record of rebellion in Africa that provoked to the extreme “people will resort to arms in the struggle for a more just ordering of society” (1986: 22). In other words, under extreme provocation passive resistance will ultimately shift into active doing. We may classify these forms of active doing according to our preconceived analytical categories such as ‘rebellion’, ‘banditry’ or ‘vigilantism’ and build our interpretations on these, but this mode of analysis, useful as it may be in some respects, may in other respects preempt the analysis because it is guided by these preconceived categories.

In the present case of the *Sungusungu* movement we may well, in accordance with the discussion above, view and analyze the outburst of violent action as a case of vigilantism outside the legal framework of the state. However, I believe it is important in our inquiry (while being wary of recourse to preconceived categorizations) rather to focus our main attention on aspects of the thought-world and the mundane social reality of the participants in the movement, and in this perspective reflect on the relationship between the state in its present form and the local society.

Resistance against or the quest for?

The concepts of social movement and of vigilantism have thus been chosen as conceptual points of departure by researchers for interpretations of the *Sungusungu* movement. The theme of resistance is another one. This

theme was, in previous decades particularly common in peasant studies,⁶ although in more recent studies it seems to be less so. Among the students of *Sungusungu*, Horace Campbell is the one who most emphatically and consistently in his analysis has stuck to this interpretative perspective (1989). Though a slugger in style, with a preaching tone in his exposition and apparently only with superficial knowledge of the intricacies of Sukuma and Nyamwezi ethnography, history and culture, the merit of his work is that he draws the political economy into the picture more than any of the other writers on *Sungusungu*. The author bases his interpretations on a kind of classic class analysis, which in its normative conclusions rather confuses than clarifies the issues under study. Yet, a thorough picture as possible of the particulars of the political economy at this time in Tanzanian post-colonial history, when Sukuma and Nyamwezi peasants suddenly shift from passive compliance with the system to active doing, is definitely warranted.

In spite of its pronounced ideological bias and normative message, Campbell's study do add some valuable pieces for a more comprehensive understanding, this must be acknowledged. However, this mode of analysis presupposes the conclusion of resistance as the driving force of the social commotion, that is, resistance against the state or an exploitative national and international capitalism. Now, even if we could agree that there is a clear point in this reasoning, it does not tell us what the particular popular movement of our studies is a quest for.

"The study of peasant struggle", Allen Isaacman writes, "requires the Africanists to address the issue of resistance against whom and toward what" (1990: 22). However, most studies of peasant movements have tended to emphasize "against whom" to the detriment of "toward what". In line with Michel Foucault's often quoted dictum, power presupposes resistance: "where there is power, there is resistance" (1978: 95-96). In this perspective all struggles are expressions of resistance against controlling and dominating power. However, overemphasis of the "against-perspective" may blind us from what people struggle toward. Taking the actors' perspective, their struggle is always directional, that is a struggle for betterment of their life conditions and for forms of life of their choosing, that is, toward something. But then taking a statist perspective, all peasant struggles are in some crucial respects against the state since the state constitutes the ultimate framework of power in the modern nation state. Isaacman, however, reminds us to be wary about overemphasizing "the struggles of peasantries against the state" (1990: 22). There is a need,

⁶ For example James Scott as a strong proponent of this trend (e.g. 1985, 1990).

he argues, though carefully and critically, “to pay greater attention to the voices of peasants” in order to arrive at a better understanding not only of the “against whom” of peasant struggle but also its “toward what” (Isaacman 1990: 18). As Scott has drawn attention to, the political “transcript” of the oppressed is often “hidden” and may contain multiple and even mutually contradictory meanings (1990). Yet, as Isaacman remarks about Scott, important as it is to researchers to uncover “the hidden” in order to understand the thoughts and actions of people, we must be aware that by referring to cultural expressions as containing hidden messages we run “the risk of viewing them exclusively from an external perspective – since”, as he continues, “the performers and audience may well be “aware of their meaning” (1990: 19). The researcher is thus facing a two-dimensional problem in his or her interpretative endeavour. First, to grasp what is hidden to the researcher but not to his or her interlocutors in the field and, second, to elicit meanings that are not explicit to the actors themselves but implicit in their words and social practices.

From the actors’ point of view

Apart from Masanja (1992), who sympathetically describes the *Sungusungu* movement simply as a peasant struggle for justice, Abrahams, Sufian Bukurura, Emo Gotsbachner and Suzette Heald are among the students of and commentators on the movement the ones who most pronouncedly, in the classic social anthropological manner, strive to take the actors’ point of view into consideration in their analyses.

In several ethnographic accounts, Abrahams has described the Nyamwezi neighbourhood organization in great detail (e.g. Abrahams 1965, 1967b, 1977). He emphasizes the relative autonomy of the neighbourhood in relation to the wider political arena. He draws attention to the multiple sets of relationships within the neighbourhood, grounded on principles of cooperation and mutual aid. To a large extent, he argues, the neighbourhood has continued to function according to its own principles irrespective of changes of the wider societal framework, be it that of the pre-colonial chiefdom, the colonial regime and, more recently, the post-colonial one.

However, when Abrahams in 1974 returned to the field for follow-up of his previous studies, he could see a change. This was the time when the Tanzanian brand of African socialism, the *ujamaa* policy, was strongly propagated and even enforced as in the case of the villagization programme of the mid-1970s when the rural population living in dispersed settlements were forcefully moved into compact villages. Now, with re-

gard to his previous neighbours in the area, Abrahams made the observation that “[o]ne of the more noticeable features of their new situation was that neighbourhood cooperation of the earlier voluntaristic sort was much reduced” and that people “were also scared of government reactions to the informal neighbourhood courts, with their sanctions of fines and ostracism, which had been a marked feature of the 1950s” (1989: 361). He found the situation such that it made him declare: “I began to think that grassroots neighbourhood collaboration was a spent force in this area” (1989: 361). With the sudden emergence of the *Sungusungu* movement in the early 1980s, however, this gloomy prediction about the future of customary grassroots neighbourhood collaboration proved unwarranted, because, while later on studying the developments of the *Sungusungu* movement, the author could now conclude that “the rise of *Sungusungu* partly involves a recapture of village level organization in the face of increased state influence” (1987: 194).

Indeed, any ethnographically informed observer could not avoid seeing the importance of customary organizational templates for the rapid acceptance and spread of the movement in the Sukuma-Nyamwezi area. And, of course, one could agree with Abrahams that all this could be understood as a recapture of village level organization to some degree and a recreation of community coherence. Nevertheless, this is only part of a more comprehensive story of the movement.

Bukurura has written extensively on various aspects of *Sungusungu*. In his PhD thesis (1994a) and in a number of articles (e.g. 1993, 1994b, 1996a, 1996b) he has treated the emergence and developments of this movement. Conceptually and analytically, he follows closely in the footsteps of Abrahams – his PhD supervisor at Cambridge where he presented his thesis – though Bukurura provides more of ethnographic detail than his teacher in his writings on the topic, particularly so in his PhD thesis, one of the few prolonged in-depth studies hitherto made on *Sungusungu* in the area where the movement emerged.⁷ Like Abrahams, Bukurura regards the formation of *Sungusungu* groups as a kind of recapture of village level organization and a recreation of community, in a historical situation characterized by social disintegration. The main focus in his studies, however, particularly so in his PhD thesis, is to view the organized groups as community interest associations and a form of civil society (1994a: 10, 157-162). This take may raise wider questions in the scope of ‘civil society’ within the framework of the post-colonial state.

⁷ Bukurura carried out fieldwork between October 1991 and September 1992 in the part of Kahama District where *Sungusungu* first emerged (Bukurura 1994a: 10).

Though, Bukurura does not theorize about the issue, he argues strongly for viewing *Sungusungu* as a civil society formation. “Different kinds of voluntary organizations and common-interest associations”, he reasons, “exist ... to fill the gaps left by the absence of the state or as a result of its total failure” (1994a: 158). Following this line of reasoning, this is how *Sungusungu* as a social phenomenon could be understood, namely as a popular mobilization and an organization for filling a gap left by the absence of the state with regard to provision of peace, order and security. Deficiencies or failure in provision of peace, order and security, Bukurura furthermore argues, “raise similar concerns to the community as those raised by absence of social and economic provisions” (1994a: 158).

Now, there is an apparent problem, perhaps a definitional one, in the debate and writings about civil society as to what types of social associations to be included or excluded from the ledger. In development studies and mainstream social sciences concerned with the global South, the plethora of community interest associations in the non-modern societal sector seems rarely to be considered as forms of civil society. An additional problem with a common interest association like *Sungusungu* is the fact that by focusing its activities on social order, security and on combatting crime, it trespasses into grounds that most emphatically are the sole monopoly of the modern state.

Heald, in her writing on *Sungusungu* (2002), follows closely the understandings of Masanja in her interpretations, that is, to see the *Sungusungu* groups as representing “an assertion of community values and solidarity over and against the bureaucratisation of the state and the divisive nature of modern commodity production”, and, furthermore as “a movement of the ‘weak’, ... standing in sharp contrast to the protection rings that richer farmers could organise among themselves to pay the police” (2002: 20). Heald also emphasizes the fact, important in this context, that the movement has a pronounced collective stance. It is not only that defence groups are formed within the village but also that the whole village is involved. It is thus not a question of *Sungusungu* groups in the villages but rather of *Sungusungu* villages in entirety, and when functioning according to the villagers expectations, *Sungusungu*, in the view of the villagers, represents “the righteousness of the ordinary citizen, a guard against the corruption of the state officialdom” (2002: 3). Ultimately in her analysis, Heald concludes optimistically that “the popularity of these movements, and the degree of local democracy which they enjoin, could feed positively into the development of civil society and the participatory democracy now advocated by the international organisations” (2002: 24). She describes these movements “as small miracles of survival, asserting new forms of

community autonomy and responsibility in the face of opposition from both within and without” (2002: 24). All this could well be seen so in the short-term, but in the long-term the prospects might, however, be less optimistic. From the outside, the international organizations rarely take notice of local forms of civil society and the state rarely gives room to forms of local democracy that fall outside the matrix of state power and control. From within, internal cleavages, factionalism and struggle for power and influence between groups and individuals can in the course of time change “small miracles” into something quite other than miracles.

Gotsbachner, except for Bukurura the second researcher who has carried out prolonged field studies on the *Sungusungu* movement in Sukumaland and Unyamwezi,⁸ focuses his interest on the legal aspect of a popular movement like *Sungusungu* and the possibility for a form of legal pluralism within the framework of the postcolonial state but of a different kind than the hierarchical form of legal pluralism known from colonial times, which distinguishes between statutory and customary law (1993, 1994, 1995). Though from a different point of departure in terms of inquiry and with a different conceptual framework for the analysis, Gotsbachner arrives at conclusions of a rather similar nature as Heald concerning *Sungusungu* as basically containing seeds of a democratic development. In his understanding of the issue this form of collective, popular justice can, in situations where people feel themselves alienated from the post-colonial institutions and their functioning, be seen as representing, as he puts it, “strains of a genuinely African form of democratization”. This could well be harboured within the precepts of the African Charter on Human Rights concerning people’s rights for development and self-determination, provided there was scope for forms of collectivity that are not identical to the state (1994). However, as the current political realities are, this is a dream that is not very likely to materialize, in any case not in our near future.

What unites the contributors commented on in this section, irrespective of differences in interpretations, is an attitude of interpretive charity toward their interlocutors in the field. We learn from their studies, one could say, about the actions and doings of a subaltern class within the socio-economic and political formation of the Tanzanian state, that is, a class of people who normally have little say on the national political arena but unite for a common course to solve to them immediate problems that seemed irresolvable for the established institutions of the state.

⁸ Gotsbachner carried out his fieldwork from November 1991 to June 1992 (Gotsbachner 1993: 56)

Views from the outside

There are, indeed, as has been illustrated above, many different views on the *Sungusungu* movement and suggestions on how to basically perceive it. To the sympathetic views and interpretations and the efforts to try and understand the movement from the actors' point of view, exposed in various degrees in the contributions commented upon in the previous section, there are others standing in sharp contrast to these.

First, in the early 1980s, when the news about the sudden emergence and the rapid spread of armed groups in the administrative regions of Shinyanga, Tabora and Mwanza that operated autonomously in the rural areas, by-passing all the formal institutions of the state, this was of course highly alarming to the government and the ruling party, CCM (*Chama cha Mapinduzi*, 'The Revolutionary Party'). There were rumours among people of conspiracies in the forests and of incipient rebellion among the peasants, which caused worries about insurgency. And to the educated urban public, the violent and merciless methods of the groups when dealing with their enemies, the warlike appearance of the bands of young men, armed with bows and poisoned arrows while tracking stolen property, and the generally markedly local cultural forms in which the activities of the groups were couched, implying among other things brutal methods of investigation and punishment, seemed antithetical to common conceptions about 'modernity' and 'progress'. Masanja quotes a notice in *Daily News* from 1983, the main national English newspaper at that time, in which the movement, now becoming known as *Sungusungu*, was described as a "ruthless army which is above the law and has gone against humanity" (1992: 203).

Indeed, there were excesses in the operations of *Sungusungu* groups. Cattle rustlers who were chased and caught red-handed by the pursuers did risk a treatment which made it most unlikely for them to go cattle rustling ever again and people suspected of committing crime were in many cases subjected to brutal methods of investigation to make them confess. And even more offensive to the liberal sense of human rights were the cases of witch-hunting and killings that some *Sungusungu* groups instigated in their fervour to cleanse the community from maleficent influences. In these cases, mainly elderly women suffered and became prey.

To the police and the judiciary, the emergence of *Sungusungu* groups was quite understandably highly disturbing, since their dealings with cattle rustlers and other criminals were in no way in line with governmental principles of implementing justice through due process and the national Bill of Rights and thus outside the rule of law (Peter 1992: 144-145). In

addition, people's more general mistrust in the police and the judiciary made the cleavage between the parties even more pronounced. Corruption was known to be rampant both within the police forces and the local courts and there were rumours and suspicion of collusion between local governmental staff and the organized criminal gangs. Thus, the situation as it was did not speak for peaceful relations between the *Sungusungu* groups and the government authorities. Consequently, when organized groups in the early 1980s first began to take action against cattle rustlers and rampant crime in the villages, the activists were, indeed, harassed and arrested by the police.

However, there was strong support for the movement among the rural people. A policy of confrontation would have risked leading to increasing polarization. Perhaps this is why the national political leadership, at an early phase, realized the need to move with the tide and not against it. Following the investigation of a party commission in 1982, President Nyerere spoke out in support of *Sungusungu*. Basically, he argued, the *Sungusungu* movement did not contradict the ideological tenets of the *ujamaa* policy on self-help and participatory democracy. On the contrary, people organizing themselves for solving their problems were in line with these. The President furthermore announced that, instead of harassing and arresting *Sungusungu* members, the government should strengthen and support these self-defence groups (Masanja 1992: 203-204). In September the same year President Nyerere granted amnesty to people arrested because of involvement in *Sungusungu* (Bukurura 1994a: 129, 137). This marked the start of a policy of integrating and incorporating *Sungusungu* into the formal structure of village governance and thus *Sungusungu* was to become *Jeshi la jadi*, traditional army, for the defence of the village but as such placed under the authority of the ruling party and the government. By incorporating *Sungusungu* into the formal village government structure, the state was to gain control over the movement and make it a means for its own ends.

Basically, this was also the position taken by critical but considerate academic observers of the movement, while pointing out both *pros* and *cons* (e.g. Mwaikusa 1995). The situation in some of the rural areas of the country was at this time unbearable for the local people. Since nobody else took action for their sake they had to do something by themselves and the outcome was the organization of self-defence groups. However, these groups operated outside the rule of law and this fact constituted an apparent risk for excesses of various kinds and a development into mobocracy. Consequently according to this line of reasoning, the movement could well have a role to play within the national government setting and could

even be allowed to retain its popular character, given that its activities were firmly controlled by the state and contained within the limits of the rule of law.

Other voices

Indeed, there are many voices raised about the *Sungusungu* movement in Tanzania. In addition to the studies mentioned in the foregoing there are many other contributions, both unpublished (e.g. Kerner 1983; Sabasaba and Rweyemamu 1984; Hangaya 1989; Kamara 1991; Kakoti 1998; Paciotti 2002; Cross 2013) and published (e.g. Brockington 2001; Paciotti and Hadley 2003, 2004; Paciotti and Mulder 2004; Paciotti et al. 2005; Heald 2006; Makoye 2007; Cleaver et al. 2013; Cross 2014, 2016), that make *Sungusungu* a topic of scholarly inquiry and treatment. The spread of *Sungusungu* to Kenya, and formation of self-defence groups under this label there, has also been treated by several authors (e.g. Heald 2007; Mkutu 2010; Masese and Mwenzwa 2012; Otiso 2015; Oyagi 2016). All these studies contribute together with the others commented upon in the foregoing, to the scholarly work of depicting and eliciting various aspects and developments of the movement to be considered to a variable extent in forthcoming chapters.

However, among contributions mentioned above, there are particularly three sets of studies I wish to pay special attention to in the coming parts of my exposition. These are the contributions by Suzette Heald, Brian Paciotti with co-authors, Daniel Brockington and Frances Cleaver et al. because of their accounts of *Sungusungu* in other areas and socio-cultural contexts than where the movement once emerged, Herbert Makoye because of the attention he draws to the role of performance dynamics in terms of singing and dancing among *Sungusungu* groups and Charlotte Cross because she describes the most recent developments, that is the reorganization of *Sungusungu* from 2006 onward into a form of community policing, called *ulinzi shirikishi* (participatory security), supposed to be entirely incorporated into the administrative structure for security and controlled by the state. One could even argue that the introduction of *ulinzi shirikishi* marks an end of the trajectory of *Sungusungu* from its emergence as a genuinely popular movement in the early 1980s, outside the control of the state, through various phases of increasing party and state control during the 1980s and the 1990s, and with the police reform of 2006 (TPF 2007), the total incorporation of the movement into the administrative apparatus of the state and, ultimately,

even the abandonment of the word *Sungusungu* from the official vocabulary as a term for designating community policing. Thus, in principle *Sungusungu* is no more. But both in the areas where the movement originated and in some other more distant areas where Sukuma and Nyamwezi people predominate, *Sungusungu* is still alive today both as a name and, though remoulded over time, in practice.

From here to where?

In his study of *Rondas Campesinas* in northern Peru, Orin Starn reminds us of the need for “close hermeneutic readings that convey the unique *cadence* of every rural movement” with a focus on identity and meaning because, as he stresses, a “firm grasp on identity and meaning can assist greatly in answering questions about why rural protest occurs and how it unfolds” (Starn 1992: 90).⁹ And, in a critical review of anthropological studies of social movements, Arturo Escobar adds to this reasoning when he emphasises that “[w]hat is crucial to these studies ... is that social movements be seen as cultural struggles in a fundamental sense, that is, as struggles over meanings as much as over socio-economic conditions” (Escobar 1992: 412). This is all in line with the basic and classical anthropological task of interpretation and re-interpretation of the ethnography where, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty put it in his philosophical reflections on the ultimate mission of our subject: “The variables of anthropology [...] must be met with sooner or later on the level at which phenomena have an immediate human significance” (1964: 119), that is, the ambition to view the problem under study as closely as possible from the actors’ point of view. And, along this strain of thought, one could also stress with Maurice Bloch that, “Fortes’ method which refuses to set aside in any way data from informants whether it be linguistic or otherwise should always be our first guide” (1973: 86).

⁹ *Rondas Campesinas* (‘peasants who make the rounds’), studied by Starn (1992, 1999), displays as a peasant movement some striking similarities with *Sungusungu* in its early more autonomous phases of development with respect to the widening of functions beyond the immediate cause that made people to organize. As in the case of *Sungusungu*, organized cattle rustling was a main reason for peasants to form self-defence groups. However, the *Rondas* soon expanded their functions. As Starn writes: “They (the *rondas*) evolved into an entire alternative justice system with open community assemblies to resolve problems ranging from wife-beating to land disputes. The movement became a pride for peasants, who were tired of inefficient and often corrupt town bureaucrats” (1992: 90).

How do people reason about the world and how do they discursively legitimate their judgements? What kind of perceptual worlds guide their actions? These must be our main questions of concern. We speak of peace while Nyamwezi and Sukuma men and women in the villages in their vernacular spoke of *mhola*; we speak of democracy and they spoke of *kwiyigwa*, mutual listening; we speak of war and social crisis and they spoke of *bulugu*, violent discord, and *bulogi*, witchcraft; we speak of security and they spoke of *kwilinda*, self-defence and mutual care. Local society has in colonial history as well as during the post-colonial period largely been subjected to the “discourse of the other” (Castoriadis 1987: 109), politically, economically as well as culturally. In relation to this discourse of power their own discourse has carried little weight in terms of recognition and legitimacy. In the *Sungusungu* movement a, political language is both verbally forged and expressed through action. What has been invisible and suppressed comes out in the open.

In order to catch something of the very tenor or, as Starn put it, “the cadence” of the social movement we are studying, we have to consider Merleau-Ponty’s advice above and, following in the footsteps of Fortes, not to set aside data from our informants in any way. Adhering to these tenets for the ethnographic inquiry, one cannot know at the start where the interpretative journey undertaken will lead us, what it may add to what has already been revealed in previous studies or where it lastly will end.

Taking a cue from classic anthropological forms of extended case method and event analysis (e.g. Gluckman 1958, 1961; van Velsen 1967; Burawoy 1998) and more recent elaborations of this methodological approach, emphasizing a concern with events not as one-time occurrences but “with the effects over the long-term and their realization of original structures and meaning” (Kapferer 2010: 9), the present analysis is consequently of an open-ended kind. The emergence of *Sungusungu* in its particular socio-political context constitutes a generic moment that sparks a process with, over time, many different far-reaching social, political and judicial repercussions. It is thus a story with a marked beginning but, in terms of consequences, with no ultimate end.

Based on long-term fieldwork engagements and an extensive literature review, the study thus sets out to trace the trajectory of the *Sungusungu* movement in various cultural, social and political detail, from its early emergence as a genuine localized popular movement with both its achievements and limits and, then, its transformations over time until the present through a series of various interventions, into institutionalized forms of community policing under state supervision and control, emulated widely over the country and spread even to parts of Kenya.

In this chapter I have made an overview of various researchers' and other outside observers' views, interpretations and conclusions about the *Sungusungu* movement and also briefly sketched the history of its emergence as a spontaneous popular movement and, subsequently, its transformation ultimately into a state-sanctioned institution. In the following chapters I will first return to the field and listen to the voices of my interlocutors about issues of immediate significance to them in their renderings of the emergence and the evolvement of the movement, and then, from there onward, broaden the scope of my exposition while elaborating issues briefly touched upon in this chapter, including other questions and topics I deem important for adding to our understanding before concluding my explorative journey.

2. Voices from the field

Who were the early leaders of the movement of *Sungusungu*, what kind of personalities were they, and what were the historical circumstances in which they emerged as leaders and organizers of the movement and to which socio-cultural environment did they belong in terms of social class and socio-economic positions? My intention is not to stereotype the typical leader personality since they were all colourful characters each one in his or her own right, though there are in cultural and socio-political respects some general features to sketch out. Most of the leaders, and all of the more renowned of them, were middle-aged or elderly men and, in various degree, influential persons in their local communities. Though they were all smallholder agro-pastoral farmers and, in this respect, just villagers among their fellow villagers, most of them had experience of various leadership roles within and beyond their local communities. Some of them had been party representatives of lower ranks, some had been elected as councillors in the local government, some had been local representatives of the cooperative movement and, again, others were just respected village elders with a say in the village assemblies of various kinds.

In this chapter, my intention is to move beyond the generalities described in the foregoing by recalling the voices and experiences of three *Sungusungu* leaders I happened to be personally acquainted with, even before the emergence of the movement, and whom I had the opportunity to listen to and discuss with during repeated visits to the country.

Jemedari Paulo

The picture below shows a contingent of a *Sungusungu* troop just returning from chasing a young man who had caused arson in the village. He had first been caught red-handed after stealing and then taken to his home village to be tried by the *Sungusungu* council there, but there they would not have him. So, I was told, he was taken back to the village where he initially was caught and tied up with ropes and put in custody in an empty hut while awaiting trial. During the following night, however, he managed

to loosen the ropes and get out of his confinement but, before taking to the bush, he set fire to the grass roofs of three houses in the village. Then, *ndulilu*, the gourd-stem whistle for raising alarm, was blown, *Sungusungu* was mobilised and a pursuing party organized to set out for chasing the perpetrator. In the dark of the night, though the pursuing party ultimately managed to trace the man and even hit him with an arrow from a bow, he escaped his pursuers.



Figure 1. *Sungusungu* group returning after the night's chase – Jemedari Paulo to the left. (Photo: Per Brandström)

I came this time, it was in 1984, to the village of Mwaguguli in north-western Nzega District, not for the sake of *Sungusungu*, but with the intention of making a follow-up of a household survey I previously had made in the area focused on household composition, land, livestock and mobility patterns. Now, I only happened to arrive there just when the pursuing party was returning from the chase of that night.¹⁰ Thus, the news of the day in the village was *Sungusungu*, and *Sungusungu* only or rather *Busalama* as the movement more commonly was locally called. Consequently, as an anthropologist, I had no choice but to follow Evans-Pritchard's wise advice of making your interlocutors' immediate concern into your own (1973) and to put my own investigative concern aside for a while.

¹⁰ This encounter occurred, according to my diary, on the 26th of June 1984.

My main contact in the village was Paulo Kiyabo, or Ng'wana Kiyabo, 'son of Kiyabo', as he most commonly was called (the man in the long coat on the picture above). I knew Paulo quite well from my younger, pre-anthropological time in the country. Paulo was a great character and to me, when I later in life came back for anthropological field studies, a valued informant. I have elsewhere tried to sketch the character of Paulo as follows:

In his younger days Ng'wana Kiyabo had been to the Coast, *Ng'hwani*, and worked as a wage labourer on the sisal estates and as a clove-picker on Zanzibar. After a few years on the Coast he returned to his home area, established a family, cultivated his fields and converted to Christianity. When I became acquainted with him he was, with his family, cultivating some five acres of land and owned a few cattle and small stock. He was an Evangelist, a village elder, a Party representative, a man extraordinarily well-versed in the intricacies and details of his own cultural traditions and a storyteller of rank. Later, in the early 1980s, when the *Sungusungu* movement started, armed with a bow and poisoned arrows, Ng'wana Kiyabo became a local *Jemedari*, 'General', of this movement. Ng'wana Kiyabo did not dislike to be asked questions, quite the opposite; he invited them. But when the first question had been posed, he took command and he talked for hours, choosing his topics freely and beyond any control of the poor questioner. Such people cannot be snared like sparrows by the ethnographer and put into his neat little analytical cage. They are like the *Ikona*, the Bateleur (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) in the East African sky. What remains for the observer on the ground is only to admire the aerobatics of the eagle, high above the ground. (1990b: Chapter 1:14)

Now with Paulo, there was thus no need to ask questions in order to get the discussion going. You just had to sit down and listen. Assisted by the young *Sungusungu* warriors seated around us and their comments, the story of the night's chase was told in great detail. But not only that, the whole story of *Sungusungu* was told. Why it emerged in the first place, how it emerged and what it came to mean and imply in and for the life of the villagers.

The village of Mwaguguli was not situated far from Jana where people sometime in 1981 started to organize self-defence groups and rumours travel fast. In Paulo's renderings, he himself assumed a vital role in bringing the news of the movement to his village. He was personally acquainted with one of the original leaders in Jana, called Shugi Makonda, and through him the village of Mwaguguli was initiated into the movement and organized for self-defence already in early 1982 according to the tenets of the movement.



Figure 2. Early *Sungusungu* leaders – in the middle Shugi Makonda.
(Photo: Per Brandström)

The stories about *Sungusungu*, or *Busalama*, were told with great enthusiasm. Things had been bad, a community in despair, people were exposed to destructive powers beyond their control, but with *Sungusungu*, things had changed. Now the peace that had been lost had been regained. There was *mhola*, peace, in the village thanks to *Sungusungu*.

This was the kind of story told from place to place during the early time of the movement. People were dejected, they were powerless, they could find no way out of their tribulations. But then a seed of hope was sown among them: people started to organize themselves, they joined together for a radical change of the prevailing circumstances, and hope was regained.

The organizational pattern of *Sungusungu* in Mwaguguli was basically the same as in other villages that had joined the movement at this time. There was an elected king, *ntemi*, there were commanders, *makamanda*, for the executive tasks, where the chief-commander in this particular village was called *jemedari*, ‘general’. There was a secretary, *katibu*, a treasurer, *tunza hazina*, and a steering committee with elected members. The stories I were told, though, did not say much about the other features of this organization, for which people knew the external world had little understanding. That is, for example, about the role of divination for the *Sungusungu* operations and about secret initiatory details.

This organization echoes both tradition and modernity. Tanzania is administratively and politically a thoroughly organized country. On district level the line of administrative organization runs from the district, headed by the District Commissioner, via the division, the ward, the village and, ultimately, to the sub-village, each level with its leadership cadres. And in the 1980s, when Tanzania was still a one-party state, the village community was further divided into ten-cell units, every unit headed by a locally chosen party representative. It was within this political and administrative space that the movement found itself and defined its mode both of organization and operation, where the more visible traits resounded modernity whereas the officially less visible ones were deeply anchored in Sukuma-Nyamwezi cultural values and customary modes of community organization.

One could here recall Steven Feierman's formulation, in his study on peasant intellectuals among the Shambaa in Tanzania, about "peasants who draw upon a rich variety of past forms of political language" (1990:3), but it is not only that. There is also the fact that peasants draw upon a rich variety of contemporary political language. There are, in other words, forms of institutional bricolage.

Frances Cleaver, in an article on bricolage and social embeddedness of natural resource management, identifies three aspects of institutional bricolage: "the multiple identities of the bricoleurs; the frequency of cross-cultural borrowing and of multi-purpose institutions; and the prevalence of arrangements and norms which foster co-operation, respect and non-direct reciprocity over lifecourses" (2002: 11). These three aspects summarize well some of the salient organizational and institutional features of the movement of *Sungusungu*.

On an individual level, my friend Paulo was a telling example of multiple identities and cultural bricolage. At this particular time he was the pastor of a Pentecostalist congregation, serving church members in the village and from the surrounding area. He was a trusted senior village elder, a party representative and the *jemedari* of *Sungusungu* in the village and of course, as all the other villagers, a small-holder agro-pastoralist farmer. His multiple roles and engagements were an asset to village and community life, a source of influence, one could say. They widened his social network and gave him a voice in a number of different fora. Being the pastor of a Pentecostalist congregation and a war leader of *Sungusungu* at the same time was seemingly no contradiction at all in the socio-cultural environment where Paulo was situated, since both roles, as Paulo himself argued, were explicitly concerned with peace, one with spiritual peace and the other with social peace.

Regarding the institutional features of *Sungusungu*, reference has been made above to “cross-cultural borrowing”, but there were also the aspects of multi-purposiveness and “arrangements and norms which foster co-operation” and respect.

This time when I arrived at Mwaguguli, the news of the day was not only the night’s *Sungusungu* chase and the social digestion of the adventure through storytelling and elaboration of the details of the event. The concern was also about another case in the village that was to be finalized the following day.

This case was about a villager, a man who, when drunk, had raped a young woman and publicly abused and beaten other women in the village. When sober, so I was told, this man was a hardworking fellow, kind and sociable and a responsible family head who cared for his family, but when drunk he often became abusive, violent and a nuisance to his fellow villagers. Until now the villagers, because of the man’s other qualities, had coped with his occasional misconduct. The quarrels it caused had been of a kind left to be sorted out between those who had been offended and the man himself. This time, however, the man’s misbehaviour was such that it became the whole village’s concern and a case to be dealt with by the village elders and *Sungusungu*.

Rape is a serious crime under Tanzanian law. If the case was forwarded to the police and the courts, the man would certainly have been sentenced to a long-term imprisonment. The man’s abusing and beating of women in public were also serious instances of unlawful behaviour. The option of the village elders and the *Sungusungu* leadership in this case was, in the first instance, to try and sort out the problem within the village and not to forward it to authorities outside the village. Most decisive in this process, whether it could be solved within the village or not, was the opinion of the abused women and their families. Would they accept the mediation of the village elders and the *Sungusungu* leadership and recompensation according to local customary practices? Or would they demand the involvement of authorities outside the village.

Apparently in this case, this part of the problem was, to the offended parties, satisfactorily solved. But this was not enough. The man had by his misconduct disturbed the peace, *mhola*, of the whole village. In order to restore peace, the perpetrator had to reconcile with not only those whom he more closely had seriously offended but also with the whole village community and for this there was also a need for atonement. The verdict of the *Sungusungu* leadership in this particular case was that the man paid a fine of five heads of cattle to the village community.

The second day of my stay in the village, while seated outside Paulo's house with Paulo and a few villagers, we could watch five heads of cattle being driven by in the direction of two big mango trees not far away from where we found ourselves. The topic among us was naturally the current case of the perpetrator and the reconciliation festivity to take place later that day. And then, around noon, people start to assemble under the two mango trees.

The division of labour among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi in most communal ceremonies is that the men are responsible for preparing the meat while the women make the *ugali*, the stiff porridge to be consumed together with the meat. The old and the middle-aged men were seated under the mango trees while the young men butchered the slaughtered cattle and started to boil the meat in big drums, all this in the close vicinity to the assembled men. The women were assembled in a nearby homestead where they did the cooking and where they, when ready, would have their reconciliatory meal together.



Figure 3. The young men preparing the meat. (Photo: Per Brandström)

While resting under the mango trees, the participants were discussing various topics of concern to the villagers, telling stories, cracking jokes and playing *bao* (in Swahili), *isolo* or *ipango* (in Sukuma and Nyamwezi), the kind of board game commonly played. The perpetrator himself was seated among the participants and, just as the others, took part in the discussions, storytelling and the cracking of jokes.



Figure 4. The women bringing the *ugali* for the reconciliation feast.
(Photo: Per Brandström)

Then, before the food was ultimately served, speeches were made, one after the other, by anybody who felt like talking. All these speeches underlined the need for peace in the village and for unity and cooperation among the villagers. Simultaneously as these speeches strongly condemned the misdeeds of the man they commended him for his willingness to seek atonement and reconciliation with the victims of his misconduct and, finally, with the whole village community, by accepting to pay the very heavy fine of five heads of cattle. However, and this theme was repeated over and over again in the speeches, the village would not tolerate any more disturbances of the village peace by the man. If he caused more annoyance, he would ultimately be ostracized, *funyiwa bubiti* (literally, ‘brought out into hyenanness’), by the village and, in case of offences as serious as the recent ones, he would be handed over by *Sungusungu* to the justice of the state.

In the late afternoon, after all the speeches had been made and the food consumed, people started to depart. I followed Paulo back to his house. Paulo was in a hilarious mood. In his view, peace had been brought back to the village thanks to *Sungusungu*. One could perhaps say that Paulo exaggerated the role of *Sungusungu* in this particular case because it was handled in quite a normal Sukuma-Nyamwezi manner with regard to cases

taken as village matters. One could, however, argue that *Sungusungu* had played a decisive role in mobilizing the community and bringing together the various parties involved in the conflict for peace making and, ultimately, reconciliation. In this sense, I believe, there was a kernel of truth in Paulo's judgment.

The following day, I could leave the issue of *Sungusungu* behind and embark on the less exciting task, for which I had come to Mwanguguli this time, namely making a follow-up of my previous household survey on household composition, land, livestock and mobility patterns in the village.

The life story of Mayunga and his involvement in the movement

I first became acquainted with Mayunga Mahona long before the time of *Sungusungu*. That was in 1953, when I was in my early teens, living with my missionary parents and my older sister at the Swedish mission station in the village of Itanana. Though Mayunga had never lived there before, he regarded Itanana as his home village because his family, his divorced mother and a number of his brothers and sisters, had settled there. The family, headed by Mayunga's eldest brother Melkisedek, had moved to Itanana several years previously and Mayunga had been away from his family for many years. He had left his family when he was only sixteen years old and now when he came to Itanana he was twenty-four. Mayunga had worked at various places in the country and even spent a year in Uganda. Thus, he came to the village with many stories about his adventures from here and there. I was acquainted with Mayunga's family through Isaka, one of his younger brothers, an age-mate and a friend of mine. The link to the family through Isaka gave me the opportunity to listen to many of Mayunga's engaging and colourful stories.

In those days, the young teenager I was, I of course had no idea of recording Mayunga's life story, though I certainly got several fragments of it from his many stories. It was first much later in life I sat down with Mayunga, put on my tape recorder and asked him to tell his life story in greater detail.

Mayunga was born in 1929 in Luhumbo in Shinyanga District. He was the fifth child in a family of twelve children. From Luhumbo the family moved to Busanda, also in Shinyanga District. While living in Luhumbo, Mayunga's parents had converted to Christianity after coming into contact with the African Inland Mission, an American Baptist Mission which

started mission work in Sukumaland in the early 1900s. Now while in Busanda, Mayunga's father joined and was initiated in the association of *Banunguli*, literally meaning 'the porcupines' (see e.g. Gunderson 2001), one of the kind of associations and guilds common among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi. This meant that Mayunga's father defected from Christianity. To be a member of any of these societies, with their often secret initiatory rites and other practices associated with 'paganism', was not tolerated by the church. Mayunga's mother, however, remained faithful to the teachings and the norms of her congregation.

This division between wife and husband regarding beliefs and religion had serious repercussions for the whole family when the wife, after Mayunga in her row of births, bore twins, *mabasa*. The husband, supported by his association, demanded his wife to undergo the customary twin ceremonies together with him and become initiated into the association of twin parents, *mabasana*.

Among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, as in many other Bantu cultures, twins are considered extraordinary and ambiguous figures. Birth of twins does not only represent an excess of human fertility; their birth is also believed to endanger the cosmic order. It may cause natural disasters, as people say, *mbula ya kubalaluka*, (violent thunder-storms) and drought (Brandström 1990a: 180-182). To set things right, rituals have to be performed to secure the well-being of the land and the whole community.¹¹

In the case of Mayunga's parents, the birth of twins implied a radical clash between two different cultural idioms. To Mayunga's father, the culturally defined demand on carrying out the twin rituals was unconditional, while to his mother, in obedience of the norms of her Christian religion, this was unthinkable. This conflict made Mayunga's father divorce his wife, but since he was still in debt to his wife's family for the bridewealth for his wife he had no rights over the children. Therefore, after being divorced, Mayunga's mother left with all the children and moved with them to one of her brothers who lived in Mwangoye in north-eastern Nzega District. But it was tough for the divorced mother to cater for her many children, and because her brother, under whose custody she now lived with her children, had his own family to cater for. Mayunga describes the life of the family after his mother being divorced as a life of hardship. So, at the age of sixteen Mayunga left his family to find a job somewhere to earn a living and also to support his family back in Mwangoye.

¹¹ In chapter 7, the ritual complex surrounding birth of twins will be treated in more detail.

Mayunga first went to Morogoro, in the eastern part of the country to find employment at one of the sisal estates in that region. This was in 1945. He was employed and worked for a number of years. However, while working there, he heard rumours about the big groundnut-growing enterprise being established in the late 1940s in Kongwa, to the west of Morogoro, one of the three mechanized large-scale groundnut-growing schemes established and managed by the Overseas Food Corporation in the country at that time (see e.g. Coulson 1977; Hogendorn and Scott 1981; Rizzo 2006). Though all of them proved to be a total economic failure after only a few years of operation, for Mayunga to hear about the Kongwa scheme and about the kind of job opportunities offered there meant an appealing alternative to the arduous and poorly remunerated work at the sisal estates. He thus, in 1948, left the sisal estate, where he was working, for Kongwa and there he was lucky to find employment. He first received basic training as fireman and was then allocated to the fire brigade of the scheme. While in Kongwa he also started to learn how to drive.

When Mayunga in 1950 ultimately got his driving license, he left his job in Kongwa and returned to his home district to become a truck driver there. There were few African truck drivers in those days in the district, less than a handful. I believe we as teenagers knew the names of all of them. Most truck drivers were still Indians or Arabs. Thus, to be an African truck driver implied status and renown. Mayunga first found temporary employments with Indian and Arab traders and then later with a diamond prospecting company. This employment took him all the way to Uganda, where he worked for a whole year.

In 1953, however, Mayunga started having problems with his eyes which caused him to stop driving for some time. This was when he came to his family at Itanana and for treatment at the mission dispensary there.

In 1954 Tanganyika African National Union, TANU was formed under the leadership of Julius Nyerere. With TANU the struggle for political independence for Tanganyika had gained a strong voice. In spite of the dearth of public media like newspapers and radios, the political message spread fast even to the countryside. Although, at this time, it was prohibited for government employees and schoolteachers to join political parties, and even for the employees of some of the missions, many of them nevertheless joined TANU secretly. One of the first, perhaps the very first, TANU-members to become known at Itanana was Hezekia Nkwabi, a man working at the mission dispensary. He had been on medical training in Dar es Salaam in 1954 when the party was formed and became a member and received his membership card that very year. He came back to Itanana in

1955 and, though half-secretly, started to spread the message of TANU there. It was a message about ousting of the colonial government and about the upcoming struggle against *umaskini*, *ujinga na maradhi*, poverty, ignorance and diseases.

Mayunga, being the character he was, strongly oppositional to the colonial rule and all forms of racial discrimination that was commonplace in those days, quite naturally became an early member of TANU. Mayunga describes this time as a time when the powerless became strong, a movement for the sake of *wakulima na wafanyakazi*, peasants and workers. It was a movement that reached out to the villages. “We met secretly”, he relates, “and discussed all throughout the nights without sleep, because the movement was strong among us”. Mayunga became an active party worker and, when a TANU-branch was formed at Itanana, he became its secretary. Mayunga then continued to support and work for the party in various local positions all throughout the 1960s and up until the 1980s.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the villagers of Itanana were suffering from the increasing lawlessness that was a general feature of that time and, in particular, rampant cattle rustling by organized criminal gangs. The rustlers either attacked the herdsmen while they were grazing their livestock away from the village or, more frequently, they came by night to pre-selected homesteads. They were well-armed, often with modern firearms, and they threatened the owners who, in order to save their lives, had to remain silent indoors until the rustlers had driven the cattle far enough for the owners to dare to raise their *ng'wano*, the customary hue and cry, to alarm their neighbours. When the villagers ultimately had organized themselves to track the robbers they would, because of the time lag, be on the safe side. The rustlers had emptied several cattle carols in the village and it seemed that they could carry on with their pernicious deeds with impunity. The villagers could not protect themselves against this kind of organized brigandage and there was no help to be expected from the police and the government authorities. The stolen cattle were never retrieved again. People suspected the police and the local courts for corruption. The criminal gangs had resources to bribe their way through.

But there were not only these enemies from the outside. There were people within the village suspected of being in collusion with the rustlers. The rustlers seemed only too well informed about where to go and when to strike. This caused suspicion among the neighbours and a situation in which rumours thrived. Who was to be trusted and who was not?

“The situation was such that we had to do something by ourselves”, Mayunga relates, *aliyo aho tulanja tutamanile ikubiza Busalama*, “but when we started we did not know that this would become *Busalama*”. This

was in early 1982. In the Jana area in Kahama district, some distance north-east of Itanana, people had started to form self-defence groups already the year before. In Mayunga's account, however, they had no knowledge about what was taking place elsewhere when they started to organize themselves. It was only later, Mayunga relates, they heard about villagers forming self-defence groups in the Jana area and then sent representatives there to learn about their experiences. In Mayunga's narration, it was solely the troublesome situation in which they found themselves that made responsible men in the village sit down together and ponder how to go about finding a solution. They concluded that for a single village on its own there was not much to do. It was necessary to broaden the sphere for mutual aid. On the 8th of March 1982, Mayunga tells, a secret meeting was convened with representatives from the neighbouring villages of Buduka (of which Itanana was part) Kayombo, Ikindwa, Mahene, Malolo and Chaming'wha. There it was agreed that if the rustlers attacked any of these six villages messages would be passed to all the other villages and action would be taken to encircle and fight the rustlers. It was also agreed that all cattle owners should contribute 100 shillings each to a fund to be used if the pursuers had to track the thieves long distances away from their home villages.¹²

There was however a problem in creating unity within the respective villages for this purpose. Would those who did not have cattle be prepared to risk their lives for the sake of the cattle owners? This issue, according to Mayunga, was discussed at great length. There was a need for unity, *kwiwigwa*, literally 'listen to each other', not the least because it was necessary to get the young men involved, those who had the strength and courage to pursue and fight the brigands.

The proportion of families owning cattle varies considerably over the larger area of Sukumaland and Unyamwezi, for example, from less than 20 per cent in some densely populated old settlement areas to over 70 per cent in other areas more favourable for livestock keeping, though, there is no section or sub-group specializing in pastoral production only (Brandström 1985a: 6-7). Whether the rate of cattle ownership is high or low, livestock keeping always coincides with the crop production by individual households. One has to consider the multi-functionality and polysemic nature of cattle in society, i.e. the fact that cattle mean so many things to their owners. Cattle are property and, still today, an important form of storable wealth; land is usually not a commodity and grain cannot

¹² In one case, I was told, the thieves were tracked all the way to Urambo some 200 kilometres south of the village where the cattle were stolen.

be stored over long periods. The animals satisfy consumption needs in terms of meat and milk, they provide a source of ready cash through sales, and they can be bartered for grain to meet emergency needs. The rate of return on the investment in livestock is comparatively high and achieved with far less labour expended by the household than would be required to obtain the same income from agricultural activities. Cattle are given as prestations to legitimize marriage and to establish and maintain social networks. Rank or status is acquired by the slaughtering of animals on ceremonial occasions, and transactions of animals are instrumental for the accumulation of power through, for example, patron/client relationships. Consequently, there is a strong impetus for each household to accumulate cattle and there is a considerable flow of cattle between households and a shift of ownership over time. Furthermore, the issue of rights to and ownership of livestock is a complex matter. People who have no livestock in their own homestead may have certain bonds to or stakes in livestock somewhere else through inheritance, marriage, debts or other social and economic obligations. In other words, livestock is a concern for many more than only those who have an immediate physical control over this resource.

Mayunga recounts:

After lengthy discussions among us, a unified stand was arrived at between all parties, both within the respective village and between the villages in alliance and we were successful. We joined forces and cattle rustling in our area was brought to a stop and we were also, in several cases, successful in retrieving previously stolen cattle. The rumour of our achievements spread to surrounding areas and when a case of cattle theft occurred in the village of Mwamala north of our village area we were asked to help. There were again discussions among us. Some of us were reluctant to assist other villages beyond our own circle of villages while others among us argued that we had to widen the network of mutual assistance to be fully successful in fighting our enemies. Ultimately we agreed to extend our help to other villages. We went with Ng'wana Mabonde from the village of Kahama ya Ng'halanga¹³ to Mwamala and installed a *Busalama ntemi* there, and from there we went to the villages of Nhabala, Busalala and Itumbili and initiated them into *Busalama*. Now we had problems with the police. They began to harass us. In Itumbili Ng'wana Mabonde was arrested and taken by the police to the prison in Kahama. However, we collected money among us to bail him out and get the case moved from Kahama to our own district court in Nzega, where we hoped to gain support from high

¹³ Ng'wana Mabonde from Kahama ya Ng'halanga was the most renowned *Busalama* leader in the district at this time. He later, when the movement had gained official recognition, became the first district representative of *Sungusungu*.

ranked party officials who we thought would be positive to our work. In 1983 the police went totally mad, *polisi yasala kabisa*, about *Busalama*. We were pestered by them. Some of us were apprehended and taken to the police station in Bukene for interrogations. But I had long experience of working for the party, I knew the party principles and guidelines, and that what we were doing was wholly in line with Nyerere's words that, *Tanzania italindwa na Watanzania wenyewe*, 'Tanzania should be guarded by the Tanzanians themselves'. Since I knew the law, I became an adviser. I did not want to be a leader, *ntemi* or *kamanda*, though I accepted to assume the position of *katibu*, secretary. I was called to other villages to give them advice. Some people were scared of being harassed by the police, but I told them there were no reasons for that since we did not contravene the law of the country when we organized ourselves for self-protection. I went to the party chairman of the district to argue our case, but he was scared of supporting us. I then went to the regional party chairman, Petro Sengerema, and since he realized that we were moving along with the party, he was willing to give us his support. The police made investigations about the origin of *Busalama*. They went to the village of Kahama ya Ng'halanga, the home village of Ng'wana Mabonde. They were told it started at Itanana. The police wanted to know the details about how it all began and I wrote a detailed letter about how and why we had organized ourselves into *Busalama* and about its very purpose, ensuring that we worked fully in line with the principles of the party. This letter went all the way to the regional Party Head Quarters in Tabora. Then further investigation about us and our work were made by high ranking party and government representatives and following these investigations, this was in 1983, we gained support for our work from President Nyerere, the Secretary General of the Party Rashid Kawawa, the Prime Minister Sokoine and other national and regional leaders and those among us who had been arrested by the police were released from prison. *Busalama* was recognized as *jeshi la jadi*, traditional army, but not under the name of *Busalama*. The authorities preferred the name of *Sungusungu* though we continued to use the name of *Busalama* among ourselves because we are *Basalama*, the guardians of peace, in our community.¹⁴

Mayunga's story about the origin and development of *Sungusungu* in his village and in the surrounding village area does not stop with their achievements only in organizing themselves to combat the merciless brigandage and violent cattle rustling to which they had been exposed. *Busalama* meant unity within the community also in other village concerns. *Basalama* took initiatives to organize rotational credit societies,

¹⁴ This was so because the term *Busalama* in its Swahili form recalls the official designation of the police, namely *Usalama*.

*ifogong'ho*¹⁵, in the sub-villages of the larger village. They involved themselves in peace-making when there were conflicts of various kinds within the village, they assumed the responsibility for cultivating the collective village farm, mandatory for all villages under the *ujamaa* regime of those days, and they mobilized the villagers for different projects such as improving the village roads and repair and maintenance of communal village facilities.



Figure 5. Mayunga Mahona in the foreground – *Sungusungu* improving the village road. (Photo: Per Brandström)

Following Mayunga's narration, these were the good days of *Sungusungu* in the village, the first few years of the movement. From 1982, when the movement started, to 1984, people felt that they had made important achievements. There was hope and enthusiasm among people. They were

¹⁵ This is a kind of village-based credit institution common among Sukuma people.

no longer, as they had been before, suffering from highway brigandage and cattle rustling. Unity had been created within and between villages for a common purpose and their organization had been recognized by the party and the government authorities. Yet, there were internal cleavages within the village and it did not take long after the first times of high spirit and enthusiasm before they started to make themselves known. There was a struggle within the village and within the *Sungusungu* leadership about the mandate of and directions for the movement. There were, one could say, moderates and radicals in the village and within the leadership, where the former were in favour of a more cautious and perceptive stand in relation to the voice of the party and the government while the latter were less inclined to consider the blessings of the party and the government for their activities. In the early days of the movement in the village the moderate faction was in the lead. This faction was most emphatically supported by Mayunga and the first *ntemi* installed in the larger village of Buduka, of which Itanana was part, also belonged to this faction. The leaders were wary about confronting the authorities by taking the law wholly in their own hands. For example, when stolen cattle had been tracked and ultimately found in a cattle carol somewhere they would rather prefer to involve the police to return the stolen animals to their owners instead of retrieving them on their own by force and violent means. In the village, they would work in close cooperation with the village government and strive to act in line with the guidelines of the party. Thus, one could say, they were a restraint to excesses of various kinds such as indiscriminate violence against suspects and witch hunting within the village, that is, excesses of a kind that were common in villages in other parts of the wider area where the radical strain within the *Sungusungu* leadership was in the lead.

However, in Mayunga's account, the radicals gained in influence in the village and ultimately a new *ntemi* was installed. The new *ntemi*, Issa Sebengo by name, was not a man of Mayunga's choice. He was, according to Mayunga, inspired by a *Sungusungu* leader called Kitaselema, widely known for his radical stand. Mayunga describes Kitaselema as a thief, a thug and a gang leader of cattle rustlers who following the tide had shifted alliances and joined *Sungusungu*. There were, in fact, during this time stories circulating about criminals infiltrating the movement and, because of their ruthlessness and violent methods in pursuing *Sungusungu* operations discrediting the movement.

With the new village *Sungusungu* leader in place, Mayunga renounced his position as secretary of the village *Sungusungu* committee. He would remain an ordinary member but in strong opposition to the new *ntemi* and

his style of leadership. This conflict within the leadership ultimately led to a split of *Sungusungu* within the village and, for some years to follow, there were two *Sungusungu* sections in the village in opposition to each other, each section with its own *ntemi*.

My last talk with Mayunga was in 2014. He was now a man in his mid-80s, reflecting over his long life. He had seen and experienced a lot, as old people often put it: *Tunakotoka ni mbali*, that is, ‘We have walked a long way’, or, literally, ‘From where we come is far away’. During the colonial times life was not easy, people were under the yoke of the colonial power but Nyerere brought a dream to them, the dream of *uhuru*, freedom. When the independence struggle started, there was hope, there was enthusiasm and belief that things would change, all for the better. The early period of independence was also a time of hope. The independence party, TANU, gave the poor peasants a voice, made them strong. But things changed.

In the mid-1970s ‘Operation Villagization’ was carried out. This implied a dramatic change in the villagization policy of the ruling party. The *ujamaa* policy, following the Arusha Declaration of 1967, originally emphasized the voluntary decision of the people themselves to form production cooperatives, called *ujamaa* villages, with the assistance of the party and the government cadres (see e.g. Nyerere 1973:66–70). The new policy thus meant a change from voluntary to compulsory villagization.¹⁶ The operation was carried out with great force. Almost the entire rural population of Mwanza, Shinyanga and Tabora Regions in western Tanzania, where most of the Sukuma and Nyamwezi people live, were resettled. The dispersed type of settlement, prevailing in this area until then, was in a short span of time remoulded into a pattern of nucleated villages comprising up to 500 families each.¹⁷ The reasons for villagization given by the party were plain enough: the dispersed settlement vitiated against an efficient utilization of the limited resources of the government for the benefit of the rural population. Schools, health facilities and improved water supplies were all things that people yearned for. If improved living conditions were something to be achieved through villagization, people could see a point in this reform, in spite of the hardships which this process would entail for those involved such as demolishing their present houses and rebuilding their new homes somewhere else. However, there is the Sukuma-Nyamwezi saying: *Bula bukwisumbyaga, biswe banhu yaya*. This means: ‘Intestines clump together, people don’t’. This is a saying with several connotations. One concerns the smallholder economy of the agro-pastoral farmers. Proximity to arable land and pasture is

¹⁶ For a summarizing account of the sequence of the *ujamaa* policy implementation from 1968 to 1974 see Andrew Coulson (1975).

¹⁷ Resettlement in this area took place mainly during the dry season in 1974.

crucially important. Nucleated settlements would imply concentration of livestock on the land – with dispersed settlement livestock spread over a larger area – and it would also imply longer distance to pasture, longer walks to and from the fields and less control over them. There is also a connotation in this saying on neighbourliness. In nucleated villages, formed compulsorily, people with internal conflicts would be brought physically close together. This could cause cleavages within the community affecting the spirit of neighbourliness and even lead to witchcraft accusations among neighbours.

As the sincere party man he was, Mayunga was involved in implementing the villagization programme in his area, though he personally was not in favour of the shift from voluntarism to compulsion in the policy, or, in his own words: *ikabiza bukandamizi*, ‘it became oppressive’. And indeed, there were excesses of force and violence in places where people were slow to respond to the call for resettlement. People were harassed by the militia and in some cases their houses were even burned down to make them move. However in Mayunga’s village, according to his account thanks to him and other considerate leaders, the resettlement was carried out smoothly and without causing serious disturbances among the villagers. Yet, Operation Villagization was a political measure that caused conflicts within the communities and a wound in the trust among people in the party and in the government.

And then, in the late 1970s there were the international oil crises constraining the economy of the country and there was the Uganda war and, in the wake of the war, the spread of illegal weapons in the countryside by Tanzanian recruits who had fought in the war. Things were deteriorating. Social services were faltering, there was a shortage of basic commodities and law and order was in dissolution. People were used to hardship, to eke out their living under difficult circumstances though there were limits to their endurance. They just had to do something. This was, in Mayunga’s account, the very moment when they ultimately started to organize themselves and the very setting in which *Sungusungu* emerged.

Now, during my last encounter with Mayunga, he was a disenchanted man. The hope of improvements of life awakened during the independence struggle and the dreams of *maendeleo*, development, in early post-colonial times had never or only partially come true. For small-scale agropastoral farmers like him little had changed since colonial times. They were struggling to make ends meet with basically the same agricultural technology as in the past, the hand-hoe and the ox-plough, and the land did not yield more than in the past but rather less, because the land was more exhausted. In colonial times, Mayunga reminded me, there was a network of *mabwana shamba*, agricultural extension workers, for advising

the farmers, there was a veterinary service reaching out to the livestock owners, and there were also other kinds of services that the early national government worked hard to strengthen and extend. And there was the cooperative movement that served the farmers in many respects, which grew strong in the late colonial period and which the early national government also strongly supported. But in the course of time things deteriorated. Services to the farmers became more and more dysfunctional. In Mayunga's version, development was elsewhere. There was corruption, those in power enriched themselves and less and less trickled down to the poor farmers. And then the Structural Adjustment Programme initiated in the 1980s meant increasing economic pressure on the farmers, implying among other things cost-sharing for social services of various kinds and the withdrawal of subsidies for farming inputs like fertilizer and pesticides, measures that reduced productivity on the worn land since the poor farmers could not afford buying the inputs for upholding the productivity of land. In other words, with fewer earnings from their agricultural work their expenditures increased.

In 2014 Mayunga had left the party he joined in the 1950s during the independence struggle, the party he so wholeheartedly had supported and worked for in several decades and instead joined an opposition party. The reason given by Mayunga for this decision was brief and laconic: *Sisi wakulima na wafugaji tumesahaulika*, 'We cultivators and livestock keepers have become the forgotten ones'.

The early days of *Sungusungu* were, in Mayunga's narration, a parenthesis of hope in a time of failing expectations. Those days meant an increased degree of self-determination for the people and feelings of pride among themselves for what they managed to achieve on their own. But even this arisen hope, as so many others, failed. Now in 2014 *Sungusungu* was still there in the village, as in the beginning of the movement, unified under one *ntemiship*. It was now since a long time a well-integrated institution within the state machinery such that there were nowadays few conflicts with the government authorities. In Mayunga's opinion, *Sungusungu* did function as a policing institution. Yet, in Mayunga's own conclusive words: *Kwa jumla Sungusungu inaendelea lakini haina nguvu. Bila imani yote inaharibika*, 'In sum, *Sungusungu* is still there but it has no power. Without faith things fall apart'. The expectations once held about the movement as something more than only and solely an institution for preventing crime in the village were now, to Mayunga, expectations that totally had failed.

Issa – Another story

I sat down for a long talk with Issa Sebengo. This was in Issa's homestead at Itanana in June 1996. I knew about him before the emergence of *Sungusungu* but got more closely acquainted with him during my stay in the village in 1984, when the movement was at its very prime. I had furthermore met him several times at revisits to the village between 1984 and now, in 1996. In 1984, Issa was the strong and very articulate *ntemi*, the *Sungusungu* leader of the village, and he was still *ntemi* in 1996. My wish was to learn about Issa's reflections over the movement in retrospect now when *Sungusungu* had developed into a firmly established village institution.



Figure 6. Issa Sebengo (left) and the Village Chairman Nshimba Lubasha. (Photo: Per Brandström)

However, Issa did not restrict his account to the origin and developments of *Sungusungu*. It broadened to include himself and his ethnic ancestry in the narrative. Because Issa was not Nyamwezi or Sukuma by origin but Tutsi, a descendant of groups of Tutsi who migrated to central Nyamwezi in the late 19th century. This was in the days of *Mtemi* Mirambo (*Ntemi* in northern dialect), a prominent political figure of that time, referred to by various writers as a traditional king, warlord, state builder and modernizer (see e.g. Bennett 1971; Broyon-Mirambo 1877; Kabeya 1966; Reid 1998; Roberts 1968; Harvey 1950) and, by Henry Morton Stanley, as “the African Bonaparte” (1872: 296). Mirambo rose to prominence from a small

Nyamwezi chiefdom and created an 'empire' covering a large area south of Lake Victoria. This was a time of political and social upheavals in the East African interior caused by expanding trade and external interventions of various kinds. In this political and social setting, Mirambo was one of several local leaders who rose to such prominence that their names became remembered not only in the memory of local people but also through the writings of the early explorers and, later, historians. "Mirambo's kingdom", Richard Reid summarizes, "was almost wholly the achievement of this ruler insofar as he had brought together a number of smaller chiefdoms, partly by coercion, partly as a result of his own charisma, and partly through the lure of commercial adventure, which also implied resistance to (or at least participation in) an increasingly exorbitant and interventionist coastal trading culture" (Reid 1998: 74). Though, Mirambo's Nyamwezi 'empire' did not last long (it collapsed shortly after his death in 1884) his reign had more long-lasting repercussions beyond the larger political and social arena of which he himself was part.

Returning to Issa Sebengo, one could say that it was the initiative of Mirambo that brought about the historical political circumstances far back in time that caused his forefathers to come here, to the place where Issa was born and where he now lived and worked, far away from his ancestors' home country. Issa related the story he had been told about the past by his grandfather, a story about the greatness of their Hima ancestors. It was an account about their ancestral countries, Ankole and Karagwe, far away from Unyamwezi, and about the cattle keeping Tutsi-Hima and the Hutu who initially had no knowledge about cattle. However, so the story went, when the Hutu, or the original inhabitants of those countries, had tasted the sweetness of milk they started to yearn for it and for the sake of the sweet milk they subdued to the rule of the cattle-owning Hima and became their servants as herders and milkers. And this was a core point in the story, namely cattle and knowledge and skills of tending and keeping cattle.

Now Mirambo, the story continues, raiding in various directions, acquired more and more cattle that had to be tended and cared for. But Mirambo's own people were not considered knowledgeable enough for this task. They were like once the Hutu in Karagwe in Issa's narrative. So, Mirambo called Nyaligwa, a prominent Tutsi-Hima from Kargwe, to come and become caretaker of his growing cattle herds. And Nyaligwa came and with him other Tutsi of various ranks and categories. However, the Tutsi were not only fond of cattle and skilled cattle keepers, they were also cunning people. They started to steal cattle from Mirambo's herds and moved away with the stolen animals in various directions. Some of

these Tutsi, among them the forefathers of Issa, settled on the plains of Mwakarundi, the area where Itanana is situated. And there they were, the descendants of these migrants far back in time, all called Tutsi by the local people though they among themselves, in spite of their integration into Nyamwezi society, still tended to keep the various categorical distinctions their forefathers brought with them from their places of origin, some claiming Tutsi origin of higher hierarchical social status, as Issa himself, while others were said to have Hutu origin of lower social status.

In Issa's account on *Sungusungu*, his introductory story about his ancestral origin did not seem directly related to his own role and involvement in the movement, nor did he explicitly link his personal pedigree to the position he had achieved, though he made a point of the fact that he was of Hima origin and not just a Hutu as some others in the area claiming Tutsi origin. Issa's story could rather be read as a way of positioning himself in the social universe in which he found himself, but more important than this, I believe, it can be read as a declaration of the importance of cattle. In his narrative, this was the very bridge to *Sungusungu* and his involvement in the movement, namely the love for cattle and the knowledge of how to tend them.

One could at this point recall Edgar Winans' intriguing analysis on the rumours of hyenas killing cattle in Pawaga in southern Tanzania where he writes: "The beasts of the forests were destroying one of the few things [namely cattle] that had meaning both in the old and the new orders" (Winans 1992:127). Normally hyenas don't kill cattle but here they allegedly did. Winans reads these rumours as an expression of a disturbed social order where highly cherished values were threatened and at risk. In the village of Itanana of the 1980s, as was the case in Pawaga, cattle were one of the things that carried great value to the people, a value that in their changing social world "had meaning both in the old and the new orders". The hyenas in the lifeworld of Issa, one could say, were the cattle rustlers. He had personally been a victim to them and suffered the loss of his cattle herd, but thanks to *Sungusungu* the stolen animals had all been retrieved and brought back to him. Thus, to Issa, *Basungusungu* were first and foremost *bashosha ng'ombe*, that is, those who return stolen cattle. The organized gangs with their cattle rustling had turned the order of things upside down. *Basungusungu* turned the order right again.

"We were just tired of being robbed of our cattle", Issa related, and he continued:

The very start *Busalama* in our village was the unity of *ng'wano*. We raised a hue and cry when robbery had occurred and organized our-

selves for tracing the rustlers. Every cattle owner contributed 100 shillings each for food and other necessities to the men who took up the pursuit. Now the circle was widened, that is, also neighbouring villages were involved. We shouted, *Kwili Basalama*, 'May the *Basalama* multiply', and we responded, '*Kwilinda*', 'to protect each other'. An old man advised us on the use of *ndulilu* (for raising alarm). We made investigations to figure out who the thieves were (referring to villagers in collusion with the gangs of rustlers). When we traced our cattle in corals somewhere else, we tried to retrieve them. But the thieves were armed so we had to arm ourselves. We said to ourselves we had to acquire *busungu*, poison, for our arrows. Trusted men, men without grudges in their souls, were each to be armed with a bow and five poisoned arrows and we decided a particular day for smearing poison on the arrowheads. Thus armed, we could fight the rustlers and retrieve our cattle. Now there were rumours that we were rising up against the government and the police harassed us. But there was a committee formed by the party and the central government to make an investigation about us. The committee found that we were not at fault and President Nyerere supported us since we only exercised our rights of self-protection as Tanzanians. We were advised to work hand in hand with the party. We were also told not to use force while retrieving stolen cattle but instead involve the police when we had managed to identify our cattle somewhere. This was in 1983 and from there on we were incorporated into the village government. The village chairman and the village secretary were to attend all our meetings and we were now recognized by the government as *jeshi la jadi*, the traditional army, within the village. And we had our own committee within the village government formed by *ntemi*, the 'king', *katibu*, 'secretary', *tunza hazina*, treasurer, *kamanda mkuu*, chief commander and his assistant, with the task of *kubeja buganaga wa kubinza magulu basambo bakasenegele*, 'to make medicine that break the legs of the robbers in order to unable them to flee their pursuers', and, in addition, a number of sub-commanders.

It was in early 1982 that the first *ntemi* was elected in the village. He was installed by Ng'wana Mabonde from Kahama ya Ng'halanga. But before installing a *ntemi* and making the village into a *Busalama* village, there was the need of *kusafisha kijiji*, 'to clean the village'. Medicine to make thieves confess was made and in a public village meeting thieves were asked to rise and confess. Upon confession, fines were imposed. In one single day seven heads of cattle paid by confessing thieves were slaughtered and consumed by the village community. When the village thus had been cleansed, the installation could be carried out. In case there were identified thieves who refused to confess, the punishment was *kufunyiwa bubuti*, 'to be ousted into hyenanness' (that is, to be ostracized by the community until you confessed and paid the fine imposed with cattle to be slaughtered and consumed by

the villagers as an act or ceremony for the reintegration of the perpetrator into the community).

While accounting for the very origin of their self-defence movement and the naming of it, Issa told his story. Whereas Mayunga in his narrative makes a point of and underscores that the movement started among themselves before they, the local people, had learnt about organizing themselves in a similar manner in other places, this is not the case in Issa's account. In his story, the movement neither emerged in his own village nor in the village of Ng'wana Mabonde, the man by many people in this part of Nzega District believed to be the very author of the movement, who installed their first *ntemi*. In Issa's narrative, as it continued, the very originator of the movement was a female diviner somewhere in Shinyanga region called Ng'wana Majo. She, Issa related, prepared the medicine which endowed Sita, living in Mwalugulu village in Kahama district and descendant of the legendary Sukuma diviner Ng'wana Malundi, with the magical power to wage war against the enemies. Sita in turn, who now widely became known as Kishosa Mang'ombe, 'the returner of cattle', spread the message and initiated others into the movement, among them Kitaselema of whom Issa later on became a follower. To this Issa added that Kitaselema was the leader who gave spread to the name of *Sungusungu*, instead of the name of *Busalama*, the name brought to them by Ng'wana Mabonde when the first village *ntemi* was installed and that until then had been the common designation of the movement among people. That is to say, in the understanding of those days, *Sungusungu* was a designation connoting a more radical stand of the movement. Thus, in his narrative, Issa situates himself in a kind of charismatic genealogy where he received the charisma from Kitaselema who had received it from Sita who in turn had received it from the female diviner Ng'wana Majo through her medicine and revelatory divinations.

In the areas where people first started to organize themselves for self-defence, the movement was generally known as *Busalama*, 'the peace movement', and those who joined it *Basalama*, 'the peace people'. However, how the name of *Sungusungu* originally was coined as a designation of the movement, there are different stories, and about this issue, Issa had his own.

In Issa's story, the very authors of the new designation of the movement were the village women. When the women saw the troop of men marching by with their bows and quivers containing poisoned arrows, they ululated and shouted, *babita Basungusungu*, namely 'Alas, the poison carriers are passing by', and from here this new designation of the move-

ment started to spread. However, people who did not know the Sukuma-Nyamwezi word for poison, *busungu*, mistakenly took it for the Swahili word for a species of ants, namely *sungusungu*. From here on, the narrator concluded, the movement became more and more widely known under the name of *Sungusungu*, now without Sukuma-Nyamwezi prefixes.

Regarding the conflict that led to a split of the village *Sungusungu* organization into two separate sections, each with its own elected *ntemi*, a conflict that Mayunga ascribed to a struggle between moderates and radicals within the *Sungusungu* leadership, Issa had his story. According to him the very cause of the conflict was that some of the *Sungusungu* leaders sided with a few of those who had been accused of being thieves but who refused to confess, pay the fine imposed and reconcile with the village. When these leaders disregarded the judgement of the village *Sungusungu* leadership, a fault for which they were ostracized, they broke away and formed their own *Sungusungu* section within the village. This conflict lasted for several years until, ultimately, reconciliation between the warring sections was brought about through the mediation of the government authorities.

Comparing Mayunga's narrative with Issa's, their narratives coincide at some points and divert at others. The narratives coincide regarding the very reasons for the early mobilization, namely break down of law and order, rampant crime, organized armed and violent cattle rustling and ensuing social insecurity. There is also agreement on the very organizational template of the movement. But apart from these basics of the issue, the two narrators employ different threads in the narrative tissue they respectively weave.

Mayunga, in his narrative, depicts himself as a man who had travelled widely in the country and beyond and who he had seen and experienced the world outside the narrow village horizon. He is, in his self-description, a man of the present and not of the past, a man of political modernity who early joined the independence movement through the TANU party and made Nyerere's political precepts and tenets his own and who has continuously over the years worked for and supported these precepts and tenets. It is with this personal background he situates himself in relation to *Sungusungu* and the role he played in the emergence of the movement in his village and in its early developments.

While Mayunga, in his account, makes little reference to the customary past in the present, and attributes the origin and developments of the *Sungusungu*, movement wholly to the mundane socio-political arena, Issa's narrative is abound with references to mythical traditions of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, to divination, magic and extra human power. There is

the female diviner with her divinatory revelations and magical medicine which, in Issa's narrative, constitutes the very origin of the movement; the charismatic genealogy from her to Sita Kishosha and via Kitaselema to Issa himself; there is the medicine that breaks the legs of the cattle rustlers and the medicine that reveals hidden thieves within the community; and there is Issa's Tutsi genealogy which endows him with a certain dignity or authority in relation to the cattle issue.

However, in spite of their personal differences the two narrators did in fact cooperate in the initial phases of the self-defence movement. They were both small-scale farmers and livestock keepers, they both shared a common enemy in the ravaging cattle rustling gangs and they were both strong characters with a voice in the village. They were thus both in a position to exercise influence over their fellow villagers and, with their respective personal qualities and capacities, able to contribute substantially to the success in mobilizing the villagers and in forming the village organization for the cause of the movement. While Mayunga, in his self-depicting and also in his efforts to exercise influence on his fellow villagers, employs a political discourse consonant with that of the national political establishment, Issa more emphatically employs a local discourse on power with roots in customary values and perceptions. In the initial phases of mobilization and organizational efforts, the stands represented by the two proponents together, one could argue, constituted an asset in reaching out to a wide audience in the village and beyond. However, when the enthusiasm and effervescence, characterizing the early period of the movement, turned into routinization and carrying out of more mundane and everyday tasks, the differences between these two proponents and between them and others within the village soon began to make themselves known to the extent that the initial unity within the village started to crack. Power struggle and conflict ensued (certainly with roots in the community that predates the emergence of *Sungusungu*) that led to factionalism and ultimately to the split of the *Sungusungu* organization in the village into two different *ntemiship*, a split which lasted for several years until the political and administrative authorities made it mandatory that there should be only one unified *Sungusungu* organization in each and every village.

3. The beginnings and the people

When, where and who?

When and where, more precisely, did people begin to form self-defence groups that later became commonly known under the label of *Sungusungu* and who were the very founders of this movement? Early reports were all rather vague and imprecise about these questions.

Masanja, in his early paper on *Sungusungu*, states that information indicates that the movement secretly began in 1982 in Kahama ya Ng'halanga, a village near Bukene in Nzega District, whereas the founder of the movement, according to Masanja's informants, was a man called Kishosha, allegedly the grandson of Ng'wana Malundi (1984), that is, in Sukuma tradition the legendary hero – dancer, diviner, healer and master of marvels – from the early decades of the last century who, among other great deeds, is said to have returned cattle herds rustled by Maasai raiders by means of his strong magical medicine. However, neither the statement that the village of Kahama ya Ng'halanga was the very place of origin of the movement, nor that a certain Kishosha was its very founder are historically well-founded facts. Masanja's account, as my own informants' accounts above in the previous chapter, demonstrates the vagueness of these issues among people.

Abrahams, in his first article on *Sungusungu* (1987), is also vague about the early history of the movement. He rehearses Masanja's assumption that the first group was formed in 1982 in Kahama ya Ng'halanga and that a man called Kishosha was its founder, though he adds, referring to a research report by Sabasaba and Rweyemamu (1984)¹⁸, also an early documentation of the *Sungusungu* movement, that his full name was Kishosha Mang'ombe, which means 'returner of cattle'. By his own informants, however, Abrahams was told that it all began in the Buluma area of Jana, situated on the eastern edge of Kahama District bordering on Shinyanga District (in fact, some distance from the village of Kahama ya Ng'halanga), and that its leader was said to be a man called Nkanga son of

¹⁸ By Bukurura dated to 1986 (1994a: 205).

Iyumbu (1987: 182-184). From Abrahams we learn no more, however, about the early history of the movement than these notes, neither in his first article on this topic nor in any of his several later publications.

Bukurura, who did prolonged fieldwork on *Sungusungu* in the early 1990s in Mwalugulu village in the eastern part of Kahama district and neighbouring areas of Shinyanga and Nzega districts where early *Sungusungu* activities are historically clearly documented, is cautious in his writing. He restricts himself to remark that he is “inclined to say that *Sungusungu* groups started to be formed sometime in 1981” (1994a: 40) and that this, most secretly, took place somewhere on the eastern edge of Kahama District bordering on Shinyanga District. He corroborates his statements with village information on collections to *Sungusungu* funds dating back to September 1981, and with records on the earliest arrests of *Sungusungu* members that took place in December the same year. He writes that more than four of the people said to have been in the initial stages of the formation were dead before he started his fieldwork, and that information from early participants, who were still alive, was often of a self-enhancing kind and contradictory about what actually had transpired (1994a: 38-40).

Also Bukurura mentions the widespread rumours about Kishosha Mang’ombe, more commonly called Sita Kishosha, as being the very founder of the movement, said to have been the descendant of the renowned historical figure Ng’wana Malundi. He had lived in Mwalugulu, where Bukurura did his fieldwork, but died in 1990 before Bukurura arrived in the village. He had been a prominent person in the village and far beyond, known as a great diviner and a renowned politician, having been the District Chairman of the ruling party in the past. Bukurura concludes that Sita Kishosha certainly played an important role in the movement in this area but he could find no evidence for Sita’s involvement in its very early formation. All his evidence pointed to villages in the Jana Ward, close to his village of Mwalugulu, as the very area of origin (1994a: 39).

Gotsbachner, who like Bukurura carried out fieldwork for his PhD in the early 1990s, takes us a bit further towards a better understanding than the previous researchers mentioned, both concerning the area of origin and the early leadership cadre (1993). He collected his information from early leaders of the movement in easternmost Kahama District and in neighbouring areas of Nzega District, and from district records and minutes kept by *Sungusungu* groups. As in several other narrations and testimonies on the rise and development of the movement, the names of Sita Kishosha and Ng’wana Malundi also figure in Gotsbachner’s account. He describes Sita Kishosha as “a teacher, prophet and charismatic leader

who became widely known within the movement” (1993: 70).¹⁹ However, like Bukurura above, Gotsbachner obtains no information proving that Sita Kishosha was involved in the early mobilization of self-defence groups.

The name Ng'wana Malundi, as previously mentioned in my exposition, relates to the legendary Sukuma hero known by this name who, apart from other heroic deeds, is known for, by magical means, returning cattle herds rustled by Maasai raiders, for bringing rains when there was drought and who, in the memories of people, epitomizes early protest and resistance against colonial rule (see e.g. Holmes and Austen 1972:401; Itandala 1992: 16-17; Boaz 1974). Names are not arbitrary with respect to their literary meanings. They tell a story (Brandström 1998). The hero's original name was Igulu son of Bugomola but he became known by names that told stories about him which spread his fame. The name of Ng'wana Malundi, it is said, refers to the shape of his legs, *malundi*, and, as the stories go, his volatile and fast moving manners, as Kishosha Mang'ombe he is the 'returner of cattle' and as Kishosha Malunde, a name which is sometimes heard, the 'returner of clouds', that is, somebody who brings rain.

Masanja, as mentioned above, writes that legend has it that Sita Kishosha was the grandson of the original mythical Ng'wana Malundi (1992:204). Gotsbachner and Bukurura state the same in their accounts (Bukurura 1994a:39-40; Gotsbachner 1993: 70). There is a clear point in the stories told to emphasize that Sita Kishosha was actually the grandson of the great legendary diviner, who died in the 1930s in Seke in northern Shinyanga, where he has his grave which is still attended to.²⁰ The close identity, according to Sukuma-Nyamwezi mode of thought, between alternate generations is worth noting. Although the father is superior to his son in the actual of family life of the present, what matters in genealogical reckoning is whether ego is classified as 'child', *ng'wana*, or as 'grandchild', *ng'wizukulu*, with reference to the founder of the descent group. In this perspective 'grandchild', belonging to the same generational category as the founder, is superior to 'child'. This mode of classification bears not only upon the long perspective, covering several generations, but also upon the restricted few-generational family group. This is where fathers and sons become in relation to each other both fathers and sons. The father bears a son who represents the second ascending generation, namely that of the father's

¹⁹ My translation.

²⁰ In 1997, I had the opportunity to meet with old people in Seke in Shinyanga District, who had personal memories of Ng'wana Malundi. I also visited the place in Seke, where the grave of the great diviner is said to be located, situated in a ritual grove.

father.²¹ As the grandson of the legendary hero Sita Kishosha fuses with his grandfather. The two different historical persons are woven into one single representation.²² The feature of weaving symbolic threads into the tissue of a simple factual narrative, one could say, broadens the perspective beyond the narrow dimensions of time and place, which frames the factual historical events.

There are, indeed, many tales rendered about the marvellous deeds of the great hero of the past, told and retold in various versions and adapted to different situations and contexts. One of these I was told, while discussing the emergence and rapid spread of the *Sungusungu* movement, alluding to visions, tribulations and, ultimately, accomplishments, went as follows: The hero got his vision through a dream. He dreamt that the dry tree in the middle of the vast plain was struck by lightning, caught fire and set the whole plain into flames. But before his vision could be realized, he had to undergo difficult trials away from home. He told his wife to fill a bowl with fresh milk and asked her to watch the milk every day while he was away. If the milk remained fresh his life was safe but if the milk went sour he was in trouble and would never return. The milk never went sour. The hero came back and accomplished his marvellous deeds.

The visions and deeds of the legendary hero become the visions and the deeds that made *Sungusungu*. The powers of the great diviner and rainmaker of the past, renowned for bringing the clouds back and thus saving the people from drought and famine, for protecting his people from attacks of the cattle raiding Maasai by magical means and for defying the colonial oppressors, are transposed into the present to bring the stolen cattle back.

²¹ The child's *lina lya ng'homba*, 'gruel name', is normally taken from its grand parental generation, which make the child in important social and ritual respects belong to the same generational category as its grand parents (e.g. Brandström 1990b: 7:10-12; Brandström 1998; see also Schönenberger 1995; Stroeken 2002).

²² The identity between alternating generations comes out in many situations of everyday life and, most conspicuously, when grandparents ostentatiously profess that their grandchildren are themselves. Blohm (1933: 164) gives a fine example of this mode of thinking when he quotes the father-in-law addressing his daughter-in-law after her first delivery: "I thank you, mother, for having borne me a grandchild; through this act you have borne myself" (my translation). The field data presented by Blohm were collected between 1897 and 1916 in southern Nyamwezi dialect. In 1984 when I was discussing with an agemate in northern Unyamwezi how he could manage, from his very meagre income, to cater not only for his own many children but also for a few grandchildren born by two of his unmarried daughters, he exclaimed: "What could I do? Grandchildren! They are me" (Brandström 1990a: 169).



Figure 7. The grave of Ng'wana Malundi in the ritual grove (James Mabula to the left, the author and a local companion).

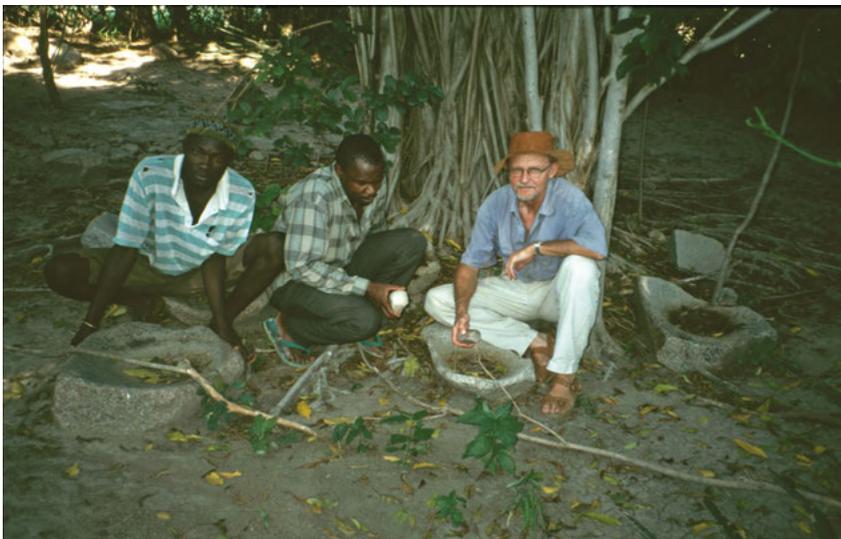


Figure 8. The grinding stones where Ng'wana Malundi is said to have made his magical medicine (the author and two local companions).

Back to Gotsbachner, though he finds it a tricky task to fully clarify the earliest history of the movement, due to the wealth of mutually contradic-

tory stories, he, like Bukurura above, ultimately settles for Jana as the area where people first started to form the kind of self-defence groups that later, after the spread of the movement, became known under the label of *Sungusungu* (1993: 68-72).

As to the question whether there was any outstanding figure in the early process of group formation, some of Gotsbachner's informants pointed to Ntima Change from Butondolo village in Jana Ward as the most prominent one. This information was, however, contradicted by Nkanga Iyumbu from Buluma village, also in Jana Ward, – the first leader to be elected district representative *ntemi* of *Sungusungu* after the movement had gained the recognition of the national leadership in 1983 – who claimed that he and not Ntima Change was the one who initiated the process of forming self-defence groups in the area. Other early leaders in the area mentioned by Gotsbachner were Bukano Jisungu, Yakobo Njange, Mananga Kengela, Robert Doto and Shugi Makonda (1993: 68-70), all names that figure in various stories within the area and beyond about the heroic deeds of the early *Sungusungu* groups.

One can, indeed, agree with Bukurura when he states with respect to the early process of group formation, “that *Sungusungu* was not founded by one person, however prominent, but by a group of elders who discussed and worked together in devising the mechanisms for its operation” (1994a: 40). It must be kept in mind that the grievances at that time were engaging people in various locations over the area in debates on how to solve their problems, and that various renderings of the events will often tend to enhance the role of the narrator and his own village in the process which led to the rise of the movement.

Regarding the time when villagers first started to organize themselves, Gotsbachner sets the date to early 1981. According to minutes kept by one of the early leaders that the researcher had an opportunity to meet, three group members were chosen sometime in April that year to go to Ushashi in eastern Sukumaland to acquire poison for arrows for the armament of the group.²³ This indicates that at least one group seems to have been formed by that time.

Meeting with early leaders

While on field trips in 1996 and 1997, I had the opportunity to visit Jana on the Kahama side of the district border and the neighbouring Didia on

²³ Easternmost Sukumaland is renowned for having skilled poison-makers.

the Shinyanga side. On the part of the government administration there were no obstacles since I had my official research permit which allowed me as a researcher to move freely in the region. My question was how to approach and build rapport with early *Sungusungu* leaders who were still active and alive. James Mabula, an acquaintance of mine since the mid-1970s when I worked in Mwanza Region with a Sida-funded multi-disciplinary project on integrated regional planning, came to my assistance. James, a schoolteacher by profession, was at that time Divisional Secretary in Mwamashimba in southern Mwanza Region, one of the areas where I as the anthropologist on the team carried out fieldwork on the socio-economic aspects of livestock keeping (Brandström 1976). Later on, James was posted as Education Officer in the district of Shinyanga but was now retired. He happened to have an old friend called Sombi Kang'wezi, who lived in Didia close to Jana, formerly also a schoolteacher, and we went both there together. Sombi invited us to stay with him during our visits and introduced us to his elder brother, Mungo Kang'wezi, who was one of the early leaders, installed as *ntemi* of *Sungusungu* in the village of Chembeli in Didia Ward in 1981 and who still filled that position. Mungo in turn, who was well acquainted with those of the early leadership cadre who were still alive or around in the area, helped us to come into contact with several of them. In addition to Mungo Kang'wezi, we had thus the opportunity to meet and hold discussions with, Injini Mashiri, Iweda Ndima, Yakobo Nyange, Everasti Yegela Mahizi, Shugi Makonda and Saliboko Madereko, all of them involved in the early formation of the movement in various leadership capacities.

From interviews and discussions, a picture emerged characterized by coherence in many respects but less so in others. There was a common agreement about personal names of early prominent leaders and about names of places associated with important events in the formation and organization of the first groups. There was also full agreement about the no-longer bearable depredations the villagers were exposed to at that time by the criminal gangs that sat the organizational process in motion. However, to the question of whether any one of the early leaders could be singled out as more prominent than any other in the early formation process, there was little agreement. The grievances people were facing at that time made villagers ponder how to go about when there was no help to be expected from the government and its organs for peace and security. There are numerous stories from various villages over a wide area about elders meeting secretly in the bush to try and find solutions to their problems, and this was apparently the situation in this border area between Kahama and Shinyanga Districts. Elders met in the bush to ponder their problems.

There were, however, two elders repeatedly mentioned by our informants as particularly influential in the early formative process. One of them was Mananga Kengela and the other Bukano Jisungu (Jisungu alternatively pronounced as Kisungu in southern dialect), both living in Jana Ward. Mananga is said to have come up with the idea of forming a village association of cattle-owners for self-defence against the cattle rustlers, but only with the involvement of actual cattle owners, since they were the main target for the ravaging organized gangs of rustlers, *batulija*, and to establish a fund with a fee of thirty shillings from every member to support the young men who were sent to track the stolen cattle. Bukano saw the potential in Mananga's idea but is said to have had a broader outlook on the issue than him. He realized that a single village that only involved cattle owners would not provide an organizational basis strong enough to withstand the organized crime and, consequently, there was a need for a broader range of, *kwigunana*, cooperation, that is, a more inclusive involvement of the villagers and the spread of the idea over a wider area. But there were other elders beside these two who are said to have participated in the early, secret deliberations on the issue. Names mentioned in addition to those mentioned above were Ntima Chenge, Nkanga Iyumbu, Magale Nkomya, Doto Ndugu, Madereko Singu and Iweda Ndima, the last one a renowned diviner in the area.

The discussions held lead to an agreement among the participants that they should form an army that included the many. *Bizunilija tubeje ijeshi lya bose*, that means, 'they agreed, let's form an army involving everybody', and that they would call themselves *Bapolo*, 'the cool ones', that is, an association of peaceful people. From here the message about forming village associations for self-defence was secretly spread around to trusted elders in neighbouring villages.

The first villages to form self-defence groups during this early mobilization phase in 1981 were, according to our interlocutors, in Jana Ward Kitongo, Butondolo, and Bukalange and in Didia Ward Mwamalulu, Chembeli and Bukumbi. With the geographical spread, the movement was gaining in strength, but the question now was how, in more detail, they were to organize and arm themselves for the task they had set themselves to realize.

There are, indeed, personal names, village names and also names of locations in the bush that are weaved into the narrative tissue which impart the stories, told and retold with a surplus meaning or a meaning beyond the literal words spoken. It was a time, so it was told, of great tension and strong feelings. In all the early planning strict secrecy was a must because whom could you trust? The criminal gangs were believed to have collabo-

rators within the villages, the police was considered corrupt and bribed by the resourceful rustlers and the government officials of higher administrative echelons would, if it came to their knowledge, certainly not appreciate the meetings, deliberations and planning taking place in the bush. There was therefore the need for very tacit manoeuvring in these early efforts to build up the movement.

In this context of the formation of the movement there were three occasions that, among our interlocutors, were considered particularly important and vividly kept in their memories, all three named by features in the environment where the occasions took place. The first of these was called *ha mongo*, 'by the river', the second *ha mshishi*, 'under the tamarind tree', and the third one *ha nkola*, 'under the *nkola* tree (a species of hardwood).

The first of these occasions, 'by the river', refers to the secret meeting when the first *ntemi* was elected and installed together with the leadership cadre of the village complex of Butondolo/Kitongo in Jana. Leaders selected at this occasion were, according to our informants, Ntima Chenge as *ntemi*, Injini Mashiri as deputy *ntemi*, Bukano Jisungu as *tunza hazina*, treasurer, and Yakobo Njange as *katibu*, secretary. A song composed in praise of Ntima Chenge goes as follows:

*U'Ntima Chenge alina masala
tubeje busalama twiunge.
Lelo basambo bakong 'wanzoka
tubadukagule.
A'bibi tubafatile u'mapanda gabo.
Tulabakomange machuma.*

Ntima Chenge a man of wisdom
(told us), let's unite and restore peace.
Today the robbers, the snake chohabitors,
let's abuse them,
let's track them down
We shall stop them with iron.

At the second and third of these occasions, *batemi* (plur. of *ntemi*) were initiated for several villages in Jana and Didia Wards and now with an association involving several villages one was building up strength enough for, ultimately, waging a war against the criminal gangs.

But there was still the issue on how, in more detail, they were to organize and arm themselves for developing an efficient force for self-defence.

A basic organizational idiom of great importance for mobilizing the villagers in case of need, as mentioned previously, was the *ng'wano* institution that has long historical roots among Sukuma-Nyamwezi. The *ng'wano* institution was part of a security system within the village. In case of emergency occasioned by dangers of various kinds, a hue and cry of a special kind, the very meaning of the word *ng'wano*,²⁴ was raised to alarm the neighbours and it is then the obligation of every able-bodied man to rush out for assistance with whatever means at hand, be it a stick, bow and arrows or a gun. To refrain from turning up is considered a serious offence against the community and such people, if no agreeable reasons could be given for not participating, would be liable to pay a fine, called *masumule* or *lwadida*, to the community.²⁵ Human voice, however, does not reach far beyond the immediate neighbourhood, so there was a need for a means for raising alarm with a more far-reaching sound. What became the solution to this problem was the *ndulilu*, the kind of gourd-stem whistle or flute, which, when blown, makes a muffled, far-reaching sound. In case of serious emergency such as cattle rustling, the *ndulilu* was to be blown. Neighbouring villages could swiftly be alerted by the sound and, since sound travels faster than cattle rustlers, the perpetrators stood a poor chance not to be encircled by the pursuers who were prepared to do their part in recovering the stolen cattle and return them to their proper owners. The *ndulilu* now became the means for raising alarm wherever the movement spread over the wider Sukuma-Nyamwezi area.

In some important respects, one could say, that the mode of operation developed within the movement was basically an extension of the existing *ng'wano* institution now reaching beyond the precincts of the single village. It could furthermore be argued that the *ng'wano* institution as a familiar organizational idiom facilitated the rapid spread of *Sungusungu* among Sukuma-Nyamwezi villages. New organizational forms could easily be developed and elaborated on the basis of a familiar organizational template. Furthermore, the idea of *buzenganwa*, 'neighbourliness', extended to incorporate neighbouring villages in cooperation for a common course, was not an alien thought to the people.

²⁴ *Ng'wano* is the noun of the verb *kwana*, 'make noise', 'cry out'.

²⁵ During one of my visits to the area back in the 1960s, I failed, out of ignorance, to turn up when there was a *ng'wano* in the middle of the night. The following day I was summoned to a council of village elders to explain myself. The long and eloquent exhortations addressed to me by the elders were all about good neighbourliness, *buzenganwa*. By not showing concern I had severely failed in *buzenganwa*. Fortunately, the elders forgave me. Otherwise I would have been fined one to two goats.



Figure 9. *Ndulilu*, the gourd-stem whistle for raising alarm. (Photo: Per Brandström)

Still there was the issue of armament to be solved, that is, how were the self-defence groups to arm themselves for their task?

As regarding many other questions about the formation of the *Sungusungu*, there are several stories about the issue of armament. The most straightforward story says that to acquire efficient firearms was both difficult and costly and, in addition, the government authorities would never turn a blind eye to villagers arming themselves with firearms in great numbers. Therefore, they would simply have to rely on their customary weapons, namely bow and arrows. But, as mentioned above, there are other stories more imaginative than this rather factual one.

A more imaginative story on the issue of armament was told to us by one of our informants. According to him, a group of elders – consisting of Bukano Jisungu, Ntima Chenge, Yakobo Njange, Magale Nkonya, a man called Kipole and the narrator himself, Everasti Mahizi, all from Jana Ward – met over a game of *baob*, the board game so commonly played. The topic of the day they were discussing was the question of how to form their self-defence and how they should arm themselves, *kwilinda*. Some of the participants brought up the idea of acquiring firearms but Kipole objected to that idea. He argued that fighting the rustlers with the same weapons as they used when raiding them would not do. Instead they

should have to rely on their own ingenuity, use their traditional weapons, bow and arrows, apply tactics, silently pursue the rustlers when they had emptied a cattle corral by night, intercept them, hide in the bush and attack them by surprise with their bows and arrows. The elders agreed among themselves on the issue and selected representatives to go to eastern Sukumaland for acquiring poison to make their arrows lethal.

Indeed, “No man speaks from nowhere” (Mudimbe 1991: 20, citing de Certeau 1969). It is a matter of being situated somewhere, be it ‘the global community’ of the Western cosmopolitan or the village land of a Tanzanian peasant. But the dynamic aspect of place is space – “*space is a practiced place*” (de Certeau 1984: 117, emphasis in original). The local texture of place yields the semantics of space, and the stories we are told can be said “to carry out a labor that constantly transform places into spaces or spaces into places” (1984: 118). The stories we are told about riverbeds, localised trees, village names and personal names connected to identified places should not be read as a mere matter of local geography but as statements containing a message about the actors’ situatedness and bearings within a specific social and political environment where the narrative carries out the labour of transforming place into a space of identity and a domain of belonging.

We learn from the testimonies of our interlocutors about an organization and of a mode operation that is gradually formed during this period of secret deliberations and meetings, including initiatory practices regarding not only the leadership cadre but the whole village community in the respective village involved, until the time one felt strong enough to take armed action. There was even a song composed, sung for us by our informants, setting a date when the first organized action against cattle rustlers is said to have occurred:

*Tukanja tarhehe makumiabili
kubatula basambo nidatu
ngwe’wezi gwa kenda.*

We started on the 23rd of September (1981)
to fight the robbers.

As concerning so many other issues during this early phase of the movement, there are several versions about how and when the first armed actions took place. One of the versions, we were told, tells that there was a case of cattle rustling in late 1981 after the first forming of associations for village self-defence. An alarm was raised that went from village to village,

the rustlers were pursued and intercepted and a few of them were killed. One of the surviving rustlers rushed to the district office in Kahama and reported the incident, alleging that an association had been formed in Jana with the expressed purpose of killing people. The District Commissioner immediately took action and about twenty persons were arrested on 4th December in 1981,²⁶ among them the narrator of this story himself. The party, however, the narration continues, made investigations and President Nyerere visited the area personally to learn about what was actually going on. Following these investigations all those who had been arrested were released from prison. That was in October 1982. While the other of the early leaders were imprisoned, Ntima Chenge, Mananga Nkengela, Magale Nkonya and Nkanga Iyumbu, who had not been apprehended, were said to have consolidated the movement. When the official investigations concluded that it was fully in accordance with the Party Guidelines that the citizens defended themselves against crime, the movement was gaining official recognition. Although, in doing so they should not contravene the law but cooperate with the state organs for the security of the citizens, With this, a process began to overcome the initially conflict-loaded relationship between the village initiators and the government and for a gradual integration of the movement for self-defence into the official village and district administrative machinery.

The naming of the movement, as indicated in the foregoing, is also a story with many versions. Thus, according to the Jana/Didia version told to us, when people first started to organize themselves against what they experienced as threatening and socially disintegrating forces, they called themselves *Bapolo*, 'the cool ones', with the task of warring for *mhola*, the peace that was lost²⁷ When the movement spread the common designation became *Basalama* when referring to the people involved, and *Busalama*, when referring to the movement in entirety. These designations derive from the Swahili word *salama*, meaning peace, safety, health. The name *Sungusungu* came into use later on in the history of the movement. This word, also mentioned in the foregoing, derives from the Sukuma-Nyamwezi word for poison, *busungu*. All abled-bodied men had to arm themselves with bows and poisoned arrows. Thus, they were *Basun-*

²⁶ This information about the time of the first arresting of members of the movement corresponds to the information given by Bukurura. He writes: "Related to the information on the record is that the earliest arrests of *Sungusungu* members were made in Kitongo village in December 1981. On that occasion 12 people were arrested" (1994a: 40).

²⁷ This alludes to the common theme in the thought-world of many Bantu peoples where coolness represents health and social peace while heat represents aggression and disintegrating forces.

gusungu, ‘those who carry poisoned arrows’. This name, we were told, had some particular historical roots, that is, in the past hunters who used poisoned arrows for hunting were called *Basungusungu*. Here, one could say, an association is made between the hunters of the past who audaciously faced the wild of the bush with the *Basungusungu* warriors of the present, facing the wild threatening their contemporary society. However, as pointed out earlier, this term was soon, when the movement spread beyond its original area, abbreviated to *Sungusungu* and commonly taken for the Swahili word *sungusungu*, simply meaning a species of black ants.²⁸

We can, of course, ask ourselves the questions of when and where it all began and about who the very initiators were and on the basis of available evidence arrive at reasonably well-grounded answers. However, of more interest for the present interpretative journey than historical accuracy are the dynamic and processual aspects in the developments of the movement, that is, the lived experience of those involved, their way of reasoning and acting in building up a grassroots movement of such an impressive force and rapid spread over a wide area as that of *Sungusungu*.

²⁸ Abrahams and Heald provide examples from their fieldwork of inventive applications of this linguistic mistake from places beyond the area of origin of the movement, where the image of the black biting ants was taken as a metaphor for the mass of small people against the big thugs and the black colour, according to their informants, was associated with the black cloths Sukuma pastoralists sometimes wear and the black colour seen as an unpropitious colour, consonant with the tough task of the warriors (Abrahams 1987: 181; Heald 2002: 4). See also Campbell and his research assistants, being subject to a linguistic misinterpretation of the term (1989: 23).

4. Broadening the perspective

Emergence and developments

The very emergence of *Sungusungu*, that is the early steps people took to organize themselves, is, as has been indicated in the foregoing, to a considerable extent wrapped in mystery. People were keenly aware that by meeting secretly in the bush, as they initially did, and by spreading the message and starting to organize themselves, they were contravening the law of the state. People were thus challenging the outer world of power. They knew it and, consequently, they expected repression and prepared themselves to face it with their own means, one of which was secrecy. But this is not to say, as also has been shown in preceding chapters, that there is a drought of information in terms of stories being told. The stories told are indeed manifold. They are formed into a variety of localized tales, which all, while intoning a common theme, present variations of mutually conflicting contents regarding the historical details on the emergence and early formation of the movement. One can even say that these ‘early facts’, as narrated among the people who participated, in many cases assume an almost mythical character. The common theme in the stories is simple and straightforward. It tells the story of a seriously afflicted social world, of a disintegrating community and the sufferings of people who were left on their own, to their own devices, to their own ingenuity and their own knowledge. While the common theme concerns the question “Why?”, one could say, the many conflicting variations on this theme address the question “How?”. And this is where the stories endow the ‘early facts’ with a mythical character. In these stories, the seeds that grew into a social force, which challenged the power of the state, were conceived in the dream of a great diviner, in the oracle of an old wise woman or in the play of a *bao* board game among a group of close allies. These tales engage a local discourse on power. They place a symbolism of great ambivalence on stage, like a Janus-face which leaves us to reflect, but not, like the diviner reading the trails of the oracle to the afflicted patient, to reveal its secrecy.

The question “Why?” is also the point where there is agreement among the external observers and commentators on *Sungusungu*. In his ethnographically detailed PhD thesis, Bukurura summarizes the commonly held opinion when he simply states that “[t]here is a general agreement among researchers that *Sungusungu* was formed to provide order and security among the rural communities which found themselves confronted with insecurity and lawlessness” (1994a: 38). The time preceding the rise of *Sungusungu* was characterized by growing crisis in the rural areas. The forced villagization in the 1970s, *Operation Vijiji*, meant a shift in the early *ujamaa* policy, which emphasized persuasion rather than coercion in achieving its goals of socialist transformation. Indeed, the *ujamaa* policy, following the Arusha Declaration of 1967, emphatically stressed the voluntary decision of the people themselves to form production co-operatives, called *ujamaa* villages, which were conceived as a main tool for rural development in a socialist direction (see e.g. Nyerere 1973:66-70). However, in 1973 President Nyerere declared that by 1976 all Tanzanians would have to live in villages. Goran Hyden has called the compulsory villagization which followed this political decision “the strongest blow to peasant autonomy after independence” (Hyden 1980: 129). This political programme was implemented in a large-scale manner with great vigour and rapidity. Hyden writes, “[t]he compulsory villagization in Tanzania between 1973 and 1976 is the largest resettlement effort in the history of Africa” (Hyden 1980: 130). In the Mwanza, Shinyanga and Tabora regions, where the majority of the Sukuma and Nyamwezi people live, the villagization campaigns were carried out in 1974. The previous dispersed settlement pattern, adapted to extensive agro-pastoral land-use practices of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, was thus in a short timespan remoulded into a pattern of more nucleated villages. But the operation not only meant the remoulding of physical settlement patterns, which itself put the people under increasing pressure, due to hardships involved in demolishing old houses and rebuilding new ones. It also meant drudgery because of longer distances to family fields and to pasture gradually leading to over-utilization of land and decreasing yields in the vicinity of the villages because of congestion of people and livestock. It also implied more direct changes in social relationships. Previously people had, to a considerable extent, been in a position to choose their neighbours. In the new situation where people were moved together indiscriminately to form concentrated settlements, existing customary practices for inclusion and exclusion of people in the community and for handling intra-community conflicts were difficult to maintain. Therefore, one can argue, that the compulsory villagization was not only, as Hyden put it, a “blow to peasant autonomy” in general but

also, simultaneously in the cultural and social context of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, a blow undermining community spirit in particular.²⁹

Among the researchers who have taken an interest in the development of *Sungusungu*, Bukurura is also the one who most thoroughly has considered the wider contextual prelude of the movement (1994a:17-36). He moves from the time of colonial governance by indirect rule through the local chiefs, the abolition of the chiefly system soon after independence in the early 1960s, and increasing political penetration and centralization of power through the appointment of government cadres down to village level and the organization of the supreme ruling party reaching out all the way to the ten-cell units in the villages. He hints at the changes in the early 1970s from a policy of persuasion to that of confrontation and coercion, which most evidently became manifest in the villagization programme of the mid-1970s, where, in Bukurura's words, "appointed officials resorted to high and heavy handedness in their dealing with the villagers" (1994a:34). He also remarks that this change of policy was reflected in a decreasing involvement of villagers in decision making in place of increasing centralized political control through instructions issued to the villagers, the obedience of which officials at divisional and ward levels were supposed to ensure. He, furthermore, points to the serious economic crises of the 1970s which thwarted the ambitions of the government to fulfil its objectives to capture the "uncaptured peasantry" with all its "exit options" to evade the control of the state (Hyden 1980). Bukurura pays special attention to the effects of these changes on the criminal justice

²⁹Abrahams finds the role of the new villages complicated in relation to the rise of *Sungusungu* (Abrahams 1987: 194). He argues that it is possible that the new villages have contributed to the problems, which *Sungusungu* set out to solve while at the same time the pattern of compact settlements facilitated the rapid mobilization and formation of *Sungusungu* groups. Bukurura, on his part, also emphasizes the positive aspects of the villagization programme for the strengthening of neighbourhood relations (1994a:161), while Campbell and Mesaki stress the negative and disintegrative aspect of the forced villagization (Campbell 1989: 20-21; Mesaki 1994: 54-55). My own experience from the field would make me inclined to concur with Campbell and Mesaki in emphasizing the disintegrative role of this historical fact. However, viewing the problem in its totality, both as disintegration and mobilization, my opinion would come closer to Abrahams more dialectical point of view. That is, at the same time as the compulsory villagization created a situation, which vitiated against the unity of the community, it provided, due to the ensuing tendencies toward disintegration, an impetus for reintegration and revival of community spirit. Abraham's assumption that the compact settlements facilitated the rapid creation of *Sungusungu* groups might carry weight, but I cannot see this assumption clearly substantiated by the Sukuma-Nyamwezi ethnography. Communication within and between the neighbourhoods was even before villagization and the formation of more nucleated settlements remarkably effective.

system and to the conditions of order and security in the countryside. During this period armed robbery and cattle rustling were on the increase. He lists among important factors for the deteriorating situation, inefficient bureaucracy, inflation and shortage of essential items, an increased circulation of firearms, particularly after the Uganda war, which ended in 1979, and “an unprecedented increase in corruption in high places in general and in the Police force and the Judiciary in particular” (1994a:34). Campbell adds to the picture of the deteriorating situation by presenting figures of cattle thefts and murders in Shinyanga, Maswa, Kahama and Bariadi districts, where there were 11,453 cattle thefts reported and 15 murders in 1981 and 21,922 cattle thefts and 8 murders in 1982 (1989:21). He also points to the role of the black market in this process in which, apart from stolen cattle, gold (mined in the area) and also diamonds, constituted valuables for smuggling out of the region and the country and in exchange for contraband goods. He also refers to rumours reported in the press of up to 11 deaths per week in Geita, the main gold mining district in Mwanza region (1989:21-22).

People in the villages were, indeed, seriously affected. They were facing forces beyond their control. When I, in 1978, spent a month in one of the villages in the Nzega District of Tabora Region, where I previously did fieldwork in 1970 and 1972, I took note of changes, that had occurred. In the period between my visits, villagization had been implemented. In this rather densely populated area, villagization did not necessitate people to move long distances to form new villages, but it nevertheless meant a regrouping of people in a more strict lineal pattern, along ‘village streets’, which was radically different from the previous settlement pattern of homesteads and hamlets, seemingly haphazardly spread within the area constituting a named neighbourhood. It also meant an enlargement of the scale of settlements. I encountered the increase of violent crime and cattle rustling as a main topic among the villagers. Even this particular village had been severely hit by this plague. Several families had suffered from the attacks of cattle rustlers, housebreaking was said to be common and petty crime was prevalent. Unless kept under the close surveillance of the owner, I was told, bicycles, radios, cloths and even food would just disappear, never to be retrieved again. One night during my stay, a family living at a distance of some 400 meters from the house where I stayed, lost its entire herd to the rustlers. Due to the expected ruthlessness and the firearms of the thieves, the owner did not dare to raise alarm immediately. Thus, when the alarm later was raised and a pursuing party organized by the villagers, the cattle rustlers were already on the safe side and the stolen cattle were never traced. In the face of this growing problem, the villagers

experienced themselves as powerless and forgotten by the party and the government. They saw themselves as prey of a conspiracy of overwhelming strength, of an organized crime, which, apart from the bandits themselves, involved elements within the police and the local courts, transporters in the townships and rich businessmen, and disloyal neighbours within the village. The Sukuma-Nyamwezi are extremely good story tellers (see e.g. Brandström 1990b: Chapter 7) and it goes without saying that the stories told by the villagers about their tribulations were well composed, lively, full of detail and, to the listener, very suggestive. These stories did not only tell about enemies who attacked the community from the outside and of disloyal neighbours who joined hands with these outside forces. Witchcraft was frequently a concomitant theme, in fact, to an extent I never encountered before. That is, rumours of witches within the community, who caused illness, misfortune and death.

I mentioned above the rumours on witchcraft in the village where I stayed in 1978. In fact, the increase of witchcraft suspicion and accusations was a general feature all over the Sukuma-Nyamwezi area during this period. Particularly in the northern parts, that is the administrative regions of Mwanza and Shinyanga or the area, which is commonly called Sukumaland, violent dealing with suspected witches was becoming prevalent. In an article on this particular problem in Sukumaland, Simeon Mesaki presents figures on reported witchcraft related murders from thirteen of the country's then twenty mainland regions between 1970 and 1984. According to his sources, Mwanza and Shinyanga alone accounted for 2,246 out of a total of 3,692 reported witchcraft-related deaths for all these thirteen regions (1994: 52). The figures are alarming as such but may be even more so, since the nature of witchcraft makes for secrecy and thus a likely underreporting.³⁰ While Mesaki emphasizes the rootedness of witchcraft beliefs “in the whole Sukuma system of knowledge and morality”, he understands the present scale of witchcraft accusations and violence as a recent phenomenon, which had been developing since the 1960s in the wake of political and economic changes that followed independence, among which the forced villagization played a most decisive part

³⁰Abrahams, in a comment to Mesaki's article, takes a different position. He is cautious not to read too much into figures and reports on witchcraft related homicide because of the difficulties of establishing clear evidence of connections between the deaths and witchcraft (1994: 16). It is true that the difficulties are enormous in a juridically satisfying way. But witchcraft thrives by rumour and rumour causes people being killed. Brutal killings are an obvious fact and if these, by the people concerned, are related to witchcraft, the killings are both to them and to the authorities, who have taken these developments very seriously, witchcraft related facts which have to be approached and treated as such.

(1994: 48). He sketches a scenario where the previous mechanisms in Sukuma society to mediate and contain social tension, expressed in the idiom of witchcraft, within the bounds of ordered community life, had eroded and opened up for socially destructive violence within the community.³¹ Whatever the ‘true’ explanation ultimately may be, the upsurge of witchcraft accusations and killings finds the enemy in close proximity within the community and it hits at the seemingly weakest in this proximity, that is, women and, among them, predominantly old women (see Mesaki 1994, 1995).

One can firmly state that social tension was steadily building up during this period. There was pressure from the outside, most visibly in the form of organized and violent crime, and there were fissional processes within the communities, perhaps most evidently expressed in the idiom of witchcraft, which led to suspicion and accusations among relatives, affines and neighbours. There were, in fact, in the period preceding the rise of *Sungusungu*, a number of local protest actions or smaller uprisings specifically directed against the increase in cattle rustling. Masanja and Bukurura mentions a number of instances of protests, one of these called *Buchagi Machimu*, ‘raise your spears’ (Masanja 1992: 204; Bukurura 1994a: 34), the rumours of which spread quite widely among people, claiming that villagers took the law into their own hands and fought the cattle rustlers operating in their area. However, these various manifestations of social protest were highly localized. They did not spread into adjacent areas, and they were soon curtailed and suppressed by the government through its police force.

Though unpredictable in terms of form and direction, time was ripe, as it were, for social protest. However, as James Scott nicely put it in his study of everyday resistance among the Malaysian peasants of Sedaka, “[r]esistance begins [...] as, I suspect, all historical resistance by subordinate classes begins: close to the ground, rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience” (1985: 348). And this is where researchers, who have paid attention to *Sungusungu*, would all agree, irrespective of any disagreements due to differences in mode of explanation and interpretative perspectives, namely that *Sungusungu* as a social phenomenon emerged very close to the ground, deeply rooted “in the homely

³¹Mesaki bases his interpretations of the increase of witchcraft related violence among the Sukuma on Mary Douglas’s now almost classical sociological model (Mesaki 1994:55-56). This is one way of many to help improve our intellectual understanding of this type of social phenomenon. For a more thorough and penetrating treatment of the issue of witchcraft among the Sukuma, see Koen Stroeken’s monograph, *Moral power: The Magic of Witchcraft* (2010).

but meaningful realities” of the daily experience of the people themselves who were involved.

Local renderings

In my experience of taking part in *Sungusungu* meetings, conversations and interviews with leaders, being together with ordinary people and just listening to stories being told, there are two narrative dimensions or themes, which come to the fore in the stories and renderings. One theme alludes to aspects in the Sukuma-Nyamwezi cosmology, to notions of extraordinary powers, of divination, oracles, clairvoyance and knowledge of medicine from trees and herbs and from other potent sources, acquired through apprenticeship with famous diviners or through the direct mediation of the ancestors. This theme may be called a discourse on power, because it relates to conceptions of power. The other theme links to Sukuma-Nyamwezi social values and ideas about the morally exemplary person in the community. This theme may be called a moral discourse, because it concerns notions about social mutuality and responsibility within and between the neighbourhoods where people live.

The second of these two themes, which invariably comes forth in the context of more formal interviews, emphasises the collective nature of the early formative processes of *Sungusungu*. Here solutions are found, not in the sphere of extraordinary powers but in the mundane arena of everyday social life. A group of elders meet at a funeral in a village (cf. Bukurura 1994a:39), over a game of *bao* (see above) or in any other normal community context; to discuss their worries and grievances and start to share ideas on how to deal with their problems. Below I summarize three of the oral accounts from the two preceding chapters as illustrations to this mode of representation.

Account 1.

Sometime in 1981, six men met in the village of Jana to play *bao*. While playing they discussed with each other. There was no longer peace, *mhola*, in their country. They felt they were under the rule of thieves and bandits and organized gangs of *batulija*, cattle rustlers, who with increasing boldness and with impunity terrorized the people. The villager's lives and property were threatened and cattle owners were subjected to extortion by competing gangs of thieves in order to avoid their visits. The villagers would have to defend themselves, *kwilinda*. There was a state of war, *bulugu*, and thus a war had to be waged to regain peace. So, a process was set in motion. A series of se-

cret meetings were held in the forest, leaders were elected and initiated, and an increasing number of reliable villagers joined the new association for self-defence until enough strength was gained to successfully wage a war against the thieves. Initially there were ideas of acquiring firearms. But others objected, arguing that the enemies, who used modern arms, could not successfully be fought with their own weapons. Thus, only traditional weaponry, that is bow and poisoned arrows, was to be used and men were sent to eastern Sukumaland to acquire the poison, *busungu*. The members started to call themselves *Bapolo* and later *Basalama*, the peacekeeping people. But their poisoned arrows recalled to peoples' minds the memory of the hunters of the past who were called *Basungusungu* because of their poisoned arrows, and so the name of *(Ba)Sungusungu* started to spread among people.

Account 2.

There was an elder in the village of Butondolo, called Mananga Kengela. He saw the need of the cattle owners to cooperate, *kwigunana* in organizing themselves against the thieves and cattle rustlers. His idea was that members should contribute to a fund to provide for the needs of the young men when they were to track stolen cattle long distances. Mananga, however, did not see far enough. The elder Bukano Jisungu in neighbouring Kitongo was a more farsighted man. He understood the value of Mananga's idea but he realized the need of the village as a whole, including non-cattle owners, to unite in order to gain strength enough to succeed with their task. The elders joined hands and so they succeeded.

Account 3.

The elders had discussed the deteriorating situation for a long time. Efforts had been made to unite the cattle owners who were the primary target of the thieves. The elders realized that all villagers had to agree, *kwiwigwa*, and unite in action against the threats they were facing but those who did not own cattle were not prepared to risk their lives for the sake of the cattle owners. There was division between owners and non-owners. The increasing pressure made them, however, ultimately to unite in tracking stolen cattle. Ultimately six villages united in a pact of defence and defence groups were formed in each of these villages.

In these accounts, solutions are found, not with reference to the sphere of extraordinary powers but indeed in the mundane arena of everyday social life. People meet, they discuss, they negotiate and, ultimately, unite in common action. There are heroes and remarkable persons in these accounts as well, but the notion of the remarkable person and his/her importance recedes in place for the idiom of the local community as a source

of power. These renderings mediate and enhance, I would argue, community values, which are deeply ingrained in Sukuma-Nyamwezi thought and social tradition. They elaborate on the strongly morally loaded notion of *buzenganwa*, neighbourliness, which, in the local idiom, above all entails *kwiwigwa*, which literally means ‘listening to each other’, that is agreement between neighbours, *kwigunana*, mutual help and assistance, and *kwilinda*, guarding and protecting each others life and property. The social motion in the society at that time, and its subsequent articulation in organized action are depicted as locally grounded within the communities. The creation of *Sungusungu* is in these accounts not described as an invention brought to the community from the outside, but as a seed that grew from within the community, the same kind of seed but planted in different places.

But there were problems with creating unity among the villagers because of existing differentiation within the villages. This fact is reflected in Account 2 and 3 above. As has been underscored in the foregoing, the economy of the vast majority of Sukuma-Nyamwezi peasants is thoroughly agro-pastoral. Livestock constitutes an integral part of the rural economy, and it is furthermore an important asset not only economically but also socially. There is, indeed, livestock in each and every Sukuma and Nyamwezi village, however ownership, as has been indicated in the foregoing, is unevenly spread. Some families own and control large herds of cattle, others own less numerous herds and still others only have certain stakes in family herds or own no livestock at all. Masanja mentions *Chama cha Kumi*, ‘Party of Ten’, which was an organization among rich cattle owners for bailing themselves out from the extortions of the organized cattle rustlers, *batulija* (Masanja 1992: 204-205). While the poorer people in the villages were ruthlessly exposed to the machinations of the rampant criminality, rich cattle owners were in a position to safeguard their interests to a certain extent. Consequently, they often came under suspicion of being in collusion with the gangs. Account 2 above praises the wisdom of Bukano Jisungu to realize the need to move beyond internal differences and create a unified front against the experienced evil, a front that would even check the disintegrative forces within the villages, while Account 3 pinpoints how an agreement was ultimately reached about united organized action.

But why should cattle assume such a value as to unite a community beyond internal differentiation and conflicting interests? It is worth reiterating that in an economy where livestock still constitutes the most significant form of storable wealth available to the common man and woman cattle naturally become an extremely important economic asset. But there

is more to it than only that. There are also marked social and deep symbolic values attached to cattle. There is the old saying among the Sukuma, *Tuti bana ba baba biswe aliyo tuli bana ba ng'wombe ja baba siswe*, 'We are not the children of our fathers; we are the children of our fathers' cattle' (Cory 1953: 14). Through bridewealth and the exchange of women for cattle, social bonds are created between previously unrelated family groups. People and cattle, one could argue, fuse symbolically into a common value such that theft of cattle could be likened to witchcraft, where witchcraft represents the radical evil within the community while cattle theft represents the radical evil hitting the community from the wild of the outside. The strong emotional aversion against the witch equals the aversion against the cattle rustler. From this perspective of viewing the world, they are, to turn Masanja's quote from the daily press in 1983 upside down (chapter 1), the ones who "have gone against humanity" (1992: 203).

In a situation of social and economic crises and societal changes caused by powers far beyond the reach and control of the villagers in their mundane everyday life, where cattle also assume new values in the changing order of things, there is certainly reforging of meanings and values while, at the same time, long-held views retain importance.

Again Winans' suggestive analysis could be referred to on the conundrum of hyenas allegedly killing cattle in Pawaga in southern Tanzania: "The beasts of the forests were destroying one of the few things [namely cattle] that had meaning both in the old and the new orders" (Winans 1992: 127). Who the 'hyenas' were in our *Sungusungu* case, 'the beasts of the forest', has been well illustrated in the foregoing – *basambo*, the robbers, *batulija*, 'those who suddenly strike' – namely, the cattle rustlers. But from where did they come? Were they insiders or outsiders, did they belong to one's own people or did they come from elsewhere? Cattle rustling as such was not a new phenomenon in this part of the world. Oral tradition abounds with stories about this subject. There were stories about inter-ethnic cattle raiding, particularly about Maasai raiding in eastern Sukumaland. There was even in that particular area an institution with long tradition, called *dagashida*, for community mobilization and for self-defence against the raiders (see e.g. Brandström 1996). But there were also stories about intra-ethnic cattle thefts, about brutal and immoral people who did not care for the lives and the peace of their fellow human beings, though, these stories were most often about misdeeds that had

occurred somewhere else and not in the close surroundings of the storytellers.³²

What now differed most dramatically between past and present was the unprecedented scale of crime and a situation where, in the views and reasonings of people, the enemy was there, both within the community and in the outside wild. A necessary step when initiating a village into *Sungusungu* was to cleanse the community of evildoers; thieves were made to confess (see Issa's account of the process in chapter 2). They represented an enemy within the community but in contrast to the figure of the witch, perceived as entirely of the intimate inside, they were ambiguous figures linked both to the known inside and to the unknown outside. Yet, about this outer world there were signs to be read that made rumours and suspicions thrive. However, from where the outside enemy came, whether from near or afar, was to my interlocutors in the field a matter of secondary interest. What mattered the most to them was the havoc *basambo* caused to them from wherever they came and how to find means and ways to remedy the evil befalling them.

In his treatment of political discourse and consciousness among the Shambaa peasants in north-eastern Tanzania, Feierman contends, “[w]hen peasants organise political movements, or when they reflect on collective experience, they speak about how to bring life rather than death, to bring prosperity instead of hunger, and to bring justice rather than inequity”. He furthermore argues that “the means for achieving these are defined by peasants themselves; it is peasants who draw upon a rich variety of past forms of political language; it is peasants who create new political discourse” (1990: 3). Indeed, the local representations of the emergence and growth of the *Sungusungu* movement heavily drew on the “rich variety of past forms of political language”. The dimensions of power and of morality, reflected in the various renderings of local history and events, intertwine in the narrative fabrics in an intricate way which links the present to the past and the past to the present. But this is not simply a rehashing of past forms. It also represents something new. Through the powers of the past, in the midst of the turbulence and afflictions of the present, a vision is created about a future with a moral community regained. The various threads of the past and the present, one could argue, weave into a fabric with a pattern clear and telling enough to unite people into action against the experienced evil, even while envisaging powerful resistance from the state.

³² As young I listened to many stories on this theme, colourful stories and to us attentive listeners most like a kind of grisly and unnerving fairy tales.

5. Who is a Sukuma and who is a Nyamwezi?

I have so far in the text used ethnic labels in a rather conventional and unreflecting manner. It was indeed among people who call themselves Sukuma and Nyamwezi, and called so by others, that the *Sungusungu* movement emerged. But what do the ethnic labels employed stand for, if we consider the issue in more close detail, and what did ethnicity and the cultural practices and values mean in the emergence and spread of the movement? Before proceeding with my ethnographic exploration more narrowly focused on the *Sungusungu* movement, I will in this chapter, as a background to the coming reasoning (next chapter), give the question of ethnic classification and identity some consideration.

Ethnic classification and identity

The reading of official documents and early ethnographic accounts often give the impression that tribal and ethnic labels refer to an empirical order comparable to that of natural facts. As such, there are official censuses with exact figures on the various ‘tribal’ groups, maps indicating ‘tribal’ territories and geographical distribution and descriptions as to what distinguishes one group from the other in cultural and linguistic terms.³³ However, it is a well-known fact that the issue of ethnicity is a tricky one. There are, indeed, ethnic designations in the real world but they can mean a great many different things. Ethnic classification and identity, as repeatedly argued in the more recent anthropological literature on the topic are not natural facts but cultural constructions “which are liable continually to be reconstructed or amended” (Ovesen 1983: 331).

³³ Linguistic classification of Sukuma-Nyamwezi (Malcolm Guthrie’s referential classification of Bantu languages): Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Group, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid Southern, Narrow Bantu, Central, F, Sukuma-Nyamwezi (F.21 & F.22) (1967-1971).

The issue of Sukuma-Nyamwezi identity, or identities, is no exception to this rule. From the pre-colonial era, the ongoing process of national integration in Tanzania, ethnic classification and identity have been liable to reconstruction or amendments in interaction with the outside world. By applying a historical perspective and by contrasting different points of observation, I will in this chapter illustrate some essential elements for the understanding of ethnic classification and identification in this particular cultural area.

Outsiders' classification

How do the 'outsiders' classify the people rendered here as the Sukuma-Nyamwezi? In early historical sources, the country of the Nyamwezi, often referred to the whole area south of Lake Victoria extending "between 32° and 34° E. of Greenwich, and from 2° 30' to 6° S. lat." (Broyon-Mirambo 1877: 29). Striking similarities in language, cultural features and social and political organization in this region were generally acknowledged.³⁴ Yet there was a lot of confusion at this early stage as to how to delimit the various 'tribal' groups within this geographical region. John Hanning Speke, the first European to traverse the area from south to north, that was in 1858, seemed to be of the opinion that all the various peoples inhabiting this country constituted sub-divisions of the Nyamwezi people. In a passage on the Sukuma he contends: "Sukuma means north, and the Wasukuma are consequently 'Northmen', or northern Wanyamwezi" (1864: 271). Other early commentators proposed other opinions. Hans Hermann von Schweinitz argued for example:

I do not hereby consider Wassukuma to belong to the Wanyamwesi people, as is often shown on the maps of East Africa; the two peoples show great differences and the Wassukuma do not call themselves Wanyamwesi. (1893: 477)³⁵

However, for these early observers who viewed the Nyamwezi and the Sukuma as two distinctly separate peoples, there was no agreement as to where the border should be drawn between the two territories. Thus Carl

³⁴ Paul Kollmann (1898: 99), for example argued: "The language, customs and institutions of the Sukuma people are so similar to those of the Nyamwezi of Tabora and Nzega in the western Province that there is little doubt that they may have a common origin" (my translation).

³⁵ My translation.

Peters (1891: 325) and Franz Stuhlmann (1894: 754) both considered Shinyanga as a Nyamwezi area, while Paul Kollmann (1898: 99) drew the line further to the south, more in accordance with more recent notions about the territorial extension of 'Unyamwezi proper' (Abrahams 1967a: 11).

The point emphasized by these early writers on the classification of the Nyamwezi and the Sukuma did not consider differences in language and other general 'tribal' characteristics as much as the differential involvement in the caravan trade and the relative role of livestock-keeping in the local economy.

Thus even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, west-central Tanzania was involved in trade exchanges over considerable distances (see e.g. Roberts 1970: 42; Rockel 2006). The main items for exchange were locally produced items such as hoes, salt, pottery, livestock and grain. However, the development of long-distance trade did not gain real momentum until the demand from Asia, Europe and America mainly for ivory and slaves during the nineteenth century was felt in the interior (Roberts 1970; Kjekshus 1977: 111-125). By the middle of this century a network of long-distance trade routes were already well developed with caravan routes from the coast to Buganda, Katanga and Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika, converging in Tabora. Ivory, livestock and also slaves were exchanged on the coast for products like cloth, guns and beads (see e.g. Verbeken 1956; Roberts 1970; Rockel 2000). Thus, the people of the Tabora area in the south became heavily involved in the caravan trade. It has been estimated that, in the early 1890s, at least a quarter of the male population of this area was absent on portage during the dry season (Raum 1965: 170). However, the people of the north, that is the Sukuma, who were somewhat off the main caravan routes, were not involved in the caravan trade to the same extent. Then a contemporary observer, von Schweinitz is quite explicit about this point. He wrote:

Yet, the Wassukuma porters from Ukumbi-bay distinguish themselves from the Nyamwezi porters. The Mnyamwesi with wife and children annually move off for the coast, often the whole family, often even entire villages, leave their home area behind not to return before half a year or three quarter of a year. The people regard this march but as an integral part of their lives, therefore, they take pleasure in doing it. ... However, for the Wassukuma, such a march is an adventure. Often it is only the young daring people who undertake this adventure, generally leaving wife and children at home. For the Wassukuma the march is an unpleasant interruption in their habitual life. (1893: 481)³⁶

³⁶ My translation.

Obviously, the degree of involvement in the caravan trade constituted one distinguishing feature between the people of the south and the north respectively. The other feature frequently mentioned at the time, was the ‘Northerners’ preoccupation with livestock. Although the local economy in the general area was mainly of an agro-pastoral type, livestock-rearing played a more preponderant part in the north than in the south.³⁷ While livestock in the southern part of the region was less numerous, the cattle and smallstock of the “Wasekuma” were described as “innumerable” (Broyon-Mirambo 1877: 30). Usiha (part of today’s Shinyanga District) was depicted as “the commencement of a most beautiful pastoral country, which terminates only in Victoria Nyanza” (Stanley 1878: 137).

It can be argued that the early involvement of this region in the caravan trade made its people known to the outside world and that it was in relation to this wider world that they were conceived as Nyamwezi. While *sukuma* is a directional term, i.e. north, *mwezi* (*ng’wezi*, in Sukuma and northern Nyamwezi dialects) is the word for moon both in Swahili and Nyamwezi. A possible translation of ‘Nyamwezi’ is then ‘of the moon’. Since, among the peoples to the east of the Nyamwezi country, this celestial body is commonly associated with the west. Fridolin Bösch concludes that the name denotes the direction from which the people came to the east coast for trade and, thus, while on the coast were called the ‘people from the West’, *Wanyamwezi*, the moon here denoting the west. He adds that people when on the coast used to identify themselves as Nyamwezi whatever part of the larger Nyamwezi-Sukuma culture area they happened to come from (1930: 8). Wilhelm Blohm (1931: 6) gives a similar verdict and Hans Cory states, “the Basukuma were called and called themselves until recent times, Banyamwezi as soon as they left their own country” (1952: 26).

Irrespective of the origin of the meaning of the label, what evidence there is does not indicate that the ‘insiders’ among themselves formerly employed the term (see e.g. Yongolo 1953: v). The terminological confusion of the early visitors to this region can partly be explained by the fact that they encountered two different sets of systems of classification, one

³⁷ It is, however, doubtful whether the southernmost Nyamwezi properly speaking could be described as agro-pastoralists, even before the devastating rinderpest panzootic of the early 1890s. Paul Reichard for example, who spent more than a year in this area in the early 1880s, describes the southern Nyamwezi, whom he called the ‘true’ Nyamwezi, in the following terms: “Nowhere do Wanyamwesi keep livestock. Under them there are Wahuma or Watusi immigrants, as they there are called, who keep cattle” (1882: 315). (My translation.)

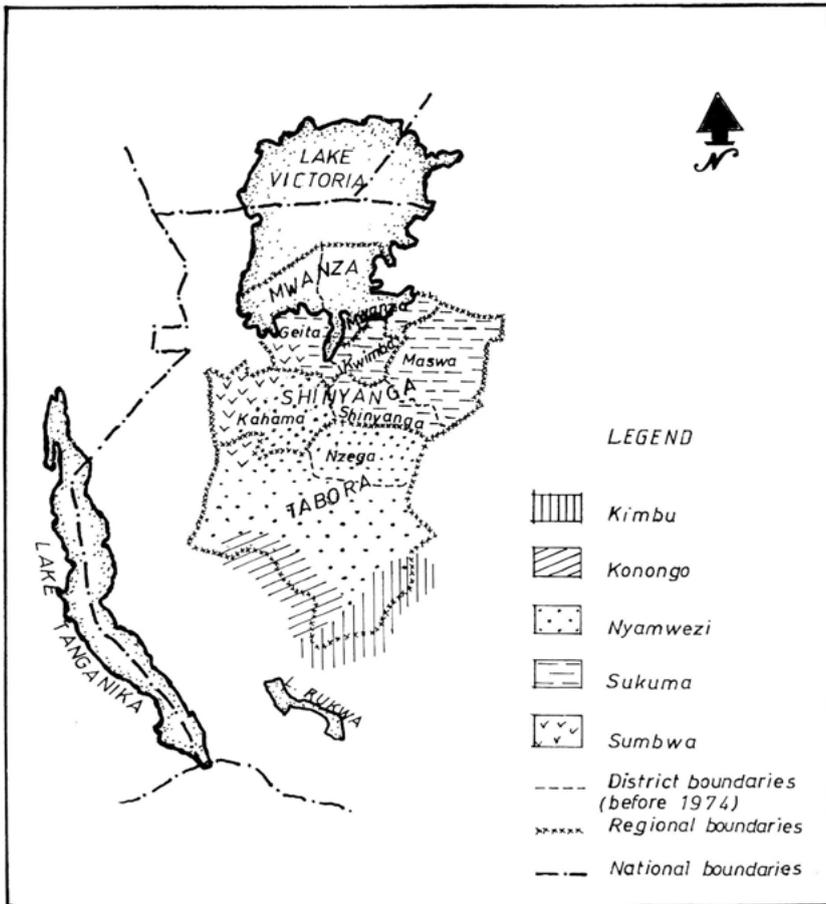
for insider/outsider-relations and the other for insider/insider-relations. A person became, so to speak, a Nyamwezi in the inclusive sense only in confrontation with the outer world. However, within the region there were also other systems of classification in operation.

During the colonial period the term 'Unyamwezi' in its broader sense fell into disuse. From the very onset, the colonial masters made use of traditional institutions for local administration. Step by step these institutions were transformed or adapted to suit colonial demands. In this process ethnic groups, which before colonial rule constituted rather fluid social entities, were given a more defined identity as 'tribes'. In fact, there was an apparent proliferation of tribal names for official use during the colonial period. The number in the census reports shows a marked increase over this period. Thus only 72 tribes were listed in the 1921 census while in the 1948 census the number of tribes had increased to 120 (Bates 1965: 631). It is in this process that the perception of Nyamwezi and Sukuma as two distinct and separate groups is becoming established. In the interaction with the outer world and, in particular, the colonial government, implying fixed provincial and district boundaries, with tax registration and population censuses, formerly rather loosely knit social groupings were given new identities under exclusive tribal names.

Abrahams, for "convenience of description", has in his work used the term 'greater Unyamwezi' for demarcating the cultural area encompassing the Kimbu, Konongo, Nyamwezi, Sukuma and Sumbwa as distinguished on 'tribal maps' (Abrahams 1967a: 11). This definition of the area largely coincides with the delimitation of 'Unyamwezi' made by some of the early observers (e.g. Broyon-Mirambo 1877) and also by ethnographers like Bösch (1930) and Blohm (1931). According to this system of classification, the Kimbu and Konongo are considered as the southern, and the Sukuma and the Sumbwa as the northern, major subdivisions of the Nyamwezi with a central Nyamwezi area, called Bwirwana by Bösch (1930: 10)³⁸ and Unyamwezi proper by Abrahams (1967a: 11)³⁹.

³⁸This term has now become obsolete.

³⁹Aylward Shorter, the prominent ethnographer of the Kimbu, argues that "the evidence on which it is assumed that the Kimbu are to be classed as Nyamwezi is remarkably scanty" (1972:2).



Map 2. 'Greater Unyamwezi', ethnic composition.⁴⁰

Today, however, the term Nyamwezi is most commonly used to refer specifically to the people originating from the Tabora Region and Kahama District in Shinyanga Region as opposed to the Kimbu and the Konongo in the south-east and the south-west, the Sumbwa in the extreme west and the Sukuma in the north of the general area. In the National Censuses of 1948, 1957 and finally 1967, the last one in which ethnic groups were

⁴⁰ The delineation of ethnic groups on Map 2 only indicates the majority group in respective area. It is based on maps drawn according to the prevailing situation in the 1950s (Moffet 1958; Abrahams 1967a). Today, however, Sukuma make up an increasing proportion of the total population also in the other areas ethnically marked on the map. More generally, population movements over time have ethnically made the areas decreasingly homogenous.

recorded, all five groups are listed as separate ‘tribes’. In 1967 the Sukuma numbered 1,529,917, the Nyamwezi 405,967, the Sumbwa 91,936, the Kimbu 30,760 and the Konongo 26,755.⁴¹

The official censuses reflect people’s self-identification in relation to the outside world. As such, it is meaningful for a person to respond to a census enumerator in terms of these categories. At a common-sense level this consideration suggests an answer to the question: Who is a Sukuma and who is a Nyamwezi? A person is a Sukuma or a Nyamwezi if he or she identifies himself or herself as a Sukuma or a Nyamwezi respectively. Although useful at some levels of description this conceptual system is not totally satisfactory. Indigenous ethnic classification provides further insights on the problem.

Insiders’ classification?

The terminology here excludes the Kimbu, Konongo and Sumbwa. The discussion focuses on the Sukuma and the northern Nyamwezi who in linguistic and cultural terms are the most closely related groups within the cultural area of ‘greater Unyamwezi’.

(a) Directional terms

Directional terms are applied as the most inclusive way of classifying closely related people. Thus, *Basukuma*, *Badakama*, *Banang’weli* and *Banakia*, as the terms imply simply mean Northerners, Southerners, Westerners and Easterners. The criteria for identification are here, above all, linguistic. All the dialects spoken in Usukuma and northern Unyamwezi are mutually comprehensible. However, there are differences in intonation and vocabulary that disclose the area of origin. Furthermore, there are some variations in local habits and customs as well as indigenous stereotypes in the form of stories people tell about each other. The Easterners, for example, in a joking manner, are said to be outspoken, quarrelsome and cunning, while stories are told about how timid and gullible the Southerners are.

This way of classification implies a certain degree of relativity. A person is a Northerner only in relation to a Southerner, a Westerner only in relation to an Easterner and so forth. Since there is no term denoting the centre, the

⁴¹ According to *Ethnologue* (2020), more recent estimates of the number of respective group is as follows: Sukuma 8,130,000 (2016), Nyamwezi 1,470,000 (2016), Sumbwa 361,000 (2009), Kimbu 67,700 (2009) and Konongo 51,000 (1987).

people of the area will have a ‘floating identity’ in this classificatory system. For example, a person from the Nzega district in northern Unyamwezi, who most likely would list himself or herself as a Nyamwezi in a national census, would be considered a Southerner, *Mdakama* or *Ndakama* (sing. of *Badakama*), by people in the Shinyanga district north of Nzega. Alternately he or she would be identified as a Northerner, *Msukuma* (sing. of *Basukuma*), by the people living in Tabora south of Nzega.⁴²

It is important to underline that these principles of classification only apply to the people within the Sukuma-Nyamwezi cluster. The Maasai and the Iramba in the east are not spoken of as Easterners but as Maasai and Iramba, and the Zinza in the north-west would always be identified as such.

(b) Territorial attachment.

Parallel to this system of classification based on directional notions, there is another more exclusive system of classification at work. While the main rationale of the former system seems to be the identification of other related people, this latter system is directed towards the origin of the individual and territorial attachment.

The Sukuma-Nyamwezi area was divided into a number of chiefdoms of varying size under the leadership of *batemi* (sing. *ntemi*) (see Abrahams 1967b; Cory 1951, 1954; Liebenow 1960). There is no common myth of origin and there is no evidence that the people historically ever constituted a political unity greater than the individual *ntemiship*. Abrahams describes the chiefdoms as “a number of centralized states bounding on each other” (1967b: 62). Groups of chiefdoms, however, formed larger clusters of *ntemiships* under separate ruling dynasties, each of them claiming a common founder and origin. Thus, within each cluster the individual chiefdoms were ruled by members of the same dynastic ‘clan’. Some of the best-known ruling families in Usukuma and northern Unyamwezi were the Binza, Kwimba, Siha and Kamba.

The *ntemi* was the political and ritual leader and the ‘owner of the land’, *ng’wenekele si*. Members of the ruling families were called *ba si*, which literally means ‘of the land’ while other inhabitants were termed *bazengi*, which means builders or settlers. Although the Sukuma-Nyamwezi kinship system is mainly patri-oriented in family life, succession to the office of *ntemi* was, only with some exceptions, matriline-

⁴² On linguistic proximity between Sukuma and Nyamwezi, see for example Clement Maganga and Thilo Schadeberg (1992: 11).

al.⁴³ In fact, according to tradition many of the dynastic ‘clan’ names refer to the mother of the first *ntemi*.

In salutations and greetings people used the name of the ruling ‘clan’, *lwimbo*, of the area from which they originated to identify themselves irrespective of whether they are *ba si* or only *bazengi*. Cory writes with reference to the Sukuma:

They themselves adopted the clan names of the ruling dynasties as their specific tribal names, so that a man from Mwangala, if asked the name of his tribe, would probably answer ‘Binza’ if he thought that the questioner knew the country... . (1953: 2)

The use of *lwimbo* will communicate no meaningful message to a person who is unfamiliar with the *lwimbo* greeting. However, in a context where people among themselves recognize this means of identification, this system of classification is applied. People will just call themselves Kwimba, Siha, Kamba etc. and in the process convey a notion of belongingness to a certain territory. This notion should not be confused with the concept of ‘clan land’, common among many lineage-based East African peoples, for no jural rights are implied.⁴⁴ A man cannot, for example claim land in Kamba country only in his capacity of being a Kamba. For land tenure there was an entirely different system in operation based on the neighbourhood organization. The relation to land implied by the *lwimbo* concept is rather of a symbolic nature. In other words, it can be seen as a symbolic expression of territorial attachment.

The chiefly system was abolished by the national government in 1963. Consequently the *batemi* were not political leaders anymore and their ritual importance has radically diminished over the years. Although the *lwimbo* concept was vested in the traditional political ideology, the abolishment of *ntemiship* has not made the concept obsolete. However, there is a marked difference between the Nyamwezi of today and the Sukuma. For

⁴³ Matrilineal succession to chiefship appears to have been the predominating pattern among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi in pre-colonial times except for in a series of chiefdoms in the northernmost parts of Sukumaland (Cory 1951; Holmes and Austen 1972; Varkevisser 1971). As an exception to matrilineal chiefly succession in Unyamwezi, Abrahams mentions the great chiefdom of Unyanyembe (1967b: 33). Shorter (1972: 116), however, points to the fact that the rule of matrilineal succession was followed in Unyanyembe up to the mid-nineteenth century. In the social upheavals during the late nineteenth century and with the establishment of colonial rule, matrilineal succession to the chiefly office was generally changed into patrilineal all over the Sukuma-Nyamwezi area.

⁴⁴ See for example Jan Lindström (1987) on the matrilineal Iramba and Parker Shipton (1984) who has discussed lineage and locality principles in East African systems of land tenure with some comparative scope.

example, nowadays the Nyamwezi tend to use *lwimbo* only in ceremonial greetings, while the Sukuma apply it in daily interactions, particularly when addressing older people.

Multiple identity

Perhaps Cory is correct then when he argues that there was no 'tribal' unity in pre-colonial times beyond the realm of the individual dynastic clusters of chiefdoms (1953). On the other hand, there is a common agreement among students of this region that Sukuma and Nyamwezi linguistically and culturally could be considered as one people (Blohm 1931: 5; Bösch 1930: 9-10; Malcolm 1953: 20-21; Abrahams 1967b: 5-6). Theories have been propounded about early proto-Nyamwezi-Sukuma speakers who were subjugated by groups of immigrants arriving from other areas, who then settled and established authority over sections of the indigenous population (Itandala 1979; Oliver 1966). Although politically dominant, it is argued, the invading groups were largely, culturally and linguistically, assimilated with the original inhabitants. Chronologies based on oral tradition date the invasion and establishment of ntemiship and ruling dynasties to the late 16th and the 17th century (Itandala 1979). These historical theories attempt to account for, on the one hand, the cultural and linguistic similarities displayed all over this region and, on the other hand, the apparent lack of consistent ethnic unity.

It is most probable that the name Nyamwezi, as a label denoting a particular people, first came into being in the interaction between local society and the wider world. There is no evidence, in historical sources or in oral tradition, that there was any group of people who called themselves Nyamwezi among themselves. However, with the involvement of the inland peoples in the caravan trade and with the establishment of colonial administration and rule, the word Nyamwezi as a concept of group belongingness gained in usage.

As pointed out earlier, the word Sukuma as a designation of a group of people derives from the indigenous mode of directional classification. Sukumaland, *Busukuma*, was not a territory with fixed boundaries but just 'northern country' in the relative sense of the word.⁴⁵ However even in this case, the concept eventually developed into a more consistent one. Of particular importance in this process was, one could argue, the

⁴⁵This does not apply to the small chiefdom of Busukuma on the lakeshore in the very north.

establishment of the Nyanza Federation of Sukuma chiefdoms in the 1930s (Austen 1968: 189) and later the Sukumaland Federal Council (Maguire 1969: 23-26). The drawing of provincial and district boundaries was also a significant factor. Thus, in the case of the Kamba ruling clan (see above) the colonial district boundary happened to cut the 'clan territory' so that the area came under two different provincial governments and three different district administrations, namely Kahama, Nzega and Shinyanga. Since the federation of chiefs operated within the provincial governments, the Kamba chiefs of Kahama and Nzega were referred to the Nyamwezi Federal Council, while the Kamba chiefs of Shinyanga belonged to the Sukumaland Federal Council. Today the Kamba of Kahama and Nzega most likely would list themselves as Nyamwezi in any official census and the Kamba of Shinyanga as Sukuma. Simultaneously they all consider themselves as Kamba as they share cultural traditions; they are linguistically closely related and also display a similar kind of agro-pastoral economy.

But how do the Sukuma-Nyamwezi themselves conceive of differences between Northerners and Southerners or, rather, between Sukuma and Nyamwezi in the way these identities have evolved? The Sukuma are said to adhere to tradition more than the Nyamwezi.⁴⁶ Furthermore, a distinguishing trait commonly mentioned is the Sukuma 'love' for cattle. These are cultural generalizations and stereotyped notions. Nevertheless, they contain some essential elements. As noted, I believe that these features can, apart from different ecological conditions in the northern and the southern parts of the area⁴⁷, be related to the degree of early involvement in the caravan trade. The Nyamwezi were heavily involved while the Sukuma never became involved to the same extent. External impact such as the early Arab influence, Islam and opportunities for non-traditional wage labour, had a much stronger impact in the south than in the north. It is particularly important to consider the process of the accumulation of wealth, *kukwaba*. Fundamentally this term means to acquire cattle. In Nyamwezi *kukwaba* became synonymous with *kuja ng'whani*, that is 'to go to the coast', or portering in general.⁴⁸ In Sukumaland the term retained

⁴⁶ For example, in the southern parts of this ethnic area, initiation into the eldership association *ihane*, has since long become obsolete while it has continued to be practiced until the present in some of the northern parts (see e.g. Stroeken 2010: 78-85).

⁴⁷ The southern parts were, and still are to a considerable extent, covered by tsetse infested *miombo* woodland inimical to cattle-keeping, while the northern part consisted of large tracts of open grass land more favourable for the pastoral enterprise.

⁴⁸ In his historical treatment of the East African caravan trade in the 19th century, Stephen Rockel describes the Nyamwezi as "a nation of porters" (Rockel 2000; see also Rockel 2006).

more of its original meaning. Cattle were, and continued to be, the most important means for accumulation of wealth: In effect, the Sukuma maintained their cattle orientation. This is, perhaps, one of the important reasons why the 'love' for cattle is so strongly marked in both economic and symbolic terms in comparison with their southern neighbours. Cattle accumulation also implies territorial expansion, which has been the case over the past decades. In search for pasture and arable land, Sukuma migrants have overflowed the northern Unyamwezi, and substantial numbers have today reached far beyond the traditional area as far as to the southern parts of the country. These migratory waves have changed previous patterns of ethnic composition and led to a process of 'Sukumaization' far beyond areas formerly conceived of as 'Sukumaland proper' (Brandström 1990b: Chapter 3). This in turn has, together with social, economic and political changes over time, become part of the process of "reconstructions and amendments", traced above, to which the ethnic identities, as cultural constructions, are continuously liable.

Domains of belonging

We can speak of ethnicity as one domain of belonging among myriads of domains of belonging we encounter in human societies. However, what such domains entail in any single case can only be an empirical question. It is indeed, as James Fernandez argues, "that humans organize their worlds in domains of belonging and that a great deal of human life is spent in maintaining, arranging, or rearranging these domains" (Fernandez 1986: xii). Ethnicity as a domain of belonging implies a sense of familiarity between people because of a whole set of reasons, such as common language, shared cultural practices of greeting and relating to each other, modes of reasoning and cracking jokes, gestures and other bodily movements, and a number of other signs immediately recognized as characteristic in social encounters and communion. If you, for example, as a total stranger meet elderly Sukuma and greet them with the *lwimbo* greeting or an elderly Nyamwezi and show a command of the complex ceremonial greeting called *kupoja mhola* they will most likely exclaim, "Alas, you are a true Sukuma!" or, "Indeed, you are a true Nyamwezi!" irrespective of your ethnic origin, your complexion or other signs of strangeness. At least for a moment, only by these single expressions, a certain sense of belonging between you would have been created due to the fact that these expressions awaken a whole world of culturally grounded associations that suggest a ground for a kind of mutual understanding. This kind of signs,

suggesting a ground for mutual understanding and a sense of togetherness, we would find wherever in the world we go, and there is in my present ethnographic exploration of the *Sungusungu* movement no need to delve deeper into the field of ethnic identity and experience of belonging as such. What matters in this context is the relative significance of ethnicity as well as cultural values and practices in the formation and spread of the social movement, the very topic of the present exposition. This issue will be explored in the following chapters.

6. Do ethnicity and culture matter?

In the preceding chapter I sketched the historicity of the ethnic concepts of Sukuma and Nyamwezi as a background to this chapter. I argued that what ethnicity as a domain of belonging entails in any single case could only be an empirical question. In the present chapter I discuss the relative significance of ethnicity and cultural values and practices in the formation and spread of the *Sungusungu* movement. To frame my discussion and for the sake of the argument in my empirical exploration, I draw from reasonings of Fredrik Barth (1969), Luc de Heusch (2000) and Steven Feierman (1990) – Barth and de Heusch because of their clear and different positioning regarding the relative importance of social interaction versus culturally grounded values and practices in forming of ethnic units and Feierman for his efforts to blaze a conceptual and theoretical trail to avoid the impasse of an either or position in our analyses.

Social interaction versus culture

In this section of the chapter I discuss, in relation to my case, Barth's take on the issue of ethnicity in his seminal text on ethnic groups and boundaries (1969)⁴⁹ with de Heusch's in his fine-grained article "*L'éthnie: The Vicissitudes of a Concept*" (2000).

Barth, in his argumentation on the question of ethnicity and the formation of ethnic units, plays down the cultural aspects in favour of the social ones. Though he admits that signals or signs of various kinds – “the diacritical features” – and moral orientations are important for the forming of ethnic identities, he argues that the focus of investigation should be on the social boundaries defining the group and “not on the cultural stuff it encloses” (1969: 14-15). He states: “I would argue that peoples' categories

⁴⁹ Here leaving aside the vast debate on the issue ensuing Barth's contribution. See, for example, the publication edited by Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Marek Jakoubek (2019), fifty years after the publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969a) where a number of contributors assess and reflect on the legacy of Barth's seminal contribution to the study of ethnicity.

are for acting, and are significantly affected by interaction rather than contemplation” (1969: 29). Thomas Hylland Eriksen, as a follower of Barth, is even more explicit on this issue when he argues that ethnicity should be understood as a question of social relations and “not a cultural property of the group” (1993: 34).⁵⁰

Barth in his reasoning emphasizes the organizational aspect of ethnicity, that is, on aspects he perceives socially effective and where the critical feature becomes “the characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others” (1969: 13). He concludes:

A categorical ascription is an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his background. To the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction, they form an ethnic group in [an] organizational sense. (1969: 13-14)

In his two-pronged definition, historical background and the interactive aspect, Barth most clearly emphasises the latter. It is beyond doubt that social interactions matter in forming and reforming ethnic identities and ethnic units of various kinds, and the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, returning to our ethnographic case, is no exception to this rule. As shown in the foregoing chapter, Sukuma and Nyamwezi ethnic identity or identities have in the course of history been constructed and reconstructed in interaction with the external world and most emphatically so during the caravan trade of the nineteenth century and then, even more radically, during the colonial era and particularly so due to the efforts of the colonial government to define tribal units for the purpose of colonial administration. But is there empirical reason enough to underplay the importance of the cultural aspects, as Barth tends to do on the topic of ethnicity? It is indeed true, as Barth argues, that ethnic categories in many cases do provide “an organizational vessel” for varying purposes, there are many worldwide examples of that, but ethnic categorization can well be prevalent without providing a ground for organizational interaction.

Regarding the present Sukuma-Nyamwezi case and the contemporary Tanzanian social and political landscape, I thus find Barth’s definition only partly applicable. The first part of his definition, I find well applicable to the present ethnographic case while the second part seems less so.

⁵⁰ To do Eriksen justice, it should be noted that he, in a more recent article (2000), reconsiders his previously pronounced Barthian stand in down-playing the importance of the cultural aspects in the analysis and thus placing him more in line with de Heusch’s take on the issue in his article discussed in my exposition.

Since the formation of TANU (Tanganyika African National Union) in 1954 under the leadership of Julius Nyerere and with the process of nation building and societal changes during the post-colonial period following political independence in 1961 and onward, the issue of ethnicity has most consciously been played down by the political leadership in favour of the formation of a national Tanzanian identity. Nevertheless it is still true that a person's background, the historical aspect in Barth's definition, is fundamental for ethnic ascription. Most children are born in families where the first language they learn is the family's vernacular language. Even if they also learn the national language Swahili at an early age and no later than when they start school, the vernacular is their first means of verbal communication with its words and idioms for talking about and understanding the world. Then, there is the home environment with its practices and the social world with its patterns of relationship with relatives and neighbours: a host of explicit and implicit forms of local knowledge and of values brought to bear on the socialization process. Indeed, quite self-evidently the person's background does matter. However, the second part of Barth's definition above I find less applicable to the Sukuma-Nyamwezi case of today because it does not provide a good ground for labelling neither Sukuma nor Nyamwezi people as "groups" in a more practical sense of the word. This is so because it is only to a rather limited extent one can say that Sukuma and Nyamwezi people today "use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction". In some ritual contexts, for example, one could say ethnic identity provides "an organizational vessel", but as a basis for more wide-ranging kinds of interaction there are few examples where ethnic identity explicitly has provided or in the present provides an argument for interaction. When a man or a woman states: "I'm a Sukuma" or "I'm a Nyamwezi", of course, one could say that this is a proclamation of ethnic identity, but the ethnic entity referred to here is rather, to use Benedict Anderson's concept, an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006) than a bounded group for interaction based on common identity.

Turning to de Heusch, his take on the issue of ethnicity differs markedly from that of Barth. He argues that ethnic groups, according to Barth's subjective definition, focusing on the social aspects, "would only be one particular form of social organisation within the global society (de Heusch 2000: 101-102). De Heusch finds it unfortunate, as he reads Barth, to oppose the social to the cultural and "to assert from a general and sociological point of view that culture as such should be removed from the definition of *ethnie* is a questionable position" (2000: 102, on Barth), because, as he argues, Barth's stress on the role of social actors tends "to neglect

the way such actors are led to operate in relation to a pre-existing cultural system, a system that every generation transforms according to a limited number of choices” (2000: 102). De Heusch is thus critical of Barth’s underplaying the cultural aspects in his definitional efforts.

What de Heusch forcefully stresses in his discussion is the long-term perspective or *la longue durée* in relation to social and cultural life. In his view, *ethnies* and what we can call ethnic identities, are not to be seen only as recent inventions caused by colonial intervention or other forms of more recent external agency, as some proponents would have it (2000: 99-100), but as an integral part of human society and culture as long back in history as we can trace. He writes, and this is an essential part of his argument:

We thus fall back on the conception of traditional societies and on those *ethnies* we hardly dare to say nowadays that they ever existed before colonisation. No doubt they [*ethnies*] had in time been fluctuating and changing, yet they remained inscribed in the *longue durée*. (2000: 104)

In short, following de Heusch’s suggestions, we have to take *la longue durée* seriously and not underplay the cultural aspects in our analysis of ethnicity and ethnic identity. While most of the “cultural stuff”, as Barth put it, has its roots in the past, the socio-political aspects are to a large extent determined or affected by the social, political and economic realities of the present. Put in another way regarding the long-term perspective and the analysis of socio-cultural realities in the present, one could borrow from Maurice Bloch his phrase “the past and the present in the present” (Bloch 1977), used for another interpretative purpose but applicable in the present discussion or, even better, I would say, reformulated to read ‘the bricolage of the past and the present in the present’. It is this bricolage of the various aspects and their relative importance that we, to enhance our understanding, have to consider in every single case of analysis.

The *Sungusungu* movement emerged among Sukuma and Nyamwezi, that is, people who called and call themselves Sukuma and Nyamwezi and who were and are called so by others. This is a historical fact, but this is not reason enough to conclude that *Sungusungu* as such was an ethnic movement. This could be said because ethnic categorization and ethnic identities were not a matter on the agenda of the participants in the emergence and developments of the movement or, in other words, the actors did not “use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction”. What united the people for action were the problems they were experiencing, and in this situation, ethnic identities or ethnic

categorizations did not play a decisive role. People did not act as members of a particular ethnic group but as members of their community irrespective of the ethnic mix in each and every community. My argument, then, is simply that ethnic belonging as such was not a matter of primary concern for the participants in the movement. However, considering *la longue durée* and the “cultural stuff” another picture emerges.

What then did matter?

In preceding chapters, I have pointed out the importance of organizational templates, moral values and conceptions of power rooted in the past for the mobilization and the rapid spread of the *Sungusungu* movement among Sukuma–Nyamwezi people while readapting the legacy of the past to the actual situation and thus creating something new. These are issues pursued in this section of the present chapter.

Organizational templates

Sukuma–Nyamwezi society was indeed, and still is to a great extent, characterized by a great number of voluntary associations or societies of various kinds. This associational life makes a conspicuous feature both of the local community and beyond (see e.g. Hall 1936; Revington 1938; Cory 1946, 1955; Juma 1956; Abrahams 1965; Jellicoe 1969; Knudsen 1977; Stroeken 2006). Several of these associations within the local community were, and in many cases still are, focused on agricultural work and mutual aid. For example, among other community associations the kind of rotational savings and credit societies, called *ifogong’ho*, mentioned about in chapter 2. For cooperation within the community for various purposes there were thus well-developed templates among this people.

To provide a more concrete illustration of this kind of neighbourhood cooperation in agricultural work I may refer to an example from my first anthropological fieldwork. That was in Mwamloli neighbourhood in Igunga District in 1970. Mwamloli was a new settlement area where people had started to clear land for cultivation in 1960. I took stock of the number and the kind of workgroups that the family with whom I stayed while in that village, below called household A, had utilized during the agricultural year. There were six permanent family members in this household, namely the family head, his wife, two grown-up sons, one unmarried daughter and her infant. Some twenty acres of the family holding were under cultivation. The family owned 18 head of cattle, a few

smallstock and some poultry. The picture that emerged was as follows (Brandström 1990b: Chapter 4: 15-16):

1. *Bumo wa magembe*, 'The ploughing association'. – Four neighbours who ploughed together. The principle of return was reciprocity, that is, people from households A, B, C, and D made up one ploughing team. About 80% of the fields of household A had been ploughed in this way during that year.

2. *Bumo wa bakima*, 'The association of women'. – A group of young women, eight to ten, from a number of different households who came together for weeding. The principle of return was reciprocity.

3. *Bumo w'igunguli*, 'The association of the neighbourhood'. – Men and women who joined together from the entire neighbourhood for agricultural work. The return was beer or food – a cow or a few small-stock were slaughtered for the working party. This group had been utilized once that year by household A for weeding. Two sheep were slaughtered.

4. *Isalenge* – the *isalenge* was a well-organized neighbourhood work group for mutual aid in agricultural work. There can be a men's *isalenge* and a women's *isalenge*. In this neighbourhood there was only a women's *isalenge*. Household A had made use of this work group twice during the year. Two days for weeding, when some 30 women participated and the payment was one cow and one goat, and one day for cotton picking, when the same number of women participated, and the payment was two goats.

5. Dance societies. – If you belong to a society you may ask your society for help in different activities. Household A had made use of this opportunity once during that year. The *Bagika* dance society had been installing a *Bagika* 'king' in the neighbourhood when household A called for help with cotton picking. In response to this call, 27 young men came and picked from eight o'clock in the morning to one o'clock in the afternoon. One goat was slaughtered.

6. The threshing team. – This was the strongest seasonally manifestation of communal labour in the neighbourhood. Households that had made no use of any other communal work group during the year called the threshing team. Household A had made use of this opportunity for threshing their sorghum on two days, and the young men of the household had participated on thirteen different occasions at other neighbours' homesteads.

Apart from being a straightforward exchange of labour in cases where the capacity of the individual household is felt to be inadequate, the work group system can be seen as a means of distributing underutilized labour. It could be argued that the more established households were likely to benefit more from this system of cooperation and labour exchanges than the less established households. The more established households would, for example, be in a position to summon work group parties more frequently than the less established ones. Nevertheless, there is a mutual gain. It would be difficult for a young and newly settled family to establish itself in a new settlement area without any assistance from established families. What develops is an interdependence characterized by a certain degree of inequality. However, as long as nobody is bereft of access to the basic means of production, namely arable land, and as long as the growth of newly established domestic units goes along with fissional processes in the older and more established households, there was in the developmental cycle of the neighbourhood a process of 'levelling out' over time (see Brandström 1990b: Chapter 4).

In addition to the different forms of local associations there were, as mentioned above, other ones with a much wider spatial reach. Membership in these associations is not confined to any particular neighbourhood or locality. The declared explicit rationale of these associations could often be rather restricted, yet, on another level of analysis, the socially multipurpose character of these associations, including the element of mutual aid, comes into the foreground. Some of these associations, such as the *Bagalu* and the *Bagika*, often called dance societies (see Cory 1953: 120; Malcolm 1953: 41), have an old tradition and are very well organized and widely spread over the Sukuma-Nyamwezi area. In the neighbourhood of Mwamloli, for example, the majority of the adult population claimed membership in one or more of these associations. In one section of the neighbourhood where household census was carried out, membership was spread among eleven different associations.

The importance of existing organizational templates in the formation and for the rapid spread of the movement among Sukuma-Nyamwezi communities has been well treated by Abrahams and Bukurura in their various publications on the *Sungusungu* movement (e.g Abrahams 1987, 1989, 1996, 2000; Abrahams and Bukurura 1993; Bukurura 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1996a, 1996b). Abrahams points out features in the social organization of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi that he finds of special importance in this context. He writes:

Thus there have been dance societies, cultivating teams, spirit possession and other ritual associations, hunting groups, threshing teams, and more general forms of neighbourhood organization... . These have provided individuals and households, both in everyday life and in emergencies, with many different forms of interaction and support additional to those of kinship and the form of governmental institutions of traditional chiefship and its post-independence replacements. (1987: 193)

Abrahams adds that it is true that forms of groupings and associations of this kind have borrowed titled roles and associated ideas from chiefship and other external organizational forms, but, he continues, “more important than such borrowing is the fact that the groups have themselves provided a continuing model and a source of practical experience for villagers who wish to organize their own affairs”. He concludes this reasoning by stating that, “it seems understandable that groups like *Sungusungu* should emerge in an area where a great deal of their basic organization and structure mirrored in one or other part of presently or previously existing groupings which villagers have long experience of running for themselves” (1987: 193-194).

Bukurura, and particularly so in his PhD thesis (1994a), provides ample ethnographic exemplification of the kind of fit between past and present organizational forms that Abrahams draws attention to. A culturally well-grounded practice, that Bukurura (1994a: 72, 99-100) draws attention to is that of *kuhembekwa*, meaning ‘to be made follower’ and its corollary *baba buhamba*, meaning ‘father of the follower’ or ‘father of the fellowship’. This is of particular importance for facilitating the spread of the movement from village to village and, one could argue, for creating a certain uniformity over the area in the composition of village leadership cadres, their roles and titles, the pattern of village initiation and the manner of carrying out the tasks of the organization that was formed.

Busalama or *Sungusungu* was indeed in its initial secretive phase a union of the self-elected few, this must be underlined, but when the movement came out in the open and started to spread among the villages, it was no longer an organization of the few but of the many. That is, it was not, as has been pointed out in the foregoing, a question of organizing a section of the village or part of the village but a matter of concern for the village in its entirety. The village as such, so to speak, turned *Sungusungu*; all were, as Masanja puts it, “deemed to be *Sungusungu*” (Masanja 1992: 210), irrespective of gender or age (see also Ndagala 1991: 76).⁵¹

⁵¹ From his readings of Masanja (1984), Abrahams (1987) and Campbell (1989), Mamdani mistakenly draws the conclusion that *Sungusungu* was constituted only by

While the decision to organize *Sungusungu* in a village, in the first phase of its spreading, emerged from within the respective village, the task of initiating a village into *Sungusungu* was carried out by a known *Sungusungu* leader from another village. This initiation borrowed traits from installation and enthronement procedures of the chiefs in the past. It was spoken of in terms of *kutemya*, that is, to enthrone, where the master of ceremony should be an enthroned *ntemi* from somewhere else. Apart from the enthronement of a *ntemi* of *Sungusungu* in the village, the initiation involved the formation of the ranks and files to fulfil the various functions and it also included procedures of cleansing the village from internal evils.⁵²

However, the villagers could to a large extent choose the initiator according to their own liking. This feature of choice follows the Sukuma-Nyamwezi idiom of *kuhembekwa*, mentioned above. In a society like that of the Sukuma and the Nyamwezi with a whole variety of voluntary associations – such as mutual-aid associations, divination and medicine societies, dance societies and esoteric guilds and ritual societies of various kinds – to be made a *ng'hemba*, follower or disciple, is a most familiar concept. The initiand, *ng'hemba*, makes his or her choice, the initiator is *baba buhemba*, the father of the fellowship, and the initiand becomes *ng'wana buhemba*, the child of the fellowship. Between initiator and initiand a bond is created likened to that between parent and child. This does not necessarily imply recognition of leadership but rather a relation of respect toward the person who has conferred certain charisma or particular knowledge to the initiated. Thus, in consonance with this idiom, the initiator of *Sungusungu* in a village, who had to be an established *ntemi* of the movement in a different village, did not by the act of enthronement assume a directly leading role with respect to the village or to *Sungusungu* activities in that village, where a new *ntemi* was installed. This was apart from what the bond implied of respect and authority between the initiator and the initiated, created through the act of initiation. The initiated village would remain self-determining and autonomous both in relation to the initiator and to other *Sungusungu* villages, though the name of the initiator

militia groups operating in the villages and not a movement involving the entire community (1996: 206). While this too could be said to be true in the later developments when *Sungusungu* became a state-sanctioned village institution for community policing, this was not so initially when *Sungusungu* emerged as a spontaneous social movement relying on the entire support of the community irrespective of gender and age.

⁵² Descriptions in varying depth and detail of the installation and initiation procedures, based on field knowledge, can be found in Abrahams (1987), Bukurura (1994a), Gotsbachner (1993) and Masanja (1992).

would tell about the leaning of the movement in that particular village with regard to the various directions that developed within the movement. Some of the renowned leaders carried with them the fame of being moderate and complacent in relation to government authorities while others were known for being radical and more strongly oppositional,⁵³ some were said to prioritise the struggle against the external enemies of the community such as the retrieving of stolen cattle, while others were known for making the most of cleansing the community from internal enemies, not the least by aggressive witch hunting. In other words, although the basic organizational idiom showed great uniformity over the area, there were on the part of the leadership, variations both in terms of emphasis on the agenda and the procedures.

There was thus no lack of civil society in this part of our world, one could say. On the contrary, the associational life was very rich and varied. One could argue that this preparedness for associational life, couched in culturally grounded and to the people concerned familiar and telling idioms, provided a kind of bedrock for *Sungusungu* mobilization and formation. The leaders could appeal to commonly held and cherished community values, and this is also what they did in their speech and exhortations.

In brief, existing organizational templates constituted an important aspect, a kind of structural precondition, when considering the easy adoption and rapid spread of *Sungusungu* in Sukuma-Nyamwezi communities. But for setting things in motion, there was also a need for local actors and a persuasive political language. This is where prevailing and in the communities commonly shared, moral values were crucial for forming a telling and persuasive political discourse.

Peasant intellectuals and political discourse

Apparent long-term stability in cultural conceptions alongside radical change in social practice has long been a topic of great concern in anthropology and various schools of social theory. The relationship between structure and agency, and structure and contingency, and the issue of how to accommodate and account for long-term continuity and active creation within a single all-encompassing explanatory framework have been subject to much intellectual pondering. In the wake of the more penetrating theoretical and epistemological streams of argumentation, the development debate on traditionalism versus modernism, resistance to change

⁵³ See the example of Ng'wana Mabonde versus Kitaselema in chapter 2, the former known as 'moderate' and the latter as 'radical'.

versus proneness to change, and on the relative importance of global and local factors as *pros* and *cons* in the transformational process of society is unabatingly carried on.

Feierman, in his thorough and well argued book, *Peasant Intellectuals, Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (1990), referred to in the foregoing, focused on political discourse among the Shambaa in north-eastern Tanzania from a historical perspective, addresses this problem of how to develop an interpretative approach which accounts both for historical process, socio-cultural contexts and human agency. In his case of ethnographic inquiry, Feierman resolves the dilemma of, what he calls, the “seeming paradox” of “rocklike stability in conceptions alongside radical change in practice” (1990: 5) by focusing on peasant discourse as local and the organization of power as national. In this perspective, global/local inter-connectedness is accounted for, and long-term continuity and active creation no longer present themselves as incompatible facts, because “[even] when forms of discourse are inherited from the past, the peasant must make an active decision to say that they are meaningful at this moment, to select a particular form of discourse as opposed to other forms, and to shape the inherited language anew to explain current problems” (1990: 3).

“Peasant intellectuals” is a key concept in Feierman’s analytical approach. Intellectuals are defined in his work “by their place in the unfolding social process: they engage in socially recognized organizational, directive, or expressive activities” (1990: 17-18). He derives his definition from Gramsci, who argued that intellectuals could not simply be defined by the fact that they engage in intellectual activities because all people do to some extent. “All people are therefore”, Feierman argues, expounding on Gramsci, in some respects intellectuals, “but not all people have the social function of intellectuals, a function that is directive, organizational, or educative” (1990: 18). Intellectuals are thus defined by their place and their role within the ensemble of social relations.

But who were the peasant intellectuals in Feierman’s ethnographic case? His answer is that they were men and women who earned their daily livelihood by farming but who, as he argues, at “crucial historical moments ... organized political movements of the greatest long-term significance, and in doing so elaborated new forms of discourse. ... To call them peasant intellectuals defines their historical role at moments of leadership, moments of organization, and moments of direction” (1990: 18).

Local ethnic boundaries in Africa, Feierman, categorically contends, “have always been a fiction, when taken in the classic ethnographic sense as marking off coherent, isolated islands of cultural practice, each with its

own political structure”, because in the world we encounter in the field “the local society and the larger society merge and interpenetrate at many levels, to the point where we cannot say what is local and what is larger” (1990: 35). The “dissolution of a spatially coherent ethnographic object” (1990: 34), he argues, poses an intriguing challenge to scholars who describe African culture and society at the local level. Feierman resolves the problem of delimiting the ethnographic field for his study by focusing on peasant intellectuals, defined as above, and their discourse and practice. His research strategy is based on the identification of locally embedded cultural categories and fundamental characteristics of social life that endure over long periods of time, while assuming the perspective that the “wider world is not external to the local community” but “at the heart of the internal community's internal process of differentiation” (1990: 36). When the spatially coherent ethnographic object dissolves in view of the observer, one could say, a cognitively and socially defined subject emerges in its place in and through the political discourse. Or, as Feierman puts: “The study of intellectuals, of their discourse and practice, leaves us with a strategy for dealing with the dissolution of spatially a coherent ethnographic object – the end of ‘tribe’, the ‘ethnic group’, the ethno-linguistic community (1990: 36).

The very purpose of his study, Feierman declares, is “to explore the relationship between the historical context in which peasants, as historical actors, found themselves and the way in which they created and recreated political discourse” (1990: 13). In his analysis he focuses on Shambaa terms and concepts employed to form the political discourse in peasant struggle for various reasons over time. There were among the Shambaa particularly two strongly value-loaded terms recurring over and over again, namely *kubana shi*, ‘to harm the land’, and *kuzifya shi* ‘to heal the land’. “Healing the land and harming the land”, Feierman writes, “call forth a series of images of the rhythmical or continuous passage of time, the moon or the sun, masculine or feminine, with all the images rooted in the individual and collective experience of hunger and satiety” (1990: 6-7). When doing fieldwork in the 1960s Feierman made the observation that *kubana shi* and *kuzifya shi* and “the associated prepositions and metaphors were important in peasant political practice at that time”, but not only that: “Historical traditions collected at the same time, combined with archival research, demonstrated that configuration of concepts, images and configuration of speech had been in active use a hundred years earlier” (1990: 7), that is in other words, a period covering pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial times. This is the “rocklike stability in conceptions” alongside radical societal changes that Feierman draws attention to in his work.

Taking a cue from Feierman's reasoning I wish to further illuminate the topic of this chapter. Thus, the people among whom the *Sungusungu* movement arose were all peasants in the sense Feierman gives the term. Although to various extents integrated in the larger economy, they basically derived their livelihood from farming and explicitly identified themselves as *wakulima na wafugaji*, literally 'cultivators and livestock keepers'. The *Sungusungu* leaders can all be described as peasant intellectuals, considering their "historical role at moments of leadership, moments of organization, and moments of direction", and, finally, the leaders, in order to transmit their message and make their voices heard, drew in their mobilizing efforts "upon a rich variety of past forms of political language". This, the last point, is a field where the culturally grounded values and precepts indeed do matter.

As among the Shambaa there were among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, as in all human societies, I believe, telling terms and concepts rooted in the historical past, a number of which have already been mentioned in the previous parts of my exposition. In the following section, I will in more detail expound on the significance of some of these terms and concepts and their place in the political discourse in relation to the *Sungusungu* movement. These are terms and concepts recurring particularly in *Sungusungu* public speech, exhortations and songs.

The Sukuma-Nyamwezi local community was not a kinship-based unit. The *igunguli* or *nzenzo*, that is, the village or neighbourhood, was composed of families tracing different lines of descent. They were united by the fact that they were *bazenganwa*, literally meaning 'those who build together'. In the past this meant 'building together' in the most practical sense of the term. When there was a need for a neighbour family to rebuild an old house or to build a new one, or when a new settler had been welcomed to the community, it was the duty of all neighbours to assist in building. With the term *bazenganwa* follows the concept of *buzenganwa*,⁵⁴ neighbourliness, and what it morally implies, namely above all *kwigunana* (reciprocal form of the verb *-guna*, 'to help'), cooperation and mutual aid between neighbours, *kwilinda* (reciprocal form of the verb *-linda*, 'to protect', 'care for'), mutual care, guarding and protecting each other's life and property and *kwiwigwa* (reciprocal form of the verb *-igwa* 'listen'), literally meaning 'mutual listening', that is, to strive for concord and peace, *mhola*, in the community. The concept of *buzenganwa* thus carries with it a moral notion on solidarity and the obligation of mutual aid be-

⁵⁴ *Buzenganwa* is the abstract form of *nzenganwa*, neighbour (*bazenganwa* plur. of *nzenganwa*).

tween neighbours in situations of need. There is the Sukuma-Nyamwezi saying, *nzenganwa ankilile nduguyo*, that is, your neighbour is superior to your kinsman. This paradoxical saying makes, one could say, the ‘is’ in relations between kinsfolk an ‘ought to’ for relations between neighbours. It contains a kind of political philosophy on territoriality as an organizing principle and a notion of moral obligations toward neighbours, which ought to be of the same order as that which is recognised to exist between close kinsfolk. Although real social life often most conspicuously contradicts these values, people still speak of them in terms of the common good that is *per se* undisputable and obligatory for each and every one to recognize and publicly support.

The *Sungusungu* exhortation and mode of addressing the audience, previously quoted in the Preamble, is a telling example of the speakers’ invocation of these values:

Speaker		Audience
<i>Kwili Basalama</i>	May the people of peace multiply	Hii!
<i>Bashosha ng’ombe</i>	Those who recover stolen cattle	Hii!
<i>Bashosha mbuli</i>	Those who recover stolen goats	Hii!
<i>Balinda busiga</i>	Those who protect the millet	Hii!
<i>Balinda banhu</i>	Those who protect people	Hii!
<i>Bakuniguna</i>	Those who help me	Hii!
<i>ulu nahinjaga</i>	when I am in trouble	Hii!
<i>Kwili kabili</i>	May they multiply twofold	Hii!

As I put it there, anybody giving a speech to a *Sungusungu* gathering must honour and employ this mode of address in order to be considered a person worth listening to. The wording of this kind of address to the audience can vary from case to case but only to a limited extent. The speaker must always refer to community values that are recognized and cherished by his or her audience. After the initial exhortation, “May the people of peace multiply”, in the address above, the speaker refers to the basics of the agro-pastoral livelihood of the people, namely livestock and food crops, the very condition of life endangered by the enemies of the community. Next in the address there is the reference to the values of *-linda*, to protect or to care for and *-guna*, to help or assist, when you are in trouble. In the gathering described in the preamble there were only men. In meetings where both men and women attend the phrase *bababa na bamayu*, ‘fathers and mothers’, is often added to the address, invoking family solidarity and love as a model for community solidarity, mutual help and cooperation. This formalized mode of addressing the audience sets a frame of discourse

within which every speaker has to position himself or herself whatever the message would be for the particular talk to be delivered.

This is a language for doing and not for contemplation and as such a political language. It calls into play a whole range of emotionally charged images and associations beyond the literal words. A sense of *communitas* is created in the audience by the wording of the speaker, figures of speech, proverbs, metaphors and other culturally recognized tropes. It is both a performative discourse, the talk is by itself a doing, an accomplishment by words, and a language for action. The audience is engaged and carried away by the talk. In the moment you forget the differences and cleavages between yourself and the others. In the effervescence created in the audience by the speech, you are united and from there you feel prepared for action, for moving forward.

In many walks of life there is singing, drumming and dancing not only for entertainment but also for communicating messages of various kinds.⁵⁵ There are bards or composers, *balingi*, to be found in all communities who, out of instant feats of inspiration or on demand, compose songs and poems to give voice to whatever topic there is in a given situation or context. Herbert Makoye, in his brief but interesting article (2007), mentioned in chapter 1, draws attention to the role of this kind of cultural expressions particularly for spreading and asserting the purpose and objectives of *Sungusungu*. Wherever the movement spread, songs were composed that told about the achievements and deeds of *Sungusungu* and about the agenda and rationale of the movement. Makoye presents several illustrating examples among which one was composed and sung by the initiation party at the installation ceremony of a new *Sungusungu ntemi* in a village.⁵⁶ This song is most explicit about the professed cause and purpose of the movement (Makoye 2007: 229):

<i>Baba ntemi</i>	Chief, our father
<i>Twenhaga busalama kung'wako</i>	We have brought peace to your place
<i>Shilanga shishe buta na masonga</i>	Our weapons are bows and arrows
<i>Ga kulwila basambo</i>	To fight the wrongdoers
<i>Tutabatulaga nulu kobibonela</i>	We don't beat or bully them
<i>Bise tulikoba mhola duhu</i>	We are only seeking peace

⁵⁵ Frank Gunderson, in his comprehensive monograph *Sukuma Labor Songs from Western Tanzania* (2010), where he describes a whole range of, what he calls, "musical labour genres", provides ample illustrations of the importance of this particular cultural feature among the people.

⁵⁶ Additional examples of *Sungusungu* songs are provided in Gunderson (2010: 435-452).

The message is clear. There is evil in the shape of *basambo*, wrongdoers, and there is war, expressed in terms of *buta na masonga*, bows and arrows, but the purpose of the work, the very labour of *Sungusungu*, is *mhola*, peace. This is the ‘language of *mhola*’ by which the dream of a utopia of peace is made visible to those who are familiar with this language. It is a message expressed in cultural idioms that are cherished and well taken by the audience. Makoye’s brief article offers only a glimpse of this kind of highly value-loaded form of culture specific communication, yet, to catch something of the unique tenor and tune of the *Sungusungu* movement it is a critically important aspect to take into consideration in the interpretative endeavour.

In the foregoing, preconditions in local society and culture for the early formation and developments of the *Sungusungu* movement have been discussed. Another condition, partly implied in the community centred ideology displayed in the rhetoric of the *Sungusungu* leaders, is the local conception of justice.

Masanja, in his early and brief but pregnant notes on the movement (1992), summarizes well a perception of justice, founded on values invoked in *Sungusungu* exhortations, public speeches and songs, that is focused on the community as a whole and not on the individual, as is the case in the liberal conception of justice and the rule of law. He writes that for *Sungusungu* “their starting point is the community to which individuals belong. Their lives and well-being is founded in the community. The community is the ‘father and the mother’. It is the society that comes first and is not an artificial contrivance in which individuals are forced to give up something because of society. Community interests are the individual’s interest” (1992: 213). And he continues: “Cooperation, mutuality, participation in the community activities on the basis of consideration of the group are the values which are emphasized”. In other words, the community represents a superior value in relation to the single individuals making up the community. From this follows a conception of justice where, as Masanja writes, “the community is paramount should even an individual unfortunately suffer in the process” (1992: 214). This is a conception of justice that, though well anchored in the local society, contradicts the ideas of rule of law and human rights with a focus on the single individual, sanctioned by the national state. Therefore *Sungusungu* dispensation of justice according to its holistic premises was doomed to be curbed since it could not be harboured within the legal machinery of the state.⁵⁷ Yet, in

⁵⁷ One could call to mind Louis Dumont’s penetrating studies on holistic versus individualistic ideologies (e.g. 1977, 1979, 1980, 1980).

the early days of the movement, the *Sungusungu* mode of jurisdiction with its rootedness in the communities was one of the factors, among others discussed above, that facilitated mobilization of people and the rapid spread of the movement in the Sukuma-Nyamwezi area.⁵⁸

The very core of the argument in this chapter is well summarized in Karl Marx's classic dictum in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (1984 [1852]).

So, is there then any conclusive answer to the question posed for this chapter about the relative importance of ethnicity and culture in any case that we make the topic for our studies? What could firmly be concluded is that there is always a cultural dimension to consider. Otherwise, there is unavoidably the bricolage of the past and the present in the present to try and account for, though, knowing the 'rhizomatic' character of the socio-cultural complexity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), our accounts would always fall short of completion and remain what they ultimately always are, namely essays, in the term's literal meaning, that is, interpretative attempts to widen the horizons of our understanding.

⁵⁸ In an article on security from below and the rule of law in the Sahel, Sten Hagberg discusses dispensation of justice according to local perceptions in situations characterized by extreme insecurity where he highlights the critical relationship between security, democracy and the rule of law, a theme with apparent bearings also to the present *Sungusungu* case (Hagberg 2018).

7. Yearning for *mhola*

In foregoing chapters, the notion of *mhola* has been mentioned several times and some of the basic tenets of this notion have been hinted at. In this chapter I will broaden the ethnography of the thought-world within which this concept assumes its place and importance. It was within this thought-world the *Sungusungu* movement emerged and evolved, a thought-world familiar to all and sundry in the communities. There were the values the leaders invariably invoked in forming their political discourse and there was the ultimate goal for the very endeavour of the movement, namely *mhola*, ‘peace’ as understood by the people.

Cultural practices, perceptions and beliefs, as we well know, do change continuously. At the same time, it is equally well known that there are always traces of the past in the present. In our ethnographic descriptions we always run the risk of cultural essentialization. We ‘fix’ a culture for descriptive reasons while, as Koen Stroeken puts it: “Anthropologically, a culture may refer to a social reality that stimulates certain states (manifest in experiences as much as in social process) within a range of interrelated possibilities available to all humans” (Stroeken 2010: 10). This dynamic take on the notion of culture is good to keep in mind, but as a guideline for more straightforward descriptive purposes it poses problems.

In the present chapter I will describe some cosmological notions and ritual practices for *mhola* among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi. I do this on purpose to provide more ethnographic background to the topic of my exposition and while doing this I do have in mind the emic concepts of my interlocutors in the field, namely *nhungwa na shimile*, which in English translation most literally would mean ‘customs and traditions’ of the peoples concerned. In more anthropological terms, this is simply the issue about how people view their world, speak about it and act upon it.⁵⁹ Some of these practices like rituals concerning the veneration of ancestors do still to a considerable extent belong to the present, while others, like the chiefly territorial rituals I describe, have largely become obsolete and are

⁵⁹ In Swahili these terms would read ‘*mira na desturi*’. But there is also a term for ‘culture’ in a more comprehensive sense in Swahili, namely *utamaduni*.

not practiced regularly any longer. Things change over time, yet *mhola*, ancestors, sacrifice, medicinal knowledge, witchcraft, the marvel of twin-births and other culturally rooted concepts and images still belong to the current discourse world of people in the villages and therefore to a variable extent do matter to them in their daily lives.

The people of *mhola*

To Evans-Pritchard, the anthropological ancestor I here invoke, familiarity with the language and the contextual use of words and symbols was the very key to the understanding of the thought-world of the people studied. He uncompromisingly argued that the success or failure of the anthropological investigation hinged on the ability of the fieldworker to identify crucial key words and to determine their meanings (Evans-Pritchard 1967 [1951]: 79-80). In the preface to *Nuer Religion* (1956), Evans-Pritchard makes his conviction most explicit. He writes that from his earliest days among the Azande he constantly heard the word *mangu*, witchcraft, and it soon became clear to him that if he only could elicit the meaning of this word, he would have the key to Zande philosophy. Later, among the Nuer, he constantly heard them speaking of *kwoth*, ‘spirit’, and he realized that “a full understanding” of this word was the very key to their philosophy. The results are well known. Even if “a full understanding” will continuously elude our efforts, Evans-Pritchard's rich ethnographic work has for decades provided a most fertile ground for intellectual pondering, interpretation and reinterpretation again.⁶⁰

Though in principle accepted by many, the adherence to Evans-Pritchard's prescription has varied among ethnographic practitioners. Particularly the rule about learning and working through the vernacular language has not in all instances been followed to the letter. But even if there is a strict obedience of Evans-Pritchard's dictum regarding language and vernacular terms, there are still problems facing the fieldworker. As the

⁶⁰ A good example of rewarding results from following the ‘key-word approach’ advocated by Evans-Pritchard is Godfrey Lienhardt's study of the Dinka religion. In Lienhardt's interpretative work, *Divinity and Experience* (1961), leading the thought to William James classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), the Dinka notion of *nhialic* is de-exoticized and made part of our common human stock of varieties of religious experience. More recent examples of a work in this vein, though without reference to Evans-Pritchard, are Feierman's study of peasant intellectuals in Shambaa society and history, discussed in the foregoing (1990), and Knut Myhre's more recent study of language, life force and history among the Chagga in Kilimanjaro (2018).

master himself argued, to identify and determine the meanings of the crucial words is the most difficult task in the anthropological endeavour (Evans-Pritchard 1967 [1951]: 80; 1973). Taking the lead from Evans-Pritchard's insistence on being guided by cultural key concepts in ethnographic work, I have asked myself what words or concepts of a similar ubiquity and importance as *mangu* among the Azande and *kwoth* among the Nuer exist in the thought-world and social life among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi.

In Sukuma-Nyamwezi imagery and thought-world there is 'spirit', *Liwelelo*, and there is 'witchcraft', *bulogi*. These words are important and frequently used, as are the words for kin, the living and the dead, *badugu*, *masamva*, *mizimu*. But the word most constantly heard in all facets of life is that of *mhola*. In fact, it is so frequently spoken that, to the listener, it could easily pass by as word of no great significance. During my childhood and youth, spent as the son of missionaries working in northern Unyamwezi, I both heard and spoke the word every day, since it is repeatedly used in all encounters where greetings are exchanged. It was good to hear and good to speak, but it was a 'lived' word and not a word to reflect upon. Later in life, when I took an interest in ethnography, I did not come across any closer treatment of this concept in the fairly extensive documentation on various aspects of Sukuma and Nyamwezi culture and society. During my summer holidays in Tanzania in the mid-1960s, I documented Sukuma ideas about the 'Supreme Being' for an undergraduate paper in History and Psychology of Religion (Brandström 1966). This was most rewarding, because it radically changed my preconceived ideas about Sukuma-Nyamwezi religion. Still the notion of *mhola* was too self-evident to me to become a topic for reflection. I even did my anthropological fieldwork in the 1970s without starting to ponder this concept that now seems to me vitally important.

I have elsewhere (Brandström 1990a: 168) described *mhola* as the 'cool' state, the state of peace and good relations both between the living and between the living and the dead, where the women conceive, the herds and flocks multiply and the land yields fruit. Health, prosperity, peace, and all the good of life belong to the realm of *mhola*. It refers to the desirable state of life in a most comprehensive sense and carries a notion of wholeness and completeness. To be *mhola* is to be complete, to be whole, both as a social and physical person. Whenever people meet they reassure each other about each other's *mhola* in their exchange of greetings. Though the uncertainties and vicissitudes of life are taken for granted in the everyday experience of people, this fact is simultaneously negated in the unceasing reaffirmation of the desirable state of life. Whatever problems a person expe-

riences, the first assurance in any social encounter will invariably be that *mhola* prevails. You ask after the *mhola* of the other and you are invariably ascertained of the prevalence of *mhola*. This part in the exchange of greetings, though couched in the form of a question, can be read as a wish of prosperity or a blessing. Only then may things non-*mhola* come to the fore in the interlocution.

However, there is no inclusive expression for the state of non-*mhola*. Things non-*mhola* are all spoken of in terms of ‘not being with’ or ‘lacking’ *mhola*. I translate *mhola* as the ‘cool’ state but bracketed with inverted commas to indicate that this is not a literal translation. The word *mhola* is not directly associated with physical cold. Yet it contrasts with *busebu*, which is the word used both for physical heat and, in ritual discourse, for danger. The term for making or restoring *mhola* is *kuhoja*, ‘to cool’, the causative verbal form of the noun, that is, to counteract the disintegrative and harmful forces in life.⁶¹

All socially sanctioned rituals are performed to ensure the state of *mhola* or, when *mhola* is disturbed, to restore this state. Against the fragile and utopian condition of *mhola*, there is sickness, *busatu*, and death, *lufu*, natural calamities such as drought and subsequent famine, *nzala*, and there is competition and strife causing enmity, *widuma*, *wikenya*, and there is the radical negation of all community values, most emphatically expressed in the idiom of *bulogi*, ‘witchcraft’. In other words, there are forces at play for and against the desirable state of *mhola*, which people have either to master or comply with.

Life is thus an incessant quest for *mhola*. In everyday life this is expressed in various forms of being together, in the daily exchange of greetings, and it comes to the fore in rituals like sacrifice, *kitambo*, for individual afflictions and in collective rituals of cosmological significance like those following the birth of twins. The idiom of *mhola*, its creation and recreation, constitutes a theme, which infuses a cosmological aspect into the performances, whether formal or informal, and tunes them toward ritual.

The Sukuma-Nyamwezi word for the totality of the universe is *Liwelelo* (Brandström 1991: 134; 1990a: 172-173). The term *Liwelelo* refers both to the concrete physical world and the animating principle of the world. It is beyond designation in terms of male and female, good and evil, and is spoken of in both personal and impersonal terms. Though unreachable and beyond human control and all that is related to the human

⁶¹While *mhola* is a word with entirely positive connotations, *mbeho*, the word for physical cold, carries negative ones.

sphere of influence, *Liwelelo*, under one of its many appellatives⁶², is continuously addressed and invoked. Indeed, in essential aspects Godfrey Lienhardt's fine-tuned description of the Dinka *nhialic* as 'divinity' could well apply to *Liwelelo* when he writes that the "word can be used to convey to the mind at once a being, a kind of nature or existence, and a quality of that kind of being; it can be made to appear more substantive or qualitative, more personal or general, in connotation, according to the context ..." (1961: 30). Students of various aspects of Sukuma and Nyamwezi religion have alternately translated the word *Liwelelo* as 'Supreme Being', 'God' and 'High God' (Bösch 1930; Cory 1951; Millroth 1965; Wijzen 1993). I prefer to retain the vernacular term, alluding again to and paraphrasing Lienhardt, to save us from shifting our attention from a Sukuma-Nyamwezi word "to undefined, yet for every one fairly definite, conceptions of our own" (Lienhardt 1961: 30). In the Sukuma-Nyamwezi thought-world, as I have argued (Brandström 1990a: 173), *Liwelelo* is both an ultimate value and a non-value in the sense that it represents neither plus nor minus, neither good nor bad; it expresses the ineffable and constitutes, in some essential sense, an empty category or an indeterminate value. This concept accommodates the vicissitudes of life beyond human control as well as the unforeseen and never experienced. But, being beyond human control, there is not, apart from invocations, any particular cult of *Liwelelo*.

The very focus of ritual life is constituted by the perceived relationship between the living and the dead. This relationship assumes its visible manifestations in the veneration and the cult of the ancestors. The ancestors count as a part of the cognatically related collectivity of kin, *budugu*, and are addressed by the same terminology as living kin. As *masamva* or *mizimu*, that is, the active aspect of the ancestors, they manifest themselves as a source of power affecting the living. The flow of ancestral power encompasses all descendants, both males and females, and a person's communication with the ancestors is directed toward and confined to the collectivity of his or her own ancestors. Only the royal ancestors and, in some respects twin-ancestors and the ancestors of great diviners and rainmakers of the past, are believed to have an influence that extends beyond the restricted kin group, an influence that relates to the well-being of the land and the territory.

While *Liwelelo* represents power beyond human reach that can take any shape, personal or impersonal, ancestors represent power within human reach. With them there is sharing. The shrine where the ancestral sacrifice is made is called *kigabilo*. This means 'the place of sharing' or

⁶² Bösch (1930: 26-27) reports fifty-five appellatives and even more names could be added. See also Paul Schönenberger (1961).

the place where you partition or distribute between yourselves and the addressees of the ritual the assets or resources you possess. This marks a sharp difference between the ancestors and conceptions about power beyond the human sphere. One of the appellatives of *Liwelelo* is *Nyahazimbolwa*, that means, ‘the one to whom no offerings can be made’ or ‘the one with whom humans have nothing to share’. *Bugota* is a third category that in the quest for *mhola* represents an important source of power. Although the ancestors as a source of power and influence are superior to the living, the relationship between the living and the dead is one of reciprocity, characterized by gifts in various forms from the descendants to the ancestors with the hope of counter-gifts, though one can fully agree with Stroeken in his recent and well-researched study on Sukuma ritual life, when he, on the issue of sacrifice, argues: “While sacrifice implicitly feeds the expectation of return (for example, health and prosperity) from the receiver (such as the ancestor), its outspoken meaning is the exact opposite: placating, beseeching, the blessing from the ancestral spirits” (2010: 13). Or, as he argues elsewhere in his text about sacrificial attitude that it does not imply the *do ut des* of the gift, namely, in due time you will have something back, but rather a form of: “Will the ancestor feel compelled by our sacrifice?” (Stroeken 2010: 101). *Bugota*, however, is a power that can be manipulated by man, though in various fields of the art, the blessing of the ancestors could be considered a prerequisite.

Bugota refers to any objects, substances or combination of substances, or combination of objects and substances, which through their intrinsic properties or through their manipulation are believed to have a desired effect. The aspirin of the Western physician as well as the rainmaker's bundle are all classified as *bugota*. The person who masters *bugota* is called *mfumu*, a knowledgeable person and an expert to whom people in trouble and affliction can turn to for help.⁶³ Most commonly the *mfumu* relates to the ancestors in his or her practice, but any person may at will seek apprenticeship with an established *mfumu* to learn his or her specific art of *bugota* and, subsequently be initiated into the art.

The notions of *Liwelelo*, ancestors and *bugota* are all vitally important in the Sukuma-Nyamwezi discourse on *mhola*. They constitute idioms for

⁶³ In the southern part of the region the word *mganga* is commonly used instead of *mfumu* and the word *buganga* instead of *bugota*. For more detailed information on the Sukuma *mfumu*, conceptions of witchcraft and Sukuma healing practices see for example Cory (1949), Colby Hatfield (1968), Marlene Reid (1982) and, more recently, Koen Stroeken's ethnographic well-informed study (2010). For further ethnographic detail see Bösch (1930: passim), with a broader regional scope, and Blohm (1933: passim), the latter more narrowly confined to southern Unyamwezi.

talking about the world and thus making it imaginable. In the life of people, they are like strings on the instrument for tuning the melody on the vicissitudes of life, its joy and its sorrow, its *mhola* and its lack of *mhola*. In this melody the strongest discord is *bulogi*, witchcraft and sorcery, the destructive and radical evil.

The term *bulogi* covers both the sorcerer who causes death and destruction to his or her neighbours through unsocial use of *bugota* and the witch that travels invisibly by night, associated with owls and hyenas, to commit its heinous acts. I said above that *bulogi* is one of the words frequently used. This statement needs some clarification. While *Livelelo*, and to some extent *bugota*, belong to the overt and public domain, *bulogi* belongs to the obscure and hidden domain. In public, people may freely tell astounding stories about dreadful events in the past and in distant places, but carefully avoid allusions to *bulogi* in the close community. Sorcerers and witches, *balogi* (sing. *nogi*), the practitioners of *bulogi*, are the intentional destroyers of life and therefore a constant threat to the *mhola* of the human community. In other words, *bulogi* is the very negation of *mhola*, and as such an unatoneable evil.

Diversity and unity in ritual practices

Sukuma-Nyamwezi ritual life is characterized by rich variation in forms, flexibility with regard to individual choice and a focus on the circumstantial features of life rather than on regular transitions related to the biological life cycle or to the annual cycle of nature.

In Sukuma-Nyamwezi tradition, there were no elaborated initiation rites related to the development from child to adult and none of the practices of male or female circumcision, common among neighbouring peoples to the north and to the east of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi area. Boys and girls grew into the cultural patterns without any dramatic ritual project marking the transition from childhood to adulthood at puberty and it was continuously so regarding the series of age-categories an individual passed through during his or her lifetime.⁶⁴ Perhaps the most elaborated rituals in the life cycle of an individual were those that marked the transition from adulthood to elderhood, *ihane* or *bunamhala*.⁶⁵ But, even here, there was room for certain flexibility.

⁶⁴ The Sukuma-Nyamwezi did not possess a formal age-set system. However, age-categories were and are crucially important in community organization and community life (see e.g. Abrahams 1967a: 67-68).

⁶⁵ See Stroeken for a treatment of this issue in close detail (2010: 78-85 et passim).

The rituals linked to the agricultural cycle and its annual calendar (see Cory 1951), were in the past all closely related to chieftainship and the mediating role of the chief between the cosmological order and the cultural and social order. As long as the chiefs remained in power, these rituals continued to carry weight, in the context of social changes, to a variable extent. With changes over time and especially the abolishment of chiefship after the dismantling of colonial administration, however, this ritual calendar largely fell into disuse, though not entirely into oblivion.⁶⁶

The contexts in which Sukuma-Nyamwezi ritual life has continuously and persistently come to its most conspicuous and elaborated expressions are those of the ancestral cult in its various forms and those of the numerous ritual guilds, special-purpose associations and dance societies. These latter contexts, as has been pointed out in the foregoing, present a multitude of groupings criss-crossing the society, each of them, though often multi-purpose in character, with a particular feature under which its fame is spread, such as divinatory practices of various kinds, special healing and fertility rites, knowledge of trees and plants for curing, snake charming or just groupings for mutual aid in agricultural work or dancing and social entertainment. Some of these groupings are of long standing while others are of more recent origin. Some are open associations with little ritual elaboration involved while others are closed societies requiring elaborated initiation rituals for admittance⁶⁷, and some are rather localized while others are widely spread over the entire Sukuma-Nyamwezi area and even beyond.

At a first glance, this variety of forms yields a picture of great ritual diversity. Woven into the ancestral idiom and the continuous discourse on *mhola*, however, features of unity rather than diversity may emerge. According to this mode of thinking, nobody could build his or her fame separated from the flow of power of the ancestors. The great leaders of the various guilds and societies are all renowned *bafumu* (plural of *mfumu*). They are diviners and healers, men and women of marvels, who participate in the continuous interpretation of the world according to the way of the ancestors. While the totality of the world, *Liwelelo*, is to man's comprehension 'like groping around in the dark', *gitumu munhu alishiminza uja ukumyakumya*, 'their true path', *nzila yabo tetele*, along which the vicissitudes of life in an incomprehensible world are given their meaning, is the ancestors (Brandström 1991: 134-135). Above, I translated the word

⁶⁶Recently, installation of chiefs has been reported from various parts of Sukumaland.

⁶⁷A telling example of this kind of more esoteric kind of associations is the *Chwezi* spirit cult. For a detailed description and analysis of this cult in contemporary Sukumaland see Stroeken (2006; 2010: 217-234).

mfumu as ‘knowledgeable person’. Bösch (1930: 133) describes the *mfumu* as *sacerdoce* and he derives the word from the verb form *-fumbula* which means ‘to open up’, ‘to reveal’ or ‘to make the obscure and hidden transparent’. Although Bösch’s derivation is not entirely unobjectionable on linguistic grounds,⁶⁸ the *mfumu* is indeed a seer and a *sacerdoce* in the sense that he/she is the master of ritual down to its detailed minutiae, whether in the context of the ancestral cult or in any other ritual context.

Labour for peace

To say that the Sukuma-Nyamwezi are a people of *mhola* does not of course imply a society of stable peace and harmonious brotherhood. There is sickness and death, there is enmity and radical evil, and there is drought and famine, which threaten the *mhola* of the individual, the family, the society and the land. The social and cosmic harmony is always at risk and when it reigns, it is like a precarious truce. The world of *mhola* rather than a world of static being is a world of becoming or a world in constant making and remaking. In the endeavour to create and recreate *mhola*, sacrifice in various forms play an important part.

In his masterful study on African sacrifice, Luc de Heusch argues that one common function of African sacrificial rites “is to restore the normal physical condition of man – his health, or his status – which has been compromised by some ‘offence’” (1985: 5). He points to the symbolic interconnectedness of the social order with the cosmic order and how men, defined by their network of prohibitions, resort to sacrificial rites to restore the normal conditions of life when the orders have been compromised (1985: 5-14).

In Sukuma-Nyamwezi cultural tradition, livestock is considered a privileged means of negotiating a truce and of recreating a harmonious state when the social and cosmic orders have been disturbed. Depending on context and circumstance, the life of a bull, a goat or in some instances a sheep is required for the restoration of *mhola*. We may speak of sacrifice, though the slaughtering of an animal for *mhola* would not in all cases imply any reference to non-human powers or agents.

In the ritual practices, sacrifices to the ancestors do not pose any definitional problem since they would fit well into conventional matrices for classifying ritual acts as sacrifice. There are other ritualized killings of

⁶⁸ Alternatively the term can be related to *-fumbul-*, disclose, expose something kept secret or hidden (Richardson 1966: 28).

animal victims, however, in which the classification is more problematic in relation to conventional schemata. That is, for example, in cases where the animal is not consecrated to any supra human subject and where the killing of the animal, according to the indigenous exegesis, refers to nothing but the efficacy of the act itself. Here I am not inclined to make any analytical distinctions between these various instances by referring to the dichotomies of sacred/profane, human/non-human agents or religious/non-religious, since I interpret them all as variations of a common idiomatic theme in Sukuma-Nyamwezi culture.⁶⁹ With regard to the form of the acts, however, the various instances could well be classified, following de Heusch's scheme as mainly conjunctive or disjunctive (de Heusch 1985: 213 and passim), though they are all reparative in nature and part of the ritual work to create unity and wholeness.

In the ethnographic documentation on the Sukuma and the Nyamwezi there are several valuable ethnographic descriptions of sacrificial practices. Here the ethnographies of Bösch (1930, 1938-39), Blohm (1933) and the unpublished documents on Sukuma religion and ancestral cult contained in the White Fathers' Archives in Rome (Rome n.d.) are rich in detail and deserve a special mention. The ritual complexes described in these documents are functional to a variable degree today. Generally one can say that the royal or chiefly rituals of the past (Bösch 1930: 149-153, 496-502; Cory 1951; Tanner 1957) do no longer figure prominently in ritual life, neither do the dramatic disjunctive and reconciliatory rites in connection with murder, parental curses and adultery, which sometimes involved the cutting of the animal victim in two (Bösch 1930: 246-253; Blohm 1933: 122-124). In domestic rituals and communal ceremonies of reconciliation, however, immolation of animal victims still constitutes an important feature.

Sacrifices addressed to the ancestors are or were mainly of two kinds, either concerning the territorial realm or the domestic one. For example, the chiefly sacrifices to royal ancestors concerned the territorial realm while the familial sacrifices concerned the domestic realm. That is, while the former are performed for the prosperity of the land and the peace and wellbeing of its inhabitants, the focus of the familial sacrifice is the health and fertility of the afflicted family member. It should be emphasized that according to the Sukuma-Nyamwezi ancestral idiom, effective communi-

⁶⁹Focusing on the notion of *mhola*, I take as sacrifice, rites of killing animal victims in a broader ritual context where the killing of the animal is a necessary condition for the accomplishment of the ritual, or, to allude to de Heusch's functional argument, when the killing of an animal victim constitutes a necessary part of the ritual work to re-establish compromised or disturbed social and cosmic orders.

cation with ancestors is confined to one's own ancestors, *badugu*. That is the collectivity of both left-side ancestors, *ba buta*, of the bow, the father's side, and right-side ancestors, *migongo* (back), of the back, the mother's side.⁷⁰ There is a sharp divide between kin, *badugu*, and 'strangers', *ban-amiko*. In the familial context, the wife, being neither 'bow' nor 'back' in relation to her husband, is a 'ritual stranger', *munamiko* (sing. of *bana-miko*),⁷¹ to him. She will take part in the ancestral cult of her husband, as do the neighbours, but she is outside the realm of influence of her husband's ancestors, and the same principle applies to the opposite relationship of husband to wife's *badugu*. The royal ancestors were considered the ancestors of the land, *ba si*, and as such the guardians of the land, of the peace and prosperity of the entire territory with which they are identified. In the familial cult, however, the same principle of exclusion/inclusion applies between all families, whether royal or non-royal.

The chiefly ritual work of the *ntemi* was *kuhoja chalo*, to secure the *mhola* of the territory. Through divination the *ntemi* was advised to sacrifice, not a goat as in the familial cult, but a bull or a he-goat of black colour to the chiefly ancestors. The setting of the sacrificial drama was complex, inscribed as it is in the symbolic idiom of bow and back, left and right, father's side and mother's side, male and female, east and west, with reversals between the territorial realm and the domestic realm, where the *ntemi* is 'right' and the child of women, while the family head, *namugi*, is 'left' and the child of the father, all representations out of which a social and a cosmological domain is formed.

In the familial sacrifice, rather schematically described, one could say, since there are variations on the theme, the *mfumu* again is the revealer of the grounds of the affliction, the prescriber of the remedy, the one who through divination identifies the ancestor concerned to whom the sacrifice is performed, and also the master of ceremonies, but as the master of ceremonies only a consultant to the afflicted family. The neighbours are around, as witnesses of the performance and as participants in the common meal that concludes the ritual. A *mpugo*, ideally in some of the instances, should be present. That is a member of a family who stands in joking relationship to the family of the afflicted person, since a *mpugo* is the right person to immolate a consecrated animal. The main actors of the drama are the afflicted person and his or her close relatives. They are the ones who address the ancestors. Most important in this ritual inner circle is

⁷⁰ For a more detailed treatment of lateral symbolism among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, see Brandström (1991).

⁷¹ The term derives from *miko* (sing. *ng'wiko*), 'ritual prohibitions'.

the *mhoja*, the sacrificer, in some instances a *ng'wizukulu*, a classificatory grandson of the ancestor concerned, and the *mhojiwa*, the sacrificer.

The sacrificial victim, one could say, is the pen with which the cosmography of *mhola* is redrawn and when accomplished, commensality begins. The neighbours who are *banamiko*, ritual strangers whether members of chiefly or non-chiefly kin groups, the diviner, a total stranger, and the *badugu*, the bounded circle of the sacrificial event itself, all partake in the communal meal prepared of the sacrificial animal. The immolated beast is partitioned not according to the dualities of kin and stranger, chiefly and non-chiefly, territorial realm and domestic realm, a world of bounded and separated parts, but according to age and gender categories which unite the separated parts into one whole, that is into one social body.

Apart from ancestral sacrifices, a long list can be made of instances where a beast was or is considered the privileged means of restoring cosmic harmony and of mending the social fabric when torn by some offence. Murder, certain kinds of adultery, marriage between distant relatives (incest between close relatives was not considered ritually amendable; in the past it is said the perpetrators were killed or expelled from the chiefdom in order to avert the natural calamities that were thought to follow the act (Bösch 1930: 532)), widow inheritance and transgression of community prohibitions are all instances where the ceremonial immolation of a beast is like the 'rubber stamp' of ritual efficacy. The ritual vocabulary tells a story of *kweja*, to cleanse, to purify, of *kwinja* or *kutina nsoni*, to dissolve or to cut off shame, and of *kulya*, to eat. All the different terms, however, are subsumed under the encompassing term of *kuhoja*, to 'cool' or 'to make' *mhola*. In the communal reconciliatory ritual, when the perpetrator has brought his fine, *masumule*, in form of cattle or goats and when the men, in the open, have done their work of butchering, partitioning and cooking the meat while the women do their work of cooking the cereal food in in-door seclusion, and the beasts have been consumed in commensality, the perpetrator and the offended social body together, then the *mhola* of the community has been regained. The exclamations *twalya ng'ombe*, 'we have eaten cattle', or *twalya mbuli*, 'we have eaten goat', mean that there is peace.

Destroyers and bringers of *mhola*

I described in the foregoing the witch, *nogi*, as the intentional destroyer of life. In bewitchment, *bulogi*, one could say, the evil intention counts. The

figure of the witch belongs to the social proximity of the bewitched, most commonly to the circle of kin and affines. There is therefore a moral relationship between the witch and the victim of bewitchment, constituted by social obligations. Is then the bewitched person experientially indebted to the witch-suspect because of unfulfilled social obligations? In his monograph, *Moral Power: The Magic of Witchcraft*, Stroeken gives the issue of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations in contemporary Sukumaland an ethnographically very thorough and theoretically challenging treatment (2010). The witch's grudge, he writes, "whether or not justified in the victim's eyes, gives the witch access" (2010: 30). This is what Stroeken calls, the witch's moral power and why evil intentions, imagined or real, experientially count. Now, this is not the place to delve deeper into the intricacies of the topic, so multivocally treated by anthropologists and other students of humanities and social science, not the least the tricky issue concerning why culturally formed conceptions about witchcraft and bewitchment in some historical situations are contained while in others 'go wild', causing witch-hunting and killings. Suffice to say that in relation to *mhola*, the topic of this chapter, witchcraft, *bulogi*, as has been argued, represents a radical and unatoneable evil.

While the image of the witch unambiguously evokes associations about destructive power and the dark side of social relationships, there are other powerful images simultaneously connoting both destructive and regenerative power. The image of twins is one telling example of this kind of ambiguity. Among many peoples around our globe, though with varied cultural articulations, the births of twins were and still are considered to be events of extraordinary importance and so was and still is the case to a large extent with regard to the Sukuma-Nyamwezi people. Twins are perceived to have an extraordinary and highly ambiguous status; they represent both a curse and a blessing and, thus, births of twins are subject to elaborate ritual practices for resolving the ambiguity of the ominous event, so considered, for the sake of *mhola*.

The birth of twins, though a family matter, was considered to have implications far beyond the restricted domestic domain. It represents an excess of human fertility expressed in terms of 'heat', *busebu*. Twins, *mabasa*, are said to be 'hot', *basebu*, and their dangerous 'heat' not only threatens the lives of their parents and of the extended kin group to which they belong, *budugu*; it also endangers the cosmic order, the fertility of the fields and the coming of the rains. Thus, unless rituals are performed to transform the ominous 'heat' into life-giving power, epidemics and natural disasters may strike the country.

In the various ethnographic accounts, the ambiguity of twinship comes out strongly. Cory, basing his opinion on material from Sukumaland and northern Unyamwezi, writes about “the old custom of killing twins or one of the twins” (1944: 34). N. D. Yongolo, writing on the southern Nyamwezi, corroborates Cory's view about the custom of killing one of the twins, because, he writes, “twins are thought to be witches, they cannot live peacefully together so one of them must be defeated” (1953: 3).⁷² Among the earlier observers, Blohm stresses the ominous aspect of twinship (1933: 17-18), while Bösch emphasizes the ambiguous aspects (1930: 465-467) and Michel Gass, finally, presents the view, that the birth of twins is an event of cheerful rejoicing and of felicitation (1973: 446). These contradictory opinions truly reflect the ambiguity of the topic. Twins can be likened to ‘king’, the *ntemi*, who in Sukuma-Nyamwezi imagery and symbolic representation is both a ferocious animal of the forest and a source of power for the *mhola* of the land and the entire country (Brandström 1990a: 180-181). Bösch most emphatically states that twins were regarded like kings, “*comme rois*”, and accordingly treated as such; royal insignia were required for their ritual and when they died they were honoured like members of the royal family (1930: 223, 465-466). The figure of twinship in Sukuma-Nyamwezi thought-world and symbolic imagery is equally as Janus-faced as that of *ntemiship*, containing both destructive and regenerative aspects.⁷³

The birth of twins thus challenges the normal orders of life. It threatens both the social and the cosmic order. Instead of one child, a daughter or a son, two children are born. Instead of children born in a prolonged temporal sequence and accordingly classified as senior and junior, there is coevalness. In the naming of twins, gender distinctions are ignored. Irrespective of sex, twins are named *Kulwa* and *Doto*, the first-born and the second born. They are said to be highly envious and therefore care must be taken to treat them equally. The birth of twins also upsets the normal name-giving order of the family for two consecutive births. The first child born after twins is called *Shija*, a word connoting that there are still things to be accomplished. With the second child after twins the cycle is closed.

⁷² My translation.

⁷³ The ritual complex surrounding birth of twins and other extraordinary births, like infants born in reversed position, those born with teeth or those who cut their upper teeth first, are described in various detail in the ethnographic literature on the Sukuma and Nyamwezi. Apart from Bösch (1930), Blohm (1933), Cory (1944), (1953) and Gass (1973), referred to in my text, Serge Tcherkézoff (1986) has offered his interpretation of the ritual complex surrounding birth of twins, entirely based on previously documented ethnographic material, and Koen Stroeken his interpretation, based on fieldwork in the 1990s (2010: 188-189).

This child is called *Mhoja*, that is the 'Peace-Bringer', the one who re-establishes the normal order of things.⁷⁴

While the ordinary ancestral cult hinges on a notion of efficient communication between alternate generations along the ascending patrilineal and matrilineal lines, twins are equal to ancestors at birth. Irrespective of the fate of the twins, whether they survived the delivery and the precarious early infancy or not, the rituals have to be performed to domesticate the ancestral power of the twins and to avert the ominous influences of the event. And even recently dead, twins are addressed as a powerful ancestral force through the adorned calabashes, *mafinga*, consecrated to them and carrying their names. These calabashes are precious cult objects, attended to, in the cult, by female relatives.

The twin rituals vary considerably in terms of ceremonial detail and refinement of procedure over the Sukuma-Nyamwezi area, both as described in the past and as performed today. The rituals are replete with symbolism marking distinctions between inside and outside, inhabited space and wilderness, dry and wet, male and female, life and death. Besides the symbolism of contrast and dualities there is a rich display of symbolism of form, similarity and metonymy, engaging trees and plants from the bush and utensils used in the domestic sphere as symbolic objects, and there is a play of reversal of orders and values. In the rituals, symbolism of fertility abounds in dances, songs and the language used.

Within this range of variety, however, two common themes are discernible. One is the theme of domestication of ancestral power and the other the theme of linkage between the twins and the wellbeing of the territory. The former theme concerns the domestic realm. Although extraordinary beings, through the rituals, twins are made part of the collectivity of kin, *badugu*. The divide between kin and non-kin and the place of the twins within the array of the ancestral cult is made clear and unambiguous. The other theme concerns the territorial realm. This is where twins become like 'kings'. In the past, the *ntemi* had to be informed about the birth of twins and one of the royal drums was required for performing the twin rituals. But *ntemiship* and twinship are, symbolically, both interlinked and opposed to each other. On the one hand, the birth of twins concerned the *ntemi*, or the titleholder of the local territory, *ng'wanangwa*. On the other hand, however, royal wives who bore twins were expelled with their progeny from the chiefly court.

⁷⁴ In some areas of this ethnic region there are even more elaborate systems of the naming of children born in subsequent order beyond the second birth after the birth of twins.

With his suggestive imagery, de Heusch has described the sacred king as a “body-territory” and “the place where the human territory meets an exterior territory” (de Heusch 1985: 205). Borrowing from this imagery, perhaps one could say that twinship in Sukuma-Nyamwezi thought is the place where the domestic realm meets the territorial realm. Twinship transcends the bounds of domesticated fertility as defined within the symbolic matrix of *budugu* and infringes on the territorial domain, which is that of *ntemiship*. While the ‘king’, who in Sukuma-Nyamwezi mythic thought “comes from elsewhere”,⁷⁵ from the outside, undomesticated domain, as a threatening stranger, the twins emerge as threatening strangers from the ‘inside’, domesticated domain. And while the ‘wildness’ of the ‘king’ in the enthronement rituals is symbolically appropriated and transformed into a promise of rain and abundant crops and pasture, the ‘wildness’ of the twins is in the twin rituals appropriated and transformed into domesticated human fertility (Brandström 1990a: 190-181).

In distinction to the rituals surrounding *ntemiship*, where men are the masters of ceremonies, the women are the prime authors of the twinship ceremonies and the guardians of the cult of twin-ancestors. Or as I elsewhere, perhaps a bit challenging, put it:

However, in connection with twins, the male/female asymmetry and the contrasts of the active male and the passive female are radically transposed. In twin rituals the women assume the superior and active role, while the role of the men becomes subordinate. The women are the officiants of the worship of twin-ancestors and the guardians of the ritual secrets. In this symbolic linkage between the regenerative power of land and human fertility, all orders are confounded and this is where the child-bearing wife becomes the king. (1990a: 182)⁷⁶

In this section I have largely employed ‘the ethnographic present’ in my exposition, that is, describing social life as fixed and unchanging. But where in the changing world of today do we find ourselves in relation to the topic? In the ritual endeavours for *mhola* described, one can simply state that *ntemiship* and the ritual complex surrounding this institution has, with the changing times, largely receded or become obsolete, while twin-

⁷⁵ I borrow again from Luc de Heusch’s thought-provoking metaphoric constructs (1991).

⁷⁶ The prime role of women in this ritual complex is emphasized both in Bösch’s (1930: 222-223, 465-267) and Cory’s ethnographies (1944: 40). Though there are variations in ritual practices over the wide Sukuma-Nyamwezi area, this particular feature tallies well with my own observations in the field.

ship has, to a considerable extent, remained both a subject of pondering in Sukuma-Nyamwezi thought and an object for continued ritual practice.

Wholeness in everyday life

Although occasions such as sacrifice and twin ceremonies are circumstantial, dramatic ritual events to set right what has gone wrong, when the social fabric has been torn or the cosmic order has been compromised, the 'making of *mhola*' is a continuous endeavour in everyday life. In greeting and in various forms of being together the idiom of *mhola* is, as has been pointed at, recurrently evoked.

From the first personal encounters in the early morning, when you quietly sit down and exchange your greetings, until the sun sets in the evening, repeatedly, whenever you meet, you reassure each other about each other's *mhola*. The incessant assurance and reassurance of *mhola*, negates the disruptive forces of life, sickness, death, social disunity and famine. It is a ritual work 'in small' for creating and recreating wholeness.

Greeting implies a formal concordance of experience. People meet and are related to one another, they part and are re-related by telling each other what has happened during the period of separation. Separation creates 'heat' which has to be 'cooled'. This theme comes out most clearly in the ceremonial and highly formalized greeting between people who stand in special relations of respect to each other and between acquaintances who have been separated for some time. The exchanges in this greeting are described by the verb *kupoja*, which literally means 'to cool'. Through the greeting, following a formalized series of exchanges, the disunity caused by separation is repaired and *mhola* regained.

The words of greeting not only 'cool' a disruptive 'heat' and reconstitute wholeness between social partners, they also, like the body of the sacrificial beast, represent and confirm the wholeness of the social body constituted by the community. In sacrifice, the sacrificial beast represents the sacrificing group through its body. It demonstrates, as Lienhardt so aptly put it for the Dinka, "the ordered social relationships of the sacrificing group, the members of which are indeed 'put together' in each beast and represented in their precise relations to each other in the meat it provides" (1961:23). Like the body of the sacrificial beast, the body of words of greeting, alluding to a series of classificatory categories (kinship, generation, affinity, territory), 'puts together' the community. They demonstrate

the precise social relationships constituting the social whole.⁷⁷ And just as the sacrificial act, the partitioning of the sacrificial beast and its consummation, in a more dramatic form confirms an order of *mhola*, the spoken word in the everyday life of the community, in less dramatic form, continuously confirms the same order.

While the words addressed to the ancestors often are urging and rough and the words employed in twin ceremonies abound with sexual allusion and abuse, the words of *mhola* in daily social encounter are just or graceful, *yawiza*, sweet, *minonu*, and beautiful, *misoga*. The standard context where the 'sweet' words are spoken is that of *kuhoya*. Below I quote at length a passage from a chapter on storytelling in Sukumaland in my PhD dissertation (Brandström 1990b: Chapter 7):

Kuhoya is a central concept in the social life of the Sukuma. It can be most nearly translated as 'to keep company'. *Kuhoya* is not, however, just any association with a circle of friends and acquaintances, it is being together in a relaxed and amicable atmosphere. In addition, the expression suggests the lack of any expressed purpose on the part of those who come together. When people meet to discuss a specific problem, this cannot be described as *kuhoya*. In that case one has *ibanza*, a deliberation; there is a definite purpose for the meeting. The concept *kuhoya* is associated with idleness and rest. In the evening by the campfire, at mealtimes, during the hottest hours of the day – these are the appropriate occasions for *kuhoya*. There is also a sense of chance and coincidence in the term. One happens to go by a group who are sitting and talking and because it is pleasant to keep one another company one joins the group. The expression '*atogilwe kuhoya na banhu*' (he likes to keep company with people) says about a person that he is sociable, congenial and pleasant. A corollary of *kuhoya* is *kuseka*, to laugh. A person who likes to keep company, *kuhoya*, with people also likes to laugh, *kuseka*, with people, and he who laughs has no evil intentions. He lives in peace, *mhola*, with his fellow-humans. *Kuhoya* is the context for storytelling. Here one has made oneself comfortable, wants to hear good stories and to laugh together.

⁷⁷ Perhaps the most difficult task of the alien fieldworker is to master the art of greeting, including modes of address, with all its subtle nuances and trickiness. Though, for relaxed socializing and feeling at home in the community, it is more important than any other means.

Past and present in the present

When I in 1997 sat down with old Machalila Gundu, old enough to have memories from the time after World War I when German colonial rule was replaced by British rule, and asked him to explain the very meaning, *makulu gete*, of the notion of *mhola*, he answered in the subtle and rather allegoric way that could be expected from an old, wise Nyamwezi elder. He said, first comes *isumbi*, the stool, then *shiliwa*, food, and then there is *kwiyinha mhola*, that is, peaceful social exchange. In other words, first you have to be seated to ‘cool’ yourself and still your hunger, and only then the stage for *mhola* has been set. With an unsettled mind and unsatisfied physical needs there are no conditions for peaceful social relations. Old Machalila’s answer boils down to the essentials of human life irrespective of whether we find ourselves here or there in our world. What differs is the way we, in the long duration of time, have formed our ways to handle our basic human condition.

In this chapter, I have summarized some of the tenets of Sukuma-Nyamwezi ways to handle the basics of the human condition by exploring the notion of *mhola*. One could perhaps argue that this line of reasoning underplays influences of alternative and competing modes of thought, when the impact of the Christian mission and Islam⁷⁸ since the late nineteenth century and onward, and, in recent times more and more widespread, formal schooling and modernizing education is taken into consideration. This is true but it is equally true that the Sukuma-Nyamwezi culture has been moulded and remoulded in constant interaction with the external world for a much longer period than that, though in this process, as in all cultural worlds, retaining traits of the past in the present. Perhaps the *mhola* idiom within its multifaceted cultural thought-world is less to be understood as a feature of resistance to change than a means to accom-

⁷⁸ According to the figures of the National Census of 1967, the last census in which religious and ethnic affiliation were reported, the distribution of the population according to the religious categories used in the census was in the Sukuma dominated regions of Mwanza and Shinyanga, for “Local Belief” 74 percent, Christians 16, Muslims 5 and for “Not Stated” 5 percent respectively. Based on figures of the Roman Catholic Church, Wijssen (1993) estimates that in 1988 some 10 percent of the entire population of Sukumaland was Catholic. Since the Catholic Church was then the largest single Christian denomination and the Muslims constitute a small minority in the rural areas, this figure indicates that “Local Belief” is still a fact to reckon with in the analysis. Though statistical figures on religious affiliation never should be taken at face value, available figures and estimates indicate that a considerable part of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi population still today does not, even nominally, confess to Christianity or Islam. And those who do adopt the idioms of the proselytizing religions, it could be added, do this to a large extent with considerable culture-specific creativity.

moderate change. One of the appellatives of *Liwelelo* is *Nyangalu* or *Linyangalula*, this means ‘The Great Changer’ or ‘The Great Transformer’; it refers to a world in continuous change, to the fact that you can never foresee the wonders of tomorrow, things unseen before and to experiences and circumstances never faced.

We humans can never detach ourselves from the implications of *la longue durée* and the cultural heritage we carry with us. This is something that to a greater or lesser extent continues to matter in our lives in the very present. To this condition of human life the *Sungusungu* movement, in its emergence and developments, was no exception. The imageries of *bufumu*, divining/healing, *bugota*, medicine, *kitambo*, sacrifice, *bupugo*, joking partnership, *mabasa*, twins, *bulogi*, witchcraft, and many more than only these carried meaning and had practical implications for the people, who formed the movement, in their quest for *mhola*.

Arturo Escobar reminds us, as previously hinted at, that it is crucial “that social movements be seen as cultural struggles in a fundamental sense, that is, as struggles over meanings as much as over socio-economic conditions” (1992: 412). The struggles over socio-economic conditions are generally more accessible to our vision while the struggles over meanings are less so. Yet, it is only here we can catch something of the tenor or, as Orin Starn puts it, “the unique cadence” of any particular social movement (1992: 90). The struggle for *mhola*, which was the professed objective of the *Sungusungu* movement in its early emergence and developments was, indeed, apart from the most apparent struggle over socio-economic conditions of that particular time, a struggle over meanings in the sense of making the struggle comprehensible and meaningful for those addressed and involved in it.

8. From social movement to state-sanctioned institution

The early phase of the movement

In its early formation and spread, *Sungusungu* could well be described as a social revitalization movement.⁷⁹ It emerged, one could reiterate, upon a prolonged period of social and economic stress and disillusionment among people with the existing order of things and experience of economic and political depravation. People in the villages were, indeed, severely afflicted by the deep societal crisis and the harassment from organized, armed crime and increasing lawlessness in everyday life was painfully felt by the village people, irrespective of whether they were men or women, old or young, relatively wealthy or poor. In this situation bits and pieces of the past and present fall into place to form something new. After a series of unsuccessful attempts of various protest actions, a certain form for mobilization develops or crystallises, consonant with a political language that was comprehensible to the many. It is now, in the early 1980s, that *Sungusungu* becomes a movement sweeping from village to village.

Sungusungu, when the movement was formed, was, indeed, thoroughly couched in the idioms of local understandings. It emerged from within the local society. The leaders were village peasants who cultivated their fields and herded their flocks. The language was local, the organizational templates were those known from the past and so were also the arms, that is the bows and particularly the poisoned arrows, which came to be the very markers of the movement. The name itself of the movement, as has been pointed out, *Sungusungu*, deriving from the Sukuma-Nyamwezi word for poison, *busungu*, referred to the poisoned arrows and as such an essential part of the weaponry of the defence groups that were formed. Though the movement became widely known as *Sungusungu*, the participants among themselves most widely used the name of *Basalama*, derived from the

⁷⁹ Anthony Wallace's classical model on religious revitalization movements could in some respects be applied to the *Sungusungu* movement concerning its emergence, its structuration process and routinization (Wallace 1956).

word, as has been pointed out, for peace, *salama*. This name tells us something fundamental about how the participants viewed themselves, namely as peacekeepers or guardians of peace. In the local cultural idiom, the task of the *Basalama* was simply to restore and maintain *mhola*, ‘the cool state’, namely peace and harmony, in the community. People spoke of *mhola*, ‘peace’, which was lost. They spoke of the time as a one of *bulugu*, war, instead of *mhola*, of *widuma*, conflict, instead of *kwiwigwa*, concord, and of *bulogi*, the ruthlessness and destruction of witchcraft, instead of *kwigunana*, mutual help and communal solidarity. They used, of course, the intellectual and material means at their disposal, that is, their inherited language, their own notions and concepts of understanding, their organizational knowledge and skills and, of course, available material means for self-defence. These ‘images’ and ‘tools’ rooted in local knowledge and tradition must not, as has been argued in the foregoing, be read as simply signalling a return to the past or as a sign of a nostalgic urge for an imagery paradise lost. Rather, we face in our interpretations, to use Michael Jackson’s words on cultural praxis, a “field of a dialectic in which the sedimented and anonymous meanings of the past are taken up as means of making a future” (1996: 11). The language of the past together with the conceptions, knowledge and skills, derived from the past, were applied by Sukuma and Nyamwezi peasants to cope with the problems of the present. As Steven Feierman wrote in his study of peasant discourse and political change among the Shambaa in north-eastern Tanzania, one could say that “forms of discourse inherited from the past” were actively chosen by the peasants “to shape the inherited language anew to explain current problems” (1990: 3).

When I in 1984 returned to the village of Itanana, as described in the foregoing, the situation in the village had radically changed compared to the situation during my previous visit in 1978. *Sungusungu* was now at its height. There was a kind of effervescence in the village and pride among people for what had been achieved. People had a new sense of power and importance. I was told that the power of *bibonya*, those who do not respect their fellow humans, had been broken, cattle rustling had declined sharply and housebreaking and petty theft was no longer a problem in the village. However, as has been described, the sphere of activity of *Sungusungu* was not restricted only to village security. It also included community affairs in a more comprehensive sense. Thus, for example, *Sungusungu* took responsibility for cultivation of the collective village field, for carrying out repair and improvement of feeder roads to the village and for organizing mutual aid groups for various purposes in the village.

Much of the literature on *Sungusungu* has focused on the policing aspects of the movement, that is, the coming to grips with violent crime and increasing lawlessness beleaguering the community. It is certainly true that this fact constituted the ultimate triggering cause for the organization to emerge. However, the scope of the early movement was broader than only that of fighting crime. More basically, one could on this point agree with Abrahams, it implied local empowerment and the recapture of authority from the administrative structures of the state over community affairs (1987: 194). Irrespective of competing interests and power struggle within the village due to economic, religious and other differences, the most pronounced cleavage of interests was that between the community and the local government administration. To the local government staff, the organization of *Sungusungu* in the villages meant an obvious infringement on their exercise of authority, and especially so since *Sungusungu* did not refrain even from making a case of corruption and mismanagement among the local party and government leadership. Simultaneously, the methods of *Sungusungu* in dealing with their enemies were not according to government rules and the due process of law, which made it both a right and a duty of the government authorities to restrict the activities of the organized groups, a fact which created strong tensions between the executive staff of the government on the local level and the village activists.⁸⁰

By transforming *Sungusungu* from a movement pursuing its own agenda into an institution for community security, the state sought to gain control and make *Sungusungu* a means for its own ends. In the situation of increasing crime and insecurity, and inefficiency on the part of government institutions, *Sungusungu* would thus, under the control of the ruling party and the government, provide a complementary mechanism to assist in maintaining law and order. Some writers have argued that *Sungusungu*, in this process, was co-opted by the state and thus neutralized as a social movement (e.g. Campbell 1989; Shaidi 1989; Shivji 1990). Other authors have pointed to the complex relationship of give and take between *Sungusungu* and the ruling party and government, which provided scope for retaining some autonomy (Abrahams 1987; Bukurura 1994a: 109-135). In fact, *Sungusungu* members often praised especially the higher echelons of the party leaders for their supportive attitude. They generally found the problems at much closer quarters where they, in their daily activities, con-

⁸⁰ While carrying out surveys in various villages during my fieldwork in 1984, I frequently travelled with government staff at divisional and ward levels. The attitude among them towards *Sungusungu* was generally highly ambivalent. Most commonly they painted a picture of *Sungusungu* in rather dark colours.

fronted the authorities, that is, the leadership at divisional and ward levels, the local courts and the police.

It is true that the initiatives of the government and the ruling party affected the grassroots character of *Sungusungu*, especially when this organizational concept was adopted by the national leadership as an example to be emulated in other parts of the country (Masanja 1992: 203). But it is important to make a clear distinction, on the one hand, between the movement which evolved among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi in the early 1980s, and, on the other hand, the local self-defence groups, also labelled *Sungusungu* which were later formed following the initiatives and encouragement of the ruling party in various parts of the country. Perhaps one could say that *Sungusungu*, in this process, lost its freedom but saved its life. The agenda of the movement was subordinated to the agenda of the state. Open confrontation was replaced by a repressive tolerance, which provided scope for *Sungusungu* to continue to exist but only within the boundaries formed by the institutions of the state. However, this relationship between *Sungusungu* and the formal structure of governance was an uneasy marriage and continued to be so. That is, from a legalistic point of view as Jwani Mwaikusa wrote: "The government, scared of banning the institutions, encouraged its deployment by shouting from political platforms. When the contradictions between the law and what *sungusungu* entails became too glaring, the government finally climbed down to insert the word *sungusungu*, for the first and so far only time, in the statute books with the People's Militia Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act of 1989" (1995: 174). Yet, the rule of law of the state and the rule of justice according to local notions remained an unresolved and conflict generating issue.

The process of taming a social movement

Bukurura identifies three types of *Sungusungu*. First, there is the *Sungusungu*, which spontaneously emerged among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi and rapidly spread in Shinyanga, Tabora and Mwanza regions in the early 1980s. Second, there is the *Sungusungu*, which was formed following the initiatives and encouragement of the ruling party, within the area of origin and in other rural parts of the country. And, third, there is the government supported *Sungusungu* which was established in the urban centres of the country, implying for example compulsory formations of night patrols (Bukurura 1994a: 4-6). In this process one could agree with Peter that *Sungusungu* developed into a different concept altogether, outgrowing its original roots (Peter 1992: 144).

In this chapter I consider the first of these three types of *Sungusungu* mentioned above, and how the movement increasingly became subject to government control and transformed into a village institution with a restricted mandate for only a kind of community policing.

The time when the *Sungusungu* movement arose, Tanzania was still a one-party state. This was a time when the ruling party, CCM, and the government were interwoven in a way that, one could say, the party and the government spoke with one voice. From the national level to the administrative regions, districts, divisions, wards, and villages and down to the ten-cell units in the respective villages, the key officeholders represented both the party and the government. Within this tight-knit system of governance there was thus little formal scope for the *Sungusungu* movement, when it arose, to retain much autonomy.

As has been described in the foregoing, when the early self-defence groups had been formed in the eastern part of the Kahama District and people in late 1981 first took organized action against the cattle rustling and the general banditry they were victims to at that time, they were forcefully suppressed by the district authorities. They were harassed by the police force and a number of the activists were brusquely arrested. Nevertheless, in spite of the resistance met from the government authorities, the movement spread from village to village. As related in chapter 2, the movement had reached the Bukene area, some 50 kilometres from the area of origin, already in early 1982. However, the tide against it started to move in a more favourable direction for the movement.

There are, during the first decade of *Sungusungu*, two landmarks in the process of legitimizing and integrating the movement in the government machinery for community security worth special mentioning. The first of these was the announcement in 1982 by President Nyerere where he declared that *Sungusungu* in their activities only put in practice the 1971 party guidelines on defence and security and that the 'revolution', *mapinduzi*, of self-defence in the villages should be encouraged by the party and government. The President furthermore pronounced that those arrested because of *Sungusungu* activities should be released, that the government should strengthen these self-defence groups and that they should not be ill-treated by the government authorities (Masanja 1992: 203-204). The President's attitude of support to *Sungusungu* was also shared and publicly declared on various occasions, in the period that followed, by several high-ranking party officials including the Prime Minister. The second of these landmarks, one could argue, was the amendment of People's Militia Laws in 1989. The support of the President and other high-ranking officials certainly meant encouragement to the *Sungusungu* groups organized

by that time to carry on with their activities and was also promotive for the continued spread of the movement regional-wise, but it did not solve the legal issue, namely the judicial status of these groups. In any case, as Heald put it, the amendment of People's Militia Laws can be seen as a step towards "bestowing upon them a quasi-legal status" (Heald 2006: 16). However, the differences between *Sungusungu* practices and perceptions of justice and governmental administrative and legal procedures were not resolved solely by these measures, though it provided some freedom for the *Sungusungu* groups to continue with their activities.

Bukurura, based on his prolonged fieldwork in the Kahama district, provides a detailed and telling account of ensuing frictions of various kinds between the *Sungusungu* groups formed in the district and the district administration. For the coordination between the various *Sungusungu* groups, and between the groups and the government, there were committees or unions formed from the village and up to the district level already by 1983. Four *Sungusungu* leaders from each village in the whole district composed the district union that was formed. The name chosen for this district forum indicates the role *Sungusungu* was supposed to play, namely *Muungano wa Walinzi wa Jaji wa Wilaya*, meaning the District Union of Traditional Guards (Bukurura 1994a: 46-47). However, there were and continued to be frictions between the parties. There were orders and instructions issued by the district authorities about various obligations and duties that the members of the *Sungusungu* groups did not feel comfortable with. As exemplified by Bukurura about unpopular orders and instructions, there were among several others the "district level Party directives instructing *Sungusungu* members to round up *moshi* (illicit alcohol) drinkers and to enforce District by-laws on environmental protection" and, furthermore, "to 'police' Party organized rallies and processions and to enforce Party contributions and other Party initiated fund raising activities" (1994a: 113-114).⁸¹

Bukurura describes how the District Union of Traditional Guards, in 1987, formed a special committee for dealing with conflicts between *Sungusungu* and the district party and government authorities. He writes: "The committee was created as a result of *Sungusungu* grievances and complaints against the Police, Magistrates, Ward Executive Officers and other government officials, who were said to harass and victimize *Sungusungu* members in the course of their duties" (Bukurura 1994a: 47).

⁸¹ Bukurura argues that the *Sungusungu* groups only complied with the orders and directives on a pick and choose basis (1994a: 114). Basing my impression on my own field experience, I would rather say that the room for defying the orders and instructions of the party was during that time rather limited indeed.

This committee, composed of the district *nemi* and his assistant, the district commander and an assistant, the district treasurer and two representatives from each of the six divisions of the district, broadly represented all the various *Sungusungu* units within the entire administrative district.

The District Union and the various committees provided a meeting ground where differences between the involved parties could be discussed, and conflicts, in the best of cases, resolved. But these various forums that were formed also constituted a stage for the government authorities to provide guidance to the *Sungusungu* leadership regarding both the scope and the limits, according to government statutes, for *Sungusungu* activities and operations. Furthermore, seminars were organized to educate the leadership on their obligations under party and government rule (1994a: 112-113).

To reconcile differences in the understanding of the means and procedures appropriate for solving the problem for which *Sungusungu* basically had been formed was not an easy task. Bukurura's rendering of a meeting between a well intending and toward *Sungusungu* positively inclined High Court Judge and his *Sungusungu* audience provides an illustrating example. The paragraphs are worth quoting at length, first the judge's address to his audience and then the response to his addressing from the audience (1994a: 124):

[The] High Court Judge felt that *Sungusungu* had good intentions but lacked guidance, which he decided to offer. He took the initiative to speak to *Sungusungu* leaders about the limits within which he expected them to operate, without violating the law. He addressed *Sungusungu* in two different districts. He explained his appreciation of their efforts to combat crime and how that could be done without going to excess. He also told them that they needed to cooperate with the established institutions of law and order and the need to observe the rights of the people they arrest, all of which were provided for in the Constitution.

And the response of the audience to this address:

On both occasions *Sungusungu* leaders are reported to have appreciated the Judge's trouble to address them and give them advice. He was, however, asked whether the victims of crime were not protected by the Constitution. He was also asked whether the cooperation that he was requesting from the *Sungusungu* members was only expected from them but not from the Police and the Judiciary. One questioner is reported to have been more blunt by asking: "where were the Constitution, the Police, the Judiciary and even you (the judge), when thieves were killing with impunity?"

The meeting between the High Court Judge and his *Sungusungu* audience throws the two mutually irreconcilable positions into sharp relief, namely that of the non-negotiable Law as conceived by the state and that of the villagers with their lived experience and perception of justice, where the latter position ultimately, because of the power relation between the two, would have to yield to the former's demands sooner or later. This is also, one could say, a positional struggle unfolding in the development history of *Sungusungu* from its start as a spontaneous popular grassroots movement to gradually a more and more state-controlled institution.

Thus, through the issuing of instructions and guidelines, amendments of laws and by other formal means the government authorities strived to gain control over, regulate and incorporate the kind of popular movement *Sungusungu* originally was into the administrative machinery of the state and make it a means for its own ends. But the road toward an efficient implementation of these ends was not that straight and easily passable. First, there were many administrative layers between the political centres and the villages, and the implementors of the policies in the villages were officials situated at more local administrative levels. The implementation of laws, regulations and decrees by these local powerholders' could in many cases be rather arbitrary and contingent upon subjective intentions, personal interests and perspectives and thus in practical terms vitiating the intentions of the policy makers. Second, at village level *Sungusungu* in its practices, despite the organizational pattern that exposed a high degree of uniformity in the villages, could differ considerably from village to village because of leadership, peoples' perceptions of their situation and ideas about how to go about solving their immediate problems in the most efficient way because of a whole range of various local circumstantial reasons. The relationship between the state and the local society could thus be described as a kind of 'regulated anarchy'.⁸² From the side of the state there was regulation and increasingly so with the expressed intention of making the popular movement into an institution for village order and security tightly under government authority and control. However, while the order imposed by the state implied a certain control over the move-

⁸² I borrow the concept from Gunther Schlee, who in an article on law and conflict resolution in Somalia (2013) employs the terms 'regulated anarchy', borrowed from Christian Sigrist and 'ordered anarchy' from Evans-Pritchard (1994 [1967]), to illuminate a situation where *sharia* as the Law represents a non-negotiable truth while, regarding customary law, *adat*, there are, in relation to *sharia*, local interpretations and articulations where the Law does not preclude room for a wide range of variations in local practices that are not considered to invalidate the Law.

ment regarding incorporation in the administrative system and its range of activities, this did not prevent the movement at village level to evolve in different directions due to local circumstantial conditions. In other words, within the formal frames set by the state there was still at local levels space for articulations of varied and, in relation to the rulings of the state, sometimes of a conspicuously anarchic character.

Bukurura's renderings, referred to above, illustrate on a more general district level the positional struggle between *Sungusungu* as a grassroots movement with its own agenda and the party and government authorities representing the perspective of the state on how things ought to be. Moving from here to my own first-hand experience of *Sungusungu* from my fieldwork in 1984 provides glimpses on the evolvement of this positional struggle at a closer village level. I return in my exposition to Itanana/Uduka village (see chapter 2) in Nzega District and add Mwamloli in Igunga District (see chapter 6) to illustrate variations due to local circumstantial reasons.

In 1984, the early and tempestuous period of the movement had changed into a calmer stage in the Itanana/Uduka village. The threat of general banditry and ravaging gangs of cattle rustlers were no more strongly felt, and the process of integrating the movement into the government administrative machinery was underway. Forums for representation and dealing with *Sungusungu* issues were formed from village to district levels and in the village *Sungusungu* was now represented in one of the three standing committees in the Village Government Council, namely the Committee for Defence and Security.⁸³ As previously described, in everyday village life there was little display of the more war-like aspects of *Sungusungu*. Most of the activities were of rather mundane and peaceful character like, as described in the foregoing, apart from more general community policing like settling disputes and dealing with petty thefts within the village, to repair the feeder roads to the village, to cultivate the communal village farms and to play a role in mobilizing villagers for various other community activities. I recall a case when a young boy in the early morning had gone with his family's ox-cart to a forest at some distance from the village to collect firewood and lost his way. When the boy did not return within the expected time, the father of the boy reported to *Sungusungu* and the *kengele*, a heavy metal piece used as a bell, was rung. In case of emergency within the village, the *kengele* was banged to raise the alarm and not the *ndulilu* flute, as in cases of more general dan-

⁸³ At that time two of the seven members on the committee were *Sungusungu* leaders in the village.

ger, and the alarm was aimed to reach and involve a wider village area. The alarm requested every able-bodied man in the village to join the party that went in search for the boy. The boy was ultimately found and brought back to the village. In the late evening the same day there was a feast celebrating the successful search and the safe return of the boy. All of us participating in the feast had chicken and *ugali*, the chicken provided as fines paid by those who without acceptable excuses had not participated in the search.

From the side of party and government authorities the effort was, in a similar way as described by Bukurura for Kahama District, to gain control over and regulate the activities of the movement in the whole Sukuma-Nyamwezi area where it was spreading. By issuing instructions and guidelines regarding the mandate of the movement and by making it part of the formal village government system through representation, the movement, originally uncontrolled by the authorities, was to be transformed into a village institution under party and government auspices. This meant a narrowing down of the broader activity scope of the early movement solely to the policing aspect, that is, *Sungusungu* was now supposed to be only a kind of village militia. In the People's Militia Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act of 1989, the legal frame for this specific mandate was put in print. In this Act, the character of *Sungusungu* as a kind of People's Militia is described as follows:

“Peoples Militia” means an organized group of the people of the United Republic, operating with the authority and under the aegis of the Government and which is receiving any military training or participating in any military, quasi military or law enforcement exercise for the protection of the sovereignty of the United Republic or for the protection of the people or the property of the United Republic, by whatever name known, whether as *Wasalama*, *Sungusungu* or any other, but does not include the Police Force, any army branch of the Defence Forces, the Prison Service, the National Service or the Immigration Services. (URT 1989)

Regarding the mandate for the activities of such groups as defined above, the Act stated that they “shall have the same powers to arrest for breach of any provision of written law and of search as are vested in a police officer of the rank of constable and such powers may be exercised subject to the same limitations, restrictions and conditions as apply in relation to an arrest or search effected by such police officer” (URT 1989).

In Itanana/Uduka, as the situation was in 1984, the presence of *Sungusungu* meant a spell of social peace. The villagers generally praised the

achievements of *Sungusungu*, or *Busalama* as the movement more commonly was called. The spread of the movement, implying the formation of self-defence groups in a wider area surrounding the village, had formed a kind of bulwark against the cattle rustling gangs that had ravaged the villages before. Within the village, the cleansing of the village, that was a standard part of the initiation of a village into the movement, had meant that accomplices to the gangs, identified within the village, had been made to confess and reunite with their fellow villagers by paying *masumule*, fines comprised of livestock then slaughtered and consumed in reconciliatory feasts. These were all achievements that villagers liked to talk and tell stories about.

At this particular period of time, *Sungusungu* could be described as a kind of mobilizing force within the village for a whole range of community activities, apart from the basic duty of *kulinda busalama*, being the guardians of peace. All this could well be described as something new but simultaneously with deep roots in the historical past when the younger men in the communities used to perform a variety of practical duties under their elected leaders, in northern Sukumaland called *basumba batale*, literally meaning 'great young men'. One could say that this age group in those days constituted a kind of executive arm of the village council of elders (Cory 1954: 72-76; Malcolm 1953: 33-40). The institution of young men under their leaders had, due to various societal changes, lost its power and importance over time, and in more recent times not the least because of the socially disruptive forced villagization operation. Nevertheless, the organizational template as such was not alien to people in the villages and consequently easily adaptable to the current situation.

Now, as the situation actually was in this village, one could agree with Abrahams (Abrahams 1989) when he describes the movement of *Sungusungu* as a recapture of village-level organization by the villagers themselves and, following Heald (2002) as an instance of local participatory democracy and the development of civil society and even with Gotsbachner (1993, 1994) when he concludes that *Sungusungu* meant a recapture of local judicial competence from postcolonial institutions. Thus, it could be argued, in relation to the demands of the government, the village and the *Sungusungu* leadership had managed to strike a balance that allowed for a certain freedom for the village to run its own internal village affairs in a way that could, without conspicuously contravening the rules and regulations of the state satisfactorily, meet the preferences and expectations of the villagers. This is what I above called a spell of social peace in the village, though no more than that since, as the testimonies in chapter 2 indicate, this internal village calm did not last very long.

Moving to Mwamloli village, situated some seventy kilometres north east of Itanana/Uduka, the situation was markedly different compared to that in the former village. In the Itanana/Uduka area, the forced villagization in the mid-1970s had been carried out without serious social disruption, neither causing serious conflicts either with the government authorities or within the community. This was partly because the area was relatively densely settled, which meant that people had not had to leave their fields and pasture land behind when they were regrouped in a new village formation, and partly due to the tactics and diplomacy of the government staff and the village leaders responsible for carrying out the operation. To the inhabitants of Mwamloli, however, the villagization process had meant a most agonizing experience. A leading idea in the villagization programme was, for the sake of accessibility and for facilitating government provision of social services, to form larger village units comprising several hundred homesteads. Mwamloli, situated at a distance from all-weather roads and comprising only some one hundred homesteads at that time, was not considered a unit qualified to form a new village on its own by the authorities. The decision was therefore made to move the people from their homesteads, fields and pastureland to form part of a larger village at some distance from Mwamloli with accessible roads and even a primary school. People protested vehemently and sent delegations to higher ranked party leaders and government officials but to no avail. They had to move. People, however, continued to express their dissatisfaction about their situation. The area to which they had been moved was densely populated; there was a shortage of arable land in the vicinity and of pasture for the herds of livestock people had brought with them. Ultimately, after some time, the authorities took the complaints of the people seriously and they were allowed to return to their former place, repair their homesteads and form a village of their own.

When I now returned to Mwamloli in 1984 the reverberations of the conflict-ridden history were still quite evident. The kind of social cohesion and spirit of mutual aid between neighbours, which impressed me during my several months' stay in the locality in the early 1970s, was no longer the same. Rather, I encountered a community seriously disturbed by its historical antecedents. Walking through the village, I observed that the homestead of one of the two first settlers (the area became settled in the early 1960s) comprising several houses and a wide cattle coral was totally deserted. I was told that the place was bewitched, the household head had died, and the family had moved away from the village. And there were more stories about witchcraft and bewitchment. When the village a few years earlier, so I was told, had been initiated into *Sungusungu*, two elder-

ly women had, in the process of cleansing the village from evildoers, been identified as witches and killed by the *Sungusungu* guards, their corpses then dragged away and thrown into the bush. The relatives of the murdered women reported the incident to the police, but it took time before the police came to the village for investigations and when they ultimately arrived all evidence of the fatal incident had been carefully swept away. Consequently the case was closed without any further action on the part of the police. But the brutal deed committed by the *Sungusungu* guards, though with the blessing of the village leadership, rather than creating peace aggravated an already conflict-loaded situation in the community by causing more of social cleavage and suspicion between people. One of my interlocutors during my visit was Maziku, the youngest son in the household where I stayed during my previous fieldstudy there, now a mature man with wife and children who had taken over his parents homestead and land. He added to the grim picture of the actual situation in the community. Maziku's father had died in the late 1970s and also his mother was dead. One night a couple of men had broken into her house and hacked her to death by machetes, allegedly because of a conflict between the family and their in-laws, only to disappear into the dark of the night. Maziku found the situation in the community more and more unbearable and was considering leaving the village and to move somewhere else with his family and livestock. (I later learnt that he had ultimately moved from the village.)

I left the village in a sad mood. The contrast between my past experience of the community and my impressions of the present situation was stark. And so was my impression of the contrast of *Sungusungu* as I met it in Itanana/Uduka village and as I had met it here.

Sungusungu, when it emerged and spread in the rural areas, was not, as I have argued in the foregoing, only a feat of vigilantism where people in the face of increasing social insecurity and violent crime took the law into their own hands to solve this particular problem but a community organization also for dealing with a range of other community problems experienced at that time. In Itanana/Uduka, though there were rumours around, witchcraft was not perceived as an issue to be dealt with by the community through the organization of *Sungusungu*, while in Mwamloli, in a situation of more general social unrest, witchcraft was perceived and dealt with as a community issue. In other words, what *Sungusungu* in various communities came to mean in more practical terms, depended to a large degree on local historical and actual circumstances.

There are many reports on *Sungusungu* guards killing witches in various parts of Sukumaland, but this is not to say that cleansing the commu-

nities of witches as such constituted part of the *Sungusungu* agenda, only that *Sungusungu* groups acted on behalf of the community for community peace whatever, in the single case, the experienced problem happened to be. As the cases above illustrate, in the first village, purging the community of witches was not taken to be an obligation for *Sungusungu* while in the latter village it actually was considered so. As mentioned in chapter 4, epidemic feats of witch-killing in Sukumaland have been documented since the 1960s, long before the emergence of *Sungusungu*. This societal feature became more and more pronounced during the 1970s and onward following the upheavals caused by the forced villagization in the mid-1970s and other societal changes later in time. There are several scholarly attempts to explain why traditional ways of dealing with witchcraft suspicion and accusations that in the past only rarely lead to brutal killings changed into a pattern of more immediate and, in many cases, directly fatal violence (see e.g. Tanner 1970; Bukurura 1994b; Mesaki 1994; Stroeken 2010). Irrespective of the ultimate cause of this change, the empirical fact is that regrettably many, mostly elderly women, have over the last decades become victims of this kind of violence.⁸⁴ The government took and, in more recent times, has taken various measures to come to grips with this problem – like organizing large scale crack downs on perpetrators of violence (Mesaki 1994: 57-59) and by prosecuting diviners supposed to be responsible for identifying witches (Stroeken 2010: 193-194) – but with limited success. There was also the measure of making the village leadership responsible for the operations of the *Sungusungu* guards so that in cases of unlawful and excessive violence used against witchcraft and criminal suspects within the village, the village chairman and the village *Sungusungu* leaders would be taken to task for the deeds. This was to some extent and in some cases a working means to put pressure on village and *Sungusungu* leaders to disassociate themselves and the village *Sungusungu* guards from exercising unlawful violence.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ According to statistics presented by Mesaki, some 80% the victims in Sukumaland between 1970 and 1988 were women and among 826 women murdered between 1980 and 1988 in Mwanza Region, 90% were above forty years of age (1994: 54).

⁸⁵ The incident described in the Preamble provides an example of this kind of pressure on the village leadership. The village chairman's awareness of his own exposed position in relation to the demands of the government authorities made him do his very best to cool the rage of the young men to inhibit them from tracing the man who had raised a false alarm and exercise instant justice upon him. In a neighbouring village where the *Sungusungu* leaders failed to contain the enraged villagers from killing an alleged thief, the village *ntemi*, his chief *kamanda* and the village *Sungusungu* secretary were all apprehended by the police and taken to court.

The involvement of *Sungusungu* groups in various forms of excessive violence was the negative side of their activities that the government strived to inhibit. In various ways and by various means *Sungusungu* as a grassroots movement was to be transformed into an institution obedient to governmentally defined rules, regulations and laws and as such serving the state only as a vehicle for maintaining law and order in the communities. However, it could be argued, that simultaneously in this process of bringing *Sungusungu* fully under government control, the socially revitalizing side of *Sungusungu*, that is, its character as a social movement recreating community spirit and fostering a sense of local self-determination, also was curbed. It was in the process of gradually yielding to the pressure of the state that one could say that *Sungusungu* lost its freedom but saved its life.

The United Republic of Tanzania can be described both as a strong and a weak state. It is a strong state in terms of administrative organization. In administrative terms the state is present everywhere, from the national level down to family units in the villages and the urban quarters, and there is a keen awareness everywhere among people about the presence of *serekali*, the government. However, in terms of the efficiency of the state in implementing its policies there are many obstacles on the way due to various reasons, like the lack of economic resources, lack of staff, in some cases uncommitted and corrupted implementors at various administrative levels and also sometimes reluctance among people to follow the state directives in a manner they are supposed to. In this setting the efforts of bringing the *Sungusungu* movement under more and more strict government control can be described as a process characterized both by leaps forward and setbacks on the way, though, where the general trend over time, nevertheless, meant increasing state control. But at this point in my present exposition I venture a leap in time to a situation where the institutionalization of *Sungusungu* in village life had gone a long way.

In 2008 I had the opportunity again to spend some time with Nshimba Lubasha. Twenty-four years had elapsed since the late evening when we had our evening meal together and heard the sound of the *ndulilu* and Nshimba grabbed his bow and quiver, handed me a herder's stick and we went out in the dark to join the array of men moving in the direction of the sound (see Preamble). Actually, we had met several times since then and conversed about several things, but this time I was curious to learn about Nshimba's view on the evolution of *Sungusungu* from then to now. After a series of five-year terms as village chairman he had served the ruling party in different capacities at village and district levels and he was

currently the *Sungusungu ntemi* of Bukene Division, an administrative unit comprising a few wards and several villages.

In response to my question, Nshimba smiled and said it was a long road with many meanderings and corners, *makonakona mengi*. He said, yes, after the early time of village unity and peace there had been many problems to overcome along the road. Quarrels about leadership within the village and about directions to take and about the very mandate of *Sungusungu* within the village and ensuing factional struggles that led to splitting the village into two different *Sungusungu ntemiship*, had all been tricky issues to handle. However, now most of these issues were settled. Thanks to the directive of the government authorities to make it mandatory that there should be only one *ntemiship* in each and every village, the villagers had ultimately agreed to unite around one elected leader. Other less controversial issues had also been sorted out in the course of time. Nshimba did not at all share the despondency about the developments of *Sungusungu* that Mayunga Mahona gave voice to in his renderings (see chapter 2). In his opinion they had achieved a lot. They had started on their own, relying only on themselves to solve the problem of social insecurity they suffered due to the organized cattle rustling and general banditry of that time. They had joined together to form an organization for peacekeeping, namely *Busalama*, later known by the name of *Sungusungu*, and they became *Basalama*, the guardians of peace in practical terms, and they still were, like when they first joined together and formed their organization for self-defence. They had started their work without the blessings of the ruling party and the government, but due to their achievements in restoring community peace they increasingly gained the recognition of the authorities and today *Busalama* or *Sungusungu* was a fully recognized and integral part of the village government and village life with representatives at all administrative levels in the district. Currently, the *Sungusungu* leaders in the district were discussing the election of a regional *Sungusungu ntemi* for the whole of Tabora Region of which Nzege District is a part. They had brought forward the argument that the candidate ought to come from Nzege because this was the area of the Region where *Sungusungu* first was formed and, consequently, the place where most experience had been gained regarding its operation and integration in the government system for village security, though, the outcome of the selection was by this time not yet clear. There were places, Nshimba continued, where *Sungusungu* was dormant and no longer an active force in the villages and other places where *Sungusungu* was still active but, in his opinion, in improper ways. He mentioned among others incidents of excessive violence, the killing of witch suspects and the pouring of kerosene

over thieves caught red-handed and burning them to death on the spot. To Nshimba the Nzega model as practiced in his village was the right way to go about things. To him this meant obedience to the rules and regulations laid down by *serekali*, the government, and close cooperation with the police in village cases that were not to be handled within the mandate given regarding the operations of *Sungusungu*.

In this process of adaptation, *Sungusungu* had lost several of the ritual features that characterized the movement in its early days. Nshimba described the election of a new *ntemi* as it was carried out nowadays. Divination and medicinal practices, though still common among people for various reasons and for personal purposes, were no longer part of the election process, at least not in the open. Now election was simply a matter of majority decision. The election was a business of the village assembly. On the very occasion, the candidates for the position stood up and people lined up, men and women, behind the candidates of their choice and the candidate who got most supporters won the election. The election was then confirmed in a public feast for which the winner had to provide livestock to be consumed in the festivity. As in other national and communal elections, the winning candidate for the position was elected for a five-year term. This was all according to the democratic principles people now took for granted. When forming the village *Sungusungu* committee the national gender policy had now also to be taken into consideration. Women should be represented on the committee and there should not only be male commanders, as in the past, but also female *Sungusungu* commanders to handle village cases in which women were involved. (Nshimba's wife had during one five-year term been one of the female village *Sungusungu* commanders.)

The seasoned village politician Nshimba was, he was well-aware that in all human affairs there is a need for negotiations and navigation between various and often conflicting interests and power constellations and in this process there has to be a giving and taking to a variable extent. To Nshimba *serekali* represented the ultimate power that you could not question, yet, under this umbrella of power there was still space for negotiations. His political philosophy was here well in line with the Sukuma-Nyamwezi saying *wa kumala nze atiho*, that is, nobody can have or cover the whole world. In other words, if you cannot have the whole morsel you have to satisfy yourself with pieces of it. This is what they had achieved. *Sungusungu* was continuously a reality in the village, though not as the dynamic social movement it once was. It was in its present form, as Nshimba saw it, there to stay. In his opinion, the long road with its many

meanderings and corners had gradually been straightened out for a smooth running of *Busalama* or *Sungusungu* concerns in the village.

Taking a broader view of the area where the *Busalama* movement aroused and spontaneously spread from village to village, the situation in the present could well differ a great deal from what Nshimba describes regarding his village, where government control by now was pretty tight and locally unchallenged. However, one could irrespective of local variations in practices well argue that the general trend implying increasing government control and less space for local and, in relation to the state anarchic expressions, was the same everywhere. The spontaneous grassroots movement that emerged in the early 1980s had in the course of time to a considerable degree been tamed by the state.

9. *Sungusungu* beyond its area of origin

“Sungusungu among Sukuma and Nyamwezi”, Bukurura writes, “is an example of a social movement formed in contemporary times as an expression of cultural identity, where the nation state tended to play down these identities in favour of national unity” (1996a: 258). Bukurura is right in pointing not to ethnic but to cultural identity, that is in brief, a commonality based on shared understandings about social obligations and morality, organizational templates and justice.

The driving force of the situation in which the movement aroused was, as has repeatedly been argued in the foregoing, the exposedness people experienced and their victimization under powers beyond their control. They had nowhere to turn for help and assistance but to themselves, their own ingenuity, their own inventiveness and their own cultural and material resources. In relation to the authorities and their concerns above the local level they were in most real terms “the forgotten ones”, as Mayunga Mahona succinctly put it (chapter 2). This was the situation in which local leaders and village elders in the wards of Jana and Didia in Kahama and Shinyanga Districts far from the centres of national power started to meet in secret to deliberate on how to go about to solve their problems relying only on their own resourcefulness. The solution they ultimately came up with, though rooted in the people’s cultural past, was an invention, one could say, to tackle immediate problems that people experienced in their contemporary world. It was a model for action containing, firstly, a political language alluding to familiar perceptions of mutual obligations, social morality and ideas about justice, and secondly, an organizational template grounded in the cultural knowledge commonly shared and thus easily emulated by the many and, thirdly, an armament for self-defence, namely bow and poisoned arrows, that was within easy reach of every able-bodied man. *Bapolo*, ‘the cool ones’, *Basalama*, the people and guardians of peace, *Basungusungu*, the hunters of the past facing the wild armed with bows and poisoned arrows now resurfaced as the guardians of the community against the threats of the wild of the present – a narrative was created with a web of meanings that was telling and made sense to people. The exhortation, *Kwili Basalama*, ‘May the people of peace multiply’,

became heard from village to village. Evocative speeches were made and songs were composed and sung that hit a chord among the listeners, because it all evoked what was dear to them: *bashosha ng'ombe*, 'those who recover our cattle', *Balinda busiga*, 'those who protect our millet', *bakuniguna ulu nahinjaga*, 'those who help me when I am in trouble'.

To understand the movement as a recapture of village-level organization by the villagers themselves (Abrahams 1987), as an instance of local participatory democracy (Heald 2002), and as a taking back judicial competence from postcolonial institutions (Gotsbachner 1993, 1994), yes, these modes of understanding make sense in relation to available ethnographic evidence, yet, they are all etic interpretations in the sense that they only represent the understandings of the observers and not those of the participants. These features identified by researchers were all outcomes of the struggle, not part of the participants' intentional objectives. It was only in the course of the struggle that these features materialized because of the context-specific knowledge and perceptions of the participants of how to organize themselves, act and strive for, according to their understandings, the sake of *mhola*.

My interlocutors in the field were not backward looking. There was no tone of nostalgia in their talk. They talked about the present and the future, about their achievements, their agency and their determination to improve their existential conditions. In this phase of developments, that is my argument, *Sungusungu* was a social movement with a much broader scope than only combatting crime.

It has been said that the movement was co-opted by the state. This is only partly true. *Sungusungu* as a social movement was never co-opted by the state, far from that. What was co-opted was only the policing aspect of the movement, in other words, the potential of *Sungusungu* to become a supplementary force to the state police for combating crime in the local communities. It was this specific aspect of *Sungusungu* that was positively recognized by the state and actively promoted for emulation widely over the country.

This was, also pointed out in the foregoing, a time characterized by increasing levels of violent crime both in the countryside and in the urban areas. With an understaffed police force unevenly spread in the vast national territory and fraught with corruption, there was an apparent problem for the state to come to grips with the problem.⁸⁶ In this context *Sungusungu*, or rather the aspect of vigilantism that the movement represented

⁸⁶ In the late 1980s the police to population ratio was stated to be 1:10,000 and the ratio judicial officers to population 1:17,000 (*Daily News*, 30 May 1989 and Nyalali 1990: 16, cited in Bukurura 1996a: 263).

could be used as a resource for the alleviation of a situation “characterized by emergency of unprecedented levels of crime waves” (Safer Cities 2000: 42). It was this aspect of the movement that President Nyerere *cum* Chairman of the ruling party in August 1982 spoke out in favour of as worth promoting. This was a political declaration fully in line with the Party Guidelines of 1971 with its statement that, “the basis of development of defence and security in Tanzania, is on the Tanzanians themselves, and in particular every patriotic Tanzanian. The country has no ability to employ a big paid force to manage its defence and security affairs” (Mwongozo, TANU Guidelines, issued in 1971). President Nyerere’s supportive attitude meant a powerful impetus for the formation of *Sungusungu* watch groups widely across the country. In all this, however, the legal issue had not been solved. Even though the amendment of People’s Militia Laws in 1989 could be seen as a step towards bestowing upon these groups a “quasi-legal status” (Heald 2006: 280), this measure did not fully solve the legal issue and the judicial status of these groups continued to remain unclear. Yet, in spite of unresolved contradictions between the political will and the state judiciary, *Sungusungu* groups continued to proliferate.

In a Tanzanian police conference paper the situation with respect to *Sungusungu* watch groups in the country in the early 2000s is summarized as follows (Safer Cities 2000: 47):

Since there is no law which establishes *Sungusungu*, there is also no government chart which illustrates the smooth operation of *Sungusungu* in the administration of justice in the country. However, in spite of all the problems which might have hindered *Sungusungu* activities, *Sungusungu* groups have continued to emerge and spread to all regions in the country. By February 1989 session of the Parliament, the Minister of Home Affairs announced that *Sungusungu* had spread to a total of twelve (12) regions. Today *Sungusungu* has spread to almost all urban centres as well as in rural areas where it has become so popular with notable achievements.

Regarding achievements of *Sungusungu* in crime prevention the paper reports that “during the ‘peak’ period of *Sungusungu* interventions (late 80’s towards early 90’s) crime rate in the country dropped by 60% and 72% in mugging and robberies respectively, with 20% drop in burglaries and 24% drop in assault cases” (Safer Cities 2000: i). Taking these figures at face value, it would seem that the formation of *Sungusungu* groups widely over the country significantly contributed to reducing the rates of

crime, yet these figures do not tell us anything about the problems involved in *Sungusungu* operations in various places in the country.

It was indeed the policing aspect of the early movement that was positively recognized and promoted for emulation widely over the country. In the process of its spreading, the cultural specificity of the movement was thinned out. Several of the culture specific-practices that characterized the movement in its early days were not replicated in the areas of spread, even the designating term, *Sungusungu*, lost its original lexical meaning in this process, namely denoting poison and those who carried bows and quivers with poisoned arrows. What remained was *Sungusungu* as a template, detached from its cultural roots, for forming watch-groups for security reasons in the rural and urban communities. For this purpose the Swahili meaning of the word *sungusungu*, a species of black biting ants, was telling. This was a transposition of the original lexical meaning of the term that, among the Swahili speaking people everywhere, could spark the image of the black biting ants as a metaphor for the mass of small people against the big thugs (Abrahams 1987: 182; Heald 2002: 4).

As Bukurura put it, this can well be rehearsed once again. There is the *Sungusungu*, which spontaneously emerged among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi and rapidly spread in Shinyanga, Tabora and Mwanza regions in the early 1980s, and there is the *Sungusungu*, which was formed following the initiatives and encouragement of the ruling party, within the area of origin and in other rural parts of the country (Bukurura 1994a: 4-6). This is all a story with many different outcomes depending on social and cultural settings and local conditions where *Sungusungu* was now implanted. To illustrate varieties in outcome, I restrict myself in the following sections of the chapter to consider the imposition or spread of *Sungusungu* among the Kuria on the border to Kenya, three cases of *Sungusungu* formation in Southern Tanzania, and of state supported formation of *Sungusungu* groups in Dar es Salaam and other urban areas.



Map 3. Territorial spread of *Sungusungu* discussed in Ch. 9. (Prepared by Jonatan Alvarsson.)

Sungusungu among the Kuria in Mara Region

There have always been various forms of stock raiding both between and within the cattle keeping communities in west-central and northern Tanzania. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, cattle raiding in the pastoral and agro-pastoral areas increased dramatically. As Daniel Ndagala portrayed the situation during this time, “thefts involving only a few animals became a thing of the past”. Now, instead of this pattern of the past cattle owners “began to be raided by armed gangs of up to fifty men. The raiders attacked herdsmen in broad daylight, at watering points or in open pastures, and drew away all the animals leaving the herdsmen dead or wounded” (1991: 76). According to the regional statistics Ndagala

refers to, from five of the cattle rich administrative regions of this part of the country, 151,306 heads of cattle were stolen between 1981 and 1985, of which only 29,281 animals ever to be recovered. In the serious economic crises Tanzania found itself in the late 1970s, one could say that an informal cattle raiding economy was developing. Commodities were in short supply and available goods sold at excessive prices. In this situation, as Ndagala put it: “Racketeering developed and an illegal export-import system operated side by side with the formal one which had almost collapsed, especially in the rural areas”, and furthermore in this economic game, “A growing number of livestock were sold at illegal stock markets across the country’s borders to obtain consumer goods which were brought back and sold on the black market” (1991: 77).

The Tarime and Serengeti districts in Mara Region, where the main parts of the Tanzanian Kuria live, were also during this time seriously affected by the consequences of this cattle raiding economy.⁸⁷ It was a situation characterized by deteriorating security and increasing social unrest in the communities. Michael Fleischer and Suzette Heald have in a series of publications treated this situation from various angles (Fleisher 2000a, 2000b; Heald 2002, 2006). In my exposition below, I draw from their research.

Cattle raiding as such was a feature in Kuria life even far back in pre-colonial times. However, in the colonial days and an increasingly market-oriented economy the raiding underwent changes from, as Fleisher argues, “its pre-colonial roles of demonstrating the mettle of new warriors and enlarging the community herd to an illicit, oftentimes quite violent cash-market-oriented enterprise” (2000a: 213). By the 1930s this new form of cattle raiding had developed into a serious administrative problem for the colonial authorities (Fleisher 2000a; quoting Ruel 1959: 152).

A conspicuous feature of Kuria stock raiding is that raiding was not only an inter-ethnic issue, as in several other instances in the northern pastoral and agro-pastoral parts of the country, but also a main matter between the various Kuria *ibiro*, ‘clans’ or ‘sections’. “Stock raiding among these groups”, Heald writes, was “a perennial part of the local scene”, though, “these wars pale into insignificance in comparison with what was to hap-

⁸⁷ The Bantu-speaking Kuria, or *Abakuria*, live astride the Tanzanian-Kenyan border east of Lake Victoria. The main part of the Kuria live on the Tanzanian side of the border – the estimated number in Tanzania was, in 2009, 424,000 (Ethnologue 2020). Kuria socio-political organization was to a large extent clan-based with an often highly competitive relationship between the units. For basic ethnographic information on the Kuria, see e.g. Malcolm Ruel (1959, 1962, 1965), Eva Tobisson (1986), Kirsten Kjerland (1995) and Ann-Britt Bernhardsdotter (2001).

pen in the 1980s in the aftermath of the Tanzania/Uganda war.” (2006: 267). In this situation, Heald contends (referring to Fleisher 2000a; 2000b), Kuria were well placed to take advantage of the upsurge of cattle rustling of that time, especially because of three particular reasons. Firstly, as indicated above, raiding was an entrenched part of Kuria life. Secondly, among the ethnic groups in Tanzania, Kuria are known as the one most in favour of military service. In the mass recruitment into the army for the invasion of Uganda in 1979, Kuria recruits formed a substantial part, estimated to some 50%. After the war, the returning soldiers, in various ways, brought modern weaponry, including AK-47s, and ammunition with them back home. “Yet”, Heald writes, “guns did not only originate from the war and from the vast stockpiles of weapons from Amin’s troops. Contacts while serving in the army provided a continuing supply of weaponry and bullets and also facilitated links with gangs operating elsewhere. Kuria was awash with arms” (2006: 268). And thirdly, the commercial aspect, namely, as Heald puts it: “With Kurian sections represented on both sides of the international border, they were well placed to facilitate the movement of stolen stock from Tanzania to Kenya” (2006: 268). One could well say that this part of Tanzania had become an extension to the west of the stock raiding corridor Ndagala depicts in his article referred to above (1991).

The government made various efforts to come to grips with the critical situation. There were a series of police and military operations, between eight and eleven during the period 1982–1988, deportations of rustlers caught from the region to regions where there were no cattle, and efforts to negotiate peace between the warring factions of Kuria in Mara Region and on the Kenyan side of the border in which the President himself was involved, but all to little avail (Fleisher 2000a: 213; Heald 2006: 270-271). The fierce and martial form of cattle raiding continued unabatedly. Heald, drawing from reports in *Daily News*, gives some figures illustrating the scale of the violent raiding. Between 1982 and 1984 forty-three people were reported killed and 25,606 head of cattle stolen, and between January and August 1986 more than one hundred people were killed and over 25,000 heads of stock were stolen in Serengeti District alone (2006: 269). Fleisher, on his part, provides an illustrating glimpse of the situation at a local level from the village in Tarime District where he carried out field-work, where the village cattle herd from 1978 to 1995 had dropped by at least 50 percent, mainly due to cattle raiding, and in the year 1994 alone, the number of incidents of cattle theft, reported to the police, rose by 47 percent over the previous year (2000a: 213).

It was in this situation of social unrest and turmoil that *Sungusungu*, in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, as a means of improving the situation, was introduced by the government administration in Kuria country (Heald 2002: 9). This was a *Sungusungu* explicitly imposed ‘from above’ and not emerging ‘from below’ as it was in the area where the movement first arose.

The results of the state-prompted introduction of *Sungusungu* in Kuria country were, if we follow Fleisher’s reasoning on the topic, of a mixed kind with both its *pros* and its *cons* (2000a). As advantages of the formation of *Sungusungu* groups Fleisher mentions, firstly, that it enabled local people to dispense with the police, whom they regarded as utterly corrupt and having in their place “law enforcers” who were people of the community and accountable to it. Secondly, it reduced the costs of law enforcement, since the fees paid to *Sungusungu* for the security work were lower than the bribes normally demanded by the police and, finally, it enabled local people to punish fellow villagers who had done wrong by administering beatings and levying fines without handing them over to the formal justice in which they had no trust. On the negative side, Fleisher mentions that *Sungusungu* itself was not free from corruption. Doing rounds on night patrol provided opportunities to gather information on villagers’ cattle corrals, about sleeping patterns, security regimes and other details and pass this information on to comrades in the thieving profession, and there were cases of leaders soliciting bribes in the form of cattle from local thieves. Furthermore, there was the very harsh treatment of suspects, often beating them with a hippopotamus-hide whip and other cruel means to make them confess (2000a: 226-227).

The kind of *Sungusungu* in Kuria country that Fleisher describes differs in many respects from the *Busalama/Sungusungu* that was formed among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi. In the Sukuma-Nyamwezi case it was, as has been described, on local initiative and on a locally grounded mobilization that the movement evolved, while in the Kuria case it was an organizational concept imposed by the administration on the communities, without considerations neither of the local socio-cultural context nor whether there was any real local demand for it among the people. Among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi the movement was anchored in culturally familiar organizational templates, while among the Kuria the new formation of village defence groups mostly would call to mind the People’s Militia formed during the height of the *ujamaa* era, by then largely defunct, without any real anchorage in the local socio-cultural world. In the Sukuma-Nyamwezi case there was, in the early days of the movement, no clear hierarchical order above village level, while in the Kuria case the hierarchical order

from district level down to village level was clearly defined from the very onset. In the former case the whole community, so to speak, went *Sungusungu*, while in the latter the issue was more narrowly to form defence groups of, in Swahili, *walinsi wa jadi*, ‘traditional guards’, in the villages.

Heald, in her study of *Sungusungu* in Kuria country, draws attention to the importance of incorporating new practices in local socio-cultural institutional settings in order to make them sustainable and effective.⁸⁸ She argues, along with Fleisher (2000b, 2000a), that the kind of self-defence groups under the label of *Sungusungu*, which the administration introduced among the Kuria in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, in line with the national policy of encouraging such groups, were “perhaps in retrospect less than even moderately effective”. However, she continues, “a new form of the movement, equally sanctioned by the state but more embedded in Kuria political organisation, was to develop from the mid-1990s onwards” (2002: 11). Her account of how this change came about and what it led to is telling in this context.

Heald relates this change to the coming of Kobia “who is attributed with breaking the terror of guns and ushering in a new era” (2006: 271), namely that of “the second *iritongo*” (2006: 273). In the narrations of Heald’s informants, Kobia is endowed with a kind of mythic aura. Little is known about the man apart from the fact that he was an army officer who had come to set things right. He arrived in Serengeti District some time in 1990 and set up a camp with a special force of 200. In his commission he was answerable only to the President. Heald writes that before he arrived in the district, “Kobia is said to have sent an undercover investigative team to Serengeti, mandated to get the names of those with guns and effectively do anthropological work among the Kuria in order to find a way to break the terror” (2006: 271). In carrying out his mission, Kobia is said have honoured Kurian values and, in his operations, he made use of Kurian community institutions. Of particular importance was his utilization of the *iritongo*, that is, the Kurian assembly for dealing with community affairs, including interrogation and punishments of thieves, and this was also effective. “In two months”, Heald remarks, “Kobia is said to have collected hundreds of guns; army issue machine guns, rifles, pistols as well as many of the home-made variety” (2006: 272). This was an important step toward peace, since without the guns the community could not be terrorized as before. This gave Kobia the status of a hero among the Kuria. He is credited with the inauguration of a new-style *iritongo*. “In breaking the

⁸⁸ In a recent article, Iddy Magoti (2018) explores in some detail the importance of ritual practices for reconciliation and peace-keeping among the Kuria today.

rule of guns”, Heald argues, “he gave people new ideas as to the power the *iritongo* could wield” (2006: 272). Not only the Kuria but also the regional administration was impressed by Kuria’s achievements. In 1995, the regional administration encouraged the development of the new *iritongo*-based form of *Sungusungu*. This form of *Sungusungu* then spread throughout Serengeti and Tarime Districts and, later on, further across the border into Kenya’s Kuria District (2006: 274).⁸⁹

The most significant difference between the early form of *Sungusungu* and the new one was the integration of the latter in the community. Now *Sungusungu* was being identified with the *iritongo*, the assembly or community. While the previous form of *Sungusungu* was imposed by the administration on the community like an appendix to the local institutional set-up, the latter was incorporated in it. With the new template, *Sungusungu* was both identified with and answerable to the *iritongo*.

Summarizing Heald’s account on the local institutional set-up (Heald 2006: 274-275), the *amatongo* (pl. of *iritongo*) may occur at any level, from that of a family cluster to that of the main political unit, the village, ward or division. They can be spontaneous gatherings or more formal meetings called by the elders or government officials, and they are essentially democratic where all adult men have a right to speak, led by members of the ‘ruling’ generation. Behind the *iritongo* there is the *inchaama*, the conclave of ritual elders. The members of the conclave, who usually meet in secret, are responsible for the ritual wellbeing of the people, they set the dates of the initiation ceremonies and decide on other issues, which affect the community as a whole. An additional important function of the *inchaama* is to administer the *ekehore*, the oath or ordeal. If a thief refuses to confess they can put him through the oath and they have power to curse him and his line. Heald quotes the District Commissioner of Tarime District who attested that to be successful in Kuria you have to work with the *inchaama* elders and not against them (2006: 274).

However, the identification of *Sungusungu* with the *iritongo* did of course not imply a separation between the administration and the local community but rather a marriage between two organizational patterns and ideas of governance, that of the modern Tanzanian state and that of Kuria society with its socio-cultural specificities. The hierarchical order of command remained unquestionably that of the state, and the mode of forming committees with chairmen, treasures, secretaries with minutes and reports to be filed with the divisional and district authorities, and

⁸⁹ In a addition to her study of *Sungusungu* among the Kuria on the Tanzanian side of the border, Heald later made a follow-up of the spread of *Sungusungu* among the Kuria in Kenya (2007).

women representatives on the committees in line with government directives, was all in accordance with a general administrative pattern common all over Tanzania. The specificity on the Kurian side was, under the umbrella of the state administration, to practise *Sungusungu* while relating to the *iritongo*, the *inchaama* and to Kurian social values and perceptions of justice. This was the past and the present in the present in the Kurian case.

With the spread of the new form of *Sungusungu* and thus widening the area of co-operation across administrative divisions and sectional Kuria boundaries, the efficiency of *Sungusungu* to perform its task increased. As Heald puts it: “In this process the older impediments to catching the thieves have to a considerable extent been overcome as *sungusungu* cooperated with others in different divisions and even over the national boundary”, and subsequently: “It became possible to follow the tracks of stolen cattle over clan borders and there enlist help of the *sungusungu* of that territory to track down the thieves and cattle, with some hope of getting the cattle returned” (2006: 272).

While the early form of *Sungusungu* introduced in Kurialand, as described by Fleisher and Heald, had little in common with the early form of *Sungusungu* among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, apart from the name and the policing aspect, the “second *iritongo*”, as depicted by Heald, displays two apparent similarities, namely, first, the integration of the movement in the local institutional set-up and, second, the widening of the sphere of operations beyond the local community and its close vicinity. Likewise as the movement in the Sukuma-Nyamwezi case was identified with the whole initiated village, *Sungusungu* was now in the Kuria case identified with the *iritongo* and thus made an integral part of the community. Regarding the sphere of operations, the *ndulilu* alarm of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi made it possible to mobilize a whole range of *Sungusungu* villages to track and encircle and fight the cattle raiders. In the Kuria case, the new organization enabled a widening of the area of co-operation beyond sectional and administrative divisions that, in comparison with the earlier organizational form, made it more efficient in its operations to track and return stolen cattle to their owners.

Sungusungu in Southern Tanzania

There are several researchers who have taken an interest in exploring various aspects of *Sungusungu* in southern Tanzania. Below, I discuss the contributions on the topic by Brian Paciotti and co-researchers, Frances Cleaver and co-researchers and Daniel Brockington. Paciotti and co-

researchers studied *Sungusungu* in multi-ethnic villages in Mpanda District, in today's Katavi Region, with special attention to differences in *Sungusungu* group formation among the Sukuma immigrants and inhabitants belonging to other ethnic groups (Paciotti 2002; Paciotti and Hadley 2003, 2004; Paciotti and Mulder 2004; Paciotti et al. 2005). Cleaver with co-researchers (2013) and Brockington (2001) in their studies paid attention to the role of *Sungusungu* groups, especially with respect to local governance and natural resource management. Cleaver with co-researchers regionally focused their interest on the Usangu Plains, in Mbeya Region, and Brockington on Sumbawanga District, in Rukwa Region, to the west of Usangu Plains, both areas with large numbers of Sukuma immigrants. Before I discuss the various contributions mentioned above, I will briefly sketch the background of the Sukuma migration to the southern parts of the country.

Sukuma agro-pastoralists have over the past decades migrated in large numbers from their home areas to the southern parts of Tanzania in search of arable land for cultivation and pasture for their livestock (see e.g. Brandström 1985a; Galaty 1988). This is a long history of territorial expansion and rural migration, starting in colonial times, accelerating after independence in 1961 and reaching as far south as the Usangu Plains already by the mid-1960s (Walsh 2012: 309) and, in the following decades, even beyond.

Susan Charnley, in her thorough studies of political ecology and environmental change in Tanzania with a focus on the Usangu Plains, has paid special attention to the environmental consequences of the inflow of migrants to this part of southern Tanzania among whom Sukuma people made up a considerable part (Charnley 1994, 1997).

The Usangu Plains, covering an area of some 15,500 km² with plenty of arable land, vast grasslands, numerous watercourses and dry season swamps, which make them well suited for both irrigation cultivation and livestock herding. This area, though sparsely populated, had long been settled by the Sangu people.⁹⁰ But, particularly following independence in 1961 and the abolishment of restrictions on rural migration current under the colonial regime, the Plains became a receiving area of large numbers of immigrants in search of arable land and pasture. Consequently, in the early 1990s when Charnley did her studies, the Plains were population-wise a melange of some 20–30 different ethnic groups with Sukuma as the largest group of immigrant herders (1997: 598; for more detail see 1994).

⁹⁰ The estimated number of Sangu was, in 2009, 119,000 (Ethnologue 2020). For ethnographic detail on this people, see Walsh (1984).

Charnley, focusing on the Sukuma, states that those who made it all the long distance, some six hundred kilometres, from their home areas in Mwanza and Shinyanga Regions through large tracts of tsetse infested *miombo* woodlands to the Usangu Plains were mainly cattle owning families. The main reasons given for their migration was scarcity of water and pasture in their home tracts. Ninety-two per cent of Charnley's respondents had never been to school. Their lack of education precluded the possibility of employment in the modern sector, but they were skilled in their agro-pastoral mode of livelihood, and they made it well in their new surroundings. From 1953 to 1994 the cattle population on the Plains grew from some 200,000 animals to half a million, and whereas the Sangu before 1953 owned most of the cattle on the Plains, by 1990 the Sangu cattle herds accounted for only 12% while the Sukuma cattle herds comprised an estimated 65% of the regional cattle herd (Charnley 1997: 608-609). Charnley found that Sukuma household herds at this time averaged 285 cattle in this area, or 15.5 cattle per capita, and she rightly concludes that "[t]hose numbers are extremely high by East African standards" (1994: 213), and, one could add, indeed much higher than in the home areas of the migrants.

I have elsewhere treated the dynamics of the Sukuma agro-pastoral system in relation to labour (people), land and livestock (Brandström 1990b; see also Brandström, Hultin, and Lindström 1979). It can in brief be described as a system based on crop cultivation where surplus from cultivation is invested in livestock. With increasing number of livestock, the household can expand, involving more people, which makes for more labour invested in crop cultivation, which in turn, with increasing output, allows for acquisition of more livestock. For the successful Sukuma family enterprise, the option will ultimately be migration to less populated or unpopulated areas in search of land for cultivation and pasture for the growing livestock herd. Thus, the main part of the Sukuma migrants to the Usangu Plains or to neighbouring areas in the South started to move because of lack of pasture for their herds. Arriving in areas with plenty of land for cultivation and pasture for their herds and with less of the social and ecological restrictions in the new settlement areas than what the migrants had been subjected to in their home areas, the expensive dynamics of their agro-pastoral system was, so to speak, given free reins. This is the situation described by Charnley, with average household herds amounting to 285 heads of cattle. The economic success of the migrating families is, one could say, the positive side of the coin. The negative side is the effects on the natural environment of the extensive and expansive agro-pastoral practices of the Sukuma, in the long run risking land degradation and bush

encroachment. This is an environmental issue treated by Charnley in her studies.

While *Sungusungu* in the Kuria case was introduced under the auspices of the government, the movement in the southern part of the country was spread mainly by Sukuma agro-pastoral migrants and consequently was here more akin to *Sungusungu* in its original Sukuma-Nyamwezi form than in the Kuria case.

Sungusungu in Mpanda District

Paciotti conducted some ten months of fieldwork, spaced over three trips in 1999 and 2001, in the villages of Mirumba and Kibaoni in Mpanda District to the west of the Usangu Plains. It was mainly in these two villages that he learnt about *Sungusungu*. He was during his fieldwork even invited to join *Sungusungu* in the Mirumba village (Paciotti and Mulder 2004: 116-117; for more detail see Paciotti 2002) and was thus given the opportunity to follow the workings of the organization from the inside. Paciotti, then together with co-researchers, analyse in their studies various aspects of *Sungusungu* organization and practices among Sukuma migrants in their study area far from Sukumaland proper in comparison with the adaptation of *Sungusungu* by other ethnic groups, especially the Pimbwe, the original inhabitants of that area (Paciotti 2002; Paciotti and Hadley 2003, 2004; Paciotti and Mulder 2004; Paciotti et al. 2005). These studies indicate, among other things, that both the social zeal and the organizational templates of *Sungusungu* among the migrated Sukuma groups, irrespective of the physical distance, had retained much of the mode that characterized the movement in its early days in the areas where it emerged. This particular feature can well be related to Charnley's findings in her study, namely that the Sukuma people in the new settlement areas, retaining much of the original thrust and character of *Sungusungu* up to the time when Paciotti and co-researchers did their studies, were the least affected by modernization through education and changes in their customary mode of agro-pastoral economy, forms of social organization and social life. To them the original concepts of *Sungusungu* and its organizational templates were not culturally alien but easily emulated and practised. In addition to this fact, in the distant new settlement areas the state control could not be as tight as in the old settlement areas that were more easily reachable from the administrative centres and, consequently, the Sukuma migrants in the new settlement areas were given even more scope than in the old ones to live their lives according to their likings and understandings. It was under these conditions, one could argue, that the

original *Sungusungu* organizational idiom could thrive and survive distantly from the original Sukuma areas.

News about the formation of *Sungusungu* in the North spread fast through intra-ethnic communication from the Sukuma in the North to the Sukuma in the far South. According to the researchers' informants, *Sungusungu* groups were formed in the study area already in 1982, roughly no more than one year after the emergence of the movement in the North. Local leaders travelled north to learn about *Sungusungu* organization, and *Sungusungu* leaders from the north travelled south to facilitate the initiation of new villages there. "[V]illagers learned the structure and process of the organization and implemented it almost immediately", Paciotti and Moulder write. They continue: "An elder informed us how the newly formed Mirumba organization then worked to spread *Sungusungu* organization to all the Sukuma settlements in the division" (2004: 117). The authors furthermore add that the "structure and process have remained intact and are strikingly similar to the organization described by Bukurura 1994 in the area near the town of Kahama". By the end of the 1990s *Sungusungu* was widely spread and well established in the study area and engaged in a whole range of community issues, spending "most of their efforts mediating civil cases, fining their members for breaking organizational rules, and throwing parties" (2004: 117). For example, the type of cases listed which the *Sungusungu* organization arbitrated in the Mirumba village from January 1997 throughout February 1998 were: debt dispute, theft, adultery, farming-herding dispute, slander, bridewealth dispute, boundary dispute, lying, resisting arrest, domestic dispute and witchcraft accusation (2004: 118). In other words, a whole range of rather ordinary community issues. In the village, the *Sungusungu* secretary, *katibu*, kept a record of all the activities of the organization. Records, perused by Paciotti, showed that there was also a considerably efficient inter-village cooperation. For example, in case of cattle theft in the village, the secretary sent written notes to all nearby villages about the stolen cattle, "complete with diagrams of the cattle brands" (Paciotti et al. 2005: 60). These villages in turn sent letters to other villages. In the village *Sungusungu* archive, Paciotti saw letters, used to identify and capture cattle thieves, from villages hundreds of miles away.

The methods of assuring compliance to community rules and to treat criminal suspects were much the same as in the original area of *Sungusungu*. In case of violating the rules, the perpetrator was fined and if he or she refused to pay the fine, ostracism in one form or the other was applied to make him or her comply. The researchers relate a case where *Sungusungu* fined a shop owner in the village for having committed adul-

tery. The shop owner, however, delayed in paying his fine and went to the police in hope of escaping the punishment. On this *Sungusungu* wrote a letter to all nearby villages that forbade any *Sungusungu* member from going to the fined man's shop. Since most of his customer were Sukuma and most Sukuma *Sungusungu* members, the boycott was effective. Only within a few days the man had paid his fine. In case of dealing with a criminal suspect, the methods of making him confess were less lenient, and after confessing he had to state how much he was willing to pay in fine and to raise the offer until everybody agreed before being forgiven and reintegrated in the community (Paciotti et al. 2005: 60). The methods applied, it can be noted, were here of the same kind as in Sukuma-Nyamwezi communities in the North.

Among the Sukuma in this area, *Sungusungu* was, according to Paciotti and Mulder, often described as an "army of ancestors" because of its origin among Sukuma and Nyamwezi, and every Sukuma the authors talked to claimed that they were *Sungusungu* members. This ethnic bias did not, however, preclude members of local ethnic groups in the area from joining *Sungusungu*. There was openness among the Sukuma toward members of other ethnic groups to join and non-Sukuma even held high leadership ranks in some of the village organizations. In fact, most village *Sungusungu* secretaries were non-Sukuma since there were few Sukuma formally educated and able to write in Swahili (2004: 118).

According to the observations of the anthropologists, *Sungusungu* performed well and efficiently as a multi-ethnic organization when Sukuma templates and practices were adhered to (Paciotti and Mulder 2004; Paciotti et al. 2005). However, among the non-Sukuma in the area formation of *Sungusungu* organizations was less efficient. As an illustrating example the authors provide the case when the Pimbwe in Kibaoni village attempted to form their own *Sungusungu* organization.

The Pimbwe are a relatively small group of Bantu-speaking people inhabiting the Rukwa Valley and thus, in relation to the migrant Sukuma, the original inhabitants of that area.⁹¹ Referring to Roy Willis' ethnographic account (1966), Paciotti and Mulder summarize that historically the Pimbwe governed themselves with loosely linked clans controlled by a chief in a central village. As small-scale cultivators and hunters there was no need for large-scale cooperation and, thus, their institutions remained more small-scaled within village and clan polities (2004).

⁹¹ There is relatively scarce ethnographic documentation on the Pimbwe (see Willis 1966; Seel, Mgawe, and Mulder 2014). Their number was, in 2009, estimated to 64,000 (Ethnologue 2020)

Now, the efforts of the Pimbwe in Kibaoni village to form a *Sungusungu* organization were not very successful. Though they modelled their organization after the Sukuma *Sungusungu*, it soon dissolved. Documents held by the secretary in the village showed that only 44 Pimbwe out of approximately 500 adult Pimbwe men living in the village ever joined the organization. Paciotti and Mulder argue that few rules existed in Pimbwe society to motivate cooperation beyond the scope of family and clan and, consequently, the Pimbwe were not familiar with or prepared enough to mobilize participation as effectively as the Sukuma who were familiar with institutional structures formed and adapted for larger scales of cooperation (2004).

The authors may in some respects draw too far-reaching conclusions on their body of empirical data in their reasoning about “cultural evolution” and preparedness for adopting institutional innovations among various cultural and ethnic groups (for details of this reasoning, see Paciotti and Hadley 2003; Paciotti et al. 2005), yet, they strike a chord when they reason that “social learning of complicated institutions is difficult. In many cases, some rules will be incompatible with pre-existing ones. Consequently, some groups struggle when trying to rapidly create institutional arrangements. Rather than creating something entirely new, groups usually modify their own pre-existing institutions” (Paciotti et al. 2005: 64). These are or should all be self-evident facts to social scientists (though they rarely have been among development agencies and development experts neither in the past nor in the present) worth rehearsing. We are all victims of the past and the present in the present, scientists and our interlocutors in the field alike, wherever in the world we do our research, and so also the Sukuma settlers and the local ethnic groups described by Paciotti and co-researchers with regard to formation of *Sungusungu* organizations. The Sukuma settlers, unlike other ethnic groups in the area like the Pimbwe, the authors argue, “already had rules that promoted large-scale trust, and they could quickly invent a justice system when need arose” (Paciotti et al. 2005: 64). Consequently, as the authors argue, cultural boundaries hampered the diffusion of an institutional innovation like that of *Sungusungu* across the boundaries.

Sungusungu in the Usangu Plains

Cleaver and co-researchers, in their article “Institutions, Security, and Pastoralism: Exploring the Limits of Hybridity” (2013), analyse the role of *Sungusungu* in the Usangu Plains, where Charnley previously had carried out her research, particularly with respect to local governance.

In their analyses they employ the concepts of hybridity and bricolage to illuminate their case. Regarding the former of these two concepts, they align with, as they put it, “contemporary thinking about African development ... concerned with the hybrid nature of governance in which official rules and mechanisms combine in various ways with local practices and norms of moral economy, including ideas of mutuality and the right to subsistence” (Cleaver et al. 2013: 166; with reference to Hyden 2006; and Chabal 2009). Regarding the concept of bricolage, the authors refer to Lévi-Strauss (1966) though they do not employ the term in a strict Lévi-Straussian sense, that is, as a word for describing the characteristic patterns of mythological thought, but rather in a more mundane sense of the term, for example, as defined in dictionaries like Merriam-Webster’s, as a construction achieved by using whatever is at hand or, something created from a variety of things. Adapting the concepts of bricolage and hybridity more specifically to the topic of governance, the authors write: “‘Institutional bricolage’ consists of a process in which people (consciously and unconsciously) draw on existing social formulae and arrangements (rules, traditions, norms, roles, and relationships) to patch together institutions in response to changing situations”, and, in extension, the “institutions so produced are dynamic hybrids of the modern and traditional, the formal and the informal” (2013: 168).⁹² To the authors, *Sungusungu* as they came to understand the movement in their research, is a telling example of both hybridity and bricolage and is in their article analysed and explicated in these terms.

During fieldwork for an environmental project⁹³ in 1999–2002, the researchers found, as they write, “an active network of organized Sungusungu groups linking young men and boys herding cattle in the grasslands of the Ihefu⁹⁴ wetland with one another and with their home villages” (Cleaver et al. 2013: 170). At first sight they thought that these groups were only a kind of Sukuma militia for guarding cattle. However, at closer scrutiny they realized that these groups, activity- and institutional-wise, meant much more than only that. The groups were not a kind of free-floating Sukuma militia detached from village government. They were

⁹² Somewhat critically one could say that the concepts of hybridity and bricolage, as understood above, are not only conspicuous features of governance and institutional arrangements in current postcolonial times but features characterizing human and cultural life in all times. Moving less far back in time, British indirect rule during the colonial era provides, one could argue, an example of a most intricate melange of both institutional hybridity and bricolage.

⁹³ The Sustainable Management of the Usangu Wetland and Its Catchment Project.

⁹⁴ *Ihefu* refers to the swamp and seasonally flooded grasslands at the centre of the Plains.

incorporated in the village administration through the official village defence committee and thus accountable to the village government, and they were not solely purely Sukuma as for members but cross-ethnic, including both Sangu agriculturalists and Maasai immigrant pastoralists. And in the villages under observation, *Sungusungu*, as an institution, was markedly multipurpose in character, “acting not only to maintain law and order but also as a communication channel, and a welfare organization, ensuring the health and well-being of the herders in seasonal camps”, and, furthermore, “The Sungusungu foot-soldiers, roaming around in the course of herding animals and carrying out their duties, also acted as messengers, broadcasting information about meetings and events in dispersed settlements” (Cleaver et al. 2013: 179).

However, when the researchers returned to the Usangu Plains in 2011, dramatic changes had occurred in the meantime. Between 2006 and 2007 reportedly 70,000 livestock keepers, most of them Sukuma agropastoralists, and 300,000 livestock had been forcefully evicted from the Plains by a heavily armed police force, an anti-poaching unit, game wardens and ground and air patrols (Walsh 2012: 304, 316). The history behind what resulted in these drastic government-initiated measures is long and intricate with many different groups of stakeholders.

The Usangu Plains in Mbarali District in Mbeya Region constitute a contested area with different interest groups involved. This well-watered area, situated in the Great Ruaha River Basin with fertile soils and abundant grasslands, is, as pointed at above, suitable both for irrigation cultivation and cattle grazing. The area is characterized by a rapidly growing population, particularly because of migration, and of agricultural intensification, where land and water are increasingly appropriated by the state, private companies, immigrant and local individual farmers and livestock keeping peoples like the immigrant Sukuma and Il-Parakuyu Maasai. Part of the area had recently been “designated an agricultural growth corridor under a government and private-sector initiative aimed at developing commercialized smallholder farming and modernized (nonmobile) cattle production” (Cleaver et al. 2013: 169). Furthermore, there was the conservationist interest of extending the Ruaha National Park to include parts of the north-western area of the Plains and, consequently, excluding all herding from that part, and there was the national interest of securing a steady water-flow down the Ruaha river system to the hydroelectric dams of Mtera and Kidatu, providing the main part of the nation’s hydropower.

Martin Walsh in his article “The not-so-Great Ruaha and hidden histories of an environmental panic in Tanzania” (2012), sketches the details of this scenery of conflicting interests. He describes a discourse in which,

though based on questionable evidence, the livestock keepers in the Plains, mainly the Sukuma, were made the scapegoats for most of the environmental problems of concern in the debate: overutilization of the wetlands, detrimental to the agricultural potential of the area, and disturbance of the ecological balance causing irregularities in the water-flow down the river system and also infringements in the game reserved areas by the livestock herds harming the wildlife environment. In this struggle of competing interests, those of the government, private business and national and international conservationist lobby groups, the least powerful, namely the livestock keepers, subjects and not citizens in that sense Mamdani has given to these terms (1996), were the losers, and what then ultimately followed was the violent eviction mentioned above.

Now, when Cleaver and co-researchers in 2011 returned to their study area, the form and functions of *Sungusungu*, following the eviction of people and livestock herds, had undergone conspicuous changes. They summarize the main traits of this situation: (i) People with large herds of cattle were now relocated to other parts of the country with only remnants of their families who continued to tend smaller herds around Usangu villages; (ii) *Sungusungu*, in this new situation largely delinked from local government, had contracted in function and membership to become primarily an ethnic identity organization operating covertly, secretly meeting in the bush; (iii) no longer as multifunctional as before, the main concerns of *Sungusungu* had become to ensure the practical well-being of the remaining cattle keeping families and to assert their agro-pastoral form of life under continued pressure to destock and disperse (Cleaver et al. 2013: 179). Thus, the large-scale eviction of people and livestock herds had significantly changed the form and functions of *Sungusungu*. “Informants”, the researchers recall indeed, “linked the breaking up of communities and social networks to the loss of collective power of *Sungusungu*” (Cleaver et al. 2013: 179). However, irrespective of changes occurred, *Sungusungu*, though now with a more restricted scope of activities than before, was still in its changed form a viable institution. Thus, in the upcoming situation, the authors add, *Sungusungu* was not totally delinked from all kinds of formal institutional life. In pastoralist associations formed by the government and NGO’s to ensure that the livestock keepers’ interests were safeguarded in relation to other groups also dependent on natural resources like land and water, *Sungusungu* was still, though in relation to other interest groups to a more marginal extent, recognized and given a certain voice (Cleaver et al. 2013: 179-180).

To Cleaver and co-researchers, *Sungusungu* in the Usangu Plains provides an illustrating case of institutional hybridity and bricolage. Hybrid

institutions, they argue, multipurpose in character and operating intermittently, “overlap with both customary arrangements (assemblies, clan, lineage) and with bureaucratic and political workings of village government”, and they wax and wane over time due to varying socio-political circumstances, for example, “in relation to the state and to authoritative governance relationships” (2013: 182). All this can, and with good reasons, very well be said and concluded about *Sungusungu* as observed by the researchers in the Plains, though, this is only one side of the coin. What strikes me most in Cleaver’s and her co-researchers’ description of *Sungusungu* organization in the villages in the Usangu is not the features of institutional hybridity and bricolage displayed, that one could well say are there, but rather the resilience of the *Sungusungu* organizational template such as it was formed several decades earlier in the area where the movement arose. The blend of the formal and the informal, perceptions of governance based on Western traditions and perceptions grounded in local cultural traditions, and the multifunctionality of the *Sungusungu* organization beyond the issue of security and social policing to include a whole range of matters of more general community concern, all these aspects were conspicuous features of *Sungusungu* among Sukuma-Nyamwezi agro-pastoralist far away from the Usangu Plains during the early days of the movement. To this could be added the openness toward people of other ethnic belonging than Sukuma as long as they bought the rules of the game. The form and functions of *Sungusungu* in its first phase in the study area, as described in the article, with its multipurpose character and broad involvement in community affairs, resembles to a notable extent the movement as I came to know it in the early 1980s in the North. In its second shape described by the authors, however, when *Sungusungu* due to powerful external pressure had contracted to become more or less a covert organization for safeguarding the Sukuma immigrants agro-pastoral form of life, one could say, *Sungusungu* came to resemble the movement in its most early and secret form before getting the support and recognition of President Nyerere and the ruling party. One could well assume, as in the case discussed above of *Sungusungu* in Mpanda District, that the Sukuma immigrants learnt about the organization through intra-ethnic communication and consequently replicated the form of *Sungusungu* along the same organizational and conceptual lines as in the North. Thus, one could argue, something essential of the tenor and cadence characterizing the movement in its very early phase had here among the Sukuma in the Plains, irrespective of all the features of hybridity, bricolage and malleability over time, continuously been retained.

Sungusungu in Sumbawanaga District

In his article "Communal Property and Degradation Narratives: Debating Degradation Narratives", Brockington's concern is not primarily to study *Sungusungu* formation and mode of operation but, as he puts it "to identify what local controls existed over the management of resources" and furthermore, "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'" (2001: 3). However, with regard to *Sungusungu*, Brockington's article provides an illustrating case of rapid and efficient formation of *Sungusungu* groups in case of emergency and need among immigrants, mainly Sukuma agro-pastoralists, and local Fipa farmers in his study area in the Rukwa Valley.

After surveying three districts in Rukwa Region, Brockington chose for his study Motwisa village in Sumbawanaga District, which he found representative for his topic. What is played out on the scenery here is the conflict over arable land, livestock and pasture between the local Fipa⁹⁵ and the immigrant Sukuma, the former with their small-scale agriculture and livestock keeping and the latter with their large herds and extensive cultivation practices.

To the anthropologist, Fipa informants described the Sukuma agro-pastoralists as intruders. They had tricked their way in, so it was said. They initially arrived with a few cows and then brought in big herds and a large number of relatives. The animals trampled and degraded the soil, destroyed crops and consumed all the thatching grass for the Fipa farmers (Brockington 2001: 4). Though some people spoke positively about the Sukuma – the industriousness and wealth of the Sukuma had contributed to the upturn of the economy in the valley, some locals had formed friendship and business partnership with the Sukuma trading cattle and receiving gifts of oxen and there were intermarriage between the two groups – the general consensus was that the coming of the Sukuma was bad for the Fipa. "The poor relationship between the two groups", Brockington argues was basically, "rooted in the problems caused by stock damages to the farms and by contrasting approaches to farming between Fipa and Sukuma practices" (2001: 5).

The Fipa's farming system differed significantly from that of the Sukuma. While the Fipa generally cleared no more than four acres per family, cultivated by hand and using only own family labour or communal

⁹⁵ For detailed ethnographic accounts on the Fipa, see Willis (1966, 1981). The estimated number of the Fipa was, in 2009, 713,000 (Ethnologue 2020).

parties, and with farming practices oriented toward conserving the fertility of the soil, the Sukuma system was extensive. They cleared large pieces of land, 10 to 20 acres that they ploughed with their oxen and weeded with communal parties or, resourceful as they were, with paid labour. The trampling of the large Sukuma owned herds hardened the soil and made it difficult for the Fipa to hoe and the animals spread types of grass that was difficult to weed. Fipa farmers complained about a decline in fertility on their farms that they attributed to the cattle invasion and about cattle encroachment onto their farms, damaging crops and after harvest consuming the residues that the Fipa considered as fertilizer (Brockington 2001: 5-6).

Brockington looked around to see if there was any system for regulating the use of resources or mechanisms for managing pasture but found none. The range controlling system, called *ngitili* or *ngitile*,⁹⁶ common among Sukuma agro-pastoralists in the more densely populated areas in the North, was not at all practiced here in the South. Cattle were without restrictions and freely grazed everywhere. With an abundance of resources in the valley, copious grass, and numerous streams near the Rukwa Lake for watering the stock, there was, thus, nothing to induce a more constrained and regulated use of the environment (2001: 4).

The Sukuma-owned large herds of cattle and the uninhibited grazing practices of the herders, which caused damage to the farms, created animosity between the local Fipa and the Sukuma. This conflict was even more aggravated by the fact that there was no recompensation to have for damages caused by the animals, because the herders had means to bribe the officials who were supposed to guard the villagers' rights (Brockington 2001: 7-8). But there were also other reasons for causing tension and conflict between the groups. Below I summarize Brockington's account of this particular case (2001: 8-10).

When Sukuma migrants in the 1970s began to arrive in the area, they found the Fipa-owned cattle wandering about unattended. This was the Fipa cattle-owners' practice at that time. After harvest, in the dry season, they drove the cattle to the plains bordering the lake and left them there unattended to feed and breed until the beginning of the dry season. For the cattle-loving Sukuma to see the Fipa-owned stock grazing around totally

⁹⁶ In areas where there is shortage of pasture during the dry season, there is a practice of making grass-land reserves, *ngitile* (Smith 1938; Malcolm 1953: 73-78; Brandström 1990a: 3:26). Two types of reserves are made: family reserves and communal reserves. Family reserves can only be made on arable land in fallow, as there is communal access to all land that is not efficiently cultivated. Communal reserves are made on any land that is suitable for dry season grazing. The area chosen as *ngitile* is closed at the beginning of the wet season. In the dry season, when pasture within easy reach of the village is becoming scarce, the *ngitile* is opened up for grazing.

unattended, in their view cattle of a highly attractive breed, posed a great temptation. The Sukuma started to steal, first individual animals and then groups and ultimately whole herds of cattle. In the 1980s the situation reached a stage where the regional authorities began to fear that inter-ethnic violence would erupt between the local Fipa and the immigrant Sukuma. Consequently, planning commenced to move the Sukuma on. But the Sukuma learnt about the plans and asked for a grace period to sort things out. This was when *Sungusungu* in this particular area first came into the picture. Representatives were sent to the North to learn about *Sungusungu* there and, subsequently, a *Sungusungu* organization was formed with both Sukuma and Fipa members and leaders with the main task of recovering stolen cattle and returning them to the original owners.

The newly formed *Sungusungu* worked efficiently. With *Sungusungu* tracing methods and mode of making interrogations, thieves were identified and interrogated and when a confession was extracted the perpetrator was taken to the offices of the ruling party to sign a confession. The number of animals stolen was then reimbursed to the original owner from the thief's kraal.

However, the thieves on their part joined together, complaining that they had been robbed of their livestock by local thugs. They managed to have the ears of regional and district police and judiciary for their complaints, alleging that animals with the thieves' brands had been found in local peoples' kraals and, as consequence of their allegations, the Field Force Unit was deployed to repossess the thieves' animals and arresting *Sungusungu* members and leaders.

To the cattle owners it seemed as if the thieves were in collusion with the police and judiciary against them. In 1986 they formed a committee and sent representatives all the way to Mwalimu Julius Nyerere⁹⁷, at that time retired president but still chairman of the ruling party, and he engaged himself in the case. He sent an investigation officer in advance to assess the situation before he himself arrived, and when he arrived a meeting was summoned in which both sides were given the opportunity to present their side of the case. Ultimately in this case, castigating the authorities in question for their corruption, Nyerere sided with the complainants, namely the farmers and cattle owners. The end result of this story was that a new set of the Field Force Units was deployed, with the task to see to it that the stock returned to the thieves during the previous operation

⁹⁷ *Mwalimu*, meaning 'teacher' in Swahili, was an honorary term for addressing Nyerere or referring to him. Another one, commonly used today, is *Baba wa Taifa*, meaning 'father of the nation'.

now would be taken off them again and returned to those who originally had been robbed.

Brockington concludes about the accounts he got in the field concerning this particular case and its various turns: “If this was truly the case, 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” (2001: 10). To this case, Brockington adds two additional cases to illuminate the issues of his article, interesting cases *per se*, but beside my exploration of the destinies of the *Sungusungu* movement. Yet, his article pregnantly depicts the complex setting of competing interests between the local Fipa and their mode of livelihood and land-use practices and the immigrant Sukuma and theirs; between the regional and district officials and their doings, formally and informally mixed with corruption, in relation to the local arena, on the one side, and power holders at the higher level of the power hierarchy with their views and agenda, on the other side; and between long-term conservationist interests and short-term economic ones, and how these interests represented by the various and competing interest groups are mediated and solved or just kept at bay or left pending. It is in this complex setting that *Sungusungu* with its organizational template and mode of practice, at least for a while, became a vehicle for uniting the otherwise contesting groups of Fipa farmers and Sukuma agro-pastoralist for a common purpose and a task that they together successfully accomplished, not the least, or rather most decisively, because they, in the final round of their struggle, managed to have the ears of no less than Mwalimu Julius Nyerere himself.

Sungusungu in an urban context

After gaining political acceptance, the spread of *Sungusungu* as a model for community policing went pretty fast around the country. The police conference paper from 2000, referred to in the foregoing, provides a glimpse of the scale of this spread, that is by the time of presenting this paper, not only to the rural areas of the country but “to almost all urban centres as well” (Safer Cities 2000: 47).

Already in 1983 there was a political drive to spreading *Sungusungu* to urban centres. For example, in that early year of the movement the then Prime Minister Edward Sokoine, addressing a rally of 6,000 *Sungusungu* in Kasamwa in Geita District, Mwanza Region, though warning them to stay within the law, praised them for their ‘revolutionary’ activity. As a sign of his support he even promised a sum of 200,000 shillings to the

Sungusungu groups in the district, a sum they should be free to spend as they wished. The Prime Minister, furthermore, while visiting the region, urged the regional authorities to employ *Sungusungu* to weed out loiterers and racketeers in Mwanza Town in accordance with the national campaign of that time, which the town authorities that far had failed to implement. It was also stated that *Sungusungu*, while carrying out their task in the town, would be allowed to use their traditional weapons and wear their usual outfits (Abrahams 1987: 191).⁹⁸

Later in time, with the appointment of Augustine Mrema as Minister for Home Affairs in 1990, the drive for promoting formation of *Sungusungu* groups all over the country was increasingly emphasized. This was part of a broader campaign initiated by the newly appointed minister against crime and corruption in the country. The main issues he addressed, all of great concern among people, were (1) personal and property safety; (2) fraud and theft in government revenue; (3) interspousal aggression, exploitation and abuse; and (4) tracking down various smugglers (Mallya 1994: 75). Mrema's pronounced stand and radical measures to achieve his goals made him publicly known and, initially, very popular. In a 1991-issue of *Bulletin of Tanzanian Affairs*, he is described as the best known person in Tanzania of that time, being in the press almost every day, depicted as "Tanzania's Robin Hood" and "the minister who is willing to bark and bite" as "he travelled from end to end of the country in a massive government anti-corruption drive" (Bulletin 1991). In this more general campaign against various forms of lawlessness that haunted the society at that time, the Minister especially encouraged formation of *Sungusungu* watch-groups in the urban areas of the country.

With respect to reduction of crime, the Mrema campaign paid off. Mwaikusa, in his article "Maintaining Law and order in Tanzania" (1995), refers to police reports in 1992 that showed an impressive decline in the rate of crime over the most recent time in the city of Dar es Salaam, particularly robbery and related offences. Mwaikusa concludes: "The reports were not merely police propaganda. Public opinion in Dar es Salaam tended to agree with them. The fall of crime was attributed to one outstanding factor: the deployment of *sungusungu* in Dar es Salaam as in other urban areas" (1995: 166). Initially, the significant fall in incidents of robbery and burglary in the urban areas earned the Minister and his campaign much public approval and popularity. However, Mwaikusa continues: "In typical Tanzanian fashion, he ordered *sungusungu* work to be compulsory for every adult male" (1995: 170). The measure to make the formation of

⁹⁸ Abrahams referring to *Daily News*, 27 October 1983.

Sungusungu watch-groups compulsory in the urban communities made the campaign lose in popularity among people. The regularization of *Sungusungu* demanding compulsory service from the members of the community, Mwaikusa argues, changed the relationship with the state and eroded the original character of *Sungusungu* as a popular organization (1995: 170).

Thus, the kind of state-supported urban vigilantism under the label of *Sungusungu* that Mrema propagated lost more and more in popularity. Heald recounts the impressions of one of her informants in Shinyanga town who described this period as a “terrible time”: “One was compelled to take part in the night patrols, to attend the assemblies when criminals were tried, and at regular monthly intervals the whole town would be sealed off and everyone's papers inspected to ensure that they were in order” (2002: 8).

George Kakoti, in his MA thesis (1998), provides a more detailed account of the *pros* and *cons* of the Mrema campaign, particularly in the city of Dar es Salaam and why the early enthusiasm and support for the campaign faded away.

It was made obligatory that all able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 60, regardless of their occupation, participate in neighbourhood patrols in their areas under the leadership of the 10-cell leaders (1998: 6, 61), approximately once every 10 nights between 10:30 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. (1998: 64). This was of course a cumbersome task for everybody, not the least for those who normally had demanding professional daily duties to fulfil. Those who refrained from participating in the night patrols were reported to the police and in some cases arrested, having to spend days in jail before being arraigned. There was abuse of power and developing corruption. “People began to complain publicly”, Kakoti writes, “about harassment, humiliation, and extortion from bands of vigilantes” (1998: 65). With the removal of Mrema from the post of Minister for Home Affairs in 1994 and his total dismissal from the Cabinet in 1995 the campaign, without his zeal and energetic leadership, lost its very go. In conclusion, Kakoti, borrowing the expression from Shivji (1990), describes the end result of the Mrema campaign just as a “miscarriage of justice” and, as a program that by “1996 was no longer in existence in Dar es Salaam” (1998: 68, 78), though, to a variable extent still functioning in other townships, particularly in areas where Sukuma and Nyamwezi people made up a majority of the population.

The Tanzanian development history from independence onward is characterized by a whole series of national campaigns focusing on various issues like literacy, health and sanitation, nutrition, villagization, afforesta-

tion and others. These campaigns have been characterized by intensive national mobilization, a high degree of popular involvement and, in the short-term, displaying considerable efficiency. The Mrema campaign adds to this series. Though these campaigns often have been less effective in the long-term perspective, they have always left some impressions behind and so also with the Mrema campaign. The very idea of *Sungusungu* as a vehicle for community policing in the urban areas was still there in the minds of politicians, security planners and decision makers.

Thus, with the initiation of the UN HABITAT-supported Safer Cities Programme in the late 1990s there was a revival of *Sungusungu* in Dar es Salaam (Safer Cities 2000). In this programme it is stated: "In order to build a culture of adherence to laws and by-laws among city residents, a structure was needed to complement government efforts. This was accomplished with the establishment of the City Auxiliary Police who link with communities through the *Sungusungu* groups and together implement local crime prevention initiatives" (Mtani 2007: 74). Within this programme, one could say, urban *Sungusungu* reappears partly under a new guise. Although the basic task of *Sungusungu* was considered to be the same as previously, namely community safety and security, more emphasis than ever before was given here to systematic integration of *Sungusungu* into the formal security system, to educating the participants through workshops, seminars and training, and to paying special attention within the programme to women and youth issues in the urban communities (Mtani 2007; Safer Cities 2000).

Though there were still many problems to tackle in the politically, culturally and occupationally often rather heterogeneous urban environments, it is positively stated in the police conference paper referred to in the foregoing that by April 2000 "*Sungusungu* groups were found functioning effectively" in a number of the municipal areas of Dar es Salam and, furthermore" that "*Sungusungu* was still recognized by most of the residents as the only system workable and affordable to the marginalised majority who are mostly affected by the consequences of crime and violence (or fear thereof) in their communities" (Safer Cities 2000: 49).

This positive statement is in no way conclusive about the trajectory of *Sungusungu* in an urban context, as well as in the rural areas, with its not only *pros* but also many *cons*. There was and still is a continuation. This is an issue to be considered in the next chapter.

10. The end of *Sungusungu*?

From *Sungusungu* to *ulinzi shirikishi*

In 2006 *polisi jamii*, community police, or *ulinzi shirikishi*, participatory security, were introduced as descriptive terms for community policing in a police reform programme with the expressed objective of improving relationships between the police and the citizens and encouraging the communities to take responsibility for neighbourhood security in close collaboration with the police and the local government (TPF 2007, 2008). In a paper by the Tanzanian Inspector General of Police, the expected benefits to accrue from this policy are listed as follows (Cross 2013: 1; quoting Mwema 2008: 9):

...preventing and reducing crime as well as fear of crime; reducing disorder and anti-social behaviors; increasing feelings of safety; improving police-community relationships as well as improving police-community accountability. Other benefits are reducing corruption in the police service, enhancing respect of human rights and increasing the community's capacity to deal with local problems and changes (sic) police officers' attitudes and behavior towards policing...The Police Force will be oriented towards meeting the needs of civilians and institution (sic) of democratic society...

This reform resonates with ideas about the advantages of community policing *en vogue* among donors and international non-governmental organizations, emphasizing policing with and for the community rather than policing of the community (see e.g. Tilley 2008). With this reform there is a terminological shift. *Sungusungu* as a term for community policing in various guises was no longer a term used in the official political language. From now on the official terms were *polisi jamii* or *ulinzi shirikishi*.

Charlotte Cross has made a thorough study of the history, introduction and early implementation of this police reform in Tanzania, with a special focus on the urban context, while critically assessing both achievements and shortcomings (see 2013, 2014, 2016). She did her fieldwork in Mwanza City, the second largest city in the country, in 2010–2011, at a

time when the implementation of the reform was in full swing. She refers to the vast current literature on community policing, SSR (Security Sector Reform), hybridity and the trend of increasing mixture of the private and the public in the security sector in African countries. The Tanzanian police reform would seem fully in pace with this more general trend. However, in the Tanzanian case there was the historical antecedent in the promotion of self-help policing through *Sungusungu* by the ruling party and, to a varying degree, supported by the regional and district administrative leadership. Drawing from her field experience in Mwanza, Cross writes that, although a common narrative described “community policing as an improved version of *sungusungu*, due to the greater collaboration with the police and ostensible respect for human rights, some residents did not understand *ulinzi shirikishi* to be something distinct from *sungusungu*” (Cross 2014: 528), or, as one of her informants more bluntly put it: “It’s not that *sungusungu* has died. Its name has changed. Now we call it *ulinzi shirikishi* but its origin is *sungusungu*... there’s no difference” (2014: 528).

This reform could be described as a marriage between the past and the present. “Those responsible for managing the police reform”, writes Cross, “described *Sungusungu* as the genesis of contemporary CP [community policing], which reflected their tradition, and the political culture of Tanzania “(2013: 72). Thus, as Cross furthermore notes, there were the mixed understandings of community policing “as something that is both ‘traditional’ whilst also having the ‘modern’ accoutrements of human rights and law” (2013: 72). These ‘modern’ aspects, however, one could argue do not solely by themselves signal a change between the past and the present with respect to *ulinzi shirikishi* in relation to *Sungusungu*. As Mwaikusa put it, the state wanted “to enlist the *sungusungu* service of maintaining law and order according to the state terms and criteria and, perhaps most importantly, do so without incurring any cost” (1995: 171). This is indeed so. From the early days when *Sungusungu* first gained the acceptance of the ruling party and onward, the demand for full compliance with the laws of the state was being rehearsed over and over again. *Sungusungu* was never given the mandate to go about and act according to local perceptions of right and wrong apart from those of the state. Arguably, the most significant change with the new policy is the shift of the source of authority from that of the ruling party to that of the state and its implementing arms. It was the support of the then President and Party Chairman Julius Kambarage Nyerere and other top politicians of the ruling party at that time, which endowed *Sungusungu* with its aura of legitimacy while the differences between *Sungusungu*, with its security practic-

es, and police and judiciary, remained a largely unsettled issue. With the police reform initiated in 2006, the responsibility for implementing the community policing strategy is supposed to rest with the police in collaboration with the authorities responsible for local governance. Though, rhetorically *ulinzi shirikishi* was intended to be a strategy led by the residents, where the role of the police was said to be “to offer advice, expertise and education about security to the groups and the rest of the community” (Cross 2013: 71; referring to TPF 2007: 9), the order of command was no matter of confusion. The implementation of the reform was now officially under the auspices of the police.

A second notable difference between past and present in the reform is the ambition by various means to bring about a more thorough integration of community policing into the regular state security system than was ever the case in the history of *Sungusungu*. Furthermore attempts were to be made to improve the public image of the police and enhance communication between police and citizens. For example, programmes were produced for radio and television to explain the precepts of *ulinzi shirikishi/polisi jamii*, mobile telephone numbers to senior police officers were released to the public for direct communication between police and residents and there were campaigns for informing about and promoting the revised policing strategy country-wide (Cross 2013: 67). In the annual police reports the results of these efforts were reported. Thus, in the national annual police report of 2009 it is stated that the number of people sensitized so far were no less than 11,487,151 (Cross 2013: 72; referring to TPF 2009: 4). In Mwanza, where Cross did her fieldwork, the police conducted seminars for local government staff to inform them about their responsibilities in maintaining local security and made visits to schools and used local television and radio stations for reaching out with information (Cross 2013: 71). However, in more practical terms the difference between the *Sungusungu* past and the *ulinzi shirikishi* present may seem less conspicuous.

Cross selected three sub-wards, *mitaa*,⁹⁹ in low- and middle-income areas of Mwanza for her deep study of the implementation of the *ulinzi shirikishi* reform. The population in two of the sub-wards was above 4,000 and just below 3,000 in the third of them. The cases, named A, B and C, were selected, as the author put it, “to demonstrate variation in terms of the extent to which CP had been ‘successful’, in terms of having sustained collective action” (Cross 2013: 77).

⁹⁹ The sub-ward, *mitaa*, plural *mitaa*, is the lowest level of local administration in urban areas.

The new policing strategy was a national policy to be promoted throughout administrative levels from higher to lower ones, although, at the time of Cross's fieldwork, first as a pilot project in five of the country's administrative regions, one of which was Mwanza (Cross 2013: 76). However, the level where this policy of community policing ultimately was to be implemented was the community level, in the urban areas, as in the Mwanza cases studied by Cross, the sub-ward and in the rural areas the village under the responsibility, in the former case, of the sub-ward government and, in the latter, that of the village government. Though there were general principles laid down for the reform it goes without saying that its practical implementation at the local level could, due to varying local circumstances and conditions, vary considerably and assume many different forms. This fact is well illustrated in the cases studied by Cross. In all her three cases – termed sub-ward A, B and C – the operational models for implementing *ulinzi shirikishi* in respective sub-ward differed considerably.

In sub-ward A, seemingly the most 'successful' among Cross's cases, the institution of community policing appeared well integrated in the local government and in relation to the police (2013: 99-107). The security committee had a broad representation of various groups in the locality, including representations of religious organizations, political parties, disabled persons and school pupils. There were twelve elected *makamanda*, commanders, of whom half were women. It was argued that it was important to have female participants because it was considered inappropriate for a man to search and arrest a woman. The *makamanda* led night patrols twice a week on a shift basis, accompanied by young male residents. The ten-cell leaders were required to provide the names of eligible residents for duty one night each month and were responsible for organizing the timetable for the patrols. A by-law had been passed that made it compulsory to participate, imposing a fine of 5000 TZS (Tanzanian shillings) for failure to report for patrol, and those who were unable to participate due to work commitments had to contribute 3000 TZS per month. Persons apprehended by *ulinzi shirikishi* on suspicion of criminal offence were taken to a nearby police station. Every evening, before patrolling, the community police reported the names of those participating to the police, this because participants were entitled free medical care in case of injury sustained during patrolling and also for helping to prevent those patrolling from being mistaken for thieves. A police station was located only some five minutes' walk from the sub-ward office. In addition to night patrolling, the community police were supposed to be vigilant about the daily security in the locality and to mediate in various quarrels and other in-

trapersonal conflicts arousing in the locality. There was also, in this sub-ward, policing for hire. On requests from a property owner, the community police could against an agreed fee ensure that the patrol of guards passed his property a certain number of times each night and vehicle and motorbike owners could park their property outside the office of the community police for a fee of 500 TZS per day. The income accrued from these services was used for purchasing necessary equipment for the operations, such as torches and batteries. There were no financial contributions to be expected from the government to *ulinzi shirikishi*. All work had to be economically sustained by the community itself. Fines and fees for security services, as those mentioned above, apart from occasional donations that in this particular sub-ward had enabled the community police to purchase uniforms and rent an office, were thus the only sources for financial support to the community police for performing their duties.

Case B seemed to be just a variation on a common theme in relation to case A with respect to the integration of *ulinzi chirikishi* in the local government (Cross 2013: 107-110). There was thus a security committee with both male and female members for handling local security matters and for overseeing the guards' nocturnal activities. However, there were also differences in relation to case A. Instead of making all able-bodied men obliged to take part in night watch duties, according to the *Sungusungu* model, patrolling was, one could say, outsourced to local young men paid by the community for their service. For the remuneration of the guards every house owner was obliged to pay 1000 TZS monthly, owners of businesses 5000 and car owners 3000 respectively and the monthly allowance to each guard was set to 40,000 TZA. Furthermore, the relation to the police was not as close as it was in case A. In brief, there was a functioning *ulinzi shirikishi* in this sub-ward at the time of Cross's fieldwork however, as it appears, less spirited than in sub-ward A.

Sub-ward C was the last of the three case sites studied where *ulinzi shirikishi* was adopted following the introduction of the new policy for community policing (Cross 2013: 111-116). That was in this locality in 2009. This sub-ward was situated some 12 kilometres from the city centre, an area that until recently had been a rural one, and some 2.5 kilometres away from the nearest police station. Although declined in this area, *Sungusungu* was still in the memory of people. The initiation of *polisi jamii* or *ulinzi shirikishi* was here taken as a reintroduction of *Sungusungu* and the organization for community policing was moulded accordingly with an elected *ntemi*, *makamanda* and other *Sungusungu* ranks, all positions filled by men. As in case A, all able-bodied men who did not have conflicting duties were obliged to take part in night patrols on rotational basis with the

ten-cell leaders being responsible for overseeing that this obligation was properly fulfilled. There was no formalized system for collecting contributions to cover the expenses for night patrol necessities. One had to rely on contributions from more wealthy residents on an *ad hoc* basis. However, this system did not work well. The contributions were unreliable, and the ten-cell leaders were lax in fulfilling their duties. A new approach was then attempted, namely, to make the ten-cell leaders collect 2000 TZA from each household for employing young men to guard. But even this system failed. People simply did not contribute enough. Ultimately it was decided to revert to *utaratibu wa jadi*, ‘the traditional system’, where the ten-cell leaders were required to provide the names of participants in accordance with a timetable for patrolling. There was also an expressed intention to involve women in the policing work for handling female cases, for example, when apprehending and guarding female suspects, though this intention had not materialized when Cross did her fieldwork. There was a small lock up close to the *Sungusungu* office where an apprehended person could be secured and then questioned by the *Sungusungu* leaders and then, in case they could not solve the issue, be taken to the police station for further handling of the case.

Among the three cases studied by Cross, sub-ward C seems to have been the least successful one in forming a system for community policing that actually worked. In this sub-ward in the outskirts of Mwanza city, there were many internal conflicts. There was distrust between the sub-ward leadership and *Sungusungu* leaders and there were accusations of embezzlement of public money and other irregularities making people reluctant to participate and contribute and, in addition, as Cross concludes, “many residents were not even aware that there was any CP in place” (2013: 117). A gloomy picture, one could say, but representative with respect to variations in formation and practices of *ulinzi shirikishi* as well as with respect to *Sungusungu* groups in the past and their formation and practices.

In Mwanza, though with an ethnically mixed population Sukuma people make up a large part of the residents, *Sungusungu* had to a varied extent continued to operate after declining in many other parts of the country with several of its original features retained over time. No wonder then that the long presence of *Sungusungu* in the city and its surroundings had an impact on the formation of the new groups for social policing. This legacy is well reflected in the case of sub-ward C. In the understanding of Cross’s informants, *ulinzi shirikishi* was just a reintroduction of *Sungusungu* with organization and practices as they were used to in the past, though, with a more close cooperation with the police and with less brutal

methods than in the past (2013: 115). But also, in the two other cases the legacy of *Sungusungu* is reflected to a variable extent simply because this was an organizational template people were aware of and acquainted with. How to form a security committee with *makamanda* to oversee the operations with reliance on the ten-cell leaders on the most local administrative level for organizing collective action, was a well-established template where in every single case the outcome to a large extent, however, would depend on local circumstances, like quality of leadership, socio-economic situations of the residents, political constellations and other cleavage patterns within the locality.

The impact of multi-partyism for the implementation of the police reform is an important political issue that Cross also draws attention to in her treatment of the police reform. As long as there was one-party rule in the country, the supremacy of the ruling party was unquestioned whatever political decisions made. When Tanzania reverted to multi-partyism in 1992 after several decades as a one-party state,¹⁰⁰ the scenery started to change. There were now other important actors in the political landscape besides the hitherto ruling party, TANU before 1977 and since then CCM.¹⁰¹ With CCM as its legitimizing authority, *Sungusungu* was closely related to and associated with the party and continued to be so even under the new multi-party era. The historically close relationship between CCM and *Sungusungu* made oppositional parties suspicious about *Sungusungu*, seeing it as an institution in the hands of the ruling party for its own political ends (see e.g. Kakoti 1998; Safer Cities 2000). Although the new form of social policing was supposed to have no affiliation with political parties, this suspicion mirrored over on *ulinzi shirikishi*. In the Mwanza case, the oppositional party CHADEMA had a strong position.¹⁰² In the 2010 general elections CHADEMA won 11 of the 21 wards in the city and a CHADEMA affiliated councillor was elected mayor (Cross 2013: 168). Even if all the three sub-wards studied by Cross were under CCM leadership, the implementation of the *ulinzi shirikishi* reform in the localities was not free from politicizing aspects. She concludes that “[w]ithout any regular government funding, community policing institutions are suscepti-

¹⁰⁰ The first one-party national election after independence in 1961 was held in 1965. For a detailed study of the political deliberations and debates that ultimately made the country into a one-party state see Bienen (1970 [1967]).

¹⁰¹ In 1977 TANU (Tanganyika National Union), the independence party, merged with Zanzibar’s ASP (Afro-Shiraz Party) to form CCM (Chama Cha Mapinduzi, ‘Revolutionary Party’).

¹⁰² CHADEMA, short for Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo, ‘Party for Democracy and Progress’. CHADEMA became the largest opposition party on the mainland following the 2010 general elections.

ble to incorporation into networks of political patronage that may result in their instrumentalization by politicians”, adding that in some places “[b]oth CCM and CHADEMA have already cultivated security functions within their youth wings (the Green Guards and Red Brigade respectively), and state policing of political competition since the most recent general election has been violent and widely perceived to be partisan” (2014: 536).¹⁰³ This political issue, which Cross draws attention to, comes most visibly to the fore in the debate, discussed below, about the ten-cell system and its potential role with regard to community security today.

The ten-cell system and community security

One could well argue that the legacy of one-party rule did in no way end with the reintroduction of multi-partyism in the early 1990s. Tanzania was from its early years as an independent nation politically a thoroughly organized society from national down to the local levels where, in relation to *Sungusungu* and the police reform of 2006, the ten-cell system – called *nyumba kumi* in Swahili, meaning ten houses or homesteads – deserves a special mention. Following the inception of the system in 1964 (Bienen 1970 [1967]: 356-359), it has continued to constitute an important feature in the local political landscape.

In 1964 the TANU National Executive Committee reaffirmed a resolution made a year earlier that TANU cells, each comprising of ten houses should be established and consolidated all over the country, where all TANU members in the respective group of houses would choose their leader, given the title of *balози* (Ingle 1972: 215), namely the prestigious title of ambassador. Henry Bienen, in his thorough analysis of the political formation in Tanzania the years following independence in 1961, describes the ten-cell system as intended to provide a means for facilitating a two-way communication between the people and the government, and as a step in the process of a continued amalgamation of party and state structures and government and personnel that was under way during that time (1970 [1967]: 359-360). In other words, on the one hand, the cell leader was expected to communicate party and government policies to the community and, on the other, to communicate the views of his/her constituency to the party and the government. Bienen quotes the

¹⁰³ Even the second largest oppositional party after CHADEMA, namely CUF (Civic United Front), formed their guards, the Blue Guards. Though, during the national election 2015, party security groups were banned by the police (The Citizen, August 22, 2015).

Second Vice President at that time, Rashid Kawawa, on the ten-cell issue and the expected role of the ten-cell leaders (1970 [1967]: 359):

You are the eyes of the nation ... For the purpose of development, you have to establish harmonious connection between your cells and the party offices, Area and Regional Commissioners' offices as well as the development committees at all levels ... You are the pillars of the nation. You must expose dangerous characters like thieves and infiltrators who may poison our nation and put its safety at stake.¹⁰⁴

By 1963, Native Authority, the colonial system for indirect rule through 'tribal' political structures, had been abolished and replaced with a nationwide uniform administrative system with appointed officials, elected councillors and party representatives. This reform thus implied the removal of chiefs, sub-chiefs and headmen as executive officials who hitherto had fulfilled administrative functions (Bienen 1970 [1967]: 67). It was within this systemic reform, signalling a radical break with the previous colonial mode of governance, that the ten-cell system was introduced and spread nation-wide as a governance institution at the community level.

Clyde Ingle, in his historical account of the ten-house cell system in Tanzania, describes this institution as a blend of past and present (1972).¹⁰⁵ In other words, the ten-cell system could partly be understood as a totally new institutional creation and partly as a template that in its actual local articulations and practices came to owe much to legacies of the past.

The political purpose and expected governmental duties of the ten-cell system was summarized by Wilbert Klerruu, the publicity secretary of TANU, recounted in Ingle's article(1972: 215):

1. Enable people to express their views and opinion to TANU and government and to communicate the policies of TANU and government to people.
2. Consolidate unity and extend leadership to the village level so that leaders can easily be accessible to the ordinary people.
3. Obtain information regarding social and economic development in the village and forward it to the branch organs of TANU.

¹⁰⁴ From *The Nationalist*, January 6, 1965; report of speech of Vice President Kawawa to Dar es Salaam cell members.

¹⁰⁵ For a brief but informative article on the establishment of the ten-cell system, problems in its implementation, achievements and increasing politicization of the institution during its first years of existence, see Katherine Levine (1972). For some further reading on the issue of village leadership at village level, in the early transformative postcolonial era, see Norman Miller (1968).

4. Ensure the security and survival of the Party, Government and the nation by seeing ... that all laws and regulations are obeyed.¹⁰⁶

What was particularly new about the ten-cell system was its intended political role, namely the ten-cell leader as the party representative at the most local level and not the local leader as a mediator between the local and the wider administrative and political society. As Ingle puts it: “There is a great similarity between the role of cell leader in contemporary Tanzania and that of the headman during the colonial period” (1972: 221) though, he adds: “It is not necessary to depict these leaders as traditional; yet they are a product of a particular locality and representative of that locality” because as locals “they may find themselves in conflict with the values, objectives, and methods of the external political system whose agents they are intended to be”. The leaders had, indeed, while performing their duties, to strike a balance “between alienating local constituents and suffering the displeasure of higher officials” (1972: 222-223).¹⁰⁷ Ingle concludes that a most distinctive feature is that there is great continuity of village leadership (1972: 224), and, one could add, this has irrespective of organizational changes over time continued to be so.

In her study of *polisi jamii* or *ulinzi shirikishi*, replacing *Sungusungu* as an institution for community policing, Cross pays attention to the role of the ten-cell system in security matters. Particularly in urban areas with a relatively high rate of crime and where night patrolling is made an integral part of the local security system, the ten-cell leaders as mobilizers of the guards are crucial for the functioning of the operations. The expected role of the ten-cell system with respect to security matters has, indeed, deep historical roots.

From the very inception of the ten-cell system, the security aspect was strongly emphasized as, for example, expressed in Vice President Kawa-wa’s speech to the ten-cell leaders of Dar es Salaam in 1965: “You are the pillars of the nation. You must expose dangerous characters like thieves and infiltrators who may poison our nation and put its safety at stake” (see above). One could say that the ten-cell system, regarding security matters, was thought of as a kind of mini-*Sungusungu* or mini-*polisi jamii*. The ten-cell leaders were supposed to perform “a law and order function, as-

¹⁰⁶ Ingle citing from Klerruu, “Whys and Wherefores of the TANU Cell System” (*The Nationalist*, September 20, 1965).

¹⁰⁷ The elected village chairmen, indeed, also share this leadership dilemma, a predicament well illustrated in that stormy *Sungusungu* meeting, related to in the Preamble, by the village chairman’s efforts to negotiate and strike a balance between the demands of his dual roles of being, on the one hand, a villager and a *Sungusungu* member and, on the other, a representative of the party and the government.

suming responsibility for liaison with police and courts, responding to crime, collecting taxes summoning people to work on development projects and registering newcomers” (Cross 2013: 45 referring to; Levine 1972 and; Campbell 2009) and, furthermore, required “to gather detailed information about other residents, and ... obliged to provide notification of any guests received and births, marriages and deaths in the family” (Cross 2013: 45, referring to; Shivji 1990: 49), and, in the urban context, to eradicate “hooliganism, idleness, lawlessness and delinquency” (Cross 2013: 45, referring to; Bienen 1965: 36). If all this would have been adhered to down to the letter, the situation could well, as Issa Shivji puts it, have been described, as one “bordering on a police state”. In practical terms, however, this has rarely been the case, “thanks to the notorious inefficiency of the state’s bureaucratic machinery” (1990: 49), and not only because of that but also due to varying circumstantial conditions in the multitude of local communities over the country. Yet, the ten-cell system has continued to be a governance institution to be reckoned with at community level, not the least in regard to the implementation of the *ulinzi shirikishi* reform as shown in Cross’s cases, where relative success, sub-ward A, or failure, sub-ward C, to a large extent depended on the functioning of the ten-cell system with their leaders as a mobilizing agency in respective locality.

In a recent article, Richard Sambaiga discusses the past and present of *nyumba kumi*, the ten-cell system, with a special focus on local security and its potential for youth engagement in countering violence at community level in contemporary Tanzania (2018). He bases his assessments on historical sources and his own recent fieldwork in seven of the country’s administrative regions. “The major finding of the study”, he writes, “is that the presence of *Nyumba Kumi* as an important community infrastructure is evident both in the everyday practices and/or in people’s/institutions’ memories and imaginations” (2018: 57). The expectation, he argues, that the “old image of *Nyumba Kumi*” would disappear following the comeback of multiparty politics, and also due to administrative changes over time, has not come true. “Apparently”, he concludes, “the resilience of *Nyumba Kumi* is evident in continued significance of the *Balozi* ... in facilitating important activities often filling gaps in the present local government machinery” (2018: 59).

The potential of the ten-cell system in filling gaps in the local administrative machinery is brought to the fore in Sambaiga’s discussions with officials at various administrative levels and residents in rural and urban localities. Below I quote a series of excerpts from Sambaiga’s interviews that illuminate various aspects of the issue (2018: 59-62).

1. The *balози* used to work 24 hours. It was common to find that in case the *balози* is the head of the household, the partner would attend issues in case the husband/wife is not around. The *balози* was and still is a resident unlike the Village or Mtaa Executive Officer, and was less mobile to transfers (...) there is also a notable shift in the working style of the VEO/MEO whereby unlike the *balози*, they are not interested in reconciliatory dimensions but more on formal legal aspect looking at what the laws says (...) and their loyalty is not on the people but to the hiring authority or electorate (In-depth interview, District official, Mtwara, 18.8.2017).

2. Local government leaders are often appealing to us when they want easy mobilization of our community members in our areas (...) there is no good collaboration between us and the local government leaders, something that complicates our participation in local government affairs but we are trying. Often we are not invited to most of the leaders meetings except few of them especially ones that are convened by VEO [Village Executive Officer]. As a result, the local government has not been very successful in mobilizing our residents to participate in public affairs for instance to make contribution to *ulinzi shirikishi* (FGD, Ten Cell Leaders, Dar es Salaam, 23.8.2017).

3. In my view the *balози* of *Nyumba Kumi* are much more relevant in the running of local governments today because the latter suffers from inability to fully reach out to the community (...) for that matter we wait for people to report to our office what is going on in the community. For instance, incidents of crimes including violence are often detected after they have been committed (*Uhalifu unagundulika ulishafanywa*) because the *balози* are not there while the administrative areas are too large... (In-depth interview, Local government official, Mwanza region, 22.8. 2017).

4. Some of the *Vitongoji* [sub-villages, plur.] are too large (*vikubwa sana*) with an average of between 80 and 120 households. So it is not possible for the chair of the *Kitongoji* [sub-village, sing.] to follow up closely on what is going on in the community and attend to his or her responsibilities. (In-depth interview, Local government official, Tanga, 25.8.2017).

5.. (...) some of the violent incidences are coming up because we have abandoned our traditional *nyumba kumi* system which used to make sure that all people with the area of jurisdiction are known to the ten cell leader and any newcomer had to be identified and introduced to this leader before even being allowed to stay...this is no longer happening and to me this explains why violence is increasing beyond control (In-depth interview, Religious leader, Kagera, 20.8.2017).

In excerpt 1, the district official interviewed in Mtwara points at the very grassroots character of the ten-cell system. The *balози*, the ten-cell leader, is a resident of the close neighbourhood and elected by his/her neighbours. The *balози* is, so to speak, one of them and thus acquainted with their living conditions and problems. The position of the *balози* is dependent on his/her close neighbours and supposed to voice their concerns to the officials at higher administrative levels whose loyalty is not first and foremost with them but with his/her employer or electorate. The ten-cell leaders interviewed in Dar es Salaam, excerpt 2, complain that there is poor communication between them and the local government leaders. To mobilize community members for various tasks as, for example, in the case of *ulinzi shirikishi*, they are called upon. Otherwise there is little cooperation between them and the government leaders, and they feel themselves excluded from involvement in local government affairs. In excerpt 3, the district official interviewed in Mwanza argues for a reintegration of the *balози* in the regular administrative set-up. In the current administrative set-up they are not fully integrated, as he sees it, and as a consequence the local government suffers from an inability to reach out to the community. Not the least in local security matters, he considers the role of the *balози* as crucial. With well functioning ten-cells, crime and social irregularities in the communities can be detected at an early stage and information passed to relevant authorities above the ten-cell level. In the excerpt of the interview with a local government official in Tanga, the administrative issue is rehearsed. With an administrative set-up, the interviewee reflects, where the ten-cells are not fully integrated in local governance, the local administrative units above the ten-cell level are today too big for a well-functioning communication between people and administration. Even the sub-village, comprised of between 80 to 120 households on average, which today is the most local administrative level in the villages, is considered too far from the people for serving their interests well. The religious leader interviewed in Kagera, excerpt 5, emphasizes the importance of the “traditional” *nyumba kumi* system for community security. In his area the ten-cell system had been abandoned and, in his view this, had led to increased incidents of violence in the communities. With a functioning ten-cell system there could be no social anonymity in the communities and thus less room for criminal behaviour.

The ten-cell system was in its inception conceived of both as an institution for local governance and a political unit, that is, in its latter respect simply a party cell. As long as Tanzania was a one-party state, merging the administrative with the political aspects was not perceived as contradictory. In the imagination of people in the local communities this was

experienced just as the normal order of things. However, following the return to a multi-party system after decades of one-party rule, the close merger of the administrative and political aspects was becoming problematic. Yet, it is evident that the concept of *nyumba kumi* as a multifunctional governance institution at local level, irrespective of political loyalties, is a deeply engraved imagery in the minds and memories of people. In the defence of and continued trust in the ten-cell system, one could argue, there is a sprinkle of Nyerere's legacy and his dream of African socialism and *ujamaa*, namely, most basically, the idea of family solidarity and society as an ever-extended family (see e.g. Nyerere 1962). The ten-cell system, as in the case of the *Sungusungu* movement when it emerged decades back in time, tallies well with the ideological tenets of the early *ujamaa* policy on self-help and participatory democracy. The crucial issue is in the current order of things to delink the system from its close party association, as Sambaiga reflects on the issue: "With a few exceptions, even in areas considered to be strongholds of the opposition parties, there is a strong expression of a desire for a different formation of *Nyumba Kumi* outside its present political inclination and belonging" (2018: 62). As an example of a more practical effort to reconnect the template of *nyumba kumi* to the local government structure on non-party grounds, Sambaiga relates about the recent attempt in this direction by Mwanza City Council. He describes this effort as a "groundbreaking move towards resolving the dilemma of reconnecting *Nyumba Kumi* in the current local government structure in Tanzania" (2018: 63). According to this model, now launched on trial basis in two of the city's wards, the ten-cell is no longer supposed to form a party cell, as it used to be, but a grassroots institution of governance fully integrated in the local government structure where the leader is elected by the residents irrespective of what their individual party alliances happen to be. "Interestingly", Sambaiga notes, "the justification for the new system is thought in the challenges of ensuring security in the *Mtaa* [sub-ward]" (2018: 63). This is so, it is argued by the authorities, because the sub-ward is too big for the local leaders to ensure security. Therefore there is a need to have groups of more restricted number of households to organize themselves for their security.¹⁰⁸ Although Sambaiga concludes that it remains an open question whether there is a potential for the system as attempted in Mwanza to be spread across the country, he points to the fact that "there have been other forms of *Nyumba Kumi* manifesting themselves in what is popularly known in Tanzania

¹⁰⁸ Aligned to the local government structure and largely for security reasons, Sambaiga, (2018: 70), referring to Walter Andhoga and Johnson Mavole (2017) and Eric Kioko (2017) notes, a variety of the *nyumba kumi* system has been adopted in Kenya.

today as *Ulinzi Shirikishi*” (2018: 63). Sambaiga explicitly links the ten-cell system to the security issue “especially in terms of early warning system and proactively addressing insecurity” (2018: 70).

Sungusungu, ulinzi shirikishi, nyumba kumi – is there a common denominator in all of these three organizational manifestations? As hinted at above, one could draw a line from the early *ujamaa* policy and Nyerere’s dream of popular participation and grassroots democracy that, irrespective of all the unromantic aspects of actual social life and struggles over time, have retained some bearing throughout the postcolonial history of Tanzania. When the concept of community policing became timely in the development discourse the very idea now brought forward of popular involvement in local security matters tallied well with precepts deeply rooted in the Tanzanian political history. Community policing in its ‘modern’ shape was only a continuation for *Sungusungu* under a new label and *Sungusungu*, in its turn, had at least some of its organizational roots in the then long established ten-cell system.

Community policing versus privatized security

As Cross comments: “While there is little consensus (among multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and international non-government organizations) around a definition of community policing, or strategies required to implement it, professed aims typically stress a shift towards ‘policing *with* and *for* the community rather than policing *of* the community’ (Tilley 2008: 376, emphasis in original), implying accountability and responsiveness to citizens” (Cross 2014: 518), and, in addition: “These positive connotations have made community policing the ‘almost unchallenged definition of good and democratic policing’ (Marenin 2009: vii)” (Cross 2014: 518). Thus, about the good of community policing there seems to be a rather general agreement, though, less so about what its practicalities entail. What is quite clear however, a fact well illustrated in Cross’s study, is that community policing in more real terms is basically a class issue. In other words, community policing is security for the poor. When the state through its police force fails to meet its citizens’ expectation of security, those who have the economic means can pay for security service while people in the low-income urban areas and people in the villages have to rely on whatever means of their own for grappling with their situation. With an understaffed police force in relation to the size of the population, as in the Tanzanian case, budgetary constraints and corruption to come to grips with within the police corps, a participatory policing model, as Cross

comments, offers to the state a cheap way to reduce crime, though to the citizens it entails considerable costs. This is quite evidently so, because community policing requires citizens to contribute either time and labour or money to support security groups (2016: 1112-113). The authorities can always rhetorically appeal to the participatory ideology, engrained in the post-colonial political history of Tanzania and people will, in principle, take the argument. “The large majority of those interviewed”, Cross writes, “considered it ‘fair’ in theory to make a contribution” (2016: 1113), though, this is not to say that there are no matters complicating the issue.

Parallel to the current discourse on local democracy and the good of popular involvement in societal matters like that of security, there is the contemporary neoliberal trend of privatizing various fields of public concerns.¹⁰⁹ In contemporary Tanzania this trend has become quite visible in the security sector. Referring to various reports, Cross states that in 2011 there were 80 registered security firms in Mwanza alone and, in 2014, approximately 800 private security companies operating in the country employing an estimated 2 million people, “dwarfing the TPF’s 41500 active police officers” (2016: 1119). Cross also points to features of interweaving between *ulinzi shirikishi* and the private security sector as, for example, in her case of sub-ward A discussed in the foregoing, where the community police could be hired by property owners for guarding or by other customers for security service at special events. In the small, Cross relates how young men among her informants were nourishing a hope that their engagement in community policing would qualify them for future salaried jobs in the private security sector (2016: 1118) and, in a broader perspective, she refers to the co-production between the state police, community police and private companies, for example in the case of large mining companies in the country, among them the African Barrick Gold’s North Mara mine (Cross 2013: 69).¹¹⁰ All this is well in line with the old Sukuma-Nyamwezi saying: *Liwelelo lyujaga lyugalukagalukaga*, that is, the world is continuously changing. But this is not to say that the past has no bearings on the present.

¹⁰⁹ For more thorough exemplifications of this trend of privatization of security see for example Abrahamsen and Williams (2011) and Higate and Utas (2017).

¹¹⁰ For a critical assessment of assemblages of public and private agencies in the security field as in the case of African Barrick Gold’s North Mara mine (also in this case including groups of *Sungusungu*), see Abrahamsen’s and William’s contribution, “Golden Assemblages: Security and Development in Tanzania’s Gold Mines” in the publication mentioned in the footnote above (2017).

With the police reform of 2006, *Sungusungu* as a label for various forms of community policing in the country was removed from the official vocabulary. However, there are always features of the past in the present and therefore in real social and political life there is no definite rupture between that past and the present. Threads of the past are, so to speak, weaved into the fabric of the present, endowing the tissue with its particular colour composition and specific character. The terms by which we describe the social realities may and frequently do shift, not the least in social sciences, but the inertia of social life often defies our terminological inventiveness.

In 2014 and 2016, during brief revisits to Itanana/Uduka village, I had the opportunity to meet with the current village *ntemi* of *Sungusungu*, Mbogo Maji and members of the village security committee. As back in 1984, when I had my first encounter with and experience of the movement, they spoke of their organization as *Basalama* and of themselves as *Basalama* and *Basungusungu*. This is not to say that they were unaware of the concept of *ulinzi shirikishi* and organizational changes that had taken place following the police reform initiated in 2006, only that they in their local environment used a language familiar and meaningful to them. As before they considered themselves as the guardians of peace in the village, *Basalama*, and those who carry poisoned arrows, *Basungusungu*, for the defence of the community. Thus, their task in the village, their armament, bows and arrows, and also the *kengele*, the metal piece to be banged in case of emergency within the village, and the *ndulilu* flute, in cases of more general danger when the alarm was aimed to reach and involve a wider village area, were all there as before. In addition to these assets for self-defence, however, *Basungusungu* were now equipped with mobile phones, indeed, a more efficient means of instant communication between distant villages than their *ndulilu*. This far, one could say, there are many features of the past in the present. However, activity-wise the broad involvement in community affairs that characterized the early days of the movement had over time continuously been narrowed down more strictly to only security issues, the installation of a new *ntemi* had become less ritualized compared to before – the leader simply democratically elected by the village assembly – and the village security committee should, according to the present *ntemi*, have members representing different interest groups in the village, political, religious and others, with the gender issue duly considered by having female representatives on the committee. Furthermore, the contact with the police was now closer than previously. The

ntemi had the telephone number to the closest police station, some seven kilometres from the village, for calling the police in cases that could not be handled by the village *Sungusungu*. In brief, the precepts of *ulinzi shirikishi* were well represented in the village organization for community policing, though, the names preferably used by the villagers for their organization were still, as before, *Busalama* and *Sungusungu*.



Figure 10. The village *ntemi* Mbogo Maji (left) and Shija, one of his commanders, singing *Sungusungu* songs. (Photo: Per Brandström, 2014)

11. Forging political culture – colonial and postcolonial legacies

After, in recent chapters, having digressed from *Sungusungu* as it appeared in its early days, I will in this chapter return to the early stage of the movement by way of focusing more specifically on aspects in the colonial and post-colonial political history of Sukumaland, considered of relevance in relation to the emergence and evolution of the movement. The legacies of the past unavoidably linger in the present. This does not only apply to socio-cultural matters, treated in some detail in the foregoing, but also to political ones, in forming an environment with specific characteristics regarding space, though restricted in various respects, for political agency. Looking back in history provides some of the traits of the past that carried weight not only for the early *Sungusungu* leaders in their deliberations and doings but also more generally in political life, even with respect to more recent political developments in the country.¹¹¹

The colonial period

I have previously stated that neither the colonial history of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi peasantry nor the post-colonial one has been a history of re-

¹¹¹ There is indeed a wealth of publications on various occurrences of ‘vigilantism’, forming of self-defence movements and extra-legal associations, or whatever descriptive terms used, in African countries as a response to contemporary situations of social insecurity and exposure. A weak state, corruption, political economies in disarray and, as consequence, increasing levels of crime are considered as triggering causes. However, the form the various movements assume and their particular articulations, significantly depend on local and national circumstances such as colonial and postcolonial history of respective country, political culture formed, room for local political agency and diversity of cultural traditions and practices rooted in the past. Concerning the latter aspects, Sten Hagberg’s recent article on the dozo and koglwego self-defence movements in Burkina Faso provides a telling example (Hagberg 2019). The title of his article, for example, “Performing Tradition while Doing Politics”, catches in a single phrase an essential feature in many, perhaps most, of these movements including *Sungusungu*, the topic of my exposition.

peated outbreaks of various forms of organized resistance or protest against the ruling powers. It was only during the early period of German colonial incursion, 1890–1906, as Ralph Austen, in his thorough historical work on colonial and tribal politics in north-western Tanzania, calls, “the military period”, that local chiefs put up resistance, in some cases violently, against their new masters (1968). However, people soon realized the futility in resisting the colonial power with violent means. As Buluma Itandala writes in his article on the response of the Sukuma to German colonial rule (1992: 10):

After bloody confrontations with the German *Schutztruppen* (German colonial troops or soldiers), however, the attitude of defiance gave way to fear of repression and personal harm. Apparently the Germans were quick to punish harshly by shooting people, flogging them, burning their villages and confiscating huge numbers of livestock.

One could well argue that this change of attitude came to characterize most of the whole colonial period and, for that matter, also the postcolonial one to a considerable extent. When the German colonial policy shifted from its early martial methods of governance to a kind of indirect rule through local chiefs and by the colonial administration employed dignitaries, people had learnt their lesson. As Austen succinctly puts it (1968: 45):

[T]he next period would see the emergence of a new breed of opportunistic chiefs, relying on a combination of traditional authority and newly acquired skills to maintain their position between the European authorities and the body of their own people. Although such men were forced to abandon direct resistance to the colonial regime, they learned to work the system to their own advantages ...

After World War I, the then Tanganyika Territory, mainland Tanzania of today, came under British rule, legally first as a League of Nations mandate, and later, after World War II, as a United Nations Trust Territory. With the British take-over, the mode of colonial administration and ruling now stepwise being put into practice was the kind of British indirect rule usually associated with the name of Lord Lugard. Says Austen: “Perhaps the major test of the entire theory (of indirect rule) was the former German East African Protectorate, now taken over by the British as the Mandated Territory of Tanganyika” (1968: 4). While among the Germans in East Africa the practice of ruling indirectly was never given a name, “fitting only tacitly into a general paternalistic notion of native policy” (1968: 4), the indirect rule of the British was, most consciously, a method for administering the vast Territory through local political structures with only a

limited number of British colonial staff. In ordinances passed by the colonial masters, “the dual mandate” (see Lugard 1923) was given form and contents. In 1926 a Native Authorities Ordinance was passed which more, as Abrahams put it, “formally introduced the famous policy of ‘Indirect Rule’ to the Territory” (1967b: 48). In this ordinance it is made clear and explicit, first, that local chiefs were recognized throughout the Territory and given the power to enact local by-laws, secondly, that local courts, though with fixed power, were established and, thirdly, that local Native Treasuries were created. This ordinance was in 1929 supplemented by a local Native Courts Ordinance which “decreed that cases in the chiefdoms courts were to be dealt with in accordance with Native Law and Custom providing that it did not conflict with territorial law and justice” (1967b: 48). Furthermore, “the chiefs and their subordinate headmen were officially empowered to maintain law and order in their territories and levy taxes as the local representatives of Government”, and their work to be paid for out of Native Treasury funds (1967b: 49). This mode of colonial administration was further developed and refined throughout the colonial era.

This mode of colonial administration and rule, one could say, became so well established over the decades that, until the wind of *uhuru*, ‘independence’, started to blow after World War II, it was conceived among people as the normal order of things. The local power holders had their restricted political space where they retained some autonomy, while the ultimate authority rested with the British colonial authorities. I remember from my younger years in the late 1940s and the 1950s, stories being told by people about their colonial masters. In those days elderly people still kept the German period and the shift from German to British colonial rule in vivid memory. In their stories and tales the Germans were described as tough but efficient. They knew how to get things done. If they had remained in power, they would have brought more *maendeleo*, ‘development’, to the country than the British with their laxer mode of governance ever could. There was no *mchezo*, ‘joke’, in their rule, no room for negotiation. Orders had to be followed strictly, lest the punishments were harsh indeed. The British, however, did not on their part rule with brutal violence but with cunning. Thus, there was some room for negotiation, since you could always practise your own cunning against theirs.

Although popular stories and tales of this kind often are exaggerated and stereotypical they may well contain some kernels of truth. Perhaps they tell us something about a political culture of negotiation, rather than of violent confrontation, a culture anchored in the minds and attitudes of people that has characterized Tanzanian political life up to the very present. There were fits of violence during the British colonial period and

political struggle in the postcolonial era, but Tanzania has luckily been spared the kind of bloodshed experienced in so many other colonial and postcolonial countries.

Since there were no paramount chiefs neither in Sukumaland nor Unyamwezi, only a large number of separate chiefdoms, this was not a promising situation for an efficient 'indirect' administration of these areas. One of the measures taken to come to grips with this situation was to form ethnically defined federations of chiefdoms allowing for a more centralized administrative ruling and control (see chapter 5). There were many issues of immediate concern for the colonial authorities to handle after assuming control over the Territory. In the early decades of the century, there were the problems of bush encroachment, tsetse infestation, sleeping sickness epidemics and land degradation due to overcrowding in the tsetse free areas, problems besetting both Sukumaland and Unyamwezi at that time. These were all problems to a large degree caused by the colonial 'scramble for Africa'.

Between 1890 and 1910 a whole series of events led to disruptions in the traditional systems of ecology control in many parts of Eastern Africa. In 1889 an extremely virulent epizootic of rinderpest entered Africa. Spreading from the north-eastern parts of the continent, it had by 1896 reached as far as the Cape. The mortality rate was over 90 percent and, in some areas, "not a beast survived" (Mettham 1937). In the following years, smallpox epidemics and jiggers plague ravaged the country while the colonial impact was increasingly being felt in the hinterland (Ford 1971: Chapters 8 & 11; Kjekshus 1977: Chapter 7). The loss of cattle and the weakening of the population triggered an ecological transformation, resulting in the regeneration of bush over vast areas, a large-scale advance of the tsetse-belt and, subsequently overcrowding in tsetse-free areas.

Sukumaland, one could say, became a kind of laboratory both for solving the tsetse problem and the land issue. Thus, in 1921 C. F. M. Swynnerton was appointed Director of Game Preservation in Tanganyika Territory, with the dual task of protecting wild animals and solving the tsetse problem (McKelvey 1973: 138; Ford 1971: 196). He subsequently undertook extensive tsetse fly investigations to map the geographical distribution of the different species of *Glossina*, and the district of Shinyanga in southern Sukumaland was selected as the first large-scale experimental area for tsetse reclamation.

When Swynnerton arrived in Sukumaland in 1923 to put his ideas about tsetse control to a practical test, he found the situation in Shinyanga very critical indeed. According to his estimates the retreat of the population from the expanding tsetse-belt was at a rate of one mile a year and, in

the most afflicted areas, even more. About half of the district was depopulated, and the retreat from the fly led to congestion of cattle in the tsetse-free zones. Some of the areas were already “grazed to the bone” and soil erosion was impending (Swynnerton 1925).

Swynnerton set about organizing the reclamation work, and in his own words; “The chiefs and the people responded splendidly” (Swynnerton 1936: 7). Within a few years the general advance of the tsetse in the district had been halted. During the following decades tsetse reclamation work was carried out in different parts of Sukumaland, and the tsetse front was in steady retreat (Napier Bax 1943; Swynnerton 1936: 358-361; Ford 1971: 200).

John Ford (1971), in his penetrating study on the tsetse problem in Africa, *The Role of the Trypanosomiasis in African Ecology: A Study of the Tse-Tse Fly Problem*, is inclined to question the determining role in this process of organized anti-tsetse campaigns. Thus, when comparing Sukumaland with respect to the area of infestation between 1925 and 1947, he arrives at a most striking result. According to official records, about 2,000 square kilometres of this region had been reclaimed as a result of programmes organized by the colonial administration. However, during the period of comparison, the tsetse-infested area had diminished by 9,000 square kilometres (Ford 1977: 153; 1971: 200). That is, tsetse had disappeared from some 7,000 square kilometres without any specifically organized anti-tsetse measures. Ford assumes that the technical services set up by the colonial power hastened the recovery of Sukumaland more than the entomological attack on the trypanosomiasis problem (Ford 1971: 233). This was so, since the medical and veterinary services and the improvement of water supplies facilitated the ‘spontaneous’ reclamation work by the Sukuma themselves.

Ford insists on a vital point when calling attention to the initiative and the role of the people themselves in shaping their destiny. In contrast to numerous failures in the development history of Sukumaland, the eradication of tsetse was a success. Destocking, which has been on the agenda since the 1920s, has never been successful (Holmes 1969: 465-466; McLoughlin 1971: 73; McCulloch 1965). Destocking campaigns and enforced culling have throughout both the colonial and postcolonial history only yielded temporary results. The many good reasons of the planners for the reduction of stock numbers have rarely seemed equally attractive to the cattle owners. To them, the many good reasons for continuous enlargements of their herds have been much more convincing, and thus the local response to stock controlling measures has continued to be poor.

Tsetse eradication in Sukumaland contrasts sharply to this pattern. Whether it is the entomologists or the administrative authorities that are to be credited the most for the achievements may be a matter of secondary interest. The point worth noting is that the efforts, whichever they were, happened to coincide with the objectives and interests of the people themselves and directly or indirectly triggered a local response. Since the 1930s onward, the Sukuma have increasingly expanded their area of occupancy and in doing so eliminating the tsetse on their way, through a process of territorial expansion hinted at in the foregoing chapters of my exposition.

While the tsetse programme was successful with respect to eradicating the plague in Sukumaland, the land problem and how to deal with it became an issue that continued to haunt the colonial authorities all throughout the colonial period. The factor considered most important in relation to the land issue was the Sukuma kind of cattle keeping. This form of extensive cattle keeping was, and has invariably been, associated with land degradation and ecological disaster. Consequently, as pointed out above, destocking was early on the agenda for Sukumaland. Already in 1920, the colonial authorities discussed the topic. Cattle taxation in particular was seen as a means of bringing about a reduction in stock numbers. Plans were made to regulate the taxation in order to encourage the sale of what was regarded as a surplus of unproductive stock. This time, however, the plans could not be fully implemented (Holmes 1969: 421).

The issue was again raised in 1929 (Austen 1968: 198-199). Now the pertinent question was legislated reduction in the number of cattle. Naturally, there was a strong local resistance to any mandatory culling of the herds. While the issue of cattle taxation was negotiable among the Sukuma chiefs, the culling of the herds was not. As Austen writes: "Its very mention at a meeting of the Kwimba Federation chiefs produced a change from what had been a cheerful atmosphere to a distinctly glum one" (1968: 198).

To the colonial authorities the problem was obvious: Destruction of land was caused by cattle. The old settlement areas of Sukumaland were considered to be heavily overgrazed and, apparently, the Sukuma took no precautions to avoid the ultimate result of their "soil mining" practices. The chiefs could agree on a tax on what they regarded as redundant cattle, but they bluntly refused to make the tax act as a lever to cull the herds. As it seemed, none of the concessions made by the chiefs indicated that they understood the seriousness of the problem at hand (Holmes 1969: 467).

Other solutions were now sought to remedy the situation in Sukumaland, of which land reclamation and resettlement came to the foreground in the 1930s. It was assumed that control measures could more efficiently

be exercised in newly settled areas. But even here the authorities experienced disappointments. A survey of the results achieved by the new settlements, conducted in 1936, made the District Commissioner of Kwimba complain:

With the exception of the overseer, no effort has been made by settlers to live in accord with the rules with the result that the standard of agriculture is not advanced over the rest of the District. There are some two thousand head of cattle owned by settlement members none on byres as intended. There is no rotational planting and no manuring. The settlers never intended to co-operate. (Government Report, quoted in Holmes 1969: 476)

The most comprehensive effort during the colonial era to come to grips with the 'Sukumaland problem' was the Sukumaland Ten-Year Development Scheme, a project which was initiated in 1946, but which was not in full swing until the early 1950s (Maguire 1969: 26-31). This scheme was a kind of rural integrated programme that in terms of planning, coverage of rural development issues and research for the task, one could bluntly state, was more thorough and ambitious than most of the so called rural integrated programmes carried out by various agencies in the postcolonial period that followed.

Though there were, indeed, many pertinent problems identified to address, the colonial planners set out for their task, inspired by the optimistic belief that social engineering could do wonders, an attitude well formulated by Maguire (1969: 11):

To the enterprising colonial administrator, Sukumaland seemed an area of challenging problems, yet an area where solutions might successfully be effected. A situation neither hopeless nor sanguinary, Sukumaland seemed a place where the genius of European knowledge and technology might usefully confront the most typical and pervasive problems of African life and development.

There were many specialists and administrative officers involved in planning and implementation of the Sukumaland Scheme among whom two, namely D. W. Malcolm and N. V. Rounce, deserve special mention. Malcolm, with long experience of Sukumaland as an administrative officer, had in 1938 completed a study for the government, titled "Sukumaland Utilization Report",¹¹² covering the topics of land tenure, agricultural prac-

¹¹² This study provided a basis for Malcolm's comprehensive monograph, published in 1953, on land and people in Sukumaland (1953).

tices, cattle ownership systems, grazing rights, systems of pasture reservation and resettlement. He had then continuously served the government for many years both as District Commissioner and as Executive Officer of the Sukumaland Development organization (Malcolm 1953: vii). In addition to Malcolm's work, the agricultural officer Rounce's research into Sukumaland land use and agricultural practices, summarized in his book *The Agriculture of the Cultivation Steppe* (1949), provided a basis for the government's development plans in Sukumaland. Maguire comments on Rounce's work and its impact as follows (1969: 27):

Among administrative and developmental officers in Sukumaland, Rounce's book became known as the 'Sukumaland Bible'. Both a formidable compendium of factual data on land, crops, livestock and people, and an elaboration of principles for application in the field, the book provided the starting point for land usage planning in Sukumaland.

One could also in this context mention Hans Cory (Government Sociologist) and his research into the political system of the Sukuma, with the purpose of finding means and ways of improved matching between the indigenous political system and the colonial one within the conceptual framework of indirect rule, the findings of which supposed to be applied in the implementation of the Scheme.¹¹³

As mentioned above, the Sukumaland Development Scheme was a highly ambitious development program focusing on land use in general and in particular on agricultural practices, animal husbandry, range management, water provision, and land rehabilitation issues including environmental protection and resettlement, all with the explicit purpose of bringing about improvements for securing a sustainable productivity of land for feeding its population. However, the participatory component in all the well-intended efforts was in real terms, as in most rural development projects up to the very present, only minimal. Under the Scheme, land usage legislation was passed and approved by the Governor. To administer the new rules, the legislation established a hierarchy of land usage councils, composed of native authorities and popularly elected representatives, which were supervised by professional advisory councils. Maximum population densities were determined for villages by the councils, and villages were labelled according to availability of land and conditions for further settlement. All stock movements from one land usage area to

¹¹³ The title of this study when published is telling, *The Indigenous Political System of the Sukuma and Proposals for Political Reform* (Cory 1954).

another required permission and the councils were also invested with the authority to order the sale or removal of stock from overcrowded areas, in other words, compulsory destocking. Any person convicted of offences against the rules was subject to fines or imprisonment.

Even before the Scheme officially came to its end, the system of controls and regulations had largely collapsed (de Wilde et al. 1967: 420). Sukumaland was heavily “over-legislated and over-regulated” (Maguire 1969: 31). The local councils simply could not carry the administrative burden imposed on them and local resentment was strong. Peter McLaughlin concludes that the Ten-Year Development Scheme did contribute to the expansion of the area available for grazing and cropping, especially through bush clearance and through the provision of more than 300 water points. But, otherwise, the Scheme had few enduring achievements to its credit (in de Wilde et al. 1967: 419-420). Particularly with respect to the cattle issue the Scheme was a failure. Coercion and forcible measures fostered suspicion about the intentions of the development agents and made the cattle owners even more reluctant than before to listen to any message from ‘above’.

Viewing the history of past and present development interventions, little seems to be learnt from past experience, rather we seem prone to repeat the same mistakes over and over again.¹¹⁴ The lesson that developmental efforts, however well-intended they are, that do not have a catalytic effect, as for example the tsetse eradication intervention in Sukumaland, will only yield temporary results, is apparently hard to learn. This is a fact the history of developmental efforts teaches us. Regarding the cattle issue, discussed above, returning to Sukumaland today we encounter the same form of extensive cattle keeping as in the past, by the colonial experts laconically termed “soil mining” practices.

¹¹⁴ In 1985 I wrote an article, titled “Do We Really Learn from Experience? Reflections on Development Efforts in Sukumaland, Tanzania” (1985b), based on my experience from work in a Sida-sponsored regional integrated development project in Mwanza Region, 1974–76, where I, on the team, was assigned to cover the livestock sector (1976). During my work I had the opportunity to peruse documents from the colonial period in the regional archive and to listen to people in the field about their experiences of development interventions over the years. All this made me ponder what we in our project, in relation to what had been done in the past, actually were doing. In my article, focusing on land and livestock issues, I cover the period from the 1920s to the time of writing. I am sorry to say that the answer to the question of my paper was in the negative, an opinion only furthermore strengthened by experience of prolonged work in the development sector in the years that followed. An example of a telling and more recent work treating the same issue as I address in my paper, namely the fate of development interventions ‘from above’ without genuine anchorage among the people concerned, is Ben Jones’ monograph *Beyond the State in Rural Uganda* (2009).

It could be argued that the ambitious Ten Year Sukumaland Scheme and the efforts to form the whole of Sukumaland into one well-regulated federation of chiefdoms came in some important respects to mean the beginning of the end of British indirect rule and administrative control over Sukumaland. As Maguire put it: “Sukumaland was over-legislated and over-regulated” (1969: 31).¹¹⁵ This fact fostered a discontent among people that made Sukumaland a hotbed of opposition against colonial rule when the winds of independence strongly started to blow in the early 1950s.

Political liminality – the 1950s

The 1950s was a period of radical political changes in the colonies. India had in 1947 attained independence from British rule, the end of the colonial era was being envisaged and nationalist movements were formed in African countries to hasten the change of the then prevalent colonial political order. From the Colonial office in London there were memoranda urging for political and economic reforms, including recommendations to apply principles of parliamentary democracy to local government in the overseas territories. In Tanganyika the new governor, Sir Richard Twining, upon his arrival in the country in 1949, set out to meet these demands. A committee was appointed with the task of reviewing both territorial and local constitutional structures and making recommendations. Subsequently, between 1953 and 1955, new councils both territorial and local, representing a most hybrid organizational mix, came into being, as Maguire put it (1969: 13):

They were a curious and internally inconsistent blend of semi-traditional native authority structures, of principles of parliamentary democracy and of the expedient of parity representation which gave each of the three races (European, Asian and African) – vastly disproportionate in their percentages of the total population – equal representation.

When the nationalist party, Tanganyika National African Union (TANU), was formed in 1954 under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, it was with the professed aim of ousting colonial rule. The policy he stood for was not,

¹¹⁵ This was a fact recognized even by the Governor at that time, Sir Francis Edward Twining (1949-1958), who about this issue is said to have expressed: “Quite frankly, this led to the break down of indirect rule” (quoted in Maguire 1969: 31).

however, a strongly confrontational one but, for a peaceful transition to independence, a policy of negotiation. Yet, in Sukumaland the transitional period became rather turbulent.

Land alienation during the colonial period was never, as in some other parts of the country, a primary conflict generating issue, neither in Sukumaland nor Unyamwezi. These sub-humid and semi-arid areas were not attractive for European or Asian settlement, large-scale plantations or commercial farming. What made Sukumaland increasingly economically interesting to the colonial authorities, however, was the rapidly expanding cotton growing by the smallholder Sukuma farmers. Other products exported, such as hides and skins, peanuts and rice were of limited value compared to cotton. Cotton growing was introduced on a small scale during the early German colonial period by a German settler in central Sukumaland (Austen 1968: 51, 56). However, in the decades that followed cotton growing expanded rapidly until cotton ultimately became one of the country's major export products, the majority produced by smallholders in Sukumaland.¹¹⁶

Colonial regulations, limiting the numbers of traders to buy the cotton from the growers, had in practical terms come to mean an Asian-controlled buying system. In the early 1950s there was a strongly growing discontent among the growers for frequently being cheated by the buyers (Maguire 1969: 81, 86; Coulson 2013 [1982]: 97). Paulo Bomani, then Managing Secretary of Mwanza African Traders Co-operative Society, now became a powerful voice for this discontent and most influential in the forming of a cooperative movement in Sukumaland. Bomani, with politically engaged collaborators, was ultimately successful in having the colonial authorities ears for allowing cooperatives to be formed.¹¹⁷ An early step in this process was the formation of growers weighing associations for a fair weighing of their produce, fuelled by the discontent with the Asian buying-monopoly, which in turn finally resulted in the formation of Victoria Federation of Cooperative Unions (VFCU), in 1955 (Maguire 1969: 105). This was, indeed, a massive movement that soon had captured 100 percent of the total crop and become “the largest Afri-

¹¹⁶ The output of cotton in the Lake Province, of which Sukumaland constituted the main part regarding cotton cultivation, rose dramatically during the inter-war period and the decades that followed. From less than 3,000 bales in 1922 (Maguire 1969: 31) to 43,125 bales in 1936, reaching an output of 259,645 bales in 1964 (de Wilde et al. 1967: 427).

¹¹⁷ Paulo Bomani was also involved early on in the nationalist movement and after Tanganyika had gained independence, he held several ministerial positions. Maguire provides details about Bomani's personal career and involvement both in the cooperative and the nationalist movements (1969: 83-111).

can-owned and -operated cooperative organization on the continent and the single largest enterprise in the Tanganyikan economy” (1969: 164).

The grievances of people at that time, tired of being pushed around by the colonial authorities and subjected to their “improvement-through-compulsion” approach, as Rohland Schuknecht coined it in his thorough study of British colonial policy after World War II (2010: 336), linked to the success of the cooperative movement and its mobilizing effects, made people attentive to the messages of the nationalist party. Sukumaland, indeed, became a politically stormy area, such that TANU in November 1954 was proscribed in all of Sukumaland and for the next four years that followed (Maguire 1969: 164, 249). However, the ban of the nationalist party in the province did in no way mean a lull in political activities, as Maguire succinctly concluded: “Discontent: however, could not be suppressed. It sought expression in various forms during the ban, culminating in the Geita demonstrations of 1958” (1969: 164).

The Geita ‘uprising’ came to mark a turning point in the nationalist struggle for independence, not only with respect to Sukumaland where it occurred, but also to a significant extent for the whole country. As Maguire summarizes in his well-researched account of the events (1969: 196):

News of the events in Geita reached the attention of the British Parliament and the United Nations. While the events in Geita did not of themselves explain subsequent changes in colonial policy – external political pressures from the United Nations, from London and from elsewhere in Africa were at least as important in producing a redirection of policy as factors internal to Tanganyika – the breakdown of Government in Geita was so sudden, so dramatic and so complete that developments there had considerable catalytic effect on the process of change territorially.

The catalytic reason for the Geita protests was the efforts of the colonial authorities to establish multi-racial councils in line with the new policy referred to above. Again, as in the case of the Ten Year Development Scheme, Sukumaland was designated as an experimental area for proposed innovations (Maguire 1969: 35). Early in 1958, the Provincial Commissioner had suggested the five Sukumaland districts as “possible starters in the Rural Council race” but the reactions from the districts were unanimously negative. Some of the main reasons for suspicions about the reform were listed in a letter from the Mwanza District commissioner, namely i) there was a fear that the number of non-Africans on the Council would be greatly increased, ii) that the proposals were a manoeuvre by the

Government to give non-Africans an increasing and ultimately dominant say in local Government and iii) that the power and prestige of Native Authorities would be reduced and undermined (1969: 199-200). Also, the leadership of the national movement was suspicious about the reform, since they saw it as means of the colonial authorities to prolong colonial rule and delay the day of self-government and independence. However, in spite of all the strong suspicions about the reform, Geita, among all the districts of Sukumaland, was chosen as an experimental area.

The opposition against the efforts to implement the new policy in the district was and became much stronger and more articulate than the colonial district authorities had ever expected. Though the nationalist party was banned, political leaders travelled around in the district agitating and mobilizing people. There were fits of civil disobedience and ultimately mass demonstrations against the administrative reform. The reaction of the colonial authorities to the protest was strong and in cases violent. Leaders were jailed and some of the mass demonstrations met with police brutality and tear-gassing.

In the view of the colonial administration, the Geita uprising was simply the work of a few agitators inspired directly from outside the district, while in the view of nationalists the uprising “was a virtually spontaneous reaction of the people against an alien system which pleased itself to impose on the unwilling inhabitants of Geita a multi-racialism that had been decisively rejected in other districts wherever people were given a real opportunity to express their view” (Maguire 1969: 210). The truth is that the discontent among people was such that it constituted a fertile ground for nationalist leaders to mobilize a massive popular support or, as concluded by Maguire: “Leaders and catalysts, whether from inside the district or from without, could never have moved thousands of people to action unless those people wanted to be moved” (1969: 210).

The Geita uprising, one could argue, was a kind of prelude to the ending of colonial rule in Tanganyika. The confrontational approach applied during the governorship of Sir Edward Twining had proved its shortcomings. With the arrival of a new Governor in 1958, Sir Richard Turnbull, there was a significant change in colonial policy. He announced his commitment to bring Tanganyika rapidly to self-government (Bienen 1970 [1967]: 52). From this moment onward the process toward independence was fast and with few serious disturbances on the way. Maguire quotes from a letter from Nyerere to T. F. Betts at the Fabian Colonial Bureau where he, regarding the change in policy brought about, wrote that “the atmosphere has been suddenly revolutionized”, and that the Governor had

succeeded “in a remarkably short time in establishing [a] fairly good working relationship” (1969: 233).

With the shift in colonial policy, the confrontational period in the struggle toward independence was replaced by a period characterized by more peaceful negotiations. In 1960 Tanganyika achieved limited self-governance with Nyerere as Chief Minister and, ultimately, on 9 December 1961 the country could celebrate the achievement of self-governance and independence as a Commonwealth realm with Nyerere as Prime Minister and in 1962 with him as President of the now formed Republic of Tanganyika. All this marks an end of colonial rule though not of colonial legacies in various respects.

The postcolonial era

The Geita uprising in 1958 was, indeed, a popular movement regarding the number of people involved and engaged in the case, not only in the district but also widely beyond. In fact, this was the strongest outburst of protests among Sukuma and Nyamwezi agro-pastoralists during the whole colonial period, superseded only in numerical scope and popular involvement some twenty years later by the *Sungusungu* movement. Though both the Geita uprising and *Sungusungu* in their early phases could be called popular peasant movements, it is well warranted to keep Orin Starn’s reminder in mind, regarding the study of peasant movements, namely not to “overlook the fact that every protest emerges from a unique and historically specific set of circumstances”, since the attempt of researchers to generalize and find a common denominator may have “the effect of downplaying the fundamental fact that the reasons for protest vary tremendously from case to case” (1992: 92). This is all along a similar line of thought as Mamdani’s when he, while critically discussing the issue of “history by analogy” in interpreting African experiences, points to the risk, in the interpretative process, of “missing what is new in a new experience” (1996: 12).

The Geita case and the *Sungusungu* movement can, indeed, both be described as peasant uprisings, where the common denominator in both cases were grievances and discontent deeply felt among the people. However, the historical circumstances differed significantly from the one case to the other.

In the 1950s the colonial era was on the wane, the cooperative movement had been most successful in mobilizing and organizing the cotton-growing smallholders of entire Sukumaland on a large scale for a common

economic cause. The nationalist movement was rapidly gaining ground even in the rural areas and there were committed and radical political leaders appealing to the discontent among people. With the dissolution of colonial rule, the very reasons for the protests were soon resolved and subsequently, one could say, the Geita uprising had become an entry in the historical archive. Yet, quite possibly, people had learnt a lesson from their experience, namely the lesson of achievements through organized and common efforts.

The *Sungusungu* movement, on the other hand, arose two decades after independence, when national political control was at its very height. At independence Tanganyika was in principle a multi-party state though the electoral support for the opposition parties formed was most limited. For example, in the national election of 1960 the then only opposition party, African National Congress, ran two candidates, both of whom were unsuccessful (Bienen 1970 [1967]: 55). By 1963 the decision that Tanganyika should become “a democratic one-party state *de jure*” had been taken, a decision put in electoral practice in the national election of 1965 (Bienen 1970 [1967]: 239, 382-405). This reform, Shivji comments, in his brief but pregnant and informative article in 2012 on Nyerere’s legacies and political changes in Tanzania over fifty years of independence, “marked the end of independent organisation of civil society” (2012: 106).¹¹⁸ When in 1975 the party was declared supreme, the political grip was furthermore tightened, such that the lines “between the party and the state were blurred” and politics “were monopolised as civil society was statised” (2012: 110).

All this may give the impression that there was little room left for people to negotiate their own cases within this seemingly tight-knit political system. So, when Sukuma and Nyamwezi smallholder peasants in 1981 most secretly started to organize themselves, the prospects of success, as the political times were, would have appeared bleak indeed. Nevertheless, they succeeded in realizing their vision remarkably well, not solely in the short-term but such that *Sungusungu* is still today, organizational-wise to some extent and reputation-wise to a greater extent, substantially more than just an entry in the historical archives.

Since colonial times people were accustomed to a political culture of negotiation. In principle, Tanzania was a participatory democracy whatever the gap between principles and practices in the single cases on the ground happened to be, and people were much aware about discrepancies between principles and practice. As illustrated in chapters 2 and 3, in spite

¹¹⁸ When Shivji wrote his article he was the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Professor of Pan-African Studies, University of Dar es Salaam (2012: 114).

of initially being harassed and even arrested, *Sungusungu* leaders argued their case referring to principles and tenets declared by the national political leadership and put in print in the guidelines of the ruling party and in other official documents. And, ultimately, after succeeding in having the ears of President Nyerere himself and other political leaders of higher rank, the tides shifted in favour of the movement.

Nyerere's strong impact on Tanganyikan/Tanzanian political life from the early nationalist movement and the decades that followed upon independence is worth underlining in this context. Shivji, in his retrospective article cited above, furthermore writes: "Nyerere was no doubt a man of principle. But he was also a politician at the pinnacle of state power and as such, at times pragmatism, even Machiavellism, overshadowed his principles" and in addition: "He was a great thinker and stood intellectually head on shoulder above most of his political contemporaries. He could truly be described as a philosopher-king" (2012: 2), that is, both a thinker and a ruler. Nyerere was indeed, a person with more than one string to his bow.¹¹⁹ To mention a few of his 'strings', he was both a devoted Pan-Africanist and a Nationalist. When studying, for his Master of Arts degree at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, he was inspired by Fabian Socialist thinking¹²⁰ and Gandhi's principles and politics of non-violence. He was during his active political life a prolific writer on political issues but not only that; he wrote poetry and translated Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice* into Swahili, published in the 1960s, and, as Shivji adds to the rich biographical literature on Nyerere, "one of his last works was the translation of Plato's *The Republic* into Kiswahili" (2012: 114).¹²¹

Irrespective of what *pros* and *cons* the multitude of studies evaluating Nyerere and his political career and trajectory have arrived at, pinpointed and analysed, the most lasting *pro* to which Nyerere as a thinker and political leader largely can be accredited, is the Tanzanian Peace. Nyerere was no populist. To play on racist, religious and tribal sentiments, for which the actual time was ripe, was to him taboo. In the period of internal self-rule, a Citizenship Bill proposed to allow all residents of Tanganyika to

¹¹⁹ Nyerere was the son of a Zanaki chief. The Zanaki are a comparatively small ethnic and linguistic group in north-western Tanzania east of Lake Victoria. He got his secondary education at Tabora Government Secondary School, studied at Makerere University in Uganda and later at the University of Edinburgh for his Master of Arts.

¹²⁰ In Shivji's words: "Nyerere's conception of socialism could at best be described as Owenite, if not utopian" (2012: 107) adding that he later "undoubtedly read Marx but perhaps much more Lenin" (Shivji 2012).

¹²¹ On bibliographic literature see for example William Smith (1973), Godfrey Mwakikagile (2002), Tom Molony (2014) and Paul Bjerk (2015).

obtain Tanganyikan citizenship, satisfying certain conditions regardless of race. This was opposed by militant party members who argued that citizenship ought to be restricted to indigenous Africans. Nyerere reacted by strongly condemning this opinion, threatening to resign (cited in Shivji 2012: 106):

You know what happens when people begin to get drunk with power and glorify their race, the Hitlers, that is what they do. You know where they lead the human race, the Verwoerds of South Africa that is what they do. You know where they are leading the human race. These people are telling us to discriminate because of the ‘special circumstance of Tanganyika’. Verwoerd says, ‘the circumstances of South Africa are different’. This is the argument used by the racialsists . . .

... I am therefore asking for a free vote, and the moment the majority of the representatives of our people show that their views are different from ours, we resign at that point.

In line with this thinking, ethnically defined federations of chiefs, a main administrative means of indirect rule, were dissolved soon after independence and the chiefly system abolished. Nyerere was quite clear on this point, declaring already in 1960 that there was no place for the chiefs *qua* chiefs in the government (Nyerere cited in Bienen 1970 [1967]: 66):

We tell our Chiefs quite frankly that their authority is traditional only in the tribes, which were traditional units. Tanganyika is not a traditional unit at all, and if the Chiefs want to have a place in this thing we call Tanganyika, they have got to adapt themselves to this new situation. There is nothing traditional in the Central Government of Tanganyika today.

There was thus a radical revamping of the whole administrative system in which neither tribal filiation nor religious or racially based associations were envisaged to have any role to play. In line with this ambition to create a unified nation, candidates in the national elections were forbidden to discuss race, tribe or religion and to use other languages than Swahili (Maguire 1969: 373).¹²² In this process of national unification the language

¹²² This is not to say that Nyerere was opposed to cultural identity *per se*. If freed from political implications, his expressed opinion was that cultural identity was a fact to be reckoned with and viewed as a matter of pride. Shivji quotes Nyerere in a dialogue with academics in 1991 when he was questioned as to why he saw tribal identities as inherently negative when he himself was a ‘proud Zanaki’, a question to which he responded: ‘I’m a good Mzanaki, but I won’t advocate a Kizanaki-based political

of Swahili became an important medium.¹²³ However, it ought to be added, the radical revamping of the entire administrative system and other changes brought about over time for forming the new nation did not mean, as the *Sungusungu* case well illustrates, any radical ‘revamping’ of locally anchored organizational templates and practices.

I was in the country in the days of independence, took part in the independence celebrations on 9 December 1961 in the village where I then lived, and in the small railway township of Bukene in Nzega District. There was effervescence and enthusiasm among people, such that the memories of which are hard to forget. It was a time of great hopes. Things were going to change for the better. But the way forward became thorny in many respects.

In his article, Shivji identifies and pinpoints decisive moments and turns in Nyerere’s intellectual and political thought, his strong imprint on Tanzania’s postcolonial political history and the way forward with its many meanderings, corners and obstacles. *Ujamaa*, Nyerere’s vision of African socialism, in its appeal to customary practices of mutual aid and cooperation was not difficult for people to digest but the ideas contained in this concept on collective ownership of the means of production and work on collective farms were more so. And when the process in forming *ujamaa* villages voluntarily was slow and the decision was taken that by 1976 the whole rural population should have moved into villages, “the strongest blow to peasant autonomy after independence”, as Hyden put it (1980: 129), Nyerere’s political image was having a crack. There was the contradiction, as Shivji pinpoints, between Nyerere as philosopher and as king. On the one hand, there was Nyerere’s idea on popular involvement and participatory democracy, fostering enthusiasm among the people, and, on the other hand, there was his statist perspective on nation-building and economic development through stern political pragmatics that demanded obedience and hard work on the part of the people and so was less appealing. As Shivji concludes on the issue: “His well-intended policies were meant *for* the people executed *by* the state *from* the top” (2012: 104).¹²⁴

When in the 1980s Tanzania, for continued support, was put under pressure by international and bilateral donor agencies to adapt its development policies to the neo-liberal trends of that time Nyerere’s political era was com-

party. . . . So I’m a Tanzanian, and of course I am Mzanaki; politically I’m a Tanzanian, culturally I’m Mzanaki” (2012: 104).

¹²³ During colonial times, though Swahili was the administrative language, many people, especially the women did not speak the language. Today, not the least because of universal primary education, Swahili is a true national language.

¹²⁴ Shivji’s italics.

ing to its end.¹²⁵ In 1985, Nyerere stepped down from the presidency and 1990 from his chairmanship of the ruling party. *Ujamaa* was no longer on everybody's lips and Nyerere's political voice was no longer as strongly heard as before. However, people continued and continue to pay homage to his memory as *Baba wa Taifa*, the father of the nation, and as the very author of the Tanzanian Peace¹²⁶. This peace, one could say, is in respect to avoidance of bloodshed and civil war a form of *mhola*, luckily until now of a non-utopian kind. To this could be added, in relation to *Sungusungu* and its various practical articulations over time, the legacy of a culture of negotiation contained in this form of *mhola*.

Political culture of negotiation

Most of the early *Sungusungu* leaders were men in their-middle age. They carried with them personal memories of late colonial times, of the transitional period from colonial rule to independence and of two decades of nationalist rule. They were with their roots in the past also children of their times, knowledgeable about the political realities of their days and skilled in navigating and manoeuvring within their political and cultural world. One could well say they were true peasant intellectuals, to use Feierman's application of the Gramscian concept of intellectuals to this particular case (see chapter 6). By their "place in the unfolding social process", indeed, they engaged themselves in socially recognized "organizational, directive, or expressive activities" (Feierman 1990: 17-18), to a most decisive extent.

In the 1980s, when the *Sungusungu* movement arose, the early colonial period and what it contained belonged to the far past and was of little explicit importance in the minds of people. Yet, for the long-term forming of a political culture with its particular tenor, the historical antecedents certainly had their importance. Memories of later colonial history were still

¹²⁵ Maia Green's critical discussion in her recent book on the development state, aid, civil society and participatory development as understood today in Tanzania, is an interesting exploration of these 'new times' (Green 2014). Most telling is her treatment of the 'NGO plague', the mushrooming of NGOs (as understood in narrow modernist terms) and so-called CBOs (community based organizations) as a panacea for development.

¹²⁶ In his book *Utamaduni na Maendeleo Nchini Tanzania* (Culture and Development in the Country of Tanzania), Daniel Ndagala has elaborated on this theme, as he coins it, *Pax Tanzania*, particularly in relation to the culturally deep-rooted custom of *utani*, the kind of joking relationship common between various ethnic groups in Tanzania (2018: 200-205).

closer to the minds of people. The colonial “improvement-through-compulsion” approach was often talked and joked about, for example the *ndiyo Bwana*, ‘yes Master’, attitude. When clearly heard, you said yes to the voices of power and to what they demanded of you. But when the voices no longer were heard you carried on as before, unless repressions for not obeying would be considered too costly. Other more conspicuous historical events were topics for storytelling among middle-aged people with memories of the times, such as the forming of the cooperative movement in the 1950s and the Geita uprising on the verge of independence, the former event spoken of for success in safeguarding the interests of the small-holder cotton growers and the latter for making the colonial authorities yield to the demands of the emerging nationalist leadership. These were memories speaking for achievements through joint popular efforts that nurtured some sense of pride and human value among people, though not memories I ever heard referred to in relation to the forming and evolvement of *Sungusungu*. These other events, indeed, displayed a massive popular involvement but yet of quite a different character compared to that of *Sungusungu* when arising and unfolding. Both with regard to the cooperative movement and the Geita uprising, as described above, a politically engaged cadre took the lead in organizing people for action, with visions and an agenda for national self-determination. The *Sungusungu* movement, however, emerged from within the local society. There were no agents of an external ‘enlightened’ elite telling people what to do. The authors of the movement, so to say, were members of their communities, living and toiling for their livelihood just there. For the task they had set themselves, they relied entirely on their own intellectual ingenuity and resourcefulness, the knowledge of their own cultural and material world and, of crucial importance in this particular case, an understanding of the political culture of their time, both in relation to their own communities and to the wider national arena. These were internal resources at hand for setting a movement in motion that reached far beyond the local communities where it first emerged. Still, irrespective of historical and contextual differences between the former cases and the latter, the legacies of the past had their bearings on the present with respect to taking recourse to protest and negotiating in defiance of prevailing power relations.

A legacy of more explicit and immediate importance than any other was of course that of the historically closer contemporary era, coloured by Nyerere’s political convictions and ideology. Tanzania, as I in the foregoing have argued, was organizationally a thoroughly politicized country. Already during the early independence movement in the 1950’s the political message penetrated down to the local communities. From my teenage

days in the country at that time, I remember the intensive debating and the discussions going on in the village. Politics become a kind of window to the wider world beyond the single community and even beyond the borders of the country. After independence with TANU in the lead, from (1977 CCM), the one-party system and the formation of a political structure extending from the national level down to ten-cell party units in the communities, *siasa*, ‘politics’, became an increasingly commonplace issue among people. However, this did in no way imply a total concurrence between political theory and intention and practical life in the communities. In the process of political homogenization, Shivji argued that “civil society was statised” (2012: 110). This is true with respect to civil society in ‘modernist’ terms but not at all, as has been shown in foregoing chapters, with respect to civil society in ‘traditional’ terms. Regarding the latter people could carry on as before because these social formations were largely invisible to the ‘modernist’ eyes, both of the politicians’ and the developers’. In this field of activities there was some room for political agency retained beyond the seemingly tight national political grip. Furthermore, there was the contradiction between, on the one hand, the ideas about people’s involvement and participatory democracy, explicitly purported by Nyerere, and, on the other hand, as Shivji argued, about policies well meant for the people but authoritatively “executed by the state from the top” (2012: 104). Between the one and the other of these political aspects there was, one could say, some leeway for people’s political agency and for negotiating their cases. This space for people’s political agency comes forth in several instances described in foregoing chapters. By taking recourse to the precepts about people’s self-determination and participatory democracy as purported in the guidelines of the ruling party and in other official political declarations, there was, by referring to these precepts, a space for negotiation and, ultimately, for people to have their voices heard. This aspect comes forth in the example of the early *Sungusungu* leaders in Jana who first were harassed and imprisoned by the district authorities, but by asserting their rights in accordance with the political precepts, their voices reached the ears of the President himself who, ultimately, decided in their favour (chapter 3). The same is reflected in Mayunga Mahonas’s and Issa Sebengo’s accounts of their struggle to have their cause affirmatively recognized by the political leadership of higher levels against the opposition they were experiencing from the authorities of lower tiers (chapter 2). It is also reflected in the cattle owners’ and *Sungusungu*’s successful struggle for their cause against decisions made by the local authorities in Rukwa region, described by Brockington (chapter 9), and in the Mwamloli case, where the villagers forcefully had

been moved from their village during the villagization campaign but ultimately had their voices heard and subsequently were allowed to return to their former village area (chapter 8).

To say that the option of the subordinated classes has been, referring again to Eric Hobsbawm's dictum, to work the system "to its minimum disadvantage" (1973: 13), does not imply passivity and lack of political agency on their part, only that people intelligently manoeuvre within the space of possibilities for their own sake. In the Tanzanian case there was a political culture of negotiation, one could argue, with roots in the colonial past, where the country was a trust territory under the United Nations and not a colony in the more strict sense of the term, and it became politically more articulate in the post-colonial period, with a particular Tanzanian tenor. There was an attitude fostered among people favouring negotiation before other means of conflict resolution. This was a political environment within which the *Sungusungu* movement emerged and to a large degree successfully unfolded, though initially against many odds in the political landscape.

When, in 1997, I together with my companions on that occasion, Mungo Kang'wezi and James Mabula, were sitting with three of the early *Sungusungu* leaders in Jana listening to their recollections about the early days of the movement and its later developments, they expressed, while looking back in time, both satisfaction and disappointment. Two of them had taken part in the three secret, in their opinion, most formative meetings back in 1981, namely the meetings *ha mingo*, 'by the river', *ha mshishi*, 'under the tamarind tree' and *ha nkola*, 'under the *nkola* tree' (chapter 3). They talked about their deliberations for figuring out means and ways to come to grips with the unbearable situation in which they found themselves at that time, about their tribulations when they had formed their first groups for self-defence, took to action and were harassed by the police and several of them were even apprehended and imprisoned. They had sacrificed their personal security and even their lives for their cause and they had had to suffer for that. These were all painful memories to recall. The later developments, however, when Nyerere himself came to their rescue by siding with them on their just cause, when their movement was recognized and the name of *Sungusungu* became widely known all over the country, those were all memories that were good to recall, think and talk about. Yet, they themselves, their personal names, were unknown beyond the close circle of neighbouring communities. When one of their most hon-

oured early leaders passed away, we were told, his death went unnoticed even by the close district authorities. They, as the named initiators of a movement, the fame of which had flown so far, were and remained, for a wider public, the forgotten ones.

12 “We were just told”

We can only describe and say, human life is like that.
(Wittgenstein in *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*)

Migration of a name and vicissitudes of a concept

Not very long after a handful of men secretly met in the bush in the border area between Kahama and Shinyanga Districts in inland Tanzania to deliberate on the problems they were experiencing at that time and try to find solutions to their problems, and, as a consequence of their deliberations, formed the first groups for self-defence under the names of *Bapole*, *Basalama*, *Basungusungu* and ultimately *Sungusungu*, self-defence groups under this last name had been formed widely over Tanzania and even in Kenya. But the name they invented had spread even more widely than that, through public media, several PhD and MA dissertations and a large number of published and unpublished scholarly articles and papers. To some extent one could say that the dream of the mythic diviner Ng'wana Malundi, which some of my interlocutors made into a dream about *Sungusungu*, had come true, namely the dream about how the dry tree in the middle of the vast plain was struck by lightning, caught fire and set the whole plain into flames.

The grass fire is contextually a telling metaphor. By the end of the dry season, when the whole plain looks like a waste, the grass fires make a dramatic contrast. This is called *kuzimya bupi* that literally means ‘to extinguish darkness’. When the dry grass burns, the scenery shifts from that of an immensity of withered grass to black-burnt land. However, the fires set in motion the sprouting of fresh grass and, thus, the doleful scenery of withered grass, turned black by the fires shifts into life-giving green, raising hope of a regenerative year with good harvests for starving people and plenitude of pasture for emaciated livestock.

This was a kind of story my interlocutors in the field were telling over and over again: They were defenceless against the ruthless gangs molesting them, subjecting them to extortion, killings and stealing their cattle.

Nobody came to their rescue in their exposedness. The question posed by one of the men in the audience to the well-intentioned High Court Judge (chapter 8), meeting with *Sungusungu* leaders in a district, catches well the experience of people: “[W]here were the Constitution, the Police, the Judiciary and even you (the judge), when thieves were killing with impunity?”. People felt they were left totally on their own, but there came a moment in their tribulations when they could not endure any longer and so they joined together for a struggle of *kuzimya bupi*, ‘extinguishing the darkness’, and they were successful, so the story goes.

Sungusungu, the name they invented, indeed, travelled widely, but what the name was perceived to be in the eyes of the various beholders and referred to on the ground came to differ considerably. Also in these respects the metaphor of the grassfire is telling. When the dry grass of the plain is set aflame, the ultimate consequences of the fire can never be fully predictable.

The evolution of the trajectory of *Sungusungu* from its emergence throughout time has indeed, as Nshimba Lubasha put it, been a track with many meanderings and corners, *makonakona mengi* (chapter 8). I have in foregoing chapters, basing my exposition on my own field experience and other researchers’ contributions, tried to follow this track focusing on its many meanderings and corners. Social movement, vigilantism, resistance against the state, mobocracy or whatever terms, concepts, explicatory metaphors or analytical devices ‘we’ would prefer to apply in our analyses, are all expressions of ‘our’ cultural emic and not of ‘theirs’, our interlocutors’ in the field. As James Fernandez wrote, worth repeating: “Anthropology is replete with categories with which we have often been obsessively concerned that have been of much greater reality to anthropologists than to their former interlocutors about whom they write” (1985: 20). Through our cultural lenses we, as anthropologists, try our best to perceive and understand the phenomena we make the subject of our studies “on the level at which phenomena have an immediate human significance” (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 119). But we are, in our interpretative efforts, always confronted with the problem of commensurability and translatability. Even in the best of cases our accounts will remain pale reflections of the reality of our interlocutors about whom we write and their lived experience, as in my present case, of the insecurity, exposedness, vulnerability and suffering which caused them to act and in their doings employ whatever means at hand, whether of conceptual and cultural nature, material or other kinds.

The fate of the subaltern

In 1999, I took part in a wedding party in the area of northern Unyamwezi where I grew up and where my parents worked as missionaries for a Swedish Pentecostal mission from 1952 until 1987. The last Swedish missionary had recently left and external support was being phased out. The participants at the party expressed their misgivings about the future of the various educational and health services developed and run by the mission, now that external support would no longer be forthcoming. I tried to argue against their misgivings, pointing to the local potential for self-reliance, the fact that there was well-trained local staff and a lot of experience gained over the years on how to get things going. But my arguments did not dispel the misgivings of my interlocutors. Finally, when I did not concede in the discussion, old Eliasi Mutasawa began to speak. He said, “Listen, how could it be otherwise? How could we know what to do? We have never known what to do (*biswe twali tutamanaile*, ‘we didn’t know’). Look, first came the Germans and they told us what to do (*twawilwa duhu*, ‘we were just told’) then came the British and told us what to do, finally our own government was here to tell us what to do and, in the meantime, over the decades, the missionaries have been around telling us what to do. So, how could we ever know what to do?”

Old Eliasi’s personal life-experience that made him propound this argument could well be described as micro-history, but it is a micro-history reflecting the macro-history of both the colonial and the post-colonial period. Eliasi was born at the time British colonial rule was establishing itself in the then Tanganyika Territory after the defeat of Germany, the previous colonial ruler of the Territory, during the World War I. He grew up during the British era and he was a mature man when the independence party, TANU, under the leadership of Julius Kambarage Nyerere, was formed in 1954 and waged its successful political struggle for decolonization. He had experienced both the enchantment¹²⁷ of the early independence period and the disenchantments following failed expectations in the periods that followed. In the early 1980s he had, then as a village elder, actively participated in the formation of *Sungusungu* in the village, and he had memories of the initially independent multi-party state transforming into a one-party regime soon after independence and then, in the 1990s under international pressure, changing back into a multi-party system of

¹²⁷ I can, as mentioned in the foregoing (chapter 11), personally attest to the spirit of enchantment of the early independence period, when I was in the country and took part in the independence celebrations of 9th December 1961 in the very village where I now was sitting with old Eliasi in 1999.

national governance. He also had personal experiences of the effects of the Structural Adjustment Policies, as they in the late 1990s made themselves known in the rural areas where he lived, in terms of deteriorating social services and increasing hardship of life for the peasant population.

Eliasi's words contain, indeed, more than just a commentary on a specific micro-event in a distant rural village in inland Tanzania. It was in itself a sharp social critique. He did not speak out of ignorance or lack of experience, nor from a position of closure from the outside world. Apart from the daily struggle for making a living for himself and his family from his meagre and low-yielding family land in the village, he was a man who had engaged himself in local politics, in the cooperative movement when it was still serviceable and in various village affairs. He was a respected village elder, well versed in the art both of negotiating his own case and the sake he was sat to represent as a village elder. His words, marked with a streak of irony, contain a critique of universal bearing on the global distribution of power and its repercussions in distant local societies far from the centres of power. His words, *twali tutamanile*, 'we didn't know', and *twawilwa duhu*, 'we were just told', succinctly summarize the essentials of the "subaltern condition" and "the cross of inadequacy".¹²⁸ Old Eliasi's peasant critique tells the story of a social world conditioned by, to use Ranajit Guha's scholarly concept, "dominance without hegemony" (1997).

Guha, in his Indian historiography, coined the concept "dominance without hegemony" to describe the fundamental difference of the colonial state and the metropolitan bourgeois state that sired the former. This fundamental difference, he argues, "consisted in the fact that the metropolitan state was hegemonic in character with its claim to dominance based on a power relation in which the moment of persuasion outweighed that of coercion, whereas the colonial state was non-hegemonic with persuasion outweighed by coercion in its structure of dominance". In other words, in the colonial state, hegemony, in the Gramscian sense as ideological dominance diffused throughout society, was never fully achieved. Since the colonial state was non-hegemonic, Guha furthermore argues, "it was not possible for that state to assimilate the civil society of the colonized into itself" (1997: xii).

This cleavage between the dominating power and the dominated subjects has not radically changed in the post-colonial world, because "[d]ominance without hegemony has a national aspect as well", Guha

¹²⁸ I borrow this expression from Dipesh Chakrabarty who, with reference to Partha Chatterjee, uses it in his discussion on postcoloniality and history and the shaping of the colonial subject (2000).

continues. One could argue that the failure of the colonial state “to assimilate the civil society of the colonized into itself”, and the fact that “vast areas in the life and consciousness” (1997: xii) of the dominated people were never integrated in the hegemony of the dominating power reverberates in the postcolonial reality of today. In the current development discourse of today the concept of civil society has come out as an oxymoron in the debate and a buzzword for describing a whole variety of organizational devices, which fits into the conceptual world of the developers. Where, as in the past, social forms that do not fit into this world or “fail to conform to globalized definitions of civil society” (Leach 2004: xii), remain, from the perspective of the dominating power (in terms of recognition), a muted social reality. On the most particular, mundane and experiential arena of the village peasant, this general political condition of dominance echoes well in the simple and laconic words of old Eliasi: “We were just told”. This is also a way of describing the fate of the “subaltern classes”, the ones defined in the discourse of the dominating power as those “who needed to be educated out of their ignorance, parochialism or ... false consciousness” (Chakrabarty 2000: 33).

In sharp contrast to this colonial and postcolonial template, prescribing to obedience and passivity, peasants in the *Sungusungu* movement took resort to open, organized activity for a common cause. It can also be said that they, in their efforts of solving the immediate issue for which they primarily mobilized, were considerably successful. In a short period of time the levels of violent crime and banditry in the rural areas where *Sungusungu* operated were conspicuously reduced. For a while Sukuma and Nyamwezi peasants captured the stage for a play of their own liking, though, only for a while.

Mhola – The Utopia of Peace

In *Considerations on Sin, Suffering, Hope, and the True Path*, Franz Kafka teaches us that there are two cardinal sins from which all other sins derive, namely impatience and indolence. “Because of impatience”, he states, “they were expelled from Paradise; because of indolence they do not return. In fact, perhaps, there is only one cardinal sin: impatience. Because of impatience they were expelled; because of impatience they do not return”.

In the past, in the colonial history and its aftermath, Sukuma and Nyamwezi peasants can hardly be accused of frequent commitment of the cardinal sin of impatience. Rather, incredible patience to endure has been

a virtue of theirs. But with forming *Sungusungu* an exception to this rule was made. People exchanged the strategy of working the system to its minimum disadvantage for an organized struggle for, according to their visions, a more just ordering of society. The short-term success of this struggle did not mean only success in the longer term. The lesson learnt from the story of the *Sungusungu* movement, as from so many other stories of peasant movements, is that the local solutions people resort to within the framework of the state are not, when the local visions do not coincide with the visions of the state, very likely to meet with ultimate success. There are also the problems within any movement that the Nyamwezi saying aptly catches: *Magembe galihamo gakalekaga kwikumya misuka*, 'hoes put together, their handles can't avoid banging'.

This saying expresses an awareness of the conditions of social life and the fact that conflicts are bound to occur in society. Greed and self-interest are human propensities and there are conflicting interests in the community based on social commonplace issues like age, gender and differential access to wealth, and there are conflicting interests between local communities and between local society and the wider arena of political power. Social peace is always a matter of compromise and negotiations between conflicting interests. Peace, whether it concerns social harmony, physical health or the fertility of land and livestock is illusive. The world of *mhola* can thus be understood as an ever-changing and expansive world in the making. Making and maintaining peace is therefore something to work for continuously. This is not, I would argue, an attitude that speaks for fatalism and apathy in the face of an intractable reality. It is rather an attitude toward reality that harnesses people to endure hardships without losing hope.

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