

The Flickering Torch

Power and Loss after Socialism

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ABSTRACT This essay offers an ethnographic analysis of Tanzania's electrical power crisis in 2011 and the national disposition to endure suffering that it seemed to make evident. It shows that in asking citizens to suffer the near-total breakdown of the power supply in good faith, the ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM, or Party of the Revolution), drew on a cultural-political orientation developed during the socialist era and sustained through a long period of partial neoliberal reform. While some Tanzanians saw this suffering in good faith as an expression of docility and credulity, the essay suggests that it also speaks to the moral power of socialism's underlying vision of collective interdependence, and might be read as a utopian insistence on that vision in an era of growing oligarchy and inequality.

KEYWORDS Africa, electricity, infrastructure, socialism, utopia, shortages, suffering

We, the people of Tanganyika, would like to light a candle and put it on the top of Mount Kilimanjaro which would shine beyond our borders giving hope where there was despair, love where there was hate, and dignity where there was before only humiliation.
—Julius Nyerere, “A Candle on Kilimanjaro”

In 2013, fifty-two years after national independence, a writer named Mlagiri Kopoka ponders the contradictions of life in Dar es Salaam, struggling to square the impressive description of Tanzania with his own suffering from poor infrastructure and economic volatility.

Certain statistics are startling, if not surprising. The other day, I was watching TV when a certain MP uttered what has taken a long time for me to understand. According to him the economy is growing at seven per cent and he called on us to be proud of such an achievement because our economy is very healthy. He was speaking with such zeal that I started wondering about the different worlds we live in in Bongo

[Dar es Salaam, the national metropolis]; those of four wheels, standby generators and booming economic growth and those of *daladala* [minibus] users, lengthy blackouts and everlasting inflation.¹

In the early 2010s, power loss in Dar es Salaam repeatedly undercut the idea that Tanzanians' lives were developing, that their economy was growing, and that they should thus be "proud." This contradiction came to a head in 2011, when for much of the year the city of Dar es Salaam went without electricity, sometimes up to eighteen hours per day, with these outages compounding a series of economic and political hardships. In turn, some Tanzanians couldn't help but wonder why they weren't rioting or protesting. Against the backdrop of the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and unrest across the world, they remained, as one editorial put it, quiescent, simply "sulking and mov[ing] on with their lives."² Why?

In this article, I offer an ethnographic analysis of the power crisis in Tanzania in 2011 and the national disposition to endure suffering that it seemed to make evident. Such a disposition can be traced back to Tanzania's first president Julius Nyerere's 1967 Arusha Declaration of *ujamaa*, or African socialism. From compulsory villagization in 1973, to food rationing during the Ugandan-Tanzania war in 1979, to the crackdowns on "economic sabotage" and forced repatriations of urban migrants in the 1980s, Tanzanians were called to sacrifice for a young nation-state attempting to negotiate a neocolonial world system, and to remain vigilant to the ever-present dangers of selfish individuals who exploited the collective good for their own benefit. Many Tanzanians disagreed with and contested these schemes, though often tacitly, in ways that did not openly question the political legitimacy of their ends.³ The means of socialist development might involve hardships, but those hardships could at least be explained and justified in light of a shared national project. There were, to borrow Manu Samnotra's nice phrasing, "cultural coordinates that embed[ded] individuals within shared expectations about the future."⁴

Over time, this sense of a shared future became difficult to sustain. By the late 1970s, the massive centralization of state power underwritten by the Arusha Declaration was overheating. Through the political and economic liberalizations of the next two decades, the ruling party, Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM, or Party of the Revolution), placed a bet on a different kind of market-based collective development, one that, its intentions to cultivate collective prosperity notwithstanding, ended up creating massive wealth for a few and insecurity for the many.⁵ As I elaborate below, grand corruption in the power sector was emblematic of this dynamic. After a series of energy scandals wherein an oligarchic elite exploited the nation's economic lifeblood, Tanzanians were asking themselves whether they could support a long-running ruling party that, with rejuvenated socialist rhetoric, insisted it was (still) committed to broad-based development, to sweeping away corruption

at the highest echelons of business and politics, and to bringing *maisha bora kwa wote*—a better life for all.

In Dar es Salaam in 2011, during long days without electricity, the answer was apparently yes. Propelled by a minor but growing opposition politics, some Tanzanians understood this as a kind of timidity, an unwillingness on the part of their fellow citizens to rebel, demand their rights, and face the truth about a party that had long abandoned its commitment to the *wananchi* (citizens). My own inclination is to say that residents were—perhaps in spite of themselves—still committed to the ideals of a national project that had endured through decades, and willing to see infrastructural breakdown in those terms. If this quintessentially socialist logic of suffering in good faith seems to persist, it perhaps speaks to its appeal over the neoliberal hypocrisy that sees politics as simply a technocratic affair, a matter of installing and managing free markets, or over its nastier right-wing variant, the view that politics is simply the rule of the powerful.

Questions of time, socialism, and revolt also bear on recent scholarly discussions of utopia in African life.⁶ Left-wing African states have often been associated with “coercive utopias” partially inherited from the colonial period, marked by heavy-handed attempts to improve the human condition.⁷ Elísio Macamo, for instance, writes of the “eschatological nationalism” that defined FRELIMO, Mozambique’s revolutionary Marxist party, wherein “the basic principle of politics has been the notion that individual liberty is a function of a national political project, and not necessarily inherent to the individuals themselves.”⁸ This can only amount to a “utopian . . . negation” of politics, “if by politics we mean room for debate in the sense of deliberative democracy.”⁹ As I show, though, the Tanzanian state’s own socialist ambitions were not only framed as those of an enlightened state transforming recalcitrant subjects but as an open-ended, emancipatory *project*, a collective endeavor that required certain sacrifices in exchange for certain goals, sacrifices that could in fact be debated for their excesses, foregone or preserved as circumstances required.

Could such an ongoing project, flawed and messy as it often is, be understood in “utopian” terms? In his compelling manifesto *Afrotopia*, Felwine Sarr writes that an “Afrotopian” perspective entails rejecting both the long-running discourse of the African state as modernist failure *and* the shallow trope of Africa Rising that would celebrate the continent as the next Dubai. Invoking that metaphor of a path, he observes, rather, that the task is “to set off on a trail to uncertain daybreak, . . . clearing [it] of an overgrown forest, carving out a trail at the very densest part of the fog, a site steeped in concepts, injunctions supposedly reflecting societal teleologies, a space saturated with sense.”¹⁰ This dogged work of “clearing the path” so as to keep moving toward an “uncertain daybreak” resonates well with the themes of hardship and endurance that this essay explores. But if Tanzanians well understand

the predicament of persisting in *medias res*, this also implies that their Afrotopianism is not simply about “recognizing the signs and seeds of the present in order to nourish them” but also continuing to nourish those of the past as well.¹¹

Specifically, the ideals that have animated the Tanzanian experiment are collective and egalitarian, something that cannot be said of all postcolonial trajectories. In exploring how they continue to animate (or not) contemporary political sensibilities, this essay foregrounds intra-African and indeed even intranational dialogues about social order. To what degree may and must we live it up at the expense of others who sustain us into the future, and to what degree may or must we commit to others at the expense of our present? As we will see below, these questions about the proper configuration of power and agency, and the social utopias they might produce, found expression in Dar not only in the stentorian tones of official speeches and ideological broadcasts but in searching newspaper editorials, angry blog posts, and witty street-side banter. The power crisis of 2011 happened to coincide with my broader fieldwork on electricity piracy in Dar, and I read many of the textual sources cited below in situ, sometimes on a battery-powered laptop, waiting for the power in my apartment to return, and sometimes at a generator-powered café with a newspaper and cup of coffee.¹² These experiences only further convinced me that scholars must take this organic intellectual production seriously, as the product of sustained historical transformations spanning decolonization, the end of the Cold War, and the strange hybrids of the twenty-first century.

Futurity, Nostalgia, Infrastructure

The relation between time and social order has been central to analyses of post-socialist transitions. The end of the Cold War coincided with a market triumphalism that seemed to herald a global privatization of everything. This, some imagined, would invigorate liberal-democratic civil society, transition the former Soviet bloc away from socialism, and bring the world into an End of History steady state. In a certain dystopian sense, it must be said, they were proven right on the last count. If mid-twentieth-century modernist developmentalism (and particularly its socialist variants) was characterized by an orientation to the future in which populations advanced from tradition to modernity, then, as James Ferguson points out, this axis of ascendance in time is now tipped onto its side to form a spatialized, “horizontal” logic of membership.¹³ Now, instead of the collective uplift of rural peasantries and urban workers, there are those who are out and those who are in. Increasingly precarious populations are subject to structural unemployment, self-responsibilization, and incarceration, while global institutions are run by elites who move through government and private sectors with ease. And, as with the slum and enclave of the global megacity, the alien and the xenophobe of reactionary politics, or the damned and the saved of charismatic Christianity, only

miraculously shall the one become the other. Fantasies of evangelical ascension, transnational migration, or apocalyptic reckoning express the hollowing out of any meaningful trust in the “near future,” folding the End Times back into the present to create a kind of eternal, protean now.¹⁴

Still, from the vantage of the 2010s, the continuities—or at least subtler transformations—of experience are worth considering. If the liberal-democratic fantasies of the Washington Consensus have not come to pass, neither have the apocalyptic scenarios of unfettered capitalist dispossession—at least not everywhere. Social welfare policies have only grown in South Africa, while strong state-driven developmentalist models across the continent suggest the emergence of a “Beijing Consensus.”¹⁵ These developments resonate with the key insight of postsocialist scholarship: that beneath the formal ideological ruptures and embrace of liberalization, socialist dispositions endure.¹⁶ The result is a complex sedimentation of sometimes contradictory impulses and political-affective currents. As Leander Schneider has observed, “life after socialism is still socialism’s afterlife.”¹⁷

Tanzania’s relatively small 800- to 1500-megawatt-capacity national electricity grid embodies this stubborn socialist afterlife. Like those of many other developing nations, Tanzania’s generation mix was dependent on the country’s network of hydropower dams, mostly built in the 1960s and 1970s. As post-Cold War agendas of power sector reform coincided with drought-induced hydropower emergencies, the state opened up its generation sector private competition, the first step in a plan that would ultimately include the privatization and selling off of state assets in the transmission and distribution sectors as well. But this whole process soon became derailed by a complex series of political dealings and scandals. Entrepreneurial elites in the ruling Party of the Revolution (Chama cha Mapinduzi, CCM), began skimming rents on government tenders to well-connected and sometimes dubious private firms for infusions of oil-generated electricity.

While I have explored the details of these deals elsewhere, one in particular bears mentioning: a 126-megawatt natural gas/Jet A1 generator owned by Richmond Development (Later owned by Dowans Holdings and then in 2011 purchased by the American company Symbion Power).¹⁸ Over the course of 2006, drought forced the country into periods of six to eighteen hours of power loss per day. It was at this point that Richmond Development was contracted as an emergency power provider (EPP). Richmond, however, turned out to be a largely fictitious briefcase operation with close ties to the then CCM prime minister, Edward Lowassa. The widening inequality between rich and poor seemed to be condensed in the audacious ability of a few elites to profit from an emergency while the rest of the country was left literally “sitting in the dark” (*kukaa giza*).

In response, President Jakaya Kikwete initiated a series of high-profile anti-corruption sweeps that included the (forced) resignation of Lowassa and the

replacement of the general manager of Tanesco, the country's national power utility. Around the same time, the government also rejected the agenda to fully privatize the power sector, dismissing it as a neocolonial, Western, and white imposition, brusquely canceling an unpopular and aggressively neoliberal private management contract with a South African company, NetGroup Solutions. Nevertheless, energy rent-seeking around and throughout the power sector has remained, rendering the electricity supply more expensive and less reliable, and locking the national grid into a series of ratcheting price increases and deepening vulnerability to climactic variation.

The result of all this back and forth was that between 2005 and 2015, the ailing power grid became a kind of Rorschach test. Did its intractable cycles of tariff hikes and power outages index social fragmentation—a ruling elite that had capitulated to Western capitalist logics and/or left people “sitting in the dark” for its own profit? Or did the fact of collective rationing, the expulsion of corrupt leaders, and rejected privatization suggest that the party was on the side of the people, itself a victim of malicious bad actors, and thus a continued social unity? To give the party the benefit of the doubt was in effect to maintain fidelity to the premises of collective uplift that those leaders promulgated, to reject that faith was to open the political field in ways that were both risky and dangerous. People responded to infrastructural breakdown from a political culture that had long emphasized forbearance and sacrifice but whose premises were straining under long-term historical transformation. As I discuss below, this accounted for the rueful ambivalence that accompanied the worst failures of the power supply, such as the one that befell Tanzanians in 2011.

2011: Annus Horribilis

From 2007 to 2010, the power supply partially recovered from the Richmond crisis and was relatively stable. Kikwete won reelection in 2010—as CCM candidates had done since the single-party era and through the transition to multiparty democracy in the 1990s—albeit with the narrowest electoral margins in the country's history. At the swearing-in ceremony, the minister of energy and minerals memorably proclaimed that “the second phase administration of Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, will be remembered by Tanzanians as the period in which the power supply troubles were finished.”¹⁹

Shortly thereafter, the minister's promise notwithstanding, Tanesco once again announced nationwide rationing²⁰ of roughly three days a week for up to ten hours.²¹ As late as February 15, the rationing had not let up; water at the Mtera Dam—the backbone of the system's hydropower component—was only 1.32 meters above the minimum reservoir level.²² Lack of sufficient rains in March and April meant continued power outages, and by June Tanesco announced a “new” load-shedding schedule of twelve-hour daily and six-hour nightly national power

cuts.²³ After nearly eight months of extensive power rationing that averaged eight hours a day, this eighteen-hour daily cut was a self-described “national disaster,”²⁴ possibly the “worst power shortage since independence half a century ago.”²⁵ It also directly coincided with my arrival for long-term fieldwork. As in 2006, it would necessitate another emergency power plan: Tanesco contracted the US company Symbion Power to provide an additional 200 megawatts of Jet A-1 fuel-generated electricity to be installed in 50-megawatt increments over the next three months, and the UK company Aggreko to provide another 100 megawatts that would come online in late October. Until then, I, along with the rest of the city, suffered through twelve- to eighteen-hour outages, and joined up with the public mood as we habituated ourselves to this extreme deficit.

How did the outages feel? In many ways, 2011 simply saw a downward shift in economic activity and general economic prospects. Like oil, electricity is the lifeblood of commerce and industry.²⁶ Indeed, the relationship between oil and electricity was quite direct, since at the macro level Tanesco imported enormous quantities of diesel, heavy fuel oil, and Jet A-1 fuel to keep its privately contracted plants running, and this would have large ramifications for the national debt, as I touch on below. As early as March, the Confederation of Tanzanian Industries reported that many factories were forced to completely shut down operations.²⁷ The price of commercially farmed sugar in northern Tanzania’s Kiru valley increased 20 percent due to increased production costs and the fact that “the power crisis added to the problem of insecurity”; local communities torched several sugarcane fields in the area.²⁸ Students of VETA, Tanzania’s networks of technical colleges, had difficulty finding hands-on training for computers and other electric/electronic equipment.²⁹ Dar es Salaam’s tourism rankings fell precipitously, and the IMF lowered its forecast for economic growth.³⁰

Smaller industries in Dar es Salaam suffered as well. Meat and medicines spoiled, while DVD vendors saw their sales plummet; no one, one proprietor explained to me, would buy a movie without having it tested on the store’s television first. Sellers of *mitumba* (secondhand clothes) complained that customers shopping in dark corners of the Kariakoo market could not properly see the colors of the clothes they might purchase.³¹ Streets where welders and other artisanal manufacturers were located sat unusually quiet, whereas downtown commercial storefronts could become a “primitive farm of purring and noxious gas-spewing generators.”³²

Domestically, the continuous shutdown and resumption of service also played havoc with electrical appliances. “Recently,” one columnist wrote, “while watching one of those stupid soap operas whose ends are predictable, the power went off but when it came on, my junk of a TV exploded like the [Gongo La Mboto] bomb!”³³ The reference was to an event that February, when munitions from the Tanzanian People’s Defense Force barracks located near the peri-urban neighborhood of

Gongo La Mbotto detonated.³⁴ Artillery shells rained down on houses and schools nearby, killing 20 civilians and injuring 145 more. One of the official explanations was that the power cuts had shorted the air conditioners that kept the munitions at a proper temperature. On my very first afternoon in Dar es Salaam that July, in the car driving away from the airport, my friend Ally pointed out the damaged roofs and pockmarked walls as we passed through Gongo La Mbotto. Ordinary electrical current, what John Durham Peters calls “repressed fire,” could suddenly and violently combust.³⁵

As the weeks and months dragged on, these straitened circumstances gave rise to a distinct ecology of adaptation, one with its own rhythms and phenomenology. Living in an apartment in the commercial/market neighborhood of Kariakoo, I became habituated to the sound of generators as soon as I woke up, and a tide of expectation would rise in the evening. Whenever the power did finally return, kids in the street would cheer, on behalf—it seemed—of everyone’s shared relief. Phones could be charged, fans cooled skin, and people were psychologically refreshed to move through the next day’s trials. If the power was late to return, my Tanzanian roommate and research assistant Thierry, a bit of a fashion plate, would decamp to a friend’s local generator-powered bar to iron his clothes. The cuts, it was often suggested, tempted people (especially men) to frequent bars in general. In this way they could avoid “sitting in the dark,” though not the resulting strain on their wallets, nor the inevitable hangovers.

Thus while the cuts had varying effects depending on people’s positions and resources, there was also a sense that people were suffering through them *together*, and this could impart a rueful solidarity. One columnist relayed the following example:

A few days ago I had an important meeting to plan for, so got home at 5pm and as usual there was no power. I assumed that it would come back but by the time I was going to bed there still wasn’t any sign of it. I obviously assumed that it would be there in the morning. But when I woke up, there was still no power!

I entered the boardroom apprehensive of my wrinkled clothes assuming that I already lost my opportunity to make that first impression.

But on entering the boardroom, I was not alone, the chairman had a wrinkled shirt and so had two other important people. What a relief! We all smiled and immediately started ranting about Tanesco and its woes on our lives.³⁶

To be sure, not all were receptive to such ambient solidarities. One night I was walking with my friend Hamedi, the eldest son of a wealthy Arab-Shirazi family, down the streets of Kariakoo, dark but for a smattering of lighted windows across the faces of the *maghorofa* (multistory buildings), accompanied by the rumble of their

generators. “There,” he pointed with some satisfaction. “In the dark you can see who are the men and who are the boys.” And yet as much as I envied the apartments for having power, I also knew that they were burning through enormous amounts of money and thus could only be swimming against the tide. Against Hamed’s appreciation for the “individual competitive liberalism” embodied in the private generator,³⁷ I was thus inclined to reverse the figure and ground; those few who managed to keep a light burning only offset the vast darkness that surrounded the rest of us.

***Watanzania Waoga* (Timid Tanzanians)**

Through the collective habituation of the city, the power crisis also became a site of national imagining, a mirror in which Tanzanians saw the image of their character reflected back to them. In January 2011, for example, the *Citizen* published an anonymous editorial entitled “With Such Meek Citizens, Who Needs Riot Police?”³⁸ Earlier that month, Tanzania’s Field Force Unit had violently dispersed an opposition party demonstration in the northern city of Arusha. Why, the editorial asked with a touch of sarcasm, would the government find it necessary to deploy force against its own people? After all, Tanzanians are famously peaceful, even in tough times. They had greeted the new year with inflation, crippling power cuts, higher tariffs, and a court ruling that Richmond/Dowans, despite having provided no actual power generation back in 2006, was entitled to “demand its pound of flesh” in the form of capacity payments.³⁹ Compare this quiescence, it suggested, to Algeria, where higher food prices had “recently led to what could be considered an uprising.” But “whereas Algerian rioters are angered by the increase in the price of foodstuff, Tanzanians are not angered [by the power cuts]. . . . What do Tanzanians do? Some buy generators to improvise, others buy *vibatari* [matches] and *mishumaa* [candles] while those who cannot afford any source of energy settle for a sigh of indignation: ‘*Yote tunamwachia Mungu*’ [We leave it all to God]. In such a country people will just sulk and move on with their lives.”⁴⁰

Other writers concurred. “It is no secret that what gives our corrupt leaders the arrogance to abuse Tanzanians is their seemingly limitless gentleness/docility,” one blogger wrote. “People pay taxes—on their salaries, in VAT on purchase of goods, and through other vectors—but the benefits of those taxes are more apparent in the size of our leaders’ stomachs, the value of their cars and houses, and the adornments of their mistresses.”⁴¹ Tanzanians may complain on Twitter, he continues, but there is no “civilized” (*kistaarabu*) way to solve the outages; it cannot be given like a gift but must be demanded. A following entry repeated many of these themes and then ended by noting that “fortunately, our colleagues in Senegal show us how problems affecting the country are being dealt with by the public.” The post then linked to a news article detailing how Senegalese had poured into the streets to demand electricity and stormed the national utility company Senelec.

What then might account for Tanzanians' seeming docility in the face of power cuts and suffering more broadly? A clue comes from a Kenyan writer who, back in 2000, was complaining that his own country's power cuts had become "worse than [in] Tanzania: I remember visiting Arusha a while ago and couldn't breathe because every shop had its own little diesel generator on the street, pumping out black smoke. 'Why don't you guys have electricity, are there no rivers in Tanzania?' I'd ask. '*Hizo ni shida za Tanesco*' [Those are the problems of Tanesco], they would shrug, with a certain sanctimonious, communist fatalism."⁴² The notion that Tanzania and Kenya form a contrasting pair, one taking the sober, socialist path after independence and the other the wild capitalist path, is a perennial one in post-colonial East Africa, with examples ranging from the mundane to the existential. Kenyans, a friend once explained, are said to purchase shop goods by demanding *nipe* (give me), whereas Tanzanians courteously offer the more restrained *naomba* (I beg for). Ally, who was imprisoned in the 1970s for selling contraband cigarettes, and bore no love lost for *ujamaa*, once cited what seems to be an apocryphal debate between Nyerere and the first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, where the latter proclaimed, "Ninaongoza watu, sio maiti" (I lead people, not corpses). More profoundly, it is also noted that while Kenya shed blood for independence, it was given to Tanzanians. One author and blogger named Mkwazi Mhango captured this basic contrast as follows:

Shortly after our independence, there was a lampoon between Kenyans and Tanzanians. Six years after independence, we (Tanzanians) determinedly ushered in the Arusha Declaration of socialism. Equality, national ownership of means of production, self-reliance and total emancipation of Africa became our main and noble vector. Indeed, we did a tremendous job to emancipate many African countries especially in South African region, thanks to the late Julius K. Nyerere.

Kenya, on the other hand, embarked on western capitalism — under which equality of human beings is utopia. Kenyans called us a "man-eat-nothing" society while we referred to them as a "man-eat-man" society. In Swahili, a society of *nyang'au* or gibbons! I still remember one radio presenter asking his audience: "In which country does everybody own a car?" They used to reply: Tanzania, just because we wore tyre-shoes famously known as *katambuga*. We were a time capsule in the region for everybody to laugh at!⁴³

Orientations to the Future

To understand why Tanzanians simply "sulk and move on with their lives" in the face of hardship, it helps to consider the ways African socialist states configured the relationship between time, development, and collectivity. By 1967, it was clear that all newly decolonizing African nations had entered the world stage hobbled

by a position of dependence and underdevelopment. Rapid development was required to cut off history at the pass, and Nyerere often insisted to his fellow Tanzanians that “we must run while they walk.”⁴⁴ And yet in the Arusha Declaration of that year, Nyerere also warned against the temptations of shortcuts.⁴⁵ To haphazardly accept foreign capital or private investors would be to reproduce conditions of neocolonial dependence and inequality. It would make for a mere simulacrum of development, leading the country back to the colonial position it started at. Rather, true historical progress only happens when the forces of wealth and industry are channeled through the proper social form: a self-reliant national collective wherein the labors of citizens are harnessed to state management. Rather than lapse into the catch-as-catch-can scrum of capitalist competition, the party-state offered a pact in which all citizens would achieve development (*maendeleo*). But this pact had its own internally coherent temporal logic, in which past injustice and future redemption were causally linked via state management in the present. Citizens had to trust the state that any hardships they might endure were not merely exercises in suffering but a kind of sacrifice that would ultimately ensure egalitarian ends.

Sacrifice was thus central to socialist nation-building. The party-state instituted prohibitions on rural settlement patterns, “backward” cultural practices, and “traditional” forms of chiefly authority, along with strict policing of urban migration, fashion, and personal wealth.⁴⁶ In its place, the *wananchi* received the propulsive developmentalism of *ujamaa* and identification with the charismatic image of the Nyererean state as the good, if strict, father. Nyerere lacked weight and wealth, but this lack was the very thing around which Tanzanian identity was structured: the “food” he fed to the nation was garnished by the language and reflected image of moral righteousness and the desire for a socialist future.

Such sacrificial logics unfolded in dialogic opposition to other postcolonial paths. Fellow African socialist leader Sekou Touré once proclaimed, “We prefer freedom in poverty to opulence in slavery” — a comparison of his own newly independent Guinea to neighboring West African countries like Côte d’Ivoire that were quickly embracing capitalist integration with their French former colonizers.⁴⁷ For Tanzanians, likewise, Kenya’s capitalist “man-eat-man” politics may generate wealth, but they betoken a kind of naive immediacy, an approach to reality that begins and ends with the actual distribution of material things (that is, either one has the car, or doesn’t; either the people are truly independent or they are not). The socialist logic by contrast begins with the future, with a collective social form or principle that will eventually be “filled in” by material forces. As Joel Barkan notes, “Tanzania’s pursuit of socialism entailed a conscious decision by the country’s leadership to sacrifice a measure of economic growth to achieve a measure of equity.”⁴⁸

As I elaborate elsewhere, these sacrificial exchanges might be understood as a kind of phatic communication.⁴⁹ Exemplified in polite chitchat or other ritualized

acts of recognition, phatic communication is “empty” in the sense that it suspends referential content in order to inaugurate, sustain, or repair the conditions of possibility for that content to circulate. That emptiness is what makes it generative—a fact I came to appreciate while learning Kiswahili and its many salutations and courtesies. When we answer a formulaic greeting like “Mambo vipi?” (How’s it going?) with an equally rehearsed “Poa tu” (Just fine), when we observe the formalities, we subordinate ourselves to the form of the relation, bringing ourselves into alignment so that we can subsequently share more substantive kinds of messages. This act of hailing is a deeply infrastructural practice, concerned with the setup or maintenance of channels through which the stuff of collective life—energy, information, affect—is sent and received. Through overt ideological pronouncements and the arrangements of command planning, Tanzanians were continuously and reflexively called into alignment with the state and with each other, interpellated into a vast sociopolitical piping that would be progressively “filled in” with industry, money, and development.

One of the pleasures of collectively assuming social form, moreover, is the way it looks to an external gaze, however imagined or implied. Ali Mazrui famously called this “Tanzaphilia”: Nyerere’s vision of *ujamaa* was an inspiration to leftists, sympathetic academics, and even a couple of Black Panther émigrés, all convinced that the East African nation was on the right side and even leading edge of history.⁵⁰ When I first came to the country as a student learning Kiswahili, I would impatiently dismiss the many soliloquies where I was welcomed to “Tanzania, the land of peace and unity” (*nchi ya amani na umoja*). I thought this was “merely” a platitude designed to appeal to or reassure a US visitor and tourist. It was only later that I could really hear what this meant—how deeply a sense of stability and national unity is woven into the identity of Tanzanians on the international stage. Once the home base of southern African liberation movements, Tanzania continues to host refugees, to house the seat of the International Criminal Court, and to position itself as an exemplar in a troubled region. Indeed, an early national symbol of Tanzania is the *Mwenge wa Uhuru* (Freedom Torch), meant to inspire hope in the then not-yet-liberated Mozambique and South Africa. This is an obvious and powerful metaphor for reflexivity, for seeing yourself as if through the eyes of others, and it moves through the grand avenues and little corners of Tanzanian public life.⁵¹

The “Kenyan” rejoinder to all this heroism was that the commitment to outward social form may well come at the expense of inner “material” substance. By the late 1970s, Tanzanians’ sacrifices were not exactly bearing fruit, the sense of orderly progress stalling out as they navigated a range of external economic shocks and internal postcolonial burdens.⁵² In cultural and historical accounts, one can detect an oscillation between revolutionary pride and embarrassment at the possibility of being an underdeveloped “time capsule,” the two sentiments blurring

together in what Emily Brownell calls “liturgies of waiting,” the public airing and sharing of daily grievances that drew people together in a sense of ironic, even rueful solidarity.⁵³ Yes, Tanzanians were eating nothing, but they were eating nothing together. And that still held out the possibility of eating something more in the future—didn’t it?

Forty years later, I argue, a similar sort of rueful acquiescence appears in response to power loss as it flowed down through a national power transmission and distribution system. Since the 1990s, residents of Dar es Salaam have endured periodic crises of supply. However, because that system has remained public, its crises have generally remained public as well. That is, it has generally faltered in such a way as to preserve the social form that the flow of electricity traces out, even as that flow was diminished in its material force. On his personal blog, then parliamentary Chair for the Committee of Energy and Minerals January Makamba evocatively, if unintentionally, captured this condition: “Once upon a time,” he wrote, “there were no power cuts. Yes, those who were connected to the Grid were relatively few but had power most of the time. Today, those connected to the Grid do not get power most of the time.”⁵⁴ In twenty-first-century Dar, more residents than ever are connected to the grid, but they are often connected through the paradoxical experience of *not* getting power.⁵⁵ Residents may have on the whole been deprived of electricity, but not relative to each other. Such common burdens did not invite protest or riot so much as another round in a long history of complaining and coping—a “sanctimonious communist fatalism,” perhaps.

Looking Upstream

If the material structure of the transmission and distribution network seemed to describe and invite a state of (rueful) national sacrifice, the upstream conditions that precipitated it potentially told a different story. For the critical-minded writers and bloggers discussed above, collectively complaining and coping with TanESCO’s rationing in ways that seemed to channel the socialist past amounted to a misrecognition of how much *had* changed in Tanzania. Decades of neoliberal reform had created an entrepreneurial class of business and political elites exemplified in the tendering of dubious “emergency power” contracts. The *Richmond* scandal in particular nourished a minor but growing current of political opposition. The oppositional Party for Democracy and Progress (Chama cha Maendeleo na Demokrasia, CHADEMA) had secured nearly 30 percent of the vote in the 2010 presidential election, a remarkable jump from the previous, single-digit showings it had regularly produced in 1995, 2000, and 2005. The power crisis that unfolded in early 2011 only further underscored this loosening of CCM hegemony, at least potentially. After all, Tanzanians had learned—bitterly and belatedly—that the

2006 power crisis five years earlier was not only caused by drought or a generalized postcolonial underdevelopment but by elite malfeasance and self-enrichment at the highest levels. State-managed load shedding, however collectively borne, is a different kind of animal if one experiences it with the knowledge that state agents themselves have contrived and profited from it.

In response, CCM and its supporters attempted to frame the narrative of the power crisis in ways that aligned with a somewhat nostalgic, Nyerere-centric approach to reckoning with the dissatisfactions of the liberalization era. In early July, for example, cabinet minister Samuel Sitta, sponsor of the parliamentary report on the *Richmondi* scandal (and rival to Lowassa) denounced the crisis as the work of “wealthy corrupt individuals,” declaring, “We will not let this one pass unchallenged, and we promise you that we will do all it takes to restore the integrity this country was known for during the time of Mwalimu Nyerere.”⁵⁶ The country, he observed, was blessed with abundant natural resources; thus it could only be “due to sheer greed that the nation is now in darkness”—a nod to the way criminally expensive emergency power contracts had in effect foreclosed investment in expanded generation.

This was indeed a familiar rhetorical gambit. After Nyerere’s death in 1999, CCM had begun to lay claim to his popular legacy of incorruptible morality.⁵⁷ This was a rather sanctified idea of the man, grounded in memories of what Emma Hunter calls “the Nyerere of the Arusha Declaration.”⁵⁸ By the mid-1960s, the party was suffering from popular anger at leaders’ corruption and dissensus at the top, embodied in the suppressed army mutiny of 1964 and in Nyerere’s charismatic rival Oscar Kambona (exiled in 1967). Against this backdrop, the Declaration drew moral lines in the sand, hardening the fuzzier, attitudinal *ujamaa* that appeared in Nyerere’s writings from 1962 onwards. If 1967 was otherwise a year of curdling post-colonial pessimism, exemplified in the toppling of nationalist leaders like Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, then the Arusha Declaration went a long way to consolidating moral-political hegemony by rejecting Western foreign influence, embracing nationalization, and excising unscrupulous/capitalist “enemies” (*maadui*) and “parasites” (*wanyonyaji*). This was the same playbook that CCM leaned on to mitigate the scandals of the power sector: the rejection of Tanesco’s privatization in 2006, the sacking of sundry Tanesco managers from 2007 onwards, and the forced resignation of Edward Lowassa in 2008. And it was this same recuperative stance that Sitta assumed in his address. The message was clear: after flirting with the pleasures and problems of liberalization, the party was returning to the righteous path, to the integrity of the Nyerere years.

Such returns to Nyerere coursed through public talk in 2011. A few weeks after Sitta’s speech, I attended a “Meeting to Debate the Electricity Problem in

Tanzania,” sponsored by the Institution of Engineers Tanzania. One presentation began,

We have a moral and ethical dilemma in Tanzania, which cannot be modeled in a computer or solved by a scientific formula. In the absence of the Arusha Declaration, how do we go about solving this dilemma? One of the conclusions we reached is . . . that we need practical political will and patriotism to advance in tackling the power crisis.

Over and over again, it has been said that a nation shall never develop using foreign expertise. Recently there has been a conference organized in Rome on Power Crisis in Africa. Another conference of the same nature is due in Uganda next month. All these are not for our benefit. They are looking for opportunities for their development. The majority of foreign companies (be [they] of construction or consultancy) are there to market products and technology from their countries. While we have very good transformers from TANALEC, very good cables from Tanzania Cables, very good electric poles from Sao Hill to mention a few, foreign consultancy firms tend to recommend foreign products, and if you follow up, the products recommended are from their countries of origin or from sister companies and the like. Let the Patriotic Local Consulting firms be given the power of attorney to take the lead in power projects right from inception to commissioning and in a given spell of time the difference will be obvious. We envy the Koreans, Indians—they trusted their local experts: they made blunders, they were given opportunities to correct and they made it. In the same way, we can use experienced consultants to be the envy of others.⁵⁹

Later that evening, as I was sorting through pictures of the event, Hamedi happened to see a shot of the speaker, a plump, older gentleman, perhaps in his sixties, with a quasi-Nehru style jacket, and laughed: “Now that’s what a real Tanzanian engineer looks like; you don’t see those guys very much anymore.” When I told Hamedi about the “patriotism” of his presentation—his denouncing foreign companies, and so on—he nodded and explained how back in the 1960s and 1970s engineering was an immensely popular career choice. “You have to understand,” he said, “those guys were around when TANU [Tanganyika African National Union, forerunner to CCM] kicked the British out; they wanted to build the country up.”

A slightly subtler promise of patriotic return was evident on the personal blog of January Makamba, the minister who had to my mind so felicitously described the crisis as a state of being connected to the not-getting of power.⁶⁰ Makamba confidently explained that the roots of the power crisis lay in the misguided attempt to privatize Tanesco. During the long period (1996–2006) of stalled privatization, he argued, no new state investment was made in the energy sector, during which time demand grew precipitously, leaving the sector permanently on its back foot. The story is considerably more complicated, given the imbrication

of elite party politics with generation contracts, but once again this telling has a certain narrative parsimony that attributes the power crisis to a certain naive faith in Western-style privatization and, implicitly, an abandonment of Tanzanian self-reliance.

These accounts of the causes of the crisis evinced the same neo-Nyererean sensibility that animated much political discourse in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As such, they politely sidestep the important role that powerful members of the party itself had played in contributing to the crisis. This was partially achieved by invoking a unified Tanzania that, beset by outside forces, must preserve its integrity. As one editorial proclaimed: “Let us look at the power problem as a matter of life and death. We should tackle it with all our might, even if it means calling on Tanzanians to tighten their belts as they did four decades ago during the war against Idi Amin of Uganda.”⁶¹ Tanzanians, as they were back in the 1960s and 1970s, should be in it together, united under the aegis of a ruling party and enduring a common affliction.

Patronage vs. Rights

And, as I’ve argued, in some sense they were. Urban residents certainly resented the hardships of power rationing and some offered ambivalent commentaries on the national historical bargain they had struck. And yet, for all that, the plodding normalcy with which the city accustomed itself to those hardships seemed to honor that bargain, and allowed it to proceed as if the government was acting in good faith. Much of this, I’ve suggested, had to do with the manifestly collective quality of load shedding, buffered as it was by the sheer volume of communicative “declarations” that accompanied it—the return to Nyerere, the perilous water levels at Mtera, the Stakhanovite invocations of hundreds more megawatts brought on by new and emergency power projects in the pipeline. This is not to say that these explanations were entirely convincing, exactly. After all, the *Richmondi* scandal had unfolded just a few years earlier, and CCM held both legislative and executive power by the narrowest electoral margins since the advent of multiparty politics; it spoke from a position of diminished credibility, especially on matters electric. But insofar as they didn’t outright contravene the “facts on the ground,” the party’s declarations at least indicated the state was making some effort to court and communicate with the public. Tanzanians were suffering, and perhaps suffering in ways that were not entirely justified, but some combination of the state’s reparative gestures of recognition, the reflexively collective experience of rationing, and their own socialist inheritance allowed them to retain, maybe in spite of themselves, a “sanctimonious communist fatalism,” a sense that their leaders were still, however faintly, within the horizon of a collective project.

Here we come to the ethical—and perhaps even strangely utopian—element of enduring hardships like the power crisis and by extension the ruling party under whose management it had transpired. For by 2011, such hardships had gotten bad and/or outrageous enough that continuing to suffer them in good faith contrasted with an increasingly plausible alternative. This was a bet on a different kind of revolutionary logic that involved uprising, rejection, and open antagonism, and that risked fragmenting a sense of a shared project built up over Tanzania's postcolonial decades.

In her “ethnography of hunger” in rural Singida, central Tanzania, Kristin Philips writes perceptively about how, over the first decade of the 2000s, opposition politicians like Ibrahim Lipumba of the Muslim-dominated Civic United Front (CUF) and Tundu Lissu of CHADEMA mobilized an idiom of “rights” (*haki*), rather than an idiom of “patronage” more characteristic of CCM (and indeed of many anticolonial nationalist parties).⁶² In the logic of the latter, CCM is the father who feeds his citizen children, who are expected, categorically, to remain loyal to the family as it collectively negotiates hardship. By contrast, a rights-based idiom tends to emerge when a population can no longer credibly see “the state as father and the nation as family, but [rather sees] the state as parasite,” whose exploitations must be countermanded through action and advocacy.⁶³

In 2011, exercising one's rights certainly resonated with a regional and even global moment of popular uprising against parasitic, predatory states. Alongside the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, walk-to-work protests were unfolding to Tanzania's north in Kampala, Uganda,⁶⁴ while carnivalesque occupations had overtaken Maputo, Mozambique, to its south.⁶⁵ Privileging action over sufferance, demand over supplication, these uprisings aspired to the ruptured time of the Event,⁶⁶ when situations miraculously “break with the past” and become fluid and open.⁶⁷ The talk of Tanzanians' handling the power crisis like the Senegalese or Algerians—that is, of their rioting—has to be seen in the context of this historical moment. Whether a Tanzanian Spring or “Occupy Arusha”⁶⁸ might arrive, and what might provoke it, was an ambient question.⁶⁹

And yet as the jab at Kenyan politics as a “man-eat-man” society intimates, there are also traditions of political thought that appreciate the dangers of the breaking with the past and the ways such a break might spin out into social fragmentation. In his seminal work on the *longue durée* of political thought in the Shambaa kingdom of what is now eastern Tanzania, Steven Feierman gives an extended discussion of two political conditions and their associated temporal rhythms: *kubana shi* (a land harmed) and *kuzifya shi* (a land healed). The former was associated with “action that damages the land,” particularly when rainmakers competed to withhold rains against the rainmaking power of chiefs, creating drought and famine.⁷⁰ Healing the land emerges when a single political authority can “cover” (*kufunika*)

his competitors.⁷¹ Crucially *kuzifya shi* is associated with structured time, periods of sowing, rain, and harvest, while *kubana shi* is associated with unpredictability, contingency, and destruction. “The unvarying organizing principle in discourse about these symbols is an opposition between the rhythmized regularity on the one side, and irregular unpredictable random events (and possibly unceasing continuity) on the other.”⁷² Too much competitive “force against force” (*nguvu kwa nguvu*) between powerful agents was, in some sense, future-annihilating.⁷³ It reduced the experience of the durational unfolding to a foreshortened crisis in which self-propelling cycles of rain, harvest, and prosperity could no longer be preserved. Against this possibility, the subordination to a collective project was, whatever else it constituted, the foundation of social perdurance.

Analysis has to proceed with caution here, as it can easily lapse into ethnological romanticism or an apologetics for patriarchal order. There is all manner of evidence across the historical record of the ways individual powers and agency were valued,⁷⁴ and the ways youth, women, and other (in)subordinates took up competing sources of power—including nationalist movements—with alacrity.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, it remains widely recognized that logic of social interdependence can act as a counterweight to the centrifugal disruptions of competition and capture. This is especially so when the hierarchies of political kinship or community are leavened with aspirations for emancipatory justice, and/or when individual license is warped by the antisocial logics of capitalist accumulation.

Consider Mike McGovern’s discussion of the historical imagination among his interlocutors in the forested region of southwestern Guinea.⁷⁶ The Loma villagers he interviewed divided up historical experience into periods of relative *booyema*, which translates into the “strength of one’s own arm” and stands for personal agency and striving, and *ziielei*, a “cool heart,” which stands for collective peace and security. The precolonial era of slave raiding and warlords in nineteenth-century West Africa tended toward a dangerous liberty that translated into upward mobility and enrichment for a few smash-and-grab entrepreneurs and rampant insecurity for the many. This Gilded Age of Afro-capitalism was not consigned to history but rather resurfaced in the post-1980s period of deregulated economics and government and, more specifically, in the resulting wars that enveloped the region in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Guinea remained an exception in the region, in part, McGovern argues, for the way a shared socialist history, repressive though it was, managed to preserve a sense of collective obligation that overrode other tendencies to factionalization.⁷⁷

Somewhat analogous dynamics can be found in postcolonial Tanzania. Though Nyerere occasionally invoked the inherently socialist nature of “traditional” African village life, *ujamaa* had less in common with a precolonial politics characterized by the depredations and enrichments of the slave and ivory trade than with the postwar colonial state’s ambitions to monopolize migration, trade, and taxation.

And yet, taking the reins of the colonial developmental state was a site of genuine ideological investment, even as that state was still resented for its incursions into people's autonomy and for the material deprivations it entailed. Autocrats like Idi Amin of Uganda or Jean-Bédél Bokassa of the Central African Republic Africanized the worst elements of colonial coercion, "styl[ing] themselves as 'chiefs of chiefs' using a backward looking utopian idiom." And yet as burdensome and coercive as socialist regimes could be, leaders like "Toure and Nyerere styled themselves as servants of the people's demands for justice and fairness, looking forward to a utopian future."⁷⁸

Thirty years of liberalization strained the plausibility of that utopian future. But to disregard the various explanations and exhortations and forgo the rueful solidarities of national crisis was a high-risk, high-reward gamble. Opposition — even simple electoral opposition — could escalate into a dynamic of power grabbing and repression that might look less like the collective effervescence of the Arab Spring, and more like the repressive kleptocracies or roiling ethnopolitics of neighboring postcolonies like Uganda, Kenya, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Yes, seized by frustration and revolutionary spirit one could act "in the now," but what might be lost the day after?

The columnist Mlagiri Kopoka circled this tension in an August 26, 2011, column entitled "Did the West Tell All about UK Riots?" The title refers to the riots of August 6–11, 2011, which saw looting and destruction in London and other cities after the police shot and killed a local man of Afro-Caribbean descent named Mark Duggan during an arrest. It was like, Kopoka muses, "the Arab revolution had finally reached Europe."⁷⁹ Yet Kopoka finds that his desire to follow global current events is undercut by his own country's disconnection. Load shedding meant that he was not up to date on the international news that day. Luckily, there is a small TV at the front of a *daladala* he boards heading home from work. At first, there are just a few passengers on board, so he asks the driver, "as if the other passengers had selected [him] to represent them," to turn down the loud *bongo-flava* music coming from the speakers so they could hear the news, and the driver obliges. As more passengers pile in, tiffs ensue. A seated man asks a young woman unlucky enough to be standing in the aisle if she could "bend a little" so he could see the screen, to which she retorts that if he wants to see the screen so badly he should just switch with her. Other passengers joined in to agree with the woman, mocking the man and the sexual undertones of his request that she "bend." As the passengers jostle, Kopoka's thoughts

switched back to the rioting youth and what was shocking was the fact that the mobs in Britain did not have a civic agenda. They were out on the streets to simply cause mayhem by smashing, looting and burning property. Then I asked myself whether the

western media was hiding some of the truth about these riots because they were taking place in their own back yard? I wondered if the same type of riots were taking place in a third world country [sic] like Bongo the stories would have been the same. Suddenly I lost my view when a certain woman entered and stood right in front of me as a feminine voice said, “*I jamani pole pole* [hey, easy!]. You are hurting me!”

This is a suggestive scene with many interwoven threads. The first is the quintessential experience of riding a minibus in which passengers are stuffed cheek to jowl and, against all odds, always seem capable of adding one more person. For residents who live out in the city’s rapidly expanding peri-urban areas, evening and morning commutes are jam-packed and can last two to three hours; finding ways to stand in such cramped circumstances can be agony. I had often thought jokingly to myself that *ujamaa* was alive and well in Tanzania; one simply needed to board a *daladala* to experience it. Sometimes after a drink or two of Safari lager I would try the line out on friends, usually to bemused (or perhaps just charitable) chuckles. And yet I was not alone in thinking along these lines. In his recent “Essay on the Share,” Ferguson reflects on the African minibus taxi as a site of

a kind of shared sociality, where certain minimum standards of civil conduct are almost always respected [based on] on a kind of accidental co-presence. . . . This adjacency imposes a non-trivial sociality that entails real obligations and a more or less continuous set of pragmatic adjustments, [given that passengers must] yield a precious share of that scarce, tightly packed space. . . . We must make ourselves less comfortable, simply because someone (with the same needs as we have) has appeared.⁸⁰

This allocation of space is not exactly planned; nor is it particularly comfortable. It is, as Ferguson goes on to observe, defined above all by irritation and complaint. But then, what can one do? One is obliged. In this sense, the random movements and adjustments are not mere physical hardships but meaningful sacrifices, pragmatic expressions of a governing logic, a commitment to sociality as such.

We might, then, take Kopoka’s experience of crowding around an international news broadcast on a cramped bus as an image of Tanzania’s shared sense of collective movement. Frayed and meagerly provisioned as it is, people are still making pragmatic adjustments that signal and preserve its form. Brits, by contrast, are not riding the bus of state but, as it were, torching it. The “mayhem” that has unfolded across their cities—and the police killing that caused it—signals no such pretense of collective obligation, such that all that remains are the risks and rewards of “force against force.”

Of course one can only sacrifice for so long. Alongside international news and *bongo-flava* hits of the day, the city’s radio and television stations also broadcast

regular announcements that 2011 was the fiftieth anniversary of Tanzanian independence. For some, these ideological addresses couldn't but ring hollow: "This nostalgia about turning 50 is being shoved down our throats. . . . Does this constant attempt at reminding us that we are turning 50 reflect a fear that we might forget? Is the fear that regular people aren't quite demonstrating their excitement at Tanzania's semi-centennial?"⁸¹ The celebrations of Tanzania threatened to lapse into the *merely* phatic: an empty promise that would never be substantiated, a wire without current, "a mere sequence of sounds or written shapes without [any] quality of life that animates it."⁸² Or perhaps, most diabolically, those promises could be cover for their opposite. Perhaps the parasites that exploited the nation were not external to the government still committed to a socialist morality but rather one and the same. As Mhango writes,

The Kenyans we used to laugh at at least have something to show for their paradigm whereas Tanzanians have nothing to show but regret after a few devils miserably vended every mineral, animal, log, bank, parastatal and whatnot for their own selfish interests! The enemy who tells you; "I am your sworn enemy" is better than the one who pretends to be your hubris [*sic*]. Ours have sedated us—with sweet words—so as to [have us] mistakenly regard them as our saviors while they are our slayers!⁸³

Tanzanians who followed out this line of reasoning emphasized the need to take the political process into their own hands, whether via demonstrations or involvement in opposition politics. But in ways both conscious and subconscious, I think, it was also recognized that to do something about this in any dramatic way would be to risk the collective commitment to peace. Against this background, even "sweet words" and a lingering socialist habitus had a certain rueful value. Why didn't Tanzanians riot? Perhaps, at least for the moment still, it was better to eat nothing, together.

Conclusion: Utopian Pragmatism

It is a commonplace to suggest that Tanzanian socialism was an exercise in authoritarian high modernist ideology, with Nyerere as its imperious philosopher-king.⁸⁴ In many respects this was undoubtedly true. And yet another strand of socialist discourse and rhetoric was not one of modernist confidence in the inevitable march of history but a pragmatic sense of remaining committed to a collective project in spite of obstacles and challenges. "We must grope our way forward," Nyerere proclaimed at the start of independence in 1961.⁸⁵ By the late 1970s, self-reliance was as much an improvisational making-do with the odds and ends of material poverty as it was a heroic program of mass mobilization.⁸⁶ This is a different sort of utopianism, one found not at the end of the journey (the ideal situation arrived

at and actualized), nor at its origin (natality, potential, lines of flight, and so on) but in the durational middle, in the continued choice to assimilate obstacles and friction in accordance with one's commitments—even (and perhaps especially) if it seems unlikely an end will arrive. As many believers know, this can create a peculiar blending of identification and resentment, a sense of going on in spite of oneself that anthropologist Michael Herzfeld dubs “cultural intimacy.”⁸⁷

While Ferguson finds the “African” minibus to be a compelling scene of instruction, there are many settings across the continent in which these mobile publics are not so civil in the face of strain and shortage, where violence (particularly gendered) remains an all-too-real possibility.⁸⁸ Even in Tanzania, where much of this description holds, there is another missed dimension: the sheer scrum of trying to get *in* the bus when it pulls up to a central station. Athletically minded men dive through back windows, while the front entrance is a lurching crush of bodies. But then, perhaps this is the kind of hackneyed image that Kopoka suspected the West holds of the African city, in which anarchy threatens, in which everyone is free (and indeed forced) to act as they like. Against this ugly stereotype, Ferguson is surely right to admire and indeed find something utopian in the simple pragmatism of making room and keeping on, such that some sort of collective future obtains.

It is an open question as to what an Arab Spring–style uprising or carnivalesque occupation à la Maputo in 2010 would have wrought in 2011 Dar es Salaam. In 2013, Tanzania did see one of the largest protests since the precolonial era. Residents in the southern region of Mtwara demonstrated against government plans to build a pipeline that would siphon their vast natural gas reserves up to a processing plant and power generation facility in Dar es Salaam, torching government offices and targeting the homes of party officials. The uprising was quickly and violently suppressed, but it did suggest the depths of the ruling party's delegitimization. It was against this background that 2015 saw CCM's inner circle nominate one John Pombe Magufuli for president. Previously a little-known public works minister, Magufuli initially gained widespread popularity for his spartan attitude and campaign to “lance the boils” (*kutumbua majipu*) of corruption in business and government, including the power sector. At the same time, he was criticized for his bullying governance style and intensified suppression of oppositional media and political figures, including the attempted assassination of opposition leader Tundu Lissu, who in 2017 was shot sixteen times by “persons unknown.”⁸⁹ The Magufuli era turned out to be a simultaneous ratcheting up of state moralizing and violent preservation of a status quo marked by inequality. It was cut short only by his untimely death in 2021, which many attributed to COVID-19, whose presence in Tanzania he floridly denied. The electricity supply continues to cycle through periodic shortages, though thanks to the Mtwara pipeline and other state investments it has yet to descend into full-blown crisis like in 2011. Meanwhile, amid the claims

of collective progress, Tanzanians continue to weather a world of “*daladala* users, lengthy blackouts and everlasting inflation,” the moral core of its experiment persisting, perhaps sometimes in spite of itself.⁹⁰

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Notes

1. Kopoka, “Statistics That Mean Nothing.”
2. *Citizen*, “With Such Meek Citizens.”
3. Maddox and Giblin, *In Search of a Nation*.
4. Samnotra, “Right Moments,” 29.
5. On the affinities between Tanzania’s socialist and neoliberal variants of developmentalism, see Sanders, “Buses in Bongoland.”
6. See Blanes and Bertelsen, “Utopian Confluences.”
7. Jennings, “Building Better People,” 104.
8. Macamo, “Power, Conflict, and Citizenship,” 198–99.
9. Macamo, “Power, Conflict, and Citizenship,” 200.
10. Sarr, *Afrotopia*, xiii.
11. Sarr, *Afrotopia*, xiv.
12. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of Kiswahili sources are my own.
13. Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, 188–89.
14. Guyer, “Prophecy and the Near Future.”
15. Aminzade, *Race, Nation, and Citizenship*, 268–72. See also Mains, *Under Construction*.
16. Pitcher and Askew, “African Socialisms and Postsocialisms.”

17. Schneider, "Visions of Tanzanian Socialism."
18. See Degani, "La Véranda."
19. Mosoba, "So Help Me God."
20. Machira, "Tanesco Issues Nationwide Blackout Alert."
21. Kamndaya, "Power Cuts to Continue."
22. Kimboy, "Tanesco Says Power Crisis May Ease Soon."
23. *Citizen*, "Tanesco Announces Twelve-Hour Power Cuts"; *Citizen*, "Why Power Rationing Is Needless Suffering."
24. *BBC Monitoring Africa*, "Government Terms Power Rationing."
25. *Citizen*, "Muster Resources."
26. See Huber, *Lifeblood*.
27. Mirondo, "No Lasting Solution."
28. Mashalla, "Power Cuts Affect the Price."
29. Tukur, "VETA."
30. *Citizen*, "Dar Falls Twelve Places"; Mutarubukwa, "IMF Set to Lower Forecast."
31. Masare, "Small Businesses."
32. Munyaga, "Electricity Has to Be."
33. Muthamia, "Candid Talk."
34. Liganga, "Fury over Bomb Blast."
35. Peters, *Marvelous Clouds*, 26.
36. Chacha, "How the Blackouts Have Changed."
37. Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 244.
38. *Citizen*, "With Such Meek Citizens."
39. The invocation of Shylock demanding his pound of flesh was the same trope Julius Nyerere memorably used in the 1980s when describing structural adjustment conditions imposed by IMF loans. See Tripp, *Changing the Rules*, 79.
40. *Citizen*, "With Such Meek Citizens."
41. Chahali, "Mgao wa Umeme Usio na Kikomo."
42. Mutuma, "Blame It All on the Weather."
43. Mhando, "We Laughed at Them." Reposted in Smatta, "Capitalism or Socialism?"
44. Quoted in Grundy, "Frene Ginwala."
45. "We have put too much emphasis on industries. Just as we have said, 'Without money there can be no development,' we also seem to say, 'Industries are the basis of development, without industries there is no development.' This is true. The day when we have lots of money we shall be able to say we are a developed country. We shall be able to say, 'When we began our development plans we did not have enough money and this situation made it difficult for us to develop as fast as we wanted. Today we are developed and we have enough money.' That is to say, our money has been brought by development. Similarly, the day we become industrialized, we shall be able to say we are developed. Development would have enabled us to have industries. The mistake we are making is to think that development begins with industries" (Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 26).
46. Ivaska, *Cultured States*.
47. Quoted in McGovern, *Socialist Peace?*, 38.
48. Barkan, *Beyond Capitalism*, 23.
49. Degani, *City Electric*.
50. Mazrui, "Tanzaphilia."

51. Indeed sometimes literally, as in the case of the annual Uhuru torch race, where the ever-lit monument is carried around different parts of the country before it is planted atop Kilimanjaro.
52. See Tripp, *Changing the Rules*, 79–101.
53. Brownell, *Gone to Ground*, 100.
54. Makamba, “Politics and Power Cuts.”
55. The play of presence and absence of recalling the structure of Eastern Bloc jokes about planned economies — “We pretend to work and they pretend to pay us.”
56. Nelson and Mathias, “Sitta.”
57. It must be said that CCM did not, much to their chagrin, have a monopoly on Nyerere. In the 2010 Presidential election, CHADEMA candidate Wilibroad Slaa also ran on the CHADEMA ticket with the slogan *Nyerere Hadi Slaa* (From Nyerere to Slaa). CCM supporters objected to this appropriation of their party’s founder, but after all, it was Nyerere himself who had late in life advocated for multiparty elections, showing little patience for filial obedience to a party per se. See Fouéré, “Julius Nyerere,” 47.
58. Hunter, “Julius Nyerere.”
59. Mgaya, “Practical Methods.”
60. Makamba, “Politics and Power Cuts.”
61. *Citizen*, “Muster Resources to Tackle Power Woes.”
62. Phillips, *Ethnography of Hunger*.
63. Phillips, *Ethnography of Hunger*, 163.
64. Ojambo, “Arab Springs.”
65. Bertelsen, “Effervescence and Ephemerality.”
66. Guyer, “Prophecy and the Near Future,” 417.
67. McGovern, *Socialist Peace?*, 13.
68. The Occupier, “Occupy Arusha.”
69. See, for example, Eyakuze, “New World Order.”
70. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, 77.
71. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, 80.
72. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, 84.
73. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, 80.
74. Guyer and Belinga, “Wealth in People.”
75. See, for instance, Geiger, “Specificities,” 337; McGovern, *Unmasking the State*, 184–91.
76. McGovern, “Liberty and Moral Ambivalence.”
77. McGovern, *Socialist Peace?*
78. McGovern, *Socialist Peace?*, 223.
79. Kopoka, “Did the West Tell All.”
80. Ferguson, *Presence and Social Obligation*, 25–26.
81. Ahmed, “Ni Hamsini, Ni Hamsini.”
82. Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, para. 143. See also Das, “What Is Ordinary Ethics?,” 61.
83. Mhango, “We Laughed at Them.”
84. See Brennan, “Julius Rex.”
85. Quoted in Devji, “Subject to Translation,” 184.
86. Brownell, *Gone to Ground*, 131–34.
87. Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*.
88. See, for example, Mutongi, “Thugs or Entrepreneurs?”

89. *Citizen*, “MP’s Attack.”
 90. Kopoka, “Statistics That Mean Nothing.”

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