Controllers in Rural Tanzania

by H. U. E. Thoden Van Velzen

The cornerstone of Andre Gunder Frank’s model is the notion that a few métropoles dominate and exploit a vast number of satellites. Relationships within the satellite countries themselves are assumed to mirror the hierarchical and exploitative nature of this mondial pattern: as the metropolis sucks wealth out of the satellites the provincial capitals live off the surrounding countryside. To this should be added the fundamental unity and integration of the whole system. Frank (1969: 6) chose to express this point with these words: ‘Furthermore, the provincial capitals, which thus are themselves satellites of the national metropolis — and through the latter of the world metropolis — are in turn provincial centers around which their own local satellites orbit. Thus, a whole chain of constellations of métropoles and satellites relates all parts of the whole system from its metropolitan center in Europe or the United States to the farthest outpost in the Latin American countryside’.

The point of departure of this short article is that we can profitably use Frank’s model but that more empirical data on the processes of exploitation and the extraction of wealth are badly needed. In particular, we often lack detailed knowledge about the various mechanisms which enable the centre to maintain its grip on the periphery and drain off its wealth. If we do not have sufficient information on what is going on at the local level — on the dynamics of the power struggle which is the reality of everyday life in so many of the developing countries — the we will merely repeat and elaborate each other’s slogans. In this contribution I will present some case material from Rungwe District in South-western Tanzania (Mbeya region) on the process of satellite development.

1, The controllers

The units of this analysis are sociological rather than geographical. It is not Tukuyu, the District Capital of Rungwe, which interests us here but rather the elite of administrative and party personnel which represents, or is supposed to represent, the national interest at the local level. Some of these representatives are residents of Tukuyu, while others live in a number of ‘outposts’, villages which have been selected as rural centra. But wherever they are stationed in the district, and whatever their internal disagreements, these controllers form a separate social grouping, occupying a clearly distinct social position vis-à-vis the peasantry. The reasons for this social distance are twofold: the powerful position of the controllers and the vested interests which they attempt to safeguard.

The power assets of the controllers derive from the strategic position which they occupy as gatekeepers. The metaphor used in this connection could be described as follows. Society is conceptualized as a huge flow system: 1 goods

1 This model is derived from the systems analysis school of political science: cf. Easton 1965a and 1965b.
are extracted and manpower is mobilized to be put at the disposal of the centre. From there, part of it is redistributed again through certain channels to particular sectors of the periphery. Each channel has its check-points which are manned by what Easton (1965, b: 86-96) called the gatekeepers. The gatekeepers regulate the flow and may — to some extent — redirect the stream or shift its projected course, thereby providing privileges to certain sectors of the peasantry. The gatekeepers take their toll as the resources pass them.

Controllers are contestants themselves in the struggle which takes place at the periphery about the distribution of resources. There are a number of reasons to mention for this involvement. Controllers have to defend their own 'class' position and safeguard the various emoluments which are attached to it. Equally important, they cannot be indifferent towards development in rural areas because they — the controllers — have used their advantageous position to develop mutually profitable exchange relationships with the wealthier peasants. This has been observed (Van Hekken and Thoden van Velzen, 1972) in one part of Tanzania but it may be the pattern in other parts of East and Central Africa as well. Therefore, it seems justified to direct attention to the involvement of the controllers in rural politics and the stake which they appear to have in the status quo.

The elite of controllers forms the centre. Around the centre 'orbit', in Frank's terminology, a number of satellites. The subsequent analysis of the relations between a centre and its periphery is mainly based on fieldwork data from Bulumbia division in Rungwe district. Itumba, administrative centre of this division, has a few resident civil servants called 'staff people' (WaSitafu) by the peasants. This group of controllers comprised the Divisional Executive Officer (D.E.O.), his treasurer and messengers but also such functionaries as the agricultural extension officer and the medical dispenser. This elite group of controllers forms the centre. The satellite field is composed of the peasants of Itumba and other villages in Bulambia Division.

2 Rungwe District is part of the Mbeya region. The field work on which this paper is based was conducted between August 1966 and December 1968. The first half of this period was spent in Itumba, the administrative centre of Bulambia division, the most western division of the district. I was at that time a member of an interdisciplinary team from the Afrika-studiecentrum at Leyden (Holland), engaged in investigating the factors hampering or stimulating the development of the rural economy. My colleagues working on this project in other divisions of Rungwe have generously allowed me to make use of their field work data. The responsibility for the conclusions, however, is solely the author's.

This paper essentially covers the same ground as some of the reports which I wrote earlier, particularly Staff, Kulaks and Peasants (1971). However, the emphasis on game analysis as a separate and distinct method for the analysis of micro-political processes is new. Also, the focus of this paper is now different from those of the earlier reports.
2, Extraction
At first glance, the adjective 'exploitative' seems hardly appropriate to characterize the relationship between controllers and peasants. There is no discernable flow of goods and services from the satellite fields to the controllers. Though some government officials receive goods (vegetables, maize or other agricultural produce, a loan of land and in a few cases a cow) in a clandestine way, their benefactors are wealthy farmers or kulaks, as I prefer to call them.
In many parts of the world, the main instrument of extraction is the taxing system. Although a 'local rate' or poll tax of 45 shs existed, this legacy of the colonial epoch was abandoned in 1968.
Not only are we in a position to deny that the controllers suck wealth out of the peasantry, but even the opposite position can easily be defended. The government of Tanzania is channeling more wealth into the rural hinterland than it gets back, or will ever get back, from direct or indirect forms of revenue. Through the First and Second Five-Year Plan, the government has greatly expanded both the funds and the manpower which were put at the disposal of agencies promoting local development projects.
This Tanzanian situation is certainly not characteristic of the situation in the Third World. As is well known, Tanzania has for many years accepted and propagated a socialist ideology, which was expounded in the Arusha Declaration of 1967, the 1971 TANU-guidelines and in numerous speeches by President Nyerere. At the national level, the planning agencies of the various Ministries consciously strive to protect the interests of the peasants, and the abolishment of the poll tax testifies to the seriousness of their intentions. Thus, in this part of the world, the relationship between centre and periphery cannot be meaningfully characterized as 'exploitative', at least not in the sense that a substantial part of the locally produced surplus of goods and services is drained away and absorbed by the centre.

3, The development of satellite status
No matter how beneficial the centre-satellite relationship seems to be for the peasantry, strong pressures are at work which subjugate the satellite field to the centre. To the majority many of the new opportunities created by the processes of development and modernization are denied. This threatens to thwart the projected socialist transformation. Paradoxically, these mechanisms of satellite

3 The concept of 'kulak' has been borrowed from recent Russian history. Dumont (1957) has argued that this is also a significant social category in Africa. The concept should be stripped of most of its emotional connotations of oppression, repression and exploitation which it has acquired in Soviet history. By 'kulaks' I simply mean the better-off farmers whose position in rural areas has become controversial ever since Tanzania committed itself to socialism. Since 'better-off' is a relative concept it has to be operationally defined anew for every rural community.
development operate in a national framework which has created optimal conditions for the growth of socialism.

The mechanisms of satellite development apparent in that corner of Tanzania where I conducted field-work are the following:

1 — The present position of the controllers in the district capital and at the outposts offers them a vast number of opportunities for the ostentatious demonstration of an elite culture and 'style of life'. In this way, symbolic divisions between controllers and peasants are being sustained and infused with new and bad blood. I will not elaborate this point any further as I have done so elsewhere (Thoden van Velzen, 1971).

2 — The controllers support the wealthier sectors of the peasantry, thereby encouraging further processes of power accumulation in the satellite fields. This frustrates efforts to introduce programmes for collectivized agriculture (Ujamaa), cf. Thoden van Velzen, 1970. Moreover, such support tends to discredit the Tanzanian Party, TANU, as an instrument of the happy few. In fact, when I first came to Rungwe Districts TANU was almost a shopkeeper's party; many small retailers occupied functions such as 'ten-house-group' leader, chairman of the Village Development Committee etc. Elsewhere (Van Hekken and Thoden van Velzen, 1972) it was pointed out that the rich farmer is not only overrepresented in TANU's grass-roots machinery, but also occupies most of the salaried positions in the villages. Of 143 such functions available in 1967 in five villages of Rungwe District 72 were filled by the wealthiest 20% of the population.

3 — Though a country such as Tanzania is sparsely populated in comparison with most European or Asian countries, fertile land fit for agriculture is rapidly becoming scarce. The frontier days when good new land could be staked out are coming to an end. The argument then is that Tanzania has now entered a decisive period which, in all likelihood, will not last much longer than two decades. After that period, new land will only be available at high, and for many prohibitive, costs of reclamation. Nowadays, in many parts of Tanzania there are still some open resources as new land can be converted into fertile plots at low costs. The future shape of Tanzania's rural society is to a large extent determined by this crucial distribution process. The relevant questions are: who will dominate this last frontier? What opportunities will those who now find themselves among the landless enjoy in the coming years? My experience is that, by and large, the controller throws his weight behind the kulak and in that way enables him to expand his landholdings to the detriment of his poorer neighbours.

The five villages concerned are Itumba and Ibala in the western part of Rungwe District and Ngamanga, Buloma and Jerusalem in the eastern half. Information on Ngamanga was kindly made available by Ir. P. van Hekken, while the data on the last two villages were provided by Drs. J. H. Konter.
4, Game analysis

Though more and more lip-service is being paid to the processual study of local-level politics, the development of a method for the systematic analysis of antagonistic interaction lags far behind. Norman Long in 'The local community as an ecology of games' (1967) and F. G. Bailey in 'Stratagems and spoils' (1969) pioneered new approaches in this field. The authors utilize the concept of 'game' as the centre of their conceptual framework.

A game is a series of antagonistic interactions which can be delineated from other such series and from other forms of interactions. Game analysis attempts to investigate two related subjects. The first one is that of the relative positions of contestants in a political field. Here, attention is devoted to the power base, strategy and arena map of both parties in a dispute. It also investigates the structure of arenas relevant to the competition of struggle. Secondly, game analysis tries to record and understand the processes triggered off by political actors attempting to change the existing distribution of resources and honour. Game analysis is particularly useful when it addresses itself to the study of political dramas, i.e. situations when a major threat to the status quo occurs. In Staff, kulaks and peasants (1971) I related one such a political drama which took place in the village of Itumba in 1966 and 1967. The case study describes how one wealthy farmer called Chomo, with the help of some staff people, maintained his position in the face of mounting opposition from the majority of the population. The fight became particularly bitter when the ownership of a valuable sugar-cane garden was at stake. Chomo received substantial support from the side of the agricultural extension officer (Mwakalinga) and the medical dispenser. From the political drama we extracted the following information on the position of the controllers, and their allies the kulaks.

4.1, Power base of the controllers — Definition of power base: that part of a person's resources which give him the potential to exercise power.

The peasants have an exaggerated view of the extent to which staff members and kulaks co-operate and collude to further their interests and safeguard their privileges. But before dealing with the more distorted perception of field conditions by peasants, I would like to point out the objective basis for at least part of their feelings. This concerns the power base of the controllers:

a — The staff directly control a number of 'legitimate arenas'. Decisions reached in such arenas are recognized by the outside world as authoritative and are backed up by force if necessary. Examples of such arenas are the

An arena is here defined as an institutional framework which may serve as a setting for antagonistic interaction, i.e. for restricting and channeling it. By 'institutional framework' I mean rules, procedures and personnel.
Primary Court, the investigations of the local police commander; the enquiries set up by the Divisional Executive Officer as 'Justice of the Peace'. Indirectly, the staff have an important say in a number of other arenas, the most important of which is the Village Development Committee.

b — Furthermore, the staff control access to certain material resources such as, for example, medicine and medical treatment, which can be obtained from the medical dispenser and mid-wife. Other valued goods and services which one can obtain through 'staff people' are: employment in a government service as messenger (or other forms of unskilled labour); expertise of government officials: farm implements, sowing-seed; and transport.

c — Another important power basis of the controllers is their alignment with the kulaks. Objective evidence that such a coalition operates — and that both partners derive considerable benefits from it — is not difficult to procure. In return for information and certain goods (viz. gardens, food such as vegetables, finger-millet and sugar-cane) the staff help their kulak friends in a number of ways. Not only do they assist them in occupying official functions, they also throw their weight behind these kulaks in disputes; this became apparent when the political drama in Itumba unfolded. From the same drama it appears that the following transactional relations existed between staff member Mwakalinga and kulak Chomo (Ibid, pp. 38-48).

... Chomo ceded part of his sugar-cane garden to Mwakalinga and gave a river garden on loan to the medical dispenser;

... Chomo escorted Mwakalinga to the hospital and took charge of mourning proceedings when his son died.

... Chomo regularly received information from his staff contacts which enabled him to forestall his enemies' moves;

... Mwakalinga assisted Chomo with technical advice and a loan of money in order to make it possible for him to appeal to a higher court, after the local Primary Court had ruled that one of Chomo's best fields (a sugar-cane garden) would have to be handed over to his enemies. The magistrate appeared to have come to this judgement only after considerable pressure had been exerted by the mass of the peasants in the village.

4.2, Arena map of controllers — The arena map comprises the perceptions of a particular participant concerning the positions of others in an arena or political field. Thus, it contains estimates of its own and enemy strength and information on the development of forces. This is the subjective view of the participants: it is obvious that such 'intelligence' can at times vary greatly from the presumably more objective information gathered by the sociologist. The staff people know that they occupy a powerful position in rural areas; they feel entitled to the prestige and emoluments of an elite grouping (cf. section 2). A basic tenet of these controllers is to equate success and wealth...
with the innate capacities of the peasants concerned and their (the peasantry's) ideological motivation for furthering the interests of their country. The majority of the staff people believe the poorer peasants to be lazy, ignorant and prone to practise witchcraft, the argument being that as they make no progress while others succeed they would tend to become envious of the more privileged farmers. Such opinions are sometimes sincerely held, and sometimes no more than rationalizations of their own interest in aligning with the richer peasants.

4.3, Strategy of the controllers — A strategy is a general plan of action which assesses priorities and indicates to which areas (arenas, other sets of relationships) surplus effort and resources have to be allocated. On the basis of such an overall strategy manoeuvres are performed in order to consolidate gains, inflict losses on the enemy or undermine his position.

A strategy contains indications of how these objectives may be achieved with a minimum of losses and a maximum of efficiency. Schelling (1966: 3) emphasized the significance of this concept in the following words: 'The term is intended to focus on the interdependence of the adversaries' decisions and on their expectations about each other's behavior'.

The controllers follow two important strategic guidelines: (a) a 'betting on the strong' strategy and (b) concentrating their attacks on weak spots.

Wertheim (1964: 262) has formulated the 'betting on the strong' strategy to account for the selective and preferential approach which government personnel use to bring about innovations. The author mentions the fact that in India and Indonesia government officials rely on the advanced farmer for introducing innovations.

The above tendency has also been signalized by a number of sociologists working in Tanzania: it has been called the progressive (Saul, 1967) or model farmer approach (Cunningham, 1968). As mentioned before, official instructions ensure that progressive farmers will represent the peasant population on government committees. Apart from these instructions, however, there is no clear-cut policy of the various government services in this respect. Government personnel work in a climate of laissez-faire which permits them to select their audience according to their own inclinations and interests.

It is pertinent to stress here that the tendency to give preferential treatment to a restricted segment of the total peasantry definitely goes against the grain of the national ideology in post-Arusha Tanzania. This acquires an added significance because the category of the advanced farmers seems to overlap considerably with that of the kulaks.

Wertheim rightly assumes that his conclusions are applicable outside the field of innovative behaviour. Basically, what Wertheim draws attention to is that the controllers are likely to choose the wealthy farmers as coalition partners, i.e. to bet on the strong rather than on the weak and the many. This is also
the strategic choice controllers opt for in Itumba, since, as we have seen, many exchange relationships have developed between staff people and kulaks. Though this is the most frequently occurring type of coalition, it should not be viewed as the immutable and permanent alliance.

Another characteristic strategy of the controllers is the tendency to concentrate attacks on ‘weak spots’ and ask only those peasants to comply with unpopular measures who are expected to offer a minimum of resistance.

Many fields in Itumba are cultivated for periods of four to six years continuously, before these fields are left to lie fallow for a period of three years. The widow Namatanga let one of her fields lie fallow in 1965. In November 1967 — at the beginning of the new agricultural season Kalinga, one of the more wealthy peasants, visited the Divisional Executive Officer and asked his permission to take over the widow's plot. The official called Namatanga to his office and urged her to start tilling the field immediately. The Divisional Executive Officer warned her that if she did not comply with his request, he would regretfully be forced to confiscate her plot and hand it over to others. He pointed out that there were too many people in Itumba who did not have enough land. In vain Namatanga pleaded that the plot had not sufficiently recovered its fertility.

In the same year Chomo left several acres of river land, which has no regeneration cycle, unused. These plots could have satisfied the immediate needs of a number of poorer peasants if they had been taken from Chomo and given to the have-nots.

We have surveyed the position of the controllers in the political field with the help of some concepts from game analysis. We will now utilize these same concepts to elucidate the position of their counterparts.

4.4, Arena map of the peasants — Peasants are inclined to dramatize the collusion of staff and of staff and kulaks. Although the suspicions of the peasants are sometimes without any factual basis they are nevertheless important; they influence their actions and mould their strategy and thus form an integral part of the arena map. In the case study the following accusations and suspicions are mentioned.

The medical dispenser was alleged to have kept a stock of medicines reserved for his colleagues and kulak friends in times of scarcity. This, according to the peasants, had resulted in a lower mortality rate among children of this group than among peasant children. Furthermore, the medical dispenser was accused of withholding medicine from the divorced wife of Chomo and thus, indirectly, to have caused her death.

In a law-suit between Chomo and a few poorer peasants concerning the ownership of a valuable sugar-cane garden, the Primary Court Magistrate was believed to have come to an impartial judgement only after pressure had been brought to bear on him. In the eyes of the peasants he had relinquished his impartiality by secretively advising Chomo — via his friend the agricultural
extension officer Mwakalinga — to appeal.

Chomo was reputed to have supplied the medical dispenser, the Primary Court Magistrate, Mwakalinga and two teachers with vegetables, onions and sugar-cane. It was well-known that staff were often among his quests at his beer parties.

The arena map of the peasants contains such information as:
(a) all legitimate arenas are dominated wholly or to a large extent by staff.
(b) Staff control access to vital resources.
(c) In case of conflict staff will close ranks.
(d) In case of conflict the richer peasants are supported by staff.

4.5, Strategy of the peasants — On the basis of this arena map a strategy evolves which has the following elements.

a — In case of conflict with a member of staff it is extremely difficult to press a charge against him. A possible course to pursue is to enlist the backing of another member of staff before taking action. This happened, for instance, when a farmer from Itumba wanted to protest to Mwakalinga about the alleged sorcery of his son. He succeeded in getting the police officer to escort him to Mwakalinga and deliver his protest.

b — In case of a conflict do not enter the 'legitimate arenas' but try another battleground in which more effective manoeuvres can be performed.

The medical dispenser at X was alleged to have regularly had affairs with married women in the community. This charge would have resulted in a civil case if the seducer were a peasant. But on the basis of the above stratagem peasants reacted differently: for two years no action was taken, then, in the middle of the night, people set fire to his houses. The dispenser escaped just in time from the blazing house.

More often peasants have recourse to threats which can be as effective as arson. In 1967 some villagers of Itumba bore grudges against the magistrate. Then, on a given day, the wife of the magistrate was advised by a 'helpful' neighbour to leave because 'people' intended to set fire to the thatched roof of her house. Two weeks later they left the village on a transfer. The magistrate who presided over the case of the valuable sugar-cane garden was told by people to pass a judgement favourable to the opponents of Chomo. If he failed to do so, 'things would happen to him'.

This points to the fact that another way of inflicting harm on an opponent is to conduct a 'war of nerves' against him. Mwakalinga was assailed in this way, mainly because of his support of the unpopular Chomo. This 'war of nerves' consisted of numerous threats, accusations and indications of impopularity. It turned out to be fairly effective because Mwakalinga considered leaving Itumba, although this entailed considerable losses for him as nobody was prepared to give him a penny for his two houses with corrugated iron roofs. Further-
more, it would have meant giving up fertile river plots which he had on loan from Chomo and another kulak.

Conclusion
The controllers in some villages of the Rungwe District occupy a class position in the sense that they form 'an aggregation of persons in a society who stand in a similar position with respect to some form of power, privilege or prestige' (Lenski, 1966: 75). On the basis of the available evidence it seems justified to conclude that a class consciousness is emerging among the members of this elite (cf Thoden van Velzen, 1971). More significant, the awareness that shared interests require protection causes the controllers to cultivate exchange relationships with the more wealthy segments of the peasantry. Evidence for these alliances or coalitions is derived from a number of indicators. For example, it was shown that the kulaks of five villages are overrepresented in official functions. Furthermore, from a number of clashes which took place when the ownership of some valuable resources was at stake, game analysis revealed the actual pattern of co-operation between controllers and kulaks. At the same time, game analysis exposed the close weave of interest between controllers and the wealthy peasants.

Thus, the coalition of controllers and kulaks is one of the more important mechanisms which - if they are left unchecked - are bound to transform Tanzania's peasantry into a rural proletariat. Although the cohesion and strength of this coalition should not be overestimated, it is nevertheless a real and potent force at the local level. It denies most of the new opportunities to the poorer majority of the population, and plays a pivotal role in the distribution of the last resources of land. Moreover, it keeps at bay the spontaneous 'grass-roots' levelling movements aimed at the kulaks.

References
Cunningham, Griffiths: Socialism and rural development (1); Dar es Salaam: Kivukoni college (mimeo) 1968.
Dumont, René: Types of rural economy; London; 1957.
Luning, H. A.: 'Cash crop and money income in Rungwe District' 1955-1957; in:
idem: 'Some social obstacles to Ujamaa: A case study from Rungwe'. Mededelingen van het Afrika-Studiecentrum, no. 6; Leiden, 1970.