**Land as Resource, Land as Commodity: Toward an Urban Political Ecology of
Land Tenure in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania**

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"Land is a big investment in Tanzania. If you have land, you can do anything"
>~Farmer, Dar es Salaam,
>Tanzania (Interview, 5/2006)

"A lot of people who live around Dar es Salaam are selling off their land because they
look at money as if it's a big thing. In fact, its nothing compared to what they are
selling."
>~Professor and Farmer, Dar es
>Salaam, Tanzania (Interview,
>4/2006)

In a country such as Tanzania, where the majority of the population engages in

agriculture as primary source of livelihood and many more use agriculture to supplement

household income and defray food costs, access to land is crucial. Beyond sustaining an

economic livelihood, people need access to land for other basic needs, particularly

housing. In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's economic and administrative center, which has a

population of over 3 million people, agriculture is visible and widely practiced. People of

all social classes rely on agriculture as an entrepreneurial activity, a means of subsistence

or to defray the cost of food for their families. Though exact figures are difficult to come

by, the city's population is estimated to be growing at somewhere between 2% and 4%

annually, largely a result of rural to urban migration. All of these new migrants, as well

as those already living in the city, require land for housing, agriculture and other needs.

In Tanzania, the government is the official owner of all of the land in the country

and allocates individuals usufruct rights, or rights of occupancy. This system has

persisted from colonialism through the country's socialist period and into its current

transition into market economics. The system of land distribution, however, is largely

ineffective and inefficient and there is a large backlog of requests for land. The state is attempting to formalize and streamline its system of land distribution, but does not have the resources to conduct this exercise effectively. Because the land is crucial to many for sustaining livelihoods and because demand for land has far outstripped its availability, at least through formal means, a large and thriving informal market has developed. Land in itself has become transformed from a resource into a highly desired commodity, with systems of formal and informal tenure existing side by side, as well as planned and unplanned areas of the city. Therefore, issues of power, availability and access to land become important to analyze. These issues are particularly salient in urban areas where the gap between rich and poor is the greatest and most visible, but the two groups often live side by side. Though land tenure in Tanzania and in Dar es Salaam have been the topic of numerous academic papers, the issue has often been framed in as one of government complacency, a perspective that underemphasizes the inherent complexities and roles other actors have played.

I became interested in the topic of land tenure and land access while completing fieldwork in Dar es Salaam related to another research paper. The farmers I interviewed engaged me and piqued my interest in the topic through impassioned discussions of the value of land in Tanzanian culture and the way in which the social structure in Dar es Salaam is being changed through the practice of buying and selling land. Recent economic development initiatives have widened inequalities to the point which many people who owned land and once used it for farming now work the land of others. This transformation of social structure through human interaction with the environment

seemed a classic example of a contribution a political ecology perspective could make to the study of this issue.

Political ecology provides a unique lens through which to examine the issue of land tenure because it offers potential for analysis of the underlying forces behind inequitable distribution of and access to resource as well as recognition of the importance of scale and the uniqueness of place. Political ecologists have long concerned themselves with connecting local human-environment interactions with larger forces. In the subfield's early days, political ecologists centered much of their research on issues related to rural, agricultural societies in the third world. Therefore, land tenure and land access are not uncommon themes in political ecology research related to rural areas (ex Bassett, Schroeder, Turner, 2004). There is also a growing body of literature concerning political ecology in the first world. Much of this body of literature focuses on urban issues in related to environmental justice and environmental racism, for example Heynan, Perkins and Roy's (2006) study on the political ecology of urban forest cover in Milwaukee. Largely absent from the literature in political ecology, however, is discussion and analysis of third world urban issues. Though the issue of land tenure has been widely studied inside and outside of political ecology, political ecologists have given less attention to the issue of land tenure in the context of urban areas.

In this paper, I will examine the issue of land tenure and land access in Dar es Salaam from a political ecology perspective, giving attention to the unique set of circumstances that together have created the land tenure situation in Tanzania. I will examine both the underlying issues that have rendered the government of Tanzania largely ineffective at distributing land and regulating its sale as well as the inequalities in

power and access that have resulted from the development of an informal land market. In the first part of the paper, I will review existing literature on urban political ecology to develop a concrete set of ideas and theories that constitute urban political ecology. I will then examine the issue of land tenure in Dar es Salaam, giving a comprehensive overview of the evolution of the policy of land distribution and looking at the ways others have studied the issue in the past. In the final section of the paper, I will apply the theories of urban political ecology to the issue of land tenure and develop a framework for analyzing the issue through political ecology. This section will center on questions of who is marginalized under the current distribution system and why this exists as well as what struggles exist over land access and how these struggles are resolved.

Methods

I relied primarily on key texts within the subfield of political ecology as well as the emerging literature related to urban political ecology to develop an appropriate framework through which to analyze the topic of land tenure. I also examined past academic studies of land tenure in Dar es Salaam as well as more-policy oriented literature related to land tenure in Africa more generally. I also lived in Dar es Salaam for four months on a study abroad program and much of my thinking on this issue was framed by observations and conversations, both formal and informal that I had while in Tanzania.

An Urban Political Ecology Framework

Loosely defined, political ecology is the study of the political economy of human-environment interactions. The subfield is centered on questions of power, marginalization and the connections between human-environment interactions at the local level and larger, national or global forces. To this point, much of the research of political ecologists has focused on third world rural areas. When political ecologists do give attention to urban areas, it is largely in the context of issues related to environmental justice in the first world. Comparatively less research, however, focuses on analyzing third world urban issues from a political ecology perspective.

Political ecology is such a broad field that different definitions emphasize different aspects of the field. However, because this paper focuses on the ways in which social relations and the environment are intertwined, the following three definitions for the term are the most useful in the context of this paper. First, according to Blakie and Brookfield (1987, p.17) political ecology "combines the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy. Together this encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself." Second, Watts (2000, p. 257) puts for the idea that the goal of political ecologists is "to understand the complex relations between nature and society through a careful analysis of what one might call the forms of access and control over resources." Third, Robbins (2004, p.12) writes that the term political ecology describes "empirical, research-based explorations to explain linkages in the condition and change of social/environmental systems, with explicit consideration of relations of power." These definitions emphasize the ways in which political ecology as a mode of inquiry

recognizes the complex social, political and economic forces that shape human-environment interactions.

Some scholars attribute a lack of interest in urban areas to dualistic thinking about the relationship between humans and nature, where nature and the city are viewed as two separate and mutually exclusive entities. Friedberg (2001) writes that political ecology has done little to challenge the notion that what she terms the "natural environment," meaning the environment containing natural resources, is rural. Heynen et al (2006) have a slightly different take on the issue, writing that scholars have traditionally viewed urbanization as a process in which the natural environment is traded for the built environment, which thereby makes thinking of cities as separate from nature easy. This notion becomes problematic, however, when one's livelihood in an urban area is based on a natural resource, as is the case with the agriculture practiced in Dar es Salaam and in many other cities of Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, considering the city as part of the natural environment and thinking of natural resources as contained within the city becomes necessary.

Urban political ecology attempts to integrate the politics of nature with the politics of social relations. The idea of a distinctly urban political ecology draws on the traditions of political ecology but is also heavily influenced by other critical social theories such as eco-Marxism, eco-feminism and eco-anarchism. The theory rests on the Marxist idea that nature is produced through social relations, of which labor is a central part. Therefore, because humanity produces the idea of nature through its social relations, there is nothing particularly unnatural about cities. Swyngeduow and Heynen (2003, p.898) write that a Marxist urban political ecology perspective "provides an integrated

and relational approach that helps untangle the interconnected economic, political, social and ecological processes that together go to form highly uneven and deeply unjust urban landscapes." Cities themselves are complex networks of human social and environmental interaction. Therefore, "the transformation of nature is embedded in a series of [complex] relations that are tied together in a nested articulation of significant, but intrinsically unstable, geographical configurations like spatial networks and…scales" (Heynen et al, 2006, p.7). Key to Heynen et al's (2006) conception of political ecology is the idea of metabolism and circulation present within the produced nature of a city. This metaphor of metabolism implies a process of flow, change, transformation as well an idea of interconnectedness and therefore captures the complex network of forces and interactions that work together to produce nature in urban areas.

Because urban political ecology is a relatively new mode of inquiry, its core theories are not yet well defined. Nonetheless, the small body of literature within the framework of urban political ecology does share some common themes. Heynen et al (2006) put forth a number of ideas as key tenets within the framework of urban political ecology. Many of these are consistent with the ideas in political ecology, but with special attention to urban environments, while others mark somewhat of a departure from this framework. Central to Heynen et al's (2006) theory is the idea that environmental and social changes co-determine each other. This in turn, produces urban environments that are a direct result of specific socio-environmental processes. These processes thereby create conditions that either enable or disable certain groups of people. Thus, in a similar vein to mainstream political ecology, Heynan et al (2006) argue that changes to an urban area are never socially or ecologically neutral and that people affect each other via the

environment. Thus, social relations are mediated through the environment and questions of sustainability become fundamentally political because of differential impacts across groups.

Much of the literature on urban political ecology has thus far focused on issues related to environmental justice and environmental racism in the first world (Heynen, Perkins and Roy, 2006). It is important to note, however, that environmental justice has different meanings in different contexts (Moseley, 2006). In the first world, environmental justice tends to refer to the disproportionate negative environmental impacts low-income communities and communities of color face as a result of their relative lack of political power as compared to the majority. In the third world, however, environmental justice is often thought of as equitable access to resources such as land in order to secure a livelihood. Therefore, because agriculture requires access to land, and agriculture is important in the secure livelihoods of so many in Dar es Salaam, the issue of land tenure and land access could be framed as an issue of environmental justice.

The issue of land tenure and land access in Dar es Salaam present a classic example of the way in which social relations, against the backdrop of the natural environment have worked together to produce an urban landscape that privileges some at the expense of others. Thus, the current land policy has enabled people of different social classes to impact one another through the medium of the environment. Such themes represent an important contribution to the emerging literature in the subfield of urban political ecology.

Tanzanian Land Ideology

Tanzania has historically been a place where agriculture was widely practiced and formed the basis of the economy. Thus, a relationship between humans and the natural environment has always been an important part of the life of most Tanzanians, even dating back to before there was such a place as Tanzania. Socialist ideas have also historically a part of the psyche of many Tanzanians, as struggles for the nation's independence were couched in ideas of equality, self-reliance and constructing a Tanzanian, rather than tribe-based, identity. Thus, an understanding of the importance of land to people in Tanzania becomes important to address when looking at the issue of land tenure.

Shortly after independence, Tanzania's first leader Julius Nyerere adopted the socialist *ujamaa* (a Kiswahili word meaning familyhood) policy. This policy emphasized equality and self-reliance and rural development, in accordance with what Nyerere saw as traditional African values (Nyerere, 1968). All industries were nationalized and nearly 9 million people living in rural areas were moved to communal villages in order to facilitate the provision of basic infrastructure in these places. Nyerere worked hard to develop a strong sense of identity as Tanzanian through the establishment of Kiswahili as a national language and the abolition of the position of tribal chief. Because of the *ujamaa* policy's emphasis on equality, access to land was of paramount importance given that most of the population of Tanzania participates in agriculture (Tsikata, 2003).

Villagization, though a rural policy did affect urban areas in two ways. Many people who were reluctant to move to their assigned villages instead flocked to Dar es Salaam, which caused massive population growth in the city during the 1970's. This

served to increase pressure on and competition for available land as many of these new migrants were engaging in agriculture. Also, the principles of *ujamaa* were still very important to the mindset of people living in urban areas and this mindset still persists today, even after Tanzania has undergone the transition from socialism to a market economy.

Land Tenure Policy in Tanzania

Scholars have tended to describe the process of land distribution in Tanzania as inefficient, outdated and even "chaotic" (Kironde, 1992, p.3). No doubt, land tenure and land allocation are complicated issues in Tanzania. Largely due to the influence of colonialism, two tenure systems, formal and informal, operate simultaneously in Dar es Salaam. In rural areas of Tanzania, land is held through customary tenure. In urban areas, however, land is held under statutory tenure (a vestige of colonialism) and it is expected that the government will be the primary distributor of land. In practice, however, this does not happen and an informal market for land thrives. Land tenure in urban areas is a particularly complicated issue because the sheer number of people in these areas and the disparate interests of groups desiring access to land necessitates the intervention of the state or some other body (Payne, 1997). Nowhere in Tanzania is this phenomenon more visible, or more contentious, than in Dar es Salaam.

Before beginning an in-depth discussion of land tenure, however, it is necessary to clarify a few key terms. First, statutory tenure refers to a policy of landholding that is consistent with the mandate of the law. Statutory tenure operates in tandem with the formal land delivery system. Customary tenure is agreed upon via kinship or membership

in a group. The holder of land in a situation where customary tenure exists is generally not recognized as the owner of the land in question in a strictly legal sense. Rather, security of tenure arises out of agreement of the members in a group (Payne, 1997). The United Nations defines customary tenure as "rights to use or dispose of use-rights over land which rest neither on the exercise of brute force nor on the evidence of rights guaranteed by government statute but on the fact that those rights are recognized as legitimate by the community"(United Nations, quoted in Payne, 1997). This form of land tenure has its roots in agricultural societies, where communities commonly accepted the idea that land "belongs" to the person who initially cleared it. The land itself had no economic value; rather it served as a means to a secure livelihood. Land, then, is viewed as a resource rather than a commodity. Thus, several groups can claim different use rights to the same land.

The extreme form of customary tenure is public tenure, where the national government is the owner of all of the land and allocates rights for occupancy or development. The idea behind this is that through allocating resources based on use need, greater equality is achieved, however the administrative systems in charge of distributing land are not always the most efficient at actually achieving equality. Payne (1997) notes that customary tenure has been the most successful in societies where social change and demand for land are modest.

In contrast to societies where customary tenure is practiced are societies where private property is the norm. The idea of private property is so essential to North American and Western European values and legal systems that many countries in these places are referred to as private property democracies (Payne, 1997). Private property

can either be for an indefinite period of time (freehold tenure) or for a specified period of time (leasehold tenure). A system based on private property is designed to promote the most efficient and flexible use of land through the unrestricted exchange of land and property in a market based on supply and demand. Therefore, land itself is a commodity with a value assigned to it, rather than a resource. The existence of a market, while it may promote efficiency, happens at the expense of equality. Systems of private property and land markets become particularly problematic when they exist simultaneously with a national land ownership policy, as is the case in Tanzania. The imposition of the concept of private property in a situation where it historically has not been the norm has had profound implications for the way the land tenure system operates in Tanzania.

Concepts of land tenure are, to a certain extent, an expression of the values a society holds. Therefore, the distinction made between national, public and private property becomes important. Tanzania is one of 20 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that has some form of a national land ownership policy, meaning that the state is the sole owner of all the land in the country. Therefore, the act of individuals buying and selling land is, strictly speaking, illegal. Mabogunje (quoted in Payne, 1997) posits four reasons for why the policy of national land ownership is so common in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many governments believe that national land ownership is consistent with traditional African ideas where groups, not individuals hold land. In many French colonies, national ownership is a vestige of French colonial policy that refused to recognize de facto, or customary, land tenure. In still other places, the policy resulted from the government's intention to improve the efficiency of land allocation for public and private use through state ownership. The final reason Mabogunje cites for national land ownership is socialist

legacy. Tanzania falls into the latter category. Originally, Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania after its independence, decided to maintain the system of national ownership in order to ensure that the African population would have the same access to land as the white and Indian minorities in the country (Kironde, 2000).

Formal Systems of Land Management

Formal systems of land allocation are those that operate within a government-mandated framework. This is known as statutory tenure because it involves tenure under the jurisdiction of the law. In Tanzania, this does not involve an individual purchasing the land itself, but rather usufruct rights or rights of occupancy because the state owns all of the land in the country. The policy of national ownership dates back to the colonial period. Under the Land Ordinance of 1923, all land became publicly owned and was vested in the governor. The colonial state granted rights of occupancy to those who desired plots. All of the land that indigenous communities occupied was grandfathered into the new policy. Therefore, Tanzanians in rural areas were granted rights to keep the land on which they already lived. (Kironde, 1995).

Figure 1. Dar es Salaam City Center
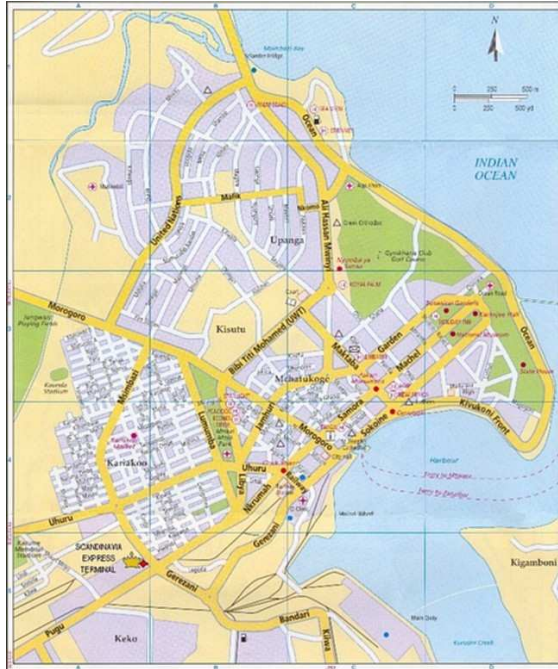
Source: http://www.scandinaviagroup.com/images/map_dar_streets.jpg

This policy, however, did not apply to urban areas in the same way. The British

colonial government sought to keep Africans out of urban areas or, for those already

occupying Dar es Salaam, segregated from the more affluent Indian and white

population. The city was divided into three administrative zones, one reserved for whites,

one for the class of Indian merchants and one for African's, the idea being to keep

Africans as far away as possible from economic centers within urban areas (Kironde,

1995, see Figure 1). Whites and the Indian business owners lived and worked in the area

around the harbor, which is today the central business district of Dar es Salaam. Africans

were relegated further west to Kariakoo, which today is one of the most densely settled

areas of the city Also during the colonial period, urban administrative boundaries were

kept artificially small in order to deny the African population living in cities access to

urban services (Kironde, 1995). Such isolation is one of the contributing factors to the

growth of the informal system of land delivery in Dar es Salaam as the African

population relied on customary tenure.

Until 1974 it was possible to obtain urban land directly from the government,

because the government had extra land to dispose of and openly invited interested parties

to apply. Now, however, the process has become much less streamlined. The allocation

process is a complicated one in which an individual desiring land must first apply to a

district official requesting a desired parcel. The application, when approved, is then sent

to an allocation committee that makes the final decision on the matter. The process is

complicated and time-consuming and there is a large backlog of land requests that have

not been approved. Kironde (1995) notes that in practice, the formal system of land

delivery does not work because the demand for plots far outstrips the supply. Between

1977 and 1986 the Dar es Salaam City Council, at the time in charge of allocating land,

received 212,446 applications, surveyed 27,622 plots and allocated 20,622, less than 10%

of the total requested (Kironde, 1992). Further, between 1999 and 2001 the government

received 243, 473 applications for land, but allocated only 8,209, an even smaller

percentage of the total requests (Kombe, 2005). Kironde (1992) attributes this lack of

efficiency in allocation of plots to chaotic allocation procedures and records, tardy

bureaucracy and lack of oversight. The inadequacies of the existing system of allocating

land have, in part, contributed to the growth of informal land allocation, which will be

discussed in greater detail in a later section.

In the early 1990s, when the country was in the midst of its economic reforms,

the government began discussions regarding revisions to existing land laws in Tanzania.

These discussions were in part motivated by tensions resulting from a bias that favored

production of export crops over small-scale agriculture, increasing demand for land from the mining and tourist industries, conflicts between farmers and pastoralists, foreigners and locals and between government conservation agencies and local people living near parks that had created conditions of land scarcity, insecure tenure and land degradation (Tsikata, 2003). During this time, Tanzania also adopted a system of multiparty democracy and the ruling party, Chama cha Mapunduzi (CCM) largely abandoned socialism as its ideology.

After years of debate and discussion, 1999 brought with it the passage of the two most recent pieces of legislation dealing with land tenure in Tanzania. The first, the Village Land Act, concerned only land in rural villages. The second piece of legislation, the Land Act, dealt with land throughout mainland Tanzania. This piece of legislation stated that use and occupation would still be allocated through usufruct rights and customary rights of occupancy, but that each would be equal in the eyes of the law. It also retained the power to allocate land and its ownership in the central government (Tsikata, 2003). Critics of this legislation have argued that though the government rhetoric surrounding its passage was that the law was designed to mitigate local land conflicts, it has actually made it easier for foreign investors and wealthy Tanzanians to gain access to land (Tsikata, 2003). Critics have also questioned the motives of the national government in passing the legislation as many have pointed to pressure from international donors and financial institutions as major reasons for its passage (Tsikata, 2003).

Informal Systems of Land Management

The informal system of land allocation operates outside the government-mandated framework. Strictly speaking, the buying and selling of land in Tanzania is illegal, as the government is the owner and provider of land. Yet, particularly in Dar es Salaam, an informal market for land operates and even thrives. Land exchanged on the informal market is considered privately owned because the people occupying it have recognized authority over the land (Kironde, 1995). Such authority does not come from any sort of government mandate, but rather from community level social structures. Though it seems as though a system of land distribution that arises more organically would better promote equality of access to land, in reality it suffers from many of the same problems as the formal system. Customary tenure is problematic because it does not ensure access to an inheritance of land for marginalized groups, particularly women (Tsikata, 2003). The Tanzanian government has historically been somewhat unwilling to accept that such a market exists, thus has made few attempts to regulate it. Kironde (2000) asserts that this has resulted because the government does not believe that such a market is a major source of urban land or because the government does not recognize the sale of undeveloped land and therefore does not acknowledge that such markets exist. Because the market relies almost totally on the interaction between buyer and seller, the price quoted for land does not often accurately reflect its value and can either be much lower or much higher than if the land were officially appraised.

It is important to note, however, that informal is not the same is illegal and that there are legal ways of obtaining land informally. Informal means of obtaining land are common in urban areas, both for the poor and other social classes (Kironde,1995). Unlike

in many other countries, however, the property rights of informal landholders are not insecure. A court case in 1985 declared that the rights of landholders in a particular area not extinguished when an area is declared a planned area (Kironde, 1995). Land can be obtained informally through a number of means including occupation without permission, allocation by community leaders and landholders, inheritance and outright purchase. Occupation of government land without a permit is rather uncommon as much of the government land within Dar es Salaam was largely exhausted, meaning it was already developed, at the time of independence (Kironde, 1995). Inheritance is the most common means of obtaining land in the inner city, particularly in the zones where Africans were made to live during the colonial period. In the city's peri-urban zone, however, purchase where actual cash is exchanged is the most common means of obtaining land informally (Kironde, 1995)

Informal means of obtaining land is not limited to unplanned areas. Frequently, planned land is allocated informally as well. This allocation takes a number of forms including local officials selling abandoned or unallocated land. Also plot allottees can sell undeveloped land. This process is, in most cases, illegal, but the government allows it for reasons of "love and affection," terms which many interpret quite broadly (Kironde, 1995). This loophole in the law is one of the major contributors to the development of a land market and the commodification of land. The final, legal, way in which people gain land through informal means is through developing land and then selling the developments on the land, which gives the purchaser the right to use the land itself.

A number of communities, particularly in Dar es Salaam's peri-urban zone, have developed their own informal, but highly regulated, systems of land exchange. There are

no formal guidelines but the buying and selling of land is regulated through local, community level structures. These meetings usually include the buyer, seller, broker and local leaders (Kombe, 2005). Such local level community-regulated structures highlight a number of aspects about the informal land market. First of all, the development of such highly regulated structures makes it very difficult for the government to deny that such a market exists. Further, it helps add legitimacy to the transactions because there are so many outside parties involved.

Still another important point to note about informal land distribution is that it is not strictly poor households that are involved in the practice. First of all, the government allocates land at a relatively cheap price. This policy was originally designed in order to assure more equal access for land. However, in practice, this policy has marginalized all but the most powerful members of society. According to Kironde (1995),

"the rationale behind such cheap land policy has always been that land is national property to which anybody, particularly low income households, is entitled and that putting a high cost on land would prevent its acquisition by the urban poor. In fact, this policy, inherited from the colonial era, has only served to allow the socially powerful members of society to get access to planned land cheaply."

Therefore, many middle and even upper income people find themselves living and sustaining a livelihood in unplanned areas (Durand-Lasserve and Royston, 2002). Because these groups can afford to purchase land at a higher price than poor groups, it is largely the activity of the middle and upper class that is driving the operation of the land market. This practice, however, may make the condition of the very poor worse (Kironde, 1995). Kironde (2000) further adds that the land market in itself is not homogenous and that each actor involved in the process

Among the places in Dar es Salaam where the land market is most visible and most salient is in the city's peri-urban zone because this is where the city is expanding most rapidly. Briggs and Mwamfupe (2001) argue that the structural adjustment policies Tanzania enacted in the mid 1980s have lessened the effects of the economic crisis for the middle and upper class. They write "there is an argument, therefore, that structural adjustment conditions have again militiated against the urban poor and have very much benefited the emerging urban 'middle class' in the peri-urban zone" (Briggs and Mwamfupe, 2001, 278). The increase in urban poverty has led a number of poor landholders to sell their land in order to meet social and economic obligations, which, in turn, limits people's ability to sustain a livelihood (Kombe and Kreibich, 2000). Those who have benefited from structural adjustment are able to buy land from willing sellers in the peri-urban zone of the city, which has created two factors that exclude the poor from land. Land speculation, where a person buys a plot of land waits until it appreciates in value and then sells the land, is a common practice in the peri-urban zone of Dar es Salaam (Briggs and Mwamfupe, 2001). At the rate the value of land appreciates, speculation is also a lucrative practice. Briggs and Mwamfupe (2001) found that a plot (of unspecified size) of the highest quality, most desirable land in the peri-urban zone was, when adjusted for inflation, selling at 350,000 Tanzanian Shillings (TSh) in the early 1990's. By 1998, the same plot was selling for 5 million TSh. Real estate, which further adds value to land, has also become a common means of investing for the middle and upper class.

When the impacts of uneven development facilitated by structural adjustment and manifested in the commodization of land are considered, pointing to the government of

Tanzania for its complacency on the issue of land tenure becomes an all too simple explanation. Through the development of land market, the natural environment has become the medium through which social relations are played out. Thus, because of its emphasis on the ways social relations and the natural environment are intertwined, political ecology becomes a relevant lens through which to analyze the issue of land tenure in Dar es Salaam

Problems, Critiques and the Missing Perspective: Toward a Political Ecology of Urban Land Tenure

Analysis of the current mode of land tenure and land distribution reveals that the system is much more complex than it originally appears. Colonial and post-colonial interactions have created a confusing, chaotic system in which formal and informal, planned and unplanned, imposed and indigenous systems operate side by side. It is clear from even cursory analysis that the system does not work the way it was intended to and that not all actors have equal access to resources. The reasons behind this, however, extend beyond government complacency and any discussion of land tenure in Dar es Salaam must take into account the broader forces that have impacted the current system. Analysis of the issue must also take into account the real way in which the current system, through the medium of the natural environment empowers some groups while simultaneously disabling others.

The first step toward a political ecology of land tenure in urban Dar es Salaam requires a reexamination of what constitutes "nature." Both the academy and policy making communities have recognized that agriculture is central to the livelihoods of people of all social classes in the city of Dar es Salaam (Sawio, 1993). Yet, agriculture is

seen as belonging only in rural areas and the antithesis of what should be contained in a modern, planned, urban space. It is often viewed as a fleeting phenomenon or coping strategy that will disappear eventually (Sawio, 1993). However, the fact that agriculture has persisted through numerous economic and political changes to the point at which it has become a near-ubiquitous activity, means that the practice of urban agriculture is not temporary, nor is the dependence on land for securing livelihood, even in a city. Thus, to think about the importance of land tenure within a city requires that one accept that an urban area is a place that contains nature and natural resources. Power relations and access to these resources impact livelihoods in a real way in cities as well.

Analysis of the issue of land tenure in urban Tanzania also brings to the forefront the importance of place and scale when looking at the issue of land tenure. A particular set of historic and present policies, from colonial policies that favored export-oriented agriculture to post colonial villagization to the neo-liberal reforms and multiparty democracy that have taken place in the last 10 years have worked together to create the current juxtaposition of formal and informal that exists in Dar es Salaam. These circumstances, though similar to those faced in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, are, in large part, unique to Tanzania. Also, the problems faced related to land tenure in urban areas are not the same as those in rural areas where a system of solely customary tenure is much more common. Understanding the specific historical and social contexts that produced the system of land tenure and land distribution that exists in Dar es Salaam becomes important when attempting to analyze the nature of that system as well as when attempting to make policy to rectify it.

If one accepts the idea that nature can, and indeed does, exist within urban areas then the issue of land tenure becomes a clear example of the way class relations are mediated through the environment. Land tenure studies in rural areas have examined, through the lens of political ecology, the ways differential power and access to land are affecting the landscape as well as the way different ideologies affect the way people view land and how it is used**.** Though the conflicts over land in urban areas do not usually involve tension between pastoralists and farmers, they do involve a complex set of forces that have enabled the middle and upper classes to have greater access to land than the poor, which threatens livelihoods of some while simultaneously altering the urban landscape.

Another important aspect missing from the conversation about land tenure in Dar es Salaam are the environmental realities of the situation. Little attention is devoted to the kinds of land marginal populations occupy within the city and the impacts this has on livelihoods in general. There has been almost no mention in the literature on this topic that is specific to Dar es Salaam, thus speculating on it becomes problematic without having conducted any primary research related to the issue. The literature does suggest that poor populations often live on land that has the least access to the city, because the land is the cheapest (Kombe, 2005). However, there is no mention of the suitability of that land for agriculture, which is crucial to the livelihoods of not just the urban poor, but people of all social classes. Urban political ecology could therefore provide an important missing link in the literature related to land tenure in Dar es Salaam through examining the impacts a land market has on the livelihoods of the urban poor.

Political ecology also offers the potential to examine, in depth, the role of each actor in the situation and how the actions of each have converged to result in the current system. It is clear that first world actors, through encouragement of privatization and implimentation of structural adjustment programs, have helped promote the uneven development that has facilitated the commoditization of land and its transformation from resource to commodity. However, first world actors cannot be held completely responsible for the situation.

It is also clear that the government is not operating as efficiently as it could when dealing with issues of land allocation and has been slow to recognize and regulate the informal land market that is currently thriving in Dar es Salaam. Attempting to formalize the informal sale of land would create more revenue for the Tanzanian government, which it could then use to make the system of land distribution more efficient. However, the government has much larger issues, such as AIDS and poverty eradication, to deal with. Therefore, blaming the failures of the system of land tenure on government complacency undervalues the complexities present. Though middle and upper class residents of Dar es Salaam have benefited somewhat from the informal land market and have used this to their advantage, one has to consider that social reality is far more complex than simply rich exploiting poor. Jobs in the formal sector do not pay well and even people in the middle and upper class often have to struggle to make ends meet. Thus, investing in land or real estate is a way of minimizing risk and spreading out assets, or may be a way of making extra income for retirement.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the case that urban political ecology is an appropriate theoretical base through which to analyze the issue of land tenure in Dar es Salaam. Though this is an issue that has been widely studied in the past, explanations of the reasons for the problem have often presented a simplified version that ignores some aspects related to the it. Political ecology, because of its emphasis on the ways power, access, local and global forces shape human interaction with the environment, becomes an appropriate medium through which to analyze the complexities inherent in the issue of land tenure and land access in Dar es Salaam. Mainstream political ecology however, has done little challenge the notion that the natural environment is contained in cities. Therefore, because of its focus on interactions between the built environment, the natural environment and social relations, urban political ecology provides a unique framework for analyzing the issue of land tenure in urban areas.

It is obvious that the system of land tenure in Dar es Salaam is a complex problem that will prove difficult to fix. This is not simply an issue of government complacency, nor is it simply a matter of those with power exploiting those who lack power. Understanding the historical background of the issue and the broader systems in which the system of land tenure in Dar es Salaam become crucial when attempting to rectify the problematic nature of the system. Other methods of studying the issue of land tenure fail to put enough emphasis on the role of outside forces in shaping the issue, ignores the way class relations are being mediated through the environment, or does not examine the environmental implications of the current land tenure system. Urban political ecology, because it thrives on trying to understand the complexities involved and emphasizes

looking at the broader picture can begin to form a solution that is cognizant of ecological,

social and historical realities.

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