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## Some Swahili Political Words

by CAROL M. M. SCOTTON\*

A STRONGLY charged Swahili political vocabulary has emerged in Tanzania, which sharply distinguishes persons and nations, in both domestic and foreign affairs, as being either for or against Tanzania's policies. The implications of the selection and usage of this vocabulary are considerable in any assessment of political trends in Tanzania, since language and culture are certainly related. Not only does language reflect cultural patterns, but language also imposes its patterns on culture.<sup>1</sup>

A word acquires meaning because it is commonly used in certain situations and commonly stimulates certain responses in listeners belonging to the same linguistic community. In other words, we can make reasonable judgements about meaning from past usage. And usage, which we have just invoked to define meaning, is correlated with the social situation. For example, we note in Swahili that people speak in the singular of going to 'our home' rather than 'my home', which suggests the communal society so much in evidence in Tanzania. Further, a Tanzanian politician and journalist was so sure that the clear correlation between vocabulary and politics extended beyond his own country that he stated in conversation: 'If you gave me a newspaper from anywhere in the world—assuming I could read the language—I could tell you where the newspaper came from on the basis of the types of words used.'

Rather than attempting to discuss systematically the relationships between the entire vocabulary of a language, and the society of its speakers, on a much more modest scale I shall deal only with a small number of political words. Few though they are, they are the key words in Swahili relating to the political situation. And, in general, their usage appears to show Tanzania as a nation (1) acutely preoccupied at home

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<sup>1</sup> Most writers have concentrated on demonstrating how culture appears to be reflected in language. But on the other side of the relationship, the fact that language not only communicates thought but helps to shape it, should also be emphasised. For an earlier study of some Swahili political words, see W. H. Whiteley, 'Political Concepts and Connotations', in *St. Antony's Papers* (London, 1960).

with patriotism, voluntary nation building, and the establishment of a classless and seemingly apolitical state, and (2) in foreign policy classifying the world into those who fit into the same classless brotherhood as that being built at home, and those who threaten the brotherhood, mainly the so-called imperialists.

It is impossible to legislate effectively concerning word usage, as the failure of numerous attempts has shown. Yet habitual exposure to certain words in certain contexts cannot help but make an impression on listeners and readers. Therefore, while the Tanzanian Government has not dictated, and cannot dictate, which words shall be used, the words which are actually used in the newspapers and by the typical Swahili speaker fit in with Tanzania's real need and obvious immediate objective: to build a psychological and emotional basis for a nation. This seems to be a clear example of the interlocking nature of language and culture: the political climate influences word usage and, once established, this usage sets up a pattern into which further political ideas must be fitted.

Certainly, the use of the same political words over and over again, whether by clear design or not, must affect the political ideas of the populace. For example, the frequency with which the phrase *kujenga taifa*, 'to build the nation', occurs in every political speech, and inevitably in every newspaper report of it, reinforces the strong commitment of the people to nation building. A conversation with an educated friend in the capital of Dar es Salaam demonstrated that this commitment, for some Tanzanians at least, is an unusually strong one. He refused to complain of his new office schedule which required him to work some hours on both Saturdays and Sundays, on the grounds that 'everyone must make sacrifices to build the nation'—*kujenga taifa*.

Turning to the area of foreign policy, we find that the use of the word *mabeberu*, to describe any nation whose policy conflicts with that of Tanzania, is common in newspapers. *Mabeberu* (meaning literally 'he-goats' with the political connotation of 'oppressive and aggressive') is used to refer to the United States Government and the former colonial governments when they are supporting policies which the Tanzanian Government opposes. But *mabeberu* is also used to describe the South African Government, and others which still control African colonies. In effect, then, in the minds of Tanzanians, many western powers are lumped with Portugal, South Africa, and other countries as oppressive and therefore anti-Tanzanian.

This intense preoccupation with national unity and apparent fear of external intervention, is not, of course, unusual in Africa. What may be

unusual (although no comparative studies exist) and is of great interest, is the extent to which the drive for national unity is closely related to the political vocabulary. In other African states the lack of a widely used 'national' language may rule this out even though English is widely spoken by many. But the commitment of Tanzania to Swahili is complete;<sup>1</sup> for example, Tanzania's laws were recently translated from English into Swahili, a difficult task requiring the coining of new words and the resurrecting of old ones to fit English legal terminology.

The political terms to be examined here are: (1) *mwananchi*, translating roughly as 'comrade' or 'citizen'; *wananchi* is the plural form; (2) *mwanasiasa*, originally used to identify men fighting for independence before *Uhuru*, now less widely used and lacking a clear-cut meaning such as 'politician' in English; *wanasiasa* is the plural form; (3) *ukoloni*, 'colonialism'; *mkoloni*, 'colonialist'; *wakoloni*, 'colonialists'; (4) *ubeberu*, 'imperialism'; *mbeberu*, 'imperialist'; *mabeberu*, 'imperialists'; and (5) *ukoloni wa mamboleo*, 'neo-colonialism'.

The judgements in this article are based primarily on material gathered in Dar es Salaam, and are valid, if at all, only for that area; up-country, sentiment and word usage may be different. The method of study was through personal interviews, a questionnaire in Swahili on certain words and the contexts in which they could occur, and an examination of some local newspapers over a period of several months.<sup>2</sup>

*Mwananchi*, 'comrade' or 'citizen', is not a new word and means literally 'child of the land or country';<sup>3</sup> but its meaning has changed and its usage has become very frequent. The *wananchi* (plural) are found in linguistic contexts with the slogan-type terms most closely

<sup>1</sup> Swahili is not only the official language of Tanzania, but is in fact widely used by all classes and racial groups both on the mainland and in Zanzibar, as well as in other areas in East Africa. Since Swahili has traditionally been the language of commerce and the second language of all the diverse peoples of Tanzania, its status as the first language of the new nation has never been seriously questioned.

<sup>2</sup> The 30 Tanzanian Africans interviewed in Dar es Salaam were selected from different regional, educational, and economic backgrounds. The questionnaire was considered only incidentally, since the number of responses was limited. *Uhuru*, one of the two daily Swahili newspapers of Dar es Salaam and generally considered more or less official because of its T.A.N.U. sponsorship, was looked at most closely. All issues of March 1965 were checked and other issues from November 1964 to June 1965 were spot-checked. (*Uhuru's* daily circulation is about 8,000, but one copy is commonly passed around among many readers.) A number of issues of *Ngurumo*, an independent Dar es Salaam daily, and some of *Kweupe*, a daily published in Zanzibar, were also checked. All issues of *Vigilance Africa*, a self-styled 'socialist fortnightly review', published in both English and Swahili (the Swahili apparently being a translation of the English) were also surveyed, from its inception in December 1964, up to the end of March, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> A Swahili proverb says, '*Mvunja nchi ni mwana nchi*' - 'the destroyer of a country is the son of the country'.

associated with the goal of nation building. These include *kazi ya kujitolea*, 'voluntary work in nation building', *kujenga taifa*, 'to build the nation', *anayependa taifa kwa moyo na mwili*, 'he who loves the nation with heart and body', *anayefuata sheria*, 'he who follows governmental laws', *kushirikiana*, 'to co-operate or participate', with the implication of participation in building the nation, and *kufanya kazi bega kwa bega*, 'to do work shoulder to shoulder'. While certainly several of these words may occur in other contexts, especially *kushirikiana*, 'to co-operate', the point is that they occur with striking regularity in political contexts with such words as *mwananchi* to the point that we can see they become part of the semantic field of *mwananchi* although not exclusively so. For example, to quote President Nyerere: 'But I come back again to say that all these accomplishments come from the fine co-operation [*ushirikiano*] between the *wananchi* and their Government'.<sup>1</sup> Another example is: 'Mr Shaba praised the efforts of the army and continued to urge them to step up *ushirikiano* with the *wananchi* in building our nation.'<sup>2</sup> One interviewee stated, '*Kufanya kazi ya kujitolea* is to take part in [*kushiriki*] any work whatsoever which offers no payment whatsoever to the individual himself unless for the benefit of all, for example to build a school and the like.'<sup>3</sup>

While *mwananchi* does mean 'citizen', it is decidedly a political term in that it implies more than just citizenship; it implies *involvement* in the affairs of the nation. The majority of those interviewed agreed that the term of more neutral connotation for 'citizen' is *raia*, and usage in newspapers and journals bears out this view. For example, perhaps just because *mwananchi* is political in meaning, *raia* was used in every instance but one in the Swahili edition of the recently-published 35-page *Report of the Presidential Commission on the Establishment of a Democratic One Party State*. In the one exception, *mwananchi* and *raia* were juxtaposed in a way which illustrates the differences in their meanings: 'We do not see TANU as an élite but as a mass party [*wananchi*] through which any citizen [*raia*] of good will can participate in the process of Government.'<sup>4</sup> The contrasted meanings of *mwananchi* and *raia* are also illustrated in this

<sup>1</sup> '*Lakini narudia tena kusema kwamba mafanikio yote haya yametokana na ushirikiano mwema baina ya wananchi na Serikali yao*'. *Uhuru* (Dar es Salaam), 6 January 1965.

<sup>2</sup> '*Bwana Shaba alisifu juhudi ya Askari Police na akazidi kuwaomba wazidishe ushirikiano na Wananchi katika kujenga taifa letu*'. *Ibid.* 3 April 1965.

<sup>3</sup> '*Kufanya kazi ya kujitolea ni kushiriki katika kazi yo yote ambayo haina malipo yo yote binafsi isipokuwa kwa manufaa ya wote, mathalani kujenga shule na kadhalika*'.

<sup>4</sup> '*Sisi hatuoni kwamba TANU ni chama cha watu wachache wanaojiona bora bali twakiona kuwa ni chama cha wananchi wote ambacho raia ye yote mwenye nia nzuri anaweza kuingia ili aweze kushiriki katika kuendesha serikali*'. *Taarifa ya Tume ya Rais juu ya Kuanzishwa kwa Serikali ya Kidimokrasi ya Chama Kimoja cha Siasa* (Dar es Salaam, 1965), p. 15.

quotation: 'The newspaper *Mwafrika* was established during the period of colonialism by a group of *wananchi* [patriotic comrades?] who decided to start it off: the group's intention was to aid the leaders of TANU and the *raia* [citizens?] in the efforts to win independence for the country. For this reason, the newspaper was very much valued [or liked] by these leaders and also by the *wananchi* themselves.'<sup>1</sup>

Another occurrence of *mwananchi*, this time in reference to Southern Rhodesia, shows the associations of the word with the concept 'child of the land', but in a strictly political sense: 'These steps would have received the assent of the African *wananchi* and certainly the assent of more of the 52,000 whites who took part in the election battle and those who refused to vote in the election on the occasion of the weak referendum of Smith a few months ago.'<sup>2</sup> In a typical quotation from *Uhuru* we find the same idea of action and involvement associated with *mwananchi*: 'Every fine [conscientious?] *mwananchi* knows that Tanzania will not be built through [foreign] aid, especially aid from imperialists. It will be built through our own efforts, the efforts of us *wananchi*.'<sup>3</sup> As would be expected, *wananchi* is also the word used by politicians in speeches as the opening greeting to their listeners.

In home affairs, the usage of *mwananchi*—which dates from Independence, *Uhuru*—not only connotes political involvement, but also keeps foremost in everyone's mind the qualities of friendly brotherhood and equality as the attributes of a *mwananchi*. These are as important as political involvement in building a strong, classless state.<sup>4</sup> One interview produced the following anecdote to illustrate the meaning of *mwananchi*: 'This is a word which is used a great deal by people who think about politics. A few days ago, as I was walking along, a man greeted me with respect, and he clearly showed this in saying, "How are you, *mwananchi*." And I answered, "Very well, thanks. *Shikamoo*." [a greeting of great respect, used often only for elders or persons of superior rank]. And

<sup>1</sup> 'Gazeti la *Mwafrika* lilizaliwa enzi ya ukoloni wakati kikundi cha *wananchi* kilipoamua kulianzisha: madhumuni yake yakiwa kusaidia viongozi wa TANU na *raia* katika jitihada ya kudai uhuru wa nchi hii. Kwa sababu hii gazeti hili lilipendwa sana na viongozi hao pamoja na *wananchi* wenyewe.' *Mwafrika* (Dar es Salaam), 31 December 1964.

<sup>2</sup> 'Hatua hiyo ingepata kibali cha *wananchi* Waafrika na hakika kibali cha zaidi ya wewe 52,000 ambao walipinga katika kura na wale walikataa kupiga kura wakati wa referendumu dhaiifu ya Smith miezi michache iliyopita.' *Uhuru*, 18 December 1964.

<sup>3</sup> 'Kila *mwananchi* safi afahamu kuwa Tanzania haitajengwa kwa misaada; hasa misaada ya Mabeberu. Itajengwa kwa nguvu zetu wenyewe. Nguvu zetu sisi *wananchi*.' Ibid. 2 March 1965.

<sup>4</sup> An interesting use of political vocabulary, and of party funds, has been the creation of the Mwananchi Development Corporation, and its numerous eponymous subsidiaries, such as the Mwananchi Publishing Co. Ltd. (which produces *The Nationalist* and *Uhuru*), the Mwananchi Engineering and Contracting Co. Ltd., the Mwananchi Trading Co. Ltd., etc. Other, private firms are listed as Mwananchi this and that in the current Tanzania telephone directory, obviously hoping to acquire a favourably disposed public.

straightaway he replied with the question, “*Mwananchi*, could you show me where the office of the National Transport Co-operative is?”. I directed him, and he said, “Thank you, *mwananchi*. Goodbye.”<sup>1</sup>

The extent to which *mwananchi* and its associated words, such as *kujenga taifa*, have permeated the everyday vocabulary is so great that these words have even become the butt of jokes. It is not uncommon for two friends to exchange such a greeting as this: ‘*Unakwenda wapi, mwananchi?*’ ‘Where are you going, friend?’, to which the clever answer is, ‘*Nakwenda kujenga taifa.*’ ‘I’m going to build the nation.’

But while classlessness is indicated by the usage of *mwananchi*, the same usage also shows a note of discord in this classless society. While in theory every man may become a *mwananchi* simply by involving himself in the nation’s progress, in fact *mwananchi* is based on a colour distinction. When questioned closely on this point, most of those interviewed reserved *mwananchi* for African citizens of Tanzania. The situation appears to be that (1) the original meaning of ‘child of the land’ for *mwananchi* is retained, while (2) the new meaning of ‘being patriotically involved in building the nation’ applies only to individuals who are acceptable under the original meaning.

The confusion of an African nursing assistant was typical. At first she stated that any man who lived in Tanzania would be considered a *mwananchi* if he helped build the nation, but then she changed her statement to any man born in the country. When asked about the possibility of people becoming *wananchi*, she decided perhaps any man who had lived in Tanzania for a long time could become one. But after further questioning, it was clear to her that there were some limitations on who can become a *mwananchi* of Tanzania, even if she was not sure what they were. On the other hand, an Arab from Tanzania (a political refugee) had no doubt that to be a *mwananchi* is *jambo la rangi* [a matter of colour], and he felt himself discriminated against as an Arab. One clear example can be given of the use of *wananchi* as a term not including Asians: ‘It is necessary that Co-operatives and other organisations should employ this power to make the *wananchi* and the group of Asians who are studying in this country hurry to contribute their wisdom [learning].’<sup>2</sup>

The usage of *mwananchi* as a matter of colour is significant, particu-

<sup>1</sup> ‘*Neno hili ni neno ambalo hutumika sana na watu ambao wana mawazo ya kisiasa. Katika siku chache zilizopita za matembezi yangu mtu mmoja aliniamkia kwa heshima—na heshima hiyo alinionyeshwa wazi akisema, “Je? hujambo, mwananchi.” Nami nilimjibu, “Sijambo, Shikamoo”; Naye papo hapo alititikia na akaniambia, “Je? Mwananchi, unaweza kunionyeshwa wapi ipo Office ya Shirika la Usafirishaji?” Nami nilimwelekeza, na akaniambia, “Ahsante, mwananchi. Kwaheri.”*’

<sup>2</sup> ‘*Vyama vya Ushirika na mashirika mengine ni lazima yatumie uwezo huu na kuwahimiza wananchi pamoja na jamii za kiasia zilizomo nchini humu kutumia utaalumu wao.*’ *Uhuru*, 15 March 1965.

larly to the thousands of Asians in Tanzania, many of whose families have lived in Africa for generations, and to the lesser number of Europeans who have permanently settled in Tanzania. If *wananchi* by definition are Africans, and if *wananchi* are also those patriotically involved in nation building, then what role is open to native or immigrant Tanzanians of other races? These people appear to be by definition denied a role in the new nation.

Part of the connotation of *mwananchi* as a term for Africans only stems from the period when only they could and would join T.A.N.U., and when the T.A.N.U. members were those active *wananchi* who were seeking independence for the nation. T.A.N.U. dropped its colour bar some time ago, and the efforts of Asian citizens towards building the nation are now publicised.

President Nyerere has stressed the necessity of stamping out racial discrimination and has said that all who help build the nation can participate equally in it. Perhaps time and these efforts will bring a change in the meaning of *mwananchi*, or perhaps it will drop out of use. But early in 1965 it was clear that *mwananchi*, when used to refer to domestic matters, was a colour term which promoted unity among Africans, yes, but also sometimes marked off Africans from others living in Tanzania.

In discussions of foreign affairs, *mwananchi* also figures prominently, with a special meaning. In regard to any international conflict, the press uses *wananchi* for those on the side of the Tanzania Government and refers to others by a neutral term or one that implies that they are tools of the imperialists. Obviously when applied to international political matters, the meaning of *mwananchi* has lost its 'child of the land' aspect, since many times, as in the case of the Congo, those on both sides of a dispute are, in fact, native inhabitants of the land in question. Other aspects of the meaning have changed, too. *Mwananchi* now means patriotically involved on the *right* side, from the Tanzania Government's point of view. And the question of colour is here irrelevant, since the term may be applied to any nation.

This is clearly illustrated by the reports on the Congo conflict, in which the 'rebels'—as well as the general populace—were always referred to as *wananchi*; the assumption seems to have been that the majority sided with the rebels. For example: 'These days, in the city of Stanleyville, *wananchi* are forced by the soldiers of Tshombe to wear white cloths to show that they are friends and are not involved in a plan to aid the soldiers of the *wananchi* in freeing [literally 'ransoming']—a term often used to describe the throwing off of colonialism or oppression of



any sort] the Congo.’<sup>1</sup> *Wananchi* has also been used in reporting other foreign conflicts: the rebels in the Dominican Republic were *wananchi*: the Viet Cong are the *wananchi* in Viet Nam. For example: ‘Recently the Government of the American imperialists admitted that it is using poison gas to kill the *wananchi* of Vietnam.’<sup>2</sup>

*Wananchi* is also used as a blanket term simply for citizens (or native inhabitants) of nations with which Tanzania has especially friendly relations, generally other recently independent nations; for example: ‘A more important matter is how the *wananchi* of Algeria have begun to draw up plans for getting rid of major problems.’<sup>3</sup> Another reference is to the people of China as *wananchi*, even though the context is a neutral one: ‘The Government of the *wananchi* of China has condemned strongly the judgement of imprisonment for 10 years handed down by the Government of Brazil for every one of the seven persons who are *raia* [citizens] of China.’<sup>4</sup> Here it is entirely possible that *wananchi* is used as a direct translation of ‘The People’s Republic of China’ and has no special significance. But I have found no instances of western nations or peoples being called *wananchi*.

We have seen that *mwananchi*, as applied within Tanzania, connotes patriotic political involvement and a classless brotherhood. It seems fair to conclude that Tanzanians, when they read newspaper accounts mentioning *wananchi* in other countries, must conclude that those people are also to be considered politically active in an admirable way, a case of transferred meaning. Curiously enough, according to a report in an English-language newspaper, *mwananchi* appears to be less acceptable in Zanzibar: ‘It was announced on Radio Zanzibar that in accordance with the ban imposed by First Vice-President Karume on the use of the word *wananchi* the Government-run co-operative store formally known as *Duka la Mwananchi* will now be known as *Duka la Afro-Shirazi*.’<sup>5</sup> An earlier report stated that Karume was opposed to *mwananchi* because it is non-African (although it does, in fact, come from Bantu roots). Afro-Shirazi is, of course, the name of the ruling party of Zanzibar.

The word *mwanasiasa* (meaning literally ‘child of politics’, although

<sup>1</sup> ‘Siku hizi katika mji wa Stanleyville, Wananchi wamelazimishwa na majeshi ya Tshombe kuwaa vitambaa vyeupe vya kuonyesha kama wao ni marafiki wala hawamo katika mpango wa kusaidiana na majeshi ya wananchi kuikomboa Kongo.’ *Uhuru*, 5 December 1964.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Hivi karibuni Serikali ya mabeberu wa Kiamerikani imekiri kwamba inatumia upepo wa sumu (gas) kuwaua wananchi wa Vietnam.’ *Ibid.* 29 March 1965.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Jambo la maana zaidi ni namna Wananchi wa Algeria walivyoanza kupanga mpango ya kuondosha matatizo makubwa.’ *Vigilance Africa* (Dar es Salaam), 1 January 1965.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Serikali ya Wananchi wa Uchina imelauma sana hukumu ya vifungo vya miaka kumi kila mmoja vilivyotolewa na Serikali ya Brazil kwa watu saba ambao ni raia wa China.’ *Uhuru*, 92 December 1964.

<sup>5</sup> *The Standard* (Dar es Salaam), 29 March 1965.

*siasa's* primary meaning is 'tact') is mainly of interest because it seems to be going out of use. It was a word very much used before *uhuru* to name any person actively working for independence—a very admirable connotation, of course—and more than one interviewee thought of *mwanasiasa* as one who sacrifices his wages for the nation (*hana fikiri ya pato*, 'he has no thought of advantage or gain').

But the interviews revealed great confusion as to just who should be called a *mwanasiasa* today. There was little doubt that President Nyerere was a *mwanasiasa*—in any case he was a *mwanasiasa* in the old sense of the word, 'a fighter for independence'—but beyond that few could agree as to exactly which groups of individuals could be called *wanasiasa*—members of parliament, party workers, area commissioners? One of the clearer definitions stated: 'When we speak of a *mwanasiasa* we mean one who is taking part in or is interested in the politics of his Government.'<sup>1</sup> But this is the most general of definitions, and it could well be used for *mwananchi* as well. Indeed, a nursemaid during her interview completely interchanged the terms *mwanasiasa* and *mwananchi*, as to some extent did most of the less literate individuals. This lack of differentiation, of course, reinforces the idea of one classless society where all individuals, regardless of their position in government or party or nation, are considered equal in the task of building the nation.

The responses to a questionnaire showed that *mwananchi* was chosen for a number of contexts where the western observer would have expected to find *mwanasiasa*, on the basis of past usage, and probable present meaning, if any. This particular questionnaire was administered to only 30 people, who were given a list of Swahili sentences, with gaps for words to be filled in from a choice of eight words. The words offered included *mwananchi*, 'comrade' or 'citizen', *raia*, 'citizen', *mwenyeji*, 'inhabitant', *mgeni*, 'stranger' or 'foreigner', *mkaazi*, 'worker', *mwanasiasa*, 'politician' or 'fighter for independence', *mtumishi wa serikali*, 'civil servant', and *kiongozi*, 'leader'. For the blank in this sentence 'Our Government is controlled by our . . . . . ' (*Serikali yetu inaondeshwa na . . . . .*), 21 out of 30 chose *wananchi*, 'citizens'. And in this sentence, 'The . . . . . of Mozambique are fighting for their independence' (. . . . . *wa Mozambique wanapigania kwa uhuru wao*), 25 out of 30 chose *wananchi*.

As to the meaning of *mwanasiasa*, interviewees were asked, 'Do you associate any particular set of morals with a *mwanasiasa* and is he necessarily admirable?' The question generally puzzled those interviewed

<sup>1</sup> 'Tunapongea juu ya *mwanasiasa* tunamaanisha kuwa yeye ni mmoja mwenye kushiriki au kupendelea siasa ya Serikali yake.'

and this may indicate that in a one-party system without a significant dissident group the citizenry simply thinks of its government as 'good'. It simply seemed not to occur to people to pass moral judgement on men active in government (although in the 1965 election some kind of judgements were indeed passed on those former members of parliament who were not returned). This puzzlement may also reflect the confusion over identifying the *wanasiasa* of today, for one cannot judge a person one cannot identify. But it is interesting to note that the more nationalistic individuals, especially young people with a good education, did make a moral judgement—whether or not they could satisfactorily say which individuals fitted the definition of a *mwanasiasa*—by stating strongly that the ideas of western political morality did not apply in Tanzania: while a western politician might be good or bad, a Tanzanian *mwanasiasa* was trustworthy almost by definition. This judgement was very common among the educated, but not quite universal. One university student commented: 'Every politician [*mwanasiasa*] thinks that wherever he walks it is necessary for him to have a baton in his hand.'<sup>1</sup>

Of more interest, however, were the responses from those who rejected the term *mwanasiasa* as inapplicable to present-day Tanzania at all. Several said that *mwanasiasa* could be applied only to a man who had fought for independence and that now the term had no meaning. One well-educated individual (Master's degree) stated flatly that he did not use the term; instead he would use *mtu wa serikali*, 'man of government', or *mtetezi*, 'representative', to cover respectively high government officials or members of parliament—anyone who in western terms might be called a politician. Of great interest was the rejection by several people of the *concept* of politician along with the word *mwanasiasa*. A common response was, 'Under a one-party system we do not need politicians.' This is a view that any one-party government might be happy to see prevail.

It is apparent that Tanzanians are either confused over the usage of *mwanasiasa* or reject it as a word not applicable in the current political and social community. Clearly it has lost some of its usefulness in the sense of 'fighter for independence'; but what about the 'men of government' and T.A.N.U. officials who supervise the nation's political development and make policy decisions? Why should they lack a special name? *Mwanasiasa* appeared only once in the newspapers surveyed, although it is true that the word 'politician' would seem to have a low frequency rate in western newspapers too; perhaps it belongs more to the spoken than the written vocabulary.

<sup>1</sup> 'Kila *mwanasiasa* hufikiri kwamba kila *atembeapo* ni lazima awe na fimbo *mkononi*.'

While *mwanasiasa* is apparently rarely used in seriousness, it is often used jokingly to refer to anyone who wears a shirt sewn out of *kitenge*, a cloth imported from Japan or Holland but designed for the (originally West) African market, often bearing political portraits, such as Nkrumah or Nyerere, and nationalist slogans, such as *uhuru*. Such a person is called *mtu wa siasa*. This usage no doubt stems from the fact that many T.A.N.U. and governmental officials do wear *kitenge* shirts on special occasions. People will also refer to anyone who likes to argue (*mbishi*) as *mtu wa siasa*, but again only in a joking way.

Certainly, if a special term for a special type of person working in politics disappears, it would reinforce the official view which the Government would like to project—that there is no special group of ‘politicians’ with a special place in the nation. This, of course, is also in line with the concept of African socialism as based on *ujamaa* (‘family’) in which all men are equal brothers in an extended family relationship.<sup>1</sup>

A number of Swahili words connote external political intervention. They are: *mbeberu*, *mabebeberu* (sometimes *wabebeberu*), and *ubeberu*, meaning approximately ‘imperialist’, ‘imperialists’, and ‘imperialism’; *mkoloni*, *wakoloni*, and *ukoloni*, for ‘colonialist’, ‘colonialists’, and ‘colonialism’; *ukoloni (wa) mamboleo* and *ukoloni wa chini chini*, both meaning ‘neo-colonialism’, with the connotation of craft and deceit; *mabepari* (or *wabepari*) and *ubepari*, meaning approximately ‘capitalistic agents of the colonialists or imperialists’.<sup>2</sup> Another word in this same series, but not specifically discussed here, is *vibaraka*—applied to any person acting as a tool or stooge of the imperialists; it has been used to describe Tshombe’s forces in the Congo.

The accumulation of layers of meaning may give a word a special connotation, difficult to translate, as is the case with *mbeberu*. One meaning of this is ‘he-goat’; a second is ‘a man who takes a thing by force or by fighting, and without payment’. It is used to some extent with both of these meanings in non-political contexts in everyday Swahili. But *mbeberu* is most frequently used in political contexts with both of these meanings and the additional and stronger meaning, ‘someone who tramples on someone else’. *Mbeberu*, *mabeberu*, and *ubeberu* are often used in the press with reference to the Government of South Africa and to the Portuguese in Mozambique and Angola. Apparently *ukoloni*, ‘colonialism’, is not a strong enough word to describe the oppression associated

<sup>1</sup> See Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa, the basis of African Socialism* (Dar es Salaam, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Many Africans in Tanzania think of *mabepari* as a word applied exclusively to those Asians who have made substantial profits as businessmen in East Africa, but the word is certainly applied to other groups as well.

with these régimes by Swahili speakers, although *ukoloni* is the word used for former colonial rule, including the presence of the British in Tanzania.

*Ubeberu* is labelled as external menace number one in the Tanzania press over and over again. A typical statement is this: 'they returned with tremendous respect for NUTA and the Government of Tanzania in regard to the progress which has been made in our country in getting rid of colonialism [*ukoloni*], neo-colonialism [*ukoloni mamboleo*], imperialism [*ubeberu*], and the practice of acting as capitalistic agents of the colonialists [*ubepari*].'<sup>1</sup> On the same day Tshombe was called 'the propaganda secretary of imperialism and neo-colonialism in Africa'.<sup>2</sup> *Ubeberu* is often applied to certain western powers, mostly to the United States. For example, 'There are American men-of-war in the Mediterranean to be used to menace the freedom of the countries of North Africa and to make these countries follow the policy of American imperialism [*kibeberu*].'<sup>3</sup> And in the socialist journal *Vigilance Africa* (published by the Chinese-owned Tanganyika Bookshop, Ltd., Dar es Salaam), passages of this type often appear: 'Nearly all the weapons in Africa are the property of the Imperialists [*Mabeberu*], especially those Imperialists who are members of that gang of hooligans, NATO, that is to say the Americans, English, French, Belgians, Portuguese, and West Germans.'<sup>4</sup> Even when its domestic racial problems are discussed, the United States is referred to in *Vigilance Africa* as practising *ubeberu*. For example: 'The Negroes have organised groups to fight for their right to be citizens of America. When they demonstrate against acts of discrimination, they are followed by police who are employed by the imperialistic American Government.'

There is a certain confusion as to how to distinguish in meaning between all these terms referring to colonialism and imperialism. Sometimes *ukoloni mamboleo* is applied to the Portuguese in Mozambique: 'The [NUTA] meeting decided to condemn strongly the *ubepari* [being

<sup>1</sup> '...wamerudi na sifa kemkem kwa chama cha NUTA na Serikali ya Tanzania kuhusu maendeleo tuliyofanya nchini mwetu katika kuondoa ukoloni, ukoloni mamboleo, ubeberu na ubepari.' *Uhuru*, 6 March 1965.

<sup>2</sup> 'Tshombe amekuwa katibu mwenenzi wa Ubeberu na Ukoloni Mamboleo katika Afrika.' *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> 'Kuwepe manuware za Kiamerikani katika bahari ya Mediterranean kulitumiwa kuhatarisha uhuru wa nchi za Afrika Kaskazini na kutaka kuzilazimisha zifuatake mwendo wa kibeberu wa Kiamerikani.' *Kuwepe* (Zanzibar), 26 May 1964.

<sup>4</sup> 'Karibu silaha zote kubwa zilizomo Afrika ni mali ya Mabeberu, hasa wale Mabeberu waliomo katika lile genge la kihumi la NATO, yaani Marekani, Waingereza, Wafaransa, Wabelgiji, Wareno na Wajerumani Magharibi.' *Vigilance Africa*, 1 December 1964.

<sup>5</sup> 'Wanegro wameanzisha vyama vya kupigania haki zao wakiwa raia wa Amerika. Wanapofanya maandamano kupinga vitendo vya ubaguzi huwa wanaandamua vikali na Police wanaoitumikia Serikali ya Marekani Mabeberu.' *Ibid.* 4 February 1965.

capitalistic tools of the colonialists] and *ukoloni mamboleo* [imperialism?] which is directed by the Government of Salazar'.<sup>1</sup> But usually *ukoloni mamboleo* is reserved for the actions of governments which apply pressure surreptitiously to other nations which they do not overtly control. This is certainly the usage in a sharply-worded political pamphlet from China, *The Representatives of Neo-Colonialism*, in which Russia is chided for being less aware of the danger of neo-colonialism than it should be. The following statement is typical: 'The Americans are making a strong effort and are very clever in making neo-colonialism [*ukoloni mamboleo*] prosper by means of its weapons; the American imperialists [*wabeberu*] are trying to slip away from colonialists [*makoloni*] and the dominion of other imperialists [*wabeberu*] so that they can rule the entire world.'<sup>2</sup>

However, while a strict distinction between *ubeberu* and *ukoloni mamboleo* is not always maintained, it is clear that both derive their force (making them stronger than *ukoloni*) from the idea of being crafty and deceitful. And, while few interviewees said that they would personally use *ubeberu*, *ukoloni mamboleo*, or *ukoloni wa chini chini* as political words in conversation, they clearly indicated that the words, with their special connotations, were commonly understood and that their usage was standard in newspapers or political speeches.

*Mkoloni*, a weaker term, is used in political contexts in newspapers, but it has also come to be used non-politically in everyday Swahili. Where *mbeberu* has gone from the non-political 'he-goat' to a decidedly political meaning, *mkoloni* has moved in the reverse direction. If a man does his fellow wrong, the wronged one may say, 'Leave off colonialism, you!' ('*Ee, bwana, acha ukoloni!*') Someone who is simply swelled with self-importance or who is annoying may be called *mkoloni*. 'You are still a colonialist' ('*Wewe bado mkoloni*') would be an apt comment to such a person.

The contrast between these derogatory words and *mwananchi*, a very favourable term, frequently encountered within the same sentence, indicates the importance of the context in both reflecting present meaning and establishing future meaning. For if the word *wananchi* is used regularly in the sense of those who are patriotically working for a national and/or international brotherhood, as opposed to *mabeberu*, it

<sup>1</sup> '[NUTA] *Mkutano umeazimia na kulaani vikali ubepari na ukoloni mamboleo unaoendeshwa na Serikali ya Salazar.*' *Uhuru*, 31 March 1965.

<sup>2</sup> '*Marekani ni mwenye bidii kubwa kabisa na ni mwerevu kabisa katika kukusa ukoloni mamboleo kwa silaha hizi, wabeberu wa kiamerekani wanajaribu kwa jitihada kubwa kuponyoka makoloni na milki za wabeberu wengine ili kujiwezesha kutawalia dunia nzima.*' *Watetezi wa Ukoloni Mamboleo* (Peking, 1964).

follows that those to whom the word *mabeberu* refers—for example, governments whose policy Tanzania opposes—will be considered as opposed to the best interests of the *wananchi* of Tanzania. And, should any new word be placed in the same context—at the opposite pole to *mwananchi*—this, too, would take on a derogatory connotation from the context. Examples of such contrasts are: ‘It is clear that these plans which are called “aid” are not aid for the benefit of the *wananchi*; it is a scheme of the colonialists [*wakoloni*] and the capitalists [*mabepari*] to continue their injustices. This indeed is neo-colonialism [*ukoloni mamboleo*].’<sup>1</sup> Again: ‘We will welcome friendship with any organisations in the world which adhere to democratic principles and the policy of fighting imperialism [*ubeberu*] and colonialism [*ukoloni*]. The capitalists [*mbepari*] of foreign nations want to use the poverty of Tanzania to spread their policies, and the *wananchi* recognise these policies and refuse to be deceived by these policies.’<sup>2</sup>

In assessing the significance of the use of any particular one of these Swahili words signifying various degrees of external intervention, a number of factors should be remembered. First, *ubeberu* and its related words have many strong connotations, covering a range from ‘he-goat’ to ‘craftiness’, which indicates that even ‘imperialism’ is not a good enough translation, for it does not carry the connotations of personal offensiveness that *ubeberu* does. To be a *mbeberu* is the complete opposite of being a Swahili *mwungwana* (a gentleman in the sense of being morally upright and kind). It is also the opposite of everything which a proper *mwananchi* or adherent of *ujamaa* stands for. Secondly, *ubeberu* is used as a cover term for all foreign powers which the Tanzania Government opposes on certain foreign policy issues, sometimes identifying all the western powers with the colonial powers in Africa.

Thirdly, *ubeberu* is constantly presented in the press and in speeches as an ever-present threat to the future of the new nation. For example, in the *Uhuru* editorial for Independence Day, 1964, we see this significant grouping of the nation’s enemies: ‘Tanzania still has problems. Our enemies—ignorance, poverty and disease—are still here. The *wabeberu* [and their agents] are increasing their efforts to cause trouble in the country. They are increasingly spreading rumours to divide the

<sup>1</sup> ‘Ni wazi kuwa mipango hiyo ya kuitwa ‘misaada’ si misaada ya faida kwa wananchi, ni mbinu za Wakoloni na Mabepari za kuendeleza dhuluma zao. Hwo ndio ukoloni mamboleo.’ *Kweupe*, 14 May 1964.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Tutakaribisha wafiki na vyama vyote vya Ulimwengu ambavyo vinafuata siasa ya Kidemokrasi na siasa yenye kupinga Ubeberu na Ukoloni. Mabepari wa nchi za nje wanataka kutumia umaskini wa Tanzania kwa kueneza siasa zao na Wananchi wametambua siasa hiyo na hawakubali kudanganywa na siasa hiyo.’ *Uhuru*, 26 March 1965.

people.’<sup>1</sup> Here we clearly see Tanzania’s ‘enemies’—domestic and foreign—linked together; the nation is at once admonished to build unity at home by overcoming material shortcomings and exhorted to stand psychologically firm in order to resist forces which would seek to destroy the nation’s unity.



As stated at the outset, the goals of this article have been modest. I have not prescribed restrictions of meaning for language in general or even for the few Swahili political terms dealt with. Rather, I have reported on how certain Swahili words have been used in certain common situations and I have suggested that these usages have some bearing on political trends in Tanzania and can help to indicate the nature of these trends. A wider sampling of words applicable to politics, or perhaps another study at a later date of the same words, could indicate whether the suggestions here merit consideration in connexion with the political vocabulary in other developing nations.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Tanzania bado ina matatizo. Maadui wetu—Ujinga, Umaskini, na Maradhi bado wapo. Wabeberu nao wanaongeza jitihada zao za kuleta fujo humu nchini. Wanazidi kuendesha minong’ono ya kuchonganisha watu.’ Ibid. 9 December 1964.