

## **Social Insecurity of the Elderly People in Tanzania Today: A Theoretical Framework**

*J. Abunuwasi L. Mwami\**

### **Abstract**

The dominant paradigm in social gerontology both in the west and in the underdeveloped countries has been descriptive and prescriptive rather than analytical. It has tended to treat the plight of the elderly people as ineluctable and arising from chronological age; and the social context of their fate has never been the focus of analysis. The purpose of this article is to provide an alternative theoretical perspective towards understanding the social problems of the elderly people in the underdeveloped countries. To this end, a socio-historical perspective is suggested. It is hereby argued that the undermining by colonialism of the erstwhile kinship relations which used to be the bedrock of the security system in the olden times, and the imposition of the new commodity relations in their place—have wrought unprecedented upheaval in the social fabric of these societies. Hence, the plight of the elderly people need to be understood within the context of the deleterious effects of these new relations.

### **1. Introduction**

Security for him (the African peasant) consists, not in the amassing of capital but in the maintenance of social links with neighbours able to help him in times of need.

Richards, *et. al.*

The imposition of settler (colonial) rule and the capitalist mode of production thus interrupted the historical continuity of African societies. The African, estranged from the authentic possibilities of the new orders, had no new alternatives for growth; their economy, technology, and culture became of marginal relevance. Indigenous customs lost their vitality and became instruments of oppression. Even the ideological elements which structure life-philosophy, art, literature and the family, atrophied and became irrelevant. It is important, therefore, to see the present in terms of the past.

Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane

Since its humble beginning in the western imperialist countries, the dominant paradigm in social gerontology has been individualistic in approach and repressive in its orientations: its focal concern has been “adjustment” of the elderly to “society and culture”. In the words of Tibbits:

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\* Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Dar es Salaam.

A considerable amount of theoretical and empirical study is being devoted to the nature and processes of *adjustment* to ageing; to the meaning of retirement; to the development of theories of *personality change* with ageing (Tibbits, C. 1963:343). (emphasis mine)

Influential research and study into old age have been premised on the assumption that the physical, mental and social features of ageing are natural and largely inevitable.<sup>1</sup> Ageing was viewed as a double process. On one hand, it was seen as a biological process in which progressive decline in cellular composition and capacity for growth in the human body, in tissue structure and in the function of granular and other organic systems operationalise. Parallel and related to this process is the decrepitude, invalidity, senility and a host of chronic diseases that accompany old age—thereby placing the elderly people into one of the most vulnerable groups in society. This bio-medical approach has sought knowledge of hypothesized biological and physiological sources of decline with age.

On the other hand, it was viewed as a sociological process in that the biological changes became determinants of the social capacities and behaviour of an individual, thereby affecting changes in the social circumstances/situation of an individual as a member of the family and community. In this way, they determined the social organization patterns with regard to the appraisal, status and care of the old person in a given society.

Such georontological theories have focused largely on individuals (as isolated automatons and have attempted to shed light on their role loss, economic dependence, adjustment and isolation in old age. Consequently, they have contributed towards blaming the elderly people for their condition.

However, recent biological and social science have clearly demonstrated that the decline of inevitable ageing is a fallacy.<sup>2</sup> Both biological and historical evidence on the ageing process show that it is not simply true that because of ageing, older people are destined to be ill, impoverished, cut off from society, sexually incapacitated, despondent or unable to reason or remember. On the contrary, the vast majority are reasonably well and able to function independently and effectively.

Massive research evidence demonstrates that the ageing process is neither fixed nor immutable. Biologists are now showing that many symptoms that were formerly attributed to ageing are in fact produced by diseases. There is a large body of scientific evidence which suggests that much of the debilitation and morbidity experienced in old age is a function of the health related behaviour and

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risk factor exposures occurring earlier in life. Thus, much of the age associated functional loss or morbidity observed among the elderly is a result of life-long accumulation of exogenous factors on the physiology of an individual.

While the above paradigm has explained ageing and the attendant changes in biological and individualistic terms, others have viewed the problems of the elderly people as part of the natural historical development towards a new form of society, i.e., the so-called modern society. In the words of Neugarten:

Although the point has been exaggerated, it is true that as a result of a slow historical process the older person is no longer the depository of wisdom which he may have been in simple and more stable societies. More recently, he is also moving away from the role of economic producer, or the role of workers, as we have usually used the term. (Neugarten, 1974: 187-198)

More specifically, the lowered status of the elderly is viewed as a function of "modernisation" process whose major aspects include, among others, the application of modern technology in the field of health and economics, urbanization, and education:

The demographic transition is a necessary accompaniment of the modernisation process. The reduction of mortality is one of the early goals of modernisation, and experience has taught that unless fertility is also curtailed, many of the hoped for economic gains become impossible. However, if fertility is reduced, the population begins to age. We must therefore conclude that the ageing of populations is also a necessary accompaniment of modernisation. Nevertheless, modernisation has thus far tended to devalue old people and to reduce their status. (Cowgill, 1974: 82).

Thus, in the Western capitalist countries, a great deal of influential research in social gerontology has tended to treat old people as a detached minority and "their problems" and "solutions" in terms of individual "adjustment" to ageing or retirement. Social gerontologists have asked only *how* old people can *adjust* to retirement, or *how* the administration of institutional care can be made more efficient.

In the underdeveloped world, gerontological studies and researches have been dominated by the same pernicious sociological traditions and perspectives that now dominate academic sociology in the United States and Western Europe. The extent to which the structural-functionalist paradigm has conditioned their conceptual apparatus have made their findings, models and theories rest upon unrealistic assumptions about human conditions and relationships in the underdeveloped world; and hence, generalisations which are normally asserted often appear exceedingly abstract, limited in their utility, and even trivial. Above

all, their formulations seem to be of little value in accomplishing the task which is central to any serious gerontologist, namely, explanation of the socio-economic and historical conditions which have led to the current deprivation, poverty, detachment, loss of status/prestige and misery of individual elderly people in the contemporary peripheral capitalist social formations.

For the sake of convenience, these studies can be characterized as *atheoretical*, *ahistorical* and *anti-humanistic*.

First of all it is fair to say that most gerontologists have tended to neglect problems of theory. Explicit theory and conceptualisation are central to any discipline both as goals of inquiry and also as tools of analysis. For one thing, to study a phenomenon, a theory or conceptualization is a prerequisite as it specifies the critical elements of the phenomenon, and describes the relationships between and amongst the elements.

But in gerontological studies, conceptualization of *phenomena*, *processes* and *relations*, and the social *conditions* under which they unfold are simply ignored. Instead, the studies tend to equate quantification with science, and yet we all know that all science is quantitative, but certainly not all quantification is science! Worse still, the tendency has been to formulate conceptual categories in ways that facilitate “application” to what are taken to be “practical” questions and obvious problems, thereby meeting the demands of the powers that be whose regard to “mere” theory is negative as it is regarded to be the least practical aspect of social theory. The consequence of this is that data are frequently treated as effectively synonymous with concepts and, indeed, with historical reality. This has led to what Gouldner has characterized as a

theoryless empiricism in which the conceptualization of problems is secondary and energies are instead given over to questions of measurement, research or experimental design, sampling or instrumentation. A conceptual vacuum is thus created, ready to be filled in by the common-sense concerns and practical interests of clients, sponsors and research funders. (Gouldner, 1972: 82)

The core concepts of “modern society” and “modern culture” which are at the very foundation of this approach entail the view that their autonomy and uncontrollability are normal and natural condition, and are viewed as having laws of their own that operate quite apart from the intentions and plans of man who created them. And its dominant focal view of man is that of a passive automaton that must “adjust” and “adapt” to the prevailing “society” and “culture”. It is this assumption that is at the heart of the repressive component of this dominant paradigm in gerontological studies.<sup>3</sup>

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The above approach has an institutional side. The elderly problems are seen as homogenous, universal and timeless. Gerontologists forget that not only social but also even *personal problems* are socially caused. Worse still, they seem not to recognize the postulate that every factor has its own origin and hence, *certain conditions for its genesis, growth, and subsequent development*. For one thing, it is not possible to make sense of what one observes or is told about without a grasp of at least its recent *history*.

Thus, lack of a genuine historical perspective in analysing the problems of ageing and the elderly has not only resulted in a mythological understanding of humanity, but has also led to excluding in its analysis, a confrontation with historical alternatives. Hence, its dedication to the phenomenon of peripheral capitalism does not permit it to suggest historical alternatives which could bring to an end man's domination by man. By endorsing the basic socio-economic structures prevailing in these countries, gerontologists are, in a sense, approving the status quo.

Lastly, most gerontologists have exhibited a certain kind of thinking which amounts to what Baran has called a "cold grimace of misanthropy and cruelty" (Baran, 1957:398) which have emanated from their writings. Taking their cue from their predecessors and neo-Malthusians, gerontologists have continuously and systematically disseminated a pernicious ideology which is hateful and contemptuous of human happiness and disdainful of human life - and in particular if the happiness and the life involved are those of the starving, disease-ridden and desperate masses: the unemployed and the "greying populations" in the underdeveloped countries. As Mandel once remarked: "...there is a rising irrational and pathological tendencies towards contempt and hatred to humanity among the possessing classes". The sheer number of the elderly people is viewed as a "problem" (Mandel, 1972) for no other significance can be attached to formulations such as the following:

As will be seen, the severity of the *problem* of a greying population varies: in certain developed countries the *age-boom* is already experienced in full force, in certain developing countries its effects are beginning to emerge as matters for national concern, while in other less developed countries, the problem is restricted to relatively few individual cases... *The greying of the population constitutes a major problem for the entire world, and in that sense requires the most serious economic and political attention.*<sup>4</sup> [emphasis mine]

Given such a disdainful and contemptuous attitude to human life, it is only logical to find policy prescriptions for the problems of the elderly in Africa modeled on those distilled exclusively from the historical experience of the European and North American capitalist nations: policies whose content and

spirit is to “contain” and “adjust” the elderly people to the existing “society” and “culture”.

Worst of all, problems of the elderly are conceived to be caused by undefined and untheorised problem of “urbanization”, “rapid rural-urban migration”, “industrialization”, “modernity” and “post-modernity”. All these phenomena are alleged to be responsible for the displacement of the elderly people from their traditional roles and status, poverty and misery.

At the Dakar conference, for example, “migration”, “industrialization”, “education” and “urbanization” were singled out as major determinants in the marginalisation of the elderly and the attendant problems in Africa. Professor Nana Apt and Ag. Rhaly had this to say:

Immediately following political independence, African societies abandoned agriculture in favour of industrialization which seemed to them the only way to achieve economic autonomy and assure their development. Urbanization which resulted from this choice deprived the countryside of its most dynamic and innovative manpower. The technological choice made, moreover, have contributed to the marginalization of the aged persons whose wisdom is wasted. (Tout, 1987: 87).

The problems of such formulations lie in the fact they are speculative as well as imprecise in so far as the phenomenon of industrialization and urbanization in Africa are abstracted from their *historical* and *social* contexts; and the consequence of it is that social reality is mystified instead of being illuminated.<sup>5</sup>

What is forgotten by these scholars is that industrialization and urbanization in Africa are neither independent variables, nor were they internally induced: they are the consequences and long-lasting heritage of colonialism with the distorted “dualist” structures of economies and societies. In addition, it is the colonial legacy which have influenced and still continue to determine the *volume*, *direction* and *character* of industrialisation, urbanization and migration. The strange juxtaposition of the capitalist sectors which are vertically integrated with the metropolitan economies and the surrounding “traditional”—mostly subsistence sectors—serving the former by cheap labour, cheap raw materials and cheap food (but unable to develop and transform them) is typical of the colonial economies in the politically independent states. It is this type of industrialisation in the present underdeveloped countries which Szentes has characterised as “false industrialisation”:

The type of industrialisation in Africa does not create the ‘engine’ of industrial and technical development for the national economy as a whole, which comes into operation in all cases of industrialisation. Rather, it is a false industrialization which

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'implants' only secondary, surface elements of manufacturing industry; certain industrial enclaves, which by the nature of their output and input structure, product orientation and the technology applied remain almost as isolated from the major part of the economy and society as the primary producing export enclaves (Szentes, 1976: 797-789).

Likewise, urbanisation and migration are more clearly related to the capitalist and lop-sided character of the colonial situation. Historically, urbanization and the associated mass of unemployment appear only under the *capitalist conditions*: pre-capitalist traditional societies did not face this problem. The same applies to migration.

In Africa, pre-colonial migration were associated with internecine warfare, disasters, the search for fertile farmlands, and colonisation of new areas. But with the advent of colonialism, most of the population movements were linked to the economic strategies of the colonial governments. The development of the foreign export sector [such as mining, plantations, and administration under colonial rule] resulted in considerable inequality in both the growth of the sectors of the economy, and the distribution of the benefits of such growth. Today, peripheral capitalism which is expressed in lop-sided development and the general *commoditisation* of the neo-colonial economies together with the intensification of *commodity relations*, constitute the principal and underlying root cause of most of the social problems prevailing in Africa in general and in Tanzania in particular – unemployment and the attendant search for wage-labour included.

### **2. Social Security Systems in Tanzania**

Like any other developing country, Tanzania has no national (universal) statutory social security system for its elderly people. The only form of old age protection that has been available since the period of British colonialism is the one restricted to a wage/earning population alone who represent a very small minority of the total working population. The majority of the elderly people (who incidentally happen to be peasants in the rural countryside) either fend for themselves; or else are taken care of by their kinsmen, neighbours, or friends.

One of the explanations for the absence of a national wide social security system of the working people is a historical one: it is embedded in the racist and colonial British policies with regard to the colonial subjects. In 1944, for example, the British government report for the Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) discussed the various security provisions for Europeans, child welfare services, health and housing provisions for needy persons, workmen's compensation, and private insurance. As regards Africans, the report pointed out that:

In general, the reserves are expected to support their own destitute natives.... No native is at present entitled to the government Old Pension and this fact along with many others is indicative of the general attitude towards natives. This attitude is roughly that the home of the native and his economic and social security is to be found in his reserve. The years he spends in town are merely an interlude. (Hampson, 1980).

Barring racist and paternalistic attitudes and policies inherent in all the colonial masters (today and yester year), implicit in this ideological rationalisation is the notion that the unemployed old people in the rural and urban areas have nothing to fear as their relatives will look after them under the so-called extended family system. To-date, this belief carries with it the assumption that the traditional African family and kinship system is still extant; the economic, social and the deleterious dislocations, changes and transformations that have been wrought by colonialism on the African social fabric notwithstanding. This unfounded belief has even shaped and influenced the orientation and conceptualisation of both scholars and practitioners with regard to the nature of the care and social support system for the elderly people in Africa in general, and Tanzania in particular.

The theoretical assumption behind this axiom has its material base in the tradition African economic and social structure: parents were expected to get economic, social and psychological support from their children and other kinsmen when they grew older. This expectation was not left to the discretion of any one individual member of the household, compound or village community as such, rather it was embedded into the entire socio-cultural fabric of the traditional African social system of kinship. Children were socialised in such a way that care of ageing parents was their responsibility. It was believed, for example that an undefined curse would befall children who neglected their ageing parents; and as long as the material base that supported such norms and beliefs continued to exist, this threat worked effectively in favour of the ageing population. The reality of ageing in contemporary Tanzania, however, points to a totally different trajectory.

### **3 Evidence: Facts and Figures**

On the basis of population census of 1967, 1978 and 1988, Omari (1992) notes that the mortality rate of the aged in Tanzania is quite high, that is, after the under-five, old age mortality rates come next. Consequently, for the last two decades or so, the percentage of old age group has remained almost constant (i.e. stagnant) despite the phenomenal increase in the general population of the country as a whole. (See Tables 1 and 2). The conclusion that he draws from the above data is that old age population has a high mortality rate, and that is precisely the reason it has remained stagnant for over twenty years. He goes on further to state that on the basis of a study conducted on a few retired officers

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from the civil service and private sectors, the revelation has been that many of them die within a period of two years after their retirement

**Table 1: Age Specific Mortality Rate per Thousand**

<i>Age-group</i>	1978		1988	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Under 1	129	159	118	131
1-4	103	109	72	84
5-9	42	50	19	22
10-14	17	19	14	17
15-19	28	31	24	28
20-24	37	42	32	38
25-29	39	43	34	40
30-34	40	45	35	42
35-39	44	49	40	47
40-44	52	56	44	56
45-49	65	74	60	71
50-54	85	95	81	94
55-59	111	127	109	126
60-64	156	179	158	180
65-69	211	144	221	248
70-74	304	355	322	354
75-79	404	493	455	485
80	1000	1000	1000	1000

**Source:** Population Census Results, 1978 and 1988

**Table 2: Population distribution by Broad Age Group, 1967, 1978 and 1988**  
(Percentage)

<b>Age Group</b>	1967		1978		1988	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
0-14	43	45	45	47	44	47
15-64	52	49	52	49	51	48
65	5	6	4	4	5	5

**Source:** Population Census Results: 1967, 1978 and 1988

Omari goes on to observe that in the rural countryside, old people are in a very precarious and agonizing condition. He contends that the traditional care of the elderly in Tanzania today is non-existent due to industrialization, elitist education, rural-urban migration and insufficient incomes from children who are supposed to look after their elderly parents and relatives. Furthermore, he advances that the traditional extended African family has faltered to the extent of

breaking down. On the basis of the above factors, Omari has recommended a number of measures to rectify the appalling and precarious condition amongst the elderly. Among these are measures to:

- (a) increase the amount of old pension scheme and insurance benefits for the retirees;
- (b) strengthen the family institution from disintegration by way of helping families and households to get out of the "poverty of culture", and
- (c) combine the traditional African way of caring for the aged and the Western type of institutionalized care system, i.e., something akin to the day-care centers which have now proliferated in the urban centers of Tanzania.

Another study by Safari (1993) is, indeed, revealing. According to him, the ageing population Tanzania is in trouble as social security is non-existent for the majority of them; and secondly, given the fact that even what is acquired by those who benefit from it is not sufficient for subsistence. He observes that the traditional means of care and social support for the elderly, namely, children help, is not functioning properly. Out of a sample of 1189 old people from 13 regions that he studied, only 236 (20%) received some form of assistance from their children, while 331 (28%) received completely nothing. The explanation he advanced for this state of affair is that the children's income is too meagre to be shared with their parents.

Safari goes on further to observe that even community care—i.e., from kin and neighbours in the village—was inadequate in some regions, and none at all in others. Out of 1189 elders, only 23 (2%) received community assistance while the rest, 1166 (98%) received virtually nothing. His findings have led him to point out that growing old in Tanzania is both "stressful and hopeless". And he concludes by posing the following questions: "If children do not help; social security is inadequate; and community assistance is not available, to whom then can one turn for help"? In other words, is it not, therefore, right and rational that "some elderly people abandon their homes and community and go to streets to beg in order to survive"?

In a recent study by Kate Forrester, the same issues and problems have been echoed. Compared with the past when older people would be assured a comfortable old age, today there is less support from the family and community partly due to the fact that

Young people move to towns and are unable to assist with day-to-day needs of old people, and in many cases cannot help financially. In the past, older people would be assured of a comfortable old age by the number of cows they would receive when they

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married off their daughters, but as part of the social changes sweeping through Tanzania, daughters often now decline to marry, or impoverished potential parents-in-law refuse to part with cattle, if they possess them at all (Forester, 1999: 60).

She reiterates the point that many elderly people today are increasingly having difficulties in obtaining basic needs such as food, clothing, water and housing because "“families are becoming more fragmented, that network of help is dwindling”. Forester further points out that nowadays the roles of the elders have been reversed. In comparison with the past when the roles of the elderly were mainly advisory and ceremonial, today, “many older people have much more active role”.

Due to the increasing difficulty in obtaining basic needs occasioned by both harsh economic conditions obtaining in the country, as well as the declining social support and care from family and the community:

Many older people are now forced to generate income simply in order to keep themselves alive and to pay for medical treatment and taxes. In addition, many have also shouldered the responsibilities of running a family, rather than just contributing to its running as in the past—many older people have been left with grandchildren by parents who have gone off somewhere else or have died, or by young single mothers who cannot cope with bringing up children ... This new active role is much more tiring and stressful than their traditional roles, and is also less rewarding. (Forester, 1999: 62)

From the foregoing it is abundantly clear that the traditional means of support and care for the elderly in Tanzania are inadequate and, not infrequently, non-existent. The fact today's children do not help much and that the available state (public) social security assistance is, despite its selectivity, not readily available either raise the immediate questions. First, what has gone wrong with the much vaunted African traditional social security systems? And, how do we then account for this? Secondly, under the extremely hard and harsh economic conditions now prevailing in Tanzania, how do elderly people manage to live and survive?

The above-cited studies about the social and economic conditions of the elderly people in Tanzania have been more *prescriptive than* analytical. They have tended to treat differences between the fortunes of individual elderly people largely as a function of the *undefined* and *untheorised* “forces of modernization”, “urbanization”, “industrialization” and “rapid rural-urban migration” – as well as their personal and cultural peculiarities. This approach which takes on an essentially *static* and *ahistorical* view of societies in Africa—thereby ignoring the dynamics of *pre-colonial change* and *transformations* and the hard realities

of colonialism—has deformed their view of the Tanzania social formation with regard to both social structure and the associated *processes* and *relations* which constitute the forces behind the deprivation and marginalization of the elderly people in Tanzania.

And yet, we cannot hope to understand, let alone formulate, adequate gerontological theory and social security policy for the majority of the elderly people who suffer from poverty, diseases and misery without first learning their past economic and social history that has given rise to their present predicament. But in studying the conditions of the elderly people in Tanzania, most gerontologists have tended to *ignore*, *disguise* or even *dismiss* the colonial situation both past and present of the contemporary Tanzania social formation. This has resulted into serious misconceptions about ageing and the associated social problems.

The tenor of this paper is that the *social relations* which promote both social prosperity for the elderly people on one hand, and social penury, on the other, cannot be discerned by merely eliciting the values and cultural ideals which surround old age. The latter definitely do constitute a significant backdrop to the ageing process, but they do not determine its course.

The article makes a number of assertions. One is that, in pre-colonial Tanzania the elderly were placed in high esteem and their care and social support was not the responsibility of an individual person or “family”, but a collective community endeavour which was in-built into the indigenous African social system. The advent of colonialism<sup>6</sup>, however, and the attendant *transformations* of the *indigenous production relations*—and especially the imposition of the institution of *private property*, *capitalist division of labour*, and the *production of commodities*—wrought unprecedented social upheaval in the traditional social fabric.

Second, the article demonstrates that the prejudices against the elderly people, their loss of status neglect and poverty; the disintegration of the “extended family” and the wider kinship system are all associated with the emergence of colonialism and capitalism in Tanzania. It contends that the colonially imposed commodity relations and the corresponding exchange/value which constitutes and so remains the dominant social form of products—has had profound and debilitating effects not only on the quality of personal relations, but also on the welfare of its members both at community and at the household level. The new social relations, therefore, have led not only to household’s loss of economic autonomy, but also to the breakdown of harmonious inter-personal relations amongst members of the household and between households; the destruction of

the delicate balance of economic rights and social obligation have resulted in growing antagonism between members of the household; and also there has occurred a deterioration of both conjugal and filial relations as well as kinship relations among the (village) communities. All these factors, coupled with general mass poverty that is characteristic of the whole Tanzanian social formation have inevitably and adversely affected the quality of life and welfare of the elderly people in the society today.

#### **4. Traditional African Egalitarian Relations and the Quest for Subsistence Security<sup>7</sup>**

Given the low level of development of the productive forces in pre-colonial societies in Tanzania, individuals on their own were unable to produce the material means of life: food, drink, shelter protection against different types of inclemencies, and insurance in old age. For this reason, people were obliged to work *collectively* due to their weakness in the face of the mighty forces of nature. Thus, the main productive force here was the strength of the *collective* itself—be it in the homestead, clan or village. It was on this basis that the collectivist communal relations in the form of kinship relations arose and developed.

These together with age and sex, organised both production and other social activities which ensured the continuity of the people. It is hereby argued that an understanding of the social security system in these societies is best developed from an analysis of the nature of the production and distribution systems with an examination of the whole ensemble of social institutions which supported it.

The fear for food shortages has, in most pre-capitalist social formations, given rise to what might appropriately be termed as a “subsistence ethic”. This ethic which the communal producers in Tanzania shared with their counterparts elsewhere in Africa was a consequence of living close to the margin. A bad crop would not only mean short rations, but also the price of eating might be humiliation arising from dependence on others which, if prolonged over years, would bring shame on the concerned household. Typically, the communal producer sought to avoid the failure that would ruin him. Hence, the primordial goal of the communal producer was the need for a reliable subsistence. It is precisely for this reason that many of the technical and agronomic practices were adopted such as the use of seed variety, ridging, “ngoro”, “swedden”, etc., so as to avoid undue risk.

The problem of the communal producer in Tanzania, therefore, was that of providing for his household a *reliable* minimum income (subsistence). While a minimum subsistence has solid physiological dimension, we must not overlook

its social and cultural implications. In order to be a fully functioning member of a village community, a household required a certain level of resources to discharge its necessary ceremonial and social obligations, as well as to feed itself adequately to continue to cultivate in the next season,. Thus, to fall below this minimum was not only to risk starvation, it was also to suffer a profound loss of standing within the community.

The pre-capitalist social formations in Tanzania were, in a sense, therefore, organised around this problem of the minimum income. They were organised to minimize risk to which its members were exposed by virtue of its limited or low development of the productive forces, as well as the caprices of nature. Traditional forms of patron-client relationships, reciprocal and redistributive mechanisms which prevailed may be seen from this perspective.

Production was of use-values for communal use, and was controlled through kin relations which controlled the distribution of land, labour-power and the instruments of labour. The purpose of production was food production as well as non-food subsistence production. In other words, while village communities and people were associated with a territory, rights to use the resources were determined by kin and quasi-kin connections.

While the pre-capitalist societies were singularly ill-equipped to provide for their members in the event of collective disaster, they did, however adequately provide households social insurance against the normal risks of agriculture through an elaborate system of exchange. Here, the implication is that *all* were entitled to a living out of the resources within the village community, and hence no one would starve while others had some surplus. Thus, the modest but critical redistributive mechanism did nonetheless, provide minimum subsistence insurance for everyone.

Thus, within the village context a wide array of social arrangements typically operated to assure a minimum income to inhabitants, i.e., stability and security of subsistence income. Everyone was expected to be charitable, to help out kin and neighbours in difficulties, etc. Webs of kinship reciprocities maintained a collective resilience among household dependence upon pooling and sharing domestic product. The logic of gift-giving was most intense among close kin, within descent groups and between friends; but variants of reciprocity were evident between individuals of different social status. Even relations between chiefs and their subjects, for example, reflected special cases of a mutuality in which reciprocal obligations, rights and norms were closely defined and morally enforceable—they were not authoritarian and paternalistic as in the case today.

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The philosophy of mutual help and interdependence predominated in all walks of life where sharing of products and risks predominated. One of the important institutions which conferred a degree of collective security for its constituent members was the household which was both a productive and consumption unit. In collaboration with other institutions in the wider village community, it was the source of insurance against individual distress due to illness, pests, or crop failure.

It was not money but social networks of gift-giving, mutual help and exchange of goods and services which provided important extra familial sources of emotional support and material security which were only partly met by a single household unit. For instance, in the African kinship system, the cultural norm of concern and solicitude was one of the features most characteristics of kin relations. Concern here implies a strong sense of identification with others, especially feeling with and for others, particularly if they are sick or confronting other difficulties. Thus, concern here was a matter of sharing, a sense of or duty of helping others. It also embodied the value of trust, of closeness and intimacy and beyond the parochial resources of the household, shared *values, obligations* and *norms* seemed to reinforce mutual assistance.

### **5. The High Esteem Accorded to the Elderly**

In a society in which for most households the object of production was the reproduction of the conditions necessary for household consumption; where subsistence security depended on the agronomic influence, on regular weeding, mixed cropping fallow-crop rotation, and manuring and other agricultural practices, the role of the elderly was highly crucial. Apart from the fact that they were resources managers who controlled rights to critical resources, they were in addition repositories of essential technical knowledge concerning local resources. They were the ones who had acquired the necessary precise knowledge as to the time to prepare the land for sowing; when and how to sow; how long to let the land lie fallow; what soils suited certain crops; what varieties of the same crop would succeed in certain localities and what varieties in others, and how to ensure rotation.

On the basis of their economic and social contribution, old people were respected, and even revered for their wisdom, and for their knowledge and control of the religious secrets of their people. They were thus treated with kindness, fed and attended to when sick or decrepit, and never left to starve. Everywhere, the old, the feeble and the invalid were provided with the basic needs of subsistence.

Old women, too, were treated with great respect by the society. They were cared for, and their advice was sought and frequently taken. Although they were never

leaders in funeral ceremonies, their opinion as members of the patrilineage in-charge were sought, and considered important. In Ubende, Mpanda district, for example, a woman was privileged to be a senior wife in polygamous households as her position gave her jurisdiction over the other wives and their children.

Among the Bende people,<sup>8</sup> women assumed more responsibility, became more assertive and tendered their advice more frequently as they became older. They had a more profound knowledge of and interest in mythology, and possessed a fund of experience drawn from journeys, attendance at meetings, quarrels, etc. They presided over the rites associated with women activities like birth, puberty, lactation, etc. Together with old men, they were the depositories of myth, were responsible for the handing on of tribal norms, values and customs, and were therefore autonomous ritual actors who actively participated in the creation, transmission and maintenance of the values of their society. To be old was, therefore, to be respected; though not necessarily to be revered.

Those who neglected their obligations were subjected to severe criticism. When someone was old and especially weak and feeble, the household was expected to mobilize the provision of comfort, care and material support. It was considered callous and reprehensible for one to desert an ailing old person, or indeed, anyone who is sick. The principle was that as children and parents grew older, their roles ideally began to reverse. The children were meant to take on the nurturing role and care for their parents much as their parents cared for them when they were young.

Even in the absence of negative sanctions such as public criticism, people adhered to a philosophy of domiciliary care for the aged and dying. The sick, old and feeble were ideally attended to by kin. Female relatives would massage the patient's limbs, provide sustenance, wash the patient, move her/him in or out of the sun, and patiently and humorously attend to any complaints or requests. Care givers had rotating shifts such that someone was always awake to tend the patient. If the condition of the patient appeared to be worsening, those in attendance would intensify care.

Unlike today, the death of an old person (male or female) was not simply a personal loss for the household members, rather it was a social loss. A link with leaders—the dead—was lost, as well as the knowledge and wisdom—sacred and secular—of a lifetime. To a certain degree, she/he was also sacred because of her/his nearness to death and because of the sacred loss which he/she held.

Thus, elders were respected not just because of household background or accomplishment but more importantly because they guided and nurtured the

young generations into maturation so that they too, in turn, could take over the impending responsibilities of social production and reproduction in all aspects of life: cultivation, herding, hunting, fishing, socialization, etc.

### ***5.1 The Normative context of Old Age: Some Notes***

As already noted, the household was the primary institution of social security for every individual. In these societies, the elderly did not see themselves as a burden or as a problem—even if they were unable to produce enough for themselves. They expected others to care for them when they could no longer do so. Entitlement to care was naturalised within the culture, and elders did not have to negotiate care as if it was a favour, rather it was perceived as a right.

Thus, care giving was normatively described as being the responsibility of all adult children and grandchildren, and it was the responsibility shared equally among children. If a child failed to discharge his/her duty, others would do it, especially if the old person had no children. Thus, the web of care-taking went beyond the limited confines of the individual household of the homestead. It was located in kinship. The elderly lived in a moral universe of high caring standards, in which the ideal seemed to be that every person was directly obliged to meet the needs of other persons all the time.

In describing the high status of the elderly people in pre-colonial societies, gerontologists have correctly and rightly attributed their esteem to matters directly related to their economic contribution: their role in the production processes as being depositories of detailed knowledge and skill essential for production and reproduction of the means of production and subsistence. While the above is true, I tend, however, to think that most gerontologists—while studying other peoples' culture—have not critically examined the essence, that is, the *meaning* and *values* attached to certain relationships between and amongst members of the household, clan or lineage which they studied. Not infrequently, they have preoccupied themselves with *forms* and not the *essence* of social relationships; and have assumed that value is of a certain quality and magnitude, and that its meaning is self-evident.

All, without exception, have always projected a particular set of meanings and values to all peoples everywhere, and they have never questioned this practice because they assume it to be self evident. For example, the English expression and meaning of 'father' has been projected to be the same all the time and everywhere. In this respect, fatherhood is the same in every culture—for it is a matter of engendering. Likewise, motherhood, is the same in all cultures at all times and places because in its distinctive features and its definition: it is a matter

of a child being born of, or engendered by, a woman. This perspective assumed that mother is mother the whole world over, and that mothers can be compared.

The truth is that to project a particular set of values and meanings of say, the English father/mother relationship to all people everywhere is, according to me, erroneous and at best preposterous. For one thing, not all genealogies are equal: the defining features of the genealogy may be variously valued, and have different meanings and significance to different cultures.

In the traditional African kinship system,<sup>9</sup> the brothers of the ego's father are his fathers and their wives are his mothers. The respect, obedience and deference to his father and mother are as well required for the brothers of the ego's father and their wives. On the other hand, the brothers of the ego's father, would treat the ego as their own son, having the same obligation of protecting him against any danger as his own father would do. Likewise, the wives of the brothers of the ego's father would treat the ego as their own son with more or less the same duty of nourishing him as their own.

Here the use of the term 'father' is quite inconsistent with the implications of the English word 'father' as genitor. Rather, it suggests a guardian to care for, protect, and watch over the welfare of all. Thus, for some cultures in Tanzania, the stress in father/son or mother/son or child/parent relationship is one of equality, sharing, trust and mutual assistance. It is a relationship of dependence, obedience and respect on the part of the son, for the father or mother is superior, has authority, provides care and protection for the son, and demands and expects respect and obedience from the son.

The Bende, for example, formulate the relationship between *tata* (father) and *mwana* (child) in terms of *authority* which is exchanged and maintained for ever. The *tata* provides for *mwana* when he/she is growing up and weak and without knowledge, but when the *mwana* grows into adulthood, the *mwana* returns the care and the provisions which the old person (*tata*) requires.

Thus, in Ubende, the terms *tata* (father) or *majo* (mother) are special and distinctive terms which mark and denote responsibility, authority, and independence. The father or mother is responsible for feeding, protecting, loving and caring for the child when it is still young. But even if it grows into adulthood, a child—whatever the age—is required to revere, respect and obey his/her parents; and this refers to all fathers and mothers (*tata/majo*) whether biological, social, or putative. Likewise, on the other hand, being a *mwana* (child)—regardless of age—denotes obedience, subordination, deference and dependence. And since the *mwana* was protected and cared for during childhood,

then it is its responsibility to protect and care for its father/mother in old age. So it is a dialectical relationship which involves a myriad of responsibilities, rights and obligations for all parties involved. This is true for all and every genealogical relationship: they have a distinctive meaning and value embedded into them.

Thus, the high esteem accorded to the elderly people was in part due to the array of values and meanings attached to designate interpersonal relationships in the societies under review.

## **6. Colonialism, Commodity Relations and the Fragmentation of the Household and Kinship Relations**

The breaking down of the African self-sufficiency, i.e., the destruction of African subsistence agriculture became the primary aim of colonialism; for by doing so African labour would be available for plantations, 'public' works and cash crop production. The effect of the particular form of capitalist development in Tanzania was to *rupture* the cycle of communal production, to expand *commodity production*, and in the process *individuate* communal society, thereby transforming the erstwhile communal producers into peasants. The tissues of the moral economy were stripped away, making peasants *vulnerable* to the market forces and other natural crises. The mode of capitalist accumulation—chiefly through merchant capital—expanded the role of the market; and by intensifying commodity relations in the countryside the erstwhile subsistence guarantee was undermined, jeopardised, and ultimately destroyed. For the poor old people this has had an unprecedented transformation in their lives: it has meant not only a life of poverty, but of perpetual and insecure poverty.

### **6.1 The Process of Commoditisation**

The whole ensemble of both *economic* and *extra-economic* coercion were brought to bear on the erstwhile communal producer, the purpose of which was to re-organise and *restructure* production; from production of use-values for communal consumption to production of commodities and the associated commodity relations. The worst tragic result of the destruction of the natural economy and hence the autonomy of the household, together with the kinship relations, has been the drastic deterioration of the material conditions of the elderly people who, today, are increasingly being forced to care of themselves.

### **6.2 Labour and Labour Migration and their Effects**

The question of labour supply brings us to the heart of the problem which confronted all colonial states in their initial contacts with the indigenous people. The lead, mica, diamond and gold mines which were discovered in the country;

the railways and roads that were to be opened up and the sisal and coffee plantations—all required native labour. But to secure this labour was no easy task. In a community where each household provided its own food, built its own house and hut, and made most of its clothing and domestic utensils, the idea of seeking employment on a settler farm or a mining settlement was definitely out of question. For this reason, therefore, various means to secure labour were resorted to. Forced labour, taxation and land control (land alienation) were the first instruments used to secure an unimpeded flow of labour in the country. Hence, at the centre of the stage was the colonial state itself.

Demographically, the withdrawal of a substantial fraction of young adult males from the village deprived it much of its potential productive forces. Economically, at the household level, it meant fewer number of people who would be available for fishing, cultivation, herding, hunting etc.. Culturally as well, the pattern of migration tended to dilute the distinctiveness and autonomy of the village's traditions; and looked at from another angle, the tendency was to bind the village's economic and social ties to the urban sector.

Financially, the most significant links were now external, not internal, and the nexus of local social pressures and economic imperatives that held the subsistence-oriented village together was bound to weaken. The resulting social disorganisation was likely to rule out the mutuality and shared interests and impoverishment that typified involution, and produced instead a pattern of mutual hostility.

Labour migration to enclaves of capitalist development in Tanzania has been central to reshaping and moulding the nature of the rural settlement group or homestead as well as in undermining (although not completely destroying) the substantive forms of African traditional life, especially social institutions relating to the family and kinship relations. For one thing, the very physical removal of able-bodied individuals from their villages have inexorably altered the fundamental relationship in the village homesteads: between father and son, uncle and nephew, brother and brother, woman and man.

The specific nature of the impact of the process of migration can be seen in relation to the disappearance of many of the functions of the wider kinship especially those centering on kin groups such as clans, lineages and kindred. It has heralded the process whereby kinship relations have shrunk entirely to the compass of man's family of birth and family of marriage. In turn, this shrinkage has had profound repercussions for social support networks provided by the wider kinship relations which alone have provided a reliable subsistence security for the elderly people in the country.

### **6.3 The Sociology of Taxation**

Everywhere, taxes were—and have been—the major institutional threats to the labouring people in Tanzania—the elderly people included. The more rigid, inflexible and regressive the tax regime has been, the more unpopularity it has engendered. Historically, taxes have periodically enraged people into rebellions. Taxes have been the main route by which wealth in labour or in kind or cash was taken from the labouring people. However, the distinctiveness of the colonial taxes—contemporary and yesteryear—lie not so much in the fact that they were higher, but in the nature of those taxes, as well as the blind rigour with which they were imposed.

First, and most important, the taxes that bore more heavily on the labouring people were fixed charges that had no relation to one's ability to pay or to his subsistence needs. The then head tax and the present development levy which is imposed equally even on the elderly people, for example, was ultimate in its regressive fiscal measures. It fell indifferently on both rich heads and poor heads in good and bad times with the result that its actual burden on the tax paying individual fluctuated wildly from year to year.

The ways through which taxes were administered in the colony was at least as important as the form they took. Many pre-colonial taxes were in principal fixed as well; but the chief difference was that the traditional chief was, in the eyes of the subjects, legitimate and that he did not possess the means to impose his will. Moreover, the tax collectors approached the subjects humanely – as individuals whom they knew and not impersonally as is the case today.

One of the notable characteristics of capitalism is its tendency to reduce everything, including human beings, to a common denominator. Thus, working through formulas, procedures, regulations and laws, these had deleterious effects on kin peoples in the society. For the extraction of taxes destined for the civil sphere (the colonial state) initiated the fragmentation of the kinship division of labour. The split between public/civil and kinship and domestic spheres also altered the unit of kin people's social identity. By calling people into labour services according to categories of gender and age, and not according to their social personhood, the colonial bureaucracy spelled the process of divorcing the people from their integrating influence of kin roles. In other words, in the civil sphere, people started to have abstract identities as *wanawake* (women), *wanaume* (men), *wafanyakazi* (workers), *manamba* (numbers), *toto* (children), etc.—although in kin-defined shere, they still remained as simultaneously as men, brothers, husbands, sisters, fathers, etc.. People also began to be defined in physical and biological terms, e.g., as peasants, women and men—ultimately giving rise to class, sex and racial stereotypes which were never there before.

Moreover, by requiring the head tax receipt as a form of personal identification for a variety of purposes, colonialism managed to reduce all people to a common denominator, namely, the colonial *labour force*.

The crucial moment in the penetration of natural economy by capital was the breaking of its *cycle of reproduction*, which was accompanied by the *monetisation* of at least some of its elements. The methods used to effect this rupture included the imposition of taxes which necessitated sources of cash income, and the use of forced cultivation of particular cash crops. In both cases the implications for household subsistence guarantee have been grave; without the direct expropriation of the direct producers the pre-existing self-sufficient and self-contained economic systems of production were undermined by the withdrawal of labour from use-value production whether in agriculture, fishing, handcraft activities, etc.

The rupture of household reproduction cycle was also affected through the substitution, in the sphere of necessary consumption, of commodities for use-values previously produced locally or acquired through simple exchange. Thus, the needs of simple reproduction came to include the consumption of commodities and new needs developed. Following the initial phase of coercion, establishing the conditions became internalised in the simple reproduction cycle to the extent that it could no longer take place outside commodity relations. In other words, commodity relations became an economic necessity in order to meet its need for cash, the household had to produce commodities which became, through the process of circulation, material elements of means of production and subsistence.

The processes and relations that were originally initiated by both the German and British governments were taken over by the nationalist government which, since the attainment of political independence to-date, has taken measures aimed at intensifying them. In Tanzania today, commodity production (the so-called money economy) is ubiquitous, and every individual person is affected by it.

In contemporary Tanzania, the intensification of commodity relations has had deleterious consequences at the household: household reproduction cycle is increasingly being realised through the reproduction and exchange of commodities. That is, the production of household necessary consumption purchased at market-determined prices has substantially increased and the means of labour, and labour-power has likewise assumed market forms; and the *survival* of the household itself (both in urban and rural areas) is contingent upon production of *exchange values*, and in some instances, upon quite specialised commodity production.

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Thus, in the process there has emerged an economy of individualised private producers where every producer must exchange in order to reproduce. Secondly, we see the emergence—on a massive scale—of peasant households who, in order to survive, have to supplement grain through either sale of labour-power, or engage in petty-commodity production activities.

Today, merchant capital—individual and public—has subjected production more and more to exchange-value. It has dissolved traditional kinship relations, and instead has increased money circulation in the household economy and the same goes for old welfare functions that were based on customary patterns of law and kinship relations. With expanded commodity production and the attendant rupture of the household cycle of reproduction, there have been a partial displacement of *personal* and *institutional* mechanism for the mobilisation of land, labour and the means of production by *market determined* prices which are responsible for undermining and threatening household subsistence security, not only for the general population but also for the elderly. It is no wonder, therefore, that even in food producing villages, hunger has become the order of the day, and hence, social security for the elderly people too has been jeopardised. Again, today, it is the market forces which determine *what* to eat, *how much* of it, and at *what* time.

At the same time, the process of commodity production has *individualised* and *fragmented* household units of production and consumption along the following lines. As heads of households fail to meet the cash demands for all adult children as well as spouses, these household members begin to look for off-farm cash income in the form of migration, employment, casual labour, or petty income generating activities. In the process, they become detached, indifferent and independent from their parents/spouses for their needs. Thus, increasingly over time, household's loss of economic autonomy has led to the breakdown of harmonious relations between members of the household and amongst households; the destruction of the delicate balance of economic rights and social obligations has resulted in growing antagonism between members of the household; and the deterioration of both conjugal and filial relations together with kinship relations within a given community, as a whole, have helped to marginalise and undermine subsistence security for the elderly people—who are now exposed to the whims of the market forces which are as incalculable and highly unpredictable as the weather. As the world of the insular commune is being destroyed through the physical dispersion of children and kindred, today the trend has been towards the atomisation of the household into father, mother and children only (i.e. towards a nuclear family), which by its very nature can hardly provide adequate economic and social support for the elderly people.

## 7. Conclusion

The above, therefore, constitute the main social processes and the attendant social relations which are responsible for the poverty and marginalisation of the elderly people in Tanzania today, both in the rural and urban areas; the “good” social welfare policies and programmes of the government and NGOs notwithstanding.

This article has attempted to highlight two things. Firstly, that with the imposition of colonial capitalism and the attendant disorganisation and dissolution of the erstwhile communal, self-sustaining and egalitarian traditional African social fabric, there has been a reversal in the structure of needs in our country. Exchange-value (as opposed to use-value) has become the dominant social form of production. Today, in contrast to the olden times, the desire to possess material objects, the need for surplus product, the needs of capital (the drive to accumulate) has become the *differentia specifica* of the structure of needs in our community. As a result, *money*, has directly and simultaneously become the real community, since it is ‘the general substance of all’, and at the same time the social product of all. For an individual, the community appears a mere abstraction, a mere external and accidental thing compared to money. For her/him, the community is simply a means for her/his satisfaction as an isolated individual.

Secondly, the article has argued that the kind of capitalism (i.e peripheral capitalism) which penetrated and came to dominate these societies have had quite debilitating social consequences; the development and intensification of the new relations of production. *Commodity relations* have eroded and *undermined* the substance of the erstwhile kinship relations which were the bedrock of subsistence security in the olden times. With their dominance and pervasiveness in Tanzania, subsistence guarantee for the majority of the populations has been thrown overboard; and worse still, households are increasingly being individuated, and in the process they have been exposed to new incalculable and volatile risks of the market. As a result, the erstwhile household autonomy and autarchy have been undermined, people have lost control over the production process—and hence over their lives—and in the process have become simply pawns for the rapacious and accumulation needs (cheap labour, cheap food, cheap raw materials) of both local and foreign capital.

The miserable conditions of the elderly people, (both rural and urban) is a product of the above-mentioned social processes and relations; and it is to these that we need to address our attention.

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### Notes

1. This is well illustrated by the following pernicious literature originating particularly from the U.S.A. See for example, Donahue, W. and Tibbits, C., *The New Frontiers of Ageing*, An Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1957; Tibbits, C., *Handbook of Social Gerontology*, University of Chicago Press, 1960; Atchley, R and M. Seitzer, *The Sociology of Ageing: Selected Readings*, Belmont, California: Wardsworth, 1977. See also Stears, P. D. *Old Age in European Society*, London: Croom Helm, 1977; Clark, T.L and J. J. Spengler, *The Economics of Individual and Population Ageing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
2. Many myths and stereotypes speculatively constructed and propagated as “scientific” knowledge by scholars such as Tibbits, Stearns, Clarm, Cumming and many others are currently being exploded. For example, it has been shown that depending on the nature of the social system most older people have far greater and more diverse strengths and competences in intellect, health and interest than is generally recognised; and that though death is inevitable, the course of the ageing process is not. For more illustrations, see, Standingers, Ursulla, M. Steven, M. Cornelius and Paul M. Battes, “The Ageing of Intelligence: Potential and Limits”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 503, (May 1987) p. 43-59; Judith Rodin, “Sense of Control: Potential for Interventions” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 503, (May 1987), pp. 29-42; Matilda White Riley, Anne Foner and Joan Waring, “Sociology of Age” in Smelter, Neil J. (ed) *Handbook of Sociology*, Newbury Park C.A.: Sage Publications, 1988, pp. 243-290.
3. One of the most outstanding characteristics of academic sociology is its reification of social entities and institutions and hence its disregard for the human agency as the creator of these institutions. Its most central concepts of “society” and “culture” are viewed as having a life apart from the men who create, embody and enact them; thus, it conceives them as autonomous things that are independent and exist for themselves. Hence society and culture are made to appear as “natural” phenomena, as having laws of their own that operate apart from the intentions and plans of men; thus, in the process social institutions are reified. Instead of being viewed as expressions of certain social relations in a given society, they are seen as entities having a life of their own. This, in my opinion constitutes the heart of the repressive component of sociology: individual persons such as the elderly people are required to “adjust”, to “conform” and to “integrate” into “society” and “culture” and not to change or transform them.
4. Tout, Ken *Ageing in Developing Countries*, London: Oxford University Press for Help International, 1987, pp.2-3. At this juncture I must categorically state that a “social science” which is frankly anti-humanistic or anti-emancipatory in its guiding interests and hence serving the status quo cannot, in my opinion, be of any use or help to the suffering masses in the present underdeveloped countries. I therefore, prefer Baran’s concept of a social science that is frankly humanistic and emancipatory in its guiding philosophy and interests to the one which is openly anti-people as is the case in mainstream sociology and its sister discipline – social gerontology. In like manner, I just cannot see how anti-people social scientists can be of any use here. In this case, I cannot help again recall Baran’s apt remarks on this issue when he said “... A meaningful discussion of human affairs can only be conducted with humans; one wastes one’s time talking to beasts about matters related to people”, see, Baran, Paul A. *The Longer view: Essays towards a critique of political economy*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1962, p.12.

5. Both African and Africanist gerontologists have chosen to appraise in an unduly descriptive, speculative and facsimile manner African social reality in the light of concepts and theories propagated by the dominant caste of bourgeois scholars who have claimed the relevance of "industrialisation, migration, modernisation etc..." to understanding African social reality. Like their mentors in the West, for the them, the "fact" of "social change" has been built into their ideological make up: social change is not a matter requiring theoretical comprehension, rather it is something given and taken for granted. In this way they have not been able to evaluate objectively and comprehensively the relative relevance and efficiency of all available theories – Marxist and non-Marxist – in order to explain the dynamics of African social organisation. See for example, Tout, Ken *Ageing in Developing Countries*, London: Oxford University Press, 1989; Hampson, Joe *Old Age in Zimbabwe*, Gweru and Harare: Mambo Press, 1980 and his *Ageing and the Elderly*, Harare: Strang Multiprint, 1982. See also, Rosenmayr, Leopold, "More than wisdom: A field study of the old in an African village", *Journal of Cross-cultural Gerontology*, vol. 3, (10988), p.34; and also his "Improving the health status of the Rural Elderly in Mali", *Journal of Cross-cultural Gerontology*, vol. 3, July, 1991.
6. For apologists of the capitalist system, colonialism is never considered or conceived as a continuous process sustained and "maintained by institutions and class structure created by hundreds of years of European and, more recently by, United States domination" – à la Rhodes – but rather as a transient and ephemeral phenomenon with no fundamental significance in the social history of the African people. Yet, the truth of the matter is that the imposition of colonial rule in Africa in general and Tanzania in particular took the form of many dimensions of assault on traditional social organisation and culture. In the words of Magubane:

“(1) Military and political, the African population was subjugated; (2) economically, the displaced and defeated population was harnessed, first as a labour force in agriculture, and then in diamond and gold mining; (3) ideologically, Africans were systematically domesticated by being converted to the least utilisable aspect of European culture – Christianity; and (4) socially, a process of radical atomisation shattered the fabric of traditional social structures”. See Magubane, Bernard M. *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979, p. 36. For a succinct analysis of colonialism as a process of domination and cultural exploitation, see among others, Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Paris: Maspero, 1965; Memmi, Albert *The coloniser and the colonised*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967; Sartre, Jean-Paul "On Genocide" *Ramparts*, 6, (1968): 38.
7. See generally, Kjekshus, Helge *Ecology control and economic development in East African History: The case of Tanganyika, 1850-1950*. London: Heinemann, 1977; Koponen, Juhani *People and Production in late pre-colonial Tanzania: History and Structures*, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988; and his *Development for Exploitation: German colonial policies in Mainland Tanzania, 1884-1914*, Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1994. On the "moral economy" of the peasant, see Scott, James *The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and subsistence in Southeastern Asia*, New Haven: Yale University press, 1976.
8. This is one of the nationalities in Mpanda district, Rukwa region.

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9. For an alternative and insightful discussion regarding the nature of kinship relations and the attendant meanings and values embedded into these relations, I have benefited immensely from: David M. Schneider. *Critique of the Study of Kinship*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984.

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