

RITUALS OF VERIFICATION: INDIGENOUS AND IMPORTED ACCOUNTABILITY IN NORTHERN TANZANIA

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The process of holding people to account, in its many different forms, lies arguably at the heart of human society. According to Michael Power, 'It is through the giving and monitoring of the accounts that we and others provide of ourselves, and of our actions, that the fabric of normal human exchange is sustained' (1997: 1). In the view of Mary Douglas, 'accountability and account giving are part of what it is to be a rational individual' (cited in Power, 1997: 1). Being held to account means being held responsible for one's actions: '[I]n the context of social life,' write Day and Klein, *accountability* 'implies that our actions are open to inspection and can challenge scrutiny' (1987: 1). It is hard, indeed, to imagine a society we would call human in which individuals did not provide justifications, to themselves and others, for their own behaviour.

In a continent where societies are frequently figured as things which are falling apart—with their governmental corruption, routine flouting of the rule of law, vigilante violence and growing interdependence of state and criminal networks—it is important to recognise that ordinary Africans nevertheless strive, on a day-to-day basis, to hold their leaders accountable to locally produced ethical norms (Bayart *et al.*, 1999; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Gore and Pratten, 2003; Olivier de Sardan, 1999). Certain academics, and 'experts' in donor circles, meanwhile, regard these indexical standards of behaviour—or else a presumed condition of normlessness—as the key to explaining the continent's collapsed states and calamitous record of economic decline. They seek to promote another sort of accountability, typically operationalised through multi-party elections, liberal constitutions, an independent judiciary, a free press and a civil society composed of associations contractually formed (World Bank, 1989, 2000; Landell-Mills, 1992; Williams and Young, 1994; Hyden, 1997).¹

While holding, or attempting to hold, people to account is a feature of all societies, the process of accounting, as well as the ends of accountability, can take a variety of different forms. Recently, in the face of the 'imposition' by donors of liberal modes of governance on Africa, certain voices have urged a search for forms of politics with deeper indigenous roots. According to Peter Geschiere, these authors

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¹ A recent World Bank document speaks of federalism and consociational democracy, tailored to African realities, but of liberal democracy nonetheless (World Bank, 2000).

'have emphasized that democracy in Africa can only succeed if it is grafted upon local culture'. He cites Achille Mbembe, who says that 'We must capture . . . the dreams and desires, the moral ideals and imagination of our people by showing that they can be realized' (Geschiere, 1997: 7). Patrick Chabal, too, has expressed scepticism over the viability of liberal democracy, and urged that the focus of political analysis should widen to consider alternative modes of accountability (1992: 31, 54–68; Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 50–6; Chabal, 2002: 454–62).

Typically, social science has drawn a conceptual divide between 'African' forms of social and political action, such as witchcraft, and social phenomena more familiar to the West. The results of some recent scholarship imply a challenge to this dichotomy. For instance, Michael Power, writing of the increasing prevalence of audit technologies in modern society, has argued persuasively that auditing is a 'ritual of verification' which remains 'at the level of a folk craft or art' (1997: 30). Richard Harper has argued that economic statistics, when incorporated into IMF mission reports, undergo a kind of 'moral transformation', making a transition to the sacred from the mundane (2000: 47, 51). In a similar vein, Harrison has argued that modern commercial brand names, subject to an ideational and legal anthropomorphism, have acquired a metaphysical or magical value (2002: 221). Peter Geschiere, perhaps most suggestively, has drawn a number of parallels between 'witch doctors' in Africa and 'spin doctors' in the United States (1998).

The current article discusses two different means of holding people to account. The first is the practice of 'breaking a pot'—a powerful form of curse in the Mount Meru area of northern Tanzania. The second is the local government audit, a practice that is being strengthened, with the help of foreign donors, in the interests of 'good governance'. By juxtaposing these two outwardly dissimilar practices the article attempts to show that they have more in common than might otherwise be supposed. Both practices, I hope to show, are forms of verification, aimed at disclosing truth and disciplining behaviour in order that a situation of accountability can be attained. In addition, both have recourse to esoteric knowledge, unfalsifiable pronouncements and dependence upon trust. They have, in this respect, powerful ritual dimensions that accompany their material effects. Not only do they invoke mystical forces, but they also comprise 'action of a distinctive sort: the sort that might, in fact, produce the very power it purports to draw from elsewhere' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993: xix).

By placing cursing and auditing together in the same frame, this piece is composed in a similar key to much writing in current anthropology which seeks to unsettle the conceptual boundaries between the 'traditional' and the 'modern', the 'rational' and the 'irrational'. As Moore and Sanders exemplify, 'are western teleological beliefs about progress, development, rationality and modernity . . . really so different from the idea that occult forces move the world?' (2001: 19; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993). But the article is intended not solely as a journey into epistemological disorientation. It is also an attempt to probe, in a

speculative fashion, the very practical question of whether or not institutions of governance with a global distribution—for example, representative local government—can be rendered accountable via local, ‘particularistic’ means; or whether forms of government imported from the West ought to be and can be underpinned by accounting technologies of putative universal appeal.

The article proceeds as follows. I begin by sketching the ethnographic setting and describing cursing and the experts that administer the curse. I then offer some illustrations of cursing taken from local fieldwork in Arumeru District, Tanzania. I turn next to a description of the practice and purposes of auditing, in particular the local government audit. I use examples from the report of an audit of Arumeru District Council in order to illustrate the process of auditing in both its ‘scientific’ and its ‘unscientific’ dimensions. I then discuss some of the potential difficulties associated with integrating the practice of cursing into local council politics and administration. Finally, I assess some of the problems in instantiating the audit as a new technology of governance in local administration.

RITUALS OF VERIFICATION (1) ‘TRADITIONAL’ CURSING ON MOUNT MERU

Mount Meru (4 566 m) is a dormant volcano whose lush slopes dominate the geography of Arumeru District in northern Tanzania. Its fertile soils support ‘zero-grazed’ cattle and goats, pyrethrum, coffee, maize, beans and a variety of legumes. Population density is high. The mountain levels out on to a semi-arid plain, the beginning of the Maasai steppe. Here population density tends to thin; the plain supports livestock, maize, beans and, where there is water for irrigation, flowers and legumes. Farmers on Mount Meru, and even on the plain, are heavily integrated into the cash economy. Arumeru encircles Arusha town, a burgeoning urban centre, whose growth is fuelled by tourism, the gemstone industry and international diplomacy, and whose population is fed on Arumeru’s agricultural production. To the south of the district lies the Mbuguni-Mererani mining area, where the precious stone tanzanite is mined. Many small mines are owned by natives of Mount Meru, and many Meru youth migrate to the mines in search of income.

Ethnically, Arumeru has a population numbering around 400,000 people. Ethnic Arusha, a *Maa*-speaking people, predominate, with the Meru, or *Rwa*, forming the second largest group, of around 150,000. The article will focus on cursing among the latter. The Meru are composed of at least twenty-six patrilineal, patrilocal, exogamous clans. Each clan has an elder or *nshili* nominated by the ordinary male clan members. The collective *nshili* form a clan council, known as *mringaringa*, which meets under a sacred tree of the same name in Poli village. The council elects a head of all the clans, an *nshili nkuu*, who has special authority when it comes to settling disputes between clans and in representing Meru to the outside world. Neither this position nor that of *nshili* enjoys formal recognition in the Tanzanian

system of local government. In practice, however, *nshili* maintain significant moral authority in matters relating to land and family. They are often, also, considered key witnesses by the local court system. On a day-to-day basis, household heads dispose of considerable autonomy when it comes to managing their land and family affairs. *Nshili* tend to become involved only when there are disputes between household heads, or disputes, especially relating to land, between a household head and his offspring. Other influential institutions include age sets (*rika*), the local government (based on a model introduced by the colonial power), the ruling CCM party, and the Church (Puritt, 1970; Spear, 1997; Larsson, 2001).²

Kupasua chungu

Cursing—which has been interpreted by Harjula as a form of social control—is a common phenomenon in Meru society (Harjula, 1989). Anyone can deliver a curse, although certain categories of person, for example certain deceased historical figures, clan elders, infertile women or people with certain disabilities, are believed to be possessed of special cursing power. According to Harjula, Meru traditionally believe that the life force of existence is known as *finya* (variously translated as power, strength, force, vitality, virility, ability). Objects and beings stand in hierarchical relationship to one another, depending upon the amount of *finya* they command. At the top of the hierarchy stands God (*Iruva*); at the bottom are stones, sand and other inanimate objects (*marwe*, *nsanga*). Curses—which are normally uttered without any accompanying ritual—are thought to be extensions of one's personality and to contain a person's *finya* (Harjula, 1989: 127–8). The idea of power-at-a-distance that this implies explains how Meru can believe that curses harm and even kill people.

The focus of this article is a particularly public and powerful form of cursing known, in *kiswahili*, as *kupasua chungu*, or 'breaking a pot'.³ In the words of an informant:

Breaking a pot (*kupasua chungu*) is a way of looking for a malefactor, especially [one] who is unknown. It is done by using a small statue of either a man or a woman made out of stone, of black wood or clay soil. The small statue has special powers to affect the malefactor as cursing words are said during the pot-breaking.⁴

Pot-breaking can be used to punish a number of different misdeeds: it is most commonly used in cases of theft; however, it can also be used in witchcraft, assault, murder, adultery, disagreement on judgements, and land deceit cases (Mungure, 2002: 19). Informants were generally of

² All these institutions have their own norms of accountability, which compete in arenas of overlapping power.

³ The word for 'pot' in Kirwa is *nungu* (see footnote 8).

⁴ Interview, Lowililo Mungure, Ambureni village.



PLATE 1. This *chungu* is made from stone.

the opinion that it could also be used to curse a person who had misused clan authority, or abused government power—for example, by embezzling monies. Some informants qualified this latter opinion, a point to which we shall return.

As the above quotation states, *vyungu* are not in fact pots but, generally, small gendered figurines. *Vyungu* are fashioned and armed by individuals who have special knowledge of them. Such people can be found in a variety of places, including Sumbawanga, Rombo and Kahe (Mungure, 2002: 16). In my experience, the Meru regard the first of these locations as a notorious centre of witchcraft. My informants also mentioned Tanga, another ‘witch-infested’ area, as a centre for pots. Typically pot makers sell *vyungu* to the men who conduct pot-breaking ceremonies. The latter can then pass these on to their sons. Another type of pot used in Meru consists in a piece of volcanic stone, also with some crude markings to suggest sexual identity. These are said to originate among the Maasai, and are known as *emoti nadanyi* (Mungure, 2002: 16). Female pots are said to be more powerful than male ones. They have ‘no pity’, in the words of a pot breaker’s apprentice.⁵

Harjula (1989) refers to the men who break pots as ‘sorcerers’, of which the usual Kiswahili translation would be *mchawi*. A pot-breaker

⁵ Female genitals are often assumed to have extraordinary occult power in Africa. I thank Lynn Thomas of Washington University for this piece of information.

with whom we spoke denied, initially, that he was an *mchawi*, but later, at a time when he became angry with us, pronounced that he *was*, and warned that if he cursed us we would not return alive to Arusha. Pot-breakers appear to be morally ambiguous: they use their power to kill, but they do so in the interests of justice. In light of this ambiguity, I shall follow Mungure's usage and refer to them by the neutral term 'chungu men'.⁶

Pots are not physically broken; only symbolically so. It is possible that they are termed 'pots' because a cooking-pot, standing on the hearth, symbolises the heart of the home and the inner core of Meru social relations.⁷ Once broken, a cooking-pot is impossible to repair, suggesting the seriousness of the offence. Adding another layer of meaning, Mungure ventures that 'being cursed by *chungu*, one is likely condemned to break into pieces like a broken pot which is impossible to mend' (2002: 18–19). However, the fact that the breaking is only symbolic leaves open an avenue for reconciliation.

Typically, pot-breaking curses will take one or more of the following forms:⁸

Iwe ndu kundemboo massa a X., shaamba ii ikapane nawe.

You, the person who has taken X.'s property, let this giant fight with you.

Iwe ndu kundemboo massa a X., nungu ii ikuwaa.

You, the person who has taken X.'s property, let this pot kill you.

Iwe muwaa X., shaamba ii ikapane nawe.

You, the killer of X., let this giant fight with you.

Iwe mwiiwa masaa a X., nungu ii ikapane nawe.

You, the one who has stolen X.'s property, let this pot fight with you.

Iwe mwiwaa masaa a X., nungu ii inyanyate ufware kwafo.

You, the one who has stolen X.'s property, let this pot scatter your clan.

Iwe muwaa ndu kwalea inumbuwa nungu ii ikunle.

You that have denied killing X., let this pot look on you.

Iwe ndu ndu kundeiva masaa duken ii, ili iruva liakya laakye nawe.

You that have stolen properties from this shop, when the sun sets, let it set on you.

⁶ They are never women.

⁷ Puritt (Moore and Puritt, 1977) does not discuss the pot-breaking ritual, or the role of the hearth, though he does discuss oathing (p. 123), or the role of the hearth. However, Moore, for the Chagga, mentions that pots can be used in cursing (p. 51); moreover she mentions as ritual symbols 'the hut, cooking pots, the hearth' and states that 'fire was the hearth fire, centre of the female hut, symbol of the sexually generative powers' (p. 49). Since Chagga and Meru are related, there may be a correspondence. It is certainly not unusual for the hearth to be accorded special symbolic significance in Africa. Elsewhere in Tanzania pots have been broken as a means of committing suicide (Moreau, 1941). I thank Sloan Mahone, University of Oxford, for sending me this report.

⁸ The vernacular is Kimeru, or, as it is known locally, Kirwa. The translations are my research assistant's.

Informants were asked whether they had ever attended a pot-breaking ceremony. The following description of a ceremony is fairly typical:

Yes. One day when I was on my way back home along the Akeri–Patandi main road from Tengeru market I met a group of people gathered together witnessing a pot being broken. It was in Nguruma village. I saw the pot-breaker. He was half naked. He had no shirt, the left half of his body from the head to the waist was smeared with red soil, and in front of him on the ground there was the pot itself. It was a symbol of a person; it was a symbol of a woman, and also the symbol was half dressed, and also its left part was also smeared with a red soil. The breasts of that symbol were not covered. The pot-breaker was jumping from one place to another, shouting out words, saying, ‘You, the one who has broken into this shop, let the giant fight with you!’ ‘You, the one who has stolen from this shop, have a car accident, get yourself drowned in a lake, let a tree branch fall on you!’ The pot-breaker took the pot and pointed it to a tree near by and said that when the tree branch starts to dry up, then the pot will start to work; and then he stopped and went away.⁹

The ritual varies slightly between pot-breakers, but common ingredients include sacrificing and anointing; holding the ceremony in the place where the offence is thought to have taken place; publicly pronouncing curses; pointing the pot and walking with it in the direction of the route of ‘escape’ thought to have been travelled by the culprit; and indicating some organic index of the pot’s activity—usually a tree. When the pot is activated it is said to be ‘clicking’. In a case recorded by Mungure, the *chungu* man pointed to a tree and said that, for every branch that fell, a member of the culprit’s clan would die. Apparently several branches fell over the ensuing months and each corresponded to a death (Mungure, 2002: 28). The identification of this type of empirical index provides a measure of scientific ‘falsifiability’ to the hypothesis that the pot kills people.¹⁰

Accounts of how the pot functions are not entirely clear or consistent. According to Mungure, ‘One of the informants regarded *chungu* as a soldier who through a proper ritual is sent to seek, capture and punish a culprit’ (2002: 15). Prior to the ceremony, it is normal for a sheep to be slaughtered and for its blood to be smeared on the pot. I was told that the blood then ‘follows’ the culprit. Alternatively, I was told that it is the giant who finds and kills culprits, and that the giant is the pot itself. This perhaps squares with the idea of the pot as ‘soldier’. During the ceremony God (*Iruwa*) or other supernatural powers are invoked (Mungure, 2002: 15). The specialists I visited said that the power to curse comes from God and is found in the mouth of the *chungu* man.

⁹ Interview, Anton Kaaya, Akeri village.

¹⁰ In practice the hypothesis is difficult to falsify, since the causes of death the *chungu* man specifies are numerous, and, because Meru clans are quite large, clan members are dying all the time. The ‘drying up’ of the tree is, however, a puzzle to me.

Chungu men are often referred to as ‘bad-mouthed people’ (*kana kakasha*; Mungure, 2002: 17). However, a *chungu* man can bestow upon another the power to use the pot and say the curses, as had happened in the case of one of our informants.

Chungu men are supposed not to keep the pot indoors, and in some cases it is not uncovered until after libations of milk have been distributed. This suggests that the pot is not just a conduit or an amplifier for the curse, nor merely a ritual prop, but something that has intrinsic power. If a culprit confesses and pays compensation, then a pot can be disarmed, or ‘cooled’. Part of the cooling ceremony involves smearing the pot with ram’s fat. One interpretation is that the fat is food for the ancestors, who have the power of reconciling people. Against the idea that power resides in the pot itself, however, is the fact that one of the *chungu* men we met had accidentally smashed his pot—which he had inherited from his father—leaving it barely recognisable. Although he said he would go to Tanga to get another one, he claimed the smashed pot would still work.¹¹

The causal mechanism by which the pot works, then, is rather opaque. Speculatively piecing the above fragments together, one might say that with the aid of the anointed pot, the words in the *chungu* man’s mouth acquire the *finya* of God, unleashing a giant to do battle with wrongdoers. The giant can be placated through the intervention of the ancestors, who are fed by smearing fat on the pot. Neither of the *chungu* men with whom I spoke provided particularly detailed or consistent explanations, however. It might be that they are concerned to protect their esoteric knowledge; or it might be that they have no very clear idea in their own minds of how the pot works. Ordinary people in Meru certainly lack a clear understanding of these occult powers, although they have a firm belief in their efficacy.¹² Even if a good interpretation of the symbols deployed in the ritual could be made, we would still lack the kind of visual ‘proof’ of the powers in play that is normally demanded by the Western world view. What makes the pot ‘click’ is, I suggest, ‘epistemologically obscure’.

Unfathomability notwithstanding, the pot seems to work. All my informants could provide examples of cases where pots were broken

¹¹ After visiting the *chungu* man at his remote home in Engare Nanyuki we traced him the following day in a village on the mountain where he had come to negotiate a pot-breaking case. He told us that if we returned at dawn the next day we could witness a ceremony, were one to be held, and if it were not we could see the *chungu* anyway. After more negotiating the next morning we followed the *chungu* man into a banana grove, where he unwrapped the *chungu* from an elaborate receptacle made of banana leaves. ‘Oh,’ he said, crestfallen. ‘It has broken. I was travelling here yesterday and my donkey fell on it.’ Inside were a few clay fragments, one of which could have been the head of a crude figurine. Beyond that, there was little more than a handful of dust.

¹² There are clearly some symbolic oppositions in play—for example, blood of a female sheep, fat of a male sheep—but neither I nor my informants had the knowledge or the ethnographical imagination to render the above accounts cosmologically intelligible. This is partly because no very detailed ethnography of the Meru has been written.

and suspected culprits had met an untimely demise. I provide now a few examples. The first concerns a case of murder, and leads to a 'successful' resolution.¹³

The . . . case took place in Engare Nanyuki area, where a person known as Sengei was murdered. That murder was not related to anyone; people failed totally to trace the killer. Therefore the family of Sengei made it clear that they have the intention of breaking a pot to look for the killer of their person. After putting that notice up they broke a pot against those who killed Sengei and against those who knew about it and refused to give the information. In two months' time the killers showed up after a death of one of them. Then the two clans met to reconcile and to pay compensation for the dead person. After the compensation agreement between those two clans that pot was cooled down.¹⁴

The next example concerns the relatively common crime of shop-breaking. It is interesting because the pot has killed people within the plaintiff's own extended family. Compensation has not been agreed:

This one happened in the family of my in-laws. My father-in-law who died last year, Mzee Mbarare, broke more than eight pots in his lifetime. The latest one I knew about was broken because one of his grandson's shops in Nguruma village was broken into and money and goods were stolen. The pot-breaker was Mzee Lekashu from Samaria village. The pot-breaker aimed the pot at a tree and said that the tree will dry up after three days; then after three days the tree dried up. The pot-breaker cursed those thieves, saying that they will be drowned in a lake. Actually one of the victims of that pot was found dead in Lake Duluti. That pot continued to kill more people of the same family. (Mbarare had three wives, the shop which was broken into belonged to a grandson of the first wife and the thieves were grandsons of the second wife.) Now after the death toll reached five the in-laws and aunts decided to intervene and cool that pot.¹⁵

The next case also concerns shop-breaking and is notable for the fact that the pot kills people within the plaintiff's nuclear family!

A shop belonging to Julius Kishili Kaaya was broken into and goods and money were taken away. The pot owner came from Samaria village and the pot-breaking took place about five years ago now. The pot-breaker started with cursing outside powers which may block his pot from looking for the thieves, then he warned the shop owner not to have sexual relations with his wife for seven days, then he cursed a tree which was near the shop, saying that it will dry up within three days as a sign of the pot working. The pot-breaker then started cursing those thieves. 'You thieves who have taken

¹³ It is worth noting at this point that clans in Meru try to settle criminal cases, including murder, without recourse to the state. If clan compensation is paid and the parties are reconciled, witnesses will often refuse to give evidence to the police or in court.

¹⁴ Interview with Thobias Akyoo, Kimundo village.

¹⁵ Interview with Jeremiah Issangya, Nguruma village.

properties from Julius's shop—fight with this giant, hang yourself, get knocked down by a car, kill yourself, die as the sun goes down.' 'You person, who know about or saw the action and are hiding the information—fight with this giant.' He repeated those curses in every corner of that shop, he went along the road cursing for about forty minutes. Then he stopped and went away. That pot killed two members of Julius's family before he (Julius) went to cool it down. His own son died and his mother hanged herself. That showed that the thieves were family members of Julius.¹⁶

In the next case, pot-breaking appears to have been used in place of a personal injury suit:

I remember one case but not exactly in detail. There was a tractor accident in which one person died. The clan of the dead person wanted to be compensated (to be given forty-one cows) by the clan of the driver of that tractor who caused the accident. The driver of that tractor and his Sumari clan elders were not serious with that issue, therefore the other clan of the dead person (Kaaya clan) decided to break a pot to punish the Sumari clan. Until now the family of that tractor driver is not in good order. It is as if there is something behind them.¹⁷

In discussing the efficacy of cursing, Harjula notes, from conversations with medical doctors, that curse victims frequently 'fade away', without any apparent medical reason. They seem to die from a sort of 'auto-suggestion' (thanatomania) (1989: 130). Alternatively, they may die as a result of self-fulfilling prophecy: 'the self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come *true*' (Merton, 1968: 477, cited in Harjula, 1989: 130). For example, a man who has been subjected to a curse designed to kill him through a car accident may become dangerously nervous on the road. Arguably, self-fulfilling prophecy and thanatomania sometimes combine, as in cases where a curse victim is involved in an automobile accident, and subsequently dies from non-lethal injuries.

A doctor cannot know that an ailment has been caused by a pot. For example, in a car accident you receive your patient and treat [him or her] as any other patient from a car accident; or a snake bite you diagnose the ailment and treat it as normal; or other such diseases. *But* if there is a pot behind the disease or behind the accident complications occur: maybe the wounds fail to heal, or the bones fail to join, or a tetanus can attack from nowhere and cause death. Sometimes there are diseases or illnesses that are non-diagnosable and there is not a doctor who can treat it.¹⁸

¹⁶ Interview with Thobias Akyoo, Kimundo village.

¹⁷ Interview with Jacob Sumari, Nguruma village.

¹⁸ Interview, 'Dr' Lameck Gideon Kaaya, medical assistant, Nkoanrua village.

Chungu men

Chungu men are people who own *nungu*, or pots. They are assumed to have special cursing powers. Sometimes they have been born with them—a physical disability being a common external sign—or sometimes they have inherited them. If the former, acquiring a pot has simply magnified their cursing power. There are several *chungu* men in Meru. Mungure interviewed five. We were told of three by clan elders, of whom we managed to interview two. *Chungu* men come from a variety of clans and, it appears, their power is not confined to their native clan. The two we visited were old and outwardly poor. They appeared to have neglected farming in favour of plying their specialist trade. One claimed to have been involved in negotiations surrounding forty cases in the previous year. Since negotiation cannot be entered into without a down-payment, this would provide an income more than sufficient for subsistence.

Chungu men are given a certificate of practice by the clan council at Mringaranga. Normally, if one wants to approach a *chungu* man one does so through one's *nshili*. Before a pot is broken, a notice of intent must be posted some weeks before the actual ceremony (see Plate 2). Clan elders will normally give their consent to break a pot only if they are satisfied that other channels of dispute resolution—normal clan fora, the police, the courts—have been exhausted. Because the pot is believed to be so powerful, elders are reluctant to allow it to be used without good cause. In addition, by licensing *chungu* men and legitimating individual cases, the clan attempts to defend its own imperfect hegemony of social control. To break a pot, it is also necessary to obtain a permit from ward or village government—a point to which we shall have cause to return.

In the twelve months preceding May 2002 there were at least fifteen cases in central Meru which were under negotiation or in which a notice had been given of the intention to break a pot. These cases are summarised in Table 1.

When a threat is made to break a pot, there is an opportunity for reparations to be made. Fearing the pot's lethal effects, which may affect an individual culprit or the culprit's clan, many offenders either expose themselves or are exposed by kinsmen. The culprit will then visit the *chungu* man with his *nshili* and confess. Later he will be made to confess in the aftermath of the slaughter of a black ram. According to Mungure, words spoken in the confession ritual include the following: 'We, people of X boma, we ask forgiveness. We did what is evil . . . thus we have suffered punishment . . . We ask for forgiveness' (2002: 31). Appropriate compensation will then be paid to the plaintiff by the culprit or his clan. The two sides will later enjoy a reconciliation meal.

In the words of an informant:

Pot-breaking also brings harmony in the society, as it forces people to behave well: people become careful and afraid of doing a crime against each other. By breaking a pot truth is brought forward openly. Therefore, in short, to

MILA NA DESTURI ZA WAMERU TANGAZO LA KUVUNJA CHUNGU

NDUGU **PETRO SANDEA KAAYA** WA MAJENGO ARUMERU MASHARIKI AMERUHUSIWA KUVUNJA CHUNGU.

CHUNGU HICHO KITALENGA MTU/WATU ALIYEHUSIKA/WALIOHUSIKA AU WATAKAOHUSIKA NA :-

1. KUMCHOMEA BOMA LAKE AU KUFHAMU WAKAACHA KUSEMA.
2. KUBOMOA NYUMBA YAKE NA KULA NJAMA YA KUBOMOA.
3. KUTUMIA MBINU AU KUSHIRIKI KUNYANG'ANYA MALI (URITHI) WA WATOTO WAKE KWA HILA.
4. WATAKAO KULA NJAMA YA KUMDHURU YEYE AU WATOTO WAKE.

KUJITAMBULISHA.

MTU YEYOTE AMBAYE ANAHUSIKA AU ANAYEFHAMU LOLOTE KATI YA HAYO HAPO JUU, AJITAMBULISHE KWA :-

OFISI YA KIJJI AU YA KATA AU KWA MSHILI YEYOTE WA UKOO KABLA YA TAREHE 15.1.2002.

BAADA YA TAREHE HIYO MHUSIKA ANARUHUSIWA KUVUNJA CHUNGU CHAKE.

NI PAMOJA NA SALAAM ZA MILA, JIAMBULISHENI MLINDE WATU.

MILA NA JADI ZA WAMERU

Mwenzetu

Katibu

WENU J. N. ISSANGYA
KATIBU MKUU MILA

MERU

AMBWA
29/12/2001

NAKALA:-

- ▶ Ofisi ya Kata ya Makiba
- ▶ Ofisi ya Kijiji cha Majengo Dipu
- ▶ Mshili Ukoò wa Kaaya Kanda ya Magharibi

kwa taarifa
kwa taarifa

PLATE 2. A pot-breaking notice: 'TRADITION AND CUSTOMS OF THE MERU. *Announcement of pot-breaking.* Comrade Petro Sandea Kaaya, of Majengo, Arumeru East, has been permitted to break a pot. This pot will be aimed at the person or people who were concerned or who will be concerned with (1) burning his compound or knowing about it but not saying, (2) demolishing his house or conspiring to demolish it, (3) strategising or co-operating to cheat his children of their inheritance, (4) wanting to conspire to harm him or his children. *Give yourselves up.* Anyone at all who is concerned, or who knows anything about the above, should surrender themselves at the village or ward office, or to any clan elder before 15 January 2002. After that date the concerned is allowed to break his pot . . . Surrender yourselves that you may protect the people.' (My translation.) The notice bears the stamp of the clan council and the signature of the clan secretary.

TABLE 1: *Official cases of pot-breaking in Meru, May 2001–May 2002*

<i>Name of clan</i>	<i>No. of cases</i>	<i>Nature of case</i>
Ndosi	3	The Akyoo clan want the family of a deceased man to honour a payment for goats received A Nanyaro man took cows from an Ndosi and has failed to pay An Issangya promised land in return for cows received; he has yet to pay
Kaaya	1	In a case of mistaken identity the police shot a man. His family is threatening to break a pot against the misinformant
Sumari	1	A Sumari allegedly knocked a child off its bicycle; Ndosi demands compensation
Nnko	1	An Nnko was mugged and accused a neighbour; on threat of pot-breaking, the culprit's family paid
Akyoo	2	A pot was broken after car parts were stolen; the culprit revealed himself, paid compensation, and the pot was cooled A man who murdered an Akyoo was released from prison after bribing the court; Akyoo demand compensation
Kitomari	1	Kaaya have refused to pay compensation in a murder case
Pallangyo	3	Akyoo claim compensation in a murder case Pallangyo claim against Ayo in a murder case A Pallangyo has lost an eye, and claims compensation from a Kyungai person
Issangya	3	Shop-breaking; culprits have revealed themselves Mugging Mugging

break a pot is to look for the truth of the matter (*kupasua chungu ni kutafuta ukweli wa jambo*).¹⁹

This perspective clearly presents *chungu* as a ritual intended to hold people responsible for their actions; in other words, to discipline behaviour by bringing about visibility, transparency and accountability. It also appears, on the face of things, to be highly efficacious, since in spite of the numerous threats to break pots, the more serious of which reach the point of posting a pot-breaking notice, only a few *actual* pot-breaking ceremonies are officially sanctioned in any given year. In most cases, confessions are made and compensation paid before a ceremony has to take place.

However, matters may not be as functional as this picture suggests. Most of my informants were of the opinion that instances of both

¹⁹ Interview, Thobias Akyoo, Kimundo village.

threats to break a pot and actual cases of pot-breaking had increased in recent years. The reason given was a perceived rise in the rate of crime. Attempts to acquire official statistics for Arumeru proved fruitless, but it would hardly be surprising were crime on the increase.²⁰ Population growth has swelled the number of people living on the mountain, and economic liberalisation has sharpened social differentiation (Larsson, 2001). Although *mringaringa* continues to try and exercise a grip on pot-breaking, there is evidence that it is escaping its control. In June 2002, in the space of a week, I personally came across two cases in a single village in which a local clan elder was acting unilaterally, without the consent of *mringaringa*. More dramatic still, there is evidence that a form of pot-breaking has emerged which is completely individualised:

I have heard of another type of pot-breaking which happened a few years ago. The one who broke the pot lived in Patandi village and those who were affected lived in Kimundo village. It was also a theft case. Three goats were stolen from Irikael Sikawa of Patandi village and he suspected that his houseboy, who was coming from the Rasia Mungure family in Kimundo village, stole the goats. Mr Irikael asked his houseboy several times if he was the one who stole those goats. He denied completely. Irikael Sikawa decided to break a pot but it was a different type of pot: it is known as *iliva*; it works just like a pot but you don't need to do it in public. This type is aimed at a matured green banana bunch in the farm of the wrongdoer. When one banana gets ripe and falls down, a person dies. After a while when another banana gets ripe and falls down to the ground another person dies. Five people died before the family knew that there was a pot against them. The Rasia Mungure family approached the Sikawa family and they negotiated how much will be paid back. Irikael Sikawa cooled down his pot. That was in 1985.²¹

Informants were generally of the opinion that secretive, illicit pot-breaking had increased. In so far as this is the case, it appears that pot-breaking is becoming 'privatised' in a way that has been observed of other ritual practices, previously collectively controlled, elsewhere on the continent (Ellis, 1999). I will return to the significance of this point, which would repay further research, in a subsequent section.

RITUALS OF VERIFICATION (2) THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUDIT

The Tanzanian government, on the advice of donor agencies, is working to strengthen accountability in all arms of the state. It focuses exclusively on mechanisms which are historically associated with the West, but which are now presumed to have universal validity. Multi-party democracy, legal reform, civic education, training in public service ethics, the strengthening of a Prevention of Corruption Bureau:

²⁰ I was unable to gain access to statistics either at Usa River police station or at the regional police headquarters in Arusha.

²¹ Interview with Sifael Bethueli Kaaya, Kimundo village.

all constitute examples. Another, very important, example is the strengthening of the National Audit Office.

According to Power, 'The modern external audit has been described as an independent examination of, and expression of opinion on, the financial statements of an enterprise by a qualified auditor' (1997: 17). The modern auditing procedure began to take shape in Europe around the middle of the nineteenth century. Established by the Public Finance Act 2001, the National Audit Office of Tanzania, a new executive agency, has as its Vision the aim 'To foster a culture of financial discipline and accountability within the Government' and as a Mission 'To provide an independent audit review and report to parliament and people that Government revenue has been properly collected and used'.²² Auditors, who are registered by the National Board of Accountants and Auditors of Tanzania, see their role as that of 'watchdogs of the Government', and hope to 'create faith in the people that money is being properly used, [so that] the Government will be better able to govern the entire country'.²³

The overall purpose is to get audit evidence which will support the accounts so that they are reliable to people who read the accounts . . . in our case, the central government, the local government, and those donors who give their funds to be used in this country.²⁴

The local government audit takes place in five main stages.²⁵ In the first stage, the auditors familiarise themselves with the environment of the auditees; this involves reference to guides, accounts manuals and internal auditing procedures; then they make a suitable plan and devise an audit programme. Secondly, the auditors stage an 'audit entrance conference' with the local authority. This is clearly in part a ritual demonstration of the centre's disciplinary surveillance and power. Thirdly, they carry out the auditing procedures. This involves an examination of the council's financial accounts. Auditors look for documents that validate the accounts, focusing on 'vouchers' or other documents indicating payment or receipt of money. Procurement procedures, which are supposed to follow a process of competitive tendering, are also investigated. In addition, steps are taken to ensure that expenditure is in accordance with stated intentions; this may involve procedures such as physical inspection of stores and council assets. There may also be visits to council projects, such as roadworks, in order to assess that work has been completed to a standard

²² NAO 'Vision' (Dar es Salaam: National Audit Office); NAO 'Mission' (Dar es Salaam: National Audit Office).

²³ Interview, National Audit Office, January 2002.

²⁴ Interview, National Audit Office, June 2002.

²⁵ To anyone who has endured the Quality Assurance Assessment in British higher education these stages will sound distressingly familiar.

commensurate with the expenditure claimed.²⁶ The aim is to look for irregularities, or 'red flags' that put the auditor on alert to possibilities of fraud (Power, 1997: 24).

It's not easy to hide [an irregularity]; we may be able to get a good percentage of the irregularities due to the procedures we follow . . . the audit programme will focus first of all on areas of big monetary values and areas of purchase of high value, and sensitive ones, so we are likely to get some irregularities, though not all . . .²⁷

On the basis of these procedures the auditors arrive at certain findings, incorporating positive features of the financial accounts, and problems. In stage four of the audit these are communicated to the auditee. There is normally disagreement on the findings, and this leads to investigation into the sources of disagreement. Finally a report is drafted which is sent to the Auditor General for scrutiny. He or she signs it and communicates the contents to the relevant governmental authorities.

In 2001 ten out of Arusha's eleven districts received adverse audit reports. With respect to Arumeru, the Controller and Auditor General commented that:

In view of numerous errors and omissions in the accounts, in my opinion, the Balance Sheet and the Statement of Income and Expenditure do not present fairly the financial position of Arumeru District Council as at 31st December, 2000. [Controller and Auditor General, 2001: 10]

In a letter to the District Executive Director, copied to the Arusha Regional Commissioner, the auditor expressed concern, *inter alia*, about missing receipt books, suspected misappropriation of revenue collections, non-collection of revenue from an agent appointed to collect revenue on behalf of the council, unvouched and improperly vouched expenditure, untraced transfers of funds between council accounts, and questionable payment of employees' salaries. The auditor commented that:

The standard of accounting was low in that it was evident that only a few of the internal checks required by the Financial memorandum were being carried out by the District Executive Director and the Treasurer.

To give a little more detail on some of the more interesting irregularities: A total of 205 revenue receipts books, totalling Sh 26,008,600, were not produced. The auditor commented, 'In the absence of these receipt books audit could not confirm accountability of the revenue collected on them.' I infer from this that there is a possibility that financial statements under-declare the amount of

²⁶ Interview, National Audit Office, June 2002.

²⁷ Interview, National Audit Office, June 2002.

revenue collected, with the tax collector pocketing the excess. The audit also found that revenue collections of Sh 26,207,768 'were neither accounted for in the books of accounts nor banked'. This, I infer, induces a strong suspicion of embezzlement (Controller and Auditor General, 2001: 2). The auditor identified a questionable tender award:

The Council advertised on 24/11/1999 a tender for collection of revenue emanating from sand, stones fees on behalf of the Council. In response to the advertisement, M/S Afro German Associate, a firm based in Arusha bid to collect and submit to the Council a total sum of Shs. 78,120,000/- per year.

Tender letters were opened on 16/12/1999 and selection was made on 17/3/2000. In awarding the tender which was made on 16/5/2000 the amount bid by the selected tenderer was revised to Shs. 42,000,000/- per year payable to the Council . . . Relevant committee minutes approving cancellation of the original bid amount were not availed to audit. [Controller and Auditor General, 2001: 3]

I infer here the possibility of collusion: either a tender was awarded on the basis of an unrealistic but later revised bid, and/or a realistic bid was revised in order that individuals on the council could share in the surplus.

The auditor raised concerns about Sh 252,740,555 in unvouched and improperly vouched expenditure. This was a result of missing payment vouchers, payments not properly supported and payments on the basis of pro-forma invoices. 'As a result, goods and services for which this expenditure represents could not be confirmed to have been correctly received and properly applied' (Controller and Auditor General, 2001: 3).

The auditor reported that 'Spare parts worth Shs. 4,345,000/- were purchased for a motor grader, under questionable circumstances. . . . (v) Old parts replaced by the new ones including one compressor worth 2,500,000/- could not be produced to audit when called for' (Controller and Auditor General, 2001: 5). Because the old parts could not be produced, I infer that the possibility of collusion between the council and the parts supplier could not be discounted.

The council had received large amounts of money from the European Commission in order to rehabilitate feeder roads to coffee farming areas, money which went into the Coffee Feeder Roads Stabex Account. According to the auditor, 'The account closed with a cash book balance of Shs. 90,603,474/- without being supported by the following essential separate statements, (i) Statement of Income and Expenditure, (ii) Balance Sheet' (Controller and Auditor General, 2001: 9). In other words, there was no transparency at all in the management of the account.

As indicated earlier, none of these observations by the auditor provides evidence of fraud, embezzlement or corruption. They merely provide evidence of failure to follow accepted financial accounting procedures. The omissions could be the result of carelessness, or incompetence, or lack of resources. In the words of our informant:

by the way the intention of national audit office, or the responsibility, is not to disclose all the irregularities, not even to find fraud, the responsibility is to express an opinion on the financial accounts and supporting documents underlying those accounts. We can only point out irregularities which have happened . . . major omissions or misstatements; but it is not easy to fix that responsibility as relating to corruption.

The audit identifies areas of opacity which other agencies—in Tanzania the CID, the Prevention of Corruption Bureau, the courts—must attempt to illuminate. Unlike the pot-breaking ritual, which is a highly concentrated technology of accountability, rolling investigation, trial and punishment into one, the audit is merely the first in a chain of ritual procedures which might eventually end in concrete individuals being held responsible for their actions.

If an adverse audit cannot provide evidence of corruption, neither can a positive audit provide evidence that corruption, or other forms of wrongdoing, does not occur. This is because the ‘evidential basis’ of audit is, arguably, insecure. Let us return to the audit process. The exercise centres on the council balance sheet—a compilation of figures for which the auditor attempts to find the ‘facts’.²⁸ Let us focus on the expenditure side of the sheet. Suppose the council has recorded that it spent a certain sum of money on iron sheets for the district’s schools. The auditor, in order to verify this expenditure, has a number of options open to him or her. He or she can begin by physically inspecting the council stores. If the sheets are to be found in the stores, the relation between financial figures and material reality or ‘hard facts’ seems fairly straightforward. However, if the sheets have already been distributed, the auditor must make greater efforts. He or she can visit schools in the district, making sure that they have recently received iron sheets of the requisite grade. However, Arumeru District has many schools, and it is unlikely that an auditor could visit them all in a typical two-week audit.²⁹ An alternative is to make do with ‘receipt of goods’ documents, most probably from the builders contracted to build the schools. These substitute for seeing the sheets themselves. And here is where an epistemological anxiety can be said to arise. A great deal of an auditor’s work is dedicated to examining receipts. The auditor never gets to see the material phenomena that the financial figures stand for. Instead, auditors see figures and books of receipts, pieces of paper that are taken to denote material phenomena. They see signifiers without signifieds. But it is possible for the ingenious to pervert the audit trail: they may falsify receipts or, through collusion, over- or under-invoice goods, and so on. Books, like pots, can be cooked, since their ultimate referent remains obscure.

²⁸ For a revealing discussion of this process in IMF missions see Harper (2000).

²⁹ Note that the auditor also requires some expertise to know, for example, whether or not roads have been built to stated standards, whether materials are of the stated grade, etc.

Although audit limits itself to commenting on the financial statements of an organisation, the implication is that its comment says something useful about the relation of those statements to reality. If audits uncover irregularities, it is assumed that they have been successful. Irregularities identify opaque areas of unaccountability which other agencies—investigators, prosecutors, sentencers—attempt to make transparent. The real difficulty for the auditor occurs when he or she finds only regularities. For how long should an auditor investigate? How deep should they dig into the material foundations of financial reports before expressing an opinion? The question arises because there is an inevitable trade-off between the degree of assurance desired and the cost of the audit. Because of this, auditors increasingly speak about providing ‘comfort’ to shareholders and the public, rather than ‘proof’ (Power, 1997). In spite of the ‘mass of technical procedures available to the auditor’ there is no objective foundation for an auditor’s verdict, other than the opinion of the auditor him or herself. As the Enron–Arthur Andersen affair has recently made clear, auditors sometimes get things drastically wrong.³⁰ Power describes this as ‘the deep epistemological obscurity of auditing’ (1997: 28), and argues convincingly that:

There is no robust conception of ‘good’ auditing independent either of auditor judgements or of the system of knowledge in which those judgements are embedded and against which particular audits can be judged. Good auditing ends up as conformity to agreed procedures which have stood the test of time. [Power, 1997: 29]

It is for this reason that Power refers to audits as ‘rituals of verification’, and audit as a ‘folk craft or art’. Audit processes, dedicated to providing ‘transparency’ in modern organisations, are not themselves transparent. The efficacy of audit, both in its ability to give grounds for suspicion and in its ability to reassure, is contingent upon trust in the auditor’s expertise and judgement. In the Arumeru case, the auditor opens his report with the empty declaration that ‘The examination was made in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and accordingly included such tests of accounting records and other auditing procedures as was considered necessary’ (Controller and Auditor General, 2001: 1). Without trust, or belief, it is difficult to see how the audit can exert an effect on the motivation of audited individuals or the agencies to which they are responsible. There is some symmetry here with the case of the pot-breaking ritual. Without trust or

³⁰ A great deal of comment about the Enron–Arthur Andersen affair is available on the internet. For one which criticises the auditors, and also an investment fund, Janus, see <http://www.maxfunds.com/content/ff112901.html>. The latter traded on an advertising campaign stating that ‘Janus do more than just look at a balance sheet when researching a stock. They get down and dirty.’ Janus subsequently lost as much as a billion dollars on Enron. ‘In Enron’s case,’ notes the commentator, ‘it appears they didn’t dig quite deep enough.’

belief in the expertise of the *chungu* man, in his ability, that is, to unleash supernatural powers in pursuit of malefactors, it is difficult to see how the pot could control and solve crimes or, in some cases, bring about social reconciliation.

INDIGENOUS ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPORTED GOVERNMENT

The majority of pots broken in Meru were aimed at thieves, debtors, assailants and murderers. In other words, they dealt with cases of everyday crime. But, as the audit account above implies, Meru are also subject to depredations and predations on the part of their elected District Council. Indeed, in 1998 the western part of the district revolted over a rise in the rate of tax, accusing the council chairman in particular of mismanagement and corruption (Kelsall, 2000). In the course of my fieldwork I was told that pots could be used against leaders in the clan system who were suspected of abusing their office. It is also the case that, on assuming office, *nshili* take an oath, which takes the form of a self directed conditional curse. This led me to enquire into whether the pot could be aimed at local government officials who were suspected, for instance, of embezzling council money. Was it possible, in other words, that an imported form of local government could be rendered accountable by indigenous means?

Many informants, including one of the *chungu* men, thought that it could. In fact in 1998, in a celebrated case, the council chairman was car-jacked. Subsequently some of his political opponents started a rumour that he was in cahoots with the car thieves. In order to squash the rumours, supporters of the chairman on the council arranged to break a pot. Shortly thereafter, three men suspected of involvement in the car-jacking met a violent end. In other parts of Arusha, Maasai elders have collectively cursed the district administration.³¹ In addition, in the most recent campaign for the council chair, the defeated candidate complained that his opponents were unfairly garnering support through cursing and oathing. Further, I collected a case in which a pot had been used in another modern setting—a farmers' co-operative society.³² In the light of these examples, it appears that there is nothing in principle to stop the pot being used in 'modern' government fora. In practice, however, this hardly ever occurs.

There seem to be three main reasons for this. The first is that there is a question mark whether the supernatural forces invoked by the pot have power over any other ethnic group. This was implied by a clan elder, who said that pot-breaking was a Meru affair. If the agents unleashed by pot-breaking are the Meru God (*Iruva*), or particular Meru ancestors or 'giants', it may be that their power is limited in respect of other ethnic groups. This would square with the situation in

³¹ James Igoe, personal communication.

³² Interview, Lowilile Mungure, Ambureni village.

other parts of Africa, where occult forces such as witchcraft are often believed to be confined to the family (Geschiere, 1997). Arumeru District Council is a polyglot community, and, if the above is true, the pot could be expected to be less efficacious in this setting. However, there are reasons to be sceptical of this explanation. To begin with, the pot can already cross clan boundaries. Secondly, the pot paraphernalia frequently come from outwith Meru. Further, pot-breaking continues in the multi-ethnic urban setting of Arusha town. Finally, when I first made contact with *chungu* men they assumed that I myself desired to break a pot.³³ All these examples suggest that *chungu* need not be confined to the tribe.

The second reason is a simple collective action problem. Pots are normally broken by individuals who have suffered some sort of personal or familial injury. It is individuals that seek out clan elders, who then take the case to the *chungu* men, negotiate with them, make down-payments and set a date for a ceremony. In a case of government corruption it is more difficult to identify the injured party. The taxpayers in general suffer, but it is a diffuse harm. No individual is likely to want to incur the financial costs of a *chungu* ritual in this case, and raising donations in order to open negotiations with a *chungu* man would not be easy. It is conceivable that in a dramatic case of government corruption *mringaringa* would be motivated to arrange a pot-breaking itself. However, this would place clan elders on a collision course with government authority, something that historically they have been keen to avoid.

The above observation leads to the third and, I think, most compelling reason. Currently the government tolerates the practice of pot-breaking. Indeed, it even taxes it. However, it does not actively condone such rituals, since, like the government of South Africa, its authority is based upon a disenchanting world view (Ashforth, 1998). In the case of car-jacking referred to above, the District Executive Director had to inform the councillors that it was improper for the council, in its official capacity, to break a pot. This did not stop the councillors holding a ceremony and publicising it; but they did so as private individuals. If citizens wished to break a pot against a suspected malefactor in government office it is probable that a permit would be much more difficult to obtain. In fact it is likely that *chungu* men could be prosecuted, if the state so desired, under the Witchcraft Ordinance.³⁴ This is clearly a significant deterrent to the pot crossing the permeable boundary between 'traditional' and 'modern' arenas. It is possible, of course, that a pot could be broken in secret. But a secret pot-breaking, precisely because of its lack of publicity, would be less

³³ I did give this course of action serious thought, since whilst in Arusha I lost a pair of sunglasses and suspected them stolen. Precious though they were to me, I decided, on balance, that the end did not justify the means.

³⁴ I thank Richard Waller for pointing this out to me.

likely to bring redress. Moreover, illicit pot-breakings carry risks, since Meru believe an unjustified curse rebounds on the person who curses (Harjula, 1989).

IMPORTED ACCOUNTABILITY AND MODERN GOVERNMENT

There appear to be significant obstacles, as things currently stand, to integrating *chungu* more thoroughly into formal government systems. This is perhaps disappointing, given that in other realms it acts as a highly efficacious means of holding people to account. Are the prospects of strengthening accountability through audit any better? The answer has to be a qualified 'yes'. However, the qualifications are important.

The first one relates to 'trust' in the audit profession. At present, auditors are not highly trusted, not only because the methods they use are unfathomable to most ordinary Tanzanians but because it is assumed that auditors can be, and frequently are, bribed. The people I spoke with in Arumeru placed more faith in the pot than they did in modern systems of financial accountability. They mistrusted accountants and auditors, just as they did the entire apparatus of government. It was felt that accountants could always be corrupted, whereas the pot 'cannot lie'. Its 'gaze' was, in their view, omniscient.³⁵ It is interesting that one of our informants who expressed such an opinion was himself both a clan elder and an accountant on the municipal council!

The second relates to resources. The audit profession has estimated that it is massively under-resourced and lacks 'human capital'.³⁶ Until this changes, some audits are likely to lack thoroughness.

The third relates to the role of other agencies. Although in the West the main epistemological anxiety surrounding financial audit relates to the fact that too often it provides an unfounded assurance of comfort, in Tanzania auditors frequently give adverse reports. The problem is that little is done about them. As suggested earlier, audits identify irregularities, dark areas that it is the responsibility of other actors to investigate. However, it is not always easy to prove cases of embezzlement, and it is even more difficult to prove a case of corruption (that is, embezzlement or fraud combined with a bribe or political motive). Corruption normally takes place in secret, between an agent and a principal, and, if neither party squeals, its existence is extremely difficult to prove. Compare with this the summary justice of the pot, which easily finds its target and begins its lethal work. In spite of an

³⁵ On hearing this description, Rob Blunt of the University of Chicago coined the term 'panoptical pot'.

³⁶ For example, central government has only nineteen Certified Public Accountants when it has been estimated that it needs 329. ('Big challenge thrust on NBAA', *Sunday Observer*, courtesy of editor@rahanews.com.)

ostensible 'war on corruption' currently under way in Tanzania, very few people have actually been convicted.³⁷

Legal complexities notwithstanding, inaction on corruption is also doubtless attributable to lack of will on the part of politicians. Although there exist agencies in Tanzania dedicated to promoting 'good governance', many officials remain mired in corruption and think nothing of protecting other corrupt officials (Kelsall, 2002). As a result there is inconsistency in the outcomes of audit: some adverse audit reports occasion prosecutions, some transferrals or retirements, and some no action at all.³⁸ In view of this, the way in which audit technology, when combined with other institutions of government, leads to accountable outcomes is in some ways more mysterious than the ritual of *chungu*.

CONCLUSION

PLURAL ACCOUNTABILITIES OR UNACCOUNTABILITY?

This article has attempted to compare indigenous and imported mechanisms for holding people to account, both of which are currently in use, though in only partially overlapping spheres, in Arumeru District. The aim has been to suggest that indigenous accountability and imported accountability will not fit neatly into an 'irrational/rational' conceptual scheme. It has also addressed the question of whether indigenous modes of accountability might play an increased role in the 'modern' government system, perhaps supplementing, or even displacing, the local government audit.

The article documented a number of cases, based on informants' testimonies, of people who, after the ritual breaking of pots, had suffered misfortune (normally death) as result of being linked, by action or by kin, with some kind of social transgression. It also presented evidence of people who had confessed to transgressions and paid compensation to plaintiffs because of a fear of the effects of the pot. There is empirical evidence, then, that the procedure of breaking pots is successful in holding people to account for their actions. Whether it is successful solely because of its psychological impact upon individuals who believe in its efficacy is difficult to say. The causal powers unleashed by the pot have not been consistently explained to the

³⁷ In 2000 the Prevention of Corruption Bureau received 1,461 reports of corruption incidents; 103 cases were in court; over 800 public servants had been retired in the public interest, but not a single high-ranking politician or official had been convicted. ('Cash boost increases PCB efficiency', *Guardian*, 1 August 2001; Hoseah, 1999: 17.)

³⁸ In the Arumeru case two junior cash officers were charged, the Treasurer was transferred, and the District Executive Director, after spending two days with Prevention of Corruption Bureau officials, was apparently cleared. 'If she is cleared she had bribed the PCB!' said a political opponent. I visited the DED, and she gave a plausible story in defence of herself. It is rumoured that the Treasurer has connections in the government hierarchy, and that, transferred to Karatu, he immediately began to embezzle money there. These rumours must be treated with caution, however.

satisfaction of this researcher's 'scientific' mind, and remain, in that sense, mystical and mysterious.³⁹

The procedures of local government audit have also been analysed. The idea behind audit is, I suggest, scientifically familiar in so far as it relies on sampling techniques to provide a picture of reality. However, accounting remains vulnerable to error, or subversion. When we shift between numerical statistics, documents (such as receipts) and materials (such as iron sheets, schoolbooks or cement) we traverse different ontological categories. Audit affects to operate on the basis of an epistemology that ties them together. But this epistemology cannot be spelled out or justified according to the canons of logic. When does one *really* know, for example, that receipts have not been forged? When does one know that one has checked a large enough number of receipts? Such 'knowledge' can be based only upon the subjective judgement of the auditor, informed by audit's own 'tried and tested methods'.⁴⁰ Hence audit is also, to some degree, mysterious. Given its fallibility, trust in the auditor is crucial to the mechanism's success. Obviously, that trust is more likely to be forthcoming in some politico-cultural contexts than in others.

Unlike pot-breaking, which is a concentrated mechanism of accountability, audit is just the first cog in an institutionally differentiated accountability machine. Harper has argued that, in the social context of IMF mission work, numbers that have passed the test of audit undergo a 'moral transformation' and acquire a new potency: they are not merely fossilised records of economic actions past, they provide the basis of *policy*, which has manifold effects in the real world. In the case of local government in Tanzania, however, the figures distilled from audit exercises make a much weaker brew. Although there is some evidence of their potency increasing, audits are often followed by indifference or inaction on the part of other responsible agencies. The empirical evidence for audit changing motivational structures and working as a mechanism of accountability is, I suggest, rather thin.

In spite of this fact, certain actors in government, backed by foreign donors, are ploughing energy and resources into audit. It is not just about resources, though; it is, as our informant at the National Audit Office said, about creating 'faith'. Currently audit's image in the mind of the public is sullied with the profanity of corruption; it needs to be elevated to a more sacred plane. Only, perhaps, when this occurs will it motivate the public sufficiently to induce other governmental agencies to take steps that will eventuate in increased accountability. And such inducement will undoubtedly meet with resistance from actors in the state with no interest in having their actions checked. As it stands, audit

³⁹ One might wonder whether it is precisely the pot's mysteriousness that contributes to its irresistibility. If malefactors understood how it worked, its effects might be easier to countermand.

⁴⁰ In similar vein, Geschiere (1998) has critiqued the scientificity and transparency of statistical analysis in opinion polling in the United States.

remains a top-down mechanism of accountability that can be used as an excuse for disciplinary action by interests in central government and by external donors whenever it is politically expedient to do so.

Pot-breaking, by contrast, is a genuine bottom-up, grass-roots form of accountability (though it is not, strictly speaking, 'popular', since it hinges on the expertise of the *chungu* men). But the chances of its increased instantiation in local government appear slim. The main problem, I think, is not that it couldn't be expected to work—because it could—or that it would be difficult to organise—though difficulties there are—but that government would be determined to prevent it. Aside from the fact that the state bases some of its claim to dominance on the basis of its scientific knowledge and expertise, there are individuals and groups within the state who would not wish their actions to be subjected to the scrutiny of *chungu*.

It is interesting here to note that the continued dominance of people in this apparatus of power is partly contingent on the support of foreign donor agencies, which subsidise the Tanzanian state massively. Donors seem unlikely to get involved in supporting indigenous practices such as pot-breaking, for a number of reasons. To begin with, it contradicts their 'rational', 'scientific' world view, their expertise in which provides, as in the case of government, a rationale for their continued intervention. Secondly, because of its self-encapsulation, *kupasua chungu* provides no obvious point into which donors could plug their programmes and personnel (compare Ferguson, 1990). It would be hard to imagine 'consciousness-raising' workshops on *chungu*, or 'training of trainers' in pot-breaking. Finally, because the pot exacts a communal revenge, and is typically cooled by clan co-operation, it contradicts the individualising thrust of liberal governance programmes, which elevate an atomised individual above his or her community *milieu* (Williams and Young, 1994).

Because of the efficacy of the pot, it is unlikely, as modernisation theorists might predict, to fade away. On the contrary, in a context of accelerating economic differentiation there are signs that it is increasing. Audit, also, faces a future of increasing prevalence, owing to the efforts of donor agencies. Thus local social and political life in Tanzania will continue to be governed by a plurality of accounting regimes. At the same time, because of the difficulty of instantiating either audit or the *chungu* ritual into government, a great deal of unethical behaviour will continue unchecked. An army of consultants, frequently schooled in political science or public administration, currently advises donor agencies on the best ways of implementing imported technologies of governance. The challenge for proponents of indigenous accountability is to think more practically about how local technologies could have an improved effect.

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accountability in Arumeru District. A subsequent field trip in December 2001 led to further discussions and visits to both a pot-breaker and the National Audit Office. They were followed by around twenty interviews focused on the subject of pot-breaking, conducted and tape-recorded by my research assistant, Jehovah Roy Kaaya. An attempt was made to include informants from a variety of walks of life: clan elders, local government officials, a policeman, a pastor, a medical assistant and farmers. In June and July 2002, on another field trip, Roy and I conducted further interviews on the subject of pot-breaking, including a visit to another pot-breaker. Interviews were conducted in a combination of Kiswahili and Kirwa. (I cannot speak the latter.) I was also introduced to a recently completed Diploma in Theology on the subject (Mungure, 2002), which proved to be a rich ethnographic resource. Another interview was also held at the National Audit Office. I would like to thank Jehovah Roy Kaaya, all my informants and the library staff at Makumira University College for help with fieldwork; the Nuffield Foundation and the University of Newcastle, which provided small grants for field study, and the participants at a conference, 'Crime in Eastern Africa: Past and Present Perspectives', Naivasha, 8–11 July 2002, as well as Lisa Richey, Todd Sanders and five anonymous referees for constructive comments on an earlier version of this article. The author began working in Arumeru in 1996.

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ABSTRACT

Holding people to account for their actions is a feature of all societies. This article examines two different mechanisms of accountability, both of which are used in the Arumeru District of Tanzania. The first is a form of ritual cursing called 'breaking a pot'; the second is the local government financial audit. By placing both practices in the same frame the article aims to unsettle the conceptual divide between the rational and the irrational, the modern and traditional, the scientific and the occult. It also asks whether imported forms of local government, such as are represented by Arumeru District Council, might be made responsible via indigenous and indexical mechanisms of accountability, or whether imported institutions are best rendered accountable by 'universal' means.

RÉSUMÉ

Rendre les individus comptables de leurs actions est une caractéristique commune à toutes les sociétés. Cet article examine deux mécanismes de responsabilité utilisés tous deux dans le district d'Arumeru en Tanzanie. Le premier est une forme de malédiction rituelle appelée «casser un pot»; le second est le contrôle financier de l'administration locale. En plaçant ces deux pratiques sur le même plan, l'article entend bouscler le clivage conceptuel entre le rationnel et l'irrationnel, le moderne et le traditionnel, le scientifique et l'occulte. Il demande également s'il est possible de rendre comptables les formes importées d'administration locale, comme celle que représente le Conseil du district d'Arumeru, pas des mécanismes indigènes et indexiques de responsabilité, ou s'il vaut mieux rendre les institutions importées comptables de leurs actes par des moyens «universels».