

# *Powering the Nation: Natural Gas Development and Distributive Justice in Tanzania*

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The discovery of large recoverable reserves of natural gas in southeastern Tanzania has bolstered Tanzania's determination to transform itself from being one of the poorest aid-dependent countries in the world into an industrializing Middle-Income Country (MIC) by 2025. Drawing on an ethnographic study conducted in the rural Mtwara region, this article examines the hype and hope surrounding the dominant national political discourse on how the gas project will empower the nation and oppositional discourses from the margins that tell a different story. Narratives of people affected by the gas project reveal differing perspectives, including experiences of domination, exclusion, indignation, humiliation, injustice, resistance, powerlessness, and indifference. The article illustrates how the process and scale of the gas project, and the rapidity with which it was implemented, represents what scholars have variously called accumulation by dispossession and accumulation by displacement. Ultimately, those at the helm of policymaking and governing actions must be fully convinced that the affected communities' concerns regarding dispossession, violence, compensation, and employment are real and deserve to be addressed, urgently. Only then will Tanzania be able to use its gas bonanza to genuinely empower the entire nation.

**Key words:** natural gas development, dispossession, state violence, ethnography, narratives, Tanzania

The southeastern region of mainland Tanzania has historically been referred to as the “Cinderella region of a Cinderella territory” to imply that it is a neglected region from which no economic or social development will emerge (Lal 2015; Liebenow 1971; Seppälä 1998). In the post-independence period, scholars have described the region as an “underdeveloped periphery” and the “bottom of a sack,” while exploring the reasons for its “backwardness” in comparison with the country's relatively developed northern regions (Rizzo 2006; Seppälä and Koda 1998). More recently, some scholars have excavated the region's oral history to offer a corrective to the region's infamous reputation as a location of passivity and apathy (Ahearne 2016; Lal 2015; Seppälä 1998; Wembah-Rashid 1998). In contemporary popular discourse, however, the people of Lindi-Mtwara regions are pejoratively described as culturally backward, intrinsically

primitive, thriftless, stubbornly lazy, and inherently apathetic to development initiatives.

The recent discovery of new, large recoverable reserves of natural gas in rural Mtwara has, however, led to a reconsideration of the region's long-standing, low status in the national imagination and its significance to the national economy. The new gas discoveries prompted the former Tanzanian president, Jakaya Kikwete, to call the nation's attention to the Mtwara region's important role in powering the nation, metaphorically and practically through gas-fired electricity, and catapulting Tanzania from being one of the poorest aid-dependent countries in the world, into an industrializing Middle-Income Country (MIC) by 2025 (Anyimadu 2016; Lokina and Leiman 2014; Shanghvi and Jingu 2013).<sup>1</sup> The Mtwara natural gas project (hereafter gas project) is part of a plan to add another 2,000 megawatts of new electricity generating power by 2018 to increase Tanzania's generating capacity to 10,000 MW by 2025. In addition to using the gas for domestic consumption, power generation, and industrial development, Tanzania is keen to become a leading liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporting country in East Africa. To that end, the government initiated plans to build a two-train LNG project in Likong'o village in Lindi region, with an estimated investment of \$30 billion (Kasumuni 2016).

The aim of this article is to examine the social impact of the gas project on the people of rural Mtwara. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in four coastal villages in rural Mtwara, I explore local understandings of, and responses to, the gas project. I focus on the “local perspective,” which is often acknowledged in the literature on extractives and

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national policy documents, as crucially important for ensuring the socioeconomic well-being of project-affected people. In practice, however, it remains a neglected domain of anthropological inquiry and analysis (see Shanghvi and Jingu 2013; Willow and Wylie 2014). The article's ultimate goal is to examine how some of the provisions articulated in Tanzania's Natural Gas Policy (2013; revised in 2015) are translated into reality on-the-ground and to bring the local reality in the form of narrative representations to the attention of concerned stakeholders, scholars, and global policy analysts. Based on ethnographic data, I demonstrate that notwithstanding the upbeat, hegemonic national discourse about how the gas project will enable Tanzania to become a MIC by 2025, the "local perspective" on the project reveals a different narrative, one informed by lived experiences of domination, repression, exclusion, indignation, humiliation, injustice, resistance, indifference, powerlessness, or an ambivalent attitude toward the project and its significance to the project-affected people. I illustrate how the process and scale of the project, and the rapidity with which it has been implemented, represents what Harvey (2004); Hall (2013); Holden, Nadeau, and Jacobson (2011); and other scholars have variously called "accumulation by dispossession," "accumulation by displacement" (Araghi 2009), "regime of dispossession" (Levien 2013), and similar processes in neoliberal environments (Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012). Collectively, these concepts "theorize the historical specificity and the predatory character of capital accumulation processes under neoliberal globalization" (Araghi 2009:135).

Scholars who theorize the processes of accumulation by dispossession in contemporary contexts draw their inspiration from Karl Marx's explication of the "original" or "primitive" accumulation where people are dispossessed of their land, means of production, and livelihood through various mechanisms, including predation, fraud, and violence (Hall 2013). In this formulation, "the poor located in the peripheries of society are systematically deprived of their means of making a living and forced to look for work from the rich and powerful" (Holden, Nadeau, and Jacobson 2011:142). Consequently, the dispossessed are left with no option but to sell their labor in the wage-labor system in order to survive (Marx 1975 in West 2016). David Harvey's (2004) analysis of Marx's classic theory of primitive accumulation or original accumulation and its reinterpretation as "accumulation by dispossession" for modern day social analysis incorporates some of Marx's fundamental tenets, but without the temporal assumption found in Marx's concept of primitive accumulation (Hall 2013; West 2016). While some scholars use primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession interchangeably, others make a conceptual distinction between the two. Nonetheless, "the processes by which land and other resources are enclosed, and their previous users dispossessed, for the purposes of capital accumulation are central to both" (Hall 2013:1583). Moreover, as Hall (2013:1583) points out, "the role of the state in capital accumulation and dispossession, too, is at the core of both the theorization of primitive accumulation and

accumulation by dispossession and of land grab research." Scholars who have examined the relevance of accumulation by dispossession in empirical contexts have concluded that the processes are often violent, especially in developing countries where opposition from the affected communities can be strong. And, in such situations, "the state often resorts to active repression even to the point of low-level warfare" (Holden, Nadeau, and Jacobson 2011:157).

I use accumulation by dispossession as an organizing concept to examine the gas project's social impact on the people of Mtwara and reflect on people's narrative representations of their experiences of dispossession on multiple fronts. In doing so, I seek to underscore how people make sense of traumatic experiences, especially in relation to the state violence that has marked the development of the gas project, the powerlessness that characterized people's encounters with the security forces, and the meanings they ascribe to their individual and collective experiences. I do this to illustrate how "violent expropriations play a role in capital accumulation" (Hall 2013:1586) and how the state uses "extra-economic coercion to expropriate means of production, subsistence, or common social wealth for capital accumulation" (Hall 2013:1593). On an applied note, I propose steps that all key stakeholders involved will have to take, at the policy level and in practice, to fulfill the government's legal obligations to ensure distributive justice (i.e., just distribution of costs and benefits, including procedural justice) to the people of Tanzania, especially in the gas producing region. Thus, my representation and analysis of the social impact of the gas project on the people of Mtwara is not simply to present yet another ethnographic case study of state-directed violence and dispossession in the extractive sector, but to highlight the policy implications of the findings obtained through ethnographic engagement with the people affected by the gas project.

The article is organized as follows. I first provide some background information on the sociopolitical context of the gas project's development and indicate how the project became controversial on multiple fronts, marked by state-directed violence. In the middle section, I examine the narratives of those whose lives have been directly affected by the gas project. I use a meaning-centered approach to shed light on their lived experiences in relation to the project and the different meanings they individually and collectively give to their experiences of environmental and social dispossession. I focus on people's understandings of vulnerability, elicited through oral histories and narratives, and highlight "how people as 'experiencing subjects' make sense of violence and turbulent change" occurring in their lives (Eastmond 2007:249). I follow this with a discussion of the key findings and conclude by reflecting on the wider implications of the findings of this study for Tanzania's energy (natural gas and electricity) policy and more broadly for anthropology and ethnography in highlighting the nuances of how multinational resource extraction projects affect local communities (Willow and Wylie 2014).

## Gas Discoveries and the Critical Mass

Tanzanian gas reserves were discovered in 1974, first on the Songo Songo island near the mouth of the Rufiji river, and in 1982 by the Italian National Oil Company (AGIP) in Mnazi Bay, Mtwara. It was not until 2004, however, that production for domestic consumption began in earnest (Anyimadu 2016; Mawasiliano 2013; Pedersen and Bofin 2015). Buoyed by several new gas discoveries between 2009 and 2012, which put the country's natural gas reserves at between 46TCF and 55TCF, there was high optimism among the country's political leadership surrounding the new gas discoveries in the Mnazi Bay area (Michuzi 2012). In public speeches, President Kikwete announced that after decades of economic marginalization, the people of Mtwara will soon be able to enjoy the fruits of gas development such as access to uninterrupted electricity, factories, paved asphalt roads, dependable transportation infrastructure, hospitals, schools, and hotels. More importantly, he promised plentiful jobs for the youth and ultimately sustainable poverty reduction. Unsurprisingly, people's expectations from the anticipated *maendeleo* were high.

The notion of *maendeleo* and its opposite, *rudi nyuma* (underdevelopment, going backward), has particular connotations in Tanzania's historical context. Over the years, numerous scholars have shown how *maendeleo* has remained a contested cultural trope in policy discourse and popular interpretations, with no single narrative (Ahearne 2016; Lal 2015). In policy documents and politicians' public speeches, *maendeleo* is commonly equated with tangible "progress," better infrastructural facilities, livelihood opportunities, higher living standards, and quality of life. Vernacular understandings of *maendeleo*, however, differ from such broad representations of the idea of betterment or *endelevu* (sustainable) development. Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that when rural Tanzanians talk of *maendeleo*, the focus often tends to be individualized. Walley (2004:221), for example, notes that on Mafia Island, people commonly use the term *maendeleo* "to refer to individuals rather than societies; it referred not to a general state of 'progress' and societal uplift but very concretely to financial well-being...." Similarly, Green (2014:51) notes that "going forwards depends on real *maendeleo*... from the perspective of rural people, this cannot be achieved collectively, but through an individual's struggle to bring about *maendeleo ya mtu binafsi* (individual development)." In other words, the people of Mtwara expected not only improvements in the region's physical infrastructure but also their individual *maendeleo*. Their expectations were soon dashed.

On May 21, 2013, Professor Sospeter Muhongo, the Minister for Energy and Minerals, made a budget speech in the parliament, in which he stated that the gas extracted from the Mnazi Bay area in Mtwara would be transported via a 532 km<sup>2</sup> pipeline to Dar es Salaam, the country's commercial capital, and beyond. The initial elation that the people of Mtwara experienced surrounding the gas project quickly turned into

antagonism. Violent protests broke out in several towns in the Mtwara region. People were expressing their deep resentment over the government's decision to transport the gas elsewhere instead of using it to generate power and provide employment in the impoverished Mtwara region, as was originally promised. They referenced President Kikwete's speech, given in February 2013, in which he promised that 84 percent of the gas would remain in the Mtwara region (Ndimbwa 2014; Onyango 2013). The ruling party's leadership promptly accused local politicians from the opposition party of deliberately spreading misinformation and inciting violence. Consequently, paramilitary forces (Tanzania People's Defense Forces) were deployed to quell the protests. The actions that followed resulted in the deaths of several civilians and widespread property damage. The national and international media extensively reported these protests. They also received scholarly attention (see Ahearne 2016; Lal 2015; Must and Rustad 2016; Ndimbwa 2014). The people of Mtwara rhetorically threatened to secede from the Tanzanian State over the question of natural gas extraction and its distribution. They claimed that they have been historically neglected and deprived of investments that would lead to economic and social development in the region. The demonstrators were protesting against the political leadership's broken promises, claiming their rightful share, and their entitlement to directly benefit from the natural resource being extracted from their lands (cf. Painter and Castillo 2014; Poncian 2014). As Lal (2015:128) notes, "The turmoil in Mtwara brought older and deeper questions about citizenship and development to the surface of national politics in ways that both suppressed and revived the historical dynamics...."

President Kikwete emphasized in his speech to the people of Mtwara that, as with all natural resources and subterranean mineral resources, the natural gas found in Mtwara belongs to the entire nation and not to the people of Mtwara alone.<sup>3</sup> He reiterated that the resource will be used to improve the socioeconomic well-being of all Tanzanians (Michuzi 2013). Kikwete also emphasized that most of the natural gas will be utilized to generate electricity and facilitate power generation for new industries in the Mtwara region, which in turn would generate employment opportunities and economic and social development. He alluded to some of the provisions articulated in Tanzania's Natural Gas Policy and reassured the people of Mtwara that there was a misunderstanding or miscommunication of the facts. By November 2014, the construction of the gas pipeline infrastructure was going full steam ahead, with much of the midstream work undertaken by the Chinese state-owned giant, China Petroleum Technology and Development Corporation (CPTDC). The rapidity with which an environmental and social impact assessment of the project was undertaken in 2014, completed and published on the Internet by Maurel and Prom (2014), revealed the project's underlying political expediency. It had to be completed before the general elections in October 2015. President Kikwete inaugurated the gas pipeline on October 12, 2015, just two weeks before the general elections on October 25, 2015.

The ruling *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (Party of the Revolution) party, which has been in power since its founding in 1977, decisively won the elections, and the incoming president, John Magufuli, nicknamed “the bulldozer,” consolidated the dominant national discourse on the gas project’s significance for national economic development.

## Research Setting and Methodology

This article draws on fieldwork conducted in the rural Mtwara region in July and August of 2013, and August to December 2014. My previous fieldwork in the region provided important background information about the gas project as it unfolded (Kamat 2014). Given the nature and scale of the gas project, I chose to do my fieldwork in different villages inside the project’s catchment area. I did not concentrate my fieldwork in any particular village. Two of the study villages, Msimbati and Mtandi, with a combined population of approximately 10,000, are the main villages in the upstream area, where the gas fields are located. The other two villages, Nalingu<sup>4</sup> and Mkubiru, located about 15 miles from Msimbati, with a combined population of approximately 7,000, are coastal villages in the gas project’s catchment area. However, the gas project has not had the same level of impact on the latter two villages with regard to dispossession of farmland, trees, and other livelihood assets. A dirt road connects all the villages inside the catchment area.

The vast majority of the people who live in these villages self-identify as Makonde, which is the largest and dominant ethnic group in the Mtwara region. Most of them are followers of Islam. Similarly, nearly all the village residents speak KiMakonde and KiSwahili. The majority of the residents are poor, economically and socially disadvantaged, and heavily dependent on subsistence farming and marine-related and coastal activities, including subsistence fishing. Although the region is well-known for producing cashews and coconuts in commercial quantities, very few households engage in full-time cashew and coconut farming. Most villagers live in thatched mud and wattle houses, and only a few households have access to wired electricity.

During July and August of 2013, I conducted in-depth interviews with a convenience sample of twenty-four villagers—twelve men and twelve women—and four focus group discussions (FGDs)—two with six women in each group and two with six men in each group—in Msimbati and Mtandi, with a focus on dispossession and social transformation. I followed this with additional interviews and focus group discussions in Msimbati, Mtandi, Nalingu, and Mkubiru between August and December 2014. During this phase, I conducted a total of 160 interviews, with a convenience sample of eighty men and eighty women and eight FGDs—two in each of the four villages—with the help of a male and a female research assistant. Participant ages ranged from thirty-three to seventy-five, and they had varied occupational and socioeconomic backgrounds. I also met with government officials and village-level leaders to ascertain their disposition

toward the gas project. The data presented in this article are from both phases of fieldwork. I recorded all interviews and FGDs on a digital audio-recorder. These were transcribed verbatim into Kiswahili. I reviewed the transcribed data at length to identify key issues and representative quotes; these quotes were then extracted and translated into English. The emergent issues were further categorized into overarching themes such as betrayal and injustice, compensation-related concerns including government interference, hopes and unemployment, and state-mediated physical violence. Verbal informed consent was obtained and audio-recorded from all those who participated in the interviews and FGDs.

## Social License to Operate

In 2005, when Artumas, the Canadian independent energy producing company, began drilling wells in the Mnazi Bay area, local residents did not complain about its operations because Artumas offered to adequately compensate villagers who would lose their livelihood assets to the project. Artumas also promised that it would refurbish roads and schools, upgrade the dispensary, and provide free electricity to all the households in the affected villages from the 12MW gas-fired power plant that it would build in Ruvula to serve Mtwara and Lindi. Moreover, the company promised to create employment opportunities for approximately 1,000 local residents, albeit on a temporary basis (Artumas Group 2005). Thus, assured of the social license to operate, Artumas began to drill a few exploratory wells offshore and on land.

Mzee Waziri, a seventy-five-year-old resident of Msimbati village, was among those who lost their farmland to the gas project. I interviewed Mzee Waziri twice and engaged in informal conversations with him on several occasions during my fieldwork. He repeatedly told me that he did not regret losing his farmland to the project because he considered it a sacrifice he made for the good of the nation. He recalled a meeting he and other villagers attended with Artumas’ president, Steven Mason, during which he learned about the gas project’s national and international significance. Mason assured the villagers: “Msimbati is soon going to twinkle (*utamemeteka*) with electricity.” Mzee Waziri bemoaned the people in his village who did not understand the project’s significance and wrongly believed that the government was playing an unfair game. “That’s not true,” he asserted, because the gas project has indeed brought many tangible benefits to the village; but, unfortunately, many people from his village were unnecessarily suspicious of the government’s good intentions.

Similarly, Mzee Isa, a fifty-four-year-old resident of Mtandi village, described how he viewed the gas project favorably. He said:

Artumas came here to help us. The company president had told us that Artumas will build an all-weather asphalt road from Ruvula till Msimbati, but the government interfered and said that it was for TANROADS [Tanzania National Roads Agency] to make decisions on road construction.

Even then, Artumas helped us to refurbish the primary school and the kitchen in the secondary boarding school, but now a new company [Maurel and Prom] has replaced Artumas.

Another participant, Mzee Salum, a sixty-four-year-old resident of Msimbati village, praised Artumas but expressed his disappointment with the government's interference in the matter that ultimately deprived the people of Msimbati and Mtandi from enjoying free electricity. He explained:

Artumas had agreed to “throw in” (*mtupe*) free electricity, as part of the compensation, because we had lost our land and trees to the project. But the government intervened and said that it was TANESCO's [Tanzania Electricity Supply Company] responsibility to provide electricity and not Artumas'. We had agreed to support the gas project because Artumas had promised to provide electricity to the entire village free of cost.... Artumas had even brought one generator exclusively for us, but TANESCO sent it elsewhere.

Thus, villagers such as Mzee Isa and Mzee Salum were doubly disappointed with government interference that had “tied the hands” of a foreign company that was willing to fulfill its corporate social responsibility (CSR) in return for the social license to operate. The promise and expectation of free electricity prompted many of those who lost their assets to the gas project to acquiesce to Artumas' compensation offer without much protest. These narrative segments from three older men from Msimbati and Mtandi village concur with Artumas' declared intention to fulfill its CSR by using some of the revenue and power generated from the gas project for the benefit of the local village community in the form of free electricity, fair compensation for the land and trees lost to the project, and an improved infrastructure (Artumas Group 2005). As will become evident later in this article, however, many villagers expressed their disappointment with the government's interference in the gas company's desire to fulfill its CSR. In other words, while companies engaging in extractive activities are coaxed to fulfill their CSR, the process may be complicated by potential “misinterpretations” of the respective domains of authority, such as those between Artumas and the Tanzanian government. Even so, Mzee Waziri's, Mzee Isa's, and Mzee Salum's praise and support for the gas project in general and Artumas, in particular, was exceptional among those who participated in this study. Many study participants were ambivalent about their dispositions toward the gas project as it unfolded. Some of the older women simply stated: “I have no idea what this gas project is all about.” Many also spoke negatively about the project and its destabilizing effects. They sought to give credibility to their narratives by providing lengthy explanations, flourished with examples of their lived experience with uncertainty, and the predicaments they face due to the dispossession of their livelihood assets. Through their narratives, they provided insights into their subjective experiences and their personal struggles over making sense of the dispossession and discontinuities they were experiencing in their lives due to the gas project.

## Developmental Injustice

As noted earlier, during the gas project's initial stages, President Kikwete assured the people of Mtwara that the project would bring development (*maendeleo*) to the Mtwara region on an unprecedented scale. Mzee Hamisi, a sixty-five-year-old resident of Mkubiru village, explained the context in which the hype surrounding the gas project and *maendeleo* was initiated:

In his speech, our president said that the people of Mtwara should get ready to witness dramatic developments in the region. He said that the gas project will result in the construction of big hotels, big houses, a bigger port, a bigger airport, and about fifty-one new factories, including cement and fertilizer factories, where the youth will find employment, and women too will find work. He promised us that the gas project will bring income earning opportunities for men and women.

In the above quote, the narrator alludes to president Kikwete's representation of *maendeleo* as not only about enlarging the region's infrastructure but also bringing individual-level prosperity through employment. Moreover, both men and women would materially benefit from the gas project. It would provide employment opportunities for a key social category of individuals—the youth—and it would also indirectly facilitate gender equality through expanded employment opportunities for men and women. In sum, the gas project would be a win-win investment.

Mzee Hamisi added that the president promised the people of Mtwara that if they worked hard, they will be able to fulfill their desires, like owning bicycles and motorbikes purchased with their earnings. People were initially delighted with the president's promises, but once they learned that the gas was going to be transported to Dar es Salaam and not used to generate electricity and facilitate industries and jobs in Mtwara, they became disgruntled. “That's when the angry protests started,” Mzee Hamisi said.

Embedded in Mzee Hamisi's narrative is an oft-heard theme in Tanzania's southeastern context of being betrayed by political leaders and the president who had apparently gone back on his promise (*akaja kuligeuza*) of bringing unprecedented development to the people of Mtwara. People were also displeased with the gas project because many had lost their farmlands to the project, and they felt shortchanged in regard to the compensation paid to them. They expressed their despair and disillusionment with the gas project through their narratives, and in doing so, they often moralized their experiences and the events they recounted.

## In a Wounded Land

On one occasion, Bi Mkubwa, a sixty-year-old woman, pointed to the drilling rig that was about 100 meters from where we were standing, and said to me:

You see the tower/rig (*minara*) there? That [gas flaring] is what is polluting the air and causing us shortness of breath. It's making everything hot here. Even the coconut trees

have become poisoned. The coconuts are falling down on their own, all dried up. It's because of the gas [flaring]. They are also injecting chemicals into the soil. Our land is wounded... we are living in a wounded land.

Bi Mkubwa's comment encapsulates a range of problems that many local residents associated with the gas project, including air pollution and the poor health of their intergenerational coconut trees. To many households, coconut trees constitute an important source of livelihood and food security. Therefore, her statement that the gas project has significantly altered the physical landscape and wounded the land on which people have lived and relied on for generations, through injection of toxic chemicals into the earth, is a moral commentary on the hurt that the villagers were experiencing due to the gas project. It also reveals their despair over the loss of healthy land and trees that have now been rendered wounded and infertile. In other words, Bi Mkubwa's comment illustrates how "even when people are not physically displaced, the sensory experience of environmental degradation can lead to equally damaging *dysplacement*" (Willow and Wylie 2014:226; see also West 2016).

Mzee Yusuf, a forty-six-year-old resident of Mtandi village who initially acquiesced to the gas company's decision to dig trenches on his land to bury the pipeline, explained how he was originally satisfied with the compensation he received but then became shocked and disappointed with the project as it was scaled up. He said:

If you go to the oceanfront, where they have buried the pipeline, you'll see that they have uprooted hundreds of coconut trees that our forefathers had planted. One coconut tree can live up to seventy-five years or more, and if I harvest the coconuts I can get up to Tsh 200,000 (\$100) per year from each tree—every day I can harvest five to six coconuts from each tree, and at the end of the month, I can sell up to sixty coconuts from each tree. So, it's a big loss.

In addition to expressing his despair over the permanent damage caused by the gas project to the oceanfront, in the above quote, Mzee Yusuf also calls attention to the villagers' forefathers' thoughtfulness in planting coconut trees to ensure decades of guaranteed economic and food security for future generations. His characterization of the destruction of the landscape as an irreversible "big loss" and his valuation of a coconut tree is at once an expression of his economic insecurity and a moral commentary on the project's destructive effects. In sum, those who lost their farmland and intergenerational trees to the gas project were not only concerned about the economic loss they had incurred but also the permanent, highly visible environmental damage that the gas project caused.

### Of Sacrifice and Hopes

Many of the study participants asserted that they were willing to lose their land and trees to the gas project in return

for compensation they knew was meager because they had pinned their hopes on president Kikwete's promise that the gas project would generate thousands of jobs. They believed that their grownup children would find long-term employment and bring home regular cash income. Villagers saw themselves as sacrificing their immovable assets in anticipation of wage earning opportunities for themselves and their children. At the time, most of the youth in the study villages were unemployed. Both men and women expressed these sentiments in their understandings of the gas project. Mzee Saidi, a forty-four-year-old resident of Msimbati village, had this to say:

We have lost our livelihood resources to the project, so they should give first preference to our youth and employ them on the project... so far out of the 400, only ten may have found some employment and that too temporary employment, but the remaining 390 are unemployed—they just wander around in the village like hooligans (*wahuni*).

Mzee Saidi's statement reveals the local villagers' sense of moral entitlement to jobs on the project, precisely because of the big losses they incurred following the permanent dispossession of their livelihood assets. Additionally, Mzee Saidi's statement also reflects his concern regarding the very limited employment opportunities created by the gas project. In his view, it's the gas company's moral responsibility to generate employment for the hundreds of youth, who, due to lack of employment, have become hooligans. Several other respondents echoed Mzee Saidi's comments that it's incumbent on the gas project to provide gainful, long-term employment to the village youth so that their income will bring prosperity to the village. In their view, if the youth in the village remained unemployed, they will inevitably become hooligans, which is an insulting, stigmatizing nomenclature and a source of constant worry and embarrassment for parents and the village community in general. As noted earlier, Artumas had indeed fulfilled its promise that it would employ hundreds of local villagers on the gas project. However, several villagers told me that nearly all the new jobs that were created during the initial stages of the project were temporary, short-term ones. Bi Mwema, a woman in her mid-sixties, reflected on this issue:

Our youth are still living in their homes without proper employment, so we don't know how this project is going to bring us development. We haven't seen any development from this project so far. We are occupying the lowest rung (*sisi tumeisha kalia chini*) because although this project is based here, most of the people who work on this project are from outside of Mtwara. So how can we say that this project has brought us benefits?

Bi Mwema's rhetorical question in the above quote reveals her skepticism about any claims that the project will bring maendeleo to the village and maendeleo to individual villagers such as herself. In her view, the government and the gas company both marginalized the local people and unfairly placed them on the lowest rung of the ladder of development priorities, jobs, and prosperity. Effectively, Bi Mwema's

frustration over being marginalized in relation to the gas project is reminiscent of the region's long history of neglect discussed in the earlier pages of this article.

Bi Zainabu, a forty-two-year-old woman, expressed her frustration regarding the gas project as follows:

If the gas project had provided employment opportunities to the local people, that would have been good, but it has not. The gas project has come only to humiliate us (*tumenyanyasa*), to kill us (*wanakuja kutuurwa tu*). Neither I nor my family members have benefitted in any way from this gas project. We have been completely marginalized (*tutakuwa tumedimidia kabisa*).

Bi Zainabu's frustration with the gas project; her feelings of being marginalized, humiliated, and threatened by the project's presence in her village; and her use of caustic language against the project's excesses are indicative of her sense of abjection and abnegation resulting from domination. In essence, her statements of vulnerability reveal the underlying asymmetrical power relations and the resultant suffering. The overall negative disposition of several of the study participants toward the gas project must be understood in relation to "the social and political contexts that have shaped and continue shaping the circumstances of their lives" (Eastmond 2007:252). Their statements need to be understood and analyzed in the context of the cultural memory of the state violence that was still fresh in the minds of the people of rural Mtwara, a topic I turn to next. Notably, throughout my fieldwork, tensions in the study villages over the gas project had not dissipated, nor were they dormant.

### Violence on the Periphery

As Harvey (2004:74) asserts, "The state, with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, plays a crucial role..." in the process of accumulation by dispossession. In the context of the gas project, the Tanzanian state displayed its asymmetrical power over the people of Mtwara in May 2013. The TPDF descended on the villages, especially Msimbati and Mtandi, following the news that someone had firebombed the Marine Park's office<sup>5</sup> late in the night. The Marine Park's office was close to the gas pipeline and one of the gas wells. Unlike the gas project's infrastructure, which was heavily guarded by security personnel with sub-machine guns, the Marine Park's office was a highly visible, easily accessible, unguarded soft target. Bi Mwanaidi, a thirty-three-year-old resident of Msimbati village, recalled:

It was late in the night, and my neighbor told us that someone had tossed a bomb inside the Marine Park office and destroyed it. After some time, the soldiers (TPDF) came and started beating up people randomly until they fell to the ground. They were beating people mercilessly as if it was a punishment (*walipigwa na adhabu*); it took up to a month for those who were beaten to recover from their injuries. Others ran into the forest, but I did not; I had one child on my back and another in my hand. I will never forget what happened that day.

The above segment from Bi Mwanaidi's narrative reveals the shock, suddenness, and the scale and intensity of the physical violence that the TPDF unleashed on the people of Msimbati and Mtandi. It also reveals the long-term negative impact of the unsettling dramatic event on Bi Mwanaidi's memory. Significantly, she was one of the many who believed that they were being collectively and unfairly punished for a crime that some disgruntled individuals had committed.

Bi Hadija, a sixty-four-year-old woman from Msimbati, reminisced about what happened when the TPDF arrived in Msimbati village late in the night:

I had taken one of my grandchildren outside to the toilet when I saw people running helter-skelter. I stood there and watched until my neighbor yelled at me: "Don't you see us running? The soldiers are here. Run!" I rushed inside, and my children and I picked up the grandchildren, and we also started running blindly into the forest. I carried two of my grandchildren. I was terrified by the soldiers; we hid in the bush (*kichakani*). Then we started running into the forest with my grandchildren, and there were dry thorns (*miba anamakavu*) everywhere; my grandchildren still have scars on their faces. I lost my balance and hit my head on a rock as I was running. We were all soaked in blood. There were many others, and we were all running blindly in the forest; we did not even have any proper clothes on us. The next day we heard that the soldiers had left the doors of all houses in the village open. They had announced that women and children were free to return, but we were too scared and decided to stay away for three days until the violence in the village had died down completely. I think I'm going to take this memory to my grave.

For Hadija, the day the TPDF descended on the village was a terrifying, traumatic experience. As with several other village residents, she distrusted the TPDF and was too scared to return home despite TPDF's assurances. Her narrative of the dramatic event is a moral reflection on the "why me or why us" question. It also asks: "What have we done to deserve this? Why did we have to run away from our own homes and survive in the forest with our young children?" Her coda in particular is indicative of the long-lasting psychological effects of the violence-related trauma.

### Discussion

The new gas discoveries in Mtwara have once again brought Tanzania's southeastern region to the center of developmental and nation-building political discourse (Lal 2015). Rather than being depicted as a developmentally stunted region, Mtwara is now attributed with the power to wrest the Tanzanian nation from the grips of poverty and overdependence on foreign aid and transform it into a self-sufficient MIC by 2025. The resurgence of the idioms of self-reliance (*kujitegemea*), self-development, and optimism currently articulated in political speeches, the popular press, and the country's Vision 2025 document are reminiscent of the nationalism and optimism that characterized much of

Julius Nyerere's post-independence *ujamaa* era (Lal 2015). Thus, the dominant political discourse in Tanzania is replete with optimistic statements about how the "gas bonanza" in rural Mtwara will be a "game-changer" for Tanzania and East Africa (Poncian 2014), albeit many have cautioned state actors and policymakers of the pitfalls of the "resource curse" and "grand corruption" (Moshi 2013; Pedersen and Bofin 2015; Shanghvi and Jingu 2013). As discussed in the foregoing pages, however, most people who live in Mtwara's gas producing region despair over the project's negative impact on their lives. Ordinary people are telling stories that are imbued with hopelessness. Their narratives reveal how the project dispossessed many households of their ancestral farmlands and directly threatened their means of livelihoods and food security. People are trying to make sense of the unexpected discontinuities and disruptive changes in their social, economic, and political lives. There is a persistent feeling among many villagers that instead of creating job opportunities for local residents, the gas project will push the people of coastal Mtwara toward more hardships and insecurities. Not surprisingly, the most common tropes emergent in the narratives of disappointment were those of domination, repression, exclusion, humiliation, despair, anger, resentment, powerlessness regarding the displacement, and dispossession resulting from the gas project. At the same time, these unsettling narratives imbricate peoples' hopes and aspirations for their family members, particularly the youth who have very limited employment opportunities.

In addition to their feelings of betrayal by political leaders who did not live up to their promise of bringing unprecedented *maendeleo* to the Mtwara region, people are also displeased with the gas project because many have lost their ancestral farmlands and intergenerational cash crops such as coconut and cashew trees to the project. They feel shortchanged by the cash paid for their compensable assets, particularly coconut trees, which are emblematic of the value people place on economic sustainability and food security. Although people were not physically displaced or relocated, they expressed indignation at being "fenced off" from their own farmlands and their disenchantment with the ongoing perceived social injustice. The women in particular were dismayed at the physical violence that the TPDF unleashed on them, their men, and their children in May 2013. They expressed their disillusionment with the false promises of plentiful employment opportunities and prosperity that political leaders made to them following the discovery of the gas deposits in their area. In a context where alternative livelihood strategies and grievance mechanisms to seek redress are very limited or fully absent, villagers are bound to be disappointed with the government's handling of their predicament, in the name of gas-for-national development. Given the extensive power asymmetries that exist between the Tanzanian state and ordinary citizens, the majority of the study participants believed that they were in a structurally weak position and left to their own devices. Therefore, some of the study participants described themselves as having become physically

and emotionally too weak to engage in any meaningful dialogue with the government. Several narrators also expressed their feelings of indignation at being unable to negotiate a reasonable cash compensation for the livelihood assets they lost to the gas project.

The gas project is highly visible in terms of the infrastructure in the Mtwara region and in the national imagination and media representations. Consequently, the ongoing process of accumulation by dispossession in the region puts an extra burden of ideological legitimation on the state. The Tanzanian state has had to repeatedly justify to the project-affected people and to the public-at-large through the media why the gas project should be given priority over the coastal villagers who have been dispossessed of their means of livelihood because of its significance to the national economy (Levien 2013). Indeed, as Lal (2015:5) notes, Tanzanian leaders have gone so far as to justify the displacement and dispossession of people in rural Mtwara by "invoking the welfarist logic of villagization" and claiming that the expropriation of the land for the gas project "is intended to benefit rural people according to the socialist principles of the past." What is more, according to Lal (2015:29), the Tanzanian government has even sought to resurrect the "1960s discourses of Afro-Asian solidarity to legitimize connections to foreign investors [especially China, which has heavily invested in the gas project] that increasingly hail from the former Third World."

The violence unleashed by the state apparatus on the people of Mtwara in May 2013 underscores the lengths to which the government is willing to go to privilege the gas project in the name of national development over the rights of its citizens on the society's periphery. The scenario described in this article reveals the banality of the violence and consistent pattern of dispossession associated with the extractive industry (see Holden, Nadeau, and Jacobson 2011). It underscores the pervasiveness of the inherent tensions that exist in the extractive industry's relationship with local communities in Tanzania and elsewhere (cf. Painter and Castillo 2014; West 2016).

The importance attached to the Mtwara gas project, amid political expediency, is, however, predictable given that in Tanzania, less than 25 percent of the population and only 7 percent of the rural population has access to electricity (United Republic of Tanzania 2014).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the urgency among political leaders, government representatives, international financiers and donors, and the public-at-large to use natural gas to generate the much-needed electricity, and to distribute it fairly across the country through the national grid, is well-recognized. But the urgency is bounded in unrealistic expectations because of the scale of the investments and the infrastructure that is required to realize all the project's key goals within the timeframe of Tanzania's Development Vision 2025 and amid ongoing allegations of corruption scandals (Anyimadu 2016; Ghanadan 2012; Gray 2015; Pedersen and Bofin 2015).

The demand for a reliable supply of cheap, sustainable electricity in Tanzania to "power the nation" into becoming a self-reliant economy is recognized in Tanzania's most recent National Five Year Development Plan—2016-2017 through

2020-2021 subtitled *Nurturing Industrialization for Economic Transformation and Human Development*. From the perspective of the impoverished people of Mtwara, however, this strategy, justified in the name of national development, is counterproductive. It is hurtful to those who have already lost their farmlands and livelihood assets to the project in return for compensation they consider unfair. Moreover, given the checkered history of Tanzania's electricity supply industry and the numerous corruption scandals associated with it in recent years, it is not surprising that the people of Mtwara resent the government's decision to transport the gas from Mtwara to the country's commercial capital—Dar es Salaam—to benefit the already wealthy industrialists and factory owners based there. As Ghanadan (2012:423) has rightly observed, there are few NGOs in Tanzania that take on the role of a watchdog over development relations, and the ones that do “have not focused on the electricity sector, which is largely out of public view.”

In the current circumstances, the political leadership will continue to explain the dispossession of the people of rural Mtwara as unavoidable given the gas project's significance to national economic growth. Thus, the Mtwara gas project and all it entails is indicative of the process of accumulation by dispossession in Tanzania's neoliberal economic environment. The state-driven expropriation of land in rural Mtwara for gas development has elements of the process of dispossession. The Tanzanian state will explicitly justify such blatantly visible expropriations with an ideological (and legal) claim to be serving the “common good” or a “public purpose”—typically cloaked in the language of “development” (Levien 2013).

Tanzanian scholars have long recognized the importance of judiciously using the nation's natural resources to bring the country's millions out of abject poverty through comprehensive sustainable interventions and investments in health, education, social protection, and employment opportunities for youth (Moshi 2013; Shanghvi and Jingu 2013). They have demonstrated that there is no dearth of well-meaning ideas and intentions aimed at bringing the benefits of the gas project to the poor and marginalized Tanzanian citizens, especially in the Mtwara region. The challenge, however, is to implement measures to translate these laudable ideas and well-meaning intentions into tangible programs that will genuinely benefit those whose livelihoods have been disrupted by the gas project. The way forward should be balanced development to avoid repeating previous patterns of development of the northern regions at the cost of the neglect of the southeastern region (Lal 2015).

The gas project's long-lasting impact on local communities, especially regarding the state-mediated dispossession of intergenerational livelihood assets and people's experiences with state-led violence, is not unique. On the contrary, there are several parallels between the situation in rural Mtwara described in this article and other extractives sites in Tanzania and East Africa, such as the large-scale gold mining operations in Northern Tanzania and the tita-

nium mines in Coastal Kenya. The fundamental problems of distributive justice are encountered with predictable regularity in all these extractive sites (Abuya 2015; Emel, Huber, and Makene 2011).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, while the dominant discourse about how the gas project in the Mtwara region will transform Tanzania's economy and the nation's future is being consolidated, alternative, oppositional discourses about how the gas project may have caused irreversible damage to those on the margins of rural coastal Mtwara remain largely suppressed. In this article, I call attention to their predicament by bringing to the fore voices from the margins that have received very little attention in the media and scholarly avenues. As Willow and Wylie (2014:226) rightly emphasize in the context of their ethnographic research on hydraulic fracking, “We need to tell real stories that speak to real people's experiences, to give voice to views that may otherwise remain unheard.” As such, I presented the stories of the people of rural Mtwara whose lives and livelihoods have been seriously affected by an extractive project that is putatively tied to the nation's future and effectively the ruling party's future. These narratives provide ethnographic insights into the social drama of dispossession unfolding in the rural Mtwara region: local expressions of indignation; embodied effects; and experiences of dispossession, disempowerment, and vulnerability to suffering. Collectively, these insights could be read as a corrective to the overly top-down manner in which extractive projects are implemented in Tanzania and elsewhere in the world, where natural resources are coercively expropriated (Ferguson 2006; Watts 2004). The importance of an ethnographic approach to the study of the social impact of the extractive industry lies in the fact that as ethnographers, we are uniquely positioned in our local focus yet also retain our ability to articulate global-local imbrications. A meaning-centered approach with a focus on lived experiences enables us to provide a more textured and nuanced representation of the local reality: of people's insecurities, hopes, and expectations.

The extractive industry's economic and social impact on local communities has reemerged as an important component of CSR and national policy documents. Thus, it is imperative that the Tanzanian government adheres to the provisions that it made in its revised National Gas Policy to increase transparency, engage with local-level actors in a meaningful manner, and mitigate the harms that the gas development activities have brought to the people of Mtwara. Among the first steps toward ensuring distributive justice is a need for a reconsideration of the “fairness” or “justness” of the “inadequate” monetary compensation paid to the people of rural Mtwara whose lands were expropriated. To this end, it is crucial that accountability mechanisms are instituted to ensure that equitable compensation is provided to the project-affected people in a timely manner. It is also important that

the mandated requirements for “local content” in CSR are interpreted more broadly to include not only the utilization of local goods but also a commitment to provide training and employment opportunities to the youth, especially those from project-affected households.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, for a country that prides itself in being called an oasis of peace in Africa, state-directed violence against its citizens in the name of protecting national interest is bound to be counterproductive. Rather than criminalize and repress protesters, the government must demonstrate respect for the human rights of affected communities and respond to the local communities’ demands through open forums and dialogue.

Clearly, there is an urgent need for those in charge of the gas project and political leaders who emphasize its benefits for national development to demonstrate responsible stewardship as they move forward with project expansion. They must make a deliberate effort to adhere to the principles of social and distributive justice (including procedural justice), as outlined in the country’s revised gas policy, and to redress the social and economic disruption that the gas project has caused in the coastal villages. Ultimately, those at the helm of policymaking and governing actions must be fully convinced that the affected communities’ concerns surrounding dispossession, violence, compensation, and unemployment are real and deserve to be addressed urgently. Only then will Tanzania be able to use its gas bonanza to genuinely empower the entire nation.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Green (2014) for a detailed analysis of Tanzania’s Development Vision 2025 (the 2011 Five Year Development Plan), which delineates the country’s middle-income ambition and the means through which it will be achieved.

<sup>2</sup>The pipeline is owned by the Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation (TPDC) and funded by a concessionary Chinese credit of \$1.2 billion.

<sup>3</sup>Under Tanzanian law, ownership of land is vested in the state under the administration of village governments.

<sup>4</sup>In 2012, Artumas drilled an exploratory well in Nalingu but closed it following insufficient gas reserves.

<sup>5</sup>The gas project is located in the WWF-supported Mnazi Bag Ruwama Estuary Marine Park.

<sup>6</sup>Demand for electricity is expected to grow to 4,700 MW by 2025 and to 7,400 MW by 2035, far outstripping the 1,500 MW that is currently produced (Anyimadu 2016).

<sup>7</sup>The government of Tanzania has taken some steps in this direction through the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) in Mtwara.

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