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SOCIAL ASPECTS OF CONSERVATION IN THE EASTERN ARC MOUNTAIN FORESTS

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INTRODUCTION

For a social scientist, an International Conference on Research, Conservation and Management of the Eastern Arc Mountains of Tanzania offers an occasion to reflect upon theories and practices of social transformations in Africa. Over the past 100 years or so there have been shifts in paradigms with the discoveries of a number of conceptual models of the process of understanding and dealing with environmental and conservation aspects, agricultural extension and health promotion in Africa. These models, which at times have struck people with all the dramatic force of the apple that fell on Newton's head, have finally come to a paradoxical rediscovery of social factors. The character, behaviour, livelihood and fate of the massive majority of rural dwellers in African societies have come to be seen as the most crucial issues in conservation and management of renewable natural resources.

Over the last two decades the most dearly held and widely debated concepts in Natural Resource Management (NRM) have been those related to people's participation in planning and management and sustainability in conservation of natural resources (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The Brundtland Commission explicitly showed that there is an interrelationship between poverty and environment: "Poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems without a broader perspective that encompasses the factors underlying world poverty and inter-national inequality" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development of June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro went as far as defining sustainable development in terms of improvement of the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. This definition incorporated both socio-economic and environmental factors.

This conference on the Eastern Arc is taking place at a time of immense changes in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres at both an international and African level. There is a general restructuring of the production systems within the international division of labour and global markets, a tendency that has been termed 'globalisation'.

Unfortunately the concept of globalisation more closely resembles a programme of desired outcomes than an empirically-supported general understanding of trends and activities. Worse, studies conducted by social scientists in Africa have often merely involved the transposition of the concepts rather than a detailed analysis of the situation.

Much has been written about the crisis facing Africa and the African social sciences in the past two decades, especially as regards Structural Adjustment Programmes, often within the context of the so-called 'globalisation' process. But despite these studies, theories of development and transformation of societies are said to have reached an *impasse*. More than fifty years of institutional development of social sciences in Africa have not yielded much in

terms of their capacity to furnish the necessary social capability for the transformation of social processes.

It has become profoundly difficult to conceptualise and develop mechanisms suitable for developing more humane communities in Africa. We are in a situation that calls for a new agenda for research and analysis of societal issues. This means an interrogation of the status and place of social sciences in Africa into mainline thinking and planning. Experience in Tanzania demonstrates that acknowledgement of the crucial role of social factors in environmental management has not necessarily meant complete acceptance of the social science paradigms by environmentalists and conservationists. In fact, a fair observation is that it is only findings on communities acceptable to environmentalists (grounded in social engineering) that have found a fertile ground in policy issues.

Despite the basic importance of the social dimension, social scientists have often been regarded as sources and causes of problems and disruptions, rather than as specialists whose observations and knowledge may assist in solving environmental problems and in the long run, improving conservation and management efforts. For example, the Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA) 'Guidelines on Social Science Research and Surveys in and Around Tanzania National Parks' issued in 1993 note that the consequences of social research and surveys may "confuse local people, and... cause unfounded alarm about intentions to expand boundaries, etc. and that most requests to conduct... research in national parks are purely academic exercises..."

It is suggested here that our knowledge can only be as good as the questions we ask. One of the most obvious things that should concern us at this juncture is why certain questions are not raised, or why, when those questions are raised, the tendency is to answer them from only one perspective, ignoring others. Or why is it that certain approaches are suppressed and others have gained credence?

It would be a form of intellectual dishonesty on my part to claim to be able to deal with the social aspects of conservation of an area comprising eight separate mountain blocks forming the Eastern Arc within a single short paper. It will be even more dishonest to pretend that the social aspects of conservation can be easily pointed out, given the major shifts in paradigms mentioned above.

This paper will endeavour to deal with some social science research and methodological issues regarding environmental matters, with a focus on how social issues in NRM have been treated in the past. In this way I hope to stimulate discussion and to raise concerns over a number of issues which are of direct importance to the conservation and management of the forests of the Eastern Arc Mountains, and indeed, to natural resource and biodiversity management in general in Tanzania.

OFFICIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Forestry, wildlife and land policy

Environmental concerns as expressed in the policies and actions of successive governments in Tanzania are directly related to the country's colonial history as well as to more recent, post-independence political events and policies.

Foresters in Tanzania have reported on the threats facing forests since the end of the 19th century. Tree felling, mangrove exploitation and decline of forest cover were all regarded as major concerns. Concern about the environment was a recurring issue even during the earliest portions of the colonial period. It was in part because of this concern that Germans

started organised forestry in 1897. It was reported by 1898 that the forests of the Usambara Mountains had almost vanished (for details see Kjekshus, 1977). The fear was that the "scarce forests..." were being "constantly subjected to damage and destruction by human interference of rural people... due to burning, over-cutting and overgrazing."

When the German colonialists arrived in Usambara, it was at a time when the state of the Wasambara had been disrupted by the slave wars of 1870 and 1882. Their traditional organised approach to land use, land conservation and land improvements was becoming increasingly difficult. The influx of white settlers who occupied the best lands in the area turned the original inhabitants into seasonal labourers and accelerated this decay of traditional land use systems. Forty-one settler farms were established in the West Usambaras by 1911. The District Officer had decided to concentrate the Africans on part of the land and alienate the rest. Shortages of land and labour were already rampant in the Usambaras by this time, to the extent that the government decided to close the West Usambaras to further settlement (Iliffe, 1979).

By the beginning of the 1930s, reports were rampant about the environmental crisis in the area, particularly on the declining fertility of land due to over-cultivation, overgrazing, failure to manure and failure to protect topsoil on the slopes. The government embarked on an attempt to restore the fertility of the Usambaras in 1951 but this scheme was suspended in 1957 because of peasant protests. Similar programmes were implemented in the Ulugurus, and were similarly abandoned after intense protests by local people.

Forestry policy, concerns and legislation have remained fundamentally unchanged since colonial times. Emphasis has been on protection and management of reserved forests in order to achieve "perpetual production of wood for the country's needs and secure ecological and hydrological stability of major watersheds; people are not allowed to reside in forest reserves or to use any products from these reserves, although locally customary rights have developed, whereby people residing near the reserves are allowed to collect branches as firewood or herd cattle through the reserves along special tracks" (Luukkanen, 1991).

Forest as well as other natural resource policies are, of course, intimately and inextricably related to land and resource tenure issues, which are often complex and vary greatly from community to community and with varying ecological conditions.

After establishing their authority, the Germans decreed all land to be 'ownerless crown land'. The existing legal framework governing land matters is guided by the Land Ordinance of 1923. It has also constituted the basic grounding of all the subsequent legislation to date. Within this legislation, all land is supposed to be public and the Governor (today President) was granted powers to make land grants and leases if he deems it to be for the benefit of the public/national interests.

There are two sets of law relating to land tenure: (a) Statutory law, which governs lands that have been granted by the government (such as the land held by private companies, state farms, large scale farmers and medium scale farmers). These rights are also known as 'granted rights of occupancy'. (b) Customary law, which governs all untitled land under small holder production. These are also called 'deemed rights of occupancy' since 1928 (United Republic of Tanzania, 1994).

Under German colonial rule (1885–1916), it was only settlers and plantation owners who owned land as they possessed documentary evidence to the effect. In contrast, Africans were given rights of occupancy. The German policy of administration was geared towards plantation and settler agriculture. Massive land alienation took place to the extent that by the eve of World War I some 1,300,000 acres of the best lands in northern Tanzania and the coast had been alienated to immigrants. There were also large tracts of land set aside for

wildlife and forest sanctuaries under the pretext of conservation. The number of Europeans in the country grew from 1,390 to 4,998 between 1904 and 1913. Of these, 882 male adults were involved in agriculture, a number almost equal to that of Kenyan settlers (Iliffe, 1979).

As a result of the Maji Maji war of resistance against forced labour and land alienation (1905–6) that was fought throughout the southern portion of the country, the German administration had already started to reconsider its policies on land alienation in 1907. Henceforth, forced labour and land alienation were undertaken more cautiously. It was in this way that the administration reached the decision that it was more desirable for the country to remain a peasant colony.

After World War I and the transfer to a British Administration, more care was exercised in issues of land alienation, and priority was given to the establishment of native authorities. This culminated in the promulgation of the Native Authority Ordinance of 1921. When the Land Ordinance was passed in 1923, the Native Authority Ordinance was being amended. All these policies were to be consolidated in 1927.

The philosophy underlying the policy of Indirect Rule and the Land Law was the same, and aimed at dealing with the problems arising from the “conflict of interests of the African population and those of European enterprise”. The government became convinced of the necessity to incorporate the ‘natives’ and some of their partial views (those favourable to the sustenance of colonial relations) in the government for its own use.

Western civilisation demanded raw materials and food crops, which were necessary to the living standards of the ‘principal nations’; this constituted the ‘problem of empire’. According to the colonial officials, it was the honest interests of the indigenous inhabitants. The era of ‘modernisation’ and ‘modernising imperialism’ had dawned. The colonies were increasingly seen as dominated by dual economies: traditional and modern, community and society, agricultural and industrial, rural and urban, particularistic and universalistic, low achievement orientation and high achievement etc. Societies had to be transformed from the traditional subsistence stage to the modern productive stage.

Changes in development conceptions resulted in alterations in land policies. Land alienation for the immigrant communities was undertaken on a greater scale than ever before in the history of British colonialism. Between 1945 and 1955 British settlers in then Tanganyika increased their holdings from 287,635 acres of land on lease to 1,300,654; Greeks increased their holdings from 90,803 acres to 294,649 acres; Indians increased their acreage from 68,110 to 235,715. The Overseas Food Corporation with its Groundnut Schemes had initially aimed at clearing 3 million acres. It acquired 480,000 acres leased for 35 years but succeeded in clearing only 50,000 acres. Of the estimated cultivable land surface of Tanganyika (5 %) by the 1950s, 40 % was owned by capitalists—primarily Europeans but also Asians, Arabs and later Africans (Bates, 1976).

The famous Meru land case (1951–53) and the fear of land alienation were the forces behind the mobilisation of Africans against colonial rule and the formation of Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). The 1954 UN Mission pointed out that land and its use and tenure comprised among Africans “the outstanding political and economical issue of the day...” (Lonsdale, 1973). In the 1950s, “Land, and the ownership of land, struck a sympathetic chord in African peasants” (Listowel, 1965).

Tanganyika became independent in 1961 and converted all freeholds into government leases, which were in turn changed to rights of occupancy in 1969. In other words, land was nationalised after independence without necessarily any legal backing. The fact that all land was public and the radical title was vested in the Presidency meant that the government could still alienate land without compensation. It could even force people to move from settlements

whenever it deemed necessary without fear of any consequences. It was in this way that the government was to collectivise rural dwellers in 1972–74 under the Ujamaa programme.

It was the land tenure system that enabled both colonial and post-colonial governments to organise natural resources and forestry control and management as they deemed fit without any major hindrances. Germans were already accelerating conservation measures in the form of ‘game preserves’ and ‘sanctuaries’ by the 1890s in Tanzania (German East Africa between 1884–1916), which were more or less fashioned in the manner of those in Germany. They were first introduced by Governor Hermann von Wissmann in Moshi and Kilimanjaro districts in 1891, and finally extended to cover the whole colony by 1896. In forestry, although reserves had been created much earlier by Germans and Britons, it was the 1953 Forest Ordinance that formed a watershed in matters of forestry policy. By the early 1990s, while the total area under game conservation (as estimated to be 239,065 km² or 26 % of the total area of the country, 945,166 km²), gazetted forest area was approximately 13 million hectares or 15 % of the total land area of the mainland. Most of this was for production rather than protection purposes. The forests that were gazetted for protection purposes were the catchment forests in mountainous areas. While classification and distribution of gazetted national parks and game reserves started during the German colonial period and was to be intensified during British colonial period, it was from 1959 that human rights were excluded from the National Parks.

Land policy, natural resource conservation and ‘development’

Land issues are not taken into consideration in most studies that deal with natural resources generally, and specifically forests, in Tanzania. This issue is pertinent today when a debate on land is going even though a land policy and a Parliamentary Bill have already been prepared. This land policy has been introduced in response to the liberalisation of the economy and in the name of the creation of an enabling environment for investors. Fundamentally, although it encourages individualisation and titling of land, it retains the radical title within the Presidency as has been the situation in the past. In other words, the President can grant rights to an investor if he/she deems it to be for the public interest or for development. As in the past, it is the economic interests that dominate. Often, the so-called ‘developments’ demonstrate that it are not the public or environmental interests that dominate, but those of capital. The following examples from the wildlife sector serve to illustrate this point.

In 1992 a lease for over 4,000 km² of Loliondo Game Reserve, Arusha region, was secretly granted to an Arab Sheik, Brigadier Mohammed Adulrahman Al-Ally of the United Arab Emirates, for hunting purposes. This was arranged through Ortello, a Kenyan-based hunting company with presumably powerful local secret interests. The people of twenty-five Wamasai villages were affected by this governmental action. As a result of the ensuing public outcry against this action, spearheaded by the private press, the government was forced to attempt to defend the legitimacy of its action, and lost considerable credibility.

In 1994, the government attempted to grant 381,000 acres of land in Monduli and Kiteto Districts, Arusha Region, to a foreign investor, Mr Hermanus Philip Steyn, who had been declared *persona non grata* in 1983. This land was taken from pastoralists and other local communities. A portion of the land that was being granted also included portions of the Simanjiro Game Controlled Area and critical wildlife migration routes for large mammals in the Tarangire National Park. The Wildlife Division, the government agency responsible for the management of the wildlife resource and which manages game reserves, and Tanzania National Parks, would have been expected to oppose such an arrangement. However, this

was not the case. The investor was informed by the Government that it expected him to abide by the Wildlife Conservation Act of 1974, but that he could, of course, kill animals on the land under protection of life and property; surrender trophies to the government; and, expel any animal which would be found in or entering the land under the Right.

As noted earlier, people have been displaced when game reserves have been created, losing their traditional rights of access to wildlife resources, fuelwood, etc. once formal boundaries have been gazetted. However, Government has sometimes gone further, and Tanzanians living near national parks and game reserves have not forgotten the physical hardships suffered when Wildlife Division and Tanzanian military personnel harassed them during searches for ivory poachers during 'Operation Uhai'.

The power and influence of capital and investment is also evident in the forestry sector. The East Usambara Mountains are recognised worldwide for their high biodiversity values, with high species diversity as well as high levels of endemic species (Lovett & Wasser, 1993). A number of Forest Reserves were established in the area during the German and British colonial periods, and an international research station was established at Amani.

With the escalation of land shortages in the 1950s and the land alienations, which were taking place sporadically for the benefit of settlers, local communities pegged their support for independence struggles on land. They wanted to be allowed to clear the forests for agriculture. The independence government granted them that right. According to estimates, the forest area was reduced from the original 100,000 hectares in the end of the last century to 23,000 hectares by the end of the 1980s (Porvali *et al.*, 1995). A notable aspect about the early 1960s, when people were allowed to clear the forests, is that one third of the richer peasants owned two thirds of the cultivated land. By the 1970s the richer farmers not only controlled much of the land, but they also hired labour and owned most of the cattle. Thus even by the 1950s, the so-called land shortages were an expression of the forms of differentiation that had resulted into amassment of land in the hands of the few, and landlessness among many (Freyhold, 1979).

Yet, despite the outcry about environmental degradation and the need to protect the Usambara forests against the rural dwellers, commercial interests again seemed to overwhelm the government of Tanzania. Finnish support in the forestry sector began with forest surveys by a Finnish company in the East Usambaras in 1977–78. The surveys concentrated on natural forests and the aim was to establish the feasibility of commercial exploitation of these. Initially, recommendations were made to the effect that such exploitation was viable. The result was that Sikh Saw Mills, a parastatal company, with strong financial support from Finland, began to exploit these natural forests—even though the Forest Division's own regulations for logging on steep catchment slopes were violated. This project was to become an object of international concern, with conservationists from within Finland, Tanzania and many other countries challenging it.

Some years later, large-scale mechanised logging was banned. FINNIDA had also become concerned over the environmental damage it was helping to cause, and it developed a project in support of the implementation plan of catchment forestry. This began in 1990, with the objective of conservation of biodiversity of the ecosystem in Usambara and promotion of sustainable use of natural resources. The manner of implementation of the project was rather technical, and apparently there were conflicts and struggles over control and use of resources in the area. The struggles permeated all levels, from grass roots to state and donor level.

In the course of implementation of the conservation measures, among other things, the insistence has been on involvement of local populations in the planning and management of

the project (Porvali *et al.*, 1995). However, this 'local participation' aspect is introduced into a situation whereby commercial interests already dominate in the gazetted forests.

Commercial people are given licenses after paying fees to local authorities, an aspect that results in illegal felling in some instances. Local people do not have any control over the resources and yet, they are supposed to participate in decision-making, planning and management. In the 1996 Report on Corruption by the Warioba Commission, a number of complaints were raised by the public relating to the manner in which licenses are issued by the Department of Forestry. Simply, the Department is corrupt. According to the report, Forestry officers provide permits for cutting trees or harvesting forest products after receiving private payments. They also allow individuals to harvest without permits after being bribed.

In summary, economic assumptions lie beneath the arguments about environmental protection, people's participation and the tendency to see environmental degradation as being caused by poverty and population growth. The Tanzania Forestry Action Plan, for example, claims that its goals and principles are environmental. But clearly, the justification for these are couched in economic terms. They are related to the question of economic growth, the forest sector's contribution to the GDP with increased exports and employment effects, and improvement of food security. Environmental benefits are listed last (Ministry of Lands, Natural Resources and Tourism, 1989).

SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Hitherto, explanations of environmental matters have started with what are considered to be factual, incontestable issues. In the case of Tanzania, these have included: the variety of climatic and vegetational conditions of the country; an abundance of unexploited mineral wealth, such as iron ore, coal, precious metals and gemstones; the dominance of peasant agriculture; the spectre of geometric population growth and its chain of problems of poverty, disease and environmental degradation, land pressure, etc. A recent Earthscan publication states the following on Tanzania:

"The population is still primarily rural and agricultural, relying on a wide range of crops... for 85 percent of its employment and 60 percent of GDP. However, only one-fifth of the country has a secure annual rainfall of more than 750 millimetres, so rain-fed agriculture is precarious. Together with poor soils over much of the plateau, the conditions have produced intense populations of up to 200 people per square kilometre in the favourable agricultural areas around Kilimanjaro.

Thus the majority of the country is still covered by sparsely populated grazing lands and woodlands; only 5 percent is cultivated. In addition, Tanzania is renowned for its wildlife, National Parks, Game Reserves, and Game Controlled Areas" (Reed, 1996).

As far as forests are concerned, claims have been made since the early 1970s that about 300,000 to 400,000 hectares of forest are cleared each year in Tanzania; these echo the concerns of foresters for an entire century. The 'woodfuel gap theory', for example, led the UNDP/World Bank in the 1980s to the predictions that the last tree in Tanzania would disappear in 1990 and in Sudan in 2005 (Leach & Mearns, 1988). Even the Tanzania Forestry Action Plan had the same apocalyptic scenario created with the assistance of the projected growth of population: "... clearing for agriculture, overgrazing, charcoal burning,

woodfuel harvesting, bush fires for various reasons and harvesting for industrial wood. In many areas land is extensively burned for eradication of tsetse flies" (Ministry of Lands, Natural Resources and Tourism, 1989). Mascarenhas (1994) rightly asserts that there would be no forests left at all if such figures were true! He comments further that aspects such as overgrazing do not take place in forests but in grasslands and thickets. Moreover, most literature on environmental destruction does not bother to show under what *circumstances* agriculture proves to be destructive.

Yet, it is these 'facts' and the general scenario of environmental destruction that have formed the present natural resource policies. Some pertinent questions are: why has such a doomsday scenario persisted and even been encouraged, in the face of contrary evidence? Could this constitute a dogmatic error in development theory and practice? Why is it that some questions are posed and others excluded?

The answers to those questions suggest that there is no error. Simply, the whole issue lies in the nature and dominance of the scientific forces. Scientific investigation over the past 200 years has been dominated by positivistic paradigms, based on the theory that asserts the primacy of observation and the pursuit of causal explanation by way of inductive generalisation. Science seeks to discover the true nature of reality, the ultimate aim being to discover, predict and control natural phenomena. Knowledge, as far as positivism is concerned, becomes a sum of universal generalisations or laws. Good science is that with a high degree of control over the system being studied.

In the context of Tanzania today such 'good science' would be science that can enable one to control or direct the rural dwellers directly, through economic incentives or markets, or to transform agricultural systems. Thus, it does not come as a surprise when environmental degradation is attributed to modern poverty—which, it is claimed, forces villagers to sacrifice sustainable long-term resource management in favour of short-term uses. Inevitably, this view justifies arguments that call for both more state control of natural resources and for privatisation and registration of land tenure. There are those who have even suggested that indigenous forms of local institutional control, which once were effective in environmental management, have recently broken down, and thus indicated that there is a need to reinforce the local institutions as well as state forms of control. Such arguments are often couched in terms of 'local or community participation'.

This view has been dominant among bio-physical scientists. In this paradigm, people hardly feature, and the role of social factors or the agency in history is irrelevant or at best marginal.

It is scientists who determine what the problem is and what should happen or could happen: the rest is left to politicians and others in authority to make happen, with little regard for how this is done. In this context, the development process means the transfer of scientific discoveries and technology to the users. Ecology is essentially a bio-physical science incorporating the social actor. It may incorporate issues such as the use that people make of the ecosystem, but it does not necessarily bother to try and grapple with the question why people make such a use.

Within ecology, even when people become of central interest, as stated above, the focus has usually been on the use of the ecosystem. Here people are assumed to have an in-built objective—that of optimising utility. In a study produced in 1996 on social assessment and research it is stated that:

People involved in promoting conservation and sustainable resource management are increasingly recognising the pivotal role of human and social factors in their work.

Until quite recently most of these people were preoccupied with ecological concerns. Many were trained in ecology, wildlife biology, forestry, agriculture or fisheries. The recognition that natural resources management involves managing people's behaviour toward natural resources, has at least in part sometimes given rise to considerable confusion and apprehension among those practitioners (Byers, 1996).

Thus, in this recognition, there are fundamental assumptions about decisions, actions and practices made at all levels (local, national and international): these are made by people acting in ways that they perceive to be in their best interest. What is important here is to grasp the nature of the behaviour of people so as to promote ecologically sustainable behaviours and discourage unsustainable ones (Byers, 1996).

This paradigm is usually associated with economists. Here, what is of paramount importance is the values and uses of biodiversity and natural resources. The economic perspective, as pointed out above makes an assumption on optimisation of utility. Once this assumption is made, then "there is no need to worry anymore about the what or the why. You can start working on the how and focus on designing goal seeking policies, measures and devises". In other words, both the scientific and economic perspectives get results by assuming objectives. In that sense, scientists and economists can be said to engage in 'hard systems thinking'.

The above paradigms have been devoid of the social, historical environmental and complex processes influencing transformations of formations. The dominance of these paradigms results from the prevailing socio-cultural, institutional and financial structures which cause certain perspectives and methods of investigating environmental changes to dominate, while excluding others from consideration. These also influence the methods and theories of grasping environmental issues.

Studies are commissioned by donor agencies and projects who need (or at least, must be seen to have sought) socio-economic information to help them tackle more appropriately and with more participation the environmental problems on which their institutional survival depends. Often then the environmental problem is built into the very terms of reference of consultants who have neither the time nor the social position to investigate village natural resource management and its changes over time. Furthermore as the dominant social and demographic explanations of environmental degradation are the stuff of academic debate, consultancy reports phrased in the terms gain easy acceptance and credibility (Leach & Fairhead, 1994).

The above is not intended to dismiss scientific or economic knowledge as useless; rather it is their uni-disciplinary perspectives which are called to question. They have treated environmental issues economically and technically, and issues of development/transformations (regarded as 'projects') have taken a business-like orientation. For the bureaucrats, politicians and donors, the issue has been simply that of improving administrative and leadership capacities of those involved in environmental management, economic planning, etc.

Such perspectives are increasingly being transcended given the experience of the past 10 years or so. One of the practical criticisms of the post-independence models of development, which were based on modernisation assumptions, has taken the form of championing the sovereignty of the 'civil society'. Civil society has become a ubiquitous concept, with a connotation of social and political movements within struggles for self-empowerment and control of resources. Without going into details this theme is associated with what Kothari (1984) regards as a process of the 'rediscovery of the civil society'. The contents of politics

are increasingly being transformed, since the whole process has been accompanied by protests for democratic rights to enable the creation of social capacities to challenge the state monopolisation of politics and decision making.

In this case, it is necessary to examine the whole question of environment from the point of view of these emerging forms of critique. This means one needs to examine environmental issues within the context of wider processes taking place in our countries. In this regard, it is imperative to grapple with the relationships between social structures and human agency within transformation processes. The starting point should be social and political relations. Bhaskar (1979, 1993) clarifies this further and states (Bhaskar, 1979) that concern should lie "with the persistent relations between individuals (and groups), and with the relations between these relations (and between such relations and the nature and the products of such relations)." Emphasis should be on viewing society from a relational point of view, whereby collective phenomena are seen primarily as expressions of enduring relationships. With such premises, examination of processes need to be viewed from the point of view of relations among people, and people and the state and how their differences are treated. The central problem should be the question of treatment/resolution of differences among the people themselves in society rather than simply the actions of states. In sum, one must grasp environmental issues by examination of the modes of life of the people within historical processes. Ecological questions do not merely concern how people can cope with and contain environmental damage, but are bound up with the very ways of life fostered within societies.

It is imperative to examine contradictions defining modes of exploitation in African societies as the motive force. The starting point should be the concrete forms of accumulation taking place in today's Africa. Issues around this are such as how is production organised? Who is producing? Who is appropriating? Around what issues are intense struggles/conflicts taking place? It is clear that among the most important aspects that are central if these questions are taken seriously are land and natural and mineral resources. These have historically been the major sites of accumulation, and they have become more so today with the changing forms of capital today.

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