THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

In Ghana we noted that the strength of civil society had fluctuated, but that there had been, for most of the post-independence years, an abundance of flourishing groups built especially on ethnic, religious, professional and cultural bases. These groups had frequently believed in, and practised, democratic principles, yet their interaction with the state had not led to sustained democratic government. The ruling party had proclaimed that ‘The CPP is Ghana and Ghana is the CPP’ but this claim had always been a hollow one, with the party doing little more than scratching the surface of civil society. The ruling party in Tanzania did not make a comparable boast, yet it might have had more justification for doing so.

While the viability of democracy in Ghana may depend on the ability of a strong (if not always effective) state, and a strong civil society, to achieve a consensus on their respective roles, a major problem in Tanzania appears to be the weakness of civil society in the face of a state that has been dominated by the same elite for over thirty years. Indeed it is not always clear to an outsider where one should begin looking for civil society. Tribal chiefs have long since been abolished, so there are no obvious channels for articulating the demands of ‘traditional’ groups, and religious groups have remained largely aloof from politics. As in much of the Third World, religious groups which have accepted the existing political order, and have been partly co-opted into it, have faced competition from more ‘fundamentalist’ churches which offer a spiritual alternative to failed political gods, but these churches tend to offer an exit from politics rather than alternative political paths. There have been sporadic Christian-Muslim clashes, notably over the proposed return of
nationalised schools to church ownership and over Zanzibar's short-lived membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, but in each case the situation was defused with a return to the status quo ante. (Ludwig in Westerlund, 1996: 216–36)

For the most part, religious groups have been neither a major source of institutional support for, or opposition to, the government. An unspoken understanding of mutual non-interference may have developed between church (or mosque) and state. The churches have not had to suffer the near-deification of the head of state, with party ideology being presented almost as a pseudo-religion, in the way that they did in Ghana under Nkrumah, with the ever-present possibility of a criticism of this cult producing political retaliation, which would in turn drive the churches further into the realm of opposition and resistance. Neither was there any obvious scope for the churches in Tanzania to take up the injustices suffered by the poor, as in Latin America, given Tanzania's record of social provision. As for Islam, Muslims are in a minority except in Zanzibar, and there is therefore no possibility of establishing an Islamic state. The practice of nominating a Zanzibari (and invariably Muslim) vice-president whenever there is a Tanganyikan president, and vice versa, has probably helped the process of integration.

Where, then, does one look for autonomous groups beyond the state which might help to devise and police the unwritten rules of political conflict, and which might thus provide counterweights to the power of the state? One obvious role for such groups would be in encouraging people to register as electors, and ultimately to vote, thus preventing a monopolisation of these processes by party and state officials who might have a more direct interest. Maliyamkono suggests some of the 'opinion leaders' whose services were sought.

Opinion leaders are people of influence who can motivate others to register and later to vote. In most cases they are primary school teachers, co-operative workers, youth leaders, religious leaders, elders and influential workers or business people. (Maliyamkono 1995: 19)

Insofar as these people belonged to organised groups, many of the groups were, or had recently been, wings of the ruling party or employees of the state. Or, in the case of religious