

## Matthew Holden. Jr., Development Administration in Miniature: The Meru Land Dispute in Tanganyika (1964 paper) under reconsideration in 2006.

Explanation. This paper is a return to a piece of what is, by the social science of 2006, “ancient history.” In 1949, the Meru were a rather small population (somewhere between 25, 000 and 35,000) living principally on the Northeastern slope of Mount Meru. The nearest major town today is Arusha, the jumping off place for Serengeti tourists, and the situs of a conference facility from international war crimes have recently been held. The east is a valley then known as the Sanya Corridor and on the easterly side of that the famous Kilimanjaro.

The country today is Tanzania (population), the union of the former Tanganyika and Zanzibar. In 1949, Tanganyika (population approximately 8, 000, 000) was a United Nations Trust Territory, under the administration of Great Britain.

In 1949, the Government of Tanganyika set out to move the Meru, or some of them at any rate, from lands they occupied and establish in the Sanya Corridor what the official documents called a “homogeneous ranching area.” This meant a ranching area in which the settlers would be white people. After a good deal of local resistance, the Government enforced its plan, moving the Meru out of the disputed area in November 1951. The Meru managed to take an appeal to the United Nations, with the cooperation of Kenyan political figures, some missionaries in Tanganyika, some left-wing Labor figures in British politics, and others.

In due course, the matter got a rather complicated settlement. The Meru were given some other lands, and learned new lessons themselves as their own local (tribal) political structure was reorganized. Perhaps the most important thing was that the Meru land dispute also became the means by which the emergent nationalist independence movement, led by Julius Nyerere, established itself in this northern part of Tanganyika.

I became interested in this matter in the 1950s, at the suggestion of Roland Young, then my adviser in the Political Science Department. Though I never achieved the original purpose of writing a master’s thesis on the subject, I remained interested in it and connected a rather large amount of detail on the Meru, the land dispute, the United Nations process, and the administrative facts of Tanganyika as it then existed.

In 1964, when the original dispute had died down, the question still remained as to what the end result had been for the Meru people. In the 1960s there still was a lot of attention in political science, and some in other fields, to “development” or the economic improvement in African countries. There was still some confidence that governments, whether colonial or independent, could have useful roles. The concept that the market, and the market alone, had anything to do with anything. This paper was written within

those assumptions. However, my attention moved entirely to other matters, and I made no attempt to study anything African until the early 1980s, and never got to East Africa until 1992.

In 1992, I was a United States Information Service lecturer in South Africa. The people arranging the tour wanted, sensibly, to maximize benefit to the budget and asked where else “in the region” I would go. I agreed to go to Mozambique, especially as Eduardo Mondlane had been an advanced student when I entered Northwestern. I happily agreed to go to Tanzania as well. (I had a certain sense of “I might have been there” when terrorists bombed the embassy building I had visited—and where it turned out the ambassador at the time, Edward de Jarnette, was a University of Virginia alumnus. Edgar Shannon had been one of his teachers.)

The USIS representative in Dar-es-Salaam seemed puzzled that I insisted on going to Arusha. He did not seem to understand why the Meru would be interesting. A Tanzanian national, whose name I recall as Vincent Chidosa, working for USIS understood. The Meru land dispute had been taught to him in school as important part of the independence struggle. The Arusha trip was unproductive for my original purpose, though not for others.

But I did learn, those many years later, that the Meru land dispute was no small matter. Upon reviewing files, after retiring in 2002. I turned anew to the paper itself. In the Meru experience, I rediscover some aspects of decision-making that are manifest in many other settings. Among them: (1) “politics” does play a role in development and plans for development will almost certainly revive issues and relationships that are often thought “old” and “dead,” (2) technical planning is not self-executing, as much as technocrats may think their approaches as “rational,” and depends upon viable administration, and (3) “administration” necessarily involves the realities of “field administration,” in which the reasons for deviation from central premises are highly predictable, if often ignored.

Finally, there is the question, which surely can now be examined for the Meru people forty and fifty years later, as to the good or ill done for any set of people by the various interventions that are undertaken.

Some of what I say in the two previous paragraphs is what I may find time to reassess in looking at this paper after these many years.

Comments are entirely welcome.

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