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Recapping the Meru Land Case, Tanzania

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Abstract - Mt Meru dominates the scenery and economy of the people living on its slopes. The lower slopes of the mountain provided fertile, well-watered land for the Meru and Arusha people for several centuries. Here they have developed "moral economies," innovative and well-managed mixed farming and agro-pastoral systems. The earliest Meru were Chaga speakers from western Kilimanjaro who expanded across the Sanya plains sometimes in the 17th century. They were traditionally organised through “big men” known as vashili (singular nshili who supervised all important matters including traditional prayers, land conflicts, inheritance, farm boundaries, ceremonies and punishment. There were chiefs and elders who met under a large sacred tree, the mringaringa. Colonial occupation since the late 19th century caused the closing of the land frontier on Meru and alienation of most of their land to white settlers. The Meru Land Case was a protest by Meru people, living in the Eastern part of what is now Arumeru District, against the allocation of their land to Europeans for development purposes. It is a tale of the Meru united to demand in an international forum the restitution of their rights to land. It is the story of Kirilo Japhet the first Tanzania to speak at the United Nations and in Kiswahili at that.

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Recapping the Meru Land Case, Tanzania

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I. The Setting: Mt. Meru

Mount Meru ("that which does not make a noise" or the black mountain" in Ki-Maasai) is said to be one of Africa's most beautiful volcanic mountains (*www.tanganyikaexpeditions.com)*. Located just 70 km west of Mount Kilimanjaro and-. at 4,566 metres high, it ranks as Tanzania's second highest, and as Africa's fourth highest mountain. Mt. Meru is a strato-volcano feature whose history has been quite explosive. It has had four eruptions, the last of which occurred in 1910. It is believed that once upon a time Mt Meru was higher than Kilimanjaro, but it erupted sideways, leaving the northern, southern and western slopes intact, at the same time destroying the eastern slope of the volcanic cone.

When viewed from the south, Mt Meru shows the typical cone shape of a volcano. However, when seen from the east, it offers a completely different sight. One of the spectacles of the mountain is the huge fig tree found as one climbs the mountain that forms a natural arch which it is claimed is large enough to accommodate an elephant or a Land Rover. Plant life on Mount Meru is remarkable, ranging from open grassland, montane forests, and giant heather zone to moorland. Its fertile slopes rise above the surrounding savanna and support a forest that hosts diverse wildlife, including nearly 400 species of birds. During the colder months and with high altitude rains, its peak can be covered by snow. The southern and eastern sides of the mountain hold some of the most fertile soils and well watered agricultural lands in Tanzania. They provided fertile, well-watered land for the Meru and Arusha people for several centuries. Here they have developed "moral economies," innovative and well-managed mixed farming and agro-pastoral systems. Its temperate climate and rich volcanic soils, irrigated by innumerable streams and rivers, support maize, beans, bananas, pyrethrum, legumes, and most importantly, coffee; all of which thrive in the different micro-climates of the mountain. The mountain slopes level out onto a semi-arid plain: the beginning of the Maasai steppe, to the south. To be sure Mt Meru dominates the scenery and economy of the people living on its slopes. It can be seen looming above from every corner of the area. Its impact on the local economy is 3-fold:

i) High altitude traps the rainfall that is vital in an otherwise dry corner of North Eastern Tanzania. It-displays striking eco-logical zones unfolding downwards from the bare, upper slopes towards the heavily utilised plains.
ii) Its volcanic nature provides extremely fertile soils capable of supporting a dense human population but which are susceptible to erosion.
iii) Attraction for the thriving and lucrative tourist industry.

The belt of fertile well watered land on the mountain's lower and middle slopes is divided unequally and quite sharply into Meru territory and a larger but less watered section of Arusha territory; the later sections thought of as hotter, drier and more open but less exposed to education, Christianity and progress while the Meru sections are forested, cooler and the people involved in coffee farming and eager to adopt education and Christianity (Mayallah, n.d.; Spear, 1997; Larsson, 2001). The plight of the mountain has been presented in a poetic form as follows:

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Mount Meru: The Lost Glory By Kaaya Shilia

Mount Meru of rain and beauty
Mount Meru the jewel of Arusha
The snowy cape on occasion
The majestic protruding rock
A mass of forest and elephant grass
The envy of many admirers
The roots of the mountain buttressed
So admirably to Mbuguni plains
Closer to the blue rock, Tanzanite

Flowing to Engare Nanyuki of history
Where the Meru warriors clashed
With the land grabbers of the time
With "Bwana Shauri" ordering fire
Putting aflame the houses
Leaving people destitute and in tears
Painfully narrated in "Blood on our land"
In childhood memories of Ismael Mbise

II. The Wameru

a) Origins

The Meru (a.k.a. Varwa ("those who climb") are a Bantu speaking people who are reported to have come about three hundred years ago. In their own native language they are called *Varwa* which means someone who is going up to the hills. The reason is that, they moved from the down side of the country towards the higher land and from there they were called *Varwa* meaning that they were going upwards. However the question of their origin is a perplexing one as there are so many explanations from different authorities (Mbise, 2006), Though Meru traditions generally recall that the earliest Meru came from Usambara, Thomas Spear categorically states that, "the earliest Meru were not from Usambara but were Chaga speakers from western Kilimanjaro who expanded across the Sanya plains sometimes in the 17th century Meru descended from agricultural Chagga who have long farmed a similar environment on Mountain Kilimanjaro…"(Spear, 1997:6).

b) Clans

Meru clans are groups of people thought to be descended from a common ancestor often an earlier settler, who shared a claim to a common territory and who sacrificed together to ensure continued fertility (Spear 1997:21). Each clan had its leaders. The clan leaders were known as *vashili (singular nshili).* They supervised all important matters of their clan including traditional prayers, land conflicts, inheriting properties of the deceased person, farm boundaries, ceremonies especially wedding and traditional punishment and fines. Spear (1997, ibid) lists 26 clans of the Meru whose origins were either from Shambaa, Maasai or Chagga. Some of the more important Meru clans are Kaaya (Shambaa-"royal" clan) Mbise (Shambaa-"rain makers"), Nyiti and Ndossi (Chagga), Nko and Pallangyo (Maasai).

c) Age-mate/set (rika)

The clan system doubles as an age-set organisation. As well as being members of clans, all Meru were initiated into particular age-sets spanning the clans. The whole male population was divided according to age in a number of groups (generations) called rika in ki-Rwa and Kiswahili. Each rika has its own name and solidarity is strong between its members. *Rika* is a group composes of the people who are circumcised in the same period and normally they are of similar age. Through circumcision and initiation, young men enter the youngest rika to which their circumcised age-mates already belong. Initiation took place every seven years or so, and an age set remained open for around twenty years. Locally, each generational group chose a chief, and all these local chiefs elected a generation chief whose authority extended to all the members of the generation in the Rwa community. Generally, the main role of the generation system is to see to it that everyone behaves and respects the elders. The rules of behaviour, which are tightly codified, are largely the work of the generation to which one belongs and are taught secretly to the young during and after circumcision. For example the Talala age-set prominent during the late 19th century is remembered for being an generation set to restore moral order in a world in danger of collapse due to afflictions such as witchcraft, illicit sex, drought, famine, riderpest, disease and colonisation. Talala age-set engaged itself in a moral crusade to purge the moral evils, from within and outside Meru society that threatened social order and survival of the Meru. It also attempted to unite people behind a single moral vision against the many evils besetting them. Although most of the age set system are gone and the initiation ceremonies that used to accompany individuals through the life cycle only are exercised in a symbolic fashion, the age grade system still serves as a reference and guide for personal conduct, whom a person can marry, must pay respect to and to and which persons can be commanded for communal types of work, village representation etc. The community was led by a 'big chief, mshili appointed by all the chiefs and elders who met for this purpose under a large sacred tree, the mringaringa (cordia abyssinica). Formerly the *nshili* was very authoritative but these days it is going on loosing strength and ties.

d) Mangis (chiefs)

A list rulers/chiefs (Mangis) who ruled in Meru between colonial domination and independence is reproduced below:

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- Ndemi-1887
- Matunda Kaaya (1887- 1896)
- Lobulu Kaaya (1896 - 1900) hanged by the Germans
- Masengye Kaaya (1901)
- Nyereu Nasari (1901- 1902)
- Sambegye Nanyaro (1902- 1922)
- Sandi Nanyaro (1923- 1930)
- Kishili Kaaya (1930- 1945)
- Sandi Nanyaro (1945- 1952) reluctantly consented the 1951 eviction
- Sylvanus Kaaya (1953- 1963) (Source: Spear, 1997:80)

According to Godlove Mbise (2006) the Mangi type of leadership started during the 18th century. It is believed that the first Mangi came from the Kaaya clan and contenders from Kaaya clan continued to inherit the *Mangi* title until 1900 when the reigning M*angi* was hanged by the Germans. Incidentally a brother of the slain ruler is said to have refused to take over the title fearing that he would face the same tragedy. There after the Nanyaro and Kaaya clans changed positions and the last Mangi came from the Kaaya clan.

e) The Meru Today

Whereas in the 1890s a successful Meru was expected to have a big farm (kihamba), a large family and some cattle, by the 1960s his reputation had changed tremendously. Now one's status rested on having education, a job, one's role in the church, cooperative society and citizens' union, income from coffee on a small kihamba surrounding his house and the production of annual food crops on the plains. The Meru today number about 150,000. The bulk of population growth has been absorbed on the mountain or on the surrounding plains. Adaptations include intensification of farm production, expansion of cultivation to the plains below the mountain, and diversification of incomes. The overall livelihood trend has been from subsistence to market dependence, with household income activities increasingly responding to and being intertwined with foreign markets, as well as with nearby urban centres. In the early 1950s, coffee assumed supremacy as a cash crop. Since mid 1980s, however, it has lost some of its position to dairy farming and income from off-farm sources. As a whole, the area has been well located to take advantage of recent macro-economic reforms. Small businesses abound, building activities flourish. A striking feature of the Meru is the survival of traditional institutions such as the clan system, age grade, patriarchal order and kuvunja chungu ("breaking of the cooking pot") phenomenon (Kelsall, 2003). Relatively speaking, the Meru and Arusha people on Mount Meru like their Chagga neighbours on Kilimanjaro enjoy a higher standard of living than most other rural people of Tanzania, and at the same time display population growth rates that are among the highest in the country. Villages on the mountain present a fairly prosperous impression as many families live in cement houses with tin roofs; they have small gardens surrounded by hedgerows. Inside is electric lighting and locally made furniture with comfortable cushions and glass fronted cabinets with neatly arranged crockery. However, most people complain about the condition of the economy and the cost of living. Scarcity of land is an incessant headache. Changes to the structure of the economy have had a marked impact on gender relations. Previously patriarchal authority was based on the ability to provide income for the family through coffee and to allocate land to sons for inheritance. Today, few fathers can pass on economic plots of land, and coffee has been overtaken by bananas and milk, traditionally the province of women. Consequently the authority of elder men is increasingly challenged, and familial conflicts, over land or domestic relations, are extremely common. In the south the mountain gives way to a more arid plain, on which the main crops are maize and beans, and the main livestock indigenous goats and cattle. Fruits and vegetables can be grown on land with access to irrigation. Smallholders compete for land with larger commercial farmers, many of expatriate origin, growing flowers or vegetables for export.

III. Colonisation: Political Domination and Economic Control

a) The Germans

Direct German involvement with the WaMeru came with the attempt of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission of Leipzig to establish a mission in Meruland in October 1896. Two missionaries, Ewald Ovir and Karl Segebrock who had been welcomed by the then Mangi (Matunda) were murdered by Arusha/Meru warriors. German retribution for the death of these missionaries was swift and ruthless. Punitive expeditions against both the Arusha and Meru were launched in late 1896 and early 1897 in the course of which large number of Arusha and Meru were killed, their cattle confiscated, banana groves burnt down and their wives repatriated to Kilimanjaro. Shortly thereafter the Germans granted huge blocks of land on north Meru to settlers from South Africa and subsequently alienated a solid block of land across the southern slopes. Colonial administration was effectively established by 1900. Early German rule involved forced labour and taxation, and the alienation of land to the north and south of mount Meru. Having been brutally incorporated into the colonial order and money economy, further expansion by the Meru towards the foot of the mountain was effectively prevented by an "iron ring" of settler estates and plantations. German rule posed a challenge to social, political and economic practices and beliefs "work", a threat to family production and values, all of which contradicted Meru moral economies based on everyone's right to sufficient

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land to support one's family, the fruits of one's own labour and the exercise of social and political influence. One of the major conflicts with the Germans was the imposition of forced labour that, together with taxes designed to ensure the Africans' need for cash and need to work to obtain it, added burdens to their own economies. This was also a challenge to the world view that the Meru held. In their culture, land and labour were connected: rights to land belonged to those who cleared it. They saw the demands of the colonizers-using other people's labour and appropriating land that remained unused-as immoral. By the time the British replaced the Germans in 1916, there was an "iron ring" of alienated land around native lands on the mountain, while upward expansion was limited by a forest reserve.

b) British Rule: 1961-1961

German rule over Tanganyika abruptly ended during the 1st World War but colonialism continued in Tanganyika for another 45 years, as League/United Nations-British trusteeship. Whereas it had been one of the most important German colonies, it became only a minor mandated territory under Britain's vast colonial empire. In addition British resources were limited such that colonial rule was not established firmly until 1920s. Administratively the British adopted the famous "Indirect rule" system and among the Meru continued to recognise pre-existing chiefs (Mangis-Sambegye(1902_25; Sante (1925-30, Kishili (1931-45; and Sante again (1945-52). With respect to land, as pointed out above, by the time the British replaced the Germans, there was already an "iron ring" of alienated land around native lands on the mountain, while upward expansion was limited by a forest reserve. The British expelled the German settlers and confiscated their farms and reallocated them to Greek and British settlers. Attempts were made under British rule to address problems of land shortage on the mountain by reallocating some farm land, but with little understanding of African needs. The problem was defined as overpopulation and wasteful ways of cattle owning. Little attempt was made to understand local farming systems that were often efficient in combining the resources of mountain and plain. In fact they went much further than the Germans, by opening up new lands south of the Arusha-Moshi road for sisal production that increased the amount of land alienated around by 81%. In trying to solve the shortage of land to the Arusha and Meru the British government actually assisted the Wameru in the 1920s and 1930s to buy two "white" ranches adjacent to the northern Meru reserve which became the key to the ensuing land dispute. However land famine in Meru continued and it was exacerbated after World War II. During a period that has been referred to as 'the second colonial occupation', the colonial office sought means of rapidly expanding production in the colonies to boost the economy of the metropole. One site thought fit for development was Meru.

c) Wilson Commission

A one-man commission of inquiry, under Judge Mark Wilson, was commissioned in August 1946 to inquire into the land situation in northern Tanganyika. The Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the commission were spelt out as:

i) To improve the homogeneity of alienated land and tribal lands respectively;

ii) Afford relief to congestion of the native population with particular reference to the question of providing them with adequate means of access to other areas of grazing of stock, cultivation of crops and eventual settlement; and

iii) Advise government as to the availability or otherwise of land in the areas in question for further European settlement after adequate provision had been made for the present and future requirements of Chagga, Meru and Arusha".

It is to be note that this third aspect was added y the Tanganyika government without the knowledge of the colonial office in London which was extremely annoyed" (Luanda, 1989).

In December of the same year the investigation was complete. It correctly identified the core of the problem as, "the serious congestion of population in Kilimanjaro and Meru, explained as being due to European medicine and other improvements. Acknowledging the "iron ring" clamped on the Arusha and Meru peoples since the German colonial period, he reasoned the solution was not to remove the "ring" but found the "germ of the solution" in the "surplus population to come down from the mountain with their stock and seek their future on the plains…" The most controversial recommendation was for the removal of Meru from farm 31 (Ngare Nanyuki) and 328 (Leguruki) to King'ori supposedly to improve the homogeneity in racial settlement blocks. This was to turn the entire northern part of the Meru lands to white settlers. The Ngare Nairobi, Sanya Juu and Ngare Nanyuki areas were to be made into one homogenous block of non-native settlement. In 1949 alone the governor held six Barazas in Meru and Arusha to convince the people of the government's "good intensions" but they objected. It is said that the Mangi (Sante) gave consent to the proposals reluctantly. The Meru complained that they were not given the opportunity to present their views before the commission. Still the government went ahead to enact a special bill to implement the recommendations of the Wilson report and was passed into law in a matter of a single day (3rd November 1951) and was not even objected by the African member in the Legico, Chief Kidaha Makwaia, saying: "…I am not supporting the Bill with a view of trying to appease the European settlers-I have no such fear–my support is based on fair play (sic) that we so much want in this territory…", for which he incurred an everlasting wrath

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of the Meru and of nationalists in general. Outside the Legico (Legislative Council) some criticism was raised. E.R. Danielson of the Lutheran Church of Northern Tanganyika warned the government about inexorable resentment from the Meru who according to his opinion, believed white settlers were forcing the issue on the government. The colonial office was also reluctant to approve the compulsory removal unless some equivalent compensation was afforded. Certain members of the district administration also advised strongly against the move and in fact the District Commissioner himself asked to be reassigned rather than carry out the orders.

d) Justification?

A government White Paper of 1952 is quoted as justifying this unusual and shabby decision: "It has always been government policy not to allocate land under Rights of occupancy (i.e., to white settlers) unless the Native Authority has been fully consulted and, normally, its agreement obtained. . . . Where, however, land is required in order to carry out a scheme of general benefit to the territory it may be necessary to acquire land compulsorily". The general benefit was expected to result from higher productivity of the land when divided among 13 European cattle ranchers. The Meru objected vigorously to the proposed scheme pointing out that the lands offered as compensation were inferior, infested with tse tse files, poorly watered and malarious. They scornfully replied that if government's purpose was to build up the cattle industry then why could not they themselves be the partners in this scheme? As it happened, the decision was shown to be not only morally indefensible but also economically unsound. Thus a 1954 U.N. Visiting Mission concluded that, "the land was ideally suited to peasant cultivation…and European farming methods were impracticable."

IV. The Meru Land Case

a) "Operation Exodus"

Before Eviction-day the Meru wrote a letter to the District Commissioner (DC) requesting the eviction to be deferred until a reply was received from UN to which they had appealed. He answered in the negative and insisted on government's resolve to that Meru of Ngare Nanyuki would have to be moved even by force. Chief Sante is said to have consented though reluctantly. It took place in the early morning of 17 November 1951 when seven European officers, 66-120 armed policemen, 100 Kenyan labourers and the DC in full ceremonial dress entered the Ngare Nanyuki valley and ordered 300 families to abandon their land and dwellings in what was code-named Operation Exodus. The traumatic exercise took 13 days (17th November - 12th December) during which houses were levelled, the cattle, sheep and goats rounded up and driven to King'ori. They also burned the dispensary, school and the sturdy stone church that the Meru had painstakingly built in 1938 (Spear, 1997:225). There were 25 arrests and 2 deaths recorded and Ngare Nanyuki was deserted but so was Kingori because the evictees took refuge with kinsmen or found sympathy with European farmers who allowed them to squat in their farms. The Meru organised their non-violent field force to meet the armed field force of government. Plans were entrusted to a committee of seven who bound themselves and their neighbours to a promise of secrecy. Several swore to fight the eviction to the death. The WaMeru came to E-Day outwardly defenceless but inwardly fortified to endure even an outburst of physical violence. The government was given no grounds whatsoever to claim that one single policeman or labourer was harmed throughout the violent exercise. It appears the Meru counter move "to give neither provocation, nor the slightest cooperation either, thus deliberately forcing their evictors to unilateral violence in order to "dramatise their case". The case was not without some strange episodes. Bad-luck afflicted the settlers: their cattle died, crops failed, families fell ill and they bitterly regretted for ever settling there. To make matters worse the staunch advocate of the scheme, Major du Toit fell off the balcony of a building he was constructing and died when the DC had come to convince the WaMeru about the move. The Meru were amazed…they praised the Lord! Some suspected occult forces were at work.

b) To The United Nations

Prior to the eviction and in its aftermath, the Meru had staged a concerted protest against the scheme. They had written letters to the DC, to the Legislative Council the colonial office and aired complaints at barazas (local assemblies). They had also made depositions to the United Nations Trusteeship Council Visiting Mission which encouraged them to table the issue at the UN headquarters New York. The petition, which had massive popular support, was organized by a Committee of the Meru Citizens' Union under the leadership of one Rafael Mbise. On 9th June 1952 they were accorded a hearing before the Trusteeship Council provided they arrived before the end of the month when the British representative John Lamb had to leave for knighthood by the king. The Meru had to send in advance a Bermudian lawyer then practicing in Moshi, Earl Seaton. He arrived in New York in time to be heard on 30th June but Kirilo Japhet had to grapple with many obstacles (vaccinations, passport, foreign exchange etc) that he arrived on July 17th to join Seaton. The two presented the Meru land case eloquently and powerfully. Seaton capably laid the case before the delegates in careful lawyerly prose while, Kirilo speaking in Kiswahili (Seaton translating), followed with impassioned and detailed plea for justice. The Trusteeship Council discussed this at some length, but found that it had been confronted with a fait accompli

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about which it could do little. The British government maintained that the Meru case was a local issue, blown out of proportion to its realities and maintained that the Trusteeship Council could review a matter only after it had taken place, and this was not a case where a reversal was possible. As a result Trusteeship Council could merely express its disapproval and request that the matter be re-examined in its next meeting (1954). Even at the 4th Committee of the General Assembly, 32 votes to 17 adopted a recommendation for the immediate restoration of the land in question to the Meru people; but at the plenary session the voting was 28 vs. 20 which failed to get the necessary 2/3rds majority and therefore was lost.

c) A Noble Failure

Various interpretations have been offered on the consequences and ramifications of this ground breaking case. They are listed below:-

- Though it failed the case had had a tremendous publicity, for one thing, there was significant moral and political pressure brought to bear on the administering authority.
- Their struggle evidently shook the might of the colonial empire and marked the beginning of the end of foreign rule in Tanganyika…
- It provided an impetus to the national movement for independence and the formation of Tanganyika National Union (TANU) it was crucial in stimulating the creation of TANU…links from a tribal union to a national political organization.
- The discontent and publicity on Kirilo Japhet's appearance in 1952 as the first Tanganyikan African to address UN broke the ground for the transformation of a national movement.
- As the most celebrated single case of opposition debated in UN, it was crucial in stimulating the build up of TANU giving it explicit links between a tribal union a national movement
- It led to the development of considerable political sophistication with a few Meru e.g. Kirilo playing a role in national political scene.
- It had shifted decisively the leadership in Meru politics from the old generation represented by Mangi Sante to the younger and more educated [TANU] leaders.
- The case ended the leadership of Mangi Sante who was obliged to resign from the Baraza (Council) on 17 December 1952.
- It had a modernising influence on social, political and economic life of Meru people. Notably one of the impacts was that of turning their energies internally embarking on a remarkable period of self improvement e.g. revitalisation of peasant production of coffee. In the same vein as a result of Kirilo's visit to the USA an American Quaker advisor named Anton Nelson was invited to help build a nucleus of political leaders and assisting Meru children's education through their incipient cooperative movement.
- As far as the colonial government was concerned radical politics had been born in area and no one was certain what the outcome would be.
- At the local level the event brought forward a new leadership within the tribe; sent the first Tanganyikan, Kirilo Japhet, to speak before the United Nations;
- Meru politics had become internationalised; it led to an accumulation of political experience in the northern province.
- Connecting the popular politics of the North East to a territorial realm, thus …
- "…the evictions had made the English word development a dirty word for us…." (Japhet Kirilo to an American friend).
- The eviction woke up Meru people up to the indignity of being ruled without their our consent by foreigners. The national front Kirilo Japhet took up the mantle of "waking" up" all Tanganyika and he toured eastern, central and lake provinces for one and half months arousing keen interest especially among cotton growers in Sukumaland telling them: association that the "British are dictators and not democrats in 1954 for they had cheated the Meru over their land and UN had judged against it though they ignored the verdict.
- It raised the bogey of land alienation throughout the country. Thus in almost all the TANU branches and representations to the UN Visiting mission in 1954 mentioned first and foremost the Meru case.
- The case was described as "one of the most significant events in the later history of the Trust Territory of Tanganyika".
- The original decision to exclude the Meru people from their northern grazing area to make way for European ranching under controlled conditions dramatized the post-war British interest in colonial development, at the expense of African land rights;
- It demonstrated the extent of settler influence upon the Administering Authority (United Kingdom);

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- It raised in acute forms the economic implications for Africans of the evolving doctrine of multi-racialism.
- It had forged links with and confirmed the worst suspicions of the Kikuyu of Kenya about the sinister intentions of white settlers and their collusion with colonial rulers.
- Provided much of the drive behind one of the most successful coffee co-operatives in East Africa (cf. Mr Nelson).
- Nyerere together with S. Kandoro asked K. Japhet to tour the country under the banner/umbrella of TANU to inform the people about the Meru land case. Indeed the 1954 UN visiting mission pointed out, "…the fact remains…that the land and its use and tenure comprise in the African mind, the outstanding political and economic issue of the day….the alienation, which has created real economic problems on the slopes of the northern mountains, has at the same time created political fears and suspicions not only there but in Mwanza, Tabora, Tukuyu, Dar es Salaam and wherever else African political leaders have a following".
- Shortly after Nyerere founded TANU in 1954 and became its first President, a mission of the United Nations Trusteeship Council visited Tanganyika, met Nyerere and found him sound, trustworthy and a brilliant communicator.
- The report of the British Governor Edward Twining about the visit reads: "they thought our constitutional development was far too slow … regretted our attitude about elections and thought that TANU was the finest thing in Tanganyika and that Julius Nyerere and Kirilo Japhet were the prophets." (Illife, 1997:6).
- A struggle over land had become a national struggle against colonialism.
- Even the UN mission that visited Tanganyika in 1954 admitted that the land issue was at the centre of resistance. The Meru land case had caused indigenous people of the country to unite against s foreigners.
- Provided Meru with a moral victory and fuelled their militancy in disputes over land and local governance to come. For example; the Meru continue to evoke evictions in continuing struggles with the state over the establishment of the Arusha National Park.
- Land and its shortage continue to be a cause of political tension to this day. Thus the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Land Issues ('The Shivji Report'), for instance, states that as of 1992, twelve under-used farms were earmarked by the [Arumeru] district leadership for redistribution to smallholders, but in most cases problems over compensation, the desire of absent owners to return, or else the surreptitious reallocation of farms to powerful individuals or foreign companies have prevented this.
- However, it is rather interesting, nay strange, that the Meru land case made little impact on nearby Arusha who suffered even greater pressure eon land.

d) Return: 1962

On April 22 1962 Easter Sunday the formal return of the evictees was symbolised by the dedication of a church built with funds received in compensation for another church destroyed during the 1951 evictions. The farms in Ngare Nanyuki were purchased back by the post-independence government and by 1962 the area was back in the possession of its original inhabitants though, "the social and economic conditions of the land's inhabitants had been immeasurably trans-formed".

i. *A more "reasonable" governor*

It is said that the then governor, Sir Edward Twining, was misled by his advisers and would not have agreed to the Wilson proposals had he looked at them on the ground. Later he commented, "In the light of experience the government made psychological mistake in forcing the issue after the strong opposition of the Meru had been displayed, but at that time there was the conviction of the rightness of the case and that the ultimate benefit to be derived by all concerned made it necessary to evict the Meru compulsorily". Sir Edward Twining, with whom Julius Nyerere did not see eye to eye over developments towards independence, ended his third term in early 1958 and in his place came Richard Turbull who knew the realities of the emerging African nationalism having served in Kenya previously. He recognised the strength of TANU and soon developed a sound personal relationship with JKN so that the country's transition from colonial dependency was a "…model of peaceful and orderly change" (London Times), smooth, swift and successful" (Daily Telegraph). Some years later Julius Nyerere invited, Sir Richard Turbulll, whom he had described as a "reasonable" governor, to return for a fortnights' holiday with whom they toured the country.

V. Forgotten Hero: Kirilo Japhet 1921-1997

Kirilo Japhet Ayo was born in 1921 in Poli, Nkoaranga in today's Arumeru district in one of the first Christian families. His grand father, Nganayo, was a

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famous traditional healer. His father, Ngura Ayo became one of the first modernisers. A trusted church treasurer and a leader of the Meru coffee growers, he also learned carpentry and hired to build a lot of churches in the area. He was one of those early to adopt coffee farming and built a modern house (burnt bricks and iron roofs) in 1935. He bought the first tractor (see picture) in the area. He sent all his children to school. Kirilo died 30th May 1997 and is survived by his wife Ndeleto Kirilo with whom they had had ten children (4 females and 6 males-two of whom have died). Two of the sons are currently residing and working in USA. They are Zakaria Kirilo and Jefferson Kirilo. There is also woman medical Doctor working at the Mt Meru hospital married to one Nko; her name is Anna. The children continue to take care of their mother and also maintain the farms left behind by their father. Kirilo completed eight years of schooling and trained as a teacher in Marangu though he did not get any certificate; still he taught for some time in his locality. He worked more as a dresser in government service in Mpwapwa, Dodoma and Arusha. At the time of the Meru land case Kirilo was aged 31. But his impact became more prominent as chairman of the local TAA branch and as secretary of the Meru Citizens Union which was to catapult him into stardom. Kirilo was a powerful spokesman at Barazas and the district council up to 1950s with a gift for articulating Meru feelings. According to Nelson, his fearless, if impetuous, initiative in defending fellow Africans in their difficulties with white settlers and British officials, made him known throughout the northern province of Tanganyika, "…had he been born overseas Kirilo would most likely have been a college footballer and a member of the debating club" (Nelson, 1967:66). He was also controversial, earning both feelings of support and antagonism. For example when he returned from the USA he was accused by some people of embezzling Citizens' Union donations. With 60 acres of land Kirilo was a model farmer but this was to cost him his membership in the ruling party and therefore his parliamentary seat (MP) on allegations that he was a capitalist (and exploiter). He observed, "I was an MP between 1971 and d1974. I ceased to be MP because allegedly I had "too much money". I was told to sell my farms if I wanted to continue but I refused saying that the country needed good farmers I went back to my farm which is much better than that those of my neighbours…" (AMHT[3], 1988). To the colonial administration he was an agitator and politically notorious. On his return, Kirilo played a role in national political struggles. He toured many parts of the country under the auspices of TANU to explain the Meru land case and stressing the need for a national movement, becoming the first regional chairman of TANU in the Northern Province. After the UN presentations Kirilo Japhet remained in America for a year to study gaining a wealth of ideas and experiences which he used on his return. One of these was to invite an American Quaker, A. Nelson to come and help in the cooperative movement. As a result the introduction of modern, scientific methods of cultivation and processing coffee, use of insecticides and strict discipline in farm husbandry improved the quantity and quality of the coffee produced by Meru growers that their cooperative union became the pacesetter for African coffee growers in other parts of the country. Kirilo was instrumental in generating funds for the education of Meru children abroad. Some of the prominent ones were:

- Peter Kishuli Pallangyo-ambassador
- Eliawira Ndossi died in USA last year
- Moses Ndosi (Doctor)
- Mathias Kaaya,
- Mike Urio-Board of Internal Trade
- Ndewira Kitomari (BoT)-Deputy governor

At another level Kirilo solicited funds from abroad and locally and supervised the construction of primary, secondary, and vocational schools not to mention lorries, milling machines all destined for Meruland. Despite all these, it is strange that not even a primary school/secondary school dormitory in the district or a street in Arusha city is named in honour of this illustrious Tanzanian. Kirilo was an avid mountain climber who accompanied the legendary climber of Mt Kilimanjaro ("Roof of Africa"), General Mirisho Sarakikya several times. It is reported that in one occasion he climbed up the 35 km mountain in just thirteen-and-a-half hours. He was also a keen entertainer seen in some pictures playing his guitar and was a cultural performer as evidenced by the costumes he wore. To the Meru, Kirilo Japhet is a *Merishai* (in KiMeru), i.e. hero.

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