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THE MERU OF TANZANIA:
A STUDY OF THEIR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

BY

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THESIS

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
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My primary debt for the opportunity to do this study is to the Meru people of Tanzania. I hope that this minor effort will stimulate some of the Meru people to investigate more thoroughly the past and potential role they can play in the building of a great Tanzanian nation.

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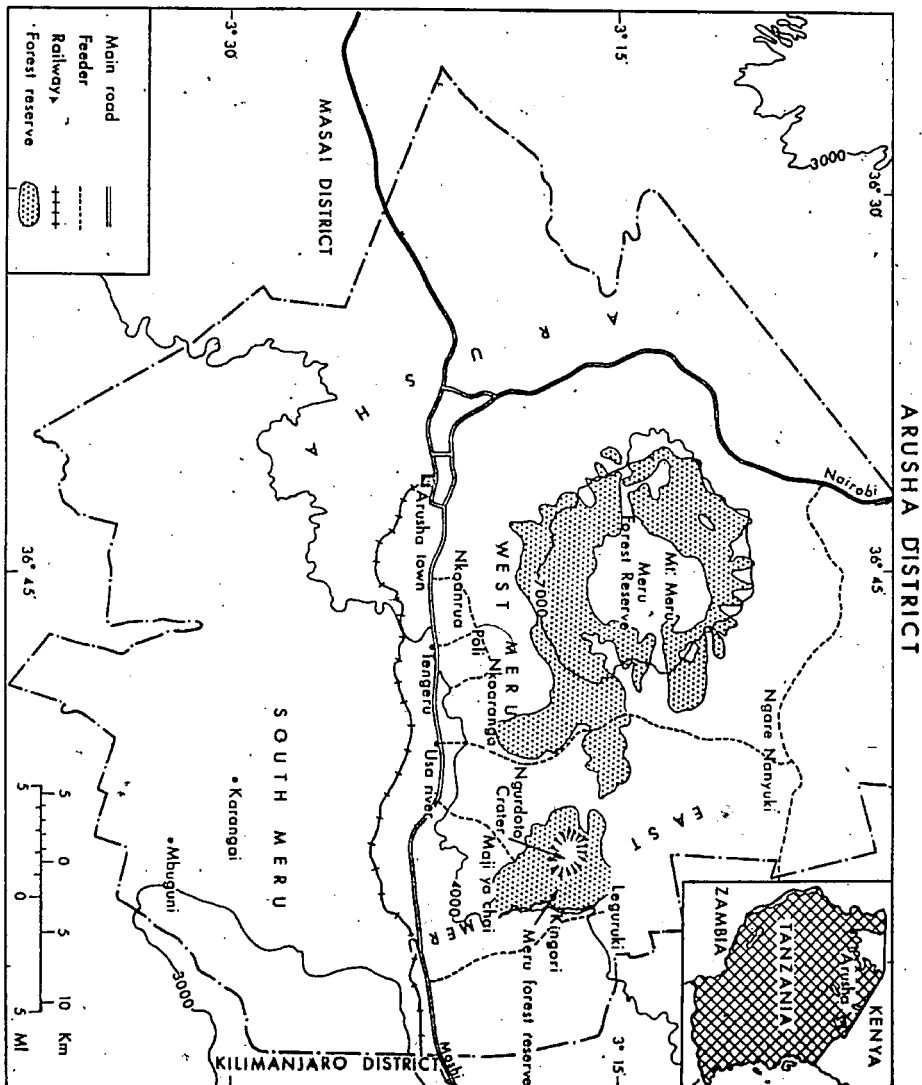
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THE MERU LAND CASE

In 1951 the colonial administration of Tanganyika forcibly evicted three thousand people from their homes on the northeastern slopes of Mount Meru. The non-violent, yet strenuous, resistance with which the Meru people fought this act became known as the Meru Land Case. This series of events was of great significance in the life of the Meru people, in the history of nationalism in Tanganyika, and in the activities of the United Nations Organization concerning International Trusteeship.

Several authors have referred briefly to the Meru Land Case as an example of tribal protest to colonial rule, but what excited the interest of political scientists and others was the fact that a small tribe could challenge the might of British colonialism to the extent of presenting a petition to the United Nations Trusteeship Council requesting the Council to advise the British administering authorities in Tanganyika to return the land from which three thousand Meru had been forcibly evicted. Many pages have been filled by various authors on this aspect of the case, but very little has been written on the background to the case or the details of the Meru response to the colonial government's action.

It was this lack of information which prompted me to choose the Meru people as the object of an anthropological

investigation. It seems appropriate therefore to present first, in some detail, the background to the Meru Land Case before beginning the discussion of Meru social and political organization.

The foothills of Mount Meru being so well endowed with an excellent climate and fertile soils, the German and later British colonialists embarked on a policy of encouraging the establishment of European plantation settlement in large numbers. So much land was alienated from the Meru in this way that by the 1940's population density on the mountain slopes was reaching a critical point and there were no longer any natural avenues to accommodate their necessary expansion. Complaints by the Meru and other tribes in northern Tanganyika, and by the European farmers who were pressing for the acquisition of even more tribal lands, led to the setting up of a commission to study the distribution of land in Arusha and Moshi Districts. The report of the commission admitted that previous alienations of land had created an intolerable situation for the native peoples in the area and recommended that certain paths be agreed upon to allow the Meru and others to expand to the peripheral areas below the foothills of the mountain.¹ But due to pressure from the European community, the report still recommended further alienations

¹Report of the Arusha-Moshi Lands Commission, Government Printer, Dar es Salaam, 1947.

in the Ngare Nanyuki and other areas to form a homogeneous block of European ranching land stretching from the northern slopes of Mount Meru to the western slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Ngare Nanyuki is the Maasai name for a river which flows from the centre of Mount Meru crater northwards to the plains surrounding the mountain. The source of the river, called waato in the Meru language, is an historical site where it is believed Lamireny, the first Meru to explore the centre of the mountain, had camped for some time. By the 1940's and 1950's this area was not being used by the Meru for extensive cultivation but it was of vital importance as an area which could be used for grazing cattle by the people on the southern slopes where the cultivation of coffee and other crops had taken up almost all the available grazing space.

The colonial government did not take any action on the commission's report until 1951 when the District Commissioner called a meeting in Ngare Nanyuki to inform the people living there that they must vacate this land and the land adjacent to the east, Leguruki, so that government might sell it to Europeans as dairy farms. The response of the people was not sudden or dramatic. After the announcement, four individuals set to work quietly to see how they could thwart the intentions of the colonialists.

The British authorities in Arusha town had obtained the approval of Mangi Sandi (the Meru chief) and when the

people of Ngare Nanyuki called meetings to inform the authorities of why they did not want to move, they were told that they had no choice but to obey the order. In August 1951 the committee of four decided to take the matter over the heads of the local administering authority.

The committee of four consisted of Rāphael Mbise, a Lutheran evangelist and mission school teacher, Emanuel Makya, a jumbe (headman), Munya Lengoroi and Moses Isak, who were farmers. The need for secrecy forced Mbise to keep his position as chairman of the committee undisclosed and he did not sign any of the correspondence. When necessary, he used the name of Raphael Megilienanga. Makya was known as a jumbe, therefore he signed committee correspondence as Maasa Makya. The other two were unknown to the government and were able to use their own names. They began by writing letters telling of government's intention to evict them and their reasons against the move to the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Secretary of State for Colonies in London, and the Chief Secretary in Dar es Salaam, with copies to the five African Members of the Tanganyika Legislative Council. News of the letters reached the colonial government and officials were sent to Ngare Nanyuki to find out who had written them. The four men were suspected, but no evidence could be obtained against them. Lengoroi and Isak had carried the letters to Kenya to be mailed from there because they suspected the correspondence might be intercepted.

As the date for the evictions approached and no response was forthcoming, more letters were sent to Fenner Brockway in the British House of Commons, the Congress of People against Imperialism in London, Dr. Ralph Bunche in the United Nations, and others.

Meanwhile the government was going ahead with its plans to evict the Meru. There were stories circulating that the Meru were preparing poison arrows, spears and clubs to use against the police if they were forced to move. These stories probably had their origin in the general fear among the European community in East Africa over the trouble brewing in Kenya concerning Kikuyu lands which erupted a year later in the Mau Mau revolt. In fact, the Meru leaders were repeatedly cautioning their people not to resort to violence, but rather to engage in passive resistance. Still the colonialists were sufficiently afraid that when the evictions began on November 17, 1951 a field force of police surrounded the people of Ngare Nanyuki who had gathered together in silent protest. When one man rose to address the crowd and requested them to remain quiet as the police began to burn their houses, the government officials, not understanding the Meru language, assumed the man was instigating; they arrested him and had him fined and imprisoned for trespassing.

The evictions took more than two weeks to complete. In addition to burning houses to the ground, storage huts were destroyed, household goods and moveable property were either

removed or destroyed, crops and livestock were either confiscated or driven away, and several people were fined and/or arrested. The people of Ngare Nanyuki and Leguruki scattered and sought refuge among relatives and friends throughout the southern slopes of Mount Meru.

The government had offered compensation in the form of cash for the houses and crops and alternative land in the Kingori area to the south of Leguruki. The offer was unacceptable to the Meru not only because the land at Kingori was less fertile than that which they had been forced to abandon, infested with tse tse fly, and having insufficient water, but also because Kingori was already part of the Meru tribal lands and thus the colonial government could not offer them as an alternative what was already theirs. None of the evicted people accepted the land at Kingori and, through the advice of their leaders, for a long time none of them accepted the badly needed cash as compensation.

Mangi Sandi and many of his followers, on the other hand, did accept the land offered in compensation, even though they had not been evicted. These people were allowed to claim as much land as they thought they could use and to this day they have large farms in the Kingori area which benefit from the water supplies and tse tse controls installed by government as part of the compensation. This action marked the end of Sandi's political influence in Meru country. He had been unpopular when he was imprisoned in 1930 for misappropriation

of funds and only after a supposedly "changed" Sandi had emerged from prison and Mangi Kishili resigned was he re-appointed as Mangi in 1945. He then proved to be too favourable to the colonialists' interests and lost most of his support among the Meru when eleven of his opponents were arrested and exiled after opposing the 1948 constitution. Siding with the government again over the issue of moving from Ngare Nanyuki was the last straw and Sandi was forced to announce his resignation as chief at a public meeting on December 17, 1952.

The committee of four had expanded their number to seven. They employed a few men as couriers to keep them informed of government's activities; one of these couriers was caught and arrested. For a few months before the evictions the resistance was centered around this handful of men and the residents of Ngare Nanyuki and Leguruki only. But after the evictions virtually all of the Meru people became involved. The Meru Citizens Union had been organized since 1949 through the efforts of such people as Nsilo Swai and Petro Njau of the Kilimanjaro Citizens Union, but their activity was centred mainly in West Meru. They had already been in opposition to Mangi Sandi and after the evictions they combined with the committee of seven to form a united front representing all the Meru people in their protest against the administering authorities.

In the meantime some answers had been received from the letters which had been sent to London and to the United

Nations Organization. The affair was being publicized in London and other newspapers. Eventually, an invitation was received for a representative from the Meru people to present their case in person before the United Nations Trusteeship Council. The Meru Citizens Union decided to send Kirilo Japhet, a farmer and former medical dresser, because he had a reputation of being a good speaker and not easily intimidated. To assist him in legal matters and translation, Earl Seaton, a West Indian lawyer then working in Tanganyika, was engaged to accompany Japhet to the United Nations. The colonial officials made it as difficult as possible for Japhet to go by creating all sorts of bureaucratic problems concerning exit visas, etc. Seaton had to leave alone to be on time for the meeting of the council, but finally Japhet was able to go as well. He addressed the United Nations in Swahili, the first time this language was used in that Organization, and the petition was one of the first instances of a tribal people carrying their protest to the actions of a colonial regime to such heights. The effort failed, however, as the vote to have the eviction order reversed failed to receive the necessary two thirds majority of the General Assembly.

The hopes of the Meru people for justice died and the fears of the Europeans that violent reprisals would occur increased. Mau Mau was now in full swing in Kenya. Many Kikuyu families who had been farming on the foothills of

Mount Meru were rounded up and sent away by the Tanganyika government. The European farmers on Mount Meru, many of whom were Boers from South Africa, carried sidearms day and night. Nevertheless, justifiable as it may have been, the Meru response was not one of violence. Two deaths did indeed occur during this period. One of the South African farmers who had led the demand for the alienation of more Meru land fell from the second storey of a new house he was building and broke his neck. Another European farmer in the Sanya Corridor between Mount Meru and Mount Kilimanjaro was said to have been speared by Maasai warriors.

The Government proceeded to grant the land at Ngare Nanyuki to individual European farmers to use for dairy ranching. At the same time they set about to pacify the Meru by establishing a committee to write a new constitution which included in its membership individuals from the Meru Citizens Union as well as the District Commissioner as Chairman and the Government Sociologist, Mr. H.A. Fosbrooke. They also sent one of their best community development officers, Mr. Horace Mason, to Meru. Through his efforts Mason was able to gain considerable popularity and support even in this difficult period of Meru relations with Europeans.

As early as 1954 a United Nations Visiting Mission was able to discern the lack of truth behind the allegations of European farmers that the evictions were necessary in order to establish a dairy ranching industry for the benefit of

the whole territory.

It is also relevant to any consideration of the case that the flourishing European dairying industry envisaged at the time of the Wilson Commission has not yet materialized. On the contrary, the Mission has recorded that it heard from a spokesman for some of the settlers that the occupiers of the six 2,000 acre units at the southern side of the block were in difficulties. He maintained on their behalf that this land was unsuited to the purposes (mixed farming) for which it had been granted to them, that it was ideally suited to African peasant farming, and that some of the settlers were anxious to exchange it with the Meru for undeveloped land in the lower Kingori area. The mission has no option but to accept this most unexpected complaint as valid, since it is a matter of Government policy that applicants for land should be considered in the light of their personal qualities, experience and available capital, and it is reasonable to expect that special care was taken in the selection of candidates for a scheme which was regarded as of particular importance and was surrounded with considerable political complications.

The Mission believes that the facts which it has set forth on the case tend clearly enough to their own conclusion. It is obvious that the Meru people - and this is their feeling as expressed both by the Citizens' Union and the Tribal Council - are suffering under a deep sense of grievance, which must be removed before it becomes even worse. This is the Mission's own impression, and it is confirmed by that of the Lutheran Church leader and by the statements of the European settlers concerned. Furthermore, the eviction of the Meru people has obviously shocked responsible African opinion throughout the territory, and has understandably become a symbol of the worst widespread fears about the future of the land.²

The Visiting Mission did not exaggerate the widespread influence the Meru Land Case was having throughout the

²Report of the United Nations Visiting Mission to Trust Territories in East Africa, 1954, United Nations Trusteeship Council, Distr. General, T/1142, December 23, 1954, paragraphs 614, 615, pp. 263-264.

territory. The Tanganyika African Association which in 1954 became the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU - the present ruling party of the nation) was using the case as a cause celebre to prove the iniquities of the colonial regime and to press for independence. President Nyerere himself has said that the Meru Land Case was important in arousing political consciousness in Tanganyika, thus leading to the growth of nationalism and attracting international attention to Tanganyika.

Nevertheless, no action was taken by the colonial government to return the Ngare Nanyuki and Leguruki lands to the Meru. By 1958, as the European settlers were abandoning their attempts to develop the area, the Meru Cooperative Union was able to purchase one of the farms in Ngare Nanyuki from a departing settler. Soon afterwards several Meru families mainly from the southern slopes pooled their resources to establish companies which purchased more of the farms from the settlers. Finally, the Meru District Council purchased all but two of the remaining farms. One of these is now being used by the National Development Corporation as an experimental dairy farm and the other is still leased by Europeans.

On April 22, 1962, ten years and five months after the evictions, a general celebration was held at the site of a new church, built on the spot where the old one had been destroyed, in order to celebrate the return of the Meru to their homelands.³

³p. Puritt, "The Meru Land Case," Tanzania Notes and Records, Number 69, November, 1968.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND METHODOLOGY

In November 1964 I began my field study of the Meru people armed primarily with Julian Steward's theory of contemporary change in traditional societies,⁴ a theory which attempts to determine the processes or evolutionary transformations that have affected traditional societies. Using this theory, I had intended to do a study of the social and cultural changes which had occurred in Meru society as a whole. I thought I would examine such things as the trajectory of change in recent years, viewed against the backdrop of Meru "traditional" society; this would require choosing arbitrarily some point in time as a "base line" when Meru society could still be said to be "traditional". Then the effects of modern, industrial culture on Meru society would be isolated in order to see what were the external as opposed to internal forces which brought about changes in Meru society and culture. The extent to which Meru society had developed supra-community or supra-tribal institutions would then be analyzed in terms of Steward's notion of different levels of socio-cultural integration.

It became increasingly more difficult to work within this framework as my fieldwork progressed. I found it very restricting to use Meru society as a whole as my unit of analysis and misleading to pose a dichotomy between traditional

⁴ J. H. Steward editor, Contemporary Change in Traditional Societies, 3 volumes, Urbana, Illinois, 1967 and J.H. Steward Theory of Culture Change, Urbana, Illinois, 1955.

and modern Meru society. Traditional and modern are often not mutually exclusive categories and the Meru are not a homogeneous people.

In fact, generalization is often impossible since various segments of the Meru population occupy different ecological zones throughout the slopes and foothills of Mount Meru which results in the existence of a variety of life styles among a people who are all members of the Meru tribe. Their language and adherence to common systems of authority are the same, but they are divided religiously as Christians and non-Christians, they do not cultivate the same crops, they differ as to the extent of their dependence on cattle, food and cash crops, and their level of education and degree of participation in modern development institutions are significantly different.

The traditional - modern dichotomy forces upon us a static model of a society remaining more or less intact over a long period and then reacting to the incursions of a supposedly monolithic industrial culture. However, there are, in fact, numerous local manifestations of industrial culture even when they come as part of the overall framework of British colonialism. And the recipient society is not necessarily wholly affected. There is an interaction; certain aspects of society embrace certain modernizing elements. It is not simply a matter of taking from without, but rather incorporating a new idea or technique and adjusting it to new needs, with concomitant adjustments in the social organization of the adopters, and then the society presents itself as something new.

My emphasis on looking at aspects of societies and their cultures and how they change, and at the role of these aspects in adopting, adapting and exhibiting certain aspects of modern industrial societies, does not allow me to see process in terms of levels of socio-cultural integration. These levels are obviously important, as are the external agencies which mediate change, but I have chosen not to discuss them in Stewardian terms in this thesis:

Social anthropologists rarely make honest and detailed statements about their field methods. Methods courses, when they are given at all, often emphasize the totality of the experience of living in a foreign culture for a long period of time and the depth of insight which can thus be obtained. This is certainly true and I would not deny the richness of anthropological insight. But the equally important factors of the theoretical framework which the fieldworker has in mind and the day to day techniques which he uses to gather information must be more fully discussed. This is necessary not only to provide a check of accuracy and the possibility of replication, but also simply to allow a more meaningful understanding to the reader of any particular ethnography.

I did my field study of Meru society for a period of nineteen months. Throughout this period I lived with my wife and children in a house provided by the Meru District Council on the grounds of a primary school in Nkoanrua, West Meru. This was situated on the southern slopes of Mount Meru two

miles up a mountain road from the main highway between the towns of Arusha and Moshi and eight miles from the town of Arusha.

More than seventy-five percent of the Meru people speak Swahili, the lingua franca of East Africa, and I studied Swahili in an intensive six week course before arriving in Tanzania. By insisting on speaking Swahili every day after settling in Meru country, I was able after six months to speak the language fairly fluently and thus carry on my research activities primarily in Swahili. My children were a great help in this respect as they learned to speak Swahili so quickly while playing with the children from the primary school and our neighbours that I was often motivated to try to keep pace with them. The Meru people were also very encouraging; they were pleased that I was making the attempt to learn Swahili and they were always enthusiastic over my progress.

After approximately one year in the field, I decided that it was important for me to speak the Meru tribal language as well. But it proved impossible for me to attain any degree of fluency. By this time information was readily forthcoming in Swahili and the Meru people were used to speaking to me in Swahili. It became painful to try and continue our discussions with my extremely limited knowledge of the Meru language so that after a few minutes we always reverted to speaking Swahili.

I identified myself to the Meru people as a Canadian scholar who was interested in studying and writing about their language, history and culture. Most people with whom I came into contact readily accepted this and I found I was able to make friends quickly. I decided at the beginning to concentrate on Meru oral history which required me to seek out older men as informants. I believe it was my lengthy discussions and friendship with these old men which strengthened the acceptance of my enquiries and further justified my presence to the many Meru people who knew me or knew of me.

In the meantime, my wife had volunteered her services as a part time helper to the local clinic and dispensary and to the primary school where we lived. This augmented the number of people with whom I could come into contact and among whom I could choose informants.

As I began to discover the variability in styles of life between the Meru people who inhabited different parts of Mount Meru, I moved further away from home to find people to interview. I was often accompanied by one or another of the secondary school students who I employed as research assistants and who provided me with introductions to their relatives and friends. I suffered from asthma throughout the time that I lived on Mount Meru and this problem somewhat restricted my movements. For example, I could not live away from home in other parts of the mountain for as long as I would have liked to, but I still managed to visit and spend

some days in most of the areas which the Meru inhabit.

At various times I employed research assistants to help me in my work. These were usually secondary school students who were able to work for me for one or two months during their holidays. All of my assistants were young men, except one young married woman, a non-student, who worked for me for about six months. The assistants alternated between accompanying me when I interviewed and going out themselves with questionnaires I constructed which dealt with various topics about which I wanted to collect a wider range of information than I could cover on my own.

My field methods included interviews, questionnaires, a household census, examination of court records, student essays, and four life histories, as well as daily observation and participant-observation. I preferred to interview people individually rather than in groups as I found it easier to check on the accuracy of statements this way. Together with my assistants I conducted a one hundred percent census of households in four villages in West Meru. Two of my assistants copied the records of four magistrates' courts in West Meru covering a time period of eighteen months. Questionnaires were usually administered to more than one person and, depending on the subject involved, people of different ages and sex were questioned. I asked some students at the primary school in West Meru and some of my assistants to write essays on various subjects. Two old men and two old women volunteered

to allow me to record their life histories. The two men told their stories into a tape recorder, but the two women told their stories to my female assistant who recorded them by hand.

In short, I followed the more or less traditional anthropological methods of inquiry and used ethnographic categories as a framework for description. However, I found this approach was not adequate for the study of the changes which had occurred in Meru society. I also found myself at a loss for an all-embracing and satisfying theory to explain the processes of social and cultural change in Meru society. These changes seemed to have been occurring at various rates throughout Meru history as a result of a variety of external stimuli and internal adaptations, yet, at the same time many traditional Meru social and political institutions persist until today. For example, mechanisms of dispute settlement and other forms of political organization of considerable antiquity in Meru society still exist side by side with various modern institutions which allow the Meru people to participate actively in a rapidly developing market economy.

In this thesis I shall first discuss the setting in terms of Meru geography, economy and history, and then the social and political institutions including the mechanisms of social control through which Meru society is organized. Next I shall discuss some of the more recent socio-political changes which have been of significance in determining the direction of change in Meru society. Finally, I shall conclude by

examining some of the reasons for the difficulty in treating Meru society as a single unit of analysis, indicating some of the cross-cutting complexities which determine the nature of this small, but fascinating group of people in northern Tanzania.

SETTING

The Meru of Tanzania are a Bantu-speaking, agricultural people who number about 50,000 persons and inhabit the south-eastern slopes of Mount Meru some forty miles west of Mount Kilimanjaro. The Meru are mixed farmers, with a strong orientation to cash cropping in recent years. They are a patrilineal people organized traditionally under a tribal paramount chief. In the past clans appear to have been organized as localized groups, but today their members are dispersed throughout Meru country and clan controlled lands are found in all territorial divisions of the tribe. Between forty and fifty percent of the people are nominally Christians, the first mission having been established successfully in their country in 1902.

Compared to their neighbours, such as the Arusha and Maasai, the Meru are well educated and politically articulate, though less so than the Chagga who live forty miles to the east of them. In Arusha Region, which extends from the plains to the east of Mount Meru westward to the dry Maasai steppe and shares a border with Kenya to the north, the Meru are the most economically advanced people. The climate and volcanic soils of Mount Meru are extremely fertile and early contact with western civilization allowed the Meru to develop in advance of the other peoples in the Region.

There is another, and anthropologically better known, tribal society in Kenya called the Meru, but the Tanzania Meru are in no way related to the Kenya Meru. In their tribal language the Tanzania Meru call themselves Varwa. No one has yet satisfactorily explained the origin of the name Meru. It is interesting to note that in various early Indian writings a mythical mountain which is often sought by travellers is called Meru. It may be that early Indian travellers seeing both Mount Kenya and Mount Meru named these mountains Meru and the people residing in these places were then called by that name. In the Arusha language, the tribe which has occupied the western half of Mount Meru for the last 150 years, the mountain is known as Koimere. The last two syllables could, I suppose, have been changed to Meru to designate the people who occupied the mountain before them. This possibility however could not include the Kenya Meru. Yet another explanation which may apply to both peoples is that they were named by the Maasai who occupied adjacent territory to both the Kenya and the Tanzania Meru. In the Maasai language, il tung'ana le meiru are people who do not hear, or who, in other words, are considered as rather stupid. Not understanding the language of either tribe, the Maasai may have dubbed them "meiru" or Meru. Each of these possibilities is equally conjectural and arguments could easily be brought forth to dismiss them.

Although the Meru refer to themselves as Varwa, all other people in Tanzania know them by the name Meru. It has become

standard practice of most Africanists writing about Bantu-speaking peoples to drop the prefixes which designate the people, their country, or their language and use only the name stems. For instance, in Swahili - the lingua franca of East Africa - the Meru people are Wameru, their country is Umeru, and their language is Kimeru. In this thesis I will conform to the standard practice and refer to the Meru people simply as the Meru. Where necessary I will indicate whether I am speaking of their country or their language. This will apply also to their neighbours, the Arusha people who I will refer to quite often by way of comparison.⁵ An added complication exists here in that Arusha is also the name of a town situated at the southern foothills of Mount Meru. When referring to the town as opposed to the people, I will say Arusha town.

Arusha town is presently the administrative centre of Arusha District which includes Mount Meru and its immediate environs. The main inhabitants of the District are the Meru and Arusha peoples. A rough census of the District carried out by the District Council in 1965 gave the population of the Meru people as approximately 50,000 and the Arusha 90,000. Arusha town is also the headquarters of Arusha Region, an administrative unit of the national government, which includes Arusha, Maasai, and Mbulu Districts. The town is

⁵ For further information on the Arusha, see P.H. Gulliver, Social Control in an African Society, 1963.

inhabited by members of over twenty different tribal groups as well as Asians and Europeans. The bulk of the African population according to the 1957 national census is derived from peoples whose home area is not Arusha District. The Arusha and Meru peoples comprised only the tenth and fifteenth largest ethnic groups in the town respectively.

According to oral traditions, the first Meru people migrated from the Usambara mountains in the northeast of Tanzania and settled on the slopes of Mount Meru between 300 and 400 years ago. They were said to have been led by the founder of Mbise clan and to have been ruled by a paramount chief named Kaaya, the head of the Kaaya clan. The various clans which participated in this first migration occupied separate parts of the eastern and southern slopes of Mount Meru and were governed by their respective clan heads under the authority of the paramount chief who was repeatedly chosen from the Kaaya clan. Subsequent immigration of peoples from the Tanzanian mainland seeking the fertile mountain slopes continued to augment the original Meru population. The acceptance of the paramount chief's authority and the adoption of the Meru language were the two primary integrating forces.

It was not until the arrival of the Arusha who settled on the southwestern slopes of Mount Meru about 1830⁶ that certain dramatic changes began to occur in Meru society. The military superiority of the Arusha required the Meru to

⁶P.H. Gulliver, op.cit., pp. 10-11.

transform many aspects of their culture and adopt an age-set system which added a new dimension to their political organization. This began a new phase of integration of Meru and Arusha cultural elements in Meru society which lasted for over sixty years until the establishment of German colonial rule.

European overrule with the accompanying taxation, forced labour, cash cropping, road building, European plantations and settlers, etc., set in motion processes of change in Meru society which are continuing even today. These external contacts, I believe, have acted as the impetus for change, but I will examine the internal adaptations which have accompanied these external stimuli, which I consider to be more significant and more revealing as to the nature of Meru society.

To the extent that the Meru have always been a more or less "independent political division of a population with a common culture", they can be considered as a single tribe.⁷ And the Meru people regard themselves as members of the same tribe. But, as I have mentioned, ecological differences on the mountain slopes, varying degrees of confrontation with external forces, and variations in adaptation by different segments of the Meru population to these forces gives one the impression of an extremely fragmented society which in

⁷Lucy Mair, Primitive Government, 1962, p. 15.

only some respects can be called a wholly unified society. The chieftainship, the common adherence to the authority of clan leaders, the generally accepted body of legal rules of behaviour, and the religion based on worship of clan ancestors are constantly vying for control of Meru society against such forces for change as new developments in their agricultural economy, the addition of elements in their cultural inventory and new social and political structures brought by immigrating peoples, colonialism, and the requirements of the newly independent national government.

Geography:⁸

Topography

The topography of Meru is dominated by Mount Meru, an extinct volcano whose peak rises 14,978 feet above sea level. The center of Mount Meru is a huge crater whose eastern wall was blown out in the last eruption of the volcano. Much of eastern Meru for miles around the crater is strewn with large and small boulders which were scattered during the eruption. From the peak the mountain falls sharply to about 11,000 feet above sea level at the edge of the dense forest which circles the mountain. This forest was established as a restricted forest conservation area by the German and later the British colonial governments and extends down to

⁸ Much of this information is taken from the Regional Agricultural Office, Arusha, Tanzania.

approximately 7000 feet above sea level, in order to preserve the water retention properties of the upper reaches of the mountain so that soil erosion would not occur further down in the cultivated areas.

Immediately to the east of Mount Meru is Ngurdoto crater. It covers an area of some 10 square miles and abounds in wild game of all kinds. The crater itself and the surrounding area, including the Momella lakes, has been declared a national game preserve. Settlement in this area is restricted and the national government receives a small revenue from the fees charged to tourists. While Ngurdoto is small and unspectacular compared to many other game preserves in Tanzania, the area is one of great beauty.

Steep gorges occur throughout the forest reserve which give way further down to both gently and sharply rising hills which make up the cultivated mountain slope region of Mount Meru. These slopes surround the mountain and fall more gently to meet the plains below at about 3000 feet above sea level. Before overpopulation on the mountain slopes made it necessary for people to emigrate, the lower limit of Meru habitation was at about 4000 feet above sea level. Nowadays they range widely even over the lower plains.

In east Meru there are eight lakes, but none as spectacular as the one in west Meru, Lake Duluti, which is a crater lake that covers thirteen square miles. The main rivers in Meru are concentrated on the south side of the

mountain, except for Ngare Nanyuki River which originates in the crater and flows northward until it is lost in the Maasai plains. Most of the rivers on the south side of Mount Meru join in south Meru to form the Kikuletwa River which flows southeastward. This is joined by many of the rivers from Kilimanjaro and further south becomes the Pangani River. All the rivers in Meru are very high in fluorine content, evidenced by the discoloured teeth of almost all the inhabitants of Mount Meru. There are fish in the rivers and lakes, but most Meru do not eat them as they consider fish to be unfit for human consumption.

The soils in Meru are volcanic in origin. The rocks are lavas and the soils and subsoils are neutral to alkaline, becoming more alkaline the lower they are from the mountain. The humus content is high and rich in minerals especially in the areas of high rainfall, but this decreases to moderate in the drier areas. Wind and water erosion is a serious problem in the dry season as the surface dries rapidly and becomes very dusty. The natural vegetation cover varies from tropical rain forest in the forest reserve, grassland and deciduous thicket on the slopes, to dry thorny bush on the plains.

Many farms on Mount Meru which are close to the forest reserve, game preserves or plains often suffer from the foraging of wild animals such as elephants, wart hogs and monkeys. The wild animals to be found in these areas include giraffe, zebra, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, gazelles, buffalo,

lion, leopard and hyena.

Climate

The seasonal pattern includes two wet seasons separated by dry seasons, one of which is hot and the other cold. The sequence over the year is: A hot dry period from January to mid-March, during which storms may occur; the "long rains" from mid-March to May; a long, cool, dry period from June to October, July and August being the coldest months, after which temperatures gradually rise; and the "short rains" in November and December.

Temperature and rainfall vary considerably depending upon altitude and different sides of Mount Meru. On the southern side of the mountain between 6000 feet and 7000 feet, just below the forest reserve, rainfall often averages 70 inches per year and temperatures will vary from 80° fahrenheit in the hot dry period to below 40° fahrenheit during the long rains. On the mountain slopes between 4000 feet and 5000 feet the temperatures are similar but less cold and rainfall usually averages 60 inches per year. In the southern parts of Meru which border on the Maasai steppe temperatures are usually warmer and rainfall is often as low as 10 inches per year. The northern side of Mount Meru receives much less rainfall than the western side, which receives less than the eastern side, which in turn receives much less rain than the southern side.

Habitation⁹

The present boundaries of Meru tribal lands include the eastern half of Mount Meru from the forest reserve stretching downwards to the surrounding Maasai plains. The Arusha occupy the western half of the mountain, the boundary between the two tribes is roughly the Nduruma River on the southern side of the mountain and the same general area, approximately the middle of the mountain, on the northern side.¹⁰ The total area inhabited by the Meru people covers about 300 square miles. Traditionally the Meru did not occupy the northern slopes of the mountain and even today few people live in this area. On the southern slopes, however, population densities exceed 1000 people per square mile in the highly cultivated coffee-belt and can go as high as 1500 and more in some places. In east Meru which has only in recent years been occupied by large numbers of Meru as a result of the expansion into this area since the conclusion of the Land Case, the population density rarely exceeds 50 people per square mile. The dry, uninviting plains of south Meru contain only about 20 people per square mile, but this area also has European and Asian owned plantations of sisal and sugar which employ large numbers of Africans from various tribes throughout the country including some Meru.

⁹Population density figures are based on personal estimates and District records.

¹⁰This is about 5 miles further east than the Temi River which was roughly the boundary in the early days of Arusha contact.

There are surprisingly few Meru working for wages on the farms of settlers, especially on the numerous European and Asian owned coffee plantations on the mountain slopes. The majority of African plantation workers in Meru country are from neighbouring tribes such as the Chagga, Pare, Arusha, Rangi, Nyamwezi, and Gogo. Members of these tribes and others such as the Maasai and even some Somali often come to Meru to settle in time of drought since the Mount Meru area rarely suffers severe consequences from the numerous droughts which afflict many parts of East Africa.

Geographical Communication¹¹

Dirt roads or foot tracks are the main access routes throughout Meru country and most travel is done on foot. In recent years buses owned by Meru and Chagga people have been used by many Meru for inter-village travel as well as to go to Arusha town and Moshi. Between the towns of Arusha and Moshi there is a tarmac road with heavy traffic. A railroad with three stations passes through Meru country between Arusha and Moshi and links the main line to the coast. Telegraph and electric power lines between Arusha and Moshi towns also run through Meru country, but only one main line goes up the mountain from the highway into the interior of Meru.

¹¹ See Map, p. v.

Ecological Variation

I have already referred briefly to the rich variety in styles of life between different segments of the Meru people. Many of these variations appear to occur as a result of the significantly different ecological zones which comprise the total Meru habitat. The inhabitants of the mountain just below the forest reserve grow very little coffee as the cold at this altitude will not permit successful cultivation of this crop. Thus, they do not participate as much in the cash economy as do other people further down the mountain. Cash is available to the few farmers who do grow some coffee and to those who have begun to grow pyrethrum which thrives in these upper slopes. Maize requires a much longer maturation period of about seven months compared to four months on the central slopes. Very little missionary activity and few schools have been built until recently in this area, so that it contains the largest proportion of pagans and uneducated Meru.

The central slopes between 4000 feet and 6000 feet on the southern side of the mountain are the richest part of Meru in terms of wealth, due mostly to the intensive cultivation of coffee. In this "coffee belt" most farmers cultivate between one and three acres of coffee which they sell for cash and food crops are interspersed, including mainly bananas, maize and beans. The most intensive culture contact has occurred here because of the Arusha - Moshi highway at 4000

feet and the old German horse track at 5000 feet; the majority of schools, missions, and clinics also are located in the coffee belt. A large proportion of the population to be found here are Christians as well as the richest and most educated Meru. In addition, most Meru regard some part of the central slopes as their traditional homeland since it was the area of original and longest habitation. Even if individuals move to the eastern slopes or southern plains they try to maintain rights to some land in the coffee belt. This is also the location of most ritual activity, containing the majority of clan graveyards and historic sites.

The dry southern plains below the lowest slopes are unsuitable for coffee, and bananas only grow along the banks of the few rivers. Beans and maize will do well in south Meru providing the rainfall is sufficient in any given year. Still, only a small proportion of the tribe have settled here, and these only because of the population pressures on the land in the central slopes. The majority of Meru settled on these southern plains are among the poorer and less educated of the tribe.

East Meru is a very recent area of heavy settlement. Here the environmental conditions come closest to approximating those to be found on the central slopes. Due to the low population density the people in this area have recently been able to cultivate large acreages of wheat, beans, and maize. Also, cattle are kept in large herds. Missionary

activity is a more recent phenomenon and one finds a large number of pagans amongst a fairly wealthy segment of the tribe.

The following table shows the population figures for these various parts of Meru as of March, 1965:¹²

Figure 1: Arusha/Meru District Council Census

West Meru (includes upper slopes)	29,835
East Meru.....	14,680
South Meru.....	<u>5,710</u>
Total	50,225

The foregoing discussion of ecological variation would be misleading if it were not emphasized that not all the land which is cultivated nor all the cattle which are kept are owned by Meru permanently settled in the respective areas. Many Meru, perhaps even a large majority, own land and cattle in areas other than their homesteads. For instance, a farmer in the central slopes may grow coffee and some food crops around his homestead and keep a few cows, goats and sheep in and around his house, but he may also send members of his family to south Meru or east Meru to cultivate crops and herd cattle which he owns there as well. Nevertheless, the difference in population densities, sometimes as high as 1500 or as low as 20 persons per square mile, the different crops to be cultivated, or the emphasis on herding as against cultivation, leads to considerable variation in the way of life

¹² Taken from Arusha/Meru District Council Census, 31st March, 1965.

of these people either temporarily or permanently resident in the various parts of Meru country.

Economy:

The first Meru settlers on Mount Meru were mixed farmers. That is, they cultivated small garden plots, beans being the primary crop, while keeping cattle, sheep, and goats. This subsistence economy involved some trade, both within the tribe and with neighbouring tribes. Kinship obligations to feed one's relatives accounted for much of the exchange of food, but there was also a certain amount of trade between localities depending on the success or failure of crops or livestock in any part of Meru for any given year. Very little information is available on the extent of trade with other tribes except that my informants claim it did exist on a limited scale, although they do not specify the articles of exchange other than to say that it was mainly food. There were no fixed units of exchange, rather it depended on the abundance or scarcity of any particular crop in that year and the exchange rate varied accordingly.

The mountain slopes were covered with virgin forest which the Meru had to clear to cultivate their gardens. This fertile environment probably allowed for a steady increase in productivity and more land was cleared to accommodate the rapidly expanding population. In the early 1800's, during the reign of Mangi Ndem, bananas and finger millet (eleusine) were introduced to Meru from Chaggaland. A

system of irrigation ditches was developed over most of the mountain slope area, especially in central Meru, which became almost as elaborate as that in use on Kilimanjaro from whence the idea was taken.

Hollow logs were suspended by vines from the branches of certain trees. These became beehives and the Meru would periodically gather the honey. Most of the honey was fermented and made into a tasty and powerful honey wine which had considerable economic, social and ritual importance. Honey wine was used as payment for food and other goods, it was mainly consumed by old men as a prerogative of their age, and it was offered to the spirits of the ancestors during sacrificial ceremonies. In the 1800's mbege, a beer made from bananas and finger millet, took the place of honey wine as the single most important beverage in Meru and assumed the same varied functions.

Mbege, honey wine, and some agricultural produce were traded to the Maasai as they began to occupy the area surrounding Mount Meru and from them the Meru obtained cattle, milk, and hides for clothing. New food crops, mainly maize and sweet potatoes, were introduced to Meru after the Arusha had settled on the western slopes of the mountain. The Arusha and the Maasai constituted a new source of trade for the Meru, but it was only of limited economic importance due to hostilities between the tribes. Nevertheless, for the first time regular markets appeared in which some Meru did participate. The most important market

center at that time was kambi ya maziwa (the milk camp) which functioned once a week west of Meru on the border between the Arusha and the Maasai.

Hunting played a minor role in the Meru economy. There were no prohibitions against the eating of wild game, but it was not preferred. Game was hunted, though, for purposes of trade. Large trenches were dug so that elephants would fall in and die or be killed, and then the tusks were sold to Arab traders. In return, the Meru were given beads and cloth. Wood and vine traps were the most common means of obtaining game of all kinds. Today, the only hunting of any significance which occurs in Meru is that of Government game scouts who shoot those wild animals in the area who are a threat to people or their crops.

Today the Meru cash economy is dominated by a single crop - coffee. Coffee was first introduced to northern Tanganyika in 1885 when the Roman Catholic mission at Kilema, Mount Kilimanjaro began its cultivation. It was not until 1906 that the Lutheran missionaries on Mount Meru began to grow coffee. The relative ease by which this crop could be tended and then sold for a considerable cash return encouraged the Meru to plant more and more coffee. By 1946-7 the district administration attempted to appoint agents who would be responsible for marketing Meru coffee. The Meru, however, were unhappy with this arrangement and they formed their own Native Growers Association.

In 1954 an American arrived in Meru to help establish a coffee factory and cooperative. In 1960 the first factory in Meru for processing the raw berries was built in Ngyani. The coffee farmers were organized into societies in various divisions of Meru so that today there are seven such societies at Akéri, Poli, Ngyani, Seela, Nkoanrua in Meru and Koimere and Sokon in Arusha. These, together with the pyrethrum societies at Songoro (Meru), Engorika and Mwandet (Arusha), form the basis of the Arusha-Meru Cooperative Union established by the government in 1962. While the Meru coffee cooperative movement has not attained the size of that of the Chagga, which was established much earlier, it has grown at least as rapidly. In 1965-6 the Chagga coop marketed 13,000 tons of coffee as against 5,200 in that year for the Arusha-Meru' cooperative, but, this must be compared to the Meru total of 20 tons in 1955.

In 1965-6 the price received for parchment (cleaned coffee) averaged approximately Shillings 298/- per cwt. (112 lbs.).¹³ Depending on the grade of coffee, it went as high as Shs. 345/- per cwt. The total poundage of parchment for the Arusha-Meru coop in 1965-6 was 9,912,602 which received Shs. 13,112,602/-; this was divided among 8,114 growers, 6,341 of these being members of Meru societies.¹⁴

¹³\$1.00 (American) is worth approximately Shs. 7/- (Tanzanian).

¹⁴Arusha-Meru Cooperative Union records.

The Arusha-Meru Cooperative Union is still growing at an impressive rate and is attempting to include more cash crops into its domain; some of these are pyrethrum, maize and castor oil seeds. Maize is still mainly consumed by the growers themselves, but in 1963-4 approximately 32,000 bags (200 lbs. per bag) were marketed through the cooperative and received Shs. 25/- per bag. Pyrethrum can only be grown effectively in the higher altitudes below the forest reserve on Mount Meru and in 1965-6 the Songoro society produced 39,573 lbs. of pyrethrum which received approximately Shs. 2/- per lb.

The average Meru farmer who resides in the central part of Meru has between 2 and 3 acres of coffee under cultivation for which he may receive approximately Shs. 1000/- per year. The total area he farms is usually 3 or 4 acres and what is not in coffee contains various types of bananas, maize, beans, and perhaps a few other vegetables. In the upper slopes coffee does not grow well at all nor does maize. The Meru who inhabit this area may grow some tobacco for cash but on the whole they have very little cash income. In east Meru the large farms often grow wheat, castor oil seeds, finger millet, large stands of maize, as well as supporting large herds of cattle. These farmers usually see more cash each year than the average Meru. South Meru is too dry for most cash crops, but maize and beans do well in certain years. These Meru on the whole are poor, much like those on

the upper slopes, although the people in south Meru often have large numbers of cattle.

Women do most of the work related to cultivation. Men supervise their activities and increasingly these days, as the Arusha/Maasai influence is declining, men will also work in the fields as they did in the past. Small boys put in long hours caring for cattle, sheep and goats as they graze. Only in southern and eastern Meru is there still enough open pasture for large herds of livestock. In central Meru there are still some small enclosed pastures, but the majority of households have to keep their few head of livestock in their homes where they are stall fed. In recent years chickens are also being kept in homes, but these are mostly for trade as the majority of Meru do not prefer to eat chicken or eggs. Only a few hours in any day are required for work involving cultivation, only a few days during the week are required, and only at certain times during the year do various crops need attention for planting, weeding, harvesting, etc. It was not possible for me to measure this in any statistical way, but I was rather surprised to observe how little time is in fact spent by any Meru on the tasks directly related to obtaining food.

There are ten different open market places within Meru country which usually operate on only one day in the week. Agricultural produce, clothing, utensils, and many other things are displayed and sold here mainly for cash but

occasionally through barter. Throughout Meru, but especially in the coffee belt area, there are small shops owned by Meru or a member of another tribe such as Chagga. The general shops do little business and sell a variety of household items like tea-leaves, sugar, salt, cigarettes and soap. Butcher shops do a lively business buying cattle from the large cattle auction near Arusha town, walking them along the road to Meru, then slaughtering and selling the meat from their shops. There are a number of very small hotels usually attached to a shop or a bar which will sell tea, bread, or soup to passing strangers and, perhaps, provide a room for sleeping. One of the best business enterprises in Meru is the beer or pombe shop. Pombe is the Swahili word for beer; it is called wari in the Meru language. The type of beer which is now sold at all pombe shops in Meru is mbege, the beer made of fermented bananas with finger millet added. By law pombe shops can only operate from noon until nine p.m. daily except holidays when they can open earlier. The beer is quite cheap to buy, Shs. 0/50 per pint, but large quantities are usually consumed as the alcoholic content is very low. Men will gather at these places to meet their friends, to talk and gossip, and simply to pass the time of day. Old men often spend the entire day, almost every day of the week in these pombe shops. The owner of a pombe shop near where I lived, whose shop was only the average size, estimated for me that per week the shop has about 1400 customers and for one month about 6000.

The pombe shops and all other economic enterprises in Meru which depend on cash are subject to the fact that large amounts of cash are usually only available twice during each year. This is because of the way in which the cooperative union pays for the coffee, maize, and pyrethrum it receives. Half the estimated full value for the produce is paid immediately upon delivery. The cooperative union then markets the goods through the appropriate channels and when the actual full price has been received the individual growers can return to the cooperative offices, usually six months after original delivery, and collect the rest of the cash which is due to them. This second payment is called baki, presumably from the English "back pay".

HISTORY

There are no published records of Meru history before the arrival of the first Europeans in 1896. But fairly reliable oral traditions can still be obtained from several old men who are quite articulate on the subject of Meru history. Unfortunately, there are often disputes between some of these men as to the accuracy of one or another of their versions of the oral traditions. The version which follows is in a sense a composite which I have put together after many weeks of interviews with several of these old men who are considered to be experts on this subject.

Meru history may be divided into four stages:

Figure 2: Stages of Meru history

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------|-------------|---------|
| (1) Pre Arusha Influence | - ca. | 1550 to ca. | 1850 |
| (2) Arusha Influence | - ca. | 1850 to ca. | 1900 |
| (3) European Contact | - | 1902 to | 1961 |
| (4) Independence | - | 1961 to | present |

Stage (1) begins when the Meru people first arrived on Mount Meru and extends until the settlement of the Arusha people on the southwestern slopes of the mountain and the beginning of their influence over the Meru. Stage (2) includes the period of Arusha dominance over the Meru until the arrival of the Germans. Stage (3) extends from the establishment of German rule in Meru country until the end of

European colonialism. Stage (4) is from Tanganyika's independence until today.

Stage 1 - Pre Arusha Influence:

Perhaps some 2000 people emigrated from the Usambara region of Tanganyika which is a mountainous area approximately 200 miles southeast of Mount Meru. The leaders of the migration were the paramount chief (Mangi), Kaaya, the pathfinder, Lamireny who was also called Mbise, and Sumari who was an advisor to the Mangi. The reason given for undertaking this long trek in search of new land is that there was famine in the Usambaras and a serious outbreak of malaria.

It appears that the people now known as the Machame, Chagga accompanied the Meru in this migration and were led by a man called Nyari. The Machame may have gotten their name from a son born to Nyari near the present town of Same who was called Mashame.¹⁵ Lamireny and Nyari decided to part company at a point south of both Mount Meru and Mount Kilimanjaro. The Meru advanced northwards towards Mount Meru. Varwa, the name by which the Meru call themselves, means those who went northwards. Nrwa, the singular of Varwa, can be translated as "a Meru" and is also a name sometimes given to Lamireny, "the man who went northwards."

¹⁵Cf. K.M. Stahl, History of the Chagga People of Kilimanjaro. Mouton & Co., London, The Hague, Paris, 1964, p. 86.

The Meru settled on a large hill east of Mount Meru which they called Sakila, "the place where there were always spies." Lamireny inhabited a cave called Ung'u inside the crater of Mount Meru which is at the source of the river Waato, more commonly known by the Maasai name Engare Nanyuki. The cave at Ung'u was visited by a German missionary in 1920 and he told one of my informants that he observed there the stones on which cooking pots were probably placed. Until recently some members of Mbise clan visited the place to offer sacrifices. From Ung'u Lamireny would often send people to patrol Sakila to be on the lookout for enemies. The only humans the Meru found inhabiting the Mount Meru area at this time were short people whom they called Vakoningo. These were perhaps Bushmen or Bushmen-like people. After less than two generations the Meru had driven most of these people out of the area.

It is said that Lamireny had two wives whom he settled on two hills near Sakila. The older one was given the hill, called Nkyeku which means "old woman", and the younger wife was given the hill, Kikatiti, meaning "young woman". It is said that Lamireny divided the southern slopes of Mount Meru between the three main clans; Kaaya, Mbise, and Sumari. This privilege was given to him for successfully leading the people to the fertile slopes of Mount Meru. For his own clan, Mbise, Lamireny took the land between the Maji ya Chai river and the Sanya river in East Meru. This land was also

to be used by the clans Sarakikya, Akyoo, Palangyo, Mungure, and perhaps Sikawa - the ironsmith clan. The adjacent land to the west was given to the Sumari clan and the clans who came under the leadership of the Sumari leader. This was the land between Bubu hill, near Sura, and Iweele, at the confluence of almost all the rivers of Mount Meru, south of Mbuguni. The clans it included were Sumari, Nko, Nyiti, Marua, Urio, Nasari, and Ayo. To Mangi Kaaya for the Kaaya clan and the clans Nrundumu, Rukuma, and Natulo was apportioned the land bounded by the Temi River, Iweele, and Solomo river, near Damu in Kimundo.

The Meru actually inhabited the Sakili area for two generations before moving over to the southern slopes of Mount Meru itself. I believe that many of the clans mentioned above did not migrate from Sakila, but came directly to Mount Meru from elsewhere. Another version of the story, which is probably not completely accurate, describes the order in which the clans came to Mount Meru and I include it as a better explanation of the nature of the rapid growth of the Meru tribe after they began to inhabit the southern slopes.¹⁶

¹⁶ After the two generations on and around Sakila, the Mbise clan remained here to occupy east Meru. The Kaaya clan moved southwest to Kimundo. Then a group called the Wasonjo arrived at Songoro hill in east Meru, some of whom eventually returned to whence they had come, but the remainder stayed and became known as the Akyoo clan. In this version the Sumari were only a fourth group who came to Meru from Somaliland and settled at Poli. It is suggested that the fifth group, Nko, came from Maasailand. (Nko in Kimeru means "path"; so that Nko-a-ranga means "Ranga's path").

The various clans arrived and settled in the Mount Meru area individually and chronologically in the order given in footnote 15. When each clan arrived, they asked permission to settle peacefully from the nearest clan leader already in the area.

Meru youths were initiated into named age groups approximately every generation. Very few Meru can list the names of the generation-sets since the tribe first arrived on Mount Meru, but there seems to be general agreement on the following list; Kiborony and Kiwandai were the names of the first two generation-sets when the people lived at Sakila.

They settled at Nkoaranga and Ndoombo. The sixth group, Palangyo, settled at Nkoaranga. The seventh, Sarakikya, settled at Sing'isi and Nkoaranga. Nandole, the eighth group, settled at Ulonga. The ninth group, Isanja, came from Machame, it is said, because there is now a group by this name at Machame, and they settled at Akeri. Ayo, the tenth group, settled at Sura. The eleventh, Nyiti, also settled at Sura. Ndosii, the twelfth group settled at Poli, Mungure, the thirteenth, settled at Poli and Nkoanrua. The fourteenth, Kanuya, were also called Kasenje, they settled at Ndoombo, Kitomari, the fifteenth group, were scattered over a wide area. Urio, the sixteenth, were also scattered. The seventeenth group, Nasari, settled mainly at Sura and Poli. The eighteenth group, Jungai, settled at Sing'isi. Saiya, the nineteenth, also settled at Sing'isi. The twentieth, Kimuto, settled at Sing'isi as well. Vanika, the twenty-first group settled at Sura. The twenty-second, Nyari, came from Machame and settled at Ulonga. And the twenty-third group, Ilkiuyoni, which is another Maasai name, probably came from Maasailand and settled at Ambureni.

All these names were originally the personal names of leaders and then they became the ufwari (surname or clan) of the leader's group.

During the third generation, Ulukuvai, the clans occupied the slopes of Mount Meru. Meru historians claim that in the fourth and fifth generations, Kisavai and Nginana, some Portuguese (Vareno) with Abyssinian warriors settled in Meru and stayed for several years before they were driven out by Mangi Rari I. I know of no such colonization so far inland by the Portuguese at this time. The sixth and seventh generation-sets were called Ulmara and Kisaruni. It was during the eighth generation, Kisetu, that the Arusha arrived to settle on the southwestern slopes of Mount Meru. The names of the following generation-sets to the present are: Aremu, Marishari, Mirisho, Soori, Siyoi, Jung'uri, Manguusha, Iltalala, Iltiwati, Iltareto, Kisali, Sitimu and Steling.

This list of generation-sets should not be considered authoritative. Obviously, Arusha and Maasai influence has been considerable, as the following lists of names demonstrate. But I am not, as yet, able to explain satisfactorily the difference and discrepancies between the Meru names and those of the Arusha and Maasai.

If one calculated twenty-five years per generation the twenty-one named generation sets would imply that the Meru first arrived some 525 years ago. But this figure has to be reduced to take into account the occasional irregularity of the intervals between the initiation of new generations and during the period of Arusha influence the Meru changed to an age-set rather than generation-set system which has initiations

Figure 3: List of generation and age-sets

<u>Meru</u>	<u>Arusha</u> ¹⁷	<u>Maasai</u> ¹⁸
Kiborony		
Kiwandai		
Ulukuvai		
Kisavai		
Nginana		
Ulmara	Diyoki	Diyioki (1791-1811)
Kisaruni	Kisaruni	
Kisetu		
Aremu		
Marishari	Merishari (c. 1811)	Meirishari (1806-1826)
Mirisho	Kidotu (c. 1825)	Kidotu (1821-1841)
Soori	Dwati (c. 1839)	Dwati I (1836-1856)
Siyoi	Nyang'usi (c. 1853)	Nyang'usi I (1851-1871)
Jung'uri	Laimer (c. 1867)	Laimer (1866-1886)
Manguusha		
Iltalala	Dalala (c. 1881)	Dalalani (1881-1905)
Iltiwati	Dwati (c. 1896)	Dwati II (1896-1917)
Iltareto	Dareto (c. 1911)	Dareto (1911-1929)
Kisali	Derito (1926)	Derito (1926-1948)
Sitimu	Nyang'usi (1942)	Nyang'usi II (1942-1959)
Steling	(Kiwoni) 1955	Dobola (1955-)

¹⁷P.H. Gulliver. Social Control in an African Society, 1963, p. 33.

¹⁸A.H. Jacobs. "The Traditional Political Organization of the Pastoral Masai", D. Phil. Thesis, 1965, p. 49.

at more frequent intervals. The list of Meru paramount chiefs since Mangi Kaaya comprising only seventeen names also implies a period of occupation covering approximately 400 years.

Figure 4: List of paramount chiefs

	<u>Mangi</u>	<u>Clan</u>	<u>Year</u>
1.	Kaaya	Kaaya	
2.	Kisarika	Kaaya	
3.	Malengye	Kaaya	
4.	Samana	Kaaya	
5.	Kyuta	Kaaya	c.1550-1800+
6.	Rari I	Kaaya	
7.	Sola	Kaaya	
8.	Rari II (Ndemi)	Kaaya	-1887
9.	Matunda	Kaaya	1887-1896
10.	Lobulu-	Kaaya	1896-1900
11.	Masengye	Kaaya	1900-1901
12.	Nereu	Nasari	1901-1902
13.	Sambekye	Nanyaro	1902-1922
14.	Sandi	Nanyaro	1923-1930
15.	Kishili	Kaaya	1930-1945
16.	Sandi (second term)	Nanyaro	1945-1952
17.	Sylvanos	Kaaya	1953 -

(Chieftainship
abolished by
Tanganyika
Government in
1963)

Other evidence which suggests that the Meru could not have occupied their present location for more than approximately 400 years is the degree of similarity between the Meru and Machame Chagga languages. These two tribes presumably spoke the same language when they migrated to Mount Meru and Mount Kilimanjaro. They have had only slight contact since that time, being separated by a large expanse of inhospitable land called the Sanya Corridor, generally inhabited by Pastoral Maasai. Yet in examining a list of over 500 words and phrases, there are only the smallest phonetic and vocabulary differences between the two languages.

The Meru were said to have been mixed farmers when they first settled around Mount Meru. Each household kept some cattle, sheep, and goats, but their primary crop was beans. The variety of bean they cultivated most was called mba. Two other types of beans were later added to their economy, presumably through influence from the coastal region; these beans are called mashumba and soko. They used wooden hoes and digging sticks; men cultivating along with the women. The men would break the earth with the digging sticks and the women would follow behind removing the weeds with the hoes.

Very little change in the subsistence activities of the Meru is known from this early period of Meru history until the reign of Mangi Rari II (Ndemi). Mangi Ndemi was perhaps the greatest of all the Meru paramount chiefs. The exact date of the beginning of his rule is unknown, but he ruled for many

years until 1887 when his son succeeded him. It is said that Ndemi himself was the first to bring bananas and finger millet to Meru after he had made a visit to Machame and seen these growing there. He also persuaded the Meru to begin digging long irrigation ditches such as he had seen on Mount Kilimanjaro. The first banana garden that Ndemi planted was at the source of the Kuumu River in the north of Kimundo. This garden still stands today as an historic and sacred grove. Maize was also first introduced into Meru country during Ndemi's reign, but it is alleged to have come from the Arusha. During this period of agricultural diversification more wealth was evident in Meru society with a resulting increase in class distinctions and specializations in labour, e.g. clay pot makers and iron workers. A class of itomi (meaning something similar to aristocrat) developed among people who were wealthy, much respected, but with no necessary positions of authority.

Stage 2 - Period of Arusha Influence:

It was in the early part of Ndemi's reign that the Arusha tribe first settled on the slopes of Mount Meru. The Arusha who were originally a mixture of Maasai and Bantu-speaking peoples migrated from somewhere south of Mount Meru and began to settle on the southwestern slopes of the mountain from about 1830.¹⁹ They cultivated and kept some cattle,

¹⁹P.H. Gulliver, op. cit., pp. 10-11. Cf. H.A. Fosbrooke, "An Administrative Survey of the Masai Social System," Tan-ganyika Notes and Records, No. 26, 1948, p. 11.

sheep, and goats, and maintained a trading relationship with the surrounding Kisongo Maasai. The Arusha settled first in an area known as Selian, which is now immediately to the west of Arusha town. The Meru claim that the Arusha asked Ndemi for permission to settle here. Ndemi agreed largely because the area near Ngare Mtoni had recently seen a cholera epidemic and there were few Meru living there and also because he believed the presence of the Arusha would protect Meru from Maasai raids.²⁰

At one time during his reign, Ndemi became annoyed with the Nandole and Nyiti clans of Meru. He persuaded Meru and Machame warriors to kill as many members of these clans as they could. As a result of this slaughter, many Meru who lived between the Songota and Temi rivers defected from Meru and henceforth claimed to be Arusha. At this time the Meru elders met and decided to call Rari II Ndemi meaning "someone who has done a very important thing".

The initial relationship between the Meru and the Arusha was alleged to be friendly, although there was suspicion and

²⁰ Gulliver says that the Meru tried to resist Arusha settlement but the Maasai helped the Arusha to settle by raiding the Meru and thus weakening them. P.H. Gulliver, "The Arusha - Economic and Social Change," p. 253 in Bohannon, P., and G. Dalton, Markets in Africa, Doubleday and Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, 1965.

apprehension from both sides. The Meru traded bean seeds with the Arusha and in turn they received maize, sweet potatoes, and pumpkins. Around this same time the Meru had also added mules, donkeys, and dogs to many households. The dogs were kept to chase wart hogs and other wild animals from their gardens and the mules and donkeys were used as beasts of burden and for riding by the chief and some elders.

It is not clear when the Sikawa, the ironsmith clan of Meru, began to develop the use of metal tipped tools and weapons, but I believe that they were in use to some extent by the time of Arusha settlement. It is obvious though that the Meru weapons were no match for those of the Arusha, nor was the Meru military organization. In less than two generations the Arusha had increased their population through natural growth and through the addition of Meru and Chagga immigrants, voluntary as well as captured, that they were able to defeat the Meru in numerous raids and ambushes. The military and economic success of the Arusha, along with the apparent disinclination of the Meru to fight, brought about a situation in which the Arusha were able to exert considerable influence over Meru ideas and behaviour.

It would appear that the Meru began to imitate the Arusha at this time, partly because they recognized the superiority of many Arusha practices and institutions, and partly because they were ashamed by military successes of the Arusha over them, the ease with which Arusha men captured Meru

women, and by the taunts of the Arusha that Meru men behaved in fact like women. One Meru story of this period tells of a girl singing before her wedding that it was useless to settle in her marriage with her Meru husband as the Arusha warriors would soon come and carry her off.

Some examples of the extent to which the Meru imitated the Arusha and adopted Arusha/Maasai ways are: (1) Meru men stopped digging in the fields and left cultivation entirely to the women. (2) Men would no longer eat meat in the presence of women. They also gave up eating green vegetables, ripe bananas, and certain mixtures of maize and beans which were considered to be women's food. (3) The Meru adopted the Arusha/Maasai system of initiation and age-sets and the Arusha/Maasai technique for circumcision. All of this was alleged to be coordinated by the Laibon (ritual leader) of the Kisongo Maasai. (4) Meru spears and shields were manufactured to imitate those of the Arusha. (5) Meru men and women started to wear their hair in the greased and ochred style of the Arusha and Maasai. (6) Men and women began to wear their clothing of hides and their beads, bangles, and necklaces in the same way as the Arusha.

One of the most important changes which occurred at this time was the loss of a certain amount of authority of the Mangi and clan leaders as the new age-set leaders began to act as spokesmen for their people and the new age grade of warriors assumed the role of protectors of the tribe and were no longer so easily controlled by their elders. While

the Meru had always kept some cattle, sheep, and goats, Arusha influence enabled the number of cattle being kept to increase considerably until eventually, like the Arusha and Maasai, the Meru came to feel that the most important index of wealth was the ownership of cattle.

Stage 3 - Period of European Influence:

The first attempt to establish a Christian mission in Meru country was undertaken by two Catholic missionaries in September or October of 1896. These were, perhaps, French "Black Fathers" who were active in the Kilimanjaro area at this time.²¹ They began construction of a church in Akeri, but after one week their workers, none of whom were Meru, told them of the hostility of the Meru people and warned them that their lives were in immediate danger. The missionaries packed in the middle of the night and returned to Moshi.

The Lutheran Mission Society became upset when they heard of the presence of the Catholics in Meru. In 1892 the Leipzig Society had moved into a vacuum in Moshi and Kilimanjaro created by the withdrawal of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) due to a conflict with the German Administration.²² The Lutherans became quite active in Kilimanjaro

²¹C.P. Groves, The Planting of Christianity in Africa, Vol. III, 1878-1914, London; Butterworth Press, 1955. pp. 69-82.

²²R. Oliver, The Missionary Factor in East Africa, Longmans, Green and Co., London, New York, Toronto, 1952, pp. 166-7.

and were determined to establish themselves in Meru as well in order to create a link with the more western areas. Thus they decided to send two of their missionaries who were fluent in the Machame language to Meru as soon as possible.²³ On October 13, 1896, the two Lutheran missionaries, Karl Segebrock and Ewald Ovir, left Kilimanjaro for Meru accompanied by over fifty bearers, mostly Machame. They arrived at Kimundo, Akeri at the home of Mangi Matunda, the son of Ndemi, on October 15, 1896. Matunda welcomed them and offered them beer, maize, and bananas, and a bull which was slaughtered to feed their bearers. The missionaries gave Matunda several gifts and then began to set up their camp, situated about half a mile north of where the Catholics had begun to build.

Captain Johannes, who had taken over as Acting Commissioner for this northern region of German East Africa after the killing of Baron Bulow, who was Carl Peters' successor, arrived in Akeri on October 18, 1896 together with his wife, Lieutenant Merker and fifty native soldiers. They made their camp across the Malala River from the missionaries and a few hundred yards to the north. Rumours were being spread at this time of the hostility of both Meru and Arusha warriors over the presence of the missionaries. The warriors believed the Europeans were planning to settle in Meru and that they would be put into forced labour. Some said that these were

²³Evangelisches Lutherische Missionsblatt, 1896, p. 410.

the same two Europeans who had left a week or so before, but that this time they had brought soldiers to help them. The warriors began to make plans to kill the missionaries and the soldiers. Neither the missionaries nor Captain Johannes believed the rumours they heard. In fact, the missionaries refused an invitation to move to the soldiers' camp; they preferred to stay at their own camp where they slept in one tent and ate in another tent where their provisions were stored.

On the morning of October 19 the boundaries of the mission's plot were agreed upon and that afternoon Mangi Matunda accompanied the missionaries to Captain Johannes' camp to receive the payment. The missionaries presented Matunda with several bolts of cloth, necklaces and beads as payment for the land and the chief distributed part of this to a few of the clan leaders.

That night Mangi Matunda returned to Captain Johannes' camp to warn him of an impending attack by the Meru and Arusha warriors. Later around 3 a.m., two influential Arusha men, Ravaito and Masinde, arrived at the camp with the same news. Suddenly the soldiers in the camp began firing their rifles at the shadowy figures of warriors who were creeping towards them through the banana trees. Captain Johannes ordered the shooting stopped and then they heard a single pistol shot from the direction of the missionaries' camp, followed by howls and the sound of boxes being smashed.

The warriors had divided into two parties, the larger going to attack the soldiers and the smaller group to the

missionaries. The attack on the soldiers' camp was foiled by the rifle shots which made the warriors fall silent or flee. In the meantime, the other group were able to creep right into the missionaries' camp. One of the missionaries had time to fire a warning pistol shot into the air before he was speared to death. The other was speared while he was still in his tent.

Captain Johannes, feeling that he was still surrounded by warriors, sent a Meru servant to check on the missionaries. This man reported that they both had been killed. At 5:30 a.m. Captain Johannes and his soldiers went to the missionaries camp and found them both dead, drilled by about thirty spears each; their provisions were all smashed or removed. Missionary Ovir's servant and three of their workers were also killed. Two workers were captured and five others fled to safety. Captain Johannes had a grave dug immediately for the two missionaries with a cross and a picture of Christ erected on the spot. Later, however, the warriors returned and removed the bodies, taking their clothing and leaving the corpses on the ground.

This account of the fate of Missionaries Ovir and Segebrook as described in the Leipzig Mission Society records is in large part corroborated by my informant's testimony.²⁴

Captain Johannes returned immediately to Moshi where he gathered a force of 100 soldiers and some 8,000 to 10,000

²⁴Ibid., 1897, pp. 12 ff.

Chagga warriors who returned to Mount Meru to attack the Meru and Arusha. Some of the belongings of the two missionaries were found in the Headquarters (boma) of Ravaito and he was killed, along with several hundred Meru and Arusha. This punishment expedition was the beginning of six years of warfare between the Meru, Arusha, Chagga and Germans.

At the end of 1896, after Matunda's death, Lobulu was seated as paramount chief of the Meru, even though he was not the eldest son of Matunda's first wife. The second war between the Chagga and other German soldiers against the Meru and Arusha was fought shortly after this at the instigation of the German authorities, possibly due to a Meru attack on a Dorobo community near Ngongongare to the northeast of Meru.²⁵ Lobulu's houses were set afire and much of his property destroyed some say because he was unwilling to prevent this attack by the Meru warriors.

Meru warriors at this time were fighting alongside those of the Arusha. They also had adopted the Arusha/Maasai style of fighting in lines; the second line attacking if the first was being defeated. The Mangi never accompanied the warriors into battle, but he received a share of the spoils when they returned and his approval was ordinarily needed before a raid could be launched.

²⁵The Dorobo are hunters and gatherers who inhabit scattered localities in many parts of East Africa.

Perhaps as a result of the killing of some traders near Ngorongoro, a third punitive attack was launched against the Meru and Arusha. Afterwards, the German authorities began the construction of a military post on the site of what is now Arusha town. This was the year 1900. Shortly after soldiers were garrisoned at Arusha, the wars came to an end. In the meantime, Mangi Lobulu was taken to Moshi where he was hanged along with several Chagga chiefs as part of the German authorities' efforts to execute "troublemakers" and bring peace to the region. Masengye, a younger son of Mangi Matunda and a half-brother of Lobulu, became paramount chief of the Meru. The Germans apparently had some say in the appointment of Masengye, but after less than one year, Masengye killed a man. He was deposed and imprisoned. I assume that the German authorities had more to do with the appointment of the next Mangi, because Nereu was chosen who was from Nasari clan. One old man of the chiefly Kaaya clan, who was about twenty years old at the time, told me that it was the Kaaya clan which decided to seat an outsider because they were afraid since the last two Kaaya Mangis were hanged or imprisoned. But Nereu was removed by the people after less than one year because they were displeased with his behaviour as Mangi. He would, for instance, frequently round up young Meru girls and send them to the soldiers who were stationed at Arusha town.

It was during Nereu's reign, however, that the next two missionaries from the Leipzig Mission Society came to

Meru. On February 24, 1902 Missionaries Krause and Fickert arrived at the military post in Arusha and introduced themselves to Lieutenant Merker who was in charge. Merker was concerned for the safety of the missionaries, but they decided to proceed. When they arrived at Akeri, no trace of the grave of the previous missionaries was left. In fact, the entire area appeared to be almost completely depopulated. They proceeded east some four miles until they came to the homestead of Mangi Nereu, who along with many people from Nkoaranga, welcomed the missionaries warmly and presented them with an abundance of food and drink. Krause and Fickert inquired as to whether they might not establish their mission on the site where their brethren had been killed. Nereu persuaded them to settle in Nkoaranga near his homestead so that he might be nearby to offer protection and because most Meru now avoided the area around Akeri.

Missionary Fickert began immediately to have the area cleared and to have huts built to house the mission. Several Chagga in the area and some Meru offered themselves as workers. Meanwhile Missionary Krause started to learn the Meru language and to teach young Meru children. These were mostly boys whose parents had offered them to the mission as students and helpers and some boys who had come to the mission against their parents wishes in order to partake of the generosity of the missionaries in terms of food, clothing, and occasional salary.

The Meru people for the most part were quite friendly to these two missionaries. Some Meru say it was because they feared the power of the German authorities who were close by. But many people would come daily to the mission at Nkoaranga to ask for food or medicine or simply to sit and watch the activities of the missionaries. Mangi Nereu was a daily guest at the mission.

The following is a description of the Meru as they appeared to Missionary Krause in 1902.²⁶ He refers to them as the Waroo which is his transliteration of Varwa, the indigenous term for Meru people.

The Waroo are a good-looking, tall tribe like the Wachagga. Many of them can hardly be distinguished from the Wachagga. One can notice that again others are related to the Masai. As the Chief told me the Waroo were supposed to have come to their present place from Arusha Chini. They build their houses like the Waarusha and like the inhabitants of west Kilimanjaro. The houses are round like the half of a ball and finish off with a little peak on the top. They build them with poles and plaited rods. These are covered with the bark of the banana trees. Nearly all the women still wear leather skins. Into these they wrap themselves from their upper bodies down to their knees. Besides that they wear a lot of ornaments like the Masai. The men usually also wear hides which are knotted on one shoulder.

Before the German Government came to rule here nearly their only occupation was cattle thieving. With their spears, shields and swords they usually went to their neighbours, the Waarusha far into the country, in the east as far as Voi, to the west as far as Ubugwe, in order to steal the coveted cattle. If they got a hold of only a few they ate them in the bush, had they many they drove them home. Sometimes

²⁶ Missionblatt, op.cit., 1902, p. 283.

these raids were only short, then again very long. Once they did not return home for nine months. It is no wonder that these people had huge herds in the early days. If one owned 100 head of cattle he was not yet a rich man. The Meru has wonderful pasture-land towards the bush as well as towards the mountain peak, so that cattle could thrive. But through the punishment expeditions the cattle of the Waroo grew less and less. The chief owns now about six head of cattle, most people none. Still the men have not learned to work in the fields, which would be well worthwhile in this wonderful country. The men lie around or walk about and drink beer, which seems to be brewed in vast quantities, while their women work in the fields and the children take care of the few cattle. Many wives is the desire of a man here too. May God help them so that these wild people learn to humble themselves before their Saviour.

By the end of 1902, Mangi Nereu had been deposed and imprisoned by the Germans. Sambekye was appointed Mangi. He was a much respected leader from Nanyaro clan. By this time large numbers of Meru men and women were being recruited by the German authorities and their appointed village leaders, Akidas, to do compulsory work on roads and buildings. A census was taken and the Meru were found to number 5,506 individuals. This low figure was considered to be due to the numerous people who had been killed in the recent wars. The actual total for the tribe can be assumed to have been much higher given the inadequate methods of counting which must have been employed. By this time, as well, German and Boer settlers in increasing numbers were beginning to farm on the slopes of Mount Meru.

In 1906 two more missionaries, Ittameier and Schachschneider, were sent by the Leipzig Mission Society to help further the work on Mount Meru. The mission had

expanded to include out-stations in three more Meru villages. Coffee had been planted on the station in Nkoaranga and was cultivated by Meru labourers. The Meru were replenishing their cattle stock and harvests had been good. Fewer people were being required to do forced labour and the Meru were beginning to prosper again. This growth continued among the Meru as well as the European community, missionary and settler, through the following years until the outbreak of the 1914-18 war. The Meru remained neutral throughout the conflict in East Africa, but some individuals did join the army.

After the war Mangi Sambekye found it difficult to cooperate with the new British authorities who were beginning to introduce changes in the administration of Meru. In 1923 Sambekye's son, Sandi, was seated as the Meru Mangi. Many of the changes which occurred in Meru from the time of Mangi Sambekye until that of Mangi Sandi are described by Missionary Edward Ittameier who returned to Meru in 1926 after a long absence.²⁷

Twenty years ago there were about 6000 inhabitants. Today there are twice as many. The area they live in is small; from east to west about twelve kilometres, and it is only about half as wide. So the area is almost over populated. The wide bushlands have been cleared, banana gardens, fields and paddocks have taken its place. The nice old places of sacrifice and "cemeteries" have almost completely disappeared. The slopes, and where possible also the gorges, have been tilled and made into gardens. In some places the young couples who want to marry have difficulty to find a piece of land for themselves. The pastureland is poor, and far too scarce. It is hardly possible to extend the boundaries. Towards the mountain

²⁷ Ibid., 1928, p. 202.

and to the east are the boundaries of the forest reserves. The administrative authority does not allow the forest to be cut down any further than it is now (because of water). Towards the pori they are cut off by the European farms which are on the foot of the mountain. The natives don't like to move beyond these because they cannot come up against malaria. Besides that the tse tse fly has come into that area only recently, and is spreading out. The land problem is troubling the Meru, but it will be serious in a few years to come.

Till recently the wooden hook and wooden tilling-stick were the tools used for cultivating fields. These primitive utensils have been exchanged for the iron hoe, the spade and axe, of European make. A few small coffee plantations are in the area. Occasionally one sees a solid house, partly built the Swahili and European way (instead of the usual round huts). They are surrounded by trees, and mostly they belong to Christian natives. A few native shops have been opened. They are indirectly supported by the authority, as they do not permit foreign merchants to settle down. All this is progress, even if it is very small. The standard of living has not yet been achieved like it was before the war. It is possible to work on European farms, but the wages today are worth less than in former years, as prices have gone up for all things. The natives cannot expect much of their coffee gardens. So on the whole the people live like they always did. Their way of clothing has remained almost the same as well. The Christians of course refuse these clothes.

And yet something has changed the slow, conservative Meru. Their mental attitude has started to change, and also their world-outlook. They themselves say, "Everything is changing now." It is the collision with the European ways. This is not only since the last ten years. This development set in before that. Meru was of economic interest before the war. But the war set matters rolling. Many men got out of their surroundings during war, travelled far, and I am always surprised how they talk of these times, how closely they observed things, and their striking opinions. They learned to know the good and weak points of the Europeans. They woke up and found they also were worth something. They did not want to be only an object which someone else used for his own advantage.

In 1930 Mangi Sandi was convicted of embezzling tax money and he was imprisoned. Also in this year the Catholics opened a mission and school in Meru country near the Arusha-Moshi road. Several Moslems, most of whom were now settled in shops along the Arusha-Moshi road, tried to establish themselves further up within Meru country, but they were not allowed to settle there.

The clan from which the Mangi had traditionally come, Kaaya, rallied support for the position of paramount chief to return to their clan. Kishili, a son of Mangi Matunda, became the new Mangi. He ran into difficulties with one of the Lutheran missionaries who, perhaps, would have liked to see a Christian appointed as chief. Kishili also found it difficult to deal with the British authorities. This was a time of considerable upheaval in Meru political, social, and economic life. The authority of the Mangi was being challenged by increasing participation in local affairs by the authorities based in Arusha town. The town and various places along the Arusha-Moshi road now contained native bars and shops which many Meru were beginning to frequent. Increased coffee production by Meru farmers provided the cash for engaging in these activities and the newly broadened scope of interests resulting from travel and the presence of foreign contacts provided the incentive. Rapidly increasing population and the breaking up of localized clans lessened the authority of clan elders and parents. The missionaries complained of a general degeneration of morals among Meru

youth, which they attributed partially to Maasai influence, but which was more probably due to a combination of factors resulting from these changing times.

Kishili was finally removed from office and Sandi, after he had served his prison sentence, was reappointed paramount chief in 1945. This was done against the strong feelings of many Meru who felt that Sandi would be more interested in appeasing the British authorities than helping the Meru. The Provincial Commissioner, for the Northern Province understated the case in this way:

The Meru administration is in a chaotic state caused chiefly by a number of adherents of ex-chief Kishili who are doing all in their power to embarrass chief Sante; the situation is in hand and here also the new year will bring a new administration with representation based on the tribal structure.²⁸

The "new administration" referred to by the Provincial Commissioner was the attempt in 1948 to write a new constitution for the Meru Native Authority. But this attempt met with considerable opposition.

The District Commissioner, Arusha, writes: 'The reorganization of the two tribes of the District, forecast last year, has been carried out in a fine spirit of cooperation among the Arusha and in the teeth of great difficulty among the Meru'.

A small, intransigent and fanatical group of Meru, referred to in the reports for 1946 and 1947, had done all in its power to arrest the introduction of a constitution similar to that adopted by the Arusha in the face of a favorable majority, although they admitted openly the excellence of the proposals; the faction demanded the dismissal of the chief, Sante,

²⁸Annual Reports of Provincial Commissioners, Government Printer, Tanganyika, 1947, p. 74.

as a prerequisite to the new constitution; when this was refused they publicly flouted the chief, against whom they had previously worked; the trial and conviction of eleven of them for undermining the authority of the chief followed.²⁹

The agitation in Meru for land reforms and for a more effective voice in the management of their political affairs was symptomatic of a general trend in this direction in most of Tanganyika. The Tanganyika African Association was expanding from a predominantly town-based organization to include branches in many rural areas. Unions of African farmers were being formed to increase their participation in both the economic and political affairs of the country. The Kilimanjaro Union, which was one of the most active, was beginning to expand its influence to include the Meru and their problems.

The British Trusteeship Administration called on Mr. Justice Mark Wilson to head a commission whose purpose would be to formulate a plan for the redistribution of alienated and tribal land on and around Mount Meru and Mount Kilimanjaro. Noting the congestion which was occurring on Mount Meru among the Meru and the Arusha due to population increase and the incursion of European settlers, Mr. Wilson wrote, "...an 'iron ring' of alienated land was clamped round the native lands on the mountain."³⁰ In view of this the Commission recommended

²⁹Ibid., 1948, pp. 63-4.

³⁰M. Wilson, Report of the Arusha-Moshi Lands Commission, Government Printer, Dar es Salaam, 1947, p. 17.

that expansion routes be provided which would allow the Meru to move their cattle and establish new homesteads in the drier, but not so heavily populated areas of south Meru. In line with the terms of reference of the Commission required by the Administration to establish homogeneous blocks of native and non-native settlement, the Commission recommended that Engare Nairobi, Sanya Juu and Engare Nanyuki should be made into one homogeneous block of non-native settlement to allow the establishment of European ranching and dairy farms. It was also recommended that the area occupied by the Meru in Leguruki should be alienated so as to avoid the possibility of Meru cattle infecting the stock of the adjacent European ranchers.

The government decision in 1951 to implement these recommendations met with an alarming response from the Meru which culminated in the famous Meru Land Case. Whereas the Commission thought it would "involve very little disturbance for a (Meru) householder to move himself and his few possessions to better land and to build another "beehive' hut", the Meru by no means saw the matter in this light.³¹ The attempt by the British authorities to remove the Meru and their response to this demand has been described in considerable detail in the first Section.

In 1952 the Meru Citizens' Union Freeman was formed partly in response to the enforced alienation of tribal land

³¹ Ibid., 1948, p. 92.

but also as a means for the Meru to represent themselves and their grievances to the Government. Since the attempt to introduce the constitution of 1948 was seen to receive very little support from the Meru, the Government convened a conference under the direction of the District Commissioner to discuss a new constitution. Tribal representatives including members of the Citizens' Union met with the District Commissioner and the Government Sociologist, Mr. H.A. Fosbrooke. After twelve such meetings the new constitution was written up and circulated throughout the tribe; it was discussed at village meetings and finally accepted on May 27, 1953. The more prominent features of the new constitution were the decision to elect the Mangi by secret ballot, the separation of the executive and the judiciary at all levels, and the setting up of sub-committees of the tribal council to deal with specific services.

Mangi Sandi had resigned at the end of 1952 mainly due to the furor which was aroused over the Land Case. On July 25, 1953 polling took place for the election of the new Mangi. Two names had been submitted by the tribal elders: one a member of the chiefly clan, Kaaya, and a grandson of Mangi Matunda, the other a much respected man from the Mbise clan who lived in East Meru in the area from which the people had been removed. The balloting revealed a rather serious split between east and west Meru and Sylvanos Kaaya from west Meru was elected by a small majority.

Meru settled down to a period of political tranquility following the elections, but the rest of Tanganyika was still seething with political fervor. In 1954 a new mass political party was formed called the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). The majority of Meru did not then and still have not taken an active part in the formation or the subsequent development of TANU, but some Meru and especially the Meru Land Case have played a significant role. One observer writes, "The Meru case was, I think, crucial in providing a sizeable impulse for the creation of TANU."³²

The Meru had entered a period of economic prosperity marred only by the increasing overpopulation on the mountain slopes. More and more Meru began to open up new land in south and east Meru. A coffee growers association was formed to help market the increasing production of coffee by the Meru. A few community development officers were now meeting with limited successes in some areas. Medical clinics, more primary schools, and more mission stations were being opened throughout Meru.

Stage 4 - Independence:

In 1961 Tanganyika achieved its independence. Since that time the ruling party, TANU, has changed the political picture in Meru by establishing more local TANU branches,

³²L. Cliffe, "Nationalism and the Reaction to Agricultural Improvement in Tanganyika during the Colonial Period," Paper read at the Annual Conference of the East African Institute of Social Research, 1964.

Village Development Committees, and cell leaders of every ten houses. In 1963 the Government abolished chieftainship throughout the country. The Meru Mangi continued to exercise influence in traditional and domestic affairs, but he no longer had any official position in the political structure. The independent government met with considerably more cooperation in self-help schemes and the pace of development can be seen to have increased. Education has proceeded at such a rate that there are now almost no jobs available for the large numbers of primary school leavers.

Economic development has been such that the Meru can be considered one of the rich tribes of the country, overshadowed in the northern part of Tanzania only by their much richer neighbours, the Chagga. In the central region of Meru, almost every farmer now has at least one or two acres of coffee. They and others also receive cash for bananas, maize, beans and onions. A small percentage of farmers have purchased tractors and in other respects have mechanized their farms. In the southern and eastern parts of Meru large farms of beans, maize, and wheat can be found. In the northern parts of Meru below the forest reserve some pyrethrum is being grown. The Meru Cooperative Union, which amalgamated with that of the Arusha, (as did their District Councils in 1965) is fast becoming a large concern which buys and sells virtually all the coffee in Meru and Arusha and it is now diversifying to handle other crops as well.

Leadership in the development sphere is entirely in the hands of the elected officials and educated sector of the population. But domestic and local difficulties still call for the elders in the traditional political structure for mediation. Cases before the elders are almost a daily occurrence in all parts of Meru. The courts are also busy with thousands of cases each year being handled in each baraza (court house or meeting place). In central and east Meru the Village Development Committees and the cell leaders of ten houses are taking a much more active part in village affairs than is the case in north and south Meru. On the whole, though, there is widespread misunderstanding of the role of the Village Development Committees (V.D.C.) and the ten house leaders. In many instances these positions overlap with people holding positions in the TANU branches.

Through the sale of coffee and other crops a considerable amount of cash is available in Meru. Goods of all kinds are bought and sold; portable radios and record players are commonplace. But eventually most of the cash realized in Meru finds its way to the beer shops and bars. Drinking is almost a full-time activity for most old men, and many young men and women. Every village has at least one shop where the local beer, mbege, is sold. These become places of meeting and gossip for most Meru and make their owners some of the richest people in Meru.

Much of Meru still remains undeveloped or underdeveloped. To the extent that the Meru can be called a conservative

people, perhaps this is due in part to their long and close contact with the more conservative Arusha and the ultra-conservative Maasai. About fifty percent of Meru are Christians and the numbers who are receiving primary education is slightly higher. Witchcraft, mainly in the form of poisoning, or the fear of it is still quite common and oaths are still often administered to accused witches. The use of traditional remedies is as popular or more so than the habit of visiting the modern clinics and hospitals. Male and female circumcision is still practiced with dubious sanitary precautions and only a very small percentage of Meru young men are being circumcised in hospitals with a subsequent loss of prestige for them at home. These and other examples could be multiplied, but they should not seriously detract from the overall picture of a tribe with significant economic potential, a relatively high proportion of educated people, and a level of political sophistication unusual in the rest of Tanzania.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The most important traditional social institutions of Meru society are the clans and homesteads. While non-corporate lineages or sub-clans are present, they are of much less social importance. For example, all Meru people can name the clan to which they belong, but the majority of Meru are not aware of their membership in any particular lineage. After the influence of the Arusha became strong, age groups assumed significance as an integrative mechanism, as did villages after the imposition of European overrule. But clans, lineages, and homesteads still exist and perform most of the same functions as they did before Arusha contact. A new homestead is created by a married couple after their marriage.

Courtship and Marriage:

After early childhood boys and girls are separately involved in various tasks. Girls help their mothers with household chores and with cultivation by digging and weeding; they often work together in groups. Boys are less regularly involved in employment except for those who herd cattle in families which have a large stock. In the past, it is said, these youths were often involved in the discussion of, if not the actual practice of, raiding and fighting. The opportunities for boys and girls to come

together were mainly restricted to dances on various special occasions. Today co-education along with other factors has increased the degree to which young people may meet and co-operate. Both educated and non-educated Meru boys and girls these days are commonly seen walking, talking, and playing together. For courting purposes, dances are still the most regular meeting places, although they are perhaps less frequent in many parts of Meru today as a result of missionary disapproval.

There were no special societies or organizations of young people in the past other than the boys age-sets which were introduced after contact with the Arusha. Nowadays there is the Chama cha Vijana (Youth Club) which is operated by and organized for young educated (secondary school) males and females, but its membership is very small and its representation and influence in Meru is negligible.

A prospective bridegroom makes various preparations for customary marriage. He will start putting some money aside if he is able. He may begin to build a house or collect household and farm tools. It is assumed that he will give some gifts to his future parents-in-law, usually in the form of some beer for the father-in-law and a gourd of butter and a tin of millet flour for the mother-in-law.

The main restriction regarding marriageable age was that both partners must be initiated adults, that is, circumcised. In the past, a boy would be circumcised between the ages of 25 and 30 and could marry any time after that. A girl was

usually circumcised (clitoridectomy) and married a few years after puberty. After contact with the Arusha, the age of circumcision was reduced for both boys and girls, and after the influence of European missionaries became strong, some few young people, mainly girls, ceased to be circumcised at all. Age at marriage varies considerably today; education and wealth among family members will usually allow for an earlier marriage. On the average, throughout Meru nowadays, a boy will marry from 20 to 30 years of age and a girl from 18 to 25.

Elder daughters ideally take precedence over younger daughters in marrying. If a younger daughter were to marry first, people would think that the elder daughter has some deformity which prohibited her from marrying first and even if she succeeded in marrying after her younger sister it was believed that she would not be able to bear children.

The length of the period of engagement depends on the speed with which the main bridewealth payments can be made and on the consent of the father of the bride. If the payments are made quickly or if the father sees that his daughter is old enough and ready for marriage, the engagement period may last for only six months, but if these conditions are not met, the engagement can go on for one or two years and sometimes more.

In the past boys and girls were not free to choose their own marriage partners. This was done by their parents

on their behalf; that is, the parents of the boy would initiate discussion with the parents of a suitable (hard-working, good family) girl. Both young people would be told by their parents to avoid each other in future as they were, or were to be, engaged. Then the father of the boy would begin to make the initial bridewealth payments. Since European contact, this system has become much less rigid in many Meru families. While girls are still not free to announce their choice of partners, they may decline an offer of marriage; although her family may bring considerable pressure to bear on her if they think the match is suitable. Most boys in Meru feel free to make their own choice of a spouse, providing they can persuade their families that the girl is suitable in order for them to agree to help with the bridewealth.

Engagements have become more easily broken as the young couple themselves have had more say in the matter. In addition, the amount of time the engaged couple can spend together has increased. Some informants claim that in "the old days" the boy and girl whose parents had arranged their engagement would not see or speak to each other until the day of their wedding. Nowadays, there seems to be ample opportunity for the engaged couple to meet at dances and elsewhere, but the ban on sexual intimacy, or at least the statement of its prohibition, is as strong as ever. Informants who speak of "the old days" (which in this case must be well before the arrival of the Germans), claim that an unmarried couple found

to have engaged in sexual intercourse were laid on top of each other at a crossroad and a wooden stake was pounded through the two of them into the ground. In premarital sexual relations as in other matters pertaining to sex, the Meru exhibit a strong puritanism in their stated values. Cases of premarital sexual intercourse are numerous if not typical, but this form of indulgence is considered to be gross misconduct.

An indication of this difference between ideal and real behaviour is seen in the expectation of virginity at the time of marriage. A girl is supposed to be virgin when she marries, but the bridegroom cannot demand the return of bride-wealth if she is not. If it is discovered that the bride was not a virgin, the marriage contract is not jeopardized, but the girl and her family are shamed and the father of the bride will pay the bridegroom one sheep.

Wedding Ceremony:

For non-Christian Meru the wedding ceremony centres around the initiation ceremony of the bride. On the day of the ceremony the bridegroom, his relatives and friends gather at his home and "march" along singing (urio) to the bride's father's home. In front of the group two sheep or cows are led to be offered in order for the bride's door to be opened. One of the songs which is sung upon reaching the house goes something like, "Mother-in-law open the door for us to bring in a cow....."

The bride is usually dressed in a smooth sheep skin, she wears a buffalo horn bracelet, and carries two sticks about one and a half feet in length with which she had danced the night before. The bride's decorative dress is called masaa. The bridegroom wears a calf skin decorated with beads and colobus monkey skins around his wrists and ankles.

It was believed that there were bad and good days for circumcision. The first day of the week or month was good, the second was bad, the third bad, fourth good, fifth bad, sixth not good or bad, seventh worst, eighth good, ninth bad, tenth good, eleventh very good, etc. Before a girl was to be circumcised, she had to collect a group of girlfriends and they would walk for a few days together, visiting many people to inform them of the impending circumcision and collecting gifts. Each evening they would dance at the girl's home; many people would join in and the dances often lasted throughout the night.

On the day of the circumcision everyone dances urio until about 4:00 p.m. at which time the girl is ready. The circumciser with her razor sharp tool called an nndunya waits inside the house; with her are the bridegroom, his best friend (the only two men allowed in) and several female relatives of the bride. A few yards from the door, the girl removes her clothing and runs naked into the house. She does this to show her body to the assembled crowd and prove that there is nothing wrong with her. As soon as she enters the house she throws her dress to the bridegroom to demonstrate

that she is his. She then sits on a low stool, the bridegroom holds her shoulders or her waist, and she is circumcised.

Upon completion the circumciser walks out of the house holding the bride's dress above her head and leads a women's dance. Other women join in with joyous ululations (mindoro) to celebrate a successful operation in which the bride did not cry out.

The only activity which indicates some form of blessing of the union of the couple is when one elder on the circumcision day dips a flywhisk of hartebeeste or giraffe tail into a container filled with honey and local medicine and sprays this over the bride and anyone near her. Of course, there is no question of consummation of the marriage after a clitoridectomy. The bride is secluded until the bleeding stops and then she continues to live in her father's home where the bridegroom is allowed to visit her and stay over-night. She continues to live here for one year or at least until she has given birth to one child. The room the bride occupies is known as kiri, the first room on the right hand side of the house as you enter the door.

Modern Christian Meru have their wedding ceremony in the local Lutheran church. The bride is dressed in a white gown and the bridegroom in a suit and tie. After the church ceremony there is a procession reminiscent of the traditional ceremony, but in this case the relatives and friends of both sides walk to the bridegroom's home where presents are received by the newly wed couple and a feast is prepared for


the guests. The couple live with the bridegroom's father or in a separate house of the bridegroom near his father's house. The marriage is consummated on the wedding night. Some Christian families still have their daughters circumcised, but this is done surreptitiously some time before the wedding.

The couple often rest for a full month without doing any work. The women of the bridegroom's family do the work; his mother usually does the cooking. This is carried over from the traditional ceremony where the bridegroom's mother was supposed to cook for the bride on her wedding night and during her confinement after circumcision. Residence after marriage is thus patrilocal in the majority of cases today. Among some progressive farmers and the few highly educated young marrieds residence is neolocal and among many of the non-Christian Meru the initial period of residence of the bride in her father's house until she has given birth is still common practice, after which patrilocal residence is assumed.

Elopement is said to have been very infrequent in the past. When it does occur, and there is intent to marry, the man must pay the father of the girl one cow, one sheep and some beer before the usual bridewealth payments begin. If the girl has been betrothed to another man, this fine is still payable to the girl's father, and any payment already made by the originally intended husband is returned to him in cash immediately. The fine is not considered as part of the bridewealth payments.

When a bride is known to be pregnant the wedding ceremony is considerably shortened; there is little celebration and less respect is shown to the bride and her family. A Christian family in such circumstances might not hold the wedding in the church but simply have a small party given by the husband's family. There is no ceremony performed at all in the case of a customary union between a widow and the brother of the deceased (levirate). There is no obligatory sororate, but if a husband marries his deceased wife's sister he may be allowed to pay a reduced amount of bridewealth and there may be a wedding ceremony or the sister's father will allow her to move in with the husband and the husband's family will work for her for one month. No ceremony occurs when a divorced couple remarries, although relatives and friends may have a party.

Bridewealth (findo fa ukwe) is paid by the family of the bridegroom to the family of the bride. Usually, the father of the bride divides the main bridewealth payment as follows: father of the bride receives three cows and one goat; mother of the bride receives two debes of milk, one sheep or some meat; father of the father of the bride receives a special share of the beer; mother of the mother of the bride receives one sheep, some meat, and two debes (four gallon tins) of milk (this only applies where the bride has been named after the mother's mother); each sister of the bride receives one sheep.



Several other special payments are required in traditional Meru society. After the first verbal contract has been agreed to by both families, the prospective bride is presented with a string of beads for her head (kimbere) and more beads (nna) which she wore to show that she was engaged and thus discourage other suitors. The family of the bridegroom must prepare various quantities of beer (wari wa yaambuya iramba) to be consumed by or with the family of the bride in order to publicly acknowledge the marriage agreement. Several debes of beer, wari wa nna and wari wa ndera, are consumed before the wedding ceremony by the clan of the bride and are worth approximately Shs. 150/- each. Wari wa ingutu and wari wa mbwaria are approximately the same amount of beer, but are consumed by the bride's family after the marriage ceremony. One young sheep is said to be given to the father of the bride in lieu of working for a time for him. Working for the bride's father is not a requirement but may be used as a substitute for some small payments. A young cow and a young bull are also presented to the father of the bride in order to ensure his friendship. Very often a blanket, worth about Shs. 40/- is also given to the bride's father. Occasionally the bridegroom is asked to pay his father-in-law's tax for one year. If the bride is a last born child, half a debe of honey or Sh. 30/- and an axe are given to the mother of the bride.

Homestead:

Often before, but certainly after marriage, a young man, with the help of his relatives and friends, will begin to build a homestead for himself and his wife. A homestead may consist of only one, but in the vast majority of cases, more than one house. They are built with the help of his male relatives and friends on flat, cleared ground near to a supply of water.

The first house to be built is called numba ya kirwa (Meru style house) and is for the use of his wife, children, and domestic animals. Then the husband builds another house in the cleared area for himself which is called nshellu. Numba ya kirwa, where all domestic affairs are carried on, is a hemispherical house with one door and no windows. The door is not fixed to the frame and therefore can be removed in the daytime and tied with a strong rope to the frame of the house during the night. The frame of the house is simply wooden posts sunk into the ground on the sides and a mass of intertwined thin sticks arching to form the roof and supported by a few strong planks. From the roof to the ground the house is thatched by the wife and her female friends and relatives. Before bananas were introduced to Meru, the houses were thatched with grass, but nowadays, half-dry banana fibres taken from the trunk of the banana "tree" are used. The house is rethatched every year just before the long rains. At the apex of the roof a broken cooking pot is placed to

press down the top fibres and keep the thatch from being blown away by wind. The thatching may be completed by a group of women in a single day.

On top of the doorway there is a portion of the frame projecting forward and outward, called kimanja which directs rain water away from the door and prevents it from entering the house. There is one central supporting post called ngo ya iriko (post of fireplace) which can be between eight and fifteen inches in diameter. It also supports the attic-like storing and drying platforms near the ceiling. The centre post rises from beside the hearth which consists of three soft stones (masiya) arranged in a triangle. The hearth has domestic and ritual significance as the wife's primary domain and the post represents the male owner or supporter of the house.

The numba ya kirwa is divided into bedrooms along the walls, and towards the centre there is a place for cows (kwa numbe) with posts erected to accommodate one cow per space and in front of the posts is a hollowed long trough (mundi) for keeping the food, - grass, banana stems and leaves - for these stall-fed cattle. Beside them is a place for sheep and goats (kwa mburu) separated by a thin wall of sticks. Sometimes there is also a place for sheep which are being fattened (kisauny ya suwe) on a slightly raised wooden floor.

The bedrooms are separated from the rest of the house by thin walls of intertwined sticks filled with mud and dung.

The floor is solid dried mud and in the bedrooms dry banana leaves are heaped with a cow skin covering on which people sleep. Nowadays wooden bed frames and mattresses are also used. Usually above the domestic animals towards the ceiling there are some wooden planks which are used as storage space for maize, firewood, ripening bananas, and other things. The furniture consists mainly of three legged wooden stools. Just inside the doorway there is a small area where visitors may sit and where the husband may come to take his meals; it is the only part of the house that is not usually filled with smoke from the fireplace.

Misheliu or men's houses are more like modern houses; rectangular in shape, but still usually built with wood, mud, and banana fibres. They were introduced after the arrival of the Germans. These houses may be divided into several rooms, there is usually more furniture, and it is here that a man entertains his male friends and has his food and drink brought to him by his wife and children.

Other types of houses to be found in a Meru homestead include misonge, similar to numba ya kirwa but the thatch does not reach the ground, instead there are short walls of mud and dung; mabanda, again similar to numba ya kirwa in construction but rectangular in shape; and mbili, a house used by old men which is identical to numba ya kirwa except in size - an mbili is usually about nine feet in diameter, whereas a numba ya kirwa may vary between fifteen and twenty-five feet in diameter.

A typical homestead will also include several storage huts for maize, millet, etc. which are built on raised wooden platforms. The older ones are circular and are made of thin sticks interwoven to form a high cylinder. This is called ikumbi which is spelled the same as the word for hoe, but they are differentiated in pronunciation by tone.

Today most Meru are striving to build stone houses with tin roofs. Many have already succeeded in this ambition; especially in the coffee belt one can now see almost as many modern stone houses as mud and grass ones.

The homestead is the basic agricultural working unit in Meru country. An average homestead usually consists of an adult male, his wife (or wives), his children, male and female, who have not yet married, or who have just married but have not yet established their own households, and any other relatives, agnatic or affinal, such as aunts, uncles, cousins, or grandparents, who through adversity or choice have come to live in the homestead of a particular adult male. In homesteads where the adult male is dead or temporarily absent, it is possible for a woman to act as the head.

The average Meru homestead cultivates between two and four acres of food and cash crops. In the coffee belt less food crop acreage is used and between one and three acres of coffee is cultivated. The general activities of the homestead can be summarized as follows according to the annual seasonal cycle:

January to March is called iruna (the dry season). This is the time of harvesting, especially of maize and beans. Women and girls collect firewood to store up against the coming rains. Coffee and bananas are planted at the end of this season.

The middle of March to the end of May is called kisiye (the season of long rains). There is very little agricultural activity during this season due to the intensity of the rains. It is considered to be the time for staying at home, resting, and eating.

June to August is called feeri fa mbiyoo (the cold season). Agricultural activity increases in this season, especially that of weeding and pruning.

The cold season gives way to hot dry weather from about September onwards until materi (the season of short rains) beginning usually in October or November and lasting through December. The short rains is usually the time for planting of maize, beans, etc. Coffee and bananas can also be planted at this time. Some crops which mature twice a year in the most fertile parts of the mountains can also be harvested at the end of this season.

The work of the homestead is supervised by the adult male head. Times of peak activity often see groups of homesteads working communally on each other's plots. At such times the women of a particular homestead prepare food and beer in large quantities and relatives and neighbours are

invited to help in the work and share the food and beer.

Clan (ufwari):

Very few Meru clans are divided into smaller, named units (numba-lineage). Those clans such as Kaaya, Mbise, and Sumari, which number well over a thousand individuals each, are usually divided into three sub groups which are simply a smaller version of a clan. One's social relationships are more easily managed within this smaller unit than would be possible in a very large clan. The description of clans which follows can as well apply to the smaller groups where they are found among the larger clans.

There are approximately thirty-five named clans in Meru country. It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of clans in existence at any one point in time due to the way in which clans come into being. Except for the few original clans which undertook the migration from Usambara to Mount Meru and formed the nucleus of the Meru tribe, the rest of the clans who now call themselves Meru came from various parts of Tanganyika, usually in search of better land. After obtaining permission to settle on some unoccupied portion of the mountain, they would often intermarry with the Meru already there and would soon refer to themselves as Meru.

All members of one clan, male or female, claim to be related through patrilineal descent from a common ancestor in the distant past. While this ancestor is usually a male and often considered to be the founding father of the clan,

the common clan ancestor may be a woman and, in the case of some Meru clans, a person who lived in the not so distant past. Examples of the latter cases may include Meru women who were married to men of other tribes and then have chosen to divorce and return to Meru. Their children are then raised as Meru and their clan name is either that of their mother or of their non-Meru father. Several Meru clans in existence today take their names from a man who as recently as one or two generations ago settled on Mount Meru. For these reasons, the size of Meru clans varies tremendously, from as many as several thousand members of the original clans like Kaaya and Mbise to as few as one hundred or so for the recent arrivals.

An individual is automatically a member of his or her father's clan as a result of being the recognized son or daughter of his or her father. Ideally, any individual can choose to change his membership to any other clan. This would involve the individual convincing the leader of his own clan and the leader of the clan to which he wishes to belong to accept the change. The person must present a bull for slaughter which is eaten by the leaders and, perhaps, other clan members of both clans. In fact, the incidence of such changes is very rare as clan leaders are loathe to allow the number of their clan members to be depleted.

Ideally clans are exogamous units, and in practice marriages occur between members of different clans. But

individuals may marry within their clan and such marriages are not rare. However, a bull must be slaughtered on such an occasion by the groom or his family and it is consumed by all the clansmen involved in order to sanction this breach of clan ideals.

It is said that all Meru are to some extent duty bound to aid a fellow Meru in time of hardship. However, no sanctions can be brought to bear on clansmen who fail to offer help. However, a fellow clansman can be socially ostracized or fined if he refuses without good cause to give aid within his clan. Land is considered to be clan property and all clan members are expected to take an interest in maintaining the integrity of its boundaries and its fertility. Ikari is the Meru word for "blood payment", and all clan members should contribute their share in the event that any clansman is required to pay ikari to another clan as a result of inflicting injury to a member of another clan or his property. No payment is demanded for injuries or even murder within one clan, as this is thought to be like a snake cutting off part of its own body because it is too long. The amount of ikari to be paid and the share of each contributor is decided by a meeting of the clan leaders and interested parties.³³

Each clan has one man who is its recognized leader. He is appointed by a general meeting of the clan on the basis of his personal abilities to speak well at meetings, to be

³³For more information on ikari, see chapter on Law and Social Control.

wise and just, and above all to be considered to be "a reasonable man". The position is not hereditary, although the son of a clan leader has a better chance of being appointed if he can show that he has the requisite qualifications. A clan leader can be removed from office at any time if his fellow clansmen are dissatisfied with his performance. All matters affecting the clan as a whole must be discussed and settled at a meeting in the presence of the clan leader. He usually presides over the meeting, but does not on his own decide on issues. Unanimity is necessary among all those present before any particular case is considered settled and then it is usually the task of the clan leader to implement the decision, unless he has delegated the authority in this matter to another person.

A woman's position with respect to clan membership is different from that of a man. Before she is married, a girl is a member of her father's clan but she has no voice in the affairs of the clan. When she marries, she belongs to the clan of her husband, or, put differently, she acquires certain jural rights in her husband's clan replacing those same rights in her natal clan. In recent years as women's rights are increasing, she is beginning to have more say in clan affairs, especially as a mother with male children. But she never absolutely relinquishes her membership in the clan of her father, so that in a sense a woman is a member of two clans simultaneously.

As a rule Meru clans are not divided in terms of different or separate functions. There are however two significant exceptions: the Sikawa clan and the Sarakikya clan. Sikawa is the clan of iron workers or blacksmiths. It is uncertain exactly when iron working was introduced to Meru country, but it is believed that the art was learned from coastal people who passed through the area just prior to the reign of Mangi Ndemi. Iron working was surrounded by magical significance and thus the Sikawa clan was feared by other Meru. They were forced to be endogamous, no Sikawa person could marry another Meru. Anyone could take a piece of iron to a Sikawa man and pay him to fashion it into the desired implement, a spearhead, knife, hoe, or whatever. Today, of course, store-bought implements are more easily available and many members of Sikawa clan are turning to cultivation and becoming more integrated into Meru society. In the past, if a travelling Sikawa was given a place to sleep he was not allowed to urinate inside the house; he was given a calabash and asked to go outside. (The residents usually urinated inside their houses at night, a practice which developed as a result of their fear of wild animals.) The curse of a member of Sikawa clan was considered to be especially potent. He could break a piece of metal in two and this action meant that the life of the cursed would also be broken.

The other clan which is said to have special functions is Sarakikya. When a Meru is building a new house or

preparing a new garden or simply moving to a new site, he should invite a specialist from Sarakikya clan to come and bless the new site. The Sarakikya man will walk around the circumference of the proposed house or garden and bless it; he may also light a fire in the centre of a new house site. Except for this special ability, the Sarakikya clan are otherwise ordinary members of Meru society.

Each Meru clan can look to one or more specific places, perhaps a certain tree, and see this place as their sacred grove; the place may be the one where the first member of this clan to come to Mount Meru was buried. To this day, non-Christian members of each clan travel to these sacred groves to sacrifice in order to ensure the well-being of their clan. When a single tree marks the location of the sacred place, the tree is said to symbolize the clan itself. For example, if a branch was to break from the tree and fall to the ground, it is believed that a member of the clan will soon die.

On the day of a sacrifice, the clan leader would assemble those present at the foot of the sacred tree or ancestral burial place (kifu) and anyone bearing the name of the ancestor would take a mouthful of beer and spill the rest at the foot of the tree. Other people would prepare a bull, cow, or sheep for slaughter. Those present would eat some of the meat and the rest would be left for the ancestors. Mbise clan often slaughter a bull at Lamireny's cave at Ung'u

to pray for rain. Nsaiya lineage of Kaaya clan slaughter a bull or ram at Lake Duluthi. They also throw the skin and intestines into the lake where one of the sisters of their lineage was drowned; she is expected to eat the intestines and bring rain or protect them from disease.

When any clan goes to sacrifice, all the Meru are supposed to remain idle for seven days. They may eat and look after their cattle, but they may not do any other work under penalty of a fine which is imposed by the clan that is sacrificing. If a fine has to be paid, the sacrifice must be done over again. Some Meru claim that in the past even the Arusha were subject to this rule. A special function of the Mbise clan was to impose a fine on anyone caught burning the forest. The Mbise believe that they "own" the upper part of the mountain because their founder, Lamireny, was the first to see it.

Meru clans are said to have been originally localized units, each clan occupying a distinct and known area on the slopes of Mount Meru. Today, the location of clans is considerably mixed, members of many different clans can be found residing in most villages. Among the reasons for this are the many wars and diseases which have scattered the Meru throughout the mountain, sons who have moved off of clan land due to lack of space, daughters who have occasionally inherited clan land from their fathers and then married men of other clans, and, in recent years, people selling land to members of another clan.

Age Group (rika):

One of the most difficult aspects of Meru culture to analyze is their system of age grouping. Having adopted the Arusha (Maasai) system of age-sets so many years ago, there are no living Meru today who can recall the system of age grouping as it existed before the Arusha influence. The Meru did have such a system traditionally, but it seems to have been one of named generation-sets. When one of the Mangi's sons was old enough to be initiated into manhood, all Meru youth of approximately the same age (twenty to thirty years) were circumcised on the same day and a single name was given to the entire group. If the Mangi did not have a son ready to be initiated but there were many other boys ready, an itomi (a wealthy, respected man) might take it upon himself to call for the formation of a new generation-set and, again, all boys ready at that time would be circumcised on a certain day.

The primary change introduced through the adoption of the Arusha system was that of timing: initiations were held at more frequent intervals and a particular age-set, bearing the same name, could be circumcised over a period of years before that set was closed and a new one established. In the following description of Meru age grades and age-sets, I will indicate similarities and differences with the Arusha system where they are significant.

All Meru males and females pass through three age grades in their lifetime (the Arusha and Maasai have at least five).

Figure 5: List of age grades

Males

Grade 1 - iseka (pl. maseka) - uninitiated boy

Grade 2 - nsero (pl. vasero) - initiated man

Grade 3 - nsuri (pl. vasuri) - old man

Females

Grade 1 - sambura (pl. masambura) - uninitiated girl

Grade 2 - nka (pl. vaka) - initiated (married) woman

Grade 3 - nkyeku (pl. vakyeku) - old woman

An uninitiated boy's (iseka) main activity was to look after the family's cattle, sheep and goats and do domestic chores such as fetching water and firewood. He was required to be especially respectful of anyone in the age grades above him. When meeting an older man, the iseka would bow his head and wait for the man to place his hand on the boy's head as a blessing. His recreation consisted mainly of running about with his fellows when the chores were done and listening to stories by his elders at night. The same general pattern pertained for an uninitiated girl (sambura) except that she did not herd cattle, but rather cleaned up after those that were kept at home and looked after children younger than herself.

When enough boys (maseka) were considered to be old enough to be initiated, this fact would be mentioned at a public meeting and the Mangi's permission would be sought to form a new generation or age-set. It appears that from about 1880 until about 1925 Meru age-sets were opened and

closed in accordance with the Arusha and Maasai schedule. After the date was fixed, parents would begin to store food in preparation for the circumcision feast.

On the day before the circumcision of all the maseka to be initiated, their relatives and friends gathered at the designated places. During the evening until about midnight everyone participated in songs and dances; a special dance called irimbi was performed by the maseka. They were allowed to rest for a few hours, then at about 4:00 a.m. there were more songs and dances until the circumcising began at about 6:00 a.m. The songs were mostly in the form of mbyaa, songs involving rules of behaviour and teasing of the maseka and their parents. People would abuse the maseka mercilessly, perhaps spit on their faces, and insult their mothers. All this was done to infuriate the young boys and make them all the more anxious to go through with the painful circumcision in order to pass into an age grade where they could not be so insulted. In addition, they had to wear girls' skins or dresses at this time, i.e. just prior to initiation.

For each group of boys to be initiated an old man called a teacher (iishi) was appointed who would lead them through the circumcision and give them instruction. Just before the circumcision the iishi would lead the boys to a stream where they would wash themselves and then walk them back to the place of circumcision. Each boy would stand in turn holding two banana trees or two sticks and be circumcised. All his

relatives and friends stood by to watch that he did not cry out or show any sign of pain. The least such sign would brand him as a coward and besides shaming his entire family, he might bear the name of coward for life. As each iseka bore the pain well and became an nsero, the assembled women would ululate with joy.

Immediately afterwards the youths were taken by their iishi into the bush where an mbili (large hut) had been erected. Here they stayed for about three months to recuperate and be taught the rules of behaviour of an nsero. Food would be brought to them here by their mothers, but served to them by the iishi; no women were allowed in or near the mbili. During this time their food consisted mainly of meat in large quantities, milk mixed with fat, and milk with blood. They would have to vomit to show that they would no longer eat food which was disgraceful for men; the vomiting was called mbeeni, the word for green vegetables. All these food taboos were borrowed from the Arusha: besides green vegetables an nsero was not to eat ripe bananas, maize mixed with beans, and above all, they were not to be seen by women while they were eating. They were taught that certain portions of meat were food for men, while others were only fit for women and children.

During the months in the mbili, their hair would be cut short so that they appeared fat rather than thin. Whenever they went out they painted their bodies and faces

with a white chalky substance known as ngwehati, they tied two ostrich feathers to their heads, and wore an expensive bead necklace of ostrich egg shells. Around their waists they wore a wide leather belt with a piece of black cloth attached.

They paraded about the villages in groups carrying bows and arrows, not speaking to people but knocking the arrows against the bow in order to greet them. If they saw a young girl, they would remove the rings from her fingers and put them on their own fingers. They competed in shooting their arrows into the air; it was a great shame not to be able to retrieve one. Maseka would sometimes try to hide an arrow from them, but in general they were given a wide berth as they might easily beat up any older maseka they came upon.

Before entering a house the nsero would cough or clear his throat to indicate that a circumcised man was approaching. He would not immediately accept a stool to sit on that was offered by a woman. She might be testing him to see how well he had been taught. He must move the stool to sit in another direction so that his loins were not exposed to the view of women. Other teachings in this vein included: not urinating, flatulating, or defecating in the presence of women, not telling a woman he has a stomach ache as this might imply diarrhea, not agreeing to make a fire for a woman as corn husks which are usually used as kindling were also used as menstrual napkins and the woman might be trying to make him

sick by handling something which had menstrual blood on it.

Each nsero was given a new and more permanent name. The group would approach in turn each of their mothers' houses. They would then greet the mother by saying, for example, "Good morning, mother of so-and-so," using a number of names until the mother responded to one. That then would become the name of the young man in question.

The final phase of life in the mbili was choosing a best friend who would be a lifelong companion. They would have to help each other in every way including courtship, at the marriage ceremony, in farming, etc. After each had chosen, the young men were free to leave the mbili, dress as ordinary people, and return to normal life. Also, unlike the Arusha and Maasai who had to wait until they had passed through the warrior grade and become elders, the Meru vasero were free to marry. It must be remembered that Meru males were initiated between the ages of twenty and thirty, whereas the Maasai were more often circumcised between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five.

Each generation-set or age-set of vasero cooperated in work and in war. They were the Meru warriors. They fought together in battles to protect their country and in raids to increase their herds of cattle. They remained respectful to older men, but chastised the ma'seka and saw to it that they looked after cattle properly. Before the vasero went to battle they would gather in an ikaari (similar to the

word for blood payment, to be discussed later, but pronounced with a long "a" and a different tone). This was a collection of huts in the bush where the vasero would bring their girlfriends or sisters and eat great quantities of bull and sheep meat. This custom was also borrowed from the Arusha and resembles the Maasai warrior village (manyatta).

In Meru society, unlike the Arusha and the Maasai, there is no special ceremony to mark the transition from warrior to elder. An nsero becomes an nsuri when he has settled down, has several children, or simply appears to be old. An nsuri may still work in the fields if he wants to, (except during the period of intense Arusha influence) and if he occupies some political position or is an influential man, he will be sought after to arbitrate cases or give advice in disputes. The primary activity of vasuri has always been, and still is today, drinking beer. For most old men in Meru this is a daily activity which fills a good part of every day.

Female circumcision at the time of marriage has already been discussed. Like the boys, each girl has an older woman (iishĩ) who teaches her the rules of behaviour for women during the time she is confined to a hut after circumcision. For the most part girls are taught how to behave properly towards their husbands, to be obedient, good mannered, not to serve food to men while menstruating, not to call an ox by an abusive word as this would mean abusing her husband's

mother, or a young cow as this would be abusing her husband's sister, or a bull as this would be abusing her husband's father, not to say mura but rather usokwa - both mean water but mura is a slang term for sperm (nyeke) and using it would imply insulting men, not to say mwaasho but rather kyele - both mean a container like a bowl but to use mwaasho would be insulting women, not to enter the house of her husband's father alone, and many more.³⁴

From the time a girl is circumcised she is called mbora which is like a temporary age grade until she has borne at least one child and enters the grade of nka. Women's work is long and tedious in Meru. They must do the domestic work, care for children, carry grass long distances to feed stall-fed cattle, as well as most of the cultivation of the family fields. A woman passes into the grade of nkyeke when she is obviously old or especially if she has male children who have been initiated. Vakyeke are highly respected and have much less work to do than younger women. Nowadays, more and more of them have taken to drinking local beer in groups and with their husbands. This tendency is also occurring among younger women and young men and is a cause of great concern to many Meru.

³⁴The proliferation of special rules of behaviour for men and women appears to have been another affect of Arusha influence. The Arusha differentiated the activities of men and women much more than the Meru, and Arusha men were said to have abused Meru men for behaving like women.

The system of age-sets and initiation as described is rapidly breaking down. Among non-Christians most girls are still circumcised at or before marriage, but very few Christian girls are circumcised at all. Christian boys have adopted the habit of going to a hospital to be circumcised and no ceremonies are observed when this occurs. There has not been another named age-set initiated since Steling began in 1955 and Meru elders are still arguing as to the time and form of the next initiation.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The traditional political organization of Meru society has shown remarkable persistence throughout their years of residence on Mount Meru. Each successive stage of history has seen the introduction of a new system of authority and social control. But each new system was relatively easily incorporated and the new conglomerate shows a certain consistency in the maintenance of social and political order. In questioning informants about such things as how the role of the clan leaders (yashili) has changed since the advent of European rule or how the position of the headman (jumbe) has changed since independence, almost invariably the answer is that there has been no change. Certainly Meru society is not alone in exhibiting this type of conservatism together with a willingness to adopt new forms of social control. Swartz, in his study of the Bena, has indicated the existence of a similar situation: "...Bena political structure and functioning has shown important continuities, particularly at the village level, during the eighty to one hundred years of remembered history. During that time there has been little change in the socially significant characteristics of village officials or in the manner of their operation."³⁵

³⁵Marc J. Swartz, "Continuities in the Bena Political System," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 20, No. 3, Autumn, 1964, p. 241.

It is necessary to emphasize this aspect of Meru political organization in the face of such comments as Apter's that,

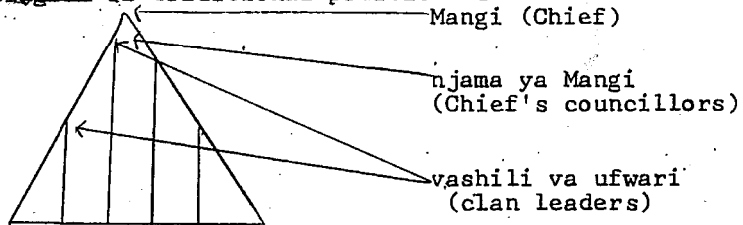
History is strewn with political societies and the pace of discard has if anything quickened in the political tempo of today's world. This is particularly so with tribal systems in Africa. Culture does not die easily. It shows amazing persistence and stubbornness. To a smaller extent, social institutions can show great resilience, but political institutions, dependent for support and legitimacy on the entire network of social and cultural institutions, are notoriously fragile.³⁶

In the Meru case, while dramatic cultural changes have been occurring at a rapid rate, one of the most persistent features have been their political institutions.

Traditional Political Organization:

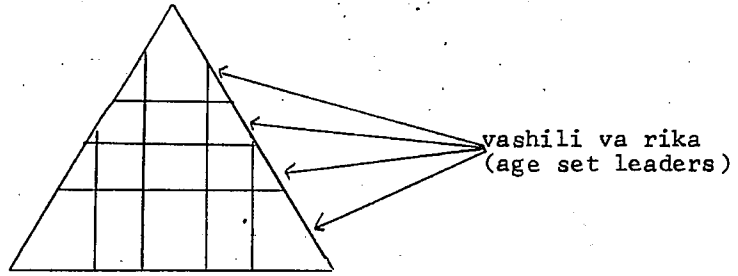
We can diagram the changes in Meru political organization by representing the total Meru political structure as a pyramid or triangle with each political office occupying a node on the triangle. Lines through the figure demarcate that segment of the political structure which comes under the authority of each particular political office:

Figure 6: Diagram of traditional political structure

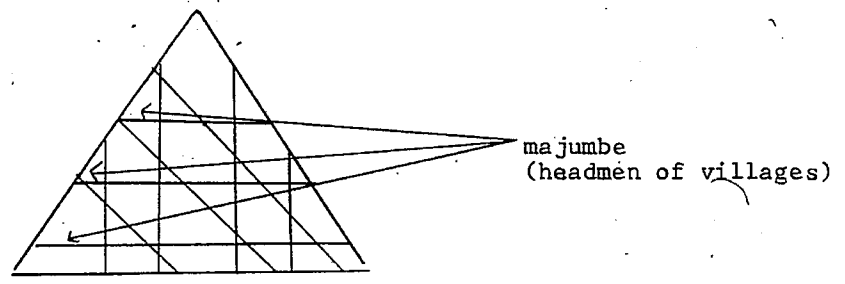


³⁶David E. Apter, The Political Kingdom of Uganda - A Study in Bureaucratic Nationalism, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1961, pp. 8-9.

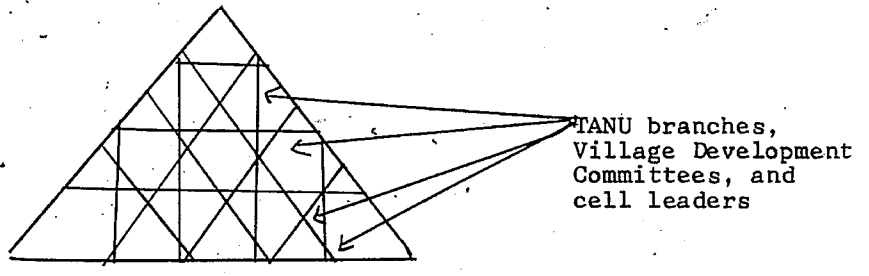
After Arusha influence - Figure 7: Diagram of political structure after Arusha influence



During colonial rule - Figure 8: Diagram of political structure during colonial rule



After independence - Figure 9: Diagram of political structure after Independence



Mangi (paramount chief) -

The whole of Meru country and everything within it was said to be under the control and leadership of the Mangi. He ruled the country and passed judgment on all cases brought before him. He acted as a kind of "high court" as almost all cases would have been heard in various "lower courts" where no satisfactory decision was reached before they would be taken to the Mangi for a final decision. These cases were heard in an open field near the Mangi's house; anyone who had an interest in the case or who simply wished to listen could attend. Under colonial rule until the 1953 constitution was introduced, the Mangi was also the head magistrate of the native authority court system.

The Mangi appointed his own councillors from among the clan leaders throughout Meru country. These councillors (njama ya Mangi) sat with the Mangi in all official meetings. With the support of his councillors and other vashili, the Mangi had the right to command his subjects to do anything. Even though he was supposed to consult with these leaders when making an important decision, if a particular Mangi was powerful enough, he could act on his own. This occurred, for example, when Mangi Ndemi (Rari II) ordered the massacre of the Nandole clan using Machame Chagga warriors; it is said that he did not consult with the Meru vashili on this occasion.

The Mangi could demand tribute from all his subjects. When the vashili brought cases before him for his judgment, they came with cows, sheep, beer and other goods. Wherever the Mangi travelled, people prepared meat and beer feasts for him at regular intervals along the way.

At the death of a Mangi, he was usually buried inside his home, unlike other individuals who would be carried to the clan burial ground. Then the njama and other vashili would meet to decide who should succeed him. They usually chose the Mangi's eldest son by his first wife, but they could also choose any other more capable individual who was a near male relative from the Kaaya clan.

At the investiture of a new Mangi, the elders of Kaaya clan presented him with several gifts on behalf of the people which symbolized his leadership over them. These included a leopard skin (or other wild animal skin) shawl which was worn over the shoulders, a metal (sometimes silver) bangle worn on the right wrist; an elephant tusk bracelet worn on the left arm above the elbow, a low three-legged stool, a wooden club, a coil of beads, a fly whisk made of a wooden handle decorated with small beads and the tail of a wildebeeste, oil for the hair on his head, a bull, a female calf, a female sheep, and a blanket.

The wild animal skin shawl must only be worn by a Mangi. The other items such as the beads and bangles are often seen in smaller versions worn by many Meru people.

There was a penalty of a heavy fine or worse for sitting on the Mangi's special stool.

When these gifts were being presented to the Mangi at his investiture, one of the elders would hold him by the shoulders facing him, and in front of the large assembled audience he would say, "We have given you this 'throne', sit on it, and rule over us." The Mangi would sit and then one by one the elders would present the gifts. With each one he would hold it up to show the audience and say, "Here is the club (or fly whisk, or bangle, etc.), I am giving it to your chief.. He will rule you with all your possessions. What do you say?" And they would answer in unison, "Let it be so." At the end of the ceremony the Mangi would usually make a speech of thanks and promise to rule well.

Vashili va ufwari (clan leaders) -

Those clan leaders who were chosen by the Mangi to be his personal councillors had, in addition to their ordinary duties, the right to act as confidential advisors to the Mangi, to help him in judging cases, to impose sentences themselves including the death sentence, and could approve or disapprove requests for raids or wars. They did not live with or even necessarily near the Mangi's homestead, but they came almost every day to sit with the Mangi for a while.

Clan leaders are elected by all the members of the clan. Each clan has one old man who is the head clan leader; he is assisted by a deputy clan leader and, if the clan is

very large, there may be other minor leaders, such as lineage or sub-clan leaders, whose functions are similar but whose jurisdiction is smaller. The head clan leader is elected by the whole clan, but the lower clan leaders are elected by fewer people and the head clan leader usually has some say as to who may stand for election within his clan. These people can remain in office for life so long as the people are satisfied with the way in which they execute their duties. The offices are not hereditary but the son of a clan leader, if capable, has a good chance of being elected. The Mangi cannot on his own remove a clan leader from office, but the people can do so if they are dissatisfied with him or if he has committed some offense.

All clan leaders are more or less equal in power with the exception of Kaaya clan leaders and Mangi's councillors who wield more power. The various clan leaders usually met as a group only in time of war, otherwise they concerned themselves with the affairs of their particular clans. Their power was usually sufficient for them to influence the decisions of the Mangi.

Upon election each head clan leader was presented with a black wooden club which symbolized his office, a cow, and a blanket by some elders of his clan. Lower clan leaders were given a male goat.

Their duties include judging cases of disputes involving members of their clan, imposing fines, organizing the collection of blood payment (ikari), bridewealth, and other

clan payments, overseeing the distribution of inheritance, especially the disposition of clan lands, and appointing guardians for widows of clan members.

Vashili va rika (age-set leaders) -

As part of the British colonial administration's attempts to revise the constitutions of the Arusha and Meru native authorities in 1948, Hans Cory, Government sociologist, was sent to Arusha District to study both tribes and offer recommendations. In his unpublished reports Cory stresses unduly the importance of age groups among the Meru and belittles the political role of the clans; two reasons, I suspect, for the ultimate failure of implementation of the 1948 constitution in Meru. For example, Cory wrote:³⁷

The Arusha and Meru tribes are not only geographically neighbours but also their tribal institutions are closely related to one another, although important differences exist. For instance, the Meru clans are of no significance in the general tribal organization. The leaders of the clans have no other functions than those concerning family members.

In a later unpublished report Cory said that:³⁸

Through force of circumstances, the constitution had to be hurriedly devised, and was apparently accepted by the Chief, Jumbes and 300 age-grade leaders of the WaMeru. It does not seem, however, formally to have been put to the people themselves.

³⁷H. Cory, "Proposals for the Adaptation of the Meru Age-Grade System to Modern Requirements," N.D. (Copy in the Africana Collection of the University College, Dar es Salaam).

³⁸H. Cory, "The Meru Problem," N.D. (Copy in the Africana Collection of the University College, Dar es Salaam).

In concluding his recommendations for the Meru 1948 constitution, Cory admitted that,

The weakness of the above reforms is the necessity of basing them on the age grade system, which the Meru adopted from the Arusha about 70 years ago. It is related that previously they also had a kind of age classes but these were mainly not military organizations like the Masai rika; they were circumcision groups. Thus one can say that the rika system of the Meru is not indigenous to the tribe. But there was no choice of a base for reforms because original Meru institutions including the Meru clan system lost all political significance many years ago.

The traditional generation-sets of the Meru did not have a position of leader attached to them. With the introduction of age-sets due to Arusha influence, a new office of age-set leader, sometimes referred to as lokonan, began to have some political importance. These individuals did not function merely as spokesmen as in Arusha society where they could only speak on the side of age-set mates in any dispute and were not allowed to hand down decisions like a leader, but rather in Meru society they operated just like clan leaders, giving judgements in cases such as those involving theft, fighting, or murder. They could also levy fines, and if the matter could not be brought to a successful conclusion, they could send the case to be heard by the Mangi.

The members of an age-set which at any particular time were in the age grade of vasero were the warriors. They would wage war on behalf of the Meru people or engage in raids to capture cattle. To do so they needed the permission and approval of the Mangi. The Mangi did not accompany the

warriors into battle, but simply gave his blessing and received a portion of the spoils when the warriors returned.

Primarily, age-set leaders were involved in organizing and "policing" the behaviour of members of their own age-set. They organized the distribution of work, food and beer in any activity involving their group. Occasionally, representatives of several age-sets would meet to put forward a candidate for another political office, perhaps that of jumbe of a village.

With the dispersion of clans and age-sets throughout many villages in Meru country, there are often several leaders of the same clan or age-set. There may even be one such person for each village in some areas. A meeting involving either a clan or age-set affair will then require inviting many leaders to be present at a particular time and place.

Modern Political Organization:

With the establishment of German rule in Meru at the turn of the century another system of authority was introduced in the form of village jumbe (headmen). While there are no true villages in Meru, that is, no nucleated villages, but rather dispersed homesteads, localities based usually on the natural divisions of streams and hills are named. These named physical divisions were used by the colonial governments as administrative units and have since continued to be called villages. The jumbe had the power of the German colonial government behind him and besides collecting taxes he often was involved in judging cases to solve disputes.

In the beginning the Meru people put forward their own clan or age-set leaders (vashili) to become jumbe. But when it became obvious that their own interests clashed with those of the administration (taxes, forced labour, etc.), they tried to elect men as jumbe who had no authority within the traditional tribal organization. Later, when the authority of the jumbe became well entrenched, they acted as another legitimate body for social control.

British colonial administration introduced a modern court system in Meru in 1925 with the Mangi as magistrate. In the 1950's local courts were established in different parts of Meru country and the Meru elected as magistrates men who were known to be honest, reasonable, and good speakers. These men were not necessarily chosen from the ranks of the vashili and jumbe. The courts acted as yet another system of authority for the maintenance of social order, but they did not replace the existing systems. Serious cases were taken directly to the magistrates at the insistence of the government, while minor disputes were still heard first by local leaders and, perhaps, even the Mangi, with only the more difficult of these cases being taken to the court. One reason for the preference of airing cases before the vashili rather than the magistrates was that fines and compensations were paid to the vashili in the form of food or beer instead of cash. Cash was, and still is in some parts of Meru, a rare commodity.

Since independence the government has introduced Village Development Committees (VDC) and, in 1965, cells were

established which group every ten houses under a leader chosen from one of the ten houses. Along with their primary task of mobilizing the people for development projects, the VDC officers and ten house (cell) leaders act as an additional source of social control in Meru. Cases which are not of direct concern to the clans or age-sets are often taken to these men for arbitration.³⁹ Here, as well, fines are often paid in kind rather than cash.

Today, these various systems of authority are all active and effective throughout Meru society. Many Meru appreciate the alternatives which this allows in choosing where one prefers to have a dispute settled. In fact, the choice is often predetermined by the spheres of influence which are defined for each set of leaders. Cases involving homicide or theft must be heard in the courts. Tax evasion is a matter for the jumbe who in turn may choose to take the offender to the magistrate. Rights to land and boundary disputes are dealt with by the clan vashili. Problems arising among age mates or between age-sets are usually resolved by the age-set vashili. With the abolition by the government in 1963 of the position of Mangi as the chief executive of the Native Authority, his role as the final court of appeal has been replaced in most cases, especially those involving the development of Meru, by the local party (TANU) branches where the VDC

³⁹ Women are also elected to positions in the Village Development Committees, but they do not serve as arbitrators of disputes.

leaders often serve as arbitrators.

Jumbe (headmen) -

The German colonial administration appointed a representative (jumbe or akida) in each village and paid him a small salary. At first they were often non-Meru from coastal tribes who had already worked for the colonial regime. Later, however, Meru people were appointed to be the jumbe in Meru villages. Their main duties were to collect taxes and to assist the colonialists in recruiting labour to work on the road and building projects in Arusha District. Nowadays the jumbe are elected by the people of a village. They are still paid a salary by the District Council of approximately Shillings 180/- per month. Their main duty remains that of collecting taxes and locating tax evaders. In this they are assisted by the vashili and the tarishi. Tarishi are the primary court messengers who also function as police. When ordered to by a magistrate or jumbe, the tarishi may apprehend a person and bring him to court. Each local court in Meru has a small room attached which is used as a jail and the tarishi may lock people in these rooms for a few days or less until their case is heard by the magistrate.

The Village Development Committees, TANU branches and cell leaders will be discussed more fully in Chapter VI under Socio-Political Change. It remains now to mention briefly one further informal position in the political organization of Meru society, that of people with influence.

Vandu va nrwe (literally - "people with heads") -

Individuals who do not occupy any official position within the political structure, but who are good speakers and have some influence, are called vandu va nrwe or mavelle. They would often speak, or be called upon to speak, at meetings on behalf of the people in their area. Their advice is sought by the vashili and jumbe and also by ordinary people. They may also be asked to listen to cases of minor disputes and give judgements and even impose small fines.

LAW AND SOCIAL CONTROL

In the discussion of law and social control which follows, statements often appear to refer to the Meru people as a whole. Obviously, this is an oversimplification. In many cases Christian or other "modern" Meru no longer uphold the same practices. Occasionally, laws are described for the Meru which are Arusha or Maasai in origin. Diversities of this kind may be significant, but an attempt will be made to generalize as much as possible in order to simplify the presentation.

I have limited myself to a discussion of those aspects of Meru customary law which pertain to marriage, divorce, guardianship, inheritance, abuse, murder, theft and witchcraft. I chose these topics not because they exhaust the discourse of Meru law and social control, but because they are among the most common sources of dispute in Meru society and, thus, help to illustrate processes of social control. A rather lengthy description of most of the details of law pertaining to these topics will be followed by some general statements about the application of the norms to specific cases. Through observation and participation in Meru legal cases in action, I came to the conclusion that, as is generally the case in Africa and elsewhere, the main functions of the "court" are first of all to effect a reconciliation between the disputants, secondly to rectify the situation by demanding fines or some

other form of retribution, and lastly to maintain respect for the "court" and the law by following accepted tradition and proper procedure.

The laws themselves are important and must be enforced, not as a precise set of rules to be applied indiscriminately in every instance, but rather as a set of "boundaries" which will guide the discussion of a group of elders, witnesses, disputants, and interested persons as they argue at length in order to find a unanimously acceptable path towards reconciliation and retribution. I will expand on this notion in the conclusions, but first, like any Meru elder who wants to make a reputation for himself as a reliable arbitrator, we must acquaint ourselves thoroughly with the details of the law.

Bridewealth Payment:

The father of the bridegroom is required to pay bride-wealth to the father of the bride. The bridegroom himself is expected to help towards the payment, as are his brothers, especially if the father is not alive. The main bridewealth payment consists of cattle, sheep, goats, milk, blood and beer. Among some modern families many, but never all, of these items may be replaced by their cash equivalents.

The individual and total bridewealth payments vary from family to family depending on relative wealth and on the agreements which are reached. But they usually vary only within the limits set by accepted custom. Even cash payments nowadays are based on the modern money equivalents of the

usual commodities which were presented in the past. The amount of bridewealth payment is not restricted in any way nor even the concern of local magistrate courts, but in cases of the failure of a marriage where the problem is brought to court, the magistrate will usually uphold the customary requirement of repayment of the bridewealth or up to the cash equivalent of approximately Sh. 3,000/-.

Lack of virginity of the bride or the existence of an illegitimate child does not necessarily imply a decrease in the amount of bridewealth payment, but these facts will almost certainly enter into the initial negotiations between the two families when agreement is being reached on the nature of the marriage contract and amount of bridewealth.

The actual time at which the various payments of bridewealth are made are subject to negotiation but delays are quite common. It often takes years for the full payment to be completed and individual instances are known to have gone on for more than one generation when sons and grandsons are asked to complete the payments for the father or grandfather. If payment is still pending, the birth of children is often the time when the subject will be brought up by the bride's family, but bridewealth payments are not obligatory at these times.

Brideservice does occur in the form of the bridegroom doing odd jobs for his father-in-law such as housebuilding or helping in cultivation both before and after the wedding,

but while this is common, it is not a necessary requirement. While the father of the bride is the only member of the bride's family to benefit from such service, with regard to the property he accepts as bridewealth, he must distribute this to other members of the bride's lineage and clan. This is said to be a voluntary distribution, but, in fact there would be so much pressure brought to bear if it were not done that it amounts to a social obligation.

If cattle which are part of the bridewealth payment die after they have been handed over to the receiver, they do not have to be replaced, but in certain circumstances the family of the bridegroom may in fact replace an animal just to show their sincerity. Once cattle or other property have been received, they become the unrestricted property of the receiver over which he has full rights of free disposal.

Maternal relatives do not pay or help to pay any part of the bridewealth and they do not enjoy any rights over the children of the union over and above those duties which are expected of grandchildren in helping grandparents with various chores. In a rare case in which bridewealth may be fully or partly paid by a man outside the family, he may claim no rights over the children of the union unless he has formally adopted the bridegroom; if not, he must depend on the sense of responsibility of the bridegroom for any recompense he may get.

After the death of her father, a daughter's bridewealth will be received by her guardian (see p. 137) who may be her older brother, her father's brother, or some other representative of her father. This situation is complicated in a polygynous household where the father's representative may refuse to accept all the bridewealth directly as he fears that at some later date the male children of the other wives may claim that he has taken advantage of their sister and "eaten" their wealth.

The special bridewealth payments and a certain amount of the main payment must be made before or at the wedding ceremony and the balance is paid over time after the marriage. Agreement is usually reached as to fixed dates for the payment of installments, but these are subject to renegotiation. Arrears can be claimed in court, but as a rule these problems are settled by the families concerned or by a meeting of local clan elders. The father-in-law is not permitted to recall the wife if the husband is in arrears, he may only bring the matter up for discussion to the elders. If a wife dies before the last installment of bridewealth has been paid, the balance is usually not forthcoming unless she has produced children and the husband cannot reclaim what he has already paid. If a husband dies before the last installment has been paid, the balance will be paid by his lineage providing his widow agrees to become the wife of a member of his lineage.

Repayment of Bridewealth:

Bridewealth has to be repaid in full if the bride or her family decide to terminate the marriage before or after the wedding ceremony. The father of the bride must repay the bridewealth, unless another man has decided to marry the woman, in which case this man must repay the bridewealth. Repayment usually requires a meeting with the clan elders who will decide exactly what is due and the person responsible should make the whole payment immediately or agree to installments within a short period of time. If the man who has to repay has no property, his lineage must help him. Bridewealth must be repaid in the same commodities, and if in stock, of the same quality as that in which it was paid. Today, cash equivalents are usually accepted instead of commodities. The elders will decide in each situation whether the offspring of stock must also be returned.

There is no legal obligation for persons other than the receiver of the bridewealth to help to return it, but those people who shared in its distribution and even other relatives and friends will usually feel compelled to help in the repayment. In a clear cut case, some Meru say that everything must be returned including gifts such as dresses which the wife has received.

In a situation involving divorce, the bridewealth must be paid back in full if the wife is found to be the guilty party. If she is to remarry after the divorce, it is her

new husband who must repay the bridewealth, if not it is her father. Where the husband is judged to be guilty in a divorce suit, no repayment of bridewealth occurs. If the divorced couple have children and they remain with the husband's lineage, the father-in-law can withhold one cow for each child (male or female) from repayment, but a second husband who is repaying cannot withhold this. When the children go with the wife, full bridewealth is repaid. The amount to be repaid is only in question with regard to children who are still alive at the time of divorce.

The second husband of the divorced wife will pay the bridewealth directly to the family of the first husband, unless part of the repayment has already been made by the wife's father, in which case the second husband will pay the full bridewealth to the wife's father and he will pay the balance to the first husband's family.

Bridewealth must be repaid in full if a widow refuses to be inherited by the lineage of her deceased husband. If a widow is intending to remarry outside of her husband's lineage, the elders will wait for the second husband to repay the bridewealth. The number of years of the widow's married life with the deceased is not taken into consideration.

A husband cannot claim the whole or even a part of the bridewealth if his wife becomes insane or incurably sick. There is no exception to this rule no matter what the disease may be. Nor is there a possibility of repayment if a wife

dies of whatever cause, irrespective of the existence of children or the number of years she has been married. Sorority may follow in such a situation, but it does not necessarily occur nor is it typical. There are usually no legal complications for the husband in terms of bridewealth even if his wife dies during pregnancy or childbirth, nor does it depend on the particular place where she dies.

Near relatives such as father or brother of an absent husband are not entitled to demand repayment of bridewealth and so to dissolve a marriage under any circumstances.

A debt originating in the non-payment of bridewealth usually does not have priority over other debts; in fact, in court it may have rather low priority. In the rare instances when a demand for repayment of bridewealth is taken to the magistrate court, a reasonable time limit will be set for repayment and the case will be handled just like an ordinary debt.

Restrictions on Marriage:

There is no custom of betrothal of minors with payment of some of the bridewealth. Fathers will occasionally arrange betrothals, but no payments are involved and children, particularly today, can later refuse to carry out the agreement. If a minor girl is pledged against payment with the intention of subsequent marriage and the girl later refuses to marry the man, the payment must be refunded; if the girl dies, refund is not automatic but may follow after negotiation.

Theoretically marriage is prohibited between any individuals who can trace a "blood" relationship and especially between members of the same clan. In practice Meru do occasionally marry within the clan and even within the lineage in which case a sheep is slaughtered "to remove the shame". It is also said that brothers should not marry girls from the same family, nor can people connected by blood-brotherhood make marriage contracts.

It is not required that a Meru man inform his first wife and make her a gift if he marries a second wife, but he usually will inform her and he may even send the first wife to the family of the intended second wife to arrange the marriage. A man's wives must be provided with separate houses and they have separate fields to maintain and cultivate, but the harvests are combined.

There are no general restrictions on marriage with respect to a person's profession or rank, except for iron-smiths who are members of the endogamous Sikawa clan (who were not permitted to marry outside the clan), and to some extent within families where women are known to be witches.

Divorce:

The contract of marriage can be dissolved before a council of clan elders or by a judicial decree. If one of the parties rejects the decision of the elders and files a suit over the same matter in court, the case may be heard at the magistrate's discretion and some of the elders will be

invited to give evidence. If the elders' decision is upheld by the court, the party bringing the suit may be fined by the elders.

Responses to questions concerning divorce often differ according to the sex of the informant. Points of law which are disputed between men and women will more often, but not necessarily, be decided in favour of the men.

Adultery by a woman is recognized as grounds for divorce and is also considered by women to be a finable transgression of the co-respondent. Many Meru men claim that the rising incidence of adultery by women is due to Arusha influence. There is no time limit within which a charge of adultery must be brought before the elders or the court. A husband or his brother, if the husband is away, is entitled to bring a charge of adultery against a wife and one or two witnesses are required to testify for his evidence.

Compensation payable for adultery is a bull to the husband, a bull to his age-set and a sheep to the elders who hear the case. The woman who has committed adultery may also be fined two debes of beer, but her father may be required to pay her fine since her transgression may be due to a poor upbringing. Women claim that the co-respondent and divorced wife are allowed to marry after the divorce has been granted; men say that while she will be free to marry, she may not marry the co-respondent.

Evidence of adultery is sufficient when the husband or his brother catches the couple in flagrante delicto and/or the testimony of witnesses who watched the occurrence from a hiding place. Corroboration is only necessary if the wife denies the act.

The infection of a husband with venereal disease by his wife is grounds for a divorce. If the person is known who infected the wife, compensation may be payable to the husband in addition to the fine for adultery. A wife who has infected her husband may have to pay damages as well.

In response to the question as to whether a husband is entitled to demand a divorce after he returns from a prolonged absence and finds his wife pregnant, women replied that he simply receives a fine from the co-respondent and remains with his wife, but men said that he can obtain a divorce. A husband is expected to have made proper provision for the maintenance of his wife during his absence, however whether he did or not does not influence the issue of divorce. If the husband hears after his return that his wife has lived with several men in succession, he will sue the one his wife agrees she lived with or the one witnesses testify against. It is generally agreed that a husband can both claim compensation and obtain a divorce if he can prove that his wife has lived with someone or committed adultery some time after his return. But if the husband has publicly forgiven his wife her transgressions during his absence, he

cannot at a later date demand a divorce for the same transgressions. If a husband finds upon his return that his wife has died in her lover's house, he can not only claim compensation for adultery, but some men say that he would be entitled to forty-nine cows (i.e. the payment for murder).

When a child is born of an adulterous act, the husband claims compensation for adultery from the child's father he cannot refuse paternity. He must accept the child and care for it, but women say that the husband does not love this child as his own.

A widow with children is free to choose a lover of her husband's lineage. Any children she may have belong to her first husband or if the levirate has been waived she is free to choose any lover and he will pay compensation for any children to the family of the deceased husband.

A co-respondent is not guilty of adultery if he does not know that the woman is married or if she has announced before witnesses that she is not married. When he discovers the truth he must either leave her immediately or report the affair to her father if he is to avoid paying a fine. If the adulterer could not reasonably be expected to know the truth he is not liable to pay damages.

Desertion by a wife is not sufficient grounds for divorce until such time as the elders hear the case and take a decision. If a wife leaves and goes to live with her relatives it is not considered desertion unless she left without

informing her husband and then stayed away for a long time. Any person, including a relative, who hides a wife and denies her presence in his house is punishable by fine. The wife's father is an exception in that she may go to his house and he need not inform the husband; in fact, he might wait for the husband to approach him and if the husband does not come there looking for his wife he may himself be fined. It is the legal duty of a husband to search for his wife if she has deserted him.

Women say that attempted suicide by a wife is not grounds for divorce but that her father will have to pay her husband one sheep. Men say this is sufficient grounds and the husband can return the wife to her father.

Damages are awarded and divorce granted without further proof if a wife and her lover are caught in the act of eloping or living in a common household. A person giving shelter to an eloping couple will not be necessarily fined. If a wife after elopement changes her lover it will be the man with whom she is eventually found who will bear the burden of paying damages.

A husband who wishes to change his domicile can demand divorce if his wife refuses to follow him. He can take his children with him providing he has paid bridewealth. If he has not paid bridewealth, but his wife agrees to follow him, there is no question of the children accompanying them; the wife's father can demand the bridewealth at a later date.

Injuries inflicted by a wife on her husband or children may be grounds for divorce, if they are serious enough or repeated. A small injury will just entail a fine, but broken bones, for example, will require a large fine and perhaps divorce. Neglect of domestic duties may also be grounds for divorce if the wife is chronically lazy. A husband will complain to her father if she simply refuses to cook for him and the father will usually give the husband permission to hit his wife in front of witnesses. Refusal of conjugal duties is grounds for divorce.

Other offenses which are mentioned as not being considered sufficient grounds for divorce include deliberate or accidental abortion or accidental killing of a newly born child, the use of magic medicine by a wife unless it results in someone's death, and infertility which will usually lead to the husband taking a second wife.

A wife cannot demand a divorce if she is deserted by her husband; if she has borne no children by him she may return to her father. She cannot take any of his property if she returns and if she does have children she remains in her husband's house with his children and property. Injuries inflicted by a husband are not grounds for divorce; if the injuries are severe he will be fined according to a set scale of compensation.

Women claim that impotence of a husband is grounds for divorce at any time, but they say that most women will keep

their husband's secret and have children by other men with his knowledge because he will not want his secret known. Men say that while impotence of a husband is grounds for divorce at the time of marriage, afterwards it is not and the wife must remain and care for her husband. In answer to the question as to whether neglect of conjugal duties by a husband is grounds for divorce, some men said no and others said yes. Women replied that while the wife cannot ask for a divorce she may begin to have affairs with other men and if the husband does not seem to mind, she may do other things which will cause him to give her a divorce. Irregularities in sexual intercourse on the part of a wife may cause a husband to demand divorce, but a wife can make no such demand. Nor can a woman ask for a divorce if her husband neglects to maintain her properly; she may only run away to her father or some other relative.

Grounds for divorce by either husband or wife may include mutual antipathy or the practice of witchcraft, but insanity, epilepsy or other illness, conviction of a crime, or assault or abuse of parents-in-law are not sufficient grounds for divorce. The last of course, will involve payment of a fine.

After a divorce has been granted a father cannot renounce possession of children and demand repayment of full bride-wealth mainly because his lineage will not agree. A mother can insist that a child remain with her until it is weaned and the father should, but often does not, pay for the child's

maintenance during this time. If a child remains with its mother for a considerable period after it has been weaned, the father is not required to pay for its maintenance when he demands that the child be returned to him.

The mother has the right to visit her children after a divorce, but women say that a mother may not be allowed to visit and indeed may not want to visit her children once they have been taken away from her. A father cannot under normal circumstances be deprived of the guardianship of his children.

The responsibility for maintenance of a divorced woman falls on her father, her lineage, and herself. Her husband is responsible only for the expenses of sending her home. She may take with her her private property such as clothes, utensils, furniture, and any other goods which she brought to the marriage or which were given to her by her family. She may not take any crops from the fields or in store. Witnesses will be present at the division of household property.

A divorce is considered to have taken effect when all the bridewealth has been returned, or when a District Council certificate of divorce has been issued, or, if no bridewealth has to be refunded, when the parties remarry.

Status of Children:

A legitimate child belongs to his father, that is, the man who has legally married the child's mother. Step-children can become heirs of their step-father, if, when marrying their mother, he pays the required compensation so that when taking

her to his home he is also permitted to take her children as his own. When a father remarries after divorce from a first wife and keeps the children and then the second wife gives birth to children, the legal position of all his children is equal. The father will treat them and the estate will be divided among them equally. A man can adopt a son by marrying the child's mother and paying compensation. If a natural son is born subsequently, the adopted son will be counted as the second born for legal purposes.

A child born out of wedlock belongs to the father of the child's mother until such time as his physical father recognizes his responsibility for him or until another man marries his mother and pays compensation for him to the child's mother's father. If the child is a boy he can inherit from the man who marries his mother, but if no compensation is paid and he does not go with this man, he is theoretically entitled to inherit from his mother's father to whom he belongs, but in fact his case will entail much debate and negotiations by the clan elders. If the child is a girl the bridewealth for her will be received by the man who married her mother providing she has been legally adopted, but if not, it will be received by her mother's father.

By simply paying bridewealth for the mother of his child born out of wedlock a father does not legitimize his child. The maternal family must agree to surrender the child and the father must pay to them the expenses incurred for the

birth and maintenance of the child and one cow. This amount does not vary according to the social rank of any of the persons concerned.

A woman's nomination of a man as father of her child is not decisive in determining paternity; the man's agreement is essential. If no one admits paternity the mother remains with her father and the child is legally his and a member of his clan. In some cases when enough evidence points to the paternity of a particular man and he denies it, he may be required to take an oath. When she is subsequently to be married the fact of an unmarried girl having had a child does not diminish the amount of bridewealth to be paid for her.

If a wife has conceived a child during her husband's absence, the child is considered to be his unless he wants to deny it, in which case he will need strong proof to establish the paternity of another man and have him fined. If it can be proved that a wife was pregnant by a man other than her husband before her marriage, she can be divorced immediately, taken back to her father and fined, or forced to name the correspondent so that he may be fined.

A lover who has caused the pregnancy of a woman other than his wife is liable to be fined and may be required to pay compensation to the clan of the woman's husband and then may try to claim the child as his own. The compensation is payable after the pregnancy has been discovered and the clan elders have met to decide the case. In the event of a

miscarriage the fine may still be payable but not the compensation. A single compensation is payable for twins. The amount of compensation is usually one cow, one sheep and about 4 debes of beer, and does not vary according to social rank. In default of cattle the compensation can occasionally be paid in land or, these days, in cash.

Guardianship:

Upon the death of a Meru man, his lineage will appoint his brother or another adult male member of his lineage to act as the administrator of the estate, if the deceased did not appoint someone while he was alive. The administrator supervises the inventory of the estate and guards it until it is to be distributed, he helps in the allocation of inheritance and the appointment of a guardian. There is a one week period of mourning after death during which time all debts owing to the deceased are collected by the administrator. After all debts have been collected (this may take more than one month), the estate may be distributed to the heirs. An heir cannot claim his share before distribution. The administrator is not entitled to any payment for his services, but as a male relative he is usually among the heirs. The lineage bears the expense of entertainment of the mourners. If an heir is dissatisfied with any action of the administrator he can appeal against him to the lineage or clan elders.

A guardian for the estate of a deceased must be appointed if he leaves heirs who are minors or only female dependants.

The mother may be appointed co-guardian in conjunction with a paternal relative. A kinsman of the mother cannot be appointed as guardian. When the deceased has no brother or male lineage mate who can become guardian, a more distant male relative of his clan will be found; a non-relative cannot be appointed.

The levirate husband of a widow is usually the younger or older brother of her deceased husband. The widow can veto a particular individual, but eventually must accept some male lineage mate of her husband who is chosen by the lineage. If the widow wishes to change her levirate husband or obtain a divorce from him, she must appeal to the lineage or clan elders who will make the decision in her case. The status of a widow is dependent on whether she has children or not; the more male children she has, the higher her status and the greater her ability to influence the lineage of her husband to take decisions in her favour. But the status of a levirate wife does not differ from that of any other wife. A childless widow must marry a relative of her husband. She has no option not to do so, and the lineage of her husband will not, under normal circumstances, refuse to marry her. The number of years of married life of the widow with the deceased do not affect the situation. If the widow has a child subsequently, it legally belongs to her deceased husband. A widow can only refuse to continue to be a productive member of her husband's lineage, that is, married to a levirate husband, if she has a

son who is of age to inherit his father's estate or if she is barren; she then remains with her children within the household of her deceased husband under the protection of his lineage.

Most often the mother and the brother or other male relatives of the deceased who inherit her under the levirate act as co-guardians of the estate. Depending on the individuals involved, the mother may move to the household of her new husband or stay on at the household of the deceased. In the rare instance of the union of a levirate wife and her husband being dissolved, the children will be divided between the two households, or bridewealth will be returned. If a co-guardian dies, the lineage or clan elders will choose a successor. If the mother dies and the children are still not old enough to care for themselves, the lineage or clan elders will appoint a representative to care for the estate. In a polygynous household only one co-guardian is appointed for all the wives and their households.

If a co-guardian neglects his duties the wife or wives will complain to the lineage or clan elders and another man can be appointed. A neglectful wife cannot be deprived of her guardianship, but is treated as any wife who neglects her duties. The co-guardian's duties include taking responsibility for all the property and income of the estate, decisions regarding the wards and their maintenance, and representing the family in public matters. The mother maintains her usual rights

and duties regarding her own fields which she cultivates, her cattle, and household affairs.

Wards who are small children and move to the household of the co-guardian do not take any special position; they maintain a close parallel cousin relationship with the children of the co-guardian. When the wards come of age they can ask for an accounting of their property which was being held in trust for them by the co-guardian and their mother. The co-guardian is not entitled to any special compensation for rendering these services. If they think the co-guardian has failed in his duties, the wards can take their claims to the lineage or clan elders - such cases often appear in the magistrate's court as well.

The estate is distributed to the wards as they come of age. Usually a son will get his share of the property when he marries. If there is any delay he will demand that the elders or the court act upon his claim. An eldest brother who comes of age may take over the guardianship of the property of his younger siblings, especially if the mother is no longer alive. He may use their property, but he should not sell it; he is holding it in trust until they come of age and if he fails in his duty, the younger brothers can bring a case against him to the elders. In a polygynous household the property is distributed to the eldest son of each mother as they come of age and marry.

The mother of an absent heir should act as a check on a guardian. If a son has sent money home for the buying of

property or if he has left property behind him, such property will be counted as part of the common estate of his deceased father unless there were witnesses to the son's ownership. Upon his return the absentee heir can ask the lineage or clan elders for an accounting of the use of his property by his father during his lifetime or by the heir who was appointed as guardian.

In the event that all the heirs are absent the estate of the deceased will be entrusted to a male relative of the clan and an attempt will be made to notify the heirs whose domicile is known. If the guardian also goes away and does not return, his office is not inherited, the elders will appoint another person. A remote relative who is guardian will have to be more careful in the handling of the estate than a near relative; he must consult more with the wives and other relatives on matters concerning the property of the deceased.

The guardian is not responsible for making good any losses in the property from his own property. The produce of the cattle belongs to the heirs, but the guardians may use the milk and may eat the cattle if they die. He must produce witnesses to prove that the cow has died and not been slaughtered. The guardian is not entitled to any compensation for his services, but the heir when he returns may make him a gift of some meat and beer.

In the case of female dependents, the guardian acts as a father until the girls marry. If a daughter marries and

is then divorced, she returns to the care of the guardian. The guardian is also responsible, along with the lineage and clan, for the maintenance of indigent and insane persons.

With all these duties and so few rewards the position of guardian is not one that a man necessarily willingly accepts. He usually feels a very strong social obligation or is persuaded by the clan elders to assume the responsibility.

Inheritance:

There are different grades of heirs beginning with the eldest son of the first wife to the youngest son, who occupies a special position as an heir, to the sons of other wives, other male members of one's lineage and clan, and finally affinal and unrelated individuals who may be specified in one's will. The sequence of heirs begins with the eldest son who gets his share first, either before his father dies when he marries, or afterwards, and then the estate is divided in diminishing amounts among the other sons and lineage members down to the youngest son who is said to have closed the mother's womb, and he usually inherits the largest portion of the estate. This is often due to the fact that the father will divide his property among his sons while he is still alive at the time when each of them marries. The youngest son will inherit all the remaining property of the father at the time of his death. Thus the eldest son will acquire less property if he obtains it before his father's death. A father may choose to distribute the majority of his

property among his heirs before his death. This procedure is held to be valid even if he does not observe the customary rules regarding the sequence of heirs.

After all the sons have acquired their portions of the inheritance, brothers of the deceased usually get one cow each and the clan as a whole receives one cow. The shares of the estate of a polygynous father are distributed equally between the various houses and within each according to the sequence of heirs; the first wife's eldest son will get a larger portion and the last wife's youngest son will get the largest portion. If an heir dies before inheriting his sons take the position he would have had in the sequence of heirs.

Women are not entitled to inherit. But if a man dies and has no known relatives or children, his widow can inherit his property. In such cases, if a non-relative were to inherit the estate, through a previous agreement with the deceased, it would be his duty to provide for the widow.

Individuals who perform certain religious functions at the burial ceremony are not entitled to shares of the estate, but they are usually given a gift of a sheep or some cash.

In the event that all the heirs are adults, a lineage or clan elder (administrator) will be chosen to divide up the property. This will be done approximately one month after the death following the collection of all outstanding debts. In the distribution of livestock, crops, money, and clothing, each wife's house keeps the stock, fields and crops which her

husband had allotted to them; money is divided among the wives and clothing goes to the brothers and sons, except for the father's own blanket which must go to the eldest son along with a cow to show that he has received the blanket.

There are set procedures for the claims and debts of a deceased's estate to be discovered and acknowledged. Shortly before he dies, a man who feels he is near the end will announce all of his debts to other people and also list those who owe things to him. Whether or not he has done this, during the mourning a special day will be set by the elders of his lineage or clan for all claims of debts to be made against the deceased. On this same day, which is called nkonu wa yaala masaa, any persons who owed debts to the deceased are supposed to come forward and make arrangements for payment. Large quantities of beer and meat will be prepared by the lineage of the deceased and many members of his clan, other relatives, friends and neighbours will be present. A creditor without a witness must swear an oath and times are set for the distribution and collection of debts. At the end of the day one of the lineage elders stands up and says, "If there is anyone with a debt belonging to (name of deceased) who refuses to come forward and pay, may God see him."

Claims and debts can be inherited by the heirs if they are not settled in the lifetime of the debtors. The heirs or the guardian are entitled to demand payment from a debtor to the estate or his heirs. Such payments are divided among the

heirs if the estate has already been distributed. Assets in kind or in immovable property may be used to pay debts of the estate. If creditors delay in making their claims after the appropriate time has elapsed, they may still claim from the guardian or the heirs of the estate. The guardian, the heirs, and/or the family collectively are responsible for the payments of the debts of the estate. In the rare instances where there are no obvious heirs, the clan of the deceased will choose a guardian for the estate and he will be responsible for the collection of debts from the clan and the payment of these to the creditors. The clan will also be responsible for the payment of debts of a deceased clan member who did not leave any property. If the claims on the estate are greater than the entire estate, the remainder will be paid from crops yet unharvested, will become a debt of the heirs, or will be the responsibility of the clan.

Last Will:

The institution of making a verbal last will was present in traditional Meru society. A valid last will should be uttered in the presence of witnesses, one of whom should, perhaps, be a non-member of the clan; the individual should be considered to be of sound mind at the time of the utterance and should have made no further statements as to the distribution of his estate before his death. A man can legally appoint a guardian for his children or a levirate husband for his wife by a verbal will. He can appoint an outsider as his

heir if he gives good reason for breaking the rules of customary law and the clan agrees. He can change the sequence of heirs. A man can disinherit an heir by a last will in the presence of witnesses for various reasons, but usually because a son has refused to care for his father or has otherwise shown disrespect for him. All wishes expressed during the utterance of a last will, including instructions regarding the maintenance of female dependents, should be observed by the heirs.

The institution of a written will is acknowledged by the magistrate's court but the practice is rare and very few individuals in Meru follow modern established procedures concerning special forms, medium of writing, or specified number or status of witnesses. The contents of a written will are valid even if they are in contradiction to customary law, but their implementation will depend on the agreement of the clan. Ideally, an heir dissatisfied with the provisions of a written will could file a suit against the testator while he is still alive, but, again the practice is quite rare. More commonly, an heir might claim a share of the estate if he has been omitted in the written will and the elders or the court would be asked to decide on his claim. There are no procedures for the safe deposit or registration of wills, but an individual may give a written will over to the safekeeping of the eventual guardian whom he has chosen.

Blood Payment (Ikari):

A clan must pay a fine if any of its members injure or kill a person of another clan; the payment of this fine is called ikari. The fine increases in amount with the seriousness of the injury, for example, payment for a cut may just be some meat and four debes of beer, for a broken tooth or torn ear-lobe it is a female sheep and three debes of beer, whereas a broken bone or injured eye would require a bull, a male and female sheep and fourteen debes of beer. The vashili (leaders) of the clan of the injurer collect the fine from him and other members of the clan and hand it over to the vashili of the lineage or clan of the injured person and any other members of the clan who want to participate. Part of the fine is consumed by the injured person himself; this is known as ngovito and usually consists of the first sheep which is paid. Ngovito is said to prevent the wound from "growing".

In the past, before the arrival of the Arusha, when a person was murdered, the murderer was supposed to report immediately to an nshili (leader) of his own clan. This nshili would seek out an nshili of the dead person's clan and together they would approach the Mangi. The nshili of the offended clan would seize one of the Mangi's children and place him at the feet of the Mangi and then proceed to explain how one of his clansmen had been murdered. The Mangi then sent one of his nshili to the family of the person killed to

prevent them from taking revenge into their own hands by killing a member of the murderer's clan. The Mangi and the vashili concerned demand payment, of a bull, a female and a male sheep and a girl, from the murderer, his family and any other members of his lineage who would contribute. The female sheep was eaten by the mother of the deceased, the male sheep by his family, and the bull by the vashili and other members of his clan. The girl was married to a member of the deceased's family so that she might bear a child who would replace him.

After the arrival of the Arusha the custom of paying ikari in the case of murder was introduced to Meru society. Ikari for murder requires the payment of forty-nine cows to the clan of the deceased, the same amount as in Maasai society (See Jacobs, A.H., 1965, op.cit.). The cattle must be of good quality; a cow with a white head, white tail, twisted hooves, or a bad eye is not accepted. If the murderer and his clan cannot pay the forty-nine cows, a girl will have to be given to be married and bear children for the clan of the deceased. Nowadays when a killing is reported to the police, the courts, or the Government, ikari is still paid if the murderer is given only a jail sentence, but if he is hanged, ikari is not payable. When no payment and no girl are forthcoming, the injured clan may seek revenge by killing a member of the murderer's clan, usually someone of equal status to the deceased, but any individual adult or child would be sufficient.

Abuse:

Any verbal or behavioural insult or disrespect is termed abuse and is a serious offense among the Meru. A young person who abuses an elder is considered to have shown gross disrespect for the entire age-set of that elder. The elder will report to the vashili of his age-set and the young person will be fined or punished in some other way. Abuse may also be non-verbal. Showing disrespect by eating prohibited food, for example, green vegetables in the case of young men or certain parts of a cow by women, is also abuse of the age-set. Marrying within one's lineage or clan is considered abuse of the clan and payment of one sheep is demanded by the clan elders. Refusal to pay a fine or accept punishment for abuse can result in a curse upon the individual by the elders of the clan or the age-set. One can be excused for having abused someone if he takes a child and places him at the feet of the insulted party, or simply kneels himself before the abused person and apologizes for the insult.

Theft:

The Meru say that before the days of European contact theft was a relatively rare occurrence within the tribe, compared to its greater prevalence nowadays. The belief in a particular ritual known as ibara nungu (to break a pot) which is also a common practice among the Arusha (see Gulliver, P., 1963, op.cit.) was said to prevent most Meru from becoming involved in theft or the destruction of property.

Upon discovering that his property has been stolen or destroyed any person could approach an old man who was expert at this ritual, which included most vaanga (doctors), and other men, with knowledge in this field, and invite him home. Word would spread that such a ceremony was to be performed and several days might elapse while the expert gathers the necessary paraphernalia including a small clay pot. Many of these pots are kept in safe-keeping by various individuals who may be called upon to perform the ceremony themselves or who may simply lend the pot to some expert. The pots are said to contain considerable ritual power and they must be kept covered at all times. If one is inadvertently uncovered and it happens to point at someone, that person could suffer serious injury. On the announced day the expert would recite several incantations and then condemn the thief or the property destroyer, whoever he might be, while exposing the pot. The curse of the expert through the power of the pot causes the culprit or some member(s) of his family to fall ill or even die or at least suffer some loss of property himself.

The belief of the efficacy of this ritual is still strong in Meru. Most Meru Christians who may have given up any belief in other forms of witchcraft will usually vouch for the effectiveness of "the breaking of the pot". Some rationalize the situation by saying that it is the belief in the power of the curse on the part of the thief which causes him to return the stolen property before the ritual

actually occurs. Many of my informants could recount instances of this kind. I believe it is safe to say that the vast majority of Meru would agree that if the property was not returned and the ceremony was performed, the culprit or his family would suffer in some way.

In spite of this, theft has become quite common in the Meru area and the fear of theft is very widespread; perhaps, because of the wide differentials in wealth which now exist and because Ibara nungu is actively discouraged by the Christian church and Government officials. Precautions are taken from the locking of one's house to the organization of groups by the Divisional Executive Officers who walk around at night with clubs and torches in search of thieves. Cases of theft are constantly brought before the magistrate's courts. In a survey of cases heard in the central primary court at Nkoaranga between July 1964 and September 1965, the total of 319 cases included one-third (95) listed as theft, 5 house-breaking, and 3 destruction of property. Of the remainder, other offences in significant numbers put before the same court during that period were 60 cases of abuse, 57 fighting and 45 non-payment of taxes.

Witchcraft:

A final topic which must be discussed before concluding this chapter on social control in Meru country is the practice and prevention of witchcraft. Vaanga (sing. mwaanga) are doctors who have special knowledge of particular medicines and

magical practices which can be used to cure many diseases. Vaanga are usually men who use their skills upon request and receive some small payment in return for their services; they are also farmers, that is, they cannot subsist on their medical practice alone. Vasawi (sing. nsavi) are sorcerers and/or witches who consciously use magical techniques to harm other people. Vasawi can be men or women; they must practice their craft secretly for if they are discovered they can be beaten, ostracised, or even killed.

A mwaanga does not inherit his position. Any person with the inclination and the capacity to master the techniques can become a doctor. A male nsavi also acquires his ability and reputation through conscious effort on his part, but a female nsavi can be said to "inherit" her witchcraft. A woman who possesses usavi (witchcraft) must pass her knowledge on to her daughters. This usually takes place just before circumcision or marriage when a mother is supposed to stay indoors with her daughter for several days. The daughter cannot refuse to accept the knowledge or she will be unable to bear children. She demonstrates her acceptance of usavi by secretly killing some living creature such as a dog or a cat or perhaps a human being. It is therefore often possible to know which women to suspect of being vasavi in Meru, because if a woman in the past was discovered, one can assume that her daughters, granddaughters, etc. have been taught usavi.

Most vasavi in Meru country are women. When a male nsavi is caught he is usually found to be a member of some other tribe, often a Sambaa, who has been hired by a Meru to kill another person. The most common activity of vasavi is poisoning. Their poison is usually obtained at night when they will prowl the bush naked in search of small rodents, lizards, herbs, and other special objects to mix into a poison. Crocodile poison is said to be the most powerful and in recent years, ground glass is often used. It is widely believed that often vasavi women of a polygynous household will poison the sons of the other wives so that her own sons will stand to inherit more of the husband's property.

Usavi is a popular topic of discussion in Meru country. The number of vasavi is said to have declined considerably after the German administration's ruthless handling of suspected vasavi, but there are still enough around to make rich men especially quake with fright. Vasavi can be women or men from any clan or village.

Vasavi are usually caught at night in the act of mixing poison or attempting to place poison or other objects in the food or belongings of the intended victim. After being caught he or she will be beaten and a great clamour will be raised to waken others and announce that an nsavi has been captured. The nsavi, and the person who hired him, if he is also caught, will be dressed in dried banana leaves to attract attention and humiliate him and he is then paraded throughout the remainder of the night and into the morning

from village to village. Large crowds follow along shouting and singing with individuals occasionally moving to the front of the parade in order to hit the nsavi. In this way, in the past, an nsavi was often killed. Nowadays he is protected to some extent from severe injury so that he can be locked up until such time as he might appear in court.

On two occasions I witnessed the parade and was able to interview vasavi who had been caught, paraded, and locked up in this way; both professed their innocence to me and claimed that there had been a terrible mistake. They said that when they were caught they were not practicing usavi but rather beneficial uganga (medicine).

A captured nsavi who is not a Meru will usually be told to leave Meru country and warned never to return. A Meru nsavi will be forced to swear an oath either to the effect that he is not an nsavi or that he will never again use usavi to harm someone. To swear an oath (ila mma or ila ikite - literally to eat a dog, but also the most common expression for oath-taking) may take many forms. In the past it is said that an accused nsavi might be placed in a hut which was filled with thick smoke and he would be asked to answer questions and admit whom he had killed.

Special oath swearing places exist, usually beside a large tree in an open grove. Market places are also used because here too a wide open space is available for enough people to witness the oath-taking. In general the oath

consists of something the suspect must eat, then he swears that he has not done what he is accused of, or that he will not do it in the future; if he is lying or if he commits the offence again, the oath will kill him. The oath may be a mixture of chicken blood and dirt on the end of a stick or it may be seven small pieces of meat of a sheep or a cow placed on the end of seven sharp sticks and administered by seven elders. The number seven has magical significance.⁴⁰ The old men say to the accused, "Those above (God) and below (spirits of the dead) can see you and we seven give you the seven sticks with seven pieces of meat; let them kill you if you are cheating". If an oath is being sworn by two men who are quarrelling over something which cannot be proved, one is made to drink some blood drawn from a cut made in the other's arm and then both swear their respective testimony. The blood is supposed to kill whichever is lying.

A period of time usually of one year, is waited for an oath to be effective. At the end of that time the person who took the oath is given something to make him vomit the oath and he is then considered innocent of the charge against him. When a person who is guilty takes an oath and then begins to fall sick, he may admit his guilt and ask to be made to vomit. His request will be granted and he will have to pay all the expenses involved in the oath-taking, the

⁴⁰ I collected several examples of the use of the number seven in ritual activities, but I was unable to obtain any coherent explanation for its use.

original offence, and appropriate fines decided upon by the elders concerned.

Witchcraft accusations are not made lightly. One must have proof that someone is an nsavi before any action can be taken; which usually means catching the nsavi in the act of poisoning or intending to poison or otherwise do harm. Some waanga were capable (very few today) of discovering who was practicing indirect witchcraft on a particular individual. The mwaanga's evidence was sufficient for some action to be taken, but a confession or the administration of an oath was still required. An accusation of witchcraft without sufficient proof often results in a fine of Sh. 50/- to Sh. 500/- which the accuser pays to the accused.

The distinction which is made by some social anthropologists (Evans-Pritchard, E.E., 1937; Middleton, J. and Winter, E.H., 1963) between unconscious witchcraft on the part of witches and conscious witchcraft practiced by sorcerers is not clearly made by the Meru. In the Meru system, while a mwaanga may be a gifted person who acquired his capability of manipulating magical paraphernalia and invoking the supernatural, he must learn his craft and consciously work at perfecting and improving his techniques. Vasavi intend to harm the victims they have chosen. Only the motivation for the intention may be unconscious. Female vasavi who "inherit" witchcraft from their mothers can be said to be co-opted unwillingly. Other women who are unable to bear children or who have only daughters may become vasavi unintentionally,

but they will not be accused of practising witchcraft until such time as proof is available that they have succeeded or attempted to use usavi to harm someone.

Social Control - a Typical Case:

A simple description of rules or norms is not sufficient to understand the processes of social control among the Meru. Customary rules are applied by the elders and society at large to specific instances of behavioural disputes. The flexibility of Meru rules of customary law has allowed for the incorporation of significant changes in Meru society - the Arusha influence, European overrule, Christianity, the introduction of a cash economy - with a remarkable persistence of legitimacy attached to the traditional legal institutions.⁴¹ The best way to study social control in action is to look at several examples of the application of customary law to specific cases. During my stay in Meru country there were a few cases heard of disputes which involved my close friends and neighbours in which I was invited to participate as an elder. This is not unusual as the vashili are often assisted in arbitrating disputes by ordinary citizens who are called vandu va nrwe (literally, people with heads, or intelligent people).

Two married sisters whom I knew quite well quarrelled one night while drinking beer with their husbands and friends.

⁴¹Cf. the flexibility of Lozi judges in M. Gluckman, The Judicial Process among the Barotse, 1955.

The next day I learned that the younger sister was accusing the older sister of having stabbed her with a knife during an argument. For the next few days the younger sister exhibited the knife to some elders in the vicinity and asked them to convene a moot to hear her accusation. The elder sister agreed to have the case heard because she said that she did not really try to stab her sister and besides, she wanted to tell the elders that her younger sister's husband had accused her that same night of being an nsavi. She wanted it agreed, though, that there would be no mention of the fight earlier in the evening between her husband and herself when she was seen to beat her husband. The younger sister would not agree to hiding any of the facts which might be relevant.

The sisters and their husbands finally agreed to have the case heard by a local nshili, a friend who was a member of the Meru District Council, and myself, but they understood that if the dispute could not be settled in this way, it would have to be taken to some other elders who, they realized, would levy a heavier fine. We met on a Sunday morning, one week after the quarrel, at the home of the older sister. The friend of the older sister and her husband, who was also the godfather of one of their children, announced that he was "taking off his friend's hat" and that he would listen and decide impartially. After agreement was reached, he said, he would "pick up his hat" and be a friend again. It was better, he observed, for this case to be aired among our small group

rather than approach other more disinterested elders who would certainly impose large fines for such serious accusations. We, on the other hand, could accomplish what we all wanted, namely, the resumption of friendly relations, after a thorough discussion of the problems and with a minimum of fines.

In the beginning the younger sister kept frowning and shaking her head during the discussion. She seemed to feel that she was being robbed of public satisfaction by having the matter settled at this small meeting. The husband of the elder sister did not join in the discussion except to answer questions which were put to him, but his wife and the husband of the younger sister both professed their innocence in the dispute at great length. Throughout I was encouraged to make pronouncements on the truth or fairness of the statements being made and to give my decisions in spite of the fact that I claimed to be ignorant of the customary procedures which must be followed.

After two hours of discussion the quarrel was divided into four separate disputes: (1) The older sister's attempt to stab her younger sister, (2) The older sister insulting her brother-in-law (the younger sister's husband), (3) The older sister and her husband fighting to the extent of hitting each other, and (4) The friend of the family who was hearing the case not helping the older sister upon learning that she had been beaten by her husband to whom the friend stood in a father relationship as the godfather of his son.

The decision was taken to make this division in order to deal with the case properly. It is interesting to note that the division follows the various kinship relationships that were involved.

In the first dispute, it was decided that the older sister having a knife in her hand implied that she wanted to stab her younger sister who, in fact, did receive a small cut in her hand. A fine of two debes of beer was suggested. Since no one objected to the amount, the husband of the older sister was asked to produce the money for the fine immediately. He protested that he did not have any cash with him, but after a few moments he found the fourteen shillings required and it was handed to the younger sister. She announced that she did not want the money from her sister and brother-in-law and if forced to keep it she would rather give it to her nephew. The arbitrators pointed out that the money was to buy two debes of beer which we would drink, so that there was no question of the younger sister keeping the money. At this point the two sisters were asked to shake hands to show that their dispute was settled; slowly with some embarrassment, they did.

Then we went on to the case of the exchange of insults between the older sister and her brother-in-law. He had called her names, perhaps including "nsavi", after the attempted stabbing and she had replied with insults to him. It was decided that the brother-in-law could not insult the older sister as she is like a mother to him, being his wife's older sister. He was fined one debe of beer and again after

protests that he did not have the money, he produced the seven shillings which was added to the other money. I was asked to hold this along with the other cash which at this point was in my keeping.

After some discussion it was decided to postpone the hearing of the case of the fighting between the older sister and her husband. Then the older sister reminded us that the friend should be fined because being like a father to her husband he should have come by the day after the fight to inquire about her health or her needs. The friend protested that he had indeed asked the husband how she was feeling and when told she was fine he felt he had fulfilled his social obligations. The others said that this was not sufficient, but the friend ruled that as an arbitrator he could not now be brought into the case as a defendant. A very brief attempt was made to locate another elder in the neighbourhood who might listen to this complaint, but as none could be found, the case was put off to some unspecified future date. (It never did come up again to my knowledge; nor did the case of fighting between the husband and wife).

The following day we all met at the same place. The beer was brought, along with some meat which was bought by the husband of the older sister and roasted by her. Several neighbours were invited in as well. The three arbitrators began to drink the beer and eat the meat and then invited all the others to join. We thanked the disputants for supplying

the fines and declared the case to be closed.

I would venture to say that my presence did not seriously affect the procedures followed in the hearing of this case. Other such cases I have observed were conducted in a similar manner but with less informality due to the fact that in the above case we were all friends and we often paused for things to be explained to me.

Procedure at a Typical Baraza:

Baraza is the widely used Swahili word for court, moot, or simply, meeting. In Meru country baraza are held in clearings, under a large tree, or in one of the buildings built for this purpose in each village and called a baraza.

When the date for a case to be heard is announced, anyone having an interest in the case, especially any witnesses, should attend. Casual observers are also permitted to attend. People gather around in a circle and the nshili who is presiding over the case occupies a central position. He explains the reason for the gathering and sets forth the details of the case. The protagonists are asked to speak for themselves, first the accuser and then the accused. Anyone else with an interest in the case, or the witnesses if they are present, are then given an opportunity to speak. Only one person should speak at a time occupying the central position of the gathering; it is the duty of the nshili in charge to maintain order.

Depending upon the complexity of the issues involved, discussion may continue for various periods of time. Discussion must continue until agreement is reached which is satisfactory to all those concerned. If no such agreement is forthcoming, or if the judgement is deemed unacceptable by any of the parties concerned, the case will be taken for judgement to a higher court.

The primary function of Meru traditional "courts" is to restore social order by reconciling the disputants and not simply by punishing individuals. There seems to be implicit recognition of the inevitability of conflict in society. Little attempt is made to maintain social order, or even to contain conflict, but rather cases of conflict are constantly being aired throughout Meru country almost every day of the week and leaders and participants throw themselves wholeheartedly into the effort of restoring the order which has been destroyed through the conflict.

SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE

As an introduction to this chapter I would like to present an essay which was written for me by a Meru secondary school student, Godwin P. Kaaya, who worked as one of my research assistants during his holidays. The views of this student on the subject of social change in Meru and in Tanzania are representative of the majority of educated, Christian Meru today.

The Wameru are among the backward people of modern Tanzania. The main reason is probably because the Europeans have come to Meru very recently, mainly because they were encircled by the fierce Wamasai who kept away all the foreign tribes such as the Arabs; Europeans and other African tribes. Surely the Wameru themselves have not been very fierce because although they attacked the first Europeans who arrived, it is just because they appeared too strange to their eyes, and it didn't even take too long before they accepted to live peacefully with them and started to adopt their culture.

Economy:

The land of Wameru is one of the most productive in Tanzania, but their greatest obstacles to progress are ignorance, laziness and extravagance. There is a great need for agricultural officers and veterinary officers to advise the farmers, (all the Wameru are farmers), how to do their farming properly.

The Wameru produce only what is enough for them although they can produce much more. This is partly because they are lazy, but mostly because they are ignorant. There are many uncultivated areas at Karangai, Kingori, and some shambas on the foot of the mountain are left uncultivated for years, simply because the people think that by digging only one of their shambas, they can produce enough to feed them for the whole year.

Some other places like Nturu don't produce coffee, but people could produce more maize and some cash crops to sell, but they don't bother to do that.

Coffee is one of the easiest crops to care for, and it is the crop which the Wameru cultivate. They get plenty of money yearly, but again, they don't know how to spend their money. They spend about 95% of the money in pombe, which doesn't only finish up their money, but makes them lazy and unhealthy. You will find a person in a pombe shop for all day long, every day of the week.

To treat this disease, the government has forbidden the selling of pombe in the mornings, but this doesn't seem to help much especially because it has also increased the pombe bars. This is a pity, because I have noticed serious changes for the last two years. Almost everybody is now engaged in drinking pombe in these bars, i.e. men, women, children and girls. This is becoming serious because although there was pombe in the past years; the amount of pombe was little and women, young men and girls were never allowed to go to pombe shops, while the bars give equal rights to everyone, women, girls, men are becoming drunkards.

Some of the richest people in Meru don't keep their money in banks, but in pots and in holes. Once they get clothes to wear and food, they don't think of anything else. Introduction of different cash crops in Meru will help to facilitate the progress because in certain years, the price of coffee drops and people start to suffer since they depend on only one cash crop. Also in places like Kingori, there is a great shortage of water and if the government could solve this problem, it would be a great help to the Wameru.

Those few people who have established their small estates on these areas are among the richest people in Meru. This shows how everyone will be if they just work harder.

Education:

Education in Meru is still very poor. There are few primary schools and no secondary schools at all. The main problem is that the natives themselves don't understand the value of education. Since they know nothing of the outside world, they never have the reflection of the future. They are too conservative to accept education. An old man at Nturu would never allow his son to drop his traditional work of looking

after cattle and go to school. They see no advantages of going to school whatsoever.

This is because they have not seen an example of a Mmeru who has gone to school, living in Meru with a higher standard of living. It is a pity that those few Wameru who get educated try to run away from Meru like people running out of prison, instead of returning to help their fellow Wameru.

I know there are many problems an educated Mmeru will face if he lives in a society of uneducated Wameru, but even so, people should realize that they owe something to their societies, and it is not the societies which owe them as most people used to think. Those Wameru who are marooned are helpless because they have nobody to advise and help them.

Most of what I have written down is pure tribalism, but this is not bad because the government itself doesn't take much trouble to develop the Wameru. The government has built hundreds of schools for the Wachagga, but very few for Wameru. The Wameru students have to struggle for narrow and few changes offered to them, for secondary schools, and only about 20 go to secondary schools.

If this will be the case, the country will remain in its backward state for the next 10 centuries. If the country could afford its own schools, it would be a great advantage, because hundreds and hundreds of students would be educated per year, and it might be these educated students would help to develop Meru.

Social:

Most of the Meru tradition has been destroyed by the Europeans. Before the arrival of the Europeans, the Wameru had very interesting traditional systems.

Our native dances were regarded as barbaric by the Europeans and they tried to stop them and establish their own. Very few people have adopted these European dances and songs and very few still practice the native ones, and most of the Wameru are confused, i.e. they are neutral, because they think that if they attend the native dances, people will laugh at them saying that they are uncivilized, and these people are unable to practice the European dances mainly because they are too different from our traditional ones.

The same case has happened in our religion. Most people used to practice native religions which involved offering of sacrifices at kifus, and ibara nungu, which prevented people from doing evil things since they strongly believed in nungo.

The Europeans have forbidden all of these traditions and a few people have attempted to adopt the European system, and very few are still attached to the traditional ones, especially those living at Nturu where Europeans haven't gone. However, most of the Wameru are confused. They neither follow the European system nor the traditional system and they are those who mostly compose the group called pagans. Therefore most of the Wameru pagans are not true pagans but are a confused group of people.

In Meru, there are very few churches compared to the Meru population. Most people especially those living at Nturu are so far from churches that they don't get much idea of what churches and their advantages are, so that almost all of them are pagans.

Moreover, the pastors in the churches are so illiterate that they are just in the same class as those pagans; as a result, those pagans are not too much interested in people of their own class.

I believe if the pastors were well educated people, or Wazungu, most people would find it interesting to go to church.

Myself, I don't enjoy going to churches where the illiterate pastors preach, because they don't preach very well, they are irrelevant and sometimes instead of preaching according to the Bible, they give their own ideas.

I can't predict what directions will the future changes take, because if education was progressing well, it may be I could predict. If the economy of the country was progressing well, I might also be able to predict.

It seems likely that economic progress is the first step to be taken, because as I said, unless we are able to build our own lower, primary, upper primary and secondary schools, as the Wachagga, there will be no good educational progress.

It is also necessary that we should have our own hospitals and increase the number of churches.

Tanzania is also one of the backward countries of the world. However, it seems as if there is a tremendous effort which is applied to facilitate the progress of the country.

A large number of children are being educated although not very highly, but these will return to their fellow uneducated natives and help them. This is an excellent way of raising the educational standard of a country. The government has abolished school fees for all classes above class 7 so as to enable a larger wave of students to reach degree level if possible, and they will in return help the others. After a few years, the educational standard of Tanzania will rise very rapidly.

The national building schemes and the TANU Youth League are progressing the economy of the country tremendously. Most people are getting hypnotized that they are living to serve the state, and they have indeed developed the spirit of working for the government without expecting much in return. Once people get such a spirit it will take very few years for the country to get a very good economic progress.

Many changes which have taken place in the economy of the country for the last few years, because of this spirit can be clearly seen.

Many schools, hospitals, roads, bridges and other government houses have been built under this basis.

The country is also progressing very well politically. The TANU Youth League is hypnotizing the illiterate people in the towns and country that TANU is the only good party, and that President Nyerere is the only ruler who can really rule the country well. Myself I know that President Nyerere is one of the most able rulers.

This difficult work of TANU has succeeded very much, because whenever you ask an old man to tell you the best ruler, he says it is President Nyerere, and therefore the position of the government is very strong.

There is a very efficient system of secret police in the country to find out people who are likely to destroy the government, and once they are caught, they are imprisoned without trial. It is therefore almost impossible for a person to form a reform party.

People have been in constant fear of these secret police and TANU Youth League and as a result, most of

the people have entered TANU Youth League to protect themselves.

Most people in Tanzania became Muslims almost for a reason similar to this. It was a law of Muslims that they were not allowed to enslave other Muslims, so most of the Tanzanians on the coast and in central Tanzania became Muslims to protect themselves from enslavement.

This plan of TANU is therefore strengthening the government very much by making the people enter only TANU to form one political party free from dangers.

The chance of Tanzania of becoming a very advanced country in the world is very big, but if only these people who are being educated will be honest, and bear in mind that they owe something very important to Tanzania. They should realize that the government has loaned them education so that they may use it to develop the country and not to use it only for their own benefit.

They are like few people among a starving group, who have been given the little food left, so that they may be able to run for 10 miles to the nearest town to buy some food for the group. If these people don't take the food to their friends, they will have stolen the little food which they were given.

Only a few explanatory comments are necessary. The stress on education and the view that it is some kind of panacea is the opinion of the majority of Meru people today. The area which he says is an exception to this called Nturu is in the higher altitudes on Mount Meru just below the forest reserve where there has been very little external contact and where cash crops such as coffee do not grow well. The ambivalence which is implied in the essay towards the efficacy of a one party state is also a common attitude among many Christian Meru and is a product of missionary education which has for many years preached the evils of communism and socialism.

From the turn of the century until just after the second World War, several factors combined to give the Meru new aspirations, allowed them to reevaluate the type of leadership they desired, and make them reluctant to passively accept colonial rule. Cash crops enabled them to satisfy novel needs, but more important, freed them from the tedium of subsistence agriculture and gave them the confidence that accompanies a robust economy. The persistence of their political system provided the ability for concerted action, while the erosion of their confidence in the Mangi due to colonial overrule gave them the incentive to question any form of authority imposed from above. On numerous occasions the Meru clashed with the colonial regime giving them the reputation, as compared with the Arusha, of being a difficult tribe to rule. One District Commissioner commenting on the Meru rejection of the proposed 1948 constitution said, "The Wameru are afflicted by every disease of the mind and spirit that follows a semi-absorption of western ideas and I expect no such quick and excellent results as the new constitution has achieved among the Waarusha - a truculent, stiff-necked but far healthier tribe."⁴²

The remainder of this chapter will look briefly at the new constitution which was accepted in 1953, the modern development institutions which have been introduced since

⁴²Arusha District Book, Vol. I, 1948 (Microfilm copy in the Library of the University College, Dar es Salaam).

independence, and the changes which have occurred in Meru leadership.

The 1953 Constitution:

We are fortunate that during this significant period of Meru political development an observer was present who has written a detailed article on the construction of the 1953 constitution and the elections which followed it. I will now quote at some length from this little-known, but excellent "on the spot" report written by Mrs. Betty George.⁴³

The drawing up of the new Meru constitution was quite obviously intended as an antidote to the widespread bitterness among the Meru engendered by the lands eviction....Representatives of the political organization which spearheaded the land agitation, the Meru Citizens' Union, have for several months turned their attention to the task of drawing up the new constitution, with the help of government officers, and on July 25th the Meru people for the first time elected a new chief by secret ballot.

The forcible land transfer had engendered tribal-wide bitterness not only toward the Tanganyika Government but also toward the recognized Native Authority of the tribe, Mangi (Chief) Sante. Sante, disregarding the overwhelming opposition of his people, had reluctantly approved the Wilson Report and had not changed his position when his advisory council - appointed in 1949 but largely inactive since then - opposed it....The Meru Citizens' Union, proclaiming the land rights of the common people, whose legal and traditional leaders had failed them, soon became the strongest force in the Meru country.

A committee was formed late in 1952 to draw up a new constitution for the Meru tribe - formally entitled the Committee to Examine the Administration of Local Government and Local Courts Amongst Wameru. Of its

⁴³ Mrs. John B. George, "Meru Land and Politics," Institute of Current World Affairs, Newsletter, 15 August 1953.

eighteen members only two were British Government officials, the District Commissioner of Arusha District, Mr. Michael Davies, and the Senior Government Sociologist of Tanganyika, Mr. Henry Fosbrooke, whose office is here in Arusha. The other sixteen members were all nominated by the Meru Citizens' Union. The District Commissioner acted as Chairman and two Meru, Raphael Mbise and Gamalieli Sabulaki, served as Vice Chairman and Secretary respectively.

The Committee held sixteen meetings between February 6 and May 18, 1953. At the end of the eleventh meeting, a subcommittee, including the two European advisers and four Meru members, was appointed to draft the new constitution incorporating the provisions which had been agreed upon. This subcommittee met on March 20 to discuss the form of the document; Mr. Fosbrooke and the Secretary drafted the document; the subcommittee agreed to it on March 24; and the full Committee accepted it at its twelfth meeting on March 26. The draft was then presented to the Committee of the Meru Citizens' Union whose representatives were permitted to attend several of the constitutional committee's meetings (12th, 14th and 15th) to express their views on the document. Later the report was published and circulated among the Meru, and after a period for consideration it was discussed with the people at meetings held in mid-May at three centers in the Meru country. After a few modifications, agreed to at these meetings, had been incorporated in the report, it was finally accepted at a tribal-wide baraza on May 27th.

A notable feature of the new constitution was the removal of judicial functions from the Mangi and the Headmen, and the setting up of a new, purely judicial, wing of the Native Authority.... Thus, the dual executive-judicial authority formerly exercised by the Mangi and the headmen was abandoned, and only the members of the Judicial Sub-Committee drawn from the Meru Council would exercise both judicial functions (as members of the appeal court) and legislative functions.

The most controversial question throughout the meetings was the way in which the Mangi should be selected. The advisers wanted the Mangi elected by all the people (male taxpayers) from any clan rather than selected from the traditional chiefly clan (Kaaya)... The Committee members immediately divided on this issue. One group insisted that the Mangi simply be chosen by the Leaders and their Assistants, stating that "Leaders and Important People" were sufficient for the common people, and that,

if an election were held, the unsuccessful candidate would plot against the one who was elected....Another group, including the President of the Citizens' Union, Gamalieli Sabulaki, and Raphael Mbise, wanted to consider means of allowing the people to express their views and urged that the Mangi be elected by the people from two candidates. Some, taking a middle course, opposed the nomination in each village, suggesting that the people simply vote on two candidates nominated by the Leaders.

The draft report provided for the system which the advisers had suggested - the nomination of one candidate by each village; the selection from these nominees of two candidates by a joint meeting of all Leaders and Assistants; and finally the secret balloting by all registered taxpayers.

There is one most striking feature of these discussions. There was not - as an outside observer might have expected from the all-Citizens' Union constitutional Committee - a united reaction against the Mangi, the Washili and traditional processes. During the Committee meetings the members were clearly split into two camps - the progressives, who wanted to give the people more power in their government through popular elections, and the reversionists, who seemed determined that the Leaders should retain dominant authority. When the conservatives on the Committee had been outvoted and the Committee itself had reached agreement on a draft report providing for election of the Chief by all taxpayers, other members of the Citizens' Union resumed the fight against the popular vote. At both stages, the reversionist group tried to prevent the question from being presented fairly to the people, and even attempted to seize the power of decision from the Committee. This group, it should be noted, seemed to be working very closely with the Leaders, whom the Citizens' Union had earlier criticized; they had drawn up proposals for the new constitution in consultation with the Leaders, and, during the Committee meetings, had insisted on referring the matter of the vote back to them. The Citizens' Union, united on the land issue, had split wide open on the question of the tribe's political future - its Secretary in the reversionist camp and its President in the progressive camp.

The Meru have moved a long way up the scale by which native authorities are judged. A Council, rather than a Chief alone, has become the Native Authority. The Chief has been relegated to the role of Chairman of the Council, and he must be elected by all male taxpayers and

confirmed every two years by the Council, rather than being installed in perpetuity from the traditional chiefly clan. A committee system has been adopted and separation of the judicial and executive branches has been achieved.

But greater power still rests in the Leaders than in the people - despite the Government advisers' efforts. The Leaders nominate headmen. They, rather than the people, elect the counsellors and decide which ones will step down after two years. They, rather than the people, nominate candidates for the election of the Chief. Since the Council has the power to confirm the Chief after two years or force his resignation, the Leaders, through the Counsellors - who depend on the Leaders for reelection - might also control the succession to the chieftainship. One wonders if the Leaders will not continue to control the entire political setup.

When the constitution had been accepted finally and put into effect, the Leaders chose the members of the new Council and then nominated the two candidates for Chief - Sylvanus Kaaya, a member of the traditional chiefly clan and an employee in the Lutheran Mission hospital at Nkoaranga, and Raphael Mbise, the progressive, outspoken Vice-Chairman of the Constitutional Committee. Raphael was formerly in charge of the Mission churches and dispensary in the area from which the Meru were evicted and is now choir leader and Swahili teacher at the Nkoaranga Lutheran Mission.

There at Nkoaranga it was a landslide for Raphael Mbise, who is now living only a few hundred yards away on the Mission grounds. At West Meru, the "cradle" of the Meru and center of the traditional chiefly clan, almost all the votes had been for Sylvanus. The third area, we were told, was splitting its votes between the two candidates. When all the votes had been tallied it was found that some 2,000 of the total of 5,000 taxpayers had turned out to cast their ballots, and that Sylvanus had been elected the new Mangi by a vote of 1,007 to 1,164. This was a victory of the conservative western area, from which the reversionists members of the Committee had come, over the more progressive eastern area. The election, like the discussions in the Committee, had clearly revealed the rift between the two areas, of which the administrative officers had long been aware.

Changes Since Independence:

On April 1, 1962 a Local Government Ordinance established the Meru District Council which comprised the area in Arusha District of the former Meru Chiefdom. The Ordinance was amended in 1964 providing minor changes in the Meru Council and then on January 1, 1965 another Ordinance established the Arusha-Meru District Council which amalgamated the former Arusha District Council with the Meru District Council.

The period of my field research from 1964 to 1966 was one of rapid changes in the political superstructure of Meru society. Not only was the nature and composition of the Council changed several times, but also the office of Chief (Mangi) was abolished, Village Development Committees and leaders of every ten houses (cells) were introduced, and an election was held for a representative of the Meru-Arusha rural district to the national parliament. These activities and an analysis of their affects on Meru society are not treated in this thesis, but are discussed in two articles I have written with Lionel Cliffe, the Director of Development Studies at the University College, Dar es Salaam.⁴⁴

Independence is a process of becoming. It is only since 1961 that independence has been a political reality in Tanzania and as such it has been celebrated and affected

⁴⁴P. Puritt and L. Cliffe, "Responses to Penetration of the Arusha and Meru of Arusha District, Tanzania," forthcoming and "The Arusha District Development Plan," forthcoming.

the everyday lives of the leadership - those who were primarily involved in the changeover of personnel. But the real task, the task of becoming independent economically, of freeing peoples' minds from the years of colonial oppression, of developing a Tanzanian national ethic, is still only beginning.

Since 1961 the national leadership has been trying to implement new ideas and forms of political and economic organization which were nurtured during the years of the nationalist struggle and are now being tried and altered in the realities of political independence. To the majority of Meru people many of the new changes seem confusing. To them the independent government is still "the government", centered in the capital, Dar es Salaam, somewhat less remote than before, but still making demands from above. The recent move towards changing Tanzania into a democratic one-party state is poorly understood and, for Christian Meru, runs counter to the "anti-communist" teachings of the church. This misunderstanding which makes the tasks of explanation so difficult for visiting government spokesmen is less obvious when one is speaking of local level reorganization. It is thus in the Village Development Committees, the cells, the Cooperative Union, and other local institutions where it is hoped the Meru people will continue to assert the spirit of 1953 in their concern for socio-political reorganization and reform.

Leadership:

In questioning informants about who they consider to be a leader among the Meru today, a large majority named individuals or offices which are part of the modern authority structure and not traditional political leaders; the Mangi, however, the focal position in the traditional structure, still ranked quite high. The order in which the leadership positions were listed is as follows: the Executive Officer of the District Council, the Mangi, the Divisional Executive Officers, TANU officials, the Regional Secretary of TANU (a Meru), the cell leaders, the former manager of the Co-operative Union, the Meru representative at the United Nations in the Land Case who was defeated in the parliamentary elections of 1965, the Village Development Committee members, and the village jumbe.

The Meru people have very high expectations of people in leadership positions and they (especially the educated, Christian Meru) are quite explicit regarding requirements a leader should fulfill. He should be hard-working and interested in the welfare of the Meru people as a whole. He must be a persuasive speaker at public meetings and successful in presenting the problems of the Meru to the government. He should be constantly working to promote development in terms of more schools, hospitals, roads, etc. He should be a wealthy man in order to have the respect of the people, yet he should be liked by people as well. He must be a reasonable man who will arbitrate cases of dispute

fairly, give advice to the people, and be able to levy fines. He must be honest when dealing with money. He should not be a drunkard. Ideally, he should be a Meru so that he can speak to the people in their language and gain their respect. He should be a literate, educated person who understands modern needs and who has, perhaps, travelled widely and can bring comparative experience to bear on Meru problems. And finally, a leader should be a middle aged person, married and with children, because if he is too young he will not have the respect of the people and if he is too old he will tend to be conservative.

In comparing the traditional leadership of the Mangi and vashili to the modern leaders, most Meru say that the traditional leaders were too autocratic and conservative, while the present leaders, although much more limited in their power, and less respected, are more fair in that they must follow the national laws and they are more progressive. A typical complaint about the modern leaders is that they are too often hidden from the people. The traditional leaders could be seen walking daily through Meru country and could be consulted at any time to listen to the people's problems. But the modern leaders seem to be fixed in their offices, they do not get out among the people, and they often cannot be seen when the people need them.

The Meru thus have extremely strong feelings about the need for leadership to be representative, to reflect the

wishes of the people, and to be replaced easily if they do not do so. Even in the past the Mangi and vashili could be removed if they were not popular. These positions, although hereditary, did not necessarily pass to the eldest son, if he was not deemed fit, but could be given to another relative, or occasionally non-relative, if he was considered to be more capable. The Meru representative to the United Nations during the Land Case gained considerable popularity at that time, but after his return, his inability to account in detail for all the funds raised for his support, caused him a certain amount of loss of popularity and, perhaps, a significant number of votes in the 1965 parliamentary elections.

There is much overlap of traditional and modern leadership roles in Meru society. A clan or age-set nshili can also serve as jumbe, TANU official, divisional executive officer, or cell leader, etc. This constitutes a tremendous asset in mobilizing people for development activities. A leader with legitimacy and prestige gained through his role as arbitrator in dispute settlement can be much more effective than an outsider in transmitting instructions to mobilize the people for development projects.

CONCLUSIONS

Implicit throughout this thesis has been the question of whether or not the Meru of Tanzania can be considered to be a unified social group. In other words, are the Meru in fact a tribe, in the common usage of the word tribe; or, are we justified in making generalizations about the 50,000 people in northern Tanzania who are called Meru? The answer, of course, is both yes and no.

In terms of their internal identification and their view of the world around them, the Meru people see themselves as a single social, political, and cultural entity. They call each other by the same name, Varwa or Meru, they speak the same language, they share many basic values, and they recognize the legitimacy of certain common systems of authority. Inevitably, there are exceptions even to the above statement. All Meru who have thus far received university education - of whom admittedly there are still very few - have left Meru country to live and work elsewhere and apparently have no intention of returning. High school students, both those who have completed and those who are still studying, are demonstrating the same tendency or desire to leave Meru country and not to return. On the border of Meru and Arusha country especially, people speak both the Meru and Arusha languages and their style of life is not

really distinguishable from either. There are historical precedents for abandoning the Meru tribe such as the time during the reign of Mangi Ndemu when the remnants of two clans which were killed at the Mangi's command, left Meru to join the Arusha tribe. In recent years, some Meru coffee farmers unwilling to cooperate with the Meru Cooperative Union have marketed their coffee through one of the Arusha coffee primary societies.

However, even after we agree to consider the vast majority of the Meru people as a unified entity in many respects, differences in social stratification are so obvious that any generalizations appear to be invalid. There are several parameters of social stratification including wealth, education, religion, and locality.

A growing minority of Meru farmers having engaged in the cultivation and sale of coffee for many years are in recent years expanding their land holdings through natural expansion and through purchase to the point where they now receive cash revenue not only from their coffee farms but also from wheat, maize, and bean farms and cattle herds in East and South Meru. The style of life of these people has become markedly different from that of the bulk of the Meru. Many of them own buses or vehicles used as taxis, some own tractors, and some own bars or have engaged in other small businesses. These people constitute a sort of Meru bourgeoisie. Social gatherings among them are characterized

by conspicuous consumption of bottled beer, sherry and whiskey, European-style clothing, manners, and behaviour.

The majority of these people, or their children, are among the most highly educated of the Meru. Education beyond primary school is not, however, restricted to only this group. The educated constitute another stratum in Meru society. Children are encouraged to seek as much education as possible and they are respected by their families if they succeed. But among many Meru, the educated are regarded with suspicion, mainly because they believe that the educated despise them; in which belief they are often justified. Secondary school students have organized themselves into a Meru Students Union which meets more or less regularly largely depending upon the organizational ability of the incumbent executive. They have attempted some community development projects, but their impact and social significance is negligible except as an example of the aloofness of the educated elite and their need for a separate social life.

Religion is one of the most serious divisions in Meru society. Christian missionary activity has been very intense for the last sixty years. After the killing of the first two missionaries, the Lutheran church entered Meru with a zeal which was not often seen elsewhere. As a result, approximately fifty percent of the Meru are Christian, but many of these people court excommunication from the Lutheran church by engaging in such practices as polygyny, traditional-

style dancing, and drinking. A mutual disdain and distrust obtains between Christians and pagans, bolstered by the fact that the Christians are usually more wealthy and educated, while the pagans are for the most part poor and occupy the less fertile areas of Meru country.

The other significant stratum of society, a form of horizontal stratification based on locality, has already been discussed in some detail under Ecological Variation (pp. 30-32). Two areas, the high altitudes just below the forest reserve and the southern plains below the foothills of the mountain, are inhabited primarily by pagans who do not as a rule engage in the cultivation of cash crops. They are often unwilling to allow their children to attend primary school, or perhaps, are simply unable to pay the school fees. The high altitude area is called Nturu which is often used as a derogatory term. Among Christian, educated Meru, if someone is talking foolishly or acting stupidly he will be told he is from Nturu.

Aside from these aspects of social stratification in Meru society, there is disunity and a danger in generalization due to the cultural fragmentation as a result of differential borrowing of externally derived cultural elements. The influence of Arusha values and customs was intense but unevenly distributed in Meru country; West Meru was much more affected than East Meru. European contact was restricted mainly to the central slopes of the mountain. There are parts of

Nturu, for instance, where very few Europeans have even been seen by many of the people living there. The national ethic being promoted by the independent Tanzania government and the values of nation building have penetrated to many parts of Meru society but not all.

To a large extent this fragmentation of culture can be attributed to the effects of differential acculturation. It appears, first of all, that deep fundamental acculturation occurred with Arusha contact. Not only were new cultural elements adopted such as dress styles, food and work taboos, and military organization, but the basic fabric of Meru, social and political organization was changed with the adoption of Arusha style age-sets which resulted in new patterns of behaviour for the majority of the Meru population. Acculturation as a result of contact with western culture was less widespread, but had more far reaching affects for certain segments of Meru society in terms of enriching their cultural inventory, changing their behaviour, and giving them new goals and values. Arusha influence added a new dimension to the social structure but did not destroy what was already in existence, whereas European contact not only changed the political structure by adding the village jumbe and the magistrate courts, but also eroded the power and prestige of the paramount chief, placing their authority above his and delegating power to people below him, causing the people to lose confidence in him.

In addition to differential rates of change of certain aspects of culture among various segments of the Meru population, there are also different rates of change within each specific cultural item. For example, walking through Meru country one can see men, women and children cultivating with digging sticks, men, women and children using iron hoes, men ploughing with oxen, and some men ploughing with tractors.

Many factors combined to force the Meru to adopt more and more changes in spite of their conservative attitudes and the desire of most of the people not to allow European demands and innovations to destroy the integration of their society and culture. The need for cash to pay taxes, the large areas of European alienated land around the mountain together with the natural increase of the Meru population and the necessary expansion of their cultivated land, created such pressure on the land that involvement in cash cropping became inevitable. Throughout Africa, as with the Meru, the acceptance of cash cropping and all that it entails led to further changes in the style and standard of living which accelerated the trend toward disjointed social relationships and fragmentation of culture.

It is not possible or legitimate to concentrate only on external stimuli to explain the changes in Meru society and culture. The simple fact of the continuing expansion of the scale of society is of considerable importance. An expanding population, widening networks of social relationships, new opportunities with different behavioural options, are

equally significant in explaining the fragmentation of Meru culture which is evident today.

One further possibility which I offer only in passing because it was not the subject of sufficient study is the role of the topography in Meru country. The rolling slopes of the mountain-sides abound almost everywhere with banana trees and their high, wide leaves, other trees as well, and coffee bushes which grow to a height of four and five feet. One can walk through most parts of Meru country and not know that a homestead is but a few yards off the path; it simply cannot be seen. Even in the most densely populated areas, almost every homestead has a degree of privacy which is impossible in another society which inhabits the open plains. I can only guess at the effects this would have on the social psychology of a group of people living in such circumstances and the degree of independence it might give people to follow different lines of development.

This combination of external and internal forces illustrates what has been said by many writers on the subject of social and cultural change in recent years about the complexity and difficulty in studying a society undergoing rapid change. As Beattie has said, "It is now a little plainer that modifications in a people's social institutions and values through time are not to be understood in terms of any simple, 'blanket' principle, but rather that a multiplicity

of processes is involved, often contemporaneously."⁴⁵

The trend towards further social change and cultural fragmentation coincides to some extent with the national goal of Tanzania to destroy tribalism and its disruptive effects on the unity of the nation. Two measures to implement this goal were the drawing of the boundary of the Arusha Rural constituency to include both the Meru and Arusha tribal areas for the 1965 parliamentary elections and the posting of Meru divisional executive officers and other officials in the Arusha area and vice versa. In fact, these actions have thus far tended to have the opposite effect. In 1965 two candidates stood for election, one from each tribal group. Voting broke down mainly along tribal lines. While the election situation was more complicated than this simple statement implies, it is safe to say that the majority of the electorate voted for the candidate whom they knew best, which in most cases meant a vote for the respective member of their own tribe.⁴⁶ Swapping of local level officials may do more in the long run to eliminate tribalism, but at this early stage of the experiment villagers are complaining that it is

⁴⁵ J.H.M. Beattie, "Culture Contact and Social Change," The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. XII, No. 2, June, 1961, p. 165.

⁴⁶ For a detailed analysis of the Arusha Rural and Urban 1965 election, see Lionel Cliffe and Paul Puritt, "Arusha: Mixed Rural and Urban Communities," One Party Democracy, edited by Lionel Cliffe, East African Publishing House, 1967, pp. 155-185.

more difficult to work with and accept the leadership of non-members of their tribe.

The biggest single inhibiting factor for the elimination of Meru in-group solidarity and out-group hostility is the strong feeling of tribal identification as a result of the persistent social and political structure with the adherence to common systems of authority. As was pointed out in the chapter on Political Organization, new systems of authority introduced from the Arusha, Europeans, and the independent national government have not radically transformed Meru political organization, but have simply been added on to the traditional system leaving the structure of Meru society relatively intact and well-integrated. This is not to say, however, that tribalism will necessarily continue much longer in Meru country. Subtle changes are indeed taking place. The growing Meru "middle class" are beginning to see their interests and hopes for prosperity as lying outside of mere tribal identification as they increasingly hitch their wagons to the rising star of national values. Another indication, not really in line with national socialist values but away from tribal solidarity, is the expansion of individual land holdings through purchases, ignoring traditional clan ownership and rights to the allocation of land.

A more subtle change, but perhaps of greater significance, is the tendency for leaders in the modern development sphere to slip easily into the traditional leadership role of arbitrators in dispute settlement. On the one hand this

indicates the persistence and integration of the traditional system, on the other hand it also means that modern ideas and national values are filtering through a leadership cadre which has gained legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

In short, I believe the national ethic will prevail as year by year more Meru will be drawn into the attempt to build a new nation for the benefit of all Tanzanians. This people on the slopes of Mount Meru whose political sophistication and economic potential allowed them to challenge the might of British colonialism and bring international recognition to Tanganyika will not be left out of the excitement and challenge of building a new Tanzania.

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Degrees: B.A. University of Toronto, 1959
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Teaching experience:

- 1959-1961: Graduate Assistant, University of Toronto.
Courses in introductory anthropology and physical anthropology.
- 1961-1963: Teaching Assistant, University of Illinois.
Courses in introductory anthropology and archaeology.
- 1966-1967: Teaching Assistant, University of Illinois.
Course in African peoples and cultures, and part-time Swahili language teaching.
- 1967-1970: Visiting Lecturer, University of East Africa, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
Courses in introductory anthropology and sociology, development studies, and rural development.

Research:

- Summer, 1960: Archaeology supervisor, Central and Northern Ontario, with a University of Toronto project.
- Summer, 1961: A study of cultural change in Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories, Canada.
- Summer, 1962: A linguistic study of the verb structure of Nahuatl in Tepoztlan, Mexico.
- 1963-1964: Research Assistant to Professor K. S. Carlston, Faculty of Law, University of Illinois, on legal systems in Africa.

- 1964-1966: Field research on the social and political organization of the Meru of Tanzania.
- 1967-1970: Vacation research on rural development in Arusha, Kilimanjaro and Kigoma regions of Tanzania.

Publications:

"Systems of Authority among the Meru," East African Institute of Social Research, Conference Papers, 1966.

"Arusha: Mixed Urban and Rural Communities," with L. R. Cliffe, in One Party Democracy, edited by L. R. Cliffe, 1967.

"The Arusha District Development Plan: A Progress Report," East African Academy, Conference Papers, 1968.

"The Meru Land Case," Tanzania Notes and Records, 1969.

Sociology: A Reader for African Universities, co-edited with S. Chodak. Forthcoming, to be published by East African Publishing House.

"Responses to Penetration Of the Arusha and Meru of Arusha District, Tanzania," with L. R. Cliffe. Forthcoming, to be published in a symposium on political penetration, edited by J. S. Coleman, M. Doornbos, and L. R. Cliffe.

"Ethnic and Racial Relations in Tanzania," with Y. Ghai, S. Mbilinyi, and G. Grohs. Forthcoming, to be published by Unesco.

"The Meru of Tanzania: A Study of Their Social and Political Organization." Ph.D. dissertation, not yet published.