“A Developmentalist State Frustrates Development: Rural Tanzania in the Time of Ujamaa”

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In the newly-independent Tanzania of the 1960s and 1970s, resettlement of the agrarian population in socialist villages became the primary strategy of rural development. Architects of resettlement believed that concentrating the inhabitants of rural Tanzania’s many hamlets and small villages into new, larger settlements would make feasible the construction of schools, clinics and an improved system of roads. They also believed that once relocated villagers had settled into their new communities and increased their productivity by adopting communal farming, they would market a larger agrarian surplus. A recent book on ujamaa villagization by Leander Schneider argues persuasively that the state bureaucracy drew much of its legitimacy from its reputation for expertise in rural development. He shows that the state claimed authoritative knowledge of development, jealously guarded its authority, and used it to justify unprecedented and pervasive intervention in rural life.

My own perspective on this period is shaped by my experience as a historian. In my view, the aspect of this period which appears most prominent is not the state’s claims to expertise, but rather its amnesia. If the state possessed expertise, it was grounded in willful forgetting about the recent past. State administrators either forgot or never knew that the rural societies which they were reordering through ujamaa had in preceding decades made remarkably energetic efforts to integrate themselves into colonial and national markets. The many scholars and consultants who created a vast
academic and technical literature on villagization, incidentally, shared this amnesia. Ignorant of the past, the architects of *ujamaa* development often found themselves, sometimes unwittingly and sometimes consciously, restraining rather than encouraging the energies which had characterized rural life in post-Second World War colonial Tanganyika. The result on the ground was frustration. Villagers were frustrated by a government which appeared disruptive and capricious; state administrators interpreted the frustrations of villagers as recalcitrance. Frustration became the dominant motif of the period; it pervaded bureaucratic reporting of villagization and underlay villagers’ reactions to resettlement.

I am able to draw upon an extensive body of documentary sources and oral accounts. These sources cover not only the well-known period of *ujamaa* villagization, but also a preceding, less well-known phase of rural resettlement in the early 1960s. Scholars have often highlighted contrast between these two phases of resettlement. What I wish to do in this paper is to show that, despite the significant differences between them, both forms of resettlement generated the same forms of frustration that I have described above.

Much has changed in Tanzania, of course, since the 1970s. Most notably, in the mid-1980s the government abandoned *ujamaa* socialism and embraced neo-liberal capitalism with a fervor that has scarcely diminished since. Nevertheless, frustration with a government that proclaims its commitment to development, yet seems continually forgetful of rural aspirations for development, endures down to the present.