

CORRESPONDENCE

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* In each issue of UFAHAMU we have attempted to expand in some way, offering our readers various services and opportunities to participate. In the second issue we began our "Correspondence" section. In this third issue we are initiating a "New Publications Received" section. We are also offering our readers a chance to advertise, free of charge, their job availability (teaching and community service positions only). Notices should be limited to 50 words, and will be included as space permits. Institutions advertising positions open will be charged \$5.00.

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A PROPOS

RALPH AUSTEN REPLIES TO UFAHAMU

Reconsidering African Colonial History

[Response to Joy Stewart's review of *Northwest Tanzania Under German and British Rule*, by Ralph Austen, in *Ufahamu*, Volume I, Number 1.]

One reason that the colonial period in African history continues to present such conceptual problems to historians is that it is possible to distinguish within it three very different yet closely interrelated historical processes at work. One is the continuation of indigenous patterns of African development, which are in themselves difficult to uncover and especially transpose into generalizations. The second - most commonly perceived by both colonial and anti-colonialist historians - is the imposition upon Africa of development patterns with their origins in Europe. The third, which has received considerable attention for the last decade or so, is the emergence of modernizing nationalist movements among western-educated African elites.

A major weakness of my book, *Northwest Tanzania Under German and British Rule: Colonial Policy and Tribal Politics*, - but also a central flaw in Miss Joy Stewart's review of the book in the first issue of *Ufahamu* - is the failure to make clear what these patterns were and how their intersection is to be understood. Miss Stewart made her own task somewhat easier by imputing to me certain attitudes which do not represent what I was trying to say, e.g. that I was claiming to write indigenous rather than colonial history (I only argue that my perspective is *more* indigenous than that of other colonial historians); a "denigrating" disregard for precolonial political institutions in this part of Africa (the negative quotations she cites refer only to the use made by local chiefs of their position as collaborators in the colonial period); an excessive enthusiasm for British policies in Tanzania (which Miss Stewart then refutes by a quotation revealing *German* administrative attitudes); and the failure to recognize the authoritarian and confused manner in which colonial administrators pursued local modernization (this last revelation was, I thought, one of my main points).

My main purpose in accepting the invitation of the editors of *Ufahamu* to respond to this review is not, however,

to defend my book. Such exercises are seldom enlightening; interested scholars will have to read the book themselves to determine its merit. Moreover, Miss Stewart has raised some valid critical points, and I myself would prefer to use this opportunity to consider how studies of African colonial history, and this one in particular, might be improved upon.

At the time I undertook my research among the Haya and Sukuma of Northwest Tanzania little serious work had been done on precolonial local history, so that the patterns which I discussed in my introductory chapters were inadequate in a number of ways, including an inaccurate assessment of long-distance trade on Lake Victoria (1). A good deal of historical investigation has taken place in this area more recently, although it is still too early for me to suggest what significant modifications it would make in my own arguments. Summary accounts of this research are now being collected in a volume edited by Dr. I.K. Katoko under the tentative title, "A History of the African Kingdoms Near Lake Victoria XIV-XIX Centuries".

A general model for considering the effect of indigenous historical dynamics upon colonial developments has been suggested recently in various articles by Professor T.O. Ranger. Insofar as he has made use of my findings in developing his own generalizations, Professor Ranger seems to agree that Northwest Tanzania offers better examples of traditional rulers using the colonial regime to increase their own powers than of anti-colonial resistance movements creating new dimensions of political and cultural cohesion (2). Had I myself been more conscious of the issues suggested by Professor Ranger's work I might have given greater attention to those local movements (mainly the independent Malakite Church (3) and Sukuma dance societies) which do represent innovative but culturally indigenous responses to the colonial situation.

A more serious shortcoming properly noted in my work by Miss Stewart is the lack of systematic concern for the peasant masses rather than the chiefly elites as representatives of African responses to colonial rule. I do discuss at some length the Bukoba coffee riots of 1937, but without adequately explaining the social background to this event (the East Lake World War I risings referred to by Miss Stewart are more easily understood because the chiefs had been artificially imposed by the Germans only a few years earlier). The essential flaw here is not, I think, elitism as such, but too much attention to political and administrative
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tive affairs at a certain expense to economic and social analysis. Insofar as treatment of these issues does appear in my book, Miss Stewart is right to complain about the frequency of such hollow terms as "progressive", "recalcitrant", "enlightened", etc. to define the positions of African participants.

For her own part, however, Miss Stewart seems to share some of the illusions of European administrators in this period that their problems were due to "ignorance of the traditional institutions which checked autocratic chiefly rule" or the absence of academic anthropologists from inter-war Tanganyika. Amateurish as their research may have been, colonial administrators did develop a fairly good understanding of at least the political aspect of the African societies with which they were dealing. What they could not see - and what the historian must attempt to comprehend - was the total process of change taking place as the very result of, among other things, Africans and Europeans trying to comprehend one another's societies for the purposes of accommodating to a colonial situation.

Since the discussion of the European input into North-west Tanzanian colonial history constitutes probably the main focus of my book, I do not want to go over it at length here. Miss Stewart objects to my use of the Robinson and Gallagher concept of an "official mind", i.e. representatives of the state vs. private economic interest groups as the determining forces in the European colonial presence. Against what I take to be her alternative views I still insist that my evidence - even for such abusive periods as the early "pacification" era and the British arrival during World War I - does not indicate the operation of "imperialistic capitalism", if this means the dominance of private exploitation. Against Robinson and Gallagher, however, I would now argue that the official mind was concerned with more than protecting strategic points along the imperial lifelines from foreign encroachment. The role of colonial administrators as developers of African resources was, as Miss Stewart rightly implies, not merely accidental. Colonies were intended to provide extra economic dimensions to the development of industrial Europe, although they did so as a more or less deliberate departure from the classical patterns of capitalist development. The problem which arises from this situation is that the European modes of change introduced into colonial Africa not only competed with African modes, but were also being questioned by the very Europeans charged with introducing them. This resulted less in the systematic exploitation of Africans than in the absence "of any consistent policy

in line with consistent goals" about which Miss Stewart (in essential agreement, I believe, with my own analysis) complains. It also has important implications for African concepts of modernization.

Unlike some other reviewers of my book, Miss Stewart has not argued that I should deal at greater length with the emerging "modernizing elites" of colonial Northwest Tanzania (4). While it is easy enough to see the antecedents of the present postcolonial Tanzanian regime in the western-educated agitators of this period, the movement from such an observation to a full historical analysis presents problems of political judgment which even now I am hesitant to tackle. The position to which my own findings lead me is one of suspicion concerning the adequacy of the new leadership which began to emerge during this era. Professor Ranger's presentation of the kinds of mass movements which have their roots in indigenous values also creates doubts about the degree to which the nationalists who have taken over since independence meet the same kind of criteria. It is certainly incumbent upon an historian to indicate what kinds of questions are raised by his inquiries, but in the present situation, non-Africans cannot presume to decide what paths of development should be followed by African states and how history should be used to legitimize such paths. Given this dilemma, a certain amount of ambiguity will undoubtedly continue to cloud writing about the colonial period in Africa. This should not, however, prevent critical questions from being asked about the works which are produced in this field especially as our growing general knowledge of Africa and even of European history forces us to transcend received interpretations.

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Notes

1. Gerald W. Hartwig, "The Victoria Nyanza as Trade Route in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of African History*, XI, 4 (1970), pp. 535-552.
2. T.O. Ranger, "African Reactions to the Imposition of Colonial Rule in East and Central Africa", in L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan (editors), *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960*, Vol. I; *The History and Politics of Colonialism, 1870-1914*, (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 293-324 and especially p. 301.
3. see T.O. Ranger, *The African Churches of Tanzania* (Nairobi, 1968) which indicates materials and developments

that I overlooked. There is also some documentation of the Malakite movement in my book which does not appear in Professor Ranger's pamphlet, but, more significantly, this whole dimension of Tanzanian history is now undergoing extensive new research.

4. e.g. Roland Oliver in *Journal of African History*, X, 2 (1969), pp. 332-333; for further discussions of such leaders and the emergence of the nationalist movement in Northwest Tanzania see Goran Hyden, *Political Development in Rural Tanzania* (Nairobi, 1969); John Iliffe, "The Age of Improvement and Differentiation", in I.N. Kimambo and A.J. Temu (editors), *A History of Tanzania* (Nairobi, 1969); G.R. Mutahaba, *Portrait of a Nationalist: The Life of Ali Migeoyo* (Nairobi, 1969); G. Andrew Maguire, *Toward 'Uhuru' in Tanzania* (Cambridge, 1969). The Mutahaba pamphlet also offers some valuable insights into sub-elite experiences in Bukoba from German times to the present, including the 1937 coffee riots.
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