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Uganda: An Historical Accident? Class, Nation, State Formation by  
Ramkrishna Mukherjee

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which the country's health services can be rehabilitated. The articles in this section indicate that primary health care is beginning to again take root in Uganda; baseline data on vital statistics has again been obtained from a number of areas; and the implementation of "social pediatrics" at Mulago Hospital has resulted in improvement both in the care of patients and the teaching of pediatrics. What is needed is a strong political will, finances and patriotic personnel to restore Uganda as the "Pearl of Africa".

In conclusion, *Crisis in Uganda* is highly recommended to everyone concerned with Uganda. It is both a lesson and a challenge. It calls for all Ugandans to love and work for the peace of their country and realize that participation in bringing solutions to a distressing situation is both challenging and rewarding.

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Mukherjee, Ramkrishna. *Uganda: An Historical Accident, Class, Nation and State Formation*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1979 (first American edition). 281 pages. Tables, Appendix. \$16.00 paper.

As Immanuel Wallerstein mentions in the foreword to this book, it was written between 1950 and 1955. The work must be seen, then, in light of events occurring during that time, the "last days of unapologetic colonialism" (p.iii). So, the main significance of Mukherjee's work is his criticism of all the varied justifications given by the colonialists for their rule. For historians of Uganda, and East Africa in general, the work can be seen as an historical document in itself.

Mukherjee recounts that he first went to Uganda to assist in a social study of the Acholi, interested in applying probability sampling into the investigation of this community at the request of a colleague. He began his project with two major points of initial inquiry. First, "what were the characteristics of social organization before the Uganda Protectorate was established, and what were the distinctions and interrelations among these characteristics in the scheme of social development of the human species" (p. vi). Second, "how the ethnic communities in Uganda were consolidated within the colonial regime and why the people bore the identification of Uganda Africans despite

the fact that Uganda was not an identity before the advent of European colonial powers in Africa, and what were the incipient social processes which affected Uganda society in being in the 1950s and in becoming later?" (p. vii).

Therefore, the central issue may be labeled, in his own words: "Uganda - an Historical Accident? Class, Nation and State Formation in and across Ethnic Communities" (p. vii). His main theme was the intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic transactions in society with reference to the emergence of markets, with an eye to labor-capital relations. Most significantly, he feels that changes occur when a commodity economy dominates the social relations, and with inter- and intra-ethnic distinctions "more durably" established by the colonial state. So, for Uganda in the 1950s and beyond, the central issue would be to "explicate the market in human and other materials which had emerged" (p. xi). This necessitated a look both at the relations between the British, Indians and Africans, and among the ethnic communities of Africans in the Protectorate.

The book was first published by Akademik-Verlag, Berlin, in 1956 under the title: *The Problem of Uganda: A Study in Acculturation*. The author claims he became a "non-person" in British academic circles as a result. Apparently, Western academic authorities did not encourage its circulation, while he feels, the Eastern bloc presumably preferred the discussion of colonial oppression "en mass", so an analysis of tensions emerging within African society was discouraged. However, the book has found a publisher again in the 80s in Africa World Press.

Though not of significance for the work itself, the copy editing of the new material, the foreword and the new preface, was quite below standard. It is quite annoying to find in a book republished so recently, and with such promise, an average of one "typo" per page in the preliminary pages. The book is divided into five chapters, with a final conclusion. The chapters include a general background, and introduction to Uganda, Uganda before the British, then under British rule, Uganda in Perspective, and Concluding Remarks.

In the first chapter, Mukherjee discusses the racist stereotypes which typified European attitudes towards Africa, its civilizations and its peoples. He briefly alludes to the realities behind the myth of the "Dark Continent", using examples from the accounts of European visitors to what came to be Uganda, and mentions the excesses of the slave trade and the "civilising mission".

The second chapter very briefly describes the country, and includes interesting statistics from the 1948 census to assess the relative numerical strength of varying communities. Interestingly, although



very critical throughout of the colonial government, he accepts statistics as presented by that same source rather uncritically. However, he neatly juxtaposes citations from European supporters of colonialism with the criticisms of the system and its structures of education and administration from African sources of the same period. It is in this chapter that one begins to see the central theme beginning to emerge, discussing the contending forces within Ugandan society and the presentation of the problematic of which social formations actually gained in the process of the introduction of a cash economy.

In Chapter Three, Uganda before the British, Mukherjee continues his discussion of Uganda pre-colonial life. In a quite theoretical analysis, he analyses and criticizes the description of Ugandan society as "tribal" using the "classic" definitions of such. In short, he disproves that assertion, using the very same theoretical constructs those claiming it to be the case! He makes a strong case for the *changing* nature of pre-colonial Ugandan society, indicates close correspondence between developments occurring in Africa and those occurring elsewhere including "the cradle of Western civilization".

Most telling is his discussion of the existence of class-based societies, and of developments advancing from the feudal stage. Of course, he was not in a position to conduct in-depth historical analysis of each of the kingdoms of Uganda, and relies heavily for his information on the analyses of Roscoe, Crazzolara, Johnston, and others, understandable given the scope of his work and the time period in which it was prepared. What is significant are the conclusions which he draws from that material towards his overall theme. For example, the case of Bunyoro he describes how a "new set of relationships was in the process of establishment, replacing the previously established division of society into aristocrats and commoners...the society began to be divided into rich and poor," and gives examples of this change (pp. 60-61). He does the same for Acholi, Toro, Ankole, and other parts of Uganda indicating that while some cases had already evidenced this shift, other communities were at least tending towards differentiation and the development of centralized authority, the prelude to the formation of a class society (p. 106).

His premise, discussed throughout the chapter on British rule, is that the normal course of development in Ugandan society was cut short with the advent of the British. In fact, had it not been for external interference, he contends, improvement would have been recognizable in Ugandan society towards developing the state of the productive forces, that leading, in turn, to improvements in the "social fabric" of society in Uganda. The balance of the chapter is taken up with the

examination of the expansion of European capitalism abroad, and its rapid accumulation of colonial possessions. I can imagine how concerned academics and others in Britain would have been in 1956 when they encountered a section entitled "Invasion of Uganda" in Mukherjee's fourth chapter, describing Britain's take-over of the soon-to-be Uganda Protectorate. We should keep in mind that the weight of the British media at the time was concerned with the "Mau Mau menace" reaching its peak in Kenya in that same year, using a distorted view of that movement as they had done in the past to rationalize their domination and control of African society.

The remainder of that chapter discusses in some detail the occupation of Uganda and the establishment of indirect rule, as well as including extracts from the Buganda Agreement of 1900, and the mechanism created for the financing of the administration. In this section he denounces the effects of the administration on Uganda and its citizenry, explaining the deliterious results of colonial policy on education, health, agriculture and the like. He also spends considerable time on the appropriation of the Ugandan economy by the colonial government, showing the growing centralized control of the means of production during the colonial period considered. In fact, Mukherjee claims that it was precisely the domination of the economy of Uganda by the colonial regime which caused the degeneration within Ugandan society, and this degeneration, itself, was used as the criterion for the legitimization of foreign domination! Not only:

"...the retrogression of Uganda is seen not only in the disintegration of the life of the mass of people in all its aspects and in the perpetuation of feudal exploitation under colonial rule. It is also seen in the obstruction put forward by the colonial regime to the emergence of new social forces among the Uganda Africans" (p. 206).

Mukherjee proceeds to discuss the emergence of a nascent bourgeoisie, as "entrepreneurs" and "intelligentisia", from among the upper stratum of the precolonial class structure. He also describes the limited means available for Africans to become bourgeoisie, primarily because of lack of capital, they were generally not able to become involved in trade. This, then, left for the Indian community, which had the economic wherewithal to succeed. So even in the case of the African "nascent" bourgeoisie, the colonial system restricted their development.

Perhaps one more quote from Mukherjee is in order here to summarize his interpretation of the results of British rule in Uganda:

"It has neither initiated progress in the political



structure of the Uganda societies nor has it improved their productive forces. All that Uganda Africans have faced under colonial rule is retrogression, behind glittering 'prosperity', from their previously normally-developing socio-economic life. However slow that development might have been, it could ultimately lead them to peace, prosperity and progress. Instead, under British rule, Uganda has entered a blind alley of disintegration and decay without any scope of future progress so long as the colonial-feudal domination persists." (p. 208).

In his final chapter, "Uganda in Perspective", Mukherjee presents the various possibilities for Uganda's future, depending whether the colonial situation was to prevail, discussing the possible permutations of that future, or whether the peoples' perspective would eventually dominate. He discusses in some detail the post-World War world, specifically the preeminence of the United States, and the need for Britain to attempt to maintain the system of colonial exploitation of those colonies still remaining to it, which had been so long beneficial to its economic development. However, Mukherjee is prescient in seeing the expanding hand of the U.S., and U.S.-based corporate capitalism behind many of the post War maneuvers to maintain this control over Africa, and what that would eventually mean for Africa and its economic future.

He details the flow of private capital into Uganda, and the amount of Colonial Grants, but notes they were only "a fractional return of the colonial tributes collected...over a number of years" (p.22). And as part of the continuing exploitation, little attention was paid to the industrial sectors of the Ugandan economy, as the rewards were great for agriculture production with the exploitation of inexpensive African agricultural labor. He also documents the internal inequities developed under the colonial system, with the Baganda wage-laborers mainly employed as skilled or semi-skilled workers, and the peoples of Buganda and especially West Nilers forming the bulk of the unskilled labor. The situation certainly has had its effects on political developments in post-Independence Uganda!

He also presaged a point in time when the Indian community would become the scapegoats in diverting peoples' anger from the inherent inequities within the system. He recounts a brief summation of their history in Uganda, and the role they played in assisting the British exploitation of the colony. He singles out the mercantile classes of the Indian community especially as supporters of the system, and providing leadership for the bulk of the Indian community to remain subservient

British overlordship. He feels the central problem with the presence of the Indian community as it exists in Uganda is:

"...while in the Union of South Africa the simultaneous presence of Indian and African working class [sic] could provide the basis for a united resistance movement against the racist and undemocratic forces, no such basis is yet available in Uganda. There is no working class or peasantry other than the African...the existing parasitic living of the Indian community on the toils of the African prevents any healthy contact from developing." (p.263).

It was Mukherjee's hope that with the leadership of Nehru towards sympathy and support for African independence, the Ugandan Indian community would place themselves on the side of the Uganda Africans.

In sum, then, what we see presented in Mukherjee's book is an exposition of the type we would only see again many years later with works such as Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. It is also very clear that Mukherjee should be seen as the ideological ancestor of such progressive, more contemporary East African scholars as Arnold Temu, Issa Shivji, Dan Nabudere and Mahmood Mamdani. The centrality in all their workloads, of the economic bases for society and its ills, the historical effects of the exploitation of colonialism and imperialism on the African masses, coupled with the recognition of the emergence in the pre-colonial era of class-based African societies, is indicative of their similarity of perspective. In fact, I think it is precisely in the works of these young scholars that Mukherjee's hope for a unity of purpose between Africans and Indians in East Africa can best be seen, and his dream see fruition.

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Bagaya, Elizabeth. *African Princess: Princess Elizabeth of Toro*, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1983. pp. 230.

This book is one among a rare literature about the institution of monarchy in the African society. It offers a broad perspective of the Toro kingdom in Uganda, that existed from the end of the 18th century until 1966. It becomes more interesting because the author is an insider