

BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS AND LETTERS

Sir:

A recent article by Ian C. Parker ("Ideological and Economic Development in Tanzania," *ASR*, XV, 1, 1972; pp. 43-78) contains three statements which require rebuttal. Beginning on p. 52, he lists eight reasons why he believes Tanzania has an unusual degree of national unity; five of these he states to be "basic historical influences and three [are] related to the character of political development...."

The first of the five historical factors he calls "low population density." Ignoring for the moment that this is more geographical than historical since it is basically spatial in nature and founded in the high-risk character of the physical environment, he implies that this low population density is causally related to a low level of conflict between tribes. On the other hand, he continues, "High population density, particularly in a primarily agricultural-pastoral economic environment, implies a heritage of competition for space; conflict, conquest, and exploitation; and lasting enemies between peoples, which make subsequent achievement of unity on a larger national scale extremely difficult" (p. 53). This sentence and the one on low density are statements of assertion that cry out for substantiation, but none is offered. In both instances a causal link is implied that is not and probably cannot be demonstrated. The relationship between density and conflict is not as simplistic as he implies if in fact it is causally linked at all. In precolonial times, conflict was a common element among pastoral peoples (Masai, Somali, Baggara, Matabele, Nandi), groups whose very mode of life required comparatively low density. Examples of low-density areas in modern Africa lacking Tanzania's qualities can be cited (Zambia, Malawi, Central African Republic, Chad) and areas of high density lacking the conflict implied can also be found (Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Egypt). His example of Uganda as a case of high density leading to conflict is questionable. Were the Buganda expanding against the Bunyoro due to high density of population (meaning population pressure?--one is not sure Mr. Parker implies this) or for simple aggrandizement purposes? Or was it due to any single reason? Finally, if the relationship between high density and conflict is as Mr. Parker indicates, one would expect to find a consistent record of "conflict, conquest, and exploitation" in all high-density places in Africa. The historical record will not support that contention.

Additionally, on the same page (53) and under the same subheading, he states, "The relative abundance of land diminished not only inter-tribal conflict but also intratribal conflict, since in many tribes conflict as a result of competition for space could be avoided by moving to unoccupied land." The relative abundance of land was an illusion,

especially in Tanzania, where much of the surface was and is unproductive due to environmental limitations, chiefly moisture, and due to the technological level of the subsistence systems present. It is not easy to pick up and move, either en masse or individually, in order to avoid conflict when the risks of the environment are so great as to raise the possibility of starvation or, at the very least, severe difficulties of subsistence. Agricultural practices and systems are far more difficult to transfer than the statement implies and require relatively long periods for adjustment to different ecologic zones. Insofar as I am aware, there is no documented evidence of such moves in Tanzania as Mr. Parker indicates. He has once again implied a causal link between empty land and lack of conflict. That is not demonstrated, if in fact it is demonstrable.

Finally, on page 54, Mr. Parker asserts another unfounded assumption. He states, "Among such prominent tribes as the Wahaya and Wachaga, bananas implied a year-round food supply, security, and therefore receptivity to innovations (such as cash crops, commerce, and education; and defensive centralization encouraged tigher social organization and relatively high population densities" (emphasis added). There is no question that possession of the crop bananas had many advantages, of which a year-round food supply was most prominent. Whether or not it provided security is questionable; in the sense of lack of food, yes; in the sense of defensive security, no. However, most questionable is whether or not possession of bananas encouraged receptivity to innovations. This line of causation simply cannot be demonstrated. If in fact that were true, then one would expect to find banana cultivators in Africa-over receptive to innovations. Such is not the case as that type of cultivators in the Congo demonstrate. It can probably be shown that the Haya and Chagga are no more innovative than the Ibo or the Akan, neither of which rely primarily on bananas for food. If it was the security of a year-round food supply that made the Haya and Chagga receptive, then Mr. Parker is arguing against recent research which implies that it is insecurity which fosters receptivity (e.g., Boserup, 1965; Mortimore, 1967; Gleave and White, 1969), particularly insecurity due to population pressure!

I have pointed out three errors in Mr. Parker's article. These raise doubts in the mind of the reader and affect judgment on the remainder of the article.

Bob J. Walter
Department of Geography
Ohio University
Athens, Ohio