‘Us in the Time of Strangers: Imagining Community in Colonial Kenya and Tanganyika, *c*.1900-1965’

Edward Goodman

Balliol College

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In the mid-nineteenth century, while linguistic and cultural similarities were acknowledged and prudential links maintained across ecological zones, insurance against environmental disaster, ‘felt’ community across East Africa was, pushing generalisation to its limits, intensely local, indeed parochial. A century later, as independence loomed, public argument turned on the fate of historically novel visions of ethnic, racial and territorial community. My thesis seeks to explain this development. It explores the way in which community came to be imagined by thinkers across East Africa, the way these communities featured in people’s lives, and developing, and diverging, understandings of the relationship between various visions of community in Kenya and Tanganyika, seeking to widen our understanding of community in East Africa beyond the recent domination of the literature by tribe. It argues that conceptually similar visions of ethnic and racial community were called into being in Kenya and Tanganyika as a response to what was by the 1940s a region-wide sense of disorder, the product of the disruptive impact of widening markets in labour and produce on existing moral economies, and rapidly became the central object of public argument. From this region-wide crisis and response, thinkers developed in the same decade specifically Kenyan and Tanganyikan understandings of the relationship between these communities, more forcefully in Kenya, more ambiguously in Tanganyika, understandings upon which intellectuals in the next decade, convinced now of colonialism’s destructiveness, brought the novel imperative to independence to bear, further shaping distinctively Kenyan and Tanganyika visions. These longer-term developments, in turn, shaped the imaginations of the region’s post-colonial nation-builders.