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## LETTERS TO AFRICA

Letters to the Editor should refer to matters raised in the journal and should not exceed 450 words in length. They should be signed and give full address and position of the writer. The Editor reserves the right to shorten letters or to decline them.

*From Dr. Charles D. Laughlin, Visiting Fellow, University of Pennsylvania*

Sir, I regret that Mr. Weatherby found our article on the ghost cult in So (January 1972) to be so sadly misleading and replete with faulty information. Let me address myself briefly to the concerns expressed in his letter in the January issue of this journal:

First, I cannot but agree with Weatherby's observation (identical to our own on p. 12 of the article) that the *kenisan* on all three mountains must agree on the holding of an initiation ceremony. I must also agree that a few *kenisanat* will state that the initiation ceremony should occur either on Kadam or Moroto (preferably the former). But as an anthropologist I am perhaps oversensitive to the distinction between statement *de jure* and models of actual social process. I cannot ignore the fact that the last ceremony which occurred in 1953 was held in all three sections.

Mr. Weatherby is also correct when he says that cases of theft are not 'brought before the *kenisan*'. As we mention in the article (p. 12) such matters are brought before the council of elders, some of whom are members of *kenisan*. Under normal circumstances, thefts are cleared in council. However, if the perpetrator is not discovered, then, and only then, will the matter become of concern to the *kenisan*.

It is indeed not correct to say that women were the first *kenisan*, and had we said that we would be seriously in error. We said that the So *believe* women to have been, for a brief time, the first *kenisan*—thereby manifesting a distinction between mythic representation and reality. I regret that this distinction has confused Mr. Weatherby.

The historical and functional relationships between the age generation system and *kenisan* will be explored in detail in a forthcoming article in the July 1974 issue of this journal. Mr. Weatherby is quite right to emphasize that, generally speaking, the status of a man in So society will accrue to his son when that status is the result of wealth and/or standing in *kenisan*. However, according to our *kenisan* informants there never has been a time when junior males, of whatever status, participated in council. I find it remarkable that Mr. Weatherby is able to make statements of such certainty about the political process in So before the advent of the formal age generation system—a happening he claims to have occurred prior to the early nineteenth century. In fact, the present age generation system in So was borrowed by them from the Karamojong sometime after 1900.

God, or *belgen*, is said to dwell in the sky, on the mountain tops, and in the mountain streams, depending upon the circumstances under which he is mentioned. The water sprite, *tegwec*, is said to dwell in still pools of water where people bathe.

I find myself puzzled by statements in the last paragraph of Mr. Weatherby's letter which seem to hint at, but never specify, some dark doings or methodological inadequacies on our part. I do hope that in the future, at least, a simple sense of fairness to those about whom he writes in public print will restrain him from innuendo.

Yours faithfully

CHARLES D. LAUGHLIN  
Philadelphia

From Dr. C. R. Hallpike

Sir, In his review of my book *The Konso of Ethiopia. A Study of the values of a Cushitic people* (Africa, July 1973) Hector Blackhurst asserts that I have 'merely studied the values without the society, the rituals without the actors'. He seems to have assumed before opening the book that anyone who treats values seriously must be some kind of vague metaphysical waffler, uninterested in social reality. Given this ideological prejudice, he sets out to show that the book is largely concerned with belief, ritual, and cosmology, and pays only peripheral attention to social relations. Anyone who actually reads the book will be surprised to find that the analysis of cosmology does not begin until page 222, that the chapter on Values contains much information on social relations, including a long section on the status of craftsmen, that the chapter on God and Earth is based on the relations between warriors and elders and between the sexes, and that the chapter on Diviners and Magic goes into some detail on the social status of diviners.

Perhaps the most remarkable omission from this review, however, is any mention of my material on Konso generation-grading systems, and the analysis of their significance. Anyone familiar with the ethnography of East Africa will realize that there is much new and important information here, presented in a totally new light. To have studiously avoided any mention even of the existence of this chapter, of 42 pages, suggests either malice or ignorance of its significance.

The object of the book was to examine the inter-

relationships of Konso social institutions, and in particular, the working of the generation-grading systems, and to see if this complex set of institutions could be explained in terms of traditional functionalism. The conclusions drawn in the book are that functionalist explanations are quite inadequate especially in accounting for the generation-grading systems, which are, in practical terms, less efficient than ordinary age-grading systems and much more difficult to understand and to operate. I claim that the generation-grading systems and associated ritual and institutions are most fruitfully understood in terms of the value and belief systems, not in terms of some putative contribution to 'social harmony'. These claims may be unfounded, but sweeping assertions that the book 'makes pretensions to sociological analysis' and 'lacks any sociological significance' are not by themselves convincing. We require reasoned arguments, supported by evidence, which we are not given.

No one objects to fair criticism by a qualified person, but if even a long monograph (332 pages) filled with detailed ethnographic facts and argument can be 'refuted' in a few paragraphs largely composed of partisan abuse and selective omissions, in a professional journal such as *Africa*, the future for any honest discussion of the fundamental issues of our discipline looks rather bleak.

Yours faithfully

C. R. HALLPIKE  
Totnes  
Devon