

Maendeleo Mema: Concepts of 'progress' in late colonial East Africa

In his seminal collection of essays, *Futures Past*, Reinhard Koselleck set up a contrast between pre-modern and modern ideas of the future in Europe. For Koselleck, one of the characteristics of modernity was the idea of a future which 'transcended the hitherto predictable', characterised both by the 'increasing speed with which it approaches us' and 'its unknown quantity'. In the nineteenth century, alongside utopian visions of radical change, the concept of 'progress' became increasingly central to self-understandings and to political projects in Europe, tied to political philosophies of liberalism. However, as recent work in the global history of ideas has shown, it also became a global concept. This paper explores the concept of 'progress' in late colonial East Africa. The concept of 'progress' was integral to ideologies of legitimation in late colonial East Africa and framed the discursive terrain in which colonial subjects engaged with colonial rulers in Tanganyika's Swahiliphone public sphere. This paper uses empirical evidence from Swahili-language newspapers to map out the ways in which African writers engaged with the concept in the public sphere, and demonstrates that it was characterised as much by an optimistic vision of the future as pessimism about the fragility of progress and the risk that it could go backwards as well as forwards.

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