The closely related societies of the Lakes area of East Africa are remarkable for the extreme hierarchical political arrangements they exhibit, and which set them off from their neighbors. The three kingdoms, Rwanda, Buganda and Bunyoro, selected for examination, besides being institutionally similar, have each been described by ethnographers and other observers as resembling the societies of medieval Europe; that is, as 'feudal' societies or societies with 'feudal' institutions. The main theoretical problems raised by the application of the feudal notion to African societies have already been clearly examined in an article by Jack Goody (1963). Recognizing the pitfalls he has exposed, this paper will attempt to establish a precise notion of the essential elements of the feudal archetype and test this notion against the cases presented by these three African societies.

The experiences of western Europe from the ninth to the fourteenth century have given rise to the term 'feudalism' to describe the dominant social and political institutions in many societies of that time and place. Insofar as we can recognize in feudalism a general method for organizing social relations capable of reproduction in another region and another era, it is possible to analyze alien and unfamiliar social relations in terms of a feudal model (Bloch 1964:446, and Strayer and Coulborn 1956:3-14). Implicit in this is first the practicability of extracting from the varied cultural experiences of medieval feudal societies a model with which to compare other societies. Secondly, there must in fact be societies sufficiently similar to the

* This paper results from research done at the University of California, Los Angeles, under the supervision of Professors Leonard Thompson and Daniel Biebuyck to whom thanks are owed for their encouragement and advice.

1. One kingdom from each of the three main subdivisions of the lacustrine cultural region.
model to warrant a comparison which may increase our understanding. Furthermore, in selecting a model, it is necessary to concentrate on the social relations which are relevant to defining the limits of that model and then to make comparisons with those social relations and not with other extraneous characteristics which may be present in both societies under examination.

Feudalism is unfortunately a word rich in meanings and vague in connotations. For nearly two centuries it has been used to connote a political system of exploitation and of anachronistic values by enemies of that system. This polemical term has been applied to eighteenth century France, nineteenth century Russia and twentieth century Latin America on grounds of the existence of exploitation of an agricultural peasantry by a landed aristocracy. Much refinement of this political usage must be made in order to prevent any hierarchical agrarian society from being termed feudal and thereby destroying the analytical value of the term for the comparative study of societies.

The views of scholars on the concept of feudalism are numerous, but fall into “two rather broad categories of approach” (Goody 1963:1). The first approach is more general, seeing feudalism as “the dominant political and social organization during certain centuries of the Middle Ages” (Strayer 1956:15). The second definition is narrower, focusing on those “institutions creating and regulating the obligations of obedience and service [...] on the part of one free man (the vassal) towards another free man (the lord), and the obligations of protection and maintenance on the part of the lord with regard to his vassal” (Ganshof 1961:xx).

Comparison in terms of the more general concept of feudalism, while it has been attempted by others, must inevitably suffer from the arbitrary selection of the institutions being compared. While one cannot deny the significance for medieval Europe of the institutions of Church, mercantile towns, knighthood and chivalry, it is clearly impossible to base meaningful comparisons on the presence or absence of these unique institutions. For this reason it seems preferable to isolate those institutions which form the core of the narrower ‘technical’ definition of feudalism, eliminating other coincident institutions as extraneous to the concept of feudalism to be applied in comparative analysis.

The ‘core institutions’ to which I allude are vassalage and fiefholding. While several authorities consider the political functions fulfilled by these institutions a sine qua non to the notion of a feudal society (Strayer 1956:16, Stephenson 1942:228-229, and Maquet 1961a:295-296), none of the authorities on the European material consulted in this essay have denied the fundamental importance of these special
institutions to the concept of feudalism. For this reason, the absence of institutions whose content of social relations is not analogous to those of the vassalage and fiefholding complex would compel the abandonment of feudal terms for the purpose of scholarly comparison. The question of the social or political role played by these institutions is relevant to the problem of comparison only when the core institutions are in fact present. We must then extract the social content of the feudal bonds before beginning to look for these bonds in the traditional systems of African States.

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Vassalage is founded upon a legal contract known originally as ‘commendation’, by which two legally free men voluntarily enter a personal relationship and assume obligations and rights of unequal quality relating to their social positions¹. The obligations on the part of the social inferior, the vassal, are assumed by the performance of the act of homage and an oath of fealty². These acts bound the vassal to the passive obligation of bearing faith and allegiance to his lord and the active obligation of performing some service, generally of a military nature, for that lord.

We speak of fealty as passive in that it consists of nothing more than a mental attitude of deference and loyalty and the negative obligation to do the lord no harm. The active obligation assumed in becoming the lord’s man, involved the performance of personal service by the vassal. This service, especially in English feudalism, was generally “military service as a mounted knight” and was everywhere restricted to the upper classes of society. The vassal was a retainer of his lord, pledged to fight “by his lord’s shield” either as a castle guard or in the field against his lord’s enemies (Stenton 1961:192, and Pollock and Maitland 1952 vol. I:252 ff.). “The military service due from the vassal was, from the lord’s point of view, […] the essential object of the contract of vassalage.” (Ganshof 1961:87.) A secondary service due the lord was that of consilium, the duty of the vassal “to assist his lord by his advice, and […] to attend his lord when the latter summoned him” (Ganshof 1961:92).

Undue emphasis should not be laid on the military form of the original service obligation of the vassal. The form of service is of less importance in understanding the nature of the vassalage relationship than the fact that the service was a personal obligation due from one party to another based on a contract between persons in the character of private individuals. In making our comparisons,

the form of the service then will be of less importance than a proper understanding of its nature as a social tie between two parties.

The lord’s obligations under the contract of vassalage can be summed up as “protection and maintenance” of his vassal. Protection in war and in law should not be minimized. The lord was under a real obligation “to go to war in defense of his vassal” (Ganshof 1961:94). Similarly, he “was bound to defend his vassal in a court of law, even in the king’s court” (Ganshof 1961:95). The protection of a powerful lord became a highly desirable if not essential condition for even a relatively independent local land holder.

Yet far more vital was the guarantee of maintenance which was intended to enable the vassal to provide his service. The predominant method of providing maintenance in medieval agrarian society was by a grant of usufructuary rights in land, a fief, to the vassal for the duration of the life-time contract of vassalage. This provided a stable, property basis to the personal dependency of vassalage upon which the whole structure of feudal relations could be erected.

The division of ownership between the lord and vassal had far-reaching consequences for the vassalage contract and the nature of social relations at the upper levels of European society (Jolliffe 1937:139 ff., and Calmette 1923:44-56). The end product was “a system of interdependent fiefs burdened with military duties. Instead of shifting agreements between contracting parties [...] there arises a hereditary relationship between lord and man on the basis of tenure” (Vinogradoff 1908:39). The tenure, originally precarious, became heritable conditional on paying homage and thus re-establishing the vassalage contract. This became so generally the rule that the contract of vassalage came to bind together two families over generations. Furthermore, governmental and judicial functions attached themselves to the combined institution of vassalage and fief. The vassal came to exercise political authority on behalf of his feudal overlord within the territory of this fief, while a specifically feudal judicial system developed in addition to the State’s courts, which served to adjudicate disputes arising from feudal contracts (Ganshof 1961:156-160, Pollock and Maitland 1952:571, and Vinogradoff 1908:209-210). Neither administrative nor judicial functions, however, are inherent in either the vassalage relationship or the granting of a fief.

The content of vassalage as a social institution consists, then, of obligations to personal service and personal loyalty from the vassal to the lord and of protection and maintenance by the lord of his vassal. The essence of fief is to be found in the grant of usufructuary rights in property from the lord to the vassal in fulfilment of the obligation of maintenance and with a view to thus materially enabling the vassal to provide his personal service in exchange. We now
proceed to the comparison of the basic feudal institution of vassalage and fiefhold to those social relations found among the three interlacustrine Bantu kingdoms which appear analogous.

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From the first contacts of Europeans with the kingdoms of the Lakes region, the terminology of feudalism began to be loosely applied to their political institutions. In Buganda, the kabaka was equated with a medieval king and the leading and lesser chiefs were designated as barons, earls or lords. Indeed the broad outline of the political hierarchy with its delegation of territorial authority by the kabaka to his closely associated bakungu is remarkably analogous to the baronial regime of post-conquest England (Stenton 1961:84-114). The system of ‘personal’ estates which attached themselves to the highest (and lowest) political offices further reinforced the analogy. It might readily be concluded that what the missionaries and travellers saw was a system of royal vassalage, the vassal exercising administrative, judicial and military authority as a service to his lord, the kabaka, receiving in exchange a precarious tenure estate as his maintenance for that service. Certainly the bakungu were thought to owe total allegiance and fidelity as well as consilium to the reigning monarch. The apparent anomaly of the absence of a precise and legal reciprocal obligation of protection due from the kabaka to the bakungu might be considered exceptional due to the theoretically absolute nature of Ganda kingship. However, it would be erroneous to consider it so.

In Buganda, the kabaka was considered the source of all political authority, the ritual head of all the clans, and, by virtue of both of these, the ultimate owner of all the land and wealth of the country (Southwold 1965:90-91). In appointing chiefs and officials—territorial, ritual or household—the kabaka delegated his authority. It is from this act that the governmental structure of Buganda as well as the confusion of European observers arise.

The bakungu, whether they were clan heads or functionaries who were selected by the kabaka for any of a number of reasons, stood in a relationship of administrative subordination to the monarch. They, like the counts of the Carolingian Empire, were officers of government exercising political authority over the population resident in their ‘counties’ or ssaza. This is averred by the Ganda proverb, Tafuga tlaka, afuga bantu, ‘He rules the people, not the land’ (Mair 1934:158, 1. It has been necessary to ignore developmental factors and treat these societies in the anthropological present, based on the traditional situation at the time of European contact.
and Fallers 1960:34). The bakungu were required to rule in the name of the kabaka: to collect the king's tribute and taxes; to levy royal armies; and to administer the king's justice. This was their primary function. The services and the loyalty owed by a mukungu to the kabaka were those of a political subordinate to his ruler; of a minister to his monarch; not of a vassal to his lord.

The estates claimed by bakungu bear only slight resemblance to fiefs. The land is in fact the property of the political office, being transferred from one official to the next. The holder could not subinfeudate, i.e. select subordinates to perform his service by distributing his estates to them. Once largely hereditary, these estates with a few exceptions became the unrestricted gift of the kabaka by the late nineteenth century (Mair 1934:159-161, and Cox 1950). Insofar as the estates serve to maintain the office-holder, they do appear as benefices held in precarium comparable to the benefices in land of Merovingian and Carolingian Europe (Ganshof 1961:9-12, 36-40, 106-113). Nonetheless, the element of royal benefice was at best a secondary attribute of an administrative district assigned to political officials.

There remains the question of the feudal elements of vassalage and fief in the position of the particular type of Ganda chief known as batongole. According to Audrey Richards ("The Ganda", 1959:50):

"Not content [...] with the appointment of their own supporters as territorial rulers, later Kabakas took to giving out land to their own favorites as fiefs in return for some such duty as raising soldiers, collecting firewood or barkcloth or performing ritual services. These estates were known as bitongole (sing., kitongole) and their holders as batongole."

Originally appointed to bolster the kabaka's power, these independent landholders were outside the administrative hierarchy, being solely responsible to the kabaka and not to his territorial chief. "Because landholding and political authority were inseparable, the mutongole governed the people who lived on his estate and thus acted as a minor chief" (Southwold 1965:90). The political role was here secondary to the relation of personal dependence and obligation, the batongole being originally and fundamentally the favorites of the kabaka.

By the grant of the benefice, the mutongole was bound by personal ties to his benefactor. His loyalty was something more than that of a mere subordinate or other subject. The element of service is largely undefined with nothing as clear cut as knight's service being required. Rather, in addition to the governmental duties, "usually they also had some special duty to perform for the kabaka" (Southwold 1960:12). In return for these vague services and loyalty, the kabaka
granted an estate and his protection in the form of immunity from responsibility to his territorial authorities, whose hostility might be aroused by the mutongole's privileges and occasional duties as the kabaka's spy (Southwold 1960:13).

The position of batongole was never hereditary. Only the kabaka could be the lord of a mutongole. No subinfeudation was possible nor was personal military service a part of the mutongole's obligations. Despite these differences from the European feudal practice, it would seem that a mutongole as the kabaka's man had much in common with a royal granted honores, political authority, by a Carolingian monarch (Ganshof 1961:52-56). While we may be permitted to conclude that some form of feudo-vassalage existed among the Ganda, it would be fallacious to deduce that "the performance of political functions depends on personal agreements [...] and that political authority is treated as a private possession" (Strayer and Coulborn 1956:5), as in European cases. Moreover, feudo-vassalage institutions were neither so pervasive nor so important as to warrant the application of the term 'feudalism' to Buganda society as a whole. On the contrary, the principle and practice of the butongole institution was of relatively recent introduction¹, and most political institutions, especially the most important chieftainships (bakungu), retained the character of administrative representatives of royal power and authority. Feudal forms are subsidiary to political forms. Following David Apter in regard to Buganda, we prefer to call it a political kingdom rather than a feudal one (Apter 1961:9).

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To the North and West of Buganda lies the closely related kingdom of Bunyoro, sharing with Buganda a common origin and similar ideas and practices of political organization. To examine this monarchy for the traces of feudal institutions, we will rely largely upon the ethnographic work of John Beattie, who has been most explicit in his application of feudal terminology to the political relations of the Nyoro State. He contends that Bunyoro "preserves many of the characters of a centralized, 'feudal' State, oddly reminiscent in many ways of the feudal kingdoms which existed centuries ago in Europe and elsewhere" (Beattie 1961:5). Feudalism, for Beattie, means "a kind of political system which is based on the relation between a superior and his inferior or vassal, where the latter holds lands, and authority over the people living on these lands 'in feud' from the

¹. The practice was probably introduced during the reign of Mawanga, the twenty-second kabaka, sometime in the early or mid-eighteenth century (Southwold 1960:12).
former.” Central to this conception of feudalism is “the personal nature of the bond of political dependence” and the association of political office with the holding of landed estates (Beattie 1964:26). As we have seen in the Buganda case, a cautious examination of the bond of dependence and the system of territorial authority and estates is required before the concepts of vassal and fief can be applied.

In Bunyoro, political authority was focused in the person of the mukama. “Radiating from this center was a system of hereditary territorial chieftainships” (Taylor 1962:35). These chieftainships, both large and small, were granted by the mukama to various categories of individuals including members of his own Bito ruling line, pastoral Hima or agricultural Iru, generally of chiefly lines, affinal or maternal kin of the mukama or even his household officials or favorites. “Traditionally, chiefly authority was not thought of as hereditary, though it often tended to become so.” (Beattie 1961:36 and 1959:104.) Regardless of its heritability, it was always considered as the gift of the mukama which he confirmed to heirs and which he could retract. This is true in principle of all the levels of chieftainship, which were in a vaguely demarcated hierarchy. Unlike Buganda, great chiefs might have directly under them lesser chiefs of their own making, who might in turn have subordinate chiefs to themselves. Thus at all levels we find a repetition of the bond of political dependence which is initiated by the mukama and his directly subordinate great chiefs. As with the Ganda, the delegation of political authority is confounded with the distribution of land on dependent tenure. In unravelling the relationship of mukama to chief, or of chief to subchief, and of each to the land they hold we will approach some understanding of these so-called feudal relations.

All political authority in Bunyoro was essentially territorial. A chief in his capacity as an agent of government rules over people resident within the territory assigned him on behalf of the mukama, as head of State and ‘owner’ of the country. This is true whether his authority is by direct delegation of the mukama or through an intermediate authority. The territory is a unit of local or regional government, not a fief. To say that it is held “on condition of homage and service to the king or to the next chief above...” (Taylor 1962:35, and Beattie 1954a:20) is to confound personal for political loyalty and service. If feudal obligations are to remain distinct from those expressing another relationship we must know what we mean by ‘personal’. In any small scale agrarian society virtually all social and political relations will be personal in the simple sense of face to

1. Beattie draws upon Stenton and Goody’s treatment of Bloch for his concept.
face. However, the fact that political officials are personally known to one another does not mean that relations of political dependence are ‘personal’ in the sense implicit in the vassalage relationship. A vassal is primarily a retainer, whose homage has bound him to be his lord’s man, with a responsibility wider and more diffuse than performing a simple service. While the vassalage contract is not a mere barter agreement for land and labor, it is still a contractual arrangement between private individuals. If political authority devolved upon the vassals of kings and other lords in medieval Europe, it was not the function of that contract to confer it. Rather, through the decline of the apparatus of State power and as an attempt to shore up failing governmental institutions, contracting individuals often acquired political roles. In Bunyoro, on the other hand, the delegation of authority to subordinates is the fundamental agency of centralized power, the substance of the State apparatus and the determining element in the relations between the mukama and the chiefs. The idea of homage is not present in this relationship.

Similarly, the idea of protection can be seen as the responsibility to state officials of the political authorities rather than the contractual obligation of feudal lords. Moreover, the mystic identification of the mukama with the whole country and his calculated removal from the cross loyalties of kinship and clanship (Beattie 1961:25-29) argue against the partiality implicit in the idea of special protection for vassals.

Is the concept of fiefholding applicable to Bunyoro? Here again we must warn against confounding the delegation of territorial authority with fiefholding. According to Margaret Chilvers (1959:382):

"The fact of the association of office and landholding combined with authority of some sort exercised by landlords over peasants would, if it were adopted as our definition [. . .], place not only the Bito-ruled states, but many others in Europe, Asia and Africa in the ‘feudal’ category."

Therefore, following Chilvers, “the central institution of feudal-vassalage” has been singled out in our definition, rather than the association of land and office holding. In Bunyoro as in Buganda, the system of the delegation of territorial political power in the form of estates does not constitute a feudo-vassalage institution. While authority is not conceived of in kinship terms (Taylor 1962:36), neither is it a properly understood feudal regime. Although an effect of the grant of territory was the provision of the means of maintaining the territorial chief, the taxes and tribute which supported him were not his feudal dues. They were the taxes and tribute owed the mukama

and collected by his political agent\textsuperscript{1}. The estate was not a benefice but an administrative burden, held on precarious tenure by the mukama's spear, his appointed chief.

A further word might be directed to the use to which Beattie puts general structural analogies and specific political and ritual practices in comparing European feudal polities, especially Norman England, to traditional Bunyoro (Beattie 1961:39-41). While the resemblances he finds are striking and even illuminating of comparable practices found in “small-scale, pre-industrial States,” we can account for these similarities between such States as a result of the necessary limitations imposed by primitive communications, economics and technology (Beattie 1964:35). We should therefore discard such comparisons in favor of a more rigorous delineation of basic political and social institutions if we are to attempt a comparison of specifically feudal relations. In conclusion, we would concur with Beattie (1964:35) that:

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\text{“[...] it is more useful and illuminating to retain the term ‘feudalism’ and its associated vocabulary for the complex polities to which they were first applied [...] and to describe the political institutions of traditional Bunyoro [...] as far as possible in their own terms.”}
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Perhaps the most complex of the kingdoms to be termed feudal is the southern lacustrine society of Rwanda. To analyze the feudal elements of Rwanda social and political structure three distinctive features will be examined: the centralized system of administration; the military organization; and the unique structure of personal dependence called ubuhake. All these structures exist within the framework of a monarchy in which, as in the other kingdoms studied, the king (mwami) claims absolute power. Furthermore, the vertical structures of administration, military and ubuhake, lie across a horizontal division of society into more or less distinct ‘castes’, that is hereditary or ‘racial’ occupational groups ranked in social and political status. The pastoral Tutsi dominate by virtue of their control of the political apparatus as well as the control of cattle, “the symbols of wealth and power culturally recognized by their society” (Maquet r961b:133). It is the monopoly of power by the dominant Tutsi that is the central feature of Rwandese political life and the structures we will examine serve primarily to concentrate and regulate the control of the Tutsi caste and the Tutsi monarch (Codere).

\textsuperscript{1} The territorial rights and duties of chiefs were: tax collection; organizing public works; levying armies; hearing legal cases; guarding cattle and keeping the peace (Roscoe 1925:54-55).
The administrative structure of Rwanda\(^1\) bears some resemblance to those of Bunyoro and Buganda. The most significant complicating factor is the separation of the roles in the dual administration of cattle people and farmers. As in the other kingdoms, beneath the king is a category of great chiefs, here called ‘stool chiefs’, who are responsible for the administration of the major territorial divisions of the realm. The next level, however, sees the functions of administration divided between a land chief and a cattle chief, sharing dominion over the same district or ‘canton’. Each chief had specific judicial and administrative roles; the one over land tenure and agricultural tribute; the other over grazing rights and the affairs of the pastoralists. At a lower level the functions were reunited in a single authority, the hill chief. Beneath these authorities, lineage heads were the last intermediary between king and commoner. The principle functions of the administrative hierarchy were tax collection and the maintenance of central authority and, hence, Tutsi domination\(^2\).

At this point it is hardly necessary to do more than suggest that the administrative structure is based on relations between a ruler and his political subordinates and not on a contract of vassalage. Homage and fealty, protection and maintenance as apply to feudal relations are neither fundamental nor significant for administrative relations as found in these kingdoms. This is nowhere clearer than in Rwanda, where personal ties are embodied in a distinct institution, *ubuhake*, which though it overlaps and reinforces the already interrelated administrative and military systems, is neither necessary nor important to them (Kagame 1962:7).

The division of responsibility between land chiefs and cattle chiefs opens a new avenue in the consideration of the problem of fief-holding in East African societies. If we were to accept the royal grant of land rights to functionary as a fief, we must then consider as a fief a royal grant of cattle rights to corresponding individuals where cattle serve the same social, economic and political functions as land in the feudal contract. According to our dictum that the social content and not the peculiar form of service or in this case maintenance is relevant to our analysis\(^3\), we must find cattle as valid a form of maintenance as land. This question is however merely hypothetical,

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\(^3\) Cf. *supra*. Curiously, the historical root of the word ‘fief’ is related to the German word for cattle indicating a possibility that cattle served the original vassalage agreements as a form of maintenance (Bloch 1964:165).
in that we have, in any case, rejected the fiefhold nature of political
tenure in land in Rwanda.

Paralleling the administrative hierarchy is another instrument of
social control combined with military duties, the cattle and social
armies of Rwanda. As all the territory was subdivided in the admin-
istrative system, so all the patrilineages and all the cattle of the
land were organized into a military or para-military regimental
system. At the head of each army, composed of a warrior section
of Tutsi and a herder section of Hutu, was a chief directly appointed
by the mwami. Often one individual might join the roles of military
and administrative chief. The power of the military chief lay in his
ability to control the distribution of cattle attached to his army.
The control of the military system by the Tutsi aristocracy provided
a supplemental means for the ruling orders to manipulate the ‘wealth
and power’ of Rwanda (Kagame 1963:8-10, and Maquet 1961:115-124).

The army chief shares a number of common attributes with the
vassal or baron of medieval England. First, he is personally respon-
sible to his overlord, the mwami, for the performance of military
services. To perform these services he received a degree of jurisdic-
tion over non-military personnel in the persons of peasant cultivators
and in Rwanda pastoralists. However, the differences are more
striking and significant. The military service performed is different
in style and nature, being the organization and leadership of large
fighting forces and their logistic support, rather than personal service
by his lord’s shield (Kagame 1962:32-41, passim). Furthermore, in
as much as “the main function of the army was that it acted as an
agency for the redistribution of wealth, i.e. consumption goods and
cattle” (Maquet 1961b:120), the role of the army-chief was that of
an agent of central authority fundamentally akin to the role of an
administrative chief but performing different State functions. The
strictly military duties of the army system were secondary and indeed
other institutions and arrangements might be sought as more appro-
priate to the problems of warfare and defense of territory1. In any
case, the social relations embodied in the military system are not in
the nature of knight’s service to his lord as would be found in a
vassalage relationship based on military obligation2.

The system of ubuhake, or clientage as Maquet calls it, is perhaps
the closest we shall come to finding vassalage and fief institutions in
this examination. Maquet states quite directly that this institution
is feudal, that is “based on an agreement between two individuals
who unequally partake of the symbols of wealth and power [. . . ].

1. The role of the Twa pygmies may deserve consideration in this regard.
2. For knight’s service and knight’s fee in England, cf. POLLOCK and MAIT-
The person who, in that respect is inferior to the other, asks for his patronage, and, as a counterpart, offers his services” (Maquet 1961b:133). This agreement or contract ties together two people by bonds of personal obligation and commitment. This seems to approach the essential quality of a vassalage contract in the *ubuhake* system.

The *garagu* or client offers homage and service. He becomes the man of his patron, owing him loyalty and respect before others, regardless of his political or social status. He was required by the agreement to perform services of a personal nature for his lord, such as accompanying him when travelling, attending him at his manor (Gravel 1965), supporting him in warfare, carrying his messages and (if the *garagu* was Hutu) mending his fences and performing menial labor services. These services were owed to the lord as a result of the contract of *ubuhake* and not by virtue of his political or social position.

While clientage relationships were not the preserve of the upper class or ‘caste’, extending virtually throughout the social scale, the services demanded of Tutsi clients by their Tutsi patrons differ in some respects from those demanded of Hutu clients. The effect of this difference was to accent the social and political superiority of the Tutsi by emphasizing the *consilium* aspect of homage and minimizing the socially degrading labor service. We might construe this Tutsi-Tutsi contract as closer to true vassalage and see in the Tutsi-Hutu or Hutu-Hutu relationship a similarity to the medieval institution of servile homage, an imitative form developed by the European peasantry.

On his part, the *shebuja* or patron owed his client protection and maintenance. Protection was evidenced by the patron’s support in courts of law and his economic assistance in cases of the payment of fines or compensation and political aid in securing justice by blood feud. The support of an important patron in a law court cannot be regarded lightly in a society where justice can be prejudiced by the existence of a caste or color line. Maintenance was a manifold obligation including economic supplements in cases of extreme hardship, support for orphans and widows and contributions to bride wealth. However, the basic source of maintenance as provided by the *ubuhake* agreement was the grant of usufructuary rights over cattle. No contract was complete without this element which closely corresponds to the concept of fief. The client was granted “full rights of ownership over milk, the male increase of the cattle, and the meat and skin of a cow who had died...” (Maquet 1961b:129). The cattle could be used to ‘subinfeudate’, that is, as maintenance in a new

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contract between a client and a client of his. The contract was for
the life of the parties and could be legally terminated for cause only.
The contract tended to become hereditary upon mutual agreement of
heirs. The patron always retained the ultimate ownership of the
cattle as well as the female increase, insuring the permanent control
of wealth in cattle to the lord and in effect to the Tutsi caste.

There are a number of significant dissimilarities between the
*ubuhake* agreement and the contract of vassalage, which affect the
nature of the social relations of each system. First is the pervasive-
ness of the *ubuhake* agreement. While the institution of vassalage
was largely restricted to the upper classes of Europe (Bloch 1964:327)\(^1\),
in Rwanda virtually every man except the *mwami* had a patron and
only the lowest Hutu peasant or Twa potter were without clients.
It was far too impractical to be without a patron if one was weak,
making freedom of contract "socially illusory" (Maquet 1961b:134)\(^2\).

Secondly, the functioning of the system tended to strengthen the
hold of the ruling class and the monarch on their subordinates and
preserve the social power of the Tutsi and the political power of the
central government. It was supplemental to the administrative and
military hierarchies, reinforcing their powers of social control but not
usurping political power per se. Lastly, it can be questioned to what
extent the benefice of cattle served to maintain the services
In the case of Tutsi-Tutsi agreements the transfer of cattle helped
preserve the client's social status and allowed him the leisure to
perform his duties as councilor. However, in Tutsi-Hutu agreements
it would seem the flow of goods was from client to patron; from the
lower orders of society to the upper. The element of maintenance
seems illusory here as the economic benefits of the cattle were offset
by the extortionate opportunities presented to the lord. These factors,
however, result from the domination of the Tutsi rather than from
the nature of the *ubuhake* agreement, which probably served to amel-
iorate the social exploitation of the pastoral monopolists.

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In attempting to analyze the feudal aspects of the social and
political relations of the three interlacustrine societies, a clear concep-
tion of feudal institutions was sought. At the core of the concept of
feudalism a complex of interpersonal relationships having the force

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1. We therefore prefer the application of the terms patron and client, drawn
from a Roman institution in which both patrician and plebeian classes could
establish dependent relations (Rostovtzeff 1960:44).

2. Note: "Les Twa, plus bas encore dans la hiérarchie sociale, ne faisaient
toutefois pas partie, dans l'ensemble, de la structure de clientèle" (Hertefelt
1965:68).
of law, which has been called feudo-vassalage, was delineated. This structure of personal contractual arrangements provided European feudal societies with a system of land use and of military service, and a basis for the distribution of power among the members of the ruling military aristocracies. In other words, the institutions of vassalage and fiefholding form the basic structure of society and politics in a feudal regime.

The examination of the social and political systems of Buganda, Bunyoro and Rwanda for feudo-vassalage institutions uncovered two examples of fundamentally analogous structures. The Ganda system of batongole chiefs and the Rwanda ubuhake agreement seem to be the only institutions in these kingdoms which are based on personal contractual relations between two individuals, corresponding to lord and vassal. Moreover, the administrative systems of a hierarchy of chiefs, which have given rise to the application of feudal terms to these kingdoms, have been found to be based on different organizational principles and social relations. These political structures cannot be pressed into a feudal model without severe distortion of either the model or the political systems of those States. One might suggest that the notions of absolutist monarchy and administrative centralization through appointed regional authorities better describe the common political stock of the interlacustrine States. The concepts of bureaucracy, of royal intendancy, of ‘caste’ domination, on the other hand, may prove more useful tools in delineating the distinctive features of Buganda, Bunyoro and Rwanda respectively.

In any case, by implying a contractual basis in the political arrangements of the kingdoms surveyed, feudal notions fail to impart clarity to either the general or the particular modes of political organization in these States.

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