

The line between bad and better is a border: an analysis of political violence, foreign policies, and economic prosperity in Kenya and Tanzania

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Introduction

Despite being neighbouring states and having several commonalities, Kenya and Tanzania have followed different paths to become two vastly different states today. In pre-colonial times, both countries were under British rule until the early 1960s in which both countries became independent within five years of each other. Even though both countries shared many similarities, such as having populations ranging between 40 and 60 million inhabitants, relatively low GDPs per capital and similar temperate climates, they rode the path to statehood differently. Tanzania embraced Ujamaa, a Swahili word meaning 'familyhood' (Delehanty, 2020) which was used to describe leader Julius Nyerere's radical socialism that stripped the country of economic prosperity. On the other hand, Kenya followed a capitalist and international model, which created inequality and unrest within the state.

Thus, we can ask ourselves why these two nations differed in their evolution. This essay will explain how Kenya, who often followed a capitalist and internationally oriented approach, suffered more internal unrest but higher economic prosperity than Tanzania who explored socialism and strengthened its relations with African nations rather than Western ones at the expense of growth. This paper will demonstrate that the outcomes of Kenyan and Tanzanian statehoods are vastly different by examining the role of political leaders and cultural and tribal unity. Then, an analysis of the ways in which the countries' economic policies affected the people will be made. Finally, an exploration will be made about how the role of the international regime strongly influenced the chosen pattern of statehood.

How chosen languages increased the divide between Kenya and Tanzania

Language is closely related to political contexts in 20th century East Africa. Tanzania and Kenya, although neighbouring countries, adopted fairly different policies in regard to the regional language of Swahili. Tanzania took on a more socialist approach, while Kenya chose a more international and capitalistic method. Thus, when Tanzania chose Swahili, an African language, as their official and national language, it further unified the country because English, an overly complicated colonial language, and more dialects were no longer a norm. Kenya, however, chose English "as the 'gate of entry to a new world'" (Whiteley, 1956), which some considered a colonial vestige.

One of the reasons explaining why the implementation of Swahili in Kenya was quite ineffective was in part because "the number of tribal groups is larger; different language-groups are more evenly distributed" (ibid.). Another part that played an important role was the idea that English was used as a symbol of status and an opportunity for Kenyans to gain better skills and higher paying jobs. Whiteley's article on "The Changing Position of Swahili in East Africa" (1956) shows examples of Kenyans' views on English: "If only I could speak English, I should get more pay'; 'If I were English-speaking, I should be able to live in a new house'; 'I plan to buy . . . when I finish my English exams.'" This phenomenon is uniquely Kenyan as Nyerere did not believe in the individual acquisition of wealth. This makes the distinction of language between the two nations all the more obvious. We can now see that the English language was considered a capitalist asset in Kenya, which explains why the socialist Tanzanian president would choose to return to Swahili.

How ethnicity played into Kenyan conflict and why it was excluded from the Tanzanian narrative

It is important to understand the role of ethnic party bans, which researcher Anika Moroff describes as “the banning of ethnic and other identity-based parties [which] has become the norm in sub-Saharan Africa” (2010), in most regions other than the ones she exposes in her report. These played an important role in influencing party politics in East African states such as Tanzania and Kenya. Tanzania enacted one of these bans in 1992, while Kenya only enacted theirs in 2008. Ethnic party bans are considered important for equality because, without them, political parties become deeply entrenched in tribal and ethnic conflict (Branch and Cheeseman, 2009).

It is argued that ethnic conflict is not as prevalent in Tanzania. One of the reasons for this would be the legacy of post-colonial Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere. Indeed, Nyerere placed an importance on separating corruption from political contexts during his tenure as the country’s leader. In Tanzania, “[no] tribal language could be used at these meetings and no appeal for votes could be made on grounds of race, tribe or religion” (Pratt, 1999). He “adopted an intensive nation-building policy, which included the promotion of Swahili as a national language and the use of TANU [...], as an instrument of integration and assimilation” (ibid.). A 2010 report on the importance of these bans highlights that “[ethnicity] played a significant role in Kenyan politics, while in Tanzania this factor never gained such importance” (Moroff, 2010). This is due to Nyerere’s continued emphasis on the separation of ethnicity and identity-based groups from his national politics. The author

explains that this is the reason why large-scale ethnic violence was not prevalent in Tanzania either before or after the end of the colonial period, and this was inevitably helped by Nyerere’s aggressive policies.

Kenya, however, suffered many spells of ethnic violence, especially along the borders of its capital, Nairobi, such as the 2002 Kariobangi attacks. Two rival vigilante gangs sparred, with the Mungiki retaliating for the death of their comrades at the hands of the Taliban. This conflict was a recurring crisis in Nairobi and citizens felt disempowered at the lack of action by their leaders. Anderson explains that “[although] there is no direct evidence of government or KANU backing for Mungiki, there has been considerable press speculation about the likely political ‘sponsorship’ of the movement” (2002). Kenyan politicians have an advantage when they control a militant group, rather than having that group be allied to an opponent. Anderson explains that these groups are often the result of “failed institutions”, which are prevalent within the Kenyan system. In his book, Branch explains that “[key institutions showed no sign of having learned any lessons from the violence either” (2011). This was a common occurrence for Kenyans; to feel ignored by their leaders who often worked for their political gain, rather than for the good of their nation. For example, as gangs grow in size and influence, they become political weapons that MPs prefer to use to their advantage, rather than to obliterate for the sake of their citizens.

Thus, ethnic bans are seen here to be an advantage to culling these specific types of violent outbursts, as Tanzania, which enacted one earlier than Kenya, did not suffer the same plight.

Mohabe Nyirabu explains in his 2002 article, "The Multiparty Reform Process in Tanzania: The Dominance of the Ruling Party", that Tanzanian president separated ethnicity from his politics, even within his attempt at a democratic one-party state, and Kenya did not. This separation is one of the main reasons political violence and unrest was not as prevalent in Tanzania.

Differing economic policies: socialism and capitalism

Tanzania chose to follow a socialist approach post-independence as "Nyerere was distressed by and hostile towards the acquisitive individualism that exposure to the wealth of the developed world had generated" (Pratt, 1999). He also wanted to ensure "that Tanzania not surrender control of the direction of its economic development to international capitalist interests or international agencies dominated by the major industrialized states" (ibid.). Nyerere turned Tanzania "to the Left, concluding that self-reliance and socialism provided the only path forward for underdeveloped African countries." (Gordon, 1987). His policies did not align with what was discussed by Kenyan leaders at the time.

Then, it is important to focus on the economic conflicts that were taking place. A strong indicator of the difference between Tanzania and Kenya's approaches can be demonstrated by this quote from Pratt's 1999 article, "Many in Africa at the time, [...], took the position that economic growth should be the primary task and that pursuing greater equity could be left to later generations, when African countries would have more left to redistribute. Nyerere never embraced

this rationalization." (Pratt, 1999). Tanzania chose to follow a socialist approach post-independence as "Nyerere was distressed by and hostile towards the acquisitive individualism that exposure to the wealth of the developed world had generated" (ibid.). He also wanted to ensure "that Tanzania not surrender control of the direction of its economic development to international capitalist interests or international agencies dominated by the major industrialized states" (ibid.).

Kenya did not follow Nyerere's pattern and worked on acquiring wealth to create a stronger state in the future. Although their volume of wealth did not grow as fast as they had hoped, in the second decade after independence, they could rely on tourism and foreign investments, which Tanzania could not. Even game parks that straddled the border between the two nations were more often operated by Kenya tour companies than Tanzanian ones. Tanzanians also held a fundamental distrust of the formerly colonial policies still adopted by Kenya after its independence.

Kenya faced another problem that Tanzania never experienced: income inequality. This was a huge issue in Kenya. However, "[within] the African community in Tanzania, income differences were still not vast, if only because most were still very poor" (ibid.). Nyerere was working extremely hard to avoid letting the class divides take over his country. In Kenya, "[relatively] privileged groups may fear that improvements in conditions for relatively low-status groups will allow those groups more successfully to compete and threaten privileged groups at a later time" (Bienen, 1974). This clearly illustrates the capitalist mindset adopted by Kenyans, and their policies

which promoted self-sufficiency and every man for themselves.

Outward and inward foreign policies

Throughout this paper, the fundamental differences between Kenya and Tanzania's responses to different international issues were revealed. A pertinent example of this is how the two countries resolve conflict with their neighbours on the African continent. Kenya turned to the United States for help during their territorial conflict with Somalia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Tanzania, however, resolved their conflict with Ugandan dictator, Idi Amin, using solely Tanzanian troops. This highlights fundamental differences between the foreign policy of both nations. Indeed, "Tanzania has maintained a policy of strict non-alignment, while Kenya has developed close strategic ties to the United States" (Gordon, 1987). This is explained by Nyerere's socialist views and his desire to create a stronger sense of African unity. Kenya, on the other hand, chose to enter the international market, which led to it developing diplomatic and intentional relations with Western powers.

In the late 1970s, Kenya and Somalia began a dispute about the north-eastern portion of Kenya, as it was largely populated by ethnic Somalis. The conflict was heavily influenced by international actors, as Somalia was undergoing extended military disputes within its borders. Kenya decided to enter into a military agreement with the United States and asked for weapons and supplies. As well, "Kenya decided to increase its ties to Washington in hopes of gaining American leverage against any Somali efforts to threaten

Kenya more actively" (Gordon, 1987). Kenya's foreign policy is thus shown to be more outward oriented, and more willing to engage in cooperation from outside the African continent.

In a contrasting example, Tanzania responded to the crisis in Uganda with only its own army. In 1979, Tanzania decided to step in to help remove prominent dictator Idi Amin from power. Their original plan was to "play only a limited role in the overthrow of Amin". This did not happen. Amin was operating with the help of the Soviets and when they retreated, Libya stepped in to provide help to Uganda. Tanzania then decided to put 40,000 of its own troops into Uganda in order to successfully overthrow Idi Amin. Ultimately, Tanzania suffered from this decision as it could never properly extricate its troops without completely failing Uganda and it is why the "Tanzanians could not help but become the de facto authority in Uganda. A year after Amin's fall, over 15 000 Tanzanian troops remained in Uganda" (Gordon, 1987). They did not turn to outside powers for aid and attempted to resolve an African conflict with exclusively African actors. This is a pattern that aligns itself strongly with Tanzania's foreign policy.

This policy outlook contributes to the unrest within Kenya's internal structure. Kenya did not spend as much time as Tanzania working on creating a national unity in the postcolonial era. Their Kenyan identity was not as strongly consolidated, and they were generally more open to accepting inter-national interference within the African context. Tanzania, on the other hand, was extremely invested in the concept of an African identity and unifying the continent in a global context and did not hesitate to denounce regimes it found

oppressive, even those of their neighbours.

Conclusion

Throughout the events described in this paper, Kenya and Tanzania can be seen to be neighbours in geography but not in policy. First, an examination was made concerning the differing use of the Swahili language in both countries. Then, an analysis was made of the ethnicity and identity within political parties in the East African context, which shows why Kenya was more exposed to forms of political violence. Lastly, through an analysis of both countries' economic and international policies, Tanzania and Kenya were shown to fundamentally differ in their methodologies. Ultimately, Kenya's outward approach failed to quell unrest within its internal structure and Tanzania's Ujamaa unified the country in its economic doom. Neither of the two states has a perfect approach in either curbing political violence, enacting foreign policy, or creating economic prosperity. However, they highlight what we already know: they are separated both physically and ideologically by a border.

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