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Freedom and Unity? The politics of East African regionalism and federation, 1958-1964

Abstract: Recent scholarship discussing the ‘federal moment’ in world history after 1945 has re-examined alternatives to the nation-state in the years of decolonisation, arguing against any inevitable transition from empire to nation. This article focuses on the case of East Africa, where federation seemed an attractive and likely prospect by 1963, yet never came to pass. Here the politics of federation should be understood as a constitutive part of the contested nation-state making process, rather than a viable alternative to it. For the leaders who initiated the politics of federation in the 1960s, regional unity promised the further centralisation of power, and a means of defeating tribalist opposition. For their opponents, federation was seized on as a means of promoting the autonomy of provinces or kingdoms within a larger federal unit. Yet ultimately, regionalist aspiration was inseparable from national politics: and negotiations among the leaders of East African states demanded the definition of national interests, which divided states rather than united them. Such conclusions suggest that historians of the federal moment might more productively focus on the functions of federalist discourse in the making of nation-states, rather than debating the viability of federalist projects.

As Kenya moved towards independence in 1963, the last of Britain’s East African territories to do so, it seemed this would herald the achievement of unity as well as freedom in the region, through the creation of a new political community: the federation of East Africa. The leaders of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda, after three years of on-and-off statements of support for federation, had announced on June 5th their intention to unite by the end of that year. International observers later asserted that the ‘right political galaxies were in propitious conjunction’ for this potentially transformative achievement, that promised a more viable

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economic and political basis for independence in the region.¹ British and American diplomats noted the powerful emotional appeal of the idea of unity among both politicians and a wider ‘responsible citizenry’ in the region; some considered federation a ‘virtually accomplished fact’ by late June 1963.² Yet within months the prospect of federation had faded away.³ Attempts were made to revive the issue over the next year and a half, but a tide of regional disintegration set in, stemmed only in 1967 with the creation of the East African Community, oriented towards economic integration and the continued delivery of common services.⁴

The failure of federal politics has limited scholarly interest in the subject: contemporary work focused on explaining why such an apparently promising future for the region was so swiftly abandoned. For Joseph Nye, the answers centred on Ugandan concerns about its position within a larger regional unit and ideological objections inspired by Kwame Nkrumah’s vision of East African federation as a neo-colonial, balkanising plot and an obstacle to continental unity.⁵ Others also noted the long-standing hostility of the Buganda kingdom – the largest and most powerful of Uganda’s various ‘traditional kingdoms’ – to any form of union with East Africa that would reduce its own autonomy. A range of other issues were seen as contributing to failure: tensions over the uneven distribution of benefits from economic integration; lack of clarity on the function or form of federation; a lack of popular engagement with the process; and, simply, bad timing. Once national sovereignty had been achieved (which it had been in Uganda and Tanganyika by 1962), it was very difficult for leaders to surrender it.⁶

¹ T. Franck. ‘East African Federation’, in Franck, *Why Federations Fail* (New York, 1968), p.3.

² Vass to Secretary of State, June 27 1963, NARA, RG59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893

³ For example, see J. Nye, *Pan-Africanism and East African integration* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 189.

⁴ A. Hazlewood, *Economic Integration: The East African experience* (London, 1975).

⁵ Nye, *Pan-Africanism*, pp. 181-203.

⁶ Alongside Nye, the most useful work is C. Leys and P. Robson, *Federation in East Africa: opportunities and problems* (London, 1965).

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For scholars writing in the 1960s the failure to create the federation was a tragedy: Thomas Franck suggested the ‘failure to seize the moment seems almost a flouting of destiny’.⁷ Federation appeared the rational solution to problems that faced newly independent states in a predatory global environment: political unity would generate diplomatic clout and economic viability. These arguments were in line with those made by Julius Nyerere (first Prime Minister and later President of Tanganyika/Tanzania) and other East African politicians in favour of federation – and indeed they were voiced elsewhere in the decolonising world, as part of a multivalent internationalist discourse that also encompassed visions of continental or even world governance.⁸ There is something of an irony here, for whilst many politicians in the decolonising world saw supra-national unity as a defence against neo-colonialism, European imperial states had envisaged federal amalgamations of their colonial territories as a means of deflecting nationalism’s ‘fetishisation of sovereign territoriality’ and thus maintain key spheres of imperial influence.⁹ Nonetheless, recent scholarship on the ‘federal moment’ in world history after 1945, has attempted to recapture the possibilities of this period ‘between empire and nation’, suggesting that regional federation provided an alternative model for the future to that of the smaller nation-state. In Frederick Cooper’s monumental work on French West Africa especially, the failure of federalism is, to some extent, to be mourned – and its possibilities re-examined for lessons that may be applicable to the present.¹⁰

The disillusionment with the nation-state in post-colonial Africa in particular, however, has perhaps led historians to over-estimate the ideological distinction between regionalist federalism and territorial nationalism, and also under-estimate the *realpolitik* that underpinned

⁷ Franck, ‘Federation’, p.3.

⁸ F. Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation* (Princeton, 2014). R. Irwin, ‘Imagining Nation, State and Order in the mid-Twentieth Century’, *Kronos*, 37 (2011), pp. 11-22

⁹ M. Collins, ‘Decolonisation and the “Federal Moment”’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 24 (2013), p. 24 and M. Collins, ‘Decolonization in Africa’, in A.W.M. Smith and C. Jeppesen, *Britain, France and the decolonization of Africa: Future imperfect?* (London, 2017), pp. 17-42.

¹⁰ Cooper, *Citizenship*, p. 446-7.

federal projects.¹¹ In an important intervention, Michael Goebel has reminded us that the various pan-visions and regionalisms of inter-war anti-imperial activists, including Pan-Africanism, were ideologically compatible and ‘sometimes even mutually constitutive’ with ‘smaller’ nationalisms that envisaged a more pragmatic capture of colonial territorial frameworks.¹² Moreover, political science literature has long noted that ‘regionalism has often been geared to sovereignty enhancement not sovereignty pooling... [it is] a tool for the consolidation of state power.’¹³ Critical political scientists have argued that participation in regionalist summitry has ‘regime-boosting’ effects for those participating in a highly personalised and exclusive ‘club diplomacy’.¹⁴ In East Africa it was certainly true that the idea of federation emerged in the 1960s as a project of allied nationalist leaders, each supporting their neighbours in a drive to centralised state sovereignty. But federal politics had complex functions and meanings beyond the agendas of the centralising elite.

This article reveals the specific ways in which ideas of supra-national unity were co-opted into national-level debates over *internal* ‘sovereignty regimes’ in the years of East African decolonisation.¹⁵ Differing visions of regional federation were appropriated by what we might understand as rival nationalist groups struggling over the arrangement and distribution of

¹¹ For concise critiques of Cooper and the ‘federal turn’ more widely see Michael Goebel, *After Empire must come nation?* Accessed on 21 July 2017 at <https://medium.com/afro-asian-visions/after-empire-must-come-nation-cd220f1977c>, Samuel Moyn, ‘Fantasies of federalism’, *Dissent*, 62:1 (2015), 145– 51. and R. Drayton, ‘Federal Utopias and the Realities of Imperial Power’, in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37 (2017), pp. 401-406.

¹² M. Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis, Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 252, and more generally pp. 250-277.

¹³ R. Higgott, ‘The international political economy of regionalism: the Asia-Pacific and Europe compared’, in WD Coleman and GRD Underhill, *Regionalism and Global Economic Integration: Europe, Asia and the Americas* (London, 1998), p. 53.

¹⁴ Herbst, ‘Crafting regional cooperation in Africa’, in A. Acharya and A. Johnston (eds), *Crafting Cooperation. Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (London, 2007). D. Bach, *Regionalism in Africa* (Abingdon, 2016), p.34.

¹⁵ This is a term adapted from John Agnew, more commonly used to describe the ways in which national sovereignty is always diluted by dependence on other states and international institutions in a global context, but here used to suggest the contested layering of sovereignty within national units: see discussion in D. Haines, ‘A Commonwealth moment in South Asian decolonization’, in L. James and E. Leake, *Decolonization and the Cold War* (Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 186. I am also indebted to Julie MacArthur for discussions pointing in this direction.

power *within* existing territorial frameworks. What Ryan Irwin has identified as the central political issue in the Congo as it approached independence – the struggle over the distribution of sovereignty between centralisers on the one hand, and those who supported greater autonomy for regions or provinces, based on alternative nationalisms often described as ‘ethnic’ or ‘sub-national’, on the other – was a struggle replicated across much of the African continent, and vigorously fought out in Kenya and Uganda in particular.¹⁶ In this context, East African federation was presented by incumbent, centralising leaders as a regional alliance of their own persons, their parties, and the nation-states they led against divisive ‘tribalist’ opposition; their opponents and rivals constructed a rival vision of federation which would serve as a means for smaller-scale units (kingdoms or regions) to have their sovereignty recognised as constituent members of a larger federal unit, circumventing the old colonial capitals. The elite antagonists in these debates thus drew on the idea of federation principally as a discursive resource in their existing attempts to either cement, remake or break asunder existing relations between locality and centre within nation-states, rather than as a vehicle for new pan-regional identities and politics.

The unpredictable consequences of federalist politics continued to emerge during the course of negotiations over a federal constitution in 1963. As the implications of shared sovereignty in a federal unit became clear, it became necessary for politicians to articulate conceptions of the national interest in negotiation with their neighbours. National interests were not simply ‘let out of the ideological Pandora’s box’ during negotiations as earlier interpretations have suggested: rather they were constructed and defined by politicians in the process of negotiation.¹⁷ This diplomatic and bureaucratic labour produced a clearer sense of the

¹⁶ R. Irwin, ‘Sovereignty in the Congo Crisis’, in James and Leake, *Decolonization*, pp. 205-207. For Kenya, see D. Anderson, ‘Yours in Struggle for Majimbo’. Nationalism and the Party Politics of Decolonization in Kenya, 1955-64, *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 40, No. 3 (Jul., 2005), pp. 547-564; for Uganda see D.A. Low, *Buganda in Modern History* (Berkeley, 1971)

¹⁷ Nye, *Pan-Africanism*, p. 193.

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differences among nation-states in the region, rather than encouraging greater unity. Furthermore, participation in negotiations and the defence of the national interest was in itself a performance of sovereign statehood and indeed a constitutive part of the nation-state making process. Finally, as leaders moved away from their apparent initial enthusiasm for federation, their rivals and discontented parliamentarians could articulate a legitimate degree of opposition to these men by voicing their continued support for regional unity in the face of inaction by leaders. In short, this article argues that the significance of the politics of federalism in East Africa lies primarily in the multiple contributions it made to the contested politics of nation-building in the years of decolonisation, rather than in its potential to create an alternative post-national future for the region. Federation became – briefly - as contentious a project as the nation-state itself: both were vigorously debated in relation to one another.

This article uses British and American diplomatic and intelligence files to examine regionalist politics in East Africa, which contain speeches and press material from the region, alongside diplomatic correspondence that provides the fullest available archival account of events. Of course, this material cannot unequivocally reveal the inner intentions of the key African actors involved, but international observers did trace the development of regionalist politics closely. Both the British and Americans were keen supporters of the federal vision as a means of promoting stability and prosperity in the region, in the context of strategic and economic concerns related to the impact of independence and the wider context of the Cold War. The British – like the African nationalists who supported regional unity – believed in the economic benefits of a larger federal unit, which would derive from greater market size, the pooling of resources and the potential for more rational integrated economic planning and co-ordination: this would all build on the customs union and currency union already established under colonial rule. It was assumed that the resultant prosperity would ‘give each territory in the federation a

vested interest in preserving stability in the other territories'.¹⁸ This in turn would lessen the risk of radical leftward shifts in the region which might damage East Africa's status as a secure environment for British trade and investment or damage other cultural and political associations with the UK, notably the position of significant business and white settler communities that remained in Kenya. Economic success was also hoped to limit the need for future British financial assistance in the region, and it was hoped the survival of regional common services established by Britain would be guaranteed under a federation.¹⁹ British and American sources thus tend to share with academic observers of the day an assumption that federation was the rational solution to the challenges of independence – though they were also well aware of the power politics that drove much discussion around federation.

i.

Regionalism as a project of solidarity-building among the nationalist political leadership of East Africa first emerged with the creation of the Pan-African Freedom Movement of Eastern and Central Africa in 1958, a forum that supported the liberation of the region from colonial rule, and which also argued for an East African federation. In historiographical terms, PAFMECA has attracted little attention, given its obvious institutional weaknesses and lack of practical achievements. Nye wrote in 1965 that 'there was little to PAFMECA beyond conferences'; it was merely a leaders' 'forum'.²⁰ Yet the argument here is that this was in itself

¹⁸ 'EACSO and EAF', Cabinet Office note, October 1962, TNA CO 822/2730.

¹⁹ Similar logics drove the British to experiment with federalism in other parts of their empire in the years after the Second World War, notably including Central Africa, the West Indies, Malaysia and South Arabia – all of which failed to survive in the form intended by the British, each for their own reasons, though also presenting similarities with the problems noted above in East Africa. Notoriously, the Central African Federation was strongly associated with white settler privilege, which posed a credibility challenge for federalists in neighbouring East Africa trying to distance themselves from accusations of neo-colonialism in their pursuit of a policy also favoured by the British. On these cases see A. Cohen, *The politics and economics of decolonization in Africa* (London, 2017); S. Mawby, *Ordering Independence* (Basingstoke, 2012); Matthew Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961-1965* (Cambridge, 2002).

²⁰ Nye, *Pan-Africanism*, pp. 124-5. R. Cox, *Pan-Africanism in practice: PAFMECSA 1958-1964* (London, 1964) provides astute and detailed coverage of the movement's activities.

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of significance for the character of regionalist politics: this forum emphasised the legitimacy of centralising nation-builders and actively excluded those perceived to support ‘tribalist’ claims to autonomy. Arguments for federation made by these centralisers would continue the assault on sub-national political claims.

PAFMECA was dominated from the outset by Nyerere and Tom Mboya (leading Kenyan nationalist and trade unionist, and later cabinet minister) both of whom played close attention to their international and pan-Africanist credentials, as well as their domestic bases of support. From their perspective the movement was partly directed towards building a stronger voice for East Africa in the emergent continental and global politics of pan-Africanism. But from the perspective of the many other politicians who participated in PAFMECA conferences, the attraction of the organisation lay in winning recognition from their fellows as the authentic voice of nationalist politics in their territories.²¹ Equally, those supported by PAFMECA leadership – always parties with a vision of centralised statehood - worked to exclude representatives of rival parties who they often denounced as ‘tribalists’, unsupportive of unitary nationalism, from the organisation. The watchword of PAFMECA was unity: the movement emphasised the need to have a ‘single nationalist movement in each territory’. As Nyerere put it, ‘disagreeing about what sort of freedom they want will only prevent African nationalists from getting any freedom at all.’²² In this drive for single, PAFMECA-approved, nationalist movements, regionalism also served to assert the illegitimacy of opposition and shrank space for the expression of dissent. PAFMECA conferences talked of ‘tribalism’ as a profound threat to state survival which required eradication.²³ The Kenyan African Democratic Union (KADU) – the pro-devolution opposition to the centralist Kenyan African National Union (KANU) in

²¹ Will Reno has noted the significance of this imperative for anti-colonial and majority rule rebels, but the point can also be made of more conventional nationalist politicians. See his *Warfare in Independent Africa* (Cambridge, 2011), pp.37-118.

²² Tanganyika Sunday News, 16 Nov. 1958, TNA FCO 141/17923

²³ Cox, *PAFMECSA*, p. 14.

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Kenyan politics – was persistently excluded from PAFMECA membership, and denounced in meetings as pursuing a policy of division opposed to the ideals of Pan-Africanism.²⁴ In this sense, PAFMECA did not stand above the rivalries of territorial politics and factionalism: rather, it became ‘the vehicle of factional power politics... the opposite of the unity PAFMECA was pledged to construct.’²⁵

PAFMECA’s domination by Nyerere and Mboya’s leadership left Uganda’s place in the organisation rather ambiguous, with implications for the emergent politics of federation in the 1960s. Indeed, one British report suggested that ‘the lukewarm reception of PAFMECA in Uganda is because the political parties feel that it smacks too much of federation with other territories’.²⁶ Politicians from the kingdom of Buganda in particular had long-standing objections to the idea of an East African federation, just as they objected to the prospect of subordination to a centralised Ugandan government – assertions of the sovereignty of the Buganda kingdom posed significant blockages for projects of wider political unity in Uganda and beyond. It seems clear that Nyerere and Mboya saw Ugandan nationalists as requiring their tutelage rather than partnership in order that a viable nation might be established. A PAFMECA delegation led by Nyerere and Mboya visited Uganda in 1958 in an effort to bring unity to the Ugandan parties, to no real effect.²⁷ In October 1960 the Ugandan People’s Congress (UPC) and the Democratic Party (DP), despite their rivalry in Ugandan politics, co-organised the PAFMECA conference at Mbale together – both supported a centralised vision of statehood and the Mbale meeting was clearly an act of solidarity against the troublesome politics of

²⁴ Statement by Kenyan delegation at PAFMECA Conference, Addis Ababa, February 1962, TNA DO 183/35.

²⁵ Cox, *Pan-Africanism*, p.31, makes this observation in regards to Kenya, but it could equally be applied to PAFMECA’s involvement in the politics of Uganda and indeed Zanzibar.

²⁶ Acting Chief Secretary Tanganyika to Chief Secretary, Nyasaland, 8 Dec. 1958, TNA FCO 141/17923

²⁷ They were more successful in brokering a short-lived alliance between the ZNP and ASP in Zanzibar which became known as the Freedom Committee alliance. See J. Glassman, *War of words, War of Stones* (Bloomington, 2011), pp. 151-154.

monarchism in Buganda. Just before the conference, the Buganda *lukiko* (parliament) had made a declaration of the intent to secede from Uganda as an independent state by the end of that year; in the context of the Katangan secession in the Congo which had also occurred that year, this was enough to make sure that the dangers of 'tribalism' were at the forefront of everyone's minds. The UPC's Secretary General, Kakonge had announced that the purpose of the conference was to ascertain 'what assistance other parts of East Africa might be able to offer to Uganda to help fight against Buganda's obstructionist tactics'.²⁸ The Uganda National Congress – the first Ugandan anti-colonial political party, but by 1960 fragmented and in part closely identified with Ganda monarchical interests – was excluded from the meeting. Despite a mass meeting of the UNC outside the conference hall expressing support for the *kabaka* as head of state, Mboya used his closing address to attack the *lukiko* and stating 'it would be a tragedy for Uganda if it produced another Tshombe', referring to the reviled leader of the Katangan secession in the Congo. This was met with acclaim with delegates calling 'down with Tshombe' and 'no more Katangas'.²⁹

It was at the same 1960 Mbale meeting – not long after Nyerere had given his famous speech offering to delay Tanganyika's independence in order to buy time for the creation of a federation – that Mboya put the issue of federation on PAFMECA's agenda. This followed an earlier meeting between Mboya and Nyerere at which Nyerere was reported to have articulated a two-pronged argument in favour of federation:

Federation had a two-fold purpose, firstly in its effect on local East African politics and secondly in the broader sphere of pan-African influence... by uniting he believed that many of the tribal jealousies which beset territorial politics could be surmounted. In the

²⁸ Uganda Argus, Oct 14, 1960, TNA FCO 141/17924.

²⁹ Material in this paragraph taken from Kampala Special Branch report on the PAFMECA conference at Mbale, 26 Oct. 1960, TNA FCO 141/17924

pan-African sphere he thought a federation of East African states would greatly strengthen the PAFMECA [Pan-African Freedom Movement of Eastern and Central Africa] organisation and challenge Nkrumah and his autocratic ideas. In his view, some kind of alliance was necessary if East Africa was to successfully combat communism and neo-colonialism.³⁰

There were international and inter-regional concerns at work here: the concern to strengthen East Africa's hand vis a vis both global hazards and also within the rivalrous sphere of continental Pan-African politics is clear. Yet, as western diplomats noted, federal unity equally seemed an opportunity to sweep more localised ethnic politics 'under the carpet', and further shrink the political space available for opposition groups who based their support on 'sub-national' identity groups.³¹ Whilst Nyerere's control of TANU had essentially precluded 'tribalist' challenge in Tanganyika, the fear of secessionist claims were very real in the more divided politics of both Kenya and Uganda. Nyerere believed – as did Mboya – that federation would benefit centralising nationalists and further marginalise dangerous 'tribalist' opponents. The stability this would offer the region would surely benefit all three states.

British intelligence agents suggested the resolution on federation was the most significant passed at the Mbale meeting, though they also suggested it was 'of little use to the supporters of the federal idea, when such a decision is taken in private after a short and shaky discussion'.³² Indeed, as federation became the key topic of discussion, PAFMECA's activities became ever more personalised and exclusive. Instead of a full conference, plans for federation were subsequently discussed at a summit of leaders. This was held in January 1961 in the KANU

³⁰ 'The proposal for an East African federation and reaction to it in Kenya', Special Branch, Nairobi, 25 Feb. 1961, TNA FCO 141/7075.

³¹ Reith, Kampala, to Hickman, June 1963, TNA DO 168/73.

³² Ibid. Ideas that Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi might also join a federation were mooted at various times, but by 1963 it became clear that a tighter federation within British East Africa, building on existing colonial institutions was the only viable option being discussed.

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offices in Nairobi (with no KADU leaders invited). From Uganda, Benedict Kiwanuka, head of the DP attended, but not Milton Obote (leader of the UPC), nor any other Ugandan politician. The attendees agreed that an eastern African federation be created once every territory had an African government. Necessarily, not much came of this resolution on an immediate basis – but after Jomo Kenyatta’s release later in the year the cause of unity was once more energised, at least in rhetorical terms.³³ Following his acceptance of the presidency of KANU, Kenyatta visited Dar es Salaam for another summit meeting of East and Central African leaders: Kenyatta was thus inaugurated into regionalist club diplomacy, telling journalists that the ‘leaders hoped to get to know each other more closely as a result of their meeting.’ Later at a mass meeting he pronounced ‘Africa must unite. If we are united and speak with one voice a bomb 100 times stronger than an atomic bomb will not divide us’. He was then ‘showered with gifts by TANU elders’ including a shield and a spear – the shield to ‘defend African freedom’ and the ‘spear to kill tribalism in Kenya’.³⁴ Whilst Kenyatta would never be the enthusiastic federalist that Mboya had been since 1958, neither would he be a block to the cause as Kenya’s first Prime Minister in 1963.

However, Ugandans remained on the side-lines of regionalist networks: their divisions condemned them to be seen by their neighbours as a potential obstacle to effective federation. As the UPC rose to power in Uganda – now in uneasy alliance with the Kabaka Yekka (KY), the Buganda monarchist party – Obote’s position on federation remained ambiguous. Whilst many Kenyan and Tanganyikan politicians saw federation as a tool to smash tribalism – both KANU and especially TANU leaders able to view matters from commanding heights of political dominance by 1963 – a weaker Obote probably feared that federation might bring divisions in Ugandan politics to the fore, and thus pose a potential threat to the position of his

³³ Kenyatta had led the Kenya Africa Union, a nationalist organisation, from 1947 until his detention in 1952 from 1961 on (false) charges of orchestrating the Mau Mau rebellion.

³⁴ Sunday News, Tanganyika, 15 Oct. 61, TNA CO 822/2729

government. Following Ugandan independence, Obote depended on the support of the KY for his position as Prime Minister – and the *kabaka* was the head of state. Manoeuvring past long-standing Ganda objections to East African federation would not be easy, nor necessarily desirable.

KANU's electoral victory in June 1963 was the moment at which federation finally seemed to reach the top of the regional agenda. A conference of the 'big three' (Kenyatta, Nyerere and Obote) met in Nairobi immediately and announced on June 5 their intent to federate by the end of the year. It is important to note the conference and declaration also followed on from the pinnacle of pan-African summitry: the inaugural meeting of the Organisation of African Unity in Addis Ababa on 25 May 1963. Nye notes that Obote had been acclaimed as a militant pan-Africanist at this meeting, and this may have been the moment at which he felt drawn into the relationships which had characterised east African regionalism in the preceding years.³⁵ Certainly, the big three envisaged that federation would entrench the dominance of those leaders and their parties: Amir Jamal, Nyerere's Minister for Communications and one of the two Tanganyikans on the East African ministerial working party established to negotiate the federation, told American diplomats that there were plans to merge KANU, UPC and TANU into a single federal party that would fight a united campaign in federal elections, a message reinforced by Mboya and Ibingira, Ugandan Minister for Justice, in Kenya and Uganda respectively. Diplomats noted this pointed the way towards a one-party federal system.³⁶

Federation as a regionalist project in East Africa thus emerged out of the affective ties and shared interests of a small regional elite, and their conception of where legitimate authority lay (in their own persons and their key allies); it would cement the existing alliance between these

³⁵ Nye, *Pan-Africanism*, p. 184.

³⁶ Salisbury to Brubeck, June 25, 1963, NARA, RG59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893; Vass, Nairobi to Secretary of State, June 27, 1963, NARA, RG59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893

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men and their parties. Moreover, these were leaders preoccupied with the achievement of meaningful sovereignty – and federation was a tool to help achieve that goal. Yet more was at stake than merely instrumental regime-boosting: support for federation also rested on the assumption amongst the incumbent leadership that strengthening centralised political authority would support national progress and meaningful sovereignty more effectively than giving succour to what leaders conceived of as divisive, tribalist opposition.

ii.

Despite the expectation of the centralists that federation would cement their own position, their declaration of intent sparked debate in Kenya and Uganda over the shape and structure of federation. As negotiations proceeded, opposition or anti-centralist parties which supported the autonomy of sub-national regions or traditional kingdoms, mobilised their own visions of a federation of kingdoms and regions, rather than a federation of ex-colonial states. Such visions were even less likely to come to pass than those of the centralisers, and were mainly articulated for domestic purposes - but they nonetheless demonstrated the malleability of federalist discourse, and the multiple ways in which it might be deployed in national political debate over legitimate regimes of sovereignty.

In Kenya, KADU, which was setting into a process of terminal decline in 1963, had been persistently excluded from the politics of regional unity and federation. But it had enjoyed success in moving Kenya towards independence under a devolved regionalist (*majimbo*) constitution, with the backing of the British. These arrangements made the old colonial provinces into semi-autonomous regions with their own parliaments and presidents, which had significant control over resources, notably land, grievances over which were at the heart of Kenyan politics. These arrangements – bitterly resented by KANU as limiting the powers of central government - were under significant pressure following KANU's electoral victory of

June 1963. KANU had campaigned on a programme of constitutional change, and its leadership now felt they had a mandate to destroy *majimboism*. The declaration of intent to federate was clearly linked to the agenda of constitutional reform. Mboya at a KANU victory rally in Dar es Salaam on 11 June, six days after the declaration of intent, stated ‘*majimbo* has been buried in Kenya, we now want to form only three regions: Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika’.³⁷ Federal unity would remove the need for the regional governments in Kenya, and end *majimboist* obstacles to KANU’s nation-building. American observers endorsed this view, viewing federation from Kenyatta’s perspective as a ‘most useful device to play down significance of [tribalism], undercut political opposition and reduce bargaining power of minorities and UK in preserving *majimbo*.’³⁸ American and British diplomats perceptively noted that for KANU’s leadership nation-building and federation building were inseparable – constitutional change was absolutely necessary to ensure there would be ‘something left’ for the Kenyan central government in a larger federation, via the re-allocation of powers from the regions to the centre. Federation was also used as a device to push the pace of Kenyan independence. Nyerere, Mboya and Kambona (Tanganyikan minister of foreign affairs) all dined with Malcolm MacDonald, the British Governor of Kenya, on the evening following their declaration of intent (notably with no Ugandan representation), and re-asserted the importance of rapid independence for Kenya to ensure that federation be created before ‘zeal waned’ and Uganda’s previous objections re-emerge.³⁹ MacDonald believed Mboya and Nyerere to be sincere in their wish for federation, and Britain favoured a federation for its own reasons, as noted earlier. A subsequent meeting between Mboya and Duncan Sandys, Secretary of State for the Colonies, resulted in a promise of an October conference for settling the issue of independence, with an eye to achieving independence for Kenya by the end of 1963, concurrently with the

³⁷ Fowler, Dar es Salaam, to Commonwealth Relations Office, 11 June 1963, TNA DO 168/73.

³⁸ Vass, Nairobi to Secretary of State, June 7 1963, NARA RG 59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893

³⁹ MacDonald to Sandys, June 7 1963, TNA DO 168/73.

establishment of federation.⁴⁰ The idea of federation therefore did accelerate Kenyan independence. And whilst the *majimbo* constitution staggered on until 1964, it is nonetheless revealing that KANU politicians linked the achievement of federation with the destruction of *majimboism*, a theme would be returned to by Kenyatta in 1964. Federation was represented as a tool that would support KANU's vision of strong centralised statehood as the route to a secure future for Kenya, not an alternative to that vision.

This makes the position on federation taken by KADU all the more striking. Ronald Ngala, the party's leader, was quite aware that KANU hoped to use moves towards federation to upset the constitutional settlement in Kenya.⁴¹ But by 12 August, Ngala wrote to the working party on federation with a creative proposal, arguing for a reconfiguration of the form federation might take. He wrote in his capacity of President of the Coast Regional Assembly to formally request

the attendance of properly accredited representatives of this region to your deliberations as a *separate constituent member* [author's emphasis] of the proposed federation. The whole history of the coast, including its own separate historic ties with the UK and Zanzibar... fully qualifies in our view the Coast Region to the same statutes, powers and position within the proposed federation as that of Tanganyika, Uganda, Kenya and Zanzibar... if the federation is to achieve success it must be based on the willing, indeed enthusiastic support of all those who are to live within it. For this reason I am convinced that it should be based not necessarily on the maintenance of outdated and outgoing territorial concepts of imperialism of the 19th century, but upon the existence of existing entities emanating from the wishes of the inhabitants themselves to live together as

⁴⁰ Sandys to MacDonald, 15 June 63 TNA, DO 168/73.

⁴¹ Vass, Nairobi, to Secretary of State, July 13, 1963, NARA RG59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893

revealed, for example, in the recently elected Regional Governments of the Coast, Rift Valley and the Western Region.⁴²

This was a message calculated to disturb those who saw federation as a vehicle to overwhelm *majimboism*: rather federation was being claimed by Ngala here as a project that would dismantle the hold of the Kenyan central government on the regional governments, and establish a direct relationship between Kenya's regions and the federal centre. In a subsequent speech reiterating this position in parliament, Ngala drew explicit parallels to Uganda, arguing that the kingdoms there should also preserve their position, and central government be done away with: to maintain the central governments in Kenya or Uganda would simply be a device 'to create jobs for the boys'.⁴³ Summing up his views, Ngala went so far as to say this 'may appear to be suggesting that we are doing away with Kenya or doing away with Uganda or Tanganyika. But I think in the interests of Pan Africanism it is worthwhile to do this.' Ngala's position muddled the meaning of federation, and demonstrated the potential for the idea to appeal to multiple constituencies with opposing agendas and motivations. Ngala's vision of federation may also have been less literal, than it was a creative defence of the legitimacy of the *majimboist* institutions he had worked to erect in the face of KANU centralism, and an attempt to destabilise the link between federation and centralism in political discourse.

Ngala's line of argument had a close parallel in Ugandan public debate. At the time of the declaration for federation, the British High Commissioner in Uganda reported that 'all the educated classes expressed delighted adhesion' to the federation declaration.⁴⁴ Opposition parties in Uganda declared their support for federation: and UPC politicians pushed Buganda

⁴² Ngala to chair, working party on federation. 12 Aug 1963, TNA DO 168/73.

⁴³ American Consul Nairobi to Secretary of State, July 3 1963, NARA RG59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893.

⁴⁴ Hunt, High Commissioner Uganda to Sandys, 4 Sept. 1963, TNA, FO 371/167147

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politicians to embrace the cause, conflating moves towards federation with the cementing of the nation-state:

it would be a blunder if the Baganda now think in terms of tribalism instead of taking their seats in the bus of East Africa... the days of tribalism in Uganda have gone, since we have one national anthem, one national flag, and one national passport.⁴⁵

This was the common refrain that support for regional unity also demonstrated support for national unity. Yet the constitutional obstacles to Ugandan membership of a regional federation were great: and Obote's UPC lacked the commanding position of KANU in Kenya. Ralph Hone, the British constitutional adviser assigned to the federal working party, pointed out during negotiations that

some twenty odd sections of the Uganda Constitution will probably require amendment and some of these are entrenched to the extent of requiring passage by a two-thirds majority of the Buganda Lukiko... Hone seemed to think that Buganda's price... would be legal status for Buganda equal to that of Tanganyika and Kenya... This might spark a demand for similar status from the other three kingdoms and Busoga and would no doubt be unwelcome to Kenya as an encouragement of *majimboism*.⁴⁶

By the end of July, E.M.K. Mulira, one of Buganda's leading political thinkers and a prominent figure within the KY, indeed suggested in the Uganda Nation newspaper that Buganda may be willing to join the federation as a separate unit 'and let the rest of Uganda go in also, as a separate federal state on its own'.⁴⁷ The idea of separate entry for Buganda was of course entirely unacceptable to UPC leaders: Ibingira argued in parliament that 'only Uganda as

⁴⁵ Binaisa, 1 June 1963, quoted by Kennedy Cromwell, Kampala to Secretary of State, June 7 1963, NARA RG59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893

⁴⁶ EG LeTocq, Kampala to Chadwick, CRO, 4 July 1963, TNA DO 166/99.

⁴⁷ Kennedy Cromwell, to Secretary of State, 28 July, 1963, NARA RG59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893

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defined in constitution could contract any form of relationship with any outside country... any other interpretation would mean all kingdoms and territories Uganda could make same claim'.⁴⁸

In both Kenya and Uganda, the potential for federation to pull apart the existing territorial states of the region – unlikely as such an outcome may have been - became an important focus of political debate. Incumbent leaders hoped that federation would strengthen their grip on power; but the indeterminacy of the idea meant it could be claimed by the 'tribalists', and used to question the appropriateness of the territorial units bequeathed by colonialism. The notion of federation became co-opted into ongoing internal political struggles over the location and distribution of sovereignty *within* nation-states as well as between them.

iii.

Buganda's position regarding separate entry to a federation posed a problem for any Ugandan politician who wished to move federation forward. But there had always been a tension in the federation project: even as it appeared as a tool to boost the authority of centralising leaders, if it was ever implemented a considerable degree of state sovereignty would have to be sacrificed to the federal centre. It soon became clear that, despite apparent initial enthusiasm, Obote and his key supporters were unwilling to countenance that degree of sacrifice. Moreover, the limits to regionalist politics in the years before 1963 – particularly Ugandan leaders' marginal position within those networks and their affective ties – reinforced the difficulties subsequently encountered in negotiation. A sense of Kenyan and Tanganyikan superiority, both in political and also perhaps in cultural terms, seems to have permeated the negotiations of 1963, in a manner which reinforced and fed into Obote's concerns about Uganda's potential weakness within a federation. British reports suggested that at the very outset of negotiations at the end

⁴⁸ Deming, Kampala to Secretary of State, August 23 1963, NARA, RG59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893

of June, Mboya had insisted on becoming the federation's Minister for Foreign Affairs.⁴⁹ With it being forecast that Kenyatta would likely be President and Nyerere as likely Prime Minister or Vice-President, this would leave Obote (and Uganda) at number four. Nyerere himself was insistent on the adoption of Swahili as the official language of the federation. At the inauguration of the University of East Africa – an apparent high water-mark for federal enthusiasm - he said very casually to the British High Commissioner that 'all the Ugandans were going to have to learn Swahili': federation would require a new civilising mission. At a public rally in Kampala at the time of federal negotiations, Mboya also 'dismissed his interpreter, saying "I will speak Swahili very slowly, everyone will understand".⁵⁰ The British observed that if Swahili became the official language 'Ugandans will be at a hopeless disadvantage in competing for posts in the public sphere compared with Tanganyikans': Swahili had never become a *lingua franca* in Uganda, and Buganda politicians would find its adoption as an official language particularly problematic.⁵¹ British observers summarised Obote's concerns by stating that the prospect of 'Kenyatta as president, Nairobi as capital and Swahili as national language would be more than Ugandans could bear, and Obote would cut a poor figure with his people if he accepted all three'.⁵²

The obvious inter-personal tensions between leaders in negotiation mattered, because of the highly personalised manner in which the whole project of regional liberation and unity had been created. The high-handedness of Mboya, Nyerere and Kenyatta during negotiations – the sense that Ugandans and Uganda were very much the junior partner in the arrangement - also reinforced Obote's fear for Uganda's and his own position. These fears fed into Uganda's negotiating position which pushed for a loose federation with maximum state's rights. It rapidly

⁴⁹ Hunt, High Commissioner Uganda to Sandys, TNA, FO 371/167147

⁵⁰ LeTocq to Chadwick, 17 July 1963, TNA, DO 168/73

⁵¹ Hunt, High Commissioner Uganda to Sandys, 4 Sept. 1963, TNA, FO 371/167147

⁵² LeTocq to Chadwick, 17 July 1963 TNA, DO 168/73

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became clear that this was a position at odds with Kenyan and Tanganyikan views. Differences emerged on almost all significant issues that needed resolution, including UN representation (Obote wanted to retain separate representation for all three states as well as the federation in the General Assembly), the powers of the federal presidency, international borrowing rights, and citizenship.

Growing Ugandan caution and critique of plans for federation expressed substantive concerns which derailed federal negotiation. Yet for the argument of this article – that the significance of the politics of federation should be understood primarily in the context of its contribution to the contentious politics of nation-building - it is more important to note that Obote and the UPC's domestic authority was asserted and to some extent reinforced via participation in negotiation. Inter-state negotiations provided an opportunity for Obote to position himself and the national government as the sole representatives of Uganda's national interests and the embodiment of Uganda's sovereignty, marginalising Ganda claims to sovereignty in the regional sphere. As Obote put it, 'it is Entebbe doing the talking, because we shall be doing the giving from Entebbe, not from Hoima or Mengo [the seat of the Buganda kingdom]'.⁵³ In emphasising the necessity of presenting a united national Ugandan position in negotiations with neighbours, Obote reminded listeners in parliament: 'in our relationship with our neighbours... it is very, very difficult if instead of talking in terms of Uganda you talk in terms of something else which is not internationally recognised'.⁵⁴ Indeed it is striking that Obote had been consistent in his assertion of Uganda's identity as a sovereign nation-state whose government's legitimacy was rooted in the will of its people from his earliest pronouncements on federation: in a speech in November 1962 Obote found it necessary to reassure parliament that he had

⁵³ Uganda Argus, October 18, 1963

⁵⁴ Obote speech to Uganda Parliament, 3 July 1963, TNA DO 168/74

no intention of doing any secret deal on this matter... matters affecting the federation would not be discussed only with politicians because it affected the sovereignty of the whole country and the people of Uganda... any constitution of the federation would have to be publicly displayed... before any final decision was taken.⁵⁵

This rhetoric of popular sovereign nationhood was temporarily submerged in the enthusiasm of June 1963, but as soon as problems emerged in the negotiating process around federation, it was revived. A speech by Basil Bataringaya, Secretary General of the DP, during the Ugandan parliamentary debate on federation on July 12 had made an outward-looking appeal behind the idea of a strong federation, noting ‘the tendency... throughout the world was to think in terms of unity... parochialism has no place and Uganda should look outside and think of herself as part of a wider world’. Adoko Nekyon, Obote’s cousin and Minister of Information, who acted as Uganda’s chief representative in regional negotiations, made a much more specific comparison, asserting that the East African governments should ‘enter into negotiations in the same way as the Europeans do at the Geneva Disarmament Conference’. Bataringaya interjected with the emotional plea ‘we Africans are brothers’ to which Nekyon responded ‘brothers we may be, but we have our interests to protect’.⁵⁶ Such rhetoric saw UPC politicians paint themselves as the most effective representatives of Ugandan interests on an international stage.

To some extent, Obote’s caution towards federation reflected the weakness of his domestic position; yet his presentation of that caution as a sign of his responsibility for the interests of his country appears to have built him some credit within Uganda. The Ugandan press endorsed Obote and Nekyon’s ‘sober, careful and deliberate approach’ to federation, as did the Ugandan TUC President, Humphrey Luande, who warned ‘most sufferers in a hurried federation would

⁵⁵ Obote speech to Uganda Parliament, 13 Nov. 1962, reported in CO 822/2730.

⁵⁶ Report on Ugandan parliamentary debate, 12 July 1963, LeTocq to Chadwick, TNA DO 166/99.

be Ugandan workers', referring to concerns about the effects of unrestricted labour migration from neighbouring Kenya. Mayanja, Minister for education in the Buganda government, noted how Nekyon's position now mirrored the position taken by the *lukiko* position in June, interpreted by Mayanja as a sign of Buganda's continued influence.⁵⁷ The government's negotiation stance thus worked to construct a shared sense of Ugandan interest which at least partially cut across existing political divisions. In an October speech, Obote responded to the suggestion that Uganda was dragging its feet with regards to federation thus: 'are we going to forget all that the working people and farmers want us to do for them in order to give them a false image of Pan-Africanism: the farmer cannot eat it!'⁵⁸ Yet even as Uganda took a cautious stance towards the idea of a strong federation, the negotiations had provided a powerful demonstration of the exclusive claim to legitimacy which regionalism provided centralising leaders in all three territories: even when the members of the club were locked in intractable disagreement, they were still the ones doing the talking.

iv

It seems unlikely that the idea of federation would have had deep roots of mass support in the region: yet to dismiss it as an idea with *no* meaningful support, merely a project of political leaders would also be simplistic. In particular, ideals of regional unity had considerable support among a generation of Makerere College (East Africa's first higher education institution) educated youth; and among borderland populations divided by colonial boundaries, federation might be imagined as a means of dissolving that separation.⁵⁹ Federation was also a matter of

⁵⁷ Kampala to Secretary of State, August 23 1963, NARA RG59, POL E AFR, BOX 3893

⁵⁸ Obote speech reported in Uganda Argus, 26 Oct. 1963, TNA DO 168/73.

⁵⁹ J. Nye, 'Attitudes of Makerere Students towards East African Federation', *Proceedings of the East African Institute of Social Research* (Kampala, 1963). J. MacArthur, *Cartography and the political imagination* (Athens, 2016), p. 216.

keen interest and frequent enthusiasm by the East African press in the summer of 1963. It was therefore as possible for politicians and publics to criticise leaders for their failure to federate, as it was for sceptics to denounce the federal idea as an exclusive project of that very leadership. Over time the aspiration of federation became a tool with which parliamentarians could advance critique of increasingly authoritarian political leadership, and opened up a new discursive avenue for federal politics to be drawn into domestic political debate.

This became particularly clear during the course of 1964. In the latter half of 1963, Kenyan moves to independence left little room for relaunching the federal idea following the difficulties negotiations had ran into over the summer; but in early 1964 the army mutinies in the region and the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar to some extent refocused attention on the promise of federation as a means to build greater stability and security. Predictably, Ugandan objections remained insurmountable. But by now, Kenyatta's own ambivalence towards federation had also become more pronounced. Before the brief discussions of April 1964 the Kenyan Cabinet had agreed that Kenyatta would argue that Kenya and Tanganyika would federate if Uganda was unwilling, as a means to pressure Uganda into participation. In the event, Kenyatta said nothing of this. Pro-federationists told diplomats that Kenyatta's circle of Kikuyu supporters feared his loss to federal politics and replacement by the leading Luo politician Oginga Odinga, and that this explained Kenyatta's attitude – though it is worth noting that Kenyatta had always been more reticent than his cabinet on the issue of federation in any case.⁶⁰

It should also be noted that the immediate prompt for renewed discussion among the regional leadership in April 1964 was less the renewed interest in federation *per se*, and more the linked issue of the workings of the existing common market. Tanganyika had serious reservations about the effect of the common market on her plans for industrial development, and was

⁶⁰ CRO telegram to British HC's, 21 Apr. 1964, TNA DO 213/166

threatening to leave the common arrangements altogether: indeed it could be argued that for Nyerere the only way to equitably distribute the gains from regional economic integration was to create a full political federation. Without shared political leadership, regional economic disparities would continue to widen. In this sense, for Nyerere, alongside his pan-African ideological commitment, federation was also always about protecting the interests of Tanganyika within an integrated East African economy. The outcome of 1964 negotiations was to shelve federation, whilst agreeing on the creation of quotas on exports from trade surplus to trade deficit countries and to co-ordinate industrial development, addressing Tanganyikan concerns.⁶¹ But by 1965 the dissolution of the common currency and unilateral restrictions on Kenyan imports imposed by Tanzania itself demonstrated that the survival of existing economic integration was under real threat.

During 1964, in Kenya in particular there was vocal disappointment with the failure to move forward on federation – not least for some MPs because they believed the government had made unpalatable concessions on trade issues during the 1964 negotiations which harmed Kenyan interests, rather than establishing a federation which would benefit Kenya. Pro-federation KANU MPs and pro-federation newspapers asserted that ‘people all over these four territories want to see a federation formed.’ A number of KANU backbenchers were already emerging as a critical voice within parliament, and seized on federation as a key issue for articulating a degree of dissent against the government, once more demonstrating the multiple potential meanings and uses of the federal ideas for different actors.⁶² These MPs invited TANU backbenchers to a May conference on federation from which emerged a cross-party standing committee for federation, and a statement addressed to the three regional leaders

⁶¹ A. Mazrui, ‘Tanzania versus East Africa’, *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 3 (1965), pp. 213-4.

⁶² C. Gertzel, *The politics of independent Kenya, 1963-8*, (London, 1970), pp. 39-41.

calling for rapid progress towards federation. The backbenchers claimed they ‘represented the desires and wishes of 18 million souls favouring federation to promote living standards’.⁶³

Kenyatta was furious with the MPs, asserting in private that ‘this is none of their business’ and publicly denouncing them for disloyalty.⁶⁴ Yet the MPs responded that they had only made statements in line with what the leaders themselves had promised in June 1963: one said ‘Kenyatta is treating us like schoolboys. But we have responsibility to our constituencies and are answerable to them’.⁶⁵ It is also notable that the back-bench group cut across factional and ethnic lines: although interpreted by some as a move by Odinga to undermine Kenyatta, in fact Odinga voted against the backbenchers in a motion they brought forward calling for a deadline for federation of August 1964. They received more consistent encouragement from Mboya and Murumbi, who were bitterly disappointed by the stance Kenyatta had taken in April.⁶⁶ And as one American observer put it, ‘long standing dissatisfaction with Kenyatta’s authoritarianism, which no one dares to broach very openly, has been expressed through support for EAF’.⁶⁷

Kenyatta suffered a humiliating defeat in parliament in June, when the backbenchers’ motion for federation to come about by August 15th was passed with cross-party support in the face of government opposition. Yet as the August date approached, Kenyatta responded to his critics by emphasising the sovereignty of his government, and implying that federation was really the vehicle for the personal ambitions of one East African leader:

You have recently heard that some people want me to kneel down to Nyerere. Please Nyerere, they want me to say I want that we should unite. Is that real government? To go to another government? To be told that Kenya on August 15 must do this or that?

⁶³ Attwood, Nairobi to Sec of State, May 11 1964, NARA RG 59, POL 3 AFR E, Box 1873,

⁶⁴ Attwood, American Ambassador Nairobi to Sec of State, May 9, 1964, NARA RG 59, POL 3 AFR E, Box 1873,

⁶⁵ Nairobi to Sec of State, May 14, 1964, NARA RG 59, POL 3 AFR E, Box 1873,

⁶⁶ Ruchti, Nairobi to Sec of State, June 19, 1964, NARA POL 3 AFR E, Box 1873

⁶⁷ Attwood, Nairobi to Sec of State, May 14, 1964, NARA POL 3 AFR E, Box 1873

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On August 15 we want you to go to Dar es Salaam for federation. I say our government must make up its own mind without being dictated to.⁶⁸

The same speech suggested that the only substantive reason for the June 1963 declaration had been to accelerate the moves of Kenya towards independence. Nyerere and the Tanzanian cabinet responded quickly, affirming the commitment to federation had been genuine.⁶⁹ But it is notable that sections of the Kenyan press were quick to seize on the suggestion that federation was no longer of use: *Taifaleo*, the leading Swahili-language newspaper in Kenya, stated ‘Kenya can progress without the help of the Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar... let us build a strong prosperous and peaceful Kenyan Nation and so earn respect from other countries’.⁷⁰ Tanganyikan institutionalisation of the one-party state and the control of trade unions by government also provided evidence, repeated by some Kenyan politicians, that the territories were moving apart in differing directions (though by the end of the year Kenya would also be a *de facto* one party state).⁷¹ By August 1964, it was clear that federation was no longer seriously on the agenda of the three governments. Yet it is worth emphasising that the continued aspiration to unity among members of parliament had been used to critique leaders who had moved away from the positions they had initially advocated. In Uganda, the same tendency would be repeated in 1965. Ibingira and Kakonge, long-time supporters of federation, vented frustration with Obote and indeed the character of leadership in East Africa more widely at a student seminar in July of that year, Ibingira blaming ‘power mechanics’ within the ruling parties for the failure to federate. American diplomats observed, as in Kenya in 1964, that their stance was a ‘barely-disguised slap at Obote’.⁷²

⁶⁸ Dar es Salaam to Sec of State, August 3, 1964, NARA POL 3 AFR E, Box 1873, P1030221

⁶⁹ Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, August 4 1963, NARA POL 3 AFR E, Box 1873, P1030223

⁷⁰ *Taifaleo*, August 5 1964, TNA DO 213/167. The *Daily Nation* expressed similar sentiments on August 18, *Ibid*.

⁷¹ Attwood, Nairobi to Sec of State, Apr. 25, 1964, NARA RG59, POL 3 AFR E, Box 1873; see also Mazrui, *Tanzania*, p. 277.

⁷² Deming, Kampala to Secretary of State, June 22 1965, NARA RG59, POL 3 AFR E, Box 1873

iv.

East African federation did not come to pass in the early 1960s, even when the project appeared to have irresistible momentum on the eve of Kenyan independence. Yet rather than bringing East Africa into a post-national future, the process of negotiating over federation did more to harden differences among the three new nation-states, and their leaders. In conversation with the American ambassador to Tanzania in October 1963, Julius Nyerere reflected ruefully on this:

in retrospect June EAF declaration had been mistake and had led to misunderstandings and resentments which had not existed before... his private view that net result had been to bring Tanganyika-Uganda relations to lowest point in their history. ... What had gone wrong? Root cause probably staggered independence dates for EA states which had let individual nationalisms develop at different rates....

When Nyerere had made his famous (but rather hypothetical) offer to delay Tanganyikan independence in 1960, he had done so in order to avoid the ‘staggered independence’ he mentioned here. As he said at the time, ‘federation after complete independence means the surrender of sovereignty and all the prestige and symbols of such sovereignty... if it is difficult now to convince some of our friends that federation is desirable, when it does not involve surrendering any sovereignty, it is going to be a million times more difficult to convince them later’.⁷³

Yet despite the apparent complete collapse of moves towards federation, the KANU backbench motions in 1964, and their co-operation with TANU colleagues, pointed towards the continued salience of the idea amongst some quarters of the political elite in the region, and some of their constituents. When the East African Community was established in 1967 – as a

⁷³ Nyerere, ‘East African Federation’, p.89.

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means to stem the tide of economic and political dis-integration in the region that had set in since independence – the idea of federation rose again to be debated regularly within the EAC’s own Legislative Assembly, however unlikely a prospect its creation seemed.⁷⁴ The EAC collapsed in 1977 among deepened hostility among the regional leadership, but was re-founded in 2000: and strikingly included a commitment to federation as one of its pillars of integration, though this has been replaced by support for a looser confederation in recent years.⁷⁵

Despite the obvious practical limits of the politics of federation, it continues to function as an alternative ‘imaginary’ of political community in East Africa.⁷⁶ It might be suggested this is precisely because of the indeterminacy of the idea, which itself makes it so unlikely to ever be realised. What political units should make up the constituent parts of the federation? How should its institutions operate? Who will rule it? But the fact these basic questions were so vigorously debated in the 1960s shows that regionalism and the politics of federation in East Africa cannot be reduced to a simple game of regime-boosting; nor was it driven solely by a utopian commitment to a post-national future. In the 1960s federation appeared useful to centralisers and incumbent leaders; less a radical alternative to the nation-state than a tool for state consolidation. Support from these groups for federation was not motivated simply by ruthless ambition for unrestricted power from these groups, but reflected a wider belief in the virtues and efficacy of unity as the means to state survival and economic development: support for regional unity grew out of support for national unity. Yet to the opponents of centralised governments, federation also seemed to offer an opportunity to dismantle the state structures inherited from colonialism and create a new ‘sovereignty regime’ where the claims of smaller regions or kingdoms might obtain recognition within a broader federal framework. As the

⁷⁴ Hazlewood, *Integration*, p. 90.

⁷⁵ <http://www.eac.int/integration-pillars>; <http://www.thecitizen.co.tz/magazine/politicalreforms/Finally--EA-nations-agree-to-disagree-on-federation/1843776-3470014-llog2/index.html>, Nov. 30, 2016.

⁷⁶The term also used by Julie MacArthur in a recent paper: ‘Erasing Borders? Mobility, Territoriality, and Citizenship in the East African Federation’, British Institute in Eastern Africa, Nairobi, 29 July 2017.

prospect of federation faded, it also became a focus for the critique of increasingly authoritarian national leaders. The contested politics of federation was, therefore, an integral part of the equally contested politics of nation-state making in the years of decolonisation and independence. And whilst debates around federation between centralisers and localists were conducted in similar terms in different territories, it should be noted that federation was still an issue debated primarily within national parliaments, in newspapers with predominantly national readerships. When people talked about and imagined federation they were also talking about and imagining the nation, and doing so primarily in dialogue with their co-nationals. Ultimately the fact that federation did not come into being was less the failure of a challenge to the nation-state, than the outcome of a regionalist politics that played an integral role in the march towards nation-statehood: pushing the pace of independence, performing nationalist solidarity, providing a new focus for debates around sovereignty and nationhood, and – finally - forcing leaders to define and defend national interests in rivalry with their erstwhile allies. This perhaps points the way to a more productive appraisal of the post-war ‘federal moment’ more widely – rather than debating the viability of federal alternatives to the nation-state and the reasons for their failure, it may be more productive to consider what functions federalist projects had in shaping the character of newly independent states and their politics.