

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Uhuru Sasa! Federal Futures and Liminal Sovereignty in Decolonizing East Africa

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Abstract

Decolonization in East Africa was a regional affair that required the remaking of temporal orders. The staggered independence timelines of Tanganyika, Uganda, and Kenya caused considerable consternation due to transnational solidarities and visions for East African Federation. The interminable delays of Kenyan decolonization also threatened the linked economy of the region and diluted the sovereignty of neighboring states. At issue was “liminal sovereignty,” with politics and people languishing between normative legal orders. Against expectations about self-determination, East Africans found themselves in partial control of their collective endeavors. I analyze the tactics of temporal activism by Africans who aimed to undo British control over the pacing, sequencing, and synchronicity of decolonization. The indeterminate geography of decolonization was linked to uncertain temporalities of independence which threatened to subvert self-determination. In East Africa, federation was a style of claims-making and chronopolitics intended to orchestrate the distribution of rights, resources, and authority in a new layering of sovereignty between postcolonies.

Keywords: federation; decolonization; sovereignty; temporality; Kenya; Uganda; Tanzania; Zanzibar; East Africa

Introduction

On 13 June 1961, Ronald Ngala rose in the Legislative Council of Kenya to introduce a motion. The leader of the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) proposed, “This Council recognizes and appreciates that the Government is determined to press forward as quickly as possible with further constitutional advance towards independence and firmly believes that with goodwill and co-operation by all it will be possible to advance within a few months to the appointment of a Chief Minister and a larger proportion of Elected Members in the Council of Ministers.”¹

¹Kenya Legislative Council (KLC), 11 May–21 July 1961, 1166–74.

In the speech that followed, Ngala justified this motion by placing his government at the forefront of “Constitutional Advance.” KADU joined government, he explained, because “we want to speed up the independence of this country,” and he pointed to the further inclusion of Africans within the Legislative Council and the Cabinet as evidence of their effectiveness. Constitutional negotiations at Lancaster House were bearing fruit, he proclaimed. Kenya was on the cusp of significant political changes, enabled by the decline of tribalism and the violence that characterized the previous decade.

The pace of decolonization was central to Ngala’s concerns. “It is the intention of this Government to move as speedily as possible to the establishment of internal self-government and I have every hope that it will prove to be possible to achieve this within the year 1961.” Ngala concurred with the colonial administration that decolonization was a stepwise progression through what he called “the necessary stages.” In mid-1961, “internal self-government”—characterized by the appointment of an African Chief Minister and an increase in the number of Elected Ministers in the Council of Ministers—was the stage that held great promise to Ngala. He viewed its achievement within the year as a pressing issue, but only one that KADU could deliver through its partnership with the colonial government. Speaking to the opposition Kenya African National Union (KANU), he called for “goodwill, co-operation, and a responsible attitude” in order to achieve this goal. The promise of internal self-government sooner rather than later served as a means to discipline political adversaries.

In contrast, KANU viewed Ngala’s political pacing with derision. They condemned the incongruity between his insistence on the drawn-out staging of decolonization and his cry for *uhuru leo*, or “independence today.” Julius Kiano told the Legislative Council, “We refuse to be the disciples of the gospel of stages.”² Such phases were too vague. KADU, he complained, “talk of ‘due course,’ they talk of ‘as soon as possible,’” yet the indeterminate timing of independence was leaving Kenya in an uncertain position, undermining both popular faith in political change and economic stability. Internal self-government was too little in the way of ambition; it left the three most important administrative roles in the hands of colonial officers: finance, defense, and legal affairs. “It is no use saying it is *uhuru sasa* [independence now] and then have a Motion which is calling for internal self-government” because “everybody knows that internal self-government is not *uhuru*.” Instead, Kenya deserved, and was capable of handling, a Prime Minister with full powers by the end of 1961. The insistence on staged independence had no basis in law, Kiano declared. Those demanding phased independence were sacrificing Kenyans’ right to self-determination, obscuring the real meaning of *uhuru* in favor half measures. “Uhuru means independence. Uhuru means freedom. Uhuru does not mean just a Chief Minister and a mixed Council of Ministers.”³

Decolonizing Temporalities and Liminal Sovereignty

The debate that day was vociferous, with interrupting shouts of “*uhuru sasa*” and accusations of deceit and colonial collusion. Those in government, like Masinde

²KLC, 11 May–21 July 1961, 1183–92.

³On *uhuru* in Tanzania, see Emma Hunter, *Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania: Freedom, Democracy and Citizenship in the Era of Decolonization* (Cambridge, 2015), ch. 5.

Muliro, thought “Kenya has a lot of homework to deal with” before it could proceed. Others believed too rapid a decolonization would lead to a “flimsy independence,” perhaps descending into a violent conflagration as in the case of the Congo. Samwel Ayodo pointed with incredulity toward Britain’s sixty years of allegedly “genuine effort to prepare people for independence ... [without even] getting one African district commissioner.”⁴ Promises of advance under continued colonial control rang hollow. Besides, compared to territories like Tanganyika—already set for full independence at the end of 1961—Kenya enjoyed a more prosperous economy and larger population of educated Africans. Why should it wait?

What was at stake that day was not so much the foundational question of independence for Kenya. Unlike in prior decades, it was widely acknowledged that independence would arrive. What caused consternation, instead, was the temporality of decolonization. Kenyans felt themselves behind the times: Tanganyika would achieve independence in 1961 and Uganda the next year. Yet Kenyans remained in limbo, stuck in a settler colony. In Britain there was a “widespread crisis of confidence” about African territories after Harold Macmillan’s 1959 reelection; the resulting cacophony did little to clarify the way forward.⁵ For Africans, these delays meant continued racial hierarchy and denial of rights, not least because white settlers had long worked to forestall African paramountcy.⁶ Moreover, the Mau Mau conflict and brutal counterinsurgency had paralyzed much of the African political scene, not least due to the October 1952 arrest of senior leaders at the start of the so-called Emergency.⁷ Among them was Jomo Kenyatta, who was only released in August 1961. By that point, he was widely assumed to become the national leader for a colony well-behind both Tanganyika and Uganda in terms of decolonization’s advance.⁸

African politicians, in turn, jockeyed to demonstrate their ability to rework the temporality of decolonization. Ngala’s motion recognizing and appreciating his government’s forward motion aimed to depict his party as the steward of prompt independence. KANU’s rejection of “the theory of gradualism ... the theory of stages” militated in favor of an even more urgent independence.⁹ This effort to determine the timing of independence was a public affair: political parties drove vans around the country with the words *uhuru sasa* painted on their sides. Newspapers frequently speculated on the announcement of a date for independence and brandished it in headlines when it finally arrived.

⁴KLC, 11 May–21 July 1961, 1194–221.

⁵Philip Murphy, *Party Politics and Decolonization: The Conservative Party and British Colonial Policy in Tropical Africa, 1951–1964* (Oxford, 1999), 170–80.

⁶Diana Wylie, “Confrontation over Kenya: The Colonial Office and Its Critics 1918–1940,” *Journal of African History* 18, 3 (1977): 427–47.

⁷David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York, 2005).

⁸The British intended detention to marginalize Kenyatta, but it actually boosted his prominence as an international campaign for his release also condemned wider repression in Kenya. W. O. Maloba, *Kenyatta and Britain: An Account of Political Transformation* (London, 2018), 143–193; Anais Angelo, *Power and the Presidency in Kenya: The Jomo Kenyatta Years* (Cambridge, 2020), ch. 2.

⁹Mr. Mathenge in KLC, 11 May–21 July 1961, 1248.

Liminal Sovereignty

The politics of time was particularly pressing for two reasons. The first is that decolonization was not a single event or clear rupture. As Lydia Walker writes, it “was not a flipped switch, but a set of negotiations with no predetermined end result.”¹⁰ East Africa’s transition from colonialism to independence was a drawn out affair due to the variety of antagonistic constituencies and the British idea of mediating an “orderly and honourable transfer” of power.¹¹ Decolonization was a process marked by multiple “rites of passage” such as elections to determine the rightful representatives of the people, conferences to negotiate constitutions, and flag raising ceremonies to dramatize political transformations.¹²

Whether through the provision of the franchise or the removal of a British governor, these rituals inaugurated new political realities. Yet, the periodic way in which they were introduced held the territories, especially Kenya, for some time within a state of *liminal sovereignty*. By using the label liminal sovereignty, I point to not only the stages of independence—the sorting out of political claims or the stepwise introduction of internal self-rule (*madaraka*) versus full *jamhuri* (“republic”)—but also the subjective experience of such a status. Liminality, in Victor Turner’s classic conceptualization, is defined as an ambiguous intermediary status, premised on a threshold between more stable states.¹³ Rites of passage transform those who move through the liminal phase, obliging them to conduct themselves in a fitting manner. Such “a gray zone between colony and republic,” to use De’s words describing India’s dominion period, are far more common and significant than has been recognized.¹⁴ For Kenya, liminal sovereignty put it between the statuses of colonial subordination and national independence; it meant decision-making authority was split between multiple, often competing, poles. Across Africa, it was widely feared that sovereignty would be partial, a version of what Nkrumah called “cliente-sovereignty, or fake independence,” where self-determination was chimerical under the pressure of neocolonialism.¹⁵ The period under consideration here displays the variety of tactics used to escape liminality.

Federal Futures

The second reason time mattered was because decolonization threw into relief the spatial constitution of East Africa. The indeterminate cartographies of decolonization

¹⁰Walker, Lydia. “Decolonization in the 1960s: On Legitimate and Illegitimate Nationalist Claims-Making,” *Past & Present* 242, 1 (2019): 233.

¹¹U.K. National Archives [UKNA] Dominions Office [DO] 168/73: telegram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Kenya, 15 June 1963.

¹²Luise White, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Rhodesian Independence and African Decolonization* (Chicago, 2015). On late colonial elections, see Justin Willis, Gabriella Lynch, and Nic Cheeseman, “Voting, Nationhood, and Citizenship in Late-Colonial Africa,” *Historical Journal* 61, 4 (2018): 1113–35.

¹³Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, 1969).

¹⁴Rohit De, “Between Midnight and Republic: Theory and Practice of India’s Dominion Status,” *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 17, 4 (2019): 1213–34.

¹⁵Quoted in Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, 2019), 102. See Lauren Benton, “From International Law to Imperial Constitutions: The Problem of Quasi-Sovereignty, 1870–1900,” *Law and History Review* 26, 3 (2008): 595–619.

are now readily acknowledged by historians. Following Cooper's dictum that mid-century African politics were both larger and smaller than colonial territories, scholars have plumbed the alternative geographies of the 1950–1960s.¹⁶ Against the nationalist historiography of a prior generation, this research foregrounds the sub-national machinations of ethnicity, class, race, and gender, as well as supranational imaginaries and itineraries.¹⁷ Much of this work has focused on Francophone West Africa, where affective ties to the metropole drove a series of innovative arguments about citizenship outside the dichotomy of empire and nation.¹⁸ Getachew shows that federation has an important genealogy in Black Atlantic thought, not least in Kwame Nkrumah's effort to harness it in the service of ending neocolonialism.¹⁹ In South Asia, too, federation was seen as a means to maintain Indian unity while accounting for demographic and legal heterogeneity.²⁰ In these cases, what was envisioned was what Cooper calls "layered sovereignty," whereby authority in some territories would be overlaid with a more expansive geography of rule-making. Sovereignty was conceived in Francophone Africa as "complex, divisible, and transformable."²¹ Likewise in East Africa, where exactly power would reside, and over what geography and population, were the subject of heated debate and inventive inquiry, yet that was only feasible if peoples and polities had a more or less shared temporality.

In contrast to Francophone history, East Africans did not aspire to an enduring political community with the colonial metropole. Many did, however, envision independence on a regional scale, with sovereignty distributed between the existing territories and an East African Federation. Publics and politicians were invested in developments across the region, with newspapers and radio sharing day-by-day updates to eager audiences and African political parties coordinating across territories.²² Social scientists flocked to the topic, and when one American

¹⁶Frederick Cooper, "Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of African History* 49, 2 (2008): 167–96; Kate Skinner, *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland Literacy, Politics and Nationalism, 1914–2014* (Cambridge, 2015); Michael Collins, "Decolonisation and the 'Federal Moment,'" *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24, 1 (2013): 21–40.

¹⁷Elizabeth Schmidt, "Top Down or Bottom Up? Nationalist Mobilization Reconsidered, with Special Reference to Guinea," *American Historical Review* 110, 4 (2005): 975–1014.

¹⁸Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, 2014); Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality* (Cambridge, 2015). Also see the dissenting views in Michael Goebel, "After Empire Must Come Nation?" *Afro-Asian Visions* (blog), 8 Sept. 2016; Samuel Moyn, "Fantasies of Federalism," *Dissent Magazine* (Winter 2015), <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/fantasies-of-federalism>; Richard Drayton, "Federal Utopias and the Realities of Imperial Power," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, 2 (2017): 401–6.

¹⁹Getachew, *Worldmaking*.

²⁰Sunil Purushotham, "Federating the Raj: Hyderabad, Sovereign Kingship, and Partition," *Modern Asian Studies* 54, 1: 157–98. Such ideas did not begin with decolonization; federation had a longer imperial genealogy, including in interwar India, about which Sunil Purushotham writes, "Federation sought to codify the Raj's uncoded, plural, and ambiguous imperial regime of sovereignty." "Sovereignty, Federation, and Constituent Power in Interwar India, ca. 1917–39," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, 3 (2020): 421–33.

²¹Cooper, *Citizenship*, 38.

²²On the variety of regional sensibilities, see Chris Vaughan, et al. "Thinking East African: Debating Federation and Regionalism, 1960–1977," in Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits, eds., *Visions of African Unity: New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects* (London, 2020), 49–75.

researcher interviewed Makerere students from across the region he found they had elaborate views on regional federation.²³ Among other points of significance, this article shows that federation offered a vocabulary for future-oriented politics that could be deployed in the service of present-day activism. It was a style of claims-making, not only to orchestrate a postcolonial distribution of rights, resources, and authority, but also against the continued involvement of Britain in matters political and economic. The horizon of federation crucially shaped how decolonization unfolded, and it made the liminality of Kenya a great concern. In June 1963, when Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, and Milton Obote declared their intention to form an East African Federation by the end of the year, they were only the most prominent voices in favor of a widely acknowledged federal future. As one member put it in the Kenya Legislative Council in 1961, “We are all, I understand, federalists. We all are proponents and supporters of the idea of an East African Federation.”²⁴

In reality, the political landscape was less unanimous. While East African Federation was a common idiom for loyalty and an envisioned means of managing economic aspirations, it competed with other territorial scales. Drawing on U.S. and British sources, Vaughan has recently revisited this history, emphasizing the “affective ties and shared interests of a small regional elite” who used federation to bolster their centralizing projects of state-formation.²⁵ These efforts to consolidate control suggest that, as in the case of Senghor’s Senegal or Nkrumah’s Ghana, pan-African federal ambitions were not a license for domestic federalisms.²⁶

In what follows, I demonstrate how the politics of time shaped decolonization and federation. It is precisely because of the diversity of potential arrangements of territory and demography—from the irredentist secessionism of greater Somalia or Togoland to the encompassing ideas of the French Union or East African Federation—that the timing of decolonization was so meaningful. Head starts could consolidate loyalties; delays could forfeit access to resources. The lack of geographic clarity for decolonization gave particular salience to the importance of reworking its temporalities. This was all the more important in East Africa because of the economic and commercial linkages between Uganda, Tanganyika, and Kenya. A shared currency, railways, tax system, and common market gave material imperatives to the continuation of political connections.²⁷ In other words, it was not merely that solidarity crossed colonial borders, but that the circulation of currency, the migration of workers, and the movement of commodities interconnected the region, under the auspices of the East Africa High Commission. Proponents of East African Federation aimed to secure this economic endowment as the basis for developmental aspirations.

²³On the latter, see Harvard University Archive, Joseph Nye Papers [HUA JNP] Student Notes file. For the former, see the papers collected in Kenya National Archives [KNA] MAC/EAU/21 from the University of East Africa conference on “Federation and Its Problems,” Nov. 1963.

²⁴Mr. Cleasby in KLC, 11 May–21 July 1961, 747.

²⁵Chris Vaughan, “The Politics of Regionalism and Federation in East Africa, 1958–1964,” *Historical Journal* 62, 2 (2018): 519–40, 528. For an earlier period, see James Brennan, “Sir Philip Mitchell and the Indian Ocean, 1944–49,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, 6 (2017): 998–1025.

²⁶On the West African cases, see Cooper, *Citizenship*, 297; Jeffrey Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana* (Athens, Oh., 2017).

²⁷Donald Rothchild, *Toward Unity in Africa: A Study of Federalism in British Africa* (Washington, D.C., 1960); Anthony Hughes, *East Africa* (Baltimore, 1963); Arthur Hazlewood, *Economic Integration: The East African Experience* (London, 1975). There were also military ties suturing together the region; Timothy Parsons, *The 1964 Army Mutinies and the Making of Modern East Africa* (Westport, 2003).

Pace, Sequence, Synchronicity

This article analyzes the temporalities of decolonization, emphasizing the contests to remake and govern the timeline on which colonialism would end. In particular, I draw attention to three temporal registers: (i) pacing, (ii) sequencing, and (iii) synchronicity. The capacity to accelerate or slow the inevitable transference of power was at the forefront of political practice. Many experienced late colonialism as something between an interminable delay and a languid advance—confinement in “the waiting room of history.”²⁸ In 1954, Abu Mayanja and Margery Perham agreed that Ugandan independence was decades away. That same year, Julius Nyerere told a UN visiting mission that independence might arrive in twenty-five years.²⁹ Three years later, he still expected twelve years until decolonization. And as late as 1960 in Kenya, the settler politician Michael Blundell thought it would be at least ten more years before Britain departed.³⁰ As time went on, African politicians blamed colonial administrators for their intransigence, and popular discontent and strikes worked to unsettle the inertia.³¹ Self-rule arrived so much earlier than any of them expected because political temporality was susceptible to active reworking.

In addition to its pace, the sequence of decolonization was in question—what Milford calls “the precarious chronological advancement towards political independence.”³² Proper ordering of chronology—including those “stages” of independence debated above—was a source of political activism. The sequencing of elections, constitutional conferences, and internal versus external self-government was freighted with implications for the eventual achievement of full independence.³³ In particular, deadlines were means of manufacturing futures—productive rites in the transformation of the region. In one speech, Rashidi Kawawa likened *uhuru* to a meal that is on the table but for which they have to wait to say grace; all they were waiting on, he said, was the announcement of a date for independence.³⁴ Deadlines served as a commitment mechanism for British administrators who approached decolonization without the urgency demanded by African politicians. African politicians pushed for such dates and the media announced them with flourish.

Finally, because East Africans were invested in the mutual progress of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika, the extent of coordination between the three territories was also an object of activism. British officials were keenly aware that “developments in one territory could spark reactions in others.”³⁵ As Kenya languished in colonial purgatory, the lack of synchronicity was both symbolically troubling and

²⁸Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2007).

²⁹John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge, 1979), 517.

³⁰Jeremy Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (New York, 1973), 303.

³¹Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996).

³²Ismay Milford, “Federation, Partnership, and the Chronologies of Space in 1950s East and Central Africa,” *Historical Journal* 63, 5 (2020): 1325–48.

³³On sequencing, see William Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005), 6–12.

³⁴Tanzania National Archives 45/4, “Summary of Vernacular Press,” 24 Oct. 1960.

³⁵The Governor of Kenya, for instance, tried to stop his counterpart in Tanganyika from bringing TANU into government in July 1959 so as to not unduly pressure Kenya’s own constitutional conference in 1960. Murphy, *Party Politics*, 19.

economically fraught. It was not merely the different timelines for decolonization that required orchestration; rather, politicians had to negotiate and harmonize a range of other temporalities. Given the interconnected infrastructure and institutions of East Africa, independent Tanganyika and Uganda were forced to subordinate some of their otherwise sovereign decisions to the ongoing role of the United Kingdom in Kenya.

Decolonization required an adroit sense of time and its management, and the achievement of sovereignty depended on the capacity to control temporality.³⁶ This article builds on the anthropology of time to examine the experience of temporality and temporal authority.³⁷ It attends to what Zee calls “chronopolitics,” or the “manipulation, acceleration, or projection of time [as] both the condition and ongoing goal of political and governmental intervention.”³⁸ Scholars have most often studied this at the scale of the nation-state. They have documented the creation of useable pasts, debated Benedict Anderson’s argument about a sense of simultaneity, and analyzed how governments exert power through electoral intervals or the duration of prison sentences.³⁹

Others have noted different aspects of “temporalization” that were revealed at decolonization.⁴⁰ Some emphasize how the threshold of independence encouraged a new investment in writing patriotic histories.⁴¹ Wilder depicts how the “historical hiatus” of Francophone decolonization compelled a reckoning with “the problems of freedom.”⁴² James analyzes how “playing with time and space facilitated an array of social and political projects” in late colonial Nigeria.⁴³ At various points, East African politicians and administrators made the pacing, sequencing, or synchronicity of decolonization an object of activism, in part by mobilizing the regional media to unsettle received temporalities and offer visions of the future. They hoped that by enrolling enough public and official support in their projected future, they could conjure it into being. Their target was the lack of alignment between independence timelines, and they used an existing sense of simultaneity to re-engineer political time. By deploying imaginative narratives for independence, they hoped to cultivate a shared set of expectations and an imagined future that would arrive quickly.

This article therefore analyzes the types of political rhetoric and tactics occasioned by the unsynchronized independence of Tanganyika, Uganda, and Kenya. Moving beyond diplomatic and intelligence sources clarifies how chronopolitics worked through the cultivation of national, regional, and imperial audiences. The

³⁶See Georgina Ramsay, “Incommensurable Futures and Displaced Lives: Sovereignty as Control over Time,” *Public Culture* 29, 3 (2017): 515–38.

³⁷Laura Bear, “Time as Technique,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45, 1 (2016): 487–502.

³⁸Jerry C. Zee, “Holding Patterns: Sand and Political Time at China’s Desert Shores,” *Cultural Anthropology* 32, 2 (2017): 215–41.

³⁹Elizabeth Cohen, *The Political Value of Time* (Cambridge, 2018).

⁴⁰Nancy Munn, “The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 93–123.

⁴¹Derek Peterson and Giacomo Macola, eds., *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (Athens, Oh., 2009).

⁴²Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, 2015).

⁴³Leslie James, “The Flying Newspapermen and the Time-Space of Late Colonial Nigeria,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, 3 (2018): 569–98.

perceived latency of Kenya's independence is often at center stage, and I demonstrate how politicians deployed regional ambitions in the context of the delay. I first return to the Kenya Legislative Council, where another debate in 1961 reveals the centrality of federation to Kenya's delayed independence. I then discuss the controversies surrounding the continuation of the East African High Commission, where Tanganyikan and Ugandan leaders chafed at needing to coordinate with colonial Kenya. Finally, I turn to a discussion of the effort in 1963–1964 to form an East African Federation, showing how the pluralization of temporality in postcolonial East Africa stymied federation.

In order to do so, I draw on neglected documents, including drafts of a federal constitution that demonstrate the efforts went much further than previously known. I also reconstruct some of the regional public spheres of the era. Transnational newspaper readerships, epistolary networks, and radio programs provided the means for argument, organization, and agitation throughout the region.⁴⁴ East Africans were aware that the temporalities of decolonization and self-determination depended on their skillful management of an audience through rhetorical performance.⁴⁵ This article tracks these ideas and rhetoric through archives in the three independent states and Britain, drawing on both official and private correspondence, newspaper accounts, parliamentary debates, and confidential legal negotiations.

Federal Futures and the Scales of Decolonization

Ronald Ngala did not introduce his 13 June motion by happenstance. More than a month prior, Walter Odede had made notice of his own motion. On 15 June 1961, he rose to defend it: “That this Council is of the opinion that the federation of Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda and Zanzibar is both economically and politically desirable and can only be achieved in proper form by *synchronism* of the date for independence of all those territories.”⁴⁶ Odede's motion reflected a common understanding of the time, namely that a federation of the British territories was not only economically beneficial but also politically appealing. Many viewed East African Federation as a likely, even inevitable future. Odede's political adversary, Masinde Muliro, concurred: “On the issue of federation ... no Kenyan in this country would say, ‘We do not want federation at all.’ We are all committed to federation.”⁴⁷ In the years before final independence, such expressions of unanimity were commonplace. Some went so far as to offer new names for the federation, such as Keuta, “taking the KE from Kenya, U from Uganda, and TA from Tanganyika.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴On the regional infrastructure, see Derek Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935–1972* (Cambridge, 2014), ch. 2. More generally, see Derek R. Peterson, Emma Hunter, and Stephanie Newell, eds., *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor, 2016).

⁴⁵Danilyn Rutherford, *Laughing at Leviathan: Sovereignty and Audience in West Papua* (Chicago, 2012).

⁴⁶KLC, 15 June 1961, 1288, my emphasis.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 1300.

⁴⁸Mr. Okondo in *ibid.*, 671.

A Federal Common Sense

Regional federation was not a new idea, and historians have shown its roots and mutability.⁴⁹ The significance of regional unity shifted depending on the advocate, the audience, and the constellation of forces at the moment. The most recent work focuses on the transnational ties of anticolonial organization and solidarity.⁵⁰ Less remarked upon is the economic rationale for regional integration, though this was at the forefront of debate at the start of the 1960s. Indeed, over the course of the postwar period, Britain prioritized economic over political integration, with a shared currency, railways, postal services, and taxation continuing apace.⁵¹

In the context of decolonization, East Africans of distinct classes, professions, and backgrounds rallied around the economic importance of regional unity, with commercial ties seemingly necessitating political federation. Industrialists who wanted a larger consumer base and easier access to resources favored the existing common market. All three territories depended on the Mombasa port, and labor migration often followed the path of the railways that terminated in that harbor.⁵² Yet, this arrangement was under increasing strain as politicians responsible to national constituencies—especially in Tanganyika, but also Uganda—complained about the unequal rewards flowing to commercially prosperous Kenya.⁵³ Political federation was viewed as a more effective and enduring means of preserving the common market than the ameliorative efforts previously undertaken to redistribute tax income or shore up Tanganyika's nascent industry.⁵⁴ The difficulties of coordinating between “three separate governments with three separate policies and three separate aspirations” would wane with the inauguration of a federal administration.⁵⁵ Restrictions and redundancies would be removed. The East African High Commission, the body responsible for economic coordination, was viewed as “the embryo of that federation.”⁵⁶ Such a step was called a “marriage of economic convenience which completes a long period of courtship followed by a happy engagement of the three young countries in the High Commission.”⁵⁷ Securing the bases for continued regional cooperation was necessary to permit the three territories to “stand alone in the world today,” a particularly important call in the Cold War.

If it were clear enough that federation would provide economic benefits, in other ways a federal future was indeterminate. The component units of an East African Federation were not conclusively settled. East African decolonization occasioned a

⁴⁹For the interwar era, see N. J. Westcott, “Closer Union and the Future of East Africa, 1939–1948,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 10, 1 (1981): 67–88; and Michael Callahan, “The Failure of ‘Closer Union’ in British East Africa, 1929–31,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25, 2 (1997): 267–93.

⁵⁰Vaughan, “Politics.”

⁵¹Philip Ndegwa, *The Common Market and Development in East Africa* (Nairobi, 1965).

⁵²R. D. Grillo, *African Railwaymen: Solidarity and Opposition in an East African Labour Force* (Cambridge, 1973); Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven, 1987).

⁵³Donald Rothchild, *Politics of Integration: An East African Documentary* (Nairobi, 1968), 222–24.

⁵⁴Jeremy Raisman, *East Africa Report of the Economic and Fiscal Commission* (London, 1961).

⁵⁵Julius Kiano in KLC, 15 June 1961, 1296.

⁵⁶Masinde Muliro in *ibid.*, 1300.

⁵⁷Mrs. Shaw in *ibid.*, 1304–7.

proliferation of alternative geographic imaginaries. The impending British departure encouraged what MacArthur terms “radical cartographies,” an array of movements that aimed to enhance their autonomy and rework the existing political boundaries and hierarchies.⁵⁸ As Peterson noted, if borders in the region “were open to amendment” during decolonization, it was in part because Britain had actively “pruned, expanded and revised” the colonial borders.⁵⁹

East African Federation appealed to those who thought colonial borders divided organic communities. A March 1962 memorandum by advocates for the “Re-Union of Abaluyia” reminded delegates at the Kenya Constitutional Conference that the Abaluyia chieftains had made treaties in 1890 with the Imperial British East African Company, not the subsequent Kenyan or Ugandan states. Nor were they consulted when the British transferred Uganda’s large eastern province to Kenya in 1902. They demanded a redrawing of the border between Kenya and Uganda in order to unite their people; otherwise, they would secede from “a terrorist-governed ... Nazi Kenya.” However, they would consider joining an East African Federation, provided it is “approached from the basis of natural units,” such as a reunited Buluyia patria.⁶⁰

The federation to come was indefinite enough to allow partisans to enroll it within diverse projects. The Kenya Coast People’s Party, for instance, sought independence for the Kenya Protectorate by 14 December 1961, “in order that the Coast Province should be in a position to negotiate as an autonomous unit, and not as part of Kenya Colony, in regard to federation in East Africa.”⁶¹ For these separatists, East African Federation was a vehicle for an existing project of autonomy.⁶² It also required rearranging the sequence of political rites in order that proper politics could be made.

Federation was also proposed in the case of Kenya’s Northern Frontier District (NFD), where Somali irredentists endeavored to join the already independent Somali Republic.⁶³ Keen to remove the NFD dispute from constitutional talks with Britain, KANU suggested that because the Government of Somalia “has been repeatedly on record as a genuine supporter of the Pan Africanist Principles,” they could move forward together in an East African Federation “in which case secession becomes meaningless and irrelevant.”⁶⁴ The Somali Foreign Minister echoed the thought in a meeting with Malcolm MacDonald and Prime Minister Kenyatta, suggesting that their mutual border would matter little within a regional federation.⁶⁵ Federation, in other words, emerged as a future productive of otherwise distinct ambitions. Its

⁵⁸Julie MacArthur, “Erasing Borders? Mobility, Territoriality, and Citizenship in the East African Federation,” paper presented at British Institute of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, July 2017.

⁵⁹Derek Peterson, “Colonial Rule and African Politics (1930–1963),” in Nic Cheeseman, Karuti Kanyinga, and Gabrielle Lynch, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Kenyan Politics* (Oxford, 2020).

⁶⁰KNA MAC/KEN/48/5: Re-Union of Abaluyia, “Memorandum by Abaluyia Members,” 20 Mar. 1962.

⁶¹KNA MAC/KEN/44/2: Kenya Constitutional Talks, Joint KANU/KADU Committee.

⁶²On coastal separatism, see Jeremy Prestoldt, “Politics of the Soil: Separatism, Autochthony and Decolonization at Kenya’s Coast,” *Journal of African History* 55, 2 (2014): 249–70; Justin Willis and George Gona, “Pwani C Kenya? Memory, Documents and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya,” *African Affairs* 112, 446 (2013): 48–71.

⁶³Julie MacArthur, “Decolonizing Sovereignty: States of Exception along the Kenya-Somali Frontier,” *American Historical Review* 124, 1 (2019): 108–43.

⁶⁴KNA MAC/KEN/48/2: Kenya Constitutional Conference, “KANU’s Observations on the Issue of the Northern Province of Kenya,” n.d. [1962?].

⁶⁵UKNA DO 168/73: Malcolm MacDonald to Colonial Secretary, 7 July 1963.

capacity to enroll such diverse adherents gave it the air of inevitability and irreproachability.⁶⁶

Federation and Synchronized Independence

The debate that followed Odede's motion on 15 June 1961 rehearsed many of the arguments in favor of East African Federation. In fact, it was not the idea of federation that made Odede's motion noteworthy. Instead, members of the Legislative Council stridently disagreed about the motion's second clause, which asserted that federation could only be achieved through a *synchronized* independence of the colonial territories. By hitching the plausible idea of federation to the controversial goal of accelerating Kenyan independence, Odede and his colleagues attempted to manipulate the timeline of decolonization.

Against objections, Odede and KANU colleagues insisted that the two topics could not be separated. The synchronization of independence was necessary, Odede argued, "because we do not want a spirit of isolationism and parochialism to gain too much strength in these territories after independence before federation is complete." Citizens would develop sentiments at odds with the goal of federation. They would be unlikely to surrender "the little things that we always forget" such as a national anthem, flag, stamps, and emblems. Politicians, too, would hesitate to sacrifice political supremacy once they held it. Even the difference of a year could entrench "vested interests" and encourage "the fissiparous tendencies in politicians," thought Fitz de Souza.⁶⁷ Further, the lack of coordinated independence would cause those in Kenya to feel "left behind," giving rise to frustration and, he hinted, adverse consequences. In Tanganyika, scarce resources would be spent on a diplomatic corps or military that would only duplicate what could be shared among the states. Borders would harden, feared Jeremiah Nyagah, and so passports would be needed. A lack of federation would lead to customs barriers that would cause businesses to "think twice" before investing across the East African market. The continuation of the existing common market would not be possible "unless you get all these territories independent almost together."⁶⁸ KANU thought a slow decolonization would hobble Kenya within the region. Mr. Mati said KADU was "prepared to wait endlessly. We are not prepared to do that." Without rapidly acquiring independence, Kenyans could not "negotiate as equals" with the neighboring states. They risked being the "small brother in this federation."⁶⁹

The KADU members of government marshaled different arguments in an effort to disentangle Odede's proposed timeline (which they opposed) from East African Federation (which they did not). Some claimed that a slower pace of decolonization would lead to a withering of parochialisms rather than their

⁶⁶This was also true for some in Buganda, despite earlier opposition. Makerere Institute of Social Research Archives AR/MISR/96/5: Attitudes of Makerere Students towards the East African Federation. For resistance in 1950s Buganda, see Carol Summers, "All the Kabaka's Wives: Marital Claims in Buganda's 1953–55 Kabaka Crisis," *Journal of African History* 58, 1 (2017): 107–27; Kevin Ward, "The Church of Uganda and the Exile of Kabaka Muteesa II, 1953–55," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, 4 (1998): 411–49.

⁶⁷De Souza was one of Kenyatta's lawyers during his detention and subsequently helped negotiate Kenyan independence during the Lancaster House conferences.

⁶⁸Mr. Shah in KLC, 15 June 1961, 1289–340.

⁶⁹KLC, 15 June 1961, 1329–31.

growth. KADU's watchword was "caution" against the "irresponsible" rush of KANU. They argued for the sequencing, rather than the synchronizing, of Kenyan independence and East African Federation. Some Legislative Council members even doubted whether federation was widely understood. Mrs. Abwao asked, "Are we really sure that what we are talking about, or what we are trying to do now is going to suit our children?" Instead, they needed to plan more carefully, inserting preliminary steps in order to successfully create a federal future. One option was to establish a Select Committee through the East African Legislative Council; that way, they could coordinate between the territories rather than simply passing an individual motion in Kenya. Masinde Muliro even speculated that unilateral action could "prejudice the federation we want to attain." They thought KANU was "putting the cart before the horse" and argued for a different ordering, one that would "show our undoubted ability to manage our internal affairs and then—and then only—move to greater interterritorial unity." As Robert Matano put it, what divided the Council was "the time factor. This is where the trouble is every time." Unlike KANU, which thought "everything can be done in a night or in a day," he counseled "patience." Minister for Finance and Development Bruce MacKenzie thought it completely impossible to conduct the necessary federal negotiations within six months. When one member of the chamber interjected, "We can do it faster!" the Minister scoffed, claiming such optimism "the extreme arrogance of ignorance of these matters."⁷⁰ For KADU in this moment, orchestrating decolonization between the territories provided a tactic of delay, not least to maintain their role in government. The arguments in favor of synchronization did not sway them as they sought to combat the temporal activism of Odede and his colleagues. Yet, they did not contest federation—merely its pacing, sequencing, and synchronicity.

Tanganyika, the East African High Commission, and Liminal Sovereignty

The June 1961 debate occasioned by Odede's motion took place only a few days before negotiations were scheduled between Tanganyika and Britain on the future of the East African High Commission (EAHC). Given the perceived benefits of the institution and its importance to federal ambitions, the stakes were high. Its future status, however, was unclear, because Tanganyikans were unlikely to agree to a continuation of the status quo after independence in December 1961. In its existing legal form, the EAHC was essentially subordinated to Britain and took precedence over Tanganyikan rules on critical economic matters. The Central Legislative Assembly (through which EAHC passed laws) could likewise reign supreme over territorial legislatures. Nevertheless, Nyerere viewed the "maintenance of the East African Common Market as vital" and wanted to amend, not annul, the EAHC. The issue was of heightened importance because Tanganyika's status as a trust territory gave members of the UN General Assembly oversight of constitutional development. As the colonial official W.B.L. Monson worried, the Soviet and Afro-Asian blocs might argue that the EAHC "involves adulterating the pure milk of Tanganyika's sovereignty."⁷¹ Such a development would place Nyerere

⁷⁰Ibid., 1302–44.

⁷¹UKNA Colonial Office [CO] 822/2729: W.B.L. Monson to Administrator of EAHC and Governors, 10 Mar. 1961.

in an embarrassing position, depicted as a lackey. Therefore, the unsynchronized decolonization of the region—with a lack of clear timelines in Kenya and Uganda—meant it was uncertain for how long such a liminal period would last.

In the prior year, Nyerere and the British had undertaken private negotiations in hopes of avoiding such a scenario. In June 1960, the Tanganyikan leader addressed the Second Conference of Independent African States in Addis Ababa and captured headlines with his offer to delay Tanganyikan independence in order to decolonize with Kenya and Uganda as an East African Federation.⁷² One of his primary goals was to increase the pace of decolonization in neighboring countries.⁷³ As he wrote to Kenyatta at the end of 1960, “I believe that if we ourselves voluntarily join forces in East Africa and demand our independence together, we can virtually name the date.”⁷⁴ In January of 1961, the East African Governors privately agreed on an East African Federation, but emphasized that it must come from “the freely expressed desire of the inhabitants, in order to avoid any accusation that federation has been imposed in the interests of the United Kingdom.”⁷⁵ Yet, accurately gauging the popular will would likely require holding an election, itself a costly and slow process.⁷⁶

Behind closed doors, Nyerere was unable to compel an accelerated timeline for Kenya and Uganda, and he was himself being pressured by political allies and rivals alike to not delay Tanganyika’s decolonization. Vocal demands to move Tanganyika forward through its liminal sovereignty ran up against the desire to buy enough time to synchronize a federation with the more plodding pace in Kenya and Uganda.⁷⁷ As the Secretary of State for the Colonies explained, “The problem therefore is to find a status for Tanganyika which appears more advanced than internal self-government and less advanced than independence, so as to give the impression that the process towards the independence of the federation is not holding up the constitutional advancement of Tanganyika itself.” The task, in other words, was to find some status betwixt and between colonialism and independence. They thought it “may be possible to invent something for this purpose, for example giving Tanganyika its own flag,” some special rights, or even an African governor. This ultimately proved untenable, not least due to the timelines pushed by the United Nations.⁷⁸

By early February of 1961, Governor Turnbull thought Nyerere “has a bad attack of cold feet over federation,” daunted by the political difficulties in Tanganyika and the “irresponsibility and lack of unity being displayed” in Kenya, Uganda, and Zanzibar.⁷⁹ Instead, Nyerere insisted to his British counterparts that 1961 was the

⁷²Julius Nyerere, “Freedom and Unity,” *Transition* 14 (1964): 40–45.

⁷³UKNA CO 822/2729: Secretary of State for the Colonies and Julius Nyerere, Chief Minister of Tanganyika, 23 Jan. 1961.

⁷⁴AR/MISR/156/10: Nyerere to Kenyatta, 30 Dec. 1960.

⁷⁵UKNA CO 822/2729: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, n.d.

⁷⁶UKNA CO 822/2729: A. B. Cohen to John Martin, 28 Jan. 1961.

⁷⁷For the “remarkably swift” advance to independence in Tanganyika, see Cranford Pratt, *The Critical Phase in Tanzania, 1945–1968* (Cambridge, 1976), ch. 3.

⁷⁸UKNA CO 822/2720: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Jan. 1961.

⁷⁹UKNA CO 822/2729: Richard Turnbull to the Secretary of State, East African High Commission, and the Governors of Kenya and Uganda, 4 Feb. 1961.

“magic year” for independence.⁸⁰ Without this important rite of initiation, “the Tanganyikan people would feel that they had been betrayed and he would then be unable to either govern Tanganyika or take a leading part in the establishment of a federation.”⁸¹ For their part, the British were keen to avoid unfavorable UN attention and wary that Nyerere could lose his standing to other politicians.⁸² Despite their worry about the “prodigious amount of work” still required to steward Tanganyika out of its trusteeship, they acquiesced to Nyerere’s urgings and agreed to announce a date for independence at the close of the March 1961 constitutional conference.⁸³ The Tanganyikan Chief Minister reluctantly acknowledged that doing so would undermine the possibility of an imminent federation. While Nyerere would still be free to advocate for a federal future, the likely reality was that the “period of delay before the ultimate independence of the federation must therefore be measured in years rather than in months.”⁸⁴

If these divergent temporalities proved incompatible in practice, neither the British nor Nyerere were willing to allow the early independence of Tanganyika to end the ongoing work of the EAHC. Following the March announcement of an independence date of 28 December 1961 and the May inauguration of internal self-government, representatives of the EAHC, the three member territories, and Zanzibar convened in London. Delegates had a commitment to continued regional organization and an eye toward “an even wider and more general form of association.”⁸⁵ While implementing a number of legal changes to its operation (including a veto for member states to preserve Tanganyika’s independence), the agreement was mostly a rebranding exercise, and the body was renamed the East African Common Services Organization (EACSO).⁸⁶

Tanganyikan officials advertised this as a success. Amir Jamal explained to the public that their continued involvement allowed them to influence EACSO in a way “consistent with our principles” and “ensure that the benefits of these services are spread as justly as possible on an East African basis.”⁸⁷ Moreover, it would permit them to promote Africanization within the EACSO’s bureaucracy of twenty-one

⁸⁰UKNA CO 822/2729: “Note for Constitutional File,” 6 Feb. 1961.

⁸¹UKNA CO 822/2729: Meeting between the Governor and the Chief Minister, 16 Jan. 1961.

⁸²UKNA CO 822/2729: Governor Turnbull to Secretary of State, 16 Jan. 1961; James Brennan, “The Short History of Political Opposition & Multi-Party Democracy in Tanganyika, 1958–1964,” in M. Gregory and L. G. James, eds., *In Search of a Nation* (Oxford, 2005), 250–76.

⁸³They also considered the alternatives of issuing no precise date, issuing a date only to renounce it for federation, and announcing a date so far ahead that they could then “persuade the people to postpone full independence for the sake of taking part in the creation of an independent East African federation.” See UKNA CO 822/2729: “Note of Meeting between H. E. the Governor and the Chief Minister,” 14 Jan. 1961.

⁸⁴UKNA CO 822/2729: “Future Policy on East African Federation and the Independence of Tanganyika, Consequential on the Reaction of Mr. Nyerere to the Proposals Made by Him by the Secretary of State,” 6 Feb. 1961.

⁸⁵Uganda National Archives [UNA] 35C.10646, East African Federation: Telegram from Secretary of State, 28 June 1961.

⁸⁶*The Future of the East African High Commission Services*, Cmnd.1433 (London, 1961). For the negotiations, see Tanzania National Archives CIC 9/84/01: “East African High Commission,” 1961.

⁸⁷Tanzania National Archives CB/11/1 Speeches by Jamal 1961–62: “Benefits of the East African Common Services Should be Spread as Justly as Possible,” 17 Jan. 1962.

thousand staff.⁸⁸ This rosy assessment, however, would change as Kenya's ambiguous position continued and Uganda emerged from colonial control.

Rumor, Brinkmanship, and Regional Pressure

While Nyerere and the British negotiated in 1961 with equipoise, by the next year the status of EACSO, and the continued presence of Kenyan colonial officials there, was a source of controversy. Times changed with the independence of Uganda in 1962. Synchronized independence was no longer possible, but how great Kenya's lag would be was still unknown. Many Kenyans, seeing the world passing them by, ran out of patience. As one writer put it, "Unlike Tanganyika and Uganda, where independence has served to some extent as a psychological booster ... Kenya's shaky progress towards independence has brought a sense of deep frustration." This was not merely symbolic. Kenya's continued colonial subservience meant its leaders and citizens-to-be could not partake in the scramble for development aid: "Many African nations today have representatives waiting, caps or turbans in hand, in the lobbies of treasuries of Europe and America."⁸⁹ Kenyans, though, were unable to travel behind the Iron Curtain due to their status as a British colony. Tom Mboya, the trade unionist-turned-politician, was dissatisfied with British lending to Kenya. Another KANU stalwart went to Bonn to request £500,000 but was told approval was contingent on Kenya granting landing rights for Lufthansa, a decision he was unable to make without consulting the other partner states of East African Airways.

Liminality also had material consequences in Uganda and Tanganyika. Important decisions at EACSO required the agreement of territorial leaders, but relations were infrequent and fraught. KANU and KADU were both consulted but often at each other's throats. Even when they did agree, they needed Colonial Office approval. The distributed authority stymied the urgent needs of the moment. Zanzibar's application to join, meanwhile, languished for eight months.⁹⁰ Crucial financial decisions for the railways and harbors lay in the balance. Writing in 1963, Jane Banfield likened Tanganyika and Uganda to "impatient suitors" as the "bride-to-be, herself in an agitated state, bargains with her guardian."⁹¹

Milton Obote adopted a particularly strident tone. By November 1962 he took the lead in coordinating against what he called Britain's "tardiness" in Kenya. "Does Britain want another Algeria in Kenya?" he asked.⁹² Uganda's independence, he said, was "being watered down" by the delays across its eastern border. "Kenya's problems are as much ours as Kenya's," he told the press. "We share with Kenya not only the common services but her aspirations for self-rule." Pointing to the "amorphous condition" of Kenya—its liminal status and distribution of authority between KANU, KADU, and the colonial administration—he demanded Secretary of State

⁸⁸See Banfield's chapter in Colin Leys and Peter Robson, eds., *Federation in East Africa: Opportunities and Problems* (London, 1966). On the future of the civil service under EACSO, see KNA GH/21/8: "Extract from Mr. E. M. Hall's Brief for Discussions at Colonial Office," June 1960.

⁸⁹"Kenya's Most Pressing Need Is Money," *Uganda Nation*, 16 Nov. 1962.

⁹⁰This was due in part to wrangling on customs revenue. HUA JNP Zanzibar file: "Address by Zanzibar Delegation" n.d.; "'Hurry Up' Call by Zanzibar," *Uganda Nation*, 30 Nov. 1962.

⁹¹Jane Banfield, "Federation in East Africa," *International Journal* 18, 2 (1963): 181–93.

⁹²On the deployment of "Algeria" in Ghana's decolonization, see Jeffrey Ahlman, "The Algerian Question in Nkrumah's Ghana, 1958–1960," *Africa Today* 57, 2 (2011): 67–84.

for the Colonies Duncan Sandys fly to Nairobi “immediately” and name a date for Kenya’s independence. Juxtaposing the Commonwealth of postcolonial states (to which Uganda had acceded) with the continued colonial control in Kenya, Obote accused Britain of “trying to be in both the 19th and 20th centuries at the same time.” Such an unwieldy chronotope simply would not suffice. “The freedom of Uganda must be felt outside Uganda,” and there was no time like the present: “In school, I was taught that you strike the iron while hot. We will not let it cool!”⁹³

A few days later, the media reported an unspecified secret plan by Uganda and Tanganyika to pressure Britain. Speculation coursed through the region, with newspapers and radio tracking the itineraries and words of politicians in order to glean a hint of what was in the works. Politicians were happy to meet journalists at airport tarmacs and provide a few choice quotes, but never enough to clarify what the plan might entail. This parsimonious, reticent communication was hardly accidental—it was a form of chronopolitics. It drew upon the regional media infrastructure, the mutual investment of political elites, and Britain’s tenuous hold in the region to perform a temporal activism through veiled threats and innuendo. As Obote put it, “People think there is plenty of time in Africa. There is no time in Africa. So my plan to help Kenya will be announced soon.”⁹⁴

KADU politicians were also kept out of the loop. The ruling parties in Uganda and Tanganyika, UPC and TANU, generally favored KANU. This preference was not lost on KADU, whose General Secretary, Martin Shikuku, railed against neighboring politicians’ involvement in Kenyan affairs.⁹⁵ He resented Tanganyikan leaders addressing KANU rallies, while his colleague Ronald Ngala alleged TANU provided KANU with Land Rovers for campaigning.⁹⁶ KADU was committed to *majimbo*, a devolved form of authority within Kenya, while KANU mobilized East African Federation as another reason to favor a centralized Kenyan state.⁹⁷ While there was nothing necessarily incompatible with *majimbo* and East African Federation, in practice, KANU was able to marshal East African Federation in favor of a unitary national politics. The result was so acrimonious that by the time of Tanganyika’s republic celebrations in December 1962, Ngala boycotted, on account of “our friends Obote and Nyerere joining hands with KANU to destroy KADU.”⁹⁸

In early December, when Obote threatened to “rock the boat to free Kenya,” Masinde Muliro, the Vice President of KADU, angrily told him to back off: “I would remind him that if the boat rocks, it rocks both ways. Mr. Obote is fooling himself and could very well rock himself out of business.”⁹⁹ Muliro told him to change his priorities, looking inward at Uganda’s own problems before interfering in Kenya.¹⁰⁰ John Kibunga, a UPC member, condemned the Kenyan politician’s “colonial tactic of reminding Uganda of her problems.” He objected to Muliro’s

⁹³“Now Obote Steps In,” *Daily Nation*, 20 Nov. 1962.

⁹⁴“Obote Threatens to ‘Rock E. A. Boat,’” *Uganda Nation*, 4 Dec. 1962.

⁹⁵“Kakonge’s Plan Attacked,” *Uganda Nation*, 27 Nov. 1962.

⁹⁶“Tanganyika Aid to Be Withdrawn,” *Uganda Nation*, Apr. 1963.

⁹⁷David Anderson, “‘Yours in Struggle for Majimbo’ Nationalism and the Party Politics of Decolonization in Kenya, 1955–64,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 3 (2005): 547–64.

⁹⁸“Ngala Ignores Dar Revelry,” *Uganda Nation*, 10 Dec. 1962.

⁹⁹“Obote Boycott Storm,” *Daily Nation*, 5 Dec. 1962.

¹⁰⁰“Hands off Kenya’ Obote Told,” *Uganda Nation*, 5 Dec. 1962.

ideas about decolonizing chronologies and the territorial limits to solidarity: “Uganda has a good house to live in, but before we think of installing water, electricity, telephone, etc., we must see to it that Kenya leaves the colonial hut and gets as good a house as ours. Mr. Muliro must understand that Kenya’s politics and independence are not his business alone but the business of all independent African countries, including Uganda and Tanganyika.”¹⁰¹

In subsequent days the pace quickened. When Radio Uganda reported, without confirmation, that Obote intended to call for a boycott of Kenyan goods, the threat cascaded across the region.¹⁰² Jubilant KANU youth sang his praises while Kenyan businessmen feared that 40 percent of their exports could be affected. Even Mboya seemed caught off-guard by the news.¹⁰³ The trade boycott—combining bellicosity and intrigue—aimed to reorder the calendar of decolonization, pushing Kenya out of its liminal position.¹⁰⁴ Yet, efforts to understand its likely effects often arrived after events had taken a new turn.

Indeed, in the closing weeks of 1962, the news emerged rapidly, in a staccato pace reported in headlines across the region, with uncertainty, rumor, and intrigue filling the airwaves between print runs. As one astute observer noted, the “partial letting of the cat out of the bag, as it were, over Radio Uganda certainly started a furor which has occupied the attention of not only the East African press, but that of the overseas press as well.”¹⁰⁵ The result was a sense of impending crisis. One Kenyan living in Kampala thought East Africa suffered for lack of statesmen, though it “had more politicians than a country could digest. Politicians,” he explained, “were not interested in the future, merely getting re-elected at the next election, and they made promises they knew they could not fulfill.”¹⁰⁶ Another Kenyan politician thought EACSO was imperiled and unless “something was done quickly it may well be that the aim of an East African Federation might not be fulfilled.”¹⁰⁷ The Ugandan leader of opposition blamed Obote for the sense that “the date of Kenya’s independence was now farther away because the rift between [KANU and KADU] had grown wider.”¹⁰⁸

In turn, Rashidi Kawawa and Milton Obote flew to London in order to avert a crisis in EACSO. They told Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that the EACSO constitution was unworkable “because Kenya’s representatives are unable to take decisions on their country’s behalf.” Again, the dilemma was that decision-making in Kenya was perilously strung between KANU, KADU, and colonial administration, resulting in a “political tug-of-war.”¹⁰⁹ Kawawa complained that when Tanganyika agreed to remain within EACSO, “they did not expect independence for Kenya to take so long.” While Kenya was increasingly self-governing, external affairs and the

¹⁰¹“Makerere UPC Branch ‘Shocked’ by Muliro,” *Uganda Nation*, 10 Dec. 1962.

¹⁰²D. J. Muhavi, “Letter to the Editor,” *Uganda Nation*, 19 Dec. 1962.

¹⁰³“Mboya Silent on Boycott Issue,” *Daily Nation*, 6 Dec. 1962.

¹⁰⁴On trade boycotts in Uganda, see Edgar C. Taylor’s “Eddembe,” in Dilip M. Menon, ed., *Changing Theory: Concepts from the Global South* (London, 2022), 111–27; and “1959 and 1972: Boycott, Expulsion and Memory,” *Awaaz Magazine* (2022), <https://www.awaazmagazine.com/volume-19/issue-2-volume-19/cover-story-issue-2-volume-19/1959-and-1972-boycott-expulsion-and-memory> (last accessed 21 Nov. 2022).

¹⁰⁵“Helping Hand to Kenya Sets off Controversy,” *Uganda Nation*, 8 Dec. 1962.

¹⁰⁶“Obote’s Statesmanship Praised,” *Uganda Nation*, 6 Dec. 1962.

¹⁰⁷“Greater Unity in E. A. Urged,” *Uganda Nation*, 6 Dec. 1962.

¹⁰⁸“Premier Urged to Think Again,” *Uganda Nation*, 19 Dec. 1962.

¹⁰⁹“EACSO Crisis,” *Uganda Nation*, 8 Dec. 1962; “Obote, Kawawa Fly,” *Daily Nation*, 11 Jan. 1963.

thorny subjects of internal security and defense remained under the control of the British Governor.

The centrality of EACSO to Uganda and Tanganyika's long-term economic plans meant the independent states could "not afford to waste the time waiting."¹¹⁰ As a remedy, they pressed for early elections in Kenya to clarify who represented the popular will in Kenya but warned, "We are sovereign states. We can do what we like."¹¹¹ When Duncan Sandys visited Uganda in March 1963 without offering temporal certainty, he was greeted at the airport by a group of protestors wielding signs demanding immediate independence for Kenya. For their part, the British insisted on finishing Kenya's thorny constitutional negotiations before an election could be held.

KANU and KADU, too, pushed for quicker progress, reacting "violently" to delays of even a few weeks in necessary milestones.¹¹² When Malcolm MacDonald was appointed Governor at the start of January 1963, he needed "to reconcile the haste of the Africans with the caution of the British." Kenyans looked to the calendar, demanding independence before the end of the year; British authorities surveyed the mass of details to be ironed out, thinking anything before 1964 foolhardy. To the East Africans, Britain's "premium on an ordered change-over" looked like a strategy of delaying Kenya's right to self-determination.¹¹³ There was no "magic wand [to] be waved which would straighten out Kenya's tortured political structure." Kenya's settler population, on the other hand, demanded Britain slow down, saying officialdom had "little more conscience than the Belgians when they walked out of the Congo, but not much."¹¹⁴

Composing a Shared Horizon of Expectation

By the first half of 1963, opponents of federation found themselves in a corner as the idea of regional unity came to be seen as a matter of *when*, not *if*. As a result, those worried about federation adopted a familiar set of temporal tactics that did not question the inevitability so much as the chronology and pacing of change. Ganda partisans, for instance, were worried that East African Federation would marginalize the royalist elite. Fred Mpanga, legal advisor to the Kabaka (the king of Buganda), held a press conference in January 1963 and argued, "Before federation, the territories ought to settle their own domestic affairs." Hinting darkly at "a situation" if Buganda were forced into federation, his government preferred a continuation of EACSO "rather than immediate federation." EACSO, he said, was a young plant, and it "should not and cannot be made to flower and bear the fruit of political federation" at the current moment.¹¹⁵ The Ugandan central government, though, tried to maintain

¹¹⁰"Kawawa Wants Kenya's Freedom Quickly," *Uganda Nation*, 22 Jan. 1963.

¹¹¹"Obote to Press for Kenya Poll," *Uganda Nation*, 11 Dec. 1962.

¹¹²"Sandys Accused of Uhuru Dawdle," *Uganda Nation*, 13 Dec. 1963.

¹¹³"Troubleshooter for Kenya," *Uganda Nation*, 4 Jan. 1963.

¹¹⁴Those insistent on *uhuru sasa* similarly pointed to conflict in the Katanga province but thought it would be the frustrations of delay that would lead to violence.

¹¹⁵"Slow up Federation' Buganda Warns," *Uganda Nation*, 4 Jan. 1963.

a uniform narrative, projecting an image of the future at odds with the voices from Buganda.¹¹⁶

In the coming months, these competing visions for the future danced across the media. J. M. Mukasa announced a new, Uganda-wide Monarch and Traditionalist Unity party, one of whose tenets was to fight political federation with Tanganyika and Kenya.¹¹⁷ Monarchists and traditionalists were not backwards, Mukasa said, but “concerned about the future.”¹¹⁸ In contrast, one UPC youth organizer reminded “certain privileged individuals” in Buganda that they were not the only constituency capable of “causing trouble.” Stubbornness and the creation of internal problems to delay federation were inexcusable: “We want federation now. Internal problems have no end and no country has ever solved all her internal problems.” The UPC Youth League would, the activist said, use “all the forces at its disposal to hurry up the federation.”¹¹⁹ Others emphasized economic benefits federation would bring. The chairman of the Uganda Company thought the country must do everything to preserve EACSO, lest Uganda becomes “a small, isolated, and doubtfully viable unit.”¹²⁰ Even the standard-bearer of the Monarch and Traditionalist Unity party eventually had to acknowledge they would support a “Confederation of East Africa and of Africa, in a friendly pact treaty.”¹²¹

The debate more often took place in a temporal register than in one that questioned the viability, likelihood, or appeal of East African Federation. Obote said fear of federation was past due, reflecting colonial realities and not the new dispensation. He mobilized a vision of ever-broader political allegiance. While the tribe “has served our peoples very well in the past,” he told a crowd, now was the time to build a nation.¹²² In “world politics today,” the only viable path forward was through larger groupings. In his assessment, the objections to federation were “against time and not principle.”¹²³

Assertions of inevitability attempted to compose the future. Ali Kisekka used his newspaper column to remind “friends in Buganda” that “ostrich tactics of burying the head in sand to avoid seeing what is going to happen is no solution.” Responding to separatist murmurs from Buganda, he declared it “too late to talk of secession now.” Enumerating the shared regional history, infrastructure, and sentiment, Kisekka told Baganda to get with the times and acknowledge that the new constitution gave the central government power over external affairs.¹²⁴

These men argued East Africans were moving into a new era in which their fates were inextricably linked, demanding their acquiescence to a synchronization of their sensibilities, practices, and imaginaries. The distinct experiences of colonialism

¹¹⁶On the suppression of sub-nationalist claims, see Vaughan, “Politics,” 14–17; see also Walker, “Decolonization.”

¹¹⁷“Warning Against an E. A. Federation,” *Uganda Nation*, Feb. 1963.

¹¹⁸“Now UMTU Supports Kenya Party,” *Uganda Nation*, 9 May 1963.

¹¹⁹Letter to the Editor, from Raiti-Omongin, *Uganda Nation*, 2 Feb. 1963.

¹²⁰“Uganda Must Keep EACSO Running,” *Uganda Nation*, 21 Mar. 1963.

¹²¹“Now UMTU Supports Kenya Party,” *Uganda Nation*, 9 May 1963. “Confederation” was invoked as a looser, more decentralized form of political unity, though the details were often unspecified in the era, unlike in French Africa; see Cooper, *Citizenship*, 294–305.

¹²²“Let Us Build a Nation” says Mr. Obote,” *Uganda Nation*, 25 Mar. 1963.

¹²³“Premier Explains Benefits,” *Uganda Nation*, 9 Feb. 1963.

¹²⁴“Federation—We Must Join,” *Uganda Nation*, 8 Feb. 1963.

needed to give way to a shared “horizon of expectation,” to use Koselleck’s term.¹²⁵ While the expected future they had in common was often depicted as inevitable, they were at pains to actively cultivate this shared imaginary.¹²⁶ To do so, they worked through the press and politics, exhorting citizens to fall in line. The result was more often a cacophony than a common vision. As the veteran politician from Buganda I. K. Musazi put it, “The rights and wrongs of the matter, under a clash of opinion, are being thrashed out in the press to the great confusion of the common citizen, which is regrettable.”¹²⁷

A Bus to a United Africa? The 1963 Declaration of Federation

Kenya did, however haltingly, move through the stages of decolonization. In May 1963, KANU won a clear victory in the general election, ending the division of power with KADU and giving Jomo Kenyatta an obvious mandate when he was sworn in as Prime Minister on the 1st of June. Now that KANU would clearly lead the country, expectations solidified around an East African Federation. Uganda’s Attorney General Godfrey Binaisa told a crowd in early June, “The UPC bus is going to a United Africa via a United East Africa.”¹²⁸ For him and others, the sequence of future events was clarified, opening a horizon of pan-African unity.

On the 5th of June, Kenyatta was joined in Nairobi by Nyerere and Obote. In a joint statement they committed to forming an East African Federation by the end of the year. Adopting the mantle of pan-Africanism, they hoped to accelerate the efforts already underway on the continent. “There is throughout East Africa a great urge for unity and an appreciation of the significance of federation.” They pointed to the existing shared services and called for new initiatives, including a regional central bank and common defense program. “There is no more room for slogans and words. This is our day of action,” they declared, announcing the formation of a Working Party to prepare a constitutional framework and plan a conference for the third week of August. The mood was urgent and they were eager to avoid any complications. Any “attempt to delay” Kenya’s independence, they warned, would be unacceptable. They would “regard it as an unfriendly act if Britain uses the pretext of some minority interest or other to prevent Kenya joining the free nations at the earliest possible moment. We are closely involved in this matter now, since a hold-up in Kenya’s advance to independence will hinder the achievement of federation to which we are committed. The three governments, having agreed to the establishment of a federation this year, expect the British Government to grant Kenya’s independence IMMEDIATELY.”¹²⁹

Like Odede’s 1961 legislative motion, the Nairobi Declaration tied the timing of Kenyan independence to the virtues of federation. Among its more agreeable statements justifying federation—the economic benefits, the pan-African appeal—was a more pointed assertion: any delay in Kenya would be considered “unfriendly”

¹²⁵Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004).

¹²⁶As argued for an earlier period in Manu Goswami, “Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms,” *American Historical Review* 117, 5 (2012): 1461–85.

¹²⁷“Musazi Backs Merger Plan,” *Uganda Nation*, 14 May 1963.

¹²⁸“The Last Step to E. A. Federation,” *Uganda Nation*, 3 June 1963.

¹²⁹“A Declaration of Federation by the Governments of East Africa, June 5, 1963,” in Donald Rothchild, ed., *Politics of Integration: An East African Documentary* (Nairobi, 1968), 76–78.

by Uganda and Tanganyika. The leaders' sincere commitment to federation was not doubted: "There is at moment genuine enthusiasm here for Federation," reported an early telegram from Dar es Salaam. "In no (repeat no) sense is this a mere plot to speed Kenya independence."¹³⁰ Yet at the same time, colonial officials recognized regional solidarity was merging with tactical chronopolitics. The implication was not lost on Governor MacDonald who initially thought that if "independence for Kenya could be kept an isolated problem" then they could extend "internal self-government until well into" 1964.¹³¹

The Nairobi Declaration changed that as Kenyan politicians used it to press for a fixed independence date. Without such a date, they argued, they could not effectively negotiate with Uganda and Tanganyika.¹³² A delay of even a few weeks could hinder the regional negotiations.¹³³ Kenyatta insisted that this must be a *public* announcement in order to remove uncertainty and "any suspicion that it might be delayed."¹³⁴ Some suggested buying nearly as much time as possible—aiming for 30 December 1963—while others pointed out that it was necessary to do so before the 22nd in order to allow the federation to accede to the United Nations for the next year. The mundane realities of scheduling difficulties—whether the Duke of Edinburgh would travel so close to Christmas, or the Colonial Secretary's existing travel plans—intersected with the high politics of East African decolonization.

Such competing temporalities were initially overshadowed by uncertainty about what the future would bring. Some colonial administrators thought it unlikely Kenya could be readied for independence by the end of the year, but MacDonald believed federation to be "a dream answer to many of our Kenya problems." Further delays in Kenya seemed less and less tenable as East African politicians applied "rather unpleasant pressure."¹³⁵ As a result, Britain agreed to an earlier date for Kenya's independence, despite the difficulty that "Kenya has only just achieved internal self-government."¹³⁶ The activism bore fruit in the form of an accelerated pace of decolonization.

"Uhuru Speed"

When the announcement was made in July that *uhuru* would commence on 12 December 1963, it energized the Kenyan political atmosphere. Achieng Oneko said it "galvanized the country's Parliament into double quick action," commencing the "busiest five months of Government work that the nation has ever seen." "Parliament," he proclaimed, "is now getting into full swing *kabisa*." Minister Koinange announced that he and his colleagues would be working "25 hours a day ... to get everything done in time for independence and East African Federation."¹³⁷ In the course of weeks, then, Kenya went from stalled with an abundance of time, to

¹³⁰UKNA DO 166/99: Dar es Salaam to Kampala, Kenya, and Zanzibar, 25 June 1963.

¹³¹UKNA DO 168/73: Malcolm MacDonald to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 7 June 1963.

¹³²UKNA DO 168/73: Constitutional Talks, 20 June 1963.

¹³³UKNA DO 168/73: Monson to Secretary of State, 20 June 1963.

¹³⁴UKNA DO 168/73: Malcolm MacDonald to Secretary of State, 20 June 1963.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*

¹³⁶UKNA DO 166/99: "Talks with President Kennedy," June 1963.

¹³⁷"Kenya Parliament at 'Uhuru Speed,'" *Daily Nation*, 4 July 1963.

lacking enough hours in the day to sufficiently prepare for a future that now seemed imminent.

Britain was also obliged to accede to East Africans' expedited temporalities due to the rapid progress in federal negotiations. In the first week after the Nairobi Declaration, the East Africans agreed to a constitutional framework and principles and the Attorney General of Tanganyika, Roland Brown, began "working furiously on [a] draft federal constitution."¹³⁸ The momentum convinced some that they could federate by the end of October or early November. Provided agreement could be reached on the location of the federal capital and on whether or not they would retain three seats in the UN, the Declaration's 1963 deadline seemed likely.

Those involved were purposefully pressing forward with great haste. They believed there was a unique window "whilst the psychological atmosphere is favourable."¹³⁹ "In Kenya," said one early report, "everyone seems to be in favour of a development towards federation, though often for different reasons."¹⁴⁰ Even Buganda's reaction was muted, with at least some support among royalist politicians.¹⁴¹ Sources told Britain that a delegation led by Tom Mboya may have offered the Kabaka the federal presidency, and parliamentary defections in favor of Obote's UPC removed much opposition.¹⁴² His government gave every impression that federation was within reach and "dilated with enthusiasm."¹⁴³ It seemed, for the moment, that synchronicity was finally at hand. Public enthusiasm was high, but "hesitation may cause second thoughts."¹⁴⁴ One observer thought the early lack of precision in the federation's design, meanwhile, served "to veil the problems and the difficult decisions which the participating units will be called upon to make."¹⁴⁵ In other words, this zeal was understood to be timebound, likely to dissipate into doubt and dissent. Only if seized in the moment could forward momentum secure a federal future.

Federal Negotiations and the Intransigence of Sovereign Times

The Nairobi Declaration helped spur the announcement of a date for Kenyan independence.¹⁴⁶ This gave KANU one of its major goals. Combined with their achievement in the May 1963 election, it clarified major uncertainties that characterized liminal sovereignty, giving an answer to who would have power and when. The Declaration also inaugurated a Working Party of African officials who were responsible for implementing high-level guidance received from Kenyatta, Obote, and Nyerere. They moved with gusto, divvying up policy domains between national, federal, and concurrent lists.¹⁴⁷ The initial progress—a draft constitution

¹³⁸UKNA DO 166/99: Telegram from Dar es Salaam to Kampala, Nairobi, and Zanzibar, 25 June 1963.

¹³⁹UKNA DO 168/73: Malcolm MacDonald to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 June 1963.

¹⁴⁰UKNA DO 166/99: B. W. Meynell to C. R. Walker, 13 June 1963.

¹⁴¹UKNA DO 168/73: Uganda Fortnightly Summary, 30 May–12 June 1963.

¹⁴²UKNA DO 168/73: Le Tocq to Chadwick, 14 June 1963; Le Tocq to Chadwick, 19 June 1963.

¹⁴³UKNA DO 168/73: Chadwick to Hunter, 12 June 1963; and Tilney to Duke of Devonshire, 26 June 1963.

¹⁴⁴UKNA DO 213/166: "East African Federation," 8 June 1963.

¹⁴⁵UKNA DO 168/73: "East Africa Federation: Attitude of Tanganyika and Uganda," 27 June 1963.

¹⁴⁶See AR/MISR/155/3: Julius Nyerere to Kwame Nkrumah, 6 Aug. 1963.

¹⁴⁷UNA 43/2: CT (1963), 273, "East African Federation Talks."

circulated by 27 June—seemingly belied worries that new states would be unwilling to “sacrifice their sovereignty,” as Nyerere put it.¹⁴⁸

In the accelerated window of mid-1963, the layering and distribution of sovereignty between the three territories seemed viable. About a month after the Declaration, the British expected an East African Federation would form just before Kenyan independence.¹⁴⁹ Soon, however, cracks appeared in the initial consensus.¹⁵⁰ Within the negotiating team, initial uncertainty on topics including citizenship and foreign affairs multiplied into disagreements on policies of agriculture and mining, higher education, and external borrowing.¹⁵¹ Efforts to ameliorate concerns of the smaller states through a bicameral legislature did little to bring them around. The attitude of the Ugandan delegation was seemingly “anti-federal,” Amir Jamal told Nyerere.¹⁵² The likely coupling of federal citizenship to labor mobility, for example, heightened longstanding Ugandan anxiety about Kenyan migrant workers. Uganda was also unwilling to part with a seat at the United Nations.¹⁵³ Both Uganda and Tanganyika rejected Nairobi as the federal capital because they did not want to further the concentration of industry in Kenya or give the perception that the East African Federation was little more than “Greater Kenya.”¹⁵⁴

For some weeks these divisions remained behind closed doors, and public pronouncements continued to depict agreement on the incipient federation. A concerned Nyerere wrote Obote a long letter. “A Federation,” he believed, “absorbs and encompasses its constituent parts as far as the outside world is concerned.” It was necessary to build a federation that did not split loyalties through dual citizenship structures. A strong union was necessary to create “a new and stronger instrument for social and economic change.” If Uganda’s government was not prepared to join in this, it would be necessary to revisit the foundational question, for “it would be fatal for us to push forward into a federation if there was no feeling of commitment, in the deepest sense, by the leaders, and also by the mass of our people.” Tanganyika was ready, but Nyerere did not wish to move past a threshold if Obote would later turn back. Rather, he counseled, we should “take our time until we can fully commit ourselves.” “Federation,” he pleaded, “is the most important venture that we have so far undertaken, and we cannot afford to fail.”¹⁵⁵

Eventually, the disputes spilled into the media, with commentary serving to undermine the shared narrative about the immediacy of federation. While events continued to move quickly, the momentum was no longer obviously in one direction. The rapid pace combined with decreased harmony made the situation far less clear.

¹⁴⁸UKNA FO 371/167147: “Gross Mistake,” Aug. 1963.

¹⁴⁹KNA ACW/1/557: L.D.A. Baron to R. C. Tress, 10 July 1963.

¹⁵⁰This section draws on the respective national views in KNA ACW/1/557: “East African Federation Constitution”; KNA MAC/EAG/19/2: “Does Uganda Really Want to Federate”; Tanzania National Archives CCMCF/40/2 “East African Federation,” 1963; Tanzania National Records Centre (Dodoma) EAC Acc.82/2: “Commission of Enquiry”; UNA 43/2: CT(1963)273: “Report on East African Federation Talks,” 4 Sept. 1963.

¹⁵¹AR/MISR/155/1 East African Federation Working Party Papers, 1963–64.

¹⁵²AR/MISR/155/1: Jamal to Nyerere, 3 July 1963.

¹⁵³UN Archives S-0175-0399, TE 322/1/EAF (170-2): “Joint East Africa Federation Mission,” Dec. 1964.

¹⁵⁴UKNA Foreign Office [FO] 371/167147: Memorandum by Murray, 15 Aug. 1963.

¹⁵⁵AR/MISR/155/1 Amir Jamal: Nyerere to Obote, 6 July 1963.

The British High Commission in Kampala complained that every time they tried to write a summary dispatch on federation, “the situation has changed.”¹⁵⁶

The recriminations reached a head when, after a frustrating Working Party meeting in August 1963, Oscar Kambona and Joseph Murumbi told Kampala newspapers that Ugandan intransigence was to blame. The forceful reply of Adoko Nekyon made it clear that any hope for a unified temporality in the region was lost.¹⁵⁷ Against the urgency of the other delegates, Nekyon demanded time. He had only recently received “a bulky document, consisting of the Draft Constitution and those papers prepared by the four Governments on the points on which we have disagreed.” These need to be duplicated for the Cabinet, he fulminated, and then circulated and analyzed. “This needs time to complete.” It took three years to write the Uganda Constitution, he reminded his audience, “I see that there are some people in East Africa who think that we should write an East African constitution in such a hurry, as if we are writing the constitution of a football club, or the constitution of a dancing or musical society.”

The matter was complex, and federations elsewhere had devolved into bloodshed, he warned, pointing to the U.S. Civil War. Moreover, the future weighed heavily on the work. “We are writing the Constitution not for ourselves,” he inveighed, “but for millions of people who do not know each other at all, and who have different traditions, histories, and languages, and also for people who are as yet unborn. The Constitution should, therefore, be an instrument which should function in our time and also in about 300 years hence.” And then, just in case anyone still thought the ambitious timeline of the Nairobi Declaration was feasible, Nekyon declared, “I find it practically impossible to have the Federation by this year, and I am sure others will find it so also.”¹⁵⁸

While Kenya and Tanganyika considered going forward together, Nekyon’s broadside led to a long period of no meetings. There were a few efforts to revive the initiative in 1964 by backbenchers and opposition members who thought the governments were “dragging their feet.”¹⁵⁹ These efforts failed to reanimate federation. For Nyerere, a federation was desirable because it would encourage East Africans to cease basing “political decisions upon communal thinking.”¹⁶⁰ Such parochialism proved more intransigent than he hoped. Joseph Murumbi complained bitterly that Kenyatta stymied this last push for federation due to his “failure to stand up to pressure from his fellow Kikuyus” who feared that if Kenyatta were to rise to head of the region, there was no Kikuyu who could challenge the Luo politicians Oginga Odinga and Tom Mboya for national leadership. Murumbi, who spent years organizing on pan-African grounds, was depressed at the small-mindedness, and even threatened to resign. “We could have had the beginning of the Federation on Saturday if the old man had done what he had agreed to do.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶UKNA FO 371/167147: D.W.S. Hunt to Chadwick, 22 Aug. 1963.

¹⁵⁷See also UKNA CO 822/3194: “Uganda: East African Federation,” 4 Sept. 1963. For more on these months, see UKNA CO 822/3195.

¹⁵⁸UKNA FO 371/167147: Le Tocq to Chadwick, 21 Aug. 1963.

¹⁵⁹UKNA DO 213/166: British High Commission, Nairobi to Commonwealth Relations Office, 20 June 1964.

¹⁶⁰UKNA DO 166/99: Julius Nyerere to Harold Macmillan, 10 July 1963.

¹⁶¹UKNA DO 213/166: Telegram to CRO from Nairobi, 13 Apr. 1964, East African Federation.

Tanzania, too, found itself addressing more proximate concerns: as weeks turned into months, Nyerere and his colleagues were unwilling to postpone their economic aspirations for the unhurried pace of federation. Independence gave TANU extensive capacity to control the rhythms of its national bureaucracy, but federal uncertainty meant much of the regional regulatory and planning apparatus lacked clear guidance. The continued regional currency and concentration of common market investment within Kenya undermined Tanzanian economic autonomy, leading TANU to eventually introduce their own central bank and currency, as well as a variety of trade restrictions.¹⁶² Chronopolitics on the scale of the nation-state overtook those of the region as ideas about modernization encouraged national leaders to think of themselves as comparatively behind the times. As Nyerere memorably said, “We must run while others walk.”¹⁶³ How best to transform Tanzania was also expressed in a temporal idiom, as *siasa ya pole* (the politics of slow change) was contrasted with *siasa ya kali* (the politics of radical change).¹⁶⁴ Such an idiom reflects the continued fears that East Africans remained not only delayed but also stuck between normative orders.

Since October 1962, the Ghanaian High Commissioner in Uganda had worked to “sabotage” East African Federation, believing it a threat to Nkrumah’s standing and vision of continental—rather than regional—unification.¹⁶⁵ Despite official protestations by the diplomat, his subversive role reached the press in autumn of the next year.¹⁶⁶ In July of that year, Nkrumah and Nyerere exchanged lengthy letters that made clear the divergences in their pan-African visions.¹⁶⁷ Yet more important by August 1963 was the impediment posed by the fractured domestic political landscape in Uganda. Whether or not Obote, Nkyon, and other UPC leaders were willing and able to achieve a federation, they were undoubtedly hobbled by an independence constitution that fortified the legal position of Buganda.¹⁶⁸ British observers thought the only way forward would be to pay the Kabaka’s “price” or to “bulldoze the Kabaka and the other Royal survivors ... as Nkrumah did the Asanthe.”¹⁶⁹

Conclusion

By the time Obote did eventually attack the Kabaka’s palace and send him into exile, in 1966, the energy behind an East African Federation had dissipated. The efforts to align individual states’ priorities became far more tepid as the respective temporalities

¹⁶²UKNA DO 213/166: Memorandum on EACSO and Proposed Federation, May 1964; Ali Mazrui “Tanzania versus East Africa,” *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 3, 3 (1965): 209–25.

¹⁶³William Smith, *We Must Run while They Walk: A Portrait of Africa’s Julius Nyerere* (New York, 1972).

¹⁶⁴William Tordoff and Ali A. Mazrui, “The Left and the Super-Left in Tanzania,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, 3 (1972): 427–45.

¹⁶⁵Opoku Agyeman, *Nkrumah’s Ghana and East Africa: Pan-Africanism and African Interstate Relations* (Vancouver, 1992); Matteo Grilli, *Nkrumaism and African Nationalism* (London, 2018), 275–80.

¹⁶⁶HUA JNP, ch. 6 notes: “Busumtwi-Sam Statement,” 27 Oct. 1963.

¹⁶⁷AR/MISR/155/3: Nkrumah to Nyerere, 4 July 1963; Nyerere to Nkrumah, 6 Aug. 1963. This was not a new disagreement; see their letters beginning in 1960 in AR/MISR/156/10.

¹⁶⁸Audrey Richards, “Constitutional Problems in Uganda,” *Political Quarterly* 33, 4 (1962): 360–69; J. M. Lee, “Buganda’s Position in Federal Uganda,” *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 3, 3 (1965): 165–81.

¹⁶⁹UKNA DO 213/166: “Prospects for East Africa Federation”: British High Commission in Kampala to L. B. Walsh Atkins.

of domestic politics and policymaking diverged. In place of a political union, the East African states endeavored to maintain economic cooperation through the East African Community, inaugurated in 1967. Yet, that body was a far cry from the federal futures imagined just a few years before. Indeed, in some ways it was a step back from the prior common market arrangements, reflecting nationalist economic jealousies.

Analysts at the time were much concerned about the question of success or failure, as have been those writing new histories of decolonization.¹⁷⁰ Were alternatives to nation-states plausible? Why did the nation-state succeed where federations failed? These questions largely assume what qualifies as success, defining international legal recognition as the standard by which the politics of decolonization are to be judged. This is not the only way to analyze the possibilities and constraints of decolonization. Questions about plausibility and failure downplay the situated reasoning and strategizing through which decolonization unfolded. They sacrifice historical experience for the historian's adjudication.

The approach I have taken here suggests federation is better understood as a style of claims-making. Because it did not mean just one thing, federation could be marshaled to subordinate ethnic patriots in Buganda or KADU while likewise being enrolled by irredentists in the region's borderlands. It could, some thought, simply be a strategy for accelerating Kenyan independence. However, its widespread appeal also reflected a sense that political union, the harmonization of electoral rhythms and planning procedures, and the solidification of a larger market and polity would propel East Africans forward together. It was part of a vocabulary of decolonization that allowed for reasoning through a new orchestration of responsibilities, rights, and resources. In East Africa, this was especially important for the way it could secure the existing supranational economic links (including a currency and common market), as well as accelerate the uncertain waiting of the era. Sovereignty in these years was distributed between London and the East African capitals, and the remaking of political time was part and parcel of redistributing authority. Federation was a style of argumentation—rather than a solution—used to negotiate between divergent temporalities, uncertain territories, and overlapping commitments. East African Federation provided a set of techniques and ideas through which mid-century East Africans negotiated among themselves and with Britain. In negotiating the sequencing, pacing, and synchronization of decolonization through federation, East Africans worked to undo the colonial control of time, but it offered a less sturdy means for suturing the region after the threshold of independence was crossed.

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¹⁷⁰See Thomas Franck, "East African Federation," in T. Franck, ed. *Why Federations Fail* (New York, 1968), 3–36.

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