

A Comparison of Ethnic Policies in Rwanda and Tanzania

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Abstract: Ethnic construction is a historical phenomenon and process, generally involving two main directions: assimilation, integration, and unity among ethnic groups, and differentiation, separation, and diversification. Typically, these directions alternate and may coexist during certain historical stages. Tanzania and Rwanda are both multi-ethnic countries, but their ethnic relations could not be more different. The former, with more than 120 ethnic groups, is basically in harmony, while the latter has erupted into large-scale ethnic conflicts. Rwanda and Tanzania exhibit significant differences in their processes of ethnic construction, influenced by factors such as colonial rule and ethnic policies. The composition of ethnic groups and interethnic relations in these countries demonstrate distinct characteristics. This study aims to compare the ethnic composition and ethnic policies of Rwanda and Tanzania, elucidating the shaping role of ethnic policies on interethnic relations and exploring practical pathways towards ethnic integration and coexistence. This paper mainly analyses the process and relationship of ethnic construction in Rwanda and Tanzania through literature and data analysis. This paper finds that whether the relationship between ethnic groups is harmonious mainly depends on whether the government can gradually eliminate ethnic barriers and strengthen ethnic identity while respecting history, rather than ignoring or even strengthening the contradictions between ethnic groups.

Keywords: Rwanda, Tanzania, Rwandan genocide, nation, ethnic policies

1. Introduction

This paper will mainly focus on Rwanda and Tanzania's national construction, policy, and formation process of many aspects of comparison. Although many previous articles have analyzed the causes of ethnic development and ethnic conflicts in Rwanda based on events such as the Rwandan genocide, there is still a lack of research on a more reasonable development direction in the future. Therefore, this paper will draw a feasible development direction based on the comparison and analysis of the different ethnic policies of Rwanda and Tanzania and the different influences caused by the two countries. For a more specific study, this paper analyzed historical documents, data and contents collected by predecessors and summarized the development process of Rwanda and Tanzania before colonization, as well as the policies and history during and after colonization, and compared them. The research of this paper shows the influence of different ethnic policies on ethnic composition and analyzes the feasible development direction of ethnic blending in the future.

2. Ethnic Composition of Rwanda and Tanzania

Rwanda is a country in central Africa with a population of 8.12 million, making it one of the most densely populated countries on the continent. The main ethnic groups are the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. The official languages are Kinyarwanda and French (with English becoming an official language in 1999). The religious beliefs of the population include Catholicism (45%), indigenous religions (44%), Protestantism (10%), and Islam (1%). The Hutu ethnic group is a central African ethnic group primarily residing in Rwanda and Burundi, constituting the largest ethnic group in both countries. The Hutu account for 85% of the Rwandan population and mainly adhere to Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Sunni Islam, and indigenous religions. The Hutu people have historically been engaged in agricultural activities. The Tutsi ethnic group has its origins in the Ethiopian plateau and primarily resides around Lake Victoria. They belong to the Sudanese type of the Negro race, with an average height of 1.80 meters for adult males. The Tutsi comprise 14% of the total population in Rwanda. The Twa, also known as the Batwa, are a pygmy people and the oldest recorded ethnic group in the Central African Great Lakes region.

In Tanzania, the formation of ethnic groups can be characterized as “coreless.” Only six ethnic groups (Sukuma, Swahili, Nyamwezi, Makonde, Haya, and Hehe) with populations exceeding one million are predominantly located in Tanzania. Additionally, there are Arab, Indo-Pakistani, and European descendants. Ethnic relations in Tanzania are relatively harmonious. There is a wide variety of languages spoken, including Bantu languages spoken by the major ethnic groups, along with over 120 other languages belonging to the Nilo-Saharan, Cushitic, and Khoisan language families. The Sukuma ethnic group is the most populous, with over two million people, accounting for approximately 11% of the national population. However, these larger ethnic groups do not exert a dominant influence in the country’s political life, and historically, they have not played a significant role on a national scale. This pattern of ethnic composition reduces the potential for the development of strong ethnic nationalism or the emergence of local ethnic barriers, facilitating the establishment of a unified domestic market and promoting interethnic integration.

3. Ethnic Policies in Rwanda

The development history of Rwanda has been marked by ethnic conflicts between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups [1]. Whether during the pre-colonial period of Tutsi monarchy, the colonial era, or the establishment of a nation-state after independence, Rwanda’s ethnic policies have undergone a continuous evolution. The Tutsis arrived in what is now Rwanda around the 10th century as nomadic outsiders from southern Somalia. Through long periods of infiltration or conquest, even though the Tutsis were always in the minority, they were always in the dominant position and gradually established their dominance and monarchy. The Tutsis owned a lot of land and livestock and established feudal rule over the Hutu and the Twa through the Ubugabuka system. However, before the colonial rule, Hutu and Tutsi still maintained a peaceful relationship, and even Hutu could become Tutsi through intermarriage, and both sides could change their identities [2]. Therefore, the so-called Tutsi and Hutu were actually more like a division of social status rather than different tribes before the colonial rule. In the second half of the 19th century, Germany began to invade Rwanda and established colonial rule over Rwanda at the end of the 19th century. Germany did not change the social structure of Rwanda itself, but exercised indirect rule through the central government and monarchy. After World War I, Rwanda was entrusted to Belgian rule through the Treaty of Versailles. The German policy of indirect rule was retained by Belgium, which considered education to be an important factor in maintaining its informed status, so it instituted an elite education system for the Tutsis and kept the Hutus in a subordinate position for a long time. Moreover, in 1933 and 1934, Belgium conducted a census in Rwanda, and made clear

ethnic divisions between Hutu and Tutsi, and produced identity certificates to indicate ethnicity. In this process, the Belgian colonists determined the distinction between the two ethnic groups by measuring the height and appearance of Rwandans and other factors. During the colonial rule of Belgium, Rwanda suffered serious racial oppression and caused a lot of ethnic disputes, all of which planted incentives for ethnic contradictions and conflicts in the future [3].

During the period of delegated rule before independence, policies of divide and rule were implemented to oppress ethnic groups. After independence, the policies can be divided into the following stages.

3.1. The Kayibanda Government's Retaliatory Policies

Since the Hutu uprising in 1959, the Hutu, with the support of the Belgians, took control of the national government. On January 28, 1961, the Republic of Rwanda was declared, and the Kayibanda government came into power. Thus, Rwanda established a Hutu-led government and initiated a campaign of persecution and exclusion against the Tutsi under state support. The government elevated ethnic conflicts to political issues, rejecting the colonial system but inheriting an ideology of ethnic differentiation. The Kayibanda government employed racism and nationalism to manage ethnic relations. Racism was manifested in consolidating the Hutu's position of power and dividing the two ethnic groups into ruling and subordinate classes. Nationalism was demonstrated in three aspects: implementing policies of ethnic oppression, utilizing state power to execute, plan, control mass killings; restricting individual space for citizens, subjecting them to administrative power, and depriving personal freedom; fostering citizens' obedience to state power. Under the influence of these unequal ethnic policies, tensions deepened between the two ethnic groups, leading to political instability. Between 1959 and 1973, Rwanda witnessed four large-scale intertribal bloodshed incidents (in 1959, 1963, 1967, and 1973), resulting in a large number of refugees (primarily Tutsi) seeking asylum in neighboring countries.

3.2. The Habyalimana Government's "National Reconciliation Policy"

Since coming into power in 1973, Habyalimana was re-elected in the presidential elections of 1978, 1983, and 1988. The Habyalimana government denounced the previous government's erroneous ethnic policies and implemented principles of "people, governance, and enjoyment" and advocated peaceful coexistence regardless of ethnicity or region [4]. This brought relative stability to the political situation and eased tensions between the two ethnic groups. However, the issue of refugees living abroad remained unresolved and was not given sufficient attention by the government. In pursuit of their dream to return home, Tutsi refugees established the National Unity Alliance in Uganda in 1979 (later renamed the "Rwandan Patriotic Front"). After their demands for repatriation were rejected, the Patriotic Front established the aim of returning to Rwanda and seizing power through armed struggle in 1990. The Patriotic Front initiated a three-year internal war in 1990. As the conflict spilled over to neighboring countries, negotiations between the Rwandan government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front began under various mediators at the onset of the civil war. On August 4, 1993, both sides signed the "Rwandan Peace Agreement," declaring an end to the internal war in Rwanda. The agreement addressed issues such as power sharing, laws, and the resettlement of refugees. However, the peace agreement did not bring long-lasting peace. On April 6, 1994, Habyalimana was assassinated, triggering a nationwide conflict far more brutal than the previous three-year civil war—the Rwandan genocide.

3.3. The Kagame Government's Policy of National Reconciliation

In 1994, the Patriotic Front seized power during the struggle and established a transitional government. In 1998, Paul Kagame was elected as the leader of the Patriotic Front and began his term in office. The new government aimed to restore post-war peace and democracy, develop the domestic economy, and address the repatriation of refugees [5]. The government abolished the racial identity card system that had existed since the colonial period and prosecuted the main perpetrators of the genocide. The government established the “National Unity and Reconciliation Commission” to publish educational materials on national reconciliation and foster professionals in the field. In the process of economic development, emphasis was placed on promoting economic equality among ethnic groups and political fairness and justice between ethnic groups, thereby resolving the challenges of national reconciliation and strengthening national unity. After the devastation caused by the genocide, Kagame led the Patriotic Front, aiming to rebuild the economy, enhance national strength, and resolve ethnic conflicts. These two aspects are interdependent. The new government focused on promoting national reconciliation, developing the national economy, and advocating democracy and justice. First, other political parties were invited to join the government, and institutional channels were established to solicit opinions and address the demands of other ethnic groups. Second, new ethnic policies were promoted, and practical actions were taken to facilitate the repatriation of refugees and ensure proper resettlement for those who had already returned. Third, the national economy was restored after the civil war, ensuring the well-being of all ethnic groups and establishing an armed government to prevent acts of violence. Fourth, a new constitution was formulated, incorporating the new ethnic policies into the constitution to fundamentally oppose racism and separatism and highlight the importance of national reconciliation and unity. Multi-party systems were implemented.

4. Ethnic Policies in Tanzania

Tanzania is one of the African countries with the most complex ethnic composition. The various ethnic groups have diverse economies, cultures, and religions. The colonial division of territories resulted in the fragmentation and overlapping of previously unified ethnic regions. The monoculture colonial economy weakened the production of goods, and the formation of a unified market was still in progress, resulting in an uneven social structure. However, compared to most African countries, Tanzania has harmonious ethnic relations, fewer ethnic conflicts, and political stability. In addition to the objective historical and current conditions of its ethnic process, this can be directly attributed to the government's implementation of ethnic integration policies that are in line with its ethnic process, providing beneficial lessons for developing countries in handling ethnic issues.

4.1. Inter-ethnic Nature of Political Parties, Government, and Their Cadre Policies

Since independence, Tanzania has practiced a one-party system. Unlike most African countries where parties are based on specific ethnic groups or represent their interests, Tanzania's revolutionary party is inter-ethnic, representing a collective party of the country's 126 ethnic groups [6]. This is manifested in several ways: First, since its inception, the revolutionary party's leaders have come from small ethnic groups, overcoming the primacy of major ethnic groups and the ethnicization of political parties. Second, the electoral system avoids “tribalism” by combining the interests of different ethnic groups with those of the entire society. The Central Committee consists of 115 members, of whom 90 are nominated by various industries and sectors, and the remaining 25 are elected from each province. Representatives from all major ethnic groups in the country are included in the Central Executive Committee. Third, the policy of balancing leadership positions.

The federal government follows a presidential cabinet system. The constitution stipulates that the president and the prime minister of the cabinet cannot be from the mainland or Zanzibar at the same time, ensuring representation from each. Fourth, the legislative body reflects the will of various ethnic groups. In the unicameral parliament, each county has one representative seat for each ethnic group, avoiding various forms of ethnic nationalism. Fifth, the policy of having leaders from other ethnic groups. Local officials below the county level are directly elected by local people, and county and provincial leaders are appointed by the president, ensuring non-native leaders govern local areas, thereby reducing the growth of local ethnic nationalism. Sixth, the policy of frequent rotations. The government cabinet undergoes several reorganizations each year, and county and provincial leaders are frequently rotated to prevent the emergence of local ethnic nationalism and parochialism.

4.2. National Language Policy Promoting Ethnic Integration

Tanzania has over 100 diverse and complex languages, but the language that has achieved practical uniformity and becomes a national language is Swahili. All Tanzanians are fluent in Swahili, often using it more than their mother tongue. This is primarily due to the vigorous promotion of Swahili by the revolutionary party and the government [7]. The government has the National Swahili Language Commission, the Ministry of Culture has a department for the national language, and there are corresponding language institutions at the central, provincial, county, and township levels. The University of Dar es Salaam has a Swahili Literature Department and research institute, and there is a Swahili literature and poetry association among the public. Almost all news publications, educational books, official and public gatherings, service facilities, and traffic signs use English and Swahili. This linguistic integration has led to a gradual weakening of ethnic consciousness and the formation of Tanzanian identity. The national language policy has facilitated linguistic integration, greatly promoting the process of inter-ethnic integration.

4.3. Equal, Balanced, and Peaceful Religious Policies

Religious beliefs are an important part of national traditional culture and one of the most sensitive factors in ethnic relations. It can serve as a force for ethnic cohesion or become a factor of ethnic division. Tanzania has a diverse population with varied religious beliefs, including traditional beliefs as well as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. Approximately 30% of the population practices Christianity, 30% practices Islam, and 40% maintain traditional beliefs. Therefore, religion has a significant impact on ethnic relations in Tanzania. However, Tanzania rarely experiences ethnic disputes due to religious conflicts [8]. The policy of the revolutionary party has consistently emphasized religious freedom, equality among religions, non-interference of politics in religion, and the role of religion in supporting governance. Each religion has its own publications, associations, and branches throughout the country, and annual conferences are held. Muslim leaders attend Christian conferences, and Christian leaders attend Islamic conferences. It can be seen that the Tanzanian party and government have not implemented radical religious policies but have given high importance to religious relations, promoting harmonious and peaceful development of both religious and ethnic relations.

5. Evaluation of Ethnic Policies in Rwanda and Tanzania

5.1. Evaluation of Ethnic Policies in Rwanda

Rwanda, with its large population and limited natural resources, has experienced a long period of colonial rule, adding some variables to its development process. The historical ethnic massacres

have been a painful scar that Rwanda finds difficult to erase. However, after the civil war and genocide, the policies of the new government have played a positive role in achieving ethnic reconciliation in Rwanda. In 1995, Rwanda established a new constitution that explicitly stipulated the principle of mutual equality among ethnic groups. The constitution solidly laid the foundation for the new ethnic policy by ensuring equal status among ethnic groups. The principle of multiparty democracy granted equal democratic status to people of all ethnic groups, broadening the channels for ethnic interests and demands. The establishment of a sound modern judicial system defined individual behavior under the status of national citizens. Firstly, having an ethnic policy based on a constitutional and legal framework provides a basis for the specific implementation of ethnic policies. Secondly, ethnic policies cater to the desires of all ethnic groups in post-war Rwanda to build a peaceful country, aligning with the historical trend. The goals set by President Kagame's reconciliation policy are clear and in line with the overall interests of Rwandan society. However, in terms of implementation indicators, there is a lack of policy safeguards from the central government to local levels. Although the reconciliation policy is included in the legal norms, the post-war devastation in Rwanda lacked social integration mechanisms to support the government's policy implementation. The specific policy implementation process lacks stable financial support, let alone policy reward and punishment systems and monitoring mechanisms. In other words, the government's policy framework alone is used to maintain ethnic reconciliation policy. From the perspective of the environmental indicators of ethnic policies, President Kagame has been committed to promoting reconciliation in Rwanda. Efforts have been made to develop the economy, improve people's living standards, combat corruption, and promote ethnic unity. However, there are some significant issues in the Rwandan social environment that cannot be ignored. The main issue is the problem of subsistence. The new ethnic policy must find ways to improve the living standards of ordinary citizens. Rwanda still faces challenges such as an imperfect economic structure, inadequate public facilities, limited transportation systems, insufficient funding, and population growth since the post-war period. External organizations opposing the Rwandan government and domestic separatist forces are threats to national territorial sovereignty. Additionally, anti-government armed groups propagate extremist ethnic ideologies at the grassroots level, which adds to the difficulty of implementing the government's ethnic reconciliation policy. Furthermore, the deep-rooted ethnic hatred that has lasted for centuries is difficult to change in people's minds in a short period.

5.2. Evaluation of Ethnic Policies in Tanzania

Since independence, Tanzania has faced various challenges in politics, economy, culture, and religion, especially with a less optimistic economic development situation [9]. According to the "2016 Least Developed Countries Report" published by the United Nations, Tanzania has yet to overcome its status as one of the least developed countries. However, overall, Tanzania has not experienced large-scale ethnic conflicts or domestic unrest caused by ethnic tensions since independence. The various ethnic groups coexist harmoniously. From this perspective, Tanzania's achievements in ethnic governance are remarkable. In 2001, the African Democratic Trends Survey conducted a survey on self-identification with specific ethnic groups in Africa. Only 3% of Tanzanians identified themselves with a particular ethnic group. This indirectly reflects the successful construction of a national identity and ethnic relations in Tanzania. It can be said that the differences among more than 120 ethnic groups are no longer the core issues affecting national unity in the context of Tanzanian identity. Although each ethnic group still has its unique norms, language, and cultural traditions, there is a trend of unification in various fields, such as society and politics. Through a governance model that respects diversity based on integration, despite issues such as the separatist movement in Zanzibar and riots in the south-western region of post-

independence Tanzania, these destabilizing factors have not shaken the current stable ethnic situation at the national level [10]. In over 50 years since independence, Tanzania has almost had no national upheaval caused by ethnic issues, which is a breath of fresh air on the African continent. In summary, Tanzania, on the basis of fully understanding the historical relationship among diverse ethnic groups, has resolved conflicts in cultural identity, political power, and social integration through active policies in culture, politics, and the economy. This has achieved a harmonious coexistence of more than 120 ethnic groups in this diverse ethnic country.

6. Conclusion

This paper mainly explores the comparison between the ethnic groups before Rwanda and Tanzania, as well as the formation, construction and development of the two nations. Through a comparison of ethnic policies in Rwanda and Tanzania, it can be observed that the key to fostering harmonious ethnic relations lies in the ability of post-independence governments to establish a mature and stable national identity based on respecting history, without the premise of eliminating ethnic differences. For further research, it can mainly focus on the impact of different national conditions and objective conditions such as geographical conditions on ethnic groups and the impact of education on similar issues.

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