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The role of political leaders in mitigating the risk of mass atrocities: an analysis of Seretse Khama, Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere

STEPHEN MCLoughlin

A recent innovation in the field of comparative genocide studies is the investigation of why mass atrocity crimes do not occur in many places that may reasonably be considered at risk of such events.¹ This represents a significant development in understanding when, where and why the risk of such crimes occurring rises and falls. This scholarship has pointed out that mass atrocity crimes are relatively rare phenomena, whereas their common antecedents² occur far more frequently. Yet the tendency among most genocide scholars seeking to explain why cases of mass violence occur has been to focus on past cases, overlooking the more nuanced question of why it is that some countries experience such violence while others do not. To date, this emerging research agenda has made a significant contribution to the field of comparative genocide studies in three ways: by determining why high-risk countries step back from the brink of mass violence;³ by examining long-term processes of risk mitigation in countries where moderate risk exists;⁴ and by providing insights for prevention.⁵

¹ The term ‘atrocity crimes’ refers to widespread and systematic acts of violence committed against unarmed civilians, such as genocide, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.
² That is, the common preconditions or risk factors associated with such violence.
⁵ Ban Ki-moon, Responsibility to Protect: state responsibility and prevention (New York: UN Secretariat, 2013); Alex J. Bellamy, Reducing risk, strengthening
However, one aspect of the topic that has hitherto been overlooked is the role that political leaders play in managing the challenges associated with risk of mass atrocity. That leaders are crucial to the perpetration of such violence is widely known: genocide scholars have long identified the central importance of leaders in making calculated choices that result in atrocity crimes, many arguing that leaders use pre-existing myths and divisions to exacerbate tensions and mobilize populations either to take part in violence themselves or to permit the perpetration of violence against targeted groups. Yet this influence works both ways: leaders can also be instrumental in defusing tensions and reducing the potential for intergroup violence. In improving our understanding of why atrocities do not occur, it is necessary to examine the role that leaders often play in managing such tensions. To date, there has been no systematic study investigating how leaders manage challenges associated with the risk of mass atrocities. Indeed, while national sources of resilience are identified as central to preventive action, the focus in considering such sources of resilience is on structural factors, such as constitutional protections and security sector reforms.

While there has been much discussion in recent years of the impact of leaders on the perpetration of atrocity crimes, we lack a framework for understanding what good preventive leadership looks like. The purpose of this article is to illustrate the ways in which three state leaders—Seretse Khama of Botswana, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania—managed challenges associated with mass atrocity risk. I argue that these

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resilience: towards the structural prevention of atrocity crimes, policy analysis brief (Muscatine, IA: Stanley Foundation, 2016).


7 See Ban Ki-moon, Responsibility to Protect, pp. 8–13.
leaders were well aware of the disruptive potential of tribal, ethnic and religious division; that they advocated inclusive national identities and developed policies that fostered social cohesion; and that they were effective in creating social and political environments that had tended to inhibit structural risk factors associated with atrocity crimes.

The article is divided into four parts. First, I argue for the importance of negative cases in comparative genocide studies. In particular, I make the point that negative cases need to incorporate places of moderate risk, not simply places where atrocity crimes appear imminent. Second, I highlight the imbalance in the scholarship on genocide and other mass atrocities with regard to leadership: while the central importance of political leaders in perpetrating such violence is often identified, their role in averting atrocity crimes has attracted almost no interest. Third, I move on to use the ‘possibility principle’ to justify the consideration of Botswana, Zambia and Tanzania as cases where atrocity crimes were possible, owing to the existence of structural risk factors and the upheavals associated with decolonization. Finally, I provide an analysis of the strategies that these three leaders adopted in efforts to transcend identity-based difference and foster social cohesion, and in the process to mitigate the risk of atrocity crimes occurring.

**The importance of negative cases in comparative genocide studies**

The relatively new field of comparative genocide studies has amassed an impressive body of research that has demystified some of the twentieth century’s most traumatic events. Coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944, the word ‘genocide’ stormed into common parlance following the Holocaust. In the decades that followed, scholarship investigating the antecedents of genocides and other forms of mass violence accumulated a repertoire of common preconditions, which became the basis of theoretical claims about the causes of such phenomena. However, these theoretical claims are largely premised on a comparison of past cases of atrocity crimes, a tendency that accords too much significance to the relationship between the violent outcome and associated preconditions. This is especially problematic because the dependent variable in question—genocide, or other atrocity crimes—is (fortunately) relatively rare. By investigating not only why atrocity crimes occur, but why they do so...
not occur, we can arrive at a more nuanced understanding of causes and paths of escalation. To do this, a greater emphasis on negative cases is needed.

There are three reasons why the use of negative cases is important in furthering our understanding of mass atrocity crimes. The first is that an overemphasis on positive cases creates a biased understanding of the causes of such violence, which can lead to the assumption that the dependent variable is an inevitable outcome when a particular combination of independent variables arises. This tendency has been particularly problematic among scholarship on atrocity crimes, where the dominant methodological tendency has been to select a small number of past genocides and investigate common antecedents, which then in turn form the basis of theories on the causes of genocide. Often the selection of cases is limited to what Shaw refers to as the ‘mega-genocides’, which further biases conclusions about causes by basing theoretical claims on particularly rare manifestations of an already rare phenomenon. What such research overlooks is the fact that many of the preconditions associated with such violence exist in places where genocide or other mass atrocities have not occurred. Indeed, a focus on positive cases leads to what Scott Straus labels a ‘frequency mismatch’, where the preconditions exist far more commonly than the outcome under study. With a few recent exceptions, there is limited interest in

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12 Straus, ‘Retreating from the brink’, p. 343.

13 Midlarsky, *The killing trap*; Deborah Mayersen and Stephen McLoughlin, ‘Risk and resilience to mass atrocities in Africa: a comparison of Rwanda and Botswana’,
studying such causes—or risk factors—themselves, in order to understand why they often do not lead to violent outcomes.

This leads to the second reason why negative cases are important. Understanding why countries do not experience mass atrocities—despite the presence of risk—has the potential to yield valuable insights for the prevention of such violence. Insights for prevention are particularly acute when risk is moderate, and the potential for processes of risk mitigation over the long term is higher. It is not helpful, in terms of prevention, to wait until there is no ambiguity about the imminence of mass atrocities. When tensions escalate to this point, and violence begins, the types of preventive strategies needed are invasive, expensive and controversial. Moreover, as Rwanda in 1994 and the recent atrocities in Syria and Myanmar demonstrate, often the requisite political will to enact such strategies does not exist. The greatest insights for prevention come not from states on the brink of committing mass violence, but from states where risk levels are moderate and have been managed over long periods of time. The methodological challenge is to justify the identification of such contexts as negative cases when it is unlikely atrocity crimes will ever occur there, because of the—thus far—unidentified steps these states have taken to mitigate risk.

Third, a focus on negative cases has the potential to shift the way in which prevention has been commonly framed, in both academic research and policy documents. Long-term prevention, or structural prevention, is defined as the identification and amelioration of root causes of potential deadly violence. This definition is


problematic, because it assumes an inevitable link between root cause and violent outcome. In addition, the identification of root causes and the corresponding preventive strategies designed to ameliorate them are processes devised and implemented predominantly by external actors. This creates a gulf between prevention actors on the one hand and prevention recipients on the other. However, scholars researching the causes of mass atrocities have frequently pointed out just how tenuous the link between ‘root causes’ (or risk factors) and a violent outcome is. There is ample evidence that such risk factors can exist without resulting in mass atrocities. Understanding better how such risk is managed over time provides more useful insights for prevention, both in that it assumes the primacy of domestic actors, and in that it does away with the assumption that present risk equals future mass atrocities. With prevention in view, it makes more sense to strive for a better understanding of processes of risk mitigation in scenarios where mass atrocities are possible, but not probable. This is where the most effective preventive strategies can be adopted.

The Possibility Principle

Choosing negative cases on the basis of ‘possibility’ rather than ‘likelihood’ makes sound methodological sense, according to Mahoney and Goertz. They argue that if the dependent variable in question is an outcome that is possible, then this justifies the selection of that instance as a negative case. Thus they argue that the selection of


18 See e.g. Straus, ‘Retreating from the brink’.
negative cases can be justified by what they call the ‘possibility principle’.\textsuperscript{19} Possibility is based on two factors: one, that at least one independent variable associated with the outcome is present; and two, that the candidate case is excluded ‘if it possesses a value on a variable that is known from previous research to make the outcome of interest impossible’.\textsuperscript{20} They provide an example from genocide scholar Barbara Harff about the key causal role that upheaval plays as a driver of such violence. Harff defines upheaval as ‘an abrupt change in the political community caused by the formation of a state or regime through violent conflict, redrawing of state boundaries, or defeat in international war’.\textsuperscript{21} She regards the establishment of an independent state through decolonization or the breakup of an existing state as an example of upheaval. Using the ‘possibility principle’ in negative case selection allows us to seek an understanding of why atrocity crimes did not occur by looking beyond cases ‘on the brink’ of such violent outcomes to incorporate cases where the risk of such outcomes was moderate. Thus the presence of risk factors, and evidence of recent upheaval (which includes the process of decolonization), provides a good basis for selection of negative case-studies.

Is it possible to use negative cases in situations where the dependent variable in question is not a probable, but simply a possible outcome? Studying why atrocity crimes do not happen for the purposes of understanding long-term, domestically driven processes of risk mitigation compels the researcher to venture into causally ambiguous territory. It invites the potential criticism of associating\textsuperscript{4} the dependent variable (atrocity crimes) with cases that do not warrant such an association. however, the study of negative cases should not be limited to those where the dependent variable is probable, or almost inevitable. Rather, for the sake of better understanding how to prevent such catastrophes, there are practical merits to embracing causal ambiguity.


\textsuperscript{20} Mahoney and Goertz, ‘The possibility principle’, p. 658.

Leadership, case selection and analytical approach

In furthering our understanding of why mass atrocity crimes do not occur in some contexts, I contend that often the most instrumental factor in processes of risk mitigation comprises the attitudes, decisions and policies set in motion by political leaders. The crucial dimension that leadership plays in the perpetration of mass atrocity crimes is widely acknowledged. Kuper points out that genocide is often a conscious choice, made by elites. 22 Valentino argues that an examination of the strategies and policies of political elites should be the starting-point in seeking to understand why mass political violence occurs. 23 Hamburg draws links between structural preconditions and the choices that leaders make, which can exacerbate risk and escalate tensions: ‘Genocides are precipitated by leaders of extremist and violent political or religious sects or regimes who take advantage of predisposing elements and cultural myths, then skilfully work on them to incite their population to genocide.’ 24 Goldhagen also regards political leaders as pivotal agents who have the power (and often motivation) to transform social cleavages into violence. 25 Many other scholars have highlighted various ways in which leaders incubating exclusionary ideologies have taken their polities down extremely destructive paths. 26 Despite this, to date there has been no systematic examination of the role that leadership plays in the non-occurrence of such crimes. The importance of leaders in defusing tensions receives passing acknowledgement from some scholars, but the precise role they play is currently under-studied. Indeed, little attention has been paid

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22 Kuper, Genocide, p. 55.
24 Hamburg, Preventing genocide, p. 34.
25 Goldhagen, Worse than war, pp. 74–6.
to the role that leaders play, more broadly, in influencing international relations.\textsuperscript{27} Still, the impact that leaders can have has not gone entirely unnoticed. Byman, for instance, acknowledges the role that elites can play in ‘dampening’ the possibility of ethnic conflict.\textsuperscript{5}\textsuperscript{28} Straus credits Côte d’Ivoire’s inaugural leader, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, with promoting values such as inter-ethnic cooperation and dialogue, which he claims ‘created a strong counter-balance to the exclusionary drift of Ivorité’ that surfaced in the 1990s and 2000s.\textsuperscript{29} If a leader’s actions can have such a protective influence—even posthumously—what insights for prevention might be gained from a more systematic study of leadership and risk mitigation? If political leaders have the greatest agency in relation to either perpetrating or avoiding mass atrocities, a better understanding of how and why they do the latter surely warrants investigation.

The first step in examining the impact leaders have on circumstances associated with mass atrocity risk is to identify the most common antecedents of mass atrocity crimes. There exists an extensive scholarship on such risk factors. These range from investigations based on a small number of case-studies (small-N) of past instances of such violence to studies investigating the most salient preconditions of mass atrocities across dozens or scores of cases (large-N). Key risk factors include established identity-based cleavages between social groups,\textsuperscript{30} inequality based on identity-based


\textsuperscript{28} Daniel L. Byman, \textit{Keeping the Peace: Lasting Solutions to Ethnic Conflicts} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2002), p. 35.

\textsuperscript{29} Straus, ‘Retreating from the brink’, p. 355.


difference,\textsuperscript{31} prior atrocities,\textsuperscript{32} weak democracy\textsuperscript{33} and widespread poverty.\textsuperscript{34} While the presence of one or a combination of these factors do not make mass atrocities inevitable, atrocities are rarely, if ever, committed in the absence of at least one of them\textsuperscript{7}.\textsuperscript{35} The existence of one or more of these risk factors, combined with upheaval, makes mass atrocities possible. Botswana, Zambia and Tanzania are three countries that have not experienced mass atrocities since independence,\textsuperscript{36} despite all containing some conditions associated with mass atrocity risk. In selecting these three cases on the basis of Mahoney and Goertz’s ‘possibility principle’, the first test is the existence of one or more of the risk factors identified above. At independence in 1966, Botswana was characterized by politicized tribal division, systematic discrimination against non-Setswana-speaking groups and widespread poverty.\textsuperscript{37} Zambia’s independence in 1964 also occurred in


\textsuperscript{35} See e.g. Kuper, \textit{Genocide}, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{36} An exception is Zanzibar’s 1964 revolution, in which thousands of civilians were massacred. However, this occurred prior to Zanzibar’s union with mainland Tanganyika in the same year, at which point the United Republic of Tanzania came into being.

conditions of widespread poverty;\(^{38}\) in addition, it was the site of growing political tensions based on ethno-linguistic difference and calls for secession by the former Kingdom of Barotseland.\(^{39}\) Tanganyika and Zanzibar merged in 1964 to form Tanzania, a country marked by both religious division and extensive poverty,\(^{40}\) both long-term risk factors associated with mass atrocities. The second test is that a case should be excluded if the presence of any independent variable ‘predicts the non-occurrence of the outcome of interest’.\(^{41}\) In terms of genocide and other mass atrocities, the absence of upheaval would justify such exclusion, given the fact that most genocides\(^ {8}\) occur soon after upheaval.\(^ {42}\) I focus here on the formative years of independence in each country, when the recent upheaval of decolonization that each country experienced fulfils the second criterion of case selection on the basis of the ‘possibility principle’.

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\(^{41}\) Mahoney and Goertz, ‘The possibility principle’, p. 658.

\(^{42}\) Harff, cited in Mahoney and Goertz, ‘The possibility principle’, p. 658.
Khama, Kaunda and Nyerere: pro-independence struggles, inclusive ideologies and post-independence state-building

In this section, I explore the ways in which these three leaders shaped the struggle for independence in their respective countries through the ideologies they constructed, and the extent to which they were able to forge unifying national identities that transcended tribal, ethnic and religious differences. I further consider how these struggles translated into post-independence state-building, and how the three leaders addressed challenges associated with the risk of mass atrocities.

Seretse Khama

Botswana’s inaugural leader, Seretse Khama, was instrumental in setting up a modern, centralized, democratic state, persuading the eight major chieftains to relinquish most of their power. By doing so, he succeeded in managing competing claims to power in the early years of independence. Khama was born in 1921, heir to the throne of the largest chieftaincy in Bechuanaland, the Bamangwato. He was educated in South Africa and at Oxford; while in the United Kingdom, he met and married an Englishwoman, Ruth Williams. This proved controversial within his tribe, although at subsequent kgotla meetings the union was officially accepted. However, the British administrators—under the influence of the white minority South African and Rhodesian governments—opposed the marriage, and banned Seretse Khama from the British protectorate of Bechuanaland.

While in exile, Khama was faced with an ultimatum: renounce his regency or remain banned from the protectorate. Initially he refused to renounce, but as the debates on decolonization of all British-controlled territories unfolded in the 1950s, his attitude changed. In 1956, Khama relinquished his claim to the chieftaincy and returned to Bechuanaland as a private citizen, in which capacity he involved himself ‘in the political life of the territory’. In spite of his treatment by them, he remained on good terms with the British administrators. Indeed, it was with the encouragement

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43 A kgotla is a space or forum where laws are announced, grievances are heard and judgments pronounced. Initially used by the major chieftaincies, they are still used today to make public announcements and to disseminate information.
of resident commissioner Peter Fawcus that he became politically active and, after local democratic reforms in his home town of Serowe, he was elected to the post of tribal secretary.

In 1961, Khama formed the Bechuanaland Democratic Party (BDP), and through it played a major role in the development of a new constitution, in preparation for self-rule. One key provision of the constitution was the exclusion of the eight paramount chiefs from party politics; their influence would be confined to local administration and local juridical affairs. At a national level, the House of Chiefs would only have an advisory function. In preparation for inaugural elections in 1965, Khama campaigned extensively in all regions (the only leader to do so), and won support through discussion and persuasion at local forums. The BDP won with a huge majority.

Khama’s leadership was underpinned by three priorities: democratic reform, economic development and stability. His approach to politics was non-racial—he opposed and refused to provide any support to apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia. At the same time, he was cautious not to provoke these two countries, to which Botswana was intrinsically tied economically. Given Botswana’s profound poverty at the time of independence in 1966, the immediate challenge facing Khama and the BDP government was to learn how to coexist with hostile neighbours. He did this by refusing to establish bases for exiled political groups on the one hand, and by implementing a range of policies which would gradually lift the country out of poverty on the other.

The challenges that beset Botswana in the first years of independence were immense. It was an impoverished, drought-stricken country, dependent on foreign aid to cover the basic costs of administration. In order to preserve the expertise held largely by

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48 Henderson, ‘Seretse Khama’, p. 34.
49 Parsons et al., *Seretse Khama*, p. 217.
the many expatriate civil servants[12], Khama established a system of merit-based employment, which entailed investing in the education and training of locals; This investment in education and training (primarily through the establishment of the University of Botswana) was a way to ensure a continuity of expertise in the administration of government and the provision of public services, for generations to come. In addition, he maintained the principles of democracy by preserving a multiparty democratic system. There were indeed many who opposed Khama— including paramount chiefs Bathoen II and[13] Linchwe II—and instead of compromising on his decision to separate tribal authority and national democratic rule, he insisted that the rules for standing as a candidate in any party were the same for everyone.51 The longevity of Botswana’s democracy has much to do with Khama’s role in incorporating elements of traditional forms of rule into the modern centralized state. The House of Chiefs was established to form one tier of the bicameral parliament, but crucially it was not given the power of veto. The judicial system has three tiers—customary courts, magistrates’ courts and the High Court.52 Perhaps the most pressing priority was to secure adequate resources for development. The fortunes of the country, which was initially dependent on foreign aid, were dramatically changed by the discovery of diamonds[14].53 However, it was the prudent management of the revenues derived from their exploitation that ensured more than three decades of the highest rate of economic growth in the world.

Khama’s negotiations with de Beers ensured a lasting agreement that secured nearly three-quarters of resource revenues for the government. With this money, Khama invested heavily in the provision of universal education and primary health care, underpinning a steady increase in literacy from 20 per cent to 80 per cent over a 15-year period.54 In addition to this, he built up the country’s foreign currency reserves, restraining government spending to ensure consistent provision of services over the

51 Du Toit, State building and democracy, p. 51.
52 Henderson, ‘Seretse Khama’, p. 42.
53 While the discovery of diamond deposits preceded independence in 1966, this was announced publicly in 1967. See Good, Diamonds, Dispossession and Democracy, p. 9.
These foreign exchange reserves were also held as a resource to enable Botswana to prepare for drought relief and other potential crises. However, the shift to independence under Khama’s BDP did not herald an equitable society. Those marginalized groups who had suffered the most discrimination during colonial and pre-colonial times continued to suffer. During the process of land privatization, for example, those who initially gained positions of authority on the land boards were usually the same Tswana elites who were part of the tribal aristocracies. In distributing private land deeds, the land boards allocated the largest tracts to those who could demonstrate an ability to make best use of the land; in other words, those who owned the most cattle. Those groups who had been historically dispossessed of land remained the most underprivileged in the modern state of Botswana. This powerlessness was further entrenched when the government forcefully evicted the last few hundred San Bushmen from their ancestral lands in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. The gap between rich and poor in Botswana, as measured by the Gini coefficient, is still one of the highest in the world. This gap also has an ethnic character, as the traditionally marginalized San, Bakgalagadi and Wayeyi dominate the ranks of the poor.

Despite this, Khama’s investment in development and democracy provided opportunities to redress some imbalances, in three ways. The first is through the country’s strong rule of law. In particular, its independent judiciary has countered the government on numerous occasions in relation to discriminatory policies. Civil society groups and individuals have successfully challenged government policy and the constitution in the High Court on a range of issues, including gender discrimination and the exclusionary composition of the House of Chiefs, as well as rights to land and water for the most marginalized groups in the country.

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56 Good, *Diamonds*, p. 87.
57 Good, *Diamonds*, p. 89.
Botswana clearly provided advantages for the Tswana elite at the expense of traditionally marginalized ethnic minority groups, the robust democratic institutions established avenues through which disputing parties could seek redress.\textsuperscript{59}

Second, the provision of universal education and implementation of a system of merit-based employment has been of particular benefit in the public sector—the largest employer in Botswana. In cases where the appropriate expertise was not found in Botswana, the government was prompt in drawing on foreign expertise. At the same time, it invested strongly in building up domestic expertise through both local and international institutions.\textsuperscript{60} Over time, this ensured that ethnicity was not used to determine employment or promotion.\textsuperscript{61} Although some minority groups, like the San, still endure disproportionately low rates of literacy, others, like the urban-based

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\textsuperscript{60} Abdi Ismail Samatar, \textit{An African miracle: state and class leadership and colonial legacy in Botswana development} (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), p. 8; Leith, \textit{Why Botswana prospered}, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{61} Du Toit, \textit{State building and democracy}, p. 59.
Kalanga, have flourished and now enjoy an improved position in Botswanan society.62

Third, the government’s prudent management of revenue from diamond exports supported a consistently high rate of GDP growth over the country’s first four decades.63 The large stocks of foreign currency reserves built up as a result of these exports enabled the government to maintain consistent spending, even during lean years, and helped the country to weather two major crises. The first was a five-year drought that nearly decimated the pastoral industry and reduced many living in remote areas to destitution. A drought relief plan, financed from the foreign currency reserves, provided food relief and other assistance to all who needed them, and also provided feed for livestock to prevent the industry from collapse.64 As a result, the country avoided famine-related loss of life. The second crisis related to the diamond industry itself: for a six-month period during the early 1980s – owing to a global downturn in the diamond market – not a single Botswanan diamond was sold on the international market16. Despite this, government spending remained unchanged; it used foreign reserves to maintain consistency and to act as a ‘shock absorber’.65 Neither the drought nor the drop in export revenues had an effect on Botswana’s positive growth.

Kenneth Kaunda

During the formative years of Zambia’s independence, Kenneth Kaunda’s inclusive philosophy of ‘humanism’ underpinned numerous strategies that navigated the risk of growing factional divisions along ethno-linguistic lines, and calls for secession in the Western Province. He was born in 1924 in Chinsali, in what is now the Northern Province of Zambia. He trained as a teacher in Lusaka, and worked in the Copperbelt throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In 1947, he was thrown out of a bookshop for walking through the front door instead of waiting to be served at the back, as was

65 Leith, Why Botswana prospered, p. 10.
expected of Africans. This and other similar experiences motivated Kaunda’s early political activity, and motivated him to join the Northern Rhodesia African National Congress, of which he became organizing secretary in 1951.\textsuperscript{66} Kaunda’s political activism in the 1950s was largely a product of his experience and observation of the unjust treatment of the African population in both Northern and Southern Rhodesia. As a member of the ANC, he participated in early struggles against the creation of the Central African Federation in 1953, and against white-owned businesses that had engaged in ill-treatment of Africans.\textsuperscript{67}

As the 1950s unfolded, Kaunda’s activism coalesced with the territory’s emerging struggle for independence. He left the ANC and formed a new party (the Zambian African National Congress), which was shut down by the British. During a brief period in prison, he joined the United National Independence Party (UNIP), and became its president upon his release a year later.\textsuperscript{68} Under Kaunda’s leadership, UNIP called for self-government through non-violent struggle. This approach was underpinned by his Christian beliefs, informing not only his non-violence but also his opposition to the white government’s discriminatory rule.\textsuperscript{69} This firm belief in the moral wrongness of any form of racial discrimination lay behind not only his choice not to steer UNIP towards a violent confrontation with the British colonists, but also UNIP’s construction of a national identity of Zambia free from any indication of efforts to divide and discriminate, either against the British, or against ethnic or tribal groups within Zambian territory.\textsuperscript{70}

Independent Zambia was fraught with challenges from the outset. It had gained its independence in 1964, at a time when southern Africa as a whole was openly hostile to his philosophy of non-racialism. South Africa’s apartheid government, and Rhodesia’s minority white-ruled state were the economic centres of the region. Like

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{66} Kenneth D. Kaunda, \textit{Zambia shall be free} (London: Heinemann Educational, 1962), p. 52.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Kaunda, \textit{Zambia shall be free}, p. 80.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Bizeck Jube Phiri, \textit{A political history of Zambia: from the colonial period to the 3rd Republic} (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), pp. 102–13.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Kaunda, \textit{Zambia shall be free}, p. 149.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Marcia M. Burdette, \textit{Zambia: between two worlds} (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988), pp. 30–33.
\end{itemize}
Botswana, the country was desperately poor, with virtually no public infrastructure. Using royalties from the copper-mining industry, Kaunda set out to engage in the rapid expansion of the public sector, with particular emphasis on the provision of education and health. Yet these efforts were not enough to prevent four major risk factors from emerging—a growing divide between rich and poor; a multiparty system which displayed a tendency to generate allegiances and favours along ethno-linguistic lines; a serious and protracted economic decline; and a growing intolerance of opposition. Independent statehood did not eliminate inequalities and exploitation; rather, it shifted them, and created new forms.

However, Kaunda was instrumental in managing the tensions which threatened to become entrenched in the first decade of independence. His philosophy of humanism promoted a national identity that transcended ethnic and tribal difference. This philosophy was apparent in the way he responded to growing ethno-linguistic divisions during the First Republic. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Kaunda intensified efforts to counter the growing tendency towards competition along these ethnic lines—initially within the ruling UNIP, and subsequently between political parties.\(^{71}\) He frequently changed personnel at every level in the public sector, in order to prevent any one ethno-linguistic group dominating particular government departments.\(^{72}\) In parliament, tensions were increasing as a result of the growing tendency among politicians to use the language of ethnicity and ‘tribalism’ to strengthen factional blocks. In an effort to counter this trend, Kaunda divided up ministerial portfolios among members of various ethno-linguistic groups in order to maintain a power balance between the various collectives.\(^{73}\) Maintaining this balance within the UNIP government was a Sisyphean challenge, given the constant shifts in both alliances and political demands. Despite the persistent tensions, Kaunda’s reshuffling of positions and posts was effective in managing divisions and competing claims for the first few years of independence; however, the tensions escalated in 1967 after interfactional fighting erupted during UNIP’s party elections.

As these divisions threatened to become more deeply embedded, Kaunda increasingly centralized power in the office of the president, and gradually banned political parties.

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\(^{71}\) See Molteno, ‘Cleavage and conflict’.


that used ethnicity as a basis for support. In 1973, he changed the constitution to prohibit all political parties, forming what he called a one-party participatory democracy, with the office of the president holding enormous power. Kaunda himself claimed that such measures were necessary to offset these divisions. However, as the price of copper fell in 1974 (not to recover until the late 1990s), Zambia’s economy went into a long decline, which saw poverty and malnutrition increase. With no legitimate political opposition to voice these growing grievances, public dissent took the form of widespread protests and, by the late 1980s, riots. While Kaunda had avoided one crisis, he had provoked another.

Yet even his handling of the growing dissatisfaction with his own authoritarian regime is informative. Here again, his philosophy of humanism had an impact on his ultimately measured response to political dissent, and was instrumental in his concession of power in 1991. Growing unrest and dissent amid increasing poverty, particularly in the late 1980s, placed a great deal of pressure on Kaunda’s increasingly unpopular regime. Widespread riots were initially suppressed by police—not even Kaunda’s principled adherence to peaceful means prevented the use of violent tactics by the police in confronting mass protests.74 Yet even this was restrained, and ultimately relinquished as Kaunda opted for a compromise that heralded his own political demise. It was unprecedented in Africa for an authoritarian leader to succumb to popular demand and introduce democratic reform;75 and yet, after negotiating with leaders of the opposition movement, Kaunda removed the ban on opposition parties. In the election that followed in August 1991, the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) won a decisive victory. Conceding defeat, Kaunda transferred power to the MMD and its leader, Frederick Chiluba, before quietly leaving the presidential palace.76 This swift and peaceful transition from authoritarian regime to multiparty democracy could have turned out very differently—the treatment

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of opposition leaders and supporters in neighbouring countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (and its former incarnation of Zaire) and Zimbabwe are stark reminders that the peaceful handling of political and economic crises is by no means guaranteed.

Julius Nyerere

Julius Nyerere was born in 1922 in a small town called Butiama near Lake Victoria. He trained as a schoolteacher, and completed a master of arts degree in economics and history at Edinburgh University. While working as a teacher near Dar-es-Salaam, he became president of the Tanganyika African Association (TAA), a civic organization for civil servants, which had branches throughout the territory. He transformed this into an overtly political organization, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), and used TAA’s extensive branch locations as a means of mobilizing broad support for independence. This suited Nyerere’s strategy of forming a national idea which was not limited by racial, ethnic or religious identity. These ideas were clear, even while he was still a student in Edinburgh. In a pamphlet he wrote at the time, he called for unity, not just among Africans, but among all who regarded ‘East Africa’ as their home. While he was adamant that East Africa, or at least Tanganyika, was destined to be a majority-ruled democracy, and clearly one favouring the majority Africans, his speeches and writings provide ample evidence of his vision of a multiracial country where all residents regardless of background would be treated equally. Nowhere is there any sense of anti-colonial backlash, or any advocacy of violence to achieve the desired end. Thus multiracialism, unity and non-violence were the principles underlying the struggle that he articulated as leader of TANU.

Nyerere’s preference for non-violence was, in his words, a pragmatic approach, informed by the failure of past uprisings and inspired by the teachings of Gandhi. Through Nyerere’s leadership, TANU forged three key principles that guided its campaigning. The first, and the main political objective, was national self-governance and independence. As Nyerere explained in 1955: ‘We mean to work towards self-

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government in a constitutional manner.\textsuperscript{79} In this effort, Nyerere was emphatic in his promotion of a particular kind of ‘national consciousness’, and this involved developing an identity which transcended the tribal and the religious. Second, Nyerere was keen to stress that such a national consciousness embraced people from any background (including European and Asian). The third principle was to enhance opportunities for all Tanganyikans through the improvement of education and the economy.\textsuperscript{80}

The challenges besetting independent Tanzania were comparable in scale to those facing Zambia. With the exception of a few coastal areas, the country was poor, illiterate and underdeveloped. Nyerere’s goal was to bring education and self-sufficiency to the country. His initial objective was to implement a programme of large-scale ‘capital-intensive industrialization and agricultural development projects’.\textsuperscript{81} These, however, depended on foreign investment, which by the mid-1960s he realized would not be forthcoming. Instead, Tanzania was fast becoming more dependent on aid from the global North. In response, Nyerere changed tack completely, and in his Arusha Declaration of 1967 announced a new plan, declaring the establishment of ‘African Socialism’, in an effort to establish self-reliance based on African values of egalitarianism and welfare. He set up ‘villagization’ programmes, encouraging (and also compelling) people to move to new settlements in order to engage in collectivized small-scale agricultural production.

The policies of socialism and self-reliance were presented under the umbrella of \textit{Ujamaa}. Meaning ‘family’ in KiSwahili, this, according to Nyerere, was the most basic and representative expression of African socialism. The principles that underpin support within family groups (such as working cooperatively, supporting each other through difficulties and sharing resources) would become the basis for subsequent increases in development in the countryside\textsuperscript{18}, forming a bedrock of home-grown

\textsuperscript{79} Nyerere, \textit{Freedom}, p. 38.


socialism. *Ujamaa* would ensure locally driven autonomy and communal support.\(^{82}\) The Arusha Declaration launched a series of five-year plans that aimed to balance investment in Tanzania’s agricultural base with steady industrial growth.\(^{83}\) To augment this, TANU instigated a process of nationalization in 1969, which started with schools and moved to banks and a range of commercial enterprises and manufacturing companies.\(^{84}\) At the same time, the government introduced a number of policies to foster ‘cultural integrity’ within the country,\(^{85}\) including the establishment of KiSwahili as the language of instruction in schools, a move which ‘fostered cross-ethnic communication in a distinctly African context, and . . . also lessened linguistic dependence on the colonial language of English’.\(^{86}\)

Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* did not, in the event, create a self-reliant Tanzania. The country’s dependence on foreign aid continued to escalate, and by the early 1980s that aid was paying for more than half of total imports, 60 per cent of the development budget and 16 per cent of GNP.\(^{87}\) By the middle of the decade, Tanzania’s economy was in severe crisis, suffering from nearly two decades of decline, and the country was largely dependent on foreign aid to feed its population, per capita GDP having fallen to pre-1966 levels.\(^{88}\) *Ujamaa* was eventually abandoned after Nyerere’s retirement in

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1985. However, for all its economic failures, a powerful legacy of *Ujamaa* was its fostering of social cohesion, particularly between the country’s Christian and Muslim populations. Interreligious violence has been virtually non-existent; and while inequality has increased in the wake of structural adjustment reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, horizontal inequality is very low. This social cohesion was also reflected in the government, through Nyerere’s consistent commitment throughout his presidency to recruiting ministers from a variety of ethnicities and regions. Beyond this, one of Nyerere’s legacies is the continued prioritization—as part of both political rhetoric and national identity—of the ethic of social equality. Despite the very real limitations of his achievements, Nyerere achieved some success in mitigating the potential tensions based on identity-based difference in Tanzania.

**Conclusion**

This article provides a contribution to the emerging research agenda that seeks to understand why atrocity crimes *do not* occur. It extends this agenda by making the case that often the most powerful agents in the mitigation of mass atrocity risk are political leaders. The three cases reviewed here provide a glimpse into how leadership can foster social cohesion and stability. Seretse Khama, Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere all steered their countries towards independence with ideologies that aimed to transcend tribal, ethnic and religious division, while forging new national identities that incorporated diversity. They did this in the face of profound economic and political challenges: all three countries came of age in a region characterized by apartheid, civil war, genocide and mass atrocities; and all three, having gained independence, were among the poorest in the world.

The inaugural leaders of Botswana, Zambia and Tanzania bequeath legacies that are worthy of reflection when it comes to strategies of long-term risk mitigation in relation to genocide and other mass atrocities. All three emphasized an inclusive

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national identity; all three steered their territories to independence through peaceful means; all three prioritized the equitable provision of basic services in the most challenging of circumstances.\textsuperscript{92} Seretse Khama created a centralized and stable multiparty democracy which transcended the power of the eight paramount chiefdoms. Kenneth Kaunda navigated a way through the first decade of independence by carefully balancing the competing political and economic demands of the four major ethno-linguistic groups and, in doing so, prevented any one of them from gaining undue advantage and provoking antagonism. Julius Nyerere’s ambitious social engineering policies compelled Christians and Muslims to live together, and to help in the construction of each other’s religious buildings. Although Tanzania has long struggled with protracted poverty, and inequalities within the country are present, they have never emerged along religious or ethnic lines. While \textit{Ujamaa} was a failure in many respects, it was effective in fostering social cohesion.

While the lofty goals these leaders shared—of economic self-reliance and equitable opportunities—have proved, to varying degrees, beyond reach, what their three countries have in common are extended periods of governance in the absence of war and mass atrocities. The role that these three leaders played in establishing foundations of political stability and social cohesion has often been overlooked, both in the scholarship on Africa and in research on comparative genocide studies. Indeed, much of the research on leadership in Africa focuses on despots and ‘big man’ politics. While this emphasis is largely warranted, discourse on African leaders would benefit from a more nuanced understanding that is less Orientalist in perspective.\textsuperscript{93} In both areas, scholarship has mainly been concerned with why failures occur, or why violence occurs. Rarely has the question of why violence \textit{does not} occur been explored. Clearly, there are many insights to be gained from asking such questions, and this paper provides a few glimpses into how—in enormously challenging circumstances—Khama, Kaunda and Nyerere engaged in nation-building in ways that

\textsuperscript{92} Despite this, none of these leaders prioritized the addressing of gender inequality—an important prevention factor.

still have a impact in helping their countries navigate through periods of crisis and stress.

The legacies of these leaders are also beginning to find expression in strategies of mass atrocity prevention. In 2012, the government-run Tanzania National Committee, with the support of the UN Office of the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, convened an interfaith workshop in Dar-es-Salaam, focusing on the role that religious leaders can play in facilitating social cohesion and maintaining peace. This is one of a growing number of partnerships that the Special Adviser is currently fostering. In 2014, Botswana hosted the fourth Global Network of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Focal Points. R2P Focal Points, originally proposed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, are intended to be national position or mechanisms ‘which can contribute to the integration of an atrocity prevention perspective in national policies and strategies’. The 2014 meeting had a focus on capacity-building in relation to the rule of law, an area of strength for Botswana. It generated discussion among participants from Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe about the legacy that past atrocities can have for affected communities. This represents a shift in the discourse on prevention, both in the academic literature and in policy documents, away from identifying the primacy of external actors (such as the UN, international NGOs and wealthy donor countries) in initiating preventive strategies, and towards local and national actors. Countries that have had some success in managing risks associated with mass atrocities coming to be recognized as effective preventive actors. But while the gap between ‘prevention actor’ and ‘prevention recipient’ is narrowing, the role that leadership plays in long-term processes of risk mitigation continues to receive little oxygen. Without investigating the role of leaders and individual agency, it is impossible to understand why mass atrocities are committed, and how they are prevented. This article does not claim that Khama, Kaunda and Nyerere were faultless leaders, above

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95 Ban Ki-moon, Responsibility to Protect, p. 13.

criticism. But the ways in which they met the challenge of forging unified, inclusive and cohesive national identities, within borders that they themselves (along with their fellow compatriots) had no influence in delineating, is one that deserves greater scrutiny. Their ability to carve strong foundations for post-colonial political stability and social cohesion is all the more impressive in a regional context where protracted civil war and mass violence were common. Understanding these legacies in relation to the risk of atrocity crimes is one way of taking stock of the scale of the challenges of state-building that confronted them.

While the importance of asking why mass atrocities do not occur is gaining greater traction among scholars and policy-makers, the role that leaders play in avoiding such violence is only beginning to be understood. More research is needed to understand the choices and actions of leaders in a wider range of contexts, right across the risk spectrum. For instance, how have leaders steered their countries away from violence in times of acute crisis and upheaval? How have leaders dampened heightened tensions during periods of escalating risk? The more we know about the influence of leaders in these scenarios, the more likely it is that such insights will have relevance in providing non-violent options for future crises. Clearly, there is much more to learn about the roles that leaders play; this article has demonstrated that when it comes to mass atrocity prevention, leaders do indeed matter.