What's In a Name?

Forrest Becker

Research Statement

Prior to my travel to East Africa I eagerly told my friends in the United States about my journey to-come. A sentiment echoed throughout a number of these friends was "why?" They wanted to know why I wasn't traveling to somewhere of great luxury like Europe or somewhere with world-renowned food like Southeast Asia. The outside, Western definition of Tanzania is two-fold: wildlife and poverty. While this image holds truth in some regards, it is wholly unrepresentative of the diverse ontologies at play within the country. These misconceptions can stem from a lot of places, but one of the most pertinent and deep-scarring of which is that of toponyms or names in general.

A toponym can be any sort of term applied to a location; anything from London to Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamatea-turipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhen-uakitanatahu. Two different groups can have two distinct toponyms for a location, like Barrow and Utqiagvik, the latter of which was the original, indigenous name which has since been reclaimed. Some toponyms stem from indigenous terms, while some have been replaced by colonial or imperial powers, and some have been adjusted to be more useful, respectful, or accurate. Local, indigenous terms have a value, not only in their practical application, but also in their implications on cultural and national identities. But too often, these toponyms are misspelled, misinterpreted, or pasted over with more Westernized alternatives. Preservation of indigenous toponyms must be done carefully, as readily abolishing existing, incorrect place-names can lead to more systematic changes down the road. Certainly there is no one-size-fits-all approach to naming locations. Instead a system of community-based, localized corrections should be followed.

Toponyms are just one of the cartographic conventions that are used to develop countries. But the development strategies that work for the countries of the Global West when applied in the same way to countries of the Global South can detrimentally stunt the progress possible within a country. The concept of a split world, the West versus the rest, or the developed compared to the underdeveloped is a damaging one. The notion that development is a series of processes to be refined in the West and then spread to the rest of the world ignores any niche development strategies already in place. Toponyms too can take on this role, being used to oppress and impair the countries of what is known as the "Global South." It is necessary to understand spatial and cultural nuance between regions so as not to ignore such strategies. The systems that are already working in a given location are the ones most important to preserve and expand rather than the foreign ones. Historically, mapping practices like toponyms or establishing borders

have been used only to enrich the countries of the Global West and to debilitate all others. Because of this history of misdevelopment, to my friends in America, Tanzania's definition was one of subservience, destitution, and otherness.

As a foreigner, it is important to understand the context of these misdevelopments. As I write this paper, each word choice needs to be especially conscientious. Misspellings can mean that a whole village becomes invisible to the outside world. An out-of-use term or toponym can be derogatory or can generate an unrealistic depiction of the world. It is entirely possible that this writing fails some of these goals, but that is very much within the nature of engaging with such unique and sensitive subjects. We, as a global society, need to be exposed to these dialogues and terminologies if we hope to achieve global development in any capacity.

Cultural / Historical Context

The most widely-acknowledged standard for development is the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI) which calculates the development of a state or administrative district based on its life expectancy, education, and Gross National Income. This index "does not reflect on inequalities, poverty, human security, empowerment, etc." (United Nations 2022) and fails to indicate any value in the countries seen as "least developed." Nevertheless, the HDI is the public perception, at least in the West, for which countries have and do not have development. These preconceptions can be harmful to countries on the "less developed" side of the spectrum generally known as the Global South, and can negatively influence aspects of their economies, international relations, and public images.

Through the colonization of Africa, a sovereign territory did not exist in Tanzania's place until 1961, and only took on the name Tanzania after Tanganyika and Zanzibar merged their names

and jurisdictions. Prior to that point, there was a confluence of terms from German, British, and Indigenous terminology. Tanzania also accepts much of its language from Arabic, Indian, and English influences. The Kiswahili language was adopted under the country's first president, Julius Nyerere. The basis for this was to choose a language which would serve as a uniting force for the four different language groups present in the country as well as for the non-indigenous population. The language received criticism from the outside world, with many perceiving it as a non-serious language, one without sophistication or refinement. Nyerere took it upon himself to translate whole Shakespeare works into Kiswahili to prove that all the nuance of a major world language like English was possible with a local, East African language.

Beyond language, the Father of the Country, or Baba Wa Taifa, aspired to develop Tanzania along a plan that would be agreeable to his population. Nyerere wrote The Arusha Declaration and TANU's Policy on Socialism and Self Reliance, in which he argues that "the development of a country is brought about by people, not by money. Money, and the wealth it represents, is the result and not the basis of development" (1967) and instead this basis is people, land, good policies, and good leadership. Nyerere's Declaration is the best-known writing on African Socialism, which stands in contrast to Chinese or Soviet socialism, but also rejects the policy and outreach of the Global West. Nyerere's Ujamaa Village plan "was socialism in that it envisaged collective ownership of the means of production, but it did not lay stress upon central control of the economy, industrialization or class analysis" (Rist 2019) and was at its core a method of self-reliance through villagization of the economy. Six presidents later, the impact of Nyerere's revolutionary vision for development is still felt throughout the country. Tanzanians use Nyerere's Ujamaa plan as inspiration for clever and

unique development not seen anywhere else in the world. Tanzania struggles with poverty as well as the balance between wildlife conservation and indigenous people but to only see these aspects of the country would be selling Tanzania's value far short.

Reflection

One of the most wide reaching developments of the modern day is digitization and the internet. We often boast that anything we should like to know is at our fingertips with websites like Google. While the benefit of the internet is its extensive information and ability to connect its users over great distances, small inaccuracies can go unnoticed but spell massive difficulties for those implicated. Embooret is a Maasai village in the Manyara region of Tanzania that encompassed 8,860 persons as of 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics 2013). While in the region, we stayed with a few locals who were in charge of some activities, guarded the camp, and talked with us about their village. When one man named Loolayook told us that the name of the village was "Embooret" I asked him if it was spelled "Emboreet" and he told me that no, that must have been a different village. The reason I had asked this was because I had heard extensively about Emboreet Village, was told it was a place we would visit, and had read its name in books and on maps. In the digital world, there exists no record of a place called "Embooret," only the misspelling "Emboreet." Even the census data I referenced holds no mention of Embooret, and yet the two locations are spatially the same. The village of Embooret does not exist in any known way outside of what its own inhabitants know it to be called.

Embooret is an agropastoralist Maasai village, which means their rural economic activity focuses on raising livestock which is supplemented with some crop-growing. Olasiti shows the Maasai making an economic transition from rural pastoralism to agriculturalism and animal husbandry. The Maasai who live in this urban-adjacent community have even changed their name from Maasai to Waarusha, indicating a wholly distinct culture and lifestyle from their Maasai heritage. While touring Olasiti, I asked Zenan, a local man and our guide for the day, if each road had its own name. I was shocked to hear that, indeed, they did. Even the smaller alleyways had names known by nearly everyone in the community. My surprise stemmed from my prior exploration of the region on Google Maps, Google Earth, and Apple Maps, which yielded few if any toponyms across the entire region. None of the individual context, nuance, or indigenous knowledge is at all accessible by the outside world.

It is hard to understate the value of simple navigational toponyms, though for Tanzania it would be nearly impossible to navigate without a local guide. When I asked one of our trip-guides and drivers, Kisana, whether he uses any GPS, he was unfamiliar with the concept. Google Maps claims that driving and walking directions are "available in the area, with good data quality and availability" (2022), the same designation it gives to the United States of America in these criteria. This blatant failure to fill in valuable toponyms is not isolated to this region. The nearby regional capital city of Arusha has the same problem, despite being the third largest city in the country. If companies like Google and Apple have any interest in expanding their userbase in countries like Tanzania, it will be essential to rely on indigenous knowledge to develop their applications.

These misspellings and ignorances exist everywhere in Tanzania. A man named Mamus from Oltukai village pointed out a misspelling in a book I showed him. A group of maps had misspelled

the nearby Esilalei village as "Easalei." For many Tanzanians, cartographic errors like this obscure the intended cultural functions of toponyms. But just because a name is misspelled or misinterpreted does not mean that the correct course of action is to rename or correct these errors.

Because of Tanzania's complex colonial history, many locations now exist and operate with misspelled toponyms. Olduvai Gorge is often referred to as "The Cradle of Civilization" for its invaluable archeological contributions to modern understanding of human development. Olduvai is a British-colonial misspelling of the word Oldupai, a local plant. I asked our guide at the location, Susan, why they continue to use the incorrect terminology if the correction is so well-known. She told me that changing the name might bring more trouble than it would value. So many documents and databases have Olduvai labeled as such that changing its name now would create many more systematic problems for the site than just accepting the name as is. It is important to understand that just because a location has been misnamed does not mean it should always be changed back. Ultimately, this nuance will always best be understood by local, often indigenous, voices.

Disrespect for indigenous terminologies can be harmful to cultural identities as well as their place in society. Misportrayal of indigenous toponyms can impact an indigenous individual's ability to receive a job or a loan. If a foreign donor cannot find a village on a map, they may be reluctant to provide funding for the village's projects. Now, in the digital age, more than ever, it is essential to recognize inconsistencies in portrayal of indigenous terms and involve indigenous voices in their corrections. One of the fields that most heavily needs this is the conservation sector. Indigenous peoples already hold an ethic for conservation and stewardship and have more vested interest

in conservation efforts than large corporations or conservation interests. Tribes like the Maasai or the Iraqw are in closer contact with the wildlife and ecosystem services unique to East Africa. It stands to reason that these tribes would be the most capable of preserving biodiversity. Unfortunately, conservation organizations see indigenous peoples more as a threat than a support system. Eviction of adjacent or included indigenous communities is a growing problem in Ngorongoro Conservation Area and Manyara Ranch Conservancy. This is a travesty. To separate a society from one of its foundational values, that of sustainability and proximity to nature, is to commit an atrocity.

All is not yet lost for the indigenous populations of Tanzania. A growing movement in indigenous politics which favors indigenous terminologies and sciences has begun to make strides worldwide. A recognition for a Maasai man's ability to understand complex grazing patterns in Wildebeest is just as valuable as a traditionally educated foreigner. Encouraging this diversity is essential to any modern business or political model. Similarly, recognition of indigenous toponyms is essential to constructing a landscape of inclusivity and constructive dialogues.

Conclusions / Future Direction

Development can never be approached from a one-size-fits-all, top-down approach. No country is merely "better developed" than another. Some countries might have further developments in technology, economy, or human health, but identifying a people as underdeveloped ignores the developments they do have, which are often more applicable to their own situations than those of a foreign metropole. Tanzania sets a shining example of respect for indigenous ontologies with its history of rejecting the development options of the Global North and ethic for adaptability. Forcing

an American or Chinese development strategy onto Tanzania would only serve to debilitate and devalue local successes.

Indigenous peoples across Tanzania have to put up with a lot of poor development decisions which too often fail to involve them. Nevertheless, Tanzanians are especially successful in their own, local developments. Findings suggest that bottom-up development strategies are successful "in that they are small-scale; rely on adapting indigenous technologies or systems of land-water-use management; and that any outside assistance they receive is flexible and low-cost" (Black 113). This sort of development is praised by experts specifically for focusing on "adapting" that which is already in use. While in Tanzania, we observed many women breaking rocks into gravel to be sold. We saw mangrove saplings being grown out of old flower pots to bolster coastal wetlands. Kisana told us that when families fall on hard times with their personal businesses or farms, they will often find alternative sources of income until they can find something

more sustainable. This culture of hard work and adaptability is integral to the Tanzanian national identity and reflective of Nyerere's vision for self-sufficiency from global superpowers. This culture needs to be recognized worldwide and recognized in its ability to provide substantial, positive changes to fields like entrepreneurship, politics, and especially conservation.

One way to support indigenous peoples in these situations is by honoring land rights and establishing land titles which legally bind a tribe's ownership over a portion of land. We saw this with the Hunter-Gatherer Hadza tribe, who lost over 90% of their original land but acquired a land title and were able to preserve the remaining portion of land. Another is by further involving indigenous voices and epistemologies in higher-level management of these projects. Development cannot ignore the ways-of-knowing that tribes like the Maasai are able to provide to discussions surrounding conservation.

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