

A history of the Malawi-Tanzania border dispute, 1890s-2012

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This study examines the Malawi-Tanzania border dispute. It investigates the causes of the dispute in the period from the 1890s to 2012; it determines why the efforts to manage the border dispute which were made between the 1950s and 2012 did not bear fruit; and it analyses the forces behind the changes in cross-border relations between the two countries in the period from the 1890s to 2012. The study is guided by realist theory, institutional-theory and normative theory. Data for this study were gathered from various written records, cartographic sources and oral interviews. The study has found that the errors committed during the colonial boundary-making processes and the ‘worries’ of the post-colonial governments of Malawi and Tanzania in dealing with the Lake Nyasa border issue led to the border dispute in question. The errors include the contradictory Anglo-German Agreement of 1890, the contradictions of the mandate system conceived after WWI and hazy cartography. The post-colonial forces behind the dispute include the contradictions of the boundary inheritance principle, differing post-colonial foreign policies, irredentism and environmental dynamism. The colonial governments of Nyasaland and Tanganyika and, later, the post-colonial governments of Malawi and Tanzania, attempted to manage the border dispute under consideration but in vain. The study has also found that the colonising powers did not undertake a great effort to manage the dispute because it was not their priority and because it did not affect them in any way. The early post-colonial governments of Malawi and Tanzania did not make a great effort to manage the dispute either, since they were preoccupied with other pressing issues such as building their national economies and repositioning themselves in the new, post-colonial context. The making of the border in the Lake Nyasa area and the resulting dispute influenced the dynamics of cross-border relations between the communities on the eastern and western shores of the lake. Throughout the colonial period, for example, the relations between the communities on the two sides of the lake were cordial. Intermarriages, trade, missionary services, dance visitations, family reunions, education services and trans-lake transport services intensified the relations between them. However, the border dispute which occurred during the post-colonial period, especially between 1965 and 1975, caused insecurity in the border area, something that reduced

the intensity of cross-border human interactions. The interactions normalised between 1976 and 2010. However, dance visitations, relations in education and missionary visitations did not resume. Thus, the history of the Lake Nyasa border dispute is inextricably connected with the ways in which states make and adjust boundaries and, consequently, interpret the 'evolving' boundary-making processes. This shapes the manner in which states and societies position themselves within a border (and transcend it), which acts both as a divisive line as well as a contact zone. Thus, the Malawi-Tanzania border dispute can only be understood in the context in which the border was established and, later, 'adopted' by the post-colonial governments of the two countries.