

# Comparing and contrasting harry thuku's and martin kayamba's

[Education](#)



During the beginning of the 20th century, Western civilization and influence was well established in East Africa. This had various effects on the native cultures and individuals, both positive and negative. It allowed some to be educated, but also forced others to be relocated and abused. And with the advent of World War I, colonized East African regions and people were thrown into a never before experienced tumult.

After the war, however, a new mindset came to some of the African products of Western education. During this period of change, some native individuals who had garnered respect from both the Europeans and East Africans led politically and took action to fight for equality in hopes of living at peace with natives and foreigners together. Namely, Harry Thuku and Martin Kayamba are key figures in early 20th century, pre-nationalist politics of Nairobi and Tanganyika, respectively.

Harry Thuku and Martin Kayamba, although coming from very different family structures and upbringing, had many comparable characteristics of their early life experiences, including Christian influence, a wide range of jobs and training, and positive interaction with European individuals. This all led towards and affected their political perspectives and passions, which they lived out differently through their political actions and involvement. Thuku and Kayamba primarily differ in their family upbringing and early childhood.

Whereas Kayamba was the "first son" (Kayamba 173) of a well educated father and a "strict disciplinarian," yet loving mother (Kayamba 174), Thuku has little remembrance of his father who died when he was only four years

old (Thuku 2). Thuku's mother was also a kind woman that " never punished or beat any of the children" (Thuku 2). Having a small parental presence in his life, Thuku was quite an independent child visiting the mission and getting odd jobs here and there, which we will discuss later. Education was not forced upon him by his parents, unlike Kayamba.

From an early age, Kayamba's parents put him in institutions which would educate him, and he thrived with each opportunity "[reaching] the top form" and "[getting] to the top of the class" (Kayamba 175). Thuku, however, was not left uneducated. Through his work as a house servant for the Mr. and Mrs. Knapp, a missionary couple with the Gospel Missionary Society, they encouraged him " to go to school during the day" (Thuku 7). This opportunity allowed him to be educated in religion mainly but also to learn and " pronounce [his] English correctly" (Thuku 8).

But Thuku would not be educated in " political matters" by the missionaries (Thuku 8), but rather receive this education later on in life. Not everything in their childhood was different, for example their opportunity for education, but also they both believed in the Christian faith and identified themselves with the religion. Both men as boys were influenced greatly by professing Christians, Dr. Henderson and the Knapp couple for Thuku and Kayamba's parents and Bishop Weston for Kayamba.

We can observe this in Thuku's adolescence as he describes his baptism and circumcision, " two important things" which occurred in 1908 (Thuku 8).

Kayamba also openly acknowledged that he was a Christian, even within a " Mohammedan school" (Kayamba 182). Also, we see later in Kayamba's life

his involvement with the church as a " churchwarden" (Kayamba 199). We see that for both these men, religion is a major part of life, a " matter of the heart" which " must come first," according to Kayamba (Kayamba 198).

Possessing this strong Christian background however, these men also sought to befriend and cooperate with nonbelievers around them. Kayamba, from an early age, was exposed to the variety of " nationalities" in the community of the different schools which he attended, including " Indians, Arabs, Baluchis, Comorians, and Swahilis" (Kayamba 174). With these experiences as a child, Kayamba is able to affirm later on in his life that beyond religious distinctions " Africans will never progress unless they realize the necessity for unity...

We cannot move if we do not wish to move together" (Kayamba 198).

Thuku's mindset was also the same. He had " other close Muslim friends," even though he was a steadfast Christian who " never changed or dreamt of changing over" (Thuku 17). In fact, Mr. M. A. Desai, an Indian and Moslem, was one of the most influential Indian leaders in Thuku's life (Thuku 17-18). Thuku is also quoted for saying "'I was pleased too in that we fulfilled the command of our Lord God - that you should love your neighbor as yourself'" in his circular called Tangazo of February 1922 (Thuku 30).

With their common foundational education, even though through different circumstances, both men were given the opportunity to participate in the upper class of society and obtain a variety of jobs and skills. Thuku's career started as a herd-boy (Thuku 6), and then progressed into serving missionaries in their homes after attending a service at the mission.

Motivated by the desire to purchase more " cloth," he worked diligently and

was entrusted with a variety of tasks including sweeping, dusting, dressing the beds, taking care of a mule, and even looking after the Knapp's only daughter (Thuku 7-8).

Although the Knapp's hoped that he would one day "become qualified for the ministry," he instead wanted to "see the world" and make a living to support himself (Thuku 9). After 1911, he left the mission in search for work in Nairobi where he was obtained a job at the bank (Thuku 12). After an attempted fraudulent check incident, he was imprisoned, which actually allowed him to experience work on the roads, cleaning and ironing, and work as a trolley boy (Thuku 13-14). Once released from prison, Thuku began to work for the District Commissioner to do "hut-counting" to "levy [the D. C. s] taxes" (Thuku 14).

After spending time in the cities and villages of western Kenya, Thuku was sure that he "would like a job in the city," so he got one working on the newspaper the Leader of British East Africa (Thuku 14). At this job, he was taught to compose and print, read maps and print war positions (Thuku 14). More importantly, the issue of social injustice was brought to his attention (Thuku 14-15). Eventually, he left the Leader because of its biased position and practices, and found a job as a telephone operator in the D. C. 's office in Nairobi, which was a government position (Thuku 17).

Through these jobs and experiences, Thuku was allowed to interact with a number of influential people and also be exposed to the issues and troubles of society, which we will discuss later. Kayamba's work experience leading up to his political involvement was likewise just as varied and effective in

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exposing him to new people, ideas, and view points. Kayamba's first job was being a teacher, as he was top of his class and encouraged by Bishop Weston (Kayamba 178). In fact, much like Thuku, Kayamba's mentor had hopes that he would work as a "Mission teacher," but like Thuku, he had other plans (Kayamba 178).

Leaving Kiungani College in 1906, where he taught for a little over a year, Kayamba traveled to Mombasa in search of an occupation (Kayamba 178). His first job there was as tracer in the Drawing Office under an architect (Kayamba 178). Gradually, Kayamba worked his way up into the Public Works Department as an "assistant store clerk in the Executive Engineer's Store at Mombasa" (Kayamba 179). Transferring to Fort Hall while working in the same position, he became "dissatisfied with the salary" and quit to become a private tutor in Zanzibar to two European Government officials (Kayamba 180).

Then he secured a job in the Public Works Department of Uganda, where he was able to observe a native run government with a native parliament and treasury and courts, the most advanced in Africa (Kayamba 180). After the death of his wife and mother within the next couple of years, Kayamba was forced to return to Zanzibar where he found a job teaching in the Government School, which was "purely Mohammedan" (Kayamba 181-182). Resigning after three years and seeking to take time off (Kayamba 184), World War I caught Kayamba and the rest of East Africa off guard.

Like many others, Kayamba was eventually incarcerated and forced into hard labor (Kayamba 186). Evading the duties of having to carry hammocks

with British soldiers in them, Kayamba was selected to be the safari cook initially (Kayamba 188). After being "dispatched to the Prisoners of War Camp," Kayamba and other prisoners were ordered to "carry building stones" for about two miles (Kayamba 189-190). Nearing death, Kayamba was saved by two fair and kindhearted German officers, which were placed in charge of his camp (Kayamba 190).

From these leaders, Kayamba was selected to be one of the "headmen of the camp" and "supervise [his] fellow prisoners at work and in camp" (Kayamba 191). Increasing in status and trust from supervisor to head mason to camp construction leader, Kayamba was fatefully transferred to the camp hospital to serve as a hospital assistant (Kayamba 191). From here, he was allowed to go to a native hospital in town, where he was trained to examine and diagnose diseases (Kayamba 191-192). After the war's end and release and recovery, Kayamba was requested to be an interpreter for the Police and the Court at the Political Office in Tanga (Kayamba 196).

Later he was promoted to being a correspondence clerk and typist, and eventually in 1923, Kayamba was head clerk of the District Office at Tanga with an "entirely African" staff (Kayamba 197). Through all of these experiences, Thuku and Kayamba both were able to meet and learn from a variety of people that had a positive influence on them. From these experiences and people in their individual lives, Thuku and Kayamba each entered politics in a different manner and pursued separate issues.